JUNE 6, 1931

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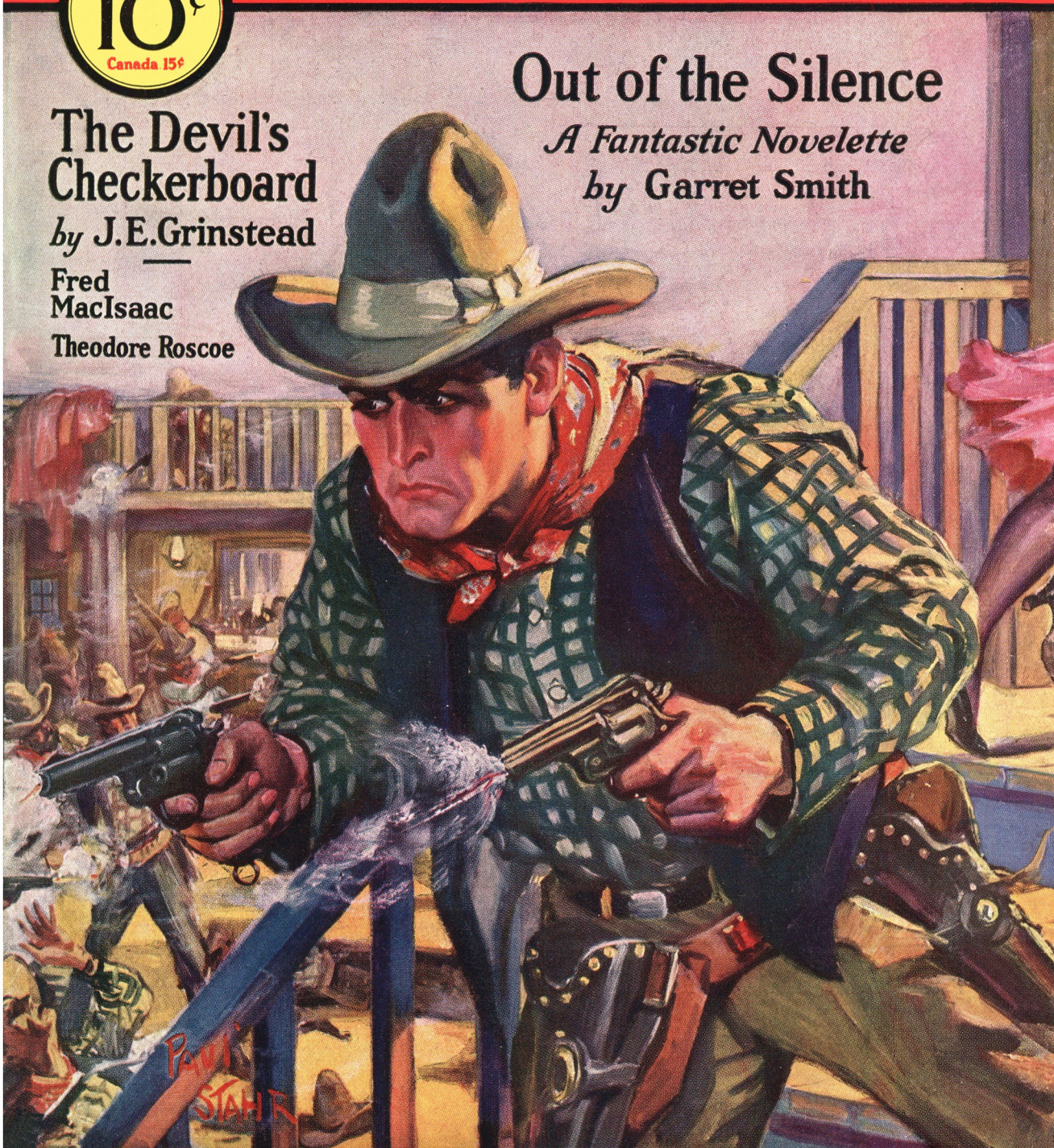

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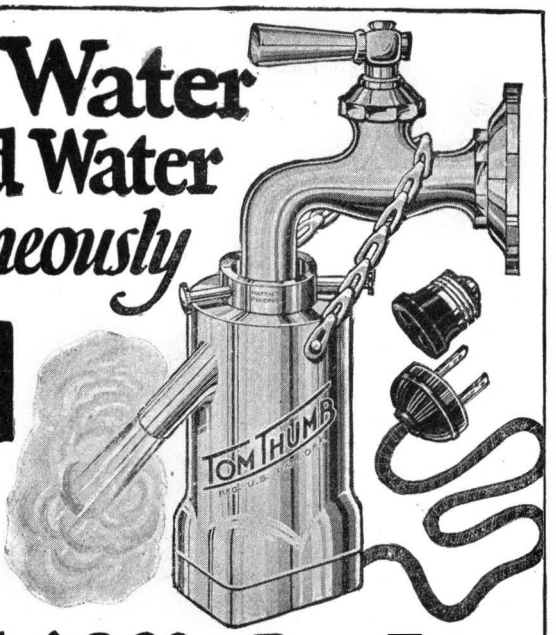

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VOLUME 221 | CONTENTS FOR JUNE 6, 1931 | NUMBER 4

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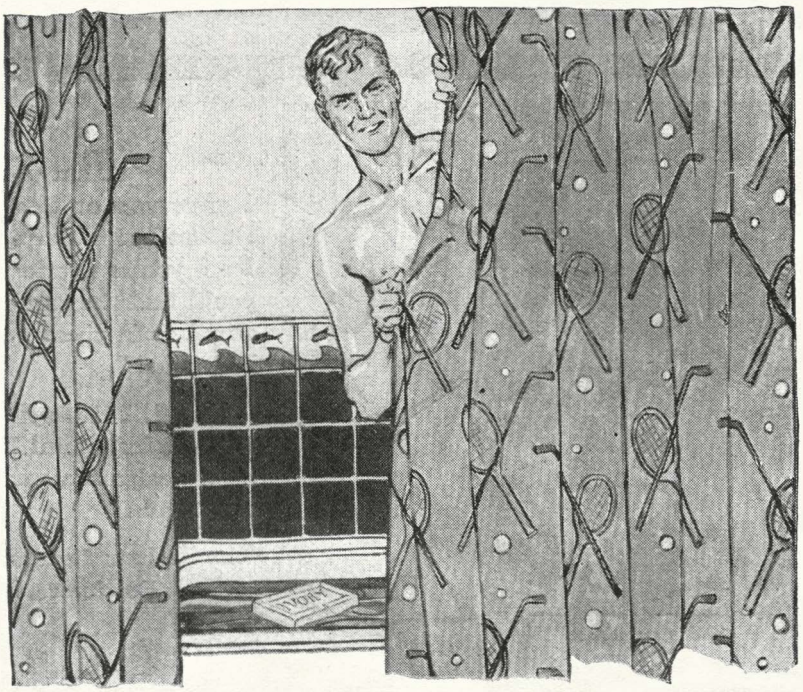

Pardon us, Mr. Jones!

Go right on splashing, Mr. Jones. Don't mind us.

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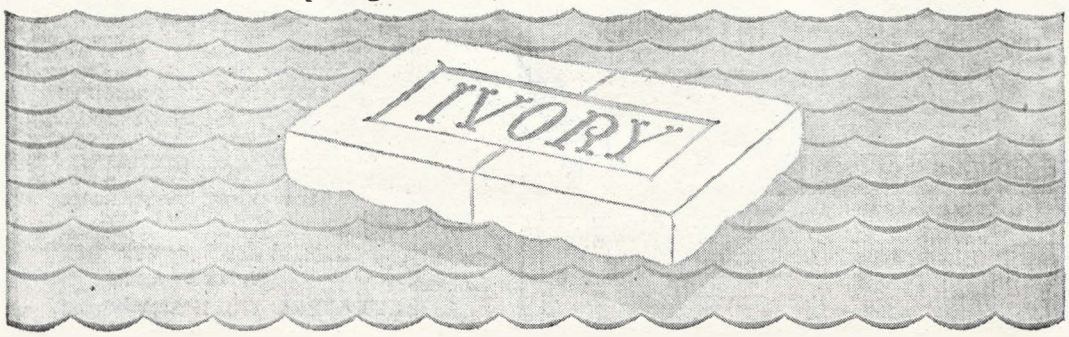


ARGOSY
ON SALE EVERY WEDNESDAY

VOLUME 221 | SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 1931 | NUMBER 4

Two shots were fired before Jim Rodney could get his gun, and then it was too late

The Devil's Checkerboard

Riding hard on the trail of a murderous outlaw, Joe Dent, Texas cowboy, found himself the storm center of a fierce conflict disrupting Rodney's Bend

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

Author of "Barons of the Border," "The Crimson Trail," etc.

CHAPTER I.

SATAN SEEKS THE KING ROW.

THE keeper of the March winds had let them slip their leash in February, and they were thundering out of the southwest like hounds on a hot scent. Tumbleweeds were chasing one another across the high prairie headland, some lodging in little gullies, while others disappeared over the great bluff, adding to that mysterious question, "Where do tumbleweeds go?"

A lone rider came up the worn old

trail that had been followed by many a herd of Texas cattle. Joe Dent was twenty-five, but looked older. He was a scant five foot six, wiry of build, with mild blue eyes and light sandy hair. At the point where the trail broke over the bluff, to wind its way into the river bottom, Dent stopped. He looked down at Rodney's Bend, with its border of cottonwoods, like the silver fringe on a giant's cape, and said to himself, musingly:

"The Devil's Checkerboard, and that river is the king row."

Half a mile below him lay the little town of Cedar Springs. Just beyond the town, to the left, stood a great, two-story white house, with broad colonial gallery across the front. Far over to the right, and two miles away in the river bottom, was what appeared to be another village. It was the old Rodney plantation, the first white settlement on that part of the border. A Rodney settled it, a Rodney had always owned it, and Jim Rodney owned it now. Far in the distance, at the very point of the long cape, Dent could see two little drab squares on the sandy point, where the ground had been swept bare by floods. He knew that one of these was a low barrel-house which catered to Indians and outlaws from the other side of the river, masquerading as a general store. The other was the ferryman's cabin.

"Strange things happen in the shadows of those silver sentinels," mused Joe Dent, "but it's business and not poetry for me." Shaking his bridle, Dent rode on down the winding trail to town. He knew the country. He had gone up the trail with one of the last herds of the great exodus of Texas cattle to the north, and that herd had crossed here. He had been only a boy then, but he recalled the place.

While Dent had stood on the bluff, looking over the Devil's Checkerboard, a move had been made thereon, and others were imminent. Cedar Springs was not and had never been a cow town. It was a rather quiet old village, for reasons—chief of which was Jim Rodney.

There was a saloon, the Open Hand, and there was plenty of drinking. Dr. Gardner, of the third generation of Gardners, who had sewn up gashes and probed bullet wounds at Cedar Springs, got drunk three times a day, but was still a gentleman. Then there was old Colonel Darnall, who hobbled up the hill from the big white house just after noon each day, and drank until the Negro porter of the Open Hand approached him and said:

"Miss Nettie say she want you at home to help straighten out them rent figgers."

Then the colonel would take up his cane and hobble away down the hill, favoring the leg that got the Minié ball at Shiloh. Miss Nettie Darnall had not said anything of the kind, but Pompey knew exactly how many drinks the colonel could carry, and he had told that polite fiction at the proper time, until it had become law.

ON that particular day, there had been a nervous tension in Cedar Springs. Jim Rodney had been in town all day. Jim was the sort who could take a drink or leave it alone. To-day, he was leaving it alone. The whisper went about the little hamlet that Jim Rodney was looking for somebody. The office of deputy sheriff was hereditary in the Rodney family. Jim Rodney was in his early fifties, tall and handsome. When he was looking for somebody, it was usually unpleasant for the lookee.

It was late afternoon. Pompey had just told Colonel Darnall his polite fiction, and was helping him out the front door of the Open Hand. Jim Rodney stood leaning against the wall by the side of the door. A man rode into town, and drew up at the front of the saloon. Jim Rodney stepped to the edge of the porch, his dark eyes fixed on man and horse.

"Does the main road turn to the right at the end of the street and lead on to the ferry?" asked the stranger.

"Yes," said Jim Rodney, "but you're not going that way just yet. Get your hands up."

Only one of the stranger's hands moved. It flashed down, then came up, smoking. Two shots were fired before Jim Rodney could get his gun, and then it was too late, for Jim was on the floor, dying, and the stranger was galloping out of Cedar Springs on the ferry road.

At the first shot, Colonel Darnall snapped erect, cold sober from the shock. He dropped his cane, and his right hand flashed automatically to his hip, where a gun should be, but was not. It was only a flash of what Colonel Taylor Darnall had been at Shiloh. In counted seconds the crime had been committed and the killer was gone. The flash passed, the colonel's shoulders sagged, and he took his broad black hat from his head and bowed his snowy locks in the wind. Half a dozen men rushed out of the saloon, asking questions. The old colonel pointed a trembling finger at the still body that lay on the planking, and said:

"Gentlemen, thar lies the last bulwark against the Devil in Rodney's Bend. They been calling this Bend the Devil's Checkerboard for some time. He has made a move to the king row. Some of you take Jim up, and get him over to Cap'n Dove's place. I reck'n I'll—"

Another horseman pulled up. A young man with mild blue eyes. He saw the dead man, but he had seen others. He addressed the colonel, as the most important figure in the group.

"I am seeking Jim Rodney, sir. Do you know if he's in town?"

"That's him," replied the colonel, pointing. "A stranger just rode in here. Jim tried to arrest him, and—"

"A stranger," interrupted Dent. "Tall, dark, handsome fellow, riding a big brown horse?"

"That's the man. He rode hell-for-leather on the ferry road. I reck'n he'll make the Devil's King Row, and—"

The colonel was talking to an empty street, so far as Joe Dent was concerned. Dent had taken the ferry road in a cloud of dust.

The body of Jim Rodney was lifted from the floor and carried to Captain Dove's little carpenter shop, where the coffins for Cedar Springs were made. Colonel Darnall stood watching until they disappeared, murmuring:

"I never thought I'd live to see this. Rodney's Bend without a Rodney to protect it. Help me down the steps, Pompey. I must go tell Nettie." The colonel, quite sober now, got down the steps, turned out of the street, and took the winding path that led down the hill to the big white house.

Miss Nettie Darnall was not the colonel's old-maid daughter, but his granddaughter. A lovely, but very businesslike and dependable young woman, in her early twenties. She heard her grandfather's cane tapping the floor of the long gallery, and read in the sound that for some reason he was sober. She went to meet him, and he dropped to a big rustic chair.

"Nettie," he gasped, "I'm ready to

take the next offer I get for the old Darnall plantation. We'll get out of Rodney's Bend before—"

"Why, grandfather! What—"

"Jim Rodney was murdered just now, and there was not a man in Cedar Springs to pull a gun. I reached for mine, but I haven't carried one since Shiloh." The old colonel told the story briefly, and then: "Tell Sam to hitch the mare to the phaeton. You and I must go over and tell Jenny Rodney and Willis about it. We are all that's left of the two old families that own Rodney's Bend."

ANOTHER view of the tragedy was held by Turk Runnels, owner of the Open Hand, and a few of his followers. When the excitement subsided, Turk was talking to some of his henchmen in the saloon.

"Well," he said, "that puts Cedar Springs on the map. I been aiming to sell out and leave here, but I reck'n I won't. Jim Rodney and his following have been holding this town back for twenty years. All the good business has went to Woodson, up above, and Leota down below, just because Jim never would let the boys cut loose proper here in the Bend. Now, they'll come acrost the river at the Isham Ford in east of here, and at the mouth of Copperas Creek in west. I guess I can get some fiddlers and open the dance hall now. That was the orneriest thing Jim Rodney ever done—not letting me open the hall, after I built my place two stories high, apurpose."

There were nods of assent, and expressions of agreement from the members of the party.

"Yes, I reck'n I'll stay now," Turk went on. "Business is apt to be good. I got jobs for all you boys. Tate Beeman, you can go to work at once. Here's two hundred dollars. I want you to get yourself some good clothes, go to the other towns up and down the river, and a ways out. Buy drinks and gamble. Win if you can, but the main thing is to give it out everywhere that Cedar Springs is wide open now. Dance hall, gambling room, and any. What it takes to make a live town is girls to dance and drink, and gamblers to gamble and drink—and split their winnings. Get going, Tate, and bring the crowd. All we got to do is open the dance hall door and sweep out."

Mr. Turk Runnels was an opportunist of parts. Jim Rodney had been the lid of decency and order in Rodney's Bend. The lid was off. There was no Rodney to succeed Jim. It was a joke to think that his son Willis, with his left leg withered from the knee down, could carry on. So before Jim Rodney was cold, plans for a wide open Cedar Springs were being projected. Turk was far from being a fool. There must be a deputy sheriff in the Bend. He had the man at hand.

Ed Green had once been in trouble, and Turk had got him out. Ed had behaved himself lately, and it would be easy to get him appointed. Somebody had to be the town's leader. Decrepit old Colonel Darnall and besotted Dr. Gardner were out of the question. Turk had the brains, and was willing to lead. Why not?

Within an hour Ed Green had gone to the county seat with a letter deploring the death of Jim Rodney and a petition asking the appointment of Green, in order that the Bend be not left without protection. Both the letter and the petition were signed by Dr. Gardner, who was not quite sober enough to realize what he was doing, and by others of the old residents, who were frightened at the thought of

being without a peace officer. Yes, Turk Runnels was an opportunist and a fast worker.

THE silver sentinels along the Devil's King Row cast blurred shadows, as their long, bare branches, tipped with the first buds of spring, waved wildly in the whistling wind. Old Benny Gaynor was a skillful boatman, and knew his river, but there would be no more crossing that day. The river was full but the danger was not in the high water. It was the wind. There was no cable at Rodney's. The boat had to be poled upstream, then pushed off and rowed across with a long sweep. In that wind, it couldn't be done. The ferryman was about to leave the boat and go to his cabin, when he heard the thud of hoofs, and looked up just as a man on a powerful brown horse rode down into the cut and stopped.

"Get that boat around here," he ordered.

"Sorry, mister," said old Benny, "but I can't put you across in this wind."

"The devil you can't," snapped the man. "Maybe you mean you won't."

"I can't, and I won't," replied Benny.

"We'll see."

The man's spurs went in, and the big brown jumped the corner of the apron and landed fair in the boat.

"Cast off," ordered the man who had killed Jim Rodney.

"Get off this b o a t," flared old Benny, dropping his hand to his gun.

There were two shots fired, but old Benny Gaynor fired neither of them. The old ferryman crumpled down on the floor of the boat. The killer tied the brown horse to the iron rod that served as a rail at the side of the boat, and whipped the cable loose from the stob in the bank. Then he pushed violently with a pole. The boat swung into the current and shot away like a cork in a riffle, just as a girl ran to the bank. The outlaw saw her, and reaching down, caught up old Benny's body and tossed it over the side. Then, heedless of the girl's screams, he seized the sweep, and began fighting for a landing somewhere on the opposite bank.

Effie Gaynor was still wringing her hands and screaming when Joe Dent rode up to the ferry. He supposed the fleeing man had compelled the ferryman to take him across in spite of the wind, so he said:

"He'll make it back when the wind goes down."

"No, no," she cried. "He killed daddy. Murdered him. I saw him throw the body in the river. Oh—" She broke down and sobbed violently.

Dent was helpless. He had been trailing Reece Porter, killer and desperado, for days. Up through Texas, from far down the Brazos Valley they had come. Some days Dent would gain a little, other days he would fall behind. That day, he had picked up the man's trail, and spurred on to overtake him, before he crossed the Devil's King Row into the Indian Country. As a farewell to Texas, Porter had committed two brutal murders. Now Dent could see him, out there on the bobbing boat, too far away for a bullet to reach him. If Porter's luck held, he would soon be with his kind.

Dent heard footsteps above the girl's sobs, and turned to see a pale dun man, standing with his hands in his pockets, chewing tobacco and spitting through the aperture caused by the loss of two front teeth.

"Who are you?" demanded Dent.

"Storekeeper, up there," and the

man nodded to the long building of cottonwood logs a hundred yards away. "I reck'n my business is ruint, now that the boat's gone. May be a month before they's any fording, and no telling when Jim Rodney'll get another boat."

"What were you doing," asked Dent, "that you didn't stop this killing?"

"I reck'n you don't know this country very well," the man said. "Stoppin' killin's on the Devil's King Row ain't a very healthy business. I've had a chance to stop a good many, but I ain't tried it yit."

MARK WEED turned and walked lazily off toward his store. Dent stood looking after him, wondering. He knew what these little stores on the banks of Red River were. Blinds for the purpose of furnishing whisky to Indians and outlaws, nothing more. His attention was taken from Mark Weed by Effie Gaynor, who had sat down on the ground and was sobbing her heart out.

"Come, young lady," he said, gently, "let me help you back to your—"

"I—I haven't got anybody," sobbed the girl. "There wasn't anybody but daddy and me. We—we lived in that cabin," and she jerked her head toward a one-room cabin that stood a hundred yards from the store.

"Then I'll take you to your neighbors, your friends."

"I—I haven't got any."

"Isn't there a house near here?"

"It's about three miles to the nearest one. Jim Rodney's place. I—I've been there."

"Come, then. I'll take you there. I'm going there, anyway."

So it fell out that just at nightfall, Joe Dent arrived at the old Rodney place, with Effie riding his horse, while he walked beside her.

Joe Dent knew nothing of the Rodney household. He had never seen Jim Rodney until he saw him lying dead in front of the Open Hand that day. All he knew of Rodney was that he was a man who stood for law and decency on that part of the border. He also knew that Rodney had been notified to look out for Reece Porter.

At the Rodney plantation, Effie went into the house. A gaunt, rawboned, gray-haired man came out and met Dent.

"I'm Joe Dent," said the younger man, extending his hand in the semi-darkness. "I have a letter for Mr. Rodney, but—"

"But you know he's dead," finished the old man. "My name is Steve Bailey. I've been overseer here for twenty years. Come put up your horse and we'll go to the house. Mr. Rodney's son will talk to you."

At the house Steve Bailey took the visitor to the big old-fashioned living room, and asked him to be seated, then excused himself. The evening was cool, and a heap of logs blazing in the fireplace cast flickering shadows on the walls of the big room while Dent sat waiting—for what, he wondered?

There had been no outcry when Colonel Darnall and Nettie delivered their message of Jim Rodney's death. Mrs. Rodney had long feared Jim would go in that manner, and while the hurt was deep, she had schooled herself for it according to her stern, harsh creed. She had asked Nettie to stay the night with her, and the colonel had agreed to sit until midnight with Willis. Then when Effie Gaynor had come in with her grief, they had all gone with the girl to another part of the rambling old house.

Dent was roused from his reverie before the flaming logs by the sound of crutches on the floor. He rose, and turned facing the door, to see a man entering the room. He was full six feet, perfectly built and proportioned, except that a small, withered foot, arrested in growth in childhood, dangled from the left leg.

"I'm Willis Rodney," he said, in a deep, musical barytone, extending his fine, strong hand. "Be seated, Mr. Dent. Steve told me who you were. This is a most unhappy time for us, and you seem to have come in for your share of the tragedy. Effie told us what happened at the ferry, and that you brought her here."

At that moment Colonel Darnall came in and was introduced. The three of them sat down.

CHAPTER II.

TROUBLE STRIKES RODNEY'S BEND.

JOE DENT felt that he was an intruder in a grief-stricken home. He was a stranger and felt that he must in some way justify his presence there. The letter he had brought to Jim Rodney was, he knew, a sort of credential for himself, so he took it from his pocket and handed it over to Willis Rodney.

The young man took the letter in silence, read it, and without comment handed it to Colonel Darnall.

"It appears from this letter, Mr. Dent, that you are out to get this Reece Porter," said the colonel.

"I was sent to get him, dead or alive."

"Strange thing. The man looked like a gentleman. He was clad like a gentleman, and had the air and manner of a gentleman."

"He is—or at least was—a gentleman. He is a nephew of Judge Amon Porter, one of the most highly respected men in Texas. Reece Porter is from one of the Carolinas. He came to Texas about six months ago on a visit to his uncle, ostensibly. It turns out now that Reece Porter, university man, honor student of law, and a member of the bar in his State, was wanted there for murder.

"Then, a week ago, it was discovered that Reece Porter was in with a gang that was stealing horses and running them north to the Indian country. A deputy sheriff, and one of the best men in the country, went to Reece to talk to him. He didn't mean to arrest Reece.

"He just wanted to talk him into leaving the country, to save old Amon Porter, whom everybody loves, from being disgraced. At the deputy's first word, Reece Porter shot him dead, then left the country."

"I see," nodded the colonel. "Such men are the worst criminals on the border. I have known many of them. Did you know Reece Porter personally?"

"Yes. When he first came to our country, I sat in a poker game with him, thinking it was quite an honor to play poker with a nephew of Judge Amon Porter. Before the game was over I changed my mind."

"This letter is from the sheriff," continued Darnall. "He gives you a good character, and asks coöperation with you, but he doesn't say you're an officer. How does it happen that you are on Porter's trail? Is it a personal matter?"

"No, there is nothing personal about it. I'm a ranch hand, and my employer breeds thoroughbred horses. It happened that Porter made the mistake of

riding one of our horses when he left the lower country."

Willis Rodney had listened in silence, as he gazed into the fire. When they stopped talking, he spoke.

"Mr. Dent, it is hardly possible that you understand the situation here in the Bend. It was once the roughest place on the border. That was in my grandfather's time. A Rodney has been deputy sheriff here since this was an organized county, but in grandfather's old age, after all his sons but my father had been killed in brawls, the old man became lax and the Bend was overrun. It was then that Rodney's Bend became known as the Devil's Checkerboard.

"Twenty years ago, when grandfather died, my father became deputy. He cleaned this Bend up, and kept it clean, but now—"

Willis broke off and sat gazing into the fire, a worried look on his face.

"Now," rumbled the colonel's deep voice, "you'll take office and carry on."

"With that?" Willis said as he looked down at the withered foot. "What can a cripple do? I'd like to be able to carry on. I'd like to avenge the death of my father, as he avenged the deaths of his brothers. But," he gazed half-angrily at his withered foot, "I'd be laughed at by the court if I applied for the job."

"Don't say that, Willis," protested the colonel. "The worst way on earth that a man can be crippled is in his heart and mind. You are sound there, and you have a matchless body, except for that foot. Take the appointment, and do the thinking while somebody else does the riding. Some young fellow like—like Mr. Dent here."

"No," said Willis. "I'll never cower behind a withered foot while some other man bares his breast against criminals, to redress my wrongs. God made me a cripple, and I have tried to accept the fact as mother keeps praying and demanding that I should, but when things like this come up, I—" Willis Rodney rose suddenly, caught up his crutches, and left the room.

DENT and the old colonel sat in silence. They felt the young man's helplessness keenly. Then Dent heard something that he would never have expected to hear in a house of mourning. It was a piano, but the music was low and weird. It combined the roar of many waters, the crash of thunder, the wailing of winds, and the pelting of rain, while through it all ran a queer air that was clearly a wordless prayer.

"That's Willis, talking to God with his fingers," said Colonel Darnall, in a low, husky tone. "He has spells like that, when he's low in spirits. He is really a wonderful fellow, almost always cheerful. He never complains much in words, but shuts himself in his room with the piano. The boy has a wonderful mind, but his sensitiveness about that foot keeps him from using it as he should. It's a terrible thing for a man like that to be lost to the world, suh."

"How did he get crippled?" asked Dent.

"I don't know. He had a spell of sickness when he was about ten years old. That foot just swelled up, and when the swelling finally went out, it withered and stopped growing. Some of the doctors said fever settled in his foot, some said it was a spider bite. They were an ignorant lot, and I don't suppose any of them knew what it was."

In the midst of the weird music,

there was the sound of a man walking on tiptoe. Grim old Steve Bailey came into the room, stooped over, and warmed his hands by the fire. It was nearing midnight, and Steve had just returned from Cedar Springs, where he had gone to arrange for the funeral next day. The service would be conducted at the grave in the family burial place near the Rodney home.

"Well, it's time for me to be going," said Colonel Darnall, rising.

"Just a minute, colonel," said old Steve. "I hate to tell you, but I have to. Ed Green has been made deputy sheriff for Rodney's Bend."

"What!" exploded the colonel. "Why, by gad, suh, that's indecent. Jim Rodney ain't cold in his coffin."

"I know it," said Bailey. "The folks in town got scared at being left without an officer. They got up a petition right away, and Ed rode for the county seat."

"Steve," said the colonel, after a moment's reflection, "the Devil has made another move. Pretty soon he'll have his king row full. I wouldn't wonder he puts a branch hell in Rodney's Bend. Come help me hitch up the mare."

"What a man he must have been in the old days," mused Joe Dent, as the colonel stalked out.

The weird music had stopped. Dent heard Willis Rodney bidding the colonel good night at the hall door. Presently the cripple came into the room. The storm had passed. His broad forehead was smooth, and his eyes placid, as he said:

"I know you are tired, Mr. Dent. Miss Darnall is with mother and Effie, trying to get them to sleep. I can keep my vigil alone. Come. I'll show you to a room."

Joe Dent had been many places and had seen a good many strange things, but his life had been spent in the newer part of Texas. The Rodney place and Rose Hill, the Darnall home, were antebellum plantations, which still clung to ancient customs. Just a bit of the old South, caught in an eddy, while the rest of the world flowed on. Dent fell asleep, wondering what was going to happen here in Rodney's Bend, with the master hand that had ruled it now still in death.

IT was broad daylight next morning when Dent dressed and walked out into the big yard. He went on to the side gate, where a wagon had just stopped. A dozen men were around the wagon, and Steve Bailey stood by the gate, his hat in his hand.

"It's Uncle Benny Gaynor's body," he said in reply to Dent's questioning look. "We hunted it all night, and found it on a bar about daylight. It'll make Effie feel better to know that he's buried decent."

It was after breakfast that Dent went to take leave of Willis in the big living room. Willis was sitting alone by the fire.

"Mr. Rodney," said Dent. "I feel that I'm an intruder here, and have come to thank you for keeping me overnight. I felt that I should go on last night."

"No, no," said Willis. "Don't go, please. Sit down. Unless your business is urgent, I'd like for you to stay until after the funeral. Coming the way you did, with a letter to him, I feel like you were my father's friend."

"My business is not urgent," said Dent. "It is only to get a stolen horse. That horse is on the other side of the river now, and—"

"Then you mean to stay in this country until you get the horse? Stay

here. You'll be more than welcome. There is something I want to say to you after—this evening, perhaps."

"Why, certainly I'll stay," said Dent. "If there's any service I can perform, I'll be glad—"

Dent broke off, as two women entered the room. One of them Dent knew to be Effie Gaynor. The other Willis introduced as Miss Darnall. There was little said, but nothing escaped Joe Dent. Nettie Darnall was not a queenly beauty, but there was an expression in her pretty-enough face that was worth more than all the beauty in the world. It seemed to show through, like light from a friendly window. Joe Dent was looking at her as she said:

"Willis, you should have slept some last night, and you didn't."

"Oh, that's all right, Nettie," replied Willis. "It doesn't matter about me."

"Yes, it does matter." Nettie's eyes filled with tears, and she turned away to a window.

What woman ever loved a man, and could keep it out of her voice at a time like that? What man ever loved a woman, that his heart didn't cry out for her to mother him in his grief? Only a few words had been spoken, but Joe Dent, keen-minded and alert, read the story. Nettie Darnall would gladly take this man, as he was, and mother him. Willis Rodney loved her as only great-hearted men can love—too much to be a burden on her, with that withered foot. Here was more tragedy in the Devil's Checkerboard.

JIM RODNEY'S funeral was held at noon. Dent walked with Willis Rodney to the burial plot. Willis stood leaning on his crutches by his mother's chair, ignoring the chair that had been placed for him. The service was simple. The entire population of the Bend was there.

After the funeral Willis and Dent turned toward the house, when Ed Green approached them. Dent caught sight of the gun under his coat, which he had not removed at the funeral. Obviously he wore it as the badge of his office. Dent made the mental note that Green looked like a man who had borrowed from the Devil at usury and was trying to renew the note.

"Just a minute, Willis," said Green. "I'm apt to be pretty busy, and I may not see you again for some time. I just wanted to say that the people called on me in this emergency, and I couldn't do nothin' but serve 'em. I hope you don't think hard of me for ot talking to you first. There wasn't time, and—"

"That's all right, Ed," said Willis. "We can talk of those things some other time," and turning away, Willis left the new deputy gasping like a fish out of water.

As Ed Green and Turk Runnels rode back to town together, Ed said:

"Turk, who is that gent with the baby blue eyes that was with Willis?"

"That's the chap that was trailing the man who removed the obstruction from the path of progress in this old Bend," grinned Turk. "He didn't catch him, either. I don't know who he is, but if he stays in the Bend, you better keep an eye on him."

"Don't worry. I'll do that. I don't like the way that gent's sails is trimmed."

IT was late that afternoon. Old Benny Gaynor had also been laid to his long sleep in the Rodney graveyard. Willis Rodney and Dent sat in front of the fire.

"Now, Mr. Dent," said Willis, "I have a proposition to make to you. You are after a certain brown thoroughbred. Such horses are not easy to get. Reece Porter has plainly gone to the wild bunch right this time, and he won't part with such a horse. He'll join some outlaw band on the other side of the river, and is quite as likely to come back across right here as anywhere. Don't you think so?"

"Yes, I think you are right."

"Very well. You could watch this part of the border better, and hear from other parts of it better, if you were foreman of a cow outfit."

"That is true, too, but I am not one."

"No, but you will be, if you'll listen to me. Steve Bailey will stay on as overseer of the ranch, taking care of the crops and buildings. However, there are about two thousand Box R cattle. My father always handled the cattle. I can ride anything I can get on, and have ridden a great deal, but I can't ride after cattle, with a pair of crutches tied to my saddle. You come to me with as good recommendations as I could ask. Besides that, I think I know men, and you appeal to me as straight and square. Take over the job of range foreman, and look for your thoroughbred at your leisure."

"I see," said Dent thoughtfully. "How many men in the outfit?"

"Only two now, but you will need at least a dozen. You should know plenty of good cowhands. You can select your own men by round-up time. It will be a month yet before there is grass to work cattle on."

"I'll take the job," said Dent. "When I find that horse, I'll send him to the owner, and if I make good, I'll stay as long as you want me."

"Fine. Now, there are some things I want you to know. Steve Bailey is the gamest, squarest man I have ever known, except my father. You can counsel with him any time, and can rely on his judgment, and on Colonel Darnall's. He has been district judge but," Rodney smiled, "nobody ever called him 'Judge.' He wouldn't exchange the title of Colonel in Forrest's cavalry for that of president.

"Now, about money matters. I know my father made a will, leaving everything to my mother. There is plenty of money for all needs. Mother's check will be good, and she knows all about father's business. So you will be taking no chance on your pay and the pay of the men you hire."

"Just a minute, Mr. Rodney," said Dent. "There will be plenty of time for these things when we get going. You are too tired to go into details. Besides that, you'll be here to supervise things."

"Yes, I suppose so, but I like to have everything understood. There is just one other thing. Steve Bailey has a room away from the house, but it is because he wants it that way. There is also a bunk house for the cowhands, but I want you to stay here at the house. You'll take the room where you slept last night and make yourself at home in it. Now, if you will excuse me, I have some other things to do and I must sleep some."

Dent said good night and went to his room. A minute after he was in bed he was asleep. What strange things happened around that grim old house before morning, Dent never knew.

He went to the dining room for breakfast. It was on the table, but no one else was there. The Negro woman who waited on him was wide-eyed with terror. Dent heard her talking to the cook in the kitchen.

"Oh, Lawd, Aunt Viney! De cunjer man done got ol' Rodney Bend. The ol' debil sho' playin' on he checkerbo'd now."

"Shut up, Mandy," snapped the cook. "You ain't got nothin' to be pestered about. Dat's white folks cunjer stuff."

"Huh. Maybe so, but dey's mah white folks. Whah at Mr. Willis? Miss Jenny go to de do' at daylight, like always. He baid ain't been mussed up, and he gone. What tuck him? Tell me dat. What about Miss Jenny and Miss Nettie in er dark room, holdin' one ernother in they arms and cryin' they eyes out?"

Dent pushed back his chair and left his breakfast unfinished. Suddenly, he understood why Willis Rodney had explained so much to him. Willis had not intended to be there. He hastened toward the overseer's quarters and met Steve Bailey. The old man's face was grayer and grimmer than ever.

"What on earth has happened?" asked Dent.

"I wish I knew," replied Bailey. "Willis didn't sleep in his bed last night, and he can't be found about the place. Mrs. Rodney and Miss Nettie are prostrated with grief. I'm just going to start a search, and I dread what we are likely to find."

So began the terrible day. At nightfall the men came in, exhausted, with no tidings, no slightest clew. Every yard of Rodney's Bend had been searched, and every part of the river bank. Not so much as a track in the sand was seen.

THE Devil was playing a shrewd game on his checkerboard. When he made a move, he didn't take his hand off the man until he knew the play was safe. On the evening after Jim Rodney was buried, and while Willis and Dent sat making their trade, the Devil put his hand on Turk Runnels and moved him.

Colonel Darnall, feeling lonely in the great old house, with Nettie gone, took up his cane for a few turns on the long gallery. He reached the end toward town and stopped. He heard a strange sound. There was something familiar about it, but he couldn't place it. He turned and walked rapidly to the other end of the gallery. There he beat a rapid tattoo on the floor with his cane. Presently a voice in the yard at that end of the house said:

"Yassar, Marse Cunnel, here I is."

"Sam, go uptown and see what that noise is, then come right back and tell me."

Sam sped away up the winding trail to town. The colonel went back to the other end of the gallery and stood listening. *Shuff, shuff, shuff* came the unusual, dull, rhythmic sound. Colonel Darnall was still standing there when Sam returned, panting from his hurried trip.

"Well, what is it, Sam?"

"Why, they's a big dance goin' on in that hall over the Open Hand."

"Sam! If you lie to me, I'll stripe yo' back. Nobody would have a dance in the Bend, and Jim Rodney not cold in his grave."

"Honest to Gawd, Marse Cunnel. The hall's all lit up. I heard de fiddles, and seed 'em dancin' froo de winders. I seen Tate Beeman standin' at one winder, wid a yaller vest on, an' he was promp'in' 'em."

"Go on to the cabin, Sam," said Colonel Darnall, calmly. "I won't need you any more to-night."

Sam disappeared and the colonel entered the house. He went to the buffet in a corner of the big living room,

poured a drink of spirits, and gulped it. Then he sat down in a chair before the fire.

"The Devil's playing checkers," he mused, "and he has put Turk Runnels in the king row. I wouldn't have thought that of Turk. His folks were po' whites, but they were honest and decent. I wouldn't charge God with such a thing. It must have been the Devil, playing checkers ahead of the game, that crippled Willis Rodney. If Willis were sound, nobody would dare to pull a dance over his father's grave before the clods got settled. I'm too old and worthless to take things in hand, but come morning, I'll speak to Turk about that."

CHAPTER III.

THE SEARCH ENDS.

JOE DENT and Steve Bailey sat in the overseer's quarters on the Rodney place three mornings later.

"Well, Dent, the search is ended," said Steve.

"Ended? Why, we haven't found a trace of Willis."

"I have. I found it the first thing, but I didn't mention it. I kept thinking some of them that hunted along the river would find Willis's body like we did Uncle Benny's. We may find it when the river goes down, and we may never find it."

"What makes you think he went to the river? Willis was a helpless cripple and it's a long walk to the river, even for a sound man."

"He didn't walk. In the first place, Willis was not helpless. He's got the most powerful arms and back of any man I ever saw, and that right leg was hard as nails. The left one, too, for that matter, down to the knee. If he hadn't been so sensitive about that foot, there was plenty he could have done."

"If he didn't walk, how did he get to the river? What was it you found?"

"Willis was a great fisherman. He had a light canoe and could do more things with it than I ever saw anybody else do with a boat. He kept the canoe in the top of a cottonseed pen. I don't suppose anybody else thought of it but me. I went to the pen that first morning, and the canoe was gone. There was tracks of Willis's crutches, leading to the backwater in the slough not more than a hundred yards from the pen. I didn't say anything about it, because I might have made a mistake. I hadn't seen the canoe since last summer. Mrs. Rodney had enough trouble without that, and I still hoped we'd find the body."

"I guess you are right, then," said Dent. "It leaves things in a pretty bad mess."

"No it don't. Everything here at the plantation is all right. Willis arranged for me to keep on as overseer, and he hired you to handle the cattle."

"How did you know that?"

"He came out here and told me that night and told me to stick by you and give you all the help I could. Things like that make me believe that Willis had his mind made up then to drown himself."

"Well," said Dent, "if I'm going to run this cow outfit, I've got to have some hands, and I want my own kind. I've got to mail a letter, and I want you to go with me to Cedar Springs. I don't know anybody there."

They rode toward the house and were passing through a gate by the side of the yard when they noticed Mrs. Rodney and Nettie Darnall sitting on the gallery. One of the house servants came out and said:

"Mist' Dent, Miz Jenny said please would you come to the house. She want to see you."

Joe Dent would rather have faced all the killers on the Devil's Checkerboard than to face the stricken woman, but there was no help for it. The two women, whom Dent had not seen since Jim Rodney's funeral, sat dry-eyed, clutched by the cold hand of a grief that had no more tears.

"Mr. Dent," said Jenny Rodney, "the search has been abandoned. Our friends have made a wonderful effort, and I couldn't ask them to search longer. It is a business matter I wish to speak to you about. Willis told me the night before he—before he went away, that he had employed you as range foreman to handle the Box R cattle. Are you still willing to take the job?"

"Why, yes, ma'am, if you still want me to, I'll carry on."

"I want anything that Willis wanted. I suppose you and Steve are going to town. When you come back, I'll give you the tally books and tell you all I know about the way Jim handled the cattle."

THE two men had ridden half a mile toward Cedar Springs before either of them spoke. Then Dent broke the silence with:

"Steve, I'll be damned if I understand this thing. Those two women were crazy with grief for three days. Now they are cold and calm like a wintry day."

"Simple enough," growled Steve. "If grief like that had kept up much longer, it would have killed them. Nature takes care of the reaction. Many a woman faints at her husband's grave, but seems cheerful three days later. She still loves her husband, she still grieves for him, but nature is applying that inviolable rule of self preservation."

Dent gave Steve an odd glance and rode on. He had not expected a remark like that from the old overseer. At Cedar Springs, Dent mailed a letter, which read:

DEAR MR. STALMAN:

I almost caught Porter, but he beat me to the river and got across. You told me not to cross into the Indian country. I have taken a job on the Rodney ranch. Will watch for Porter, and if he brings the horse to this side I'll get it and send it to you. I may need some good help to take the horse.

This outfit needs ten good men. I am sending you a list of names. Please see these boys for me. If they come they'll draw top-hand wages, and can get along with the foreman, who is nobody but me. Tell the boys to drop in one or two at a time, like cowhands hunting work.

JOE DENT.

Dent chuckled as he dropped that letter into the post office. Would old Dave Stalman send those hands? Why, he'd send a hundred to get that horse, and if possible, hang Reece Porter. If the men he had asked for came, the Box R cattle would be handled better than any cattle on that border, if he was going to spend part of his time looking for Reece Porter and that big brown horse.

Old Steve Bailey was standing in front of the Open Hand, waiting for Dent to come from the post office, so they could go in and take a drink. Ed Green came out of the saloon and said to Steve:

"See here, Steve. The boat's gone from the ferry. I reck'n you're boss at Rodney's now, and I reck'n you know that if a boat ain't back there inside of thirty days, you lose the fran-

chise and somebody else will put one in. I'm depity sheriff now, and I aim to see that things is right in this Bend. There can't be no travel here until there's a way to cross the river."

"Yes," drawled Steve. "I reck'n it is right hard on the fellers on the other side, not being able to come across for drinks. Hard on Turk, too, losing the business. You can tell Turk that I found the boat, and soon as the river falls a little more I'll have it taken back to the ferry."

"Tell Turk? Why—" Ed Green's face had gone red, and he was gasping for breath.

"Yes, tell Turk," said Steve, calmly. "I reck'n he told you what to tell me. You wouldn't care a damn if there never was another boat on Red River from head to mouth. You haven't got a damned thing on ary side of it."

"Now, see here, Steve," choked Ed. "Get this straight. You're like some more people. You think nobody but a Rodney could make a officer in the Bend. I'll show you different. I'm depity, and what I say is going to be damn nigh the law in Rodney's Bend."

"Yes? Well, since you want things straight, get this straight. If you are going to enforce the law, do it impartially. Don't have one law for rich and another for poor, one law for white men and one for black. I'm givin' you notice now that nary white man on earth can lay a hand on one of my niggers. They're like children. If they get into a little devilment, come to me about it first. Don't ever arrest one of 'em for shooting craps until you have arrested Turk Runnels for running a gambling house, and his gang of loafers for gambling."

"Sorta hard, ain't you, Steve?" said Green, choking with rage and not daring to make a break. Everybody in Rodney's Bend knew that Steve Bailey was always ready to back any talk he made.

"No, I'm not hard. You told me your side of the law in Rodney's Bend, without me asking you. Then I told you my side."

STEVE saw Dent step up on the sidewalk in front of the saloon, so he left Green standing and turned in at the door, expecting Dent to follow. Green was fairly scorching with rage. He didn't dare to mix with Steve Bailey, but here was a gentleman he would attend to.

"Just a minute, pardner," said Green. "I'm depity sheriff here, and—"

"I heard you tell Willis Rodney that," said Dent, coolly.

"Yes, you did, and now I'm telling you. I understand you was trailing the man that killed Jim Rodney. I want to see your papers."

"Papers? I have no papers."

"What was you doing, trailing that fellow, if you ain't an officer of the law?"

"I just wanted the horse he was riding."

"Oh, you did? The law don't mean anything to you, then?"

"Not when another man is astraddle of my horse."

"Well, we don't see it that way in Rodney's Bend. Your man crossed the river and got away, so I don't reck'n you got much more business around here."

Steve Bailey had stopped in the door and turned, facing them. He wanted to see how the new range foreman was going to perform. Dent was coolly looking Green up and down, and smiling the while.

"Sorry I can't accept your invita-

tion to leave the Bend," he said, "but I'm range foreman of the Box R cattle, and it is almost round-up time. So I guess you'll have to put up with me."

"Foreman or no foreman, if you stay in this Bend, you'll track the law."

"Listen, Green," said Dent, calmly. "If you don't look out you'll work yourself to death in this new job before you get started."

"What do you mean by that?" snarled Green, dropping his hand to his gun.

"Don't do that," pleaded Dent. "You're a stranger to me, and I don't want to kill you, but I'll do it if you draw that gun on me."

It was not bluster. Dent was as calm and cool as if he were carrying on an ordinary conversation, but an odd expression had crept into his mild blue eyes. They were several shades darker and cold as ice. Green went white and stammered:

"I'm not looking for trouble with you. I'm just telling you."

"Don't ever try to tell me again," said Dent. "I'm not looking for trouble, either, but I don't run from it." Dent turned his back on Green, stepped into the saloon, and said: "Come on, Steve. Let's take a drink and ride from here. I've got a lot of work to do."

As Steve and Dent rode out of town, Turk Runnels turned to Green and said:

"Ed, you haven't got the sense of a child. What the devil did you want to start anything for?"

"Aw heck, Turk," whined Green, "them fellows insulted me!"

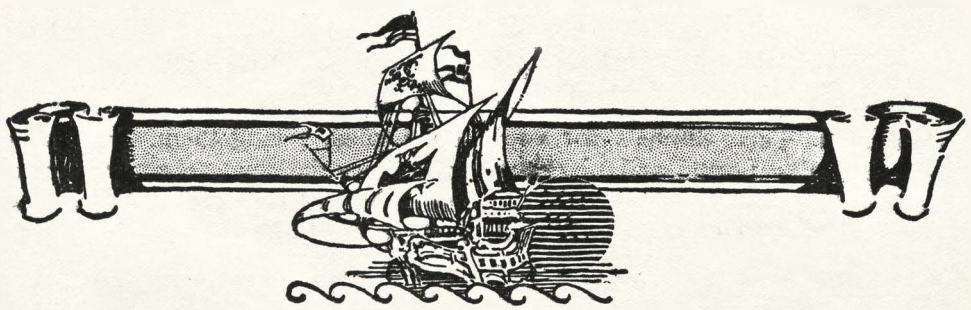
"Insulted you? Why, you started it. How the devil could anybody insult you, anyway?" Turk Runnels turned on his heel and went back into the saloon. The dance hall was going to be open that night, and every night thereafter, and he had things to do.

Turk was a little too beefy to be actually handsome, but he was a fine-looking fellow. He had a headful of brains, too. If he had turned his keen mind to legitimate business, he would have been a winner. His trouble was that he wanted heavier profits than legitimate business would carry. Turk had long wanted to rule Rodney's Bend, and now his dream had come true. There was no one but decrepit Colonel Darnall to prevent him, and that was a joke.

"What's the matter with that fellow Green?" asked Dent, when they were out on the road.

"Swell-head and lack of sense," grunted Steve. "He don't amount to anything. Turk Runnels is the man that's going to make trouble. He'll make plenty—and he'll start it soon!"

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.



The closet door opened and the light of the torch struck Pete in the face

The Golden Pitcher

Rodrigo's place in the sweltering little Central-American port of Manzaña was the setting for a tropical drama that involved two determined men, a girl and a hot-headed refugee

By ROBERT N. LEATH

THE man I came to know as the Captain Burke arrived in Manzaña just aching for trouble.

It was very hot and the sound of his voice, in murmuring conversation with Rodrigo, crowded itself through the archway and slid across the dull crimson tiles toward my table.

I could see the Captain's luggage—one enormous bag of battered pigskin. Apparently Rodrigo gave him a room, because the bag disappeared, but the Captain did not go upstairs. Instead, he came through the archway. And then you could see how he felt. You could see trouble in the clamped way he held his jaw, the way his heavy body lurched forward, but more than that you could see it lying behind his eyes.

He stopped beside my table, scowling yet contemplating me with not more than half his mind.

My table was the best to be had. It looked out from the patio of Rodrigo's place into the plaza of Manzaña.

"I think I will take this table," the big stranger said, scowling and teetering upon his powerful legs and peering off over my head into the hot town and the bright hot jungle.

I was sitting alone and there were only three or four other men drinking inside the patio of Rodrigo's place. I could see the big stranger was drunk.

"I think you won't take this table," I said, because it was very hot and I did not care to be disturbed.

His scowl deepened.

"I think I will!" he roared.

Now I am a peace-loving man, not given to fighting and vulgar argument, so I got up and hit the Captain with a bottle, just above his right ear. Because, after all, if you find it necessary to hit somebody it is the part of wisdom to make a good job of it. Particularly if the other guy happens to be a great big guy.

The theory was excellent, but the execution was somewhat faulty.

The bottle did not land with the resounding whack which had been intended. It merely glanced off the side of the Captain's skull.

Then the fight started. Within a moment we had the entire patio to ourselves, and I was trying to hit this big bozo with anything that would come loose.

Unfortunately the ham he called his right fist connected with my jaw and knocked me down, and then the Captain simply fell on top of me.

When I recovered consciousness there were some sharp pains in my chest. A swarthy, polite cop was conversing with the Captain.

"*Señor,*" the cop said with courteous regret, "I am sorry, but you must go to jail. Behold! You have wrecked all the furniture of the good Rodrigo with your fighting. It is not permissible to fight in Manzaña. *Absolutamente* no fighting. So say the laws."

"Huh," the big bozo said, scratching his scalp.

"Huh," I said.

The polite cop raised his eyebrows and looked at me.

"Ah!" he observed. "The second *señor* has awakened. How do you feel, *señor?*"

"Terrible," I said.

SO we went out into the furnace heat and crossed the plaza and turned down a dusty narrow street and entered the jail, which was one part of a narrow, low building erected on the four sides of a big square. Soldiers, who acted also as policemen, and political executives and political clerks occupied the rest of the structure. It had walls that were blinding white in the sunlight, but showing drab splotches here and there where big flakes of stucco had dropped away from the 'dobe underneath.

The big bozo sat down on a bunk.

"Mister, what is your name?"

There was no reason why I should not tell him.

"Pete O'Donal," I said.

"Mine's Burke. They call me the Captain."

He stretched back in the bunk. Then, a moment later, he sat up.

"Mister, I am sorry. It was your table."

"Yes, it was," I said.

"You had a right to hit me with that bottle. I am sorry."

"Forget it," I said.

He seemed relieved. "Got any money?"

"Yes."

"They will fine us twenty bucks apiece. That makes forty bucks. Eighty *pesos.* Got eighty *pesos?*"

"Yes."

"Good," the Captain said. "We will get out of this jail and then we will have a drink. I will buy the drink. I got credit. This is a rotten jail."

"All right."

The Captain produced a black pipe and got it going.

"I never seen you before," he observed. "How do you like the town? Got some business here?"

He knew that people do not ask your business in Manzaña. Not, at least, right off the bat. But the question came in a way that was not offensive. After a moment I said:

"I'm waiting."

I *was* waiting. Eventually a certain murderer would show up in Manzaña, and I was going to take him back to the United States. You can get extradition papers in Manzaña, but it is very difficult and unhealthy. I had none at all. Sometimes you can get along without extradition papers. This job meant five thousand dollars to me.

The Captain nodded. Slowly his jaw began to set and his eyes became distant. Trouble returned to the place behind his eyes, and once again I felt he was aware of my presence with only half his mind.

"I—am waiting, too," he said slowly. "We will wait together."

Trouble. The Captain Burke represented plenty of trouble for—somebody. I wondered who it was. It even occurred to me that we might both be waiting for the same man.

"RODRIGO!" the Captain roared. We had been waiting three months and we were getting drunk again. The heat had not decreased and I, for one, was more than a little sick of waiting, although Manzaña can get into your blood so that you will never forget it.

There are mines back of Manzaña. Gold and silver mines, so old that nobody knows just how old they are. Age, the weight of centuries seems to hang about these holes in the harsh mountains like a dull and sullen curtain, despite the modern machinery which has been installed inside the holes and within great sheds of hot corrugated iron near by.

From the town you cannot see the mines. They lie hidden in the cañons and gorges. Nor can you see the surf. But the surf is there, beyond the jungle and the marshes.

You come to Manzaña by boat, but the boat does not dock. It anchors far out. Two launches appear. Miraculously you find yourself and your luggage transferred from ship to launch and the launch is tossing itself across the brilliant sea, heading straight for the surf and the marshes. A gap opens. The launch slides into an estuary. Soon there is jungle on either side. The current quickens. You round a bend and then you see Manzaña, hot and flat and glaring.

Many things happen in Manzaña, yet time passes slowly, as if nothing really makes any difference. But the passage of time did not seem to bother the Captain Burke. Apparently his patience was infinite, the silent intensity of his secret purpose beyond the reach of time. The boat came only once a month and he lived only for its arrival. It was due to-day. Between times we had been seeing the town—and the jail—and fishing in the sea for sharks and pearls.

"Rodrigo!" the Captain roared again.

Rodrigo appeared in the archway and came toward us.

"Four more Pink Swizzles!" the captain commanded. "*Quatro mas!*"

One was for me. The Captain would drink the others.

"*Si, señor.*"

Rodrigo's place comprised the hotel, the club and the swankiest bar in town. The proprietor himself was a black with a perpetual smile upon his face,

carved there by a dull machete. Rodrigo's Pink Swizzle comes in a cocktail glass which is thin and delicate and slightly beaded with moisture from the chill of the liquid inside. The Pink Swizzle itself looks sweet and gentle and has a pretty, delicate froth floating upon its surface, but it will blow the top of your head off. It is supposed to be a cocktail, but it is made with dry gin and *tequila amarilla* and a tablespoonful of angostura bitters and a few other explosives which Rodrigo will not divulge.

"Here's luck!" the Captain said, thinking no doubt of the boat which was due.

I raised my glass and then caught sight of the polite cop, this time accompanied by two subordinates.

During the three months I had found out about the polite cop. His name was Arturo de Ortega, and he constituted the whole works. Usually he wore a sword and a lot of medals and looked very impressive.

"Good afternoon, Señor Burke. Good afternoon, Señor Pete."

"Hello!" the Captain said. "Have some swizzles. Sit down!"

"*Gracias.*"

He seated himself, arranged his sword and took a glass. The two subordinates remained at attention. Ortega tilted his drink.

"SEÑOR BURKE," he said presently, "I fill myself with regret, but I must have the gun which you carry in the trouser pocket."

The Captain grunted. His eyes began to cloud.

"I need it."

Ortega spread his hands. His voice remained courteous, but firm.

"The Señora Bárlas has made a complaint." An enormous widow who used quarts of perfume, Señora Bárlas operated what might be called, through courtesy, a *cantina*. "It appears you became regrettably drunk, *señor*, and shot large holes through all the magnificent paintings in the *señora's* establishment. Such action is in direct opposition to the laws. I fill myself with regret, but it is not permissible to shoot large holes through the *señora's* paintings. So say the laws. Now, observe! I do not take you to the jail. I tire myself taking you to the jail—you and the Señor Pete. But I must have the gun."

"Oh, all right," the Captain said wearily.

His gun changed hands.

"Now, the Señor Pete," Ortega observed. "I believe you also possess a gun. Señora Bárlas complains—"

"Here you are," I said.

I had another gun, upstairs.

Ortega got up and smiled and bowed.

"*Adiós, señores.*"

I did not watch Ortega's departure, for something which had leaped into the Captain's face wiped every other impression from my mind. His features were set and grim and hard. He was staring across the patio. Suddenly he stood up.

He had finished with waiting.

I TURNED to look. Three men had come in and taken a table against the farther wall. I had seen none of them before. Two were Mexicans or Central Americans of a high type, dressed in tropical white. The third had the lighter skin of the Anglo-Saxon, but his hair was black and wiry. He had a black, wiry beard and he was even bigger and broader than the Captain Burke, and perhaps ten years older.

All at once I realized that I, too, had finished with waiting.

Hastily I started forward, but the Captain Burke was ahead of me.

The bearded man obviously was startled, but he merely got to his feet and growled, "Hello, Burke."

The Captain did not answer. His right hand moved toward his hip, then paused. Overcome by rage, he had forgotten the recent loss of his gun, but now he remembered.

The bearded man broke the hot silence.

"Have a drink, Burke?"

The Captain's words came with slashing contempt:

"I don't drink with rats, Northrup."

Color mounted above the black beard. The man's voice shook, but he had it under control.

"Watch yourself, Burke. You got no business here."

"No?" the Captain said. "I'm here to kill you, Northrup. That's fair warning."

Then the black-bearded man threw back his head and laughed.

But his laugh stopped with startling abruptness. The Captain's right palm swung out with the flash-like swiftness of fury abruptly unleashed, smacking hard and flat against the bearded man's face.

Dimly I was aware that another figure had come to my side, a figure in uniform. My attention was concentrated on a gun which was slipping out with deadly rapidity from beneath the bearded man's armpit. I had a fantastic thought that the Captain was through with Pink Swizzles forever.

But something c r a c k e d—solid leather against flesh and bone and steel. And the gun soared upward into the air, bounced off the limb of a tree which overhung the patio, struck the top of the patio wall and fell somewhere outside.

Arturo de Ortega had not departed after all; and he had kicked the gun from the bearded man's hand.

Almost simultaneously, Ortega's two subordinates struck Northrup with a rush that knocked him prone, and I flung myself upon the Captain. The black-bearded man was my own quarry. I didn't want him killed—at least not by any one else.

"*Señores,*" Ortega spoke, polite but bristling. "I am amazed! I am astonished! Would you kill each other for nothing at all? You will give this beautiful city a bad name! So say the laws! *Señores,* are you ready? We visit the jail."

FROM the direction of the kitchen came an odor of cooking. The arrival of mealtime is no secret at Rodrigo's place. The Captain, I reflected, would have to eat in jail, and his enemy, the man called Northrup.

But his name wasn't Northrup. The black-bearded one was Amos Teague, a man who, nine years previously in San Francisco, had callously shot and killed a certain James Welton, his partner in a small stock brokerage concern. Welton had surprised Teague in the act of looting the partnership.

Welton's widow straightway offered a reward of five thousand dollars for Teague's capture, dead or alive. That reward still stood. During the past nine years clew after clew had been traced, but all had proved entirely false. Now, however, I knew that I was nearing the end of the trail. Mrs. Welton possessed a complete set of Teague's finger-prints, secured from office ledgers and papers found in Teague's desk. Those finger-prints had identified William Northrup of Manzaña as Amos Teague.

I had been commissioned to bring

Northrup in, privately. His actual arrest was scheduled to occur in California.

But when I had reached Manzaña, Northrup—Teague—wasn't there. He was at a mine he owned back in the gorges.

During the three months of our watch I found out a great deal about the Captain, from other persons. He had been Northrup's partner in the mine, but a year ago Northrup had bought him out. The Captain had departed, and Manzaña had not seen him again till the day he tried to take my table at Rodrigo's place.

Suddenly I felt an acute curiosity to know why the Captain had returned to kill Northrup. Burke was, I knew, passionate and hot-tempered. But an intense and deliberate desire to *kill:* that was something more.

The Captain had no money, but lack of money didn't bother him. He would just as soon spend mine, or Rodrigo's, or anybody else's. It wasn't money he wanted from Northrup. It was vengeance. Vengeance—for what?

I promised myself I would find out.

A WAITER brought my dinner and I began to eat. High heels clicked on the tiles. I looked up and then I'm afraid I stared. A young woman was entering the dining room, alone.

In Manzaña there are only four women who are not natives of the country, and those four are safely married and safely fat. This woman was otherwise. At first you didn't notice she was beautiful. It was something else that caught your attention. Perhaps the proud way she walked, the proud way she carried her head. She had ash-blond hair and features that were utterly composed. You seemed to know that if you could make this girl smile, her smile would be lovely. More lovely than her hair, or her figure, or her skin with its faint warm coloring.

She had seated herself at a table facing mine and she seemed to be having difficulty with the menu.

"Perhaps I can help," I said. "I've been here three months."

Then I gave her the inside dope on the things which Rodrigo thinks are food. And they are food, once you have discovered how to deal with pepper in enthusiastic quantities.

"Thank you," and she smiled.

I went away mystified. Her clothing was simple, almost cheap. You could see she should have the best. Sometimes feminine tourists come to Manzaña. But they are seldom young, and never alone, never cheaply dressed.

After I had finished my coffee I went to the telegraph office and sent a message to San Francisco. I had no extradition papers for William Northrup, but I could extradite him by force if I had a seaplane. A seaplane would be forthcoming. Then I visited the jail and paid the Captain's latest fine and got him out, which Ortega had said I could do at nine o'clock.

"Now, *señores,* I ask you as one gentleman to two other gentlemen, please to do me the favor not to engage any more in the fighting. I tire myself placing you two *señores* in the jail."

"You're not talking to me, general," I pointed out. "I wasn't in jail this time."

Ortega gave a polite snort which I still find myself resenting.

"Yes, you are right, *señor.* I apologize. But you do not have the proper regard for the laws. The laws say *absolutamente* no fighting! It is not—"

"Oh, all right," the Captain said.

But I knew that whatever laws there were in Manzaña would not prevent him from killing William Northrup, although I did not yet know why they had quarreled.

THE Captain became white and his big body started up and he cried out in a choked, beseeching voice: "Margaret!"

It was the girl with ash-blond hair and features that were utterly still. I was astonished to find that the Captain could speak beseechingly to any one. You could see he was desperately in love with her, and could scarcely believe she was there.

She neither replied nor paused. It was the most thorough snub I had ever seen. Her glance rested upon the Captain only during a fraction of a second; then her high heels clicked right on past our breakfast table, leaving him standing there and staring and trembling.

He simply could not believe it.

But at last, when the silence became unbearable, he sat down. He reached for his coffee and the coffee slopped over the side of the cup, staining the tablecloth.

"So her name's Margaret," I said. "I wondered what it was."

The Captain said nothing. I felt some one's eyes upon me, and turned my head. They were the girl's. Last night they had smiled, and recognized me as a human being. This morning they were contemptuous — it was thumbs down as far as I was concerned. Without any other expression she shifted her glance and ordered breakfast.

Shortly thereafter the Captain got up and went to his room. He had not spoken a word. At the time I supposed he had gone there to drink and get drunk, but I was mistaken. Much later, during the siesta hour, I came upon him in a corner of the patio.

He had cornered the girl there. She was furious, and I marveled that such utter fury could be depicted by so slight a change in the facial muscles.

"You got to listen to me!" the Captain was saying. "You got to! I didn't steal your dad's damned pitcher! What in heaven would I do with—"

Margaret scornfully turned her head and started to walk away, and the Captain laid an urgent hand upon her arm. He barely touched her, but she stopped quite motionless. She met his eyes, furiously.

A long moment they stood there like that. Then the Captain's hand dropped from her arm and she moved away. She passed me entirely without seeing me.

I thought we'd better have about sixteen Pink Swizzles. And maybe a couple of Green Swizzles. But the Captain went back to his room.

He wouldn't come out. He wouldn't answer any knock upon his door. The afternoon passed. Night fell. The dinner hour came and went. An answer to my telegram arrived. The seaplane would start for Manzaña at dawn. Somewhere in the heavy fragrant darkness outside Rodrigo's place somebody was playing a guitar.

NOW when night comes in Manzaña, it comes like something living. Almost always you can see the stars—thousands of stars. You become increasingly aware of the jungle. You can hear the jungle murmur; you can smell it; and once in a while you can feel it, when a hungry jungle bug decides you would make a nice dinner.

The town itself changes character, takes on new color and life. It fills with engineers from the mines, with native miners and *chicleros,* with banana growers and Chinese and Japanese fishermen and pearlers.

Members of the élite swarm into Rodrigo's place. The *cantinas* get going full blast. You can hear mechanical pianos, beating absurdly and gayly against the jungle night. Native orchestras. And occasionally a guitar, playing a love song somewhere in the darkness, a minor melody which you will never forget.

Night in Manzaña, I'd have you know, is the time to go places and do things and maybe get in jail, even though you happen to be a peace-loving man, not given to fighting and vulgar argument.

So I went down the hall to the Captain's room and walked in.

He wasn't there. The room was dark, the windows open to the night air. The guitar player had started to sing to his own accompaniment. The sound was much plainer now, coming through the Captain's windows.

I turned to go out again, but something impelled me, instead, to close the door and walk across the room. I thought I recognized the guitar player's voice. It sounded like the Captain's. Yet the thought struck me as incongruous, absurd. The violent big Captain Burke—playing a guitar and singing in low gruff voice a minor melody, a love song b e n e a t h somebody's window.

I peered out, and then I understood. Everything about the Captain was big—his body, his mind. Therefore he could make love where and how he thought fitting. He could get away with something like this. For it was against a tree beneath Margaret's window he stood, lounging in shadow. She wouldn't listen to his explanations, whatever they were. Perhaps she would listen to this.

A new sound scratched against my eardrums. The latch was moving back. Somebody else was entering the Captain's room. Swiftly I slipped along the wall, found the closet door, went inside. I left the door ajar.

The other door opened, closed. The beam of an electric torch flashed out, hit the floor. moved about. A figure passed between me and one of the windows. There was no mistaking it. Margaret began a systematic search of all the Captain's belongings.

Suddenly I felt a sharp surge of anger. This certainly didn't look like playing the game. She had known that the Captain couldn't be in his room because she could hear his voice outside, singing to her. She was taking an unsporting advantage; or at least that was what it seemed. He loved her.

Then another thought demanded attention. Margaret was searching the room. Therefore she also would search the closet, and I couldn't get out.

The closet door opened wider and the light of the torch struck me full in the face.

"Good evening," I said.

She gasped. The beam wavered, then steadied.

Amazingly and coldly she said, "Good evening." Just that.

I moved past her. "Get out of that closet," I said.

"No." She did not stir.

"Get out of that closet," I repeated.

"I'm looking into that closet," she said.

Well, if a lady won't get out you cannot very well throw her out. You are very likely to find an argument on your hands.

So I sat down on the bed. "All right," I said. "Go ahead."

She went ahead. But if she expected to find the pitcher which she thought the Captain had stolen from her father, her search was useless.

Then she turned and walked out, without excuse and without explanation. I could hear her high heels clicking down the stairs.

PERHAPS a minute I remained there. Then my legs shot me upright. Why had she gone down the stairs? Night in Manzaña may be the time to go places and do things and maybe get in jail, but it's no time for a young woman with ash-blond hair to be wandering round alone.

At the foot of the stairs I met Rodrigo. He nodded toward the exit. I sped out.

The girl was just turning up a side street which led past rows of huts toward higher ground and the houses and *haciendas* of the engineers and consuls, the landowners and more important members of the community.

When I reached the corner I could see that Margaret was about to meet a couple of half-drunk natives.

They started to grab and embrace her. But then they drew back and came around her and came on down the street. I understood quite well why they did. Margaret didn't need to speak, or scream. All she had to do was look.

I paused. Probably she was safe, but . . . I was curious, too.

A lane led to the house of Amos Teague, alias William Northrup. The girl's movements had become more uncertain. From time to time she hesitated, examined the road, looked back. I had difficulty keeping out of sight. Evidently this was no remembered journey. She was only following directions. Whose directions?

Was this girl a friend of Northrup's? Doubtless they had arrived on the same boat. Therefore, friend or enemy, Northrup could not be ignorant of the girl's presence.

For Margaret possessed at least one legitimate reason for being in Manzaña. She had a job. During the afternoon I had secured that information from the United States consul. She had been sent down as secretary to the resident manager of the largest local mine. The consul felt astonished. Tropical secretaries are male. The consul had never heard of such a thing as a female secretary in Manzaña. Her last name, the consul said, was Aikman. Margaret Aikman.

Yet there must be some link, somewhere. Apparently Margaret despised the Captain Burke. She thought the Captain had stolen something which had belonged to her father. A pitcher. Who would want a pitcher? Why so much confusion about a pitcher?

She was heading for Northrup's house. The Captain Burke had formerly been Northrup's partner. So Margaret Aikman, who despised the Captain, easily could be either Northrup's friend or Northrup's enemy.

SHE wasn't his friend, I decided suddenly. For her movements had become furtive. The house seemed quiet, deserted. Only one faint light was visible.

In the black shadow of a big tree she paused, listening intently. There was no sound foreign to the murmur of the heavy, living night. Then swiftly she sped across the ground to the wide low entrance, flattened herself against it. Evidently she found the door locked.

Next she tried the big windows,

which began not two feet above the ground. They, too, were locked. Again she stood motionless, listening. Then her figure bent, straightened. She was busy with a dim square of white, perhaps a handkerchief. Wrapping a stone in a handkerchief, I guessed. Glass broke with a sharp small crack, a shattering tinkle. One of the windows came open.

Suddenly I drew back. A shadow had appeared at a corner of the building, had disappeared again.

Margaret went through the open window.

I waited. The shadow came into sight a second time, approached the window. I made out the careless silhouette of a Mexican peon, and decided that I'd have to do something about it. So I reached down, and my fingers closed over the roundness of a rock, and I hit the Mexican with the rock, just above his right ear. He collapsed with scarcely a sound. Then I myself went in through the window.

I thought Margaret would never finish ransacking the house. Small, stealthy sounds, coming at intervals, betrayed her movements. She wasn't very good at burglary.

The Mexican, I realized, would soon recover consciousness. So I climbed out again, found my rock, hoisted him through the window, and trussed him up with a couple of curtains. Then I stationed myself there. I reflected that if Northrup had needed any guard about his house at all, he probably had not stopped with one.

And presently, sure enough, a second swarthy head poked itself into view. Again the rock did its work in behalf of peace and quiet, and again the curtains served.

But still Margaret kept on searching. She had finished with the bedrooms, and I could hear her moving about in another direction—probably in the dining room.

Cautiously I approached its entrance. The door was ajar and I peered through the crack where it was hinged to the jamb.

The roving beam of her torch left an old chest, passed across chairs and a table, tentatively investigated the doors of a sideboard, rose—and abruptly stopped.

Centered in light on top of the sideboard was a graceful tall pitcher, wide at the top and shaped more like an inverted cone than a pitcher, and surrounded by six generous cups of kindred design.

But there didn't seem to be anything extraordinary about the collection. They appeared to be made of crude red pottery.

Swiftly Margaret moved toward them. She fumbled in a sideboard drawer, took out what I guessed to be a knife, then struck one of the cups a sharp blow. I thought the thing surely must have fallen apart, but I could not see.

Suddenly her head lifted. Unmistakable small sounds were coming from the direction of the front door. Northrup was returning home.

Like a startled bird she turned and raced toward me. I had time only to draw back before she had sped across the hallway and into the big room which she had entered first. By escaping through the window, I realized, she would make enough noise to draw Northrup in that direction.

Curiosity impelled me into the dining room. Margaret had clung to the cup she had cracked, but I piled the rest into the pitcher, grabbed them up, and quietly let myself out a window. Even in that moment of haste I was

impressed by an unexpected heaviness in my burden.

At the front of the house there was a crash, a sound of running.

AT a distance from the house I paused. The sounds had stopped. Although Margaret Aikman had been taken by surprise, I didn't doubt that she had got away. Turning on the lights must have delayed Northrup a moment or two. The discovery of his two watchdogs, trussed and helpless, might have added another moment. And if the pitcher and the cups really had been stolen from Margaret's father, he might have thought twice about raising an outcry.

Five cups—a pitcher—amazingly heavy. I grinned at the antiquity of Northrup's ruse—placing them in plain sight atop the obvious place for them, the sideboard. He must have been very sure of himself, very certain no search would be made before he had got round to finding a real hiding place.

In my room I brought out my gun for use as a mallet and set to work on the pitcher.

The pottery immediately flaked off, exposing to my expectant gaze the dull gleam of gold. Clay had been formed only in a thin shell over massive metal, strangely wrought.

At first I thought the vessel might be of Maya or Aztec workmanship, valuable for the metal it contained, but far more valuable as an example of ancient art. But then I attacked the interior, and I gasped, and a vague memory began to stir. The inside of the pitcher was literally lined with pearls—their luster dimmed, perhaps ruined by Father Time, but indubitably pearls.

Hastily I turned my attention to one of the cups.

Again the red clay flaked off. Again I was looking at solid, massive, virgin gold.

There were no pearls this time, but a rich red eye glittered and blinked up at me from its setting in the center of the bottom.

These vessels were neither Maya nor Aztec, but something much more recent and far more valuable. The gold might be gold, but after all, when melted down it would not comprise a fortune. The pearls, separated from the pitcher, might be worthless or nearly worthless. Pearls should be carefully preserved, carefully worn against the skin if they are to retain their value undiminished—not pressed into molten gold and left in the gold through centuries, to decay.

But in the bottom of each cup, clasped by tiny golden fingers, lay a ruby—huge, pigeon-blood red, untouched by time.

Now rubies come small. There is nothing in rubies to compare, in size, with the famous diamonds such as the Kohinoor. The value of the red stones jumps upward and vanishes out of sight as their size increases. Talking of big stones and considering similar weights, diamonds hardly get into the same race. If you have one big ruby, you have a fortune. Here were five—six counting the one in Margaret Aikman's cup.

Aikman . . .

Without further delay I dragged out a set of thick scrapbooks, something I generally carry with me when I journey to far places. They are part of my job.

It took me some time to find the reference I sought, but at length I did find it: a clipping from an old copy of the Boston *Transcript* announcing a special exhibition of medieval Tartar

craftsmanship. Outstanding among the articles on display were six golden wine cups set with rubies and one golden wine pitcher studded with pearls. These dated from the fourteenth century, and had been wrought in Samarkand for the garden palace of Sarai Mulkh Khanum, consort and mistress of the household of Tamerlane, equal of Alexander, Napoleon, and Genghis Khan.

The wine set had been temporarily loaned to the museum by one Gregory Aikman.

I cleaned up the débris, hid the golden cups and pitcher, and went to bed. To-morrow morning, I reflected, I would do a little questioning, and then I'd probably turn them over to Margaret Aikman.

BUT I had hardly fallen asleep, when somebody was shaking me. The Captain Burke stood beside my bed. His eyes seemed hard and distant.

"Seen Margaret?" he inquired in a flat voice.

"Uh—no. What time is it?"

"After midnight," the Captain said. "She's not here. I don't know where she is."

After midnight—I must have been asleep nearly two hours. I swung out of bed and hurriedly dressed.

"Got a gun?" I said.

"Yes." He had bought one.

"Come on."

When we turned into the lane leading to William Northrup's house I sensed the Captain start.

"I—didn't think of that," he muttered slowly.

Then something fell on us like a fleet of battleships. Dark figures whirled everywhere. Then I lost interest in the proceedings. The next thing I knew, the Captain had hold of my chin and was shaking my head.

"You ain't hurt," he said.

"I'm practically dead," I observed.

Two of the dark figures lay stretched out in the underbrush. The others, if there had been any others, had gone. Natives are good fighters, but the Captain doesn't believe in getting licked by natives. It must have been quite a fight.

We went on to Northrup's house. The front door was locked, but the Captain simply knocked it open. I chose the window, and it was a good thing I did, because Northrup was waiting for the Captain with a drawn gun. The Captain's hands were empty.

"Up with 'em," Northrup said.

"Up with 'em yourself," I said, behind Northrup, jabbing him with the muzzle of my own gat.

Northrup upped.

"Margaret here?" the Captain inquired in his flat voice.

"No. Why should Margaret be here?"

The Captain went up the stairs.

There was a crash. Wood cracked and splintered. A few moments later the Captain came down again. His face was white. He had taken the gun out of his pocket.

"Rat," he told Northrup. "Your number's up. You get twenty feet head start. That's all."

"His number's up, all right," I put in. "But not that way, Burke. I'm taking this bimbo north to California—San Francisco."

For the first time during my contacts with Northrup, fear leaped into his bearded face. At last the old Welton murder had caught up with him, and he knew it. The tip of his tongue appeared, flicking over lips that were concealed yet must be dry.

"Twenty feet head start," the Captain repeated. "Then you get it, Northrup—"

"Cappy!" cried a girl's voice.

MARGARET had reached the top of the stairs. She was rubbing her wrists. The situation was fairly simple, although it was not till much later that I learned its details. Margaret never had escaped from Northrup's house.

Northrup had caught her while I was getting away. Finding the golden pitcher and five of the cups missing, he had tied her up, locked her inside a bedroom. Doubtless he was relying upon his own strength, his prestige in Manzaña, and his ingenuity to recover the vessels and get out of the country.

Meantime Margaret would have remained in his house at least overnight. Scandal would more than occupy her attention—and there is no scandal more quick and vicious than that which attaches to a young, non-native girl in a tropical, isolated community.

The Captain had found her, had cut her bonds. Then, without a word, he had simply turned and left her there and come back down the stairs. It was hard to comprehend the extent of his fury, because it was difficult to understand how completely and how hopelessly the Captain was in love with Margaret Aikman.

I shifted my glance at sound of her voice, and there was where I made my mistake. Something cracked against the side of my head, and I went down.

Confusion appeared before my eyes, then the blur focused into two figures, locked and struggling. The Captain had found his physical match.

Northrup's right hand came free, drew back and cracked against the Captain Burke's mouth with tremendous force. The Captain staggered backward, and I found myself trying to get to my feet. Northrup knew it. He crouched to the floor, grabbed a gun lying there. And then I was as near to death as I've ever been. The gun pointed at my head and went off. A bullet cracked past my right ear and hit the woodwork. Northrup was just about to fire a second time when a vase flew through the air and crashed against his gun shoulder.

Margaret Aikman had gone into action.

Down went Northrup, his legs dragged out from under him by the Captain Burke. But he retained his grasp on the gun. Kicking himself free, he jumped erect and fled away several feet, toward safety.

There he paused. The Captain was reaching for the second gun, also on the floor. Then he had it.

Flame leaped out from Northrup's gun, and the Captain staggered, hit in the shoulder. But he was firing, too—and he was the better marksman. It was a duel, writhing and flame-ridden, at a range no greater than half the width of a big room. Northrup took a bullet square in the head. The gun dropped from his hand. He wavered, his knees began to buckle, and then he suddenly pitched forward.

WHEN Margaret had recovered the sixth golden cup we walked back to Rodrigo's place. Nobody tried to stop us, although the entire neighborhood had been roused. Several figures hurried past in the heavy night. Somebody paused and muttered a question. The Captain walked in silence. Margaret Aikman was softly crying. Timidly she took the Captain's right arm—the shoulder

which had been hit was his left. When he seemed to pay no attention, she retained her light grasp. I supposed she had been in love with him, too, all the time.

Later I discovered this to be true. Following Northrup's purchase of his interest in their mine, the Captain Burke had left Manzaña, gone north and met Margaret Aikman. Northrup had followed, ostensibly upon a business and vacation trip, but possibly with some idea of recovering the purchase money.

Margaret's father was an impractical Englishman descended from a family whose wealth had been dissipated by the practice, unusual among his countrymen, of dividing the property each generation among all the children, rather than leaving it concentrated in the hands of the eldest. The Samarkand wine set, a gift to one of his ancestors by a Mogul of India, had been Gregory Aikman's most important heritage. Actuated by family tradition, he had retained it till advancing age, poverty, and poor health advised its sale.

At about that time the Captain Burke showed up—and Northrup. The Captain fell in love with Aikman's daughter, and both men became intimate friends of the household. The Captain's aid was enlisted in disposing of the wine set. Then it disappeared from his possession under circumstances which Northrup had manipulated to appear more than suspicious. Northrup himself had an alibi, but soon vanished. The Captain, in preference to defending himself, started a personal search for Northrup and wound up in Manzaña only when his money gave out.

A doctor had been called, and he was dressing the Captain's wounds when Arturo de Ortega walked in, resplendent with sword and medals, but very serious of face. He had his customary bodyguard.

"*Señor,*" he told the Captain, "I fill myself with regret, but you have killed the Señor Northrup. This is not permissible. *Absolutamente* no killing! So say the laws! It is an affair of the most extreme—"

"Just a minute, general," I said.

Then I produced all the information I had concerning Amos Teague, alias William Northrup.

"Ah!" Ortega said, frowning. "This perhaps makes a consideration. It may be permissible to kill a killer, *no es verdad?*" His face brightened. "Five thousand American dollars in reward! *Señor,* my congratulations! *Adiós, señores! Adiós, señorita!*"

I went to my room to fetch the golden pitcher and the five golden cups. They had disappeared, but I found a white button upon the floor. So I called Rodrigo and ordered five Pink Swizzles. Three for the Captain, one for Margaret, and one for me.

"Rodrigo," I said, "you have lost a button from your jacket. Here it is."

Rodrigo said *car-rr-ramba,* it was true. *Gracias, señor.*

"At the present time, Rodrigo, you will please to bring the golden pitcher and the five golden cups, and place them before the *señorita,* to whom they belong. You will bring them, or else—"

Rodrigo brought them.

"Now, Rodrigo, you will please not to steal these articles a second time. Thieving is not permissible. *Absolutamente* no thieving! So say the laws!"

Rodrigo shrugged. He was smiling, because he could not help it, on account of the wound in his black face made by a dull machete.

Well, *señor,* it was like this. A man could only try. Was it not true? He had been, he said, very careless in the matter of the white button. He was sorry.

The Captain was talking with Margaret.

"I have no money," I heard him object in a stubborn, flat voice.

"You've got five thousand dollars," I said.

He was startled. "Huh?"

"The reward belongs to you. It says dead or alive. You killed him."

The Captain turned back to Margaret Aikman.

"Very well," he said. "I have five thousand dollars. I will marry you."

My seaplane arrived next evening, roaring out of the pink-streaked sky. So, when the technicalities of Manzaña law had been satisfied, I returned to California by air. The reward did belong to the Captain Burke. I was out five thousand bucks. But, as I told Rodrigo when I said good-by to him, I had had a nice time. I had liked his Pink Swizzles very much.

THE END.

Money by the Ton

IN China such things as bank checks are unknown, and paper money is not accepted, because several new war lords have issued quantities of worthless scrip. Gold and silver are seldom used because of their value, and most of the money consists of large brass or copper coins with square holes for stringing. The common coins are brass "cash," red "coppers"—equal to ten cash—and Mexican dollars which are worth about two hundred coppers or fifty cents in our money. The cash and the coppers are strung on thongs with one hundred coins between each knot, but as cheating is expected, these must be untied and laboriously counted at each transaction.

One war lord decided to relieve the chronic coin shortage and at the same time become rich by inflating the currency, so gathering all the available coins, he melted them, mixed in three or four parts of sand, and molded new ones of the same face value. These were obviously phony, for they rang like hat checks, felt like glass, broke about as easily, and were decorated with bits of misspelled English like "Amerikum" in addition to the Chinese characters. However, they would have passed all right had he not let any one willing to pay him a rake-off go into the minting business, thus flooding the district with crude coins.

These speedily fell to about fifteen thousand to the dollar with comical results. Coolies rattled along like a bunch of scrap tin with their week's wages, while merchants sounded like old-pots-and-pans men, and sometimes needed more mules to carry their money than for the merchandise. Eight donkey loads of coins were required each week to pay the laborers building a bridge, and ten tons were collected every pay day by three thousand coolies working on a dam! Even the bandits refused to steal this sort of money unless they could get a horse at the same time to carry it on. Some day these coins will probably bring their weight in gold from collectors, but at present they are a public burden.

E. R. McCarthy.

His fellow trustees leaped up to stop the maddened Gregory

Out of the Silence

The disguised young man who astonished a great specialist had never guessed his strange situation—nor had he realized the terrible power it gave him in fighting the men who hounded him

By GARRET SMITH

Author of "When Death Went Blind," "Sky Madness," etc.

Novelette—Complete

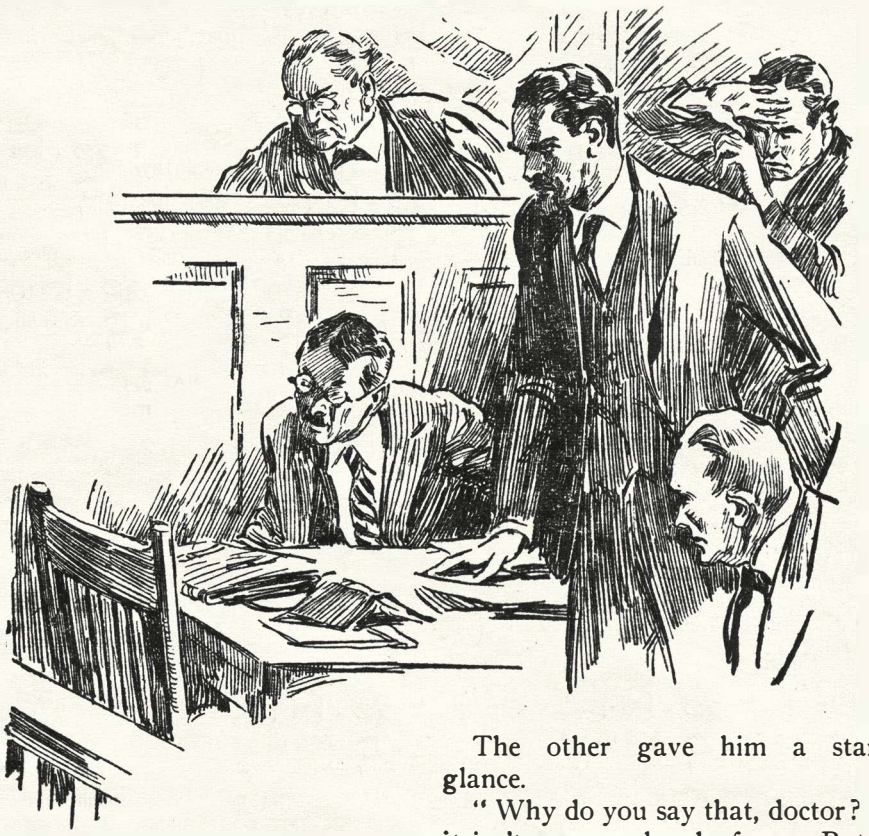
CHAPTER I.

A DESPERATE PATIENT.

"DR. FORSYTHE, I'm afraid you won't believe what I tell you. But you've got to believe it!" exclaimed the young man who had just entered the consulting room. "It mustn't happen again. It nearly cost me my life—next time it might."

The grizzled physician read over the admission card in his hand, then gave his new patient a swift estimate. Here was a man of intelligence and good breeding, too well balanced for hysteria, he judged. But the dark eyes, holding the doctor's gaze steadily from behind horn-rimmed glasses, were filled with haunting terror.

"Marvin Reid," said the card. "Age,



twenty-one." But a heavy Vandyke and worry lines across the high, sunburned forehead made the tall man look ten years older.

"Tell me about it," said Forsythe.

"I suppose I seem pretty rattled," the young fellow went on, with a nervous, apologetic grin which made him look like a boy masquerading in a beard. "But I've been lost all this last month in the Adirondack woods, and my ears were the cause of it. This morning they tricked me again. So I asked for the best ear man in New York and hustled over. It mustn't happen again—especially to-day."

"H'm," the doctor grunted. "You ventured away from the rest of your party, I suppose, and were too deaf to hear their shouts."

The other gave him a startled glance.

"Why do you say that, doctor? No, it isn't any regular deafness. But I've lost faith in my ears. I may have to use them to-day in a matter of life and death. If they fail again—"

He broke off with a shudder and a gesture of finality, then continued:

"A month ago I went to a camp in the Adirondacks. My ears were all right. They'd always been unusually keen. The first morning there, I went out into the woods alone. Just outside of camp, without the slightest warning, it happened.

"One instant I still heard voices in camp and wood sounds around me. A deer crashed out of the bushes and raced up the gravelly trail with a great racket. The next instant the sounds were gone. That deer, hardly two rods off, scattering stones as he ran, was a silent shadow.

"I shouted—couldn't hear my own voice. I ran. My feet didn't make the slightest sound. In an instant I'd gone stone deaf, just as though somebody'd slammed shut a sound-proof glass door between me and the rest of the woods.

"Well, I ran in the wrong direction—rattled, of course. Got lost and stayed lost for a month. All that time I never heard a single sound, not even my own voice. Imagine—"

HE broke off. The doctor moved uneasily at the thought of it.

"Horrible! How did you get out alive and in such good shape?"

"Had one piece of good luck. I stumbled on a hunter's lodge with a stored supply of canned stuff. Finally I had to move on. Then the queerest thing of all happened. My ears began working again as suddenly as they'd quit. I heard voices ahead of me and followed 'em into a village."

"And your ears were as good as ever?"

"Every bit. You can judge how good by the fact that when I heard those voices there was a heavy thunderstorm on, with a beating rain and high wind. One instant I was watching it, like a silent moving picture. Next instant I was hearing the whole works, and in the midst of the racket those voices some distance away. I even understood the words."

"And you say that queer deafness happened again this morning?"

"Yes. It's all over now."

"Let's see how well you can hear," said the doctor, going to his instrument table at the other end of the room. He picked up a stop-watch.

"Fine. I can hear that watch plainly."

"Hardly," the doctor contradicted. "I can just hear it myself two feet away, and you're twenty feet from it. I'll start and stop this watch a few times. Say 'yes' when it starts and 'no' when it stops."

The doctor turned his back and began.

"Yes. No. Yes. No," said the patient, unhesitatingly. The physician whirled around in amazement.

"Right every time—and yet it's impossible!" he exclaimed.

He made a variety of more complex experiments then, mumbling medical terms to himself in growing excitement. He probed the patient's ears with various instruments, and wound up with a complete physical examination.

"This is more amazing than your woods adventure, young man," he declared finally. "You're the only patient I ever had who could hear that watch over three feet away, and *you* heard it *twenty* feet. I've got pretty good ears, but I can't hear it even this far away," and he held the watch out at arm's length.

"Why—why, I can't hear it now!" the other exclaimed in sudden alarm.

The doctor clapped the instrument to his own ear.

"Now I can hear it," the patient sighed, relieved.

With an exclamation the doctor held the watch off again. Once more the other failed to hear it. He tried it several times.

"Why, doctor, that's a funny thing!" the young man said finally. "I'm hearing everything else all right, but it seems as if I can only hear that watch when you hear it."

"M'm! What else can you hear?"

"I can hear you breathing, the clock on your desk, the typewriter going in the room beyond you, and somebody talking in there."

The doctor touched the wall beside him.

"That's a sound-proof wall!" he exclaimed. "I can't hear a thing through it. But I happen to know that my secretary is dictating records to a typist in there. You couldn't have known it!"

He stared at the wall, mumbling to himself, then swung around.

"Can you hear your own watch now?"

The other pulled out his watch.

"Why—that's funny! I can't!"

"Hear your own breathing?"

"No!"

"And yet you hear my watch and my breathing twenty feet away!"

THE doctor returned to his desk and sat gazing thoughtfully out of the window with his back to the patient.

"Evidently very intelligent and level-headed. Seems honest. I've checked every chance of faking," the bewildered caller heard him say. "It's clearly one of those cases. But how does it happen he's never discovered it?"

"What do you mean by that, doctor?"

"Mean by what?" Forsythe demanded, whirling about. "I didn't speak!"

The other repeated what he had just heard.

"That settles it!" exclaimed the specialist, leaping to his feet, while the other watched him in alarm. "Mr. Reid, I've got to give you a shock, but I think your nerves can stand it. You're in perfect condition otherwise, but you're stone deaf. All your life you've been hearing through other people's ears. You're the best example on record of that rare human, an almost perfect mind reader."

Reid became thoughtful.

"If it's true that I can read minds, that accounts for everything! That's why I've been locked up since I was a kid."

The still dazed young man was not conscious he had spoken aloud. He was pacing the floor, head bowed, piecing together the incidents of his lonely and mysterious life.

Suddenly he glanced up. The physician's lips were pressed tight together in concentrated thought. But the younger man's hair crept with chill—for the doctor's voice came to him in clear-cut speech.

"Poor fellow!" it said. "He has a great responsibility. Such a power, backed by his keen mind, can make him a tremendous force for good. But the temptations are fearful. Imagine being able to read the most carefully guarded secrets of any one he meets! I wouldn't have that responsibility for a billion dollars!"

The young man shuddered.

"Doctor," he said in an awed voice, "you weren't actually speaking then, but I think I got your thought. Would you mind repeating aloud so I can be sure I can really do what you say?"

The doctor started, then smiled a little sheepishly. He repeated word for word what the other had seemed to hear, and now his lips followed the words. The youth had read his mind.

"I've just checked on one of our tests that puzzled me," Dr. Forsythe said. "You heard my secretary dictating to a machine on the other side of this deadened wall. Well, she was doing your hearing for you. She had her mind concentrated on you at the moment, because she was just dictating the notes she took when she admitted you. This thing is a little like wireless. When two people are thinking of the

same thing, or one is thinking hard about the other, their minds tune in on the same wave length."

"THIS is still hard to believe, doctor. I've always thought that mind reading was just a superstition."

"Fakers have abused it," the doctor admitted, "but it is now a recognized, scientific truth, clearly proven in laboratory tests — telepathy. Why, everybody has had the experience of suddenly thinking of a friend and then getting a letter from him the same day or bumping into him in the next block. There are many proven cases on record of people getting thought messages from sick or dying friends miles away. Flammarion, the great French scientist, wrote a book on the subject a generation ago, citing hundreds of proven cases.

"A recent book by another scientist claims this is a power civilized man has been losing, like the use of his appendix. He claims that animals still have it in place of speech. Explains why game seems to hide when a man goes out with a gun, and how carrier pigeons fly straight home.

"Man lost that power because he didn't have to use it after he learned to talk.

"You probably became suddenly deaf and had to depend on this other faculty, so you cultivated it. You must have been too young at the time to understand what happened to you, and never knew the difference between that and real hearing. Didn't you ever notice anything peculiar as a child?"

"I remember my mother spanking me for lying because I claimed to hear voices nobody else heard. After that I kept my mouth shut unless I was sure I was being talked to. I began my habit of watching lips then. I supposed the voices were people talking to themselves, or in the next room."

He paused for a moment, choosing his next words carefully.

"Doctor, I'm going to give you a little of my history. There are reasons why I can't tell you much. I'll ask you not to mention my case— secrecy is a matter of life and death to me just now."

"Medical ethics covers that," the doctor said a little stiffly.

"Doctor, I've lived an absolutely shut-in life till a month ago. I was very ill when I was four years old— typhoid, they told me. When I recovered I was told that I had been left with a permanently weak heart and must keep quiet. I found myself in the charge of a stranger who said he was my guardian and that both my parents had died while I was sick. I wasn't allowed to see anybody but him and an old cook, and a doctor who came once in a while. For seventeen years I was never allowed off the place and never out of sight of my guardian for more than a few minutes at a time. So you see, while I was never really alone long enough to check on my hearing, I never saw enough other people to realize I was different from them."

"Amazing treatment!" the doctor was thinking. "Something criminal about it. The boy's heart is all right."

"I got that, doctor. Yes, I was lied to all those years. The reason I'm telling you is that I don't understand how I could have been with my guardian so long and not have read the truth from his mind. But whenever I asked him anything about my parents or my former life, he didn't seem to know."

"Isn't it possible," mused Forsythe, "that instead of being your

guardian, he was just a hired guard who really knew no more than he said? Perhaps your real guardian had a reason for never appearing."

Reid nodded. "That's so—my real guardian must have learned right at the start that I could read minds, and kept away because he had something on his mind that he was afraid to have me learn. I'm sure there's always been some secret. I intend to find my real guardian and demand the truth. I've reason to think that I may find that man to-day, and my whole future depends on the interview, more than you can possibly imagine."

"I wish you luck, my boy. And an operation might restore your hearing—may be pressure on the auditory nerves due to an accident when you were a small child, possibly an explosion. Anyway, you can count on me to do all I can for you any time," the doctor assured him heartily as they parted.

But as he went down the elevator, the man who had called himself Marvin Reid wondered if he could have counted on Dr. Forsythe's help if he had given him the rest of his strange story. Could he have convinced the doctor of his innocence if he told him that his true name was George Brown?

In spite of professional ethics, he felt sure the physician would have felt duty bound to turn him over to the police as a man wanted for murder.

CHAPTER II.

FUGITIVE.

GEORGE BROWN'S sketchy account of his life, as he had given it to the doctor, was literally true as far as it went. Its omissions had been purposely misleading. Perhaps they were not misleading enough, he thought now, as he stood in the lobby of the Medical Building, since a false account of the murder story from the other side must have been published in all the papers a month before.

"Almost any second somebody's likely to see through this cursed bunch of new spinach on my face, in spite of my phony goggles and tan and being fifteen pounds lighter after that trip through the woods," he thought. He combed his fingers through the hated beard, then shuddered with heart-sick memory.

For George Brown had not been released voluntarily from his lifelong imprisonment. The night before the beginning of his adventure in the woods he had gone to bed as usual in his prison home, in a big, well-furnished bedroom, comfortable and cheery in spite of its steel-barred windows and heavily bolted door. John Raymond, his so-called guardian, slept in a twin bed on the opposite side of the room.

Raymond was a big, kindly fellow, more of a friend than a jailer. He was well educated and had wandered widely over the world. It was to him George Brown owed his informal but wide education and all his knowledge of the outside world.

But the big guard had been a faithful jailer for all that. George Brown, after a few thwarted attempts, had given up all hope of escape.

That night, as usual, Raymond slept with an automatic and the keys to the apartment under his pillow. Raymond was a light sleeper. Their rooms were in a small wing of a big house, from which it was separated by a dead wall. George had never seen the rest of the house, as far as he knew, except the gables that were visible over the top

of the high, spike-topped stone wall around the little garden that was the limit of his freedom.

THAT night George had gone to sleep promptly and slept with unusual soundness. When he awoke next morning he found himself alone in a one-room log cabin in the wilderness, without the slightest notion of how he got there. His head ached painfully.

The only door was locked, the one little window heavily barred. From the window he looked out on a mountain lake. On the shore three men squatted in the sand, talking earnestly. At first he was conscious only of dead silence. But as he studied the trio a voice came to him distinctly.

"So you see, Jake, there's nothing to have cold feet about," it said. "Am I right, Bill?"

The speaker sat with his back to the cabin, a stocky fellow, black-haired except for a peculiar mottling of gray streaks at the back of his head. He wore the clothes of a city man. The other two were hard-visaged woodsmen.

"Suits me," agreed the man addressed as Bill.

"Well, I'm in for it, too," agreed Jake, "but it's the dirtiest job I ever did. Suppose some nosey dick finds out this young Brown was kidnaped? Anyhow, I better beat it back to the cabin and give him the once-over now. That drug that was slipped in his coffee last night may be wearin' off by now. And I left my keys and that wad of bills you paid us in my other clothes in the cupboard."

"Well, look out for Brown—he's dangerously clever," warned the city man. "Now, let's be sure this is clear; I've got to beat it before my alibi's queered. In the first place we three have got perfect alibis. In the second place the only two people who could have possibly guessed anything, Raymond and the old cook, are dead. Everybody else around the place, including the night watchman, had drugged coffee for dinner. So nobody saw or heard anything in the night."

Raymond dead!

At the words George Brown had turned faint with horror, but he forced himself to go on listening.

"So you see how pretty the lay is? In the morning the cops find the pair with their heads smashed in, and Brown gone. Raymond's keys and gun are gone, too. They'll be told that nobody but Raymond had keys to the rooms, so they'll figure nobody could have broken in. The answer is that young Brown did the job and beat it. They'll find a ladder against the inside of the garden wall that 'll make it look still better. And when they find young Brown up here they'll find Raymond's keys and gun on him.

"Now, then, all you've got to do is to wait a while and then report to the State Police that a young fellow wandered into your camp, lost in the woods, babbling stuff about killing somebody.

"You'll keep his food drugged meantime with the stuff I'm leaving, and he'll be too muddled to know what he's about. The jury 'll convict him of being an insane murderer without leaving the box."

Again the listener had to fight against faintness for a moment.

"So that's that," the mottled-headed man was concluding. "If anything goes wrong you can get me by telegraph at the Hotel Glenmore in New York any day during the noon hour. But keep him doped. He's got a

mind like a razor and ears that would surprise you. That's why he's been kept shut up."

But George Brown had heard enough. With desperate effort he threw off his daze of horror. Jake's remarks about the money and key flashed back to his mind. In a scant two minutes he had changed to the woodsman's clothes, finding in a pocket the money and some keys, one of which fitted the crude lock on the door. This suit would make it harder to trace him.

By good luck, a clump of bushes stood between the door and the men on the shore. George slipped into the woods unobserved. And a few minutes later came that amazing deafness.

THAT month of delay, in spite of its horror, had been fortunate. It had given him the altered appearance he hoped would be an effective disguise. He'd had time to recover from the first panic and think things out carefully. The experience had toughened his body and given him a new self-reliance.

Luckily he had a good constitution, in spite of the false story of his weak heart. His body had been given good care. The food he found in the summer cabin into which he broke was wholesome, and he kept himself fit with daily exercise in the clearing around the place, chopping wood for his fire and learning to fish and swim in the lake. Freedom! How he had reveled in it—while he made his plans for vindication.

He saw now that his mind reading had helped him escape, and later had led him out of the woods when his food was gone. He had supposed the voices he heard were those of men fleeing from the storm down the trail just ahead of him. Yet the man in the cabin he had finally reached, three miles away, had told him that nobody else had passed.

George realized now that he had been getting that man's thoughts through three miles of storm-swept woods. Both had been thinking of the same thing, a tree just struck by lightning, so they were tuned in on the same "wave length," as Forsythe had put it.

"With the help of this brain wireless," George told himself, "I'm going to make that mottle-haired devil cough up his heart! There's some big stake back of this, and I'm going to find out what it is. If I just turn tail and run, I'll be a fugitive all my life."

HE lingered in the vestibule of the Medical Building, staring through a window with fascinated eyes at the passing crowd. He decided to try concentrating on the faces.

At first he got only a jumble of weird thoughts that might have been his own idle fancies. Then, as he caught the gaze of passers now and then, vagrant messages began reaching him, like fragments of half-whispered sentences.

"Bargain sale at Lacy's—that ribbon three cents cheaper—" from a fat woman tugging a whining child.

"Hungry—want to eat," was the peevish infant's thought.

"Gosh, it's hot! Why does a guy have to work a day like this? —And the boss sitting in his office rotten with coin—I'd like to shoot the old sap-head and take his dough!" as a messenger boy lagged past.

"Cutest little cuss! Bit my finger this morning, the little rascal! Going to look just like me," from a young

business man with a broad grin on his face. George Brown grinned back.

Others followed in a steady stream, glimpses of the hidden tragedy and comedy of everyday lives, usually safe from prying eyes and ears.

"Half hour late now — get the devil."

"Doc says TB—oh, my God! I'd rather go out quick with a gun!"

"Can't prove a thing on me—only took a thousand anyhow—"

A frail, troubled-looking woman came, moodily glancing in windows. "Damn him! I'd kill him if I could get away with it!" she was thinking.

"Phew!" George grunted. "You can't tell by the looks of a face what it's hiding! Are nice-looking girls like that walking around planning murder? . . . What a detective I'd make!" he mused. "Walk the streets and spot criminals by reading their thoughts. Wouldn't have to give crooks the third degree. No good for witnesses to lie in court. Or I'd make a whale of a lawyer. As a newspaper reporter, I'd be a whiz. What a cinch, interviewing people who didn't want to give up!"

Wall Street had always appealed to him. And imagine a stock market operator who could read the secret thoughts of his competitors!

But now another thought struck him. What about a mind-reading crook? What a master criminal he would make!

At that he brought himself up with a start. The warning words of Dr. Forsythe flashed back.

"Terrific temptations! I'll say there are!" he gasped. "Better watch my step! Hope I didn't inherit any criminal tendencies from that unknown father of mine!"

He mused over the little he could remember of a big, dark man he had been devoted to. All he could recall was his face and athletic figure, and his voice calling him "Junior." He hadn't been called anything else then.

SUDDENLY George came out of his musings with a sensation that some one was watching him. He whirled about. It was the pretty girl at the switchboard. He had noticed her when he went in. His young blood leaped unexpectedly.

A daring thought struck him as he caught a fleeting smile in the eyes that held his own for an instant. George Brown became suddenly conscious that he was very lonely. How did one make the acquaintance of a strange girl? Then a hopeful thought of hers slapped him in the face:

"Swell guy, all right! Looks like the coin. Maybe he's fixin' to date me for lunch. O. K. I'll give the other boy friend a stand-up. I'll make this bird come across right."

George gasped and fled with a rueful grin.

"Good jumping Jupiter!" he grunted. "So that's what these girls are like!"

Never in his life, since he could remember, had George Brown so much as seen a girl, till two days ago.

"Except Silver Top," he reflected, with a half-wistful smile.

She was the only childhood playmate that he could recall, one of the few faces except those of his parents he could bring back out of those early days. Her real name he had forgotten. He had called her Silver Top because of her silvery flaxen hair. They'd had a joint birthday party when they were four years old, just before he had been taken sick. She had given him a ring for a present. He'd always carried it as a pocket

piece, had it with him now, he made sure. A little plain band, almost worn through. He'd often dreamed of her since, vivid dreams they were.

He stopped suddenly right in the middle of the sidewalk, struck by a startling thought.

"What if they weren't dreams!" he wondered.

He remembered a particularly real impression of Silver Top, the week before he had been spirited away to the woods, on a rainy afternoon when he and Raymond were half dozing over their books. Suddenly his little flaxen-haired playmate had seemed to be standing there, stretching out her hands to him and saying: "Poor Junior! But they'll have to let you out soon! They can't keep you after you're twenty-one!"

Was it possible that Silver Top had lived near him and remembered him all these years—that instead of a dream of her, he had been getting her actual thoughts of him? If that was true, then she had known he was a prisoner! If he could find her, he could learn the truth.

CHAPTER III.

THE CONSPIRATOR'S HOTEL.

A PASSER-BY jostled against the abstracted young man in the midst of his musings, and he came out of his daze to realize he was blocking the sidewalk.

"Goat-whiskered idiot!" snapped a voice in his ear.

George whirled about with his fists clenched. But his insulter had only thought the insult, he saw at once. You couldn't very well lick a man for thinking.

"Bobby Burns ought to have known me!" thought George. "I've certainly had the giftie gied me to see mysel' as ithers see me. Not always so pretty!"

It was just before twelve when he reached his hotel. The mottle-haired man, whom he was looking for and somehow dreaded to find, had said he would be here every day at the noon hour. George's heart was pounding with nervous excitement as he entered the lobby and took up a position near the door, where he could see everybody who came in, without being too conspicuous himself.

But he was not looking for faces. He had seen only the back of the man's head, with those peculiar mottlings. The pattern had been indelibly photographed in his mind.

Yet finding him was going to be a long chance, he realized now. With a stream of people pouring in to luncheon, it would be quite possible for some one to slip by without giving him a clear view of the back of his head. At that very moment a man came in wearing his hat tilted back so that it almost rested on his collar, completely hiding his back hair.

Besides, the man might not be coming to the hotel at noon any longer. George's escape must have upset his plans. And if he did find the man, his troubles would only be started. There was first the danger that his quarry might recognize him at once and have him arrested before he had learned anything that would help him defend himself.

The best he could hope at first meeting was to learn who the fellow was and where he lived and worked. Then he would hope for some scheme for getting in closer touch with him till he got from the man's mind as much as he could about the dark secret in his life. The man might be thinking of

something else entirely to-day, and make reading his mind utterly useless for George's purposes.

At length a fruitless hour passed. George finally gave up the hope of seeing the man come in. He strolled about the place, only to discover that there were two other entrances to the hotel and a half dozen eating places. Nowhere did he see the man.

Yet, the more he saw of the strange new world around him, the more he was impressed by the readiness with which he absorbed new ideas. Two days ago he had come out of the woods practically a new-born infant in experience. From the start, however, even when he was in the woods, a queer feeling had come to him that he had seen it all b e f o r e, many times, as though he had once been a familiar resident of the world and had forgotten it.

Now he began to understand. All these years of reading and talking with Raymond he had been unconsciously getting from Raymond's experienced mind the very feeling of what the words meant. He had really been seeing the world daily through the eyes of Raymond's recollection.

READY to give up his quest for the day, he was strolling across the crowded lobby at some distance from the desk, when something turned his attention that way. The room clerk was leaning across the desk in earnest conversation with a t h i c k s e t man. Both were staring at George Brown.

With a sudden sense of warning the young man turned away as casually as possible, but he kept his mind on the pair. Their voices came to him as distinctly as though he had been within a foot of them and not another sound in the big noisy room.

"So you're sure you don't know the fellow," the big man outside the desk was saying.

"He didn't register while I was on, but I've seen him before somewhere, Mr. Kelly," replied the clerk, and added m e n t a l l y, "What's our famous house detective got on his mind now? Think this is some big shot racketeer?"

A cold chill swept the listener. So this man Kelly was a detective and had his eye on him!

"By gosh! I know now where I've seen that face! It's just come to me," the clerk went on. "It's been in the newspapers lately, within the last week or two. I remember it—whiskers, goggles and all—on the front page, but I can't remember who it was. I can find it in the files for you."

"Never mind. I don't recall the picture, but maybe that's what struck me. I noticed him close up a few minutes ago, and I've got a hunch he hasn't been wearing that beard or those glasses very long, and that tan looks new."

George Brown, his heart thumping with alarm, began edging away. This hotel was no place for him. No matter whom they mistook him for, they would soon find out the truth if he were arrested.

He was edging toward the door, trying to keep his mind on the pair at the desk, when he nearly ran into a bell hop who was working his way through the throng shouting something as he came. His attention thus diverted to the boy, George caught his words; then he dodged back in horror as he heard the name:

"Mr. George Brown! Telegram for Mr. George Brown!" chanted the boy.

Somebody had located him here and was trying to trap him, was George's panic thought. Was it the house detec-

tive? He forced himself to turn away with apparent indifference. And at that his heart almost stopped beating altogether.

A stocky, dark-complexioned man, who had been sitting behind him, jumped to his feet and beckoned to the bell hop. The face was one of the three in the memory g a l l e r y of George Brown's early childhood—the devoted man who had been with him those last days before his illness, the man whom he always remembered as his dead father.

"I'm George Brown," said this man, reaching for the telegram.

Conviction overwhelmed the younger George Brown. His father! The same name—he himself had been called Junior. They had lied to him about his father being dead, of course. He must have been kidnaped from his parents and held in s e c r e t imprisonment all these years. Perhaps his mother was alive, too.

He took an impulsive step toward the man who was tearing open the telegram. Then he stopped short at second sight of the man's face.

Yes, it was the same face, grown older. But the man who had stamped memories of admiration and affection on young G e o r g e Brown's mind so many years ago had something forbidding about him now. His figure seemed gross. His eyes were furtive, shifty above dark pouches. His mouth was a straight, cruel line between sensuous lips.

"Could that be my father?" he asked himself, a chill growing in him. He stared at the man while the latter read his telegram over twice and pocketed it.

Then the o l d e r George Brown looked up and caught the other's gaze. The man started violently, staggered back a step and turned chalk-white. Then he recovered himself.

"Almost a dead ringer for him!" came his thoughts into the younger man's mind. "If I didn't know he was dead I'd think it was he."

And the big man turned and almost fled toward the exit door. The younger George Brown, staring after him, bewildered, s u d d e n l y swayed and clutched at a chair for support. Everything went black for an instant.

The man he had just recognized as his father had exposed the back of a head marked with that strange pattern!

GEORGE swayed there for a moment, staring after the man whom he had overheard on the shore of the mountain lake plotting his destruction. Then he recovered himself with a jerk. Among the conflicting emotions whirling through his tortured brain one clear thought stood out: he must not lose sight of this man whose name he bore. Without thought of consequences or any plan of action, he hurried after him.

As he reached the sidewalk, his quarry was getting into a taxi. The man glanced back, caught sight of his pursuer and, with a word to the driver, slammed the door. The cab leaped away.

Another drew up at this moment. George dashed for it.

"Keep that cab in sight!" he snapped at the driver and leaped in.

His own cab shot off in pursuit. George fixed his eyes on the one ahead. His m i n d was in a whirl. It was strange that this man, whom George had pictured as hunting him relentlessly, had turned fugitive on sight.

But whom else could the man have taken him for? Some one who really was dead, perhaps; some one who had

worn a beard and glasses when the fugitive saw him last, and looked like George Brown, Jr. The same mysterious b e a r d e d man, likely enough, whose picture was seen in the paper by the hotel clerk. Since he had grown the beard, George himself had not been exposed to prying cameras.

A strange coincidence. But why was the man in the taxi ahead fleeing from a mere duplicate of a dead man?

The way to solve the mystery was to keep in t o u c h with the fleeing George Brown and read the truth from his mind. It was an unlucky coincidence that had put Brown to flight.

And now as he studied the mottled head silhouetted in the rear window of the taxi ahead, an ironical fact became evident, filled him with dismay.

That morning he had feared that when he found the man he was seeking, his ears might give out just at the moment when he depended on skillful eavesdropping. Now it had in substance happened. Instead of his e a r s, his miraculous mind-reading power had gone back on him.

MINUTES passed, and the two cabs raced on a few rods apart, pursuer and pursued beyond doubt concentrating on each other—and yet no hint of the fugitive's thoughts penetrated to George's brain.

To his mental ears came only a jumble of erratic, distracting impressions: the speculations of his curious driver, together with all the confusing street sounds reflected from the man's brain, other fragments of words, intruding p e r h a p s from the older George Brown's mind, but too disconnected by interference of other minds to mean anything—fragments, perhaps, from passers-by who eyed the flying cabs curiously.

For three blocks they raced southward down Park Avenue, dodging in and out of the traffic, never more than a half dozen car lengths apart. George Brown's face streamed with sweat, as he f o u g h t for concentration, his straining eyes on the back of the mottled head, trying in vain to search the brain behind it.

At the last crossing above the New York Central Building the red traffic light was suddenly set against them, just as the cab ahead reached the stop line.

But it didn't stop. With screaming brakes it shot out abreast of the enraged traffic officer and slowed to a momentary crawl. There was a word from the man in the cab. A hand reached out, held a card under the officer's nose, then placed something in his palm. At that the cab leaped forward again without further challenge.

"Follow him! I'll fix the cop! Hundred dollars to you if we catch him!" George snapped at the driver, and the taxi lunged forward.

With a trill of his whistle, the officer blocked their way, and the driver was forced to slow down to prevent running over him. The officer leaped to the running-board just as George Brown reached out and thrust a hundred-dollar bill toward him.

"Got to catch that man ahead! Explain afterward. I'm Marvin Reid, Hotel Glenmore," George shouted.

"The devil you say! Get over to the curb," the officer ordered the driver, righteously waving away the money. He stuck to the running-board, trilling his whistle again. In the distance, the pursued taxi was just disappearing in the arched roadway through the New York Central Building.

A moment's wait at the curb, in which George made another vain plea.

The roundsman on the beat hurried up. The traffic man began mumbling in his ears, but George's brain waves were working without interference again and he caught every word.

"This passenger's got to be held without bail. Orders from a guy who said his name was George Brown and had a card from Big Tom. Says Big Tom will O. K. him and he'll get in touch with the captain and the judge later and put in a heavy charge. See? Make it breakin' traffic ordinances, criminal carelessness endangerin' lives, tryin' to run me down, threatenin' and bribin' an officer. You know. Anything to h o l d him overnight without bail. Brown says he'll make good later. Meantime he wants us to find out all we can about this bird."

The unsuspected listener's heart sank to its lowest depths. Then he was trapped! It seemed clear what had happened and what was intended. The older George Brown had suspected the younger man's true identity.

But this unreasonable father of his probably knew of his son's mind-reading powers and did not dare appear in person against him. Some one who was innocent of the true facts of the deadly plot would be chosen for that. And that other person would be armed with perfect evidence. What good to be able to read minds, if those who knew what he needed most to read always kept out of reach?

CHAPTER IV.

IN THE HANDS OF THE LAW.

ALL the way to the police station he was lost in puzzled thought. But he could find no way out, unless his a l t e r e d appearance and steadfast refusal to admit his identity should baffle them. But probably the plotters had not neglected the item of finger-prints. They would find them in his prison apartment easily enough. Doubtless, too, they had planted them on Raymond's gun, which had been taken up to the woods hang-out of the kidnapers as evidence.

When they reached the station, George Brown and his driver were told to stand to one side in charge of another officer, while the man who had brought them in held a whispered consultation with the police captain at the desk.

Not till then did the prisoner get a ray of hope, as an audacious plan began forming in his mind, while he absorbed the significance of the talk between the two officers.

"George Brown, you say, and he had Big Tom's card," commented the captain. "I know a lot of George Browns, but none of the chief's men by that name. Every third crook in the country calls himself George Brown or John Smith, even that nut in the Emory case. And this Brown wants us to hold this Marvin Reid without bail, even if we have to make a phony charge till he gives us the real dope? Well, Big Tom is boss here. I'll give him a ring."

To himself the captain added: "I am leery of this case. This Reid looks like a high-class citizen. I've seen his picture somewhere in the papers lately, but I can't place him. And Tom and I are deep enough in this Archibald matter."

George Brown began to understand his position. The man who looked like his father—the older George Brown—had not recognized him as the mind-reading fugitive on whom the murder case was framed. If he had, the older man would certainly have told the po-

lice officer. It was equally evident that the police did not penetrate his disguise. Thank Heaven that, as far as he knew, no picture had ever been taken of him, to broadcast.

He saw hope that he might save himself for the time being if he played right the cards the police captain had just unwittingly placed in his hands.

That official was now at the telephone holding a brief, cryptic conversation with Thomas Morran, evidently the political boss of the district, regarding the credentials of the George Brown who claimed influence with that local power.

"Big Tom says this Brown's word is good, but that he never heard of this Marvin Reid," the captain whispered to the patrolman after he hung up. "Bring this man's taxi driver over here. I know how we can fix it.

"Listen, fella," the captain said sternly, after the man's name and pedigree had been taken. He leaned forward and spoke barely above a whisper, fixing the driver with a steely eye that made even that hard-boiled young man quail. "You're in bad. Unless you can show you weren't responsible for this thing, you're going to lose your driver's license for keeps and do a long stretch on the island for criminal recklessness endangering life. This man threatened you, I understand, made you drive like that."

The driver studied the captain's face and shrugged.

"That's the truth, captain," he said earnestly. "Sat there and threatened to croak me if I slowed down for a second."

"That's what I thought. And you heard him say he'd kill this man he was chasing, if he caught him. That right?"

"Sure. That's right."

"And you heard him threaten the traffic officer?"

"I sure did. I'll swear to it, if the cop backs me up."

"All right. Don't forget that. You can go now. Be in the magistrate's court as a witness at ten to-morrow morning. Better stop in here and see me on the way to court. I'll probably have word from the man he was chasing by then."

THE driver went out, and the captain turned to George, and motioned the officer to bring him over. As George came forward and studied the captain's granite face more closely, the daring plan of action he had been forming suddenly seemed futile and boyish, yet it was his one hope.

It wasn't going to be easy to bluff his way out of the clutches of the law, even though he knew that he was being held on the shallowest of false pretexts.

Never before in his life had George Brown needed more self-control than he used now in summoning a confident smile as he beat the police captain to the first word, after his pedigree had been taken.

"Captain Hogan," he began, having picked up the name from an officer standing near him, "I'd intended to come in to see you, anyhow, before this friend of Big Tom's butted in by mistake. I've got something to talk to you about. It 'll make quite a difference, something you and Big Tom both will like to know about before you make any mistake."

But if his words made any impression on the captain it wasn't betrayed by the granite face or any thoughts coming from behind it.

"Spill it, and never mind the applesauce," ordered Hogan.

"What I have to say to you must be said in private, captain."

"Is that so?" the officer snapped. "You'll talk right here and talk fast. This is a busy day. No stalling now."

The prisoner leaned close to the officer and whispered: "Would it make any difference if I wanted to talk about the Archibald matter?"

He had not the slightest idea what the Archibald matter might be, but when he had caught it passing through the captain's thoughts a few moments ago he had a hunch it might be something to juggle with.

But again the granite face remained unmoved.

"I don't know what you're talking about," the captain growled, but added to himself: "Hell's bells! Who is this fellow and what does he know about Archibald slipping us that fifty thousand? Has that cheap little gambler squealed?"

And George, as he got this unspoken thought, noted a slight ebb of the ruddy tide in the captain's cheeks.

"I know what I'm talking about, all right, and I'll prove it to you, but it's too much money to talk about except in private."

"All right," the officer surrendered abruptly.

"NOW what's this all about and who the devil are you, anyhow?" he demanded when they were alone, whirling on George with blazing eyes. The face itself was still impassive but there were beads of sweat on the forehead, and the alarmed thoughts racing through the man's mind were as clear to the prisoner as though he had shouted them.

"Is this a gumshoe from that damned Committee of a Hundred?" his mind was demanding. "Or one of the District Attorney's under-cover men? Which one of Big Tom's men has been stooling?" And a list of names ran through the captain's mind and with them the mental photographs of the men themselves. "Archibald himself might have squealed, but why should he? We haven't raided his house in months," and the mind reader got a vision of a luxurious interior that he recognized as a gambling house.

George's courage was rising again. He managed an ingratiating smile.

"First let me assure you that I'm not really interested in Archibald's gambling house or the money he pays you for protection. I'm not after you and Big Tom and I'm not a gumshoe from the Committee of a Hundred or the District Attorney. They don't even know me and I'm not going to do any squealing to them, though they'd give a million dollars to know what I know. I merely picked up a few facts by accident while I was working on something else. I'll soon forget them if I'm treated right. And you will, because I'm going to give you a good tip about the one of Big Tom's friends most likely to be a squealer."

"You're bluffing, young fellow. Better be careful who you call a squealer."

"Don't worry, I've got plenty of facts," said George confidently, "and I'll shoot the works if I'm not out of here in fifteen minutes, or if anything happens to me overnight. Particularly if your gunman friend, that little cross-eyed Jack the Rod, and his gang should try taking me for a ride," he wound up, catching another fleeting thought in the captain's mind.

"What do you mean by that crack?" roared the captain, but his eyes widened and the sweat drops thickened on his forehead.

George laughed.

"You wanted to be shown. Now let's be friends. In the first place, don't worry about any of Big Tom's inside men stooling. None of them have, as far as I know. They don't know me, but I know 'em all by sight and reputation," and he named and described the men whose names and faces had just passed through the captain's worried mind.

He could see that the police captain was becoming convinced that he was not bluffing. He was sure of his ground now. This, as he had guessed, was one of those corrupt police officials in league with a corrupt political boss, of which he had so often read. George Brown was suddenly in political intrigue up to his neck and for the moment had the situation in hand. But his elation cooled at the memory of what happened in such cases to men who knew too much. The captain's unspoken thought of Jack the Rod's gang had been hint enough.

"NOW, young fellow, get down to brass tacks," Hogan commanded. "I'm admitting nothing of this hooey you've been giving me, but we can't have wild talk like that going around. You better keep your trap shut and forget it. Meantime if you can show that my officers were mistaken about that traffic charge, we'll forget that too. But now what's this tip you claimed you had?"

"Glad to hear you say that," George told him with an ironical smile. "All right. It's this George Brown I was chasing I want to warn you about. I'm satisfied you don't know who he is, but Big Tom does. This Brown is going to get you both in a deep hole if you don't help me step on him quick."

"You mean he's the one's been double-crossing us?" the captain demanded, for a moment thrown off his guard.

"It'll be worse than that for both you and Big Tom if you don't take my advice," George told him confidently. "I know I'm right, but I can't prove it yet. This George Brown is at the bottom of what may be one of the biggest crime sensations of the year. When it breaks you and Big Tom don't want to be on the wrong side of it. If Big Tom is already, you'll have to dump him and go it alone."

"Wait; you're asking a lot!"

"Not a thing but what you can do safely, until I prove I'm right. All I ask you to do is to find this Brown. Bring him in on some charge or other, then let me ask him some questions. If that's O. K., I'll leave you and keep in touch with you by phone."

"Not so fast, young fellow! You're asking me to bring in on a phony charge a friend of the boss—just on your say-so that he's guilty of something you can't prove, and you won't even tell what it is or who you are. And you've made a pretty serious charge against me and the boss that you can't prove either. You better just beat it out of here and watch your step. If you do any of that loose talking outside, God help you."

"He's got something, all right. Now I'll see whether he's bluffing about being able to prove it," thought the worthy officer, and went on reviewing in his mind the details of his illegal deal with the gambler. They dealt with too many unfamiliar elements for George Brown to follow clearly. He got nothing of use to him. The mind reader was stumped. He had sprung his bluff and won a dubious liberty for the moment, but he saw that to read a thing in a man's mind was one thing and to prove it was another.

Now he was quailing under the police officer's fixed stare. He had a feeling that Hogan was on the verge of suspicion of his true identity, and that the slightest hint of the true reason for his interest in the other George Brown would precipitate it.

The captain's stare grew more intense. He couldn't turn his fascinated eyes away from it. "Where have I seen this bird?" came the man's thought. George's heart was beating wildly.

Suddenly the officer's eyes widened. He leaped to his feet and slapped a big hand on the desk top so hard that the heavy furniture jumped. Then he pointed a stubby finger at the startled prisoner.

"Now I know who you are!" he shouted.

CHAPTER V.

THE BEARDED FACE.

FOR over a month George had been schooling himself to deny his identity in case of capture, and to stick to the denial as long as there was the slightest hope that he could baffle his captors. Over and over again he had rehearsed such imagined scenes. For the last two days he had been momentarily expecting it.

Yet, when the moment came, he felt quite limp. He knew the blood had drained from his face. His power of mind reading was not the infallible tower of strength he had imagined it.

"Knowing a thing and proving it are two different things!" ran idiotically through his numbed mind. And on the other hand, his enemies could prove their point with only the slightest suspicion for a start. He could all but feel the grip of the handcuffs on his wrists as the police captain's eyes bored into his own.

The officer suddenly whirled about. Released from the boring of those steel-cold eyes, George pulled himself together.

"Well, who do you think I am, and why do you think so?" he managed to ask.

The captain strode across the room and began thumbing over a file of newspapers on a rack there.

"Come here and I'll show you," the officer commanded.

George's pulse quickened a little with vague hope. He realized that the man's voice had suddenly taken on a more respectful tone, hardly in keeping with that of a police officer who had just laid hands on a red-handed murderer.

With a suddenly renewed grip on himself, George stepped over to Hogan's side, and then gasped with surprise as his eyes fell on a newspaper cut at which the officer was pointing.

He was seemingly staring at a fairly good picture of himself, beard, spectacles and all. The man he had been mistaken for, of course. But the surprising caption, which he took in at a glance, only deepened the mystery of it.

"The late Gale Emory, Sr., multimillionaire capitalist, whose son is wanted on murder charge," ran this caption.

"Didn't you realize that with this picture in all the papers somebody was going to notice the resemblance sooner or later and guess you were one of the Emory family?" Captain Hogan asked.

"Must be that cousin from the West, all right. Rest of family accounted for and that crazy killer undoubtedly dead," the captain's thoughts ran on while the bewildered George Brown tried to unravel them.

More coincidence! A crazy son wanted for murder! And this man who looked so much like him was a multi-millionaire! There seemed to be too much coincidence to have no real connection with himself. Yet how could there be? No such name as Emory loomed up in his memory.

Only one thing was clear in his mind. The police officer had not identified him as a wanted murderer, after all, but merely some distant relative of the killer's. He had no hope that the danger was passed, however.

He wanted mightily to read the story that went with the cut, but the police captain's newly respectful eyes were upon him. It wouldn't do for him to pause at a story that every one else knew, after posing as a thoroughly well-informed man.

Hogan's mind was running over some complicated matter of an estate and somebody from the West who might try to break a will, evidently the cousin whom George was taken for now. Under cover of a pretense at being lost in thought, George ventured to glance at the two-column headline beside the cut. As he took in the sensational announcement, his very blood seemed to freeze for a moment.

HEIR TO EMORY MILLIONS VANISHES IN DOUBLE MURDER!

MAY HAVE SLAIN HIS TWO SERVANTS IN INSANE FRENZY

Son of the Late Gale Emory Escapes in Night From Home Where He Had Been Confined Under Guard Since Early Childhood—Long Held Hopelessly Insane.

GEORGE gripped the edge of the newspaper rack to keep from betraying the shock of the revelation.

"That's no coincidence!" was the first clear thought out of the sudden turmoil of his bewildered brain. "Why, I'm this Gale Emory! George Brown isn't my father! They'd even tricked me out of knowing my own name!"

The captain confirmed this conclusion.

"You must think I'm dumb not to have tumbled sooner," he said now, as the shaken young man forced himself to turn away from the revealing news story. "But you see, I'd sort of looked at this case as closed from the police end. We never did look for this young Emory down here, just sent out a general alarm as a matter of form. And of course the boy's dead now—he couldn't keep alive lost in the woods all this time, and he couldn't have got out without being caught. I just happened to remember reading that an unknown cousin in the West might show up and try to break the will."

George had himself in hand now. He must learn as much as possible and get away before the captain changed his mind. Under pretext of studying the face of Gale Emory, Sr., he bent over the story again.

"Yes," he said, "I do look more like Gale Emory than I realized."

And running his eye swiftly down the opening paragraph of the story, he caught the words, "in his quarters on the Emory estate at Highlands on Hudson."

A call there might reveal the rest of the mystery, if he could manage it. He considered for a moment.

"This fellow must have spent a lot of money on private detectives around here for weeks, to pick up all he knows about Big Tom and me," the thoughts of the captain came to him. "What's the big deal he's got on his mind, and where does this George Brown fit in?"

"Well, I might as well admit that you have made a shrewd guess, captain," said George finally, "but it's absolutely necessary that you keep this to yourself for the present. At any rate, perhaps you'll take a little more seriously my request that you bring in this man who says his name is George Brown. Perhaps before night I can make a definite charge against him. So will you look him up and at least have him where you can lay your hands on him?"

"Sure, I can do that much," the captain agreed. The Emory millions had made a revolutionary change in the official's attitude. "We'll get busy right away."

His listener quailed inwardly. The moment the captain started to make inquiries for the other George Brown, he might stumble on the truth that his caller was the youth wanted for murder, himself, and not a distant cousin.

George looked at his watch. "I'll have to go now. I'm already late to an appointment. I'll keep in touch with you by phone."

He glanced again at the Emory story, hoping to catch another helpful hint. There were other half-tone illustrations. One was a strip of three faces, substantial-looking, middle-aged business men. "Homer Gregory, Warren Whipple and J. Barton Killup, trustees of Emory estate and joint guardians of Gale Emory, Jr.," was the caption.

That settled one point. Neither John Raymond, his guard whom he was accused of killing, nor this mysterious George Brown, were his legal guardians. Yet such substantial men as these three trustees could have had no part in the criminal conspiracy, surely! He must find them and convince them of the truth of his story.

But how could they have been made to believe he was insane all these years? That damnable mind-reading power of his, of course. The conspirator had interpreted it to them as proof of insanity, no doubt. He had better be a little slow about taking these trustees into his confidence.

He was suddenly overwhelmed by a sense of helpless bewilderment.

Then his eye fell on another cut on the opposite side of the headline. It showed the head and shoulders of a beautiful young woman with the caption, "Miss Doris Lane, daughter of John Lane, the well-known broker, who is said to have broken her engagement to Homer Gregory, Emory trustee, because of a childhood attachment to Gale Emory, Jr."

With leaping heart, the young man who was now trying to think of himself as Gale Emory stared at the type then at the pictured face. Slowly the lines of the young woman's face fitted into his memory of a little four-year-old girl with flaxen hair, the playmate of his dreams.

It was Silver Top!

AN hour later George Brown—Gale Emory, as he intended to call himself from then on—was on a train headed up the Hudson River. He was bound for the old home where he had been a prisoner for so many years. He was still puzzling over the mystery of the man George Brown whose name he had borne all this time. Why had he taken the man for his father? Why did he have no memory of his true father? He earnestly hoped that this trip would clear up some of the mystery. He was hoping against hope that he would find that Silver Top was a neighbor, as he had always believed. She was the only one in the world he

could trust. Was it true, as the newspaper said, that his childhood playmate had kept her affection for him all these years?

It was late afternoon when a hired car took him along the River Boulevard toward the Emory place. As he neared it vague, long-forgotten memories began stirring in him. He seemed to have seen before the high iron fence stretching away indefinitely on either side of a big gate with white pillars. Back of it he saw heavily banked shrubbery and up a long slope in the far distance the gables of a big house peering above the tree tops.

He dismissed the driver at the big gate, then stood before it hesitantly. Whom would he find here if he entered? Some one who would penetrate his disguise instantly and call up the local police? It was not unlikely. Why hadn't he had sense enough to inquire if John Lane, the father of the girl he wanted to find, lived in the neighborhood?

Acting on impulse, he went on down the boulevard till he came to the entrance of the next estate. The house lay hidden from the gate by high shrubbery. Off to the right of it was the garden. His mind followed the maze of paths as he stood questioning his next step. Should he go boldly in and ask if John Lane lived there, and if Miss Doris was at home? Fear of recognition deterred him.

CHAPTER VI.

"SILVER TOP."

THEN he felt a sudden sense of her presence somewhere ahead of him in the labyrinth of the garden. He entered the gate and struck into a winding path, seemingly guided by subtle half-whispered directions. He was reminded of what Dr. Forsythe had said about the homing instinct of the carrier pigeon. As he went forward the feeling of her presence grew stronger.

"Oh, why does life have to be so hard?" said a voice.

"She!" he exclaimed, and hurried down the path.

He came upon her suddenly in a summerhouse beside a pool. All his lingering doubts vanished. It was his dream girl beyond question. The same silvery, flaxen hair; and the thoughts that reached him were final proof. She looked up startled, then leaped to her feet and stared at him with wide, violet eyes.

"Oh!" her lips formed, and her panic thoughts raced on. "Old Mr. Emory! No! Of course not! But how much he looks like him! Only a little younger than he was when he died! Gale might look like this now except for that horrid beard. Why—why, I feel so queer!"

Gale Emory's pulse pounded at his temples. The same face he had adored as a child and kept fresh in memory through those vivid dreams. The little turned-up nose he had teased her about. The Cupid's-bow mouth and dimpled chin. Gale Emory surprised himself by a mad impulse to rush to her and take her in his arms. In a flash he realized that all these years he had been unconsciously in love with his dream girl.

Then he had a recurrence of the shame he had felt that morning when he first experimented with his newly discovered power. Now it was more poignant, utterly personal as he realized he was prying into the privacy of the mind of the girl he loved. All he read there was good. But he had

no right to read it except as she was willing to reveal it.

His mind raced ahead unhappily, presumptuously, thinking of their possible years together, if he should escape from the grip of the plot against him. It would be impossible for him to keep his weird power from her knowledge. When she knew, she would shrink in dread from a man to whom her secret thoughts could never be hidden. Now he forced himself back to the need of extreme tact.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," her lips were saying. "You startled me. You looked so much like some one I used to know."

"I'm sorry I startled you," he apologized, feeling his way cautiously. "I guess you thought I looked like the Mr. Emory who used to live next to here. I'm a relative. Emory's my name, too. I'm from the West, and haven't been around to get acquainted in years, but I remember you as a little girl. I was in New York and heard what happened to the young man. I came up here to look around, but I didn't know anybody at the other house so I came here. You're Miss Doris Lane, aren't you?".

"Yes," she said. "And it seems as though I remember you."

"Tell me," he plunged boldly into the purpose of his call. "Do you really think Gale Emory killed those two people?"

Her eyes flamed.

"No! No! Not for a minute!" she exclaimed. "Oh, tell me you don't think he did either! Everybody else does, even father. I don't dare even talk about it. I had a dreadful quarrel with one person who I thought was a very good friend, because I said I believed in Gale and was going to stand by him."

"Why don't you think he was guilty?" he asked, trying not to show his own excitement.

"He was such a dear little boy, and so bright and kind. He would never hurt anybody in his right mind and I don't believe he was insane. He had funny little ways, and I think his father and mother misunderstood him. I remember he used to say he heard voices when we were playing alone together. But that was just because he was imaginative. You see, his father and mother were away traveling a good deal of the time and really didn't know him very well."

"I SEE," Gale said. "That's why he could remember so little of his parents, as I understand."

"Why, yes. His father and mother went to Europe when he was a little over two, and were gone a year. Then his mother was at home on and off, but she was such a busy society woman that she didn't see a great deal of him. His father was away on a long business trip most of that last year, and he didn't come home again till the week before they died. Meantime his mother found out about Gale's hearing voices and had a doctor examine him. As nearly as I can learn, the doctor said he ought to be watched carefully and kept with a good attendant. So a man was hired to look after him. Then when his father came home he made that will just a few days before he and Mrs. Emory died."

"I think you are right," Gale encouraged her. "But you had other reasons for thinking he didn't commit murder? The evidence seems pretty strong."

"I know it does, and perhaps I haven't any evidence against it that would hold in court. But it seems

strange, his getting way up into the mountains so soon after he escaped. He had no car, and didn't know how to drive. Nobody reported giving any one of his description a ride. Besides, he'd never been anywhere in his life, and would be pretty helpless. And such queer things have happened since. It looks as though some one were profiting by getting rid of him. But why am I talking this way to you?"

"Go on, please. You can trust me."

"Well, the estate goes out of the trustees' hands, you know, just as soon as Gale is declared sane and of age. My father is in Wall Street, so I know a lot about it. Besides, I have some money of my own just left me so I am watching things more closely. Father is puzzled about the market himself. He thinks there is a secret pool trying to get control of the Emory properties before the estate is settled, but nobody can find out a thing. The trustees say they are just as puzzled as he is."

"You'll think it funny I don't know more about it," said Gale Emory, "but I've been quite out of touch with things. Suppose you tell about his parents' deaths and the will and all that. I've heard conflicting stories."

"Well, when Gale was declared insane, his father made a will naming three trustees who were to manage the estate and act as Gale's guardians when his father died. If Gale died insane or without heirs, the estate was to go to charity.

"Then, you know, when Gale was a little past four, his father and mother were killed by lightning. The trustees have kept Gale shut up ever since, declaring him utterly insane, and not letting anybody see him but his attendants. They said he couldn't remember anything, not even his own name, and that he had violent attacks when anybody went to see him.

"He would have been twenty-one the day after he disappeared. Now, doesn't it seem queer that all this happened just before his birthday, when the will provides that the courts should appoint a commission to decide if he was sane and could manage his own affairs? And wasn't it queer that the only two people who had seen much of him all this time should have been killed?

"What is more, the two woodsmen who found him up in the mountains, and identified him by the gun and keys he left behind when he escaped from them, were found shot in their cabin a week after they reported to the State Police. The police believe Gale was lurking around there in the woods and did the shooting. I don't believe that, either. You know, I have a queer feeling that Gale isn't really dead."

GALE EMORY gasped. The mottle-haired George Brown had made a clean sweep of all possible witnesses, and had planted two more murders on the man who bore his name.

"Do you think it was true that Gale didn't know his own name? Why would he think he was George Brown, if he was sane?" Gale asked her. "Was there ever a George Brown around the place?"

"Yes. A man whom Gale often saw, more than he did his own father. That was the name of the first guard he had, a man his father hired after they thought his mind wasn't right. He was a big handsome fellow and Gale admired him immensely. He used to put on the man's hat and strut around saying, 'I'm George Brown.'

"Gale was struck, too, by the light-

ning that killed his father and mother, and was senseless for days, I'm told. After he came to he seems to have remembered the name of George Brown as associated with himself. He'd only been called Junior before. I believe they just let him go on thinking that was his name. I think they wanted him to appear insane, if possible. That's an awful thing to say about three such men as his trustees, but I've been wondering if there wasn't somebody else behind it, somebody who fooled the trustees, too."

That cleared up a great deal, Gale Emory was thinking, but the plan behind it all was almost as vague as ever.

"This much is clear," he said aloud. "Somebody wanted Gale Emory to be declared insane so he could control the estate. The whole thing was a plot, of course."

"Oh, you do know something, then?" she cried, rushing to him eagerly.

"Yes," he said. "Gale Emory was kidnaped. He's still alive. He always has been sane. I've seen him—he sent me to you."

For a moment he thought the girl was going to faint. He started toward her, but she pulled herself together and waved him back.

"I'm all right. Tell me," she commanded breathlessly.

Cautiously he told the story of the kidnaping and escape, as though the victim had related it to him, leaving out all reference to his mind-reading power. When he told her a doctor had examined him and declared him perfectly sound-minded, her eyes shone with triumph.

"And here is final proof that I have actually seen him and that he remembers you and loves you still," he concluded.

From his pocket he took the little birthday ring she had given him many years ago. She held it in a trembling hand, while the tears rolled down her face.

"Oh, I love him so!" came her thought to his mind, and again he fought to keep from taking her in his arms.

BUT Gale stiffened suddenly. Footsteps and voices came to him from the other side of the shrubbery and he felt the chill of a hostile presence.

"What do you think of the way the market went to-day?" asked a voice.

"I don't know what to think. Mystery to me," said another, and then his mind rambled on: "Like heck it's a mystery to me! Wouldn't this fellow turn handsprings if he knew I'm running this pool? One more day like this and we can pick up the Emory companies for a nickel a share, if nobody gets wise and starts buying. Anybody starts buying now and they could wreck us in a few hours."

Thinking rapidly, Gale Emory motioned the girl to follow him around a bend in the path.

"Who is that coming?" he whispered.

"That was my father who spoke first," she told him. "The other sounds like Homer Gregory. He's one of the trustees of the Emory estate, you know."

Gale drew in his breath sharply. This was the man who had been engaged to Doris Lane. She had flushed ever so slightly as she named him.

"What did they say?" he asked, not certain how much had been actually spoken aloud.

"Father asked what Mr. Gregory thought of the market, and Mr. Greg-

ory just said he didn't know what to think, that it was a mystery to him."

Gale was relieved on one important point. The father of Doris, then, was not one of the wreckers of the estate. But this supposedly private thought of the conspirator had given away the mystery that had baffled Wall Street. Whether or not this Gregory was in on the plot against the heir of the estate, he was certainly taking advantage of it.

"Listen!" Gale said tensely to Doris. "There isn't a moment to lose. You must believe me without explanation, and remember what I tell you. I know what's happening in the Street—Homer Gregory is at the head of a pool that's trying to wreck the Emory estate by pushing down the value of the properties until they can buy control. If somebody starts buying tomorrow, Gregory will be beaten and wrecked. Tell your father. Make him believe it! Get him to start buying—to shoot the stocks up. Put in your own money. Get him to start his friends going. Here's all I have—put that in, too."

He thrust into her hands the packet of money he had taken from the kidnapers. Then he turned to escape down the path. But it was too late.

A stocky man with hard eyes stepped out from behind a bush and fastened a biting grip on Gale's wrist. Doris Lane cried out. Her father and Homer Gregory rounded the bend on the run.

"That's Gale Emory! Hold him, officer!" shouted Gregory.

For an instant Doris Lane stared at the prisoner wide-eyed. Then, with a low cry, she rushed to him.

"Gale! Why didn't I know? I love you, Gale, and I'll believe in you always."

Then John Lane, white-lipped with horror, tore his daughter from the arms of the supposed madman.

"Sorry, Lane," Gregory grunted. "I was afraid we'd find him here, but I didn't want to alarm you unnecessarily. The police spotted him in New York and gave me a ring. I had a hunch he might come here. Emory, you're under arrest for murdering your guard, John Raymond, and three others. Anything you say may be used against you. Look out for him, officer—he's violent."

CHAPTER VII.

A HOPELESS DEFENSE.

"THANK heaven I followed George Brown's advice and don't know a thing about the details," Homer Gregory thought. "Even if Brown's idea that this fellow can read minds should be true, no living soul but Brown knows anything which would incriminate us. It's a good thing I don't know where Brown is now."

These unspoken words radiated from the mind of Homer Gregory into the tensely alert brain of Gale Emory, as he was arraigned in the little up-river county courthouse. The lean, grizzled, distinguished-looking Emory trustee stood confidently eying the prisoner. The deference paid Gregory by the magistrate and court attendants was eloquent of the power and standing of this man who had the Emory millions under his control.

The rightful owner of those millions felt his courage sinking. It sank still lower as he caught Gregory's next thought.

"Even if the boy were a perfect mind reader, and even Brown doesn't believe that, what good would it do him if he read every thought in

Brown's head? He couldn't prove a thing. If he makes any crack about being able to read minds, it would simply prove to the court that he's really crazy and play right into our hands.

"Anyhow, if everything goes all right in the market to-morrow, it won't make any difference to us whether they shut him up for life as insane, or send him to the chair for murder. One thing or the other is sure."

"Dead or insane!" was the horrifying alternative that flashed through Gale Emory's mind. After the brief statement of damning facts had been laid before the magistrate, it hit him with redoubled force.

The night watchman on the Emory grounds was the chief witness. He admitted that on the fatal night he had been overcome by brief drowsiness and had heard nothing. In the morning he had found the ladder against the iron fence, the door of the inner garden wall open, also the outside door of the prison wing and of the apartment where Gale Emory and John Raymond slept. No one but Raymond had keys to those doors. Raymond and the cook were dead, and the keys and the guard's gun gone.

The keys and gun had been found later in the shack of the two woodsmen, Bill Cummings and Jake Heffron, who had reported three days later that an insane man, answering the description of the fugitive, had wandered in and left those articles there. The man had said he was George Brown and had babbled of killing some one. When they had tried to restrain him, he had fled into the woods. Gale Emory's finger-prints had been found on the gun stock.

Clearly the prisoner saw the utter, devilish certainty of the trap—the uselessness of his power to read the plotters' minds, when he had nothing to support his bare statement of what he read.

Suppose he were to summon Dr. Forsythe to prove that he was not only sane but had the power of mind reading? He thought this over during the night while he paced the little cell to which he had been consigned without bail. What good would it do? Forsythe couldn't prove that Gale was telling the truth about the minds he read. Anyway, recognized psychologists would be brought in—paid to testify that Gale's mind was warped.

No, it would be better to keep his power a secret. Nobody present suspected it but Gregory, who had small faith in it and no fear of it as long as George Brown, with his guilty mind, was kept out of range.

There was only the fighting chance that he might have a chance to read some unwary mind, that might furnish him a useful clew.

IN the morning he was visited by the lawyer retained by the Emory estate trustees to defend him. The supreme irony of the case was that the men who were really plotting against Gale were supposed to be his defenders. He had no choice in the matter. They were still his guardians under the law, since he had not yet been declared legally competent.

His lawyer was utterly without guilty knowledge, frankly believed Gale had done the killings, and aimed only at establishing an insanity defense. Gale realized the need of being wary. Anything he said would be reported to the lawyer's plotting clients.

"Look here," he said to the lawyer, "if I did these things, I have no memory of it. But the evidence is against me. There's nothing to do but prove I

was irresponsible. I want you to call a certain man as a witness." And he gave a guarded story of his meeting with Brown and his arrest.

"Unluckily," said the lawyer, "nobody has any idea what has become of Brown."

And Gale read in his mind that he was telling the truth as he saw it.

When Doris Lane called that morning Gale told her the whole story, except for his mind reading.

Her eyes widened as she listened.

"Then we must find this Brown!" she gasped. "I'll talk to that police captain and political boss."

Two days later Doris called again and acknowledged failure.

"Both those horrible men laughed at me!" she reported. "When I tried to scare them by threatening to tell what you knew about their crooked deals with gamblers, they said you were just a lunatic imagining things."

Gale Emory gave up in despair and settled down to await his routine trial, which had been set for three weeks from that date.

WHEN the trial opened, the eyes of the nation were on the little courtroom. The prominence of the Emory name, the vast business interests involved, and the mysterious life of the heir and accused murderer made it a celebrated case.

Added to these was the spectacular failure of the raid on the stock holdings of the Emory interests, which had struck a snag on the morning after Gale Emory's arrest. Of this phase of the Emory sensation, only Gale himself knew the whole story. He read what was going on in the harassed mind of Homer Gregory as the two faced each other across the courtroom on the opening morning of the trial.

For a moment the eyes of Gregory and the prisoner locked. Then those of the older man fell. He sat with furrowed brows, deep in his troubled thoughts throughout the opening proceedings.

"Licked! Bankrupt! Unless we can get this fellow shut up as insane for the rest of his life, and we can keep control of the Emory property!" were the thoughts that flashed from the harassed mind into the over-sensitive brain of the watching prisoner.

Gale Emory sat in that deathlike silence that enclosed his useless ears, listening like a man in a trance to the mental voice of his enemy reviewing the carefully laid plot that had so mysteriously failed in Wall Street. Where had there been a break in their carefully guarded secret? What leak had given some rival group the word to start a buying wave at the very moment when the Gregory crowd had extended their resources to the limit?

For seventeen years, Gale learned, Gregory and his fellow trustees had been skillfully milking the Emory estate. When the heir came of age the law would require a mental examination of him by a commission appointed by the courts, to decide whether the trusteeship should continue. To the alarm of the trustees, a private physician had declared a few days before Gale's twenty-first birthday that the young man was undoubtedly sane. An accounting of the estate would be demanded. They would not only lose their fat pickings, but would have to do some clever juggling to cover their tracks.

In this emergency, George Brown had been called in again. He had been told to work out a method of proving the young man insane, and at the same time remove from the country any

dangerous witnesses to the contrary. The trustees were to know nothing of the details. George Brown had been thorough, but there had been a slip-up when the victim had escaped and seemingly perished in the woods. That had made necessary this desperate effort to seize the Emory interests in Wall Street by artificially depressing their value.

The rest of the story Doris had told Gale in her daily calls. She had argued her father into doing a little experimental selling short of Emory stocks the morning after Gale's arrest. Doris had promptly thrown in her own fortune. The first half-hour of trading had justified Doris's tip. The Gregory pool had begun selling heavily—and Lane had then bought, formed an impromptu pool and plunged to the limit. The conspirators had been smoked out. By the end of the counter raid the trustees' personal fortunes had been swept away in their frantic attempts to cover, and the Emory estate's control of its properties had remained intact.

There was nothing the conspirators could do now but prove the heir insane so that they could continue control of his fortune. And they were going to succeed, the helpless prisoner concluded, as he searched in vain for any thought of theirs that would show him a way to defeat them.

He listened dully to the district attorney's opening address, outlining the crime and the evidence against him.

"And we will prove by competent witnesses that this prisoner was sane when he committed these acts," he said in conclusion.

"We have no quarrel with the facts of the crimes as outlined by my worthy opponent," conceded the Emory lawyer. "We will simply show that from youth up this unfortunate young man has been irresponsible for his acts."

Gale Emory listened to no more of his counsel's opening remarks. His lawyer was not even troubling to cross-examine the witnesses. The defense had all but surrendered. And Gale Emory had given up. He saw that he was doomed either to death or life imprisonment.

Then his wandering gaze by chance fell on the district attorney's face as he realized there had been a slight delay in the proceedings. Gale suddenly stiffened and nearly leaped to his feet in amazement at the thought that had just passed through the prosecutor's mind.

"GEORGE BROWN will take the stand," said the district attorney.

Gale Emory's brain whirled with bewilderment and new hope. He saw Gregory start in dismay and sudden rage. What could be the meaning of this? The last man in the world the State would summon to prove that Gale Emory had committed these crimes, or was sane when he committed them! Brown couldn't have come willingly. Had the district attorney discovered something near the truth?

But that hope failed as the prosecutor began his questions. He seemed merely bent on getting at the facts of Gale Emory's childhood, in the hope of proving him normal then.

Homer Gregory and his lawyer exchanged excited whispers. It seemed clear at once that George Brown was an unwilling witness. The man was plainly uncomfortable and keeping his self-control with difficulty. Only once, when he took the witness chair, did his eyes fall on Gale Emory. Then the prisoner caught his thought.

"I'll keep my mind off it as much as I can. I wish I knew whether the young whelp can still dope out a man's thoughts. But what can he prove if he does? I'll make this sucker of a district attorney sorry he made me come, if he thinks he'll make me admit the boy's sane. And what I won't do to that private dick who dug up my hide-out!"

These were the thoughts of the unhappy witness as he faced the prosecutor. Then the questioning began. The prosecutor brought out from Brown that he had attended Gale Emory during the year before the death of the prisoner's parents and had since been employed by various interests as a confidential agent.

There followed minute questioning as to the daily actions of the child, Gale Emory, during the period when Brown had him in charge. In all his answers, the witness made the boy's mentality appear in as bad a light as possible.

Homer Gregory, who had been glaring at him fixedly, settled back in his seat with a grim smile.

"How was the boy affected by the sudden death of his parents?" Brown was asked finally.

"He was knocked unconscious by the bolt of lightning that killed his parents. After that he didn't seem to remember much of his past life, and was queerer. He was very ill for some time, and I left him before he recovered."

"You were a witness to the death of Mr. and Mrs. Emory?'

"Yes. The only witness."

"Describe it."

"There was a thunderstorm coming up across the river. Mr. Emory had just returned from an absence on business lasting several months. He and his wife were taking a look around the grounds. They were fond of watching the lightning, and were in the habit of standing in a summerhouse during storms, where they got a good view over the river.

"I had just brought the boy in the house, as the rain was beginning. He broke away and started for the summerhouse, I after him. He was about two rods from his parents when the shock came. I was knocked down, blinded and deafened for an instant. When I got up there was just a ruin where the summerhouse had been. The boy lay unconscious on the ground in front of me, and never knew afterward what happened. That's all."

"Your witness," said the district attorney, turning to the counsel for the defense and resuming his seat.

BUT Gale Emory was on his feet, his eyes blazing with rage and horror. It was true he had remembered nothing of the scene just described, but as George Brown talked the man had reviewed in his mind, for Gale Emory to read, a clear-cut picture far different in certain gruesome details from what he had testified aloud.

"Your honor," Gale Emory addressed the startled court, "may I claim the right to cross-examine this witness myself?"

There was a momentary hush in the courtroom, then a hum of excitement. Gale's attorney was on his feet tugging at his elbow. The district attorney stared at him in amazement.

"Something queer here," the judge was thinking. "Might simplify things, prove the boy insane without further trouble." He denied counsel's frantic appeal for a recess and told the amateur examiner to proceed.

"Mr. Brown," Gale began, "are

you sure you were the only witness to my parents' death?"

"Absolutely," Brown said defiantly, but fear was growing in his eyes.

"How about me? Are you sure I've forgotten?"

"I—why—you said you had," the witness stammered.

"Sure nobody was hidden in the shrubbery?"

"What do you mean? Of course not!" Sweat was pouring down the witness's face.

"Sure, are you? Well, then, how about this: As you followed me toward the summerhouse that afternoon, what was the round, black object about the size of a baseball that you took from your pocket and threw into the summerhouse at my parents' feet just after that terrific flash of lightning that you say killed them?"

For a long moment there was dead silence in the courtroom. George Brown was chalk-white now; seemed to be struggling with an effort to speak. Homer Gregory, as pale as the witness, was whispering frantically to his attorney. Then the lawyer for defense and the district attorney leaped to their feet simultaneously.

"Your honor, I object to this!" exclaimed the prosecutor.

"I join in the objection," added defense counsel. "My poor client—"

"Objections overruled," snapped the judge. "Answer, Mr. Brown."

"But—but—it isn't sense. He is crazy. I deny everything."

"Do you deny that when I fell, apparently senseless, you bent over me and said, 'If I've killed the kid, too, I've spoiled everything. Gregory will finish me!'?"

Brown leaped to his feet, then sank back with a jolt, staring at his inquisitor, jaw hanging, eyes popping.

"This is a trick! He's crazy, I tell you!" he gasped.

"And before it's too late," Gale went on relentlessly, "would you like to turn State's evidence and name the man who suggested all this to you, and promised to pay you well for it, as long as he didn't know the details? He's right here in this courtroom and ready to talk."

Brown, suddenly livid, leaped up again and pointed a shaking hand at Homer Gregory, who was slumped in his seat like a man suddenly stricken with death.

"I *will* name him!" Brown shouted. "Homer Gregory has double-crossed me! He made me do it. I was in his power. I used to work in his office, and got tricked into a deal he could send me up for."

Gregory was on his feet, his two fellow trustees struggling with him. One wrenched an automatic from the frantic, panic-stricken man's hand and shouted to the judge above the uproar:

"It's true! We see it now. He made us work with him, but we didn't know till now that there was murder in it!"

Then court officers overpowered the raving conspirator and dragged him from the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

SHOCK.

AT last Gale Emory was alone with Doris Lane, for the first time since his arrest. They were in the little summerhouse on her father's estate, where he had found her again after seventeen years. It was a quiet evening, the first he had really had a chance to enjoy since the triumphant close of his trial three weeks before.

But Gale was still too overwrought to relax. This had been the hardest day since his release. There had been a brief, perfunctory hearing of the lunacy commission to declare him competent in the eyes of the law, then a trip to New York to sign business papers and make preparations for taking over the estate.

Finally there had been a disappointment. A week after his trial he had gone to Dr. Forsythe and submitted to an ear operation. Now the healing was complete, but—

"There's no hearing there yet," Forsythe had told him. "It may come suddenly and perfectly, or very gradually and partially, or—not at all."

Gale turned resolutely away from the thought now, and remembered something he hadn't had a chance to ask Doris since the trial. She had collapsed after the excitement, and was just recovering.

"You've got something to explain, young lady," he said. "How did you get George Brown as a witness?"

Doris hid her face in his shoulder. "I was a cheat," she whispered. "I hired a private detective, who found him hiding in a house that Big Tom Morran owned. Then I got some stationery from the office of Gregory's lawyer—the lawyer who defended you—and wrote myself a letter, signing the lawyer's name. The letter thanked me for finding George Brown for him, but told me that Brown wouldn't do as your witness, as Brown would testify that you were perfectly sane. I had him say they were worried for fear the district attorney would find Brown and subpœna him.

"Then I called on the district attorney and made a weepy, schoolgirl plea not to prosecute you. I pulled my handkerchief out of my bag and the letter came with it. There wasn't any envelope on it, so it didn't take much temptation for the dear man to read it when he found it on the floor after I'd gone."

Gale hugged her close, his heart too full to speak for a long moment.

"You'll make a great wife for a scheming financier," he whispered finally, and added after a hesitant second, "Was it true what the paper said, about your being engaged to Gregory once?"

"Of course not!" she snorted indignantly. "He wanted to be, and spoke to father about it. But I wasn't willing. I didn't tell father the reason; but—I'd never forgotten you, Gale."

GALE drew her closer, but he was growing more and more aware of the gulf between them. "There is a thunderstorm coming up," he said, looking across the river. "We better go in."

"Not yet," she demurred, snuggling closer. "Let's stay out here as long as we can, where we can be alone together."

Alone! Could he ever really be alone with her? For though it seemed so to her, they were not alone. He felt a thousand eyes upon him, countless thought waves from as many minds beating on his brain.

He shrank with almost physical nausea from the memory of the courtroom when he was freed, when the throng gathered around him, showering their congratulations with their lips, and in their thoughts expressing envy, derision, skepticism, wily designs on this wealthy young man suddenly come into a position of power—all the unworthy, fleeting musings that pass through the human mind.

At the same time he shrank from

the thought of the uncanny power he would wield over other men, the unfair advantage. It was like blind men playing a game with one man who could see. He would be getting credit for wisdom and foresight he did not possess. All the game of life would be as unreal to him as the college entrance examinations he was planning to take in the fall, when he would set down the answers as he read them from the minds of his examiners. He was a fraud!

"A penny for your thoughts, Gale," whispered Doris.

He shrugged at the irony of it. And he would give millions if he could get rid of the thoughts of others! He loved her passionately, told her so now. But that damnable power would become a barrier between them. Some day she would realize there was something different about him. And she would grow strange and cold. She would loyally try to conceal it, but he would read it in her mind. Never could he have any illusions about her. All his life he would have to conceal this thing from her. Never could he be perfectly frank with the woman he loved.

Suddenly from across the river there came a livid lightning flash and a crash of thunder. Gale Emory felt a sharp pain shoot through his ears, then he was conscious of a harsh buzzing sound different from anything he had seemed to hear before. It seemed to reverberate through his head like something physical. Sounds always before, he realized suddenly, had been something in his mind, never loud and jarring like that.

"What on earth is that racket?" he asked, and his voice seemed to rumble and reverberate around him.

"What racket, dear? I don't hear anything but the crickets and tree-toads and the little breeze, since that thunder died away."

He was staring at her in wonder. It was a new voice he was hearing, a thing of silvery melody, the voice that belonged to her. Even as she spoke, the buzzing in his ears broke up into little chirps and trills and whispers.

He was suddenly trembling with excitement. Was it possible? He remembered the doctor's experiment with the watch. He snatched it out and held it to his ear. There was a loud, sonorous ticking like the tones of a great bell.

"Can you hear my watch tick?" he asked, still holding it to his ear.

"Why, no, silly. Of course I can't at that distance," answered the new silvery voice.

He had to look away from her to conceal his excitement. There was no doubt about it. He was really hearing at last, hearing with his own ears.

Suddenly he noticed something else. He was missing something. The air was full of sound, the tiny voices of the night, distant receding thunder, rustling leaves, the soft breathing of the girl beside him, his own tumultuous heart-beats— But he was no longer hearing the voices.

He knew then that they would no longer trouble him, as long as he listened to the sounds coming to his material ears. Hadn't the doctor told him he heard the voices of the mind because his physical ears were deaf? He could learn in time to be as other men, and the voices would return into the silence from which they came.

"A penny for your thoughts, Gale," whispered Doris.

"They're worth a million dollars," said Gale Emory gayly. "I was thinking how sweet it is to sit here alone with you and just listen to your voice."

THE END.

Peter stopped in his flight to aim at the gleaming yellow chest

Chinese for Racket

A white man's plea for help leads Peter Moore and the impetuous Susan O'Gilvie into the hostile heart of an Oriental marriage market—with the crisis of his business career only an hour away

By LORING BRENT

Author of "Vampire," "The Hand of Ung," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

PETER MOORE was sent to Hongkong by the General Electric Company and authorized to pay up to one million dollars to a certain Dr. Fong Toy, said to have perfected a device for eliminating static from radio. For two months he was refused a definite appointment on one pretext or another by the scientist's secretary, Wan Sang, who admitted that companies in Germany, Great Britain, and Japan were trying to buy the invention. But when Peter followed Eastern custom by offering him *cumshaw*—a commission on the sale—Wan Sang at last arranged a definite meeting—for one o'clock the following morning.

Yet only a few minutes before talking with Wan Sang, Peter had been ordered to leave China, by a man who said he was the American consul, but who proved to be an impostor. Peter talked it over with his thrill-loving friend, the romantic heiress, Susan O'Gilvie, but they could not decide whom he represented.

The same evening Peter received a plea from a fever-ridden white man who gave his name as Sanderson, and begged for help in rescuing a girl whom he believed to be his sister, lost years

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before. Under the name of Plum Blossom, this white girl was to be sold to a mandarin that very night at a resort known as the Jade Dragon. Always sympathetic, Susan O'Gilvie persuaded Peter to cross the water to old Kowloon. Entering the great age-darkened pile, a temple of pleasure and marriage market for six centuries, the three pushed their way to a room where the girls were being offered for sale. Posing as a prospective buyer, Peter induced Plum Blossom to wipe off her make-up. She was then revealed as a white girl, artfully made up as a Chinese.

CHAPTER VI.

CRYPTIC ANSWERS.

WHEN Plum Blossom had removed most of her Chinese make-up Peter said to her sternly, in English:

"Your true name is Ellen Sanderson, isn't it?"

The girl's hand flew to her mouth, and her eyes opened until the whites showed. Then she seemed to gain control of herself. Her face became, with the aid of rigid muscles, quite as much of a mask as it had been before.

"No," she said.

Sanderson broke in: "Then why are you so excited?"

"I am not excited."

"Why didn't you speak to us in English?"

"Because I was spoken to in Cantonese!"

"If you aren't—or weren't—trying to conceal your identity, why did you make up as a Chinese girl?"

"For business purposes!"

"That doesn't go," Peter said curtly. "You know very well that a white girl fetches a much higher price here than a native girl. Your price is twenty-five hundred Haikwan taels because you are a white girl. It is commonly known that you are a white girl. That is why it was so easy to find you. What is your real name?"

"I don't have to say."

Sanderson broke in hysterically, "For God's sake, won't you tell me whether or not you're my sister Ellen? You don't have to be afraid."

"Not so loud, please," Susan interjected.

Sanderson lifted clutching hands to her. "You are my sister," he declared hoarsely. "You must be. You're Ellen. You are. Listen! Ellen! Mother is terribly sick. She's dying. Father is dead—he died six months after you ran away. We don't care what you've become. You must come home with me."

"I'm not your sister."

"Listen. Ellen! You needn't be afraid. We won't let them hurt you. This man is a friend. We are both armed. We can get you out of here. Easier than that, we'll pay Po Tung the twenty-five hundred taels. You'll be free. Girl, won't you admit that you're my sister?"

The girl looked at him stonily. "I am not your sister."

"Yes, you are! You're just saying that. You're afraid we'll accuse you and nag at you because of the suffering you caused us. On my word of honor, we won't. You won't have to answer a question. Simply say that you're Ellen. If you only knew how happy mother would be to see you again! Ellen, please—" His voice ended in a husky sob.

"My name is not Ellen. I am not your sister."

Sanderson looked imploringly at

Peter. "Moore, talk to her, will you? I can't. My heart is breaking."

"LET me talk to her," Susan interrupted. The girl looked at her with a glint of obstinacy.

"Look here," Susan said gently. "I know that he is telling you the truth. I'm backing up every word he says. I'll personally accompany you back to San Francisco."

"I do not come from San Francisco. I am not this man's sister."

But Susan did not lose heart. "I am asking to be your friend. That is all. I only want to save you hurts and worries. I will take you home. I will furnish the twenty-five hundred taels to buy your freedom, and you will be under obligation to no man—not even your brother."

"But he is not my brother!"

Susan began to lose her temper. "Do you think you are giving your mother a square break?" she demanded. "If I were you, I would be damned ashamed of myself."

Peter glanced at his watch. He exclaimed, "Ye gods, it's twenty of twelve! I've only enough time to get back to Hongkong for that appointment."

"What are we going to do?" Susan wailed. "Either this girl is Ellen Sanderson and will never admit it, or she isn't Ellen Sanderson."

Sanderson uttered a deep, heart-broken groan.

Peter said rapidly, in Cantonese, to the girl: "If you are this girl we are discussing, won't you tell me, so that I can tell this man in the morning? I mean, if you are Ellen Sanderson and wish to marry a Chinese, it is certainly none of my business—or even your brother's. You are of age and can marry any man you wish. I won't argue about it. You can go upriver with Yen Chan to-night, as planned, and in the morning I will tell your brother that that was what you wanted to do; that your heart is here and you wish to stay here. The rightness or wrongness of it is none of my business. Whoever you are, if you want to get out of this place, away from China, we will help you, and you will be under no obligations.

"This is true talk, Plum Blossom, and the least you can do, if you are Ellen Sanderson, is to admit it to me, so that your mother will know that you are happy and living the life of your free choice, and not miserable and degraded or lying in an unknown grave. I will give you my word to say nothing until to-morrow morning."

The girl answered, in Cantonese: "It is easier to fill up the bed of a mountain torrent than to satisfy the heart of a man. You are a strange one, my fig tree. If you were not so much in love with this girl here, I might wish that I were being sold to you and not to Yen Chan, although he is a kind and noble man. But the cricket cannot speak of ice, knowing it not; and the well-frog should not talk of heaven."

SANDERSON broke in impatiently, "What are you two saying?"

"Just a moment," Peter answered; then, once more, in Cantonese: "What are you trying to say?"

The girl's eyes upon him were murky. "Not to know," she answered mysteriously, "is to be a Buddha. Living, a man knows not his soul; dead, he knows not his corpse. Who am I to say who I am? A flower may be dying for lack of nourishment, yet throw its fragrance onto the air of a desert. You think I am rotten because I choose

to live with Chinese. Yes; I am rotten, but I am beautiful. I am the most beautiful girl, yellow or white, in southern China. Listen, my jade tree. Who is this girl to you? Only compare us. Which is the lovelier? I say and you say I am rotten, but is a flower rotten because it grows upon filth? Is the fragrance of a rose any less sweet because of how its roots are fertilized? Then I am rotten—and I am a virgin. Send this man and this girl away and buy me for yourself. If you think my face is beautiful—wait until you have seen my body! Don't speak yet! Wait! A diamond with a flaw is preferable to a common stone with none."

The music started again. The girl's voice was like spiced wine. Her mouth was shaped like a heart. Her dark, melting eyes would have lured a saint.

"To look at a plum is not to quench one's thirst. My kisses would be the very dew on the blossom."

Peter was tilting his head, as might a man who is listening to the far-away call of seductive music.

The girl's eyes suddenly sharpened, and she said a strange thing.

"Do not dress in leaf-made clothes when going to put out a fire. Go—but come back to me!"

Sanderson broke a spell which was as delicate as a glass bubble by leaping up and shouting: "What the devil are you two saying?"

As if recalled from an opium dream, Peter muttered: "This—this girl is not your sister."

Sanderson cried: "You're lying! She's my sister, and you won't tell me the truth! What have you two been talking about?"

"The rice crop," the girl said, insolently; "plums and passion!"

"She is not your sister," Peter went on evenly.

"You're a damned liar!"

Peter said quietly: "Sanderson, cut that out. Susan, I haven't any more time to lose. Let's get out of here."

Sanderson jumped up, stepped across the table and swung his fist savagely into Peter's face.

PETER was unprepared, yet, with the automatic reactions of a trained boxer, he tilted his head so that he received the blow not directly, but glancingly along the line of his jaw.

Even so, the impact sent a flash of fireworks into his skull and threw him sufficiently off balance so that he stumbled aside and fell across the table. His left cheek came down with a crack on the hardwood. And in the moment while he lay there, letting his wits recover themselves, he made the curious discovery that his left eye was within inches of the gold-backed mirror which Susan had propped up for the girl to use.

Certainly, it took no longer than a fifth of a second for his brain to record what his eye clearly saw in the mirror. He saw, all about the room back of him, men rising, and in an open doorway he saw a face that he would not soon forget.

In these bizarre surroundings, it was a distinctive face—that of a young Chinese, sallow, slim and aristocratic. It was a rather scholarly face, made more so by the tortoise-rimmed spectacles its owner was wearing. Below the face was a white shirt and a pale-blue necktie. There was also a suit, unmistakably of fine Shantung silk.

In the fifth of a second while his head lay on the table, ringing with what might have been the music of the spheres, Peter distinctly saw this man—and saw the man vanish as the door closed.

It was like a glimpse into a clairvoyant's crystal, revealing his destiny.

Some one pulled at his shoulders. He heard Susan's voice, as from far away: "Peter! Get up!"

He came groggily to his feet. One hand reached for the revolver in his hip pocket, but before he could reach it, Sanderson sprang at him again. Prepared this time, Peter brought up a short ugly punch to his jaw and saw his eyes snap up as he crumpled.

It seemed to Peter that every man in the room was trying to reach him. He pushed Susan behind him and shouted: "Try to get that gun out of my pocket!"

He felt her fumbling for it; but she did not have time to get it out. The Eurasian was clawing toward him. Peter struck at a face as round, as orange as a ripe pumpkin and saw blood instantly squirt from a little bump of a nose.

The Eurasian reached his side, kicked him on the ankle bone and stretched out clawing hands for Susan. Peter turned on him, seized him by the waist and, lifting him into the air, threw him into the crowd.

The Eurasian sprang up and came at him. Peter, advancing to meet him, had to desert Susan. The Eurasian charged at him with the cold fury of a panther. Peter sent him flying back and down with a blow in the face—and was then hemmed in by moving arms and elbows. A wedge of bodies sent him crashing back against the blackened wall.

Peter was separated by that flying pack from Susan. He saw her head tossing about a dozen feet away, then saw her head and shoulders rise up magically and move swiftly down the room, as a chip is carried by a breaking wave.

Peter tried again to reach for his gun, but his arm was struck down. He began striking out methodically with both fists, making no attempt to cover himself; doing nothing but fighting frantically to reach Susan before she disappeared.

He snatched a bottle from a table and splintered it on a shaved skull. He kicked and clawed and punched; and it seemed miraculous at the time that no knives reached him. And each time he reached for the revolver, he was somehow frustrated.

He broke clear of the pack that held him against the wall, leaped across a table, struck a man down, and raced toward the door through which Susan had disappeared. It was the same door, he recalled later, where the aristocratic young Chinese man in tortoise-rimmed spectacles and Shantung silk suit had been momentarily glimpsed.

AS he ran toward the door, he managed at last to pull Sanderson's revolver out of his hip pocket. The door opened and a coolie, naked to the waist, came plunging through. There was a long, brass-handled dagger in his hand.

Peter stopped headlong in his flight, aimed at the gleaming yellow chest and fired the revolver. He fired it four times. But the coolie did not collapse. And no bullet holes appeared in his chest, although Peter's aim was excellent and he had fired at very close range.

The coolie now rushed at him, with the long knife-blade held inward, along the arch of his wrist.

Peter stepped aside, as he would have stepped aside to avoid the attack of a charging bull. But his stratagem was not successful.

As he leaped, he slipped in a pool

of spilled liquor on the floor. He threw up his hands in a frantic attempt to recover his balance, and exposed his face, his throat and chest to the coolie's knife.

With parted, puffed lips and glinting wild little eyes, the coolie held the knife poised just where it was, as if he were a statue.

He could have plunged the dagger into Peter and plunged it in again in the time that elapsed before Peter could recover his balance. And in the same time, Peter could have been attacked by those behind him.

This was mysterious. In fact, the whole aspect of the fight, from start to finish, struck him as mysterious. He could have been shot, stabbed, had his head smashed in long before this. But he did not stop to reason now. He plunged past the man with the knife and rushed headlong through the doorway.

Distantly, he heard Susan cry out, "Peter!" And he kept on down the murky corridor. He called her name, and she answered again.

"Here I am! Here!"

Her voice came from a doorway a dozen paces beyond. He rushed on and into a room, dark, save for the glimmer of light at one of the familiar ornamental paper-covered windows. A light beyond showed that there were bars on the other side as thick as a man's arm.

He rushed into the room and called her name again. She came to him as the door behind him slammed.

Susan, sobbing, clung to him. She asked him if he were hurt.

"No."

"Peter, what will we do? What will they do to us?"

"I don't know. What happened? Where are they?"

The fight had exhausted him. He was gasping for breath.

Susan said hysterically, "Some man picked me up in his arms and rushed me into this room, then left me. There was only one. Then I heard some one shoot. Was it you?"

"Yes."

"Weren't you hurt?"

"No. Give me a moment to catch my breath. We've got to get out of here."

"Peter, it's my fault. You'll miss your appointment with Fong Toy."

"No," Peter said. "I'm going to keep that appointment."

His eyes were gradually growing used to the dim light which filtered through the paper window pane. His heart was thumping dully with fatigue. His throat was stiff and aching with dryness. He was exhausted, but he had to get them out of this place. He had to return to Hongkong for that appointment.

"Come on," he said.

Susan screamed, "Look!" He felt her body against his stiffen, then begin to tremble.

HE looked. In the blackness of the far corner of the room, a snake of jade-green fire had suddenly come into being. It was as large as a full-grown python. It writhed and convulsed, but without a sound. It advanced toward them with open mouth of green fire and eyes as white, as clear as diamond pebbles.

It was not a python but a dragon—the ghost of a dragon: a luminous, terrifying apparition of green fire.

Susan screamed again as the glowing green monster coiled and leaped toward them.

With hairs bristling on the nape of his neck, Peter watched the specter. The thing was fascinating—hypnotic!

Each moment, he was certain it would leap upon them and wrap them in its coils. He reached into his pockets for matches. There were no matches; yet he was sure he had placed a box in one of his pockets.

Susan's teeth were chattering. Peter suddenly cried: "Look out! That thing's meant to distract our attention!"

He wrenched his eyes from the glowing jade monster; looked swiftly behind him. And the dim light filtering through the paper window showed him what the green dragon had intended to distract his attention from.

Susan saw it, too—and screamed once more.

A black slab of metal was slowly descending over the teak door which led into the corridor. The purpose of it was, obviously, to seal them in the room.

Peter said curtly, "Stand back."

"What are you going to do?"

"Smash down that door, if I can."

The descending slab of bronze was now only five feet from the floor. Peter hastily tried the knob of the teak door. It was locked.

He stepped back and rushed at the door with his shoulder down. A brittle teak panel cracked, but the door held. He stepped back and, with his other shoulder as a battering ram, smashed into the door again. Again the panel splintered, but the door still held stubbornly.

The thick plate of metal which would form an inner door was descending faster now. If Peter could not smash open the teak door with one more try, the iron or bronze slab would cut off their escape; make them prisoners.

Peter ran back and charged the door a third time, putting every ounce of his weight and strength into the attack. It gave way with a splintering crash. He went stumbling out into the corridor, head low, and so into the coolie who had been stationed there.

His head struck the guard in the chest; knocked him back against the wall. Before he could recover, Peter struck him down and wheeled about, shouting mightily for Susan to follow him.

He saw, to his horror, that the metal slab was a foot from the floor and coming down rapidly.

Peter dropped to hands and knees as a white hand appeared. He grasped it and pulled. Susan, attached to the small, groping hand, came flying out, just as the lower edge of the metal door came down the remaining distance.

It came down with a heavy, grinding crunch on one of Susan's diamond heels, smashing the heel and sending diamonds popping out of their sockets and spinning like globes of liquid fire. The rest of the jade-green slipper was squashed to the floor.

Peter seized her hand and pulled her along the corridor, away from the room in which his encounter with "Plum Blossom" had taken place. He had no idea where he was, and he had still less of an idea in which direction escape lay.

He glanced at his watch as they started down the corridor. It was one minute past midnight. He had fifty-nine minutes in which to return to Hongkong, collect three hundred thousand dollars, Mex, from the hotel manager and keep his appointment with Fong Toy.

Where the corridor bent to the right, he paused a moment and looked back. He saw the coolie on hands and knees picking up one of the diamonds

which had been dislodged from the heel of Susan's trapped slipper.

CHAPTER VII.

CHAOS.

A RAT imprisoned in a wire cage must enjoy sensations very similar to those which Peter and Susan underwent in the next few minutes as they raced madly up one corridor and down another, desperately trying to find a door leading to a street.

It was a wild, confused and panicky few minutes. They ran through rooms in which men sprawled asleep; other rooms in which fan-tan was being played; they ran into and down corridors with dead ends.

Susan's impressions were chaotic. Every attempt at escape was frustrated by a blank wall or a locked door. It was like trying to thread your way out of a Chinese labyrinth. It was like a nightmare in which you cannot escape from some nameless, invisible ogre.

At first, there seemed to be no pursuit. Doors opened and closed. Faces peered at them—and withdrew.

Then, suddenly, a bullet sang past and flaked off a lump of aged green plaster from the wall within inches of Peter's head. Peter kicked open a door and pushed Susan ahead of him into a room lighted by a single candle. The air was sour with the fumes of rice whisky. The room was almost filled with small empty kegs, bound with dried grass.

At the far end was a door half closed and hanging on one hinge. As Peter made for it, the door burst open, falling inward and twisting off the hinge. A coolie in wet blue rags shot in, as if he had been propelled by a spring. His momentum carried him well into the middle of the room, and Peter saw a wet, rusty knife in his uplifted hand.

Armed with nothing but a revolver loaded with blanks, Peter had only one recourse. He picked up one of the empty samshu kegs and hurled it at the coolie's head.

The keg squarely struck the target and disintegrated. Staves flew. The coolie dropped his knife and would have fallen on Susan if she had not stepped quickly aside.

Peter shouted, "Through that door!" And Susan ran on.

They found themselves now in a smaller room with doors in three of the walls. The floor was wet. As they hesitated in indecision, the sound of running feet came to them through one of the closed doors. Then they heard men running into the room they had just left.

Susan whimpered, "We're trapped!"

Peter kicked open the other door. It gave upon blackness—and mud. A gust of wind tossed raindrops into his face.

"Give me that slipper!" Peter snapped. But before she could answer or act, he had swooped down and snatched the slipper from her foot. He stuffed it into his pocket. Then he picked up Susan in his arms and ran out into the mud.

A volley of oriental expletives burst out behind them. Peter staggered on. He knew that the chase had only begun. And he had not the slightest idea where they were—north, east, south or west of the Jade Dragon.

Rain pelted his face and hair and ran in cold streams down his neck. He waded through slimy mud almost knee-deep.

Susan struggled and said, "Don't

be silly, Peter. Put me down. We can make better time."

Peter said nothing and staggered on. Where was the water front? Which way was Hongbom? Which way was Hongkong?

Scattered yells behind him indicated that the pursuit was deploying.

FAR ahead he saw a light. He crashed into the side of a wooden building and found what must have been intended to be a sidewalk, but its boards were under three inches of mud.

He flattened against the wall as he heard the splashing of feet close behind. An unseen man, puffing and cursing, went floundering past.

The distant street light was blotted out now by a fresh torrent of rain.

Another unseen pursuer went staggering past.

Peter waited a moment longer and started toward where he had seen the light. The muddy sidewalk was slippery. Several times he almost fell.

The light proved to mark a wide, muddy street, with native houses and shops on either side. He did not know Kowloon well; did not recognize the neighborhood. But there were more lights glimmering through the rain in the distance, and he guessed that that was the water front.

Bedraggled and limp, Susan clung to him. At intervals, she insisted that he put her down, but Peter strode on, hopeful only that he would reach the water front before the pursuit closed in.

The torrent ceased. Farther away, he saw more lights rising into the sky; a constellation of faint dancing stars. That would be Hongkong.

Shouts behind him caused him to break into a run.

They reached the water front. Street lights along what passed for the bund threw faint radiance on mud and rain-swept buildings.

Peter whistled. A sampan came fishtailing toward the retaining wall. A coolie with the mushroom hat of an Annamite was at the sweep.

As the sampan came alongside, Peter said, "Wanchee go Hongkong. Five dolla' — can do? Chop-chop — ten dolla'."

Which meant that he would pay five dollars for the trip—ten if the coolie made it in a hurry.

"Can do," the coolie muttered.

Peter helped Susan over the wall and aboard. When he stepped into the stern, the coolie dropped the sweep and leaped at him. He had been concealing at his side a short, thick club.

He brought this up and over, with the obvious intention of smashing Peter's skull.

Peter ducked; shot his fist into the face of this newest enemy, missed his jaw, and knocked off the mushroom hat.

To his immense surprise, Peter now saw that the Annamite coolie was not an Annamite at all; saw that his hair was slicked back like patent leather; and saw that the man's eyes were the eyes of a cobra or a python. The man was, unquestionably, the Eurasian.

Susan shrieked encouragingly, "Kill him, Peter!"

Peter did not kill him, but he did his best. He knocked the club aside as it came up again, and put all his weight into a blow which crashed into the Eurasian's jaw.

The spurious coolie went overboard with a splash. And as if this were a signal, another man came scrambling out of the dark little cabin. This one Peter recognized as the tall Mongolian

who had reminded him of a Chicago gunman.

Peter had a certain advantage, because of the elevation of the stern. The Mongolian was inches taller than he, and he was evidently an experienced fighter.

He quickly eliminated Peter's slight advantage by leaping up onto the stern. Then he put his head down and fought. He backed Peter to the rail with scientific rights and lefts; and Peter ducked, dodged and waited for an opening.

Peter straightened him up with a left uppercut, then put what little remained of his fast oozing strength into a straight punch intended for the jaw. His foot slipped, however, and the punch landed high on the Mongolian's shoulder. But the blow accomplished its desired result, and in a rather curious way.

The Mongolian slipped, or tripped. In endeavoring to regain his lost balance, he shot out his hand for the top of the retaining wall. His push sent the sampan away from the wall. For a precarious moment, he remained there, at a slant, his hands on the wall, his feet hooked onto the stern.

In this moment, while Peter's affairs were in a delicate balance, Peter snatched up the sweep and shoved the outboard end of it against the wall. The Mongolian lost his grip on the edge of the wall, and at the same moment, his feet became dislodged from the slippery stern rail as the sampan moved out into the harbor, and he plunged into the water.

HARDLY had this latest antagonist been dispatched, when Peter's attention was captured by another man who came crawling out of the darkness of the thatched cabin. He was a short, wide-shouldered, bow-legged coolie. His eyes were a-glitter with terror. He chattered:

"My allatime allee light!"

And Peter growled, "Oh, you're all right, are you?"

"Yes, masta'!"

"Does this sampan b'long you?"

"Yes, yes! Him b'long my!"

"Tell him to step on it!" Susan wailed. "Look back there, Peter!"

Peter looked back. His pursuers from the Jade Dragon—a knot of six or eight men—had gathered on the wall. A knife flashed. It came, end over end, to thump against the stout teak after wall of the little cabin.

"Chop-chop!" Peter said.

The coolie, having picked up the sweep, began to waggle it with desperate haste.

Peter, looking astern at the dwindling knot of men, saw them suddenly scatter. They began shouting. The distance rendered their words unintelligible, but he gathered that they were shouting for sampans. The chase, then, was to continue!

He squatted down, with his back to the cabin; and Susan huddled down beside him. He said: "An awful lot of people seem to hate the idea of my showing up at Fong Toy's to-night."

He saw two sampans move in to the retaining wall, and start out briskly in pursuit.

Peter glanced at his watch. It took some seconds for the radium dial to become visible.

"It's twelve twenty," he announced. "I've got just forty minutes to collect that money and go to Fong Toy's."

"IT'S miraculous," Susan breathed, "that we're alive."

"Not so miraculous," Peter grunted; "at least, not the first part."

"What do you mean?"

"Until you lost that diamond heel, we weren't meant to be hurt. After that, it was an open season for our scalps—and the other heel."

"Why weren't we meant to be hurt?"

"Racket. Sanderson — Plum Blossom—the fight—all part of the racket."

"You don't mean it was all a fake!"

"I sure do."

"Sanderson's story about his runaway sister?"

"Yep."

"And that girl was in on it?"

"She was!"

"Do you mean they staged the whole thing as an elaborate scheme to keep you from going to Fong Toy's?"

"I do."

"Is that why they wanted to clamp us in that room, where that horrible green monster was?"

"It is, Susan."

"But—but— I just can't believe it. Sanderson—"

"A smooth liar. Just like our imitation American consul. His story was phony. Sanderson was phony. The girl was phony. The fight was phony. Everything was phony—but that bullet and this chase."

"Why did somebody shoot at you?"

"Kid," Peter answered dryly, "ladies who lose one diamond heel are apt to be chased for the other. The racketeers lost control of the situation when that coolie found your little heels were studded with real diamonds. Ever hear of Frankenstein?"

"Wasn't he the man who created a human monster?"

"Correct! The monster was fine and dandy until he got it into his head that he wanted to run the show. That's what happened back there. The monster our racketeer created got out of hand when he found that the diamonds that came spouting out of your little heel were real. A ten-dollar coolie saw a thousand-dollar opportunity."

SUSAN obstinately shook her head. Incidentally, she sneezed. They were both soaked to the skin.

"You're too fast for my poor dim old brain," she said. "How do you know it was a racket?"

"I knew it," Peter explained, "when I tried to use the gun Sanderson gave me. I shot a man four times in the chest with it. The customary results didn't follow. The bullets were blanks."

"Who," Susan asked, "is behind the racket?"

"I don't know. But I do know something about him. He is clever, ingenious and imaginative."

"Why?"

"His obvious purpose was to keep me from connecting with Fong Toy. If he had been crude, he would simply have put a knife or a bullet in my back. Certainly, it required an imaginative man to conceive of that fiery green dragon. We are dealing, as I see it, with an imaginative man—and a gentleman. If he were not a gentleman, he would have had us thrown bodily into a room and had us locked in. But his mind doesn't work that way. He must employ fantastic jade dragons, sing-song girls, malarial beach combers, clever impersonators."

Susan murmured, "I can see all that. And I still stick to my original theory. How many competitors have you who would prefer that you didn't see Fong Toy to-night?"

"I know of at least four—Herman Stagle, the German; Narubi Hosakai, the Japanese; Bruce Granville, the Englishman; and Henri Beauclaire, the Frenchman. There may be others."

"It's one of them," Susan said positively. "Any one of them could have afforded to spend thousands to prevent your date with Fong Toy. Didn't Wan Sang say that a German has the appointment with the doctor immediately after yours? Wouldn't it be most to his interest if you missed your appointment? And isn't this whole racket positively Prussian in its thoroughness? I would certainly say that your racketeer is Herr Stagle."

"It still looks Chinese to me," Peter answered. "And I'm wondering what surprises they're going to spring on us when we reach Hongkong—if we reach Hongkong."

He was looking astern at the two pursuing sampans—dim shapes seen now and then through the rain in the light of some anchored ship as they passed. Their coolie was working his sweep with herculean energy, but the distance from their stern to the leading sampan's bow was gradually lessening.

Susan shouted excitedly at the coolie, "Chop-chop!"

He was sweating—a human machine being driven to its peak capacity.

The lights of Hongkong rose, tier upon tier, above them.

"Twelve minutes left," Peter announced.

"I'm going to Fong Toy's with you," Susan said determinedly. "And I'm going to bring along my thirty-two automatic."

"Too risky," Peter said firmly.

"That's why I'm coming along. Isn't it risky to stop at the hotel for that money?"

"Very."

"Don't you think," she asked, "you'd better go there without the money?"

"Going there without the money," Peter answered, "would be the same as not going there at all. The Chinese have funny ideas. Fong Toy expects me to bring a hundred and fifty thousand American dollars as an earnest of good faith. A check won't do. The Chinese have distrusted American checks since a number of sour ones were circulated here."

"I'm going with you," Susan stated. "I've been looking forward to this for weeks. I must be in on your hour of triumph. I simply can't picture you as a business man, and I want to see you in action. It's only a business adventure, but it's our last adventure together. I know it'll be perfectly fascinating. Please, Peter."

Susan generally got what she wanted.

"All right," Peter said.

There was a faint jar as the sampan grated against the timbers of the Hongkong landing stage.

CHAPTER VIII.

ZERO HOUR.

PETER paid off the coolie and sprang out warily on the jetty; but no one was in evidence but a tall, red-turbaned Sikh policeman; and the Bund, so far as Peter could see, was deserted.

Susan suggested that they enlist the services of the Sikh in blocking their pursuit, but Peter wanted no police assistance, with its accompaniment of tedious explanations, red tape, delays.

He selected two registered rickshas for the short ride up to the Oriental. They started off as the two sampans were maneuvering alongside the sampan jetty.

The hotel lobby was crowded with a party of tourists who had just come in from a dinner dance at Recourse Bay.

Susan hesitated in the doorway. Her hair was plastered wetly about her face. Her silver net and coral silk evening gown was in a state of bedraggled ruin. She looked as if she had just been dragged out of the sea.

Heads turned. Murmurs arose. Curious eyes stared at her. One young man laughed.

Susan elevated her chin. Very haughtily she strode across the lobby and into a waiting elevator, leaving behind her a track of wet prints from her stockinged feet and a trail of rain water, and the impression somehow that an infuriated princess had passed.

Peter, making his way to the desk, watched her go—head high, eyes blazing, cheeks flaming.

With one eye on the lobby door, he asked for the money he had left in the hotel safe.

Susan returned, wearing a new coat, fresh stockings and dry slippers, before he had finished checking off and receipting for the thick wad of ten-thousand-dollar notes on the Bank of Hongkong. He folded the fortune into a bundle, snapped a rubber band about it, and dropped it carelessly into an inner coat pocket.

" I've got my automatic," Susan said huskily. " Loaded—and three clips of cartridges. And don't forget that I'm a dead shot. I think it's awfully nice of me to come along and help you gloat in your hour of triumph."

He saw that she was much more excited than she pretended to be. Susan was trying to appear casual.

Peter smiled. " The next time you listen to Amos 'n' Andy—without static—maybe you'll appreciate my efforts."

" I appreciate you plenty as it is."

Peter seized her arm and said sharply: " Out the back way, kid. Pronto!"

Susan, glancing over her shoulder, appreciated his roughness and haste. The tall Mongolian and the Eurasian had entered the lobby and were looking about. As they started toward the lobby's rear, their pursuers saw them and hastened after.

Peter pushed Susan ahead of him, down a hall. He opened a door which gave on a lane running behind the hotel between Des Voeux and Queen's Roads. They ran down the lane to Des Voeux, where Peter secured two rickshas. He helped Susan into one, jumped into the other and quickly gave directions.

They were a block away, turning into Jubilee Street, when he saw the two men come rushing out of the lane.

Peter shouted, " Chop-chop—*cumshaw!*" at the coolies, and hoped that they had finally eluded their pursuers. Then he permitted himself a moment of congratulation. It still lacked three minutes of one o'clock. He would be on time for his appointment. He had worked hard to bring this interview about, and he had spent a great deal of his company's money.

THE compound behind the gray stone building which Dr. Fong Toy and his assistants occupied was brightly lighted. A flight of stone steps led up to an open door from which golden light streamed. At the top of the stairs was the reception room. Peter knew that room well; had cooled his heels in it for several hours to-day—or yesterday.

Voices issued from the door. Following Susan into the room, Peter looked about him with surprise. He had not expected his competitors to be here now, but he recognized Herman Stagle, Narubi Hosakai, Bruce Granville and Henri Beauclaire. There

were two others. All were gathered about Wan Sang.

Peter glanced at his watch. It was just one o'clock.

Wan Sang, talking rapidly, saw Peter. The plump, jolly-looking Chinese stared at him through his *pince-nez* glasses, and stopped talking. His mouth remained open, as if with astonishment. His little eyes blinked. Then he smiled and came over.

Peter asked, "Am I late, Wan Sang?"

And the Chinese answered, "What do minutes count in the majestic march of the centuries? What is time but the measuring-rod of the impatient?"

Susan thought that he was more nervous than he looked. Behind his quaint philosophy she sensed a champagne-like bubbling of uneasy excitement.

She was not trying to conceal her eagerness. Peter, glancing at her, was reminded very much of a small girl about to be ushered in to see her first Christmas tree. Her violet eyes were bright, and her cheeks were pink. He had never seen Susan so eager, so excited.

Peter was saying, "Wan Sang, I do not understand this." But he did understand it. He was to have seen Fong Toy first. Herman Stagle was to have come next. It was quite obvious that Wan Sang, or Fong Toy, had decided on a peculiarly un-Chinese method of disposing of the static eliminator. The invention was to be auctioned off!

Wan Sang made the mendacious explanation that Peter had anticipated.

"This unspeakably mean secretary to the eminent doctor humbly begs that you forgive him this quite necessary rearrangement of plans."

"Necessary?" Peter dryly asked.

"Quite," Wan Sang answered. "The doctor is exhausted. He has suffered so much in perfecting his great invention, Mr. Moore. We suddenly decided to beseech all of you gentlemen to inspect the static eliminator at one time."

"And to sell it to the highest bidder?"

Wan Sang blinked. "I assure you, Mr. Moore, that, after you have inspected the static eliminator, you shall have the first interview with the doctor."

"Alone?"

"Quite."

"Will Fong Toy see us now?"

"He is waiting in his laboratory. He is ready."

"Will he object to Miss O'Gilvie's accompanying me?"

For a fraction of a second, Wan Sang hesitated, then he said, "Not at all. And may her visit to this vile and lowly place be smiled upon by heaven! The virtuous man loathes all material considerations—but did you bring the money?"

Peter smiled. "Wan Sang, you are too greedy. Did all of these rivals of mine bring their money?"

"All of them!"

"All seven of us?"

"All seven."

"Then we have among us better than a million dollars in terms of American gold. That is a lot of money to be walking about the streets of Hongkong at this hour."

"Yes. Dr. Fong has quaint notions regarding business. There was no other way."

"But aren't they wasting their time, Wan Sang?"

"Such is my humble opinion, Mr. Moore. There is no question in my mind that you shall secure the rights

to the static eliminator. But before I take you to the doctor, may I see the money?"

Peter laughed and said, "Certainly." He took the fat wad of bills from his pocket and unsnapped the rubber band. Wan Sang glanced at the stack of ten-thousand-dollar notes.

"Very well," he said. "Do you wish to give me my *cumshaw* now?"

Peter looked at him with an indulgent smile. "Wan Sang, don't you know me better than that?" He replaced the money in his pocket.

"But I have gone to such pains!"

"The melon seller," Peter said ironically, "always declares his melons sweet. You will receive your *cumshaw* when I have the signed contract in my pocket."

"VERY well," Wan Sang said. He now introduced Peter and Susan to the six men. Several of them Peter already knew.

Susan was thrilled. She shook hands with Herman Stagle, the German representative, who she was sure had put on that wild party for her and Peter in Kowloon; Narubi Hosakai, the Japanese; Bruce Granville, the Englishman; Henri Beauclaire, the Frenchman; Pierre Lousac, the Belgian; and Salvatore Biletto, the Italian —and was amused at the stiffness with which they all greeted Peter Moore, the American. He was their most dangerous rival, and they knew it.

Susan's heart was racing, and the back of her mouth was visited by that dry, aching feeling which always came when excitement or t r o u b l e was brewing.

Yet, eager as he was, Peter remained cool and somehow detached. A little corner of his brain was sending out uneasy warnings. Nothing to put your finger on. Nothing definite. Nothing specific. It was only that cool million dollars.

Then Wan Sang murmured, "This way, gentlemen—and Miss O'Gilvie—if you please."

Susan strode with head high beside Peter as the plump, jovial Chinese secretary led them across the reception room, out into a hall and up a flight of worn teak steps. In the right-hand pocket of Susan's coat her hand snuggled the little automatic pistol. She had forgotten it was there. Its presence seemed absurd now.

Except for their echoing footfalls, silence accompanied the group up the stairs and along the wide hall on the next floor.

At a closed door painted sea-green, Wan Sang paused and looked back over the group. He seemed to be counting noses. He knocked delicately.

A muffled voice called, "Hai!"

Wan Sang opened the door a crack. And the voice from within, now clear and crisp, said: "Have the gentlemen all arrived?"

"Yes, doctor."

A pause. "Has Mr. Peter Moore arrived?"

"Yes, doctor."

A perceptibly longer pause. "Mr. Moore—is out there?"

"Yes, doctor. With a Miss O'Gilvie, whom he has requested to accompany him."

"And the rest of the gentlemen are all there?"

"Yes, doctor. There are seven gentlemen in all."

"Bring them in, Wan Sang."

Wan Sang opened the door the rest of the way and stood aside with a ceremonious bow. The room beyond was so dimly lighted that Susan could not, for a moment, see what it contained. She

caught the gleam of hooded lights on polished nickel, chromium and hard rubber; on coils, cabinets and elaborately complicated switchboards of slate, hard rubber and marble.

Susan glanced excitedly at Peter. His blue eyes were boring into the velvety semi-darkness. He felt the pull of her eyes and looked down. His smile was wan; but he did not seem nervous or excited.

"Peter," she whispered; "at last—here at last!"

"Yes," he said quietly.

They walked into the room whose magic had been whispered in the scientific capitals of the world.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CALIFORNIA BROADCAST.

SUSAN marveled at his complete self-possession. She was sure that this was, to him, the greatest hour in his life—finally to meet the man who had struck down the last barrier which stood in the way of the triumphal progress of radio telegraphy and telephony.

Static—that mysterious and little-known quality of the ether which often prevented radio communication! It was known to be caused by lightning; but there was static not caused by lightning. Some said this static was caused by unequal electrical pressure in the air about the earth. Others said it emanated from the stars; others, from the moon. Some more imaginative scientists had even claimed that it was the planet Mars trying to send signals to the Earth.

It was, at all events, and had always been the worst enemy of communication by radio. Peter had told Susan of ships which had sunk with all hands because static interfered with the reception of S O S messages. He had told her of men who had died of sicknesses which doctors at distant points might have diagnosed and cured—if the demon of static had not prevented.

The man who eliminated the curse of static would rank in scientific importance with Galileo, Newton, Marconi, Pupin. And Susan, thinking of this, wondered how Peter could be so calm. For he was the man who, if all went well, would introduce this scientific marvel to humanity; to ships at sea, to wireless land stations, and, in time, to the millions of users of the radio broadcast receiving sets.

It was, to Susan, positively fascinating. This hour would make history! And it seemed wonderful to Susan that the inventor of this boon to mankind should have sprung from the ranks of the world's most decadent nation.

It might be tremendously significant, this hour! Why mightn't it be the awakening of China to the new civilization—the hour when she again took her stand among the nations of the world?

Then she forgot Peter in her eagerness to glimpse the man who would, to-morrow morning, be hailed on the front pages of the press of the world as the peer of Edison, Marconi, Einstein.

Wan Sang had softly closed the door behind the delegation. For a few seconds, Susan stood staring about her in the dimness, wondering why the room was not more brightly lighted. It should have been flooded with limelight!

Peter, standing beside her, was making out familiar pieces of radio apparatus: banks of rheostats, condensers, tubes; complex networks of wires in amplifier circuit hook-ups. In one cor-

ner of the large room, a rotary converter whined. Waist-high benches all around the walls were stacked with apparatus. In one corner stood the black hulk of a high-voltage transformer with the familiar petticoated white porcelain insulators projecting V-wise from the rounded top. Coils of antenna wire hung on pegs on the wall near by.

A SLIM pale shadow near the transformer said: "Gentlemen, I must apologize for this lighting. But the work I have been doing, night and day, has weakened my eyes so that they cannot tolerate light any stronger than this."

Peter, listening to his voice, was looking at Dr. Fong Toy's feet. They were shod in black shoes. What peculiarly interested Peter was that they stood in small puddles of water.

Why?

Susan was having her own reactions to this celebrated laboratory. Somehow, it reminded her of that room of horror from which Peter had snatched her so recently. She argued that she was silly to feel this way; that her unfamiliarity with such a complex array of electrical equipment naturally made her feel uncomfortable. She looked across the room at a gap between two benches. In this gap was, presumably, a doorway. Just now it was concealed behind a heavy blue curtain embroidered in golden dragons. What lay behind that golden curtain?

Peter had crossed the room to shake Dr. Fong Toy's hand, and he was followed by the other members of this unique international little group. Peter looked at the slim, pale face, with its black glasses, and he wondered why Dr. Fong Toy's shoes were wet.

The Chinese scientist said briskly, "Gentlemen, I must ask your pardon for the long delays I have caused you. I would have sent for you before, but I did not want you to hear the static eliminator in operation until it was absolutely perfect. It has been so hard. As Confucius said, 'A hundred paths present a hundred difficulties.' I was exploring along new roads — blazing new trails. At any fork in the road, I could have made serious mistakes. And in the course of my experiments, I came upon many interesting new things. But I would not let myself be distracted from the road leading on to my goal."

He paused, and there was a general, nervous clearing of throats among the delegation.

"I make only one request—that none of you approach closely or touch with your hands any of my apparatus. You will say that I have a suspicious nature. That is probably true. Yet I have been working so hard—and ideas are so easy to steal. As you all know, I have not yet applied for a patent in any country."

He paused again. His voice had a curious breathless quality, as though he had been running. He went on:

"You will perhaps wonder why I have this transformer here. I installed it to discourage the prying of my Chinese colleagues—and others. This transformer delivers at its terminals exactly one million volts. Look!"

His slim, aristocratic hand reached for a switch on the wall. There was a dull and sinister humming. Almost at once a livid green snake of fire sprang to life between the brass electrodes which projected upward and inward from the transformer's terminals.

It hissed and crackled explosively. The sound was not unlike an intermittent discharge of machine guns.

The delegation had stepped back. But Peter remained where he had been standing. He had conducted some experiments with a million-volt transformer a few months before. Coolly, he watched Dr. Fong Toy, and the black spectacles of the young scientist seemed to glitter personally at him.

Wan Sang had meanwhile been busy arranging chairs in a row facing one of the instrument-laden benches.

Fong Toy now said, "Gentlemen, if you will be seated, I will demonstrate—my static eliminator. I must ask you not to leave your chairs while the demonstration is taking place, but you are, of course, at liberty to ask any questions you wish. I have nothing to conceal but the actual secret of my invention."

When the delegation was seated, with Peter and Susan on the inner end of the row of chairs, the eccentric young scientist went on. Susan, listening to his voice, did not hear his words. The million-volt spark had frightened her. It was uncanny and sinister. The hum and the deafening crackle of the discharge had scared her. She clutched Peter's hand and tried to listen.

"—And the air, fortunately, is full of static to-night, so that I can give you a demonstration under the most trying conditions."

PETER'S eyes, more accustomed to the dimness, were searching the complicated banks of apparatus on the bench before him with shrewd attentiveness. Stretching down from the edge of the bench to the floor was an apron, or panel, of some light-colored wood—sandalwood or sappan.

Fong Toy had walked to a glossy bakelite panel upon which was mounted a complex arrangement of dials, meters and switches.

"We should be able to pick up some of the California broadcasting stations." He threw on several switches; twisted one dial, then another. A bank of large amplifier tubes became darkly red. Another tube, glowing more brightly, sent a faint beam of golden light into Dr. Fong Toy's thin, aristocratic face.

A loud speaker horn began to hum. Gradually, the scratchy sound of static became audible; grew louder.

A man's deep voice came faintly through the static: "—Program of dance music is coming to you from the ballroom of the Hotel St. Francis, in San Francisco. Your announcer is Gerald Keene."

Fong Toy said, "I will bring this station in as clearly as I can—*without* the static eliminator."

He adjusted rheostats and condensers. The static became louder and louder. It did not scratch now; it came in sharp bursts, small explosions, a harsh cacophony of interference through which the dance music being played was only dimly audible.

Peter cried: "Give it more amplification!"

Fong Toy did so; turned a knob, and another. The static now came bursting from the loud speaker with the violence of thunder crashes. But the music remained dim and far away.

Peter looked once again at Fong Toy's feet. Where he was standing, new puddles had formed, faintly discernible in the semi-darkness.

"Now!" Fong Toy cried.

Susan eagerly leaned forward. She saw that every man in the row was bending forward but Peter. And she was suddenly aware that the palm of his hand, which had been warm and dry, was now cold and moist.

Fong Toy's slender, pale hand

touched a knife switch, threw it over on its two copper points.

Instantly, the music came clear. It was perfect. Not a scratch, a murmur, a whisper of static!

Susan cried tremulously, "How wonderful!" A man exclaimed, "Bravo!"

Peter said in a low whisper, in Susan's ear, "Got that gun handy?"

"Y-yes!" she stuttered.

"Keep it handy."

"Why?"

"Just a Chinese racket."

CHAPTER X.

EXPOSED.

FONG TOY snapped off switches. Amplifier tubes became dim, then dark. The music died away. The young scientist rubbed his hands together.

"Gentlemen, have I convinced you?"

There was an excited chorus of affirmations. Fong Toy asked, "Is it necessary to give you more proof that my static eliminator will do what I claim for it?"

Granville, the English representative, said eagerly, "Doctor, I will offer you, without a further demonstration, two hundred thousand dollars and a more generous royalty than—"

Herman Stagle spoke up. "Dr. Fong, speaking for Siemens-Halske, I will bid three hundred thousand—"

"Gentlemen!" the scientist stopped them. "Let us not discuss the material side of my invention—yet. Let me have only your scientific opinions."

These were given him with almost hysterical enthusiasm. Susan whispered, "Peter, what's wrong?"

Fong Toy had turned to him. "Mr. Moore, as you must know, we are all extremely desirous of your opinion. You have said nothing. Have you any questions?"

Peter stood up. He said:

"Why was it, doctor, that, when you increased your amplification, as I requested, that the static became louder—but the music became no louder? If you can explain that to my satisfaction, I'll offer you a million dollars for your static eliminator."

"I can explain it!" Dr. Fong cried.

"One moment," Peter said quietly. "I want to ask another question first. Was this supposed to have been a scientific demonstration—or a spiritualistic demonstration?"

The black lenses seemed to glitter.

"I do not understand, Mr. Moore."

Peter said: "I will explain. The announcement that we heard from the ballroom of the Hotel St. Francis, in San Francisco, was given by Gerald Keene, the announcer. Am I right?"

"Quite right."

"Yet I happen to know that Gerald Keene, the announcer, was killed yesterday morning in an automobile accident on Market Street!"

In the electric silence following that disclosure, Peter took a step toward Fong Toy. He said steadily, "Susan, point your gun at Wan Sang. If he moves, shoot."

Fong Toy was staring at him as Peter ran up to him and snatched off the glasses. He had recognized him when the ray from the tube lighted his face—a scholarly face; sallow, slim and aristocratic. A white shirt and a pale-blue necktie. A suit, unmistakably, of fine Shantung silk.

The wet feet were nicely explained. Fong Toy was the man Peter had seen for a fifth second in Susan's gold-backed mirror when the fight started in the Jade Dragon! He was the man

behind the attempt to keep the renowned Peter the Brazen from his demonstration.

Fong Toy had shrunk against the bench and was seemingly undecided what to do.

The foreign representatives had sprung up. Each man was trying to make himself heard. The consensus of opinion was that Peter Moore was crazy, or up to some trick.

Peter anticipated interference by kicking in the wooden panel beneath the bench—and finding there what he had expected to find. There was an elaborate device for playing eighteen-inch phonograph records. He had correctly guessed that Fong Toy had merely made records of American broadcasting programs on a night when there was no static.

Beside the phonograph machine was another elaborate device—a small electric motor geared to a disk of gold leaf which revolved in a porcelain bowl filled with flake graphite. This was the static-making machine. By hooking it up in a circuit with the phonograph, amplifier and loud speaker, the broadcasting program was liberally spiked with static. By cutting out the static-making device, the record of the program came clearly from the loud speaker. Devilishly clever, all of it!

NOW Fong Toy made a decisive motion. He reached behind him. He picked up a wrench and hurled it at Peter. The wrench went wild, striking Narubi Hosakai in the stomach. Peter closed in on the pseudo-scientist; grabbed him by the elbows, lifted him into the air and hurled him into the complex mass of radio apparatus on the table.

There was a very satisfactory crash as Fong Toy, clawing at the air, landed amid his condensers, tubes, transformers and rheostats.

For a moment he could not extricate himself. In the high-voltage silence, Peter addressed the dumfounded representatives of rival companies.

" Gentlemen, I hate to see this dream come to an end as much as any of you do. But it was nothing but a racket. It was all most cleverly engineered by this young man who calls himself Dr. Fong Toy—the whole idea being to whet our curiosity and our greed until we would fall for the proposition of bringing here, each of us, a hundred and fifty thousand dollars—that is, a total of one million. A nice little haul. A nice little racket. Part of this racket was to keep me away from here to-night for fear I might upset the apple cart. But I got here."

Fong Toy had freed himself from the tangle of wreckage. As he scrambled down to the floor, he cried out sharply in Chinese.

It was the simple command, " Come and get them!" The heavy blue-and-gold curtain across the room bellied out. The first man through was the tall Mongolian, and the second, the Eurasian. Behind them came a pack.

Peter acted on pure instinct. All of his training led him to leap toward the high-voltage transformer in the corner. He swiftly unhooked one of the reels of bronze aërial wire, hooked one end over one electrode, and sent the gleaming bronze coil paying out in a squirming bright snake into the midst of the pack. With his other hand, he threw the switch.

The wire, as it had fallen, crossed the Mongolian's throat; lay along one shoulder of the Eurasian and lost itself in intricate loops among the coolies behind them.

Crackling blue fire sprang from the

nose, the ears, the very hair ends of the Mongolian. It snapped from the fingertips of the Eurasian. Behind them, coolies blazed into an aurora of dancing blue and green. One million volts!

Men screamed, fell, clawed at the wire, and clawing, had convulsions and the most violent of cramps. Those who survived surged back into the room from which they had come. Their feet thundered on stairs as they hastily retreated from that awful death.

Peter pulled off the switch. The Mongolian, the Eurasian and a dozen others lay in awkward positions, dead or unconscious.

Quietly, Peter said, "Gentlemen, I urge you to go. Fong Toy may have still another ace in the hole. That million makes us a menace to ourselves."

Granville said: "How about this rotten little racketeer?"

"We'll turn him over to the police."

Fong Toy, oriental and artistic to the bitter end, had other plans, however, for his disposal. Before Peter could prevent him, he had run to the transformer, cast off the trailing bronze wire and run to the switch. He threw it on.

The vicious green-blue spark hissed and crackled explosively between the brass electrodes.

Peter guessed his purpose now. But before he could act to stop him, Fong Toy—Chinese racketeer extraordinary—had seized one of the brass electrodes in each hand.

His death must have taken place in a fraction of a second.

PETER sat at a writing table in the lobby of the Oriental, trying to compose a cablegram which would break the bad news as gently as possible to Bill Corliss. Corliss was Peter's immediate superior in the radio research division of the General Electric Company.

It lacked five minutes of three o'clock.

Peter was firmly convinced that he was the world's most outstanding failure.

Fifteen thousand miles he had traveled on this wild-goose chase! Three months of perfectly good time he had wasted! Thousands of dollars of his company's money had been spent!

He felt sick and sore and disgusted with himself. What a great, big joke he had turned out to be!

His thoughts strayed to Susan. She had, in her regal little way, ordered him to have breakfast with her. Ten o'clock breakfast. It would give them a final hour together before they parted forever.

He decided obstinately that he wouldn't have breakfast with Susan. He didn't want to have breakfast with Susan. He was so ashamed of himself that he didn't want to see her—or anybody else he knew.

As soon as he doped out this damned cablegram to Bill Corliss, he'd pack and slip out to the Mongolia in a sampan and stay in his stateroom until she pulled out. Susan would understand. She would have to understand. He wrote a note, which was much easier to compose than the cablegram:

DEAR SUSAN:

The breakfast date is off. I'm going aboard the Mongolia and the chances are I'll never see you again. You've been a grand pal. I'll miss you like the devil. Think of me when you hear those temple bells a calling. Bon voyage and good luck, kiddo.

PETE.

He now addressed himself to the cablegram again, and by four o'clock

had composed the following bitter confession:

> Greatly regret that Fong Toy static eliminator was nothing but a Chinese racket designed and built for no other purpose but to defraud seven electrical company representatives of a total of one million bucks. Absolutely phony. The laugh is on me. Am taking first ship for America.

Peter walked down to the cable office and filed this. Then he returned to the hotel and packed.

It was dawn when he came downstairs again. He walked to the sampan jetty, followed by coolies with his baggage, and took a sampan out to the Mongolia.

There was a large brass-bound porthole in the stateroom to which Peter was assigned, and from it he could see a generous slice of the harbor and the city in the first pink glow of sunrise.

And this was his last sunrise in China. Never had Hongkong looked more mysterious, romantic, alluring.

From the porthole he could also see the gleaming white hull and the fat blue funnels of the ship which would carry Susan south. The City of Singapore was like a ship carved from ivory on a sea of kingfisher jade. Saigon—Bangkok—Singapore—Java!

Susan had said: "I keep hearing the trade wind in the palm trees, the whisper of waves on golden beaches, the trumpeting of elephants in the teak yards, and the little silver wind bells tinkling in the big temples.

"Think of Java and Singapore! Think of the tropical moon, the palms, the golden pagodas, the lazy blue southern oceans. Think of seeing, hearing and smelling all those things—with me!"

He couldn't stand thinking about it any longer, so he stretched out on his bunk. And promptly fell asleep.

A SHARP knocking aroused him. He sat up and rubbed his eyes. The bright, nearly vertical sunlight of mid forenoon struck through the porthole in a golden shaft.

The pounding occurred again.

Peter swung his feet to the floor, walked to the door and opened it. A Chinese room steward had a cablegram for him. It had just come aboard.

Peter tore open the message and stared at it sleepily. He rubbed his eyes, grunted, and read it again.

> RECEIVED YOUR COMPETITORS' REPORTS ON LAST NIGHT'S DOINGS ALONG WITH YOURS AND AM CERTAINLY PROUD OF YOUR GREAT WORK. EXPOSURE OF FONG TOY RACKET WAS SUCH A CLEVER PIECE OF WORK AND SHOWS SUCH THOROUGH KNOWLEDGE OF THE ORIENTAL MIND THAT OUR FOREIGN SALES MANAGER HAS URGENTLY REQUESTED YOUR SERVICES AS TRAVELING FAR EASTERN REPRESENTATIVE. PROCEED TO SAIGON, WHERE DETAILED INSTRUCTIONS FOR SALES CAMPAIGN IN INDO-CHINA WILL BE WAITING. BEST WISHES AND HEARTIEST CONGRATULATIONS.
>
> CORLISS.

The deep bellowing of a steamship whistle jarred Peter out of his grogginess. It was the Mongolia's whistle that had blown. He looked wildly out of the porthole, and saw that the City of Singapore's anchors were still in the mud.

Hooray! He'd have just time enough to transfer his baggage and get aboard. And have a lunch with Susan!

THE END.

The stick exploded in the air behind the fleeing Bull

The Dynamite Man

It was a peculiar feud that started between steam-shovelman Madden and the wizard of dynamite, Scar Rusty—with everybody on the job wondering what the next explosion would be

By FRANK KNOX HOCKMAN

BULL MADDEN let out a startled yelp and jumped from the two-yard Ajax steam shovel. He ducked behind the cumbersome steam roller, mopped his forehead, which in spite of the late November tang in the air was beaded with perspiration, and swore earnestly and profoundly.

"I've stood for that Scar Rusty long enough," he told the roller engineer. "Danged if I ain't. It's bad enough to have the blame' garlic hound sneak into the cab with his sticks of dynamite an' thaw 'em out on a hot shovel, but when he sits down on the floor plate with a dozen sticks of the stuff layin' around him an' deliberately crimps one of them fulminate of mercury caps on the end of a fuse with his teeth, I'm blamed if it ain't much too much. Heck! Ever' time the boiler's popped off for ten days I've thought it was a stick of dynamite explodin'.

"The fool Rooshian ain't got no sense a-tall. Lookit him now, breakin' them sticks in pieces, an' they ain't more'n half thawed out, neither. Huh! You can see from the looks of him that he ain't even half-witted. Come on, you! Get outa that cab!"

The object of Bull's tirade stepped from the cab of the shovel. He carried a bucket of broken dynamite sticks in his hand, and around his neck were draped half a dozen three-foot lengths of white fuse, each with a copper detonating cap crimped to its end. The caps were jingling back and forth merrily, and any one who knows the nature of fulminate caps knows they are kept packed in cotton to avoid any jar or rub.

Outwardly, Scar Rusty bore out Bull's opinion of his mentality. He was a bit under medium height, slightly stooped by the years he had spent as a shooter in low-vein coal mines before the Mammoth Contracting Corporation discovered his particular genius and gave him a job.

As he climbed down from the steam shovel he cast an angry look in Bull's direction, then, without answering directly, shuffled off, muttering and growling to himself. An automaton, that's what you thought of when you saw Scar. Even his pale-blue eyes were dull and lifeless, and his scraggly mustache above a vacantly smiling mouth, his misshapen blob of a nose, and a stolid, flat face bore out the impression of dullness. As to his general appearance: place a grimy felt hat atop muddy blond hair, clothe a twisted, bent figure in shapeless, greasy overalls and flannel shirt, at the open neck of which a strip of dingy red underwear showed, and you have Scar Rusty.

Scar Rusty wasn't his name, really. On the books he was entered as Nikola Scarewski. But Tom Quinn, the labor foreman, had taken snap judgment on the name the first day Nikola reported for work, and Scar Rusty he'd been ever since. Scar was a Pole—not a Russian Pole, but a real Pole. He'd been in America twelve years, including service in the War; yet he so seldom said anything but "Yah," and "Naw," that I'd almost come to believe those were all he knew.

In spite of the general belief in his lack of sense, Scar was a wizard with dynamite. His shot holes were loaded to a nicety with a charge that did exactly what he wanted to get done; his shots never hung fire; and so expertly did he cut and time his fuse that I've seen him light one, toss the attached stick at an object fifty feet away, and the dynamite exploded within a foot of the target without ever touching the ground.

Scar had one complex. He had suckled hatred for all things Russian from the breasts of his peasant mother. The profane names Bull and the others called him bothered him not one bit, but Bull had overstepped the limit when he called Scar a Russian. From that day on a feud existed between the two, and things began to happen around Bull's shovel.

THERE was nothing crude about Scar's work; nothing happened that could not have been the result of an accident.

One day a shower of rock splinters peppered the sheet-iron roof of the shovel; again, as a dynamite-propelled and expertly judged avalanche came slipping down to the shovel from the top of the slope, suddenly an explosion occurred, and a gigantic geyser of clay and shale leaped from the heart of the mass and drove straight for Bull's shovel. Every one within sight held his breath; hearts pounded suffocatingly; for if that heavy cloud descended on the shovel, we'd be lucky if we got Bull, the fireman, and the "put" man out before they were smothered. Not

a pebble reached the shovel. It was agonizingly close, though, and morale-shattering.

Although he feared dynamite, Bull Madden was no coward. That evening after work Bull stopped Scar as the latter slouched toward the bunk cars. The angry engineer seized the little dynamiter by the shoulder with one hand and shook his free fist under the other's nose.

"Listen, you!" he snarled. "I seen you toss that stick of dynamite into the slide. I've been watchin' you close, an' I've seen you measurin' the distance to my shovel with your eye w'en you was mud-cappin' rocks. Them rocks all splattered us, too. Now take a tip from your Uncle Bull. I'm startin' to carry a cannon to-morrow mornin', an' the next crooked move you make 'll be your last. If you wasn't so damn puny an' yellah I'd beat you up right now. Damned if I ain't got a notion to take a punch at you, anyhow, you sneakin' Rooshian killer!"

Bull drew back his big fist, an ugly grin of savage anticipation twisting his lips. Scar's face had gone thunder-black when Bull had called him a Russian.

The big engineer's fist never had a chance to strike, for Scar rattled out a string of Polish, twisted sidewise, and straightened from a crouch, his hand holding a stick of dynamite, copper cap and fuse already attached.

Bull might have had some chance had he closed in and grappled with Scar, for the latter was by no means fool enough to allow that dynamite to go off and injure himself, but when Bull saw Scar apply the flame of a pocket gasoline lighter to the end of the fuse, he ran.

For just a second Scar held the spluttering thing in his hand, then a crooked grin curled his mouth, and he hurled the stick into the air after the fleeing man. The dynamite exploded twenty feet behind and fifteen feet above the head of Bull Madden. It couldn't have hurt him, but Bull plunged to the ground at the explosion and lay still.

At least a dozen men saw the affair. To them it looked like deliberate murder. Without even glancing at the prostrate Bull, the gang rushed Scar. He was badly mauled, and would no doubt have been killed had not Bull suddenly sat up and looked around in bewilderment. The explosion of that stick, coupled with his own fright, had caused him to trip and fall forward on his face, momentarily stunned.

Of course there were expressions of regret over the severe beating Scar had received, but even among the foreign laborers the opinion that he had been taught a badly needed lesson replaced sympathy for his battered state, for Scar was a man alone.

RIGHT after the affair I had a talk with Scar.

"This thing has to stop before somebody gets killed," I told him. "From now on, do all the shooting at night, after the shovels are done. Any time you have to do any work during the daytime, it must be done under my direct supervision. Understand?"

"Yah, I *kapish*," Scar answered. "Dot's *dobrey* by me, boss. You hear what Bool say about carry gun, eh? Better mebbe you tell him I no am Rooshian. I am Polack. He shoot gun at me, I kill, surer 'n 'ell."

"You stay away from Bull, and I'll tell Bull to stay away from you," I ordered. "There'll be no killing on this job."

For a few days this arrangement

proved satisfactory. Then one morning a fall of sleet and a heavy freeze-up occurred between the time when Scar completed his night shooting and when the shovels went to work, and the loosened ground refused to slide. Scar was at once called to the cut, and under my eyes he placed a charge to loosen the shale and dirt.

My own experience with explosives was wide and varied. I knew to a pound or two just how much of the dangerous stuff was required to perform a given task. But Scar outwitted me.

When we started to place the shot, I have an idea that Scar intended to play absolutely fair; but when he saw Bull step to the front end of the shovel, pistol in hand, some little devil of resentment must have stirred the dynamiter's soul. How he placed the dynamite so cunningly, I don't know to this day. When the explosion came the shovel of Bull Madden was literally buried under frozen clods and dirt, while the other shovel, no farther away than Bull's, was scarcely sprinkled.

What could I do? The charge had been placed under my supervision. Every man on the job knew that I was familiar with explosives, and when we got Bull and his fireman shoveled out of their dirt prison, unhurt but decidedly uneasy, it was me they blamed.

"That damn' Scar's bad enough, boss," Bull grumbled, "but I'll be darned if you ain't the limit. Let him do his own shootin' after this, will you? Me an' the fireman 'll keep our eyes on him, an' God pity him if he tries any more funny business."

"All right," I agreed, a bit peeved at the slur. "Scar comes back on the job. And let me tell you—whatever happens will be your own fault."

Bull's reply was remembered by all who heard it, on a day when horror gripped our hearts.

"I won't blame nobody," Bull answered, "an' I don't want nobody to blame me if anything happens to that dirty Rooshian . . . Listen, you!" to Scar, who stood by with eyes blazing. "Me an' you's enemies, see? The first time you let off a stick of dynamite within a hundred feet of me, I'm gonna shoot you. An' stay plumb away from me, where I can't reach you with either the boom or the bucket, or I'll smash you as sure as Hades is a foot deep. Understand?"

For a long moment Scar stared into the eyes of the angry Bull. His stooped form straightened, and his ugly face took on the closest approach to a dignified look I'd ever seen on it.

"*Dobrey!*" he approved finally. "One t'ing you mus' remember, t'ough. I am not Russky. I am Polack." Then once more the vacant look came over the momentarily brightened face; again the stoop bowed the broad shoulders, and Scar shuffled away.

FOR the next week everything went along serenely. A steady stream of sand and shale came pouring down the slope to the shovels, and on the eighth day we cut through to Deer Creek, where the bridge crew had a spectacular little stunt for us to do. Here a narrow steel bridge spanned the sixty-foot creek, carrying the single track. Now it became necessary to double the width of the span, and instead of placing another double beam alongside the old one, the plan was to replace the old bridge with an entirely new, double-track span, and do it without interrupting train schedule.

We found the new bridge completely assembled, even to the rails

being laid, on false-work to the north of the old span, and a bit higher than the abutment tops. Steel beams had been fixed from the false-work to the abutments, so the new bridge could be slid into place. We would start just as soon as the 3:05 fast freight went through on the following day; and before the 4:30 express was due it was up to us to cut the anchor bolts of the old span with acetylene torches, and then to pull in on the steel lines that would be rigged from Bull's engine to the new span. As he wound up the cables on the steam shovel's drums, a hundred tons of new steel span would slide into position, pushing the old span into the creek.

The program was an entirely practical one. Everything depended on clockwork coördination of crew speeds. With luck we'd have the new span bolted fast and twenty minutes to spare.

By noon of the following day we were all set. Bull's shovel was run across the tracks to the north side, and faced south in the same direction the spans would move. Three cables were to run from the ends and center of the new span and across the old bridge. On the other side of the track they would pass through blocks and return. All three would be clamped to a strong U-shaped clevis, from which a single line would run to one of the drums of the shovel engine.

Everybody was on his toes, ready to go—everybody but Scar. He was merely an onlooker. He stopped me on one of my hurried trips to the shovel.

"Dot cuttin' chob, it take too mooch time, boss," he suggested. "Why not let me move old span wit' dynamite? I do him queek. *Scoro!*"

"Got to cut the bolts anyhow, Scar," I answered, "so we wouldn't gain very much."

"Sure we do. Me, I cut bolt an' do him quicker as torch. Dynamite cut steel."

"Yep, and crack the abutment, too. We're all set, old-timer. You just keep out of our way with your dynamite. We'll fix."

The caboose of the fast freight had scarcely rolled clear of the old span, when our small army of workmen rushed forward. Almost immediately white-hot sparks began flying from where the hissing torches bit through the steel of the old span. Six men grasped each of the heavy cables and carried the end of it across the track, through a block, and back to the clevis, where it was clamped fast.

Bull rolled his steam shovel up the long embankment to the track until the front wheels of the shovel were just touching the rail, dropped the big bucket firmly on the ground across the track to anchor it, and waited while the cable connection was made between his engine and the clevis.

IN less than thirty minutes the cutters were through. I signalled Bull to pull up on the cable. There was a moment of tenseness as Bull opened the throttle and took the full strain on the cables. Here, a block sheave squealed protestingly; there, a heavy chain link rasped harshly as it pulled out of a kink. The engine exhaust rose to a rapid-fire volley. A deep furrow of earth piled up in front of the anchoring bucket as the terrific pull forced it forward and down.

Something had to give, and with the dry, shrill scrape of frost-laden steel on flint-hard concrete, the new span began to pull into the position of the old one.

Slowly, steadily, a foot at a time, the heavy steel came forward. The

new span had reached an eight-foot bearing on the concrete, when the old one tilted to one side and lunged toward the muddy creek. Everything went just as it had been figured—with one exception; and that exception spelled disaster.

Instead of side-slipping evenly down the concrete walls, the old span, as if jealous of the position it was being forced to yield, skewed around and dropped endwise. The lower end drove deep into the mud of the creek bottom, and the upper end fell at an angle of forty-five degrees against the side of the new span, where it lodged firmly under the overhanging deck plate like a buttress.

Before Bull could stop the engine pull, the two spans were locked together immovably. The old span refused to budge an inch. The new one could not come forward.

The express was due in about forty minutes.

A dozen men jumped out on the bridge with pinch-bars and sledges in an effort to pry the spans apart; but their labors were in vain. The old span was securely jammed, braced between creek-bed and bridge.

It took me almost five minutes to come to my senses and order the acetylene torches out to cut the old span free. They had not yet started, when I felt a tug at my sleeve. It was Scar Rusty.

"I blow him loose, boss," he offered. "Chust two sticks it take for dot chob. Cuttin' take too long."

I was too young then to realize the necessity for an even temper in time of stress, and I acted the fool.

"Get to blazes out of here, you and your dynamite!" I snapped. "When I want your advice or help, I'll ask for it!"

"Yeah. You damn' Rooshian monkey!" growled Bull, who had overheard. "Go and hide some place. Us men folks are busy."

What we both said was unwarranted, and we later had reason to repent it.

TWENTY minutes it took for the burners to cut the old span free. It was getting dangerously close to train time, and we still had to slide that new bridge a good twelve feet farther.

I didn't even wait for the men to get clear, but waved Bull the "high-ball" at once. Bull yanked that span along to its new seat in a series of sliding jerks that, at any other time, would have called anathema down upon him.

A great shout of exultation went up as the rails slid into line. Every man there took a deep breath of relief. With twelve minutes to go, the crew swarmed out on the span to place the four key anchor bolts that would guarantee safety until the express got past. At the most, it would take ten minutes.

Success was now so certain that the man we had sent a half mile up the track with a red flag, to stop the express, was called in by four blasts of the shovel's whistle. Just as the last big nut jammed tight on the anchor bolts, with four minutes left to go, Bull raised the big bucket off the ground, to be ready for backing down the embankment as soon as the crew uncoupled the cable that lay across the track. This uncoupling had been left until last because it was the easiest job we had to do. I grinned happily when my watch showed three minutes yet to go.

My feeling of satisfaction was short-lived. My grin was cut off by a gasp of dismay. There came a rattling

crash from the cab of the shovel, a shriek of escaping steam, a yell of pain from Bull's throat, and the shovel slid back two feet down the track embankment, tautening the cables so rigidly that there was no chance to loosen them from the shovel's clevis.

"Torches! Torches!" I yelled. "Get a torch and cut the line!"

It was the only hope I could see. If we could sever the cable, the shovel's own weight would cause it to drop on down the embankment, dragging the bucket clear of the tracks. The situation was desperate, and the shovel fireman brought me an additional bit of horror-fraught information.

"The engine drum busted loose with that last pull," he gasped, dashing across the tracks. "Bull's pinned in the cab. All the controls are broke loose, an' all they need to do is cut that line an' the shovel 'll free itself. Hurry up—cut that line an' let 'er roll clear!"

Sledges, picks, and even hatchets were pounding away at the taut cable, but they rebounded without effect.

"Run!" I yelled at the flagman who was coming toward us down the track, red flag under his arm. "Run back up the track and stop that train!"

There wasn't a chance in the world. The express would hit the shovel bucket a smashing blow. Bull Madden was doomed, and there was but little hope that the flying train itself would escape being wrecked. Even now it came hurtling into the far end of the cut, two hundred yards away, and the thunderous roar of its coming filled the narrow gap, while the harsh song of the rails seemed like a malicious snarl of satisfaction over the coming débâcle.

With pounding hearts we watched the long plume of steam jet from the whistle; heard the resulting danger shriek as the engineer spotted the red flag. Sparks shot from the rails as the emergency brakes clamped tight and skidded the wheels over sand, but the distance was far too short to bring that speeding avalanche of steel under control, and there was scarcely any diminishing of the train's speed.

I turned away my head, closed my eyes, and was lifting my hands to my ears to spare myself some of the horror that was to come, when a voice boomed out from the slope behind me.

"Down! Down! Ever'body down! Me—damn' Russky—I feex."

A dark object came hurtling through the air, blue smoke spitting from its end. There came a sharp, reverberating explosion; the cable snapped asunder like a clay pipestem, and the shovel dropped down the embankment, the bucket just clearing the track as the front drive cylinder of the express locomotive rushed by at fifty miles an hour.

Scar and his dynamite had "cut steel."

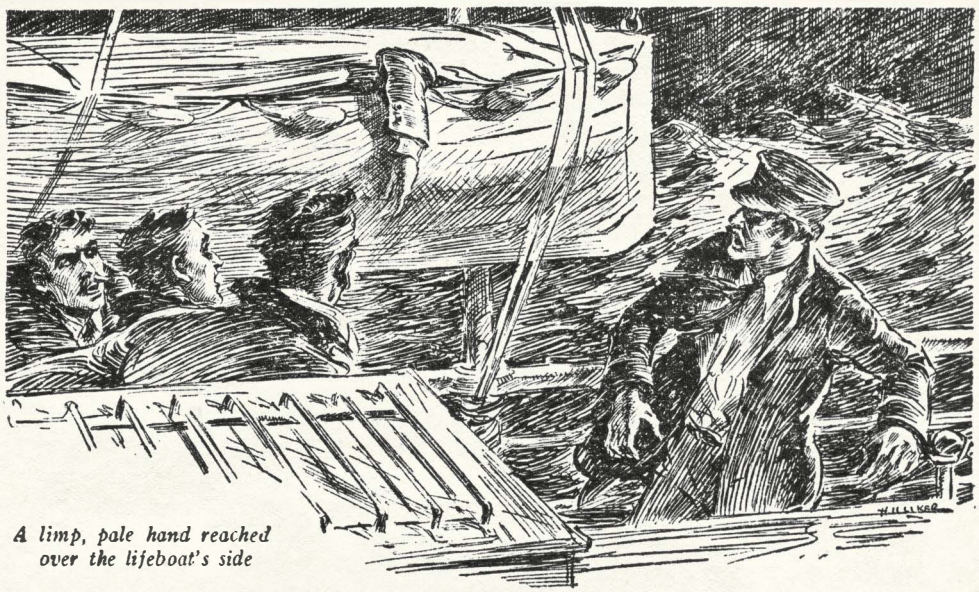
Three weeks later, at the far end of the cut, Bull dropped the bucket to the ground and stepped to the front of the gangway. He cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled at the stooped figure that stood near the crest of the slope.

"Hey, Scar!" he bellowed. "This here dynamite's thawed out, an' the fireman needs his scoop. What 'll I do with it, old man?"

"Dump him in bucket an' set him behint boiler," Scar answered, removing a neatly crimped cap from between his teeth. "I'll catch him dis aft'noon."

Bull Madden had become friendly with dynamite.

THE END.



A limp, pale hand reached over the lifeboat's side

Bentfinger

Nobody aboard the doomed steamer wallowing in the China Sea could count on his neighbor or his own continued existence—for they were sure one of their number was Bentfinger, the murderer and jewel thief who had terrorized four continents

An East-of-Suez Novel

By THEODORE ROSCOE

Author of "The Last Battle," "The Blade of Don Beltram," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

INVESTIGATING a street fight in which a French sailor is murdered, Benson, of the American consulate at Pahang (who is telling the story) hears the dying man whisper the word "Bentfinger." That word is enough to send Benson racing through the night after the fleeing, hooded figure of the murderer, for this same Bentfinger, known only through the typed cards he leaves on his victims, has baffled police in many cities with his diabolical murders.

The pursuit leads to the tramp steamer Arcturus, just leaving for Shanghai. Bentfinger disappears into the depths of the ship and Benson finds himself forced to remain aboard for the trip to Shanghai. He warns Captain Lane, master of the ship, that Bentfinger is aboard.

That night, as the little group of passengers is seated in the dining saloon, the lights go out and Captain Lane is shot through the temple, just as he was about to reveal information

This story began in the Argosy for May 23.

about Bentfinger. Some one at the table fired the shot. One of that queerly assorted but harmless appearing group is the dread Bentfinger.

First Mate Hague takes command of the ship, and Blair, who identifies himself as a Scotland Yard man, takes charge of the investigation. He grills the other passengers: the Reverend Norwood, a gaunt-faced and peculiar missionary; De Stroon, a Dutchman; blustering Major Phillipots, of the British Army, and his wife; Gorn, a shrewd and self-confident silk buyer; Dr. Ernest Wonger Smartbeck, a querulous scholar; Hope Brown, the adopted daughter of the slain captain. By clever questioning, Blair proves every person present a liar, except Miss Brown and Benson, and discovers that any one of them might have been guilty of the previous crimes of Bentfinger.

That night, when everybody has retired, the cry of "Fire!" arouses the ship and the passengers prepare to take to the lifeboats. The fire has obviously been set by one of them.

CHAPTER VI (*Continued*).

SOMEBODY WILL DIE!

THE smoke was thick in the girl's cabin, but I managed to find her cape in a cupboard and get back into the corridor. A yelling shadow ran into me; stabbed a gun muzzle into my ribs. It was Blair.

"Get out on the deck, Benson," he snapped at me. "What the devil are you doing in here? Quick, I want to talk with you. You know what this fire means!"

"Are we leaving the ship?" I gasped. "This fire—"

"Fire's n o t h i n g!" he shouted. "Nothing but a stall to get the passengers free of their cabins for a minute. Where are the others? Gorn? De Stroon? Did you see them?"

"Outside, on deck!" I yelped. "I just came back for Miss Brown's cape. Where's the captain—Mr. Hague?"

But Andrew Hague was on duty, all right. We found him with his grizzled face stern as granite, his automatic in his fist. He had lined the passengers of the Arcturus against the heaving ship's rail, and he seemed about ready to execute the lot of them. The red-headed third officer stood by with a lantern in upraised fist, and the glimmering light, the smoke, the tipping deck, the scared faces and grotesque costumes and incongruous background of a ship in tropic storm-water was weird as a phantasy from Halloween.

"They're all here, inspector," he shouted at Blair. "I caught the lot of 'em huddled right here on this rail. You all right?"

"I'm all right!" Blair coughed. "But it's like I guessed the minute I heard that fire siren go when I was talking with you, there, in the chart room. Minute that siren blew those sailors stationed to watch the corridor rushed off to their fire-stations. These people all got out of their cabins. And somebody broke into *my* cabin, just as I'd feared. Didn't find the guns, anyway. How about the fire?"

The bearded second officer appeared, stepping from a gust of smoke. "Fire's under control, Mr. Hague. It was that last cabin aft on th' starboard side. Steward had piled a lot of dirty linen in there—that empty cabin, you know. Th' door was left ajar, an' somebody must 'a' flung a match or cigarette inside. Lots of smoke—"

"Plenty of it!" Blair growled bitterly. "Enough to cover the actions of

a killer who wanted to hide his movements behind confusion and get out of a guarded cabin," he flung on the group at the rail. " Nice work, whoever of you is Bentfinger and pulled this trick. But I'll get to the bottom of this if it's the last thing I ever do. You, Gorn. Your cabin is right opposite that cabin used by the steward for linen storage. You could have thrown a cigarette butt or match across that corridor—"

" But of course I did not, inspector. And Smartbeck, here, who was next cabin to mine could have done it easier. The door was ajar on an angle which—"

" That's right!" I abruptly remembered. " Look here, Smartbeck. When I ran into you back there in the smoke you dropped a box of safety matches!"

" I didn't start any fire!" Dr. Smartbeck screeched, running fingers through the fuzzy mop on his head. " I heard the alarm signal and thought we were taking to the boats. There were matches on my table. If we were out on the ocean—in a boat—once I heard of how sailors in a lifeboat wanted matches and—"

" But it wasn't done that way!" Blair snapped. " I see it, now. When I marched the lot of you to your cabins twenty minutes ago some one threw a cigarette into that pile of linen. You had a cigarette in your fingers, De Stroon. I remember. You, too, Major Phillipots. A cigar you were smoking. Tossed it into that cabin and it smoldered for a while—"

Major Phillipots flushed angrily. " That's nonsense. My cigar had been cold for an hour. The Dutchman had just started a fag."

" The missionary gave it to me!" De Stroon squawked. " He handed me a cigarette and lit one, himself, just as we were leaving that *verdammt* smoke room. You think I start fires on this hell-ship—"

" A missionary of the Free Methodist Church indulging in tobacco?"

BLAIR turned; and the rest of us glared at Norwood. The Reverend Norwood stood against the rail, twisting nervous fingers together, his gaunt face punky yellow in the uncertain light. A cold wind swept the deck, and Norwood shuddered, for he wore no shirt and his naked skin was blue in the chill. And then Blair was pointing an accusing finger; his voice coming harsh as a saw. " What's this, Norwood? You're a missionary, you say, and I'm dashed if you're not tattooed!"

That was it! That was what made the missionary look odd. In the excitement I'd seen it, but the fact hadn't registered. Across the Reverend Norwood's chest a barkentine under full sail bowled down a faint blue wave. Even less ministerial were the three unclad dancing girls etched in green beneath the marine picture. And below the dancers an anchor, a snake, a bleeding heart and the name " Tilly " were artistically entwined.

" It was done before I was converted!" Norwood bawled, striving to hide the tattooing with his arms. " What's that got to do with this fiendish business? You can't prove anything on *me*. I'm not Bentfinger! I'm a servant of the Lord—"

The protest sounded a bit thin in the light of the man's art-work. He might not be Bentfinger, but he could hardly be a servant of the Lord, thus unspiritually designed. Here was another wry thread in the tangle for Scotland Yard, and I saw Blair wipe a sleeve across a troubled frown. An-

drew Hague stepped forward, grim behind his automatic.

"Look here, inspector," he growled. "I've made up my mind. The fire's out and these passengers have got to go back to the cabins and stay under guard. My radio operator is missing. My captain is killed under my nose. Lights go out. The ship is set on fire. I've no wireless. Some one in this crowd is a murderer. I'm not going a mile farther to sea. We're coming about immediately and going back full speed ahead to the nearest port. I'm going to follow your advice. I'll head back for Trengganu!"

"Righto, that's fine!" Blair nodded. "I can hand the ship over to the Federated Malay States authorities, and wire Scotland Yard from Trengganu. We can make it by daylight? Splendid! Trengganu—"

"Trengganu!" The name came like an explosion from the lips of Norwood. In the murky lantern-glow his face had gone from yellow to chlorotic green. "You don't mean—you can't turn the ship around and go back to Trengganu. We've paid our passages! We're passengers on this boat. This man from Scotland Yard hasn't proved anything against me—us—anybody."

"Go back!" The girl at my side caught at Hague's sleeve. I saw she was crying. "Oh, please. Please take us all back to the coast. Don't keep us out here with this—this hidden fiend! Take us back to land. Captain Lane would have turned back, and—"

"Yes! Yes, go back!" Major Phillipots, De Stroon and Dr. Smartbeck took up the cry. Gorn said nothing. From the corner of my eye I saw him studying the agitated Norwood. A strange, somber, calm face, Gorn's. If I wanted to see anybody locked in a cabin until we made port it was, I suddenly realized, this silk buyer on his way to Japan. And why had Norwood gone to pieces at the mention of Trengganu?

Thank heavens, the Scotch officer had decided to head back to the nearest port. Hell had brewed and smote on this wretched ship; go back, by all means, before it struck again. Bentfinger! Bentfinger! Every revolution of the ship's engines drummed the ghastly name; and solid earth would feel to the feet like heaven.

WE marched back into the corridor, watched by Blair's ready gun and steel-sharp eyes. The seamen and the red-headed mate swishing water in the cabin where the steward's linen had burned gave us a suspicious and hostile stare. We stood in the damp and smelly corridor, still dim with smoke, like so many prisoners waiting to be ordered into cells. Two sailors stepped forward, Winchesters under arm.

"You're not to run away this time," Blair ordered grimly. "These passengers stay right here in this corridor until I give the word. Challenge the first cabin door that opens. Those are orders from the bridge, understand? I want you chaps right there until this boat makes Trengganu in the morning."

Mrs. Phillipots sobbed loudly, and the major snorted through his nose. "I expect to be slain any minute by anybody," he snarled, following his spouse into their cabin. "By anybody except the piano-tuner." He sneered at Dr. Smartbeck. "You can eliminate *him*, inspector. Blokes who wear nightshirts may set fire to towels, but they don't work like Bentfinger does." His door slammed.

Dr. Smartbeck whinnied, "I did not

start that fire!" And bobbed into his cabin chattering: "But God knows I expect to be burned alive before I'm done. I swear I'll never travel again. I swear it!"

Quietly, the girl in the poppy-colored robe slipped through her door and I was insane enough to feel a quickened pulse when she turned to thank me for fetching her cape. Meanwhile, Norwood had shut himself in. Gorn, the silk buyer, stood in his cabin doorway, hesitant, his black eyes on Blair. De Stroon's door slammed; Gorn turned about. And then he was back in the corridor, grabbing at Blair's arm.

"Inspector! Take a look at my cabin! Some one's been in there and turned the place upside down. By heaven, it was done during that fire!"

It was true. A cyclone might have struck the silk buyer's stateroom. Bedclothes had been whirled from his bunk. Papers and books were heaped in confusion near the door. Garments lay strewn across the floor and a leather valise had been dumped against a wall, spilling wearing apparel. Cursing, Gorn glared at the mess.

"I thought so, inspector. Somebody tried a bit of robbery. But why in Satan's name they picked on *me* I can't even guess. You're up against it, Inspector Blair. A mighty good thing we're hitting back for port!"

"My cabin was rifled, too," Blair declared. "Easy enough to do it with this alleyway dark with smoke and the ship in an uproar. If you've lost anything, Mr. Gorn, come straight to me. And Mr. Gorn. Don't forget the sailors watching at each end of the corridor. Good night."

I stepped to my own stateroom, and the Englishman slipped past me to his. He looked dead tired, but the metal had not gone from his eye. Myself, I'd have been bouncing insane with that insoluble puzzle on my hands. A puzzle with life and death as the stakes.

"I'll know who Bentfinger is before twenty hours are up," he announced in a low voice, gripping my arm in a hand like a vise. "Don't worry, Benson. Once we get back to Trengganu—"

A sharp peal of thunder cut off the Englishman's speech. The crashing shook the ship from stern to stem. The Arcturus rolled heavily. The corridor took a steep tilt, and I clutched at the wall to hang on. Once again the ship careened, and the thunder muttered like panes of glass smashing down a distant horizon.

"She's coming about," Blair said. "The ship's turning around and catching a bad sea. Let the dashed storm break if it wants to. We're started back for Trengganu. See you in the morning, Benson. I want to go over your story again. But maybe I'll have Bentfinger before then."

BENTFINGER! Bentfinger! The name beat up from the flooring at every chug of the straining engines. Once again I was fast in my little stateroom with the door bolted. This time my nerves were keyed to a pitch where I wasn't tired, and I crouched on my bunk, blinking in the bright glow from the overhead bulb, ears assailed by the boom of angry sea and storming sky.

The cabin tipped and tilted, creaking. A shoe banged back and forth across the floor. My coat began to swing on the wall-hook, a thing come to mysterious life. I watched the coat. And then I was on my feet. The pockets of that coat hung inside out. Some one had entered my cabin, too!

I crossed the floor to examine the garment that had been tampered with,

and was startled by a rush of water against the thick glass of the stateroom porthole. The cabin screamed out a thousand noises. Rain pounded against the port and there was a flash of brilliant white light followed by a terrific concussion. The sky had fallen on the Arcturus with one detonating crash.

The ship heeled under the shock, putting her starboard beam deep down. Up, up and up tipped the deck; and for one breathless minute filled with the creaking of walls and stanchions and the noise of stumbling gear adrift somewhere on the deck overhead, I thought the craft was going over.

Thunder burst again. Lightning blazed in my porthole, showing a brief picture of the deck outside and a sweep of boiling waves. Then the ship lobbed upright, and I found myself hanging to the bolt on my cabin door. Some one was outside that door, and shouting. I could hear the voice of the Scotch officer, Hague.

"It was tacked on the door of the wheelhouse!" the Scotch voice was bawling. "There it is! See it for yourself! I found it when I went up there not half a minute ago. Stuck on the door with a pin. The mate on the bridge never saw nobody an' th' man at th' wheel didn't, either. But, by heaven, it was put there within th' past ten minutes—"

Blair's voice answered sharply. No need to tell you I opened the door of my cabin and got my own head into the corridor. At the same time De Stroon's door, across the way, swung in and the Dutchman appeared, braced with life-belts. Gorn already stood on his threshold. The girl, too, was in her doorway, wide-eyed, pale, n e r v e d against fresh trouble.

Andrew Hague, shrouded in dripping black oilskins, stood with Blair at the forward end of the corridor. There was something in the Scotchman's massive paw that froze the blood in my heart. I could see it from where I stood, and I gasped. The first officer held it out to Blair. A little card, it was. A little typewritten card.

Blair was glaring; reaching for the card with wooden fingers. "On the door of the wheelhouse? You say you found it on the door of the wheelhouse? Stuck on the outside panel?" His voice was brittle.

"That's where it was, I tell you," the Scotchman snarled. "How the devil it got there I can't fathom. How'd one of these passengers get out of this alley without being seen, I want to know. First thing I did was to ask this sailor on guard here. He says there ain't been a soul in this corridor for th' last quarter hour. But there *must* have been. Look at that damned thing, inspector. Read it! Am I crazy? I tell you I'll kill the devil with my own hands." Sweat glistened on the officer's gray face. His fists waved. "Read it for yourself!"

THUNDER grumbled and a shiver shook down the length of the heaving ship. I remember that the door of the Phillipots cabin bashed open to allow the major and his wife a view of the scene. Dr. Smartbeck stepped into the corridor, too, gesturing and squeaking dismal opinion that a new tragedy had been enacted.

But Blair was holding the little card to light; reading it aloud hoarsely:

To the Officers of the Arcturus:

Head the ship straight for Cambodia Point. Keep out of the sea lanes and do not attempt signals to other ships. Do not try to disobey this command. I am watching every move. If the ship's

course is not altered for Cambodia Point by five minutes of three somebody aboard will die.

BENTFINGER.

Blair whirled on the Scotchman. "Good God, man. Signed 'Bentfinger'! And it's typewritten! And —*five minutes of three!*"

"Yes!" The words clipped short through Hague's teeth. "And it's one minute *after* three right now. Turn my ship around? Change the course for Cambodia Point? Stand out to sea, again? Not on your life! No knowing which one of these devils wrote that damned warning—"

"Wait!" Blair's fevered words struck the rest of us to stone. "I—say, a thin man might have got through a porthole! These are all outside cabins. The ports open on the deck! Open on the deck on port and starboard side, don't they? By heaven, a thin person could have got through! Look! That fellow Norwood—"

"The thinnest chap on the boat!" Gorn cut in with an oath.

"And he didn't want to put back to Trengganu!" Blair shouted. "That missionary—"

"And he owns a typewriter!" The girl spoke hardly above a whisper, but we heard, all right. "He owns a typewriter. I've heard him using it."

And where was Norwood? Where was this missionary who had carried (and lied about) a sharp-shooter's pistol, who wore strange tattooings on his clerical bosom, who feared a return to Trengganu? Where was this Norwood who was thin enough to have squeezed himself out of his stateroom porthole? The Reverend Norwood from Elkhart, Indiana. He owned a typewriter. He could have typed that card, wormed himself out of his cabin, pinned the warning on the wheelhouse. Where was he? His stateroom door was closed and bolted and mute.

I stared at that door, and the sweat sprouted out on my cheeks. I saw Blair motion to the Scotch first officer; mutter instructions. The sailors with their rifles tramped up the swinging, dim corridor to stand, tense, on either hand. Yanking out his automatic, Andrew Hague stepped back; launched at the doorknob a terrific blow. The gun-butt crashed hard against the knob. The door flew open with a *bam!*

A whistly cry blew echoing and away. "Norwood!"

He sat on the floor of his stateroom with his back against a bulkhead, his legs stretched comfortably, hands languid in his lap. The unforgiving glare of the too-bright overhead light played full on his gaunt face; and his face was lacking in piety. When the ship rolled his head moved. But he did not.

Blood bubbled from the hole above his cold left eye, found a channel down the side of his nose and spilled to paint a crimson blot on his picture-gallery chest. A little typewritten card lay on the floor at his feet. We didn't need to read the name. The card in Blair's shaking hand had foretold the story.

"If the ship's course is not altered for Cambodia Point by five minutes of three, somebody aboard will die—"

It was five minutes after three. The Reverend Norwood was dead.

CHAPTER VII.

WHO WILL BE NEXT?

A SNARE-DRUM flam of thunder crackled down the night. The Arcturus leaned on her beam ends. The stuffy corridor quivered and swayed. Blair sprang into the stateroom where the dead man lounged.

"Look!" Blair's white lips barked staccato speech. "The porthole is open! See! The glass pane is cracked!" A spate of dark water showered through the circular casement. The little round pane had been swung inward on its iron hinge. The glass was cracked down the middle. "The murderer did that! Sneaked up on the outside of that porthole. Rapped on the glass with a gun butt; that's what happened. Norwood opened the porthole to see what was up. The killer fired! It was thundering hard and nobody could hear the shot."

I stared at the body against the wall. I thought of the warning pinned on the wheelhouse door. I tell you, the hair stood up stiff as wire on my head. Norwood had been slain within the past ten minutes! Shot through the temple. And trade-marked with a little typed card. My knees wanted to wobble and my vision blurred. A ring of damp, panting faces swam before my eyes. Andrew Hague was yelling at the top of his voice and filling the awful scene with mad words.

"Shot by somebody outside on that deck—how'd anybody get out there? There'll be footmarks—"

Blair's sunken eyes scanned the frantic crowd of faces. "No, Mr. Hague. We'll look, but it's no use. There won't be tracks. Those decks are swept by a flood of water."

He stepped from the dead man's cabin; closed the door; wiped mist from his face. He was old, now. Cords stood out on his British jaw. I knew what was in his mind. Somebody had got out of a stateroom, sped around the dark, rain-whipped decks to pin that dreadful warning on the wheelhouse and carry out the threatened murder.

But how? How? The only possible exits to the staterooms were the doors opening on the corridor and the round portholes opening on the deck. The sailors guarding the ends of the corridor had watched the doors. And those portholes were small. Too small. A skeleton might have wriggled through; but most of us were not skeletons. Not yet, anyway.

There was De Stroon. His fat-slabbed back could hardly get through a narrow door, much less a ship's porthole. Major Phillipots was broad as a barrel around the belt. Mrs. Phillipots? Stout as an opera mezzo. Gorn was short, but thickset and muscular and almost as broad of shoulder as Blair. Angular Dr. Smartbeck—almost as skinny as poor Norwood—might have threaded himself through, and—

The sailor who had stood watch at the aft end of the corridor was yelling protests at Hague. "Ain't I swearin' it's so? None o' these passengers come out into th' corridor. Charley an' me was watchin', wasn't we? We seen 'em all go into them cabins of theirs. This inspector was last to go. They shuts their doors, an' not one of them doors opens up and they ain't a soul in this alleyway till you comes along an' bangs for th' Scotland Yard man to open up. No, we didn't hear nothin', did we, Charley?" The sailor waved excited hands. "I say there weren't nobody in th' corridor. We'd have seen 'em if they was, an' th' devil fly away with me if that ain't God's truth."

Blair sized up the situation with a hopeless gesture. "Then it *was* a porthole! But I'm dashed, Mr. Hague. Those ports are small. Norwood might have been able to get through. But—but it wasn't Norwood. Why, only a boy could wiggle out of a porthole, and—"

"Or a girl might be small enough to get out." The low voice was Gorn's. His black eyes were fastened on the girl in the poppy-hued robe. "And your cabin is right next to Norwood's, young woman—"

SHE shrank against me, clutching my arm, trembling. "That's nonsense!" I was bellowing. "Miss Brown do that—that murder? It's insane! And the gun? Where the devil would she get a gun? Where'd any of us get a gun? Our weapons were taken from us! None of us were—"

"Wait!" Blair yanked his little blue leather notebook from his pocket. "I've got something here. Quiet, all of you. Watch everybody, Mr. Hague. When I was making notes back there in the smoke room, I—"

And then, because the whole stage setting was the stuff of dreams, it acted as dreams do. Thunder bawled and boomed, racking the ship with violent concussion. The flooring slanted as if kicked out from under our feet by the boot of a giant; and the boat's unexpected roll flung every man jack of us in that corridor off balance and down against the wall in a frenzied heap. Down we went like so many ten-pins. Mrs. Phillipots landed on my middle like a falling dry-goods store. Dr. Smartbeck's dandelion blossom of a wig smothered my face. The back of my head banged against De Stroon's gold teeth, and somebody clawed at my ear. Like a tackled football squad we piled up in the corridor. The deck reared under us. Frantic and yelling, we battled to our feet.

And something had happened during that little caprice of the South China Sea! You bet it had. For when the players had picked themselves up and the stage had tipped upright again, Blair was black-faced with rage, shaking a fist at the ceiling, wry-mouthed and furious with a crimson scratch bleeding on his jaw. "It's gone! It was knocked out of my hand! Look for it, you—every one of you! Find that notebook, or by heaven, I'll—You, Major Phillipots! You were on top of me! You snatched that book from my hand, and I'll give you one second to—"

"I did not!" The major clung to the doorknob of his cabin, feet braced for support against the weight of Mrs. Phillipots and the swing of the corridor. "How'd I grab that damned book with that man Gorn choking me and that Benson's feet kicking in my face? How could—"

"Move your feet, all of you. Look on the floor. Get back there, Smartbeck. Down on your knees. Hunt! If that book isn't on this floor—"

He waved his gun, and the rest of us pawed across the corridor with him in mounting desperation. Everybody was chattering nonsense, and it needed a climax, that episode, to prove the whole thing a fizzing nightmare. I got it, too. I was just wondering how the girl beside me could have steeled her nerves to be calm in this madhouse hour (Mrs. Phillipots was wailing hysterically and her husband was promising to throttle her and De Stroon was gabbling in Dutch while Blair was rasping: "You'll all be in irons after this!") when the climax appeared.

It appeared in the guise of two wild and frantic wraiths who plunged into our midst like a stampede. The cockney bo's'n with the jutting ears and post-bald head. And the saloon steward with the Pinnochio nose. There was commotion at the corridor's end. Then the pair were shouting in the center of the insane riddle; the cockney

bo's'n dancing before the stunned Scotchman, Hague, waving gnarled paws, his Eastham face working like one of those rubber toys that squeeze into comical shapes.

"'*E seen 'im!*" the cockney screeched. "Johnny Wist, th' steward 'ere, seen 'im. It was right after that fire was put out. I'm down in the fo'c's'le, an' th' lads was all harpin' about th' skipper's murder, they was. Gettin' worked up about it, they be. They'd 'eared 'ow the Old Man was killed in th' saloon when the lights all went out. They'd 'eard 'ow 'twas one of th' passengers as done it, an' they was all for rushin' th' passengers, they was. Then Johnny comes bangin' down th' fo'c's'le companion blabberin' like 'e's got took wiv th' shakes. 'E 'ides under a bunk, a hollerin', an' I can't pry 'im out until now." The bo's'n caught at the steward's arm; yanked him forward. "Tell 'em, Johnny, wot you been tellin' me!"

"I SEEN him!" The steward gargled; flung out shivering hands. The eyes bulged in his head, and his wet face was silly with fright. A tear of sweat wiggled down his nose.

"Seen him," he whispered. "I'd gone to my fire station on the deck below, and when the men told me the fire was out I'd started forward. They said the blaze had been in that stateroom where I'd stowed the linen. Thought I'd have to see the bridge about it.

"I'd just come up the starboard companion and—and was rounding that alleyway under the bridge. It was storming hard—dark—water blowing—and—and I had to hold on for a second. There was a flash of lightning—and—and there it was. Right in front of me, it was." His teeth clicked in his loose jaw. "A corpse like, it was. An' wings. I tell you, I couldn't move. All I see is them awful waving wings an' a big black cloak an' clawing hands. Them hands was all shriveled up to bird-claws, I tell you. An' the face was all shriveled up, too, like a dead one. And all sunk in' an' bashed in on one side."

The steward licked at his upper lip; moaned. "It was awful. Awful! An' the mouth was all gone in, and that head twisted like there weren't any neck. I couldn't scream. I couldn't do nothing, I couldn't. It goes pitch dark and then there's more lightning—bright as day — and this — demon — drops off his cape. Then I run—"

The steward's incoherent whisper choked out into dreadful silence. It was quiet as stone in that corridor of the Arcturus right then. Yes, waves sledged the ship's prow, the decks throbbed underfoot, walls and stanchions groaned, off in the night beyond God's thunder boomed and tons of water slammed, but the corridor was still as stone, if you can understand. That corridor was still as stone and peopled with cold stone statues.

It was Blair who finally tried to speak, and whispered: "Shriveled hands! Face sunk in on one side—" He brushed a hand across his lips, struggling for voice with a tongue that stalled in his ivory-white teeth and left him a weird, frightened grimace. "And a cloak? And you—you saw this—this thing on the deck under the bridge? Just after the fire! Why—it—it was while we were all in our cabins. Not—hardly twenty minutes ago. Good God! You ran away. This figure threw off the cloak it wore—"

"And I ran!" The steward blurted wildly. "Ran! I saw, I tell you. It wasn't no passenger, it wasn't. It

wasn't nobody—nobody who'd been on this craft before. The lightning was bright as day, and it waved claws and grinned at me! Grinned! And—and the arms were all screwed up like bedsprings. And the legs were twisted like a carrick bend. God save me, it—it's out there somewhere. I saw it. It's out there in the dark! A cripple! The most terrible cripple I ever saw—"

The corridor careened. Lights and shapes whirled as hands grabbed and voices wailed and squalled. The legs almost went out from under me, and I found myself against the wall, holding the girl's hand tightly, trying to work my brain and prove everything unreal. Phantasy. All phantasy. This impossible ship. This swinging, stifling corridor. These scared, babbling people. The whole mad night with its humpty-dumpty of reasonless episodes strung together like events in an idiot's mind.

That fight under a dim Chinese lantern way back in a place called Pahang. That chase to a dark, outward-bound ship. The saloon full of grotesque folk. Guns that fired from the dark. The dead and their unknown assassins. Oaths and questions and lies. Leather notebooks and radio operators that vanished. Storm and fire and death and a girl with brave gray eyes and unbowed head and something that made me want to take her hand. In a minute all of this would be gone. Something would snap in my head and things would come right. None of it had happened. None of it was happening.

YET Blair was speaking and I heard his words, and those about me heard them, too. "You were wrong then, Hague. Some one *did* get by you into that saloon. That murderer—the murderer this man saw out there on the deck—"

And the Scotchman was yelling, the sailors with the rifles darting to call all hands; Gorn and Dr. Smartbeck and the girl coming to life and Major Phillipots squawking: "Give us our guns, inspector. Just let me get my hands on a pistol, that's all."

De Stroon demanding: "I want mine, too!"

Gorn growling: "I'll not stay in my cabin!"

Dr. Smartbeck crying: "Save us. For the love of God don't let this fiend get us all!"

The sunflower-eared bo's'n yelping: "I'll warn the engine room!"

The steward's goat-voice croaking: "All crippled up, it was. Twisted an' crippled in knots. I *saw* it!"

The girl's white face looking up at me as she whispered: "I'm terribly frightened. Will you stay near by?" And I, of course, was a gawk who wanted to do everything and could seem to do nothing but gulp and try to breathe.

I remember how steeply the ship was rolling to help out with the confusion, how Andrew Hague shouted things nobody could hear, how Blair yelled: "I'll arm you all, but you've got to stay in your staterooms," and rushed down the corridor and into his cabin at its end. I don't suppose he was gone two minutes, but I began to want an automatic under my hand and it seemed like forty years. And when he was back in the corridor again it was another forty years before he spoke. White and shaking with excitement, he faced us.

"They're not in the cabin!" he groaned. "I had them locked in my cupboard. They were there when you called me, Mr. Hague, to show me that

damned warning. But some one got in there, somehow. The lock's broken. Cupboard's empty! The guns are gone—"

Guns gone! Wow! When would the wild dream end? Who could have stolen those weapons from the cupboard in Blair's cabin while this corridor was jammed with people? Then I realized with a shock that we'd all been glaring at the awful scene in Norwood's cabin and the thief might, at that very time, have slipped into the corridor, unnoticed. This creature that the steward had encountered. This horrible cripple with the cloak that blew like nocturnal wings, the claw-like hands and twisted face.

There was the assassin! The same assassin I had chased across Pahang. The one who had murdered Captain Lane in the saloon, striking through the darkness with the speed of a ghost. How had the killer slipped past Hague in the doorway? Satan only knew. Or was Bentfinger the devil himself, on a Witches' Sabbath holiday?

"I'll scour this hell-ship from stem to stern!" Hague roared at us. "Stay together in here and you'll be safe. You stay with them, inspector. Steward, you're coming with me. I'll—"

"Mr. Hague! Mr. Haaague!" Running boots drummed on the deck outside, beating time to the ghostly hallooing. The Scotchman flung about. Some one raced down the alleyway leading into the corridor; rounded the turn; galloped toward us. A youngster in ragged dungarees, chest and hands and face glistening with grease and sweat. An engineer by the looks of the wisp of rag knotted about his throat. He was waving something at the ship's commander; and I tell you, we yelled like fools. That engineer held in his clutch a little card.

"One of th' firemen found it!" he panted. "Lyin' on th' ladder leading down to th' fire room. On that port-side ladder where th' second landing is. Right near th' ice-water tank. Th' fireman was fetchin' me a drink an' he finds this thing right on th' top step of th' l a d d e r—that one down there. Blimey!"

Blimey was not the half of it. Andrew Hague snatched the card, held it to light, and croaked out the typed legend in the voice of doom:

> To the Officers of the Arcturus:
> Head the ship for Cambodia Point. If the command is not obeyed somebody will die sooner than you think. And death will, thereafter, continue to strike until the ship is turned. You failed the first warning. One has died. Who will be next?

Who will be next? Hague stared down the corridor, sweat-beads big as pearls on his seamed forehead, jaw quivering. Then his big fist crushed the card, and his voice rasped fiercely above the booming of near-by thunderclaps. "Turn about? Never, by God! And nobody's going to be next! Found this in the engine room, eh? Outta my way, you bucko! I'm going below. If a man in my crew slips up on me he'll go overside. Found this on th' fire room ladder, eh? Then somebody put it there. And somebody seen it put there! That's the end of this devil's riot, right now! I'll get the dog who wrote this card! I'll get him!"

BUT Andrew Hague never got him. He rushed for the deck outside, and the rest of us rushed out after him. Nobody wanted to remain in that awful corridor. Everybody m u s t trample and yell and stay with everybody else. I got an arm around the girl's trembling shoulder and stumbled

along in the frenzied mêlée. De Stroon was on one side of me and Gorn was on the other. Mrs. Phillipots was howling with fright and Dr. Smartbeck wailing a tenor obbligato, and the major brought up the rear with a snarling of good army oaths.

The engine room hatch was amidships, aft of the funnel. Dark? It was dark as a whale hole on that careening deck, with a world of plowing water piling and smashing and blowing beyond the rail. Wind lashed across wet iron. Spray flew and stung like hot salt. Up went the deck, and down; and we hung on and staggered and stumbled, cursing for courage and barking our shins on lifeboat davits, lashed by wind and flying water and fear.

"One has died. Who will be next?" Of that dash for the engine room I can recall little save those ghastly words.

I remember that Blair turned and yelled at us to go back. Gorn and De Stroon and Phillipots shouted. The hell-ship pitched and careened. A whip of brilliant lightning crackled across the sky and stabbed into an ocean of monster black metal waves. And Hague's square shoulders moved on.

At least the hatchway was lighted. Dim, to be sure, but a faint shaft of yellow glow and a soft breath of heat and oily smell reaching out of the darkness. The light picked out a patch of wet deck, struggled as far as the rail to show water guttering in the scuppers and the rusty davits and snarled tackle of a lifeboat. Lightning blazed fast, and the Arcturus, with its funnel and masts and impossible little knot of people hustling along the starboard rail, fought the China Sea's storm.

And then there was nothing but that little patch of deck with its phantom yellow hatchway, gushing scuppers, rusty davits and shadowy lifeboat leaning outboard on trumpeting wind. But there was more in that little area of light. Hague had just reached the hatchway with Blair close behind him, when Blair let out a yell.

"Look!" The cry brought the rest of us stumbling to a halt; and the Scotchman spun around on his heel. Blair was pointing.

You know how lifeboats are covered with a sheet of canvas to keep out the damp? Unshipped, the boat hangs in its davits with a tarpaulin covering stretched from gunwale to gunwale. Sometimes stowaways hide beneath this excellent shelter. But no stowaway leaves one hand hanging limp over the lifeboat's quarter and the canvas rumpled where he climbed under cover. And there *was* a hand reaching out from under the rumpled tarpaulin stretched over the stern of that lifeboat. A limp pale hand that reached over the lifeboat's side and wagged with the motion of the ship.

Only Blair's sharp eyes would have spied it. Only Hague could have grabbed at it with a shout. Whipping aside the tarpaulin, he reached over the lifeboat gunwale; tugged; gasped; and hauled down to the deck a sagging, crumpled body.

"Good Lord! It's—it's Sparks. It's Dunlop, the radio operator! He's been killed! Shot through the temple—"

CHAPTER VIII.

BEHIND THE BULKHEAD.

LOOKING back on that night of stark terror when a fiend loosed scarlet fancies across that storm-lashed ship lost in wild Asian seas, I am always amazed at the brawn of the

human mind. Torture and red terror ride gibbering through the dark, the breaking point is reached, yet the well of courage is deep; there is unknown steel to fend off the smash of calamity; a man fights on.

Scared? Wow! You bet we were scared. But we drew on unknown sources for courage, and we had our ways of relief. Mrs. Phillipots could faint her way through any crisis. We could open our mouths and shout oaths.

I had a girl's tight hand to hold, and if her grip could be strong so could mine. I wasn't brave, God knows; but when you've got something to fight for, you can fight. And if the strain was terrible on all of us, it was a thousand times worse on the man from Scotland Yard whose job was to shackle the fiend, and on the big Scotch mariner, commanded to fight the whole hurricane.

All the rest of us had to do was keep out of the way of that deadly sharpshooter's bullet. Responsibility hung on that man from the London Yard and the grizzled master of the ship. There was that demon's note of warning. Head the ship around for Cambodia Point, or somebody will die. And somebody, moreover, would continue to die until the order was obeyed. Norwood had died. The radio operator had died. It was up to Andrew Hague. Andrew Hague was a wall of Highland granite. The Arcturus would not alter her course.

As for Blair, he stood over the dead wireless man, and the glow from the engine room hatchway found his British face not nice to see. Suddenly the whole sky was stabbed through and through with swords of livid flame, the ship jumped out of the darkness; and I remembered how the after deck hung at a steep tilt aloft on a sledding avalanche of brilliant ebony water, the after house and mast and taffrail outlined against the blazing sky. Chain lightning played and whiplashed around the ship, bringing three seconds of dazzling day.

Crash! The automatic in Blair's fist jumped and spat. Thunder bawled, crackled, slammed like iron doors banging in the sky. But Blair's voice rose above the tumult as his gun crashed again and he bounded down the deck. "I saw him! There he goes! Quick! Behind the after house!"

The darkness roared and the world vanished to nothing but deafening sound. Lightning stabbed again, and we could see Blair racing up an iron hill, legging it for the after house at its top. The ship lurched and a sheet of water came speeding over the rail and Blair disappeared for an instant in the cataract. Then he was running down hill, a weird figure under the flaring sky. Darkness swept the ship out of sight, and I found myself running in the middle of a shouting pack, pounding the invisible, treacherous deck with heels that hoped it would be there.

THAT after deck! Water flying in gusts around iron corners. Deckbitts to smash your shins against. Ventilators leaping up to crack you in the face. The roar of pounding waves. The bang of hidden steering chains. Gear and tackle clanking and rattling, and a big square box free of its moorings and hurtling back and forth across the deck like a catamaran.

Somehow we (I don't know just who, but I was there and so were the girl and Major Phillipots and Hague) got around the corner of the deck house, after a desperate obstacle race

up the starboard side of the ship. Blair was nowhere to be seen. Lightning speared into the heaving ink beyond the taffrail; showed the after deck deserted to a cloud of spray.

"Below!" Hague screamed. "Down that hatch—"

And down the hatch we went, tumbling and grabbing, anxious only to aid, to get there in time, to get hands on the demon Blair had seen. I know I expected to find Blair at the foot of that companion-ladder, dead with a bullet in his head. And nothing was to be found. I discovered the very same baggage room I'd run into when (it seemed a million bad years ago) I'd boarded this floating Hades in the Pahang River.

Remembering the hold below, I kicked through the jumble of steamer-trunks, plunged down the second companion and once more came up against the closed iron bulkhead. I floundered about the dim-lit compartment. The storm had played havoc down there. Hawsers and hose strewed the floor in a writhing tangle. Paint cans had been tossed from their shelves, broken open, and flooded the floor with red lead. Nobody had gone through that bulkhead this time, or the paint would have marked the trail.

"No one down here!" I shrieked, grabbing for the topside ladder. I heard Hague's answering call; heard the others go thumping up the ladder from baggage room to deck. There was no one to see me when the flooring pitched out from under my feet. I skidded, tripped in a knot of rope and lost balance. Down I went, flat on my face, in a swishing mess of red paint; and when I finally got upright, cursing and sopping crimson goo, and plunked topside to the deck behind the after house, I found my companions gone!

Believe me, the after deck of the Arcturus, right then, heaving and yanking through Cimmerian gusts of thundering sky and water, was a mighty poor place to be lingering in solitude. Nor was I, with my mouth full of paint, the one to linger. Stubbing my shins, hanging on with raw hands, striving to see through the screeching dark, I edged around the corner of the after house; started a race up the deck. Somewhere amidships voices called, coming faint down the wind that was like the blast of a cold explosion. Every soul on the ship seemed to be forward of the bridge, and I wanted companionship.

I got it!

I'd not gone twenty feet before a burst of ocean founted over the deck, flung me hard against a ventilator. A vivid tongue of light split open the sky. The ocean was bright from horizon to horizon. The Arcturus tossed under the glare. And there in front of me, conjured by the glow of the storm, stood that loathsome creature in the cape.

ON my word, I was turned into ice. You have heard of the undead dead? The bloodless werefolk who prowl down the cemetery roads and feast on the souls of the young? But they are the phantoms of fiction, and radiant angels compared to the living kobold that grimaced before me in the wizard storm-light on that swerving deck.

That South China Sea lightning was no alley lantern-gleam; and I got one good look at that face. Let me tell you, the steward had not lied. I've seen the death masks of Carrier and Marat in the chamber of horrors at Madame Tussaud's. They were beautiful cameos by comparison. For the

eyes in this head were like little cups of blood. A map of purple veins laced the temples. The right cheek bulged out, and the left cheek caved in, and the lips, drawn back, showed barren gums. And crippled?

Twiglike, paralysis-knotted h a n d s wagged at the ends of malformed arms. Corkscrew arms, bent as if broken at the elbow and boneless at the wrists. There seemed to be no left shoulder and the sopping cape twirled around disjointed legs. All this I saw in that furious flicker of lightning; and the hot glare flashed on a massive automatic clutched in the twisty fingers of one crooked hand.

To this day I think the thing that saved me was the coat of red paint on my face. That monster had been waiting for me there, but unprepared to see my crimson-splashed countenance and scarlet-spitting mouth. And the lightning had gone when the automatic flamed. The bullet tore through my hair as I sprang, screaming. At the same time the sky came together with a roar, the deck tilted steep, water streamed through the whale-hole dark.

Kicking and hammering, I lunged into a billow of cloth. My knuckles struck into hard flesh. A dream! But the smash of the gun was reality; hot flame searing my throat and sending me stumbling. A smell of blood and powder, paint and burned cloth. Red in the darkness. My fingers on a rubbery wrist. Blows. Oaths. A whistly grunt. Somehow I got hold of the gun, lifted a kick, sent the weapon flying.

Then I was rolling on the deck, cracking my skull on a stanchion, fighting an empty cape. A salvo of yells was coming toward me. Boots thumping a tattoo. A light dodging in and out of gloom. Voices. Hands yanking me to my feet. Watery faces weaving in lantern-light. Hague. De Stroon. Phillipots. Gorn. A sobbing that was Mrs. Phillipots. A squeaking that was Dr. Smartbeck. All kaleidoscoping around me as I wobbled on sick legs and bleated out the words:

"I had him! Bentfinger! Right in my hands!" I was flagging the cape. The faces waxed and waned, steadied, took definite form. Gorn had me by the shoulders.

"Steady, Benson! Where'd he go—"

"There's the cape—"

"Which way? Which way?"

"Oh my God, he's all blood—"

"*Help!*" The wail echoed out of a b a s s o thunder-clap, frantic, high-keyed, coiling up out of the blackness somewhere amidships on the other side of the deck. "Quick! Help—"

"It's Blair!" Hague waved the lantern; yelled. Led by the big Scotchman we rushed down hill across the reeling deck, sprinted in wild chase for the bridge. The weak light flowed through the shadows ahead of us; found Blair kneeling against the rail under a bridge-wing, supporting in his arms some one who had fallen like a drunk in the scuppers. That some one was the steward with the big nose. And the steward with the big nose was dead.

BLAIR'S wrenched mouth barked, his voice husky as sandpaper. "I saw it! That devil! I lost him back there on the after deck; thought the rest of you were behind me and rushed back to the bridge here. The second mate yelled at me. I ran up to the wheel house. Then I heard screaming somewhere aft. A second later—this—this devil was coming down the deck. Could see him by the lightning. His cape was gone. He—he's the devil, himself.

"This steward was standing down here. I screamed. There was thunder and a blaze of light and here's this man shot through the head and—and I don't know where—where the killer's gone. 'Who's next?' he s h r i e k e d. Then—then vanished." Blair's face dripped. His eyes glared at Hague. He panted. "The steward's dead. My God, Hague, do you think—do you think we ought to turn the ship back—before some one else—"

I think it was Gorn who was hollering. I don't know. Everybody hollered. Waving arms and opening mouths and dancing around in the lantern-flicker. And then there was that fusillade. *Smash! Smash! Smash!* Thunder in the sky? It was not. Gunfire, it was, and it roared up from the bow beyond the bridge. Tongues of dull flame licked out of the dark. A wild racketing blew aft on the stinging wind. A gnome-like figure sped out of the gloom, bounding toward us. The bald-headed bo's'n with the ears!

"Mutiny! 'Elp! It's th' crew! They won't stay on this 'ell-ship no longer! They're gonna take off wiv th' boats—"

Boots banged on the bridge-wing overhead, and a bearded ghost looked down. From the beard came a foghorn bellow. "Mister Haaague! Word from below! Our wheel's gone, Mister Haaague, an' we're startin' to list! Pumps won't work! An' we're quarter point off course an' white water dead ahead—"

Bombshells! Bombshells in wild cannonade. Mutiny. Murder. Storm. But I wasn't hearing. Going from one white face to another, I was, and shrieking at the top of my lungs. Gorn, De Stroon, Smartbeck, screeching back. "Don't know!" — "Didn't see!"—But I had Major Phillipots by the collar and pounded a fist on his chest. "*The girl! Where is she? Where's the girl—*"

"Not here?" he bawled. "Why, she went back after *you!* You didn't come out of that after deck hatch, an' she waited in th' hatchway for you—"

Waited on that after deck for me! How I yelled! Throwing the major to one side, I knocked over the chittering dandelion, and bounded off down the black deck.

It wasn't forty yards to that after deck, but right then it was four thousand miles. Four thousand miles through the treacherous dark. Now the deck slid out from under my feet. Now it rose up to slug me in the face. I scrambled, skidded, s p r a w l e d, skipped, caromed off the rail. Wind snatched at my legs, water slashed at my face. A fine, gentle romp I had with that boat already beginning to tip, Hades's own symphony playing riot on the distant bow, the air full of spray and thunder and faint yells and the snapping of guns.

A wave of white lightning shivered across the horizon and showed me a crowd of greasy-faced men spilling up out of a companionway behind the tilted funnel. Bells were clamoring, the men were yowling; and I yowled like a fool at them. "Help! Help find a girl—"

What did they care about a girl, those ruffians? There was water on the fire-floor, and it was going to be every man for himself.

Try to fancy the situation. That raving, crazy-rolling Arcturus. Mutiny before the mast. No hands to help her below. Leaking like a sieve, powerless without her wheel, surf breaking directly ahead. Four dead men with bullets in their heads. A toothless fiend loose in the storming dark. And some-

where, alone on that perilous after deck, a girl who had waited for me.

I WAS in a daze, I can tell you, and the bang I got in the face as I skated around the after house through a Niagara of spray did little to clear my numbed brain. Crying her name, I flung down the ladder to the baggage room. Hope Brown was not there. I shin-banged down the second companion to hit that lower hold heels over head in a shower of oaths, water and paint tins.

Heaven knows why I expected to find her down there. I suppose I looked because the back of my squirrel-brained head kept believing that the girl hadn't seen me when I dashed topside in the pitch before, and had come below, herself, to locate me. She was not to be seen, of course. There was just that topsy-turvy hold with red paint swirling across its iron floor, cans and rubbish and my own anxious boots drifting wildly around in the paint. There was nothing but that blank iron bulkhead and the dim-glowing electric bulb swinging down from a stanchion.

Sick in my very veins, I grabbed at the ladder going topside; got one paint-plastered shoe on the bottom step. The hold spun and lurched, stifling with the stench of turpentine and tar, and for a moment I could do nothing but hang.

Exhaustion plays queer tricks with the mind. Funny how I could hear the girl's voice calling to me. Calling. Calling from far away, faint above the thousand dinnings of iron walls and straining stanchions, like an echo from another world.

"Hope!" I shrieked. "Hope! It's me—"

"In here!" The faint echo twisted the fizzing head on my neck and set me going like a jumping jack. *"In here! Help me! I'm in here!"*

Do you think I didn't get a noise out of my lungs? That girl's voice was coming from the other side of the locked bulkhead—that slab-iron partition through which Bentfinger had disappeared so many mad hours before. I pressed my shoulders against the barrier, and yelled. "It's bolted on your side! Throw the bolt—"

"There isn't any bolt!" she wailed. "I can't get out! I'm locked in—"

"How'd you get through?" I screeched, desperate.. "Where?"

"I don't know!" Her voice just reached me. "I thought you were in here! I was shoving on the door. Suddenly it opened. I fell into this room. The door slammed behind me! I think I pushed on a knob— Find a knob—"

Find a knob! Good Lord above, that cursed bulkhead was covered over with knobs. Reënforced with iron bands riveted onto the massive slab with at least two thousand bolts. Every bolt-head was a knob, and I hammered on those bolt-heads till my fists were raw.

Maybe you think I had a lot of time to go punching at those unresisting bolts. I did not. The floor was tipping at an angle of twenty degrees, and instead of swinging back upright it was staying that way. Black water was squirting across the aft end of the hold and deepening in a well in the lowest corner. And I could not open that bulkhead. My knuckles were pulped and my toes kicked numb as I thumped, slugged and banged on row after row of bolts, hammered and tore at giant hinges and casing, and that iron gate never budged.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK.

The Hard Cider Ghost

When Big Bill Brand moved to Bildad Road his ancient neighbor said there was nothing in those rumors of ha'nts about the farm — but Bill kept a wary eye open and saw some surprising things

He had never seen such a strange, motionless figure

By WILLIAM MERRIAM ROUSE

BIG BILL BRAND stood on a knoll in the apple orchard he had just bought and gazed rapturously over acres of pink and white blossoms. He was monarch of this little world of perfumed beauty. The blue mountains rolled up to the sky, with a touch of snow on the far peaks. Bill had just decided that life was perfect, when a voice as hard as a cold chisel spoke not more than an arm's length from his ear.

"They's a power of cider in them trees!"

Brand was light on his feet, having been built wedge-shaped as a good scrapper should be. He landed six feet away, turning in the air, and faced toward the voice with his hands up and his head down.

He found himself looking at a gaunt-waisted old man, whose bright and piercing eye would have done credit to a pioneer or a horse trader. The old man twinkled at him, stroked a goodly set of white whiskers, and reached for his eating tobacco.

"Who might you be?" demanded Big Bill, suspiciously. He had heard things about this Bildad Road neigh-

borhood into which he had moved and he was stepping as carefully as a dog on shell ice.

"I'm Jed Tinker," his visitor told him, "the only neighbor you got within gunshot. And I want to say, young feller, that I kin see you're going to get along all right here on the Road. You're real sprightly. Ain't nobody going to fool ye!"

"Well," said Bill, cautiously, "I hope not. I don't claim to be very smart, but I'm watchful."

"Yes, sir! You be! And you done the right thing for yourself, buying the old Darby place when it was sold for taxes. They's a mint of money in cider, and you got it growing right here. All you got to do is pick it in the fall of the year. I wished I'd had the money to buy the orchard. If folks on Bildad wasn't so superstitious it would of been took long ago."

"How's that?" asked Bill, uncertainly.

"Skeery, I mean. You've heard how come they ain't no more Darby family, ain't you?"

"Why, yes! They're dead!"

"They're dead, all right!" Jed Tinker looked off toward the mountain tops. "The hull fambly to once!"

"Took sick in an epidemic?"

"Nope. They didn't go that way. Hezekiah Darby was what you might call a lettle might oncertain in his upper story. One day he got the ax and a coil of new inch rope and the butcher knife out of the kitchen. You must of heard about it?"

"I never was here until I come day before yesterday." Brand began to feel slightly depressed. "What was it happened?"

"Afore Zeke Darby hung himself he laid his wife out with the ax and cut the gal's throat. Claribal Darby, her name was. Nice, clever gal, too, even if she was a mite thin and gangling."

"Golly!" It struck Big Bill that Bildad Road might be equal to its reputation. "I'm glad this Zeke Darby took off before I got here!"

"He's dead as a doornail," Jed assured him, comfortingly. "So's Claribel, and if I was you I wouldn't pay no attention to what folks say about her."

"It don't make no difference what they say if she's dead, does it?"

"Well, you'd call her dead. The hull fambly's buried in the cemetery over beyond the Corners. But they do say she comes back home. She allus liked it here, and that's a fact, but them kind of yarns don't sound reasonable to me."

"Comes back home!" echoed Brand. "You mean to say she's a ghost?"

"I ain't saying nothing. Don't believe in ghosts. Not even if I did see something moving slow across the dooryard one night in the full of the moon when I was going past here. It went into the barn."

"What was it?"

"I didn't wait," admitted Jed. "But, shucks! It was likely some feller and gal spooning, only I couldn't see him on account of his clothes would be dark-colored."

"I," began Bill, drawing in a breath that strained his shirt buttons, "can lick any ghost that ever walked on two feet or four!"

"THAT'S the way to talk, young feller!" cried Jed. "I knowed you wasn't like these white-livered, weak-kneed Bildaders, or you never would of bought the place!"

Bill Brand turned a searching gaze upon his guest; only to meet a frank,

admiring gaze. There was no hint of humor in the old man's face. For Brand the glamour faded a little from the acres of white blossoms; the mating songs of the birds were not quite so joyous. But he was not shaken.

"Here I be, and here I stay!" he announced.

"Of course!" agreed Tinker. "Don't you be drove off by no gossip. I don't believe a word of it, myself. Well, I got to go home and do chores. I'll take ye down to my place for a glass of good cider some day. That is, if you stay here."

Brand watched the back of Jed Tinker's blue-checkered shirt until it disappeared. Then slowly he went back to the sturdy house that was his. He entered the roomy kitchen. He had thought it a cheerful room. It did not seem quite the same since Jed's visit.

Big Bill could not help wondering just where Hezekiah Darby had hung himself. In the barn, probably. It would be more natural for a man to hang himself in the barn, where he would have conveniences. He could find a beam for the rope, and a good drop into an empty bay. But of course the other bodies might have been scattered around in the house or anywhere.

Bill Brand did not believe in ghosts, and he never had. Nor did he swallow everything that old codger had told him. Not by a darned sight! Just the same, he admitted to himself that he wished he had a wife, or even a dog. Any kind of a critter around the house would make him feel less lonesome.

Here he was with practically everything in the world that he wanted and that whiskered old he-mudhen had to come around and tell murder stories! Brand worked himself into a mild state of anger and succeeded in throwing off his depression until dusk gathered on Bildad Road.

Then the gruesome yarn of Jed Tinker came back to him in detail and when he went to the barn to feed his horse he was again wondering just where Darby had made his rope fast. The horse that usually greeted him with a welcoming nicker snorted and pawed to-night. Brand spoke to him, and started up the stairway that led to the hayloft.

BOTH feet of Big Bill became glued to the bottom step. He stood with his chin lifted, his jaw slack, and the pit of his stomach sagging against his backbone. For at the head of the stairs stood a strange, motionless figure such as he had never seen before.

There was light enough for him to perceive that it had the semblance of a girl; with a form tall and shapely in spite of a weird old-fashioned dress with a tight bodice and a skirt that came almost to her ankles.

The hands of her, or it, were crossed upon the breast. The eyes stared unseeingly over his head, into the dim recesses of the loft. There was no movement, no sound, from the apparition.

Bill reeled backward from the stairs. He found himself out in the blessed air, with solid earth under him and the tinted sky above. Then he came to. He roared a battle cry and plunged back into the barn. With a pitchfork in his hands he went charging upstairs.

A barn swallow skimmed frantically out through the doorway where hay was unloaded. There was no other sign of life. Brand prodded into dark corners, cussing so that he would hear a human voice. He called upon Hezekiah Darby to bring out his ghosts and get them licked. Still no answer.

Bill was jumpy that night when he ate his lonely supper. Afterward he stayed out of doors and smoked until he was so sleepy that he had to go in or make his bed on the doorstep. The stairs groaned to his tread. When he lay quietly under his blankets the sound of lightly running feet came from the attic. Squirrels, of course. He knew that they liked to nest in old houses.

SUNRISE dissipated the vapors. By noon of the next day Bill more than half believed that he had seen something where there was nothing to see. He had observed delirium tremens. If a man could imagine pink snakes he could just as well imagine long-legged girls in old-fashioned dresses.

Nevertheless Bill started and let his knife fall with a clatter when the kitchen door darkened while he was eating dinner. Jed Tinker stood there, meditatively stroking his whiskers. He walked in and helped himself to a chair.

"Your appetite seems to be all right," he remarked, with a chuckle. "I guess you made up your mind by this time that they ain't nothing in the yarns folks tell about the Darby place!"

Bill Brand found himself annoyed. It made him mad to be scared and he resented the prying of Jed Tinker. He made up his mind to fill both ears for the old man.

"They's plenty in them yarns!" Deliberately Bill finished his last slice of salt pork. He absorbed half a cup of coffee. "Last night just about dusk I see a girl at the head of the hayloft stairs. Pretty face, she had. That is, if she'd looked human."

"Glory be!" Tinker leaned forward in his chair. "Was she dressed kind of old-fashioned?"

"Yep!"

"Claribel Darby, sure as you live!"

"I knowed right off it was her," said Bill, calmly. "Because her throat was cut from ear to ear!"

Jed Tinker drew in his breath with a rasping sound.

"What did you do?"

"I run a pitchfork through her." Bill paused to light his pipe. "And then she disappeared in a kind of a puff of smoke."

Tinker swallowed hard. For a moment he sat in silence, staring hard at Brand. Slowly he rose.

"I ain't so young as I was once," he said. "Them things kind of upset me. I didn't suppose they was any truth in them ghost stories."

"Nor I, neither. But I don't care now I know they're harmless."

"Harmless ain't what folks around here tell," muttered Tinker, darkly, as he moved toward the door. "I hope nothing happens to ye."

For the moment Big Bill was sorry that the old man had left him. But he got over being lonesome after he had sawed wood for an hour or two. By night Brand was his normal self, although he went into the barn gingerly and reached for a pitchfork before he stepped clear of the doorway.

No wraith obscured the head of the stairway. The loft was empty of any presence but his own. When he went to bed the noises of the ancient house seemed more natural, and by the following morning Bill was thoroughly convinced that he had never seen that slim female figure in the twilight.

THIS day he whistled as he worked, and when he went to the barn at sundown to give the horse his evening meal, Big Bill lifted his voice in unmelodious song. He was going

happily toward the grain box when a long-drawn, sepulchral groan came from behind him.

Bill whirled and saw the tall girl coming from the semi-darkness of an unoccupied stall. The utter surprise of this was too much. He leaped for the open air, caromed from the side of the doorway, and sprinted all the way to the shelter of the kitchen.

Then, as he panted in the middle of the room, ready to curse himself for a nervous old woman and start back to the barn, he became aware that the cellar door was slowly opening before him. A slender white hand crept around the edge of the door.

Bill stood transfixed as the replica of Claribel Darby revealed herself. She seemed to float before his shimmering vision. One hand slowly raised and the index finger pointed to her throat.

Big Bill let out a yell that he did not recognize as coming from his own mouth. He cleared the doorstep in one leap. Only when he stood behind the chopping block, with the ax in his hands, did he begin to recover from his panic.

No human being could have come from the barn ahead of him. This time he knew that he had seen what he had seen, and that whatever it was owned a power of locomotion superior to mortals. His feet had covered the distance between house and barn in nothing flat, and instantly he had met that thing coming up out of the cellar. He sat down on the chopping block and wiped chill drops from his forehead.

That night Big Bill moved a chest of drawers against his bedroom door, loaded his shotgun, and waited. But through all the long hours of darkness nothing happened. The squirrels went about their concerns above him, and the house creaked under him, but he saw nothing of Claribel Darby.

The girl had been good-looking, there was no doubt of that. As he thought about her calmly during the night he almost wished that she were alive and intact. There was a certain shapeliness appearing through that unlovely dress. But, considering her ethereal state, he did not want to meet her again. Bill shuddered at the thought of it.

At the same time he felt sure he was going to see her some more; and this because he was not going to quit for any ghost that ever roamed the earth. Next time he would have his nerves prepared. Instead of running he would walk right up and ask her what she wanted. That was the way to handle a ghost!

DURING the day Bill caught a few cat-naps, lying out in the sun, and when night came he was reasonably sure of himself. He entered the barn with his glance swinging from side to side, ready to stop and hold converse at the first sight of a caller from another world. It was a trifle disappointing to peer up the stairway and into the shadows of the stalls and not find anything..

At the end of five minutes Big Bill took the four-quart measure and went to the grain box. He was grinning with pride at his own nonchalance as he lifted the cover. Then that grin froze, and every hair on his head prickled. For the apparition was slowly rising before his bulging eyes, out of the capacious depths of the box.

In spite of his horror Bill Brand realized that the time had come when he must be either a man or a mouse. He summoned all his courage, and reached out with iron fingers. The ghost

squealed and jumped. Bill's first grip took only a handful of cloth. He grabbed again and got an ankle just as the simulacrum of Claribel Darby went over the side of the grain box.

"Let go of me, you sassy thing!"—desperately trying to keep upright.

"No ghost ever had as pretty a leg as that," said Big Bill. "You and me are going to get acquainted!"

"I'll scratch!" she threatened. "I'll bite!"

"Not me, you won't!" Bill transferred his grip from the girl's ankle to her arm. "Come along into the house where I can look at you! I got an idea you're as cute as a six-weeks' old puppy!"

She struggled, but not enough to endanger her costume. Brand led her into the kitchen, sat her down in a corner, and lighted the lamp. Then he stood back and heaved a sigh of mingled relief and elation.

In spite of that limp, outmoded dress, and that plastered-back hair, this girl was extremely satisfying to his gaze. Little imps danced in her long-lashed eyes; nature had shaped her mouth for a pleasant purpose. Her skin made Bill think of his apple blossoms.

"Claribel," he said, "what's your name?"

She gasped like an expiring fish. It seemed that she was divided between fear and the thrill of high adventure.

"Mary Ann," she replied, meekly, but with a twinkle.

"Mary Ann what?"

Her lip quivered. The imps in her eyes changed to misty stars.

"I don't want to squeal on Pa!" she murmured.

"Ha!" Brand began to suspect that an idea was seeking him. There was a plot here. But even as he gazed at her an electric effluvium, or whatever it is in those cases, passed between them and he knew that this girl was more important to him than any plot.

"Has your Pa got white whiskers and a wicked eye?" he asked, gently. "Mary Ann, you can trust me!"

"Uh-huh!" she replied.

"Then his name is Jed Tinker!"

"He's always had the apples on this place for nothing. Nobody's lived here since the Darbys."

"Did Hezekiah Darby hang himself?" demanded Bill, sternly.

"Him and his wife was took by the galloping consumption," admitted Mary Ann, confusedly, "and Claribel went with the croup when she was three years old."

"I ain't surprised!" Bill grinned. "Mary Ann..."

"Yes, Bill?"

"I—I want to see you some more!"

"I'm coming to haunt you some more to-morrow night. They calculated one more night would finish you, Bill. They didn't figger you had sand enough to tackle a ghost barehanded. Not even if you did run a pitchfork through me!"

Big Bill laughed, and possessed himself of her hand.

"I couldn't! You're too nimble on your feet! And, say! How come you was in two places at the same time the other night?"

"I can't explain now," she told him, edging toward the door. "Honest, Bill, Pa 'll think I turned on him if I don't hustle back. And he'll maul me all over Bildad Road! Him and Jethro Annis is waiting for me over back of the orchard. I got to tell 'em how scared you was!"

"Who's Jethro Annis?" barked Bill, and he began to breathe hard through his nose.

"Oh, he ain't nothing to me!"

She appeared to be sincere, but Brand suffered, nevertheless, from the thorns of jealousy as he followed her to the door.

"It's safe for you to walk as far as the orchard with me," she told him. "I—I kind of like you, Bill!"

"Me, too!" he exclaimed, huskily. "Is it in the barn you're going to haunt me to-morrow? Same time?"

"Yes, and Pa 'll be there, hiding. He thinks you'll be all set to leave. You can grab me and he won't suspect I went back on him."

"I'll grab you for good next time!" whispered Bill.

They stood under the first of the apple trees. A canopy of blossoms hid the deepening heavens. Bill kissed her. He went back to the house groggily. The girl had gone to his head and legs at the same time, like hard cider.

THIS was another sleepless night for Big Bill Brand, but now it was joy that kept his eyes open. He wanted to get married, and it was the first time that he had ever been afflicted that way. In the morning his hands shook as he cooked breakfast.

What if she should be taken sick and die before he could marry her? He wished he had asked her right out last night. Why had he let her go at all? They could have driven all night and got to the county seat for a license the first thing in the morning. Bill Brand had a bad case.

Sunset came at last and Bill put on a clean shirt and a necktie for the last visit of the ghost. He scrubbed his face to a brick-like color and at the first hint of twilight he sauntered toward the barn, paused on the threshold to still his pounding heart, and stepped inside.

Bill entered his barn with the spirit of a conqueror. He thought he knew just what he was going to do when that dear apparition manifested itself from the shadows of stall or hayloft. He looked about expectantly, with a half smile.

There she came. Advancing slowly toward him with outstretched hands was the imitation ghost of Claribel Darby as she might have been if she had lived to grow up. Of course Mary Ann was playing the game for her father's benefit. Brand wondered where the old man was hidden.

In a moment it would be Bill's cue to grab her. He had taken a step forward for that purpose, when from behind him came a groan that might well have been the composite farewell to life of the whole Darby family.

Big Bill spun around in his tracks and for seconds thereafter his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth. He remained rigid and helpless. For down the stairs from the loft came another Claribel Darby, and her hands were also reaching for him.

At last he managed to turn his head. They were both there in sight at the same time; a ghost to the right and a ghost to the left of him. Their eyes were fixed upon his face.

"Godfreys mighty!" breathed Bill. Suddenly it came to him that perhaps he was at the wrong end of a joke. Then he got mad. He would find out whether he was seeing double or not! With a catlike leap he seized a wrist of the ghost in the stall and dragged her with him as he bore down upon the other. He swept them before him, out into the open.

One of his captives yelped as he backed them up against the side of the barn. From within came the sounds of a fierce and bitter tussle, with an

overtone of sincere cussing. Out through the doorway shot a husky-looking, wild-eyed young man. Old Jed Tinker swung on his coat tails. This was to the liking of Bill Brand, in his present frame of mind. He set himself and grinned a welcome.

"Come on!" he invited. "I eat fellers like you, along with my pancakes for breakfast!"

"Jeth!" squealed Tinker. "Jethro Annis! You be quiet! Gol durn your ding-busted hide! Do you want to spile everything? He ain't hurt her none!"

The old man flung himself in front of Annis and butted him between the suspenders. For the moment Jethro Annis was out of wind. He sat down on the grass.

"That's better!" remarked Jed. He turned a cold eye upon Bill. "You kind of think you're smart, don't ye?"

BILL hesitated. Then his better nature prevailed and he put away the impulse to take Jed Tinker by the whiskers. He turned to the girls, standing silently before him.

"Mary Ann," he said, looking first into one pair of starry, long-lashed eyes, and then into the other pair. "Mary Ann, tell your Pa to take the rest of his army and go home where he belongs. You and me are going to get a marriage license!"

The girls looked at each other, at him, and then vaguely past his broad shoulders. A mean giggle came from old Jed Tinker.

"Which one be you talking to?" he asked.

"Mary Ann!" snapped Big Bill. "I didn't know they was two of her, but I'm game! I'll marry her both!"

"Not by a durned sight you won't!" yelled Annis. He got up with his hands on his stomach. "Sary Ann belongs to me! Them is twins!"

"That's why she was in the hoss barn and the kitchen at the same time the other night!" Bill cried.

"It ain't her! It's them!" Jethro Annis was stirred to his depths. Undeniably the situation was too much for his brain. "Can't you see two girls standing right in front of ye?"

"Mary Ann!" pleaded Bill. "Why don't you speak to me?"

"She's got some pride!" snorted her father. "If you don't know the gal you want to marry when you see her she ain't going to throw herself at ye!"

"I bet you can't tell 'em apart yourself!" cried Brand, desperately.

"Huh! I brung them twins up! One of 'em's got a dimple when she grins!"

"Which one?" demanded Bill.

"I ain't saying which!" Jed snickered. "Look at 'em now!"

They were smiling and in one cheek of one twin there was a charming dimple. Big Bill turned to Annis.

"You pick out your girl, if you know which is which!"

"Not much I don't!" growled Jethro. "You don't get no help out of me!"

Bill's head was spinning. If only she would help him! If only he could look into her eyes and call her to him! But that was the trouble. He did not know which pair of eyes to look into. If he mistook Sary Ann for Mary Ann then his goose would be cooked with Mary Ann. And of course Sary Ann was bespoke.

"I aim to be accommodating." Old Man Tinker broke the silence. "If I was to get my patrimony I wouldn't make no fuss about her and you getting married."

"P a t r i m o n y?" echoed Bill. "What—"

"That's what the bride's pa gets when she's married. In this case it's an apple orchard!"

"If I had Mary Ann I wouldn't trade her for all the apple trees on Bildad Road!" cried Bill.

"Apples is cider and cider is money," announced Jed, shamelessly. "Make up your mind, young feller!"

Big Bill looked at the twins again. If his life had depended on it he could not have remembered whether or not Mary Ann had shown a dimple the night before. Now the twin with the dimple smiled at him. The other one slowly let an eyelid droop. Which was Mary Ann? The one who smiled or the one who winked?

SUDDENLY Bill Brand threw back his head and laughed. What kind of a man was he, anyway? Where did he keep his brains? In his hip pocket? Of course he could find out which was which without any help from old man Tinker or Jethro Annis! He stepped up to the twin who had winked at him and kissed her.

Spang! A small but muscular palm connected with his ear. The twin with the dimple cuffed him at the same instant that the twin he had kissed bit him on the chin. He leaped backward and caught the hand that had stung his ear, dragging the dimpled twin with him.

"Mary Ann!" he cried. "I hoped it was you that had that nice dimple! I knowed if I kissed the wrong one the other would be jealous! I like 'em that way!"

Mary Ann glared at her sister.

"You needn't of bit him!" she snapped. "But you won't get another chance while I live!"

"Nor him, neither!" hissed Jethro Annis, as he reached the side of Sary Ann.

Old Jed Tinker heaved a sigh and fumbled for his eating tobacco.

"Anyway," he muttered, "I got them apples in the fambly!"

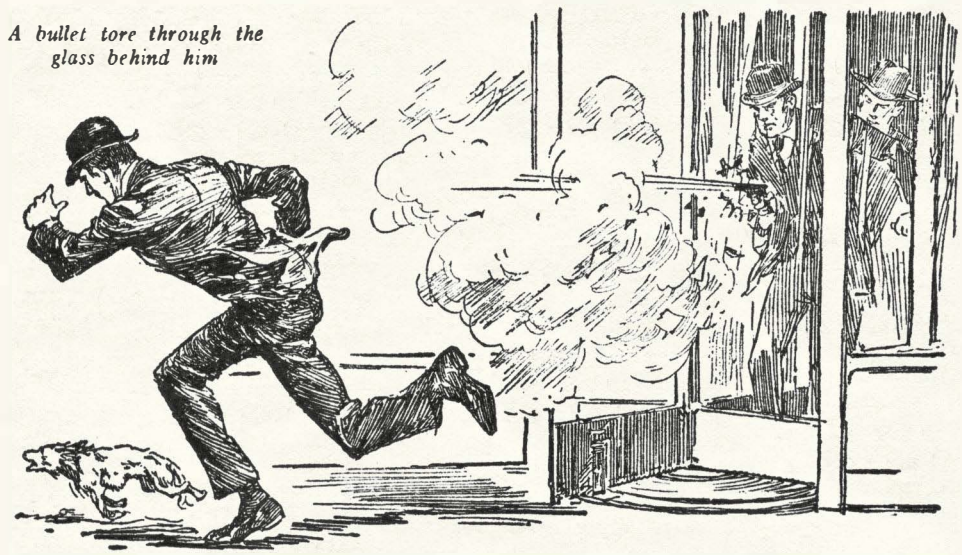
THE END.

Stilt Walkers

WALKING on stilts for reasons of utility rather than amusement is common in certain parts of the world. Fishermen along the shores of several East Indian islands use stilts, for from a height they are enabled to sight their finny prey with ease. Then bows and arrows or spears are called into play.

In the Landes of France shepherds are mounted on stilts to watch their flocks, and knit at the same time. But it is in the Faversham district of Kent, England, that stilts are most important. The hop poles of this county, famous for its hops, are from eighteen to twenty feet high, and some of the workers who string up the vines use lofty stepladders with flat tops. Faversham stringers, however, have adopted stilts of recent years, and find that they can get around faster than the men who are obliged to move their steps from place to place.

Seen at a distance, engaged in spinning their webs, the stiltmen appear to be gigantic two-legged spiders. Falls frequently occur, but as the ground between the vines is soft, but little injury results. *C. A. Freeman.*



A bullet tore through the glass behind him

Pirate of Wall Street

Flung into the icy river by gangsters, Reggie Blake finds a rude interruption to his plan to crush his father's murderer—an interruption that threatens to be permanent

By FRED MacISAAC

Author of "The Hothouse World," "Balata," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

MADE penniless by the suicide of his father, young Reggie Blake sets out to punish T. F. Speaks, the New York financier who was responsible for the elder Blake's death. In his search for employment, Reggie meets Ruth, daughter of T. F. Speaks, who had run away from her father several years before. They become friends in distress. Reggie, escorting her to her cheap apartment, protects her from an encounter with Art Hornsman, gangster, and Hornsman is killed by his own gun in the struggle.

Ruth, thinking to get money to aid Reggie to escape from the wrath of the gangsters, goes to her father, who welcomes her to his palatial apartment. Reggie, in turn seeking funds for Ruth, approaches Rita Van Storm, the girl to whom he had been engaged, but who had thrown him over when he lost his money, and asks for the return of the valuable engagement ring he had given her.

Rita, learning through her father (affiliated with Speaks's rival, John Grant) of a secret trust fund which Reggie will soon receive, welcomes him joyously and insists on renewing their engagement, to Reggie's embarrassment.

This story began in the Argosy for May 16.

A struggle is being waged between Speaks and John Grant for control of the M. W. and Coast Railroad. The thousand shares of stock that will swing the balance of power are in the trust fund that is soon to be given Reggie. In case of his death before his imminent twenty-fifth birthday, however, they would go to a railroad benefit society which Speaks controls. Speaks has his lieutenant, Randolph Cook, try to trick Reggie into signing over the stock to him. Having been warned by Aristides Lamont, an old-time "pitch man" or sidewalk vendor who knows Speaks and Cook, and who has taken Reggie under his wing, Reggie does not fall into the trap.

That plan failing, Speaks orders Cook to have Reggie kidnaped, tied in a sack and thrown into the river. The sack catches on a spike, leaving Reggie half submerged. He extricates himself and swims out into the river.

CHAPTER XVII.

"OUT OF THE FRYING PAN—"

THERE was a tug bearing down on Reggie from behind with a string of barges in tow. He struck out to the right to avoid it, for it was headed directly for him.

Heedless of his cries, it passed rapidly and he narrowly escaped being hit by the first barge.

It slid by him six feet away, and in a moment the second barge came along and passed. Reggie shouted in vain.

The third barge almost grazed him and he was swimming away from it when he saw a rope ladder, swinging wide and dipping into the water.

Desperately he grasped at it and caught the lowest rung with one hand. Saved!

But was he? The barge was moving at six or eight miles an hour and he was almost exhausted from his long immersion in a wintry sea. Grimly he clung and shifted his grip to the second rung. It seemed an age before he got a foot firmly upon the ladder, and the struggle up the ten feet to the high deck was terrific. At last his head was above the rail. He fell over it and landed with a thump upon the deck. He lay there for some minutes.

The clamminess of his wet garments prompted him to move as soon as he had recovered from exhaustion and he climbed upon his feet. He was standing upon the 'midship section of an empty coal barge. It was a two hundred foot barge, which, once upon a time, had been a four masted schooner. Jogging along at the end of a line, it needed no crew and had none save a captain and two deck hands, all three of whom were inside the deck house, seated at a table playing rummy.

Reggie moved cautiously along the dark deck, guided by the light which streamed through a cabin porthole and presently located the entrance. The door opened easily. He descended four steps and stood in a musty saloon lighted by a kerosene lamp which swung in a chandelier over the mess table.

The captain of the barge was facing the door and was the first to observe the visitor. He was a long, spare man with sloping shoulders, and a horse's face, decorated with a straggly grayish-black mustache. He wore overalls and was smoking a pipe. He dropped his cards and removed his pipe from his mouth.

"Do me eyes deceive me?" he asked in a high piping voice, "or did a guy just bust in through that entrance?"

"I beg your pardon," said Reggie,

whose teeth were chattering with the cold.

"And you should beg my pardon, mister," observed the skipper. "Comin' unannounced into a gent's boudoir, so to speak, and dripping water all over his Oriental rug. Who the heck are ye and how did you get here?"

"The guy's been in the river," said one of the captain's two companions.

"I knew he'd been taking some kind of a bath," replied the captain. "You see what you get for not staying on deck, Matt. Things crawl right out of the river and bust into me privacy."

"Aw, shut up," said the third man. "This poor bloke is freezin' to death. Get him some dry clothes."

"You let him have your dress suit, Pat," said the skipper, grinning, "and I'll give him something more valuable —a swig of Scotch."

"I could use them both, sir," said Reggie. "I'm in pretty bad shape, I'm afraid."

PAT, who was a brawny and good-natured Irishman, was already pulling the wet clothes from the stranger, and the captain, with obvious reluctance, brought from a locker a bottle of whisky about half full, poured out a stiff swig and held it to Reggie's lips.

"Matt," he said sharply, "get a towel and rub the guy down with it while Pat digs out something for him to put on."

Pat pushed Reggie into a chair and jerked off the wet and clinging trousers. As he pulled them away, something flew out of a pocket, struck the wall and landed upon the deck at the feet of the three Good Samaritans.

Three pairs of eyes were glued to it as it sparkled in the lamplight. It was the diamond ring which, earlier in the evening, Rita Van Storm had drawn from her engagement finger and returned to Reggie.

The captain of the barge won the scramble and came up with a diamond solitaire between thumb and forefinger.

"Blast my eyes," he remarked, "if I don't think it's real."

"Naw," protested Matt. "It's too big to be real."

"Is that yours, mister?" demanded Pat.

"Yes," said Reggie. "Give it to me, please."

Reluctantly the skipper handed it to him.

"How much might that thing be worth?" he demanded.

"I paid three thousand dollars for it at Tiffany's," said Reggie truthfully.

"You mean you swiped it out of some society woman's boudoir," said the captain.

"Sure he did," said Matt. "You better take charge of that, skipper. Maybe they'll be a reward offered for it."

"We know where it is if we want it," said Pat. "Here, mister, pull on this shirt and the overalls. I can't give you any boots. I only got one pair."

Reggie dressed in haste. The swallow of whisky, bad as it was, had warmed him and made him feel better.

"I'm very much obliged to you gentlemen," he said. "I'm not a thief and that ring is my property. I bought it for a young lady who has returned it to me."

"Oh, then it's a phony," said the captain sorrowfully.

"Er—yes." Reggie had realized that too much interest was being displayed by the bargemen in Rita's engagement ring.

"And you was kidding when you said you paid three thousand for it?"

"Yes."

"You're a liar. I think it's real and you're a crook. Now, how did you get into the river and how did you get on the Thomas W. Herran?"

With three rough-hewn and incredulous faces looking down upon him, Reggie told his story. And, as he told it, the thing didn't seem worthy of belief. He knew they took no stock in his tale and, in their places, he wouldn't have believed all that stuff about the sack, either.

"You escaped from Blackwell's Island, that's what you done," accused the skipper.

"The cops was chasing him and he jumped into the river," conjectured Matt.

"Anyway, he was in the river, all right," asserted Pat. "What would he be doing with a diamond ring if he was a prisoner on the island?"

"It's easy enough to verify my statement," said Reggie. "You can go ashore with me and come with me to my lodgings. I can easily prove that I'm not an escaped prisoner or a pickpocket or any other kind of criminal."

THE skipper's face cracked into what was intended to be a genial smile. "We don't give a damn what you are," he said. "You're on board this barge because that fool Matt forgot to pull in the rope ladder, and if you think we're going ashore with you, you're crazy."

"Then will you put me ashore at once?" asked Reggie anxiously. "I assure you I'm not afraid of the police."

"You don't go ashore either," said the captain. "We're outward bound, feller."

"But it would be easy to land me at the Battery, sir."

"We're in tow of an ocean-going tug and our first stop is Newport News," said the captain. "We got certain signals they understand on the tug, but we ain't got no telephone connection, mister. Unless you want to jump overboard again, you're making the voyage."

"And how long before we get to Newport News?" asked Reggie in dismay.

"Maybe four days, maybe a week. Depends on the weather. It's all right, young feller. We got plenty of grub and you'll earn your passage. More work on a barge than people think. And you'll get good quarters. This ship used to carry a skipper, three mates and a crew of twenty-four men. Being as there are only a few of us we all have officers' cabins. I'm Captain Harry Stinson, this is Matt Clews and you're wearing the clothes of Pat Moran. What's your name?"

"Blake, sir."

"Blake, eh. Can you cook?"

"I've done some camp cooking."

"Then Matt is free of that rotten job. You get a passage to Newport News, but you don't get any wages. How about it?"

"If there is no way of getting ashore, I have to accept your offer."

"That's the spirit. Know how to play rummy?"

"I'm sorry. I never learned."

"Well, you'll know by the time we get to Newport News."

"Better wrap yourself up in a blanket and go to sleep," suggested Pat. "You might get pneumonia out of what you've been through."

"Stick him in the spare cabin," said the captain. "In the morning you go to work. And Pat, you get up on deck. Tug might be signalling for all we know."

Pat Moran led Reggie to a small cubby-hole containing a narrow berth upon which were tossed two or three foul blankets.

"Wrap up warm and you'll be all right in the morning," he said kindly.

"I certainly am obliged to you," replied Reggie. "And thanks for bringing in my wet clothes."

"They look like good clothes," replied Moran, grinning. "And if they're in the room with ye, you know where they are. Say, was that a real diamond?"

Reggie nodded.

"It's bad luck for you that it fell out of your clothes. Good night, mister."

After he had shut the door, Reggie observed that there was a bolt on it which he proceeded to draw. He did not need Moran's warning to be aware that the appearance of the stone had complicated his situation upon the barge.

It was maddening to know that he was still in New York harbor, probably only a few hundred yards from the Brooklyn shore and yet was condemned to four days or a week on this hulk. His only alternative was to jump overboard.

If he had been able to overhear the conversation at the mess table he wouldn't have been so sure that the theft of the stone was the worst that could happen to him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE BATTLE ON THE BARGE

CAPTAIN STINSON had resumed his seat at the table and poured drinks for himself and his companion. He sat in silence until Moran went out on deck and then he crooked his finger to Clews, who leaned toward him.

"By rights, according to his own story, this feller ought to be in a sack at the bottom of the river," he said.

"But I don't believe his yarn," declared Matt.

The captain turned his pale blue eyes upon the countenance of his deck hand. It was not a prepossessing countenance. The features were sharp and wizened, the expression of the mouth was vicious. The black eyes were bad eyes.

"If it hadn't been for the rope ladder hanging over the side," he said, "this man Blake, no matter how he got in the river, would be at the bottom by now and the diamond ring with him."

"Sure. Nobody could swim long in ice water."

"We had nothin' to do with chucking him in the river, had we Matt?"

Matt grinned and shook his head.

"And nobody in the wide world knows, or will ever know that he climbed on board this barge, if you get me."

"I get you. Suppose that ring is phony?"

"It ain't phony. I took a good look at this guy and he's the kind that don't have phony stuff. He said he paid three thousand for it, didn't he?"

"Yeah, but I don't believe it. No ring is worth three thousand dollars."

"You're crazy. I read that Peggy Joyce had one that was worth fifty thousand."

"Well, she might. If you thought it was real what did you give it back to him for?"

"I'll tell you. I don't know about Pat. You and me have knocked around, but Moran is on the level, I think."

"Yeah. He goes to mass every Sunday when we're in port."

"That's why I gave it back. How far are you willing to go, Matt?"

Matt threw off his whisky, coughed and said, "The limit."

"Just you and me, eh? Fifty-fifty?"

"Right. How about Pat?"

"It's a black night," said the skipper. "We get rid of Pat first. We'll have some rough weather during the voyage and we'll report he was washed overboard. We don't have to make any report on the lad in the cabin, there."

Matt nodded.

"We ought to get a thousand, anyhow, for the ring. That's five hundred apiece. Better than a three-way split."

"Where are we?" demanded the captain.

Matt crossed to a porthole.

"Off Staten Island," he reported.

"Better wait an hour," the captain decided. "We don't want Pat picked up."

TIME passed. The barge began to roll very slightly as she breasted the waters of the Lower Bay. Two hundred yards ahead rolled the second barge, two hundred yards forward of that was the first barge of the tow, and two hundred yards in advance plowed the tug, with three lights on her mast to warn other vessels that three hulks trailed after her and extended nearly half a mile behind.

Pat Moran smoked his pipe on the after deck near the unmanned wheel and looked into the black night. The lights on the Jersey shore twinkled dimly and pinpoints of yellow on the wide expanse of ocean indicated the location of other craft.

He was thinking of the tale told by the young man in the cabin below and doubting it. There was no doubt, however, that the fellow had a valuable diamond ring in his possession and that the skipper had no intention of letting him get off the barge with it. Presently the captain would come up and make him a proposition to go in with them and he would refuse to have anything to do with the theft.

If the ring had been stolen by Blake and the skipper took it away from him it was up to Stinson to turn it over to the police to be restored to the owner. No luck ever came to seafaring men who stole things.

Presently he heard the cabin entrance open as somebody came out. The man came up the ladder to the after deck and approached Moran. It was Matt.

"Funny how that kid got aboard, eh?" said Matt, approaching him.

"It was one chance in a million for a swimmer to get aboard a high-sided tub like this," replied Pat.

"What did you make of his story?" demanded Matt.

"Hard to believe," replied Moran.

"Think the ring is any good?"

"You can buy 'em from street fakers for half a dollar. Piece of glass in nickel setting," replied Moran.

"Well, you may be right," said Matt. "Now!"

He sprang at Moran and grasped him by the throat just as Captain Stinson came up and pounced upon the back of the unsuspicious deck hand.

Moran was strong, however, and understood the situation in a flash. He sent a pile-driver right into Matt's stomach which made him grunt, but did not cause him to relax his grip. His powerful hands were strangling the Irishman while Stinson had him by the thighs and was forcing him toward the rail.

Silently, on the dark deck, they struggled with fists and heavy boots. Once Moran broke Matt's death grasp by a vicious right to the chin, but, before he could turn on the skipper, Clews was in upon him again. Stinson kicked his feet from under him and he went down with the others on top, raining heavy blows upon his face. They lifted him and pushed him against the rail.

"Knife him, damn you," gasped the skipper. "Knife him."

While the captain pinioned his arms, Clews drew from his pocket a long clasp-knife, opened it with his teeth and rushed in. Moran drove a boot at him which sent him flying back but, with an oath, he darted in again.

AND then help came. There appeared upon the deck a wild man who rushed into the fray with both fists flying. Matt Clews turned to meet him and Reggie blocked a knife thrust and drove a right to the side of the head which floored the deck hand. Moran broke the skipper's grip and belabored him so furiously with rights and lefts that Stinson was unable to open the clasp-knife he had drawn in turn.

Clews rose unsteadily from the deck and went down again as a result of a terrific right hook to the stomach. His head struck the oak planks and he automatically retired from the fray.

Reggie fell upon the skipper, tore the knife from his grasp and sent it overboard. The battle was won, for Moran immediately sent the barge captain to join his confederate in slumberland.

"Woof," commented Pat Moran. "Me boy, they just about had me over the side. How did you know what was going on?"

"Tell you later. Now what's to be done?"

Moran scratched his head. "Abandon ship," he suggested. "Even a barge captain is in command of his ship and he'll call this mutiny. I'll truss these two up and you and me will lower a boat. If we don't, neither of us will be alive at Newport News or, if we are, we'll go to jail."

Reggie looked with some trepidation at the black water from which he had so recently emerged.

"Is it safe in a small boat?"

"Sure. It's only ten miles to the Jersey shore and it's a calm night. It will be hours before these thugs free themselves and the tug wouldn't turn back to look for us, anyway. Go down and get your regular clothes, if you like, while I wind lines around these two bucko boys."

When Reggie returned to the deck with his wet garments on his arm, Captain Stinson and Matt Clews were snugly tied but not gagged and they were coloring the air with their curses and threats.

Moran calmly went about the business of lowering the dinghy which hung over the stern and then, telling Reggie to follow, slid down a line and landed safely in the boat. Reggie followed him much less expertly but with equal success, whereupon Moran cut the line and picked up the oars.

"Now tell us how you came gallopin' to the rescue," he demanded.

"Well," said Reggie, "after you left I got to thinking about what you said regarding the ring. I could hear the captain and the other fellow talking in low tones, and I unbolted the stateroom door and opened it a half inch to find out if they were talking about me. I couldn't understand them for some time but, as they got excited,

they began to talk louder and I heard them planning to throw you overboard so there would be only two of them to be in on the profits from the ring. I guessed that, after they had murdered you, they would get rid of me so it was up to me to help you.

"They waited a long time and I began to think they were just talking and were afraid to take any action when the captain said, 'Now, Matt,' and they left the cabin. I gave them a minute or two and slipped out after them. When I came on deck the battle was on."

"Some scrap," chuckled Moran. "You better take an oar, mister. Keep you warm. Can you row?"

"Yes," said Reggie. No use in boasting to the bargeman that he had a few years previously stroked a college crew to victory.

As he moved to relieve Moran of one of the oars he observed that the barge had vanished and only its mast light revealed its existence.

"Is it right to leave that vessel without anybody to manage her?" he asked.

"Nothing can happen out at sea. Stinson never kept much of a watch. Coming down the East River we was all in the cabin. Fact is, there's darn little the crew of a barge can do anyway. And them fellers will work out of their bonds pretty quick. I didn't tie 'em up very tight."

FOR several minutes they rowed in silence and his exertions caused Reggie to throw off the cold which had been creeping into his bones. Many a time he had pulled an oar in an eight-oared shell down the Charles when there was ice in the river and he had on nothing but an athletic shirt and shorts.

"Take us about two hours to hit the beach if we're lucky," said Moran. "Tide's with us, so I reckon we'll make it."

"Well," said Reggie, "at least I don't have to go to Newport News."

"Yeah. I got to dig up a new job and jobs are hard to get this winter."

"I'm sorry. Of course I'm responsible."

"No," said Pat. "It wasn't your fault those guys decided to jump me and if it hadn't been for you they'd have got away with it. We're quits."

"Not yet. When we get back to New York I'll sell this ring and give you five hundred dollars."

"Five hun— You mean it's safe for you to sell it?"

"Certainly. It belongs to me."

"What are you? Some millionaire?"

Reggie laughed. "Not exactly. But when I bought this ring I had quite a lot of money. I'm about as broke as you are, now, except for the ring."

"Well," said Moran, "I'll take the five hundred dollars if I get it. Why not?"

Rowing absorbed all their energies for some time. While the sea was smooth, there was an ocean swell to contend with and the skiff was so light that it was difficult to guide.

For the first time Reggie was able to devote some thought to the astonishing developments of the night which had culminated in setting him afloat in the open sea with a strange companion. He had miraculously escaped death in the river, but assassination would have been his fate on the barge had it not been for the determination of the bargemen to dispose of the doubtful member of the crew and their indiscretion in discussing it in Reggie's hearing.

The diamond ring, of course, was responsible for his danger on the barge. But who had attacked him in his room, transported him in a sack across the city and dumped the sack into the East River?

So far as he knew there was nobody who hated him or who would profit by his murder, unless—unless the friends of Art Hornsman had identified him as the man who had engaged in the death grapple with their leader. And that was possible only if they had located Ruth and forced her to reveal his identity.

If Ruth was in their hands, she must be released. He had urgent business back in New York. He began to row faster.

"Avast there, lad," protested Moran. "We've got a long pull ahead of us and the thing to do is to take it easy."

"You're right," Reggie admitted. "I just got impatient."

"Now about that yarn you told on the barge," said Moran. "You don't mean to claim that it happened to you?"

"It did," Reggie said. "Sack and all."

"Who's got it in for you, mister?"

"Nobody, as far as I know."

"They just went to all that trouble for fun? Don't kid me. You're in wrong and if you go back to New York they'll go right after you again. Better head for Philly or Chi. If you sell that ring, you'll have a good stake."

"I have business in New York," said Reggie grimly.

"Yeah? Well, you and me are going to separate as soon as I get the five hundred. I don't want to be drowned in a bag like a litter of pups."

"Just as you please," said Reggie, laughing. "Come on, now, row a little harder. The sooner we are in the sooner you'll be rid of me."

CHAPTER XIX.

ARISTIDES SMELLS A RAT.

ARISTIDES LAMONT was shaving the following morning when the landlady tapped on his door.

"Man named Blake wants to see you," she announced.

Shaving with Mr. Lamont was a very serious business, for he had a huge expanse of face with many deep cañons and crevices in it. And at the word "Blake" he jerked his razor, a safety, and demonstrated that it is possible for a person to cut himself with such a weapon.

"Tell him to come in," said Aristides, smothering an oath. "Confound it, what brought him back?

"Well, young man," he said heartily as Reggie entered, "you are foolish enough to credit the proverb that the early bird catches the early worm. Drivel, my boy. More worms around at night than there are in the morning. Sit down. Make yourself comfortable. Did you present the letter to Cook, and how did the old crocodile receive you?"

"I'm in a terrible mess through no fault of mine," said Reggie. "I don't know what to do and I want your advice. Last night an attempt was made to murder me and it almost succeeded."

"So soon!" exclaimed Lamont.

"What do you mean by that?"

"Never mind. Tell me about the attempted murder. No, wait until I finish shaving."

In two or three minutes he had accomplished that operation, sloshed water upon his countenance and proceeded to put on collar and necktie.

"So they tried to murder you, eh?"

Reggie told him what had happened.

"And you have no notion whatever regarding the motive?" asked Aristides.

"Well—I—that is—"

"You have, and I have," said Lamont. "You've been holding out on me, young man, as a result of which you have attracted unpleasant attention to me as well as yourself. Furthermore, why didn't you tell me you owned a ring worth three thousand dollars? With that for capital, you and I might have made our fortunes."

"I only obtained the ring last night, sir. How have I attracted unpleasant attention to you?"

"Well, I don't know that you have. What time was this outrage committed?"

"Ten o'clock."

"Ah!" exclaimed Aristides. "Now suppose you tell me in what manner you are mixed up in the murder of Art Hornsman."

"How do you know—" gasped Reggie, astonished.

"My young friend, I am an unusually well informed man. If you want help and suggestions from me, come clean."

"I shall," promised Reggie, who then related the Hornsman affair in detail. "In some way, they found out about me," he concluded, "and that explains the attack on me."

THE pitch man shook his head. "It doesn't," he denied. "I have been thrown, unfortunately, into the society of gunmen and gangsters many times and I am fairly familiar with their methods. About the last thing that bothers these scoundrels is the disposal of a dead body. They take a certain pride in leaving the results of their handiwork lying around. If Hornsman's gang bumped you off, they would want it to be known that you met death at their hands. Your body would be a warning to their enemies. When they go after a man they kill him quick and let him lie. You haven't had any difficulties with Ottoman Turks, by any chance?"

"Certainly not."

"Putting a person into a sack and chucking the sack into the harbor is a Turkish custom, though they usually reserve that punishment for unfaithful wives. Furthermore, I am reasonably certain that the Hornsman gang did not perpetrate this crime because it occurred at ten o'clock and at eleven they did not know who you were and had no idea where to find you."

"How do you know that?"

Aristides related his encounter of the night before with the gangster.

"Then they know about Ruth!" Reggie exclaimed. "Oh, my God!"

"Some follower of Hornsman knew who she was and saw her in conversation with you and me. If they find her it won't take them long to scare her into giving them your name and address. I may add that you haven't done me any favor by calling on me. I am in sufficient difficulties without attracting the unfavorable attention of a murderous gang."

"Oh, I'll go."

"No," said Aristides. "You might as well stay. The harm is done. It seems evident that Hornsman's mob had nothing to do with your experience. A very remarkable experience by the way. Where did you land?"

"Near Asbury Park. I arrived in New York about eight this morning."

"Suppose you allow me to see the ring."

"I returned it to the jeweler this morning. He gave me twenty-five hun-

dred for it. I gave five hundred to Moran as I promised."

Lamont shook his head. "Sheer waste of money. He will spend it on drink. For that matter, so, probably, would I. You would make a perfect balance wheel for me, Reginald. With your two thousand dollars we could go on the road and clean up big. With you for company it might be a couple of months before I went on a spree."

"But if Hornsman's gang wasn't responsible for my abduction, who was?"

Aristides scratched his head. "Some other enemy of yours. Somebody to whose advantage it would be to have you vanish without a trace."

"But why?"

"Because your continued existence is either unpleasant or unprofitable to him. Frankly, Hornsman's crowd will be on your trail very shortly and the Turkish assassins are not likely to retire from business. You and I must get right out of New York."

"That's impossible. I have to find Ruth. I can't leave her in the lurch."

"Are you in love with this girl?"

"I—well—it looks that way."

"Then you won't listen to reason. Let's change the subject. Tell me how my old pal Randy Cook received you. And did he try to find out how to get hold of me?"

"He received me well and asked a lot of questions about you."

"Did he offer you employment?"

"He did better than that. He offered to loan me fifty thousand dollars to set me up in business as a lawyer."

The astonishment of Aristides Lamont was so comically expressed that Reggie roared with laughter.

Lamont scowled. "There's something behind that," he mused. "Cook wouldn't aid a starving child."

"There was something behind it," admitted Reggie. "While I was considering his amazingly generous offer, T. F. Speaks called him on the phone. The offer, of course, came from Speaks, who ruined my father and caused his suicide and thought he could m ke amends by giving me fifty thousand dollars."

Aristides regarded him compassionately. "You are a fool," he remarked. "Cook is a hyena, but Speaks is a tiger. What I said about Cook goes double for Speaks. That black devil wouldn't make amends for anything. If he had Cook offer you fifty thousand dollars, he expected to make ten times that from you. What were the terms of the loan suggested by good, kind Randy Cook?"

"First he offered me twenty-five thousand and when I refused he made it fifty thousand."

"And who did they expect you to murder?"

"No one. In return for the advance, I was to pay them my income from all sources during the next three years."

"AHA!" exclaimed Lamont, rising from his chair and pacing the room, his hands behind his back. "Income from ll sources during the next three ye rs. All sources. That makes it plain."

"But my income from all sources won't amount to five thousand in three years. Less, the way it looks now."

Lamont stopped in front of him.

"Have you a maiden aunt or an elderly uncle who is worth millions and who has made a will in your favor?"

"No, certainly not. I wish I had."

"Is there anybody who might leave you money?"

"No one in the world."

"These two crooks know that you

are coming into something big," said Aristides. "I'm getting interested. I've bucked that pair before and I may do it again. I have more brains than either of them and they know it. My failing is whisky."

"The only reason I refused the offer was because Speaks was connected with it," said Reggie. "I assure you that my prospects are nil."

"They made you a proposition and you refused it. Last night you were placed in a sack and dumped into the river. Mark my words, Cook and Speaks were responsible for that."

"Nonsense," protested Reggie. "Don't you see that it would only benefit them to do that if I had signed the agreement and made them my heirs? Suppose money is coming to me. If I die before I get it, it does them no good. Besides, they are big business men. They wouldn't resort to murder."

"I could tell you—never mind—at that you're right. Yet they had some reason for tying you up to them financially and getting you out of the way if you refused. You see, putting you in a weighted sack and throwing you in the river meant that they didn't want your body recovered. I must admit that the thing is mysterious. Well, it may be that I can profit more by renewing my acquaintance with those two fiends in human form than by continuing the pitch business in a locality frequented by Hornsman's gangsters. Yes, I think I'll pay a call on my old friend T. F. Speaks. Who knows, he may receive me."

"How will that benefit me?"

"My boy," said Aristides, kindly, "while I like and admire you, all my actions are not motivated by your interests. Occasionally I act in my own behalf. I wouldn't be surprised if there were money to be made by Aristides Lamont from those two reptiles. While blackmail is abhorrent to me, my resources are at a low ebb and, in such a case, my old companions ought to be willing to stand by."

"I don't follow you."

"I don't exactly follow myself," said the pitch man. "Now it is quite probable that this house is watched by a ruffian who had a good description of you. If it were possible I should have warned you not to come here. When, and if, you return to your lodgings, move out, make sure you are not trailed and locate in some other section of the city. And don't come here again. Drop me a line signed John Q. Smith telling me where I may reach you. Better send it general delivery. I'm going to shift my headquarters myself. With big business in the offing we can't be annoyed by miserable gangsters."

"What big business?"

"That remains to be demonstrated —'q. e. d.' as we used to say in college some twenty years before you were born. Good morning and good luck. Remember that if you are drilled by gangsters, Speaks and Cook may be very much pleased."

"All right," said Reggie. "I'll go. But you're crazy if you think Mr. Cook had anything to do with what happened last night."

"The only persons in this world who are not crazy," replied the pitch man, "are probably immured in some insane asylum. Good morning, Mr. Blake, and the best of luck."

Reggie left the lodging house and walked down the street. He kept a sharp watch and was reasonably certain that he was not followed. Arriving at his lodgings he found an astonishing telephone message.

"Call Ruth." And the telephone

number was that which had placed him upon the line last night with T. F. Speaks.

CHAPTER XX.

PAGED BY DANGER.

REGGIE put in the call immediately and Ruth answered the phone.

"Gosh, it's good to hear your voice," he exclaimed, "but I don't understand. Did you call me yesterday?"

"Yes, and left my number."

"But I called and got a crossed wire, I guess. Who should answer but T. F. Speaks!"

Ruth laughed nervously. "I have so much to tell you," she declared. "Will you meet me for lunch at the Hotel Royale? I have the price if you haven't."

"I have it," he said proudly. "But why there?"

"Because it's safer at a big hotel. I'll meet you at noon. Good-by."

She hung up before he could begin to ask questions and Reggie ascended to his room, which he had already visited that morning, to change his disordered attire. He packed his few belongings hastily, notified his landlady that he was moving, and departed. A passing taxi picked him up and transported him to the East Side, where he changed to a second taxi and descended in front of a cheap hotel on Lexington Avenue.

For the first time in months he had plenty of money in his pocket, and it was his firm intention to force most of it on Ruth and persuade her to leave New York. Her escape was more necessary now since he had learned that the gangsters were searching for her and himself.

He was wearing his only decent suit and he thought it shabby for lunch at the Royale. While Ruth wouldn't mind, it was quite possible that he would encounter former friends and acquaintances, which would be embarrassing. He should have forced her to select another lunching place, but she had hung up before his mind was functioning clearly.

At twelve fifteen Reggie, who had been waiting impatiently for fifteen minutes, casually noticed the entry of an exceedingly smart young woman in a mink coat who wore a black toque from which depended a coquettish veil that extended to the tip of her nose.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," somebody said demurely.

The girl with the mink coat had stopped in front of him and was smiling down at him.

"Ruth!" he stammered and rose in great confusion. "How the—what the— Well, you couldn't expect me to know you."

"But I knew you, Mr. Blake," she retorted. "I'm afraid your memory is not very remarkable."

"Why, you are perfectly beautiful, stunning! I don't understand."

"All will be made clear to you," she said pertly. "Are we lunching, or what?"

Still marveling, he led her toward the dining room entrance.

"Check your coat, madame?" asked the cloak-room girl.

"I haven't owned it long enough," Ruth replied, laughing.

THE *maître d'hôtel* led them to a corner table—it was still early for the luncheon rush—aided Ruth to drop her coat upon the back of her chair, and thus revealed her in a charming street suit of brown.

"Do you like it?" she demanded. "It's a Patou model."

"I've been half out of my mind for two days about you," he said with pretended anger. "I didn't know what terrible thing might have happened to you—and you turn up in a thousand-dollar fur coat and a Patou suit. I'd be very much obliged if you would explain a few things."

"First, do you think they are becoming?" she demanded.

"You look like a picture in *Vogue*, only prettier."

"Am I as attractive as the girl who threw you over?"

"Oh!" he exclaimed. Things had been moving too fast for him to devote thought to the problem of Rita Van Storm, who had not thrown him over, but who, on the contrary, had fastened both her arms around his neck.

"You're about a hundred times as nice," he declared savagely. "I wish you weren't."

"Oh! Why?" She looked hurt.

"Well, there are reasons. Ruth, it looks to me as though about two or three thousand dollars has been placed on your back since I saw you last, and I would like to know how come."

"Do you remember what I told you that night in the lunch room, about my father, Mr. Speaks?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, I knew the police would look for me, to explain what I knew about that affair, and I was afraid, if they found me, they would make me tell them about you. So, I just swallowed my pride and went down to see my father and asked him if he wanted to take care of me."

"Then you were—it was Speaks's residence I called last night. And you were there," he exclaimed.

"Yes. You told my father to go to the devil, I believe."

Reggie grinned. "I thought I'd got on a crossed wire. I couldn't conceive of Speaks calling me."

"I called you earlier, before he came home. Reggie, he isn't half bad, really."

"He couldn't be human and be unkind to you. So that explains the gorgeous raiment."

"This isn't the half of it," she declared joyfully. "I have unlimited credit at all the shops, including the jewelers. He wants me to spend as much as I like. I'm more or less in a daze. Imagine poor little me waltzing into Lucille's, asking to be shown her latest models, and telling her that I'll take half a dozen of the most expensive. And, if I behave myself, I'll inherit all his money."

"YOU are certainly to be congratulated," he said wryly. "I suppose this means the end of our friendship."

"And why should it?"

"Well, for one thing, I'm too poor to go around with young ladies who have unlimited credit at the shops. And for another thing, I have a feud on with Mr. T. F. Speaks, even if he is your father."

"Reggie," she pleaded, "you have an entirely wrong idea of my father. I suppose he is a hard man in business, but I'm sure he has a kind heart, and I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't know that he was ruining your father. When I bounced into his office and told him I was his long-lost daughter, I half expected to be chucked right out. Instead, he was wonderful to me. Of course, I can't love him; he doesn't expect it, but he wants to make amends through me for the way he treated

mother; and I'll tell you something that will surprise you. He wants to give you fifty thousand dollars. So!"

"Eh? Did he tell you that?"

"He certainly did."

"And how did my name come up?"

"Well, you see, I had to be frank with him about how I happened to come back to him after four years. He asked a lot of questions and found out that you and I were friends, and that it was mostly on account of you that I didn't want the police to find me. He said he was grateful to you and to demonstrate it he would give you a check for fifty thousand dollars. He wanted me to have you meet him."

"He must have a queer idea of me if he thinks I would accept money for any such reason," said Reggie slowly.

"Now, don't be an idiot, Reggie. If father offers you all that money, you take it."

"Your father may be nice to you, Ruth, but he is not noted for giving young men large checks. Anyway, I don't want to see him. I might say or do something I would be sorry for."

"Paging Miss Stickney," called a bell boy passing close to the table.

"Here," cried Ruth. "Oh, no. I forgot."

"You Miss Stickney?" asked the bell boy, fixing bold black eyes on her.

"No— I misunderstood the name."

"Sorry, miss."

"That's funny," said Reggie, when the boy had passed.

"Oh, there are lots of Miss Stickneys," she said lightly.

"No doubt. But if some one thought he recognized you, paging you under your former name would be an excellent way to make sure. And you answered to it."

"But I said I misunderstood the name."

"Look here, Ruth, how well did you know this Hornsman? You said you hardly knew him, but I heard something this morning—"

"I was ashamed to admit it," she said, coloring furiously. "I dined and went to the theater with him once."

"That explains it. These so-called big shots usually have members of their gang trailing them wherever they go, for protection, and they know what you look like. One of them recognized you when you were talking to Lamont, the pitch man, and me the other night. Last night one of them tried to find out from Aristides who I was."

She turned pale. "But surely—in this hotel—"

"The finer the hotel, the more apt these fellows are to frequent it. They dress well and have plenty of money. I'll take you home, and I want you to stay indoors for a few days. Your father may be able to keep the police away from you, but he couldn't do anything about the gangsters. I can take care of myself, but I'm worried about you."

"ALL right," she said in a low tone. "I'll be careful. You don't blame me for going back to my father, do you, Reggie?"

"I think it was the most sensible thing you could do. It is his business to provide for his daughter, and it's a pleasure to know that he is anxious to do it."

"And you didn't mean what you said about it ending our friendship?"

"Ruth, if in any way I ever am able to do an ill turn to T. F. Speaks, I'm going to do it; so how can I be friends with his daughter?"

"I'm neutral," she declared. "You and dad can fight all you want to in a

business way; but I want you to call on me, and I'll tell him that I insist that you be allowed to."

"There's another reason why I can't call on you, dear," he said, growing red.

"What is it?"

"Well, that girl to whom I was engaged, and who threw me over, has found out that she loved me, and she insists upon being reëngaged."

"But you can't. She broke the engagement, didn't she?"

"Yes, but—it's hard to explain. She held my engagement ring, and it was very valuable. Last night I had to have money—I wanted to find you and send you to a place of safety—so I called. She gave me back the ring, but insisted that we were still engaged. I didn't know what to do. I had to let her think so."

"But if she threw you over for mercenary reasons, you are just as badly off financially as you were before."

"Yes, but she says she doesn't care now."

"It's very curious," said Ruth. "I think you were very weak. Though you probably still love her."

"That's the worst of it. I don't. I love—"

"Somebody else?"

Their eyes met, and Ruth flushed crimson.

"So you see how it is," he said lamely..

"Reggie, I want you to call to-night and meet my father. I insist. I want you to understand each other."

He shook his head. "I can't, dear. I would quarrel violently with your father."

"Then you can take me home," she said angrily.

He helped her on with her new fur coat and followed her disconsolately.

An old-fashioned, high-priced cab rolled up to the marquee, and the doorman opened the door. Ruth was about to step in, when she observed the absence of the "15c and 5c" sign upon its front, and, though she was now a millionairess, habit conquered.

"I should say not," she exclaimed. "Call a regular taxi."

The doorman waved the old cab away, and Reggie helped Ruth into another and followed her in. As the cab passed the higher-priced machine, he saw the driver scowling and immediately swing in behind. Their cab turned up Park Avenue and after a few blocks stopped at a signal.

Reggie glanced back and saw the old cab directly behind. The incident of the bell boy who was paging Miss Stickney flashed into his mind. It was no coincidence in names, and they were being followed to discover Ruth's residence.

"Stop at the Mirmar Hotel at the next corner," he commanded the chauffeur.

"Why? I don't want to go there," protested Ruth.

"I'm sure the cab behind is following us," he said in a low tone. "Do as I say."

WHEN their cab ran up to the hotel entrance, Reggie thrust the fare and a tip at the driver, whisked Ruth into the lobby, crossed it rapidly, and exited upon a side street. He signalled a passing cab headed for Lexington Avenue, thrust the girl into it, and told her to give her address.

"I'm staying behind to see what happens," he explained. "Good-by, dear."

"If you don't call me, I'll call you," she threatened.

He turned back into the hotel, and

observed that two men had just entered the lobby from the Park Avenue entrance. There was nothing unusual about them, save that they were dark and foreign-looking. They were rather better dressed than Blake himself.

Their eyes were fastened on him, and he had no doubt that he was facing the individuals who had caused Miss Stickney to be paged at the Royale. Well, Ruth was out of their reach for the time being.

The plot, as he figured it, was that these high-toned gangsters had been in the hotel and had recognized a resemblance to Ruth Stickney in the richly dressed young woman who had joined Blake. To make certain they had paged her, and she had answered to the name and then denied it. They had commandeered a cab to convey her to her address and had climbed into another, which would follow the first.

Ruth had crossed them by taking another cab, but they had trailed her behind the old taxi. It had taken them a minute to descend and enter the Mirmar, and in that minute Ruth had got safely away.

It would have been good business for Reggie to have accompanied her. Instinctively he turned back toward the side entrance and saw the pair quicken their steps.

"Just a minute, mister," one of them called.

Reggie was at the revolving door, and they started to run. He pushed through, saw the little block at his feet which fastens a revolving door, stooped quickly, and turned it over, and as he did so a bullet tore through the glass above him. He plunged forward and to one side and ran at top speed down the side street toward Lexington Avenue. People shouted at him, but no one gave chase, and at the corner he found a cab and told the driver to go down town.

He was shaking with excitement and weak from reaction.

Gangsters, of course, avengers of Art Hornsman. And they had recognized Ruth and taken it for granted that her companion was the man they were looking for. If he hadn't had the inspiration of l o c k i ng the revolving door, if he hadn't stooped over at that instant, he would have had a bullet in his back.

And if he had stopped when they called to him, they would have slain him in the hotel lobby, indifferent to the witnesses, and, no doubt, would have made their escape. Reggie had lived in New York most of his life. He had been reading for years of murders by gangsters, but never before had the appalling boldness of criminals and their unexampled ferocity been brought home to him.

They would hunt him down, too. They knew what he looked like now, and they would make New York too hot to hold him. Within the last t w e n t y - f o u r hours he had lived through more excitement than in his whole life hitherto, and the end was not yet.

At Thirty-fifth Street and Lexington Avenue he abandoned the cab. It was absolutely necessary to warn Ruth that she must remain hidden in the Speaks apartment. These fiends were capable of murdering even a sweet young girl.

But Ruth could not be depended upon to be discreet. She might lay low for a day or two, and then decide that she ran no risk and start out on a shopping expedition. She must get out of New York. Europe. She would be safe there.

It was no use to plead with Ruth.

There was only one thing to be done, and he would have to do it.

CHAPTER XXI.

REGGIE MAKES A CALL.

T. F. SPEAKS had spent a nerve-racking morning. For an hour, very early, he had been closeted with Randy Cook and had torn him to bits with the razor edge of his tongue.

When Cook had protested that the chances were a hundred to one that Blake had been drowned, even though he had disappeared from the sack, Speaks had roared at him:

"And suppose he is? Can you come forward and state that you know he is dead because you hired men to put him in a sack and throw him into the East River? Don't you know that, unless his body is found, he won't be legally dead for seven years? The bank can't vote the stock for him. The railroad will be deadlocked and the present management will be continued because I can't muster enough votes to throw it out."

"The body will be found in a day or two."

"It might have been carried out to sea. Why didn't you kill him before you put him in the sack, you fool?"

"I was acting in your interests," said Cook sullenly. "You are the chief beneficiary of his death, and there are plenty of people in the Street who believe you capable of anything to gain your ends. Your sudden interest in the railroad Benefit Society is suspicious. You plunge ahead and don't think of consequences, but, as your lawyer, I have to think for you. I warned these yeggs to knock him out with a stuffed club which would show no wounds. After he had been in the sack half an hour he would be taken out dead and the body turned over to the police as a drowning case. Accidental drowning or suicide was certain to be the verdict. Suicide, more likely, since he was down and out. I think the sack tore on something as it dropped from the dock and he fell out and was drowned anyway."

"But you say you picked a spot where there is no current."

"It's supposed to be a backwater at that point, but there must have been enough to float him down the river."

"Or he might have cut himself out of the sack and swum away. In which case he is alive. You get out of here and find out. Comb the city. If he should be alive, don't try any of your tricks. I have a way of working on him personally which you know nothing about."

"In that case, I certainly hope he saved himself," said Cook sullenly. "I don't go in for murder, as a general thing, you know."

"Not nowadays," said Speaks significantly. "Get out of here and get busy."

Speaks returned to his office after lunch, in a black mood. The drowning of Reggie Blake, if he were drowned, did not trouble him. What did was the possibility that his death could not be proved.

He had been back at his desk half an hour when his phone buzzed.

"What's that?" he demanded incredulously. "You're sure? I certainly do. Send Mr. Reginald Blake right in."

He hung up, and an expression of triumph painted itself upon his dark face.

"My luck holds," he said aloud. "The body walks right into my office. I wish Randy were here."

Speaks lit a cigar and turned curious eyes on the door. He did not bother with conjectures as to the object of the visit of the young man whom his henchman had attempted to drown like a cat in a sack. He did not even yield to curiosity regarding the manner of his escape. He needed Reginald Blake in his business, and he was very glad to see him.

BLAKE entered swiftly and turned hostile eyes upon the man who was responsible for his father's death. He paused inside the threshold. Speaks rose and extended his hand.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Blake," he said suavely.

"I don't care to shake hands with you," said Reggie coldly.

"As you please. Kindly state your business here."

"I wish to see you in regard to your daughter."

"My daughter? I do not discuss family matters during business hours, Mr. Blake. However, she speaks highly of you, feels beholden to you in a way, so I am willing to waive my rule and overlook your rudeness."

"I may say that I consider that you killed my father," declared Reggie, whom the *sang-froid* of the banker infuriated.

"You are mistaken. Your father killed himself after refusing my offer of a fifty-thousand-dollar job. However, I understand your point of view. Yet, if your father had beaten me in a stock market battle and I had taken my defeat so much to heart that I killed myself, would you consider him responsible for my death?"

Reggie looked disconcerted. Curiously, that angle had never presented itself to him.

"Not if it was a fair fight," he said.

"Our battle was fought on the Exchange according to its rules. I respected your father and wished him to continue his connection with the railroad. He refused . . . In regard to my daughter?"

"It's because of Ruth that I am here," said Reggie eagerly. "She is in great danger. I want you to send her to Europe immediately. New York is not safe for her."

"My daughter has committed no crime and she is under my protection. I know the police are looking for a certain Ruth Stickney, but they won't find her."

"Maybe the police won't, but the gangsters will. She says she told you about the Hornsman killing."

"And your part in it. Yes. How do you know?"

"I had lunch with her to-day."

"Indeed. Why should the gangsters wish to injure Ruth?"

Briefly and dramatically Reggie told him of the incidents at the Royale, and Speaks heard him without comment.

"You used your head," he said at the end. "I should not have cared to have them identify her as my daughter."

"But they will. They have lines everywhere. The only thing to do is to place her out of their reach."

Speaks drummed nervously on his desk. "From what you tell me, they are trying to reach the man who killed Hornsman through Ruth, and they seem to have made up their minds that you are he."

"I'm not worried about myself."

"Yet it seems to me that you are in greater need of getting to Europe than Miss Speaks. Blake, I'm going to make you a proposition. Ruth likes you. I should not care to have her

hear that you were assassinated. I'll loan you a sum of money, a large sum of money. Take it and see the world."

"Much obliged. I'm only interested in Ruth's safety."

"I'll arrange to have her go to a safe place. Now, let's see, how would fifty thousand dollars strike you?"

"It wouldn't," said Reggie. "And I've heard mention of that sum before. Your lawyer, Cook, offered it to me yesterday. I refused it."

"But it hadn't then been demonstrated to you that you won't live long if you stay in New York," Speaks said significantly. "At that, you bear a charmed life."

"Feeling the way I do about you, I am not accepting money from you or your representatives, Mr. Speaks."

"This will be in the form of a loan," said Speaks calmly.

"The return to be my total income for the next two or three years. Those were Mr. Cook's terms."

"Well," said Speaks, "it's only business to have two sides to an agreement, and you are not getting the worst of it."

REGGIE leaned his right hand upon the desk and bent toward the millionaire. "Either you make this offer to quiet your conscience for what you did to my father," he said tensely, "or you have some ulterior motive. In either case my answer is no."

"Too bad," said Speaks, with a mock sigh. "You seem to be a singularly thick-witted and obstinate cub. In addition to your troubles with gangsters, young man, the police would like very much to know who killed Hornsman."

"He killed himself."

"While in a grapple with you. A man with a gun in his hand usually kills the other fellow. You would have a lot of trouble in proving that you didn't shoot Hornsman with his own weapon. I think you would be convicted."

"It's possible," admitted Reggie.

"Of course, my daughter would endeavor to testify for you, but after all, from what she told me, she didn't actually see who fired the shot. And I don't think she would be available as a witness for the defense."

Reggie looked down into the sneering face. If the man were not old enough to be his father he would have thrown himself upon him.

"What's your idea?" he demanded. "To turn me over to the police?"

"Unless you accept my eminently fair and generous proposition, that is exactly what I propose to do," said Speaks harshly.

Reggie drew a long breath.

"Very good, Mr. Speaks. Call up the police. I'll be safer in a cell than wandering around New York. And, being innocent, I think a jury will acquit me, whether or not you prevent Ruth from testifying for me."

Speaks frowned. His cunning mind was already considering the young man's statement. If Blake was jailed, he would be held for months before being brought to trial, and during this period his unexpected inheritance would be turned over to him. Undoubtedly he would vote his stock with Grant.

On the other hand, the gangsters were after him, and if he were fool enough to remain in New York they would murder him within a week. Let the Hornsman henchmen pull the chestnuts of T. F. Speaks out of the fire.

He threw back his head and laughed.

"You've got a lot of spirit, if you have no brains," he said. "Of course, I am not going to hand you over to the police. I have felt rather badly about your father's suicide and I wanted to do something for the son. Having made my offer and even tried coercion, my conscience is clear. Do as you damn please. But, in view of the fact that my daughter is involved with you in this rotten Hornsman mess, you must agree with me that you will not see her or communicate with her in any way. And I'll see that they don't find her."

"That's what I came here to ask you," said Reggie sullenly. "I want to say that, much as I admire the young lady who is unfortunate enough to be your daughter, I am your enemy and biding my time. Good afternoon."

"Just a minute, Blake. You have not agreed to keep away from Ruth."

"I'm making no agreements with you, sir, of any sort whatsoever. But I shall do nothing which might endanger Ruth. I like her, even if she is your daughter."

Speaks clenched his hands tightly to control his temper. "So long as you keep away from her I don't care about your motives. You'll be seeing your father soon and you might give him my regards."

The slamming of the door was his answer. Speaks relit his cigar and scowled.

"Nothing to be done about him," he said aloud. "I'll give the gangsters a few days and, if they fail, I'll take him off their hands."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

Water Buffalo Fights

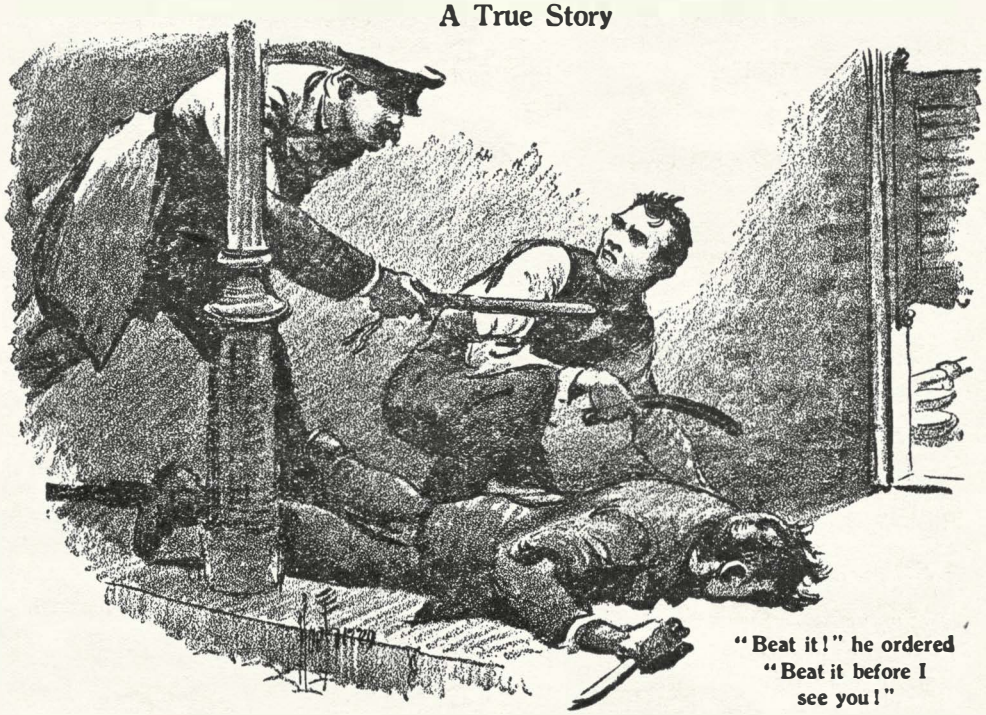
FIGHTS between *carabaos* feature in the entertainment of the Moro tribesmen in the Sulus. The giant water buffaloes weigh in the neighborhood of a ton and not infrequently their curving horns measure six feet from tip to tip. A working *carabao* may be purchased for thirty dollars, while one with an established record for fighting may bring thousands. For the *carabao*, for all the ferocity it may display at times, is tricky. If he sees the fight is going against him in its early stages the great brute may turn and run. If he does he is relegated to the plough; for the animal, to use the language of the ring, never comes back.

Sometimes a herd of water buffaloes will stampede. Nothing will stop them. During the Philippine insurrection a herd of the beasts charged and routed a battalion of U. S. Infantry. To-day the insignia of the Philippine Division is a *carabao's* head. The water buffalo is also in general use in the East Indies and Hawaii, and a child may handle it provided the animal is allowed to bathe frequently. If the bath is not forthcoming, the beast goes mad and runs amuck. In countries where no roads exist the *carabao* is invaluable as a beast of burden. Rivers offer no hindrance to its progress. They do their courting in the water, and on moonlit nights indulge in bathing parties. Often they swim for miles before returning to their owners' pastures. Strangely enough the voices of the great beasts are a thin treble, and, like the elephant, the *carabao* fears a mouse.

Charles Adams.

Behind the Green Lights

A True Story



"Beat it!" he ordered
"Beat it before I
see you!"

The Bowery Bouncer Gets a Job as a Copper, and His Life in "Wicked Gotham" Becomes a War of Fist and Club

By Captain Cornelius W. Willemse

FORMER COMMANDER OF THE FIRST DETECTIVE DIVISION OF NEW YORK CITY

CHAPTER I

The Man Hunt

FOR three warm days in the spring of 1888 the police of Hoboken, New Jersey, were concerned with a man-hunt. The police were unusually diligent, for they had been informed that the man they sought was a tough customer.

All this time the wanted man, a boy of fifteen, was hiding on a hill outside the town—undoubtedly the most scared kid who ever came out of Holland. I was that kid.

That's how one of America's greatest cops started his career. Read his dramatic story of what goes on in the police station next week in DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY, formerly FLYNN'S.

Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint

SO many readers have been asking when they'll see *Gillian Hazeltine* again that we might as well break down now and confess: June 20, in a novel called "The Grapevine Murders."

New York, N. Y.

I want to tell you how much I enjoy the ARGOSY. A patient in the hospital with me first introduced the book to me and since then I have been a faithful fan (six months). I like the ARGOSY better than most popular books on the market. I especially like stories by Fred MacIsaac, such as "Balata." I enjoyed "At the Sign of the Golden Goose," but forget the author. I like serials best, but also enjoy the short stories published.

Please print another *Hazeltine* mystery story soon.

MARION ETU.

A JAPANESE reader speaks up:

Lodi, Calif.

I am a Japanese and a very enthusiastic reader of the ARGOSY. Ever since the time, five years ago, when I picked an ARGOSY up at the newsstand, I haven't missed a single copy.

The "Argonotes" is one of the most interesting sections of your magazine. But I can't stand some of the knockers. Nothing seems to satisfy them. As for me, I don't see how the ARGOSY can be improved. It is the best balanced magazine on the stands now.

My favorite authors are Fred MacIsaac, Ray Cummings, Otis Adelbert Kline, Hulbert Footner, A. Merritt, and Erle Stanley Gardner.

SAM FUNAMURA.

GARRET SMITH'S last fantasy "leads them all":

Brooklyn, N. Y.

I have a little problem to submit to the "Argonotes": if X equals wonderful, Y equals marvelous, and Z equals superb, what will XYZ equal? Why, ARGOSY is the answer!

Now I want to write my opinion of the best stories this year. "When Death Went Blind" leads them all. Then there's "The Fetish Fighters," "Caves of Ocean," "The Guns of the American" and "The Hothouse World." What about some more stories by Merritt, Cummings?

This idea of four serials and four complete stories is great. Keep up the good work.

L. ROVIELLO.

A FAMILY round robin letter from the Kentucky mountains:

Wurtland, Ky.

I suppose there will be a fight over the picture as there are only six of us reading your book, as dad, Fred and myself have been ARGOSY fans from the old *All-Story* days. Mother says to tell you that "Flames of Feud" was the best story you have ever printed and we second the motion.

We have to get two ARGOSYS and a DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY to keep us all reading.

Regards,

CARL, DAD, FRED, DON, JOHN AND RICHARD PROCTOR.

MORE sport stories:

Pittsburg, Ill.

I would like very much to find a sport story in every issue of ARGOSY. As I am a baseball and basket ball player, and a fan in all sports, I enjoy sport stories very much, and have heard others say that ARGOSY would be perfect if it only had a sport story in every issue.

EUGENE SMOTHERS.

HISTORICAL tales by Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson are this reader's hobby; and he'll be glad to know that a novelette of medieval Italy in the dangerous days of the Borgias is slated for June 20:

Brooklyn, N. Y.

Have been a constant reader of your magazine for over five years and can truthfully say that I think it is the best magazine on the market.

The best story I have ever read in your magazine was "Alexander the Red." I am extremely fond of historical novels by M. Wheeler-Nichol-

son and the Foreign Legion stories by Roscoe. I used to like Wirt, but he is getting too bloodthirsty lately and if you don't stop him he'll have *John Norcross* and *Jimmie Cordie* wipe China off the map. Fred MacIsaac is a very enjoyable author, and for short stories, the ones about *Bill* and *Jim* can't be beat.

Am sending you ten coupons and here's hoping for continued good stories.

SAM BORODIN.

TROPICAL and Oriental tales appeal to this New Yorker:

New York, N. Y.

I think that the Foreign Legion stories are half the magazine, as well as the Oriental and jungle stories. The impossible stories are excellent and so are the Northland ones. What about a good baseball story?

Tell Mr. Roscoe that "The Last Battle" was the best story of its kind that I have ever read. Also special praise is due to Paul Stahr, who is, in my opinion, an excellent artist.

STUART GRIFFIN.

OUR last auto-racing story drew much praise—and we venture to predict next week's novelette, by a great writer of speed-demon tales, will prove even more popular:

Cincinnati, Ohio.

My first time in print, and I come forth now to hail Don Waters in his "Winner Take All."

That story touched a little spot that each year, about now, burns and burns. His story is laid back before I fooled with gas buggies, but the smell of castor oil and burned rubber very probably held the same lure as to-day. The dirt tracks of to-day are not the old flat horse tracks of that story. A horse on the new track at Ft. Wayne, Indiana, for instance, would need ice caulks to stick on the banks.

Dirt track racing has reached a point now where the drivers who have been famous in the "Big Time" for years must watch their laurels. The winners at Indianapolis, Allentown, etc., for several years now are coming out of the "devil-may-care" dust eaters. Devil-may-care is the correct term, too, for no one knows unless he's been in one just what happens when two cars roar into a dust cloud on a bend and only one comes out or maybe neither. No one knows the jealousies that can spring up in a racing team.

It's curious to think over why people go to auto races. I'll lay odds nine out of ten hope for a crack-up. It's odd. When I'm not driving I do it myself, but when I am driving I never worry and very likely some one up in the stands is thinking "What a nice-looking corpse he'd make."

Could Mr. Waters be prevailed on to give us some more of the same thing? He has a theme or subject started with unlimited possibilities. There's a story in every car or every race.

R. J. GIBSON.

HERE'S a scathing criticism of Ralph Milne Farley's "Caves of Ocean":

Boston, Mass.

I have read your magazine for years, but if you put any more stuff like "Caves of Ocean" in it, I'm all through! That story is the worst flop I've ever seen in ARGOSY. Guess the author never saw a "schooner," or he'd know better than describe it as he does.

He states the schooner went down into an underground river—yet the propeller was uninjured! How lucky! The schooner went on the sand high and dry—and was pulled off by two men aided by a block and tackle. A schooner weighs at least ten tons! And the sea captain talks like a woman.

DAN HASTINGS.

CHARLES ALDEN SELTZER and H. Bedford-Jones's *John Solomon* are being paged (and—sh! Don't tell anybody—they're both coming this summer!)

New York City.

I have been a reader of your highly popular magazine since—now let me see—yes, it was Charles Alden Seltzer's "The Gun Fanner," which appeared in the then *Argosy-All-Story* about twelve or thirteen years ago; that made me the ardent fan of your magazine that I am to-day. During all those years the number of copies I have missed can be counted on one hand. I am certainly indebted to ARGOSY for the many pleasant evenings I've spent after a dull day at the office, in leaving all that behind me and accompanying your adventurous heroes on their world-wide voyages and their adventures in the far-off corners of the earth.

Bring back our old friend *John Solomon* in a new series of international adventure and, above all, just leave ARGOSY as is, and earn the gratitude of one of the real old-timers.

Yours for continued progress and success.

ELIHU J. LUCKER.

AN Alabamian tells Fred MacIsaac to stick to his last:

Athens, Ala.

My favorite authors are Fred MacIsaac, Geo. F. Worts, Oscar J. Friend, Frank L. Packard, Hulbert Footner, J. E. Grinstead, and Robert Carse, for business and sport and Western stories.

The impossible and fantastic stories are my

weakness; however, did not think much of MacIsaac's story, "The Hothouse World." Better keep him on sport and business stories. Otis Adelbert Kline, Ray Cummings and Ralph Milne Farley are the ace high fantastic story writers. Please have Mr. Farley give us another story soon of inside the earth, and what has become of *Miles Cabot?*

Have just finished the second installment of "Captain Judas," by F. V. W. Mason, and it promises to be a fine story, but if it comes up with "Captain Nemesis," it will be going some. Please tell Mr. A. Merritt to hurry up and give us more of "The Snake Mother," as she has been in her tomb long enough.

When will Chas. A. Seltzer give us another serial? All his stories are fine and his "Gone North" was extra good.

J. E. KELLY.

A SKEPTIC is convinced:

Halethorpe, Md.

I started reading ARGOSY in January and since then I have not missed a single copy. I never believed, before, that a dime magazine could have such good stories.

My favorite authors are W. Wirt, Theodore Roscoe, R. Whitfield, and F. V. W. Mason.

ROBERT BOWEN.

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

Name.....

Street.....

City.....*State*.....

Fill out coupons from 10 consecutive issues and get an ARGOSY drawing (not the cover painting) for framing.

This coupon not good after August 20.

6-6

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YES, you can be free and independent. You can do the things you want to do. You can make *real money* and have the things you'd like to have. How can you do this? I'll tell you. Just accept the proposition I'm making to you right now. When you join me *you'll be your own boss.* No six o'clock whistles to bother you. No time clocks to punch. No layoffs to eat up all your savings. And besides all this, you'll be all set to make up to $15 and more a day!

RIDE IN A
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NOT a contest. I offer a brand-new car free to producers as an extra reward or bonus *in addition* to their large cash profits. Mail coupon for particulars.

$110 PROFIT IN 1 WEEK

Think! With this new plan of mine—the very same one I'm offering you now—Sol. Korenblit, of New York, made $110 clear profit in a single week. Mrs. Eva McCutchen, of Oklahoma, reports earning $26.55 the very first day. And Sebastian Fera, who lives in a small town in Pennsylvania, cleared exactly $49.53 in just 2 days. These are just three of the hundreds of men and women who are making big money with me. Don't their earnings *PROVE* the tremendous possibilities? And remember—they didn't have a bit of training or experience to start with. Is there any reason why you can't do as well?

YOU CAN DO IT!

My new plan is so simple and easy that any man or woman—anywhere—can understand it and follow it. It doesn't take any capital or a bit of experience. I explain everything and show you exactly what to do so you can start right in making money the very first day. C. E. Harrison, of New York, made $13.57 the first afternoon—Francis Balistreri, of California, $37.75 the first day—and D. F. East, of Louisiana, $18.50 the first 6 hours! This shows what can be done.

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All you do is call on your friends and my established customers in your locality and take care of their orders for my line of fast-selling groceries and other Household Necessities. Your own home will be your headquarters. You can work as you please—full time or spare time—daytime or evenings. This remarkable plan put nearly two million dollars in the pockets of my Representatives *last year alone.* And now I am offering you a chance to share in these huge profits.

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Just send me your name and I'll give you all the facts. It costs nothing to investigate. So don't delay getting started. If you want to *be your own boss* and make *$15 a day* for pleasant work, here's the opportunity you have been waiting for. And I'll give you your own groceries at low, wholesale prices. I'll tell you about my Free Ford Offer. This is too good to miss. Mail the coupon today sure.

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ALBERT MILLS, Pres., American Products Co.
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I'm ready to be my own boss. Tell me about your wonderful new proposition that offers a chance to make $15 in a day—full time or spare time. Also explain your Free Ford Offer.

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 (Please print or write plainly)