N.S.E.

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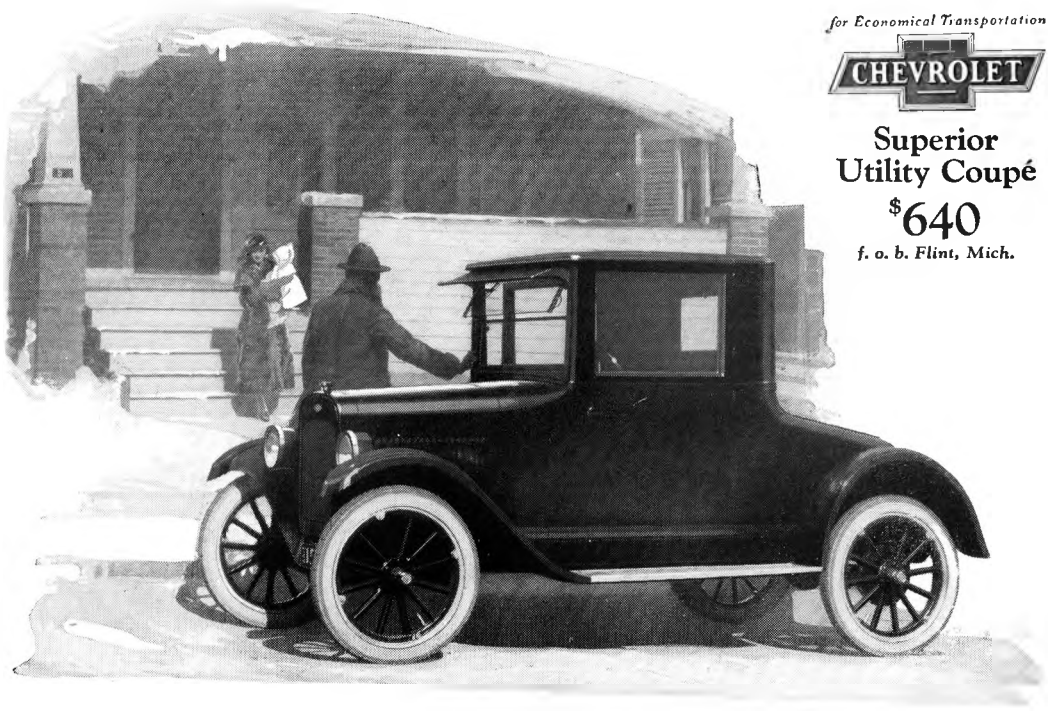
FEBRUARY 1924

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

"The Riddle of the Rangeland"—a Western mystery novelette

Adventures of the Deep Water Men, Florida Kid, Free Lance and others



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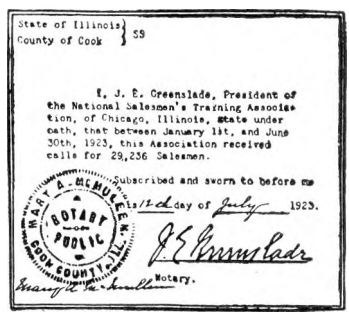

State of Illinois } ss
County of Cook }

I, J. E. Greenslade, President of the National Salesmen's Training Association, of Chicago, Illinois, state under oath, that between January 1st, and June 30th, 1923, this Association received calls for 29,236 Salesmen.

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J. E. Greenslade

Notary.

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

COVER DESIGN: Painted by Laurence Herndon to illustrate "The Riddle of the Rangeland."

A Spirited Novelette

Thirteen Short Stories You'll Remember

THE CONSOLIDATED MAGAZINES CORPORATION, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine,
36 South State Street, Chicago, Ill.

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Office of the Advertising Director, 33 West Forty-second Street, New York City, N. Y.
R. M. PURVES, New England Representative, 80 Boylston St., Boston. LONDON OFFICES, 6 Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C.
Entered as second-class matter July 24, 1906, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.

MAGAZINE

FEBRUARY
1924

DONALD KENNICOTT, Associate Editor

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: $2.00 a year in advance. Canadian postage 50c per year. Foreign postage $1.00 per year. Subscriptions are received by all newsdealers and booksellers, or may be sent direct to the Publisher. Remittances must be made by Post Office or Express Money Order, by Registered Letter or by Postage Stamps of 2-cent denomination, and not by check or draft, because of exchange charges against the latter.

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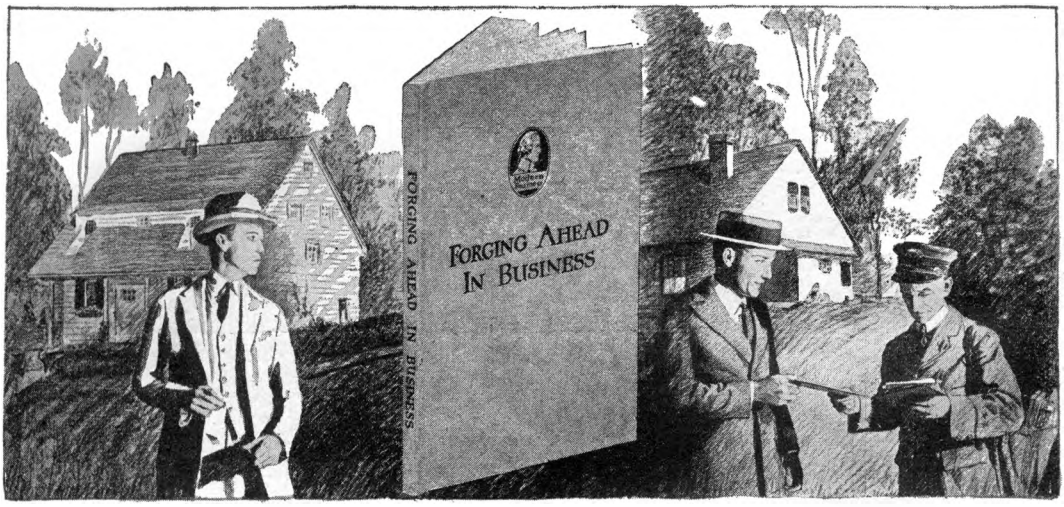
THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (Feb. issue out Jan. 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands, or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close three weeks prior to the time of issue. Advertising rates on application.



This book came between two men and separated them forever

THIS is a rather simple little story with an element of triumph in it, and an element of tragedy.

Perhaps when you have read it you will want to send for "Forging Ahead in Business"; perhaps not. The offer is made without conditions, but only you can decide.

The story concerns two young men who owned very modest homes in a Middle Western city. Their wives were friends. In the winter they played bridge together and tennis in the summer. One worked in a railroad office, the other for a manufacturing concern, and their incomes were almost the same. On Saturday afternoons they mowed their lawns, shouting good naturedly to each other across the fence.

One day the man who worked for the railroad inquired about the work of the Alexander Hamilton Institute. He read the little book "Forging Ahead in Business," which describes in detail the plan of the Institute's Modern Business Course and Service. It left a deep impression on him; a change took place in his attitude, a curious dissatisfaction with himself and his rather easy-going career. For the first time in his life he faced the fact that an income which marks a man as a success at twenty-eight means failure at thirty-eight. He wondered just how far along he would be at thirty-eight; the book stirred his imagination as it has stirred that of so many other men. He enrolled for the Institute's Modern Business Course and Service.

He played less bridge than he had been playing; he no longer mowed his own lawn but hired a laborer to do it, explaining to his wife that he had found a new value in the spare hours which he could not afford to waste. The friend next door was puzzled, and he, too, asked the reason. But he could not quite understand the explanation his neighbor gave, at least he could not see why *he* should do the same.

It came as a shock to him when his friend was promoted to be assistant general superintendent of the railroad. He was full of congratulations and good wishes, but he could not quite conceal his envy. It seemed a little unfair that good luck should come to one and not to both. Why was it that life could not treat men more equally in the distribution of rewards?

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 38 FEBRUARY 1924 No. 4

At the Cafe des Princesses

By CHARLES SAXBY

A moving and powerful story of a young American's strange adventure in the Constantinople of today—the wildest, wickedest city in all the world. Mr. Saxby is himself a world-rover, who has worked and fought in many out-of-the-way corners of Europe and Africa.

IT was the Breskaya, circling between the tables with an entertainer's impudence, who first noticed him. Merely a slim, brown-faced lad, hesitating in the doorway, a lad certainly under twenty, clad in neat blue serge. Being a woman, it was his eyes at which she first looked, for they were large, deeply set, and of an almost luminous gray.

Probably he was English, she thought. Then she doubted, for he seemed too unconscious of himself. She wondered who he might be and what he might be doing in that seething post-war Constantinople. Why he was at the Café des Princesses was probably more easily answered, especially with the furtive face of Marco, the Italian tout, peering over his shoulder. To the alert, the place reeked of answers, many and strange.

Within the place swam in a fog compounded from cigarette-smoke, hot food, chatter and perfume. It coiled up about the unshaded lights, and was beaten into visible eddies by the clamor of the orchestra. But outside, the first north wind of the winter was shredding the yellowed sycamore leaves, and sending people to shelter from its Black Sea chill. Under her professional pertness, Breskaya's imagination wandered to that outer darkness. Frowsy Galata and the tenements of Top Haneh all about; then the Golden Horn, its waters a glittering black under the new

bridge; and beyond it Stamboul, stretched like a vast lizard, jeweled by arc-lights, its back spiky with minarets.

Constantinople, the new melting-pot for the scrapped humanity of half Europe, and this Café des Princesses one of its sullen furnaces. One can pick up anything there, from a desperate refugee noblewoman, to the latest silly plot against the Rumanian throne, or the Allied control, or against something, at least.

The place was filled with what might have been a cross-section of the Near East. Levantines and Syrians; Italians from Tripoli, Greeks from Asia Minor. Armenians, professionally hunted; fugitive Russians, all marked with that Slavic 'soul,' which is principally the gloom of an inflamed egoism. Women's bare shoulders, uniforms of armies defeated and forgotten. Red fezzes, frock-coats tagged with the ribbons of dubious orders; glances of despairing, would-be seduction; men leaning toward each other to whisper absurd political secrets.

Slag, all of them, calcined into a useless compound by the overhot fires of the war years. Here and there a khakied Englishman, his face glazed by washing, trying to look as if he had mistaken the place for its more famous rival, the Café Moskva, up the hill in Pera.

The Café des Princesses is frankly down in Galata. To reach it, you must turn a corner near the old arch, stumble along a dark courtyard and then down some steps. Its prices are cheap and its drinks potent; its decorations, by starving Russian artists, are sufficiently weird; so is the music, also Russian and hungry. But the real attraction is the corps of entertainers, each one a guaranteed princess and some of them even possibly genuine.

Well, what would you? Breskaya swung her glittering skirts with a grimace of the odd little face under bobbed black hair. One might as well be there as out in the refugee-camps beyond San Stefano, among the waiting, clawing thousands who, with nothing to live for, so strangely refuse to die. She had learned that there were worse places than the Café des Princesses. Three years of constant flight had stripped Xenie Breskaya of more than any position she might ever have had. She glanced at her reflection in a mirror; it was extraordinary how much mere flesh could endure and show so little trace.

The worst wreckage was invisible as yet. It would probably show in time, just as their own particular something showed on each of the faces about her. Bit by bit those years had torn from her all that she had ever been. She could look back and actually see the particular moment at which some piece of herself had gone. Pride had been the first to go. That does not last long when it becomes an actual matter of life and death—with pride to be rent away anyhow, and horribly. Pity also vanishes in a shrieking struggle for a moldy crust. And with those gone, the rest had followed suit, like a house falling in on dynamited foundations.

And now! And to come—

SHE had forgotten the lad in the doorway. He was being ushered to a table, and across from him a woman was already preparing to make advances. A stout Levantine, with a certain horrible beauty still lingering on her face. She was the self-appointed priestess of some occult sect which was popularly credited with celebrating the "Black Mass," whatever that may be.

Breskaya almost started to intervene, then shrugged it off. It was no affair of hers. If he did not already know things, then let him learn; he would be willing enough; all men were. They were all alike within, no matter how they looked without. That perception was one of the bitter fruits of that tree of strange knowledge which has so suddenly overshadowed half Europe. An invisible tree, rooted in rent minds, dropping leaves of mephitic propagandas.

But she must shrug that off too. The worst of being a Russian was that it opened one to strange fancies which interfered with one's work.

In the entry, Infijian was whispering with the Italian who had brought the boy in. Seen against the shadows of outside, his parchment-colored profile was a mixture of bird and rodent, a vulture beak above a rat mouth. The faces of the two, bent toward each other, were curiously sinister. It was impossible to think of any good coming from behind them. Glancing toward Breskaya, Infijian crooked a finger in summons. Insolently pausing to light a cigarette, she swung across to him.

"The American," he said in the bastard French which was the bubble of that particular pot. "Go to him; you speak his tongue."

"But it is my turn to sing now," Breskaya objected.

On Infijian any opposition had an extraordinary effect, provided it came from inferiors. His parchment face broke; his hands, like dirty wax, waved about his ears as he poured forth invective. There was something unbelievably vicious about that outburst. It was as if any dealings with him were an adventure on a thin crust above depths perpetually seething.

"Pot-wash—flat-faced piece of Russian filth—"

Beside him the tout sweated and trembled, cravenly ready to gain favor by abetting his employer. Breskaya merely smoked without even a shrug. It never amounted to more than words with Infijian, and she had learned to appreciate the good fortune of words being the worst.

Pressing his hands to his anatomy, Infijian's fury changed to a screaming whine.

"Oh, my heart—you will kill me yet! Why do you treat me so? Have I not done everything for you? Did I not pick you out from the beastliness of that steamer in which you fled from Odessa? Four thousand of you, too tightly packed even to sit down—and a man two days dead hanging on your shoulder! And now—now I ask of you something, and all you think of is to sing—sing—sing!"

THE word went up in a screech that passed invective. To sing, was what he had engaged her for, but now it seemed to have become the blackest of sins. The Italian bared his teeth at her, and Infijian's fickle fury turned upon him.

"Aha—you make monkey-pig faces in my café? Get out."

"But I brought the American here; I must have my—"

A slap was the answer, and the tout moaned and fled. His anger thus relieved, Infijian turned to Breskaya again, speaking with a lisp.

"Of course some one else shall sing in your place. Can you not trust me?" he appealed. "Go to him; speak his beastly language; keep him amused and don't let any of those other women get near him. He is important; later on I will tell you more. Go to him—I must talk with that carrion again."

He thrust by her, and out through the door, his cries of "Marco—Marco—foolish one, return!" coming back in wind-blown breathlessness.

WITH a flirt of her tinseled skirt, Breskaya mechanically smiled her way back between the tables. So the boy was important, and at the Café des Princesses importance meant one thing only—money. He hardly looked it; but then, you could never tell with these Americans. He was so young, too—the only genuine youth in all the place. She wished she could be like these other women, regarding men as mere purses. The trouble was that her wreckage, though general, was not quite complete. It reminded her of houses that she had seen, mere blackened shells, but with perhaps a vase of withered flowers, or a gilded icon, remaining strangely untouched. So with herself, she was always coming on something left intact among the ruins.

The boy's head, thickly brown, rather tousled with the wind outside, was bent over a menu-card. His brows came together in attempted solution; at her greeting, he looked up in relief.

"Oh, say—you speak English?"

"That is why I am here."

She spoke in sharp Russian to the waiter, a perspiring, hectic creature who looked as if he were fed on swill. He stammered a sentence.

"*Barin,* I mek acquaint—Princess Xenie Breskaya."

The boy jumped up, bowing in young awkwardness.

"Please—wont you sit down?"

"I meant to," she laughed, with professional archness.

He was not really handsome, she decided. It was more that he was different. The sharp atmosphere of outside still hung about him like some coolness inherent in his own flesh. His gray gaze was quiet and friendly, and it was a long time since she had met a gaze like that.

"So I'm really meeting a princess?" he asked, and she grimaced down at her tawdry costume.

"We are all princesses here—from seven in the evening on. The title was always cheap enough in Russia; it had nothing to do with royalty. And now, in Constantinople, it is cheaper still."

She took the menu-card, guiding him through its maze of goulashes, marmites, "bee-steks," *ostricchi.* She had dined, she said; she would take merely a glass of wine. As she sent the waiter scurrying toward the kitchen, the boy swept her again with that glance of friendly, eager curiosity.

"So it's all true, what they say about Constantinople? Princesses working in restaurants, and all that! Of course, I've seen a lot today—"

"You have seen my people?" she asked.

"Thousands of them—mostly generals—and all selling newspapers."

THERE was a note of disgust in that, and she caught the picture in his mind. Bald men, with thick necks and an ineradicable habit of stoutness, standing in ragged uniforms, dazed with this crash of things which had exposed their inherent uselessness.

"But you," he was asking, "how did you escape?"

"Escape?"

The gay façade she offered the world kept unchanged, but behind it came memory of interminable nights in those cities of the north. Snow reddened by flames—women's shrieks—footsteps on the stairs—those were the worst. Her supple shoulders came to her aid, endangering the tinseled straps across them.

"Me—I ran." And a wave of her cigarette described enormous distances which she contrived to make humorous. "I ran to Moscow, to Novgorod, to Kars, to Odessa. I ran and ran, and now I am here; that is all. But you; tell me of yourself. You are American, no?"

"Yes; I came from California."

"Ah, I have heard of that. It is not like this place, eh?"

He laughed, in a young arrogance of patriotism.

"I should say not. This place,"—his forehead wrinkled in attempted expression,—"I can't quite say it, but it seems so *full*, somehow. Just as if it was all choked up with things that you can't see."

"That is the past," she nodded. "Thousands of years of it."

"There's no past out home," he said.

Breskaya's smile became fixed, and she smothered a yawn. He was not particularly interesting; one did not even have to spar to keep him at a distance. Of course, in a little while he would begin; they all of them did, snatching at hectic moments, not knowing at what instant the insecure surface of things might crack and let them all through to whatever was beneath it. Meanwhile, he was at least easy to amuse.

"Where is your home?" she asked, and his eyes lighted with that strange delight of talking amongst alien surroundings of things long familiar.

"Out in the San Jacinto Valley. It is thirty miles wide, with hills all round, and at one end the mountain goes up twelve thousand feet, with pines and snow on the top. At the other side it goes straight down to the desert. There are places up there where no one has ever been yet."

"You have an estate there?"

"We have forty acres of apricots. There's just my mother and my brother and myself now."

Forty acres; a peasant's holding, she thought contemptuously. She had a picture of a wooden hut, from which brutish men lurched out to scratch the soil with wooden plows. She looked at his clothes; at his face, thin, brown, eagerly alight; at his hands, tanned, but well shaped and well kept. Her mind became a puzzle.

"And your mother, does she then work in the fields?"

His blankness answered her, while puzzling still more. Then he laughed as if he caught a joke.

"That's a good one."

"But I meant it; tell me."

"Mother looks after the house, of course. And she has lots of things to do besides. She is president of the Women's Club, and she ran the Red Cross during the war; and she's on the Library Board, and—I guess they think a lot of Mother; she's always busy."

"But you, you speak well. Have you been to school?"

"Why, of course I have," he laughed again. "I went through high school at Riverside, and nearly paid my own way, too. In the summer I help on the ranch, or pick fruit for the neighbors, or help them irrigate, or mend their pumps. I put new electric wiring all through the house last year."

Breskaya was listening now, her chin propped on her hands, the smoke from her cigarette spiraling upward unheeded. Almost she could see him in that valley, tanned, untroubled, whistling in golden sunlight under trees heavy with fruit. A vast mountain all purple against a southern sky. A wide land clean of any past!

A MAN came toward them, still young, still able to carry his epauleted uniform in a way that made it look almost smart. He was smiling, bowing to one and another at the tables. He gave the im-

pression that, had he been alone, he would have swung a cane and whistled; but at sight of him, Breskaya's mouth twitched with fear. Something must have happened to bring Michael to that place, braving the insult of ejection awaiting the penniless.

He stopped at her side, laughing elaborately down at her. With a glance at the boy, he spoke in the concealment of their native Russian.

"I must talk with you at once."

"I am busy," she shrugged. "I have to hold this boy for Infijian."

"I must speak a moment; have you heard?"

She looked up, her mouth twitching again. Seen thus closely, his uniform revealed itself as a mass of intricate mending; a burst shoulder-seam betrayed that there was nothing beneath it but himself. There were greenish flickers in his eyes; his hands shook under restless gesturings.

"What is it?" she breathed.

ACROSS from them the Levantine was performing strange rites over a saucer of burning brandy. The orchestra crashed into something wild, determinedly Slavic. Under its clamor Michael spoke, smiling much from the teeth out while his lips dropped terrible sentences.

"The Allies are going to yield to the Turks. I had it from a man who knows the brother of a Kavass at the Chilian Consulate. Kemal is to have Constantinople, and he is already preparing to leave Angora."

"But—God in heaven!—what will become of us?" she muttered.

"Ah, but that is the joke."

They all laughed, these refugees of the better classes, their lips perpetually twisted into smiles like the grin upon a skull. Breskaya felt for her rouge to hide the pallor that swept her cheeks.

"All we refugees are to be shipped back to Russia—to the Bolsheviki."

Now that it had come, she knew that she had been always expecting it. The terror from which they had fled so long, had caught up with them. Its skinny hand squeezed on her heart, sending spurts of blood, hot and cold, all through her frame. Hot hopes, undying, that this might be but another rumor! Each day brought its new crop. Cold memories of times when those rumors had become appalling truth.

"We must get away," Michael said.

"Get away," she echoed drearily. Then something in his tone caught her ear. "You mean—you have some plan?"

He bent over her, the careful amusement in his tone only emphasizing the stress of his words.

"I know the captain of a Greek steamer that is leaving at midnight for Tripoli. He will take a few of us hidden in the hold—for payment."

"But how can we—"

He put the question asside with another trickle of terrible speech.

"When the Allies leave, there will be panic—worse than Odessa, for here there will be no ships to fly to. The Turks will be free to do with us as they please. And for those who are left—"

Pictures swept her mind, all fearful. This man had been—probably still was—physically brave. But the greenish flickers in his eyes were stark terror.

"How much would it take?" she managed to ask.

"A hundred English pounds. He would takes two of us for that—if—"

Michael's gaze wandered furtively, meeting everything but her own. Whatever he might have been within, his outward wreckage was less complete than hers. He could come to a woman for aid, but he hugged the superiority of being still ashamed of it.

"If—we—could only get it."

That sentence really meant: "If *you* could only get it!" They both knew that, for how was a male refugee to glean even a hundred *sous* from that city? Or a woman either, for that matter? Not since the days of its Byzantine slavery, had human bodies been so cheap. Her smile was bitter.

"A hundred English pounds by midnight! You pay me a compliment."

"Do you think I meant—" he began, but it died under her acid gaze.

"What *did* you mean, then?"

"After all," he went vaguely on, "it is your life as well as mine. You would not have the opportunity of saving it, but for me. These are things to consider—"

"Ah, *tchah!*" she cut him short. "Are we then mouthing Reds, that we must wind ourselves up in phrases? It is the how to do it, not the right nor wrong of it, that we must consider."

MEN were so strange; he talked of death on the morrow, and yet he took time to be sullen because she hurt his pride. He glanced at her companion.

"Who is this fellow?"

"An American of some kind. I cannot make him out."

"American—blessed son—they all have money."

She considered the boy, aloofly attending to his dinner while she talked with this newcomer. There must be money there, or Infijian would never have noticed him. Her face sharpened as if the jagged angles of that inner wreckage were showing through.

"Go now, Michael, or people will suspect something. But listen: if I can—do anything, where will you be?"

"At the water-steps this end of the Stamboul bridge."

"Well, I will—try."

"You had better, for your own sake as well as mine."

His shoulders sketched a horrid glimpse. Streets filled with screaming flight—and strangely enough it was always the oldest, the most miserable, who were the worst, tottering along with clawing, impotent hands. Michael strode away. That jaunty, parade air of his would not last beyond the door. Outside, he would become as the rest, slinking in the shadows from which his eyes glared wolfishly.

OVER her saucer of blazing spirits the Levantine raised an ebony cross twined with a serpent of false rubies. Above the music her voice boomed out like a brazen bell.

"Amilchas—Adamas—Gods of Little Sabaoth—"

Faces turned toward her, men licking their lips in furtive speculation. The boy's eyebrows puckered with a half-repelled curiosity.

"What is it?"

"She does it every night," Breskaya shrugged. Then came an impulse. "Don't look—it's *bad*."

"Bad?" His eyebrows climbed higher in added perplexity. "But why don't they stop it, then?"

To Breskaya that question was more staggering than an actual blow. Its sheer simplicity seemed to tear a gulf between them. It was like the speech of another world, that flat suggestion that things should be stopped merely because they were not good.

She thought of the things she had seen—escaped—and not escaped. Russia, writhing in its own venom; Constantinople all about them; Michael's rumors and the possible tomorrow. And he talked like this!

His eyes, in their gray clearness, were like still water under the dawn. She asked a quick question.

"How old are you?"

He flushed at that, caught in the guilt of youth.

"Seventeen—that is, I'll be eighteen in five months."

"What are you doing here?"

"That guide fellow told me it was a good place to eat."

"I mean, here in Constantinople, at all?"

"Oh—that—" he began; but she rose.

"In a minute; the proprietor wants me."

Infijian and Marco had returned, and apparently in recovered amity. That was sinister, for rats join only for purposes of prey. The boy looked toward them.

"What brand of nationality is that proprietor guy?"

"Armenian," she answered, and he seemed to find it a solution.

"Oh—so *that's* why they are always getting massacred."

Infijian still hung in the entry, where the swinging door let in cold drafts from outside. He was in high humor now, patting her bare shoulder as his wax hands drew her close.

"You have done well—you are friendly with him; has he drunk much yet?"

"He drinks only coffee."

"Ah, *tchah!*" Infijian whistled on his dirty finger nails. "But no matter, we can fix. Take him upstairs soon, and we will send him up a special sherbet."

"And then?"

"You will be through with him. Marco will take him away."

The Italian giggled at that, and the sound of it was like liquid slime gurgling in the half-darkness.

"And then?" Breskaya demanded again.

"What is it to you?" came Infijian's whispering scream. "Do as you are bid, or be thrown out to starve on the offal-heaps at San Stefano."

THE wind hissed through the door-cracks as if all outside were a vast basket of snakes waiting to strike. That brought fresh fear, but a false courage of desperation came with it. She had Infijian's measure of old, and her insolence matched his threat.

"I am not the kind that starves, my friend. Besides—" She stopped with a

grimace of contempt. "But I wont tell you that."

It was sheer gesture. In face of this distraught world, she felt like one of those little green beetles which rise up and, in incredible courage, strike with tiny forelegs at a man ten thousand times their size. But Infijian cringed; one could never be sure about this Breskaya. There were rumors that she had really been somebody; and she might have found a powerful friend.

She seized instantly on the moment.

"Now—about this boy: what is it?"

Infijian's whisper came back in a moaning ecstasy of greed.

"He has money—American money. Marco here has seen it—hundreds on hundreds of their dollars."

"But he is American," she objected. "You would not dare—he is protected."

"If he comes here and gets drunk, are we to blame for what happens to him after he leaves?"

"But he would go to the Allied control and tell them where he was."

Another giggle silenced her—a dual giggle this time, coming from both the men as if she had touched the spring of some strange and mutual knowledge between them. Infijian stroked her arm.

"Have no fear, little one. He will never tell of what he wakes up to in the later night. It will be such that he—that any man—will hide all, accept any loss, rather than confess it."

SO that was it, whatever it might be! She should have known that Infijian was taking no risks. In this backwash of Galata, filled with the human scum of half the Levant, there were things of which she hardly knew. Only whispers had reached her ears, whispers which she found incredible.

American money, hundreds of those all-potent dollars; out of the whirl which was her brain, one thought stood up like a rock.

This was her chance. "And what will my share be?" she heard herself asking.

Her chance, and come in a way to which even Michael could not object. That dingy entrance, the searching fingers of wind, those faces at her side—a strange nettle from which to pluck the incalculable rose of safety. The Italian was silently hating her, Infijian cursing. "Pig-trough!" Then came whines. "Have I not given you food—shelter—that dress, fit for a queen?"

"And my share?" she repeated, and before it the others became futile, turning and squirming with words like rats before a cat.

"A hundred and fifty pounds English!" That was herself speaking, but even she hardly knew the tone, it was so merciless, so instinct with a new authority. "Or else I walk that boy right out of here and turn him over to the protection of the Allied patrol."

There was actual murder around her now; those unseen snakes were buzzing with poison. A swift heel was best for such, and she stamped at once.

"Idiots—do you think I could speak so if I had not friends? If anything happens to me, they will know whom to arrest. A nice picture—eh? The two of you before a judge—each accusing the other to save his own dirty skin."

That brought pause, driving a sharp wedge between the two. Each knew the other—and himself as well. Infijian was weeping now.

"Hundred and fif—oh, God! Darling, twenty—twenty—"

"Do I take the American to the patrol, then?"

"Little charming one, thirty—no, thirty-five! I always meant—"

She had already started back across the café, but Infijian was after her, clutching and pawing.

"Eighty, my pretty—oh, make it eighty—or even—God in heaven, yes, eighty-five—ninety, then!"

Not until she was almost at the boy's table again did he make his offer, and the gasp of it brought acrid sweat pricking out on his forehead.

"A hundred and fifty, then. It is all we shall get, but you shall have it all—all!"

"Before midnight?"

"Yes—yes!"

She turned, tapping his chest in a brilliant coquetry, meant for the place at large, which had no effect upon her masked tone.

"And remember, Breskaya has friends."

"Yes, yes; you can trust Infijian," he babbled under his breath. "Now take him upstairs. Marco will bring the sherbet. Take the first room."

THE boy had finished his dinner, grinning up in welcome across a litter of despoiled dishes.

"Gee, but I'm glad you are back. That fat houri over there has been making eyes at me. I'm scared of her."

"We will—how you say it?—cook her goose?" Breskaya smiled. "Suppose you come upstairs awhile, where we can talk—no?"

He had accepted, with the same frankness, not seeming to notice the meaning glances which followed them as they crossed the café. Well, the room would enlighten him, she thought. In its red and pink frowsiness, it was the counterpart of thousands of other such rooms the world over. They were to be found in every land, all alike and unmistakable. The vase of paper carnations alone was a trademark.

She turned with a smile of professional dazzlement, slow, meaning and luscious. But he was merely looking about him, youthfully eager, intensely interested.

"Gee, this is pretty," he said with a young pleasure in the garish colors. "I never saw a room fixed like this before. I'll have to tell Mother about it when I get home."

He was standing there, alight with interest from the tips of his tan shoes to the top of his tumbled head. He tangled his feet in a rug and sat suddenly down on the sofa, laughing as he rubbed at his thick hair.

"That's me—graceful as a pelican. But say, this isn't a bit like what I thought Constantinople would be."

"What did you expect, then?"

"Oh—I don't know. Arches, I guess, and fountains—men in white robes, and veiled women under palm trees."

A blast tore at the windows, and she shivered at the thought of that black outside and the things brooding under its wind-lashed veil. His words had brought a vision of Tripoli. Arches, and white-robed men like dim saints. It would be warm there, and safe. It was years since she had known those things. She hoped Marco would be quick with that sherbet. Meanwhile this lad would be easy to manage.

She thought of the boys she had known. Peasants, their faces innocent as cows', but behind them an animal readiness for red rapine and cruelty. Boys of the once ruling class, arrogant, prematurely experienced. There came a perverse, purely feminine desire to wipe that sheer friendliness from his eyes and replace it with those other looks she knew so well. She sat down on the sofa beside him.

"Come, tell me about yourself."

"I'd rather hear about you," he said. "Wont you tell me how you escaped and how things really are in Russia? You see, I'm going there myself."

"You are going to Russia?" she echoed.

"Yes, with the American Relief Association. We got in yesterday with two foodships, and we leave for Odessa tomorrow."

HE was in full flood now, with all a boy's interest in his own absorbing affairs. His narrative came pouring out.

"You see, I heard so much about the famine, and saw moving-pictures of it, and Mr. Hoover was making appeals, and I got to thinking of all those people actually starving, when we had so much. So I got out my motor-bike and went around to all the packing-houses and ranchers and fruit-associations. I didn't ask for money, you see; I asked for fruit. A box of prunes here, a dozen boxes of raisins there—whatever I thought they could give. And in a week or two I wired the Relief people that I had a whole carload stacked up, and they accepted it and attended to the shipping. And then for fun I went on to New York with the car, riding in the caboose with the trainmen. It took two weeks by fast freight—some trip, I'll tell the world!"

It was most of it Greek to her, but through his words, and even more from his presence, came again that hint of almost another world. She could half see him, like some young crusader, all his boyish vitality caught up in a great idea, yet going about it with a cool-headed competence.

"Then in New York the newspapers got hold of it," he plunged on. "They printed a lot about me—" He flushed at that, and made hasty amendment. "It was bunk, really, but it helped. The Relief wanted flour and things instead of fruit, so I got the reporters to help me again, and I auctioned the carload off myself. Lots of people came and paid big prices. Then I got the Relief to let me come over here. And I got a lot more money given to me at the last—about fifteen hundred dollars. I hadn't time to buy things, so I just brought it along to give away."

So that was the money Marco had seen. Money for wretched Russians—well, she was one, God knew!

"What was it to you," she was asking, "—you, safe on the other side of the world, what did you care what happened in Russia?"

"It was the kids," he answered promptly. "Poor little tykes—I may have some of my own, some day, you see," he added.

She was glad that knock came on the door just then. It was Marco, and the sight of him in the passage, his smirk as he handed her the tray with the two glasses of sherbet, was like a tonic to her resolution. It brought back the world in which she was living. Not until then did she realize how it had seemed to thin under the boy's words. His speech, his air of knowing just what he was about, his atmosphere of a land of safety and abundance, of extraordinary achievements—and all of it done without talk. That was the amazing part. She thought of Russia, wrecked on floods of words. Futility going off at the mouth, while hands hung limply useless.

But that passage, ill-lit, secretive, reeking of stale perfume, cigarette-smoke and odors from the café below, brought it all back. So did Marco's face, which contrived to be at once vicious and vacant—the sort of face to which she was now accustomed.

"The full glass," he muttered, avoiding her eyes.

She nodded understanding and shut him out. The boy was at the window, looking out on ancient buildings starkly mean under the lashing wind.

"It looks just like some parts of New York," he grumbled. "Yet just over there Theodora—did something; I forget what. Wrecked an empire, I guess. And Suleiman rode into Santa Sophia over living Christians. But it all looks so ordinary."

SO ordinary! There were things which his young gaze, caught by the surface of things, had not penetrated. Some of those things were in that very room—that glass of sherbet, for instance. And the morrow when, if Michael's rumor were truth, the Allies would begin to leave.

She looked at him, standing there like a pillar of young life—or like some tree just beginning to feel its vigor. A young palm of his native State; slender, pliant, untouched.

But she must not think of those things. She must think of—of Tripoli, with its warmth and safety, of herself and Michael, of the possible tomorrow in this seething city. Think of blood on the cobblestones, human herds driven to massacre like sheep. Death should be private, at least. What was so frightening was this obscenity of being driven to it *en masse*. The awful waiting, the breathless hopes, the footsteps on the stairs—and this lad was her unconscious and only hope of escape. She took up the tray and smiled her best at him.

"Come, here is something to drink."

She twisted the tray about so that the full glass came nearest him. Odors of crushed fruit came up from it; a few rose-leaves floated on its surface. The boy's eyes were eager, but he laughed rueful refusal.

"Oh, gee, I'm too plumb full of dinner."

She could not tell whence came that sudden picture. Not from her own mind, certainly; yet it was there. Just a glimpse—a hall of some kind, all of stained wood, music, a lot of flowers, the boy, and a score like him, in cheap blue serges, their hair rigorously brushed. Girls, frank and clear-eyed as himself—one of them offering a tray of little-handled glass cups filled with pink liquid. And the boy's tones, ruefully laughing: "Gee, Mary, I'm full to the neck."

And he thought that this—*this*—was the same.

There was a pang in that thought, but fear too, and a flash of anger. She must wait; wait on the whims of a lad's stomach, while time slipped remorselessly by. Even now that little Greek tub rolling on the waves off Seraglio Point would be snorting with steam, ready to leave at midnight. And tomorrow—

She looked at him standing there so unconsciously aloof, so untouched by this world about him—and so untouched by herself. That was where the anger came in, and under its stirring all the poison-pot of wreckage boiled up within her. Black fear and its inevitable companion, cruelty! He would drink that glass before long; she had power enough for that. And then there would be a tomorrow for him too. However things went in this city of the Golden Horn, he would never forget his night at the Café des Princesses. Nor would he forget Breskaya, either; she would at least have torn a red gash across this young life of his.

SHE pulled him down again beside her on the sofa. The hard glitter of her manner was gone, and a different atmosphere enveloped her, warm, soft, her eyes mistily shining. She retained his hand, tapping it with an insistent finger as it lay in her own, brown, supple, instinct with vitality.

"Now you must confess to me," she said, smiling with delicious mystery. "A woman

is always curious, you know. How many girls have you loved?"

"Girls?" His eyebrows went up once more in that funny perplexity. "Oh—I don't know. I don't think I've ever been in love yet."

"But surely, at seventeen—"

"I'm pretty busy, you see," he explained. "What with working my way through high school—I didn't really *have* to, you know, but I thought I would. And then there was the track-team; I came near copping the junior championship in the broad jump last year. And girls—they are nice, of course; but I don't know—they are kind of silly too, sometimes. They don't seem to *know* anything."

"So you think that I am one of these sillies—eh?" she laughed.

"You—oh, no!" The flushed quickness of that proved its truth. "You have seen things and learned a lot," he went on, never dreaming the raw surfaces over which he was stumbling. "Why, I feel I can talk to you just as I would to another fellow. I never met a girl just like you before. You *get* me every time I speak."

She was "getting" him even then, in ways he did not suspect. This was more difficult than she had expected; he remained so untouched. Was it because he saw only the mists of his own immaturity? Or was it that herself and this place were the mists, among which he walked with the unconscious authority of something more sane and real?

But she was in and of those mists, that swirling fear-fog, abhorrent with shapes past and to come. As for him—half of that sherbet would breed mists enough, and at the same time lift herself up and away to the warm refuges of Africa.

"So that is how you think of me, eh?" she asked. "As just another—boy?"

"No, I didn't mean that, not a bit." He flushed.

"No?" She leaned over, nestling against his shoulder, her lips provocatively near. "Then just what did you mean? Come, be nice; tell me how you do think of Xenie Breskaya?"

"Why—"

He was so slow, groping there for words in a sort of desperate sincerity. Any boy of Europe would have been—well, different, by this time.

"Yes?" she provoked.

"Why, I think you are bully," he brought out at last. "You are so brave and fine. You must be, or you couldn't have kept gay and sweet like this after all you must have been through."

HE meant it; that was how he was actually seeing her, and the shock of it brought her to her feet. It brought a laugh too, strident, jeering. Whatever Xenie Breskaya might once have been, that laugh should have told him what she had become. It told her, and she gasped at its sound with the involuntary thought: "God, so I am that—"

He was on his feet, too sincere to be awkward as he tried to make amends from his own viewpoint.

"Say, I shouldn't have reminded you of all that. Of course you want to forget. I was a silly brute to bring it up—but what I really meant was—was—"

"Yes?" she asked, from the window to which he had turned. "What did you really mean?"

"Why, that—oh, don't you see? I meant that to be still as you are, after going through all that revolution stuff, why—that takes real *class*."

He meant it so; that was the hurt. She could not tell what she most wanted at that moment. To beat at him with her fists for the pain shooting through her? To tear aside the veil of the past years and blast his young unseeingness with one bitter revelation? Or to—to—that was where the danger lay.

Outside, the wind tore at the dingy panes. Down a narrow alleyway came the black glitter of water under a sputtering arc-light. That was the Golden Horn; near by were the water-steps. Michael and the steamer already rumbling with departure—and tomorrow—and the days to come—

Class!

The word was like white-hot iron within her; yet she could not tear it out. Class—as if anything of that were left in this screaming, fear-lashed hell of Europe? She must think of Tripoli, of warm sands and safety. She had the boy broken now; in a moment he would be doing her bidding. And he himself had made the breach.

She swung round on him, brilliant, glittering with a tinseled gayety.

"Monsieur, I thank you. That was a compliment, yes. And now—" She took up the tray, holding it toward him. "You will not refuse to drink with me? We will drink to your success in Russia, to all those you are going to save."

He took the glass, standing there waiting for her to put her own to her lips. Behind her smile a stream of images thronged by, all of them of things seen, and all horrible. She would not—could not go through that again. Then came the things for which she ached until every nerve was a quivering torment. Warmth, peace, palm shadows blue on white walls. Safety—a hundred English pounds—and the water-steps close at hand.

Class—

She could have screamed, and beaten, bitten him, for the pain of that word.

And tomorrow—*his* tomorrow? She wondered how he could stand there, clear-eyed above that boyish grin of his, while his hand held the horrid potentialities of that glass. In what den would Infijian contrive for him to wake? She could only guess at the slime in which his young cleanness was to be dipped so that its beastly glue might seal his lips.

Class—

SHE hated him for that word. It was like a molten chain dragging her toward an abyss. Class—what had she to do with such things now? And yet the chain seemed stronger than herself—stronger even than her fear—and that was the fearful part of it, to be compelled against one's own fear!

There were two worlds in that room; his—and hers. And a chain was spanning the gulf between them, binding her will as if it were his world that held the superior strength.

Class—

Her wreckage was not complete enough, for again she was meeting herself among its ruins.

She raised her glass to her lips, and at the signal, he did the same.

"Just a sip," she said, hardly wetting her lips; "and now—we change glasses. That is our Russian fashion. Not a fair exchange, eh? To be 'class,' I should give you the most. . . . . Now—success!"

THEY had drained the glasses. She would swear to Infijian that Marco had mistaken between the two. Now she must act quickly before the drug took effect. With admonitory gayness she tapped the boy's hand.

"And now I am going to send you away. You are on the ship, eh? Then—look! You will go down that alley to the water, and turn to the right to the steps. There is an English patrol there all night; tell them who you are, and they will see that you get to the ship in safety. Now—"

She pulled him to the door and opened it with a swift glance up and down the passage.

"There are stairs at that end. The door will be unlocked. I do not want you passing through the café again. Quick—go—"

"But—" He hesitated, caught by something under her tone which he could not understand. "See here, are *you* all right?"

"Me?"

Her laugh was a triumph, a rippling peal of sheer amusement as she pushed him out. She ached for—something, for some moment to remember, some touch of adequate drama to this farewell. But she saw that he must never know, nor even suspect.

"What did you think? Silly boy, what should harm me? Now go, quickly; they close the port at ten, and it is difficult to get off after that. . . . . Good-by—"

A handclasp, a quick push, another laugh as she closed the door. That drug must be potent; her limbs were already heavy as she dragged herself to the window. Wind-whipped darkness, shapes of buildings, a slim figure in the shadows, a glimpse of an upturned face and a waved hand.

He was gone. . . . . All was gone. . . . . And tomorrow, God knew what! At least, she would have sleep first; its leaden hand was already upon her.

All gone, except—class. Somehow she did not care. Let come what would. There was something clean, unstained and beautiful still in the world; and she—

Class. . . . .

Flood Courage

Wise, faithful, valiant—a dog of whose friendship any man might be proud: that was Rex. You'll find this story of his most gallant achievement especially attractive.

By AUSTIN HALL

"OU, là!" exclaimed the irrepressible Jean la Jennette. "Zat tam dog! Never you beat zat tam dog. Zat dog, she run like ze wind; she swim like ze fish; an' if he have ze wing, she fly like ze goose. Wat ze hell!"

Jean la Jennette brought his swarthy fist down upon the table in an ecstasy of exclamation. The drummer opposite him lifted a curious and critical eye to the old man's enthusiasm; his smile was tolerant and full of condescension. For a half-hour Jean la Jennette, never dreaming that the man could be an unbeliever, had been pouring forth his favorite eulogy; and now—*nom de Dieu!*—he was clinching his argument with his enthusiasm. Still the man smiled. At an adjoining table two Frenchmen were deep in the preliminaries of the hottest kind of a trade, with the matter of some fifty dollars constituting the hair edge of their difference. The drummer was interested; Jean's sudden silence enabled him to pick up the core of their conversation.

"I give to you, Pierre, jus' two hundred an' fifty dollar'," said the first. "More, I give not one more cent."

"Non, non!" exclaimed the other. *"Mon Dieu! Non!* Two hundred an' fifty for zat puppy? For wat for, ze talk! I say three hundred! Less, I no take ze one centime. Three hundred! She's ze price. I tell you on my heart, Marcell, zat Rex heemself is ze *grandpère* on zat one puppy."

An excited lapse into the original French cut off the drummer's enlightenment. For a few minutes the only intelligible sounds were the oft repeated and exclamatory words "Rex!" and "zat puppy." Now that the argument was in French, other men, tam-o'-shantered and ruddy like the first, entered the fray, until the clamor had become a maelstrom of invective. The drummer had been in many and strange places; but he had never been in a hotel lobby such as this one. Here were men—but he could not believe! And dogs! Oh, thunder! They were crazy!

JUST then the door opened and a clean-cut man, American like himself, entered and held it against the teeth of the storm —held it open to make room for a dog! Surely this neck of the woods was dog crazy. The drummer laughed, but his laugh was cut short as the strange Basque who had been his companion, stood up.

"Ou, là!" exclaimed the excitable Jean la Jennette. "See, monsieur. It ees ze old Rex heemself. Did I not say? See! Like ze king heemself, he comes over to hees good Jean la Jennette. *Oui, oui, monsieur,* Zat one fine tam dog!" The dog, Western shepherd of utility stock, trotted across the floor, leaving a wake of wet tracks and stopping unceremoniously to shake the rain out of his hide; his body was a powerful one, black, with the tawny markings of the breed; and his tail, a stubby affair of some six inches, was held at the perpendicular angle of distinction. The tail circled with swift affection at the sight of Jean la Jennette. Out of his solemn wise eyes the dog looked up into the old Basque's face. The American who had entered, closed the door against the storm; but he could not bar out the sound of the heavy wind battering against the windows.

"See, monsieur," said Jean la Jennette triumphantly. "How much now? How much you give for zat one dog? How much?" He turned to the man in the chair. Whereat the drummer gave a cursory look and a more decided pull at his cigar. Dogs were dogs, and he had heard enough of them during the last hour to be thoroughly sick of them. Here was a chance for a come-back.

"Oh," he said loftily, "—oh, I don't know. I suppose I might pay you thirty cents for him. That is—providing I happened to be in the sausage business."

The answer was too much for the Basque sheep-herder; his face became redder, and he stood up. But just then the newcomer who had ushered in the dog, stepped over to the table. He motioned the irate herder to a chair and gave the dog a friendly twist on the ear.

"You don't like dogs, then, eh?"

"Like them?" asked the other. "Oh, I don't know. I've nothing against them, but—" He motioned with his thumb. "I haven't heard anything but dogs since I have been in this hotel. Take these fellows here. They are bargaining for something, and I think it is a dog. One wants three hundred and the other is willing to give two hundred and fifty. Two hundred and fifty dollars for a dog! My lord! I wouldn't give two hundred and fifty cents for all the kiyi's in the good old U. S. A."

"No, I don't suppose you would," admitted the other. "I don't suppose you would—not while you're selling hardware. But some day when you're in the sheep business, you come around and talk to me. Perhaps—"

"Talking about the sheep business—" said the stranger. That's just the reason that I am here. Just drove in about an hour ago. .Had a time of it over these roads. Some rain! Must have been raining a month. Noticed that the river is just up to the floor of the bridge. Got here just at dark. Have a sister somewhere hereabouts. She and her husband bought up a sheep-ranch about a year ago. Thought I could get the directions here and slip out tonight—if it should stop raining."

THE other was interested; he turned to the herder who was just passing through the door and called him back.

"A sister? Then you mean Mrs. Weston. The Westons bought land from me about a year ago. My name is Bob Arnold. I am the man who sold them their sheep. They live only a mile from here; but I don't think that you had better tackle it before morning."

"Why not?"

"Because the river's up, and their place is now an island. They bought the marsh land to the east. It's a wonderful pasture for sheep; but when the river's up, it's an island."

A gush of wind drove the fury of the storm against the windows. The door opened, and a man entered, bedraggled and dripping. The roar of the gale outside was whipping along behind him.

"Whew!" spoke the man. "She's a daisy! Just got over the bridge. A foot of water running over the floor. River's rising every minute. Hello, Bob! How about the Westons? That island—"

"Perfectly safe," answered the sheepman. "The river's never covered it yet. I was talking to Mrs. Weston over the phone about two hours ago." He turned to his companion. "You'd better telephone over —that is, unless you wish to surprise her."

Just the same, when Bob Arnold stepped to the door, he whistled. To the east, not a hundred yards away, he could hear the somber lapping of moaning waters—a low

undertone that only a river gone mad can duplicate. For two weeks it had rained incessantly; and for a month the warm weather, unusual at this time of the year, had been melting the snowbanks of the high Sierras. Now it was all coming down. At four o'clock he had been out to the bank to register the rise and he had been startled. He had never seen such a storm as this.

When he turned back toward the room, he saw the drummer at the telephone. Jean la Jennette was sitting morosely at a table, stroking the head of the affectionate Rex. Bob Arnold motioned to a lantern standing at the old man's feet and called him to the door. The night's blackness, and the abysmal terror of the storm, had made him think of a detail attendant on one of his flocks. Over in the corner the drummer was evidently having trouble with his central.

"Go over and see Antonio," Bob directed. "See how he is getting along. And while you're about it, you might take a look at the river. She's nasty. Eh? What's that? Listen to that noise!"

Even as he spoke, a low boom sounded from the south—a crunching, twisting and snapping, slow and reluctant at first, then with a popping climax as of all things ending at once. The sound had a potency to chill men's blood. Before it had died into the rain-fogged air, the old dog had darted out between his two masters. His hair was on end, and his lips drawn back. "*Woo-ou! Woo-ou!*" he snarled and then drew back, looking first out toward the booming river and then up into the eyes of Jean la Jennette. "*Woo-ou!*" The men exchanged glances.

"Was that the bridge?" Bob Arnold listened for a confirming sound, but got nothing but the whirring undertone of the murky current.

"*Ou, là!*" exclaimed Jean la Jennette. "Mebbe so, monsieur. Mebbe so. Ze bridge go out wiz a pop, jus' like. Jus' you watch zat tam dog. Wat you see Rex, wat you see? See, monsieur. Rex, she know. *Le bon Dieu* has spoken. Always *le bon Dieu* speaks first to zat tam dog. She's ze hell of a night, for sure; and ze bridge has gone out, most like."

"If it has," averred Bob Arnold, "we've got our work cut out. Some one's got to post a light on the bridgeheads. We've got to get across the river and warn traffic from that side as well. And there's not a boat within two miles. I'll have to telephone Keaton; but he lives two miles back." He turned to the telephone, where the impatient traveler was still working to get his number. At the sight of the man in the corner, a frown passed over the face of Jean la Jennette.

"Eh," he complained, "for ze sausage, eh? Mebbe so ze tam river come up so she wet ze head of zat tam feller. *Ou, là!* For heem I geeve not one hair off ze tail of zat tam dog, eh?"

"Never mind him," said Arnold. "Take Rex and go along. Take a look at the river and then go out to Antonio's camp."

WITH the dog at his side, Jean la Jennette staggered across the sticky road and out into the soggy field that bordered the river. The rain had taken a new grip and was coming down in torrents; and a fresh wind, just rising from the south, struck him smack in the face. Head down and teeth set, he beat his way, with the light swinging at his side and picking up a million jewels out of the puddled water. Almost before he knew it, he had come to the torrent. A warning growl from Rex told him of his danger. Jean drew back with an exclamation. At the same moment, the ground where he had been standing broke away and went down with a splashing boom. The sound sent the cold run of terror along the back of his neck.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he cried. "Jus' one more leetle step, an' ze good Jean la Jennette would have been ze fish. *Ou, là!* Zat would not have been too good, eh, Rex!"

He stepped back to further safety and swung his light to cast the rays out into the murky current. The river had risen beyond anything he had ever known. Pieces of driftwood, fence-posts, pickets, boards, whatnot, drifted by in the surging tide. Up and down along the stream he could hear the booming of the banks falling into the water. For a moment he was fascinated by the water's swishing motion. The dog at his side stood still. The rain was beating a blur upon the water, and the wind was in his face.

"*Mon Dieu!*" he exclaimed. "She is ze hell of a night, for sure!"

Carefully he picked his way along the bank in the direction of Antonio's camp, watching the river and giving the walls plenty of room to do their own falling. He had not proceeded far when he drew up with another exclamation. Directly in

front of him a telephone-pole was lying, half in and half out of the river, held firmly by its entanglement of wires, and bobbing up and down like a cork in the stream. Instantly Jean thought of the drummer and his difficulty with the central. Now he understood.

"Ou, là!" he cried. "Zat man, she talk to her sister, eh! An' now ze good Madame Weston is under ze water!"

At the same instant there was a flash of light far out in the moving tide, then the report of a gun. Silence followed. Then a flare blazing on the water—a wicked sight, shimmering a call of agony through the pitchy dripping darkness. In the flood of the night, what with the driving rain, the blasts of the gale, and the whir of the maddened waters, it was unholy. Jean dropped the lantern to his feet and watched, knowing well enough what it meant. The lowlands of the marsh pastures were on that side of the river; and the light was coming from the knolls where stood the Weston ranch buildings. That meant trouble. Five thousand sheep were on that island. And they would all have to perish.

But that was only an incident of misfortune. What really concerned Jean la Jennette was the fact that there were human beings out there in the flood. They were in distress, or they would not be signaling. That meant that they were without boats. The telephone had failed them; and now they were using the primitive signal of fire. Jean thought at first of turning back for Bob Arnold, but decided almost instantly that there was not a minute to lose, and that he must send them word at once. The dog had crowded up to his side and was watching the flare on the waters. His low growl seemed to approve the already formed plan of Jean la Jennette. The old man patted him on the head and stooped down. It was not the first time that the balance of life and death had been shifted to the intelligence of the old shepherd.

"Ou, là," he said, picking up the dog in his arms and pointing. "She is tam bad river, Rex. Is it not so, yes? You see ze light over there? See, Rex—over there! Zat light, she say zat man and woman's is in ze water an' mebbe so almos' drown. *Non, non, non!* For why you be ze fool an' want to kiss me all ze time. Listen, Rex! Zat's it, now! Mebbe so Rex, she will swim over to ze light an' tell ze little woman zat Jean la Jennette has gone for ze Monsieur an' ze boat. *Ou, là!* See! Over there, ze sheeps. You savvy sheeps? Mebbe so, Rex, she save ze sheep, eh!"

He held the dog's head and pointed with his finger. "See, Rex, see! You understan', eh?"

Once again the dog began whining and licking the old man's face; then with quick eagerness he leaped to his feet and trotted to the brink.

"Ou, là!" cried Jean. "Now she know. Rex will swim for hees good Jean la Jennette, an' *le bon Dieu* will bring heem to ze lady. *Ou, là!* Zat is tam fine dog." He snapped his fingers and pointed to the light.

The dog had hunted out a sloping bank and had trotted down to the water's edge. Jean la Jennette came with the lantern. At the last moment, as the old dog stopped for his farewell caress, the man felt a lump come in his throat that almost choked him; but he held it back until Rex, at an indication from his hand, had taken to the water. For just one moment Jean could see his gallant old head angling above the flood; then he was gone. The light flickered under the blast of the gale, and the rain came down in redoubled torrents. But Jean did not notice. Very reverently he had taken off his hat and was speaking to *le bon Dieu.* And *le bon Dieu,* Who always watches over the gallant and the pure in heart, had hearkened to his pleading. Then Jean la Jennette started running—running and falling—to bring the news to the Monsieur.

THE light was not a great way off as distances go, but it was far indeed through that swollen river. For a few minutes the old dog, fighting against the main current, had all that he could do. The stream was full of floating driftwood and other obstructions. Time and again, as something drove against him and forced his head down, Rex took his ducking; but each time he came up gallantly and headed toward the light. That was all that he could do, and all that he strove for. He had been told to make for the light; and that was enough. Instinct warned him that something, he knew not what, was awaiting his shepherd's attention. Jean had said sheep. And sheep meant everything. Out of his long ancestry, he had the sheer grit and courage to fight his way; and now he had come to another test. When Jean la Jennette spoke, it was the law. Jean la Jen-

nette was his own particular man-thing! And Jean never made a mistake. The light was bobbing and shimmering above the flood like a torch of magic. The water came in maddened waves and washed over Rex's sturdy head; but as often as it did, he sneezed his nose clear and kept on.

In the main current Rex was borne away; but when he came to the calmer waters that had spread over the marsh meadows, he had more chance and was soon gaining on his goal. The light grew brighter and brighter, until it flared like a great beacon directly in front of him. Next minute his treading feet had struck bottom, and he was walking. He had landed on the steps of a house. The light, a gasoline affair whose rays could be seen for miles, was hanging on the porch. The river had risen until it had taken everything, and now it was encroaching on the house itself. He could hear voices inside the house. Up out of the flood crawled Rex, stopping just long enough to shake the water out of his hide, and then he advanced toward the door. There he began scratching, pulling his great paw down from the knob and giving it the emphasis of his deep gruff barks. The door opened, and a man spoke:

"Well, I'll be damned!"

"What is it, George?" a woman's voice came from behind; and then before the dog had time to enter, the friendly arms of Mrs. Weston were about his neck.

"Why, George!" she cried. "It's Rex. Old Rex! Mr. Arnold's dog! How did he get here? The old fellow! He must have seen the light. Or maybe Mr. Arnold sent him. And he swam all the way. He must have!"

"Yes, I guess he did," returned the man.

They had taken Rex inside and shut the door. The man began patting the dog with nervous hands.

"Old Rex has done some mighty uncanny tricks in his day; and this may be another. Good old dog! Anyway, he has given us a chance of sending for help. We can send him back with a note for Bob Arnold. In a half-hour they can have a boat here."

A vivid flash of lightning, unusual in this part of the world, interrupted them. Rex sprang to his feet and stood stiff-legged. From the corrals outside came the staccato bleating of frightened sheep. Mrs. Weston clung to her husband. The sheep would have to go, and with them her dream of a Western ranch.

"Oh," cried Mrs. Weston, "those poor sheep! Isn't there a thing that we can do? If the river keeps rising for another hour, they'll all drown."

"If there is anything we can do, we must do it at once," declared the man. He procured a pencil and paper from the table and took a small bottle from the mantel. "I am going to write a note to Bob Arnold. If he knows of our difficulty, he'll come at once. He's an old sheep-man and will know what to do. Who knows? He may even save the sheep."

It was a short job to write the note and slip it into the bottle. Rex watched them knowingly while they tied the string around his neck. Carrying messages was an old thing in his life. When Mr. Weston patted his head and opened the door, the old dog looked up. The woman in a sudden outburst reached down and put her arms about his neck.

"Oh," she said, "isn't he wonderful? The poor dog! He's just like a hero!"

But there was not much time to lose. Out on the porch the rain was coming down in sheets. For a moment the man and the woman stood with the dog between them, held back by the terror of the drenching inky darkness. From the south a low moaning wind swept the rainfall in their faces. The man held the dog by the neck.

"Does he know?" said the woman.

"We'll see," replied the man. He stooped down and took Rex by the neck. "See, Rex!" he said, trying to imitate Jean la Jennette. "Ze Monsieur. Rex will take the bottle to the Monsieur." He patted the dog and pointed to the water. That was all. The dog whined, looked up, and then without a hesitation stepped into the river.

TWENTY minutes later a wet sheep-dog, his body trailing a telltale path, crowded through the door of the hotel lobby. Bob Arnold had just come in and was giving orders.

"They will be down with the boat in a few minutes," he was saying. "Don't worry, Mr. Calder; we'll get your sister. If it hadn't been for that darn telephone! But Jean la Jennette sent Rex over and—Hello! Hello! Here he is now! Just as Jean figured. And he's bringing a note. Give me that bottle. Rex, old boy! Well, well, *well!* Some swim, eh, Rex! There now!" He patted the dog, while his nervous fingers untied the string.

The men crowded up to Bob Arnold. The

drummer, apparently convinced to at least some of the dog's worth, came over to Arnold's side. The sheep-man read aloud:

" 'Mr. Arnold: Your dog came to us from out of nowhere. We are in dire straits. The river is fast taking the ranch. The house is standing in water; and the corrals are just level with the main current. If it rises another foot, our sheep must go. We have no boat. Please come at once. If Rex gets this note to you, flash the word with a light.' "

"Here, John!" shouted Bob Arnold to one of the men. "Take a light down to the river and hang it on something. And step lively! Those people are anxious! Jean and that fellow have been gone long enough for that boat. They ought to be back pretty quick. Don't worry, Mr. Calder: we'll get your sister all right. That's easy! What I'm worrying about is that band of sheep. It's a shame to let them go."

"But they'll have to go, wont they?" asked the salesman.

But Bob Arnold had turned to the dog; he spoke, half to the dog and half to the man: "How about it? Have to go, eh? All those sheep! We would have to drive them out of the water. No boats and nothing to drive them to. It would be the devil's own job. How about it, Rex? Yes, we'll take old Rex with us. We've pulled off many a trick before. Mebbe—now, I wonder—"

OUTSIDE, lights were flashing and men were hurrying down to the river. Upstream, two fitful lights were bobbing up and down on the sweeping current. By the time Bob and the traveling man had come to the banks, the boats were close enough to hail.

"Ou, là!" came a call from Jean la Jennette. "Zat tam dog! Mebbe so she comes back, eh?"

"Yes," called Bob. "We've got Rex right here with us, Jean. Bring that boat to the shore. Hurry, now! How many boats have you got? Why the two lights?"

"We catchum two boats," called the Basque, bringing the boat in. "Zat is wat you call ze luck. Now mebbe so we get ze Mrs. Weston and mebbe so ze piano also. *Mon Dieu!* But she rains!"

Bob Arnold stepped into the boat. He took the oars and sent Jean to the stern to hold the dog. The drummer crowded into the other boat. Out in the stream they could see the light blazing on the Weston ranchhouse. Some one on the bank called out to Bob Arnold.

"Can you save them?"

"We can get the Westons, all right," called Bob out of the rain. "But we'll have a hard time with the sheep. I am going to try and save them."

That was all; the oars dipped into the water, and they were out in the stream. Followed a rugged pull while they were in the faster water of the main stream; but when they came to the calmer waters that had spread over the marshlands, the work was easy. In a few minutes they had grounded in the shallow water that was lapping the imperiled building. Bob called. A light flickered in one of the windows, and the door opened.

"That you, Mr. Arnold?"

Two figures stood in the doorway—a man and a woman. Through the open door Bob could see the hastily gathered treasures heaped upon the floor. Out near the corrals the half-drowned sheep were bleating pitifully. There was no time to lose.

"Yes, this is Bob! We're here. We got your message a few minutes ago and came right over."

"Thank God!" It was the woman's voice. Bob had climbed out of the boat and was wading toward the porch; but before he had reached it, the woman had her things out and was ready to embark. The other men came in, and the belongings of the Westons, all that could be taken, had been tucked and stowed into the two boats. Mr. and Mrs. Weston came into the boat with Bob Arnold. Still the sheep kept up their bleating. The call was enough to stir pity in the coldest breast. Bob Arnold turned his searchlight on the cold, immobile pack. A thousand slitted eyes glared back a silent appeal. Mrs. Weston, huddled among the baggage, gave a low cry:

"Oh, the poor things! My darlings! They will have to drown. Isn't there a thing we can do?"

"We can try, at least," said Arnold. "God can't condemn a man for trying. We certainly sha'n't let them go like this."

The dog, sitting in the stern with Jean la Jennette, had hearkened to that cry. It was against his nature to sit still when sheep were in distress. He was whining and looking up at his master for the word. Suddenly he began licking the face of Jean la Jennette.

"Non, non!" said the Basque. "Sit

down. For why you be ze fool an' cut up ze monkey-shine?"

BOB had swung the boat about so that they were close to the bleating pack. Here was the residue of a fortune—all that was left of the Westons' gamble—waiting to go down under the slow volume of the river's rise. The flood lapped along the edge of the flock and seeped under the sedge of the matted wool. As Bob Arnold played his flashlight, the pack undulated and stirred. Again the dog whined and began pulling back out of the arms of Jean la Jennette. Looking over his shoulder, Bob Arnold noticed the dog's eagerness.

"Jean," he said, "is there any way we can handle them? Do you think Rex—"

But the old Basque interrupted him. *"Ou, là!"* he said. "Zat tam dog, she want for to do somezings, for sure! Mebbe so she feels like ze fish. Now for sure ze sheep will be run in ze river. *Ou*—what ze hell!"

The dog had wriggled out of his arms and had fallen with a splash into the flood; the next instant he was swimming alongside of the boat with just his nose sticking out of the water; before they had time to reckon, he had struck the shallows and was wading toward the flock. Then came a rustle among the sheep, and a whir, as the edge of the flock began streaking its way through the water.

"Good!" called Bob Arnold. "Rex knows more than we do. Leave it to Rex! Now, if he can only get them started. Here, you in that boat! Work your way over to the left. We'll take to the right. Jean, you get out and help Rex. When the water gets too high, we'll pick you up. The dog knows what to do. If he can work them off this high piece of ground, they just have to swim or drown. Then all we've got to do is to help him herd them to the shore. Good old Rex!"

"Oh," said Mrs. Weston, "can we do it? Oh, if we only could? Can we?"

"You mean can Rex do it?" Bob Arnold spoke encouragingly. "I think he can. I never saw anything yet that he and old Jean couldn't do with a flock of sheep. All right, Jean—can you make it?"

Jean was stamping through the water behind the sheep, shouting and calling to the working shepherd. As ever, now that he had come to a time of extreme difficulty, he was calling out in his favorite Iberian. At each command of the strange tongue the dog stopped, twisted, or turned around. The sheep were moving in swift, sullen swish through the water. Jean was working them to the left, where they would be nearest to the firm lands of the bank. As Bob waved his light, they could see the head of the flock stampeding and being eaten up and swept along by the current. Behind the pack was the old dog, and to the left was Jean la Jennette. Everything was coming out right. The only thing to do now was to keep the sheep from being waterlogged. A sheep is a fair swimmer for only a short distance; they would have to keep them moving. Bob shouted to the traveling man who was in the other boat. An excited call came back—a cry that proved that the city man was getting the kick of his lifetime. Jean was calling at the dog, and the dog was bearing in with the rear of the flock. As the last sheep took the flood, the dog struck out along the side, swimming and edging them, as much as he was able, toward the other shore. Jean la Jennette called to Bob Arnold.

"Ou, là!" he shouted as the boat veered up. "Never you beat zat tam dog. See! She drives ze sheep right through ze water! Zat tam dog, she know. If one sheep go, ze whole flock, she go right along also. Rex, she know it. Zat is ze way wiz ze sheep. For sure ze father of zat tam dog must have been ze fish. *Ou, là là, monsieur!"*

THERE was no time for more. Swift strokes brought the boats alongside the head of the flock. Lights had been strung along the shore; and the sheep, out of instinct, headed toward them and safety. In fifteen more minutes they had scampered up the banks, and wet and weary, were resting on the soggy plain. Then it was that Mrs. Weston and her brother had their delayed greeting. And it was a greeting of great relief.

But it was Jean la Jennette who had the greatest triumph. When Mrs. Weston and her brother came upon him, he was holding the old dog about the neck and sobbing his endearments.

He looked up and saw the drummer. "See, monsieur," he cried triumphantly. "He saves ze lady, and he saves ze sheep. *Ou, là!* Is it not so? Zat tam dog, now, mebbe so she's worth ze thirty cents. *Mon Dieu!* Mebbe so ze smart Monsieur would like to buy heem for ze sausage! Wat ze hell!"

The Sword of Sophocles

The surprising story of Maizie the impertinent, her sarcastic boss old Nutmeg, and of divers other interesting persons involved in the strange affair.

By VIOLA BROTHERS SHORE

OLD Nutmeg is the kind of a bird that if his wife only saw him every other Palm Sunday, she'd be getting too much of his company. So when Mrs. Megg came in looking extra white and with red eyes, and closed his door behind her, I didn't imagine it was because she couldn't wait till evening for the sight of his face. And I reckoned I was missing something, sticking around that outside office.

If Mrs. Megg would rub up an acquaintance with a box of Bloom of Health and have a little eye-to-eye talk, as you might say, with a small quantity of mascara, she'd be a real stunner. She looks very nice in the kind of plain black suits she wears with some real lace sticking out in front and one of those little black hats that you think is the Budget's Friend till you go to buy them. And she has the best-looking feet I ever saw except in a looking-glass.

Well, I lifted up the wad of hair I used to wear in those days to keep my pearly ears from getting cracked, and plastered the little old shell-like against old Nutmeg's door. But first I planted a nickel on the floor where it could grow into something for me to be looking for in case somebody busted into the office and found me squatting there on my busy afternoon in what you might call an incumbent position.

"Circumstantial evidence!" Old Nutmeg was sneering; and say, that boy would rather be sarcastic than President. I knew what *that* was about, and I was glad I wasn't brought up with any false shame about listening at keyholes. "I've told you a hundred times I don't believe it possible for a man to have got himself in such a mess if his hands were perfectly clean!"

"Sophocles! *Don't* let's go all over that again," she began—and then the damn telephone had to ring.

It was old man Yudelmann. His sister was going to be married in a couple of months, and he had to call up that minute to invite me, Maizie Plum, to the wedding.

Mr. and Mrs. were invited too, and if we didn't come, my Godfrey! When all the other builders in the city are hibernating for the winter, as you might say, H. Yudelmann is toying with a string of tenements, or maybe trifling with a mere block of duplexes. Any architect that lands H. Yudelmann can eat his pie with a gold knife. And it looked as if it was going to be a gold knife for Nutmeg. God knows we needed him, because we didn't have as much as a draftsman left in our outfit. Old Nutmeg would lay off the Angel Gabe himself if he didn't have a good day's tooting ahead. And the firm of Sophocles Megg, Architect, consisted of he and I. So when our one You Lamb of a prospect called up for a little josh, I can assure you, Claribel, I did not slam up the receiver. He's a square old duffer, all except his head and his stomach, and I always liked him, but not so much at that minute.

OF course I promised to go to the wedding out in Brussels Junction, N. J. I'd have promised to go to Halifax without even knowing what State it's in. But after he rang off, I didn't waste much time polishing off the receiver. When I hit my keyhole again, things were moving along.

"You *must* take him back," Mrs. was saying. She has one of those low, throbby voices, and when she gets going, it sounds swell—like an actress.

"Is that so?" inquires old Nutmeg, real pleasant. "Let Dennis take him back."

"Oh, Soph! He wouldn't go back to Dennis—"

"No—Dennis wouldn't have him. And neither will I. I'm not taking on any men now. Business doesn't warrant it."

"Business!" (You'd think it was a bitter almond, the way she got rid of it.) "When my brother's happiness, his future, is at stake! Even in business there must be *some* sentiment!"

"Darn little sentiment he showed when he quit me to go with Dennis for a few extra dollars."

"That's not so. You wouldn't advance him, and Dennis offered him what looked like a good chance."

"Well, then—"

"Don't be so hard on him, Sophocles. The boy's in trouble. Your taking him back now will mean to the rest of the world that you—"

"That I'm the sucker."

"Please—please! You *know* he's innocent. You *know* my brother André never did a dishonest thing—"

"Nobody's brother ever did, Claire."

"But even in the eyes of the law, he is not guilty! They dismissed the indictment—"

"Well, then, what are you crying about?"

"But the shadow of that indictment will hang over him until the guilty man is found. Even then there will always be people who will only remember that he *was* indicted. The papers gave so much space to that. And they barely mentioned when it was dismissed. Oh, it's all so cruel—so unjust."

"Well, padding pay-rolls is a pretty bad business, and they certainly had a strong case against him—"

"Surely you should be all the kinder to a man about whom circumstances have woven such a cruel web. Oh, we've gone over and over this—"

"Well, as I told you, I don't take any stock in this circumstantial evidence. I don't say he stole the money. But you can't convince me a man could be such a damn fool as to put his foot in a thing like that without knowing anything about it. Strikes me he's damn lucky he had a limp and a Croix de Guerre to get him off—"

"Stop! I can't bear it! You just want to torture me!" Then she caught herself with a little choke and changed her course. "Soph, I know in your heart you really mean to give him a chance. I told him you would. In fact, I told him you wanted to see him—about taking him back—today."

"Oh—you *did!*" He changed his voice too. "My dear Claire, *who* is running this business?"

"Just take him on for a while. You've always admitted he had ability. Think what it will mean to him. Oh, if you'd do this for me, there isn't anything I wouldn't do for you in return!"

"Would you stop mooning about your lover—your François?"

"Oh! How dare you!"

"I'm not blind. When you hear his name, you go white. When he passes on the street, you go red. And sometimes I can see you thinking about him just as if his picture was painted in your eyes!"

WELL, that part of the argument was old stuff, and besides, it always made me feel bad. I know what it is to go all white and trembly and have the breath

scoot out of your chest just because somebody comes in the door. I was pretty white and trembly that minute myself, seeing who walked into the outside office.

This François was Mrs. Megg's sweetie when she was a kid in France, and he followed her over here, but it was too late. Her mother had her married to old Nutmeg. And the old prune never misses a chance to give her a jab about it. And the worst of it is, they're such noble boobs they don't even see each other. I, personally, if *I* was soft over one of these Françoises, and he left me stay hooked to a mean, tight, sarcastic prune like old Nutmeg, I wouldn't stay soft very long. But maybe Frenchwomen are different. She did want to get a divorce once, but old Nutmeg wouldn't leave her. Not that he gives a hoot about her. He don't care about anything except if the first water was thrown off of the cullyflower and what kind of starch does the laundry use on his collars. He's only afraid a good housekeeper would cost him more and want every other Sunday off. That man's got more kinds of cussedness in his head than any other mule has in his hind legs.

Well, there was André at the door, looking like the guest of honor at a spiritualist seance, with his blue eyes all watery and his clothes hanging off him like his mother bought them for him to grow in. And his limp worse than ever. I hadn't seen him in ages. He used to look different in his blue uniform with his decorations and his little pointy mustache when we both first came to work for old Nutmeg. I wasn't the only typewriter-juggler that looked after him in those days, *I'll* tell the District Attorney.

I was so nervous I dropped that darn nickel twice, and he had to come over and pick it up for me, and that didn't cure my nervousness none. And when I finally went in to old Nutmeg, my legs felt like jelly when it aint precisely a success.

Mrs. Megg came out, and I told old Nutmeg about Yudelmann. And then I inquired, "You aint gonna take *him* back, I hope?"—meaning André.

"What do you mean?" he began, but I held him with my glittering eye.

"I mean I wont stand for it, because if business is good enough for you to take on men, I want that raise you been holding out on me."

"Miss Plum, *who* is running this office, I'd like to know?"

"Far be it from me," says I, "to keep any such valuable information from you. We're both running this office, you and me inclusive. And if you could have got anyone half as good as me for twice the money, you'd have done it long ago. Only there isn't anyone else you could rely on and pick on and save money on like me!"

"Indeed!" says he, very sarcastic. "I marvel that such a paragon consents to stay where she is so undervalued. Pray tell me, Miss Plum, why do you remain here?"

"Some day I will, dearie, and shock you into something like life." But out loud I only said: "Look here, old Nutmeg—"

"Here! Don't you call me that."

"I don't call any man nothing behind his back that I wouldn't call him to his face, and I always call you that behind your back. So listen. If you take that Willie boy on, you can move his drafting board right in your own office, because I don't thrive very well in jail air—"

"Listen here, young woman, you're going too far. I stand a great deal from you, heaven only knows why. But when you presume to tell me—"

"I aint telling you nothing except if you put that Frenchman out here, I'll make his life so miserable he'll wish they'd kept him in jail."

A LIGHT came in old Nutmeg's green eyes that didn't increase his beauty none. He's a bald little runt with skin like a dried apricot—no offense to the apricot. There isn't one nice thing about that man, and I'm glad of it, like the fella says, because if there was, I might like him, and I hate the son of a gun.

I'm the only young lady that ever stayed in his office more than two months, and it certainly aint because of any sex lure *he's* got for me. You know how most girls are when their boss gets sarcastic; they either bawl or quit. I just knock him cold with his own dope. When he's human, he calls me Maizie, and we nearly get along together. And when he's his natural hard-boiled self, I call him old Nutmeg just to show him how much I aint afraid of him, and we get along together too—in a way. If Mrs. would only use my dope! All you got to do if you want him to drown is chuck him a life-line and tell him to grab it. What could be easier?

Well, they all come out from the family confab, Mrs. looking nervous and André

very white and kind of licked, and Nutmeg like he always looks when he's enjoying himself—extra mean.

"This will be your desk, André," he says, "the one you gave up to take that *good* job with Dennis. Miss Plum, here, has promised to make you comfortable."

"I thank you," says André with his cute little French accent and one of those cute little French bows. He hasn't been in this country as long as Mrs., and he's kind of foreign yet.

"It's a pleasure, I can assure you," I replied, feeling like the middle of a doughnut, the way I always do in front of André.

"It is really in a measure owing to Miss Plum," the old apricot goes on, "that I decided to give you another chance, André. Miss Plum will be glad to learn the result of her efforts in your behalf, I know—"

"You don't know the eighth of it, dearie," I replied, but not at the top of my voice. It aint always advisable to take the whole world in your confidence.

"And if there's anything you want to know about the office, or for that matter about anything, just ask Miss Plum. Miss Plum is a very wise young woman, aren't you, Miss Plum?"

"There are some people," I replied, not wishing to leave him get away with too much, "that are wise enough to once in a while let on they're damn fools. And then again there are some Wisenheimers that get the same effect by acting natural. But that's neither here nor over there. I'd be very glad to be of any help to Mr. du Vivier, but he prob'ly wont need much help from me, working for a boss that's so kind and consid'rate, and helpfulness itself."

WHEN we were alone in the office and André was sitting at his desk pretending to be thinking about something that he wasn't, and I was sitting at my desk pretending to not be thinking about something that I was, I finally got my nerve up to tell him something I'd been wanting to get off my chest for a long time.

"Mr. du Vivier," says I all in a bunch, "I think that whole thing was the darndest outrage I ever heard of, and I'm sure that sooner or later they'll find out the fella that did get that money, which prob'ly was Dennis himself, because nobody in his right mind could possibly believe it was you."

A kind of a chill went over him, and then he lifted up his head and looked at me. I worked in that office over a year with him before—but I swear that was the first time he ever really looked at me.

"Thank you, Miss Plum," he said, but the way he said it and the way his eyes got! I went mushy all over.

"I'm so happy," I blurted very fast, "that you got off, and I'm sure you'll get exonerated, and it wont be long, either, and —and—and I'm awful glad you're back with us again."

He limped over to my desk. "That is good of you, Miss Plum. There are not many, I am afraid, who believe in me."

"Oh, *I al*ways believed in you. And so will everybody some day. And if I was you, I'd try not to think about it any more. Your real friends are with you, and thinking about it isn't going to sell the others any."

He held out his hand, and I put mine in it. Mine was like ice.

"You are the first one—outside—to say that to me—and I cannot tell you how much—it means." The funny part about foreigners is they can get teary without looking foolish. "You are a real friend." He squeezed my hand. "And if I can ever be of service to you—if I can ever prove how grateful I feel—for this—this mark of friendship—"

And then, my Godfrey, do you know what he did? Bent over and kissed *my hand!* I never felt so mortified in my life. And then he turned around and went over to his desk. There I sat, with the place where his mustache touched my hand, burning so that for hours I could feel it and get chills over it, and he walks over to his desk and that's all!

Absolutely all! For weeks I used to wake up in the middle of the night and tell myself it never happened—that he never *did* kiss my hand, that I dreamt the whole thing, and cry myself to sleep. Not that he was up-stage or anything. It was always "Good morning, Miss Plum," and "Good night, Miss Plum," and if he could do me a good turn or save me a step, he'd go out of his way. But he'd have done the same if I'd been sixty-nine or wall-eyed or a man. Never anything personal. Never a bid to lunch or as much as a my-you-look-nice-today look.

Not that I was ever hard to gaze on, just between you and I and the District Attorney. I'm medium size, with gray eyes, and my hair used to be the shade—well, the shade you can only get after fifteen minutes in the henna regular. I got a

figure good enough to be a sixteen misses model in a commercial photographer's, and that ought to prove that my face aint exactly a clock-stopper, neither.

I gave up the model game because there was no future in it, and I had a good head inside as well as out, and I wanted to use it. So I took a business course, and when I came out of the school, they sent me up to fill the chronic vacancy at Megg's that nobody else would take a whack at if it was the only thing between them and the bread-line. And in Megg's office I ran across André with his blue uniform and his blue eyes and his decorations and his limp, just out of the army and holding a job there, so I thought I'd do the same. All of which aint exactly included in old Nutmeg's education.

Well, I got to figuring maybe André thought I was just a part of the office fixings, and if he could ever see me outside of the office, he might *see* me. But how was I to do that with a man that wouldn't even walk over to the subway with me, when I did everything excepting send him an engraved invitation to?

So I got the idea of going over to Megg's of a Sunday when I knew he was there, so he could realize I had some talents outside of licking stamps. Well, that was the mangiest idea I ever had in my life—although it did open my eyes to what really was the trouble between he and I. My Godfrey, I didn't have any culture at all in those days!

IT was a Sunday, and I took some blue-prints out to old Nutmeg's house somewhere at the tail end of Brooklyn, and I will say Brooklyn has its tail farther away than most other places. When I got there, they had a house full of company, and Mrs. invited me to stay, which I did. And had one hell of a time, *I'll* tell the District Attorney. I'd have died if it hadn't been for a lawyer friend of André's—Clifford Keane, who is a dead ringer for the ad with the curly hair, but one peach of a fella just the same, and I always liked him.

The women took to me like I was the black pledge. It's a wonder they didn't get chilled blains on the end of their noses. But most of the men stuck around, laughing at everything I said. And of course the more they laughed, the more I said. You know how it is when your line goes over big. André was upstairs with Nutmeg going over the blue-prints, and Mrs. was sitting at the piano, but not playing. Then all of a sudden in the middle of something I looked up and caught her eye, and say, it struck me like a tornado that she was *sorry* for me! And then it hit me a wallop between the eyes. "Oh, my Godfrey, I'm clowning, and they're laughing *at* me!" Not one soul in that room was with me except Clifford Keane and Mrs. Megg, and they were sorry for me. I was in the wrong pew all along, and I didn't even know it!

Clifford Keane drove me home in his auto. For that, he can have a call mortgage on me for the rest of my life. I'd have walked under a trolley if he hadn't. I nearly died from shame.

It was three days before I could look André in the face. What they said about me behind my back, heaven only knows, and my standing up there aint so good I'd hear about it. Not that André acted any different than before. I guess it didn't hit him with any jolt that I was different than him. He always knew it.

At last I mustard up my courage and spoke to him. "Mr. du Vivier," I said, "I want to learn to be a lady."

"But my dear Miss Plum, you are—"

"No, listen: You once said if you could do me a favor, you'd be glad to. Well, I got nobody else can do this for me excepting you. I want you to learn me how to be a lady." (That's the kind of English I used to sling in those days. "Learn me!" Would you believe it?)

"But Miss Plum—" he began again.

I was desp'rate. "Mr. du Vivier, there's a gen'leman I know, and he don't—well, he don't notice me much—take me places or nothing; and I got a hunch it's because I aint a lady."

"But—but he must be a cad."

"No—oh, no! Looka here, Mr. du Vivier, if *you* were interested in me, would *you* be willing to take me places—and introduce me to people?"

"But of course! Why not?"

"Well, maybe he would, too. I guess he just isn't interested. But even if he asked me, I wouldn't feel comf'table meeting his friends. Mr. du Vivier, do you think I could learn to be like your sister, or can't it be learnt, or am I just too dumb?"

He looked at me the way he did the day he kissed my hand—sort of soft and deep.

"Why not?" he said, to himself, like, with that funny little jerk to his shoulders. "I will do anything in my power to help you, if you so wish, Miss Plum."

I got a lump like a hard-boiled egg in my throat.

"Would you mind calling me Maizie?" I asked him. "I just hate being Miss Plum."

"If you are going to be a society lady, you will have to be Miss Plum." He smiled. Then he got serious again. "But I do not see why you wish to make yourself over. You are very sweet the way you are —and very piquante, Maizie."

It took all the remembering I could to keep me from slipping.

"You're very kind, I can assure you. But I think my gen'leman friend would like me better if I wasn't so—so—whatever I am, André!"

"I do not know why you have selected me," he said. "However, if I can be of service, I am happy. You are a very sweet girl, Maizie, and if it is your wish, we will try to make a *grand dame* of you. And the first time he takes you out, your gentleman friend, you will let me know, will you not?"

"The first time he takes me out, you'll be the first to know about it," says I. "Shake."

And we shook.

WELL, the first thing he begun on was my hair! Can you beat it? Every hairdresser I ever went to said: "Girly, you got some ceiling-decoration there." I swear, a regular set of Pickfords, only a better color. First it was the buns I had to amputate. I used to go to sleep with those muffins on my ears so in case there was a fire I wouldn't wake up feeling naked. Then he got after the color. I thought I'd die of pneumonia after a shampoo without my fifteen minutes in the henna! And say, my hair went from bad to brown.

He was death on all complexion except a little powder on the nose; so the next thing that went was my Bloom of Health. The first day I looked at myself made up the new way, I cried for a week. Well, I made up my mind if all else fails, there is always Ringling, and a good freak don't ever need to starve. But André said it was a great improvement. So for a coupla days I went around looking awful sick. But then I noticed I could get away with a little Bloom of Health. So I began to convalesce. But I never got so healthy he asked me any question about the prescription.

Then he commenced on my clothes. It was hard at first, but I kept making believe I was Mrs. Megg ten years ago. And the first time I saw myself in a blue tailor-made, very sweet and girlish with a rolled-up sailor and a rolled-down collar, I said to myself: "Maizie, what a good sport always does is admit when they're licked. And there may be something in this, after all." Even old Nutmeg remarked: "What are you doing with yourself these days, Maizie? You look like you were planning to go off to a boarding-school."

Well, soon the kind of clothes I used to wear before began to jar on my nervous system, and I got unpopular with some of my girl friends because of not being particular about keeping it to myself. But you know when you've got taste, you criticise the ones that haven't, because otherwise how does anybody know you've got it? Everywhere I went, more women looked at me and less men, so I knew I was on the right track. And not that I want to pin any gardenias on myself, but what used to come back at me from the plate glasses along Fifth Avenue didn't make me blush or anything.

I wonder what my poor mother (God rest her soul!) would say if she could have seen me learning English from a la-de-da teacher at night-school! Me that they only graduated out of public school because it was either that or get a new nervous system for the teacher. I was the la-de-da's pet, all right, and I read everything he said except Addison's essays and that kind of junk, and I did everything he said, even cutting out slang. But not all! My Godfrey, if you cut out all slang, what would there be left to talk with?

I got to seeing less and less of my girl friends. They said I was stuck up. But gee whiz! They threw monkey-wrenches in my English, and they talked loud in the movies, and I used to be scared to death André might be around and hear it. And besides, I don't understand how I used to have a good time going on bum parties with a bunch of yaps that laugh a lot over nothing, and the more nothing it is, the more they laugh over it.

WELL, what does Yudelmann's chauffeur do one fine day, but spill all about what happened the night of the wedding. And what does Yudelmann do but blow up and spatter all over the place, and writes Nutmeg one hell of a letter which I happened to see lying on his desk when I hap-

pened to be looking for some pins. And in the letter he tells Nutmeg not to bother figuring on any more of *his* work, and he don't need to trouble to go on with the preliminary plans for the Jamaica bungalows, neither.

My first thought was "Poor André!" His heart and soul was in those Jamaica bungalows, and he was all full of new ideas that he knew Yudie'd be crazy about. And when he came out of Nutmeg's office a little later, I knew by his face something terrible must have happened, and it was poor André, for fair.

When he took his hat from the rack, I got a hunch. "If he goes out that door, it's prob'ly the last *I'll* ever see of him." So I asked him would he go to lunch with me—because I never had any lessons handling table jewelry, and what would I do if my Mr. X. took me to the Ritz sometime?

We went to a little tea room on Fortieth Street where you go down a couple of steps and through the house, and in the yard they have it all fixed up with awnings and tables. The view wasn't any tourists' delight, and every now and then a caterpillar would drop down my back, but that was *the* lunch of *my* young life, *I'll* tell the District Attorney.

I was feeling so lit up on account of being out with him, it must have been catching, because soon I saw by the bubbles that he was coming up for air too.

By and by he sighed. "I shall miss you, Maizie."

My heart turned a somersault into my stomach. "You're canned?" I asked him, keeping my foot on the brakes.

He made a funny little mouth. "Completely canned."

"Good!" said I, more cheerful than honest. He looked at me as if my brain was unbuttoned. "André, I got an idea. Yudelmann likes you, don't he?"

"Well, may*be*—"

"Don't be so darn modest. You know he had you out to his house, and everything. André, don't you think it's a shame somebody else is going to do those Jamaica bungalows?"

HONEST, tears nearly came to his eyes. That man loves bungalows the way I love janitors' babies. It's an absession. He sighed again. "Too bad Sophocles quarreled with him."

"Sophocles didn't quarrel with him, for the simple reason he didn't get a chance to. He merely stepped on Yudie's feelings where it hurt the most—in the seat of his hospitality. But that's not here nor over there. What I was going to say was, why don't you go around and see Yudelmann? You know what he wants. And he's sure to fall for some of those grand new ideas of yours. If you could get his work! Why, if you could only get the Jamaica bungalows—"

"But—but would that be ethical?"

"The pig's ear! You don't owe Nutmeg much. He only took you on because Mrs. wouldn't give him any peace, and he fired you to shoot off some of this own spite. Those contracts will go to somebody, wont they? What difference can it make to Nutmeg who gets the work if he can't? Andy, I got a hunch—I mean I have a feeling. Go over and see Yudelmann. And if you land him—Andy, wouldn't you like to start in for yourself?"

He looked up around the awning at the sky, and his eyes were the exact same color. "Start for myself! We have been talking about it, Clifford and I, and he thinks I should. He even offered to advance me money—"

"Bully for Cliff! But if you land Yudie, you wont need him. You'll have a business that'll be a self-starter. Andy, if you go in for yourself, would you give me a job?"

"I'd give you anything in the world—" he commenced. "But you wouldn't leave Sophocles?"

"I wouldn't? To tell you the truth, I got no reason for staying with him any longer. He gets on my nerves. You know, I'd pay my own salary till we got going if you'd give me a little interest in the business. I always wanted to be in a business of my own. Say, Andy, would you do that?"

He leaned across the table toward me. "Child, how could I let you do that? Leave a good position—"

"Of course," said I, "if you think I'm trying to first myself on you—"

"Oh, Maizie! For myself, I should be happy to have you with me—"

"Then it's a go?" I busted in before he could talk himself out of it.

"As far as I am concerned, it is a go. But your family, Maizie—"

"Got no family."

"And your friends?"

"Got no friends."

"Your gentleman friend?"

"You don't say 'gentleman friend,'" I told him. "You say, 'My friend Mr. X.' He wouldn't care. He doesn't know I'm alive."

"But you are fond of him?"

"I'm crazy about him."

"Why do you not let him see you care for him?"

"I haven't exactly kept it hid."

"Then what is the matter with the man? Is he blind?"

"Well," I said, "everybody is got at least one blind spot, and I guess I'm his."

"But doesn't he ever take you anywhere?"

"Oh, yes. He took me out to lunch once."

"Well, then! And you said something about the Ritz?"

"Oh, *that*," says I. "He wouldn't take me there *yet*. You see, that's the whole trouble. I'm trying to get so I'll be good enough for him."

"Good enough?" He gave a laugh that was as funny as an ad for health underwear, and began to yank his little brown mustache. "I should like to meet him sometime, this—this *gen*-tel-man for whom you are not good enough! Do not be so foolish, Maizie! You are good enough for any man, and anyone who would be ashamed to take you to the Ritz or any other place is not a man—he is the son of a camel, and you should not waste even a thought on him. Good enough!" And he commenced to cuss in French under his breath. There's something about a good cuss that you can recognize in any language. I changed the subject.

"If you get the order," I suggested, "don't you think you ought to blow the firm to supper, to celebrate?"

"Fine! Absolutely! Where would the firm like to dine?"

"Well, this is a nice place."

"This? I should say not. The Ritz! Yes? The Ritz it shall be!"

"If you get the order."

"If I get the order or not. You do not realize what you have done for me today, Maizie. A hundred dinners could not repay you. An hour ago I was not willing to go on living. Now I am full of courage —of hope—of life. You have that effect on me, Maizie. Like electricity! *Alors!* I go to see Yudelmann at once—immediately. And I will let you know on the telephone what comes. But no matter what comes, tonight we dine. At the Ritz! And Maizie, I hope he will be there to see you—this *gen*-tel-man for whom you are not good enough!"

"Maybe he will," says I and added to myself: "In fact, I think he's beginning to see me already."

THAT afternoon old Nutmeg pulled his pet line on me just once too many.

"If I were you," he says, very sarcastic, "I wouldn't stay in an office where I was so undervalued."

"Thank God here's once," says I, starting for my hat, "where you and I think the same about something."

"Now, wait a minute," he backs down. "There's no use in doing anything hasty, Maizie. You've always had an easy job here. Of course, I can't afford to give you any more money just now, but when the time comes, you know you can rely on me to do the right thing. Haven't I always been more than fair?"

"Yes, you have. What the weather bureau calls fair! No, I'm through. You ought to be able to get lots of girls just looking for an *easy* job like this. For me, I'm going some place where I'll have to work hard, just so's I don't lose my speed sitting around all day."

When he saw I was really going, he pulled another pet line. "I really marvel why you remained here as long as you did!"

"I always thought," I replied, "that I'd tell you some day. But I changed my mind. You wouldn't understand, anyway."

André and Clifford nearly died laughing when I told them about it at dinner. *An* dinner, *I'll* tell the inquiring public, with Clifford and André in the soup-to-nuts, and me in my V-in-front C-in-back. But we had more important things to talk about than Nutmeg, like André getting in right with Yudelmann. Yudie is as soft as a baby, with all his being such a good business man. And if he likes you, you can have his shirt—*if* he knows he's going to get it back again with maybe a little loose change in the pocket. He was grand to André. But I knew he would be, not wishing to dislocate my arm patting myself on the back. Nobody could help liking André, and if he only had a business head, he'd be made. But then, a firm don't need too many business heads.

A firm. Get that? André du Vivier, Inc. Me and Clifford are the Inc.

Clifford was to look after all the business details, and André and me were going to pay our own salaries the first while. And maybe we didn't have enough to talk about all through that dinner without worrying about Nutmeg. But finally Clifford came back to him:

"Wonder what the trouble was between Sophocles and Yudelmann?"

"You wouldn't need to die wondering," I told him, "but I carry me guilty secret to the grave, if not for my promising Nutmeg I'd never tell."

"Then you know?" inquires André.

"Tell us," Clifford began, but André interrupted him.

"No. If Maizie has given her word—"

"But I'm her attorney. She can tell me anything. You can go take a walk around the block if you—"

"Besides," I remembered, "I didn't exactly give my word. Nutmeg only warned me never to tell, or I'd get in trouble."

"*You'd* get in trouble?"

"Yes. I was mixed in it too."

"You—mixed in?" That seemed to worry André.

BUT Clifford wasn't worried. "Oh, come on, tell us." Lawyers are the nosiest people in the world. It seems the more dirt they got to listen to, the more they want to hear.

"Well, if you'll see it doesn't get any further, I'll tell you the whole yarn." And a darn good yarn it is, *I'll* tell the Tax Department.

You see, Mrs. didn't want to go to Brussels Corners to any wedding, so there was only Nutmeg and me. I came down to the office that Saturday with my glad rags all in a suitcase, which I'll admit is not folding pocket size. When Nutmeg saw it, he let out a whoop.

"You're not going to take that trunk along?" says he.

"Well, there'll be no wedding bells for me if I don't," I replied. "My scenery's in it."

"But you don't need anything! You'll be home again tomorrow!"

"Well, I can't go to a wedding in my nightgown, and I can't sleep in my brown net. So lug me, lug my suitcase."

In the end he made me put my dress in his grip, and he put his patent-leather shoes on and made me wear my pumps so as not to make the grip too heavy. Old Nutmeg never was one to strain himself carrying anything, and he'd rather part with a year's growth than a dime for a porter.

Brussels Corners is the kind of a place you have to go to Boomville to get to. And the trains to Boomville are c. o. d.—crowded, oderiferous, dusty. And the bus that met us was f. o. b.—Ford's oldest baby. It was made to hold five, and not more than nine got in, not counting the driver and suitcases. I enjoyed it, but Nutmeg didn't seem to be getting much pleasure out of it—what I could see of him sticking out from under a fat woman and two suitcases.

When we got to the place, it was an old farmhouse with a high, busted piazza running around it, and a lot of female women ditto ditto. And to every woman, there were at least three children and a yard of whiskers. And there was food cooking in that house that didn't care who knew about it.

H. Yudelmann was there, beaming all over his face, and he introduced us to more relations than anybody's got a right to, except a guinea pig. And bless their souls, they were all so glad to see us, and they made such a fuss over us, it would do your heart good. But Nutmeg's got no heart. And besides, nothing could take his mind off that full dress suit he lugged along for nothing.

And then, children don't make any hit with Nutmeg—although some of them were quite clean. And one or two were asleep. And the room he got had three beds in it, and it didn't look as if any of them were going to be empty, and Nutmeg can't sleep if anybody walks in his room an hour before he gets there. So he went to Yudelmann and told him he couldn't bear to crowd them, so he'd put up at the hotel over in Boomville and just drive over for the wedding. But not while H. Yudelmann (*H.* stands for *Hospitality*) knew it.

"Crowd us? Not in the least. We don't have a wedding every day."

So Nutmeg had to come out with the truth about not being able to sleep with anybody else.

"But my dear fellow! I'm glad you told me." And Yudie hustled around and finally found him a room all to himself. He had to chuck somebody else's clothes off of the bed and out in the hall, but he didn't mind.

Only the somebody else did. And it happened to be the bridegroom's rich re-

lations. So their things got put back in the room very apologetic, and Yudie promised to find Nutmeg another room after the show.

SAY, I never saw anything so interesting as that wedding. They had it out on the lawn after sundown, and there was a lot of kids all dressed up with flower-baskets, and they marched the bride around and around with candles till it got nearly dark, and then they held up a do-dad all made out of branches and flowers for them to get under, and they had a long, long service with a lot of singing. Everybody was either singing or crying or both, and the neighbors were gaping over the fence.

I was sitting on a stone fence and crying too, and enjoying it swell. But Nutmeg was afraid of soiling his pants, so he stood first on one patent leather and then the other, getting crabbier by the minute, and the wrinkles in his forehead looking like chunks cut out of a tombstone. If that man ever found himself really enjoying anything, it would spoil his day for him.

After the show they had a grand supper, but old Nutmeg didn't eat a mouthful. He can't stand onions. Not that everything had onions. Some had garlic. Gee! Nutmeg looked more and more like thirteen at the table, and I guess he'd have packed up his tent like the Arab and silently sneaked away if not for being right next to Yudie, who was having the time of his life on celery tonic and thought so was everybody else.

After the eats there was dancing—mostly by the children; and Nutmeg tackled Yudie again about the hotel, but Yudie said he'd never forgive him, and he found a coupla people that had a room to themselves, and they were *poor* relations of the groom's, so he threw them out and gave it to Nutmeg. Only it was right next to the dancing, and take it from me, there was a sound of revelry by night. Even between the dances when everybody was only talking and calling their babies, it wasn't exactly a deep silence. And Nutmeg can't sleep if the clock ticks in the attic.

I saw him disappear while I was dancing, and I was figuring on him enjoying the silent night, when suddenly it struck me about my things being in his suitcase, so I went and knocked on his door. Then I knocked again. Then I tried the door.

"There is chicken in Denmark," I said to myself as I went in and saw the room was perfectly empty and the window open. And what struck me even furthermore, there was no suitcase there, neither. I went quietly out of that house and snooped around, and in a little summerhouse by the road, I found the old apricot, sure enough, looking at his watch. I'll leave you guess which one of us was gladder to see the other.

DO you know what he was going to do? Sneak off and leave me stranded. And do you know what he wanted to do when I caught him with the goods? Dump my things out and I could carry them home in a paper! After me leaving my suitcase home to please him! Can you beat it?

Well, the old fuss-budget wouldn't leave me have the suitcase because I might rune it. Every morning before breakfast I rune a suitcase or two. I begged him to come back. I said: "For one night you can stand it. The old gent's such a prince—how can you take a chance on breaking his heart?"

But he says: "The idea of inviting *me* to an affair like this. *Me!* I'll tell him I left early in the morning. Nothing on earth could make me spend the night in that room. Why, the screens are torn, and there are children near, and you have to bathe in a basin of stagnant water! Of course with a robust young person of your years, it is a different thing."

"Oh, *is* it? Well now, I don't really *enjoy* sleeping in a room with a strange baby that yammers all night. And I don't like mosquitoes and movable plumbing any more than you do. No—he's your customer, not mine. So if you go, I go with you."

When I'm easy, I'm awful easy; and then again I'm not, and he knew it. So he told me he gave Yudie's chauffeur a heavy bribe to meet him after he'd took some people down the road. He slipped him something on account (prob'ly a quarter), and he was going to give him the balance of the two dollars when he got to Boomville.

So I ran up to my room to get my hat and things, and when I got back, the old son of a sea-cook was gone. But I didn't stop developing mentally when I was ten, neither. If an automobile drove up, I could have heard it, and I didn't hear any, so I sneaked along the road, and sure enough I found the old stew lurking in the verbiage. And then he told me he heard

some one coming in the summerhouse (which maybe I believed), and anyway the chauffeur was to look for him along the road. So we started on down.

"Do you know the way?" I asked him.

"Yes. There are two ways, and either will get us to Boomville. But the chauffeur told me to take this one."

So we began to hike, him holding the suitcase and me picking out the smooth stones to walk on with my satin pumps. It's four miles to Boomville by automobile, and it's not more than thirty by O'Sullivans, and I ought to know, because I've done it both ways. And the only thing Nutmeg and me met on the way that even looked like a chauffeur was a man on a bicycle that sneaked up on us just as we were passing a cemetery, and didn't increase our pleasure none.

Gee, I never did see a town that looked as good to me as Boomville, N. J., even though God was kind of depressed when He made it. There was only one hotel in it. But one was enough for me. I kicked off my pumps and flopped into a chair while Nutmeg began ringing a bell loud enough to wake the dead. But they aint dead in Boomville—only paralyzed. So then he went in the booth and got Central to call the hotel. Many are called, but few wake up in Boomville, N. J.

WELL, miradges aren't nearly so beautiful in real life as they are in poetry. And hiking four miles in pumps for a bed, and then not even getting a close-up of one, made me very temperamental. I commenced to cry. I was crying for the bed I left behind at Yudelmann's. I even cried for the baby. I could have slept through twins. Finally Nutmeg went up through the hotel trying doors, and the only ones that would open weren't bedrooms. But at last he found one and came down for me and the suitcase.

I was that dead I didn't wait to undress —just threw myself on the bed and pulled up a cover and said: "If God wants me to get up out of this bed tonight, He'll have to come and tell me so Himself," when there was a knock on the door. I turned my back and left old Nutmeg to face his Maker alone.

But it was only the proprietor. He couldn't hear all that ringing, but as soon as there was a light in a room that was supposed to be empty, he could hear two dollars getting away from him, and he came to inquire. Nutmeg started in telling him a yarn about how we got stranded, but he says:

"It's all right. This room belongs to a friend of mine who's gone out of town for the night. I haven't another vacant in the house. Make yourselves at home. Any luggage you want brought up?"

"No. This one grip is all we have."

"All right, then. I'll leave you. And I hope your wife will be comf'table."

We looked at each other. "This is so sudden," says I.

"Don't be flippant, young woman. If this is the only vacant room in the house, we are fortunate to have him think so. With only one suitcase, we might have had—"

But I was too tired to listen to all the hot water we might have been in; so I just turned up my toes and left him get as comf'table as he could on a sort of sofa. Which wasn't very, judging how cranky he got up in the morning. And the proprietor soaked him six dollars for the room, and breakfast was so slow we had to go off without our coffee so as to not miss our train, and then the proprietor called him back and made him register, and we had to run all the way to the depot.

And the richest part was the chauffeur coming around for his two dollars! He was on the right road, all right—only we weren't. But you can imagine old Nutmeg giving him the money after he hiked those four miles in his patent leathers lugging that grip. More likely he asked him for his quarter back. Well, of course the chauffeur got mad, and he began grumbling, and sure enough the whole thing came out, and Yudelmann was as sore as a one-armed flute-player with a bite.

"My God!" said Clifford suddenly, out of the clouds, "You mean to say he registered in that hotel for you as his wife?"

"Sure. He had to—"

He took out his notebook. "What was the name of the hotel? Boomville—"

"Wait a minute. What are you getting at, Clifford?" André wanted to know. I was scared. Nutmeg warned me never to breathe a word about it.

"Why, don't you see, André, what this will mean to Claire and François?"

"Yes, I do see. But you seem to forget Maizie here—"

"But—"

"I forbid you to use what you have just heard."

"But my dear André! Claire—"

"She would forbid you to use it too. You must consider what it would mean to this child—"

"Wait a minute," said I. "What's it all about?"

"I forbid you to tell her. Nothing at all, Maizie—nothing at all."

THAT whole week I was too excited over the new office to think about anything else. We had on the door ANDRE DU VIVIER INC. It was the first time I ever was an Inc., and it kept me pretty busy. After I had things running right, I took a little time off and came in late one morning. And there was my boss walking up and down with his watch in his hand, like he was going to fire me.

"Where were you?" he exploded when I came in. "My God! I thought you must be hurt—in an accident."

"No such luck," I told him. "I just lately paid the premium on my health insurance. No, I was down having a little talk with my attorney."

"Clifford?" I nodded. "What were you talking to Clifford about?"

"Oh, nothing that concerns you or the business."

"Nothing that—Maizie, what was it? Tell me, Maizie. What is it?"

"You foreigners are so darn excitable. If you got to know, I went down to see him about something we were talking about the other night, and I wanted to know what it was all about."

He looked real mad. "You did not need to know."

"Sure I did."

"Well—and—"

"Well, and I told him to go ahead."

"You—*what?*"

"You heard me. Your sister's had a pretty raw deal so far. She's got some happiness coming to her, and I'm glad I'm going to be around when she gets it. So let's not have any more talk about *that.*"

"But Maizie, think! Think what this will mean! Your good name!"

"Clifford says he's sure he can fix it so my name wont be dragged in at all. But if it should, say, I don't have to hang onto the name of *Plum* all my life! I aint so stuck on it."

"Oh, Maizie, this is too—too colossal. You really have not the right. Your family—your friends—your—your Mr. X.! What will he say about it?"

"I don't think he'll cut me dead account of it."

"But—but will he understand?"

"You understand, don't you, André?"

"Of course." He took my hands in his.

"Well, if you understand, that's all that counts. You're my family and friends and my Mr. X. I never had any other."

It seemed like an hour before he got me. He sort of went all to pieces, and I couldn't tell if he was going to laugh or cry. And he kept saying over and over to himself: "Me! No Mr. X.! Maizie!"

Then he begun coming to. "Maizie, Maizie— My God, you don't know what you are saying! You don't know what this means to me. It is wonderful—wonderful! Too wonderful to be true! Before you came in—when I was so worried—afraid something might have happened to you—it came to me—how much you mean to me, Maizie. I am getting so I cannot live without you. And there is no Mr. X.! Oh, Maizie, if I only had a clear name to offer you—"

Was I nervous! "We're both sort of out of luck with names, don't you think?"

HE wasn't following. "Oh, but I have no right. I am under a cloud. I do not know at what moment they may begin again. I am a man under an ax—"

"That's all any of us are, André. Like the fellow in history that had an ax hanging over him by a thread. Like Nutmeg this very minute. We don't any of us know what minute our ax is going to fall. All we can do is enjoy ourselves till it does. André, names don't mean so much if people believe in each other—and if they really like each other. If you really like me, André—"

"Like you?" he whispered. "I adore you."

"Honest? Not because you want to pay me back—for your sister?"

"Pay you?" He choked all up. "Oh, *mon ange,*" he breathed, and kissed my hand!

"André," I said, holding both my hands in back of me where he couldn't get at them, "if I was dying of tuberculosis—t. b. you know—very catching—would you kiss me?"

"Of course, Beautiful!"

"Right on the mouth?"

"Absolutely."

"Well," I said, "if everything else fails, I can always try that."

RED RAIN

The wild Kachins were on the warpath, but Chandler didn't mind that; he was chasing butterflies and he liked it. And then—Mr. Miller, who knows the tropics well, tells you here of the strange thing that happened.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

THE N'ung Shwe crossroads lay just ahead. A grove of huge bushy merions marked it, all hung with yellow fruit like large plums. Professor Chandler took an investigative look-see at his map, then up the road-fork.

"Ramasawmy," he ordered the sleepy Hindoo who drove the bullock-cart with his camp supplies, "the Sahib wants you to turn north, up into those hills—understand?"

"A' right—going, sar!" wailed the Hindoo in his high-pitched whine.

Chandler set off in immediate pursuit of a specimen of *Papilio polymnestor,* a velvet-black butterfly with pale metallic blue bars which he had noted winging toward the merions. His long-handled net waved determinedly after it. A large and eager man, in khaki explorer's kit, he impersonated at that moment the devoted man of science serving his mistress with fanatical ardor. He swooped skillfully at *P. polymnestor,* securing him by a turn of the ring, which closed the net's gauze bag.

Before he had dropped the specimen into a wide-mouthed tin lethal jar hanging in a leather boot over his shoulder, and had transferred it with wings folded to one of the paper envelopes in a box strapped to his belt, the cart had reached the turnout to the north. And here, apparently, trouble was developing, for Chandler saw Gyi Pyo, his Shan *shikari* who carried his hunting rifle, suddenly run around in front of the cart and stop it, waving his arms and vociferating: "No can do! Gov'ment sahib say no!"

Ramasawmy halted his bullocks and wailed. Here were two conflicting orders; his sahib's, who was a man of mighty wraths, telling him to drive north, and Gyi Pyo, whom Ramasawmy feared as the devil himself, saying no can do! "Shiva, Protector of the Poor, have mercy!" wept Ramasawmy.

Professor Chandler ran to the cart.

"What's all this? What sahib says no. Gyi?" he demanded, with his characteris-

tic amused and tolerant smile over the doings of his natives.

"Gov'ment sahib!" retorted Gyi, one hand by force of habit seeking the hilt of the long two-handed Shan sword which crossed his chest on a slant, upheld by a complicated system of green ropes. Gyi, with his legs in enormous baggy yellow silk pants planted wide apart astride the road, looked as solid and immovable as the silent and invisible British Colonial Goverment, which in his humble way he represented.

"It is an order in Rangoon, Chandler Sahib, that no white man may enter those hills," he explained with respectful firmness.

Chandler bit his lip and looked vexedly around the turn up that road, for it led to wild country beyond the Administrative Line in North Burma where he had hoped for great things for the cause of entomology. But a case of Chandler *vs.* the British Government was a rather unhappy thing to contemplate! If there really *was* an order! He looked exasperatedly around toward the cluster of baskety-walled Burmese houses bordering the crossroads. At least there should have been a Sikh policeman in a sentry-hut on guard here if this road led to forbidden territory—*some* human being to talk to and get explanations from! But there was no uniform visible, nothing but that printed order, issued down in Rangoon, closing this district to all white men. Gyi, as *shikari* for parties of British big-game hunters in this district, should know what he was talking about, and he said no!

Chandler was hugely disappointed. He had counted on this trip up into the northern Kachin Hills, for the collections from that region were scanty indeed. But this was wild and wooly North Burma, and so an order like that was not to be ignored with impunity. Physically he was as free as the air to go on up that road. There was no human hand to stop him, unless Gyi himself should become intractable. But morally? An order regarding the public welfare cannot be disregarded for personal reasons; nor could the dignity of his profession be compromised by making himself a trespasser. There are professors and professors, but entomology demands real men, adventurers of high ideals, freely giving life, health and a daring martyrdom for its sake. These are the men whom the unthinking world derisively terms "bug-chasers," forsooth!

WITHAL, Chandler found his own pugnacious character, backed up by a large and stout body, rising up within him to combat this exasperating order. His aggressive gray beard jutted out as he began to argue with the stolid Gyi.

"An order, is it, Gyi? But why?" he demanded, his genial gray eyes looking down with humorous tolerance on the short and stubborn Gyi.

"Wild jungly Kachin country, sahib. Will kill!" explained Gyi, making the sign of throat-cutting with his forefinger.

Chandler snorted derisively. He was used to going alone into all sorts of dangerous native regions.

"Preposterous!" he barked amusedly. "That's all right, Gyi—I never saw black men yet who wouldn't run when they saw this stout—not to say fat—white sahib waving his net!" he grinned. "They all think I must be some kind of devil! Drive on, Ramasawmy!" And he waved at the perturbed Hindoo.

"Gov'ment sahib say no!" stamped Gyi truculently, and not offering to move out of the road. "Bad white mans will go in there for steal jade from the Kachin mines —no can do!" he attempted to explain.

"You mean that this district is closed because these wild Kachins are hostile to white jade-thieves, eh? Quite right—well and good; but the order does not apply to *me*—see? Here is the sahib's official permit for collecting, Gyi. Good all over Burma, it says. It's all right."

Chandler got out and showed the *shikari* his official permit, impressive in its seals and signatures. The Shan made no further objection, after one awed glance at those evidences of Government. It was beyond him now, and he stepped to one side. Nevertheless—

"Hoo!" he grunted coolly, again making the sign of throat-cutting. "Will kill!" And from that time on, he marched in the rôle of conscientious objector, walking behind instead of in front of the cart, and rumbling audibly in his throat.

THE cart creaked on north. Chandler occupied the time collecting by the roadside; but from the moment he had made that rash and hasty decision, he began to feel a distinct sense of uneasiness and foreboding which increased with every step north. The British Colonial Government was a silent and impersonal antagonist here. It was not stopping him by any physical force

whatever—merely by the moral strength of its veto. Dominated by a policy of noninterference with the natives, its rulings were always practical, but it was not wise to ignore them. Theoretically, if this district was unsafe, it should be policed. Practically—Chandler knew just about how much it *was* policed—by a young assistant commissioner with a file of tame Kachin soldiery at his back, probably stationed on the Irrawaddy ten miles away, who kept an eye on this territory of wild black men as large as a Western State.

The only way to avoid real trouble was to forbid the whole district to white adventurers, who would be sure to get into trouble with the natives and necessitate a punitive expedition of half a brigade from Rangoon.

But Chandler's cart creaked on into stern and silent hills as he hesitated, half inclined to give up and go back, again loath to leave this wonderful country, for scientifically speaking, the march was a huge success. There was *Charaxes kardeni,* a rare pale yellow specimen with double-horned tail that collectors gave months of effort to obtain; there was *P. arjuna,* a beauty in silver blue and black; also *P. demolion,* an uncommon sort with prominent yellow markings on velvet black; and there was *Kallima buxtoni,* an odd one allied to the famous disappearing-leaf butterfly of Sumatra. Only the very rare *Stichtothalma nourmahal,* that large butterfly in pale coffee and rich chocolate-brown leaf-borders was lacking from his major species. Curiously, or perhaps most alarmingly, not a sign of the formidable Kachins themselves had been seen during the afternoon's march.

BUT they managed to send him, unwittingly, a message that gave him *their* side of Chandler *vs.* the British Government. It was just at sunset, while Gyi was putting up the tents and Ramasawmy was down at the banks of a little river near camp, when Chandler heard a scared yell from the Hindoo and with it a growl from Gyi Pyo. Another yell, of real pain this time, was accompanied by sounds of Gyi beating him with a belt buckle for disturbing the Sahib's evening hour. Chandler hurried down to the river at once, for Ramasawmy continued to yell, and any outcry in this region was sure to have sinister meanings.

He met the Hindoo capering with fear back toward camp, his white eyeballs popping out of his black face: *"Ohé,* Sahib! *Ohé*—dead white mans going by, sar! Will kill! Will kill!" he wept.

Chandler brushed by him impatiently, sympathizing with Gyi's efforts to hit him again with the strap, and ran himself to the river-bank. The dead white man was still there, floating solemnly down the current, revolving slowly as the eddies took him. He was naked, and bloated from much sun; and he sprawled out on his back, crucified on a rude cross of padauk beams.

"Hoo!" said Gyi, joining his sahib on the bank. "Bad mans. Jade-thief! Do not the Kachins well by him, Sahib?"

"Ghastly!" muttered Chandler, his good body revolting within him as the Thing whirled slowly downstream and began to enter under the watery bamboo arches of the jungle river. "This settles it, Gyi! It will not do for this sahib to be taken so! The Kachins would not understand that he is not a jade-thief too, and the Government would make trouble with them. Can you find the police-sahib and bring him here to me, quickly?"

"Hai! That can I!" said Gyi with alacrity, the first sign of approval he had given since they had left the main road. "One goes down this river trail. Pipit Sahib, of the police, he is camped on the Irrawaddy, near the mouth of the little river. Is it an order that I bring him, Sahib?"

"Yes, by all means! Tell him this Sahib awaits arrest, Gyi. I cannot leave the cart and outfit, but you can go. Return with him tonight."

GYI did not wait for further instructions but set off at once, following the floating cross and its ghastly burden down the river trail. Chandler stood looking uneasily at his disappearing back. The nude and raw facts of this dead man; the grim irony of that cross, a message to Pipit from the Kachins which might be translated: "This is a Christian, one who steals our jade and abuses our hospitality."

A feeling of brotherhood with Pipit welled up in him, and it entailed an obligation to help this police officer to undo as far as possible the mischief already done. Obviously, the thing to do now, while Gyi was gone, was to reconnoiter the Kachin village and plan a defense, for it was essential for him not to be discovered and

taken. Their community house could not be very far up the little river, or that cross would have been unable to float freely. If it was near enough for ax-strokes and camp noises to be heard through the jungle, the quicker he abandoned everything and followed Gyi down the trail, the better.

Chandler passed the abject Ramasawmy, sniveling with terror among his pots and pans, and went up the dim trail above camp which followed the river bank. He could envisage that Kachin community house, a barbaric structure of thatch on stout posts, long as three barns set end to end, high as the ridge of a three-story house. In it thirty or more black Kachin warriors would be living in the most promiscuous state of piggery, their wives and their children, their sleeping mats and household utensils all in one inextricable mess of ownership. They lived on wild pig and bananas, coming out to the settlements to trade jade for rice and salt.

Not a hundred yards above his camp a large clearing showed up through the vistas of the trail. Chandler halted and reconnoitered cautiously. Fear did not possess him, but rather the idea of atonement, of doing something to help in this awkward situation into which he had plunged both himself and the British Government. The tame Kachins, of the jade-mines near the settlements, he knew as barbaric but more or less peaceful savages. These wild ones were his first experience with natives who killed white men on sight. But there was nothing of native life in the field when the professor finally crept to a position where he could survey it from the edge of the jungle. A huge Kachin community house had once stood here, and the bananas gone wild which remained, covered parts of it in an irregular pattern. The rest was weeds, a big field of them.

CHANDLER started across it, watching the trail warily for snakes. Then he stopped, with an exclamation of wonderment. Even then true to his naturalist's instincts, he had bent over to twist a weed stalk to see if there were any butterfly chrysalids hanging under it, and on that stalk were not one but three of the queer little naked mummies, hanging by silken threads. It was so unusual to find three on one stalk that he examined the next one.

Then he gave a low whistle, his collector's enthusiasm beginning to mount and to overwhelm every other consideration. The second stalk held several, and so did the next one, and the next! In fact the whole field was filled with chrysalids, which would cover this place with a cloud of butterflies when the hatch would take place! There would be all species, rare and common—the chance of a lifetime to secure certain varieties that entomologists give months in the jungle to obtain!

Chandler, now tingling with excitement, pulled up a stalk and examined the chrysalids on it with the eye of an expert. The rows of red and gold dots lining the ridges where the wings would come out, the ringed segment-joints of the green and conical bodies, were scrutinized minutely.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed under his breath. "These are due to hatch any day now—perhaps tomorrow! Damn these Kachins, anyhow—it's preposterous!" he smiled with the exasperation of the man of science opposed by the idiotic taboos of savagery. "I'll get Pipit to stay here with me until this hatch comes off, if we have to fight off all the Kachins in the hills! Good heavens, just *look* at this field!"

As it was almost dark, he gave up the idea of searching for the Kachin house and returned to camp. They and their taboos against white men were of small importance compared to this find, which in his branch of science was equal to that of a tomb of a pharaoh in archæology. The thing would have to work itself out somehow, he told himself. He and the British Government would manage it; it would be simply absurd to abandon a hatch of this magnitude!

IT was ten o'clock before Gyi came back from the Irrawaddy. With him was the young assistant commissioner of police, Arthur Pipit, who commanded ten native soldiers of doubtful loyalty and administered a district larger than the State of Connecticut. Chandler had imagined something diminutive in Pipit, so great is the suggestive power of names, and was surprised to see, looming up through the dark lane of the trail lit up by his flasher, a tall, lanky and exceedingly bony young Briton. His face was shadowed by a ghostly white topee, and the crown of the Empire gleamed on the helmet; otherwise there was nothing official about him save the suggestion due to the natty smartness of his low-collared short-sleeved khaki shirt, his wide-legged running shorts and his puttees

below bare knees. He carried nothing suggesting weapons, force—nothing suggesting authority, even, save that bronze crown insignia on his topee and a short swagger-stick. Probably he had a revolver, but it was not in evidence.

"Professor Chandler, I take it? Rum go, this, what?" remarked Pipit with the utmost cheerfulness as he and the large and urbane Chandler shook hands in the darkness. "I shall have to put you under arrest, sir, sha'n't I? For you are north of what we call the Administrative Line, y'see."

"Charmed! Pray do!" agreed Chandler gleefully. "That is what I sent our good Gyi out to you for, Commissioner. It isn't safe for a man to remain long in this region without the protection of an arrest, I learn," he bantered. "But where are your soldiers, Commissioner? As it is, I, being the larger man, might as well arrest *you!*" he laughed, looking behind Gyi for the file of tame Kachin soldiery which he had expected.

The Briton did not smile, for this Yankee persiflage was beyond him. But the fact that this professor did not appear to have the slightest inkling that his coming in here in the cause of science was in itself a brave thing to do, and that his remaining here without even Gyi for protection was a still braver, struck him as a little bit of all right.

"Rawther good, that—your arresting me, y'know! Haw-haw-haw!" he finally laughed, after a moment of puzzled reflection. "Fact is, I've sent all my blighters under my subaltern over to the Chindwin to see about a Kachin there who ate his wife—the swine!—because she talked too much," he explained, perfectly serious, while Chandler roared, entirely unabashed by the official presence. "So I came in alone, y'see. Never fear, Professor! I'll get you out, somehow."

It was Chandler's turn to feel a sudden warm glow of admiration for this intrepid man of his own race. How characteristic of the Briton, established in his lonely mud fort in the Himalayas, his Malay stockade, or just his tent in the Burma jungles, to come into hostile country entirely alone, armed with nothing but a swagger-stick and a possible revolver—to rescue a white lawbreaker whom he knew nothing about, and depending solely on the justice of his mission and the might of the Empire behind him!

"Meaning that there is danger here, even for you?" asked Chandler, catching the hint in that "somehow."

"Raw-*ther!* The swine have a jolly way of throwing javelins first and examining the white man afterward," grinned Pipit. "May send us both down-river on their peculiar raft, y'know. However, I'll go up to their village tomorrow and try to talk some sense into 'em."

He made a motion of weariness, and Chandler invited him to share his mat and mosquito-blind. They doused the fire, as a precautionary measure, and sat and talked far into the night before its smoldering and guarded embers. Tired as he was, the commissioner was still more hungry for news of the great world outside the jungle, that world of boulevards and cafés and newspapers which they both loved to talk about but not to live in. The Southern Cross was hanging low in the southwest before Yank and Briton, arrester and arrestee, turned in side by side on the expeditionary mat for some needed sleep.

Burma's fiery sun was rising over the yomas to the east when Chandler awoke. He had slept late, snoring like a major and taking his rest with the sleep of the truly just. Pipit, younger and more obsessed with his responsibilities as a servant of the Empire, had risen early, and, according to Ramasawmy, had gone up the river trail with Gyi.

"Rather fine of him, that, I'll say—but he might have taken *me* along!" commented Chandler, looking upon his jungle world as he sat down to *chota hazri* and finding it good. But no; that would not have done, either, he reflected. *He* was the culprit here, and his life was already forfeit to the Kachins, according to that ruling which left intruding white men to them to deal with.

A LITTLE later that viewpoint of the Kachins was brought home upon him when Pipit and Gyi returned. "No end of a bore, that order, y'see," explained the Commissioner exasperatedly as he joined Chandler over the buttered toast and coffee. "I've been up there, but old Po Hmut, the chief, will not listen to reason. The blighter insists that you belong to them because of our ruling—and dash it, you *do*, y'know! Fact is, they were shadowing you in the jungle all yesterday, and only my coming into camp and our staying up and yarning until—Ei*yah!*" he yawned,

"nearly dawn, wasn't it?—kept them from sticking you while we slept."

"Sho!" grinned Chandler. "And I was looking forward hopefully to a dissolute and disorderly old age! With no more jungle, and endless boulevards, all lined with luscious cafés—"

"Not a hope!" smiled back Pipit. "Po Hmut's coming for you today. Fact is, we parted in something of a row, for I'd be damned if he would and told him so! If only Hartley and my blighters get here this morning in time!" he exclaimed, with just a hint of anxiety in his tones.

Chandler's big heart winced over the perplexities of this young administrator,—all for his sake,—shorn of his rifle-power yet honor-bound to help in this foolishness which was none of his making. The Professor got to his feet with an energetic lift of his big and bearded body—for a red-hot Yankee idea had come sizzling into his mind, and it would save the situation for both of them.

"Don't worry—here's the dope, man!" he exclaimed cheerily, laying a large paw on Pipit's troubled shoulder. "Didn't you tell me last night that these Kachins were superstitious, the most superstitious of all these native tribes?"

"Right-o! The swine live their whole lives under this and that taboo, omens, *nats,* devils, what-not. What's the scheme? Get on with it, Professor," Pipit urged, hope springing up in him again.

"Easy! You leave it all to me! I'll play my own hand, if a certain big natural event which I am expecting has come off during the night, and I think it has. You tell the British Government to sit tight and watch my smoke!"

"Jolly good! But dashed if I see how you're to manage fifty Kachins bent on giving you a ride down the river, old chap."

"More better, as Gyi, here, would say! Le's go! This is entomology, my line! I've worked it before, but not with the stage-setting I hope we'll have this morning!" grunted Chandler, reaching for his butterfly net and donning his collecting jar and envelope-box.

HE led the way to the chrysalid field, which was only a short distance up the river trail toward the Kachin village. Once there, both men simply stood and gasped for a moment. Over the field now hovered a vast cloud of butterflies, every species, some of them so rare that men of science had given months of time in vain to obtain even one.

"Oh, boy!" murmured Chandler eying them with gasps of delight. "This is simply a shame! I shall stay here to a green old age! You fellows just lie low—and guard my rear!"

"Stop!" barked Pipit excitedly, for Chandler was about to wade out into them with brandished net. "I say, Professor! Most extraord'nary this!—but there cawn't have been a fight already, y'know! What in the world do all these blood-drops mean?"

He was pointing out over the field, where every weed-leaf and stalk seemed covered with innumerable blood-drops, as if a red rain had fallen somehow during the night. It was most uncanny and unexplainable; a shiver of superstition seemed running through even the unimaginative Pipit as his eyes stared at this mysterious phenomenon.

"You watch my smoke, Johnny Bull!" laughed Chandler, not offering to explain. "Just what we want—Kachins being Kachins! Besides, there are friends of mine out there—*Papilio autolycus,* and *Euploia pheananto,* and *Thaumantis odona* —gents that I have come fourteen thousand miles to get! G'way! Can't you see I'm busy!"

He charged out ponderously into the cloud of butterflies, brandishing his net. For some time Pipit watched him darting hither and yon, netting and dropping specimens into his lethal jar. He himself was thumbing anxiously the safety of Chandler's rifle, for Po Hmut and his warriors would be coming down the trail any minute now. It was not pleasant to think of the future should this mysterious red rain and the bearded maniac waving the net out there fail to impress the natives.

Presently his grip on the rifle tightened, and its safety clicked off. Gyi at his side flashed out his long and keen *da,* or Shan sword, for harsh voices and savage whoops were sounding up in the jungle.

"Stand by, Gyi! If it doesn't work, it's fight for us!" muttered Pipit, looking anxiously over his shoulder for signs of Hartley and his soldiers.

THE whoops grew louder and more menacing. Then a long line of black Kachins burst out of the jungle across the field, brandishing javelins, fitting arrows to bows. Chandler was paying them not the

slightest attention, his burly figure stamping in elephantine charges after this and that rare one. Pipit drew in his breath and watched, for the crucial moment had come. Would they notice those red blood-drops? How could they fail to! And would they think it sorcery, magic, performed by this large maniac out there brandishing an unknown weapon? It was on the cards—quite so, with superstitious Kachins!

Then Pipit gave a whistle of joy and pinched Gyi's arm. The Kachins had hesitated! A group of them was gathering around Po Hmut, who had stopped and was leaning on his spear, looking down on the blood-sprinkled weeds, then up bewilderedly at the sky, then at the large devil cavorting mysteriously out there. Surely there was magic here, evil magic! And that large devil—was he not in truth a devil?—was doing some kind of sorcery-dance with the fearsome weapon, to snatch away their lives! The thing was perfectly patent, judging by the alarmed attitudes, the expression of fear and bewilderment on all the Kachins, their frightened glances over at the burly "devil" in the middle of the field.

"Go it, Yank! Topping! I've ten quid on you!" gurgled Pipit delightedly. And as if Chandler had at that instant received the inspiration that the psychological moment had come, they saw him suddenly dash after a large coffee and chocolate-brown butterfly as big as a great moth which was winging straight for the irresolute Kachins.

"*Stichtothalma—nourmahal!* Good God! *Must* have him!" they heard the big man bellow—screech rather, in the intensity of his scientific ardor.

The Kachins did not await him but turned and bolted incontinently into the jungle. Pipit leaned up against Gyi, who leaned against him, both weak with laughter. "Oh, topping! Rippin'! My eye! My eye!" gasped Pipit; then he raised his voice to call in the Professor.

"I say, Chandler, come in—it was a noble war!" he burbled hilariously. "Shooting, sir! *Shooting!*"

The Professor mopped a heated brow as he waded back through the red-sprinkled weeds.

"Routed the whole tribe, didn't I?" he grinned. "I *told* you that few savages could stand the sight of me waving this net! And this red rain was the berries—"

"Yes, but what *is* it!" bellowed Pipit exasperatedly. "I've waited long enough—for God's sake uncork it, Professor!"

"The red rain?" queried Chandler innocently. "Why, nothing but this hatch of butterflies! Every chrysalid when it turns to a butterfly leaves a large red drop behind. In the superstitious Middle Ages these 'red rains,' as they were called, caused no end of religious penitential doings—bell book and candle; Jews were massacred, and all that. In Cæsar's time a red rain in the Forum caused supplications to the gods to be proclaimed throughout Rome; augurs were consulted; altar fires lit—nothing but a hatch of butterflies!"

"My word!" exclaimed Pipit, looking with renewed interest on the spotted weeds. "Most extraord'nary! Now, who but a Yankee would have thought of utilizing *that* to rout our friend Po Hmut and his swine!"

THEY went back to camp, where shortly after young Hartley, Pipit's subaltern, came up the trail with a file of tame Kachin soldiery at his back. Pipit took over the command with a deal of relief, for he could now take his distinguished prisoner out without fear of further molestation, should Po Hmut get over that first fright and decide to persist in claiming the intruder.

Chandler looked over with approval these natty colonial troops and their burnished Enfields. There was not much of the British Government here, but what there was looked good to him! Then he began to grin quizzically at the two youthful Britons, who were waiting politely for him to get his bullock cart started back up the road:

"Here! I want my money back!" he cried whimsically. "I've given you a good show, haven't I, and a red rain and all that? Well, where's this arrest that I've earned?" he demanded.

The two Britons looked in some perplexity at the urbane and grinning professor—most extraordinary Yankee, this! Then Pipit got his drift: "Oh, the fine, you mean! It's a hundred rupees, Professor, for being north of the Administrative Line. But we sha'n't say anything about it, shall we?" he suggested, embarrassed.

"Sure we will!" And Chandler tendered him the note. "I got *Stichtothalma nourmahal* out of it, didn't I? It was worth a hundred, just to see 'em run!"

The Western Star

This newest exploit of the renowned Hercule Poirot constitutes one of the most ingenious and interest-holding detective stories of recent years. You'll find it a real brain-duster.

By AGATHA CHRISTIE

I WAS standing at the window of Poirot's rooms, looking out idly on the street below.

"That's queer!" I ejaculated suddenly.

"What is, *mon ami?*" asked Poirot placidly, from the depths of his armchair.

"Deduce, Poirot, from the following facts: Here is a young lady, richly dressed—fashionable hat, magnificent furs. She is coming along slowly, looking up at the houses as she goes. Unknown to her, she is being shadowed by three men and a middle-aged woman. They have just been joined by an errand-boy who points after the girl, gesticulating as he does so. What drama is this being played? Is the girl a crook, and are the shadowers detectives preparing to arrest her? Or are *they* the scoundrels, and are they plotting to attack an innocent victim? What does the great detective say?"

"The great detective, *mon ami,* chooses, as ever, the simplest course. He rises to see for himself." My friend joined me at the window. In a minute he gave vent to an amused chuckle.

"As usual, your facts are tinged with your incurable romanticism. That is Miss Mary Marvell, the film star. She is being followed by a bevy of admirers who have recognized her. And, *en passant,* my dear Hastings, she is quite aware of the fact!"

I laughed.

"So all is explained! But you get no marks for that, Poirot. It was a mere matter of recognition."

"En vérité! And how many times have you seen Mary Marvell on the screen?"

I thought. "A dozen times, perhaps."

"And I—once! Yet *I* recognize her, and *you* do not."

"She looks so different," I replied rather feebly.

"Ah! *Sacré!*" cried Poirot. "Is it that you expect her to promenade herself in the streets of London in a cowboy hat, or with bare feet and a bunch of curls, as an Irish colleen? Always with you it is the non-essentials! Remember the case of the dancer, Valerie Saintclair."

I shrugged my shoulders, slightly annoyed.

"But console yourself, *mon ami,*" said Poirot, calming down. "All cannot be as Hercule Poirot! I know it well."

"You really have the best opinion of yourself of anyone I ever knew!" I cried, divided between amusement and annoyance.

"What will you? When one is unique, one knows it! And others share that opinion—even, if I mistake not, Miss Mary Marvell."

"What?"

"Without doubt. She is coming here."

AS usual Poirot was right. After a short interval, the American film star was ushered in and we rose to our feet.

Mary Marvell was undoubtedly one of the most popular actresses on the screen. She had only lately arrived in England in company with her husband, Gregory B. Rolf, also a film actor. Their marriage had taken place about a year ago in the States, and this was their first visit to England. They had been given a great reception. Everyone was prepared to go mad over Mary Marvell, her wonderful clothes, her furs, her jewels—above all, one jewel, the great diamond which had been nicknamed (to match its owner) the Western Star. Much, true and untrue, had been written about this famous stone, which was reported to be insured for the enormous sum of fifty thousand pounds.

All these details passed rapidly through my mind as I joined with Poirot in greeting our fair client—who was small and slender, very fair and girlish-looking, with the wide innocent blue eyes of a child.

Poirot drew forward a chair for her, and she commenced talking at once.

"You will probably think me very foolish, Monsieur Poirot, but Lord Cronshaw was telling me last night how wonderfully you cleared up the mystery of his nephew's death, and I felt that I just must have your advice. I dare say it's only a silly hoax—Gregory says so; but it's just worrying me to death."

She paused for breath. Poirot beamed encouragement.

"Proceed, madame! You comprehend, I am still in the dark."

"It's these letters." Miss Marvell unclasped her handbag, and drew out three envelopes which she handed to Poirot. The latter scrutinized them closely.

"Cheap paper—the name and address carefully printed. Let us see the inside." He drew out the inclosure. I had joined him, and was leaning over his shoulder. The writing consisted of a single sentence, carefully printed like the address. It ran as follows:

> The great diamond which is the left eye of the god must return whence it came.

THE second letter was couched in precisely the same terms, but the third was more explicit.

> You have been warned. You have not obeyed. Now the diamond will be taken from you. At the full of the moon, the two diamonds which are the left and right eye of the god shall return. So it is written.

"The first letter I treated as a joke," explained Miss Marvell. "When I got the second, I began to wonder. The third one came yesterday, and it seemed to me that, after all, the matter might be more serious than I had imagined."

"I see they did not come by post, these letters."

"No—they were left by hand, by a *Chinaman.* That is what frightens me—"

"Why?"

"Because it was from a Chink in San Francisco that Gregory bought the stone three years ago."

"I see, madame, that you believe the diamond referred to, to be—"

"The Western Star," finished Miss Marvell. "That's so. At the time, Gregory remembers that there was some story attached to the stone, but the Chink wasn't handing out any information. Gregory says he seemed just scared to death, and in a mortal hurry to get rid of the thing. He only asked about a tenth of its value. It was Greg's wedding-present to me."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

"The story seems of an almost unbelievable romanticism. And yet—who knows? I pray of you, Hastings, hand me my little almanac."

I complied.

"Voyons!" said Poirot, turning the leaves. "When is the date of the full moon? Ah! Friday next. That is in three days' time. *Eh bien, madame,* you seek my advice—I give it to you. This *belle histoire* may be a hoax—but it may not! Therefore I counsel you to place the diamond in my keeping until after Friday next. Then we can take what steps we please."

A slight cloud passed over the actress'

face, and she replied constrainedly: "I'm afraid that's impossible."

"You have it with you—*hein?*" Poirot was watching her narrowly.

THE girl hesitated a moment, then slipped her hand into the bosom of her gown, drawing out a long, thin chain. She leaned forward, unclosing her hand. In the palm, a stone of white fire, exquisitely set in platinum, lay and winked at us solemnly.

Poirot drew in his breath with a hiss.

"Epatant!" he murmured. "You permit, madame?" He took the jewel in his own hand and scrutinized it keenly, then restored it to her with a little bow. "A magnificent stone—without a flaw. Ah, *cent tonnerres*—and you carry it about with you, *comme ça!*"

"No, no, I'm very careful really, M. Poirot. As a rule it's locked up in my jewel-case, and left in the hotel safe-deposit. We're staying at the Magnificent, you know. I just brought it along today for you to see."

"And you will leave it with me, *n'est-ce pas?* You will be advised by Papa Poirot?"

"Well, you see, it's this way, M. Poirot: On Friday we're going down to Yardly Chase to spend a few days with Lord and Lady Yardly."

Her words awoke a vague echo of remembrance in my mind. Some gossip—what was it, now? A few years ago Lord and Lady Yardly had paid a visit to the States; rumor had it that his Lordship had rather gone the pace out there, with the assistance of some lady friends—but surely there was something more, some gossip which coupled Lady Yardly's name with that of a "movie" star in California. . . . . Ah—it came to me in a flash—of course, it was none other than Gregory B. Rolf.

"I'll let you into a little secret, M. Poirot," Miss Marvell was continuing. "We've got a deal on with Lord Yardly. There's some chance of our arranging to film a play down there in his ancestral pile."

"At Yardly Chase?" I cried, interested. "Why, it's one of the show places of England."

Miss Marvell nodded.

"I guess it's the real old feudal stuff, all right. But he wants a pretty stiff price, and of course I don't know yet whether the deal will go through; but Greg and I always like to combine business with pleasure."

"But—I demand pardon if I am dense, madame—surely it is possible to visit Yardly Chase without taking the diamond with you?"

A shrewd hard look came into Miss Marvell's eyes which belied their childlike appearance. She looked suddenly a good deal older.

"I want to wear it down there."

"Surely," I said suddenly, "there are some very famous jewels in the Yardly collection, a large diamond among them?"

"That's so," said Miss Marvell briefly.

I heard Poirot murmur beneath his breath: "Ah, *c'est comme ça!*" Then he said aloud, with his usual uncanny luck in hitting the bull's-eye (*he* dignifies it by the name of psychology): "Then you are without doubt already acquainted with Lady Yardly, or perhaps your husband is?"

"Gregory knew her when she was out West three years ago," said Miss Marvell. She hesitated a moment, and then added abruptly: "Do either of you ever see *Society Gossip?*"

We both pleaded guilty rather shamefacedly.

"I ask, because in this week's number there is an article on famous jewels, and it's really very curious—" She broke off.

I ROSE, went to the table at the other side of the room and returned with the paper in question in my hand. She took it from me, found the article, and began to read aloud.

" 'Among other famous stones may be included the Star of the East, a diamond in the possession of the Yardly family. An ancestor of the present Lord Yardly brought it back with him from China, and a romantic story is said to attach to it. According to this, the stone was once the right eye of a temple god. Another diamond, exactly similar in form and size, formed the left eye, and the story goes that this jewel also would, in course of time, be stolen. "One eye shall go west, the other east, till they shall meet once more. Then, in triumph, shall they return to the god." It is a curious coincidence that there is at the present time a stone corresponding closely in description with this one, and known as the "Star of the West," or "the Western Star." It is the property of the celebrated film

actress, Miss Mary Marvell. A comparison of the two stones would be interesting.' "

She stopped.

"*Epatant!*" murmured Poirot. "Without doubt a romance of the first water." He turned to Mary Marvell. "And you are not afraid, madame? You have no superstitious terrors? You do not fear to introduce these two Siamese twins to each other, lest a Chinaman should appear—'Hey, Presto!'—and whisk them both back to China?"

His tone was mocking, but I fancied that an undercurrent of seriousness lay beneath it.

"I don't believe that Lady Yardly's diamond is anything like as good a stone as mine," said Miss Marvell. "Anyway, I'm going to see."

WHAT more Poirot would have said I do not know, for at that moment the door flew open, and a splendid-looking man strode into the room. From his crisply curling black head, to the tips of his patent leather boots, he was a hero fit for romance.

"I said I'd call round for you, Mary," said Gregory Rolf, "and here I am. Well, what does M. Poirot say to our little problem? Just one big hoax—same as I do?"

Poirot smiled up at the big actor. They made a ridiculous contrast.

"Hoax or no hoax, Mr. Rolf," he said dryly, "I have advised Madame your wife not to take the jewel with her to Yardly Chase on Friday."

"I'm with you, sir. I've already said so to Mary. But there! She's a woman through and through, and I guess she can't bear to think of another woman outshining her in the jewel line."

"What nonsense, Gregory!" said Mary Marvell sharply. But she flushed angrily.

Poirot shrugged his shoulders. "Madame, I have advised. I can do no more. *C'est fini.*"

He bowed them both to the door.

"Ah, la-la!" he observed, returning. "*Histoire de femmes!* The good husband, he hit the nail on the head—*tout de même,* he was not tactful! Assuredly not."

I imparted to him my vague remembrances, and he nodded vigorously.

"So I thought. All the same, there is something curious underneath all this. With your permission, *mon ami,* I will take the air. Await my return, I beg of you. I shall not be long."

I WAS half asleep in my chair when the landlady tapped on the door, and put her head in.

"It's another lady to see Mr. Poirot, sir. I've told her he's out, but she says as how she'll wait, seeing as she's come up from the country."

"Oh, show her in here, Mrs. Murchison. Perhaps I can do something for her."

In another moment the lady had been ushered in. My heart gave a leap as I recognized her. Lady Yardly's portrait had figured too often in the society papers to allow her to remain unknown.

"Do sit down, Lady Yardly," I said, drawing forward a chair. "My friend Poirot is out, but I know for a fact that he'll be back very shortly."

She thanked me and sat down. A very different type, this, from Miss Mary Marvell—tall, dark, with flashing eyes and a pale, proud face, yet something wistful in the curves of the mouth.

I felt a desire to rise to the occasion. Why not? In Poirot's presence I have frequently felt a difficulty—I do not appear at my best. And yet there is no doubt that I too possess the deductive sense in a marked degree. I leaned forward on a sudden impulse.

"Lady Yardly," I said. "I know why you have come here. You too have received blackmailing letters about the diamond."

There was no doubt as to my bolt having shot home. She stared at me open-mouthed, all color banished from her cheeks.

"You know?" she gasped. "How?"

I smiled.

"By a perfectly logical process. If Miss Marvell has had warning letters—"

"Miss Marvell? She has been here?"

"She has just left. As I was saying, if she, as the holder of one of the twin diamonds, has received a mysterious series of warnings, you, as the holder of the other stone, must necessarily have done the same. You see how simple it is? I am right, then, you have received these strange communications also?"

For a moment she hesitated, as though in doubt whether to trust me or not; then she bowed her head in assent with a little smile.

"That is so," she acknowledged.

"Were yours too left by hand—by a Chinaman?"

"No, they came by post. But tell me,

has Miss Marvell undergone the same experience, then?"

I recounted to her the events of the morning. She listened attentively.

"It all fits in. My letters are the duplicates of hers. It is true that they came by post, but there is a curious perfume impregnating them—something in the nature of joss-stick—that at once suggested the East to me. What does it all mean?"

I shook my head.

"That is what we must find out. You have the letters with you? We might learn something from the postmarks."

"Unfortunately, I destroyed them. You understand, at the time I regarded it as some foolish joke. Can it be true that some Chinese gang are really trying to recover the diamonds? It seems too incredible."

We went over the facts again and again, but could get no further toward the elucidation of the mystery. At last Lady Yardly rose.

"I really don't think I need wait for M. Poirot. You can tell him all this, can't you? Thank you so much, Mr—"

She hesitated, her hand outstretched.

"Captain Hastings."

"Of course! How stupid of me! You're a friend of the Cavendishes, aren't you? It was Mary Cavendish who sent me to Monsieur Poirot."

WHEN my friend returned, I rather enjoyed telling him the tale of what had occurred during his absence. He cross-questioned me rather sharply over the details of our conversation, and I could read between the lines that he was not best pleased to have been absent. I also fancied that the dear old fellow was just the least inclined to be jealous. It had become rather a pose with him to consistently belittle my abilities, and I think he was chagrined at finding no loophole for criticism. I was secretly rather pleased with myself, though I tried to conceal the fact for fear of irritating him. In spite of his idiosyncrasies, I was deeply attached to my quaint little friend.

"*Bon!*" he said at length, with a curious look on his face. "The plot develops. Pass me, I pray you, that 'Peerage' on the top shelf there." He turned the leaves. "Ah, here we are. 'Yardly—tenth viscount—b o r n . . . . e d u c a t e d'. . . . . *Tout ça n'a pas d'importance.* . . . . 'Married, 1907, the honorable Maude Stopperton, fourth daughter of third Baron Cotteril.' Um! Has two daughters, born 1908, 1910, served South African War, et cetera. Clubs—residences. . . . . *Voilà,* that does not tell us much. But tomorrow morning we see this milor'!"

"What?"

"Yes. I telegraphed him."

"I thought you had washed your hands of the case?"

"I am not acting for Miss Marvell, since she refuses to be guided by my advice. What I do now is for my own satisfaction—the satisfaction of Hercule Poirot! Decidedly, I must have a finger in this pie."

"And you calmly wire Lord Yardly to dash up to town just to suit your convenience. He wont be pleased."

"*Au contraire,* if I preserve for him his family diamond, he ought to be very grateful."

"Then you really think there is a chance of its being stolen?" I asked eagerly.

"Almost a certainty," replied Poirot placidly. "Everything points that way."

"But how—"

Poirot stopped my eager questions with an airy gesture of the hand.

"Not now, I pray you. Let us not confuse the mind. And observe that 'Peerage'—how you have replaced him! See you not that the tallest books go in the top shelf, the next tallest in the row beneath, and so on. Thus we have order—*method*—which, as I have often told you, Hastings—"

"Exactly," I said hastily, and put the offending volume in its proper place.

LORD Yardly turned out to be a cheery, loud-voiced sportsman with a rather red face, but with a good-humored bonhomie about him that was distinctly attractive and made up for any lack of mentality.

"Extraordinary business this, Monsieur Poirot! Can't make head or tail of it. Seems my wife's been getting odd kind of letters, and that this Miss Marvell's had 'em too. What does it all mean?"

Poirot handed him the copy of *Society Gossip.*

"First, milor', I would ask you if these facts are substantially correct?"

The peer took it. His face darkened with anger as he read.

"Damned nonsense!" he spluttered. "There's never been any romantic story attaching to the diamond. It came from

India originally, I believe. I never heard of all this Chinese god stuff."

"Still, the stone *is* known as 'the Star of the East.'"

"Well, what if it is?" demanded the gentleman wrathfully.

Poirot smiled a little, but made no direct reply. "What I would ask you to do, milor', is to place yourself in my hands. If you do so unreservedly, I have great hopes of averting the catastrophe."

"Then you think there's actually something in these wild tales?"

"Will you do as I ask you?"

"Of course I will, but—"

"*Bon!* Then permit that I ask you a few questions. This affair of Yardly Chase, is it, as you say, all fixed up between you and Mr. Rolf?"

"Oh, he told you about it, did he? No, there's nothing settled." He hesitated, the brick-red color of his face deepening. "Might as well get the thing straight. I've made rather an ass of myself in many ways, M. Poirot—and I'm head over ears in debt; but I want to pull up. I'm fond of the kids, and I want to straighten things up, and be able to live on at the old place. Gregory Rolf is offering me big money—enough to set me on my feet again. I don't want to do it—I hate the thought of all that crowd play-acting round the Chase; but I may have to, unless—" he broke off.

POIROT eyed him keenly. "You have, then, another string to your bow? Permit that I make a guess? It is to sell the Star of the East."

Lord Yardly nodded. "That's it. It's been in the family for some generations, but it's not entailed. Still, it's not the easiest thing in the world to find a purchaser. Hoffberg, the Hatton Garden man, is on the lookout for a likely customer, but he'll have to find one soon, or it's a washout."

"One more question, *permettez*. Milady your wife, which plan does she approve?"

"Oh, she's bitterly opposed to my selling the jewel. You know what women are. She's all for this film stunt."

"I comprehend," said Poirot. He remained a moment or so in thought, then rose briskly to his feet. "You return to Yardly Chase at once? *Bien!* Say no word to anyone,—to *anyone,* mind,—but expect us there this evening. We will arrive shortly after five."

"All right; but I don't see—"

"*Ça n'a pas d'importance,*" said Poirot kindly. "You will that I preserve for you your diamond, *n'est-ce pas?*"

"Yes, but—"

"Then do as I say."

A sadly bewildered nobleman left the room.

IT was half-past five when we arrived at Yardly Chase, and followed the dignified butler to the old paneled hall with its fire of blazing logs. A pretty picture met our eyes: Lady Yardly and her two children, the mother's proud dark head bent down over the two fair ones. Lord Yardly stood near by, smiling down on them.

"M. Poirot and Captain Hastings," announced the butler.

Lady Yardly looked up with a start; her husband came forward uncertainly, his eyes seeking instruction from Poirot. The little man was equal to the occasion.

"All my excuses! It is that I investigate still this affair of Miss Marvell's. She comes to you on Friday, does she not? I make a little tour first to make sure that all is secure. Also I wanted to ask of Milady if she recollected at all the postmarks on the letters she received?"

Lady Yardly shook her head regretfully. "I'm afraid I didn't. It was stupid of me. But you see, I never dreamed of taking them seriously."

"You'll stay the night?" said Lord Yardly.

"Oh, milor', I fear to incommode you. We have left our bags at the inn."

"That's all right." Lord Yardly had his cue. "We'll send down for them. No, no—no trouble, I assure you."

Poirot permitted himself to be persuaded, and sitting down by Lady Yardly, began to make friends with the children. In a short time they were all romping together, and had dragged me into the game.

"*Vous êtes bonne mère,* milady," said Poirot with a gallant little bow, as the children were removed reluctantly by a stern nurse.

Lady Yardly smoothed her ruffled hair.

"I adore them," she said with a little catch in her voice.

"And they you—with reason!" Poirot bowed again.

A dressing gong sounded, and we rose to go up to our rooms. At that moment the butler entered with a telegram on a salver which he handed to Lord Yardly. The latter tore it open with a brief word

of apology. As he read it, he stiffened visibly.

With an ejaculation, he handed it to his wife. Then he glanced at my friend.

"Just a minute, M. Poirot. I feel you ought to know about this. It's from Hoffberg. He thinks he's found a customer for the diamond—an American, sailing for the States tomorrow. They're sending down a chap tonight to get the stone. By Jove, though, if this goes through—" Words failed him.

Lady Yardly had turned away. She still held the telegram in her hand.

"I wish you wouldn't sell it, George," she said in a low voice. "It's been in the family so long." She waited, as though for a reply, but when none came, her face hardened. She shrugged her shoulders. "I must go and dress. I suppose I had better display 'the goods.'" She turned to Poirot with a slight grimace. "It's one of the most hideous necklaces that was ever designed! George has always promised to have the stones reset for me, but it's never been done." She left the room.

HALF an hour later we three were assembled in the great drawing-room awaiting the lady. It was already a few minutes past the dinner-hour.

Suddenly there was a low rustle, and Lady Yardly appeared framed in the doorway, a radiant figure in a long dark shimmering dress. Round the column of her neck was a rivulet of fire. She stood there with one hand just touching the necklace.

"Behold the sacrifice," she said gayly. Her ill humor seemed to have vanished. "Wait while I turn the big light on, and you shall feast your eyes on the ugliest necklace in England."

The switches were just outside the door. As she stretched out her hand to them, the incredible thing happened. Suddenly, without any warning, every light was extinguished, the door banged, and from the other side of it came a long-drawn, piercing, woman's scream.

"My God!" cried Lord Yardly. "That was Maude's voice!"

We rushed blindly for the door, cannoning into each other in the darkness. It was some minutes before we could find it. What a sight met our eyes! Lady Yardly lay senseless on the marble floor, a crimson mark on her white throat where the necklace had been wrenched from her neck.

As we bent over her, uncertain for the moment whether she were dead or alive, her eyelids opened.

"The Chinaman," she whispered painfully. "The Chinaman—the side door."

Lord Yardly sprang up with an oath. I accompanied him, my heart beating wildly. The Chinaman again! The side door in question was a small one in the angle of the wall, not more than a dozen yards from the scene of the tragedy. As we reached it, I gave a cry. There, just short of the threshold, lay the glittering necklace, evidently dropped by the thief in the panic of his flight. I swooped joyously down on it. Then I uttered another cry which Lord Yardly echoed. For in the middle of the necklace was a great gap. The Star of the East was missing!

"That settles it," I breathed. "These were no ordinary thieves. This one stone was all they wanted."

"But how did the fellow get in?"

"Through this door."

"But it's always locked."

I shook my head. "It's not locked now. See!" I pulled it open as I spoke. As I did so, something fluttered to the ground. I picked it up. It was a piece of silk, and the embroidery was unmistakable. It had been torn from a Chinaman's robe.

"In his haste it caught in the door," I explained. "Come, hurry. He cannot have gone far as yet."

BUT in vain we searched. In the pitch darkness of the night, the thief had found it easy to make his get-away. We returned reluctantly, and Lord Yardly sent off one of the footmen posthaste to fetch the police.

Lady Yardly, aptly ministered to by Poirot, who is as good as a woman in these matters, was sufficiently recovered to be able to tell her story.

"I was just going to turn on the other light," she said, "when a man sprang on me from behind. He tore my necklace from my neck with such force that I fell headlong to the floor. As I fell, I saw him disappearing through the side door. Then I realized by the pigtail and the embroidered robe that he was a Chinaman." She stopped with a shudder.

The butler reappeared. He spoke in a low voice to Lord Yardly.

"A gentleman from Mr. Hoffberg's m'lord. He says you expect him."

"Good heavens!" cried the distracted

nobleman. "I must see him, I suppose. No, not here, Mullings—in the library."

I drew Poirot aside.

"Look here, my dear fellow. Hadn't we better get back to London?"

"You think so, Hastings? Why?"

"Well,"—I coughed delicately,—"things haven't gone very well, have they? I mean—you tell Lord Yardly to place himself in your hands and all will be well; and then, 'Hey, Presto!' the diamond vanishes from under your very nose!"

"True," said Poirot, rather crestfallen. "It was not one of my most striking triumphs."

"So, having—pardon the expression—rather made a mess of things, don't you think it would be more graceful to leave immediately and get back to London as soon as possible?" I continued.

"Why, my friend?"

"The other diamond," I said lowering my voice. "Miss Marvell's."

"*Eh bien,* what of it?"

"Don't you see?" His unusual obtuseness annoyed me. What had happened to his usually keen wits? "They've got one; now they'll go for the other."

"*Tiens!*" cried Poirot, stepping back a pace and regarding me with admiration. "But your brain marches to a marvel, my friend! Figure to yourself that for the moment I had not thought of that! But there is plenty of time. The full of the moon, it is not until Friday."

I shook my head dubiously. The full-of-the-moon theory left me entirely cold. I had my way with Poirot, however, and we departed summarily, leaving behind us a note of explanation and apology for Lord Yardly.

My idea was to go at once to the Magnificent, and relate to Miss Marvell what had occurred, but Poirot vetoed the plan, and insisted that the morning would be time enough. I gave in rather grudgingly.

IN the morning Poirot seemed strangely disinclined to stir out. I began to suspect that, having made a mistake to start with, he was singularly loath to proceed with the case. In answer to my persuasions, he pointed out with admirable common sense, that, as the details of the affair at Yardly Chase were already in the morning papers, the Rolfs would know quite as much as we could tell them. I gave way unwillingly. Events proved my forebodings to be justified. About two o'clock the telephone rang. Poirot answered it. He listened for some moments. Then with a brief, "*Bien, j'y serai,*" he rang off, and turned to me.

"What do you think, *mon ami?*" He looked half ashamed, half excited. "The diamond of Miss Marvell, it has been stolen."

"What!" I cried, springing up. "And what about the 'full of the moon' now?" Poirot hung his head. "When did this happen?"

"This morning, I understand."

I shook my head sadly. "If only you had listened to me! You see I was right."

"It appears so, *mon ami,*" said Poirot cautiously. "Appearances are deceptive, they say—but it certainly appears so."

As we hurried in a taxi to the Magnificent, I puzzled out the true inwardness of the scheme.

"That 'full-of-the-moon' idea was clever. The whole point of it was to get us to concentrate on the Friday, and so be off our guard beforehand. It is a pity you did not realize that."

"*Ma foi!*" said Poirot airily, his nonchalance quite restored after its brief eclipse. "One cannot think of everything!"

I felt sorry for him. He did so hate failure of any kind.

"Cheer up," I said consolingly. "Better luck next time."

AT the Magnificent, we were ushered at once into the manager's office. Gregory Rolf was there, with two men from Scotland Yard. A pale-faced clerk sat opposite them.

Rolf nodded to us as we entered.

"We're getting to the bottom of it," he said. "But it's almost unbelievable. How the guy had the nerve, I can't think."

A very few minutes sufficed to give us the facts. Mr. Rolf had gone out of the hotel at eleven-fifteen. At eleven-thirty, a gentleman so like him in appearance as to pass muster, entered the hotel and demanded the jewel-case from the safe-deposit. He duly signed the receipt, remarking carelessly as he did so: "Looks a bit different from my ordinary one, but I hurt my hand getting out of the taxi." The clerk merely smiled and remarked that he saw very little difference. Rolf laughed and said: "Well, don't run me in as a crook this time, anyway. I've been getting threatening letters from a Chinaman, and

the worst of it is I look rather like a Chink myself—it's something about the eyes."

"I looked at him," said the clerk who was telling us this, "and I saw at once what he meant. The eyes slanted up at the corners like an Oriental's. I'd never noticed it before."

"Darn it all, man," roared Gregory Rolf, leaning forward, "do you notice it now?"

The man looked up at him and started.

"No sir," he said. "I can't say I do." And indeed there was nothing even remotely Oriental about the frank brown eyes that looked into ours.

The Scotland Yard man grunted. "Bold customer! Thought the eyes might be noticed, and took the bull by the horns to disarm suspicion. He must have watched you out of the hotel, sir, and nipped in as soon as you were well away."

"What about the jewel-case?" I asked.

"It was found in a corridor of the hotel. Only one thing had been taken—the Western Star."

We stared at each other—the whole thing was so bizarre, so unreal.

Poirot hopped briskly to his feet. "I have not been of much use, I fear," he said regretfully. "Is it permitted to see Madame?"

"I guess she's prostrated with the shock," explained Rolf.

"Then perhaps I might have a few words alone with you, monsieur?"

"Certainly."

In about five minutes Poirot reappeared.

"Now, my friend," he said gayly. "To a post office. I have to send a telegram."

"Who to?"

"Lord Yardly." He discounted further inquiries by slipping his arm through mine. "Come, come, *mon ami!* I know all that you feel about this miserable business. I have not distinguished myself! You, in my place, *might* have distinguished yourself! *Bien!* All is admitted. Let us forget it and have lunch."

IT was about four o'clock when we entered Poirot's rooms. A figure rose from a chair by the window. It was Lord Yardly. He looked haggard and distraught.

"I got your wire and came up at once. Look here, I've been round to Hoffberg, and they know nothing about that man of theirs last night, or the wire either. Do you think that—"

Poirot held up his hand.

"My excuses! I sent that wire, and hired the gentleman in question."*

"*You*—but why? What?" The nobleman spluttered impotently.

"My little idea was to bring things to a head," explained Poirot placidly.

"Bring things to a head! Oh, my God!" cried Lord Yardly.

"And the ruse succeeded," said Poirot cheerfully. "Therefore, milor', I have much pleasure in returning you—this!" With a dramatic gesture he produced a glittering object. It was a great diamond.

"The Star of the East!" gasped Lord Yardly. "But I don't understand—"

"No?" said Poirot. "It makes no matter. Believe me, it was necessary for the diamond to be stolen. I promised you that it should be preserved to you, and I have kept my word. You must permit me to keep my little secret. Convey, I beg of you, the assurances of my deepest respect to milady your wife, and tell her how pleased I am to be able to restore her jewel to her. What *beau temps,* is it not? Good day, milor'."

And smiling and talking, the amazing little man conducted the bewildered nobleman to the door. He returned, gently rubbing his hands.

"Poirot," I said. "Am I quite demented?"

"No, *mon ami,* but you are, as always, in a mental fog."

"How did you get the diamond."

"From Mr. Rolf."

"Rolf?"

"*Mais oui!* The warning letters, the Chinaman, the article in *Society Gossip,* all sprang from the ingenious brain of Mr. Rolf! The two diamonds, supposed to be so miraculously alike—bah, they did not exist. There was only *one* diamond, my friend! Originally in the Yardly collection, for three years it has been in the possession of Mr. Rolf. He stole it this morning with the assistance of a touch of greasepaint at the corner of each eye! Ah, I must see him on the film; he is indeed an artist, *celui la!*

"But why should he steal his own diamond?" I asked, puzzled.

"For many reasons. To begin with, Lady Yardly was getting restive."

"Lady Yardly?"

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*It is suggested that the reader pause in his perusal of the story at this point, make his own solution of the mystery—and then see how close he comes to that of the author.—*The Editors.*

"You comprehend she was left much alone in California. Her husband was amusing himself elsewhere. Mr. Rolf was handsome; he had an air about him of romance. But *au fond,* he is very businesslike, *ce monsieur!* He made love to Lady Yardly, and then he blackmailed her. I taxed the lady with the truth the other night, and she admitted it. She swore that she had only been indiscreet, and I believe her. But undoubtedly, Rolf had letters of hers that could be twisted to bear a different interpretation. Terrified by the threat of a divorce, and the prospect of being separated from her children, she agreed to all he wished. She had no money of her own, and she was forced to permit him to substitute a paste replica for the real stone. The coincidence of the date of the appearance of the Western Star struck me at once. All goes well. Lord Yardly prepares to settle down.

"And then comes the menace of the possible sale of the diamond. The substitution will be discovered. Without doubt she writes off frantically to Gregory Rolf, who has just arrived in England. He soothes her by promising to arrange all—and prepares for a double robbery. In this way he will quiet the lady, who might conceivably tell all to her husband, an affair which would not suit our blackmailer at all; he will have fifty thousand pounds insurance money— Ah, ha, you had forgotten that! And he will still have the diamond! At this point I put my finger in the pie. The arrival of a diamond-expert is announced; Lady Yardly, as I felt sure she would, immediately arranges a robbery —and does it very well too! But Hercule Poirot, he sees nothing but facts. What happens in actuality? The lady switches off the light, bangs the door, throws the necklace down the passage, and screams. She has already wrenched out the diamond with pliers upstairs—"

"But we saw the necklace round her neck!" I objected.

"I demand pardon, my friend. Her hand concealed the part of it where the gap would have shown. To place a piece of silk in the door beforehand is child's play! Of course, as soon as Rolf read of the robbery, he arranged his own little comedy. And very well he played it!"

"What did you say to him?" I asked with lively curiosity.

"I said to him that Lady Yardly had told her husband all, that I was empowered to recover the jewel, and that if it were not immediately handed over, proceedings would be taken. Also a few more little lies which occurred to me! He was as wax in my hands!"

I PONDERED the matter.

"It seems a little unfair on Mary Marvell. She has lost her diamond through no fault of her own."

"Bah!" said Poirot brutally. "She has a magnificent advertisement. That is all she cares for, that one! Now, the other, she is different. *Bonne mère—très femme!*"

"Yes," I said doubtfully, hardly sharing Poirot's views on femininity. "I suppose it was Rolf who sent her the duplicate letters."

"*Pas du tout,*" said Poirot briskly. "She came by the advice of Mary Cavendish to seek my aid in her dilemma. Then she heard that Mary Marvell, whom she knew to be her enemy, had been here, and she changed her mind, jumping at a pretext that *you,* my friend, offered her. A very few questions sufficed to show me that *you* told her of the letters, not she you! She jumped at the chance your words offered."

"I don't believe it," I cried, stung.

"Ah, *mon ami,* it is a pity that you study not the psychology; you would have known at once that she was lying. She told you that the letters were destroyed! Oh, la-la, *never* does a woman destroy a letter if she can avoid it! Not even if it would be more prudent to do so!"

"It's all very well," I said, my anger rising. "But you've made a perfect fool of me! From beginning to end! No, it's all very well to try and explain it away afterward. There really is a limit!"

"But you were so enjoying yourself, my friend. I had not the heart to shatter your illusions."

"It's no good. You've gone a bit too far this time."

"*Mon Dieu,* but how you enrage yourself for nothing, *mon ami!*"

"I'm fed up!" I went out, banging the door. It really was a bit too thick. Poirot had made an absolute laughingstock of me. I decided that he needed a sharp lesson. I would let some time elapse before I forgave him. He had encouraged me to make a perfect fool of myself!

Another fascinating exploit of Hercule Poirot and his companion will be described by Agatha Christie in our forthcoming March issue. Don't miss it.

Experience

The distinguished author of "The Sea King," "Fortune" and "The Able Seaman" here contributes a specially enjoyable story of a deep-water ship's voyage through the Great Lakes.

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

THE big-boned Swedish mate of the *Polaris* shifted uneasily on his feet. He twisted his sandy mustache; he frowned; he moved his jaws as though chewing his cheeks.

"Gins," he rumbled. "We ought to have new gin-blocks. Two derricks for'ard an' one aft not safe."

"Quiet!" thundered Captain Nelson. His bull neck swelled and grew red; his smooth, fat face grew red; the veins stood out like rope. The deep blue eyes of him popped out from under bushy yellow brows. He took a tuck in his blue serge pants and scratched his leg.

He said: "I will have no new gins."

The mate blinked and went on—he was a very patient man: "We ought to have new falls for the boats—"

Captain Nelson snorted.

"I will have no gins this voyage. Nor new falls—nor anything! They will do for a while. Have I sailed for thirty years to be told I don't know rope?"

The mate rumbled, "But—" and then shrugged. You can't argue with a captain who also owns his ship.

"Bah!" said Captain Nelson. He went for'ard along the main deck. He rolled like a ship in a beam sea, a great, broad hulk of a man, five feet seven high. The mate jerked at his mustache, and his frown deepened. He went up on the bridge and cursed a snub-nosed boy polishing brass-work there. It relieved him somewhat.

For'ard, Captain Nelson found the carpenter and two men spreading the tarpaulins over Number One hatch. He watched for awhile. The men dropped the iron battens in place, and the carpenter started to fold in the corners of the canvas ready for wedging. Captain Nelson rolled forward.

He thundered: "Not that way. Give it me."

He pushed the carpenter aside. The man stood up and snorted. He was very much ruffled. He started: "I've been on lots of ships, an' I've always folded in corners—"

"On this ship you do it my way." The Captain banged the canvas savagely until it was to his satisfaction. He straightened.

"See that?" He rolled on to the fo'c'stle-head and inspected the old-fashioned anchors. The carpenter swore and scratched his head. He was a new man on the *Polaris*.

TWO hours later the little steamship slipped out of Antwerp and headed to the open sea. She was a queer-looking craft, a one-time schooner. Her bridge was right aft, built over and extended from the one-time poop. The galley and storeroom stood in a little deckhouse amidships. For'ard was a very small t'gallant fo'c'stle. Her masts were fat and stumpy—not her old sailing masts. Her wheel was an atrocious hand affair, chains about a wooden drum. Her smokestack stuck up like a cigarette from a flat board, immediately abaft the scanty little navigation bridge. She smelled of tallow and tar and old coal cargoes. Her total crew numbered twenty men. . . . .

The second mate was busy with the seamen, clearing up the decks and washing down. The mate paced the bridge with Captain Nelson. The helmsman stood in a badly built matched-board house, open at the for'ard end, before a wheel considerably bigger than himself.

"Typhoon," said the Captain, frowning. He was finishing a long argument. "Fairy tales. Bah! Twice I've sailed to Sierra Leone, once to Iceland. When I was a boy, I took a voyage to Tokio. *I* never saw a typhoon. Old woman's yarns." He scratched his leg viciously.

"It is so," the mate insisted. "Fifteen years away, I saw a wind near Madagascar. And such a wind! There was a man starting from for'ard to relieve the wheel, and the wind lifted him and blew him onto the lower bridge. With my own eyes—"

Captain Nelson thundered, "Bah!" and his neck swelled and grew red. He hammered the bridge-rail with his fists. "Am I a child to believe that? *I've* never seen such a wind. There is none. You are a good liar, Svensen. Like Olson! He said to me he had seen fishes rain in the rain. Bah!"

The Swede jerked his mustache and scowled. He knew the Captain had spent most of his sea life in the Baltic and the North Sea. What did he know of southern hurricanes?

"Fairy tales," snorted the Captain. "They try to tell me of the sea serpent. I have seen the ***kraken***, the great squid, and I know that is true. But I have never seen the sea-serpent. And I have sailed for thirty years. Is that not enough, tell me, for a man to see these things if they were so?"

The mate nodded but said nothing. He scowled at the weather sky where the clouds were massing darkly. Captain Nelson chuckled and scratched his leg.

"I will not believe that fishes rain—nor winds blow men up—nor sea-serpents. We sail now for America—first for this New York and then the river St. Lawrence. They tell me I shall presently sail fresh water where I cannot see across. I think they lie, but we shall see. And these houses that go thirty decks up we shall see also. It may be fairy tales too. Bah!"

The Swede said curiously: "Your first voyage to America, sir?" The Captain nodded. He clucked deep in his throat and scratched his leg again.

"They tell me I cannot go across the Western Ocean this time of the year—not in the *Polaris*. She is old, they say, not strong as a ship needs be for great storms. I tell them it is the man, not the ship. *I* have never lost a ship. And I get the charter, to start when we get to this fairy-tale lake. I sail. Sardines and wine and cloth for New York. Cars and steel for Montreal. Then light to this big lake of fresh water where it may be we load iron ore. They say the *Polaris* will not do all this. They refuse insurance. Fairy tales. Bah! We will show them."

He turned and rolled away, the son and grandson of sea captains, a descendent from the fiord men of old. The sea was salt. He knew because he had sailed it for thirty years, and tasted it too. It was wet. He knew because he had felt its wetness. In the same way he knew that a blow from a fist hurt because he had felt blows from fists. A strange man, Captain Nelson. The mate shook his head as he paced the bridge. He fumbled inside his jacket for an ivory charm. The touch of the thing comforted him.

THE *Polaris* limped into New York, and her decks were ruin. Salt caked her from truck to scuppers. Her engines were wheezy and running fitfully, and half her rigging hung in hopeless-looking bights. Nor had she any boats left. But her crew was safe, and on her bridge a grim, weary-looking Captain Nelson stood. He thundered at the equally weary mate: "They

told me she would not come across. Bah! We will show them!"

At her appointed time the *Polaris* was patched up, was unloaded and loaded again. She crept painfully up the coast and curved into the broad St. Lawrence. Captain Nelson's eyes popped as he traversed the mighty stream. The short, sullen seas of the Baltic were an old tale. The angry, shallow chop of the North Sea and the Channel he knew. He remembered even the quiet swell of the glassy doldrums and the swollen floods of tropic rivers. But this calm, deep surge of endless water, that split a very continent in twain, was fresh to him.

He was frowning by the time Quebec was reached. At Montreal, where the *Polaris* docked, he recovered somewhat. The river had resumed riverlike proportions, as was proper. He even argued with the mate one night, in French Marie's saloon, that it was impossible for any river to run much farther inland—because *he* had never known any such river.

The *Polaris* accomplished at Montreal what she was supposed to accomplish. Then she groped on into the hinterland, the Captain swearing softly to himself as the river curved endlessly before him. He studied his charts, new charts bought in New York, and wondered. These immense masses of water! Great Lakes. He might believe that. It was his experience that charts seldom lied. But this talk of them being fresh water. Bah! It was his experience that a fresh-water lake never exceeded a certain limited size. Doubtless these lakes were fed somewhere from the sea.

The ship plodded by Wolfe Island and breasted the surge of Lake Ontario. The Captain's eyes bulged. He took to swearing more and more to himself. He choked at the sight of the long, lean-bellied Lake steamers, with such immense flat decks between after engine house and fo'c'stle-head.

He said to the mate, protesting: "This is no lake. This is the sea, the Pacific I sailed once when I went to Tokio. It was calm like this then. Yes, this is the sea." But he would not look at the charts again.

The mate grunted and jerked at his mustache. Then he grinned and disappeared for a while. He dropped a bucket overside at the end of a heaving-line and bore it up to the bridge when it was full.

He rumbled solemnly, "Fresh, sir," and waited.

The Captain's bull neck swelled and grew red. His smooth, fat face grew red also. The veins stood out like rope. The deep blue eyes of him bulged from under bushy yellow brows. He scratched his leg mechanically.

He thundered: "Quiet! This is no lake. There never was such a lake as this. I have never—" He stopped abruptly. A little frightened look crept into his eyes. He splashed his fingers into the bucket and then sucked them. He grew very quiet, hardly breathing. He rocked for a moment as though struck by something solid. He scratched his leg again. Bleakly he searched the vacant horizon.

He said hazily: "They tell me of fishes that rain. And typhoons. And sea-serpents. Bah! Fairy tales." He recovered somewhat. He thundered again, insistently: "This water! Fresh! Bah!" He tasted it once more and cocked his head to one side. "Fresh! Bah! There is a salt tinge. I can feel it. Fresh? Fairy tales!"

He snorted and rolled away. With a sigh the mate allowed the water to run over the bucket's side. He moved off after a while, shaking his head. He was a very patient man.

THE *Polaris* went through the Welland Canal commanded by a dazed man. He blinked at Lake Erie and then retired to his charts. It was unbelievable, but it was so. The charts said it was. Worse! The charts said the Lakes ahead were bigger. He sighed and wondered if he was going mad, or dreaming. The mate was satisfied these days, chuckling often, twisting his mustache gently.

By virtue of good luck, fine weather and the uncanny sea-sense of her master that operated under any conditions, the *Polaris* crept at last unharmed into Lake Superior and began the long run past Whitefish Point to Duluth, where her charter was to commence in earnest. At Sault Ste. Marie, just before the greatest Lake was reached, Captain Nelson was forced to fly signals for a doctor. An able seaman had fallen from the bos'n's chair at the head of the smoke-stack, where he had been painting.

The doctor came aboard, a cheery, red-faced man with white fringe whiskers and a hearty voice. The Captain disliked him from the start. While setting the seaman's broken leg and ribs, the doctor talked mightily.

"From the deep water, eh? Hah! Don't laugh at our Lakes. I know you ocean men. Come here and grin. Lake sailing easy, eh? Seems like a holiday. Wait a bit! Wait a bit! There's storms here that'll crimp your hair. Make you pray for sea-room, too."

"Bah!" thundered Captain Nelson pugnaciously. "Storms here! I could sail across this water in two days—one, maybe. A pond. Pooh! *I* have never seen storms in a sheltered harbor. Land all around."

"Wait a bit! Wait a bit!" the genial doctor admonished. He stopped to shoot something into the seaman's arm. "Storms you'll see afore you're through. What you in? Taking ore-company charter, eh? Lots of time for you to learn, then. You'll pass Whitefish Point on your way. Watch out. Oh, watch out. Graveyard of the Lakes, they call it. Lake floor's thick with ships that went down there. Piled on each other."

"Bah!" Captain Nelson's bull neck swelled and grew red. "Bah!" His smooth, fat face grew red. "What can you expect? There can be no sailors on this water. Bad seamanship. I know! I have talked with a Lake skipper. He had never tasted deep sea. This is for pleasure-boats. Storms and wrecks—fairy tales! *I* have not seen a ripple since I came."

The doctor went ashore laughing. He told them the joke at the club that night.

"Nelson's his name. Cast-iron Norwegian. Believes nothing he don't see. Measures our water by the Western Ocean and giggles. I'd like to meet him a year from now."

THE *Polaris* steamed on. The Captain said less about fairy tales and fresh water when he nearly ran into a water-logged derelict off Whitefish Point. His charts, too, held him dumb. You can't argue with charts. He had thought the North Sea and Pacific, the Baltic and the Atlantic was the world. It could not be, and yet it was so, against all experience—a lake across which his strongest glasses could not see. He took soundings, doubting the charts, but found them correct. Still, a hundred fathoms, which his lead showed, was not much. He scratched his leg when he thought of this. It took a thousand fathoms to make a sea. Shallow little pond! He sniffed, but he made no more soundings.

The evening he sighted the Gull Rock Light, the water started to swell. It came up choppy at first—choppy, short and breaking over a sort of under-running pulse. Spray even flew over the knight's-heads. The mate rumbled: "We'll batten down, sir—and put lashings extra on the boats, eh? The glass—"

Captain Nelson thundered "Quiet!" and his soul was in revolt. "Am I a fool to be told the glass is falling? Batten down. Bah! There is no water here to make a sea." He rolled away and stood in the tiny bridge-wing, his hands behind him, snorting into the wind.

By dark there was weather. A sea flooded the open fore-hatch. The fo'c'stle was swimming. A few bales and kegs of deck-cargo aft had gone. The house wherein the helmsman wrestled with the monster wheel had been knocked drunkenly askew.

The mate took a chance at last. He called to the bos'n. He shouted, above the wind: "Lash everything. Get the carpenter and batten down. We're in for a dirty night."

Captain Nelson stood near and heard this. His bull neck swelled. He scowled. It was on his lips to roar a counter-command when a bitter cold spray danced over the dodger, slapped him across the mouth and robbed him of breath. He was soaked to the skin—he had not even troubled to put on his oilskins, so great was his contempt. The bos'n looked at him inquiringly. The mate waited. Then he said sharply, when the Captain made no move: "Get along and do as you're told!"

The bos'n muttered, "Yessir," and hurried away. The Captain thundered, suddenly getting back his breath, "Fairy tales! Bah!" and rolled to his cabin. He went in and slammed the door with a bang, leaving the mate and the second to carry the ship through. Nor did he show his face again until next morning, when the sun shone and the water had calmed. He noted his ship had a mauled look, and deep inside, he was perplexed.

In the minute chart-room, behind the drunken wheelhouse, he found an entry in the log-book under date of the previous night. It ran: *"Heavy wind and sea. Severe damage done to cargo."* Wrath stirred in him. Bah! A storm on fresh water! He rubbed out the entry and wrote: *"Slight swell running. Wind fair. A little damage done to cargo."* Then scratching his leg viciously, he went to see the car-

penter about fixing the wheelhouse. He was in a very bad temper all that morning. The mate he ignored completely.

THE *Polaris* drew near her destination. She curved round the Apostle Islands and picked up Granite Point far on her starboard beam. Because of his inexperience with the Lakes, and partly because of his careless contempt and indifference to the navigation, the Captain had lost time on his run from the sea. But still, he was arriving. Somewhere ahead lay Duluth, and the ore company that had chartered him.

It was late afternoon, with the port of his profanities in sight, the breakwaters to the harbor in view, when the *Polaris*, contemptuously skirting a deserted-looking shore, ran smack on to a sand bar.

When it happened, the mate rumbled: "I told you we should have kept farther out." He blinked and jerked at his mustache. The Captain cursed and shook his fists at distant Duluth.

"These blasted Lakes! Never have I sailed such a place. The whole country is crazy. I will not stand for it. Damn the charter! Back we go to the sea. Bah! Am I a child to spend my life playing with ponds?"

The *Polaris* was stuck hard and fast, on an even keel. Luckily the day was calm. Scarce a ripple shook the surface of the water. The wind was off-shore and very fair. The sun was bright. The sky was misty blue. The Captain put the engines astern time and again. They stirred up considerable sand. That was all. There was no movement of the *Polaris*. The Captain cursed again. Then he rolled below and shut himself in his room.

After a while the mate tapped at the door. He said: "Shall I signal for a tow, sir?"

Captain Nelson exploded. He bounced up from the settee where he had been lying. He choked. His bull neck swelled and grew red. His smooth, fat face grew red. The deep blue eyes of him popped out from under bushy yellow brows. He shook his fists.

He thundered: "Quiet! A tow? What should I be wanting with a tow? We will wait for the flood tide and back off ourselves. Are you crazy, Svensen? Am I made of money? Bah!"

The mate started, unperturbed: "There is—"

"Get out!" choked the Captain. "Am I a fool?"

"But—" said the mate. The Captain took a step toward him, and he fled.

"Am I crazy?" the Captain demanded of his mirror when the mate had gone. "Is every man crazy? They tell me of fresh water and lakes I cannot see across. They tell me of typhoons and sea-serpents. Now they want me to take a tow, *a tow*, when my ship is only on a sandbar. Fairy tales! Bah!" He snorted after a while: "I think all sailors died with my father."

HOURS passed. The mate went to his room and slept, smiling wisely, knowing many things. He was a patient man. The second mate and a seaman kept the watch. The rest of the crew lounged in the fo'c'stle and talked with strange tongues and gambled at strange games.

Then there came from between the harbor breakwaters, miles away, a bluff-bowed fussy tug with a great squat stern and an immense fat black smokestack. From her bridge window hung a lean, hollow-cheeked man in a dilapidated uniform. He spat tobacco-juice incessantly and had a high, squeaky voice.

The tug churned right round the *Polaris*, her lesser draft taking her clear over the sand on which the bigger ship rested. Apparently satisfied she was fast, the tug captain squeaked shrilly.

"Want a tow? Hi! Take you in reasonable."

The second mate straightened from his seat in the cool chart-room and rubbed his eyes. Yawning, he went out on the bridge. He was a Dane, dark-haired and gray-eyed. In his quaint English he answered the hail. Then he went to call Captain Nelson.

Ruffled, like a bear tormented, the Captain rolled to the ship's rail and leaned over.

"Go to hell!" he thundered. "Am I crazy to need a tow?"

The thin man gasped and spat tobacco overside. In the bows of the tug, a white-whiskered seaman was coiling a thin heaving-line ready for throwing. He looked up abruptly at the Captain's words.

"Wot the hell," said the master of the tug. "You can't stay here all day."

"Can't I? Can't I?" bawled the Captain. He choked, and his neck swelled and grew red. He scratched his leg and thundered again: "Is there a law in this mad country that a ship cannot run aground?

Am I crazy to pay for a tow? There is nothing wrong. A little sand holds us. I wait for the flood tide to float us off. Get out of my sight. Tow! Bah!"

"You're waiting for what?" roared the astonished master of the tug.

"Tide! Flood tide!"

The mate of the *Polaris* roused by the shouting, touched his commander's elbow. "But, sir—" he started. The Captain swung on him and snarled: "Shut up, you!"

"Tide?" squeaked the master of the tug. He tried to spit tobacco-juice, apparently swallowed some and started to cough. His eyes ran water. His face went red and seemed to puff.

"Did you say tide?" he asked feebly at last.

The old white-whiskered seaman in the tug's bows removed his clay pipe. He dropped the heaving-line he was coiling and stared with red-rimmed eyes. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said.

"My God," croaked the master of the tug. He collapsed inside his wheelhouse.

"Get out!" thundered Captain Nelson, swinging back to the rail. His brow was dark. "Get out of here. I want no tow."

The master of the tug stuck out his head again. He had recovered himself. He spat tobacco-juice overside. He squeaked, quite calmly: "There is no tide."

CAPTAIN NELSON'S bull neck swelled. His smooth, fat face grew red. Anger swept him. This was the crowning insult. Too long had men taken him for a child, telling him quaint tales. He scratched his leg and stormed: "Quiet! Am I a fool? Because I come from the sea to strange waters, you think I crazy altogether? No tide? Bah! More fairy tales. So they tell me sea-serpents and fishes that rain. Bah! And typhoons! Go away."

"But sir—" said the mate behind him. He flung, "Shut up!" over his shoulder and snorted.

"You're crazy, Cap'," said the master of the tug. The white-whiskered seaman in the bows scratched his head. He called: "Say, you must be crazy. Tides? Huh! There's everything but, here."

"Quiet!" thundered the outraged Captain Nelson. "Have I sailed the sea for thirty years to be told this? Fool I have been to come here at all. This pond shall I leave. No tide! *Never* have I sailed a sea that had no tide. *I* have never known the tide not to come. It is impossible. I am not crazy. Sooner would I believe in sea-serpents and typhoons. Get out. Bah!"

"But," said the mate behind him, "there is no tide here. It is known. There never was a tide in these waters."

"You too?" shouted the Captain. "Must every man think I know nothing? Have I sailed the sea for thirty years to be told there is no such thing as tide? Bah! Bah! Bah! Fairy tales!"

He stamped along the rail and shook his fists.

"I'll come back tonight," called the master of the tug. Doubling up with what might have been laughter, he headed back for the breakwaters. In the bows of his craft the white-whiskered old seaman sank helpless on a bitt and looked at Captain Nelson.

"I shall wait for the tide," the Captain announced. "Don't talk to me. This is conspiracy against me. To kid me, eh? I am not a boy. Thirty years on the sea! I know. Fairy tales. Bah!" He rolled away to his cabin and locked himself in, snorting indignantly. The mate grunted and went back to his bunk. More days, more dollars for him.

After a while, when the ship had settled to peace again, Captain Nelson came furtively from his cabin and went right aft. He leaned over the rail and gazed at the clear, cold water. Anxiously he watched it, marking its level from a rust-spot on the red-painted great rudder. He could just see the rudder by leaning far outboard. The water must rise or fall. It could not be that there was no tide. All his life he had navigated according to tide.

It must be there was a tide here. He could not imagine any body of water so great without a tide. He was lost, shaken. His confidence in himself and his seamanship was rocking. If you could not depend on the tide, what could you depend on? Perhaps in some parts of the world the sun did not rise in the east and set in the west. Perhaps in some parts it did not rise at all. And the moon likewise. Perhaps even the stars! How *then* could a man get a sight and run his reckoning? They had told him at the navigation school, twenty odd years before, that such matters ran with the great unchanging law of things. He did not remember whether tides had been included, but he thought they had.

He scratched his leg mechanically, and

frowned. The water still swirled around the rust-spot. No rise, no fall. Perhaps it was slack water. He hoped so. Perhaps the compass pointed to the east sometimes. It might be. Perhaps that accounted for so many puzzling wrecks. Some law was not working. If such a state of affairs was so, what right had the books and the schools to bluff? Why should they tell lies? He frowned deeper than before.

Sea-serpents, typhoons, fishes that rained, tideless seas, freshwater seas, lakes you couldn't look across, storms that wrecked ships in a pond! They whirled through his brain in a jumble. He stirred uneasily and scratched his leg again. He was a respectable, honest, capable skipper. He had never lost a ship. He had never been told his navigation was incompetent. He had always considered himself as one of vast experience, able, looking with proper contempt and patronage on younger men.

But this was beyond experience. It violated the wisdom of years. The whole voyage had been crazy. Everything seemed reversed. Men mocked him. He swore strange oaths and watched the rust-spot, a very lonely and bewildered old man. After a while he crept back to his cabin and raked a whisky-bottle from his locker. He thought he needed a drink.

AT evening the tug came back. The lean, hollow-cheeked man still leaned from the bridge window and spat tobacco-juice. And beside the white-whiskered seaman in the bows now stood two men in neat tweed suits and white stiff collars.

"Want a tow?" squeaked the master of the tug. He spat overside. Captain Nelson bounced on the bridge, all his pugnacity aroused.

"Quiet!" he thundered. "I will not have a tow. The tide will soon come, and I shall float off."

The two well-dressed men started to laugh. They pulled out notebooks and waved them. "Can we come aboard?" one of them called.

The Captain stormed: "I will kill the first man." He shook his fists.

"We're from the papers," said the man in response. "I'm from the *Herald*. This chap's from the *Tribune*. We want a story—"

"Good stuff!" shouted the other man. "Give you publicity. Skipper waiting for the tide off Duluth."

The Captain thundered, outraged: "Go to hell! Take your boat to hell! I would not have a tow if I stay here forever now. Get out. Bah! No tide! Fairy tales!"

Abruptly he rolled aft, out of sight of the tug, frowning and swearing. The mate followed him. The tug, after a short conversation between the master and the two reporters, put back for Duluth.

"Sir," asked the mate quietly, "shall I lower a boat and carry out an anchor?"

The Captain swelled and grew red. "No!" he stormed. "No!"

"But," said the mate patiently," there is no tide."

"Fairy tales," shouted the Captain. "Bah! Leave me alone."

He went aft and hung over the rail, watching the rust-spot on the rudder. And he was there when the stars came out and the cold Lake breeze made him shiver. He went to his room reluctantly and lay awake most of the night, perplexed. Twice he got up and went aft to view the water, and twice he came back swearing. There was no tide.

It was unbelievable and monstrous and impossible. But it was so. You could not dispute that rust-spot. The Captain slept at last, fitfully, tossing and turning in his narrow bunk.

WITH the dawn he was up and aft again. No change. The rust-spot stood as it had before, half in, half out of the clear water. The mate came to him after breakfast.

"Shall I lower a boat—" he commenced, twisting his mustache. He was a very patient man. The Captain croaked: "No! I will not haul myself off. The tide will come. This is strange, but there must be a tide sometime. *Never* have I seen a day when there was no tide. Get out of my sight."

"Yes sir," said the mate carefully. He walked away, frowning. With suppressed excitement, the crew washed down. Some of them broke into giggles at times. The mate cursed them coldly when he heard. He liked Captain Nelson. It was not right they should laugh at him.

The *Polaris* stayed on the sandbar all that day, while Captain Nelson hung over the rail and waited for the tide. By the grace of the sea-gods the weather held fine, else the steamer would have been battered to bits as she lay.

On the morning of the third day the tug came out again. Her master made no at-

tempt to get a tow. His decks were loaded with curious townsfolk who had paid a dollar a head to view the outland captain who waited for a tide. The tug swept slowly round the *Polaris* three times and then returned to Duluth. The raw-boned mate flushed under his tan as he heard the fading laughter. He swore a mighty oath. Then he started determinedly for'ard.

"Let go the port lifeboat," he roared. His voice was savage. The crew jumped, alarmed. They hesitated a moment and then ran for the poop. The whining of the old falls roused Captain Nelson from his survey of the rust-spot on the rudder. He came angrily on to the bridge.

"Damn you, Svensen! Who gave you orders? I will not drag my ship off."

The mate said harshly: "She's coming off, and you can be damned." His eyes were frosty and unafraid at his mutiny. "I'm sick of being laughed at. You're an old fool, and you know it. What do we know of strange waters? We must sail according as we find them. I do not know these Lakes, either, but the books say certain things, and the books do not always lie. Else how should we navigate!"

"Quiet!" thundered the Captain. He shook his fists. "Order that boat in. I will not— The tide *must* be somewhere," he ended plaintively. He looked suddenly old. Secretly he was glad the decision had been taken from him. He felt he was up against something subtle that was not to be resisted. It frightened him. He bluffed with a semblance of his usual arrogance: "Have I sailed the sea for thirty years to find a place without a tide?"

"You have," snapped the mate grimly. He strode away to superintend the lowering of an anchor to the boat. The Captain choked. His bull neck grew red. His smooth, fat face grew red also. He clenched his fists, and for a moment seemed about to start after the mate.

Then the smoke from the departing tug caught his eye, and he hesitated. Uneasiness swept him. He must be wrong. But —but—the world would fall about his ears. And they were laughing at him. He was waiting for a tide that they said would never come. There was no tide. He felt bewildered, and slowly rolled to his cabin.

THE mate had her off at dusk, the ship's winches gripping the cable and hauling on the anchor which had been dropped to the Lake floor far astern. The ship's engines went astern too. The *Polaris* slipped off the sand and floated lightly on the Lake. Free again! The mate went to Captain Nelson when he had the ship making slowly for the distant breakwaters.

"Are you taking her in, sir?" he inquired grimly. The Captain rose from his chair and with astonishing meekness followed the mate on deck.

Once or twice he rolled into the chart-room for a look at the chart. Apart from that, he didn't move.

As they were making for an anchorage in the center of the bay, a fussy white-painted launch shot alongside. A snappy-looking serge-suited man stood in the stern sheets and bellowed for a line. At a gesture from Nelson the mate ordered the pilot-ladder dropped. The snappy-looking stranger clambered up and strode on the bridge.

"Captain Nelson? Glad to meet you. I'm your charter party's representative. Charter starts soon as you're docked. Been making a damned fool of yourself, so I hear. Waiting for the tide! You're the laughing-stock of the Lakes. . . . . Well, that's your dock—over there." He pointed. "Get in soon as you can. . . . . By the way," he added, grinning, "how'd you get off? Take a tow?"

CAPTAIN NELSON roused himself. And he forgot his fear and humiliation. He was the seaman, capable, confident.

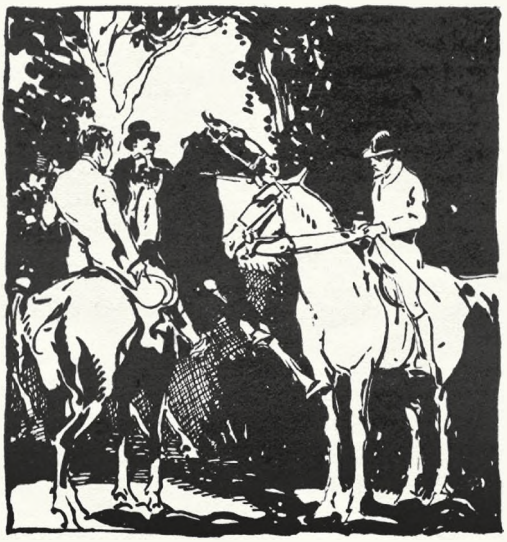
"Quiet!" he thundered.

"But," insinuated the agent, "you found there was no tide, eh?"

The Captain's bull neck swelled and grew red. His smooth, fat face grew red also. The veins stood out like rope. He shook his fists. He breathed deep. Then he burst out, in one great shedding of his old standards: *"Yes, I did!* I found there was no tide. I saw buildings thirty decks high—and fresh water seas—and storms in ponds—and damned fools who asked crazy questions!" He shouted enormously: "Now show me your sea-serpents! And your typhoons! And your fishes that rain! I guess I can stand them. They might be! Have I sailed the deep water for thirty years without learning to be reasonable? Bah!"

He scratched his leg. He stalked away, rolling like a ship in a beam sea. The mate grinned under his hand and pulled his mustache. He had been expecting this for days. He was a very patient man.

"My God," said the agent weakly. His grin disappeared.



Free Lances in Diplomacy

In this remarkable story "What Happened at Windsor," Mr. New again reveals his extraordinary knowledge of international affairs and his intimate information concerning personages of importance. Don't miss this really unique note in modern fiction.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

SIR ERIC TREFFEL, as the official in charge of certain royal palaces, has upon his shoulders an amount of responsibility which requires a strong constitution and a sound and thoroughly controlled nervous system. He is responsible not only for the personal safety of the royal family, but of the statesmen and visiting personages among their guests, as well. Beyond this, it is his duty to see that each house-party contains no individuals who are sufficiently antagonistic to cause the least unpleasantness during their stay. He has the privilege of suggesting certain people for any specific week—though the final decision always rests with His Majesty. But if he blunders in bringing the wrong people together under the royal roof, if certain visiting statesmen or members of the Continental nobility forget too far the courtesy due their host and use the occasion for political intrigue, the blame rests directly upon Sir Eric's shoulders. All this implies that he must be a man possessed of infinite tact and organizing ability. As a matter of fact, he has been noticeably more successful than some of his predecessors; and so the jolt he received from his narrow escape in the case of Mr. Goldmann, the supposed Cuban financier who accompanied the Iberian Ambassador as one of his suite—an escape which he owed entirely to Earl Trevor and his friends—was a severe one.

On the morning after Goldmann had been removed from Windsor in a limousine, with the curtains drawn,—to be taken away on one of the navy destroyers for an indefinite time,—Sir Eric was up before sunrise, not having been able to sleep at all, and riding his favorite mount in the Home Park to settle his nerves. He was going slowly along one of the narrower bridle-paths just off the Long Walk, when his horse almost ran into that of another rider coming in the opposite direction—a man who sat his mount as if he were part of the animal, whose beard was streaked with gray and

who wore a tweed riding-suit, with fedora hat to match. Sir Eric would have been out of the saddle at once if the other hadn't motioned him to remain mounted, and extended his cigar-case.

"Er—something I had in mind to ask you, Eric, if you happened to be about this morning. Something I saw from a window of my suite last night—just by chance. Been puzzling over it since I started out. You told me yesterday that Mr. Goldmann, of Don Pablo's entourage, was desirous of returning to London upon an important financial matter connected with the Embassy and requested permission to do so. Such emergencies occur, of course—though they are seldom important enough to call any of our guests away during their visit. I didn't think of the matter again until I saw a man being put into a limousine with the curtains drawn—about one in the morning—when by mere chance I happened to look down into the Upper Ward. It seemed to me that the man was unmistakably Mr. Goldmann, and that he was ill or helpless. If he was really ill, he should have remained here where the medical staff would have given him the best of care—"

"We had hoped that this affair might escape your notice, sir—particularly, as it reflects somewhat upon me and others concerned with the safety of the Court. Don Pablo is, of course, absolutely innocent—ignorant of what was going on. Goldmann has a reputation as a financier—has given him good advice concerning British and other investments—and has a good deal of influence in Madrid. His appointment as financial adviser to the embassy was indorsed by their Foreign Office very promptly—without the slightest question. Yet the man is a political conspirator—working in favor of some bloc which we are in doubt about at present but which seems to be against a peaceful reconstruction of Europe along the lines of general coöperation. Goldmann had an interview after midnight with Baron Kalycksy, in the Baron's suite—drugged him, took from his luggage a certain initialed document which is to form a tentative basis of understanding between the European states, and would have passed it on to a confederate who had managed to obtain a berth in the kitchens of the Castle, if Trevor and Lammerford hadn't been watching him and put the two of them out of business when he returned to his room.

"I had been in doubt about accepting Goldmann as one of Don Pablo's suite, had cabled New York, Havana and Madrid to make inquiries, but could find nothing at all against him. Yet as soon as Earl Trevor heard that he was to be one of the Iberian suite, down here, he said that their particular four must be somehow in the Castle when Goldmann arrived. They didn't know any more against the man than I did—but were positive he had managed to get down here with some political object. If the royal invitation hadn't been sent them, they would have come down anyhow and asked for a private interview. It seemed most desirable, however, that the sovereigns should not be annoyed by anything of the sort if it could be kept from them. Personally, I feel that I should have managed to dig up more about the man and avoided permitting him to enter the Castle. My resignation is offered in consequence."

"BUT is not accepted, Eric! If Trevor, Countess Nan, Sir Abdool, Lammerford, were none of them *sure* of anything against the man, you couldn't possibly have discovered it—because their intuitions are something abnormal. The country and the government owe those four more than will ever be known. If their many engagements permitted, they should have a standing invitation to accompany the Court wherever it goes. Particularly, it would be most desirable to keep them here at Windsor during the next three weeks. We'll be having several men down who represent the balance of influence throughout Europe, and more or less political discussion will be difficult to avoid. But I suppose the Trevors have made all their arrangements for that Oriental trip?"

"They're going out on their yacht, sir, as I understand—so there's no question of steamer reservations. Of course their dates in the East would be another matter—but it is possible that they are not definitely fixed as yet. They certainly came down here to see the Goldmann matter through, no matter how long it took."

"H-m-m—of course if it's put as a personal favor, they're sure to stay, but if they have important affairs to look after in the Orient, they shouldn't be imposed upon in any such way. Suppose you put it to them, Eric, that we'd like to have them stay, but wish to avoid any suggestion of a command on account of their many

business and social obligations which might conflict. If it can be managed without too great inconvenience, they'll remain. I know them."

ABOUT the same time, in the Trevors' suite of five rooms in the Victoria Tower, the four old friends were discussing a plausible excuse which might secure a royal invitation to extend their stay in the Castle another two or three weeks. From Sir Eric, who owed his appointment to Countess Nan's friendly suggestion when lunching at Buckingham, one day, they had learned the names of those who were coming down to Windsor during the remainder of the Court's stay, and it seemed to them a peculiar circumstance that five men who might be said to control the strongest parties in three times that number of the European states should be scheduled for a visit to Windsor at the same time. They casually asked Sir Eric how it happened—and had they been people of the average type, would have accepted the coincidence as mere chance, as he did. But they knew that chance, if accidental, was about one in a million. Further questioning elicited the fact that their friend had received hints in three instances that the individuals happened to have no engagements during the next fifteen days which could not be put off if necessary.

Invitations to Windsor are at a premium even among the greatest in Europe. At Buckingham or St. James' in London, the business of Government—the detail which necessitates important conferences with the sovereign—impinges far more upon the social life of the Court than in such country-houses as Windsor, Balmoral or any of the other estates. At Windsor, particularly, the Court relaxes into more of the holiday mood. There are occasional state conferences, of course, when the necessity appears unavoidable, but the house-party is down there for sport and relaxation. The King and his guests usually do a bit of hunting in the Great Park, which covers more than three thousand acres, including the detached forests, take long rides in the saddle, long walks, make of each evening's dinner a festive occasion lasting from eight thirty until after eleven, including the games and chat in the drawing-rooms after they leave the table for their coffee and tobacco. The Castle itself is one of the greatest treasure-houses in the world, and royal guests usually have ample opportunity to inspect its contents at their leisure. But its greatest attraction is the historic interest with which every stone of it is saturated—history closely associated with many of the world's momentous events for more than a thousand years.

AFTER Sir Eric left them, Countess Nan went downstairs, crossed the Upper Ward and hunted up the Honorable Mr. Fortescue, who took her to that section of the royal library which contained a marvelous assortment of current statistical information. A friendship of several years had existed between them, partly because of mutual tastes, partly from the wonderful systematizing ability which each recognized in the other. Countess Nan and her husband were the only people he knew whose system of reference files upon every conceivable subject, in the libraries of their own houses, was, if possible, more perfect than the one he had devised for the Windsor collections. After she had been digging half an hour for what she wanted, she mentally congratulated the royal librarian upon the thoroughness with which he seemed to have collected every available scrap of information upon men in public life all over the world. So absorbed did she become in her work and the notes she was taking, that the switching-on of the electric lights after sunset was the first warning she had of the approaching dinner-hour—and there was none too much time to dress.

As it happened, Nan was on His Majesty's left at dinner, and while she managed to carry on a fourfold conversation with a good deal of appropriate, often laughable, repartee, she got the King thoroughly interested in her thirst for information concerning some of the royal guests who would be arriving during the next ten days. A woman of another type, obviously talking out of idle curiosity and asking questions upon what was really none of her business, would have been courteously sidetracked by His Majesty and found herself discussing something of an entirely different nature without understanding quite how it happened. But the King knew, from long acquaintance, that both he and the Empire would be the first to benefit from any facts he could give the Countess of Dyvnaint—though what she had in mind, he couldn't even guess, beyond the fact that she considered the coming together of a certain five men at Windsor the sort of occurrence

which might not happen twice in half a million times.

THAT night, after the guests had retired to their various suites, the four old friends sat down for a final smoke in Countess Nan's drawing-room, which overlooked the South Terrace, with the end of the Long Walk. (This famous Avenue, by the way, runs due south three miles to Snow Hill in the Great Park, as straight as the edge of a ruler. Queen Anne's Ride, which runs almost parallel to it on the west side, leads directly to Ascot Heath, where the races are run in June.)

The men were naturally interested in the results of her researches and questioning Nan upon one point or another in order to check up on what they personally knew of the people under discussion.

"First," she reported, "we have Otto Schnellenberger—an associate of Stinnes. Born in Vienna, but a citizen of Hamburg for the last thirty years. Member of the Right in the Reichstag, but with a mysterious, surprising influence among the socialists of Germany, Austria, Hungary and Czecho-Slovakia as those countries are now constituted. He is supposed to be upper middle-class, some members of his family having married Junkers. Supposed to believe in democracy as opposed to the monarchical system, yet is known to be intimate with several members of the former nobility. Is believed to have fifty millions, gold, on deposit in foreign banks in fictitious names. It is also believed among London banking houses that in the event of revolution or serious uprising of any sort, he has sufficient influence to make it either abortive or a good deal more serious—depending upon the unknown plans of powerful interests and political divisions with which he is thought to be associated."

"Hmph! You've supplied a few of the missing links in the case of Schnellenberger, Nan—and I'll wager you did it more from a circumstantial piecing together of various unrelated items concerning him than from anything definite which you found in the library among Fortescue's data. Well—go on to the others! How about Henri Gribaut?"

"Deputy from one of the eastern border Departments in France. Supposed, of course, to be French. Actually, a Swiss from Constance, with a German family as far back as they can be traced. Closely mixed up with the socialists in Lyons, particularly its socialist mayor. Through his Swiss connections he is more or less influential in northern Italy and Jugo-Slavia—influential enough for men like Mussolini to prefer his coöperation rather than oppose him upon several recent questions between France and Italy."

"And Zakanoffski?"

"Added the last three letters to his name just before he commenced to be prominent in Warsaw. He's supposed to be a Polish financier and patriot. Actually born in Kiev as Dimitri Zakanoff—of a Greek mother and Ukrainian father. Has spent some years as a banker in New York and Chicago, speaks five languages fluently, is supposed to hate the whole German race, but is on friendly enough terms with Schnellenberger. Is a director on the boards of various central European transportation systems. Has a widespread acquaintance and considerable influence among certain political factions in the Balkans, in Russia, in Poland, even in Finland—obtained, possibly, through his banking and transportation interests, but more probably through unsuspected affiliation with them dating several years back."

"WHAT about Francisco Moreno? And Inoyue Tatsuri?"

"General Moreno—who abandoned military life for large commercial enterprises—would appear to belong in another alley altogether. On the surface there is nothing to connect him with European reconstruction or any of the formerly belligerent states. He has much influence in Spain, South America, Scandinavia and the Dutch Indies—his steamship lines trade to all of them. Under the surface that influence is as much political as commercial, because he is in close touch with Austrian, Dutch and German politicians. As for Baron Tatsuri,—the only member of the nobility in the five,—it has been said that he can dive deeper into the sea of politics, swim farther under water, and come up in more unexpected places than any other man in Oriental public life. He is as popular in North China as any of the Touchans, as well liked among the Malays as any of their own Tuans—and the one Oriental who gets concessions from the Moscow Soviet on his own terms. In any reconstruction of Europe, he will have to be taken into account, because nothing of the sort can be put upon a workable basis until it deals with the various Asiatic questions

as well. We are practically certain that a treaty of some sort exists between Moscow and Tokio—with a supposition that Berlin is party to it. Well, if that treaty covers enough ground, it controls unlimited natural resources and armies of twenty million men if they are needed. Today Japan is *hors concours*—from the crushing blow she has just received. But that by no means lessens her potential power with any such treaty in existence."

"No point in disputing that, because it's cold fact. Now—we have these five men coming together at the same time as royal guests in Windsor, where anything savoring of intrigue is supposed to be barred as a matter of courtesy to the royal host. And there's not much question but that two or three of those men have deliberately planned and managed to get their invitations here at this particular time. On the surface, collusion of that sort would imply one thing pretty clearly. If either one of them tried to bring about a meeting with two or three of the others, occupying the influential position he does, such a conference would be almost certainly ferreted out and extensively speculated upon by the news-sheets. Also, it would be very difficult to secure concerted action with the whole five if but two of them met at any one time. But as guests in a royal castle, where the invitations are subject to the monarch's personal wishes, their coming together at the same time can't be thought anything but a coincidence, unless the King himself were accused of deliberately planning it.

"ANY such initiative upon his part would imply, of course, a great deal of censure and loss of popularity if he failed to carry through whatever plan he had in mind. With the few monarchies existing merely by tolerance, as they are today, no ruler is taking any such chance as that. So there we have ideal conditions for a secret conference between these men under conditions where nothing of the sort is supposed possible. Five monarchs coming together in this way might pledge their nations to any policy of conquest or extension they wished, and get away with it. But in these days of democracies, any agreement reached by these five men can be only tentative—they've got to use all the influence they possess in order to swing the various states into accepting what they've laid out. Which makes a conference between them all the more desirable—and means either an improvement in the way of international relations, or a domination by some one power that would be worse for the world than the existing conditions. It's almost like settling the fate of Europe by a game of poker, in which the power with the coldest nerve wins."

"Would you let such a conference take place—on the chance of its bringing about an improvement?"

"Not unless I were sure beforehand that it would result that way—and with the gross selfishness, the race-hatreds, which always have been uppermost in European politics, the chances are very strongly against any such desirable outcome. How to get advance information as to what those men intend to do—what each has up his sleeve? That's the nut we have to crack!"

COUNTESS NAN'S thoughts had been flashing from one phase of the situation to another.

"It strikes me that something might be done with Schnellenberger's private secretary—Wolfgang Rapp. From what we already know about Schnellenberger and what I infer beyond that, any man he trusts with his correspondence would have to be of the exceptional sort, obliged to have his employer's affairs so completely at his finger-ends that he could act independently in an emergency, upon his own initiative. As that employer seems to me the most capable of the five, except Baron Tatsuri, he's likely to have something more than a suspicion of what the others are out to accomplish. I place the German and the Jap as the dominant minds, with a good deal more knowledge of what is going on in the other states than they are credited with.

"This Wolfgang Rapp will have the status, here in the Castle, of a gentleman connected with a personal suite—not classed as a servant, maid or valet, yet not having the standing of a royal guest permitted to dine and mingle with the other guests. Sir Eric got a jolt in the case of Goldmann which has made him dig out some of the almost obsolete regulations and strictly enforce them. No members of any personal suite, hereafter, will have the opportunities Goldmann had as financial adviser to the Iberian embassy! All of which means that, when not on duty, Rapp and others of the same status will be courteously permitted to see objects of interest

in the Castle, stroll about the Home Park, Windsor or Eton as they please—conforming, of course, to the Castle regulations. At other times they will be expected to remain in the rooms assigned to their employers or the dining-rooms where their meals are served."

"Did you turn up anything about Rapp, Nan?"

"A little. I'm fairly sure he was connected with the Intelligence Department of the German Army during the war, and had a government berth in Berlin after the abdication. There is a 'Rapp von Elting' who appears to have been a spy during the war, and whom I've confused with this Wolfgang two or three times—"

EARL LAMMERFORD smiled, in sudden interest.

"Same man, Nan," he exclaimed. "And you really know a lot about him: Wolfgang Christian Rapp von Elting was an old Wilhelmstrasse hound—succeeded to a barony in 1916. You ran against him when he was shadowing you in Berlin, secret-service men waiting to arrest you downstairs—and succeeded in hypnotizing the bounder so effectively that he called the officer in charge, below, told him that a serious mistake had been made—that you were yourself one of the more trusted agents of Wilhelmstrasse—and that any hint from you was to be acted upon without question. When you permitted him to recover his normal senses, he had this idea fixed in his mind—"

"O-o-o-h—I remember the circumstance, perfectly! Of course I should have recognized the man when I saw him, but it's an advantage to know this in advance."

"Point is—has the fellow strengthened his will-power during the intervening time so that he's less susceptible to hypnotic influence?"

"I doubt it. He had no appearance of being a 'subject,' then—in fact, I was amazed to discover that I was influencing him, though I had some advantage in being a woman supposedly in his power. He was off his guard—swayed by sex-attraction. And I was naturally doing my best to 'vamp' him on general principles. His weakest point is that he apparently has no suspicion of his being subject to hypnosis—he may never have been thoroughly hypnotized since that time. If he has been, each experience of that sort would leave his resistance weaker than before—so that I am fairly sure of being able to do what I please with him, down here—"

"But—not as the Countess of Dyvnaint. You'll have to make up as the lady-attendant of some royal guest and run across him accidently in the off-hours for both of you."

IT is interesting to watch—at any dinner in Windsor Castle—the guests who are going through their first experience of the sort. Schnellenberger, for example, had frequently dined with kings of finance who counted their fortunes in many millions. He had been received in the homes of former nobles, had sat through many corporation dinners. But his secretary, Rapp von Elting, could have told him a good deal about dining with royalty, inasmuch as he had been commanded to appear at state functions in Berlin, at the Schloss, upon several occasions while connected with Wilhelmstrasse. Baron Tatsuri and General Moreno, of course, had grown up in the court atmosphere, were most punctilious about each little detail of dress and custom. The other three were much less at their ease, but tried to conceal it.

In these days of popular democracy it is often commented upon that royalty dresses and conducts itself in public like other individuals of less exalted station—which is quite as it should be. Kingly divinity has gone out of style. In the eons through which humanity will continue to populate the world, it will return,—like dictators and emperors,—because history is a record of cycles which go the same old round once in so many years. But in the lifetime of the present generations it is unlikely that we will see any general return to the monarchical type of government. Nevertheless—those who picture a court dinner in one of the royal castles as practically a duplication of any large affair in London or New York society would form an erroneous impression.

It is likely that the King and his sons would enjoy sitting down informally to a good well-balanced meal in simple dinner-coats, and adjourning to the billiard-room, afterward, for a game or two of pool. But precedent and the political advisability of upholding precedent in these days keep up more or less brilliant ceremony in many of the Court functions. So among the noticeable ways in which they differ from the average society affairs are, first, the clothes worn by the men—knee-breeches of

black satin or doeskin, coats largely covered with such decorations as the wearers possess, uniforms of the more striking types, much gold-lace embroidery upon the coats of ambassadors and ministers. The difference in women's costumes is less marked, perhaps, to the male observer. There is a greater display of jewels worth fabulous sums, the last word in magnificent gowns, fans and personal knick-knacks. The table itself, seating forty or fifty, is equipped with a gold service and Sèvres, or something equally beautiful and costly —orchids and other blooms from the royal conservatories. The expense comes out of the King's private fortune, and is in no way a burden upon the tax-payers. A Highlander in uniform stands behind the King's chair during the meal, and at a certain time another marches around the room playing the bagpipes. In one of the anterooms, the band of the regiment in garrison at the time, or the Castle orchestra, plays music worth listening to, though it is never loud enough to interfere with table conversation in the big dining-room.

HAVING inside information from Sir Eric, Countess Nan was informed of the exact moment when "Rapp von Elting" arrived (several hours in advance of his employer) and as to the room assigned to him; and she contrived to be in the corridor when he came out for his first stroll about the Castle. She was stylishly and expensively gowned, as all the lady-attendants are expected to be when their employers are of the status which fetches along one or two of them for secretarial work in addition to their personal maids—and was, presumably, of good family. There was something vaguely familiar about her face, but he found it impossible to remember where they had met, if ever. Sentries and various officials about the buildings had the same difficulty in placing her until one of them thought it advisable to ask the Constable of the Castle—who, in turn, asked Sir Eric. Then—word was passed around that she was Lady Frances Bourney, in the suite of Countess Sarah of Tronborough—a cousin of Sir Eric's with sufficient tactful comprehension to act upon the hint from him and confirm the statement.

Rapp von Elting was enough the Prussian Uhlan to consider himself irresistible with all women; and so when the supposed Lady Frances nodded, smilingly, in the corridor and made some trivial, courteous remark, he met her more than halfway in his very best manner. With all the punctilious ceremony at Windsor, introductions are not emphasized as requisite in every case. Like the parties in most English or American country-houses, one's mere presence as a guest is considered ample guarantee of acceptability.

As both were apparently going downstairs to the Upper Ward, they fell into a pleasant chat during which he told her that it was his first visit to Windsor, though he knew the Schloss in Berlin and the Winter Palace in Petrograd. He knew in a general way about what famous collections were housed in the Castle and some of the more precious objects in them, so that with first-hand knowledge of the treasures in German palaces and the Hermitage in Petrograd, he said he would be in position to make comparisons after examining what there was to be seen at Windsor. She told him that Mr. Fortescue's marvelous arrangement of the Castle exhibits deserved much more time than they would have at their disposal that afternoon. In her own case, she must return to Countess Sarah's rooms within two hours, and she assumed that he would have duties of his own to look after, then—members of the personal entourages not being supposed to be in evidence at times when the royal guests might be examining the collections or exploring the Castle. So her suggestion of looking at St. George's Chapel and some of the more historic Towers, in the time at their disposal, met with his instant approval. He would have accepted any other suggestion with equal promptness as long as it kept him in the company of this handsome, friendly woman, who puzzled him as to whether or not she was showing a willingness to flirt with him.

MEANWHILE—they had been observed as they crossed the quadrangle by the lady's husband and their two old friends—who preceded them through the passage under the Round Tower into the Lower Ward and into St. George's Chapel, where they had time to conceal themselves in one of the Knights' stalls before Countess Nan and her quarry came in. In order to give them plenty of time, she first took Von Elting by way of the Dean's and Canons' cloisters to the covered passage leading under the Winchester Tower to the Hun-

dred Steps—down which Henry VIII used to sneak when he wished to get out into the Park unobserved, and which were used by the mysterious Herne the Hunter during the short life of Anne Boleyn as queen. Coming back through the Albert Chapel, she purposely went around to enter St. George's Chapel by the south door—because, near it in the pavement, there is a slab of gray marble which she thought might serve her purpose in a curious way.

Von Elting, by this time, was beginning to feel a little of the mental fatigue which usually results from seeing too many objects of interest in too short a time—so was in just the condition for her experiment with him. As they entered the door, she pointed out the slab of gray marble—taking him along where he could look directly down upon it and the simple name, with none of the man's titles:

CHARLES BRANDON

The name seemed vaguely familiar to Von Elting, but he couldn't quite place it—his brain was sluggish from fatigue, anyhow. So she explained, in a voice which she made as monotonous as that of the usual caretaker who shows visitors about places of interest:

"During his lifetime, the man whose bones lie under that slab was possibly known by reputation or by sight to a couple of hundred thousand people—not many more than that, I think. Then—more than three centuries after his death—he becomes famous, his story and his name familiar to over a hundred million people who would have some difficulty in finding even a mention of him in the average condensed histories of England. This, of course, is counting up the cinema-audiences who have seen the picture and the lesser number who have read the book written around the events of his life. Brother-in-law of a king, husband of a queen dowager who was but eighteen when he married her in Paris, Duke of Suffolk, enemy of Anne Boleyn, though he never approved of her execution. One of the handsomest men in England until he was thirty—but homely enough to shoot when he modeled his beard and clothes after those of brother Henry, who was no blushing violet himself in those days. One forms this opinion from Holbein's portrait, painted from life—on the supposition that it was a faithful likeness, as undoubtedly was the case."

"Brother-in-law of a king—'husband of a queen dowager who was but eighteen—' Surely you're not referring to the hero of 'When Knighthood Was in Flower?' One supposed that character largely fictitious!"

"You'd have some difficulty in writing fiction any more startling or romantic than the actual adventures in this man's life. He—a commoner at first—dared raise his eyes to the handsome sister of his monarch in a day when one's head paid the penalty for that sort of thing—and he actually got away with it, after she had been married for seven short months to doddering old Louis XII of France. Why—the mere reiteration of what he was has almost as soporific effect upon one's mind as Mark Twain's famous:

> Pink trip slip for a six-cent fare—
> Punch, brother, punch—punch with care:
> Punch in the presence of the passenjare.

"If you doubt it, just repeat the legend once or twice and see how it 'gets' one. Look me in the face if you don't mind—I wont bite! 'Brother-in-law of a king—husband of a queen—a commoner who became a duke—held the highest offices in the kingdom'— You see? Almost like counting the sheep jumping over a fence, is it not?"

VON ELTING nodded, with a foolish smile. He found it by no means difficult to look fixedly into her face—in fact, it seemed the sort of thing he'd like to do frequently—oh, all the time, more or less. There was a soft, unfathomable depth in the dark brown eyes, deeper than the deepest ocean. He liked the sensation of sinking down—down—into them—until he could find no bottom and didn't care. He was now muttering, monotonously: "Brother of a king—husband of a queen—first a commoner, then a duke—highest jobs in kingdom—brother of king—common duke—hussy of a queen." And he was so completely under her influence that she stopped him with a word and led him—walking with a fixed stare like a somnambulist—through the Horseshoe cloisters—through passages in the walls, to the Curfew Tower and up to what had been once a prison cell, where he seemed not to see three other men seated in one corner.

She introduced them as influential personages who hoped to coöperate with his employer in putting through certain *coups d'état*—and he gravely acknowledged the introductions like a wooden man, not even

turning toward them as he mechanically repeated the fictitious names. There was the chance that the man had proved harder-headed than they thought and was shamming to find out what they were up to—but there are ways of testing out a hypnotic until no doubt is left as to his condition.

When they were satisfied as to this and had seated the man so that he could relax, physically, Countess Nan remarked that they could judge better in what direction their assistance would be most valuable if they knew Schnellenberger's ideas a bit more clearly. This seemed perfectly all right to Von Elting in his muddled condition, but she clinched it by holding his attention with a fixed glance into her mesmeric eyes, and saying: "Tell us everything you know. Omit nothing."

HE smiled—rather stiffly—appearing to devote some thought toward expressing himself most clearly. "Er—you're not aware as yet that the Crown Prince has left Wieringen and will be across the German border before you hear of it?"

"We knew that the German Government had sent passports to him and to Wilhelm. Their return has been discounted. The day has passed when either can be a menace to Europe."

"Of course—but don't overlook the fact that few of the Junkers would consent to take the throne in their places without consultation or some definite agreement with them—and we're going to have a few titled rulers, presently. They will be elected presidents, at first, over regular constitutional democracies; then, when more settled conditions obtain, the proposition will be made to constitute them sovereigns of limited monarchies—some such arrangement as you have here in England."

"Is that the plan for Germany?"

"Not quite. We expect to get back to the old imperial government eventually. But the first development, probably, will be the formation in the Right Wing of a dictatorial directorate in which General von Seeckt, Von Buelow and Von Kuehlmann would be the controlling three. That, as you may remember, would be almost a restoration of the old 'High Command' during the war. With the Kaiser living in or near Berlin as a private gentleman, his advice would be available—he would be asked, undoubtedly, to pass upon candidates among the nobility and princely families for any position of authority which might be considered advisable."

"And the other states?"

"More or less tentative, until we come to a confidential discussion with Gribaut, Zakanoffski, Moreno and Baron Tatsuri. Along general lines, however, it will probably work out to something like this: Election of some noble—one of the old Magyars (not Horthy)—as president of Hungary; and shortly after that a popular vote to declare him regent for Zita's son, Otto, as king of Hungary. The people will support it, because they were ready to declare her their queen at one time. It's not impossible that Austria might join again in a dual monarchy. At present, Austria exists as a nation without any good reason for existence. She was defenseless and bankrupt, but she has achieved a national status in spite of that. We look for a possible consolidation either with Hungary or Bavaria—depending upon how strong a prince eventually comes to the top in either one. Jugo-Slavia we are perfectly satisfied with at present. Poland is no more cut out for a republic than Russia. There are Polish nobles, today, with the royal blood of centuries in their veins, who would be very popular as rulers. As for Russia—she is in just the condition for a dictator with sufficient ability to jump into the saddle and bring order out of chaos. Perhaps the Grand Duke—perhaps some other prince."

"You think it possible, then, to bring about a partial restoration of monarchy, at least?"

"It's the only form of government which can successfully handle the European situation. Consider! The people of nearly all the European states have been accustomed to monarchical rule through all their history. They have no capacity for independent thinking. They are accustomed to having their lives, their daily activities, ordered or regulated by the monarch and his executives. They've been oppressed until many of them went insane—no question about that; but they are inclined to consider this, philosophically, as a penalty for having a bad monarch—feel that conditions are always better under a good one, and there *have* been good ones. When it comes to governing themselves upon their own initiative, they know nothing of restraint—it's an invitation to unregulated license—they're jealous of every man they put in authority. Each one asks himself:

'Why am I not just as good as So-and-so for president or deputy? He's no better than I am!' Each general election is unsatisfactory, no matter who wins—they're not satisfied to accept the result. That frame of mind explains why the Americans complain so bitterly about European immigrants bringing their Old World ideas with them and not being able to accept American freedom as it is. The immigrant is not used to personal liberty—doesn't understand the basic idea when it is given him—wants his life ordered in the old European way from some man at the top. You may say that France and Switzerland have been successful republics for several generations, but it should be remembered that the temperament of each has made a fetish of personal liberty and equality for a long time—that the first republic of France was a ghastly failure because the generation was too thoroughly saturated both with the monarchical idea and the reaction from it to find a workable medium between the two extremes. The rest of Europe has just been going through an experience like that first republic—only much worse. It may result in republics a hundred years from now—but there will be an intervening term of monarchy for stability's sake."

"Are you intending to discuss this proposition with His Majesty at all?"

"Most decidedly! I don't see how he can well refuse. You see, the King is in a peculiar position. If he comes out as opposed to monarchy on the Continent, what excuse can he give for retaining his own throne? If he favors it as an institution which he represents, then he is obliged to use his influence with his cabinet and parliament toward recognition of such other monarchs as may get into the saddle again—"

"In other words—you propose abusing your position as royal guests to place him in an embarrassing position for your own purposes?"

"Ah! I see! You are putting it in that light just to see what plausible excuse we can offer for violating something which is no more than a silly custom. World politics, as you very well know, cannot consider the niceties of social usage. Advantage is obtained by taking it when the opportunity occurs. This was an exceptional opportunity. It is unlikely that any of our five will be invited down here again—so we must push our advantage to the limit while we're here. And the ultimate result, mind you, is the best which can be accomplished for Europe. A makeshift, you say! Perhaps—perhaps not. Stabilization, anyhow—whether permanent or not."

"You must have had some means of sounding out the other four?"

"Naturally. In a general way, each of them is known to favor the scheme as I've outlined it—but this face-to-face conference was necessary for our bargaining. Concessions must be made to each. If they support our ruler and the rearrangement of our government, we must in turn agree to recognize their rulers and whatever system is worked out under them. It is hoped that we may fix upon monarchs who are closely related or at least intimate friends—and whose local policies will not conflict with the others."

FOR nearly an hour they pumped Rapp von Elting's brain dry—turned him inside out. What he knew, and it was a good deal, they got. Then, with a good deal of repetition, Countess Nan implanted in his mind an obsession which he would remember and act upon when he was again in possession of his normal senses, as has been done many times before with those who are subject to hypnosis. She patiently drilled into him the belief that attempting to draw His Majesty into any discussion of their schemes while in the drawing-rooms or any part of the Castle would be a great mistake, inasmuch as he was certain to decline such a discussion and courteously switch them off—that if they were determined to have such a conference with him, it must take place while he was riding or walking in the Great Park. By studying his habits, they were pretty sure to find him some morning with only a couple of equerries who would fall back and not venture to interfere with royal guests.

When Von Elting was back in his own room, wondering why he felt so deucedly used up, and the four had reached the Trevor suite in the Victoria Tower, Lammerford asked Nan why she had started something which would prove unpleasant to the King, if not dangerous.

"It stops them from taking advantage of his position as host in his own castle—annoying him with such a discussion where it might be difficult to sidetrack it. Makes it practically certain that they'll start something out in a secluded glade of the Great Park when they catch him alone—

and gives us all the excuse we want for jumping on them, out there, under the impression that they are attacking His Majesty or at least forcing him to listen to something he doesn't want to hear."

"H-m-m—aside from abusing his hospitality with an attempt to draw him into a compromising situation, which we'll certainly stop if we can—is their scheme really a good one, or isn't it—for Europe? Eh?"

"The people have always had monarchy—they're used to it—they are neither comfortable nor successful with democracies—as yet. But they've always had war, and the pestilences resulting from war. It is a fact which has been demonstrated up to the hilt that, while democracies will fight in self-defense or for a principle which means more than life to their citizens, they never declare war if it is possible to avoid it. Monarchs go to war from personal conceit, hope of aggrandizement, love of conquest, the obsession of domination, to try out their perfected fighting machines—rarely, from any consideration of their people's welfare. As we know our world and as we understand history, so far, monarchy is generally bad medicine—and constitutional democracy is the most workable scheme yet devised for the good of the whole people. A return to monarchy in Europe, today, is like applying sedative drops to an aching tooth—it relieves the pain for the moment and enables us to forget it temporarily, but the diseased nerve is getting worse all the time, and the next toothache puts us out of business.

"It is most unfortunate that, with all these little republics starting so hopefully, with so much promise for the people, there couldn't have been leaders with commonsense whom the citizens would trust to put their finances, transportation and foreign relations upon a solid workable basis. But even though most of them, so far, are failures, monarchy is not the remedy. If we could have a king or emperor who would step down as soon as he got things running smoothly and stand for president, a few years of absolute rule might be a good thing. But if there are any such now living, I've never heard of them!"

AFTER the first evenings which the five spent in the Castle, three of them were planning how they might draw the King into a discussion of their monarchical scheme. Baron Tatsuri and General Moreno opposed this. With their court experience, they knew that such things simply weren't done unless at the monarch's request. And Schnellenberger was much surprised to find his most efficient secretary advising a contrived meeting in the Great Park, instead—a meeting at which His Majesty would be *forced* to listen to them. The Baron and Moreno thought His Majesty would probably give some tentative expression of opinion under such conditions, but declined being present—inasmuch as it would put them out of business diplomatically. They simply couldn't afford it. Schnellenberger, the Russian and the French deputy, however, were of the ruthless sort which takes what it wants when the taking is good, and doesn't worry about reputation. This policy is often successful—for a while. In the long run, it loses out.

Twice, Schnellenberger—while in conversation with the King—tried to suggest that a general return to monarchy would settle European conditions. But His Majesty apparently didn't catch the gist of the remark—and passed on to speak with some one else. Presently there came an early morning when Von Elting hurried to the rooms of one after the other with the information that His Majesty had started out riding with only one equerry and would be found in one of the smaller bridle-paths east of the Long Walk. Von Elting had four horses in readiness when they came down, and the party galloped away through the forest.

THEY came upon the King and his equerry in a shady path, dismounted, as they were prying a stone from the hoof of the royal mount—and offered him one of their horses to finish his ride. But as his own was now perfectly all right, he swung up into the saddle, thanked them—was about to ride on, alone, when they stopped him with a request for a short interview. This was an offense from guests in their position, but the King saw they were determined to be heard and courteously nodded acquiescence. Before they could say half a dozen words, however, the Trevors and their two friends came riding along the path from a thicket where they had been concealed. By a bit of superb horsemanship, Trevor made his horse rear so that it came down between the three men and His Majesty, forcing their mounts back several paces—then asked if he

might be permitted to accompany the King as far as Snow Hill.

The baffled conspirators were at a loss to decide whether they had best attempt to insist upon their request or wait for some other opportunity. It seemed likely that they wouldn't get one. In a moment Schnellenberger urged his horse a bit closer and said:

"Will not Your Majesty permit us to go on as you agreed and offer a certain matter for your consideration?"

A voice muttered in his ear: "Shut up, you fool! . . . . Can't you see that you're annoying the King! Fall back, and ride along with us!"

Leaving out the King and the Countess, it seemed to Schnellenberger that his three were a good match for the others, and he was pig-headed enough for a show-down when Earl Lammerford leaned across his horse's neck, muttering in so low a tone that nobody else heard it:

"If you don't want to leave Windsor under arrest and in enough disgrace to be a serious matter for you, *fall back,* as I said, and return to the Castle with us! Suppose we were to say that we found you men attacking and coercing the King? Perhaps you weren't quite doing that—but suppose we said so? Eh? Come along, and keep your mouth shut!"

FOR a few moments Earl Lammerford, Sir Abdool and the three conspirators rode along in silence. As far as Schnellenberger and the others could see, the arrival of their party had been purely accidental. He tried to reconstruct the scene in the bridle-path to decide how it must have looked to outsiders coming up. It couldn't be denied that he had turned his horse across the path to block the King's progress, or that his companions blocked the rear—the equerry having fallen back a little distance as soon as His Majesty mounted. On the other hand, it seemed to him that the positions of each could be explained plausibly enough—His Majesty couldn't be certain they would force him to listen, and had no reason to apprehend violence. Presently, lighting a cigar, the German asked:

"Er—what was Your Lordship's particular interest in this affair? You appear to have entirely misconstrued what you saw as you came up. Don't you think you owe us an apology for what you did—and said?"

"No—fancy not. We came along and found you insisting upon telling His Majesty something he quite evidently didn't want to hear—and were so lacking in the courtesy due him that you had blocked the path so that he couldn't ride away. Of course you may not have done that intentionally—but you were unmistakably annoying him as no royal guest is supposed to do. Had he wished for your company on his morning ride, you'd have been invited; as you had no such invitation, your presence was intrusion. If you came upon him accidentally, you should have respected his evident desire for privacy and ridden on about your business. Our interest in the affair is merely that of any other friends or guests of the King, finding him in an unpleasant position. Now—that's all there is to it—on the surface. I don't mind admitting to you that I suspect a good deal more which doesn't appear—though I may be entirely mistaken."

Schnellenberger's eyes blazed; then the lids narrowed. "I think an explanation is due us—after that remark!"

"Very good! The chance of you five men—you know quite well whom I mean—being here as royal guests at the same time is about one in a million. If you managed to secure invitations in order that you might come together here—what was your object? A person of very ord'n'ry intelligence knows that no two or three of you five could rendezvous in any city or hotel for a conference without arousing a good deal of newspaper comment—but as royal guests at Windsor, it would be accepted as pure chance. So—you presumably had an object in being here at the same time. It gave you unlimited opportunity for conferences. It's an offense to make use of a royal invitation for such a purpose, anyhow. If you go further and try to put His Majesty in a compromising position, you commit a much more serious act which is punishable with severe penalties if you were convicted of it. Of course, the matter wont be given any such publicity as that would necessitate—there are other ways of handling it in a strictly private manner."

"Such as—"

"Well—if you were to approach Sir Eric, Master of the Household, with the statement that you and Mr. Zakanoffski have received letters which make your presence in Berlin urgently required, and request permission to leave the Castle, such

a request would be granted—very pleasantly—and there would be no damaging story or gossip to follow and injure your reputations after you leave. The incident would be closed."

"Why not M'sieur Gribaut also?"

"The departure of another would arouse comment—your names would be linked together. M'sieur Gribaut has had his lesson—he'll be very careful what he does during the remainder of his stay—will hint to the others that they'd best not be seen together if it can be avoided."

"But—if Your Lordship is utterly mistaken? If we stand upon our rights as royal guests—refuse to go? Eh?"

THE Earl's voice was mild and pleasant—but what he replied was none the less a warning: "I can't say exactly what would happen—because the King is the most courteous of hosts and would consider your position in every way he could. But if some vague rumor should get about? If the equerry was curious about that little scene back there and did no more than speculate upon it with his wife? It is more than possible there would be an impression that you three had, at least, committed a very serious breach of court-etiquette and given offense to His Majesty, whether intentionally or not. Even if he greeted you as pleasantly as usual when you met, what you did would be very much resented by the other guests. Well—I've been told that one of the chilliest, most frightfully unpleasant experiences in human life is to sit at a dinner-table where one is cut by everyone else, or spoken to with a frigid politeness which makes him wish to crawl into a hole and disappear—absolutely. I don't say this would happen in your case sufficiently to produce any marked unpleasantness—that sort of thing isn't done, here. But your status would be conveyed to you none the less—and there'd be no chance to argue the matter. You gentlemen will do as you think advisable, of course—but I've mentioned the easiest and pleasantest way out of the affair."

Schnellenberger chewed the end of his cigar—studying the Earl's face. "Lammerford—for the last fifteen years there have been occasional stories connecting your name and those of your friends with some of the most brilliant secret-service work ever pulled off in international politics. Your former connection with the Foreign Office gave some color to them—though, to the best of my knowledge, it has never been proved that either you or the Trevors are entitled to the credit for those *coups*. But I'll say one thing, frankly: you're a damned good poker-player! You may never know how big a thing you've practically squashed this morning—perhaps I'm wrong in thinking you've got the brains to know it. All you've been hinting to me is mere theory on circumstantial evidence. But if there *was* collusion in regard to those five invitations, which I naturally deny, you've certainly thrown a monkey-wrench into the machinery. Were I in your place, I'd avoid getting mixed up with anything of this sort in future—there comes a time, you know, when meddlers are considered too dangerous to have around!"

The Earl smiled—as they rode into the Castle through Henry VIII's Gateway, where the Royal Standard was flying from the Round Tower. After all—the offenders were big men in their world.

Blue Checker

A most enjoyable story about one of the most wonderful of living creatures—the homing pigeon. And the race which comes as the climax is an episode thrilling indeed.

By ROBERT S. LEMMON

IT was dark and cosy and drowsily warm, in there. A faint, half-acrid scent tinged the air, pervasive and not unpleasant. The sounds of the outer world were muffled, deadened as though they came through a thick down quilt.

Blue Checker heard them dimly—a steady undercurrent of cooing accented by the *whiff-whiff* of wings; but they had no significance for him. Indeed, nothing had, at least consciously. By instinct only did he respond to even the most elemental processes of life. His brain was a blank, a hazy doll's thimbleful of whitish matter incapable of volition. He lay helpless and inert, a tiny, pinkish creature in a coat of sparse yellow down, nestled under a strong, warm body that ruffled a screen of feathers down around him.

That brooding mother form represented his world. He had known it for only three days, but already he and the twin sister that cuddled beside him had learned to grope toward it feebly whenever a certain queer, empty feeling came over them. They had only to wriggle a little and half raise their heads to cause the feather blanket to lift and bring a gentle neck seeking theirs. A moment of fumbling with soft, flesh-tinted bills, a quiver, and then a flow of warm liquid which trickled deliciously down their throats and made them feel tremendously better. Then the blanket would be lowered again and they would snuggle back to sleep, side by side.

It was all very easy and comfortable and after a while, interesting. Daily the two pigeons gained size and strength. Their eyes opened much as young kittens' do, though instead of being blue, they were almost black, and out of all proportion to the size of their heads. They acquired voices—thin and peeping, to be sure, but quite adequate to announce to their mother the stirrings of their insatiable appetites.

AS the days slipped by and pinfeathers began to show in dark ranks on their wings and backs, they came to notice many things.

Over the rim of their nest-pan, when they were left alone, they could see a great space

across which other creatures just like their parents were constantly flying up, down, to and fro, in a maze of shifting blue and white and brown. Twice a day, in early morning and again late in the afternoon, that constant activity would grow suddenly more intense. A soft whistle always preceded these occasions, a low *whew-whew-whew* that instantly started the wildest commotion among the birds. The cooing and nest-building would be forgotten in a tumult of excitedly beating wings that presently settled down below the squabs' range of vision. And when all was quiet again, save for the rustle of beaks in the newly filled grain-trough, the two nestlings, regaining courage to peek out with alert, beady eyes, would catch sight of a strange, strange monster.

It was incalculably larger than the biggest pigeon in the loft, this whistling, food-bringing apparition, and it had no wings or even feathers. It shuffled about ponderously and had a way of stopping in front of the square nesting-compartments ranged along the opposite wall and peering into them.

The first time the creature's great face appeared at their own doorway, not a foot from them, Blue Checker and his sister cowered in abject terror.

"*Eh bien,* leetle fellers, you grow to be ze beeg birds, *n'est-ce pas?* Mebbeso you make as *brave* flyers as you' father, ze great Comet. Mebbeso some day you win ze champeenship—*hein?*"

The words were softly spoken and radiated kindliness and geniality no less than did the speaker's twinkling eyes, pink, wrinkled cheeks and rumpled white hair; but to the little pigeons they were like the crack of doom. If their mother had not returned in a moment, there is no telling to what straits fear might have reduced them. Evidently she held the monster in no awe, for she whisked past him, alighted on the threshold of the box, and after a bare glance at her youngsters turned to scold the visitor with a short vehement *whuh-whuh.*

"So, so-o, *madame*—not for *le bon Dieu* do I hurt ze leetle fellers!" soothed the voice. "Only do I desire to see if you are ze *bonne mère* and feed them plenty. So, so-o-o—you are ze real homing bird, always on ze job and nevair trusting nobody too much. *Eh bien,* so-long—give them ze beeg dinner, *maintenant!*" And good old Jules Guionnet, owner and devoted lover of the Red Star Lofts, passed on to his puttering, friendly inspection of other nests.

THE next day he came again, and gathering the squabs into the warm hollow of his hand, slipped a little aluminum band marked with letters and numerals over the foot of each. They panted with fright during the process, though they were not hurt in the least. It was an unspeakable relief to be set back in the nest under their mother's sheltering breast.

The old man chuckled as he watched them settle down.

"*Voilà!* Now you have ze record of who you are, always to wear it on ze leg," he said. "Your father's and your mother's number, and your own. See, now, I write it in ze book!" And laboriously he jotted it down.

As time went on, the squabs' fear of Guionnet abated. They never felt entirely at ease when he was near, for the alertness of their breed, the tremendous nervous energy of the racing homer which sets him far above the common run of pigeons, was already stirring within them. But by experience they were learning that no harm ever followed the old man's appearance; he moved slowly and carefully about the loft, avoiding sudden motions, talking to the birds in his deep, gentle voice as naturally as though they were of his own flesh and blood.

His merry eyes behind their steel-rimmed *pince-nez* saw and understood everything. Did a venturesome squab test his fledgling wings too soon and tumble ignominiously to the floor, Guionnet rescued and returned him to the nest before any harm came to him. If an unmated cock bird, seeking a wife, set about breaking up a hitherto happy home, the old man was sure to detect the attempt and remove the disturber to an adjoining pen where he could meditate with others of his kind. Not the faintest symptom of a cold, or of a wing-joint bruised against perch or doorway escaped his notice and treatment. Not an egg was laid or hatched that he did not discover it on his next visit and record it in the book which was always under his arm. Often he would come in between feeding-times, unheralded by that gentle whistle which every bird recognized as a call to meals, and dragging in a decrepit rocking chair, sit for an hour at a time watching the busy life about him.

And as he watched, more and more his

eyes followed Blue Checker's mother and father as they flew to and from the nest, sharing the feeding, brooding and other parental duties.

"*Mon Dieu,* but they are ze well-matched pair," he would say to himself with a nod of satisfaction. "Both strong in shoulder and breast and wide in ze skull, that ze brain may be great. See their eyes, *aussi*—so beeg and bright and nevair sleepy. Nevair are they ze duffers or ze snipey-heads. From them should ze youngsters be *magnifiquc*—great flyers to win ze beeg race, mebbeso.

"Ah, ze beeg race—how I would like my bird to win it *quelque jour!* For twenty years now, I have try, and always lose But some day I raise ze champeen flyer, and he will come to ze trap all tired from ze road, and ze clock will show he has make ze best time."

THE two young birds had passed beyond the flabby, weakling stage. The colors they would carry through life grew more apparent; the plumage of both was developing into that subtle pattern of light and dark slatey blues which, in the phraseology of the loft, is known as blue checker. As they gained strength, they essayed standing up at times, crowding against each other for mutual support, their outside feet braced against the slope of the nest-pan. Even their food had changed from the milky diet of infancy to whole wheat, millet and Canada peas, softened only by a brief sojourn in their parents' crops.

The lengthening of his wing- and tail-feathers brought to Blue Checker a new sense of confidence in himself. He developed a habit of scrambling over the edge of the pan, leaving his less ambitious sister huddled alone in the nest. Thus he would reach the flat floor of the box and wabble unsteadily to its entrance. At first the exertion tired him so that when he finally gained the threshold he would have to slump down on his stomach to rest. But even as he lay there, his shoulders would twitch and his absurd wings lift a little from his sides every time he saw a bird fly past.

From these first awakenings of the instinct for flight, to full-length stretchings, and finally to attempts at actual strokes, were easy steps. The squabs' parents left them to their own devices now except at feeding-time, and Blue Checker would stand for hours at the front of his compartment high on the wall of the loft, legs wide apart like a squat sailor's on a rolling deck, moving his wings tremulously up and down and poking his head this way and that to take in every detail of the view. Now and then he would lean far forward and nearly lose his balance, ducking comically to regain it.

Seeing him there, old Guionnet chuckled delightedly:

"Look at ze leetle rascal try to fly so queek! First he think he will, and then he decide he wont. Some day soon he take ze jump, and then I have to pick him up and put him back—so."

And one day Blue Checker did jump.

HE had been at his observation post all morning, when for some unaccountable reason his attention became centered on an empty nest compartment on the opposite wall, a little nearer the floor than his own. It looked precisely like all the rest, and yet it attracted him strangely. He forgot everything else in the loft—the cooing and fluttering of the other birds, Jules Guionnet sitting in his old rocker by the door, the nest and twin sister behind him. That box over there must be reached. He craned toward it, crouching lower, his neck outstretched—and suddenly found himself with nothing under his feet.

His first sensation was of utter panic, and it drove his wings frantically through the air. He was wholly unconscious of any reason for struggling in that particular way—it just seemed the natural thing to do. He was halfway across the loft before he realized that he was sinking rapidly toward the floor. The box for which he had started lay straight ahead and above him. A great determination to reach it came over him. He threw every ounce of his young strength into his strokes, churned up to it and hooked his bill over the edge. A wild scramble with claws and wings, a final surge, and he tumbled in on the floor, trembling and gasping for breath.

Unfeigned delight wreathed old Guionnet's face as he realized the significance of the incident.

"*Mon Dieu,* how he has ze stout heart!" he exclaimed. "He almost fail, and then he say: 'No, I *will* get there!' And *sacré,* he did! Eet is *le courage* that wins on ze road, ze spirit of arrive. He will be a great homer, *quelque jour!*"

But Blue Checker knew nothing of the praise the old man accorded him. He was

wholly occupied in regaining his breath and bearings. A sense of independence dominated him; he had proved his ability to fly, to launch out into empty space. Strands of yellowish down still clung to the feathers of his head and neck, but he had flown, actually flown!

He got to his feet and waddled to the front of the box, gazing around importantly. Across the way he could see the home he had left, but the thought of returning to it never entered his head. The old nest and the small sister still squatting in it had passed out of his life with his first real wing-beat. He was through with all that babyish sort of thing. Wasn't he a real homer now, a pigeon that could fly?

He craned his neck to see a splendid cock that stood on a perch below him, preening and ruffling. Blue Checker watched him for a moment as he swiftly dressed his great flight-feathers, lifting first one wing and then the other, finally settling them back in place with a silky rustle. Then awkwardly, experimentally, he began to imitate the big fellow, found it easy, and set to work vehemently at his own toilet.

NOT a little of the feeling of ownership by right of discovery possessed Blue Checker as he primped and ruffled there in the empty box, but it was rudely jolted out of him a few minutes later when a dashing young hen bird shot in beside him like a winged bullet. For a moment she stood regarding him tartly, a trim, alert figure in silvery brown and white.

Blue Checker knew she wasn't his mother or father, but in his innocence he thought she might give him a bite to eat, anyway. He forgot all about being a grown-up pigeon and sidled over toward her, begging sustenance with fluttering wings and eager, squeaking voice.

Whether or not the young lady had ever had any children of her own is neither here nor there; the point is that she resented this particular supplication promptly and with vigor. Her head flashed forward, and she seized the adventurer firmly by the feathers between eye and neck. Before he could do more than utter a startled squeal, she pushed, shook and hustled him across the box and sent him flopping over the edge.

The attack was so unexpected and vehement that Blue Checker lost all track of he sequence of events. Fortunately the instinct for flight came to the rescue as he fell, and instead of tumbling to the floor, he found himself once more in midair, heading much more swiftly than he liked toward a square patch of light beyond which he could see a space of blue sky piled high with snowy clouds. What it might be he had not the remotest idea, but he had had enough adventuring for one afternoon. He tried to alter his course, failed miserably, collided with an invisible barrier, and floundered down like a kite with a broken string.

For several minutes he crouched where he had fallen, too confused to move. Bodily violence was something entirely new in his experience. That it had followed a perfectly innocent act of his which hitherto had been met with wholly pleasant results, perplexed him all the more. He could not understand it at all, and for a while he kept his eyes on the box where the usurper now perched, complacently oblivious of everything but her own sleek self.

The world of the floor into which Blue Checker had plunged so unceremoniously proved cruelly different from the one he had known back in the old nest. He felt as *gauche* and lonely as a boy thrust directly from the seclusion of a doting small-town family into the complexities of a great university. His life became a succession of false starts, mistakes and literal hard knocks. Everywhere he was met with cold indifference or more tangible rebuffs emphasized with swift and painful feather-tweaking. None would feed him or even turn a sympathetic ear to his quavering little wails. His confidence waned to the vanishing point. He did not essay another flight, for starting up from the floor was a much more difficult feat than launching out and down from a height. Besides, there was no particular place that he wanted to go. Even if he had thought of his own home, he could not have picked it out now from the score or more of others precisely similar in size and shape that ranged rank on rank up the walls of the loft. So at last he retired into a corner where, protected on sides and rear, he at least felt reasonably sure of not being walked or flown over, and settled down disconsolately on the sand and stray feathers which filled it.

OLD Guionnet had gone, and the loft was busy with its undisturbed afternoon activity. Pairs of birds flew to and from the pile of tobacco-stems at one side, sort-

ing over the twiglike stuff to find the particular bits which took their fancy for the next additions to their nests. Others strutted and puffed, wooed or disdained, brooded their eggs or fed their young, according to their status of mind and matrimony. The thin voices of squabs formed an accompaniment to the deep, throaty notes of the old cock birds and the occasional high-pitched cooing of the hens. Wordy battles were waged over no more important events than the right to alight on particular perches. When the arguments led to blows, the encounters were brief, spirited and accompanied by much cuffing with wing-joints and swift sparring for feather-holds.

Pigeons came and went constantly through the flying doors, for this was the hour of freedom for all, and the wire bobs of the trap were lifted. Like true voyagers of the air, the homers gloried in their power of flight, and some were always swinging in a loosely knit flock high above the loft. As they flew, they evidenced their complete self-reliance, single birds frequently falling away from the band and scouring the sky alone, mere specks in the distance, to return swift and straight as arrows, their wings bowed and whipping through the quick racing stroke that sent them hurtling forward at sixty miles an hour.

Of all these joys of the air, Blue Checker guessed nothing, but he grew distinctly tired of squatting in his corner. No one paid him the least heed. He was hungry, and no food appeared. Life was becoming a decided bore when its tedium was relieved by the arrival of Guionnet with a pail of grain, which he emptied into the feeding trough while the pigeons swarmed down in response to his familiar whistle.

Blue Checker watched the proceeding confusedly. The fluttering crowd of birds around the grain looked like rough company for a youngster who still wore strands of his fledgling down. But he had to have something to eat, and since the source of food would not come to him when he called, he would have to go to it. Perhaps he could find his mother or father out there somewhere. He got to his feet and wavered over toward the turmoil of blue-gray bodies.

The grown-ups were too busy now to peck or cuff Blue Checker. They merely ignored him as he tottered from one to another, beseeching with bill and voice and quivering wings. Whether by instinct or perception, he began picking uncertainly at stray kernels scattered around the outskirts of the crowd, gathering in only enough to whet his appetite for a real, home-prepared meal. But the experience gave him sorely needed encouragement.

He found his mother at last, and she filled his crop until it could hold no more. Then she shot up to the old nest, fed the small sister, and departed nonchalantly for the new home she was already building close under the roof.

Blue Checker watched her go, half lifted his wings as though to follow, and decided otherwise. The meal made him feel contented and absurdly independent again. He walked as sedately as he could to the corner where he had been, and settled down. It was his roosting-place now, by right of possession—cosy and warm, safe from officious intruders, altogether an excellent spot to sleep. His eyelids drooped, and his head settled slowly into his shoulders. One after another the old birds went to roost. Shadows crept through the loft, blended and deepened into night. And Blue Checker slept the sleep of the weary.

THE days that followed wrought great changes in the young homer. He learned to pick up his full share of the grain which Guionnet brought each morning and evening, and to drink deeply of the cool, clear water in the fountain by the door. Only rarely did he seek food from his parents. When he did, they usually avoided him. Their share in his upbringing was practically over now, and he meant nothing more in their lives. Both of them were too interested in their prospective new family to bother with old associations.

So increasing self-dependence came to him, and with it the power of consciously directed flight. He learned the rudiments of steering with shifts of tail and subtle changes of wing-beat—quick variations that sent him up, down, to right or left—and practiced them assiduously. And as soon as he was fully qualified for final separation from his parents, the old man transferred him to an adjoining pen where were a dozen or more other young birds of varying ages.

It was like graduating from kindergarten into grade-school. There was hardly a type seen in the yard at recess-time that did not have its parallel in that company of pigeon youngsters. From the small and timid first-graders who gravitated to quiet corners

whence they watched their stronger companions with awe, to the older and more belligerent members of the sixth and seventh, bickering endlessly—all were there. Even the school bully, asserting his domination with arrogance and much strutting swagger for the edification of the little girls along the side-lines.

Blue Checker ran afoul of the braggart on the first day after leaving the old pen. It was a wholly unjustified encounter, brought about merely because the older bird conceived a whim to preëmpt a corner which the newcomer was occupying. Blue Checker objected and tried to stand his ground; whereupon the other seized him by the back of the neck, tweaked him this way and that, and finally, by superior weight and experience, wrestled him off the board and chased him ignominiously around the loft.

A trivial-enough incident, and yet it bore definitely on the development of Blue Checker's character! The subsequent discovery that he in turn could similarly assert authority over others smaller than himself may not have been particularly to his credit, but it yielded him a certain satisfaction and confidence. By a gradual process of elimination, accompanied by many sore feathers and occasional shattering of self-esteem, he fought his way up until there was not a bird in the whole pen with whom he could not creditably try conclusions.

In none of these boylike squabbles, unimportant to human eyes but tremendously serious to their participants, did Guionnet interfere. This separate pen was the preliminary training-school for his young racers, where, secure from the aggressions of the older and stronger breeding birds, they could lay the mental and physical foundations which would count so heavily later on.

"Let them have ze row," he would say complacently as he watched them. "Eet is good for ze muscle and wind. If they do not have ze nerve to scuffle a leetle here in ze loft, *vraiment* they will not be able to fight through ze storms and winds and ze long, long miles of ze road. I desire no duffers or weaklings in my flock, for some day one of ze Red Star birds is to win ze t'ousand-mile cup, and for that he must nevair falter. So squabble and chase and pull ze feather, you leetle fellers—eet does not really hurt you, and in five minutes you have forget all about eet!"

THERE were intervals of calm, of course, long hours when the pen was soothingly peaceful. These were the times when Blue Checker speculated on a matter which of late had been increasingly on his mind.

Ever since the day of his first flight, he had noticed and been fascinated by the view out of the windows in the front of the loft. It was not so much the actual things he saw through the dusty panes that drew him, as it was their complete difference from any of his immediate surroundings. The loft held nothing like the color and size of the great space of blue that filled the upper half of the window yesterday, or the equally mysterious gray expanse that took its place today. There was no light within-doors as glaring as that which shone over everything beyond the square; nor were there any of those queer-looking, gigantic, boxlike structures with stubs on top of them from which white smoke oozed in the early morning. Without realizing it, Blue Checker felt that some day he would know more about those things on the other side of the window, and as he grew older, the impulse to investigate them strengthened.

His actual entry into that outer world came about in a quite unpremeditated manner.

Exploring the loft one morning a few days after Jules had moved him from the old quarters, he chanced to alight in one of the flying doorways cut in the southern wall. Sunlight streamed through it alluringly on the breath of a soft, fresh breeze that whispered of far outlooks over a greening world and the boundless pathways of the sky.

Blue Checker saw and felt the message, and all his adventurer's curiosity crystalized. He shifted uneasily, ducked his head, drew back, peeked furtively through the opening, then stepped hesitatingly out of the door into the open air.

For a full minute he stood there nervous and alert, appalled by his own temerity, a slender, blue-gray figure on the threshold of a new life. In the surprise of the transition from the seclusion of the loft, his feathers drew down close against his body, so that he looked smaller than ever. To the hand he would have felt compact and curiously hard, like the arm of a swimmer shivering in a cold wind. But his eyes were sparkling bright, and they missed no detail of the scene before him—the roofs and chimneys of houses, the treetops misty with young leaves, the white ribbon of road that led

away to the westward, the sky that bounded them all. Especially the sky, for that was his heritage, the birthright which now for the first time called him directly!

He cocked an unflinching eye straight into the glare of the sun. A dozen flyers were wheeling up there, circling above the loft with a winnow of wings that murmured audibly to Blue Checker each time they passed over him. Fascinated, he watched them, crouching lower and lower, his breath fluttering his sides. A moment thus, and then, as though flung from a spring, he shot from his perch and beat upward to join them.

Higher and higher he climbed, driving through his strokes with an intoxicating sense of freedom and power. The loft and all the familiar things of his life there were dropping away below him, and he gloried in seeing them go. His only desire was to be one of the flock and swing along with them, swirling splendidly through the turns in their airy road. Out of the tail of his eye he saw them coming around again on another lap; and as they passed, he changed his beat and slipped into their ranks, stroke for stroke with the leaders.

ONCE Blue Checker had felt the exhilaration of unhampered flight, he spent all his available time outdoors, and much of it on the wing. The loft drew him only at mealtime and at night. For the rest, the freedom of the skies, in wind or calm, sun or the gray, still days of the growing spring.

From the slimness of squabhood he passed imperceptibly toward the stocky build of maturity. His chest- and shoulder-muscles developed under the constant exercise, thickening to heavy bands that could flick instantly from the smooth flexibility of silk to the tautness of stretched leather. New tricks of the air came to him: the stiff-winged plunge down from a height to the landing-board, the even swifter hurtling dive of sheer health and buoyancy, the sudden burst that carried him away from his companions and sent him swinging on alone with the air singing a thin, high song of speed in his ears.

Then one day his actual training began.

In the early dawn Guionnet slipped into the loft and deftly dropped a long-handled net over him, pinning him to the floor. Blue Checker's struggles to escape its meshes were brief and fruitless; before he could surge against the cord a second time, the old man's hand slid under the ring, closed firmly around his wings, legs and body, and deposited him without further flutter or commotion in a spacious covered basket.

In the gloom of his wicker prison Blue Checker looked about nervously. He had never been in such a place, and he viewed it with suspicion. Nothing further happened, however, and presently he began to pick up the grains of wheat scattered among the chips on the bottom. After all, they were perfectly good food, and he was hungry.

He could hear Guionnet moving about the loft, talking reassuringly to the homers. A pause, approaching footsteps, and another bird was slipped into the basket. A third and fourth followed, dropping in with startled eyes and frightened flicking of wings. Then the solid feeling under their feet changed to a curious swaying that came in unison with the *clump-clump* of shoes on bare boards. The sounds of the loft grew fainter, died out completely. And still the *clump-clump* went on, and the four pigeons balanced restlessly as the basket swung.

It seemed a long time before they were set down and heard the old man's voice again:

"Crank her up, Pierre; you must reach ze bridge and be back before schooltime. You like ze fun of seeing them start, so today I stay home and time them in. Give them ze toss at seven o'clock—your watch is right, *hein? Eh, bien*—give her ze gas!"

Immediately there arose a prodigious clatter and joggling, presently intermingled with a swaying, bumping motion. For what seemed an age Blue Checker and his companions were put to it to keep their feet. Then the commotion ceased as suddenly as it began, and they felt themselves being lifted and carried a few steps. Hands fumbled at the corners of their prison. A moment later the side of the basket opened, and they looked out into sunshine flooding a broad expanse of meadowland.

For a moment the four birds crouched motionless, too surprised by the sudden turn of events to lift a wing. Then they darted out precipitately, jostling each other in their haste to escape.

His first startled glance around showed Blue Checker that he was in wholly unfamiliar surroundings. Instinctively he began to circle, climbing to get above the woods that fringed the meadow. Some-

where out beyond them must be the loft, his loft. A great desire to reach it gripped him. The hurried beat of his wings changed to a snappy, more measured rhythm, carrying him up and up. His marvelously keen eyes swept the widening horizon in search of some familiar landmark.

Presently he found it, a red barn crowning a hill a mile to the eastward, the same direction in which a sort of inevitable pulling sensation seemed to draw him as to a magnet. He had seen that building many times when he was out with the flock, and now it served as a focal point on which the whole compass swung to its normal position. He turned and darted away on his course toward home, cleaving the air with scimitar wings.

GUIONNET, watch in hand on the roof beside the loft, saw him coming, a growing speck on the horizon.

"One of them is a mover, for certain," he muttered, shading his eyes against the early morning light. "I wonder is eet that blue checker youngster? *Mon Dieu,* see him come—swift as an old-timer!"

And coming Blue Checker was, with every quiver of speed that lurked in his steely muscles and streamline form. He passed the red barn, high up and going like the wind, and stooped toward the loft. On set, tense wings he rode down the air, feeling the hard, buoyant support of it pressing against him. An imperative desire to be home possessed him and made him postpone to the last moment the sharp cupping of his wings which checked his plunge at the very edge of the alighting-board.

For a minute he stood on the narrow platform wide-eyed and palpitating with excitement, before he turned toward the door of the traplike wire cage which, connecting with the interior of the pen, forms the entrance and is a vital part of a racing loft's equipment. The wire bob which permits entry but not exit was in place, but Blue Checker pushed through, and the next moment was busy on the floor of the trap with a bountiful breakfast of hemp-seed, the greatest delicacy a pigeon knows.

All Jules Guionnet's native excitability flared up as his eyes dropped to his watch and caught the time.

"Très bien, très bien!" he exclaimed. "Five minutes from ze time Pierre give him ze toss—that is almost ze t'ousand yards a minute! And not only to ze loft, but into ze trap itself, which is what really matters. I knew that blue checker is a great bird; he beat those other three *comme ça!"*

THE young racer's work was now on in earnest. The next morning Pierre took him and several companions to a point ten miles from the loft. Blue Checker repeated his initial performance, getting his bearings even more quickly than on his first flight, and beating his closest competitor home by minutes. On the following day the rattletrap old car joggled him away twenty miles, and he covered the distance back in exactly twenty-two minutes. A three-day rest succeeded, and then Guionnet sent him over the fifty-mile route.

For two reasons that flight over the half-century distance was a notable one for Blue Checker: it was his first competition with mature, experienced racers, and during it came his initial taste of the perils of his calling.

It was a blustering, cloudy morning when the big training-basket with its half-dozen occupants was lifted from the train and carried to an open field behind the station. Blue Checker was the only young bird in the lot, and he felt decidedly ill at ease. The new experience of being basketed for hours among the unaccustomed noises of a local train was not conducive to peace of mind. Besides, he resented the assumption by the other birds that he had no right to be there, so that he was continually sparring with them and getting well cuffed for his presumptuousness.

When the basket was finally opened, there was a general scramble, some of the birds eager to be off, while others hung back lazily and got in their way. In the confusion Blue Checker was almost the last one out, and by the time he was well clear of the ground, the leader had found his bearings and was straightening out toward home.

Blue Checker saw him go, but did not follow. He had no assurance that the older bird was taking the right course. Besides, he preferred to decide such matters for himself and in accordance with his own instincts.

Once above the shelter of the adjacent trees and buildings, the gale caught the young bird and swept him far to leeward. He beat around savagely, fighting his way into the teeth of it and shooting aloft like

a rising kite. Half through a long circle, he began to sense his direction; presently he was sure of it. His homing instinct, that strange feeling of being almost physically dragged in a certain direction, came over him strongly. He obeyed it and headed away due east, quartering into the wind.

The country was hilly, and the air full of bumps and empty pockets. It was as if Blue Checker were sandwiched in between two great hands which alternated in lifting him far aloft and thrusting him down as low as the treetops. Now he was so high that he could see for miles, and again he dropped almost to the ground. And during one of these periods of depression, as he drove across the brushy crest of a hill, Fate crooked her finger. Wholly without warning, cruel and terrifying, danger grasped at him with a crashing report in the bushes below and a hot pain that seared across his side behind the shoulder.

He lurched drunkenly, and as he recovered, the noise came again. This time he felt one of his big flight feathers give way, close to the bone. For an instant it flapped wildly, then broke loose and swirled away as, thoroughly terrified, he beat skyward. Fifty yards below, in a scattering clump of young trees, he caught sight of a man's figure, red face gazing after him disappointedly.

Doubly handicapped now, Blue Checker fought on. Blood from the wound in his side soaked his soft flank feathers until it coagulated in the crisp air and formed a natural bandage. He felt weak and sore, and the extra exertion with one wing which the loss of the long feather demanded began to tell. The wind buffeted him mercilessly, for fear of another of those awful crashes kept him far from the ground and the occasional partial shelter which the contour of the country offered.

IT was all completely unfamiliar, that country, but instinctively he knew he was right, and he flew on doggedly, fighting against a great weariness. Though his body cried out for rest, for even a brief respite on one of the farm roofs that he passed from time to time, he did not stop. He knew none of these places and dared not trust them. Besides, they were not home, and home was his strongest instinct in life. Under the pressure of difficulties he craved it more than ever.

So in the end he made the loft, not diving recklessly down from a great height as before, but laboring stiffly, an exhausted cripple scarcely able to reach the alighting-board.

"Oh, Gran'pa!" called the boy Pierre, on watch from the roof. "Here he is, all hurted! *Vite, vite*—he's just gone into the trap!"

Guionnet came lumbering along the alley behind the pens and lifted the tottering bird from the trap compartment. With bulky and infinitely tender fingers he parted the feathers over the wound.

"Sacrè!" he muttered as he saw the long slash the shot had made. "Always those gunners they blaze away at ze pigeon or chicken or cow that belong to somebody—*misérables!*"

He turned to the boy peering anxiously over his shoulder.

"Run to ze house, Pierre, and bring some warm water and ze bottle of arnica! We wash ze hurt and disinfect eet a leetle."

His wound was an ugly one, and Blue Checker was sent to convalesce in a cage where any attempt at flying would be impossible. There his splendid physical condition and natural health, coupled with abundant food, water and rest, counted heavily in his favor. In a week he was out and about again.

He seemed perfectly well and could hold his own with the flock in their daily circling above the loft and excursions over the surrounding fields, but Guionnet gave him no further training that season. He was entirely too promising a racer to take any chances of ruining him by overtaxing muscles which could not but have been seriously weakened by the injury.

SO the autumn came, passed through its glory of windless, smoky distances and painted countryside, and merged into the drab chill of November. And as gray days succeeded gold, and the first snow came eddying out of the north, a great event entered Blue Checker's life: he took unto himself a wife.

Unexpectedly, of course, quite as human beings do! Also in the human manner, there was a matchmaker at the bottom of it, and an ardent courtship that bore all the customary male earmarks of strutting, serenading and otherwise striving to impress the lady with her suitor's masculine beauty, strength and general desirability as a husband.

Up to the day when Guionnet caught

and deposited him in a two-compartment wire box removed from the sight of the other birds, the thought of marriage had never seriously entered Blue Checker's head. Not that his had been a career entirely devoid of romance. Far from it. But such affairs of the heart as he had known were merely those temporary flirtations with usually married females such as every young bachelor pigeon encounters daily. They were impressive only in their throat-puffings, mighty cooing and tail-dragging, and terminated abruptly with the flying away of the object of their intention or the arrival of her lawful spouse.

So Blue Checker's affections were still unbestowed when, soon after his own incarceration in one end of the mating cage, Guionnet slipped a young hen bird into the adjoining compartment, shut the door, placed food and water for both of them, and departed.

Blue Checker glanced casually at the new arrival before resuming his mincing inspection of the cage. The wire mesh, he found, inclosed him completely; there was no possible way out. He missed his morning flight sorely. Even the luxury of a good wing-stretch was denied him. He ruffled his feathers disgustedly and settled down in a corner.

HIS companion in captivity evinced even less interest in him than he did in her. She seemed entirely unaware of his existence as she picked nonchalantly at the grain. Presently she turned her back and began preening and prinking in a wholly feminine manner.

Blue Checker eyed her lazily. After all, she was a rather trim-looking young thing, an aristocrat from the tip of her bill to the gray-black band across the end of her tail. Besides, she was the only pigeon in sight, and he was becoming bored with himself. He got up, shook and settled his feathers again, and sauntered over to the partition.

If he had expected to be met halfway, he was disappointed; she did not even glance in his direction. He stood there expectantly, drawn to his full height, the magnificent iridescent sheen on his neck gleaming even in that dull light. Still not the faintest hint of response.

Clearly she was a most remarkable bird, fully worthy of his attention; he must impress her in some way. He lowered his head and began to coo, tentatively at first, and then with growing intensity. Spread tail brushing the floor, neck mightily distended to give greater magnitude to his voice, he looked the very epitome of lusty pigeon manhood; yet the lady heeded him not. To all appearances the subsidence of his outburst left her utterly unimpressed.

AT intervals through that day, and well into the next, Blue Checker repeated his lovemaking, growing more brilliant and dominating with each demonstration. Everything else was forgotten in his passion for this demure young creature who shared his captivity. What began as mere idle interest developed within the space of a dozen hours into the deepest devotion. It seemed to him as though no other pigeon in the world was or could ever be so wholly desirable.

And in the end he won. At first by signs not to be grasped by human eyes, and then through more visible evidences in her gait and the poise of her head, she showed him that she cared. She allowed him to give her a pigeon kiss through the meshes of the partition, and in return stroked and affectionately tweaked with the tip of her bill the feathers around his eyes. This display of feeling sealed their fate, and when Guionnet came in the following day and removed the partition, he realized that the match had been made.

The return with his bride to the breeding-pen where he himself had first seen the light definitely ushered Blue Checker into the duties of matrimony. A secluded corner box caught their fancy for their first housekeeping, and thither in a few days they both began carrying material for the nest. Sticklike stems of tobacco leaves, furnished by old Guionnet for their disinfectant value, and an occasional bit of twig picked up here and there, they arranged loosely in the saucer-shaped pan that stood in the box.

By the time everything was ready, Blue Checker had conceived a fear that his mate might lay her eggs elsewhere than in the proper place, and he kept her on the nest as much of the time as he could, following her incessantly whenever she left it, and literally driving her back in a quietly domineering manner.

Partly due to this instinctive watchfulness, the first egg arrived when and where it should, and two days later another followed. Ivory white and surprisingly large, they were pleasant to look upon in themselves, fit domiciles for the sentient crea-

tures which time alone would show if they contained.

The task of incubation fell equally upon the shoulders of both the young parents. There was something peculiarly devoted and self-denying about the regularity with which Blue Checker took his place on the nest each morning at ten o'clock, keeping the eggs warm from then until four in the afternoon and relieving his mate of all care during the best part of the day. It was as though he consciously realized his obligations as the head of a family and insisted upon fulfilling them to the letter. What it must have cost him to sacrifice that freedom of the air which had been his from dawn to dark is not for us to conjecture. But when, just before sunset of those short winter days, his spouse came and settled down on the eggs for the night, he would dart out for a bit of exercise in the crisp dusk with an eagerness that could not be gainsaid.

FOR the better part of three weeks the monotonous routine of brooding went on before the silent, signless eggs awoke to life. With weak tappings at first, and then with puny struggles succeeded by long intervals when they lay as dead, two draggled, well-nigh naked little forms broke their opaque prison walls and sprawled inert and helpless beneath their mother's protecting breast. The life-cycle that had begun in that same loft ten months before was complete. A new generation had come into the world.

Family cares busied the young couple all through that long, bitter winter. A new nest and a second pair of eggs followed the first, and a third the second. Then spring seeped up from the south, loosening the fetters of the cold, and the training-season began.

Blue Checker was now a splendidly strong, mature bird, a perfect picture of the racing homer. Stocky but not squat, big but not clumsy, he was. Speed, stamina and intelligence showed in every pose and motion, every line. His eyes glowed with a clear red light, fearless and alert, like splendid rubies set above the shimmering green sheen that suffused his neck and breast. His head, perfectly poised and wedge-shaped from above, evidenced abundant brain-space. The strong webs and heavy quills of his flight-feathers reached almost to the tip of his equally well-meshed tail.

The early trial races showed Guionnet that in this young bird he possessed a flyer of tremendous promise, of greater potentialities than even the famous Comet. He put him on training-diet—Canada peas, red wheat and whole corn, with a little weak saffron tea in the drinking water—conditioning him as carefully and lovingly as the horse-trainer does a Derby favorite.

And his faith was justified. Over the hundred-mile course Blue Checker maintained an average speed of nineteen hundred yards a minute. The three-hundred-mile distance, an official race held under the auspices of the pigeon-flyers' association, he covered at almost a mile-a-minute clip. The special five-hundred, an all-comers' event in which the best birds in the district were entered, went to Blue Checker by a margin of nearly half an hour.

He acquired an official name, Red Star Flash, and his photograph appeared in the Association's magazine over a glowing account of his racing prowess.

"In this young bird, now only fifteen months old," concluded the story, "Jules Guionnet's Red Star Lofts have a valuable prize. The record of his performances so far this spring indicates that if all goes well, he may prove to be a champion of champions. Mr. Guionnet is to be congratulated on having bred so promising a bird. We hope that he will enter Flash in the thousand-mile sweepstakes in June, for the contest between him and Littleton's Bullet, last year's winner, should be a classic in the history of pigeon flying in America."

IN the lamplit sitting-room of his little house in the outskirts of the city, old Jules read the account aloud to his wife, a note of challenge in his voice as he came to the last sentence.

"Mais oui," he cried, tossing the paper on the table and striding vehemently up and down the room. "For a sureness I will enter him in ze t'ousand-mile! Do they not know that I have try for twenty years and more to win that race?

" 'The contest between him and Bullet should be a classic,' eh? *Sacré!* He will show that Bullet bird his tail, *comme ça!"* He gestured scornfully; then, his mood changing, he sank into his armchair again and dropped his tousled white head in his hands.

"Ah, Marie, if we can only win that

race, *mon* Red Star Flash and I! Evair since I was ze *garçon* like ze leetle Pierre, I have love pigeons, have fly them for speed. You remember, Marie, ze leetle loft in ze garden which I have when I first know you in *la chère patrie?* How *mon père* he carry ze two-t'ree birds for me when he drive to town on market day, and give them ze toss in La Place Vélie? How I use to watch for them returning, and keep ze record of their time! Even then, Marie, I dream of ze day when I win ze greatest race of all. And when we come to America, already I have my eye on ze t'ousand-mile!"

His wife leaned over and patted the old man's shoulder soothingly.

"But this year, Jules, this year you will win! What of those other years when your *voyageurs* were beaten—will not their sorrow be all forgotten when ze great cup of ze championship is there on ze mantel?"

Guionnet started up again, the lamplight showing the gleam of determination back in his eyes, and strode to the fireplace.

"Oui, oui!" he cried, arms dramatically outstretched toward the mantel. "See, now, I make ready ze place where ze *grande* cup shall stand all shining as a mirror, ze cup that *mon* Red Star Flash shall bring to me!"

Feverishly he rearranged the pewter and china pitchers, the jar of dried flowers, the queer old faded daguerreotypes in their lacquered frames, clearing a space in the center of the shelf and standing back triumphantly to view his work.

"Voilà! A contest that should be a classic!' *Vraiment!*—a classic that shall end with ze greatest of all words, *Victoire!"* he finished tumultuously.

And out in the dark, silent loneliness of the loft, unknowing the great feat he was soon to attempt, Blue Checker dozed the night away at the doorway of his home, keeping watch and ward over his family within.

GRAY dawn of race-day found the starting-field tense with anticipation. Though sunrise was just beginning to tinge the sky, the crowd was on hand and waiting—pigeon-racing enthusiasts from a dozen States, some with birds entered in the big event, others attracted merely by their love of the game and desire to see the beginning of the greatest flight of the year. For the all-comers' sweepstakes from St. Paul to New York, one thousand miles in an air-line, drew the pick of the racers from the latter city's territory, and that means as sterling homers as there are in the land.

They crouched now in their training-baskets, a dozen powerful flyers trained and conditioned to the limit of physical perfection, each awaiting the moment of liberation when he would be free to start the heartbreaking drive back to that cherished home which a mysterious sixth sense told him lay far beyond the horizon's rim.

Around the leg of every bird was clasped a countermark band of brass, its numerals a secret known only to the race-committee, which, when he had reached the home loft and entered the trap, his owner would detach and insert will all speed in the sealed timing-clock whose reading only would be accepted by the officials. Small honor to the racer, no matter how speedy of wing, that should fail to enter the trap as soon as he arrived home, for his record must stand as the time elapsed between the toss and the registering of that little band, and a few minutes' delay might cost him the race. Thus his willingness to trap, and to be caught in the small confines of the cage for quick detachment of the band, rated high in his scale of accomplishments.

AS the time for the toss drew near, the talk of the crowd centered more and more around the respective merits of Blue Checker and Bullet, Littleton's four-year-old winner of the previous season's race, and runner-up the year before that. These two were the ruling favorites. Each had his stanch backers, the one because of his proven worth over the same course, the other for the startling records of his recent shorter flights. It was to be a race of experience against brilliancy, of sober, tested ability opposed to unseasoned dash, of sturdy, flawless middle-age challenged by the impetuous courage of no less perfect youth.

The sky brightened, and a cool, fresh breeze sprang up from the northwest, shaking the night's rain from the trees and sending a chill through the knot of spectators. The officials gave a final inspection to the baskets, making sure that the release devices were in perfect order, and stood back, watches in hand. The pigeons shifted restlessly, brushing against each other. Then the signal came, and with a whirring rush they were out and away.

UP and up in ever-widening circles the twelve birds climbed, eagerly seeking their bearings. Higher and higher, settling into their peculiar long-distance stroke, the first rays of the sun glittering in their eyes while the field below still lay in shadow.

Bullet, making his third start from this same spot, was the first to find himself and strike off eastward. His loft-mate followed closely, a heavy-set, nearly black bird. Two or three others, still somewhat at a loss, set out in different directions ranging between north and south. One headed directly west as though her very life depended upon a quick get-away.

Blue Checker did none of these things. Something far inside his brain told him that he had a long, long distance to go and warned him against making a false start. So he kept to his climbing spirals, testing the attraction of every point of the compass, awaiting the development of that strange mental pull which, should he follow it, would lead him unerringly toward home.

It came at last, when to the men grouped around the empty baskets he was a mere fleck in the sky.

"There goes Guionnet's bird!" exclaimed one of them excitedly. "Took him a long time to find what he wanted, but he's got it now. My God, look at him travel—east, straight as a die! He must have a good wind at his tail up there, but Bullet's got a long start on him."

The man was right. What had been but a fair breeze at the ground level was, at Blue Checker's high altitude, a stiff gale. It poured out of the great void of the sky behind him with an unwavering pressure that urged him forward almost without effort on his part. He felt the lift and thrust of it, and lengthened his beat. Instantly he seemed to be in a dead-air space, a stillness that whirled along at fifty miles an hour. Then he felt a faint breeze in his face—he was doing fifty-five, a shade faster than the wind itself. Momentarily this opposing current freshened as his speed rose to sixty and then to sixty-five. There he held it, gauging his exertion for whatever distance might lie before him.

An hour, two hours he hurtled on, head out, feet close against his body, vibrant, wiry muscles flexing tirelessly. Above and all about, the clean vigor of the wind; below, the endless panorama of the earth, green and brown and gold, changing endlessly but always melting into the horizon.

It was infinitely lonely up there. Now and then Blue Checker passed a swallow, usually below him and always darting aside in terror of this feathered meteor that swept on so fast. Once, too, he glanced up and saw an eagle circling far above, white head gleaming in the sun as he turned. But for the rest, only the thin song of the wind in his wings, the hiss of it past his ears, and the great magnet of home that drew him on, always on.

MIDMORNING came, and far ahead, the green pattern of the earth was cut by a silvery flash. Blue Checker's eye caught it instantly. Even as he watched it spread larger, stretching off to right and left, as far as he could see. Presently the full expanse of Lake Michigan lay before him.

As he realized it was water, that in all that vast space there was no spot where a pigeon might set his foot, there flashed over Blue Checker the instinctive fear of such places which, in his scouting around near home, had always kept him from venturing out far over the ocean that lay to the southward of his loft. He hesitated for an instant, wavering in his course, but the magnet drew him inexorably forward. The far shore took form dead ahead, and his doubts vanished.

He was over the lake now. Its silver had changed to blue, and sharply defined against it his eye picked up several dark, moving dots, all speeding in his own direction but at lower elevations.

At first he did not know what they were, but as he gained on them, he saw that they were pigeons. Those precious minutes lost while he circled for position back there at the starting field had been made up. He had overtaken the leaders in the race.

Blue Checker passed one, a second, a third—slowly but inevitably. Another half-hour, and only one remained ahead of him, the famous Bullet, holding his course with the steady, sure directness of an old-timer.

Minutes passed with no change in the relative positions of the two homers save that Bullet climbed higher, gaining advantage from the wind. With a half-mile lead, the older bird held his own, setting a pace that the younger could not challenge.

So they tore on, leaving the lake far behind, each immersed in the great absorption of speed, oblivious of everything but himself, two splendidly coördinated creatures flying as one. Then, without

warning, Bullet dropped, swirling down toward an open field through which trailed the ribbon of a brook.

Blue Checker saw him go, and, his own speed unchecked, caught the glint of wings as Bullet hovered over the stream and alighted at its margin for a drink. Then meadow, brook and rival fell away behind and Blue Checker, again alone, led the field.

The eager spontaneity that characterized the early hours of his flight had gone now. He was not tired, but a certain doggedness of determination had come over him. Five hundred miles on the wing, even under the exceptionally fast weather conditions which prevailed, are enough to take the edge off the buoyancy of the best of homers. Blue Checker was reaching the point where sheer courage and the longing for home and family were increasingly vital factors in keeping him going.

EARLY afternoon found Blue Checker over well-settled farming country. He felt the need of water, and stooping warily to the shore of a pond, drank of the cool, clear liquid, plunging his beak in deeply and gulping down eager draughts. It was very pleasant down there out of the wind, away from the endless striving of the race, and for several minutes he perched on a boulder, ruffling and preening, while the revivifying tonic of the water crept through every fiber of his body. With meticulous care he dressed the feathers of each wing, smoothing out every wrinkle he could find. Then he sprawled half on his side, luxuriating in the brief respite from flight.

For perhaps five minutes he lounged at ease before his eye, ever cocked to guard against surprise attack by hawks, caught sight of a speck coming out of the northwest, and coming fast. Presently it was overhead, past, and fading into the distance. Bullet, refreshed by his halt, had resumed the race and recovered his lead.

The sight of that hurtling form recalled to Blue Checker his yet unwon goal. He rose to his feet, his body-feathers tightening down in readiness for flight. Another moment, and he was in the air again, not circling this time, but whipping up on a long, straight slant toward the almost vanished figure of his great rival. If there was challenge in that rocketing speck ahead, Blue Checker answered it with a determination that recognized no obstacles.

Two o'clock came, three, and still the race went grimly on. The pace was a killing one, for both birds knew where they were going. Stamina, training, sheer grit—all were thrown into the balance unstintedly. No equivocation now, no sparing of muscle or nerve.

Then, as the sun's progress toward the horizon behind them became apparent, Bullet weakened.

Slowly he dropped back, nearer and nearer Blue Checker, fighting stubbornly. Back until they were on even terms, his veteran's spirit unconquered, but his flesh no longer equal to the strain. Back toward the horizon, smaller and smaller, an old champion whose title was passing before the onrush of a new. And Blue Checker drove ahead through the waning afternoon, his wings singing a song of victory.

Sunset came, and with it familiar landmarks. A string of ponds flanked by hills, a gray-and-white town with the straight, dark line of a railroad cutting it, a village of red roofs and green lawns—the sight of them put new life into Blue Checker's weary muscles, for they meant that he was nearing home. Eagerly he strained for a glimpse of the familiar river cliffs.

Yes, there they were, a mighty line of upflung rock, crannied and precipitous, edging a band of water. He shot out over the stream, barely clearing the trees that topped the cliffs, heading for the far shore and home. And here at the very threshold of success, with the full glory of the sunset as witness to its murderous intent, Death, swift and silent, struck down at him.

Out of the sky it came unheralded, venomous as an arrow from the bow. With all the glancing speed of her own wings and torpedo-like body, augmented by the pitch of her famous falcon stoop, a duck-hawk, swiftest and most dreaded of all the freebooters of the air, plunged upon him. Just that hissing dive, the convulsive clutch of talons missing their first stroke—and then the hurtling, dodging chase, the hawk, implacable and savage, hard upon the wearied pigeon that fought so gallantly toward the safety of his loft, game to the core.

IN the calmness of the summer twilight Jules Guionnet was closing the Red Star Lofts for the night. He must be up early tomorrow, ready to meet Blue Checker whenever he should arrive. That could scarcely be before nine or ten o'clock, for

the thousand miles had never been covered in less than twenty hours or so of flying time, which meant that one night would have to be spent somewhere along the road.

Still, one never could tell—the conditions had been unusually fast today, and perhaps Blue Checker would hang up a new record. What a grand bird he was, a homer of homers! There was his mate up there, brooding her eggs. She had been on the nest all day—in fact, ever since Blue Checker had been shipped away to the race—except for occasional brief minutes snatched for food and water. How faithful pigeons were, how devoted to their home!

A slight noise at the trap outside broke in on the old man's musings. Some murderous cat, probably, trying to force an entrance. The bobs leading from the cage into the loft were fastened down, and the beast could not possibly get inside, but he'd go and teach it a lesson it would not forget, anyhow. He left the loft and walked around to the front.

For one blank, dumb second he stopped short as he came in sight of the trap, unable to believe that a pigeon, a disheveled blue checker pigeon, was in it. Then his senses reacted tumultuously and he lunged forward to fumble at the door. Reaching in, he took the bird in his hands and felt tremblingly for the little countermark band. The touch of it sent the blood swirling through his veins.

He flung back to the loft where the timing clock stood, inexorably ticking off the minutes. Blue Checker lay passive in his hands, exhausted and panting from that last superlative effort which lurks in the heart of the thoroughbred, be he bird or man, when all hope is gone. A twist, a thrust—the band was off and into the slot of the clock, registering the record beyond question or doubt.

As the bit of brass slid home, Jules Guionnet's pent-up excitement burst out. He set Blue Checker in the pen and dashed for the house, crying incoherently. In at the back door, through the kitchen, on to the telephone in the little hallway he plunged, a wake of tumbled furniture and rugs behind him.

"Melrose, 4729!" he screamed into the transmitter. *"Oui, oui, oui*—4-7-2-9—flying headquarters—*vite, vite!"*

A pause, broken by the old man's panting and his wife's frantic but unheeded questions. Then:

"Attendez! My Flash he is here—just now—from ze beeg race! Yes, I am Guionnet—Flash, *Flash,* I say, he is home! . . . . *S-s-sacré!* He *is,* I tell you! It cannot be? No other bird is report yet? *Mon Dieu,* what is that to me—do I not know my own bird? It is *mon petit* Flash, ze greatest homer of all! He make new record for ze world—*oui, oui,* tomorrow I bring ze clock and prove it to you!"

He hung up shakily and turned to his wife.

"Enfin, Marie, *enfin* we have win ze t'ousand-mile! Ze beeg cup she shall stand on our mantel, Marie. *Enfin—la victoire—la victoire!"*

IN the fast-failing light of the loft, Blue Checker flew to the nest where his mate hovered over her eggs. She welcomed him with gently caressing bill, and for a moment their heads were together as he assured himself that all was well. Then, facing about, he settled down wearily at the entrance, sturdy breast still to the front, and slept.

A hobo's career is the theme of this unusual novel; reality is its most conspicuous feature—a reality which will win your deepest interest. Even if you missed the first installment, the synopsis makes it easy for you to pick up the thread of the story.

THE FLORIDA

(What Has Already Happened:)

THOMAS CARLTON had been left an orphan, with a little place in Florida, a two years' war experience and a splendid physique as his assets. For a time he lived quietly, unambitiously, supporting himself by taking visiting sportsmen on deep-sea fishing trips. And then discontent came over him and he set out, aimlessly, to seek his fortune.

Thus it was that young Carlton became, for a time, a tramp. For the lure of greener fields beyond continually tolled him away from any steady employment or regular mode of life; and in company with his chum little Dake, he presently found himself drifting about the country, one of that curious gypsy crew, the modern hobo. But for every element taken by life from Thomas Noyes Carlton, another element had been given to the Florida Kid, as he was now known. For cleanliness had come disorder; for content, discontent; for timidity had come hard nerve; for innocence of a sort, wisdom of the deepest; for a steady belief, a steady disbelief. When the world takes, it also gives.

Hearing of a Legion reunion in a near-by city, Carlton made his way thither, and for a day or two enjoyed the companionship of his former comrades-in-arms and the forgotten pride of respectability. And so it came about that he met Helen Proctor, who owned a chicken farm in California and who introduced herself to him while doing her bit to entertain the city's guests. After that, life was not the same again for Carlton; and he promised to visit Helen soon in California. *(The story continues in detail:)*

CHAPTER IX

ONE big struggle Carlton met and overcame in the hours immediately following his leave-taking of the tall girl. This struggle grew out of the question of money, of the advisability of drawing upon the Hillson Brothers for the funds that had accumulated in Hilltop. Sturdily, in the months that had passed, Carlton had fought away the impulse to request a remittance, feeling that the amount, which he calculated was a trifle more than two hundred dollars, was his only anchor to windward.

"It's all I have," he would argue with

Mr. Horn is a relatively new writer, but his sympathetic understanding of men and their ways, his talent for the graphic depiction of stirring scenes, and his gift for making his characters real—these advantages are likely to carry him to further successes.

KID By CHARLES HORN

himself in the moments of temptation, when he was broke. "This seems tough luck, now, but it could be worse. I'll pull through. But say I was actually down and out—crippled, say. It might be all that stood between me and real hell."

Thus, on the day after he had stood at the train gate, Carlton sat in a mission, in the slums of the city, and wrote a letter to the Hillsons, asking them to send him immediately the money that was due him. Sealing the letter, he rose and started toward the door; then the hesitation came again. He wavered, stopped.

"It's not changed," he decided after minutes. "It's more necessary to have out the anchor, now. Anything might happen, now. The fact that I hesitate tells me this isn't the time. I'll wait for the big sign," he told himself determinedly.

He destroyed the letter.

DAKE and the tall man were well into central Oklahoma before the latter began definitely to awaken from the haze that bound his days. By little and little, he found he had been traveling in a state of semi-intoxication, found a spell cast over him that made him to a degree oblivious to the passage of time, the march of events, the happenings of the hour. Only when his face was turned to the west, it seemed he breathed; only when his gaze was beating into the space that divided him from the tall girl, that he saw; only when his body was eagerly, quickly, without interruption bearing itself toward her, that he lived.

His care-free mode of travel was a thing of the past, and Dake watched curiously. The youngster had become so accustomed to the Kid's philosophy of travel—"We'll let the next train decide the direction. What does it matter where we go?"—that he was filled with wonder at this sudden change in his partner. Carlton now gathered timetables from the racks in waiting-rooms; in southern Kansas he fell into deep speculation whether hours could be saved by taking the Katy to Fort Worth, the T. P. to El Paso and the S. P. to California, or whether it would be better to catch the Frisco to the Sante Fe and go thus. He bemoaned that they had not taken the Overland from the city. Dake questioned this remarkable change that had come into the Kid.

"What's the difference if we're three

weeks, or eight?" Dake asked. "We'll have to work on the way, anyhow. We aint got enough jack to carry us through. I hear they're hell on you, in California, if you aint got enough jack to keep 'em from vaggin' you. We'll have to get forty or fifty bucks, anyhow."

Carlton meditated gravely over this phase of economics, when it was first brought up by Dake. Gathering together his funds, he found himself possessed of six dollars and ninety-three cents. Counting it over and over, he fell into acquiescence with Dake's reasoning. He must have money. It was vital that he have it. One or two hundred dollars, at least, he must possess when he met the girl in California.

Stuffing the silver and pennies back into his overall pocket,—he and Dake had made a hard trade with a haggling second-hand dealer for two outfits in exchange for the khaki,—he leaped to his feet.

"Let's go, then. There's work in this burg. They're paving streets. Let's find a job."

Dake squinted up at the sun. He had had no desire to hurry the coming of work; it merely had been mentioned as a future necessity.

"Why the rush?" he demurred. "We can't get on today. Let's wait till morning. Then's when they hire men."

"We'll go now," Carlton insisted. "We'll stake out a job for tomorrow. Come on."

Grumbling, Dake followed.

ARRIVED at a street that was being covered with concrete by a gang of workmen, Carlton glanced over the group, seeking the foreman. A stocky figure, standing to one side, caught his eye, and he looked for the sign of the boss, the sign of the boss of men on every public labor—a blue polka-dot shirt, a celluloid collar and no necktie. The stocky man carrying on his body these insignia of office, Carlton approached and made his request.

"Show up in the morning," the man answered. "Be here at seven. I may be able to put you two on."

A dark-skinned youth, plainly an Indian, halted Carlton as he turned away.

"Get on?" the Indian asked.

"I think so. Told me to come back in the morning."

"You'll be on, all right. He's been wantin' to start another bunch. Got a place to board?"

"No," Carlton replied.

"Stick aroun' till quittin'-time—or come back. I'll take you up to my boardin'-shack. The ol' woman tol' me to git her two more men. Six dollars a week for chuck an' a place to sleep. Aint so bad."

"What does the job pay?" Dake asked.

"Thirty-fi' cents, ten hours. It'll—"

The whiplash voice of the foreman cut into this.

"Hey, you fellas! I said come back t'morrow, not stick around all night. Hit the ball there, you!"

This last to the dark-skinned boy, who promptly bent to the handles of his wheelbarrow.

AFTER Carlton and Dake had followed the Indian boy, Sam Nish, to the boarding-place, Carlton sat before the kitchen stove and gave himself up to financial computations which had in them the quality of dreams. Three-fifty a day, six days a week, meant twenty-one dollars; from this to be deducted the cost of his board and room and, say, a dollar for tobacco and other incidentals, left a net income of fourteen dollars for each week. In ten weeks this would have accumulated to one hundred and forty dollars. And this was the stake he set for himself.

This amount, he determined, would carry him into California; he believed he could make the trip, riding hard, in not more than eight days. And with this computation of money and time, he should arrive in the Golden State with not less than a hundred and twenty-five dollars, clear. Two or three weeks, there, to fatten this pile and to acquire suitable clothing, and he would be ready to meet the girl.

Stretching his long frame before the fire in the kitchen stove, he dreamed dreams, conjured visions. He drew great satisfaction from it, for it was a new experience, this dreaming of the lineaments of a face, and of the voice and actions of a woman. Stretching out, his hands stuffed in the pockets of his overalls, he luxuriated in the hour. And lest there be those who would censure the Kid, a wanderer, for this quick-coming of an apparently hopeless regard for the girl, Helen Proctor, let it be remembered that she had built an ideal in his life, and the ideal was finding form and growing. And let them remember, above all, that youth is the age of dreams, visions, heartaches—the golden age.

On the other side of the stove Mother Brown—she possessed an unpronounceable Choctaw name that was brought out on state occasions—pulled at her pipe until it gurgled. But the dreamer heard it not. The odors in the small room were a mingling of boiled cabbage, boiled coffee, bad tobacco, unwashed bodies; and the dreamer knew them not. At a table in a corner, under a smoking kerosene lamp that hung on a nail in the window-casing, Dake, Sam Nish and a priestly appearing Irishman, O'Connor, noisily played "set-back;" and the dreamer was not conscious of their presence. Nish and Dake were vociferous; O'Connor quietly laid each card down with a slow, easy motion, smiled a slow, easy smile, spoke in a slow, easy, careful voice—a cultured voice, it was. Carlton had watched O'Connor at the evening meal, and had been impressed with the old man's apparent refinement. O'Connor was also a workman in the paving-gang.

AND now, dreaming into the fire that reddened and flared in little spurts between the broken bars of the grate, Carlton was conscious of none of these accompaniments of the life that would surround him for ten weeks. His thoughts were away—*he* was away, speeding west. He saw the golden visions of the State on the Pacific gathering before him, and these visions concentrated into one: a long road lined with palms, tall, outspreading palms, and bordered with Ragged Robin roses and with golden poppies. Great groves lined it, surrounding him with the odor of millions and billions of orange blossoms that gave their sweetness to the evening air. It was evening, in his dreams.

The road grew before him, dipping down into a valley that nestled against the hills, and back into a mountain, straight and true as the thoughts from the heart of a man speed back to the woman he loves. White cottages stood in the greenery of the roadside—white marks in the lives of men, he thought, these mansions they had built. Couples paced the road, two by two, always two by two; and the hair of the man who paced was red, and the hair of the woman was brown, with the lock of white starting in the middle of her forehead and spreading out and back, a striking triangle.

Mockingbirds sang in trees and bushes; a white moon shone. Crunch of jaws came from the cattle standing in the fields; a touch of song—a woman's voice—lingered in the air. Every foot of the road, as it outspread before him, carried him into new wonders, more marvelous happenings.

The girl at the man's side looked into his eyes, smiled into his eyes; her lips lifted slowly to him, inviting, waiting, beseeching. The man lowered his head, felt her breath on his cheeks, felt her lips rising, lifting, nearer, nearer.

The querulous voice of Mother Brown came into the picture, breaking it.

"This danged pipe don't draw like it oughter," she whined. "Reach me a straw out of that broom, yander."

Rising wearily to his feet, his body shaking, Carlton liberally handed her every straw in the broom and turned his tortured gaze upon the men who quarreled at their game.

"Guess I'll go to bed," he said. "What time do you call us?"

"Six," Mother Brown answered. "Call ye at six. Ye sleep in hyar,"—she waddled to an adjoining room,—"in thet bed in the corner. The other felleh 'at come with ye'll sleep with ye."

Lighting another lamp that hung on the wall, she waddled out again to her place in the corner back of the stove.

Carlton took off shoes and trousers and stretched himself on the hard bed. Dake and the others went on with their game. The pipe in the old hag's fat lips gurgled rebelliously. The fumes of the smoking lamp in the kitchen, the reek of boiled cabbage and beans, with other bad odors, filled the air about him. There was not a breath of clear air in the place.

Outside, an Oklahoma wind tore at a loose board in the siding of the house—*flap-clap, flap-clap!* After weeks, it seemed, he was conscious of Dake crawling in beside him, and pulling the comforter over his head. This was a way Dake had of sleeping.

CHAPTER X

THIS was the method of manufacturing the covering of the streets of the town:

The paving company used no concrete-mixing machine. Three long boxes were used, instead. Each box held the spread out contents of four sacks of cement and twelve wheelbarrowsful of sand and "chatt"—which last is the tailings from the lead-

mines around Joplin. Sand and chatt were heaped on the boards in a long, rounded-up mass; the cement was poured on top of this. Then the mixture was cut, dry; two men at each end of the heap, one on each side, shoveled into it, causing the cement to roll down into the sand and chatt, thoroughly mixing with it. This was the trick of the job: the shovel of each workman must cut through and touch the shovel of the opposite man. This was a trick that did not come to Carlton for a considerable length of time, perhaps an hour. The irritability of the foreman made this hour seem a considerable length of time.

This foreman was a hard guy, hard but fair. No workman of his gang could, if he knew it, work harder than any other man of the gang—as witness this:

The carrying of the cement was a part of the task least desired by all of the men. Each sack weighed nearly one hundred pounds, and as there were not enough wheelbarrows to do the work properly, the sacks were carried on hip or shoulder. In the exuberance of his newfound job, Carlton sprang blithely to the carrying. After the first few trips he thoughtlessly began carrying two sacks, one balancing on each hip.

This increasing of efficiency was noted by the hard but fair foreman, and as the morning wore on, with an unfriendly sun beating below the garments of the workers, he called to one of the carriers on another board:

"Hey, you! Don't make a trip with jus' one sack. Take two. Snap into it—lift your feet!"

Carlton was unconscious of the increased labor he had brought upon his fellow-workmen until curses from the other boards began to filter into his ears.

"You've queered yourself, right," Sam Nish whispered, as they leaned upon their shovels in the moment when Dake, at the end of a short piece of hose, played water upon the outspread mass of grout. "You've queered the job f'r them birds. Totin' them two sacks of cement! They aint as husky as you, them guys. Now, you've—"

"Why, I didn't think of that. Just thought I'd try it. It's a drag, in this sun."

"I'll say it is. Them birds' tails'll be draggin' the ground in an hour, in this heat. I never saw it as hot down here, in November. But you've sure queered yourself."

Carlton determined to relieve the hardship he had unknowingly placed upon the other and weaker workmen. Therefore, on a succeeding trip, he returned with but one sack of cement. The foreman barked at him, immediately.

"Where's that other sack? We carry two, on this job."

Carlton looked him over quietly. "I tried it," he answered, "just to see if I could keep it up. I can't."

He waited. Grumbling, after a minute the foreman turned away.

AWAKENING on the morning of the second day, Carlton was conscious of a peculiarity of his hands. Lifting them, holding them before his eyes, he found them clenched, exactly as they were clenched around the handle of the shovel in his working hours. He could not extend his fingers; figuratively they were frozen in the position. Taking the tips of the fingers of his left hand in the palm of the right, he pressed them back. Blood flowed forth. The lines in his palms, the creases in the joints of the inner surface of his fingers, were cracked, bleeding. It took minutes of effort, clenching and unclenching his hands, before normal action came back to them. This condition maintained for days, and the broken places hardened with the cement that worked into them. Festering sores broke out.

Another detail that brought thought pertained to shoes. On Tuesday morning he had started work; Saturday was a day of rain; his wage at the week-end, therefore, was fourteen dollars. The shoes he wore on Tuesday went to pieces on Friday morning, and he worked on that day with rags bound about his feet, and with the cement-laden water that ran off the grout caking upon them. Paying the week's board, an additional four dollars for a pair of heavy shoes, and a still additional one-fifty for a suit of overalls, he found himself possessed of two dollars and fifty cents out of his week's wages.

On Saturday, the rain pouring outside, the four men sat in Mother Brown's kitchen, talking, smoking, playing cards. Carlton was restless; he sought through the house for something to read, a book, an old newspaper, anything. He found nothing. No book of any sort was in any of the four rooms of the dwelling—not even an almanac, not even a Bible.

Sunday was washday. O'Connor, the

priestly-appearing laborer, called Carlton aside following breakfast on Sunday morning.

"There'll be a bunch in the jungles. I usually take my clothes down there to wash them. How about yours?"

"I'll call Dake. He'll want to go too."

The ground was beaten hard beneath two oak trees, denuded of their lower limbs, that had been torn off to start fires to thaw out gatherings of wanderers. Two fires were now going; at one of these a mulligan was in preparation; on another a large battered, blackened can held more or less clear water. Two men knelt at the side of a narrow stream, sloshing garments up and down in the water. They were clad only in their underwear, their socks forming a roll above their broken shoes. Soaping the legs of the overalls, they rubbed them briskly with a stone, dipped them into the stream, soaped and rubbed again. One man sang raucously as he labored.

Oh, bury me not-ut,
On the lone prairee-ee.
Where the wi-uld coyotes—

"Say, this is a hell uv a place, aint it?" The singer broke into his lugubrious song. "Got ditched from the midnight Katy, las' night. Foun' a good place to flop, though. Up along the tracks, on top of that lumber in that lumberyard. Warm, an' the boards had jus' the right slope f'r a feller's head. Hey, how's that stew comin' along?"

Carrying the overalls back to the fire, the singer dipped them in the can of boiling water, cursed at the steam that burned his hands and arms, threw the overalls to the ground, and then had to take them to the stream again to rinse away the earth that clung to them. Carlton looked at him curiously; he was surprised at the song on the fellow's lips. Hoboes were silent creatures; in all the years of his wandering, so far as Carlton's memory told him, this was only the third or fourth wanderer he had met who sang.

"I think he's a cowpuncher," O'Connor said. "That's a cattleman's song he sang."

WITH a pocket mirror propped in the crotch of a tree, another of the jungle gang was busy at his beard with a safety razor. Still another plied needle and thread to a tear in a pair of corduroy breeches. O'Connor looked over the group.

"Not a man I know," he said. Turning away, upstream, he sought a place where might be performed the laundering of his garments.

"Mother Brown would do this," he said, "but she charges too much. About a dollar a week it would cost if she did it. It's cheaper to come here, Sundays, and there's usually somebody here that I've traveled with before. This is the first time they've all been strangers."

"How long you been here?" Dake asked.

"Six weeks. And it's a poor job, this paving outfit. Six weeks, and I've averaged ten dollars a week. I haven't made up my mind whether I'll stick here all winter and take chances on making my board, or whether I'll hit for Arizona, where a man can get in full time."

"What's laid you off?"

"Rain, mostly. Then we had a cold spell, two weeks ago, that put us out for five straight days. Afraid the base would freeze; the town inspector wouldn't pass the job. I got in three days in two weeks." Straightening up, he eyed Carlton steadily. "It's a poor graft for you youngsters. You ought to be in something steady, something that has a future."

Dake grunted. Carlton mused.

"What makes men become hoboes, anyway?" he asked.

"Haven't you found out yet?" O'Connor returned quietly. "What makes you a hobo?"

"Oh, well, I'm on my way to California. I'm—"

"That's what makes hoboes. They're on their way somewhere, but it's an indefinite somewhere that's the same as nowhere. They have no place to go—just somewhere."

"But I know exactly where I'm going," Carlton objected.

"Well?" O'Connor eyed him shrewdly.

"Well what?"

"What's the plan when you get there?"

"Oh, I'm going to get a steady job and stick."

"What sort of a job?"

"The first thing I hit," Carlton said earnestly. "I've made up my mind that—"

O'Connor sniffed wearily. "You might as well be on your way to Europe, or Canada or New York, as to hit for California in that state of mind. You'll grab at the first thing you hit—and then after a month or two you'll find it isn't what you want, and you'll have dollars jingling in your pockets and you'll hit the road again. Or you'll hunt another job, drifting from

one to the other. Aimlessness. That's what keeps hoboes on the road.

"It's not for me to tell you—to preach to you." There was bitterness in his tones. "I'm a hobo—the worst hobo in God's sight, an old one, without—without the magic of youth to excuse my wandering. But out of the wisdom of an old man, let me tell you this: don't go to California, don't go anywhere, while you're filled with this aimlessness. You'll be a hobo there the same as here."

THE old man rubbed briskly on the leg of the breeches, then carried them to the fire. Dake, reclining in the sunshine, hands locked back of his head, grinned toward Carlton.

"Told me he'd studied for to be a minister, the other night," Dake said, out of the side of his mouth. "Didn't exactly tell me, but it sorta slipped out."

"I thought he'd been a priest—"

"Hell, no. He's a Methodist. I saw a card in his grip, when he opened—"

O'Connor came back to the stream. Dake took up another subject.

"Well, my old man was a heller," he said. "He beat me too much. Then, the town was so dead that there wasn't even a strange name to the streets—jus' Main, and Brown Avenue and Smith Street, and all that kind of names. But I guess it was the old man beating me an' laughin' at me when I told him I was going to run away. I showed him, all right."

O'Connor's white head waggled sorrowfully.

"A kid's grievance," he said in a low voice. "A father's thoughtlessness." He lifted a question to Dake. "Hasn't the world beaten you too?"

"Oh, yeah—sometimes. But I've had a hell of a good time, all the other times. Some day I'll stop and find me a steady job of work. There aint no hurry. The things I'm seeing now and the experiences I'm having'll be good training for me, when I stop. Look at all those writers—nearly all of them have been hoboes. Mebbe I'll write a book. I guess I could. My old man's editor of a newspaper, back home. That oughta make a writer out of me, mebbe. Aint made up my mind, yet."

Carlton added another link to the chain of his objectives, following the talk, that Sunday, with O'Connor. A fellow, he saw plainly, must have everything lined out, in this fight toward success. A fellow couldn't just amble along, taking anything that offered, grabbing at chances as they passed. He had to make a definite plan of his life, just as the architect made the plan of a building.

Therefore the link that Carlton added was this: After much thought, running over in his mind the possibilities of employment and the classes of labor that appealed to him, he settled upon the wholesale business, and carrying it down to the last point, the wholesale drygoods business. He knew somewhat of that line, having had experience in the store of Hillson Brothers, in Hilltop; and he decided that, out of the various avenues of wholesale endeavor, the drygoods end appealed the greatest. Groceries and meats he did not care for; the candy business did not charm; cigars, he had been told, paid but little, especially when a man covered the country trade.

He believed he would be compelled to start in a stockroom, work up through the various steps until he was put on the road—then through the salesmanager's chair to an interest of some sort in the concern. That might come after fifteen or twenty years of effort, he imagined, but it would come—it would come! He would make it occur just as he had planned.

In a way it was a vague, shadowy, in-the-future sort of planning, but he felt immensely satisfied with the fact that he *had* planned. That was the big thing, he knew, the laying of lines into the future.

He gave the girl in California full credit for the coming of this newfound ambition.

EVERY penny Carlton earned, he hoarded. Out of his weekly wage he paid Mother Brown six dollars; fifty cents—he had cut this amount from one dollar—he put aside for tobacco and an occasional book. He found himself thirsty for reading, and twenty cents of the weekly wage he usually spent for a magazine of adventure stories.

Also there was a great craving for sweets; Mother Brown's table carried nothing in the way of desserts. The fare was like this, day after day:

Breakfast, served in the kitchen, as were all other meals, consisted of large, soggy biscuits, strips of salt pork, a concoction that passed for coffee, and apple sauce. The sauce had no sugar in it. Carlton cared not for it, anyway.

Lunch, wrapped in a paper sack, held

the biscuits left over from breakfast, three of them with strips of the pork making them into sandwiches, and the fourth doped on the inside with the apple sauce.

The evening meal was Mother Brown's masterpiece. In it she served butter. As the four men trooped into the kitchen, ravenous with hunger, two pans boiled merrily on the stove, sending forth their two odors. There was no mystery as to the contents. All knew that one pan held beans, the other, cabbage, both with the pork scattered through them, and an occasional potato.

"Gawd!" Dake exploded one night, when the old woman had gone outside the house for a bucket of rainwater. "If this old dame ever gets where she can't get cabbage and beans and sow-belly, she'll sure starve to death!"

Looking about for a better boarding-place, Carlton found none that would meet the strict requirements he had placed upon his purse. A hotel, down by the Katy tracks, was frequented by laboring men, but the charge for board and room was ten dollars a week. The home of a widow also held boarders, and her charge was eight dollars a week. After learning these costs, Carlton resolutely closed his eyes to the fare at Mother Brown's, fought against the odors that greeted his entrance into the house, and talking fast at each meal to forget in a measure the eternal sameness of the food, he filled his belly with the stuff put forth by the old woman, paid her cheerfully each week, and solaced himself with the knowledge that, each payday, he was adding to his store of wealth—not at the originally planned rate of fourteen dollars a week, true, but a little—sometimes five or six dollars, sometimes not so much.

THE great hunger of his belly was for sweets. He had the man-craving for candy, and it was almost overpowering. A little candy-shop, in his path to and from work, held in its window a tin tray of peanut brittle, piled high, broken into bits, with some of it that had rolled down and lodged against the glass, clinging stickily.

Standing outside that window he literally felt the tang of that candy on his palate. Delicious, it was, with a slight taste of the salt in it, crumpling between his teeth, slipping down into his throat, with the smoky, roasted odor of the peanuts rising into his nostrils. He reveled in it, felt his body expanding with satisfaction as mentally he wolfed great quantities of it, gorged it. On three days, turning from the window after this mental banquet and feeling all the more keenly his lack, he promised himself he would, on the next payday, buy a pound of the stuff. It was forty cents a pound.

Come payday, there was the feeling that he could not afford the dissipation; he determined to keep away from the candy-shop; he would go to and return from his work by another street. This resolution not to squander his hard-earned money on sweets came, it is true, after great mental travail, wavering and hesitating. The dollars were earned with too great an effort, he felt; but also he felt he'd almost give ten years off his life for the candy. The price of a pound of the brittle represented an hour and ten minutes of toil, back-breaking toil; and yet—and yet his belly was crying for its indulgence. Resolutely, finally, determinedly he turned away.

AND then, as he turned the corner, he found the dime. Lying in full view it was, glittering in the low sun, a new ten-cent piece, dated with the present year, he saw as he stooped to pick it up. Rising hurriedly, he turned as hurriedly back to the sweet-shop.

Walking slowly up the street he wolfed the stuff down. It was not enough in quantity, but it helped—this quarter-pound of sticky sweet. It helped! As he licked his fingers, came quick resolutions; hereafter he would spend a dime of his wealth, each Saturday night, for candy. And in this way the fare at Mother Brown's would seem less terrific.

He turned a corner toward the Choctaw woman's shack with his body seemingly lighter, more buoyant, and suddenly was stricken with another thought: selfishly he had eaten the sweet, all of it, even to licking the taste of it off his fingers, and without a thought of Dake. Dake also might be hungering for it. Undoubtedly the boy was hungering for it. That was no way to treat a buddy!

Entering the shop again, he spent another dime and carried the purchase, the bag still unopened, resolutely unopened, to Dake and O'Connor.

With the statement that candy made his teeth ache, O'Connor gave his share to Mother Brown. The old woman sat back of the stove, that night, her pipe neglected, sucking at the stuff, spitting the peanuts from her lips so they would not choke her.

CHAPTER XI

CARLTON strenuously beat down the desire to write to Hilltop for the more than two hundred dollars he knew was due him from the rent. This, he sternly told himself, would be the nest-egg. He'd earn the other money, the funds that would enable him to make the new start.

After much thought, milling the question over and over in his mind, he wrote to Helen Proctor, and when the letter was mailed, became aware immediately of the creation of a new link between himself and the girl. She had been, before the letter, something slightly more than a gracious remembrance; afterward this developed into a thing more concrete, more susceptible to expression, more capable of being touched, held, cherished. Estimating the time for the return of an answer, he settled upon eight days.

After the ninth day he began to make three trips to the General Delivery window each day, estimating his chances upon the number of trains from the West into the town daily.

He began to fall asleep, each night, assuring himself that the letter would come on the morrow.

O'Connor it was who brought up before Carlton's eyes a little of the possible struggles that might line the path of the future. With Dake, the two had foregathered at the "wash-rack," as Carlton called the jungles on Mill Creek. Dake was sleeping beside a tree.

"There's always a fight when a man wins to success," O'Connor mused. "That's why so many fail. There's few fighters."

"It's the hard determination," Carlton cut in enthusiastically. "It's the—the battling toward something."

"That's it," O'Connor agreed. "And it's that same hard determination that brings the struggles." Leaning back on his heels, the old man rubbed soap thoroughly into the collar of a blue shirt. "It's as you will find it from now on," he continued slowly, his eyes on the collar. "Up to now you've been drifting, carrying on with each crosscut of current, going out with the tide and coming back on it. You haven't met resistance with resistance. You've bent to it. You haven't known the fight of forcing your way over a set of circumstances, or through them, to arrive at a certain destination. You've simply gone on."

Carlton had told the clear-eyed old man a little of the vision he held before him—keeping back, carefully, the name and the thought of a girl at the vision's end.

"It's little I ask," Carlton said suddenly. "I know there'll be difficulties to meet, and I know these difficulties will seem greater because I have never before recognized them. But will they be greater?"

Gaze bent into the distance, he lapsed into silence. The Road was unwinding itself before his eyes; shapes of houses came out, clear—the red of Ragged Robin roses.

"It's little I'm asking for," he cried out, "—just a place to rest, to make good. I used to believe it didn't amount to a damn, anyway. Now, well—"

"Ideals," O'Connor prompted.

"Perhaps. Something of that sort, perhaps. I think—"

"Ideals bring all the striving of the world. Yet they are most worth striving for."

"It's just a—a place," Carlton went on, unheeding. "A clean place of some kind."

O'Connor sighed.

"The eyes of youth gladdened by visions," he said. "It's the going after the prize that brings the struggle—the going after it in a straight line. The battles come to every man who sets an ideal before him, who steps out of the road to beat a path to something he sees. He lines up forces against himself by the very act of his determining. They line up unexpectedly, but they are there—they always have been there. It's his going against them that brings the bristles to their backs.

"Understand," he continued, "I'm not trying to dissuade you. It's cheering you on, I am. You'll need cheers. You'll be like a man in the desert who starts for a mountain he sees—have you ever been in the desert? Right down in it?"

Carlton shook his head.

"Well, it's not the wide expanse of bare sand that you believe it. It's a great stretch of cactus, catclaw bushes, Joshua trees, plants of a hundred sorts, and every plant has a thousand clinging fingers, thorns that tear at a man's clothing, holding him back, delaying him.

"You'll find the world like that. It's a great deal like the desert, the world—as deceptive, as filled with clutching fingers, and with its beauties always far off, when one stands on high peaks and looks over it. You'll find the world a desert. If you were to look over that space of sand that has its millions of growths, and fix that

point of the mountain in your mind, and try to go straight for that point, perhaps you'd never make it. You'd do battle with the thorns and tearing branches. But, there's paths through and around, winding paths that'll lead you, perhaps—*perhaps*, sometime, if you don't forsake the objective, and a thousand other if's. The way to the mountain, straight, may be but a few miles. The way through the winding paths may be a hundred miles."

"Mine is the shortest way," Carlton said.

"I think you believe so. That's why battles will come. When a man starts a determined course, the hands rise up to clutch him. It's the way of the world. Yet the determined path always leads somewhere, despite the battles. Only the idler fights nothing."

"I'm going the shortest way," Carlton said again.

DAKE was greatly content with the progress of each day; Carlton fumed at the hours lost from labor, cursing when his weekly wage gave him but a few dollars to add to his slowly mounting hoard. On one Saturday night, having made a full week, he knew the satisfaction of possessing fourteen dollars to put with his savings, after his board was paid and after the fifty cents was put aside for tobacco, candy and a book.

In that hour following supper he believed he achieved to a content greater than any of his life. That he had been able to reach, once in his labors with the gang, the goal set as his weekly saving, seemed the supreme joy of existence. It was a victory won; it gave him new determination squarely to face all other possibilities.

After Dake had gone to a picture show, Carlton counted and recounted his money. With one five-dollar bill, he had thirty-nine pieces of currency. Laying them edge to edge, piling them criss-cross, making them into little piles, they were a goodly array.

In the next week he worked but fifteen hours. After he had paid Mother Brown, but forty-three dollars remained in the hoarded pile. Through the days of idleness Carlton fumed and cursed, spending much time alone, splashing through mud of the fields, his clothes soaking in the drizzle.

Thoughts of possible theft assailing him, he became suspicious of Sam Nish. He felt he should deposit the money in a bank, but was ashamed of his personal appearance, afraid the youthful clerks would giggle and grin at the entry of a hobo-capitalist.

Borrowing a needle and a length of thread from Mother Brown, he contrived pockets in his undershirts, at the place on the garment that fitted snug under his shoulder.

First snow came. Carlton felt the need of an overcoat and heavier clothing, but fought the chill from his bones by going through the streets at a half-lope. Finding an account of deep breathing in a health magazine he picked up in an alley, he learned that by keeping his shoulders well back, his lungs filled, greater warmth would be in his body.

He believed that when he crouched over, as crouched other men who hurried shiveringly through the streets, his body chilled noticeably. He pitied the other men who did not know of this means of creating body-heat.

He was superbly, vibrantly happy. Many women glanced quickly at him as he passed, head up, body erect, great chest filled. Some would glance again.

And again and again and again, some of them.

NO letter came from Helen Proctor. Carlton wrote a second time, a postcard. Some occurrence had delayed her answer, he knew. He would have heard from her, except for this unavoidable delay. He did not lose faith in the girl; did not whine, or bemoan or berate the lack of word from her. Sometimes, very infrequently, he felt he had been extremely presumptuous in addressing her. . . . .

The Road was a part of his life, now. When obstacles loomed darkest, when events arrayed themselves in their most sinister form, when the striving seemed to have reached the climax of effort, he found a call to the Vision would drive away the devil fingers, and the doubts and questions.

"Is it worth it?" the question came. "Is this—all this—worth it?"

A girl came to visit Mother Brown, her granddaughter; a half-breed, the girl was —olive-skinned, with the powder on her cheeks forming a pink coating. She followed Carlton about, laughing into his eyes, boldly inviting him. She drew close to him when he sat upon the back porch. She would look at him, wide-eyed, and laugh tremulously, and her lashes would

droop, tremble, on her cheeks. She was sixteen years old, filling with the knowledge of sex, drunk with the lure of it, at the peak of a dangerous age.

The Road helped, then.

And there were the two weeks when he worked not a day, and when his hoarded money dwindled to twenty-six dollars and fifty-five cents, and when the curse of the ages seemed heaped upon his shoulders.

He began to believe that each dollar contained three hundred cents: the cent earned, the cent saved, and the cent that would grow out of these, in the future. The first, he grew into knowing, was the least important of the three.

CHAPTER XII

THE wheels of the box-car whined on the flanges of the rails as they wound around a curve: *skruff-uff-ee—skruff-uff-ee—skruff-uff-eee!* They struck the tracks of an intersection, each truck registering its passage: *lippee-lippee-lippee,* receding in volume as the train was pulled forward. A series of jerks began at the engine and rattled backward, car bringing against car when the air was applied, much as a racking shiver that starts at a man's head and works downward through his body. The train slowed up, stopped, and the silence that followed beat upon one's ears. Two frogs, in a slough beside the track, mustered courage to ask each other the why of the cessation of the racket. The whistle cutting the air carried back clear on the wind from the west: *whoo—whoo—whoo—whoo!* Footsteps crunched on the wet gravel and cinders of the roadbed, and a trainman hurried forward, the light from his lantern making a yellow glare in the fog that surrounded everything. It was early morning.

"What's this place we're at?" Dake asked.

"I don't know," from Carlton. "I think we took the wrong train, last night, think we got on the wrong side of the crossing. Seems we've been going north."

The two men were in a box-car that had been loaded with tanbark and had not been carefully cleaned of its contents. A great pile of fibers in a corner had made a more than usually comfortable bed.

The train began its motion again, pulling slowly forward. The mark of lighted windows in houses that lined the right-of-way was distinguishable through the fog, each light forming a golden halo in a little spot in the grayness—liquid light, it became in those places. Dake crept to the door, sitting back out of sight, crouched on his haunches. His eyelids were sticky with sleep; his garments held the evidence of the night passed on the tanbark. The train was passing up the middle of a narrow street; bare trees spaced accurately, like telephone-poles, loomed out of the mist, standing out distinctly for an instant, then being absorbed again by the gray cloud. Whistling suddenly, and with a shrill note of surprise, Dake turned to Carlton.

"What do you think, Kid?" he cried. "What day do you think this is? It's Christmas! Well, what d'you know about that? Wouldn't that get a guy's goat? Christmas! I never thought of it."

"What makes you think—"

"Didn't I just see a tree all lighted up, as we passed that house that sticks out in the street? I could even see two kids—they looked like kids—on the floor in front of the tree. It was setting back against the wall, and the curtain was up. I saw it!"

"Maybe you're right. I guess you are. I had forgotten all about it."

"Sure I'm right," Dake said positively. Then, after a silence: "Aint that a hell of a note?"

"What?"

"Oh, Christmas an' everything. Us out here in a box-car, hoboes—you know, Christmas an' everything."

CARLTON grinned at the lad's display of feeling.

"Well, I was on the road last Christmas," he said.

"I wasn't. I never been out in my life, on Christmas. I always managed to have me a job of work and a few dollars stashed away. Last year I—I bought myself a present. Bought a pipe. Was working in Illinois, and I stalled around the boarding-house, went downtown and came back with the pipe and stalled around that my mother sent it to me. Wasn't that a hell of a trick?" Dake grinned in a shamefaced way. "But it makes a fellah feel rotten, not getting anything on Christmas."

Carlton nodded; curiously he felt himself drawn closer to the youngster. Dake had depths that had not been touched. The boy leaned from the car door, looking toward the head of the train.

"Come on," he said, dropping to the

floor, his legs outside the car. "We're getting to the main stem. We'd better roll off here." Carlton followed him.

THEY turned a corner into a street that was bordered with stores, all closed, and with the eaves and the edges of wooden awnings dripping with the fog that entered one's clothing with all the force of heavy rain. Silvery globules lay upon the shoulders of the garments of the men; the edges of their trouser-legs sloshed about their ankles; the chill of the dampness cut to the bone.

Dake crouched his body and shivered, his hands stuffed into his pockets, with his reddened, weatherbeaten wrists showing between the pockets and the sleeves. Carlton, the lingering remembrance of the story in the health magazine staying with him, walked erect, drawing great breaths of the watery atmosphere into his lungs.

The street was silent; the sound of footsteps was strangely exaggerated, beaten back from the fronts of the shops and reverberating under the wooden awnings. At a corner a tall man, clad in a slicker and topped with a service hat, eyed the two coldly as they drew near, his glance lingering on them, sizing them up.

"Good morning, officer," Carlton said pleasantly, touching the peak of his cap. The man growled unintelligibly. His gaze followed them as they melted into the mist.

"There ought to be some place a guy could get in out of this weather," Dake complained after a moment. Then: "Well, there's one thing, and that's a cinch: Your little Willie aint going to mooch no chuck, this day."

"We don't have to," Carlton said. "We have—"

"Wouldn't make no difference if we was broke," Dake said firmly. "I'll hit no back doors on Christmas. That's much too much. All the women'd slobber over a fellah. I hate to have anybody slobberin' over me."

Carlton grinned.

The mark of a lighted window came slowly out of the fog, the beginning of a word, "*Rest—*" showed against the glass. Carlton quickened his steps.

"Here's a place," he said. They entered.

APPARENTLY they were the first customers of the day, and they perched on two stools, the water dripping to their legs and chilling their ankles. The place was warm, gratefully warm; a fire roared in a cannonball stove in the center of the room. After peeping around the edge of a partition at the rear, a woman came forward, saw the state of their clothing.

"Good morning," she greeted. "Merry Christmas. Not so merry, either, with this weather, but it's Christmas, an' we're all supposed to say that. Say, better take off your coats and hang 'em by the fire. They'll dry out while you eat."

They obeyed, and hovered over the stove, thawing out. A delicious odor of warmth, frying food, boiling coffee, warm toast was in the air. The little place, with its greeting, had leaped out and gathered them in, as a man gathers a friend to his fireside.

"Well, what'll it be?" The woman smiled before them, saw their shivering condition. "Say, you boys better move to that table back of the stove. It'll be warmer."

Carlton's fingers went to his disordered hair. A table, he believed, meant a more careful appearance than did a stool. The woman noticed the gesture.

"Go back there," she pointed, "and you'll find a basin and a comb. Slick yourselves up. What'll I get for you to eat?"

"Got any ham and eggs?" Dake asked.

The woman nodded, still smiling. Little crinkles gathered around her eyes and lips when she smiled; she aged perceptibly.

"Well, I want an order of ham and eggs and hot cakes and potatoes an' coffee. How much is that, for both of us?" Dake asked.

The woman began the computation, counting the items off on her fingers. Dake interrupted.

"It wont be more'n twelve dollars, anyhow," he said. "We got that much. Feed us!"

She laughed uproariously. "No, it wont be that much." Then, to the cubbyhole in the rear whence came the delicious odors: "Ham-an'! Stack! French 'em! Twice on all!"

"Hotdam!" said Dake. "Them is welcome words."

Afterward, bending above the washbasin, he observed: "She's a swell dame, aint she? All these fat, black-haired women is good sisters. I'll bet she's a swell fellah. Looks like a wop, don't she?"

And, a little later: "She's sure different from them damn' church-members that had us throwed out of that jungle when we was working, aint she? I hope they all fry in

the hottest grease in hell for three thousand years. That's what I hope. I hope their houses burn up, and they all get the smallpox and die. That's the kind of a Christmas I'm hoping for them birds."

MANY times in the past week had Dake cursed the people of the town that was having its streets paved, and this is the reason for the curses:

On one bright Sunday, O'Connor, Dake and Carlton had gone to Mill Creek to wash their garments. It was the day following that in which Carlton received his first letter from Helen Proctor, and he was alight with good-will, buoyant with the entering of exhilaration. He had whistled and sung as he bent above the stream, and shuffled a dance step from the stream's edge to the fire and back again. The silent man was moved to outward manifestation of his exuberance. So engrossed was he with the warmth that coursed in his veins that he noted not the sudden silence that fell upon the group in the jungles until something hard jabbed into his side, smashing against his ribs. He straightened up. A tall, hard-eyed man stood beside him. In the hard-eyed man's hand was a billy, at his belt swung a gun, peeping beneath the edge of his coat.

"Get the hell out o' this," the man commanded.

"What?" Carlton was confused. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Dake, O'Connor and the others being hustled from the jungles by two other men.

"What's up?" he asked again.

"I said to get the hell out o' this—that's what I said! I'm giving you an hour to get outa town—all you bums."

"We're not bums," Carlton expostulated. "We work on the paving-gang—three of us."

"Hit the ball! If you aint out o' this town in an hour, it'll be ninety days for you!"

"But we work here—we live here," Carlton attempted further explanation. We—"

The hard-eyed man moved close to him and lifted the stick warningly, shaking it under Carlton's nose.

"Now, listen, you: Another yap out o' you, an' I'll beat your head off with this club!" he barked. "If you live here, get where you belong. I've had about fifty complaints about you birds gangin' up here every Sunday, an' I don't want no backtalk. The best people in town've been raisin' hell with me—all the church-members've been howlin' about it. So beat it!"

THAT was the first. The second, and last, was after this fashion:

A series of burglaries had hit the little town. One night, as the four men were playing cards around Mother Brown's table, two officers entered, guns at their hips and guns in their hands, and hustled the men off to the lock-up, "for investigation." This was on Tuesday night; on Friday morning they were released.

"Now, let this be a warning to you," the city marshal, who was the hard-eyed man, had said curtly. "Let—"

"Warning of what?" Carlton had cut in.

"Now, listen, buddy—don't you try nothin' on me!" the marshal barked. "You're too damned mouthy, anyhow. Now, get this: Let this be a warning! We've had you once, and we'll get you agin. You're a marked man—all of you're marked men. I'm going to break up this gang if I have to put you all in jail for life. I'm turning you loose, an' see that you go straight. I'm going to keep my eyes on you—especially you, you red-headed bird. We'll know every time you breathe."

He watched sullenly as they shuffled out of the door and down the steps. Outside, around a corner, Dake pulled up.

"Well, that's *that,*" he said. "What d'ye think of that, anyhow? What have we done, besides working our legs off on their dirty streets? And for that, we're crooks, eh? For that we get watched, eh? I hope him and his church-members fry in hell for six thousand years. That's what I hope."

"It's one of the penalties of being a hobo," O'Connor said as they moved slowly along. "We have no legal standing, when it comes right down to cases. They can frame almost anything on us. We're lucky; it's a godsend we're out of this, and not spending six years in McAlester."

IT was Dake's first experience of the legal standing of a hobo. O'Connor and Carlton had appeared at the bar of justice several times, and so thoroughly were they aware of the futility of attempting to recover any balm for the false imprisonment that they gave it no thought whatever. Had the experience come to a man in almost any other walk of life, there would have been recourse, but in the case of themselves there was nothing to be done.

"One thing every man needs, when he is

brought up on any sort of charge," O'Connor mused, "and that is a defender of some sort. Every community should have a public defender."

"It's the little cases that receive no attention," Carlton said.

"That's what I'm getting at. The drunks, vagrants, petty cases. Yet, in most of the jails, especially, your picture and measurements go into the Bertillon book on even the light charges. They make a criminal out of you for evading railroad fare, or begging on the streets, or any other charge they may hang on you. If you're discharged, the record stands, along with the other criminals. Then, when they pick you up again, out comes the papers with the story of how you've been mugged in such-and-such a town. It's hell." The old man was bitter.

"They didn't mug us in there," Dake reminded.

"Because it's a very little place. In a larger city it'd been different.

"And then," he continued, "when they take you before the judge, you plead your own case. You have no attorney, because you haven't the money to hire one. You're scared to death, and you're going against hard, shrewd men—men who are paid to convict you, innocent or guilty, who have tried to spin a web around you because they hate like sin to acknowledge to a mistake. If you're a wise head, you'll plead guilty, if the charge is light. If you plead not guilty,—if you know you're not guilty and stand up for your rights,—they twist you up in a web, disregard all the testimony you bring forth—and soak you the limit. You don't get sentenced for the crime, but for the style of your plea: guilty, it goes light; not guilty, you get hell!"

"It's a rough old world," Dake sighed.

"It is that," O'Connor said quickly. "And we've no one to blame except ourselves, coming right down to cases. The conditions are thus and so, and they will continue to be thus and so, and the only change we can make in them is to change ourselves. We're stepping out of the bounds of the law every time we hop a rattler or beg a meal or steal a sleep. True, millions of men, every day, step outside the law in other ways, but they're hard to catch and we are not. We know what we're up against, and we know the game isn't worth it. We know the only sensible thing is to stop, stick in one place until we have made good and got a standing for ourselves, legally and morally."

"I'll stick here until spring," Dake temporized. "I'll have a roll by that time. What about you, Kid?"

"I don't know. . . . . I don't know. I'm going to California, as soon as I can save the jack."

BUT they did neither. The most serious part of their experience was to come. When they called on the foreman of the paving-gang, seeking their jobs, they were curtly told that others had grabbed them.

"That settles it," O'Connor said. "I'm going to Arizona. A man can get in full time, there."

At a division point they met a band of wanderers who had returned from Arizona.

"Don't go down to that place," one of the band said. "They wont hire a white man on public work. Nothing but cholos. The foremen wont hire a white man."

And that night, in the railroad yards, they lost O'Connor. Dake and Carlton, hidden in a coal car, saw the old man sprinting down between two trains, a railroad detective after him.

"Stop!" the railroad detective called. "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

Listening, they heard no shots. Afterward, crouching in the car, they heard the detective return and pass their hiding-place, seeking them, cursing heavily.

Careful search, afterward, failed to locate O'Connor.

CHAPTER XIII

A BARN that loomed conveniently out of the gloom, following the hour in the restaurant, gave sanctuary. The two men turned into the long, deserted building, and with the sides of their shoes as the scrapers, raked together a pile of the hay that lay scattered over the earthen floor into a corner. Thus they prepared to spend Christmas day.

"Gee," Dake said, "this is one fine Christmas day. Oh, I'd give anything to be in a nice warm room, somewhere. Kid, do you ever get homesick?"

"No. Well, not that I can remember—not homesick, exactly, but I wish time would hustle along, so I—"

"California, eh?" Dake queried.

"Well, yes."

"Hm-m! Say, what's got into you about

this California stuff, anyhow? Why so intent on beating to that place? You gotta hunch, or something?"

"In a way, yes."

"Some folks out there, or something?"

"No, no folks."

"Gotta gal there?"

"No!"—shortly. "Just a hunch."

"Well, hunches is good things to play."

Dake tossed restlessly on the pile of hay, lying on his back with his heels against the boards of the barn, then changing his position, this way and that way.

"Gawd!" he said again. "Wish I was some place where there was Christmas going on."

Carlton's temper was shortening under this cry from Dake. He spoke sharply.

"You've got the Christmas bug worse than any fellow I ever saw."

"Yep," Dake acknowledged serenely. "It's always been that way with me, ever since I was a kid. There was just two things I watched for, year after year—Christmas and Fourth of July. Seemed like it was a terrible long time between them, in those days. I remember that I didn't hate to start to school so much because I always thought Christmas followed right after that. Gee, my old man was a good old scout, those times."

Dake scrambled to his feet, walked to a door of the long shed and stood watching the lifting of the fog. He came slowly back to Carlton.

"I think the guy I hated worst in all my life," the youngster resumed, "was a fellah, lots older than I, who undertook to prove to me there was no Santa Claus. We had a swell fight. Gee, but we battered each other up! Trouble of it was he made me believe it. That was why I hated him so. . . . . Well, that's *that*. I always was a nut about mysterious things—liked to join boys' outlaw clubs, and all that kind of stuff. Let's forget it!"

Dake grinned; Carlton returned it.

THE morning wore on, dismal, gray, a morning to bring the mulligrubs to any person. Carlton burrowed a nest into the pile of hay, stretched his head on his arm and went to sleep. Dake sat with his back against the wall, hands locked over knees, eyes narrowed in thought, in retrospection. Several times he sighed, arose nervously and paced to a door, peering outside.

It was nearing noon when the youngster returned from one of the wandering inspections of the long shed, and stood for a moment looking down on Carlton. He stopped to touch the man, hesitated, drew back, and taking a notebook from his pocket, with the stub of a pencil which he wetted with his lips, scrawled a message: *"Going downtown. Will be back soon."*

This he pinned with a straw to a crack in the boards, directly in Carlton's range of vision, leaned Carlton's hat against it for better emphasis, and went outside.

In the street, seeking in his pockets for tobacco and paper, he emptied an assortment of threads, the tiny particles of fuzz that are in the bottom of every pocket, and a few grains of tobacco into the white paper, rolled it, found a match, puffed, and spat in great disgust at the taste that came.

IT was well into the afternoon when Carlton awoke. Dake's message, looming above the edge of the hat, caught his eye, but as it gave no hour of departure, Carlton remained in the barn, awaiting the boy's return. Pangs in his stomach finally telling him the approximate hour of the day, he went out into the street toward the restaurant, ordered his meal, and then went out into the street again, seeking.

The black-haired woman had not seen Dake. Carlton returned from a fruitless search, ate and finished, then sat at the stove with the proprietor of the little restaurant, talking, telling somewhat of his wanderings.

Carlton had not imagined he could so greatly miss the youngster, be so affected at his absence. . . . .

He was loafing at the end of the station platform, beside the freight house, when he saw Dake again. The slamming of a door, beyond the tracks, quick steps down a set of stairs, brought Carlton's attention to the house. He saw Dake come out of the yard, leap across the tracks. At the sight of him, Dake drew up with a start of surprise.

"Why, hello, Kid! Where you been?"

"Looking for you. I've—"

"Man, man! I've sure found me some Christmas. You see that dump? Come on, I'll tell you about it. What you doing, anyhow?"

Dake's speech was rambling; his face was flushed, his tongue thickened, burring a little over the words. He made sudden starts and stops.

"You know how I found the dump?" he asked, lowering his voice mysteriously.

"You know how? Remember that dick we met on the corner, this morning? Well, he's the guy. His brother—or is it his brother-in-law? Anyhow, one of his gang runs the dump. An' she's some joint! Guess we aint in right with the law in *this* place—eh, Kid?"

Carlton walked beside him, saying nothing. Dake, however, was afflicted with an eruption of words.

"She's some joint! I'll say she is! Everything there,—right over the table, too. Good stuff, too. An' they had a big stew 'at they fed the gang. Card-game goin' in a room, but I didn't buck it. I didn't buck it, Kid. I took two-three li'l drinks—honest t' Gawd, I don't think I had more'n half a dozen. But they sure pack a wallop, Kid. They sure pack a kick."

Passing up the street again, they met the tall man in the slicker. This time he nodded agreeably. Carlton scowled. Dake grinned and returned the nod.

"Howdy, Chief!" he bubbled. "Say, that place—"

But Carlton hustled him away.

DUSK—a murky dusk that settled over everything and that sank into the bones of everyone. A dusk that gnawed at the nerves of men, that battered at the temperaments of women, that brought tears to children's eyes, whimperings to the little ones. Dusk that was creepy, frightful, in every way terrifying, that painted specters of the most inoffensive objects—a fencepost with a trellis above it, say, became the bones of an old man, standing stark.

Dake and Carlton crept out into this dusk, out of the barn into the mud of the street. Carlton was silent, stern; Dake was jumpy, half-awakening from the hours of sleep that had followed his Christmas entertainment, his body twitching, shaking with the chill of the evening, the warmth of the whisky and the sting of it gone, just the fumes of it lingering on his thickened, furry lips.

"Gee, I'm feeling rotten," he said pitifully, his voice shaking, teeth chattering.

"Run—hurry. That'll warm you up," Carlton told him.

"Hell! That wont do no good. I want a drink. I got a awful sorry on. I gotta have a drink."

"Forget it," Carlton advised curtly.

"Yeah! That's all right for you guys that stay away from the stuff; but me—I gotta have one to sober up on. Come on. I'm going down to that place by the tracks."

Dake turned abruptly aside. Carlton hesitated, then followed, striding to Dake's side, catching his arm.

"Don't be a damned fool," Carlton began. Dake jerked away.

"Listen," he said quickly. "I'm going down to that joint. That's all. Now, Kid," —his voice lowered—"I'm all right. I'll be all right when I have a drink, and I'll let it alone, after that. Honest to God! Come on, Kid. Then we'll hit the next train out."

A slender, round-shouldered man with a bulbous nose and piercing glance greeted the knock at the door of the house. Peering out, seeing Dake, he threw the door awide.

"Come on in, young feller," he greeted hospitably. "Bring your pal. Your friends is my friends—aint that right? Aint that right?"

Chattering volubly, he led the way to a rear room, where a businesslike bar stretched across one wall.

"The same ol' stuff, eh?" he asked. Dake nodded.

THIS is the way Calkins, the night officer, told to his chief the happenings of the next hour. Calkins was a stout, ruddy-faced man, with his upper lip drawn back in the semblance of a perptual grin, which gave him the nickname "Smiley." The grin was incongruous, now, coupled with his startled manner, his labored breathing and generally distraught air as he pushed Carlton before him into the dim hall of the house of municipal affairs in this little town. A curious crowd followed the two, those bolder spirits pressing forward, peering at Carlton, their eyes widening in appreciation of the startling.

"That's the little feller's pardner," one whispered, and this word was relayed back to those that followed.

From the hall Calkins pushed and jerked Carlton into a narrow room that was barred with a grilled partition of wood across one end. Two small windows were cut into the fanciful curves and curlicues of this grating; a swinging gate gave access to a smaller space, in which a man was seated, reading.

"Chief," Calkins gasped, "I picked this bird down by the tracks. An' I hadda accident, Chief; I hadda accident." Then,

as though in self-assurance: "I hadda accident—I hadda accident."

Becoming aware of the gaping crowd that was filling the room, Calkins turned upon them, beating them back with his fists, snarling curses upon them. The Chief rose, snapped open the gate, beckoned to Carlton and led him to an inner room, closing the door as he returned to the outer office.

"Now," he said briskly to Calkins, "lock that outside door and get me told about this accident."

The sounds of their talk drifted in to Carlton.

"I'd been watching 'em, Chief. I'd been on only a hour, you know. They come out o' Dutch John's place, an' the little feller was drunk. Happy drunk, Chief— Laughin' and raisin' hell, you know. . . . . I hollered at 'em, told 'em to come over to where I was. They come. The big feller, him in that room there, was tryin' to hush the little feller. They come up to me.

" 'Where you goin'?' I asked.

" 'Outa town,' says the little feller, an' then somepin about it's bein' a hell of a good Christmas, or somepin like that.

" 'You're comin' with me,' I says.

" 'Now, we're in right with the law, here,' says the little feller. 'We're goin' to take the next train out,' he says. And I put my hands on him, Chief; I arrested him. I—"

"What was that bird in there doing, all this time?" the marshal asked.

"Nothing—tellin' his pardner to not be a fool, tryin' to calm 'im down. The little feller was crazy, Chief. Dutch John's stuff had went to his head. He was laughin' and singin' and hollerin' about Christmas and what fine friends everybody was."

A pause. Carlton could visualize the shifting eyes, the shaking hands of the man Calkins. Then the whiplike snap of the marshal's voice:

"Go on. We'll have a crowd in here, any minute now. Make it short."

"Well, Chief, the little feller pulled away, an'—an' started to fight me—told me damned if he was goin' with me. I pulled my gun, jus' to scare him, Chief—honest to Gawd! I didn't mean to shoot. He—"

"And the big one? Did he just stand quietly?"

"Well, it was like this: The little one, he started back—started to fight. I was busy with him. I didn't see the other one. I think the little feller had a gun. I think—"

"Where is it?" Again the snap of the words.

"I don't know. I think he ditched it. I'll look for it. I'll find it, I think, back of a box-car."

"All right."

"Well, that's about all. I pointed my gun at 'im, and—and—it shot! I think it got 'im at once. He jus' kicked, Chief—kicked—kicked—kicked."

His voice fluttered into a whisper. Carlton stepped to the door, stood framed in it.

"Get on in there, you!" the marshal barked. "We'll come after you, when we want you!"

AND this is the way Carlton told of the happenings of the hour to Spider Dulin, held for forgery, in the county jail where Carlton was taken as a material witness and for investigation:

"The kid was drunk, all right. He had found a blind tiger, run by a relative of the day officer, he told me. He was there in the afternoon, while I slept. . . . . God, if I had only kept awake! He went back early in the evening to get a sobering-up drink. He took two or three. Dake loved whisky, was crazy happy when he got it—never mean, just laughing and having a good time.

"Well, we went down by the tracks, intending to catch the northbound freight. The short, red-faced dick was standing on the station platform, and he called to us. We went over to him. Dake was laughing and bubbling. Kicking at the cinders, you know.

" 'Gee! I'm warm and fine now,' he'd just said.

"The dick talked with us and told us we'd have to go with him. Dake thought he was kidding, I guess—you know, that brother or whatever relative he was of the bootlegger. Dake laughed and pulled away.

" 'You're kidding,' he said. 'We're in right with the law, here,' or something like that. Then he started to run up and down the station platform.

" 'You'll have to catch me, old-timer,' he said. 'This is Christmas ketch, we're playing.'

"Running up and down, you know—laughing and raising hell—just a drunk kid, crazy with bootleg.

"The dick pulled his gun. I think he was nervous.

" 'Don't pull that,' I said. 'We'll go with you, all right.'

"I started toward him, holding out my hands. He pointed the gat at me. I stopped.

"And Dake was running up and down the platform, laughing, standing with his hands on his knees, like kids do when they play catch—laughing at the officer, daring him to catch him. Just crazy wild, he was.

"The dick lifted the gun. I yelled at him, telling him the boy was playing. I called to Dake, told him to come on and not be a damned fool. . . . . Just before he died, I called him that.

"I think the gun went off without the man knowing it. I think he was scared—he didn't intend to shoot Dake, I believe."

"Lotsa good that does the boy," Spider grunted, then fell into cursing of the officers and everything connected with them.

"They've found the gun your pal had on him," Spider said after a long silence.

"Gun! What gun?" Carlton started from his bunk.

"They found a gat, all right. I heard 'em talking in the office, this morning. One shell exploded, they said. It was—"

"There was no gun! We never carried a gun, either of us!"

"Well, there's a gat now." Spider grinned knowingly and turned away, out of the hold-over tank into the corridor.

AND this is the picture that stayed with Carlton, that darkened his hours in the hold-over tank; that frenzied the minutes that seemed hours just before sleep came graciously to him, the long hour-minutes of terrifying darkness, when the faint light from the single globe around a corner of the corridor came into his cell and brought grotesque shadows and movings:

Dake, crouched on the wet platform of the station. Dusk around them, the murky dusk that follows the raw, wet day—the oppressing dusk of the small town, with none of the bright lights to relieve it, to make it sparkle as sparkles the dusk in cities.

Dake, with his hands on his knees, standing as stands a child in play, crouched, ready to dart to left or right or backward, playing catch with the man Calkins—playing catch with the lead from a gun's muzzle.

Dake, after the gun barked, falling and slipping, his slim body rigid one moment as the hot lead burned into him, then crumpling, collapsing. Dake slipping sideways to the wet gravel!

Dake, when the Kid rushed to him and lifted his head, whispering like this, something like this, as nearly as Carlton could remember: "The fool shot, Kid. The fool shot, didn't he? What d'ye know about that! Why, I was kidding him, that's all. Get me away from here, old-timer; please, old-timer—please, old-timer! I don't want to die, out here."

Dake, his body stiffening, the heavy gasping as the Fingers touched him, clutched him; as his hands slowly closed, the thumbs clasping beneath the fingers, slipping into the palm of his hand.

Dake whispering, rasping, at the end: "Well, that's that—that—that—that—"

A dozen times, fifty times, a hundred times—Carlton could not even estimate its continuation. A million times the word had rung in his ears, since the moment in that night.

That was the hell of it. That was the part he did not tell Spider, anyone. It might be, he believed, if the telling of it would bring justice to Dake, he'd tell. Otherwise, it was too hard, a terrifying ordeal.

That was the hell of it.

CHAPTER XIV

CARLTON felt himself greatly removed from Helen Proctor, in those hours in the jail. Sitting in his cell, or wandering in the long, cold corridor, waiting to be interviewed by the district attorney or the sheriff—waiting until he could tell of the events of that Christmas night, thus removing the stigma of a stain from Dake's death, thoughts of the girl would come, bringing with them shiverings of horror with the bite of the remembrance of her graciousness, her understanding—the cleanness, the clearness of her eyes. Leaping from the narrow place, he would pace the outer hall,—the door to the hold-over tank was continually open,—battling back the thoughts, the call, of the tall girl. She had believed him so capable of greatness.

Great thanks he gave for one thing: in a careful moment he had destroyed the letter she had sent him. He had had experience with the ways of officers and

gentlemen of the press, and knew the methods of the search, the gleaning for anything that might give a tinge of the sensational to even the most sordid, eventless happening.

For two days he waited, listening for the summons. Some of the gossip from the office came to him through a Chinaman, a trusty who was doing thirty days on a narcotic-using charge; some came filtering through the barred door that opened into the office, at night when the great stone pile was quieted, and when the loafers gathered around the long table, spitting at the sawdust-filled box beside the stove, chatting with the night jailer.

"Mart's too soft for his job," Carlton heard one night. Mart was the night jailer, a tall, calm-eyed man, grizzled with age, who called cheerily to the prisoners as he made his rounds. "Mart's too soft. He thinks everybody is innocent until they have a trial. An' after that—"

"Well, aren't they?" another voice questioned. "That's what the Constitution guarantees, isn't it?"

"I don't know nothin' about the Constitution." Carlton recognized the whining voice now. It was that of the undersheriff, one who tramped through the jail at various times in the day, barking at and cursing the prisoners, with threats of the "black hole." "What I know is that we don't make no mistakes—not often, anyhow. When we grab a crook, he's guilty. We've got the goods on him. If we aint, we go out an' git 'em. When we pick one, he's due for a long jolt. We see to that." A great measure of satisfaction was in the voice.

"Then there is no reason for a trial," the quiet voice went on. "There's no—"

"Hell! We gotta have 'em sentenced, aint we?"

"I see. Just an affair of gathering them in, deciding they are guilty and taking them to trial for sentence, eh?"

"Aw, you newspaper guys make me tired. You're all Bullsheveekee. If I had my way, you'd never set your feet in the office. I'd hand you what I wanted to hand you, an' you'd stay out! That's the way I'd treat you fresh birds."

"Perhaps you'd repent of that," the quiet voice went on. "There's the little question of publicity, you know—cheer-leaders for the public, to all your great deeds, you know."

"Aw, you guys make me sick. Here comes Mart. He's your kinduva soft nut. Hell, there aint none of these guys innocent. They wouldn't be arrested if they was, would they?"

SOUND of angry footsteps stamping out of the hall and down the steps. A quiet chuckle, a cheery greeting.

"Hello, Mart. How's things?"

"Pretty good for an old man. What's wrong with Baker? He tore outa the building like the chief'd been givin' him a workin' over."

"Nothing. He's just filled with the belief of his one-hundred-per-cent infallibility in the business of landing crooks."

"His mouth runs too much," Mart said succinctly. "Everybody's a crook, to him."

"Isn't that the way with most of the officers who have had years of service?"

"No. They get wise as they get old. Baker's a political present. He's new. I've been on the force nineteen years, one way an' another. I've learned a few things."

"Yes, but you're different. You've got a big heart."

"Oh, I don't know. I reckon I'd kill a guy if he tried any monkey business, quick enough. But as long as they give me a square deal, I'll give them one. I've found out there's some fine fellows git in jail sometimes. I've learned I'm just holdin' 'em because the law tells me to—not because I've got anything against 'em."

"Yes. . . . . What's in that sack, Mart?"

"Oh, I don't know. I reckon I'd kill a fixed 'em up for me." His tone was carefully inconsequential.

"Going to eat 'em all yourself?"

"No. Some of 'em. There's a poor devil in the hold-over tank—his pal got killed Christmas night—an' two or three others that aint got no money. I bring 'em an apple or two, nights. It don't hurt nothin'. They enjoy it, an' I git a kick out of it myself. It's hard enough to be penned up here, with no friends, aint it?"

Mart seemed intent on justifying his actions.

"You're a good guy, Mart."

"Aw, hell! It don't hurt me none. There's an old Mexican in there, about sixty, I guess, doin' sixty days for drinkin' at a *baile*. His old woman comes once a week an' brings him some stuff, an' they cry over each other between the bars, when she leaves. This bootleggin' is hell, I'll tell you.

More'n half we got in here, all the time, is for booze stuff. We had one feller set right at that desk an' die, one morning. Poisoned with the stuff."

Words drifted off into monosyllables. Carlton knew they gradually faded out of his consciousness as he went to sleep.

ONE of the tortures of Carlton's incarceration was contained in the bed on which he slept. This was a swinging thing, made of strips of thin steel, with no bedding, no pillow, no covering. It swung by chains from the ceiling, and in the daytime it could be shoved aside and hung up against the wall.

The torture lay in its creaking, and in one particular creak. Carlton had searched for this for hours, moving the cot gently with his hands, holding his ear above various places that squeaked, seeking to locate the one that made the sound: "That—that—that—that." It was the most exquisite torture; it beat into his nerves, fraying them, brought back the minute on the station platform, with Dake's head in his arms, Dake's voice whispering, rasping, Dake's eyes opening wide, questioning, staring.

As Carlton would ease his body down upon the iron of the swinging bed, with half-held breath he would wait for the beginning of the Thing, the beginning of the "That—that—that—that." Holding his breath, his body rigid, nerves taut, no sound would come from the bed. He would relax carefully, stretching out his tortured frame, his muscles unknotting. For a minute there would be silence. Then: "That—that—that—that." Increasing, multiplying, as regular as he breathed, pounding on his eardrums, beating at the base of his brain, tearing at the nerves of his body: "That—that—that—that." And on and on and on.

Cursing, he would rise and crawl into a corner of the cell, curling up on the floor. . . . .

HE was asleep in the corner, after the voices in the office had drifted into their monotones, when the clanging of the bed in his cell, its creaking as a body pressed upon it, brought him up, crouched, half-awakened. In the half-lights he saw a young man seated on the bed.

"Howdy," the visitor greeted. "Been asleep?"

Carlton nodded vaguely.

"Why don't you sleep on the bed?"

Carlton still was silent.

"More like curling up in the corner of a box-car, eh?"

"No. It squeaks."

"What? The bed?"

"Yes. I can't sleep on it when it squeaks."

The young man was studying Carlton carefully, weighingly. Seeking in a pocket, he brought forth a cigar.

"Smoke up," he said cordially. "It'll help you to find yourself. Here's a match."

Carlton lighted the cigar. The taste was delightful. Rolling the smoke around on his tongue, he luxuriated in the tang of it. Stagnation of sleep left him. His body relaxed.

"I'm handling police and jail on the *Mercury*," the visitor introduced himself. "Name's Peters. I think I see a story in you. What about it?"

Carlton, eying the man narrowly, was cautious.

"You needn't be afraid," Peters assured him. "I'm just a reporter—not a dick or anything like that."

"I heard you talking in the office, awhile ago," Carlton said after a long silence.

"All right. You know where I stand, then. The *Mercury* is for a fair deal to everybody, and it seems to me there's something funny in you being jugged here four days, with no definite charge against you. They've found a gun, they say. It looks like a story, to me."

Carlton was silent, distrustful. The reporter tried another tack. Rising, he started for the door.

"Of course, I may be wrong," he said easily. "We often get hunches about stories that don't pan out. Guess it's just a case of two bums,"—his voice carefully was hardened,—"who tried to slip something over on an officer, and one of 'em got his. Well, good night. Sorry I disturbed—"

"Wait!" Carlton called. The reporter came back and seated himself again on the swinging bed.

"I've been trying to make you," Carlton said slowly. "Trying to size you up. I—I don't know. It's a raw deal and—"

"The *Mercury* gets the news," the reporter said quickly. "If there's a raw deal and it can be proved, the *Mercury* will straighten it out. The way you been here, with that indefinite charge, gave me a hunch, that's all. What's the story, anyhow?"

"Well, there was no gun," Carlton began slowly. "We never carried a gun, either of us. Dake was drunk, got drunk at a bootlegger's joint, and the bootlegger was a relative of one of the officers, I believe. He—"

"Dutch John?" the reporter interrupted.

"That was the bootlegger's name. I heard—"

"He's a brother-in-law of the day officer, over there."

Carlton nodded. "That's what Dake said, in the afternoon before—before he was shot. Well, it was all like this—" And rapidly he told of the events of the Christmas night.

"Lord, she's a good story!" Peters' eyes lighted as Carlton finished. "Some of it's dangerous—dynamite. But that bootlegger dope will carry it, I think. The *Mercury* will eat it up, I believe. She's putting on a purity campaign now, going after the blind tigers and whisky-runners. Will you give a sworn statement?"

Carlton nodded.

"Well, keep your mouth shut," the reporter cautioned. "I'll come back later—maybe it'll be tomorrow. . . . . God, she's a *great* story! The poor kid standing in the rain, hands on his knees, laughing and playing tag, daring Calkins to catch him. Aint it a wonderful picture? Eh? Now, keep your trap shut till I see you again. Here—take these smokes. So long."

EAGER, with the light of the news-hound shining in his eyes, the youngster hurried from the cell, out through the corridor and hammered on the barred door, calling to Mart to open it. Carlton heard his quick, low-toned words. Evidently, Mart had arranged for the reporter to get Carlton's story, the man in the hold-over tank believed. . . . .

On the following morning Carlton was mugged. Calling him from his cell, after breakfast, the undersheriff hustled him out to the office, to a desk that stood in a corner. A photographer waited; Carlton was seated beside the desk, and two pictures were taken, one of his profile and one full-face. Following that, the thumbs and fingers of both hands were pressed upon an inked glass and transferred to a slip of white paper. He was weighed, measured, examined, and in every way marked as a criminal.

An examination by the sheriff, in his office, followed. The marshal from the little town, Calkins' superior, was present, and with the sheriff's assistance sought to entangle Carlton in a maze of conflicting testimony. The examination continued for more than an hour, a running fire of skillful questioning; but Carlton held firm, telling his story, over and over, in simple words and pictures.

"Why, damn it, man," the sheriff barked once, "we've found the gun! Tell us the truth. We've got the gun. Here it is. Look at it!"

Lifting a short, bulldog-type revolver from the desk, the officer held it close to Carlton's eyes. Carlton looked at it calmly.

"That doesn't surprise me a bit," he said. "Calkins said, while he was talking with you,"—he nodded to the chief,—"that he believed he could find a gun back of a box-car. It's a wonder to me he didn't plant a bigger gun, though. It would have—"

"Shut up, you!" the sheriff barked. "None o' your lip! We've even found the bullet-hole, an' dug out the bullet from the roof of the station, where it landed when either you or your buddy fired at Calkins. We got the goods on you." His voice dropped into wheedling tones: "Now, look here, son, we've got a statement all filled out. We know just how it happened. We've got witnesses that saw it all. The only thing that aint clear is whether you or your buddy did the shootin'. Here's the statement." He held it out to Carlton. "Read it over.

"All you have to do," the purring voice went on, "is to fill in with the name of the man that shot. We know—we're sure it was the feller that's dead. All you have to do is to say so—and sign the paper. That lets you out."

Quietly, Carlton laid the paper back on the desk. Steadily he looked from the sheriff to the marshal.

"That's all, eh?" he asked.

"Yep, that's all," the sheriff said eagerly. "Here's a pen, buddy. It's no use o' your doing time for the mistake of a pal. An' him dead, too. Sign on that second sheet."

Calmly, deliberately, Carlton spat full upon that second sheet—smiled coldly into the eyes of the sheriff.

"I'll see you all in hell so far you couldn't get out in ten million years," he said quietly.

The sheriff leaped to his feet, his eyes, features, body suffused with anger.

"Damn *you!*" he hissed, and struck

Carlton full in the mouth. "That for you!"

Leaping forward, from the rear, the marshal pinned Carlton's arms to his body. The sheriff stepped to the door, calling to one of his officers.

"Take this feller back to his cell. No—put him in the ninety-day tank. Lock 'im up!"

With the come-along twist on his arm, Carlton was led away.

CHAPTER XV

IN the hours that followed in the ninety-day tank, Carlton grew into the belief he should pin his faith to Peters, the young man of the *Mercury*. The paper was out for a square deal, Peters had said, and if anyone ever stood in need of a deal of that shape, Carlton believed it was he—and Dake, the memory of the boy. Carefully in his thoughts Carlton went over the details of that Christmas night, arranging them in his mind, getting them in order to relate to Peters, when the statement would be required. Going back over the events of the day, he wondered if it would be held against him that he had slept while Dake was gone. Would this be the breaking point of his evidence? Would they tear his testimony to shreds because of the fact that he did not know fully of Dake's movements in those hours when he himself had been asleep in the barn? He did not know; he feared; he wished it were possible for him to lie about it, possible to give a direct, every-minute-accounted-for statement. But he couldn't do it. He'd tell it the way it happened.

Carlton turned wearily to the wall. One thing for which he was thankful: in the ninety-day tank the beds were fastened to the wall; they did not squeak.

Carlton was resolutely pinning his faith to Peters and to the Morning *Mercury*, the paper that was out for a square deal to everybody. He cheered his long hours in the ninety-day tank with imaginings of the manner in which the newspaper would go into the business of confounding the enemies of Dake—his own part in the affair was now strangely belittling itself in his thoughts; he felt that to Dake, and to Dake only, was justice due.

From the Chinaman he learned that Dake's father was on his way from the East and was expected in the city on the following night, coming for the body of his son. Upon learning this, Carlton determined to ask Peters to arrange a meeting with the man; he believed the boy's father, a newspaper man, would know how to handle the situation.

Thus, his mind torn with the burden of the hours and the waiting, Carlton paced his little cell or stretched himself on the bed that was fastened to the wall, or pressed his face against the iron bars, hanging with his hands grasping the grating high above his head. And it was in the dark hours of the next night—Mart entered upon his duties at ten o'clock—that Carlton heard the night jailer's rumbling voice mingling with Peters' quiet tones. The pad of their rubber heels, as they climbed the iron steps, came faintly; Mart called cheerily to an occupant of murderers' row, as he passed:

"Howdy, Nate. Still got religion? Well, it's a right good thing. Stick with it, an' you'll be all right."

Then, as the flare of his searchlight swept into the ninety-day tank:

"Hello, son. Brought you up an apple or two an' a doughnut. Thought mebbe you'd like 'em for your midnight lunch." Chuckling, he pressed the huge brass key into the lock, turned it and stood aside, motioning to Peters.

"Come on in. I'll leave the door open while you're here."

PETERS entered, seated himself on the edge of the bed and produced the usual cigar.

"Smoke up."

Carlton fancied a strangeness, the mark of a fumbling, in Peters' manner. The eyes of the reporter lingered on Carlton's face, speculatively, compassionately, then dropped as the other returned his gaze.

"Well," Carlton began, after the cigar was lighted, "I've got it all lined out, just as it happened. I'm ready to begin whenever you are."

Peters glanced up quickly, and hesitated.

"Anybody in these adjoining cells?" he asked.

"No. The nearest is that cattleman in murderers' row. Why?"

"Let's be sure."

Outside, the reporter looked into all of the surrounding cells, came back.

"It's all off, Carlton," he announced quietly. "There's—"

"Off! What's all off?"

"The story. It was — it's a peach, all

right; they're hungry for it, but—well, they wont touch it with a ten-foot pole. Dangerous! You'll have to pin it in your bosom until you come up for hearing."

"God!" Carlton breathed the word after a long silence.

"It's tough, but—that's all there is to it." He lifted uncomfortably to his feet, and held out his hand. "Anything else I can do for you? Got any money? Here—take this." And Peters held forth a folded bill.

"That's all right." Carlton shook his head. "I don't need it. There's one thing you can do, though. Dake's father will be here tomorrow night. Have him come to see me, will you?"

Peters mused, biting at the end of his cigar.

"What's the idea? Want to tell him the story?"

"Of course." Carlton lifted his eyes in bewilderment at the other's tones. "What else is there to do? Dake's his son, isn't he? His father deserves the truth. Dake was no criminal. What else could I do?"

"Nothing—of course. Well, I'll see what I can do about it. So long. Sorry, old man."

CRUSHED, overwhelmed, defeated, Carlton dropped back to the bed that was fastened to the wall, staring at the stone partition of the cell, staring unseeingly, features tortured, twisted. The blow had come with so great ease—just a few short words, "There's nothing doing." The same words a man would use in refusing a drink, or a stroll around the corner, or a request for a match. Dake's eyes—the words from words a man would use in refusing a drink, I was fooling." Dake's heavy, choked breathing — Dake's staring, questioning eyes.

After minutes, as Carlton lay there, he heard the beginning of a squeak coming into something—something in the cell—regular, beating, with every pulse of the blood in his veins. At first it was far away, a mere whisper of sound, then nearer, nearer, gathering its volume, increasing its message: "That—that—that—that." Beating into his ears, it came closer, closer; his body and brain were filling with it, his intellect wavering under the beating of the Thing: "That—that—that—*that*."

Trembling, he fell from the bed and crawled to a corner, and from there he could hear the prayer of Nate, as the man made his plea upon the Almighty:

"Aw, Gawd, forgive me, a pore sinner. . . . . Aw, Gawd, forgive me, a pore sinner. . . . . Aw, Gawd—" And on and on and on. It was as regular and as beating as the coming of the Thing, but not so terrifying, because it was the sound from the lips of a human.

Carlton felt that he must cry aloud, that he must pray, that he must curse. Greatly he desired to die.

PETERS seated himself at the long table, sighed, lighted a cigar, and watched as Mart began the careful peeling of an apple.

"Life's funny, isn't it, Mart?" Peters observed, following a long silence.

"It sure is. Reckon you newspaper guys run up against some funny things."

"We sure do. Justice is funny, too; and politics and the way they run newspapers," Peters went on.

"Yeah," Mart agreed. Then, shrewdly: "What's on your mind?"

"Nothing but dandruff."

"H-m!"

Mart kept a careful, searching gaze on the reporter. Looking up suddenly, Peters encountered the shrewd eyes, smiled wearily, and shifted on his perch.

"Nothing's on my mind, Mart," he repeated, "but I'll tell you a little story—just an everyday little story to the newspaper man, Mart. But it's hell on the other fellow."

Mart grunted. "Have an apple," he offered. "They're the best medicine in the world."

"Thanks. Well, this story is about a bootlegger." Peters began gropingly, carefully choosing his words. "He was as well known in his trade as any other merchant in this town or any other town. The only thing he lacked to announce his business was a sign across the front of his house. When a man wanted a drink of hard liquor, he went to this fellow's house and bought it, just as he would have bought a pound of meat in the butcher-shop.

"Now, this bootlegger is related by marriage to a raft of prominent people; the chief of police of a certain town is this bootlegger's cousin by marriage, and the day officer in the same town is a brother-in-law. Also, the chief not only controls a swell small-town political machine, but he is related in a distant way to a State senator, and the senator controls another machine. There's an editor of a newspaper, and he has the ambition to be named to

the Highway Board. He's got his lines all laid, and is as good as appointed. He's very popular with all the ruling machines—one of the coming men, they call him."

"Have another apple," Mart said, in the pause.

"Much obliged. Had enough. Well, a swell story breaks. It starts with this bootlegger, goes on down through the chief and one of his men until it gets to the editor. The city editor is ready to eat it up, but the old man puts his foot down. It's killed."

Another pause. "Yep. Old stuff," Mart said. "They do it every day."

"Sure. I know they do. But there's a poor kid killed, in this. That's murder. Another youngster is waiting to be railroaded to the pen. That's hell. There's a bunch of cooked-up evidence to break a father's heart—and a mother's, maybe, if he has a mother. A gun conveniently found, lots of eyewitnesses and all that old stuff."

"H-m," Mart mused after a long silence. "I wondered how all that happened. This is the first time I got the lowdown on it. That's it, eh?"

"That's it."

PETERS lifted to his feet, bent above the table, becoming suddenly very earnest.

"What if it was you or me?" he said ungrammatically. "What if they—"

"That'd be altogether different. We'd have folks an' friends to fight for us."

"Maybe—maybe not. People are terribly afraid of the law. It makes 'em stutter and get nervous. Perhaps they'd button us up as tight as they have this buttoned." His face hardened; he brought his hand down on the table. "By the holy Harry," he barked, "I'm going to start something popping in this!"

"What you goin' to do?" Mart asked.

"I'm going around to the *Mercury* office and start a little battle. Mebbe I'll get fired. Mebbe I'll compromise. But if I get fired, I'll sure have a swell story to sell to one of the Sunday papers in the capital. I'll peddle it until everything smells of it, even if I can't sell it." He turned from the table.

"Well, good luck to you," Mart said evenly. "Don't do nothin' rash, though. You can get in awful bad, with a loose mouth. They aint nothin' but two hoboes, anyhow. That one is a good feller, all right, and it's a rough deal, but it aint like they had a passel o' friends."

"That's why I'm buying into it," Peters replied. "See you later."

He turned from the room, through the hall and down the steps.

TWO hours later Peters returned, seated himself at the table and elevated his feet to its top. Mart was making his one o'clock round; Peters could hear the jingle of the keys at Mart's belt as the jailer paced down the corridor, could imagine him peering into each cell. The metallic sound of the key came in the lock of the outside door, the clang as it shut again.

"Well," Mart greeted him, "see you're back. Didn't git fired, eh? Or did you?"

"No. I'm still on the paper."

"How'd it come out?"

"All right, I guess. I didn't mention it."

"No? What's the idea?"

"They've cooked up a decision to turn that fellow upstairs loose. He has 'em scared. They had the inquest tonight, about eleven o'clock."

"H-m," Mart grunted. "Rather a rotten mess, aint it? Never asked that feller to testify, did they?"

"Nope!"—shortly.

"They're sure one crooked bunch. That coroner sure plays to them, every chance he gits."

"Yeah. They're not quite decided whether to turn Carlton loose or to railroad him. My guess is they'll turn him loose. If they don't, I'm sure going to go on the stand, job or no job—newspaper or no newspaper."

"Well, you're the boss of what you'll do."

"I am that. Believe I'll go up and see Carlton, Mart, if you don't mind."

"Sure. It's all right with me. Here's the key to the tank."

THERE had been a half-hour when the huge building was quiet, a half-hour when Carlton had drifted into a half-doze. Suddenly conscious of the man who stood outside the cell, looking down upon him, he slowly lifted his head, opened his eyes.

"Hello, buddy," Peters called cheerily. "I'm coming in."

Carlton lifted to his feet as the key grated in the lock, seated himself dumbly on the edge of the bed, hunched over, his chin on his fists.

"Well, I think you'll be out of this tomorrow," Peters said.

"Yes?"—dully.

"Yes. You don't seem excited about it."

"No." Then, with the evident effort of forcing words: "Why will I get out?"

"I'm not sure you will. I simply believe you will be discharged. They have nothing on you, and they'll probably give you hours to get out of town."

Carlton turned a narrow-lidded gaze to Peters, laughed hardly, mirthlessly.

"A hell of a note, isn't it?" he queried. "They murder your pal; they put you in jail; they turn you out and give you hours. . . . . Damn 'em!"

Peters was silent.

"Isn't there to be an inquest, or some investigation?" Carlton asked after a long silence.

"That was tonight."

"And what did they decide?"

"Oh, they brought in a down-the-middle sort of a verdict. Justified Calkins, who was discharging his duty and shot in self-defense."

"They didn't even call for my testimony, eh?" Carlton asked bitterly.

"You haven't been out of here, have you?" Peters returned quietly.

"No. Well, I'm damned!"

RISING, the red-haired man paced his cell savagely, raging. Peters watched narrowly.

"And they talk of justice," Carlton gritted, "and freedom, square deals and all that rot. And they're going to turn me loose, eh? They're going to give me hours, eh?" He leaned close to Peters. "I'll see 'em in hell first. I'll—"

"What'll you do?" Peters asked quietly.

"I'll yell this mess from the housetops! I'll tell the world—"

"And you'll merely put yourself in the pen for a number of years. They're holding that gun evidence open. They'll hang it on you. You'll go up for murderous assault."

"Better me go up than Dake's memory with a stain on it," Carlton argued.

"There's nothing on Dake, in the verdict —that is, nothing outright," Peters amended.

A feeling of utter helplessness was coming into Carlton. Dropping to the bed again, he began to acknowledge how completely he was tied.

"Don't be a fool," Peters said crisply.

"I wont. I reckon they've got me."

"You couldn't make an impression against them," the reporter said firmly. "They have more power in the county, comparatively, than the governor has in the State. They're supreme. You could only—"

"They can't keep me from seeing Dake's dad," Carlton told Peters.

"They sure can, unless you're shrewd. Now, listen, buddy." Peters leaned forward confidentially. "That's one of the things I wished to frame up, if you are discharged. Don't be a dub. Your thought of clearing Dake's memory is fine, but it's also Quixotic. Here's my plan: you take their hour order, go down to the station, climb on a train and ride it to the junction, thirty miles north. I'll be there with my flivver. Tomorrow is my day off, so I'll have all the time I need. Got any money?"

Carlton nodded. "Eight or nine dollars. They put it in an envelope when they searched me."

"You'll get it back, all right. I'll be sticking around when they turn you out. Buy your ticket to Appleton, get off at the junction, and I'll be there. We'll come back here, get Dake's dad, give him your statement, quietly, and be ready to duck again."

Carlton interrupted with a grunt, but Peters' hand grasped his arm.

"Let me finish. You'll find a job, stick, and if Dake's father believes he can buck the gang here—good luck to him, by the way—and you want to risk the coming back, everything will be jake. That's the layout. How does it strike you?"

Carlton was noncommittal.

"Well, think it over until morning. I'm going home and snatch a few hours' sleep. Remember, you can probably do more by fooling them than you can by fighting them."

Carlton felt the groping of the humanitarian heart of the man Peters, knew a little of the risk Peters was taking in mixing in with the affair.

"Thanks," Carlton said. "I'll try—I believe—"

"Make up your mind between now and morning. You're about all in. You look like the devil. Got any shaving stuff?"

"They took that away when they searched me."

"I'll ask Mart to slip it to you. Slick yourself up before morning—before the day-gang comes on. So long, old man."

Carlton nodded dumbly, gratefully.

The conclusion of this remarkable chronicle of a hobo's progress contains some of its most interesting episodes. Be sure to read it, in our forthcoming March issue.

Deep-Water Men

"When a Sailor Comes Ashore" is a romance of the sea, even though its action takes place in port—and furthermore it's one of the most engaging stories the gifted Mr. Zandtt has ever written.

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

QUEENS ROAD, which traverses Hongkong for a distance of nearly five miles, east to west, is the main commercial artery of the city. Many of its blocks have arcaded sidewalks, for coolness and for shelter in monsoon weather, after the custom noticeable in most Oriental cities; but while this gives the street a more or less uniform aspect in spots, it does not prevent the juxtaposition of shops in every variety—a European clothing-shop next to a great banking institution, with its neighbor on the other side perhaps a Chinese tobacconist, a curio-shop, a native restaurant, a great shipping agency, a tea-shop or a Portuguese fish-dealer.

At a point where the long thoroughfare makes a half-circle around an abrupt dip of lower ground in the steep hill-slope, is the curio-shop of one Foo Kee. It is not a wide shop, and probably only thirty feet deep from its door on the arcade—with no other apparent exit. But pass behind an inlaid pearl-and-lacquer screen at the farther end, and you find yourself in a narrow passage, aromatic from its paneling of sandalwood—at the end of it a room twenty feet square which suggests a curious mixture of East and West. It contains a massive table, and chairs of a simple heavy pattern to match. At one side is a Chinese oven built into the stone wall. There is communication with a kitchen somewhere, but one must examine the walls and brocaded hangings closely to find it. At the rear end, farthest from the shop, another concealed passage admits to Foo Kee's private living-room those whom he honors to that extent—a chamber fitted in the usual Chinese way, with a raised dais, onyx guest-table and ebony chairs, at one side. Beyond this—above and below it—probably no Caucasian knows anything about the building.

PROPERLY, this story commences in the room immediately back of the shop—with three men who sat around the heavy

table one hot afternoon, drinking and smoking. The noisiest of the lot was easily classified—adventurer, beachcomber, a brute with the form and strength of a man, but the intelligence of a cow and the instincts of a hog. In the great majority of human beings, male and female, there is always a conscious or unconscious effort to impress others with one's importance in the world—to compel a respect to which the average atom out of the billions is in no way entitled; some assume a manner so dignified, in the endeavor to compel respect, that they almost bend over backward; some are curt—brusque in manner; many will mention their "car" during the first two minutes of conversation; nearly all are afraid to smile or laugh in a normal manner, lest they be thought too light-minded to have any solid weight in the world's affairs. Mike Hennessy's method had remained unchanged since his days at school —if other lads didn't immediately kowtow and acknowledge him cock-of-the-walk, he knocked them down. If there was argument, he kicked them when they were down. At the age of thirty his manner had the same overbearing quality. Others spoke when he permitted them to speak, and had no opinions in conflict with his own, or—he knocked them down—became progressively brutal. *His* idea of compelling the respect due him—you observe. At the moment, though, the occasion happened to be one of those rare ones upon which his methods stalled.

Tompkins, second of the three, lacked, to all appearance, Hennessy's weight or strength—but this was deceptive. He had been a deep-sea mate of "sail" for twenty years—and of "steam," for five more. Even the weight of thirteen extra years didn't prevent his being more than the beachcomber's match, and Hennessy felt this instinctively, though it had never been tried out between them. Tompkins was the type which becomes progressively quiet—and dangerous—as it becomes progressively drunk: the sort of man who, the adventurer felt, would shove a knife or send a bullet through him upon provocation, without thinking very much about it or remembering the occurrence next day. In mental capacity, the mate was Hennessy's superior by many degrees. Up to certain limitations, he was capable of individual thought —his manner of compelling respect from the world-at-large was more an implication of what he might do than any suggestion of immediate violence, and the impression was so unmistakably conveyed that he got away with it.

The third man was of medium size, with a fat, expressionless face. Sometimes he dressed in the white alpaca jacket and trousers of a comprador, sometimes in the quilted-silk overvest, black skullcap and agate button of a wealthy Chinese merchant, sometimes in English "whites" and a forty-dollar Panama hat—depending upon what happened to be on his mind at the time. The British authorities estimated the business done in his curio-shop at something like eighty to a hundred thousand taels each year—with some impression that the little *toko* might be only one of various enterprises. They never guessed how entirely correct that impression was, or dreamed of the extent covered by the "other enterprises." Foo Kee looked rather flabby—out of condition from lack of sufficient exercise. But his Number Two boy, who bathed and massaged him every morning, would have wagered every candareen he owned that the Great One, whom his underlings both feared and worshiped, could have destroyed either of the other men at that table, if necessary, before he realized what was happening. This pink of muscular condition was something Foo Kee held always in reserve but rarely used—there was so much more finesse and amusement in accomplishing the same objects with his head—without lifting a finger.

THEY were discussing a piece of gossip which had spread all through the Orient and was the talk of every port on both sides of the Pacific—the whereabouts of a mysterious platinum mine said to be of such fabulous richness that three part-cargoes of ore from it must have netted the owner nearly two millions. Mike Hennessy had talked with a man who had seen the first lot of ore when it was landed at the big smelting company's plant in Sydney—was blusteringly calling other men fools for not trying out a certain unfailing method of securing information concerning it.

"All ye gotta do is nab this here Cap'n Joe Allen when he's ashore sometime, take him to some place where nobody aint botherin' us, an' then—jus' l'ave 'im to me f'r a spell! 'Fore I git through, he'll talk, good an' plenty!"

Tompkins had drained his third glass—his voice and manner were a shade more deliberate as he questioned the beachcomb-

er's theory. "Some men might. From what I've heard of Joe Allen, you wouldn't get very far on that tack."

"Wot's that! Whoin'ell *says* I wouldn't —hey? Whoin'ell *says* I wouldn't!" Hennessy's undershot jaw was thrust aggressively out over the table—his fists knotted until the knuckles showed white. But the mate sat there looking at him with a level glance from under partly drooping eyelids —breathed a deliberate whiff of smoke across the table into the other's face. He had not stirred—his voice was low and even.

"*I* do. Trouble is with you, Hennessy, that you make a lot of noise, but you've got no brains. Easy, now! Don't try to start anything!" The mate's right hand was pouring another drink from one of the bottles, but his left was below the edge of the table—out of sight. It might be holding a gun. "If," he went on, "you made a point of reading the papers,—which you probably can't do,—you'd have picked up that story about the girl who was supercargo on Allen's boat bein' kidnaped in Frisco an' turnin' up at Thursday Island. She told the British Resident she hadn't found out who the men were who did it, but would know 'em again, anywhere, an' had one or two clues they could be traced by. Now—point is this: That girl haint got the muscle-stren'th that Allen has—nor prob'ly as much cold nerve in a jam. She knows where that mine is just the same as he does. But did they get it outa her? Not a peep! Had her in their power nearly a month—chance for tryin' all this third-degree stuff you ever thought of an' then some. But they didn't get a damn thing!"

"How d'ye know they didn't?"

" 'Cause that there boat o' theirs—the *Llangow City*—was sold by radio through Frisco brokers two weeks after the girl landed at Thursday—an' came in past the Heads of Sydney Harbor at night. When the port cap'n sent a launch out to where she was anchored, in the morning, there's nobody aboard but the crew an' a quartermaster who turned her over to Burns, Philp for the owners. Gang who kidnaped the girl was somewhere in Sydney or on their way to Melbourne—but there haint been no trace of 'em since. And the girl herself says she bluffed 'em to a finish. Well—what's the answer? How could she—all by herself—in their power? If they couldn't get the secret from her, how far d'ye think your rough-house stuff would get with Allen? Hey? There's something damn funny about the whole proposition! I'm beginnin' to think they load that ore from some junk —at sea—every time, and that nobody aboard that there *Wyanomah* really knows where the mine *is!*"

THE ghost of a smile flashed about the corners of the Chinaman's mouth for a fraction of a second, and was gone before the others noticed it. What children they were! Tompkins could start thinking for himself and was altogether Hennessy's superior, mentally—but he seemed to run out of cerebral gas before his thoughts took shape enough for practical use under any but strictly normal conditions. Foo Kee was even more bland and deliberate than Tompkins—but it seemed to him that too much time already had been wasted in argument and discussion which got them nowhere.

"Boat not loaded from junk at sea—I know if could happen. Mebbeso other steamer—mebbeso not. Girl know—Cap'n Allee know. Got plenty good devil take care of lem—plentee bad pidgin trying foolee wi' lem. You Hennessy-man—you come by this side an' say you got big pidgin 'bout this platilum mine. Tompkins-man come by this side allee same time—say got more pidgin 'bout mine. Hennessy-man got one piecee-sample lat ore—doctor assay-man wantee know where get —say plentee rich stuff. Now—we know lat mine not fake. We know him bellee plentee lich. We know him ship ore that side by Cap'n Allee ship—one time—three time. Tompkins-man find out boat can-do twenty-two knot on flist-chop coal—not thirteen knot likee people think. An' he make figger-pidgin show how boat had two day', each trip, not account' for by Cap'n Allee. My know something 'bout lat boat, allee samee, too! Hennessy-man t'ink tlee of us mebbeso fin' lat mine—split up this side what get. But he tell what evelbody know al'eady. He say he good for put up Numbel One fight when we go get. Mebbeso—but we need hundled who put up better fight. What he give this pidgin not worth fi' per cent!"

Hennessy dimly sensed that he was being eliminated from the game—and reacted as usual. "Ye dom' dirrthy haythin! Ye bloody yellee-face' monk'! So ut's double-crossin' me ye'd be afore we git fair starthed, is ut? Ye'll gi' me the third o' what ye git—or I'll massacree ye!"

When Foo Kee wished to be impressive and thoroughly understood, he reverted to the almost flawless English he could use upon occasion—thus: "On second thought, Hennessy—you will take just a hundred dollars, gold, in full settlement for the assurance that you have had a sample from this mysterious mine tested, and found that it bore out the reports of the mine's richness. I never had any doubts upon that point—so your information is merely corroborative—practically worthless. If I or Tompkins seriously decide to undertake a search for the mine, which is still open to question, it is doubtful if we'd care to have you along in any capacity. You're too explosive—too ignorant—might upset all our plans at some critical moment. My suggestion to you would be to go and make what you can out of your ore-sample with anyone else you can interest in it—get up whatever expedition you can. We shall not interfere unless we find you on the ground when we discover it. That would be, of course, a very serious matter—for you and your companions. As for your 'massacreeing' *me*—you might get something of a start at it, but you wouldn't get out of the shop. If I had any real interest in your elimination—well—something might happen before you could leave that chair. Don't be a fool, man! Take your hundred dollars and go! That's all there is to it as far as you are concerned."

THE sudden change in the Chinaman's language seemed to have a paralyzing effect upon the beachcomber. From anything he could see in the Oriental's appearance, or the general aspect of the room itself, there was nothing to prevent his stunning him with a smashing blow and then pinching the life out of his fat throat. But—there was a tense, sinister feeling in the very air, with its aromatic suggestion of the East—there might be a coolie or two concealed behind the gold-embroidered hangings—with hatchets or pistols. He'd heard of such things—also of mysterious ways by which men were drugged where they sat without realizing what was happening until they were powerless. In the hands of an intelligence like Foo Kee's, the man was an infant-in-arms—merely through the handicap of his colossal ignorance. His bullying manner, his brute strength, were powerless for once—got him nowhere. After a few moments of disgusted reflection, he accepted the handful of English sovereigns offered him and slouched out through the curio-shop into the arcade. At one in the morning he was thrown, bodily, out of a Chinese dive in Kennedy Town over near Happy Valley—without even a twenty-cent-piece in his pocket—and locked up by the police to recover from a drunk which was a masterpiece in that line.

After he had left the room, Tompkins looked furtively across the table at the bland Chinese, who had lighted a silver water-pipe and was pouring for himself another cup of tea. He was something of a connoisseur in vintage wine—chiefly because he kept both palate and stomach free from it except upon special occasions; but when he wanted mental stimulus without too much after-effect, he drank tea of his own raising. Tompkins, of course, knew that his Celestial acquaintance was no ordinary man and could probably hold his own in almost any stratum of society—but it hadn't previously occurred to him that Foo Kee's enmity might be a deadly thing to any man who seemed likely to interfere with his plans. It seemed as though there was enough of mutual interest in the business which had brought him looking for a talk with the Chinaman to permit of their working together in a fairly amicable sort of partnership—he was convinced that the Cantonese was probably better equipped to ferret out the secret of the mysterious mine than any other man in the Eastern Archipelago, because of his many underground sources of information. But it suddenly occurred to him that he might "have a bear by the tail" before he had gone much farther in the matter—and that laying his cards on the table was a far safer game than trying to keep a few up his sleeve.

"LOOK here, Kee! Way I figure it, the thing's about like this—an' it's up to you to sit in or not, just as you like: I got chinning with an engineer over at Kowloon, when he was stewed—he said he'd worked on the *Wyanomah* when they changed her to an oil-burnin' turbine—with auxiliary gear-shift for reduced speed when the owner wanted to save coal. Of course if she can do twenty-two, like he said she could, that would give her a leeway of two or three days' time on either of her last trips which her log never accounted for. Now, I got to workin' out her courses from port to port on one o' my charts—an' drawin' circles with a radius of twenty-four hours' run, at several diff'rent points on

them courses! That means I'm hep to every place she could have gone on them runs if she deviated. I don't know how much of a navigator you are or how much value you'd put on anything of that sort. But I got one little pointer you might think was worth more—I got talkin' with the 'third' of an Eastern an' Australian boat right here on the Island when he was fairly well soused—an' he's dead sure they sighted the *Wyanomah* in a certain place! They couldn't get any radio from her or make out her colors at the jackstaff—but this bird says he lay alongside that boat in Sydney long enough so's he can swear to half a dozen things about her rig.

"If I give you all this dope, you'd know just what junk-masters would be likely to have seen her in the same neighborhood an' be in position to make inquiries that none of us folks could get at all. Aside from all this, I'm an experienced navigator on any sort of craft in any sort of weather —and a damn good organizer when it comes to fitting out or commanding any kind of an expedition. Only question between you an' me is, what I'm worth in such a proposition just as I sit here—an' whether you're int'rested enough to sit in at the game with me for a partner? If you aint, why, I'll have to find some other side-kick—that's all! I s'pose there's five hundred men around both sides the Pacific who've made up their minds to have a go at that mine if they can get any dope on it —an' I'm one of 'em, with what looks to me like considerable edge over the rest!"

"Just why do you or the other five hundred assume that it is possible to seize another man's mine and get away with it?"

"Just because of the way he's sneakin' out his ore to them smeltin' plants! A mine like that is rich enough to have its own reducin' plant right on the ground—if it was in any civilized place where the law an' the Government would protect the owner! Way everybody figgers it—that bird is on ground where he don't believe he can hold the title or get any protection a-tall when anyone else gets hep to him. Well, of course, in a case like that, it's anybody's mine that's strong enough to hold it—an' it's so damn rich that a lotta men are goin' to have a try for it. I was thinkin' you'd prob'ly hatch up some Oriental idea of gettin' onto that location—with what I can tell you—that'd come near workin' out."

"H-m-m—well—your calculating those possible detours on your charts suggests something to me—but we'll have to let a third person into the game and split half of what we get between you two. I'd want a full half for putting up the expense of fitting out an expedition and paying a gang of men big enough to hold the ground after we'd gotten it—"

WHILE he was speaking, the mellow reverberation of what sounded like a big monastery gong boomed softly through the building—twice; and Foo Kee, after listening for a second or two, went through the narrow passage into the shop. Among its many curios was a bronze bowl two feet in diameter and a foot deep which, when struck on the edge with a padded hammer, gave forth a deep penetrating note that carried a mile along the steep hill-slopes of Hongkong Island. The thing was so fascinating that customers seldom resisted the temptation to strike the bowl when it stood on a table in the center of the shop—and this had become such a nuisance that it had been placed on a ledge behind one of the counters, out of reach. The more particular reason for doing this, however, was the fact that the bowl was used, with its own code of signals, to communicate certain information to the owner of the shop. He was quite well aware of whom he would see when he entered it.

A strikingly handsome girl in spotless white linen—with lace parasol, wide-brimmed Panama and a white-buckskin handbag—was inspecting some of the curios from the cool bamboo of a Canton chair. She had not asked for the proprietor —and she rather doubted whether his comprador or the clerks remembered her. But she greeted him with smiling ease when he appeared.

"Ah, Miss Chandos! This is quite an honor to my little shop! I hope we may have a few things which will please you, this time. It's a bit hot, here, don't you think? Would you care to come back where it is cooler? There's an acquaintance of yours in the other room—we can have anything you like brought in there for your more leisurely inspection—and something by way of refreshment."

This was all courteous and perfectly normal to anyone who had dealings with Foo Kee—his reputation among the English residents, in fact, was good. Nothing scandalous or treacherous had ever been said of him. But the girl looked him over, a sec-

ond or two, before getting out of her chair. And when he politely stood aside for her to enter the sandalwood passage behind the big screen, she hesitated—motioned for him to go first. As he did so, he turned to her with a smile which very few people had ever seen on his face—and pressing a spring with one finger, he showed her a gaping aperture behind one of the panels.

"Precautions would be rather useless if I really had designs upon you. The panels may be opened upon either side. As a matter of fact, you're as safe anywhere in my house as you would be on the street or up in your own bungalow at the Peak. If it seemed necessary at any time to abduct a person on the Island—or eliminate one, permanently—the matter would present no difficulty. But extreme measures are advisable only in very unusual circumstances—there are generally simpler ways of accomplishing one's object."

THE girl felt a momentary inward spasm of nervous apprehension—but controlled it before anything could be noticed in her manner. Tompkins, with amazement in every feature, had gotten upon his feet as she came into the room—and mechanically pulled a chair out from the table for her before he thought of extending a hand.

"By Jove! Who the devil would have thought of seeing you here, Nina! Have you been out here ever since I saw you last—two years ago? Not back in London at all? I s'posed of course that you'd gone back home or else to some American city, long ago! How do you happen to know Foo Kee so well? You look like money, girl! Get married out here? What's the joke, Foo Kee? Why did you bring her in here!" For just a moment, Tompkins was dangerous—in the way every Caucasian is dangerous when there seems to be any complication between his women and the Oriental. But the merchant calmly took a few puffs from his silver water-pipe, and seemed entirely oblivious to this.

"Miss Chandos," he explained, "is the person I was suggesting to you for a third partner in our little enterprise, as it happens. If you will repeat what you know concerning this mysterious mine, up-to-date, I'll mention a few other points which have occurred to me—then we'll see whether she's interested enough to join us in the game. May I offer you a little iced champagne, Miss Chandos?"

Like most handsome blondes, the girl had acquired a transparent pallor in the tropics which accentuated her beauty. She had been "on her own" ever since leaving England on a P. & O. boat to avoid being implicated in a society scandal—all things considered, she hadn't done so badly. Her various experiences had thrown her in with certain men and women whom she would have preferred to avoid, but she had no choice; and so far, she had been able to look out for herself in some fairly dangerous situations. Just now it seemed to her that by taking what she clearly saw might be a risk of unthinkable catastrophe, it could work out with increased respect from this powerful Chinaman if his intentions were really straight—for the time being. So, with no apparent hesitation, she said:

"I fancy that's exactly what I need, Mr. Kee—and I'll take your word that the stuff is all right! Since I've been out here, no Chinese has ever lied to me, or broken his word—which is more than I can say of a good many Europeans I know."

Foo Kee bowed with his usual impassiveness, and snapped his fingers—once. There was no servant visible—yet in less than two minutes one of his coolies entered the room from the kitchen with the iced champagne and a lacquered tray of delicious rice-cakes. On another were cigarettes and a tiny lamp.

DURING these few moments the girl and Tompkins had been exchanging obvious questions—but the merchant, listening in courteous silence, had been sizing up his fair guest with a touch of surprise. In the outer shop he had been certain that she was thoroughly on her guard against the unexpected, against advantage which might be taken of her. Her refusal to precede him through the narrow passage was proof of this. Very well! That made it a foregone conclusion that she was even more on her guard—inwardly apprehensive—in that secluded room, alone with two men, at the mercy of any native servants who might be quietly summoned. She would realize, fully, that anything she drank might be so powerfully drugged that one sip would render her unconscious. Yet in spite of his close inspection, unobserved, he had not been able to detect the slightest evidence of nervousness or hesitation. If ignorance of the situation upon her part were logically impossible—this could mean nothing but the possession of superb nerve and full

command of her every sense. "This is much better than I had thought," he reflected. "She's valuable! With a head like hers, the thing might be done! Hmph! Could it be merely the ignorance of a well-bred woman who has never found herself absolutely in a man's power? That might be tested a bit further. For example? H-m-m! Tompkins has had enough liquor to make him quietly reckless—he seems to have been more taken with her than she with him—on that P. & O. boat. H-m-m? If they were left alone a few moments—"

Making the excuse that he wished to get something from the shop, the merchant left them together and disappeared. Tompkins immediately became more confidential—hitched his chair nearer to Miss Chandos, began to recall sentimental happenings on the *Caledonia,* coming out, and wanted to know if she hadn't liked him pretty well all the time. She let him go on with his reminiscences—the suggestion of a smile occasionally wrinkling the corners of her mouth as she calmly opened her white-buckskin bag, took out a little down-puff, and powdered her nose. Yet when he seized and tried to kiss her, the handsome face hardened. She appeared to be making no resistance—but a something that was poking into his ribs, with sufficient pressure to hurt, made him pause long enough to look down and see what he was rubbing against. His grasp of her shoulders relaxed—slowly—but the ugly blue snout of the automatic was not removed from his ribs until he was entirely back in his chair. Then it was quietly restored to its place with the powder-puff in her buckskin bag.

"Perhaps it's just as well that we understand each other upon this point, Mr. Tompkins. You might, of course, seize me at some moment when I'm not looking for it—but there would be chances, afterward, to find *some* kind of a weapon that would answer the purpose, and I'd certainly bear you in mind when I found it. . . . . Here comes Foo Kee! Go on talking—as if nothing had happened!"

AS far as anything which might be read upon the Oriental's impassive face, he had seen nothing of the occurrence—heard nothing, as he came through the sandalwood passage. But actually he had gone no farther than that—had been watching them from behind the rug which hung over the doorway, and had returned with greatly increased respect for the girl. She possessed a rare quality of nerve, if not innocence of certain things a well-bred woman isn't supposed to know. With a faculty for condensation which was a credit to his education, the Cantonese sketched the Pacific and East Indian gossip concerning the mysterious platinum mine and the rumored attempts which had been made to locate it.

"Ordinarily, in spite of the great temptation to spend time and money in such a gamble, it's an undertaking which no sensible man should consider unless he has more definite clues than anyone seems to have at present. But as it happens, there are enough different resources among us three to promise something more than a gambling chance at it. Tompkins knows that the *Wyanomah* has at least eight or nine knots better speed than anybody supposes her to have—and has worked out detours, at different points along her recent courses, which she could have made without logging them, according to her registered speed. He also knows of a certain locality where she was sighted—though there was no proof of her identity. As for my end of the game—I put up the working capital, ship, and force of armed men. Beyond all that, I propose to search for that mine with my head—here, on Hongkong Island—rather than cruise about indefinitely with a steamer and have her movements watched by everybody out here."

"Work it out by algebra, or like a chess-problem, eh? Hell! There's other parties that'll beat you to it, Kee! Sitting still aint getting us anywhere!"

"No? Very well! Just where do you propose searching—supposing that you have the ship and a fighting gang?"

"Lots of places! I'd begin with them detours I worked out!"

"If you covered them all, thoroughly, that would take you about how long? A year? Two years? I expect to get results much sooner."

"How? What's your idea?"

"Well—I fancy it'll be quite safe to explain it, because you would find it impossible to carry out 'on your own' if you decided to double-cross me. We may assume, I think, that whether this mine has a near-by, hidden harbor, or whether the steamer lies off it in an open road, no master would venture to approach or leave the anchorage without the best Admiralty charts procurable, the most recent surveys—particularly, if it lies in a section of the Archipelago which has never been thor-

oughly surveyed. Practically all the southern and eastern islands would come under that head, as you know. Also—we may take it for granted that Captain Allen and his mates have marked their course, each day, on the regular charts they were using for the navigation. In fact, I don't recall ever hearing of a careful master who took the risk of neglecting to do this.

"Very well! That means that somewhere on the steamer *Wyanomah* there are charts which have been used for every knot she has steamed—every sea, bay or strait which she has traversed. I would consider it a foregone conclusion that her charts for straight courses from one port to another would be kept in the regular chart-room drawers, while the special ones used for detours to this mysterious mine would be concealed in some hiding-place where the average person would never think of looking for them. This brings us to the combination of circumstances which may give us a chance to examine those charts which not one of Tompkins' five hundred speculators could possibly get—and it was this possibility which interested me in the proposition. Without it, I wouldn't have wasted an hour's time or thought upon the matter!"

"HMPH! First you've got to get aboard Allen's ship long enough to make a thorough search for that hiding-place, which is likely to be a matter of days rather than hours; an' then, the one chance in a thousand of finding the opportunity for goin' over 'em or swiping 'em! I don't call that such a cinch, myself!"

"Wait a bit, Tompkins! There is at least one thing you might learn from the people of my race—one, of many: the cultivation of patience. Without patience and perseverance, very few Chinese would survive. You seem to have missed a report in the marine journals that the *Wyanomah* is on her way from Sydney to Hongkong with wool and kangaroo-hides—also, the more recent news that her agents, here, have just fixed a part-cargo to Hankow, after she discharges, with a fair chance of picking up steel girders and railway metal from Hanyang to Saigon when she reaches Hankow. Didn't know this, did you? I fancied not! It will take at least a week, here, to discharge her Sydney cargo and load for the Yangtse; at this season of the year, she probably couldn't get up to Hankow if loaded down to her Plimsoll—she's nine thousand tons, and not built for river-trade.

"You've followed me, so far—both of you? Very good. Now, I happen to know the house who acts as agent for the Jennings ships—very well. I also have a more extensive social acquaintance up at the Peak than is generally known. It is entirely possible for me to have Captain Allen met with very desirable invitations when he reaches port—the reason for increased personal interest being the halo of mystery and rather daring adventure recently associated with him and his ship. It has amounted to successful blockade-running, though of course nobody admits having been implicated in any chase after him. Allen is well known in these waters as a most capable master and navigator—has friends in all the larger ports. He is anything but a recluse or woman-hater. They say he is rather hard-headed with women who make any noticeable attempt to influence him but, like all sailors, more or less fond of the sex. It's a simple enough matter to have him meet Miss Chandos under conditions all in her favor. From what I know of her, it should not be difficult to produce a strong impression upon Allen while maintaining the manner of not being more than ordinarily interested in him—and in the natural course of attention shown him by a lot of people, to have him invite her aboard his ship—not once, but probably several times while she's in port. If she doesn't succeed in getting at those charts before he leaves Hongkong, she can easily run up to Hankow by rail from Canton and be on the ground with a rapidly extending acquaintance—with the letters I can procure for her—a week before he gets up there with his boat—"

"That'll do her mighty little good—think it over a bit! He may discharge his part-cargo at one of the piers along the Hankow Bund—but he'll drop down the river to the steel comp'ny's pier at Hanyang, and if any of his wool is going to the mills at Wuchang, as is probably the case, the consignees might arrange to have him discharge and load at the same pier. Which means that he'll be coaling, anyhow—his boat filthy from soft-coal smoke and cinders from all those big steel plants at Hanyang—all the time he's in port! He's too particular a shipmaster to fetch ladies aboard with his craft in any such condition!"

"That point is well taken, Tompkins—

but I fancy we can offset it. By one means or another, I'll keep him in this harbor at least ten days. I can be sure of having him discharge at the Hankow Bund before dropping down to the steel city—and if Miss Chandos has the bit of extra luck we always hope for in every speculation, it is not impossible that Allen may permit his agents to book passage for her down the river to Woosung, or even around to Saigon."

MISS CHANDOS had been listening, intently, while sipping her champagne, and now showed how thoroughly she grasped the proposition both in its favorable and unfavorable aspects.

"In all this gossip up and down the islands concerning Allen and the mysterious platinum mine, there has been a good deal said about the woman who sails with him as supercargo—Miss Claire Avery, or some such name—the one who was so dramatically kidnaped in San Francisco. Just where is she, now? Coming up to Hongkong with him?"

"As it happens—no! She escaped from the kidnapers at Thursday Island when the *Wyanomah* was discharging at Brisbane—cabled him to wait for her at Sydney. But the Koninklijke boat upon which she was intending to run down the coast was held up at Sourabaya with a broken screw, and it was ten days before she caught the next B. P. liner, down. By that time, she'd heard of the wool cargo by radio and told him to go ahead, without waiting for her. She's coming up on the next Eastern and Australian liner—but can scarcely reach here before he leaves for the Yangtse. In that case, she may run up by mail and join him at Hankow or take the somewhat surer course of running down from here to Saigon on the next Messageries liner, if he gets steel for that port, and waiting there for him. Why are you particularly interested in Miss Avery? She's a navigator—but the charts aren't in her possession."

"Of course not—but she's the key to your whole proposition! With her several thousand miles away, there's a working chance for your scheme—perhaps a ten-per-cent chance, I'd say. With her on board Captain Allen's steamer, occupying her own room as supercargo, there isn't a chance in the world!"

"Well—she would probably complicate matters; but—"

"Oh—use your head, Mr. Kee! Don't you know anything about women! Presumably she and Captain Allen like each other pretty well—each must admire the qualities which the other has shown in this game. With a woman, knowing the side upon which all men are usually weak, this would arouse all her protective instinct for him. She would be constantly on the watch for danger or complications—not from other men, whom he has shown himself abundantly able to look out for, but from every woman who showed any liking for or interest in him. She would suspect attack from that direction and be on the lookout for it! If she were on the ship, I wouldn't consider this proposition for a moment—because I would probably come out of the affair with a smirched reputation, if not arrest and criminal prosecution. I'm not strongly tempted, anyhow! When one considers the cold facts, it amounts to sheer robbery—the sort of a piratical adventure which used to be associated with the buccaneers—"

"Even though the present operator of the mine is probably getting out that ore without government sanction or any legal rights in which a court of law would protect him? Everything about the mine bears out that implication—in which case, any expedition that can take it from him and hold it, manage to procure a government transfer of the land—would have a better right to it than he has. It is an adventure—a gamble which intrigues every person with a spice of romance in his or her make-up. Possibly you think a quarter of what we may get is not enough for your share in the work?"

"I hadn't thought of that. As a matter of fact, you ask me to do the only vital, essential work in the whole scheme. Without it, you can't even begin!"

"You are quite mistaken, Miss Chandos. I know of a cultivated American woman in Swatow who would jump at the chance I am offering you, and might do as well when it came to the test. Without either of you, I can pick up information in two or three months from the junk-masters who go everywhere in these waters and would tell me if any steamer had been seen in an unusual place. After you have obtained the chart or memorized it, there is still the very serious matter of assembling an expedition strong enough and yet reliable enough to make the attempt of going out and seizing that mine—the business of purchasing or getting a concession for the land

from whatever government now owns it, which is something I am reasonably sure of handling successfully. Neither you nor Tompkins could even touch it. Without such a concession before we sent down our expedition, we'd not get more than one shipload of the ore before some warship would be shelling us. Of what value would your 'absolutely essential work' be in that situation? Let us first catch our hare! But—if the division I propose seems unfair to either of you, we'd best not go into the affair at all. We can only succeed through perfectly amicable and willing teamwork. If either of you does not see the risks and work involved as I do—or thinks my suggested division unfair, all things considered—the attempt is a failure from the start."

A FEW moments later Miss Chandos was about to get into a rikisha on her way to the Peak cable-railway at the Botanic Gardens, when the manager of a well-known bank came slowly through the narrow street in his car and asked her to go up with him. The clear beauty of her complexion and the animation produced by the champagne she had taken made her worth turning around to look at as the car passed along just outside the arcades, and the manager was somewhat envied for his luck in securing so charming a companion for his ride.

Nina Chandos' standing in Hongkong was good. Some vague rumors of her reasons for leaving England and making her home in the East had floated up and down the coast when she first arrived—but there had been nothing to corroborate them, and her behavior was most circumspect. She had excellent letters. She was almost too lucky at cards; but put up such a masterly game at tennis and was such a crack shot in the hunting season that nobody really grudged her winnings or laid them to anything but brilliant play. At times she laughed somewhat bitterly to herself at the cause of her self-imposed exile—the joke being more upon her than anyone else. She had been dining, one evening, with a married man who had in his pockets a very large sum in banknotes which he had collected that afternoon from a sale of property belonging to his wife,—a woman difficult if not impossible to live with,—and he had been drinking more than usual before he met Miss Chandos at the Carlton. Before she realized his condition, he had taken enough more to grow irresponsible and talk of the money he had in tones which could have been overheard, once or twice, at neighboring tables. To let him go home alone, with no chance of banking the money before the next morning, would mean its almost certain loss with possibly his murder as well—and she had known him since they were children. To *take* him home in such a condition, would have aroused scandal at once—one can't drive up to a big town-house, full of servants, and unload its intoxicated master like excess baggage without causing immediate talk. So she took him to her own apartment and put him to bed on a divan in her drawing-room. In the morning, thoroughly sober, he banked his money and went home—but in some way his wife found where he had spent the night and immediately brought proceedings for divorce. In the circumstances, Miss Chandos packed up and took the first P. & O. boat for Hongkong—the man insisting upon giving her a sufficient amount to pay her expenses for two or three years. Afterward she had speculated—successfully—when by every law of probability most anybody would have lost out. And it was the persistent luck apparently following her which had been Foo Kee's chief reason for interesting her in the mine-scheme.

ON the ride up to the Peak, the girl was sufficiently alive to be good company, but her mind wasn't on what she was saying. A dozen times she decided to have nothing to do with the affair. Alone in the Orient, save for the maid and a companion she employed in her bungalow, she had managed to maintain a respectable position and pay all expenses—by keeping her wits about her, taking advantage of opportunity when it appeared. She had been under obligations to several men for tips and cooperation in her speculations, but had never paid the price they may have had some dim idea of getting—eventually. One or two had determined that she would pay—in time, but she had nerve enough to be equally sure of their disappointment.

In all this business of maintaining herself, alone, it will be evident that—save for the old friend whom she had assisted in London—she had never yet seen a man who could strongly influence her. This was the one weak point in her make-up which she dreaded—she knew that if the right man ever did appear, she would have no adequate defenses. Somehow she rather

dreaded meeting this Captain Joe Allen—whose pictures in the newspapers showed him to be a type which most women like immensely, the sort of man whom popularity, reputation, or even wealth fail to spoil. So that when she presently did meet him in the senior-partner's office at his shipping agents, she instinctively took a somewhat reserved attitude which happened to be the one of all others most likely to attract and hold Allen's interest. He was by this time used to having women overfriendly upon first acquaintance—used to almost hasty acceptance of any invitation he cared to give. So when this handsome blonde, in a white costume that was simply perfection, showed by her manner that she considered him naturally more interested in the pretty niece of his senior agent than herself, and noticeably kept in the background as one who had little personal interest in the proceedings, it piqued his curiosity—drew his attention sufficiently to impress him with the girl's beauty and breeding.

After the cordial welcome extended by the older man, who had known Allen since he first came out to those waters as third mate, it was quite the proper thing for Allen to invite them to dine with him at the Hongkong Club, of which he had been a member for some time. It was also quite in order for the agent to excuse himself because of a previous engagement and say that the Captain would have a much better time with the girls alone—for Nina Chandos to demur about accepting, until it appeared that the proprieties wouldn't permit the other girl to accept by herself. Then she courteously agreed to go along as chaperon. But Allen's interest by this time was centered exclusively upon her—and though he did his best to entertain both, Miss Chandos permitted herself to become so fascinating in a quiet way that her friend laughingly settled into the background and watched them, admiringly.

IN getting a clear idea of what followed during Allen's stay in port, something of the conditions surrounding him during the previous six months should be understood. First, his everyday life had been an exceedingly adventurous one. Bringing his ship safely through a China Sea typhoon after rescuing Miss Avery and her crew from their foundering schooner as the hurricane broke, quelling a mutinous conspiracy to sink his ship for the benefit of grafting speculators in San Francisco, chartering her to the white Rajah of Lajoe Koera for a service not specified, but which proved to be running cargoes of ore from his mine, dodging government boats and various outfits which had been on his trail ever since he landed the first shipment in Sydney,—and being constantly keyed up to a nervous pitch in every move he made,—he naturally had taken whatever relaxation he could get in each port to ease down the strain somewhat. A good deal of the time, this had taken the form of going about to theaters and dinner-parties with his supercargo and partner in all his activities, Miss Claire Avery, whom he liked a good deal more than as a mere friend, though he was doubtful as to how much of this feeling was returned. So far as anything which had passed between them, they were intimate chums—but had never discussed being married or even definitely hinted at such a thing. And nothing of all this really stood in the way of a strong temporary fascination by some attractive woman whom he happened to run across in his next port. A sailor, battling with the elements at sea, commanding other men under conditions demanding a high quality of leadership, is more susceptible to feminine influence when ashore, more excusable for carrying a flirtation as far as women dare have him carry it.

Allen had now reached a point of confidence in his ability to put through anything he started—not a case of cranial enlargement, but the knowledge of what he could generally do and what it might be safer to avoid doing. But in the matter of women he had too much all-round admiration and a vacuum where there should have been some measure of caution. He had never yet sensed the axiom that a man may win a woman and yet lose, in many other ways.

Getting back to that first day in Hongkong, two or three hours each morning sufficed for the transaction of whatever business he was supposed to handle. After that, his time was his own. By the second morning, his spare time belonged to his agent's niece, Miss Chandos and their friends. By the third day it could be seen quite clearly that his time was entirely at the disposal of Nina Chandos—either with or without friends. She was shrewd enough to whet his interest and arouse some impatience by keeping these other women about her most of the time—but managed to give him a few hours alone each day

and yet flag him when he carried his sailor's assumption of privilege a bit too far.

GETTING Allen to invite the party aboard his ship was so easy that it suggested itself. It came into his mind as offering the best opportunity of all for an occasional tête-à-tête with her in the privacy of his own luxuriously furnished cabin, with its phonograph, books and prints. Although Claire Avery had frequently spent hours there, alone with him,—and he as many in her equally comfortable room adjoining,—the question of proprieties had never come up. Miss Avery had managed her father's trading-schooner, with its crew of Kanakas, for several years—and there was a married stewardess aboard the *Wyanomah* to give her some measure of feminine company. But Miss Chandos—really to emphasize the risks she was taking to please him—made quite a point of the conventions and wouldn't stay alone with him in his cabin until her two friends had been carried off to other parts of the ship by the mate and engineer. (If they were themselves taking chances of starting gossip, they'd have nothing on her.)

The first hour she spent alone with him was delightful—for both. She proved to be not foolishly prudish—a kiss or two was no great harm—yet abundantly able to put brakes on him when he wanted too many. When he proposed their going into Miss Avery's cabin so that she might try Claire's beautiful piano, Miss Chandos demurred—on the ground that Miss Avery wouldn't like it at all if she knew, and would be sure to hear about it, somehow. But Captain Joe merely said that he would tell her about it, of course, as soon as she came aboard—and took his new friend in. This was playing into her hands rather better than she had expected. She had a rich, well-trained contralto, yet had sense enough to sing but one ballad—on the inward conviction that men who buy five or six hundred of the best phonograph-records, mostly symphonies and chamber-music, care very little for the female voice in comparison. So—she played instead—brilliantly, with exquisite touch and phrasing. After that, he did practically anything she asked him to do.

At the end of the week she had inspected practically every nook on the *Wyanomah*—wheelhouse, storerooms, staterooms (of which there were four extra ones), mess-saloon, mates' and engineer's rooms, and the master's cabin, where at least the bulk of the charts were kept. She hadn't definitely located a place where the special charts must necessarily be locked up, but had figured it down to one of three which she might get into with time and opportunity. She had been left there alone for an occasional few minutes when something called Allen to another part of the ship, but always there had been a deckhand or quartermaster doing something on the bridge or in the wheelhouse. Knowing that every ship is more or less overhauled while in port, she saw nothing unusual in this. It never occurred to her that it was a strict rule imposed by Allen himself that anyone on board, no matter who, should be under constant espionage unless when he, personally, happened to be with them. But she soon accepted it as fact that anything she accomplished in that room must be carried out while he was in it with her, and every one of the crew keeping below the bridge while the old man was known to be entertaining a lady friend up there.

WHEN it came to planning for this contingency, Nina Chandos found herself apathetic—very much disinclined to make the attempt. She had been kissed by other men—but not with anything like the voltage. Several times she had surprised herself with a feeling of jealousy toward Miss Avery, wondered why the two hadn't married after their first voyage together, wondered if—if he had ever kissed her—and how often? Twice she had been upon the point of visiting Foo Kee to say that the deal was off—that she refused to go any farther with it. But each time, on second thought, she recalled her experiences with educated Chinese since she first came out to the Orient. That any Oriental will eliminate an enemy with no more hesitation than he would feel over anything which has to be done, is merely an Asiatic fact—to be accepted when one goes there to stay for any length of time. That a Chinaman will keep his word and deal fairly with his business associates is equally true.

Miss Chandos knew that Foo Kee would advance ample funds for her expenses and find no fault if she failed, as long as she did the best she could in the circumstances. She knew that he would scrupulously pay her a quarter of all the adventure brought in. It seemed to be an accepted fact that three part-cargoes of the ore had netted

the owner at least two millions—and on that basis, even if they succeeded in getting away with but one shipload, her share would run to something like quarter of a million—which she had thought of in round figures so often during the week that she was almost spending it in advance. Even that much would make her independent for life—put her beyond all necessity for risking herself in the power of any man. But the more she risked herself in Allen's power, the more temptation she felt to do it again. Once, in Regent's Park a few years before, she had persistently tickled a sleeping tiger in one of the cages with the point of her parasol. After a moment or two he began purring—then with a roar which brought every keeper in the Park running toward them, he whirled upright and flashed one great paw out through the bars. It seemed to her that the deadly claws swept within an inch of her nose—but they only caught the outstretched parasol beyond her hand and made of it a shower of fragments. She wondered if all interesting men hadn't something of the tiger in them when their control slipped a bit?

Those round figures in her mind, however, finally tipped the scale. On a day when, after much persuasion, she consented to go aboard with only one friend,—who was so taken up with Harry Bradford, the mate, that they could be depended upon to keep out of the way indefinitely,—Miss Chandos made certain preparations.

After playing several of his favorite selections upon Claire's piano, they went back into Allen's cabin for a comfortable discussion of various mutual interests—the blinds and door on the bridge side being closed as usual. It was one of those oppressive afternoons, with the sun barely visible through a thick haze, which usually come before a typhoon or at least a deluge of rain—the sort of weather which increased the clear pallor of Nina Chandos' complexion and suggested stimulants. Allen noticed this in a moment or two and rang for his Number One boy—who fetched up a quart of champagne and little cakes.

ALLEN'S manner when alone with Nina Chandos lacked originality—after a certain point. He got up to walk aimlessly about the cabin—picking up and dropping one object after another as he kept making chopped-off remarks, and finally settling himself down by her on the cushioned transom. This restless pacing about gave her more than sufficient opportunity for holding her hand over his yet untouched champagne for a second and dropping into the glass something which first increased the effervescence and then lost itself in the wine with no trace. A moment later he had drained the wine—and was close beside her with an arm where it would do the most good. He lost consciousness with the first kiss—and she, knowing that some unforeseen interruption might come when nobody, ordinarily, would venture to disturb the "old man" and his friend, worked rapidly. The keys which she took from his pocket unlocked the two lower drawers in the chart-cabinet. They contained large-scale maps, as she had supposed,—expensive ones,—but showed on their face that they had been used upon one voyage only. Under the Captain's built-in berth there were two large and two shallow drawers. The big ones held clothing—but under several loose sheets of drawing-paper in the first shallow drawer, she came upon a large-scale chart of very limited area which had pencilings upon it of three different visits—dated April 25th, July 10th and September 29th. Even with her rudimentary information concerning navigation, she could see where the steamer had anchored, each time, and then the buoyed course by which she had entered a narrow channel behind a headland three hundred feet high. She had no doubt whatever that this was what she was after, but the name of the place was one she had never heard—so she took from one of the bookshelves the "Admiralty Sailing Directions" for the Eastern Archipelago and looked it up in the index. The spot was where Allen might easily have reached it by a detour from either of his last three cruises.

As the chart was fourteen by twenty-two in size, she folded it in much smaller compass and concealed it in a pocket she had made in her petticoat. Then, washing Allen's glass and pouring a teaspoonful of champagne back into it to replace the dregs he had left, she went out on the bridge to call the stewardess. When Mrs. Bledsoe and Engineer Harvey came running up, Miss Chandos explained that the Captain had apparently become dizzy and then slumped down on the transom, unconscious.

The drug she had used was one given her by Foo Kee and not known to Cau-

casian physicians. The quantity administered would keep a man completely "out" for something over an hour, after which he recovered with no ill effects whatever. So, while they worked over Allen and tried to force strong coffee between his lips, he suddenly opened his eyes—wanting to know what was the matter.

"Generally speaking, old chap, I'd say it was a liver attack—I've seen lots of people taken just the way Miss Chandos says *you* were. Mebbe you're smoking a bit too much, too. But I don't think a glass or two of 'fizz' would do you any harm—your pulse is a little slow—regular as a clock. Take this champagne and then go ashore to have a sawbones overhaul you—just to see if there is anything wrong. I've no idea he'll find anything!"

ALLEN'S last recollection was of kissing the girl—before that, he'd had a glass of champagne. Knockout drops naturally occurred to him—but he had recovered much too quickly for them—felt too nearly normal. And Harvey had just given him two more drinks of champagne without rinsing his glass. He glanced slowly about the room as if merely pulling himself together again—but nothing in it escaped him. Apparently, not a thing had been disturbed—and he knew exactly how he had left them, too. So he and Harry Bradford went ashore with the ladies and called upon the Governor's physician—who tested his heart and blood-pressure, then assured him that he was sound as a new dollar—had probably smoked a little too much and eaten a little too heartily, so that the oppressive heat had knocked him out for a few minutes.

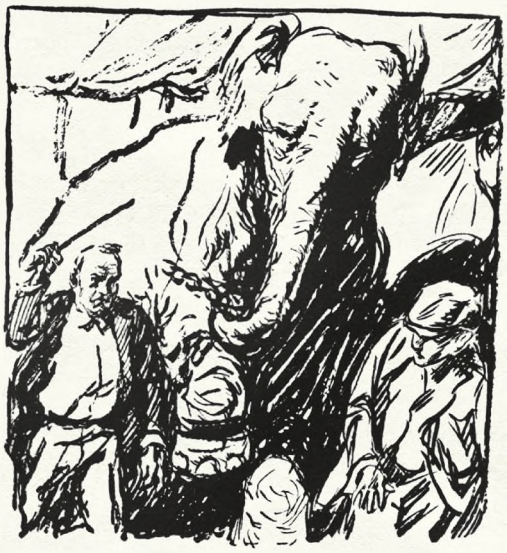
It didn't occur to Allen to make a thorough search of his room until the day before he left for Hankow. Then—he missed the chart. But it seemed utterly ridiculous to suppose that Miss Chandos had taken it or would have any object in doing so. Her introduction and credentials had been of the best. His keys, apparently, had not been removed from his pocket or their chain from his belt. Presumably the lock of that drawer had been picked—by one of his own crew or some coolie who had managed to smuggle himself aboard unobserved, at night, when the Captain was ashore. He made a thorough investigation on board—because the occurrence jarred his nerve considerably—but got nothing in the way of evidence.

CLAIRE AVERY arrived at Hongkong a week after he had left—and went up to Hankow by rail next day, coming aboard with the port captain when he dropped anchor off the Bund. And the moment that official went ashore, Cap'n Joe gave his supercargo a detailed account of everything that had happened since her abduction in San Francisco—winding up with the loss of the chart and his worry over it ever since. He said if he could only account for the way it had been taken, he would know better what to do. Claire laughed—as if she were pleased over something.

"Joe, you had me a good deal worried over your description of how you fell for that girl! Don't blame you much—I saw her in Hongkong. She's really a beauty! But she got that chart, all the same—and was after it all the time! If I'd been aboard, I'd have seen through her game at the start—but I guess the only thing on your mind was whether you could kiss her or not—h-m? Well? I'll bet she had to let you before she got much of a chance at that chart! Just how bad is it, Joe? Which one did she get?"

"Only the fake one I planted in that lower drawer—that inlet on the east coast of Borneo! I'd give something to see 'em hunting for any mine around there! Joke of it is—I stopped at Lajoe Koera on the way up—the Number Two Hold is full of the ore, but nobody in Hongkong even suspected it! The Rajah told me to sell it to the big smelting plant across the river, there, in Wuchang—said there were too many different gangs on our trail every time we made Sydney."

"A Piratical Expedition," the next story in this memorable series concerned with the "Deep-Water Men," is one of the most picturesque and engaging of the whole group. Along with "The Amazing Dare," a powerful novel by Henry C. Rowland and many other important features, it will appear in our forthcoming March issue.



The Bull Boy

The captivating story of a boy who had been cradled in an elephant's trunk, and who in later years came back to the circus in dramatic fashion—by the talented author of "A Dull Day" and "The Strange Case of Alan Corwin."

By GEORGE L. KNAPP

TRADITION plays little part in the life of America. A boy born on a farm is as likely to be found practicing law as practicing agriculture; the son of a God-fearing clergyman may become a banker, a burglar or even a Congressman. But there is still one place in our whirligig life where—as a rule—children follow in the ways of their parents. The circus is a little world in itself, peopled largely by folk who, in the phrase of the craft, were "born under the big top." On occasion, you can find three generations of the same family in the ring at once; and in off hours you can hear tales of that family stretching back to the greens of England, the roads of France or the festivals of Italy. Kissing goes by favor, and politics by pull; but the circus comes by inheritance; and lucky is he who wins that heritage. He comes from the loins of sturdy, temperate people, for wasters cannot stand the strain. Before he is out of short pants, he has a physical training ten times better than the average well-brought-up youngster ever gets; and he is schooled in his tasks by parents who love him and love their trade. Perhaps that is why, in an age of slovenly work, there is so much sound artisanship under the big tent. It is not the sole reason, however. Even a man educated as a plumber would hesitate to knock off work and send back for his tools in the middle of an act on the trapeze.

The Benbows were a circus family. Old Gran'ther Oliver Benbow, with hazy claims of kinship to the admiral of the same name, led his little caravan up and down the moist lanes of England. Some of his sons —the old man was married twice and raised a goodly crop each time—came to America; but while their sire was both performer and proprietor, they were performers alone. Their descendants can be found in every circus in the land; but this history is concerned with Kirk Benbow, only child of his

parents, and great-grandson of Gran'ther Oliver, who would have scoffed profanely at such feeble compliance with the command to increase and multiply.

KIRK was about a year old when there happened the first episode of his life that needs recording. His mother and father were partners in a splendid trapeze-act, the best performance of the little circus with which they were then connected. That act and the elephants really carried the show; and Kirk, in his mother's arms, was taking a morning stroll down the elephant line. Next to the head of the row of "bulls," as every circus man calls them, without reference to sex, was old Moll, one of the oldest and wisest bulls in America. Moll was restless that morning, and was telling the world what she thought about it in that queer elephant language that sounds partly like a hen singing to herself on a sunny morning when about ready to lay, and partly like a Chinaman intoning a laundry-list. As Mrs. Benbow came up, Moll gave a soft, entreating tootle, and touched the youngster with the tip of her trunk.

"Want to see the baby, Moll?" asked Mrs. Benbow, laughing. Moll gurgled querulously in reply.

"She wants to take him," said the head bull man. His name was Legg, but he was not a cripple, and so of course everyone called him Legs. "Let her do it—she'll be careful of him."

Old Moll repeated the pledge and request in her own way, and Mrs. Benbow held out the baby. The great gray trunk curled softly round him and lifted him up. He laughed; Moll made reassuring noises and swung him back and forth. He chuckled and crowed and patted the trunk, while circus folks who had time stopped to watch the little tableau. The other elephants watched too; one of them asked for a share in the human plaything; but old Moll warned the intruder away, rocked the child a moment longer, lifted him high over her head, and gave him back to his mother.

"You're a great old nursemaid, Moll," said Mrs. Benbow. Moll answered—according to Legs—that she was glad some one was beginning to appreciate her merits.

Next day the performance was repeated for the benefit of Kirk's father, who had not seen the initial ceremony. Soon it grew to be a habit. Old Moll seemed to consider it one of her special privileges to play with that baby a few minutes each day, and she was not often disappointed. After a time, as a favor, she allowed her mates in the bull-line to swing the child, but never long at a time. Even King Dan, head of the herd, and Moll's neighbor on the right, could not hold the infant more than a few seconds before being called on to surrender him.

NEXT year the Benbow family encountered trouble. Kirk's father got a broken leg in a railway accident, and was laid up in hospital for weeks. His wife saw him safely bestowed, and came back to the circus, where the act was recast to suit the abilities of a different partner. But then came another difficulty. Some one had to take care of the baby, and the only persons whom Mrs. Benbow cared to entrust with that duty were busy at the same time that she was. Legs offered a solution.

"Give him to the bulls," he said. "Old Moll'll take care of him. Best old nursemaid going—you said so yourself. She's been asking for him while you were away."

"I wonder," said the woman. Living close to the bulls and knowing a great deal about them, she did not receive the remark with that scorn which most folks would think fitting.

"Surest thing you know," said Legs. "Bring him along."

She brought him. Moll tootled joyously when they came. Mrs. Benbow was deadly serious.

"Take care of the baby, Moll," she said. "I'm trusting you with him while I go in the ring. Be awfully careful, Moll."

"She'll be careful," said Legs. Moll gave the little squealing gurgle that made her sound like an exaggerated hen, and reached out her trunk. Kirk, now a sturdy two-year old, flung himself upon it, laughing as if he would split. Moll took a firm hold and lifted him.

"She understands," said Legs, and Mrs. Benbow hurried away.

The whole bull-line understand. All wanted a share in the child, and after some demur, Moll consented. They swung him from trunk to trunk. They lifted him high in the air, laughing in elephant gurgles, at his cries of delight. They set him down in front of their great forefeet to let him play; and when he started to toddle off, a great trunk reached out, took him gently by the most important portion

of his costume and pulled him back. He fretted a bit at this, but old Moll's trunk was a wondrous comfortable cradle, and when Mrs. Benbow returned, Kirk was rocking there, asleep.

"What did I tell you?" said Legs. "There aint nothin' on earth to beat a good bull."

THEREAFTER, Mrs. Benbow regularly brought Kirk to the elephants when the time came for her turn. It was a better show than any in the main tent. News of it spread through the circus, and at last came to the ears of the only man who would object to it. This was a person named Skaggs, a cantankerous widower of fifty, owning a small interest in the circus and connected with the financial side of it. Mostly, he was nothing worse than a grouch; but several times a year he became a meddling nuisance as well. He drank, not in riotous merriment, but privately, sulkily; and an excess of booze always went to his disposition. For weeks or months he would run an even course, cross and unapproachable, but keeping to himself. Then he would increase his potations, and as soon as they passed a given point, he would set out to make trouble for somebody. As soon as he heard of Moll's nursemaid duties, he stalked off to the bull-line. Legs was absent at the moment, but his second, Skeeter, was on duty. Kirk was sitting on the ground, playing with a trunk that waggled delightfully before him.

"What's that kid doing here?" demanded Skaggs. "Take him away."

"Take him yourself!" retorted Skeeter. "I don't want the job."

Skaggs started for the child. A gray trunk barred the way. He slapped the trunk and it was withdrawn; but by that time, Kirk was six feet in the air, with Moll gurgling at him as she swayed him to and fro.

"Put that kid down," commanded Skaggs.

"Go chase yourself!" returned Moll; at least, that was the gist of her remarks. Skaggs reached for the boy, and she passed him to Eliza, on her left. Skaggs shouted at Eliza, who passed the youngster to Demoiselle. A baby tusker, a tiny thing, weighing not much more than an ordinary horse, was on that lady's left, so when Skaggs came to her, Demoiselle swung the boy back. The man lost his head and snatched up a stake. Old Moll reclaimed her pet, lifted him high above her head, and said something to King Dan. The head of the herd reached out, caught Skaggs round the waist, and without lifting him from the ground, flung him with a whirling throw. He spun round and round like a giant doll, all arms and legs, and when he crumpled thirty feet away, he had lost all interest in elephant-guarded babies.

The whole troupe knew the story by night, and the general manager, finding that Skaggs was not hurt, refused to punish King Dan and devised a new attraction. Next day in the grand entry, old Moll carried the baby, swinging on her trunk. The crowd gasped, and then thundered its applause. Next the act was varied by putting Kirk in a baby carriage and having Moll push that. This went well, too, till one of the societies for preventing things intervened, and Kirk's day as a circus star had to be postponed. But he still went to the bull-line to be cared for while his mother performed on the trapeze, and whether the child or the elephants got the greater pleasure out of the arrangement, I do not know.

WHEN Benbow came back, limping and pale, his wife took him to see the novel nursery.

"Isn't it great?" she asked. Benbow shook his head.

"It's a fine scheme," he answered. "But think of the years we've put in, you an' me, Mary, an' can't get a decent human being to tend the kid. I wish we were out of the circus."

Which was evidence that even canvas walls could not quite shut out the restless tide of American change. Benbow fretted and dreamed and built castles in the air, but nothing more. He knew no trade but the circus, and in the circus he stayed.

Legs was firm in the faith that Kirk was destined to become the greatest bull man in the world. There was reason in the view; the lad spent as much time as possible with the elephants, but his training was not one-sided. I am afraid to say how young he was when he could stand on his hands, turn a handspring and do a flip, which is a handspring backward. At an age when most boys are proud of being able to skin the cat, Kirk could do a giant swing, hang to a trapeze by his heels, turn a back somersault, though not a forward one, and stand on his father's shoulders

while the latter, standing on the back of a broad-beamed Percheron, rode round the ring. For Benbow, like many circus performers, doubled in his acts, and was a rider of sorts as well as an "aërial artist."

Kirk had very definite opinions about the animals of a circus. He disliked the great cats. He was not afraid of them—at least, not as you or I would be afraid. He had seen Miss Prince boxing their ears, pulling their tails and generally cuffing them into order too many years for that; but he did not like them. Neither did he care for the snaky-headed polar bears, nor for their good-humored cousins in black. He liked horses and dogs, as any normal boy must, and he often expressed a wish to try the task of training a zebra; but the elephants he loved. He and Moll were regular cronies; you could see them colloguing together by the hour, like the pair of mischiefs that they were; and if his relations with King Dan were more formal, they were still affectionate. Legs taught the lad all the queer lore of the bull-line, and Kirk was an apt pupil; but he learned at least as much from old Moll as from any human instructor.

KIRK was eight years old when, at his own suggestion, he was dressed in a costume supposed to be that of an East Indian prince, and placed on King Dan's neck to lead the grand entry. Of course an Indian prince never acts as mahout, but the audience knew no more about that than Kirk did, and everyone was happy. King Dan moved with extra care under the light weight, while just behind, old Moll, holding his tail in her trunk and giving it a jerk now and then to emphasize her remarks, kept telling the herd leader to watch his step. He did very well to look at, admitted old Moll, and had some reputation as a scrapper; but for all that, he was as stupid as the rest of his sex, and what he didn't know about children would fill a library. Elephants are nowhere more human than in their domestic relations.

Kirk's trick as royal mahout lasted—during summers—till the show was consolidated with another. Then his place was taken by a remarkably pretty young woman, and he was consoled by being allowed to help Legs with the bulls in the ring. Aside from that, there were no changes. Kirk continued riding with his father; Legs was head of the enlarged bull-line, with Skeeter as second; and Skaggs went on whittling expenses and consuming private stock. The years had not helped the old toper's temper, but his next—and last—encounter with Kirk and Moll was entirely unintentional.

It was forenoon on the second day of a week's stop; and Moll, who liked her tipple as well as Skaggs liked his, but had a far greater carrying capacity, was explaining to Skeeter that she hadn't had a drink for months. Kirk stood by, laughing at the dialogue, for it was no less.

"I can't help it," said Skeeter. "I aint a drinkin' man, an' you know it. Why don't you pick on Skaggs? He's the only bottle-hound in these parts."

Moll started to explain that Skaggs was no friend of hers, and besides, was a tightwad who wouldn't give anybody anything. Kirk interrupted the complaining tootle.

"I've got a good mind to swipe the old boy's bottle, an' give it to her. I know where he keeps it!"

"Why don't you?" asked Skeeter and Moll together.

"I've got a good notion—" repeated Kirk.

"You ought to do it," said Skeeter craftily, while old Moll set forth the harrowing details of her thirst. "The old girl's a mighty fine bull; she's entitled to a drink, now an' then; an' Skaggs, he's jest wallerin' in the stuff. He'll kill himself, most likely, if somebody don't get it away from him. It don't hurt Moll none. She could hold a barrel of it, an' not even feel squiffy."

Kirk slipped away, and soon returned with a square bottle, half full of a juniper-flavored liquid. Moll almost shed tears of gratitude at the gift, and promptly emptied it down her throat, while Kirk and Skeeter chuckled. Unluckily, Skaggs felt the need of a bracer about the same time, and when he found his cache empty, he set forth in a rage to exact vengeance. How he lighted on the trail I do not know, but he entered the menagerie-tent just as the boy was leaving to hide the tell-tale bottle.

Skaggs rushed at the culprit with a yell of rage, and Kirk bolted. Old Moll's trunk flicked down to the chain that was supposed to shackle her to a peg; she ripped the thing off with one quick move, and started in pursuit. Skaggs looked round at the warning shout, dodged just in time, and with surprising speed for one of his years, swarmed up one of the tent-poles.

"Call off that damned murdering beast,

an' tie her up!" he ordered when he had reached a safe altitude.

"I can't," said Skeeter. "You've got her mad, an' she wont mind nobody but Legs."

"Get Legs, then!" commanded Skaggs; and settled himself in the least uncomfortable position he could find to wait.

The messenger dispatched for Legs, who reported that he couldn't be found—and wasn't interested in the case, anyway; after which Legs parked himself at the best peephole and watched proceedings. Moll walked up and down enjoying herself. She knew she was naughty and didn't care—why should she, when everyone but Skaggs was laughing? She told that gentleman what she thought of him in every known dialect of elephantese, and was still repeating some of the choicer parts of her discourse when Kirk took pity on her prisoner and led her away.

The boy was scolded roundly when his parents learned of the escapade. It did not worry him greatly; the joke was worth a scolding.

A FEW weeks later came disaster. Mrs. Benbow picked up some typhoid germs in one of the small towns at which the circus stopped. Never given to pampering herself, she worked for days after most people would have been in bed with a doctor and nurse. When she finally confessed that she did not feel well, and went to a hospital, it was too late. She died within the week.

Kirk was dazed by the loss, and his father fared still worse. The balance-wheel of the family was gone, and he did not know what to do. With something of his mother's steadiness, Kirk tried his best to comfort his father, but did not accomplish much. For his own consolation, the lad seemed to depend on old Moll. Legs insisted that she understood all that had happened, and perhaps he was right. Certainly she knew that her pet was in trouble. She fondled him with little caressing gurgles, swung him on her trunk as if he were still a baby, stole his handkerchief to entice him to play, and when that failed, put it back, and stood with her trunk resting lightly on his shoulder. A stanch friend, was old Moll.

A month afterward the boy was told that he must leave for boarding school. He went to school every winter and did very well in his classes, but always looked forward to rejoining the circus in the spring. This time he was told that he must quit the show for good. Benbow blamed his profession for the death of his wife. It was too late for him to learn a new trade; but his son, he vowed, should "have a chance." He must never, never come back to the big top.

Kirk begged, pleaded, cried and argued, but in vain. Legs put in an oar, lost his temper in two minutes, and vowed that the best bull boy on earth was being spoiled to make a third-rate bookkeeper or clerk. Skeeter agreed that it was too bad, but maybe the kid would be better off in the long run. Even Skaggs offered condolences.

"You're a pretty good kid—for a kid," said the old grouch. "Don't see why in hell folks can't be born with a little sense, but they aint. You're better'n most of 'em. Good luck!" He hurried away while Kirk and Legs looked at each other, and wondered if Skaggs were going to die, or something, until old Moll's insistent trunk called back their startled wits.

Kirk's antecedents were not known at the school to which he was sent, and he was charged not to mention the circus if he could help it. He obeyed, passively. The physical director commented on the perfection of the lad's physique, but marveled at his lack of interest in so-called gymnastics. He went through the setting-up drill in perfunctory fashion; he could not remember when he did not know it, and considered it stuff for babies and the declining years of fat old men. On rings, bars and other apparatus he did what he was told, in perfect form, but with no enthusiasm. Two of the older lads tried to stir him up.

"Put some pep into it, kid," said one of them. "You aint going to a funeral." Kirk's lip quivered at the unintentional allusion, and the other, noting this, changed his line of argument. "It's great stuff," he said. "Look at Geezy!"—the physical director. "When he was your age, they thought he was going to die of consumption, and see him now. He could go into a circus if he wanted to."

"So could I," said Kirk.

One of the older boys sniffed, but the other went on: "I mean it. He can turn handsprings—somersaults, too."

"Well, what of it?" retorted Kirk. "I can too, if I wanted to."

"Yes, you can—*not!*" said the boy who had not yet spoken. "You'd break your fool neck if you tried it!"

"Would I?" said Kirk. They were at their lockers, stripping for a shower after exercise. Kirk stepped out in the main aisle, naked as the day he was born, flexed his legs and arms once or twice, sprang into the air, turned like a white flash, and landed almost in his tracks.

"Suffering cats!" exclaimed the skeptic. Kirk repeated the performance twice, stopped to get his bearings, and turned flips—that is, back-handsprings, clear through the open archway into the shower-room. The other lads stood open-mouthed and dumb, while Geezy peered at him as if he were some new species.

"Why didn't you tell me you could do things like that, kid?" he asked.

"You didn't ask me," said Kirk.

"Where did you learn?" was the director's next question.

"When I was little," said Kirk. (At thirteen, one's past unrolls a much longer vista than after thirty.) Geezy noticed the evasion and cast about in his memory, which was pretty well stored with facts about acrobatics and acrobats.

"Come to my office when you're dressed," he commanded. Kirk obeyed, and was met with the straight query:

"Do you belong to the circus family of Benbows?"

"Yes sir," said Kirk, miserably. He had not been in school ten days, and here the secret was out. Geezy held out his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "That's one on me. Giving calisthenics to a kid that was born jumping through hoops! Say, the fellows at the athletic club will guy me to death when they hear that—and I'll have to tell 'em. It's too good to keep!"

IT is hardly necessary to say that Kirk got on well with that athletic director. The boy spent hours a day in the gymnasium, and his acrobatic skill increased noticeably. This did not please Benbow senior. He wanted to turn the lad away from anything leading to circus life, and that could not be done in a school that encouraged him in circus tricks and applauded his skill at them. In the spring Kirk pleaded in vain to be allowed to join the circus during the summer months. He was sent to a farm instead, and told that a new school would be found for him in the fall.

Kirk had no objection to farm life in itself. He liked the fresh air, the open country and the animals—even the work, in moderation, for he helped at the rush season. The people with whom he lived liked him. But the farm was a barrier to the circus, and the neighbors regarded him with some distrust. When he was found standing on the vane of the windmill, fifty feet from the ground, crowing like a rooster, one old lady declared that plainly, he was born to be hanged, or his neck would have been broken long since in some other way. This view found considerable support.

Then something more serious happened. Kirk had been riding the horses, standing up, of course, and all the boys for two miles around tried the same trick. One of them got on quite well till he tried to show off and hurried the horse, when he promptly tumbled and broke his arm. Kirk was blamed for the accident; they even sent his father a bill for the doctor's fee. Benbow paid it, and wrote a seven-page letter of remonstrance and advice which made the boy blue for a week.

He was rather glad that fall to get away to Marquis Academy, an old and dignified preparatory school. The high-school studies were more interesting than the grind of the grades, but there were complications outside the recitation-room. Kirk played a considerable part in the annual class rush, and Fatty Morgan, a scrapping sophomore, decided that this young sprig needed taking down a peg.

"Think you're smart, don't you?" he said apropos of nothing.

"Sure," returned Kirk. "Don't you?" The freshman snickered at their champion's wit, and Fatty flushed.

"Say," he demanded, "do you want to get your face pushed in?"

"Sure," repeated Kirk. "Are you looking for the job?"

Fatty's answer was a left swing. He was a year the older and twenty pounds the heavier—and he had as much chance as a spaniel has with a wolf. His blow went wild; a fist spatted sharply against his jaw; and in some mysterious way he found his right wrist clamped behind him and an arm across his throat.

"Aint he cute!" said Kirk, over Fatty's shoulder. "I bet he can learn to lay down and roll over in five minutes. Down, Fatty!"

Fatty replied in language that his professor of English would have thought crude, and squirmed and struggled; but it takes a professional wrestler to break the hammer-lock.

"Down, Fido—that's a good doggie!"

said Kirk. Fatty's wrist was pushed slowly upward till it seemed as if his shoulder would crack. In spite of himself he bent over, his knees doubled, and in another moment, he was lying face downward on the grass.

"That's fine," said his tormentor. "Now, roll over!"

"Go to hell!" screeched Fatty. There was nothing wrong with his courage, and his well-padded muscles were strong, but he was helpless. Kirk shifted position with a lightning movement, and the relentless pressure began again. With sobs of rage, Fatty rolled over on his back.

"Good doggie!" said Kirk, again. "I knew he could learn." He released his victim and stepped back. Fatty rose, tears running down his cheeks.

"C-come over t-to the g-gym, an' p-put on the g-gloves!" he challenged.

"When I've nothing better to do," said Kirk. "I can't spend all my time training puppies." Fatty charged blindly, only to be caught in another unfamiliar hold, and slammed on the ground so hard it took his breath away. The freshmen carried off Kirk on their shoulders.

THERE were no further attempts to trim Kirk's spurs, and in a little time he and Fatty were good friends. One does not hold a grudge against an earthquake, and it seemed to Fatty that he had encountered something of that sort. The lads learned of Kirk's circus connections and asked him endless questions, which he answered as well as he could, and bragged mightily of the prowess of his former associates. The effervescence proper to his age was showing, though about himself he was as nearly modest as a boy of fourteen can be and remain healthy.

With the teachers, enlightenment as to this peculiar pupil came more slowly. They noticed that the usual season of mild hazing ended, instead of dragging on for months. They approved the increased interest of the lower classmen in athletics. They marveled when the freshmen took for their class yell the ringing "Hey, rube!" which is the war-cry of the circus lot when tent-dwellers are besieged by belligerent townsmen. But the cause of these variations from normal was hidden from most of the staff until one day in the English class. They had been reading Kipling's "Toomai of the Elephants," and at the close of the tale, the teacher asked:

"Do you think elephants are that intelligent in real life?"

"Sure," said Kirk dreamily, while the other lads nudged and winked.

"Could one of them unfasten his picket-rope?"

"Sure," said Kirk again. He had forgotten where he was, and spoke as an expert would speak to any inquiring greenhorn. "That's nothing. Any bull can do that."

"Any what?" asked the teacher.

"Any bull can do that," repeated Kirk impatiently. "They can untie knots, open snaps, anything. The picket-chain is just a reminder to 'em." (He was quoting Legs.) "They can get rid of it any time they want to. I've seen a bull take the nut off a clevis bolt, hold up the chain in her trunk so it wouldn't clank too much, an' go off, visiting. That's old Moll—the best old bull in the world." He could see her and himself swinging on her trunk as he spoke.

The teacher peered over his glasses in bewilderment. "Why are you talking about bulls?" he said. "This story is about an elephant."

Kirk came back to the present with a start. "Yes sir," he said. "That's just what circus folks call 'em, sir, bulls."

"And how do you come to be so familiar with circus slang?"

"I— I was with a circus for a while, sir," said Kirk.

"He was born in one!" piped up the youngest boy in the class. Kirk scowled, but the interruption averted the chance of untactful remarks from the teacher.

THE school year passed quietly. Again Kirk asked to join the circus during vacation, and again was refused; but this time he was not sent to a farm. The head of the school found a job for him with a surveying-party. He came back in the fall, taller, browner, with muscles as springy and well under control as ever, but with a look of dumb homesickness in his eyes. He was homesick—for the circus. He could stand exile well enough while busy, but when work slackened, he began to dream of the big tents, the spangled costumes, the seeming confusion that overlaid the rigid order of lot and dressing-tent, and above all, of the elephants. He could see the big beasts rocking at their pickets, holding each other's tails as they marched, doing clown tricks for the amusement of staring crowds;

he could hear them gossiping as they munched their hay when the performance was over. That was where he belonged. No doubt his father meant well, but why couldn't a fellow have something to say about things for himself?

He asked that question several times when his father visited him that winter. Logic was on the boy's side, but authority was on the man's; and the debate between those two always ended in one way. Winter turned to spring while Kirk brooded and schemed, and felt gloomier than ever when he learned that his father's circus was coming to town; and then Fate took a hand.

MARQUIS ACADEMY stands on some high ground between two good-sized streams, West Creek and East Creek, which come together nearly a mile farther down. Just below their junction is the town of Marquis, a pretty residence community of some five thousand people. Badly treated by floods for years, the town has been graded up till now an ordinary high water does no more than wet the basements; but all around, the flat valley is still subject to overflow, and sometimes is covered rather deeply. The fall before, a dam had been finished on West Creek a few miles up, to impound the surplus water, but though it had stood through the spring freshet, its stability was still a matter of debate.

The circus arrived at the end of a week of continuous rain. The streams were bank full, but as the weather bureau promised better weather, and no other site was available, the show pitched its tents in the usual place, on the flat ground between the creeks just above town. Kirk was the only boy in school who did not attend the performance. He visited his father that morning, and for the third time tried to get permission to come back to the show. They argued it at length, and by time for the show to begin, both boy and man had lost their tempers. Benbow went to the dressing-tent to get ready for his act, and Kirk flung away in a huff. If he could not join the circus, he did not want to see it; but there was as much homesickness as petulance in his mood, and he felt that he could not bear any more just then.

He walked back by way of West Creek, where a gang of laborers was at work on the foundations for a new railroad-bridge, and living in tents on the flat.

"Aren't you afraid of being drowned out?" he asked the boss, whom he knew slightly, as did most of the lads at the school.

"A little water wouldn't hurt that bunch," returned the boss. "They say it's goin' to clear up, anyway."

"I don't believe it," said Kirk, scanning the sky with eyes which early learned the importance of good weather. "If that dam goes out—good night!"

He halted a moment, minded to go back and warn the circus folk about that dam, then went on. Doubtless they knew about it already; circus managers keep posted on such matters, and his father would think he was trying to wiggle back into the show.

Kirk groused in his room for a while, then went to the gymnasium and turned handsprings and somersaults till he was dripping, but he could not work himself out of his gloom. The boys came back, bubbling over with excitement, but he did not join in their talk. At supper time, it had begun to rain.

All evening, the clouds grew blacker and the rain increased. The lightning came nearer. The school went to bed at the usual hour, but Kirk did not sleep. He was standing at the window in his pajamas when there came an extra heavy crash.

"Come back to bed," said his roommate. "You make me nervous, standing there."

"You're nervous anyway," said Kirk; but he came and sat down on the bed, busy with his thoughts while the other boy talked. Suddenly the chattering stopped.

"What's that red light?" demanded the lad. Kirk sprang to the window. A glare of fire came from the direction of the town. As he looked, lights flashed up in a dormitory nearer the point, telephones jangled, and the voice of an instructor called from their own lower hall:

"Up, everybody! Lightning's struck the circus, and the animals are loose."

KIRK jerked on his trousers and ran down without shoes, coat or hat. The outer door was locked, and by the time he got it open, most of the boys had joined him in various stages of undress. Some one had switched on the arc-lamps that lighted the campus; the crowd poured out onto the broad veranda, and stopped aghast.

The instructor's information was less than half correct. Only the elephants were loose, and not all of them. Lightning had struck a barn right on the edge of the circus lot. The elephants, brought out to help load and assemble the wagons, were

so close that some of them were hit by the splinters which the bolt ripped off in its course. Legs held those nearest him, but the others, usually the most dependable part of the herd, broke away and made for the high ground. As the boys poured out on the porch, the great brutes, no longer frightened, but feeling mischievous because they knew they had misbehaved, were stalking across the campus.

"Keep back!" exclaimed one of the teachers. "There's no telling what they'll do!" But the boy whom he was pushing back ducked under his restraining arm, ran down the steps into the rain and shouted:

"Moll! Oh, Moll!"

Every elephant stopped as if frozen. "Moll, don't you know me?" shouted the boy again, running toward her. With a tootle that fairly ran the scale of elephant sounds, Moll flung aside an uprooted hydrangea, and met him halfway. Her trunk touched him, sniffed him, then curled round his waist and lifted him high in the air.

"Oh!" exclaimed fifty watchers at once. "Ah!" For Moll put the boy down as gently as if he were of glass, and even an untaught human could sense the affection in her tones as she fondled him.

"Put me up, Moll," he said. She swung him to her neck, and he looked round at the swaying bodies and questing trunks. "I'm ashamed of you bulls!" he said sternly. "You've run away! Get in line, now. We're going back. Tails!"

Moll seconded the order with a vigorous toot; King Dan made a few well-chosen remarks, and in half a minute the herd was in regular order, trunk holding tail. The school gasped, started a cheer, then stopped as a rushing, tearing sound came from the west.

"Good Lord!" cried some one. "The dam's out!"

Kirk must have given the order that started the herd toward the construction camp on West Creek, but he could not remember doing so. Neither could he tell just what he expected to do there, but he knew that the circus could take care of itself, and he remembered vividly the helpless look of the laborers' tents. When he reached the flat, he found a black flood lapping at the very foot of the hill, a score of draggled refugees, and the foreman trying vainly to light a fire.

"Can we help?" asked Kirk. The foreman raised his lantern and stared at the half-dressed figure atop of a mountain of flesh, but answered instantly:

"Yes, if them brutes'll take the water. It wont go over their backs, I know. There's a bunch of my men out there, on top of the powder-house, an' it's liable to go any minute."

"Is there a road?" asked Kirk.

"Yes. Take me with you. Say, how do you get on these brutes?"

AT a word from Kirk the foreman, scared but game, was hoisted to King Dan's neck, and at another command the great beast moved cautiously into the flood. Water has no terrors for an elephant if he has either sound footing or swimming-room, and the foreman was right about the road. Behind King Dan came Zeb, the next-largest bull, and behind him was Moll, who was sharing with Kirk the direction of the rescue. Carefully but not slowly they forged through the current till out of the darkness ahead came a voice:

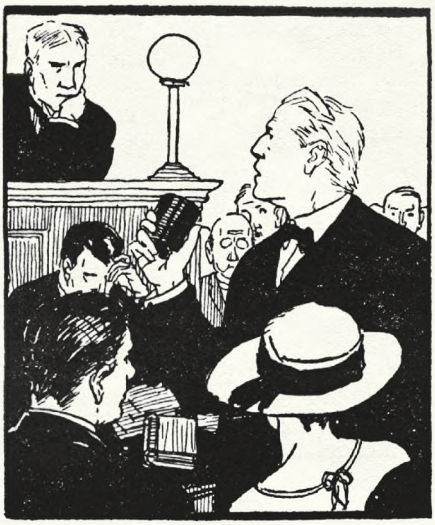
"Hold tight, boys, help's comin'—Holy Moses, it's Noah's Ark!"

The light of the foreman's lantern fell on nine men clinging to a shaking roof. For a moment, Kirk's heart stopped beating—how on earth was he going to get the men off now that he had reached them? King Dan gave a sharp toot; Moll repeated it; and the elephants let go each others' tails, and turned to face downstream, abreast and a little apart. Then King Dan lifted a man from the roof and passed him to Zeb, Zeb passed him to Moll, Moll to Eliza, and so on toward the shore, while King Dan picked the others, one by one, from their unsteady refuge. The last one he picked out of the water—the roof had collapsed.

When they reached solid ground again, Legs was there to take charge, but Kirk did not get down from old Moll's neck. He stayed there till they reached the railroad yards, whither the circus material had been dragged by superhuman efforts and was being loaded. He held fast, indeed, till his father came, looked up at him, and said:

"All right, Kirk, come down. I'll find some dry things for you, and you can turn in with me."

The circus was hours late in getting away, and the owners were gloomy; but in one berth there was perfect happiness as the car jolted onward through what was left of the night. The bull boy had come home.



Dead Men Tell No Tales?

Here is one of the most ingenious stories of criminal jurisprudence that you have ever read, written by one who has had participation in many criminal convictions.

By ELSIE VIRGINIA THOMAS

THE penitentiary gates swung open reluctantly, it seemed, so stern and forbidding were those guardians of human misery, and permitted a prisoner to pass through them into the bright sunshine of an early California morning. Instinctively the man took off his hat and, with head thrown back, breathed the soul-healing air of freedom deep into his lungs.

After five long years of prison-tainted air Clifford Corey thrilled to the joy of the unsullied elixir that stimulated like old wine. He wondered if men who never had lost freedom ever could know its value as he knew it in this, the first moment of its restoration. Impossible! One last backward glance in which there seemed silently epitomized all that five lost years may mean to a man; then he turned rejuvenated and throbbing with eagerness, toward the roadway that wound along a hillside gay with wild flowers, toward the city whose pall of smoke hung darkly above the horizon.

As he rounded the prison wall a girl, waiting just outside the barricade, cried out joyously and flung herself into his arms.

"Cliff! Oh, Cliff, Cliff," she cried, putting into the repetition of his name all the happiness and love and devotion for which her trembling lips lacked words.

"Eve!" Her name as the newly released convict spoke it, was a caress, a welcome, a promise for the future. He held her close against his breast for a moment that seemed almost to wipe out the five black years that lay behind them. Then, hand in hand, they stepped out of the chilling shadow of the prison wall into the cleansing sunshine that purifies and nourishes the souls as well as the bodies of mankind.

"I did not hope that you would be here to meet me, Eve. I did not think there was a train so early," Cliff said with almost reverent gratitude.

"There was not one soon enough; so I came last evening and stayed at the Inn on the Point. You might have known I would be here, dear."

A mist rose in the man's eyes. His fingers tightened over hers.

"Yes, knowing you, I might have known even that," he answered.

The law's allotted penalty for the wrong he had done, Corey had paid—a debt discharged in daily, compounded installments for five years. Beyond doubt, such expiation had bought the world's absolution. This was the unspoken thought that each imparted to the other through intertwined fingers. Together they went out over the hills light-heartedly, leaving, they thought, unhappiness and the grief of separation forever behind them.

DURING that first long day of restored freedom that seemed so blissfully short, Cliff and Eve planned a future unmarred by a flaw or a doubt. The mistakes of the past were past with the lesson they taught well learned from the textbook of bitter experience.

"Our Road to Happiness lies straight before us, Eve," he assured her as she sat at his knee in the home she had kept, awaiting his homecoming—a home to which she had gone as a bride but a month before his imprisonment.

"Our Road to Happiness—yours and mine," echoed the girl.

"And I'm going to travel it straight. There is only one thing left that suggests the past. I mean the auto—a car, Eve, not bought as one for you should be. I want to be rid of it—now, at once. When I can buy one honestly, we'll have another."

"Yes, yes," she agreed happily. "I thought—I hoped you might wish that, too, my dear."

"I'll take it down town to the garage now and tell them to dispose of it," he cried, springing up from her side. "Let us have the last vestige of bygone things cleared away before the end of this first day of our new life."

"You wont be long, Cliff?" she questioned with illogical anxiety as he slipped into his coat.

"Not half an hour," he promised. From the window she watched him go until the car was out of sight. "Our happiness will last this time," she assured herself and glanced at the clock. A half-hour seemed a long time to wait.

Corey turned his car into the park driveway on his way down town. The night had fallen suddenly—a dark, foggy night that the headlights of his car pierced but weakly. But Cliff's thoughts were not on the night but on the morrow and the many other morrows to come, all sunlighted.

At a bend in the roadway the lights of a car behind him loomed ahead through the blanket of mist. As it drew close it edged toward him and Cliff swung farther over to give it room to pass. Suddenly, when the two cars were almost abreast, it swung sharply across the roadway and straight toward Corey's auto, with a roar from the exhaust that proved the driver had stepped hard and deliberately upon his gas.

Cliff glimpsed men leaning forward as if to seize the murderously inclined driver; then, as he vainly tried to swing clear of the collision, the car struck his with a terrific crash and blackness blotted out the world.

WITH tremendous effort Cliff Corey struggled toward consciousness. Dimly he sensed excited voices close at hand. The pain in his head was a throbbing agony and he lay still with closed eyes and strove torturingly to reawaken a lapsed memory. An instinctive perception of disaster swept over him and he summoned the utmost power of his will to remember and name it. But recollection evaded him. Then, gradually the unintelligible murmur of voices resolved itself into words of definite meaning.

"It's the rope for him, sure, this time."

"It is, the murderin' crook."

"Poor Mike. He was a game guy—too game or he'd never have taken a chance with an ex-con. like this."

Cliff understood, and under the compelling stimulus of that understanding his dazed mind reacted to normality. He twitched his right arm and recognized the cold bite of the handcuff on his wrist. Then he raised himself on his elbow and opened his eyes to find himself on the park roadway near the wreck of what once had been his automobile.

Beside Cliff lay something motionless. Before he looked he knew what he must expect. Fastened to his arm by a handcuff's steel links was a dead body—the body of Detective Sergeant Mike Costello. An ugly crimson stain on the roadway and a bullet hole in the temple told how Big Mike had died.

Corey remembered now.

"It's the rope for him, sure, this time."

The policeman's words echoed and re-echoed in Cliff's throbbing brain as he realized, that innocently but undeniably he faced the fate predicted for him.

A group of policemen sprang to the injured man's side as he raised himself and cleared his blurred vision with a weak hand. An ambulance waited near by and a doctor worked over a stretcher upon which lay the inert body of a second detective, Dan Keenan, partner of the slain Costello. A bloodstained auto wrench in the hands of one of the policemen and a gaping wound in Keenan's head explained his fate.

"Another," Corey exclaimed weakly. Then to the doctor: "Is he dead, too?"

"Not yet, but he's likely to be soon," curtly.

"I'm sorry—" the prisoner began.

"You've reason to be," cut in one of the policemen. "You'll swing for this night's work, Corey. Do you understand that?"

Cliff made a gesture of weary resignation.

"You may be right," he conceded. "I'm badly hurt. Let's go."

AT a metropolitan jail during visitors' hours one may look upon human nature, stripped to nakedness, at its worst and sometimes at its best.

Eve as she waited in such a jail for Cliff to be brought to her, felt her own desperate anxiety grow deeper and more poignant under the stress of the cumulative atmosphere of misfortune that surrounded her. Her eagerness to see him even there and for a few moments, was deadened by the foreboding spirit of evil that lay in the tainted air. Faintly through the heavy walls she heard the sound of carpenters' hammers and shivered as she wondered whether they were building a scaffold for someone as dear to another woman as Cliff was to her.

Noisy bolts clanked harshly back from their sockets; the cell-house door swung open and Corey with a welcoming but grave smile on his lips, was at Eve's side. Bandages swathed his head and a dislocated shoulder was bound tightly to his side. Cliff laid his uninjured arm about his wife's shoulders and drew her to a seat beside him on the straight-backed wooden bench.

"Look at me and see what happens to foolish husbands who wander alone about a city like this after nightfall," he said, striving with badinage to lessen the grief and anxiety that were in the woman's eyes.

"Tell me, my dear," Eve whispered, catching his one free hand in both hers.

"How and why I managed to murder Big Mike Costello—and probably his partner also?"

"Don't jest, Cliff, please. Of course I know you didn't kill Costello or Keenan."

"You're right, I didn't harm either of them," he answered with a touch upon Eve's arm that was a fond acknowledgment of her inviolable faith in him. "I am entirely innocent but—" with a wry smile—"there isn't a person in the world beside yourself whom I can even hope to convince."

"Tell me exactly what happened and I'll find proof that will convince the whole world," Eve declared.

To Eve the caress in Cliff's fingers as he laid his hand upon hers, the grateful devotion his eyes lavished upon her as he looked into her face, were payment in full for all she offered in love and loyalty.

"I'm afraid what I know wont help, Eve, dear," he said, and explained what had happened on the park driveway. "Some part of the wreckage hit me for I knew nothing after the collision until I recovered consciousness and found myself handcuffed to the dead detective with Keenan near by and unconscious," he concluded. "That's the truth—all of it, Eve, as far as I am able to tell it. Any sane person will regard it as an insult to his intelligence to offer such an unbelievable defense. I don't expect anyone to believe it. I wouldn't myself if it hadn't happened to me. But as long as Keenan lives there is hope. He knows the truth. If he recovers consciousness even for an instant he will clear me. How is he today?"

Eve seized his hand and looked into his face, an inarticulate, choking sob convulsing her lips.

"He died last night," she said at last and hated herself for giving the blow which she saw kill the last vestige of hope on her husband's face. They sat hand in hand, in silence.

"He didn't speak before he died?" Cliff asked, though he knew the question was useless. Eve shook her head.

"Only a miracle can save me then. I'm an ex-convict. Two policemen have been murdered under circumstances that will prove my guilt to any jury in the world. Poor, poor, little girl! Oh, why should

this new disaster have happened when now we might have been happy?"

"You are innocent. If it takes a miracle to prove it a righteous Providence will provide that miracle. I have faith, Cliff dear."

"I will believe with you," he answered, and tried to keep his word as they debated each detail of the mercilessly accusing facts that menaced him.

THE police, believing these conclusive, had not deemed it necessary to make a minute inspection of the auto wreck in the park. Eve had done so. She had found broken glass that fitted the windshield of Cliff's car; also other windshield glass of different thickness which did not. An automobile expert was willing to declare his opinion that Cliff's car had been struck by the bumper of a larger, heavier one before it rolled over the bank where it was found. This was the sum of Eve's encouraging news, pitifully insufficient to corroborate Cliff's denial of guilt in the face of the unexplained fact that he, an ex-convict just freed from prison, was handcuffed to the wrist of a murdered officer.

"Visiting time is up, Corey," announced the guard. Cliff rose and laid his uninjured arm tenderly about Eve's shoulders. Once again the barred doors which had separated him from her throughout five years, summoned him.

"Go to Septimus Judd, dear," he said. "If any lawyer in California can help us, Judd is the man."

"I will, and I'll be here tomorrow. Hold to your faith, my dear, as I shall. Proof of the truth must exist and we will find it."

A kiss, a lingering handclasp, and Cliff Corey turned back through the steel doors to his cell. Eve heard them clang shut behind him. The smile of encouragement she had forced to her lips as they parted, faded. With a dozen other women, heavy-hearted and hopeless as herself, she went out through the gloomy doors of the jail anteroom into the sunshine of the world of free men but with her, as she hurried to the office of Septimus Judd, there travelled a black-capped apparition in the likeness of her husband.

Septimus Judd, with a blackened old briar pipe between his teeth and every window of his law office wide open to the enticing breath of the spring sunshine, sat at his desk painstakingly planning a purely mythical garden. His "garden," which never had and never would exist in a more tangible form than the drawings with which he covered sheet after sheet of yellow paper, was the annual spring offering to the memory of long-past years made by the whimsical, gruff, sentimental, old bachelor who wore the worst clothes, smoked the strongest tobacco, had the softest heart and won the hardest cases of any attorney in San Francisco.

"It's time my pansies were planted—really I'm late with them this year," he grumbled as he dotted them in the circular bed set aside for them. "I've never had a failure with them but I'll have to look sharp this season, and the sweet William—Mary loves its perfume—and the roses—" In the midst of the grizzled old law-campaigner's game of make-believe which turned back the calendar many years for him and betrayed a heart that would never grow old, he was interrupted by his red-headed office assistant. Red-headed law students were another of Septimus Judd's idiosyncrasies, for never in the memory of man had any youth with less vivid-hued hair been permitted to sit at the desk in the outer office.

"Walter, I told you I would be busy the entire afternoon," rebuked Judd, covering his garden drawings with blank sheets of paper.

"I know you are busy on important work, sir," replied the boy, whose ostensible ignorance of his employer's indoor gardening was a rigidly respected pretense, "but there's a young lady in the outer office I think you will want to see. I told her you were not in but she said she'd wait until you returned. She's been crying, quiet-like, all the time she's been waiting. I'll bet she's bringing you a hard case, Mr. Judd," the clerk concluded hopefully.

SEPTIMUS JUDD swept up his gardening drawings and thrust them out of sight with a crusty exclamation of anger that was abundantly belied by the twinkle of pleased expectancy in his own eyes that matched precisely what he saw in the student's. The old man and Walter were united in many such matters by a close but unspoken understanding.

"A hard case, eh?" he grumbled. "Also you think it doubtful if the young woman is prepared to pay a fee. I see it in your

eye. That's the sort of client you're always anxious to bring in here. Well, well, do so. I'd rather see her than argue the rest of the afternoon with you."

A moment later Septimus Judd was bowing Eve Corey to a chair with the courtly courtesy of an old-fashioned Virginian. He was a man of intuitive decisions in his judgment of the men and women of every type and description, physically, mentally and morally, who came to him to bare their wrongs and secrets and tragedies and ask his shrewd and kindly counsel. Before Eve had spoken, he knew he would take her case, whatever it might be.

"Mr. Judd, I have no money—not now at least," she began. Judd permitted the faintest of smiles to touch his lips and nodded with satisfaction, more pleased at his own and the red-headed Walter's perspicacity in guessing this than if his client had laid a thousand-dollar bill upon his battered old desk.

"My husband is accused of murder. He is innocent. Will you defend him? I am Eve Corey," she added.

"Corey, eh? I've seen the papers. Two detectives dead. Man with a prison record handcuffed to one of them. On the face of the published facts a plain case of guilt. But you have others, undoubtedly."

"None." The reluctant confession seemed wrung from the depths of her heart.

"Then how do you know he is innocent?" The keen old eyes which studied the girl's face from beneath bushy brows were agleam now with eager expectancy.

"Because I love and know my husband. Because on the day these murders happened he came out of prison after five years' separation from me. I met him at the gates and we went home together, forever reunited and happy and secure, we thought. I didn't tell him how I fought to keep that home during the years he had been absent. I didn't tell him how I struggled to live, struggled to keep our cottage and—and—myself for him. I knew he knew I had won. And I didn't tell him, either, that the wrong he once did was a discharged debt, paid in full by those five years. I didn't need to tell him, Mr. Judd. We both knew and understood. Through the day, we planned out the years ahead of us—wonderful years, all happiness, all sunshine, all love, with a dear garden of growing things at our doorstep and all the great outdoors to play in. He was going straight always, of course. Hand in hand, we planned it all, Mr. Judd, and it was so real to me, sometimes I was sure I caught the scent of flowers from our garden-to-be.

"The auto was the only thing left over from the past. He wanted to get rid of it on that first dear day of our new life because it was a reminder of things dead and buried. He left me to take it to a dealer. He said he would be gone only half an hour. He would have kept his word but something cruelly intervened—these murders of which he is falsely accused."

THE girl paused, fighting back her tears. Septimus Judd said not a word but his misty eyes were on the flowered hills beyond the blue water-line of the bay and the magic understanding that springtime and memories of the past brought to the old man whose heart paid no reckoning to years that were gone, enabled him to read her heart. And, reading it, he believed with full faith that her devotion had not been betrayed; that Clifford Corey was innocent.

"Not until today when I saw him did I know what happened really," Eve continued. "A car drove up behind him as he went through the park. As it was about to pass the driver purposely crashed into Cliff's auto. That is all he knew until he recovered consciousness and found himself handcuffed to the dead officer and under arrest. He has told the truth—everything he can tell. Oh, Mr. Judd, save him, save us. Can you? Will you?"

"Bless that red-headed young rascal," murmured the lawyer softly.

"I didn't understand you," said Eve anxiously.

"I said I would acquit your husband. I said you are to go on believing in the happiness to which you're entitled and that already you should catch the odor of the flowers in your garden. Your husband is innocent. Therefore we can prove it."

"You do believe he is, don't you?" she cried, a new note of hope in her voice. Septimus Judd's answer rang deep with sincerity.

"I do," he answered. "If I may be personal, my dear, any man a woman like you could love wouldn't sacrifice the cottage you kept open and waiting for him, nor the years ahead revealed to you by love's prevision, under the circumstances which the facts declare your husband did.

I start from the absolutely definite premise that he is innocent."

The lawyer laid the tips of his long tapering fingers together and paused judicially as if his problem were one of mere law instead of human lives.

"Facts don't lie," he said at last. "It is only the conclusions men draw from them that do. We wont quarrel with the known facts which seem now to declare him guilty because they must be an explainable part of all the facts which, as a whole, are the truth which in turn is that he is innocent. Will you go with me to see your husband tomorrow?"

"Oh, yes, yes," cried Eve, "and you will tell him there is hope?"

"There is more than hope," the old man answered staunchly. "Justice does prevail even in this world, but it is certain only to those who have faith in it."

"And I have faith," the girl interrupted.

"So have I. I am going to have the pleasure of seeing your husband freed to go back to you and turn into reality every last blessed detail of the vision you saw together."

SEPTIMUS JUDD sighed and looked out again into the spring sunshine. "Long, long ago, my dear, before you were born, a girl and I made plans like yours. Always there were flower gardens about the home we could see together—beds of pansies, roses and especially sweet William, for the perfume she loved so dearly, and on spring days like this—" The old bachelor who had been speaking to himself rather than to his visitor, roused himself from the spell of the long-ago with sad reluctance. "Forgive an old man his folly, my dear," he said. "Somehow you and your hopes make me feel that in helping you to make them come true, I shall find they have also come true for me."

Eve rose, extending both her hands.

"I am so glad I came to you," she assured him with fervent gratitude. "I think you will truly understand when you try this case what is at stake."

"I know I shall," he answered. "Everything life might have given me and has not yet will be at stake." Then with a forced return to his gruffly businesslike manner: "You will meet me at the prison at two tomorrow? Good."

Long after Eve was gone Septimus sat dreaming before his open window. Then he resurrected his drawings of the garden.

THE visitors' room at the jail the next afternoon while Septimus Judd and Eve waited for Corey to be brought out, was as it had been the day before and every other day since its doors closed upon its first prisoner—a room filled with grieving mothers, heartbroken wives, girls with the tainting brand of wrongdoing upon their young-old faces, all enduring through love for a day or a month or a lifetime, their share in the ruthless tragedy "Life" as man has written it. Only the victims change, some departing, others entering; but the tragic drama in which each takes an allotted part never alters, nor halts, going on and on and on as endlessly and irresistibly, it seems, as time and the human race. Nearly forty years had passed since Septimus Judd waited for his first client on the very bench, he imagined, where he now sat. Exactly what he had seen then in the faces about him he saw now. Would nothing ever ring down a final curtain upon this stage of misery?

This was the thought in his mind as he noticed a woman on a near-by bench who seemed to be pleading in whispers with a sullen-faced youth who appeared deaf to her entreaties. The woman's face, no longer young, showed unhappy remnants of refinement and breeding. Her companion was youthful—too youthful—and in her eyes as she pleaded with him, Judd caught a glimpse of scorching fires of infatuation. They told her story; they explained her unhappy rôle in the never-ending drama of the jail.

"Did you bring it to me or didn't you? I want a straight answer."

In a momentary lull in the babel of voices Judd overheard the youth's angry demand. The woman nodded but laid her hand upon his, whispering a new appeal. He thrust her hand roughly from him and sprang up angrily as if to return to his cell. She caught his arm, drew him back to the bench and then, with a hopeless gesture of surrender, took from the bag she carried an old-fashioned cylindrical phonograph record. A triumphant gleam spread upon her companion's face. He took her hand in his and then, as she nestled responsively closer to him, suddenly seized and dashed the record on the floor where it lay in half a dozen pieces.

"That's a load off my mind," he exclaimed jubilantly.

"Denny, Denny, do you know what you have done?" the woman cried.

"Yes, and I'm damn well satisfied as you would be, too, if—" The rest was lost in the clanking of bars and the hum of voices. The woman hurriedly gathered up the broken pieces of the record and dropped them into her hand bag with the abject hopelessness of one surrendering a last illusion.

"Some good impulse was strangled in that woman's heart when the young scoundrel she loves broke her phonograph record," thought Judd. "Why does she value it, I wonder."

"Here he is at last," cried Eve, interrupting his reverie, as a guard appeared at the wicket with Corey. The old lawyer's appraising inspection, as his client held his wife against his breast ended in a satisfied smile.

"She is not mistaken in him. I knew she couldn't be," the lawyer decided instantly and then the three became a council of defense upon whose deliberations Corey's happiness and possibly his life depended. But at the end of the visiting hour, after they had reviewed each detail of Cliff's one disastrous day of freedom, the frown that drew Septimus Judd's brows together in a straight line of perplexity still remained.

"It is safe to conclude that the men in the car which wrecked yours had been arrested by the two detectives," he asserted. "The deliberate collision afforded an opportunity for escape during which both officers, probably stunned in the crash, were killed. You were then handcuffed to the dead policeman in the place of the original captive and the murderers drove off without leaving behind a clew even of their existence. I'm wrong there," he corrected instantly. "No man ever failed to leave a clew behind him. These men left Dan Keenan, alive instead of dead as they believed. If he had spoken before he died he would have furnished us the evidence we need. He did not. Well then, it's waiting for us somewhere else."

Judd took the accused man's hand in his as the guard's cry, "All visitors out," echoed through the grim old corridor.

"Your wife convinced me of your innocence yesterday," he said. "Today you have confirmed my belief. We'll prove the truth and free you. How? Ah, my boy, I can't tell you that now. Absolute belief that the truth must prevail safeguards us. Be patient."

As Septimus Judd with Eve by his side, turned toward the doors, his foot struck a fragment of something that lay in the half-light, close beside the bench upon which the woman with the phonograph record had been. The lawyer saw that it was a piece of the record which had escaped her when she gathered up the others. And, just passing through the doors, he saw the woman herself.

"The record appeared to mean more to her than seems understandable," he thought. "This may be important. I'll return it to her."

The stranger was signing the visitors' book as he stepped to her side.

"Pardon me, but I found—" The woman looked up at him as he began to speak and then, as she saw Eve at his side and recognized her, she clutched at her breast as if to defend herself against an expected blow. Judd saw regret and fear and haunting dread pass in successive waves over her ashy face. Before he could offer the bit of record, she turned and fled through the doors to the street. Judd, without any clue to her strange behavior to guide him, nevertheless, dropped the bit of record back into his pocket.

"There's a mystery in her and her record that intrigues one's imagination," he murmured with a puzzled pursing of his lips. "Why should she fear me?"

As he signed the visitors' book, her name was immediately above his.

"Lola Verner," he read. "Whoever or whatever she is, I'm sorry for her," he added, remembering the sullen, scowling, ruthless face of the wastrel to whom love chained her.

BUT Judd's deep-seated belief in the invincibility of truth was severely tested during the month that followed. Four weeks of what to another man would have been heartbreaking disappointment found him on the morning that Clifford Corey went to trial exactly where he had been on the day when he first heard his story—convinced of his innocence but without evidence to prove it. Neither he nor the private detectives he employed had been able to find the slightest clue to the identity or whereabouts of the men he believed to have been under arrest in the car which wrecked Corey's. No disabled car of doubtful ownership could be discovered. The broken bit of windshield, found by Eve, and which did not match Corey's, was of a common design utilized by thousands of

cars of a hundred different makes. To any man but one who felt he could not lose because his cause was a just one, Corey's defense already was a lost cause. But, day after day with unfaltering sincerity, the old man soothed Eve's anxiety with the positive assurance that her husband would be acquitted.

"My dear, I cannot tell you how I shall be able to prove your husband innocent for I do not know," he responded almost reprovingly in answer to Eve's anxious questioning on the night before the trial. "I only know that I shall be able to do so. I cannot tell you, either, how it happens that when difficulties beset me and my faith grows weak and falters, the perfume of sweet William," the old man's eyes took on the far-away look which always was in them when his mind turned back to the past, "comes to me bringing new confidence, new faith. So cling to your faith. Nothing else is required except to recognize and accept the opportunity that will be given us at the trial."

IT was in this spirit of receptive confidence that Septimus Judd, with Corey and Eve beside him, saw the first panel of prospective jurors file into the jury box. The old man's trial methods were so noted for their uncanny success and extreme peculiarity that there was an expectant hush among the spectator attorneys present when the prosecutor turned the first jury candidate over to the defense for questioning. Septimus Judd looked up at him with no notion of what questions he intended to ask. All the man's answers to the prosecutor flooded back to his memory. They proved the juror intelligent and conscientious.

"You have told the prosecutor you favor law enforcement and the prosecution and punishment of crime and criminals," Judd said at last. "Would you vote to convict any man of a crime of which you knew him to be innocent?"

"I would not," was the surprised man's answer.

"That's all, then," said Judd.

Thereafter he asked each juror of whom his intuition approved the same question. Others against whom the same intuition warned him, he eliminated by peremptory challenge. With the defense so easily satisfied a jury was quickly impaneled. Then followed the prosecutor's opening statement in which he discoursed upon the necessity of curbing recurring crime waves by swift and stern punishment of the guilty; he pictured feelingly the grief and desolation in the homes of the murdered policemen "who died martyrs to their duty." He asserted he was prepared to prove that the defendant, an ex-convict, was guilty of murder, sketched the conclusive evidence against him and closed with the declaration he would demand the infliction of the death penalty. It was a good speech, well delivered.

Septimus Judd rose slowly to his feet to make his reply and paused until the silence in the courtroom was absolute.

"Gentlemen," he said at last, "the defense in this case reiterates all the learned and eloquent attorney for the state has said upon the necessity of enforcing the laws against crime. 'Punish the slayer of Costello and Keenan, two brave men who died in protecting your homes and your property,' the state's attorney enjoined you. The defense also concurs in this. But in fulfilling this demand you will not convict Clifford Corey, this defendant, for he is as innocent of murder as any one of you in the jury box—as we shall prove to your complete satisfaction. I thank you." Judd had given no hint of the nature of his defense but had made a bold promise whose very boldness required, at the price of his client's life, that it be fully kept.

The jury looked interested and impressed with the courtly old lawyer's confidence and the courtroom was ahum with the buzz of many whispering and curious voices at the end of his one-minute address.

"It's hang or go free for his client after that talk," said one attorney to another. "I'd say he had a cast-iron alibi for his man if Corey hadn't been caught handcuffed to his crime."

"The old fox has an ace up his sleeve," murmured the other. "Two or three of them probably—he usually has."

THE prosecutor presented his case with skillful conclusiveness. When he had finished no one in the courtroom except Corey, himself, the white-faced girl at his side whose hand clutched his in desperate anxiety, and old Septimus Judd, doubted the defendant's guilt or that he would hang. The jurors' faces were grave and they twisted uneasily on their chairs, already restive under the hateful necessity they foresaw of condemning a man to

death. The prosecutor, with his evidence all in, paused to consult with his assistant before formally closing his case.

"We are sure of a conviction, aren't we?" he whispered triumphantly.

"Absolutely, but there is just one important detail I'd stress a bit more if I were you. Recall the hospital physician and close your case by impressing on the jury that every provision was made to take an ante-mortem statement from Keenan if he had recovered consciousness and that there is no possible doubt that he died without making one. With that established beyond denial old Miracle-man Judd and his client are done for."

"The prosecution will recall Dr. Stamboul for an additional question or two before resting its case," announced the state's attorney.

"Doctor, was any provision made at the hospital to take a statement from Detective Keenan if he had recovered consciousness as you testified you had reason to hope he might?" the prosecutor asked when his witness had returned to the stand.

"There was."

"What provision."

"A stenographer from police headquarters was in attendance throughout the day and at night a dictagraph ready for instant use was beside his bed."

"Was he alone at any time, even for a minute, before his death?"

"He was not. I, myself, was with him the greater part of the time. A nurse was beside him continuously."

"And he did not speak?"

"No, sir, he did not."

"That is all. Take the witness, Mr. Judd."

All through the trial Septimus Judd had sat back supinely in his chair, his eyes half-closed, the tips of his long fingers gently touching. He had not cross-examined any of the prosecution's witnesses for he knew each had told the truth fairly. No one in the courtroom knew better than he the weight of evidence that had been piled up against his client. And against this evidence he had absolutely no defense! Yet, even now with the moment upon him in which he must present a defense or see Clifford Corey convicted, his faith in an acquittal was unshaken. All through the trial he had been watching, waiting, expecting, anxiously but with confidence for the Something on which he relied.

That something for which he waited was a whiff of sweet William—an odor out of a still-living past and which, in a desperate crisis such as this he now faced, never failed to steal upon him softly, guiding him to his opportunity to maintain the truth and supplying the inspirational prescience for which he was noted.

AS the prosecutor relinquished the witness, Septimus Judd caught a first, faint whiff of the scent for which he longed. Instantly every question and answer the physician had made appeared before him as clearly as though on a typed transcript. Ready-formed, the questions he wished to ask were upon his tongue.

"Were you with Detective Keenan at the moment of his death, doctor?" he asked.

"I had left him shortly before. The nurse was with him."

"What is her name?"

"Lola Verner."

"That's all," said Judd, gratefully breathing in new and heavier waves of perfume that seemed to deluge him from a source behind and above his head.

"The prosecution rests," announced the state's attorney. The judge looked toward Judd and waited. The old lawyer rose slowly and turned, not toward the bench and the jury, but toward the rear of the courtroom from which the perfume seemed to flow.

Seated near the doors he saw a veiled woman whom he instantly recognized as the one who had fled so strangely from his intended kindness at the jail. The scent of sweet William now was as heavy as incense in Judd's nostrils and before his eyes appeared the page of the visitors' book at the jail on which was written:

"Lola Verner."

In a flash his true defense, complete, conclusive, irrefutable, was clear to him. He whirled toward the patiently waiting judge.

"If Your Honor please, the defense requests a brief recess before presenting its case, which will occupy but a few minutes," he announced.

The court nodded acquiescence; the jury filed out; and, beckoning Eve to follow him, Septimus Judd strode down the aisle and touched Lola Verner upon her shoulder.

"Come with me, please," he said. The woman cowered from him as from a deadly

peril but rose and slowly followed as he led the way from the courtroom. When they were behind the locked door of an anteroom the nurse, her eyes wide with fright, collapsed upon the nearest chair.

"Lola Verner," began Judd gravely as might one kindly disposed who regrets a painful necessity, "before he died Dan Keenan did speak. You were with him and, as you had been instructed to do, you started the dictagraph beside his cot which had been provided for just such an emergency. He told who killed his partner, Mike Costello, and who gave Keenan the wound from which, shortly later, he died. The man Keenan named, Lola Verner, was the man you love—the boy who snatched the accusing dictagraph record from your hand and broke it upon the floor at the county jail on the afternoon I first saw you. Because you loved him you secreted the record but you intended when he was safely out of harm's way, to restore it and free this woman's husband."

"God knows I did," whispered the woman between sobs. Then, springing to her feet under the goading spur of her lover's peril, she faced Septimus Judd defiantly. "It isn't so," she denied fiercely. "Keenan never spoke. Call me to the stand and I'll deny it on a thousand Bibles. He did not speak, do you hear? And if he had don't you think I would perjure myself to save the one I love? Any woman would."

She turned upon Eve with tigerish ferocity.

"You love the man out there on trial," she cried. "If you could save him with a lie or send him to his death with the truth would you tell that lie or not? Answer, and speak truly as you hope to see him freed."

"God forgive me, but I think I would lie to save him if there were no other way," was Eve's honest answer.

"You hear!" exclaimed the Verner woman triumphantly. "But we are wasting time. Keenan died without recovering consciousness. I'll swear to it."

HER false bravado vanished at the sight of Eve's stricken face and she stood before the wife with hands clasped in supplication for forgiveness.

"Denny Dugan will be in prison three years," she faltered. "May God save your man. I can't."

"Lola Verner, where are the pieces of the record you gathered up from the floor after Dugan smashed it?" demanded Judd. The woman's eye involuntarily turned to her hand-bag, which had fallen to the floor. The lawyer, reading her mind, stooped swiftly, caught it up and as she tried to snatch it from him, drew out the record now carefully cemented together.

"You were saving it to give to us when your own man was safe," asserted Judd. "You do wish to do right. I saw it at the jail."

"I do! I do!" the nurse moaned. Then, frenziedly as fears for her lover swept over her: "Don't think you've trapped me into betraying him. You haven't. That record is worthless to you. See, there's a piece gone and it's on the missing piece that Denny—that Keenan names the man he accuses. Without me you can't even prove that he didn't accuse your own client and as I hope my sins may be forgiven, I'll never speak while Denny is where they can lay hands on him."

"You are mistaken," Judd corrected. "I do not need you. I shall not even ask you to testify. I have the missing piece of the record."

He drew it from his pocket and fitted it to its place, where he secured it with mucilage from the bottle on the table.

"Often I had intended to throw this away," he said. "I never understood until now why I didn't."

Lola Verner's head dropped upon her arms in utter abandonment to grief.

Eve knelt beside her, and took her into comforting arms. So they still remained when Septimus Judd left them and telephoned the red-headed Walter to bring a dictagraph reproducing machine to the courtroom at once.

The dictagraph stood upon the witness stand with the patched record adjusted when the judge reascended the bench and the jury filed back to the box. Septimus Judd stood up with a queer, happy light in his keen old eyes that the puzzled prosecutor noted with uneasiness.

"Your Honor," he said, "the defense does not propose to call any living witness in this case. Proof of my client's innocence shall be give you in the voice of the dead —Dan Keenan's voice."

He switched on the dictagraph before a courtroom awed and stunned by amazement.

"I, Dan Keenan, knowing I am dying make this statement and swear it is the

truth," came from the instrument in a weak, trembling voice. "Tuckahoe Slim and Denny Dugan are the men—"

"Danny's voice! My Danny's voice!" screamed his widow.

"It's himself speakin' from the grave!" exclaimed a policeman.

The prosecutor who had sprung to his feet to protest the introduction of the dictagraph record as evidence until the source from which it came had been established, sank back into his chair without making an objection, obviously futile in the face of such spontaneous proof of the record's authenticity. The record rasped on to the end telling the true story of how Costello and Keenan met death at the hands of auto thieves they had arrested.

Ten minutes later the jury acquitted Clifford Corey without leaving the box.

LATER that afternoon a smiling, red-headed youth ushered Eve and her husband into Septimus Judd's private office. Eve flung her arms around him and kissed him. Cliff shook both his hands and choked over the words of thanks he couldn't utter. In the midst of the three-cornered jubilation that followed the red-headed youth knocked and reappeared with an afternoon paper. He pointed to a small item at the bottom of the page.

"In an attempt to escape from the state penitentiary where he was serving three years for auto thefts Dennis Dugan was shot and killed shortly after noon today by prison guards," Judd read and let the paper slip to the floor.

"She prayed that he might not go to his death through her," he murmured soberly looking across the table at Eve. "A merciful Providence has granted her prayer. I am truly thankful."

"And I, too," echoed Eve.

"And now before we leave you I want to arrange about your fee, Mr. Judd," said Corey when final congratulations had been resaid a dozen times. "Frankly I must earn the money before I can pay you but—"

"My boy, will you and your wife give me the fee that I want from you—the only one I will accept?" the old man interrupted.

"Of course," from the two together.

Septimus Judd again looked out of his open window toward the flower-covered hills beyond the bay.

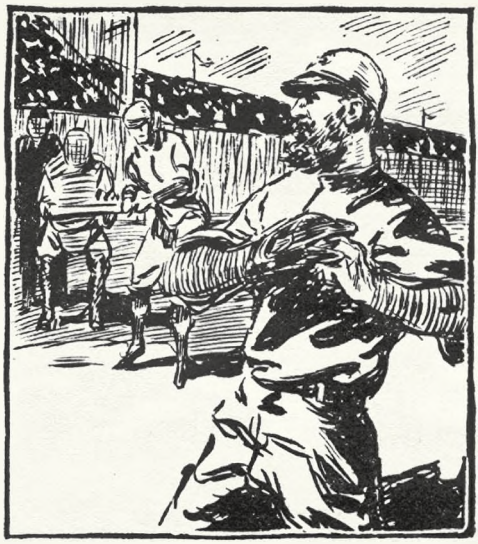
"Then, in the garden you two will have just outside the door of your cottage as you planned it once before, promise me there'll always be a bed of sweet William." The old man paused and his eyes dimmed with the mist of deep emotion. "Whatever happiness comes to you—and happiness surely will come—you will owe to the perfume of sweet William—and what it means to me. It's a blessedly sacred odor to me, my dears, something that serves and protects and guides me every day of my life because long, long ago there was a girl—" His voice failed him; he could not finish. "Run along now and leave an old man to enjoy himself in his own way," was the farewell he finally managed in faltering speech.

WHEN the Coreys were out of the office Septimus Judd pressed the bell that summoned his red-headed clerk.

"I am not in to anyone—not to anyone, Walter—for the rest of the afternoon," he commanded with a poor attempt at sternness.

And then when he was alone Septimus Judd did what he wished to do more than all else in the world. He tenderly drew out the sketches of his paper garden and painstakingly enlarged the bed of sweet William.

"There must be a great deal of sweet William—more and more each year as my time here grows shorter—a great deal of sweet William because she *loves* it so," he whispered happily to himself and in the accented present tense of the verb, Septimus Judd revealed unreservedly the faith that kept his heart young and his eyes wistfully, confidently peering ahead to a future land of restored happiness.



String Bean Slocum

From Big League pitcher to King of the Cannibal Islands —there's a career for you! And here's the story for you, told in a most engaging fashion by a new writer.

By WILLIAM BARTHOLOW

I HAVE known Mike McNulty for nearly fifty years, long before I went into the oil-business—since, in fact, I was a cub doing baseball for the *Globe* and he was a flannel-mouthed Mick breaking into the "big show." To see him now sitting on one end of the bench, with that old derby cocked over one eye, wigwagging signals to the base-runners, you'd never think it was the same man. He is dried up and shrunken like a weather-cured apple, and his old brown mug is crisscrossed with lines and pitted like a waffle; but get a square look at him—same old hard blue eye, same old kick behind it. They called him "the Hard-boiled Yegg," and in my day he was a ring-tailed tooter, and no mistake. I can close my eyes and see him squatting on his hind legs, radiating confidence like a ten-dollar bill, and joshing away like the end man in a minstrel show, and that old limber wing of his picking off the base-runners like Annie Oakley cracking glass balls.

Well, it's been a good many years since I followed baseball as a profession, but I'm up to Saint Louee every once in so often, and I always try to take in at least one game at the same old grounds where I used to watch Comiskey—he was thin then—and Tip O'Neill and that jack-rabbit of an Arlie Latham cavorting around. I've seen them all since before the days of masks and chest-protectors, but that old battery of String Bean Slocum and Mike McNulty has everything else I remember beaten both ways from the kitty.

The String Bean was about six feet six high, with hands like hams. He came from down in the Ozarks and made a living knocking the squirrels out of the trees. At any rate, that's how I wrote him up. It was exactly the same those days as it is now. The scouts would bring in the new ivory crop, and the newspaper cubs would be round trying to get a spring story about them—humorous, if possible. Well, I wrote up this Ozark squirrel story, how the String Bean plugs 'em between the eyes or he's ashamed to carry them home, and how finally it's like Davy Crockett and the coon. That night I'm down in front of Ben de Bar's Theater—all stores there now—and along comes the String Bean and Mike. They stop, and Mike, kidding the way he always does, introduces me as the famous author.

"Was that yo' hand of write in the paper today, suh?" drawls the Bean, very polite and shy. I admit the soft impeachment.

"Do you mind comin' over here a minute, suh? I got somethin' personal to ax you." He takes me up a little alleyway that goes around to the stage entrance, and I amble along, both ears cocked up, on the possible scent of a follow-up to my story.

"What I'd like to know, please suh," says Slocum stopping under a lamp, and very apologetic, "if you was funnin' in that paper, or did you mean it in general?" I was pretty flip in those days, and I came back with some josh or other.

In the middle of it Slocum says very gentle: "I caint stand personal funnin'—hit riles me."

THE next thing I remember was the doctor saying to the nurse: "Feed him on spoon-vittles for two-three days. Soon as that jaw gets over its soreness, he'll be all right."

That's the way I met Mr. String Bean Slocum, and the meeting impressed me, I must say. They told me that he sat up all that first night, and he insisted on paying my doctor's bill—and he was only a rookey, with a rookey's slim pickings. Strangely enough, after that we were the best friends in the world, and I could jolly him along without offense. Since it was a bit like teasing a pile-driver loaded with dynamite, however, I never became incurably addicted to it.

I kept an eye on him all through spring practice; his height made him easy to watch. I noticed that Mike was giving him a lot of attention, and he seemed to have plenty of "smoke." Lots of rookey pitchers are like that, burn 'em over like Walter Johnson but not one in three balls are within speaking distance of the plate. I asked Mike about it down in the lobby of the old Planters.

"Control?" he yells. "That baby's got everything. If old Chris would let me, I'd take a rockin' chair out beyant the plate an enj'y myself in the heat o' th' day." Mike had a real brogue in those days, though now you can hardly tell it.

Of course they didn't start him in a game. Just kept him bench-warming. One day he got a chance as relief. It was in the fifth inning; the game was lost anyway, and all the regulars were used up. It was the most beautiful thing I ever saw in my life. The young slim mountaineer warms up just like a well-oiled Corliss engine. He was as tall as a derrick and twice as calm, while Mike, grinning and chattering away like a monkey, simply held his glove behind the old platter and never had to move it. Wind up, *plunk!* Wind up, *plunk!* Each and every one a strike. They came in at all angles, not a "groover" among them—all corner-cutters, and speed to burn. The Greyhounds had one foot in the water-bucket most of the time, watching the good ones go by. There were three on when Slocum went in. He struck out the first two men on six pitched balls. The next man set himself and took a wicked swing. He just managed to top the ball, and it went twisting down the third-base line—meanest kind in the world to field. The Bean was on it like a hawk, reached out that long arm and touched the man going home, then with the same motion whipped it to first.

"Just to make certain, suh," he said afterward.

After that not a man touched the ball—not a walk, not a foul, all strike-outs. It was sure duck soup for Mike, who finished up the game with the biggest fool stunt I ever saw in my life. Two strikes on the batter—and Mike said: "Hold on a minute," fished out a cigarette and lighted it, then deliberately turned his back to the pitcher with his gloved hand crossed behind his back. Slocum took a careful wind-up. *Plunk*—right in the old cushion. Mike excavated the ball, held it up for all to see, blew a puff of cigarette smoke in the ump's face, who hadn't been giving the Blue Sox any the best of it, and the crowd went wild. Well, old Chris fined Mike twenty-five iron men in public, and then took him out behind the clubhouse and paid it back.

That was the String Bean's first game, and he lost it, but only because the Blue Sox were six runs behind when he went in. After that he took his regular turn in the box and finished the season with thirty-two wins and one licking, and that with a tail-end team.

THAT was the smoothest working pair I ever saw in action. When the umps announced, "Battrees for today's game, Slocum and McNulty," the home folks simply lit their *see*gars and settled back for a real nice time.

The Bean developed a slow one to sand-

wich in with the tabasco, and Mike grew more and more deadly in his throwing. He had a way of whipping it around the body of a batter to third while he was looking at the pitcher, that picked off many a fine prospect.

The Blue Sox finished in sixth place that year, but the next year Mike was made manager and things began to pop. Old Chris dug up a little money, and Mike bought a couple of infielders from the Coast League. He traded three old-timers for a good outfielder, picked up a bunch of college boys and sand-lotters, and started them all to work three weeks before the regular training-season began. "Work," I said; "drove them," I mean. All winter he'd been fiddling away on plans, and he had everything thought out: meals, rubbers, baths, cross-country hikes, blackboard study in the evenings, all new stuff in those days.

Then he had what he called a board of strategy. When they went out to actual practice, the strategy board took over small squads and drilled them for hours at one thing—laying down bunts, hitting the dirt, starting after a bunt and especially starting to go down with the wind-up.

Mike was a changed man. He grew rather professorial, and the brogue dwindled somewhat. I think the change came, more or less, from his association with the String Bean. Slocum talked like a hill-billy, but no more dignified gentleman ever walked the diamond. All the time he carried around with him this hair-trigger temper, and I have reason to know what happened when it went off. He blew up only once during a game, and that was when old Pete Berg was umpiring. He was bald as a coot, was Pete, and extremely sensitive about it. He thought nobody was wise, but all the boys on the Blue Sox knew it. They never kidded him, though, which shows how popular old Pete was. Well, one day Slocum came up to the bat, and he noticed Pete's lambrequins blowing out behind his mask just as though it was wash-day.

"Excuse me, Mistuh Berg," says the Bean, taking him aside and whispering, "I'm afraid suh, yore back hair's comin' down." Pete turns purple. Nobody could kid *him*.

"It is, *shorely*, Mistuh Berg," insists the Bean. "Lemme fix it fo' you, suh." Pete backed away, moving his hands and gurgling. Suddenly he toppled over.

"Sunstroke!" yells Mike, running out with the club doctor; and that's all anybody ever knew about it.

The hand, gentlemen, is quicker than the eye, especially String Bean Slocum's hand. The doc' never said anything, and Pete bragged for years about that sunstroke and the strange symptom of a powerful sore jaw that went with it.

That night we three had supper together, as we generally did when the Blue Sox were in town, and the Bean told all about it. It seemed that he was the last of the Slocums. All the rest had been killed off in one of those Ozark feuds. So, of course, he came naturally by that fierce temper.

"I see now," says he, "that Mistuh Berg mistook me. I was tryin' to he'p him, an' he says somethin' very uncomplimentary 'bout my ancestuhs. My ancestuhs bein' dead an' gone, hit riles me considible an' suddint. So I busts him."

WELL, that was the year of the big wind, all right. The Blue Sox were off with the bell, and the League got its first taste of inside stuff. The "delayed steal," the "hook slide," the "hit-and-run," the "squeeze," scoring from second on a bunt—that was the year all those plays came in, and Mike McNulty and his board of strategy invented every one of them.

I was a privileged character by that time. I attended many of those blackboard lectures by Professor Mike, and always came away feeling that I could lick my weight in wildcats. It was just the same, I suppose, with the team.

Curiously enough, at those lectures he dropped his brogue entirely. Perhaps it was because he was so much in earnest.

"This baseball," said Mike, standing up before his blackboard, "is a business; and a business, to be successful, needs brains, and organized brains at that. A successful business is one that makes money. In our business we will make money if we win games. How do we win games? By making more runs than the other guys. Now, what's the secret of making runs? Getting up and trying to kill it, like what the other teams are doing? That needs natural heavy hitters, and if there is any on this team, they have never announced it to me; but I'm living in hopes. Now listen, and listen hard. Our game is to get the first man on, and *when* he's on, to push him around. What's the safest way, the surest way of getting on? A walk, of course. What do you think I've been train-

ing you babies for a month to foul off the good ones for? No other reason but to get on." It was before the day of the foul strike. "Of course you can get *hit*," (Dummy Joy, our lead-off man, looked sad when it was explained to him), "but there's no other sure way. After a man is on, the thing to do is to push him around. Safest weapon is the bunt. You can all lay the short ones down the base-lines, but I mean where you don't pull it, but meet it. Find out who is to cover—short or second, and push it in the direction of the hole. Batter signals, and it's up to him to meet the ball. Runner goes in to second standing up and watching the coacher at third. If he gets the high sign, he takes a chance and keeps right on."

Then Mike went on to analyze the opposing team, batter by batter: Where he generally hit, where he hit when it was high and wide, and where it went when it came over on the inside.

"Jumbo Costigan up: catcher signals a groover. Where are you, Dummy?"

Dummy Joy, our deaf-and-dumb centerfielder got up and put his peg back underneath the flagpole. (The board was covered with little holes and a peg for every player).

"Now, Jim, you and Monahan." The right and left fielders went up to the board and placed *their* pegs closer in and covering the center-field lane. The infield huddled up, and it was very apparent that if Mr. Costigan hit where he always *has* hit, he's a gone coon.

"Now high and wide." The third baseman moved over toward short. Second played deep and toward first. Short went over back of second, and the right fielder camped just off the foul line. Man after man, and play after play, Mike drilled them: with a man on first and one down, then with the bases filled and no outs, and so on.

THE first game of the season was an eye-opener to me. The String Bean was in fine form, and the top of the batting order was mowed down, one-two-three. In our half the Dummy came up, fouled off five good ones and finally got on. Goodhue, one of the new college boys, bunted a slow roller down the third base-line and streaked it. Dummy crossed second without a pause and legged it for third, which nobody covered. Goodhue bluffed a steal, and the ball went to the pitcher. The next time, he went down in earnest, but Dummy hugged third. Mike came up—two balls on him; the next had to be good. He gave Dummy the wink, and the mute was not ten feet away and Goodhue had already passed third, when Mike met it—a perfect slow one toward first. The play was made there, but all hands were safe. Before the inning was over, the Blue Sox were five runs to the good and not a ball out of the infield.

Then the String Bean eased up, and Mike began to work the shift. Man on first; in the press-box I got the signal for "high and inside." First went over to second's position. Second dropped back of the bag. Short moved toward third, and third came in closer. Very deliberately the Bean cut the inside corner; the batter took a quick swing—daisy-cutter right at short. A double play, of course, and the famous combination was inaugurated, "Goodhue to Jernigan to Potts," which I suppose has appeared a thousand times in print since then.

In the fourth inning Jumbo Costigan was on second and Jernigan was squatting on the bag tying his shoe, Goodhue making very flattering inquiries about Jumbo's batting average. Mike made his usual speedy return to the String Bean, who sidestepped out of the way quickly. Jumbo looked around to find the ball in Jimmy Jernigan's glove.

That's the way the Sox won ball games. Not a home run that season, and only six three-baggers. They called them "the hitless wonders," but they made enough. They were mostly bunts, to be sure, or little pokes over the infield when it came in too close, or through holes in left uncovered, but the League never saw such daring base-running or such flashy fielding. If Mike had been able to buy another good pitcher in addition to the String Bean, there would have been nothing to it. But at any rate they all had control, and that was all that was necessary for the Sox' style of play.

Down into the homestretch they came fighting neck and neck with the Greyhounds, and they won out by the old String Bean's pitching. This baby went in every three days regularly, as relief when necessary, and once he pitched a double-header. Slocum was a tired boy for the world's series—a five-game series it was then, with the Bruisers, a heavy-hitting outfit. The Bean won the first game, and with a sore

arm too. The Sox lost the second and third; and the fourth went to extra innings before the Sox won with five straight bunts and Slocum pitching his head off.

Next morning Mike came in before breakfast; Slocum was in bed with his arm like a dead thing, and flushed with fever. "Good-by pennant!" said Mike to himself, and left him in the doctor's care.

WELL, Sweeny started, for the Sox, and that boy was certainly lucky. He got by in the first with the Bruisers lamming him all over the lot. Double plays saved him in the second and third; and in the fourth, with a man on third, the Dummy picked one off his shoestrings and sent it for home like a bullet without stopping to look. We got the decision at the plate by a split hair. In the fourth two singles and a pass filled the bases. Mike waved Sweeny out, and he was looking round for something he hadn't got, when the old String Bean wabbled out of the clubhouse and came weaving out to the box, glassy-eyed and tottery, but all there. It was just like old Black Jack coming out with a wreath and making his little speech: "Lafayette, we are here." Just as solemn as that, until the stands saw who it was, and then they nearly yelled their heads off.

The Bean tried to warm up, but it was pitiful to see the ghastly grin on his face as he brought that creaky old soup-bone around. The batter took a good toehold, and it came up like a wounded duck. It was Bim Lonergan, the heaviest hitter on the Bruisers, and he missed it a mile. Bim got set again, and here she came, big as a barn and as drunk as a mud-hen. Bim nearly ruined himself on that one, and I could see that he was puzzled. The next time he was going to be very careful. It came up until you could count the stitches on her—and Bim hit under it a foot.

Next man up was that foxy little Frenchman, La Vergne. Frenchy choked his bat, stepped forward, and—whango, he met it! The String Bean went up in the air until I could see the center-field bleachers under him, and I was sitting in the press-stand, six feet above the ground. He just seemed to stick there, like one of these slow-motion movies you see nowadays, and the ball stuck for a second too, and then it shot out like a bullet, and into Peg Jamison's glove at third before Slocum touched the ground.

That was the break for the Sox. They went in with murder in their eyes and scored four runs. Slocum kept feeding up wabblers, first a slow one, and then one so slow the first one seemed fast. Now and then the Bruisers would straighten out a cripple, and generally it went for extra bases. In the ninth the Sox were just one run to the good, and the wrecking-crew of the Bruisers up. Lead-off man got a three-bagger. Mike went out and put his arm around Slocum, and it was then the miracle happened. The old Bean, white as a ghost, with sweat trickling down his face that wasn't from the heat, pitched as he never pitched before, just nine times, and they came over as big as peas, hopping like smoky grasshoppers. As the third man took a wicked swing against nothing the Bean stood dazed, grinning like a skull. Then his knees gave way, he toppled and came down like a redwood falling. That's how Mike won his first championship.

IT was a month before the String Bean was out of the hospital, and then he went down to the Bonesetter for treatment. Word came back, "There's no use. The old soup-bone is completely ruined." Mike, the same old Mike that you call the "hard-boiled yegg," cried like a baby when he got the letter.

Well, that winter old Chris arranged for a barn-storming trip—the first time a baseball team ever invaded Japan. Slocum went as assistant manager, excess baggage under the circumstances, and at the last minute Baldy Sloan, owner of the *Globe,* came in and asked me if I wanted to go along as war correspondent. He didn't expect an answer, so he wasn't disappointed.

That was a great trip. Big fat wrestlers, geisha girls, theaters with music like a cat-fight, and these little baby buggies Mike called gin rickey shays to carry you everywhere. They treated us as though we were something precious, and polite—they were as bad as Slocum himself.

I must tell you about Mike. He was almost drowned once, and that in four feet of water. There were hot baths in this Jap hotel in a little enclosure with a fence around it. Mike was out there alone, paddling like a porpoise in a dishpan, when he looked up, and the top of the fence was lined with grinning brown faces like kids at a ball-game back home. Mike blushed all over and dived. When he came up for air, they would fetch a squeal, and *down* would go Mike. Well sir, this kept up till Mike was almost worn out. I come around as

he was going down for the third and last time, and shooed them away. I suppose it saved his life, but he never showed what you might call gratitude, especially after I wrote it up in the *Globe*.

At the games it was almost like going to church. They squatted around like a lot of brown demijohns as quiet as mice, except when somebody struck out or something like that; when they'd clap gently and remark "Banzai!" but not very loud, because royalty was present. And then, maybe, they would give the batter the keys to the city, or a tea-set in a shiny little lacquered box.

It was a great life, but wearing on the String Bean. He went in once at Osaka, but he couldn't get the ball halfway to the plate. After that he got scrawnier and thinner than ever, and politer, if possible. We were worried about him. Either Mike or I were with him most of the time. Mike was always talking about how many games the Bean would win next year, and our chance for the championship, but Slocum never smiled.

WHEN we were out about a week, on the voyage home, we ran into a bad storm, that Mike still calls a "mongoose," and it carried us south for days, away off our course. When it blew over, we were among a lot of little islands, nobody knew where, and picking our way very carefully. The String Bean and I sat up late watching the moon through those feather-duster trees. Whether it was the night or not I don't know, but Slocum became confidential.

"It's no use, suh," said he. "I'm through, I reckon. Old souper's finished. I shorely wanted to git in thar next year and he'p Mike out, and if I ever gits soopled up, you'll see the old bat'ry in action again."

"Sure," I said, which was all I *could* say. We looked down over the side where the water bubbled, as if with little drops of fire, and smoked a pipe without saying anything. Finally he got up, stretched, and we went in, off what Mike called the "front porch." He fumbled his cabin door, and just as he opened it he hesitated, and said: "Wish you'd tell Mike, in case—"

I never quite got all of it. And that's the last we ever saw of the old String Bean. He simply disappeared. Next morning the English steward came round but instead of intoning "Your bawth is ready, sir," as usual, he said that Mr. McNulty would like to see me at once. I found him in Slocum's room; but Slocum was gone, and Mike was terribly broken up about it, blaming himself for demanding so much of the boy, and for his failure to keep a closer watch over him.

We all thought that Slocum had made away with himself, but nobody would admit it. When we got back, I cooked up a story for the newspapers that went big, "Washed overboard by a tidal wave, famous pitcher lost at sea." And we let it go at that.

IT'S strange how the loss of one man will affect a ball-team. The Sox for the next two years were hardly recognizable. They finished in the first division, but that was about all. The third year they came along in better style, and seemed to have regained a little of their lost morale.

I was already in the oil-business by that time. We had an office in Saint Louee and one in Oklahoma City, but I was down in the Territory most of the time watching production, and too busy to look at a newspaper. One day one of the drillers, a little darky named Freedom Washington, went to town for supplies. When Freedom came back, he said the Blue Sox had a new "southpaw" and were cleaning up everything in sight.

"Boss," said he, "dey tells me he's one of these here Cubians, like where de *see*-gahs come from. Great big black man, so big he can mos' reach out to fust base an' tech de runnah. Got whiskahs all ovah him, same lak one dese heah cattymounts. Calls him er wil' man, but aint nothin' wil' 'bout his pitchin'. Stan' up yondah, big as er co'thouse. Ol' empire say, is you *ready?* Ol' ahm go roun' lak one dese heah win'mills; den *wham!* right in ol' catchah's mitt. White folks up at barbuh shop say ony way to hit dat baby is to begin when he's a win'millin'. Time you wait an' git yo' min' made up, hit's fifteen minutes late."

Well, I had to go to Saint Louee the next week, and I looked up the schedule and found out that the Blue Sox were playing at home. I got in late and telephoned immediately to Mike. He invited me to come over and take supper with him, but he was so excited that he stuttered, and I could hardly understand what he meant. I gathered that supper was to be in his room, which only added to my

perplexity. Fearing that the old boy might be ill, for he seemed almost hysterical, I hustled over to the Planters, and up to the big front room on the third floor that was always reserved for Mike. Sitting in a rocking chair was the biggest man I ever saw, dark as a Spaniard, wearing great bushy whiskers.

"Meet Mr. King," said Mike, grinning like a chessy cat.

"Pleased to meet you, Mr. King," said I, shaking hands. Well sir, he nearly shook my hand off, Mike haw-hawing like one of these laughing whatyoucallems—hyenas.

"What business are you in, Mr. King?" I said, when I finally got back what's left of my hand.

"I use' to be in the baseball business," said the big fellow, with a slow drawl, "but I aint been workin' at it lately."

"Mr. King's my new pitcher," chipped in Mike, as though he were taking the pot.

"Pardon me, but are you perhaps one of these House of David players?" said I, and they roared like a couple of lunatics.

"You tell him," yelled Mike, gasping his last.

The big chap drawled: "I use' to be quite a pitcher once, when I'm young an' tender. Fat little newspaper squirt named me. He called me String Bean Slocum, the Ozark squirrel-hunter."

WELL, sirs, that was certainly the supreme surprise of my life. I sat there with my mouth open while everybody pounded everybody else. I don't suppose there ever were three happier people in the world; and that dinner—boys, oh, boys, there never *was* such a dinner! Iced Rocky Fords, black bass and fried chicken, quail and sugar-cured ham.

"Well, Mr. String Bean," I said finally, when we are down to coffee and cigars, "you seem to have filled out some since your squirrel-hunting days, when I knew you. Do you mind telling a fat newspaper squirt just why you are ambushing around behind all this foliage, and furthermore, why Mike calls you Mr. King?"

"The whiskuhs, suh, is because of Li Chee, and Mistuh McNulty is puffectly correct," he says, standing up, very proud. "I am King—King of Lusiva."

Well, I've seen a few kings in my time but they were not even what you might call face-cards when you looked at the "String Bean." He looked like the real thing, and I reckon he *was* the real thing.

"Begin at the beginning, Your Majesty," says Mike; and Slocum lit a fresh cigar and got under way.

"Well, gentlemen," says he, "we met last on the *Rivenoak*—Yokohama to Vancouver. You know as well as I know, I had no right to make that Japanee trip. Mike, here, just took the old busted String Bean along fo' ballast. I got to thinking while we're ovah there, and I cain't stand it no longer, bein' toted roun' and handed a job fer the reason Mike thinks he's got to do somethin' for me. I feels tolerble worthless an' lonesome. That night aftuh the big sto'm when we gets mixed up with those islands, I slips up on deck, nuthin' but a pair of runnin'-pants on. She is paddlin' along very slow, an' close in between two islands. I dives off without givin' myself time to think it over, and next few minutes I'm busy keeping away from that big propeller. Well, I swum along fer a while, favorin' my soah ahm, an' floatin' occasional, lookin' up at the big stahs like out of a well—seems like you could reach up an' touch 'em, they was that near.

"I swims, an' I floats, but it don't seem like as if I gets no closer. Then I sees what's the mattuh. Current settin' in between them two islands carryin' me with it. Then I gets to work in earnest, and along about sunup I'm most petered out. I keep on, though, somehow, todes where I hears the surf roar. I'm past seein' then, and finally a big wave takes me in with a rush an' busts me on the coral. Some way I goes plumb over the reef at the same time. I must have floated in the easy watah of the lagoon to the islan' propah. I don't recollect anything of it.

"NEXT thing I knows, I'm half in and half out of the watah, just where a little creek makes into the lagoon. I am tore most to ribbons, an' I feel all oveh jus' like one big boil. My head is on the sand, and my ears is full of it. I'm just so much seaweed, and there I lay helpless as a baby—can't wiggle a finger. One of these here white parrots with a top-knot lights right over me, looks down jus' once, lets out a squawk and travels away from there in a hurry. I hear a kind of clickin' noise in the brush, and I see out of the corner of my eye a monstrous big crab. He projects around and finally climbs right up a tree.

" 'Oh, very well,' says I, kind of dreamy, 'it's startin' out interestin'. Bring on your

pink-toed didappers and your yeller-bellied whifflepups.'

"So I aint surprised none when I hear, away off, a sound of singin'. It comes nearer and nearer. Then across the creek I see, through the trees, some little girls and young ladies with flowers in their hair and all folickin' away like a Sunday school picnic. They have got on little skirts of grass, and ropes of flowers about their necks, very purty, and not much else. I aint prepared for what happens next. Somebody must of said, 'Last one in's a nigger,' for before I could blink, they'd shucked off everything. I closed my eyes quick, but I could hear them *plop-plop!* diving in. *Such* a racket and splashin' you never heard. Then, of a sudden, everything is still, like as if you stopped one of these phoneygraphs in the middle of the opry—just a sort of scuttlin' in the bushes. Somebody steals up, very quiet, and a warm little hand is pressed over my heart. I open one eye and look into what I reckon is the loveliest face in the whole world. I shut it quick and kep' it shut. Yonder I was, practic'ly in my birthday clothes, and the most beautiful young lady you ever see, bendin' over me, an' making sorrowful little noises.

"She hollers out, an' the others come trottin' back. They fix me up on some sort of rig between two poles, and we go off down a path through the trees, very careful, the girls totin' me and takin' turns. I open one eye occasion'ly to see what's goin' on, still kind of fuzzy in the head. It aint long before we come to a lot of houses like big beehives. They tote me in one, and lay me down on some kind of soft mats, and then this little brown lady washes out the coral cuts and goes all over me with some kind of buttery stuff, kneadin' it in very soothin', and singin' very soft an' pitiful. Next I drink a bowl of somethin' that tastes like chicken soup and clabber milk, and drops off. Must have slept about a week, I reckon. Anyway, when I came to, there is King Peter and Father Mellody.

" 'Ho!' says the King, chucklin'. He is a big, fat man. 'Littly bit aw rite, dammyeyeswhat!' That was all the United States he knows, and most of *it* is English.

"Father Mellody is a little man with white hair and a long black coat. He has been a missionary there on Lusiva for eight years, and after doctorin' them through the smallpox twicet there aint nothin' they wont do for him. He was the kind of man that understands you right off; and before I know it, I tell him everything.

" 'Well, my son,' says he, when I finish, 'it's not for me to say whether you done right, or not. Suttinly you acted honerbul, and if you was foolish you had a close call for it. If the Princess Melita, there, hadn't found you, I guess I'd of had a chance to preach yore funeral.'

"I says: 'If the Princess is the lovely little lady I remember, I shore would like to thank her.' Over in the dark, beside the wall, somebody I hadn't seen before spoke up, an' Father Mellody tells the King what I says, an' both of them laughs fit to kill. It's my little lady, who's been there all the time. What she says is, that she's powerful glad to save a warrior who is so tall an' beautiful.

"Well, I come around slow, generally speakin', but it's wonderful how that cocoanut lard rubs the soreness out of my muscles. Soon I'm able to hobble. I'm shore glad to be up an' around and visit with Father Mellody.

"HE has a regular house and a walk with whitewashed rocks and little home flowers growing alongside of it, pinks an' black-eyed susans an' snap-dragons like you see in the country. There is three rooms. One is a big room, mostly books, with a fireplace—not for the heat but for the cheer of it, he'd say; and in one corner a big gold harp, and evenin's we'd sit there an' smoke, and he'd talk, or play on that harp.

"Sometimes King Peter (the Queen was dead) comes, and often the Princess, but always if he was playin', you could hear outside all round the house, a soft hummin', like bees. That would be the natives squatted in a circle, come to hear the music, an' joining in, very gentle.

"Well, that was shore a fine little island, and the best people in the world. Reason for it is, I reckon, because they don't hardly ever see any whites. A Chinese trader named Li Chee touches there twicet a year, and takes away a cargo of copra and pearl-shell—but that's all. There is plenty fish and fruit and chickens and pigs, and nobody has to work much. Some of the boys spend considerable time pearl-divin', and Father Mellody tells me that the King has a big lot of them stowed away that Li Chee has been tryin' to get out of him for years.

"I go out with the boys and get the hang of it, and then I take it up pretty regular, this divin' bein' always easy for me. It's like this. You go out in one of these here little dugouts loaded with good-sized rocks. You have a little bag over your shoulder, sort of like a fish-net. You stand up, holdin' one of these rocks in your hand, take a big breath an' down you go. Then you grab up all the oysters in reach, chuck them into this here bag, drop the rock, give a big kick and come up for air.

"I got to studying about it one night at Father Mellody's—he made me come over to live with him; an' I remember about these glass-bottomed boats out in California. Father Mellody had some extra window-sash he gives me, an' I make a watertight box like a little flat-boat that I can put in the water and see the bottom most anywhere, except in the deepest parts. The King has a rusty old hay-rake that he has bought from Li Chee, nobody ever knows what for, and I take half a dozen of the tines and rig up a sort of iron basket and fasten it on a long cane pole. The morning I go out with that contraption I get more shell than I get usual in a week, so I'm a going concern, even if I don't find many pearls.

"Well, I get as black as the rest of the boys, out in the sun that way, and I begin to fill out, kind of gettin' my growth, you might say. Every night I go round, and the Princess gives the old soup-bone a goin' over with the coconut dope. Once I forget, an' she comes over to see Father Mellody, cryin' right pitiful. You see, she was just a little girl, an' I had hurt her feelin's. I like to cried myself, when he told me. Nobody ever worried like that about me before. After that, you bet I was a reg'lar customer.

"Well, the old wishbone gits soopled up some, and I spend part of each morning practicin' easy wind-ups on the beach with these here round pebbles. Trouble is, they are too heavy for their size. Finally I get together a lot of young coconuts the size of a baseball, husk and dry them out. More trouble—too light—so I try fillin' 'em with sand, pluggin' up the holes with this here thin bark they use to make clothes of—anything to give the right weight. They made tolerble good balls, but not very durable. I stretch a blanket between two trees and a pile of soft grass underneath to catch them, and I'm ready for the big series. Not much use! I finally gets my slow one goin', but when I try to put anything *on* her, it most kills me. One mornin' I am out floatin' 'em up to the square pattern in the middle of my blanket that I called Mike, when I got to thinkin' of that fool southpaw, Bugs Hennessy. Then it comes to me, all of a sudden, if that pore idiot can pitch with his left hand, why can't I? I tried it out and hit the blanket. Then I get excited, and begin to teach Lefty all the baseball I know. Little by little, day by day, as the feller says, he comes along—more speed, then a little curve, and after about three months he's got everything, control, smoke, quick-breakin' shoots—everything.

"ONE day I wake up and Li Chee's dirty old schooner is in the harbor. First thing come to my mind: 'I'll be back to he'p Mike with the end of the season,' and I starts to pack up.

"All that day Father Mellody is goin' round with a long face he tries to hide, and when I come on the Princess sudden, she busts out cryin' and runs away. That night the boys come over to the house and sings somethin' that would most tear your heart out, all about our brother, the great Palm Tree. How he was washed ashore and took root, and finally pulled up and left. It was too much for me. Funny, I aint near so anxious to leave the island as I was before.

"I row out next morning, anyway, to see Li Chee, an' I don't like his looks a little bit. He feels same way, I reckon, for when I asks him about takin' me off, all he says is: 'No can do; velly solly.' Then, natchully, I want to go, the worst way. Finally I show him my biggest pearl. That gets him all het up. He drops this Chink way of talkin' an' speaks better than what I can. Wants me to take a drink, have a *see*gah, old college chums all of a sudden. Then he begins to talk about King Peter's pearls. I let him go on until he makes a direck offer. He takes me off, if I finds out where Peter hides his pearls. That riles me considible, and I busts him. On the way out I busts a couple more Chinks that tries to stop me, and rows ashore zigzaggy, expectin' to feel a bullet in the back at every stroke. I go right to Father Mellody with it, and he sends for King Peter. 'Littly bit aw rite,' says old Peter, thanking me. 'Dammyeyeswhat!' Anyway, he seems satisfied, and they aint nothin' special to do, so we does it.

"Father Mellody tells me this Li Chee went to school in the U. S. A., but he's a bad egg, belongs to the Moy Sing *tong* even when he is a student. One of the worst rogues in the South Seas, blackbirder, and thief, pirate maybe—he don't know.

"Well, old Peter goes off very gay, but I notices he posts his men at night all along the beach. They aint takin' a chance on a night attack. Daytimes they aint a sign of life on the schooner, hardly. She just lays there, sails a-slattin', swingin' with the tide, two-three days.

"After a while I go back to batting practice with the blankets, same as usual. I'm jus' gettin' limbered up one mornin', when I hear a shot, and a big racket down on the beach. I don't lose no time about gettin' there, and when I busts through the trees, the Chinese is puttin' off in a boat, and King Peter and our boys after them with their long spears. Li Chee is standin' in the stern, and I see why our boys hasn't speared him before. He's holdin' the Princess up before him, and they're afraid to take a chance. As I come up, he takes deliberate aim. 'That,' says he, 'that's for your stubbornness!' An' poor old Peter drops like a log. All this time I been carryin' one of my coconut baseballs. There aint much to aim at but his head, but I takes a quick wind-up and lets him have it. Well, all I got to say, if it *had* of been a baseball, that Chink would of been minus a bean. As it was, he fell one way, as the Princess dropped overboard an' put out for shore. Them Chinks most busted themselves pullin'. I gets two that I knows of, and some of them looks like pincushions before they is out of range.

"I look around, an' there is King Peter bad hurt, his head in the Princess' lap, and Father Mellody bendin' over him. Me and the boys jump in the boats, fightin' mad, and put out for the schooner. The Chinks is too quick for us—anchor up an' all sails spread before we are more than half way to her; and then it was no use. She could go twicet as fast as we could.

"THE boys is mighty sad, comin' back. They start singing the most pitiful song ever heard, an' beatin' time very slow with their paddles. I reckoned it wasn't one of their reg'lar songs, but one made up about the King. They certainly loved old Peter.

"At the village everybody was indoors, mournin'. Even the dogs was tied up. It was a mighty lonesome place. I see Father Mellody for a minute, and he says the King can't last long. There aint anything I can do, so I go home.

"I get out a book of sermons and wade into it a piece. It was hard readin', all about some old-time fellers that thought a thousand angels could set on the p'int of a needle, an' the Holy Ursula what floated off on a raft, an' a whole passel of young ladies with her; it didn't say what for.

"I get to thinkin' of the Princess when that skunk of a Li Chee had holt of her. 'Spose I had missed him, what then? 'Spose I'd hit *her* instead of that yeller devil? The very thought makes me weak and trembly. Thinks I, 'spose I had gone off and left her, and all this had happened. I never could of helt my head up again. Right away I see why I felt so funny about leavin' the islands. It wasn't the boys; it wasn't Father Mellody so much—it was the *Princess*. I knowed then that she meant more to me than all the rest, the Blue Sox an' Mike here included. So long as she needs me, I'm goin' to hang around.

"After a while one of the boys comes in. He takes holt of my hand and points to the village, so I reckon that Father Mellody wants me. When I get there, the big open place in front of the King's house is filled with folks all squatted up close and perfectly quiet—not a sound but the wash of the surf on the reef. They have brung King Peter out and propped him up on a couch. He's got his shield and his big spear, and he is most covered with ropes of white flowers. A moon like a big silver dollar is ridin' up through the trees. The King is speakin' very slow and feeble, but you could hear every word. Father Mellody whispers to me, and I get the gist of it.

"'My people,' says he, 'your king is dead, King Peter is dead. This is a dead man who is speakin' to you. The dead craves to sleep in peace, but no sleep can come to him unless the mind is at rest. No son have I left to reign over you, my people; an' but one daughter only—the Princess Melita. Now it comes to me, who am already dead, that I may sleep in peace, if befo' I go, you choose a wise ruler, and that he be joined in marriage to the Princess so that the royal line may go on unbroken.'

"He stopped, and a little noise comes on like the wind in the leaves; louder and louder it grows, then dies away slow. It's

the people beatin' on the bare earth and on little log drums with their hands. Just like in town meetin', and everybody votin' aye.

"Then an old-timer gets up and makes a speech. He is nominatin' Molihua, one of the pearl-divers. Molihua goes forward and stands in front of the King. The folks beat on the drums till another man gets up to speak. They go on till six or eight of the boys is all standin' in line. Finally the one I calls Mike gets up. He is the little ugly feller I fishes with generally. Mike makes a speech, and the drums roll louder than before, seems to me.

" 'He means you,' says Father Mellody, pushin' me forward. I stumble out to the front, like as if in a dream, and stand up there with the other boys. The King says somethin', and the Princess walks out holdin' a big rope of flowers fastened into a loop. All the boys kneel down as stiff as if they was wood, and me with them. I am at one end of the line, and she begins at the other, walkin' along very slow and proud, and makin' as if she would hang the flowers over the head of first one and then another. Ever' time she does this, everybody takes a deep breath—'A-a-ah!'—like when a home run goes foul by inches. I don't know how the rest of the boys is feelin', but if they are any worse off than what I am, they must be in a terrible fix. The whole place is just cracklin' with excitement when she comes along in front of me. She makes two-three passes with that loop. I like to of died, afraid to look at her. Finally the loop goes over my neck and stays there. The drums roll out awful noisy. The Princess takes my hand very shy, and we walk over to where the King is. The Princess puts my hand in his, and he straightens up and booms out somethin' very loud that fetches a yell out of ever'body. Then he drops back, and says, so low you can hardly hear him: 'Littly bit aw rite, dammyeyeswhat!' I reckon he died then, but it is several minutes before he lets go my hand.

"THEY tote him in the big house, and ever'body sits around little fires and sings, low and mournful. I look around for Father Mellody, and he's gone, so I stand round on one foot, and by and by I follers him home. He is prayin' when I come to the door and I wait until he stands up, before I go in.

" 'Well, my son,' says he, puttin' his hands on my shoulders, 'what you doin' here? Fine sort of bridegroom you are. Don't you know you are the King of Lusiva, and a married man to boot?' Well, I allows that it's the fust time I ever been either of them, so I don't know quite how to act. He laughs an' pokes fun at me awhile; then he says that if I don't feel properly married, he reckons he will have to do the job right. He claps his hands, and the door opens, and there is the Princess and several of the young ladies to wait on her. Well, we get married all over again very solemn an' correct.

"The next day I start in to bein' a king. It comes to me without my seekin' the nommynation, but, thinks I, I got to do the best I can with her. There aint much to settle—little disputes like two families claimin' the same dog, and an old mother-in-law tryin' to rule the roost, same as at home in the best families. Father Mellody he'ps me out, and everybody is satisfied. I begin to get on to the lingo, and Melita picks up a little United States. I makes some more grapplin'-baskets and we go after oysters in earnest. It aint long before we have a powerful big pile of shell on the beach, and I got a little bag of pearls around my neck worth an awful lot of money.

"Father Mellody is some worried about Li Chee. He is sure that Chinee skunk will be up to some devilment sooner or later. Well, they is a little range of mountains runnin' right through the middle of Lusiva, same as on Matea, which is the name of the other island, close by. But on our island it's all thick woods, and in one place a monstrous big cave with runnin' water in it, and hard to find for anybody who don't know about it. I had the boys take up lots of dried fish and hams and the like of that, so if we had to, we could hide out there. It don't look as though anybody can scare us off, because the boys is fierce enough fighters when they get mad, but they aint a single gun on the island except one old muzzle-loader. Anyway, it was well to be prepared. You never can tell what's goin' to happen, and as I was king, I was sort of responsible.

"They was a flat place without many trees, back from the village a piece, and I sets the boys to work clearin' it up. It was quite a job first an' last, but finally we fixes it up, and we got as good a diamond as you can see anywheres. We got plenty yarn an' cork and pigskin, an' I

keep fussin' until we rig up some tolerbul good baseballs. The boys took to the game fine. They could all throw good, but they was most awful butter-fingered and they couldn't bat for sour apples. Every mornin' we go through reg'lar practice, an' then we'd choose up and play four-five innings. They got better an' better. Some of the boys got so they could hit 'em a mile. This boy I call Mike was the best of the lot. Well, it was a great life—everybody happy. Snappy little workouts, of a mornin', pearl-fishin' in the evenin'. So it goes along two-three years. Melita learns to talk right good and to write an' play on the harp. Ever' Sunday, Father Mellody preaches to us out under the trees, and I read most all his books until I reckon I could jump in and preach my own self.

"ONE night I am out with the boys fishin' in the harbor. The fish come up, great schools of them, and break out of the water where some shark is after them. Right then's when you throw out your net. It's like a purse-net, and as soon as it sings, you pull on the rope, and in she comes, alive with fish. Well, that night we hadn't more than started, when we see a schooner come stealin' into the harbor without lights. We hung around long enough to make sure it was Li Chee, and then we put out for the village. We hadn't more than reached the shore, when a big shell goes sailin' over us and busts. They don't see us. What they are shootin' at is the lights in the village. The boys is so scared that a body can see it's no use to try to make a stand. First time they've heard anything bigger than a musket. Main thing is to get all of them hid away in the cave. We paddle as fast as we can, an' when we hit the beach, we are runnin' already.

"In the village it's terrible—ever'body screechin' like crazy folks and scared stiff. My best outfielder is killed, and Poonitakila, the fastest man on bunts in the league, is crippled bad. I get them all lined up and off for the cave, and then I put out for home. We have built a right nice house close to Father Mellody's, and that's over a mile away, up the shore. I lope along, not losin' any time. I hear a shell explode ahead of me, and then I put on full speed. When I break into the clearin', I see Father Mellody's house on fire, what they is left of it. I am clear out of my head by that time, and I make that last hundred yards in record time.

"I can hear Melita cryin' in there somewheres, and I break through what *was* a window, and there is Father Mellody with a roof beam across him, and my little girl tuggin' away and tryin' to pull him out. I git my back under it, and she drags him out easy. He has a bad cut across his head, but they don't seem to be any bones broke. I told you that he was a little man, nothin' to carry; so we start off for the cave, Melita cryin' for joy that both of us is alive. She runs over to our house—I don't know what for, but she is in and out, and catches up with me in no time, and we take a wide circle back to the mountains.

"After a while I hear shootin' ahead of us. That means they have landed a party and are between us an' the cave. We turn back, and fetch another swing to land us in behind the mountain, but before we get very far, I hear the brush cracklin'. We keep very quiet, and I hear somebody give an order in Chinese. It's no use—not a chance in the world to get through. I pick up Father Mellody, and we turn back. We get through all right. Chinks aint been there yet but Father Mellody's is just a bed of coals. Up the shore a piece I have got one of these big dugouts with an outrigger, an' I reckon the best thing for us to do is to make for Matea; they aint no place to hide in our end of the island. Melita runs in the house and grabs up a basketful of food, an' one or two little things I have made for her—keepsakes, like—an' we push on. By and by we round a little point, and there is the outrigger ridin' like a duck. We lay Father Mellody down on some mats and paddle out, very quiet. The outrigger's got a mast and sail, but I'm afeared to use them; somebody might see us.

"Well, we get out of the break in the reef that makes the entrance to our harbor, without much trouble. Then we've got our hands full. A heavy sea runnin', an' 'casionly one of them miserable whirlpools where the current is sweepin' through. We had a sorry time of it, but finally, todes mornin', we get round on the lee of Matea where it's quiet, and go nosin' along that big black cliff, lookin' for a place to land. At last we come to where they is a great crack in the side of the cliff, like as if a giant had split it open with a monstrous big maul. Up above a rock is stickin' in the crack the size of a church, just hangin'

there, an' sea birds wheelin' above it. I reckoned it was the giant's wedge, where he had gone off an' left it. We eased into that little cove an' there is a nice sandy beach, an' a little stream tumblin' down from above, an' lots of vines and bushes. I lift Father Mellody out an' lay him down on the warm sand, an' when I go back for Melita, she is lyin' all of a heap—plumb tuckered out. I get some fresh water and wash that cut on Father Mellody's head, an' he opens his eyes once and smiles, so I reckon he is all right. Then I can sleep comf'table.

"And we suttinly do sleep, all that day and the next night; and when I wake up, who is settin' there hunched up like a little grinny monkey, but Mike, holdin' a rifle acrost his knees. He says most of the folks got away to the cave all right, but he counts noses and we aint there, so he mosies off by hisself to find us. He soon comes up to the Chinks, which is scattered in a long line across the island makin' a dragnet of it. He climbs a tree, and when they pass, he crep' up and stuck a knife in the nearest. Then he grabs his gun an' ca'tridge belt an' beats it for Father Mellody's. He finds the outrigger gone, an' he guesses the rest. He has a hard time to locate a dugout, most of them bein' smashed up, an' when he does come up with one, there is a big Chinee standin' guard. He wiggles along until he is pretty close, an' then they aint no more cover, only sand. So he tosses a rock over the Chinaman's head into the water. The Chink turns quick to see what the matter is, an' that's the last of *him*. Mike takes the guns an' amminition an' loads them in the dugout and pulls his freight for Matea, sees us lyin' dead to the world, asleep on the sand, and there he's been ever since waitin' for us to wake up.

"WELL, Father Mellody is feelin' right peart, considerin'. He is bruised and sore, but what laid him out was that belt across the head. Melita is chirpin' away like a robin, so we are all right.

"After breakfast, me and Mike hide the two boats and climb up the big crack to see what we can find out. It's slippery, what with wet moss and the waterfall sprayin' everything, but they is plenty of these big vines to pull yourself up with, and some places, where the little creek has wore it flat, it's easy climbin'. On top it's smooth, not a tree, only black rock, an' birds nestin' all over it thicker than the left-field bleachers durin' a double-header. It was hard to walk without scramblin' the eggs. You could see Lusiva easy, and some smoke rising still from where they had fired the village. In the lagoon the schooner was ridin', an' so we knowed them devils was still after us.

"Goin' down, I come to where the water makes a straight drop, like a lace curtain, about forty feet. It was pretty as a picture, an' as I stand lookin' at it, a good-sized bird flies up an' busts right through her. Thinks I, 'That's funny,' when the bird don't come out. Must be empty behind her. Shore enough, I'm right, a sandy little cave, very dry and pleasant. We go down an' take Father Mellody and Melita up there. She's awful tickled over it, an' says we will live there forever, and have many sons and they will have little fins so they can swim in the waterfall, an' little wings so they can fly up to the cave.

"We settle down to keepin' house an' talk over things. Mike and me want to go back to the island an' see whether we can't capture the schooner. Anyway, we figger that we can snoop around an' pick off a good many Chinymen without gettin' hurt ourselves. Melita an' Father Mellody wouldn't hear of it. They reason that the folks is perfectly safe in the cave, an' even if the Chinks discover it, they can't smoke them out or shell them out or starve them out. They're good for two months at least. I see where they are right, but I've got my mind made up. I'm goin' back to the U. S. A., buy me a gunboat (I got pearls enough) an' blow Li Chee into Kingdom Come.

"Father Mellody thinks that maybe I could get to Tula in the outrigger; that's a big island about two hundred miles away, where they is a settlement an' traders touch reg'lar. For himself, he couldn't leave his children. I'm feelin' tolerble homesick about leavin' Melita, but she allows very decided that the Queen's place is beside the King. And so that's settled. Father Mellody says even if we get across, he's afeard that if Li Chee finds it out, his *tong* in San Francisco will make trouble for us, an' he makes me promise to grow whiskers as a disguise, an' the Queen to go veiled. Well, we put in our time the next few days watchin' the schooner an' gettin' grub together for the trip, eggs an' yams an' mangoes an' a little pig that has wandered off the reservation just when

Mike happened to come along. We smoke his hams at night over a little dry wood-fire back in the cave. We smoked lots of birds too, that we knocked over with sticks. We skinned them an' made nice soft blankets, in case it might come up cold at night. Mike cuts down some bamboos with his long knife, an' we make water-casks out of the biggest joints. We are all set to go.

"THEN, one mornin' early, Mike comes in a-chatterin'. We all climb up, an' there is the schooner just comin' out of the harbor. She puts about an' makes for Matea, same as we done. Along she comes, not two hundred yards from the cliff. We was lookin' right down on her. Some of the Chinks was limpin', an' some was lyin' down on the deck. Li Chee was at the wheel, an' his head all bound up in a dirty bandana, an' lookin' very sour. I was glad to see that. It's evident that the boys been doin' a little bush-whackin' on their own account. I keep him covered an' it wus a terrible temptation. If I'd been alone, I would shore of plugged him, but there was Melita to think of.

"Father Mellody wanted us to go over to Lusiva an' see all the folks, before we started for Tula, but I knowed how it would be. Once there, we would get all wrapped up in rebuildin' an' reorganizin' the League, an' gettin' everythin' to goin', an' the first thing we'd know Li Chee would be back shootin' us up again. So I was in a sweat to get off. That night we started, steerin' by Father Mellody's little pocket compass. Last I saw of him, he was kneelin' on the beach, an' Mike with him, prayin'.

"Well, we had a regular honeymoon time. It was good weather, an' that old outrigger sailed noble. We had plenty to eat, an' fish-lines aboard, when we wanted a change. I got a little dirt platform fenced in where Melita could cook, an' we had our ham an' eggs of a mornin', same as the quality back home. Mornin's we are in an' out of the water, divin' an' frolickin' like Adam an' Eve on a raft; an' evenin's we'd set cuddled up in the stern on the bird-skin blankets, an' Melita would sing the Lusiva songs, and some that Father Mellody learned her about: 'Don't You Remember Sweet Alice, Ben Bolt?' and the 'Suwanee River.' We was like two kittens on a holiday. The second night we reached a little island an' lay to. In the mornin' we see they is nobody livin' on it, but plenty fresh water an' fruit, so we load up an' go along. Well, it's like that straight through—three weeks of it. We see two-three islands with people on them, but they don't bother us none, an' finally we reach Tula, with a big tall mountain on her like Father Mellody said. An English trader is there when we arrive, an' I arrange to go on to Honolulu with him. At Honolulu I book passage for 'Frisco, an' Melita buys a wagon-load of dresses.

"On the boat they is a p'fessor from Stanford an' several boys who has been he'pin' him study fishes. It seems they is fish p'fessors, same as bug an' dead-language ones. This fish p'fessor is named Nordfelt. He got to talkin' with me about fishes, an' when I told him about some of the kinds I've seen, he gets excited—says they're a new specie—wants to turn right round an' go back. Thinks I: 'This is my chance. I'll send him back to take care of Father Mellody an' my subjects, while me an' the Queen has a little whirl in the U. S. A.' When I offer to fit out a boat for him, he is tickled pink. I explain about Li Chee all I think's necessary, but that don't scare him none. He'd wade through Chinamen from A to Izzard jus' to count the fin-bones on a catfish. We get it all worked out, long before we reach 'Frisco. He says he can get plenty college boys which are good baseball players to go along as the crew, so my main worry is settled.

"FIRST thing when we arrive, I go to the biggest jewelry store with the p'fessor an' sell my pearls. It comes to a little more than thirty thousand. Then we look up a friend of his, which knows all about boats. Nobody has got a gunboat for sale, but they is plenty of other kinds. The one I want costs twenty-five thousand cash, an' the p'fessor's friend thinks it's a bargain.

"Well, I go back to the St. Francis with a long face, 'cause I know very well I can't do what I want to do with no five thousand dollars. Melita has already got the best dressmaker in town measurin' her up for another carload of clothes, busy an' perfeckly happy, but she takes one look, an' right away she knows somethin' is wrong with me. She takes me into the next room—we got three-four of them—an' says: 'What's the bad news?' so I tell her. She giggles like as if it's somethin' funny, then makes a little dive below decks, an' comes up with that soft leather bag she always wears around her neck.

She takes one of these here little fingernail scissors from off the bureau, where they is a whole flock of tools that she is learnin' to carpenter with, an' snips a hole in the bag. Then I hold my hands an' she pours out about a pint of pearls, most of them as big as marbles. They was King Peter's, an' that little rascal had 'em all the time. At the jewelry store they made a great to-do over them. Say it wont do to put them on the market all at once, but feed 'em out slow, so as not to disturb the price. They will sell them on commission for us, an' they bank fifty thousand to our credit, an' we sign the papers.

"Then things begin to move, shore enough. I buy the boat the first thing, an' a six-pounder swivel gun and a couple of rapid firers, then repeatin' rifles an' shotguns for all the boys, an' nets, an' tools, an' seeds, an' a gang-plow an' a blacksmith's outfit. The uniforms is dark blue with white stockin's an' a big white *L* sewed on the shirt for '*Lusiva.*' I get plenty balls an' bats an' masks an' chest p'tectors an' such, an' a couple barrels of chewin'-gum an' eatin'-tobacco, which my boys has always needed to make finished players of them. Then we buy a monstrous big harp for Father Mellody, an' medicines an' flower seeds an' a carload of books, such as is suitable for a missionary—old leatherbacks with commentaters an' Deuteronomies an' Latin words. Then they has to be a bonnet an' a reticule for all the ladies, an' dollies for all the little girls, an' finally the biggest flag we could get—all silk—the Old Stars and Stripes, to use when other kings come a-visitin' or when one of the teams in the Island League wins the pennant. Inside of a week we get everythin' stowed away aboard ship, includin' a captain, the p'fessor an' the Stanford boys, an' all jus' rarin' to go. Then we leaves the last things to Nordfelt an' feel free to take the Overland east, totin' along a French maid which the p'fessor hires for Melita.

"I SEE in the papers that the Blue Sox is in fourth place an' I figger that if Mike wants me, I'll finish out the season with him. He don't know me from Adam when I show up at the Park. Got an awful grouch on; says the rubes is always pesterin' him for tryouts an' he's sick of it.

" 'Call yourself a manager,' says I, 'an' you don't know a ball-player when you meet him in the big road. Here's a hundred-dollar bill,' I allows, layin' one on the table, 'what says I can strike out ary ball-player on yore rotten team.' Jus' for a little thing like that, Mike gets awful mad, an' hustles me out on the side-lines.

" 'Now, you fresh rube,' says he, 'show your stuff.' I warms up a little an' he calls up Dummy Joy. The first one is that slow right-hander. The Dummy swings once an' has plenty of time fer a second one before it gets to Mike. Then I take the same wind-up an' it shoots over—a left-hander. Dummy jus' stands an' looks at it pop-eyed. I put everythin' I got on the next one an' it most tore Mike's glove off. The Dummy don't even see it.

"Well, I get a job, all right, an' for two weeks I play with the Sox an' not a soul knows me. The bleachers kid me a lot the first game, callin' me Santy Claus an' Robinson Crusoe an' the like of that, but it's a no-hit game, an' me an' my whiskers get right popular. Next game Casey Long, the center fielder on the Greyhounds, who thinks he is so funny, comes up to the plate, an' just before he steps into the batter's box, he reaches in his hip pocket an' pulls out about three feet of red chest-p'tectors. He ties 'em on an' steps up, very solemn. The crowd roars, because he shore was funny. That didn't keep me from strikin' him out three times hand-runnin', so he give it up—see it didn't pay.

"That was the day Mike called me in to sign up a contract, an' I let the cat out of the bag.

"Says he: 'Sign on the dotted line.'

"Says I: 'Darned if I do.'

"Says he: 'What's the matter? Aint the terms right?'

"Says I: 'Terms or no terms, I'm sore at your rotten team and at you 'specially. I don't get the proper recognition. Nobody seems to know who I am.'

" 'Listen to the pore prune,' sez he, gettin' his Irish up. 'Who in the hell do you think you are, anyway? Napolyun Boney-part?'

"Says I: '*He* was nothin' but a two-spot. I'm a king.' Then I see he was makin' up his mind whether to bust me or send for the police, an' I says quick: 'My feelin's is hurt; that's what's the matter. You use' to know me right well when I pitched on the Sox, an' now you don't even call me by my right name. Listen,' I says, 'an' put yore mind on it. They use' to call us String Bean Slocum an' the Hard-boiled Yegg.' "

The Voice in the Air

A curious tale of love and politics which you may or may not believe, but which you are sure to find most entertaining.

By VAN TASSEL SUTPHEN

THE talk at the dinner-table had veered to the perennially engrossing subject of romance in everyday life; did it obtain at all? There were those who affirmed, and those who denied; Marcus Kerr had said nothing whatever. Whereupon Jermain had attempted to bait him—Pinkney Jermain, whom Marcus detested in inverse proportion to the slight acquaintance that existed between them. "How about the opportunity that is said to knock at every man's door?" he began, looking straight at Marcus. "Honestly, now, Mr. Kerr, would you ever be tempted to pass up the summons? Say it happened to be a bitter cold night, and you were safely tucked away in bed."

Marcus Kerr flushed. "I confess," he said quietly, "to more than one fruitless journey downstairs. Yet I continue to answer the bell."

"Ah, yes: 'Does Mr. Marcus Kerr live here? Well, he is wanted to save the country.' "

"Not quite so bad as that," smiled Marcus. "Of course there was a time when, like every other young idiot, I confidently looked forward to my call from the Fates. The sinking ship, the shell-swept battlefield, the wide forum of *Weltpolitik*—I was equally at home in all of these brilliant stage settings; I was only waiting for the prompter to give me my cue."

"And you are still standing in the wings," commented Jermain a little maliciously.

"At least I am learning how to wait," returned Marcus with composure. "There is just one thing, however." Kerr's voice dropped to a lower key, and he found himself looking squarely at the girl with the gray eyes. "If ever the invitation does come, I sha'n't—I hope I sha'n't—hesitate to accept it."

The girl with the gray eyes nodded understandingly. "You'll have to keep it alive, then," she said in a high, cool voice. "I mean your imagination."

"And perhaps your courage as well," drawled Jermain.

Marcus Kerr reddened; and at that moment, Mrs. Hamersley, always a dis-

creet hostess, arose. Since Kerr did not smoke, he felt justified in following almost immediately; moreover, Jermain had shown no inclination to pursue the argument any further; he was talking now about the coming legislative session, and he seemed especially interested in the measure that was generally known as the Atmosphere Bill.

"No joke, I assure you," went on Mr. Jermain earnestly. "The bill failed last year because people didn't understand its practical utility. But the wholesale contamination of the air is by no means an improbable contingency—just make up your minds to that. There's the soft-coal nuisance and the ever-increasing number of motorcars—why, take it on a foggy day—and the odor of burnt gases—" At this point Marcus had risen and made his escape. Really, as a newly elected member of the State legislature, the discussion should have interested him. But he didn't like talking to Pinkney Jermain, and there would be plenty of time later on in which to consider the merits of the Atmosphere Bill.

As Mr. Kerr entered the drawing-room, Mrs. Hamersley captured him. "I want you to meet Mary Effingham," she said. "She's a dear, and I had intended that you should take her out. But there was no one else to talk Spanish to the lady from Porto Rico, and so you had to be sacrificed."

"Mary Effingham?" queried Marcus hopefully. "The girl with the gray eyes?"

"Yes. Now do be nice to her, Marcus. You'll find it worth while—truly."

"Who is she?"

"The Virginia Effinghams. Mrs. Jermain is her aunt, and Mary is spending the winter with them."

"With the Jermains—h'm!"

"Now, what does 'h'm!' mean? You can be just too disagreeable for anything, Marcus Kerr."

"Hush—she's going to sing."

It was the old Gaelic folksong "Horo Mhairi Dhu," with its ever-recurring refrain "Turn ye to me!"—and Miss Effingham sang it well. As Marcus Kerr listened, he experienced an astonishing sensation; for the first time in his life he knew exactly what he wanted.

NOW he was talking to her; and Mrs. Hamersley had been quite right; this was truly worth while. Yet it rather took him aback when, without preamble, she recalled the late war of words at the dinner-table. "So you believe that Arabian Nights episodes, and calendars, and one-eyed mendicants, still exist," she said smilingly. "How exciting!"

"Anything may be waiting just around the corner," returned Marcus with honest conviction.

"A little candle of faith in a darkened world! Really, Mr. Kerr, the amazing thing is just you yourself."

"At least I can be ready, Miss Effingham—*semper paratus*, as we used to say."

"Whatever the summons?"

"'Turn ye to me!'" With a boldness surprising to himself, Marcus proceeded to hum over the concluding phrase of the refrain. "Some day," he went on steadily, "you will sing that song again—for me. And I shall hear it, and I shall come."

"Are you ready, Mary? Your aunt is waiting."

It was Jermain who spoke, and he was standing so near that he might easily have overheard Kerr's last words. But he did not favor Marcus with so much as a glance; and under the circumstances, the leave-taking had to be purely conventional. Yet Miss Effingham had not seemed displeased.

THE legislature had convened, and Marcus Kerr was taking his part in it very seriously. However, he contrived to find time to call on Miss Effingham, and the average soon rose to four or five evenings a week. And why not, since he knew perfectly well what he wanted. The real difficulty was with the lady; Miss Effingham had frankly declared that she was not sure of herself; she demanded days of grace. Perhaps Mr. Kerr became unduly insistent; the fact remains that one afternoon the footman at the Jermain house informed him of her departure from town for an indefinite period. Where had she gone? Really, sir, he could not say. Yes, she had actually vanished into thin air, and without a word! Marcus could not bring himself to inquire of the Jermains, and Mrs. Hamersley, who certainly would have known, happened to be in Bermuda for a month. Naturally he felt hurt and indignant; then he sought to dismiss the subject from his mind—at first with an effort, afterward more easily. All things pass, even young women with astonishing gray eyes. Besides, he had his work, his

public duties in the legislative bear-pit, the promulgation of the New Idea.

By the middle of February, Marcus was pretty well played out. He had been working like a horse, and he had been giving particular attention to that innocent-appearing Atmosphere Bill. For now it seemed certain that there was something behind it, something bigger than the wildest imagination could have conceived. In a word, the bill aimed at establishing a complete monopoly of the air, and the flying-machine was now an actuality. Ostensibly, the measure had been drafted to conserve public health and safety; in reality, it meant that no aërial conveyance could unfurl its wings in this the most important State of the Union, except under certain restrictions—restrictions manifestly drawn in favor of one particular corporation, and its particular make of airplane. Now, the president of this latter company was none other than Mr. Pinkney Jermain.

A COLD, sloppy afternoon, and Marcus Kerr paddled homeward to his cheerless bachelor lodgings in very blue mood. He had finally yielded to his physician's advice to take a few days' rest and change. Only, he had no idea where to go. What a dull thing was life, anyhow! Merely an interminable road, flat as a pancake, and without shadow of turning. Was it worth while to follow it indefinitely?

He let himself into his apartment, and walked to his desk to switch on the light. There was a letter lying on the blotting-pad, a square, white envelope that bore his name in imitation copperplate script. "Some new dodge in advertising circulars," reflected Mr. Kerr without enthusiasm. Perfunctorily he opened the envelope.

There were two inclosures—a railway coupon ticket to a Southwestern city that we may call Gallatin, and a small red card, a Pullman booking, entitling the holder to Stateroom No. 2 on Car No. 4 of the Midland Limited, for the date of February the nineteenth. That was all—not a breath of explanation, not a hint at future enlightenment.

Marcus Kerr sat himself down, and considered. So his particular long road had a turn in it, after all! Moreover there was no way of getting a peep around that prospective corner; he must either dodge or chance it. And tomorrow would be February the nineteenth.

Gallatin! Did he know anybody there? Not a soul. Had he ever heard of the place, except in a purely impersonal way? He threshed his brains in vain; no, Gallatin was only a name to him. Well, and what did that matter; Gallatin was at least an objective point, and he had made up his mind to go somewhere. His one consideration was the fate of the Atmosphere Bill, which should come up for its final reading the latter part of the present week. Outwardly, the measure seemed certain of success; it had already passed the upper house, and the governor was known to be favorable. But Marcus Kerr thought grimly of the verbal bombshell that he carried, safely tucked away in an inside pocket, the fully proved story of the venal bargain behind the innocent-appearing legislation; with the launching of that missile, the doom of the Atmosphere Bill was assured. Only—there must be no taking of chances; Marcus thought it over a little longer; then he went to the telephone.

On the face of it, there seemed to be no occasion for anxiety. The Speaker was a New Idea man, and he promised Kerr that the bill should not be taken up outside of its proper order on the calendar. That would make it Friday the twenty-second, and today was Monday the eighteenth—three full days for a pleasure-jaunt across country and back. "Why not?" asked Marcus Kerr, as he climbed into bed. Yet before he fell asleep, he had definitely decided not to go.

AT six o'clock on the evening of Tuesday, February the nineteenth, the Midland Limited pulled into the Union Station at Gallatin, and from Car No. 4 descended Mr. Marcus Kerr. He had made his prudent resolutions, but he had been unable to keep them.

A man in the uniform of a hotel porter stepped up. "Mr. Kerr?" he inquired, and Marcus smilingly acknowledged his identity. "I have a carriage for you outside," continued the functionary; and forthwith Mr. Kerr was conducted to a well-appointed brougham. He ventured on a question, and was politely informed that his destination was the Great Southern. "A hotel I presume. And you say that a suite has been engaged for me there? Oh, very well—drive on."

Arrived at the hotel, Marcus stepped to the desk and wrote his name on the register. The clerk seemed to be expecting him; he inquired pleasantly as to the com-

fort of Mr. Kerr's journey, and directed a bell-boy to show the gentleman to his rooms.

"My unknown friends are doing me very nicely," thought Marcus as he gazed about the comfortably furnished apartment. In particular the bathroom looked inviting after the dusty ride; and he incontinently deferred further speculations until he should be clean again.

A knock at the door, and a letter was handed in. The communication was typewritten, and read as follows:

> Thank you very much, my dear Mr. Kerr, for your prompt compliance with what must have seemed a most inexplicable summons, a call out of empty space. I do appreciate your kindness, and may I trespass still further upon it? I have taken the liberty to order your dinner, and I believe it will be to your liking. At eight o'clock, you will find a taxi in waiting, and you will drive to the opera house; the bill for this evening is "Siegfried." Your ticket is at the box-office. I trust that I may have the pleasure of seeing you in your seat, at least before the rising of the third curtain. I am offering no explanations; it must rest entirely with yourself whether or no you accept this invitation. But I shall hope to see you.

There was no signature. A second and even a third perusal of this curious epistle brought Marcus no whit nearer to a solution of the mystery. But the challenge was not to be refused, and he reflected that in any event he would have the pleasure of hearing his favorite opera. Accordingly he dressed and went down to his dinner, which he found to be excellent.

His seat was the end one in the twelfth row of the orchestra stalls, a sufficiently conspicuous position; of course he must assume that his correspondent would be perfectly aware of its exact location. But Marcus found not the smallest opening for the gratification of his own growing curiosity. His immediate neighbors were a stolid-looking man and his middle-aged wife. Both seemed to be entirely absorbed in the music; to Marcus they paid no attention whatever. And there was no one else within range who looked, in the least degree, out of the common. The boxes—but here again he leveled his glasses in vain. Not a familiar face anywhere, not even one whose future acquaintance might be sought with pleasurable anticipation. There was nothing for Marcus to do but to sit back in his chair and get what he could out of the performance.

Nothing happened during that fateful second intermission until just before the curtain went up for the last act. Then an usher handed Marcus an envelope bearing his seat-number. The sole inclosure was a carriage-check—green—for the Lee Street lobby. The figures were 129.

Mr. Kerr had waited in the drafty corridor for perhaps ten minutes when it was announced that No. 129 stopped the way. It turned out to be a handsome sedan motor done in sober black, with the lamps and other accessories of silver plate. A footman, dressed in a livery to match the car, stood at the door.

"This way, sir," said the man. "Thank you, sir."

Marcus Kerr drew a long breath and stepped in. The car was empty.

THE car stopped in front of what was evidently a fashionable restaurant. "After all," reflected Marcus, "I'm hungry. Here goes."

The head waiter seemed to be expecting Mr. Kerr; he bowed smilingly and escorted him to a table where covers had been laid for two. This was something like, and Marcus noted with lively interest that a handsome corsage bouquet of violets lay beside the opposite plate. He looked around inquiringly, but no one appeared to claim that vacant place; accordingly he sat down, and the waiter brought in the *hors-d'œuvres*. Again Marcus hesitated, but the situation remained unsolved, and he had to begin supper by himself. Now he was in a mood to be amused, and really the comedy was being well played; as the various courses came on, each was served punctiliously to both Mr. Kerr and his invisible *vis-à-vis*. It was the Barmecide feast reversed—an actual banquet with an immaterial guest; and the other patrons of the restaurant seemed to view the proceedings with considerable astonishment. "Some sort of crazy bet," remarked a pale youth to his gorgeously arrayed companion. The lady giggled assent, but Marcus did not care.

Shortly after Marcus had finished his first cigarette, the waiter removed the unoccupied chair—carefully, as though to assist a lady in her leaving of the table. Immediately Marcus rose, bowed, and remained standing while the waiter carried away the bouquet of violets. Evidently this was the final curtain, and the other guests applauded faintly, as Marcus left the room in his turn, thereby assuring him

that he had played his part well. But what did it all mean! For whose especial benefit had the drama been performed? The question kept running through his mind as the hall-boy helped him on with his topcoat; and here must be the answer, for now the head waiter had stepped forward and was offering him a small flat package done up in white paper; it bore his name in carefully printed letters. The motor was still in waiting; he jumped in and was driven back to the hotel.

Being by this time somewhat inured to the unusual, Mr. Kerr was not unduly exercised to discover that the parcel contained nothing more definite than a cut-up picture-puzzle. Clearly it was expected of him that he should put the design together, and thereby receive a new clue to this seemingly endless labyrinth. Now, oddly enough, Marcus had never fallen a victim to the puzzle-craze; he had even permitted himself to jeer at certain of his friends who spent most of their time in laboring away at this modern stone of Sisyphus. Ample would have been their revenge could they have seen him now sitting with bent brow over his unaccustomed task. The mysterious fascination of puzzle-building gripped him; he would die the death rather than acknowledge defeat.

As Marcus quickly realized, the puzzle was in the form of a pictorial, dissected map. Starting from the hotel in Gallatin, a pilot-line, traced in red, crossed the Harrison Avenue bridge and led into the open country. The rest was equally plain: a five-mile post, and then a church where the road turned sharply to the right; a railway crossing, and on through a small town called Marsden Courthouse; left-hand fork to Pickens, fifteen miles away; water-tower on right, and turnpike for two miles; bridge over Big Smoky Branch; white gate at the bottom of the hill; woodland road leading to an old graveyard; dead oak tree bearing a placard reading: "Eight o'clock, evening of February 20."

So these were his sailing directions, his sealed orders! Could anything be more absurd! And yet, when he finally tumbled into bed, he knew that he was foreordained to follow that same red line to its ultimate end. We can all be divinely foolish when the mood takes us.

IT was a beautiful morning, that of Wednesday the twentieth of February; and, over his coffee and rolls, Marcus decided to make the journey afoot. He was a good walker, and he had the whole day in which to cover the insignificant distance of seventeen or eighteen miles; certainly that was the thing to do. As he passed through the hotel lobby, a bell-hop ran forward with a telegram. Now, to a really busy man telegrams are of comparatively small importance; people are always trying to attract his attention by just such transparent devices. Marcus merely glanced at the superscription, and put it into his pocket unopened; this was his holiday and it was not to be unnecessarily interrupted.

The smell of spring in the air, the grass turning green underfoot, the blue arch of the sky overhead, and only six-and-thirty years and a brier pipe to carry—small wonder that Mr. Marcus Kerr stepped blithely forward on this blind trail that he had deliberately elected to follow. It was something to be going, no matter where; better fun to be tracing out a ridiculous red line on a cut-up picture-puzzle than to be swinging round the dull circle of his old life in town. Forward, then!

THE map carried him on without difficulty; and Marsden Courthouse was reached at noon; the dinner at the Dixie House, particularly the hot cornbread and buttermilk, tasted better than anything he had eaten for a long time. Afterward, as he sat smoking on the porch, the clerk brought out a letter that had been left for him at the office. Philosopher as he was, the hand of Marcus Kerr trembled as he opened the envelope; then he laughed, for it was only a card from the local barber bespeaking the honor of his patronage. Competition must be sharp around Marsden Courthouse, thought Marcus, if the urban trick of soliciting trade through the medium of hotel registers was in vogue. Anyhow, it brought him a comforting sense of the realities of existence. Barber-shops, and mule-teams, and yellow dogs—after the grotesque experiences of the last thirty-six hours, it was good to contemplate these solid entities.

Supper was taken at Pickens; then, in the fast-fading twilight, Marcus started on the last stage of his journey. Now he was in the woodland road, deliciously dewy and fragrant; through the dusk ahead pointed upward the white finger of a marble shaft in the ancient graveyard. All was very quiet and still.

What would one expect to find attached to the bole of a blasted oak standing in the deep of a Southern forest? What object more natural than a telephone, its receiver hanging on the hook, and the insulated line of communication trailing off through the underbrush! Marcus lit a match, and saw that it wanted a quarter of an hour to the appointed time; he filled his pipe, sat down, and waited.

Eight o'clock; he took down the receiver, and held it to his ear. "Yes?" he said. "You are Mr. Kerr?" came the response. "Thank you; just one moment, please, while I make the extension connection. A brief silence; now a sharp click, and the first notes of the instrumental introduction to "Turn Ye to Me." And it was Mary Effingham's voice that was singing those unforgetable words.

The song came to an end, and Marcus Kerr drew a long breath. "Mary!" he called, once and twice; then he realized that the connection must be broken; there is no mistaking that dead, empty sense of nothingness. An unreasoning anger gripped him; he pounded upon the insensate box, and demanded attention from a nonexistent "Central." There was no response, and the utter futility of further effort suddenly smote him; he hung up the receiver and considered.

OF two things he could be absolutely certain—the singer and the song. His thoughts traveled back to that night of his first meeting with Mary Effingham, and of the impulse that had led him to say: "Some day you will sing that song again—to me. And I shall hear it, and I shall come." And she had listened, and smiled, and turned away.

Well, what was he to think? This cunningly piled-up mystery—had it been a test, *his* test? The summons had come; Opportunity had knocked; the invitation had been given—to what end? Could it be that Miss Effingham had decided that after all she wanted him? Was this merely her whimsical way of recalling her lover to her side? Somehow Marcus grew a little resentful as he tried to thresh it out in his mind; he had truly loved Mary Effingham, and he had been willing to wait patiently until she should come to know her own heart. But this sort of thing was nothing more than an exercise in the art of coquetry; he didn't like it.

The positive assurance remained that that had been her voice, and since the telephone line was obviously a temporary installation, she could not be far away. The wire itself would serve as a guide; he had only to follow it to find himself in her presence. Marcus hesitated for an instant; then he stooped down and grasped the final link in the long chain.

Marcus walked on, letting the guiding wire run loosely through his fingers; for perhaps a mile he got along famously. Then came the check at last; he found himself at fault on the far side of a brook across which the wire had been stretched and secured by staples to two trees. Probably the staples had been fixed too tightly, thereby setting up a tension, so that it would require only a slightly stronger puff of wind than usual to get the trees to swaying and so break the line. Whatever the precise cause, the effect was certain: the slender thread had parted. Surely, though, it would not be difficult to recover the clue, and he addressed himself to the task. But the night was a dark one, his matches were soon exhausted, and mere groping around was useless.

A short distance away on the right, a man carrying a lighted lantern was making his way down the hillside; Marcus, hastily marking the spot by tying his handkerchief to a sapling, ran to intercept him. It was a surprise to learn that in the little valley below lay the tracks of the main line from Gallatin to the East; the lantern bearer was in charge of the way station whose lights were visible from where they stood. Twenty-Mile Crossing was its official designation, and trains stopped only on flag; the night Atlantic Express was due to pass in fifteen minutes; no, the station master had never heard the names of either Jermain or Effingham; yes, he would sell his lantern for two dollars, and to nothing further would he commit himself.

The bargain was quickly concluded; the surly native plodded on his way; and Marcus recommenced his search; within two minutes he had picked up the lost end of the wire; now he had only to go forward again; the way to the land of heart's desire lay open at last.

HE wanted to smoke, but his match-safe was empty; he searched his pockets for some paper out of which he could make a spill, and so get a light from the lantern-flame. The only thing he could find was the telegram that had been handed him

that morning, and which still remained unread; he tore it open and gave a hasty glance at its contents. It was from Carson Post, his intimate friend and lieutenant at the capitol; it told him that Williams, the Speaker, was ill, and that an effort would be made in his absence to take up the Atmosphere Bill out of its regular order; unless Kerr could get back by Thursday morning, the bill stood an excellent chance of going through.

Marcus Kerr ground his teeth. "It isn't fair! It isn't fair!" he found himself repeating again and again. He had tried to do his duty at the capitol, and he intended to go on doing it; he would make good to the people who had trusted him. Perhaps the Atmosphere Bill was not so bad, after all; or the governor might veto it; or the exposure could come later and be just as effective. Certainly no one could expect him to give up his chance of getting Mary Effingham; that was more than could be fairly asked, even of a New Idea man. "And I wont!" asseverated Marcus Kerr as he stood there fingering the precious end of wire; to his excited fancy, the flexible copper strand seemed suddenly endowed with life; he actually felt little gentle twitches and pulls drawing him forward, enticingly, alluringly.

Down the wind came the sound of a locomotive whistle, and he knew it was the night express signaling for Gallup, three miles away. He had intended to take that same train on Thursday night so as to arrive on Friday morning; but if he boarded it now, he could be at the capitol a day earlier, in time to rout the corrupt forces behind the Atmosphere Bill. But Mary Effingham, who had called to him, would wait in vain. And she was not the woman to offer herself twice to any man.

He was not conscious of having come to any decision; the time was too short for any regular mental process; he only knew that he had flung the end of the wire far behind him, that he was plunging down the hill at breakneck speed. Now he was standing panting on the platform of the little station; down the long tangent to the westward the headlight of the engine flashed into view. "Flag it!" he shouted, and without a word, the grumpy station-master got out his lantern, and set it between the rails. The engineer whistled an acknowledgment of the signal, and presently the long line of coaches came to a reluctant stop. Marcus Kerr climbed aboard a compartment car, and the train went on into the night.

Well, the dream had melted into thin air, and he had lost his chance. For he could not have been mistaken; surely that had been her voice, her voice singing that one song; again he heard himself saying: "Some day you will sing it for me. Then I'll come." Yes, he had made a promise, and now he had found himself unable to fulfill it. He had stood at the parting of the ways—on one side the shadow of desire, on the other the substance of duty. He had chosen, and without in the least understanding why, he knew that he had taken the better part. He was leaving that memorable spot where he had thrilled to the sound of Mary Effingham's voice; and yet in some mysterious fashion it seemed to him that he was still on his way to her presence. It was not a thing to reason about, but to feel; and contrary to the evidence of his objective senses, he did feel it. The train went on.

AT ten o'clock on Thursday morning Marcus Kerr walked into the legislative chamber, and Carson Post met him at the door. "I hoped you'd get my wire," he said happily, "but I couldn't be sure. What luck!"

"The bill?" demanded Kerr briefly.

"It has just come out. Is the bomb ready?"

"Got it in my pocket; come on."

As Marcus entered the hall, he saw Jermain standing in the lobby. The glances of the two men crossed like swords, but that of Jermain's wavered. "He didn't expect to see me here," thought Kerr with a flash of intuition. "That means that he loses."

He began his speech. The disclosures that he was able to make concerning the true inwardness of the bill were undoubtedly a surprise, but he could feel that the House was following his conclusions and accepting his proofs. The other side remained defiantly silent, and Marcus was able to complete his argument without interruption. As he took his seat, something drew his eyes to the ladies' gallery. In the front row sat Mary Effingham.

The vote was taken, and by an overwhelming majority the Atmosphere Bill was defeated. The result assured, Marcus made his way to the gallery. "I thought you were in Gallatin," he said with abrupt directness.

"I never was in Gallatin in my life," answered Miss Effingham promptly—whereupon Marcus muttered some unintelligible piece of politeness, and took his leave.

As Mr. Kerr considered his problem that night, it seemed plain enough. To begin with, he had lost his chance with Mary Effingham, lost it so fully and completely that she was not even willing to concede its ever having been offered. Nor could he blame her; much must be accorded to a maiden's proper pride, and the invitation had been a direct one. Then there was Mary's uncle, Mr. Pinkney Jermain, and blood is thicker than water. It is a prevalent opinion that a woman must always take the purely personal view in issues not admittedly academic, and Mary Effingham was a delightfully feminine creature; there could be no shadow of a doubt about that. No, it was all over; the opportunity had been lost, the hope finally extinguished; and before Marcus Kerr again stretched the long road, straight, flat and deadly dull.

A week later Marcus was surprised to receive a note from Miss Effingham. "You know the Jermains have gone to Bermuda," she wrote, "and I am staying with Ella Hamersley. Can't you run in Tuesday afternoon, and drink a cup of tea?"

MISS EFFINGHAM passed Marcus his muffin. "You might say something nice," she remarked, "on seeing me again after all this time. I don't care for Washington, anyway, and six weeks of it! Yes, of course, without a single break." . . . .

Marcus Kerr had finished his story, and now he sat regarding Miss Effingham. "What do you think of it?" he asked.

"Of course I'm glad that the Atmosphere Bill was defeated," she said frankly. "Your speech settled that point. Now, my Uncle Jermain knew that you were opposed to it, and that you had the evidence of the bargain in the deal. Consequently, it was necessary to get you away, and keep you away—until after the bill had gone to its third reading in the House."

"Yes?"

"Don't interrupt me. I'm trying to analyze this by purely feminine intuition, and you may throw me off the track."

"I sha'n't say another word."

"It appears that I was the bait used." Miss Effingham was blushing now, but she went on determinedly: "You remember the conversation at Mrs. Hamersley's dinner-party—the opportunity that knocks at a man's door, and how you hoped you would be able to answer the call. Well, there it is—the whole line of expedients devised to pique your curiosity and lead you farther and farther afield.

"Finally it came to the climax with the telephone. If you had followed the wire to its end, you would have found yourself in a trap. It would have meant a gentlemanly but enforced detention in some lonely woodland cabin until the fate of the Atmosphere Bill had been decided. Then, with suitable apologies,—mistaken identity and all that,—you would have been released. Clear, isn't it?"

"But it was your voice, your actual voice that I heard," persisted Marcus. "Now, it couldn't have been a long-distance wire—say to Washington."

Miss Effingham took from a drawer a phonographic record, placed it in a reproducing machine, and started the motor. The first few notes were enough.

"Three weeks ago," continued Miss Effingham, "my uncle, Mr. Jermain, was in Washington; of course he came to see me. He spoke of that song, "Turn Ye to Me," as being a particular favorite with him; he suggested that it would be interesting to have a record made of it. And so it was arranged that I should go to the studio of the reproducing company and have the work done. The record should have been delivered to me within a couple of days; actually I only received it last night. Uncle Jermain wrote that there had been some delay—"

"Meaning that it had made a little journey out to Gallatin and back," interrupted Marcus. "The record must have been run off close to the transmitter set up in your lonely woodland cabin; the effect would be precisely that of a person actually singing through the telephone. Now we are beginning to understand.

"I wonder," went on Marcus Kerr audaciously, "I wonder if you have had practice enough with that song to sing it for me—now."

Miss Effingham made a gallant effort to meet the gaze bent upon her, and failed ignominiously. But she rose, and went to the piano.

By

FORBES PARKHILL

The Riddle of

SHERIFF LAFE OGDEN, long-barreled blue revolver in his hand, knocked lightly on the rough pine door of the Red Rock ranger station. Then he stepped back softly and pressed himself close to the log-and-plaster wall beside his deputy, Seth Markey, and young Otis Carr.

There was no answer from within. The Sheriff raised his shaggy brows, pursed his lips and whistled softly. With a jerk of his head in the direction of the others, he stepped forward again. Suddenly he flung the door wide.

"Good God!" The exclamation burst from his lips, and checked the sudden advance of the two pushing forward on his heels.

"It's Joe Fyffe himself!" He nodded toward the crumpled figure which lay face downward on the floor.

"Dead?" asked Otis Carr in a strange, strained voice as he squeezed his huge bulk through the door. He wondered why he had experienced no great shock at the gruesome discovery. For Joe Fyffe, forest ranger, silent, odd and retiring, had been his friend.

The Sheriff dropped to one knee. He placed a hand on the ranger's wrist.

"Been dead quite a spell," he announced without looking up.

"Blood shows that," the deputy volunteered.

"Looky here how it's dried round the edges, on the floor underneath his arms there. Two, three hours, I reckon."

Otis Carr bent awkwardly over the huddled body.

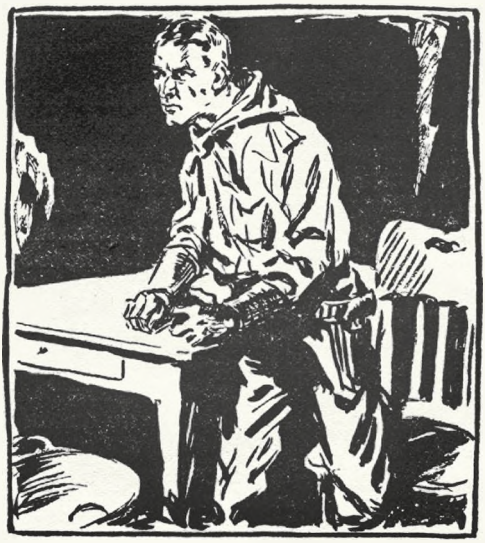
"Shot, I s'pose," he speculated, his tanned face, somehow attractive despite its homeliness, showing a trace of awe and concern. Most of his life had been spent in the cattle country east of Jackson's Hole; yet the acts of violence which it had been his lot to witness had failed to render him callous in the presence of death.

Sheriff Ogden turned the ranger's stiffening body on one side.

"That's where he bled from," he said shortly, pointing with the muzzle of his revolver to a tiny, stained hole in the ranger's shirt, under the right shoulder. "But that's what done the work," he added, indicating a similar hole in the back, just above the ranger's belt.

"It's a cinch it wasn't any accident," Otis drawled, glancing curiously about the interior of the ranger cabin. "I tell you, somebody plugged him."

"I don't see any gun," observed the Sheriff, rising, stepping over the body and walking to the door of the only other room.



The modern West still keeps many of the old-time thrills, as you who read this captivating novelette of the Wyoming mountains will discover. Mr. Parkhill himself lives in the West; "The Ken-Caryl Case" and other stories have already won him fame as an excellent writing-man.

the Rangeland

"He couldn't 'a' had a chance. Nasty job, this!"

Otis followed him to the room which served as a sleeping chamber and office. Ogden removed a rifle from two wooden pegs in the log wall above the desk, examined it carefully, and shook his head. His scrutiny of a holstered revolver which swung by a cartridge belt from a nail in the wall was likewise barren of results.

"Neither one's been fired," he asserted, frowning and turning to the maps and papers on the rude pine desk. "He never had a chance to shoot back. You knew him pretty well, didn't you, Otis? D'you know whether he had any other guns?"

Otis shook his head.

"Don't think he did," he replied uneasily, casting his eye about the room. "He hardly ever packed the revolver. Sometimes he carried the rifle in his saddle scabbard, but it was on the chance of seeing a cat or something, and not for protection from—well, you know. He never seemed to worry about the threats of the boys that the Gov'ment couldn't send in any damned ranger to collect grazing-fees for using the open range."

The Sheriff turned from the desk to a workbench containing a shallow tank, wooden racks and a row of bottles.

"I know," he remarked gravely. "But between you and me, it aint like any of the boys to shoot him down like this. What's this junk?"

"Dark-room equipment," Otis answered, fingering a developing tray. "Joe was a nut on wild-animal photography, you know. Got some of the best animal pictures I've ever seen. Did his own finishing here at night. See that blanket rolled up over the window? He'd let that down, and have a first-class dark-room."

"That's right," the Sheriff affirmed. "I remember now. He was the feller that bragged he was the only man that ever got a close-up picture of a wild mountain sheep, wasn't he?"

"I wouldn't say he bragged about it. But it was something worth boasting about, anyway."

Sheriff Ogden, his barren search of the office and bedroom completed, led the way back to the room where the body lay.

"Lucky we run into you, Otis," he remarked as he began a hurried search of its interior. "When I seen you ridin' down the Buffalo Forks road, I says to Seth, here: 'There's Otis Carr, who knows Joe Fyffe right well—maybe better'n anyone else in these parts. We'll ask him to go along.'

"We didn't know what had happened, then. Just knew somethin' funny was pulled off here at the ranger station. Forest supervisor in Jackson called me before daylight, an' said he'd just got a flash on his phone, an' that some one was callin' for help. Operator told him the call was from Red Rock ranger station.

"He'd 'a' come along, only for a wrenched leg. Between you and me, he's a pretty decent feller, that supervisor, even if he is tryin' to collect grazin'-fees for the Gov'-ment. I says to Seth here: 'Lucky thing these here ranger stations is connected with telephones for fire-calls. Man could have an accident an' lay there for a week if it wasn't for that wire.' I had a hunch it might be somethin' more than an accident, 'count of hearin' more or less how the boys been shootin' off their mouths. You been over the hill to Dubois, I s'pose?"

OTIS, who had stepped to the pine table to retrieve the telephone, which was hanging close to the floor, turned quickly after restoring the instrument to its accustomed place and shot an odd, questioning glance at the Sheriff, who was stooping over the stove. Then he peered uncertainly at the deputy, who was kneeling by the outer door.

"N-o-o," he drawled, turning back to the table, nervous fingers clumsily fingering the telephone. "Guess the old man told you them rustlers been busy again, working over some of the Footstool calves. Jess Bledsoe says they been bothering around some of the Flying A stock, too. Well, I rode over to the cabin of Gus Bernat, the French trapper, last night, figuring I might get a line on the fellow who's so free with the running-iron. Had a hunch he might be working the range down below Two-Gwo-Tee pass, but I couldn't see a thing—"

Deputy Seth Markey, seemingly impatient that the others should waste their time on such casual remarks with the mystery of the Fyffe killing confronting them, arose with an exclamation.

"Looky here, boss," he cried to the Sheriff, directing his attention to two tiny brown spots near the doorsill. "See them blood-drops? That means Fyffe was outside when he was shot, and run in here afterward. Let's take a look outside the cabin."

Ogden abandoned his examination of the stove, and the pair of worn, hobnailed Canadian pack boots hanging from the log ceiling above it by their leather laces, and joined his deputy at the door.

"Sure 'nough," he observed as he led the way outside the cabin, carefully scrutinizing the ground about the doorway. "Here's another. We'll just back-track this trail, an' see what we can find."

With difficulty they followed the thin trail of blood over the coarse gravel surface and pine-needle carpet of the pasture which surrounded the ranger cabin. It led through the open gate in the barbed-wire fence which inclosed the pasture. They lost it in the near-by creek bottom. In vain did they circle the spot where the last bloodstain appeared.

Some fifty yards away they came upon the cold ashes of a tiny wood fire. Sheriff Ogden pressed his hand among the charred fragments.

"From the feel of her, she might be a week old," he announced sagely. "The ashes aint flaky, but black, showin' that the fire didn't burn out, but was doused with water from the crick."

"But why," asked Otis curiously, "would anyone want to build a fire so near the ranger station? I tell you it couldn't be to cook a meal, because anyone could have dropped in and eaten with Fyffe."

"Maybe the ranger built it hisself," suggested the Sheriff. "What few tracks show in this coarse gravel is cow-tracks, and that don't tell us nothin'. Can't see any signs of a fight here. Let's go back to the cabin."

"He must have run in here after he was shot," speculated Otis upon reëntering the shack, "and grabbed for the phone. Like as not he yelled for help once or twice, and then dropped to the floor. Or maybe he knocked the phone off the table, and the supervisor heard him calling for help after he lay on the floor."

"He knocked that camera off the table too," the deputy volunteered. "I found it on the floor while you two was in the other room, and put it back on the table."

"What's this?" asked Otis, stooping and retrieving a stub of a pencil from the floor a few feet from the body. "I wonder if this means anything?"

The Sheriff glanced at it and grunted.

"Probably dropped out of his pocket when he fell. Or maybe he knocked it off the table with the phone and the camera."

The deputy suddenly dropped to his knees beside the body.

"Looky here!" he cried, eagerness and

excitement showing in his face as he looked up at them. He was pointing with a tanned and stubby finger at a straggling and meaningless black line upon the floor planking. One end trailed out to nothingness near where Otis had found the pencil. The other end of the line was covered with the splotch of blood. "Maybe he wrote somethin' before he died!"

Sheriff Ogden seized a dish towel from a nail behind the stove. He moistened it with a dipperful of water from the bucket in the corner. Then he too dropped to his knees by Fyffe's body and commenced to scrub at the bloodstained floor. Otis bent eagerly over his shoulder.

"There she is!" burst from the Sheriff's lips as a faint scrawl appeared beneath his hands. He scrubbed vigorously a moment longer. All three peered at the pine plank as he desisted.

Five words were scrawled on the floor. Slowly Sheriff Ogden read them aloud—a damning message from the dead:

"'Otis Carr shot me because—'"

CHAPTER II

"SIMPLE" SAMPLE, cow-hand employed by Sterling Carr, owner of the Footstool outfit, was initiating Mariel Lancaster, visitor from Pennsylvania, into the mysteries of saddling a horse.

"There aint no need for you-all to saddle a horse, long as you're around the ranch, here, ma'am," he protested as he led a "plumb gentle" sorrel outside the Footstool corral. "They's most always some of the boys about, that's willin' to he'p you if you say the word."

Mariel, who had equipped herself with a quirt belonging to Margaret Carr, her school chum who had induced her to pay a visit to the Footstool ranch in Wyoming, frowned slightly and attempted to slap her boot, as if she had held a riding-crop. The quirt, however, was too limber, and refused to slap.

"I understand, but that's just why I want to learn," she insisted with some little spirit. "What if I'd be out somewhere alone, and have to saddle—"

"I bet you-all wont be ridin' around alone, ma'am—not's long as young Mr. Otis is here," remarked Simple with assurance. He hadn't failed to use his eyes during the week that Mariel had been a guest of the ranch, and his years gave him certain privileges which the other "boys" lacked.

Mariel flushed slightly, and then laughed.

"But he isn't here today," she challenged, as if seeking to elicit further information concerning Otis.

"No, ma'am," Simple replied, his eyes narrowing as he looked away southward toward the Gros Ventre range, "I reckon he's out there somewheres lookin' over the range. First thing, ma'am, don't go swishin' that quirt around these broomtails. They're liable to think yore in earnest. Old Dynamite, here, he's plumb peace-lovin' an' reasonable, but even he's got some right funny idees about quirts.

"Step up an' gentle him some, ma'am, so he'll know yore intentions is honorable. Not from that end, ma'am, or he may kick yore slats out—beg pardon, ma'am, I mean he mayn't see it the right way. Go at him from the head end. That's right.

"Naow fold yore saddle-blanket—so. Keep on the nigh side, an' ease it over his spine. Slide it back with the grain of the hair. Fine. I bet that saddle's a purty big heft for you-all, aint it, ma'am? Naow reach under his bel—I mean, reach under him an' grab that cinch. Run the latigo through the ring—like this. Naow pull—hard."

Mariel turned to her instructor, sorely puzzled.

"Very well. But what do you do when he swells all up, like this?"

"Kick him in the slats, ma'am. Kick him in the slats. Leastways, that's what I'd do, seein' as how you-all ast me. But I guess you-all cain't do nothin' but talk to him. No, that wont do, neither, cause a lady cain't talk the language that ol' reprobate understands. Reckon you'll have to wait till he gits out o' breath. Naow—pull quick, ma'am. Good! Tie it jest like you'd tie a man's necktie. You aint never tied a man's necktie? It's like this-hyere."

Mariel, panting but triumphant, stood back and admired her handiwork.

"There!" she cried exultantly. "Sometime I'll get you to teach me how to put those—er—trademarks on the livestock. They call this the Footstool ranch because its trademark looks like a footstool, don't they?"

"Yes'm. Only they don't exactly call it a trademark. That horizontal line is the top of the footstool, and them two lines that slants away underneath, they're the laigs."

"You have such odd names for your—er—brands. Yesterday I heard Mr. Carr talking about the Lazy Y. What's that like?"

"Jest the letter *Y*, ma'am, leanin' over to one side, like it was too lazy to stand up straight. That's old man Yarmouth's brand."

"And the Flying A. That's Mr. Bledsoe's mark, isn't it?"

"Yes'm. The bar of the letter *A* sticks out on each side, like wings. An' because it looks like the letter *A* with wings, they calls it the Flying A. I notice young Jess Bledsoe's been over quite frequent of late."

Mariel colored, but smiled. "I think he's so typically Western. He seems to be made for these picturesque cowboy costumes."

"I reckon he never misses a chance to make his spurs jingle, ma'am," Simple remarked, tugging at the tobacco-tag dangling from his vest pocket. "He wears the biggest hat and the hairiest chaps between the Wind River reservation and the Tetons. He likes to tell how he captured Ed Gunn, the outlaw, after Ed had shot the gun out of Jess' hand, incidentally shootin' Jess' little finger off. But don't get him wrong, ma'am—I bet he can set on the hurricane deck of any bronc in these parts, an' he can shoot the eye out of a needle. Trouble is, he knows it. But I reckon that'll wear off in time."

"I've heard already how Mr. Bledsoe lost his little finger," said Mariel soberly. "He must be very daring. He tells me that the cattle-raisers are bothered by thieves who steal their stock. I should think they'd do something about it."

"They will, ma'am—when they catch 'em. Rustlin' aint the healthiest occupation in the world. Reckon it's the Radley boys, over in the Hole. That's Jackson's Hole proper, ma'am, over to the west there. Mebbe you've heard about Jackson's Hole, ma'am, as a hangout for cattle thieves an' such. Most folks think they hide in the Hole. But they don't. Anybody can get into Jackson's Hole. But when anyone comes lookin' for calves that's been monkeyed with with a runnin'-iron, the boys jest draws back into the Tetons, where you cain't find 'em in a thousand years.

"Them's the Tetons over there, ma'am—them snaggle-toothed mountains that rise right up like a wall. The old French trappers named 'em, because they're like a breastworks. Behind that big one, the Grand Teton, are half a dozen trails leadin' out to Idaho. Many a posse's quit cold, ma'am, when they come to the Tetons."

"I understand. But isn't it hard to steal a cow and drive her so many miles without being seen by some one?"

"They don't have to drive 'em, ma'am—not on the open range. Jest slap a brand on a maverick, and leave him. Then come round-up time, when they're sorted out, the man with that p'ticler brand gets his calf without bein' asked no questions. No one hereabouts would think o' keepin' a calf with some one else's brand on him.

"But even if he does start to drive a critter to his home range, who's goin' to interfere with a man drivin' home a stray with his own brand on him? On the open range there aint no restrictions—'cept what the Gov'ment's made right recently. The Gov'ment up an' tells the cow-man that the open range aint open any more—that the Gov'ment owns it, an' is goin' to collect a grazin'-fee for every head of cattle on it.

"I never hearn tell of sech a thing, ma'am. Mebbe you don't understand it, but it makes every cow-man boil. Ever since there was a cow in this country, the cow-men have used the open range without payin' for it. How come the Gov'ment makes 'em pay now? Here's scads of grazin' land goin' to waste. But the Gov'ment's goin' to have a real job on its hands, collectin' grazin'-fees from these ranchers."

MARIEL failed to comprehend half of the old cow-hand's tirade, and her expression showed it.

"But do the ranchers think they can oppose the Government successfully?"

"They can make it so hot that no ranger'll dare come in here an' try to collect grazin'-fees. It wouldn't surprise me a mite, ma'am, if Ranger Fyffe, up at Red Rock ranger station, would up an' decide to leave the country right sudden. In fact, the boys was talkin' last night about issuin' him a formal invitation."

"What if he refused to go?"

"Well, ma'am, the boys have a right persuadin' way about 'em, I bet he'd go. If he didn't—well, he might stay, permanent."

Horror was growing in Mariel's eyes as she listened to old Simple's explanation.

"You mean to say they'd—they'd kill him?"

"Well, now, ma'am, a wise man can take a hint. There wont be any need for a killin'. For instance, say, one of the boys

is picked to deliver a cordial invite to this ranger to leave the country—or to quit his job an' stay here like an honest citizen, for, y'understand, miss, no one's got anything personal against this ranger. If he got kilt, it would be a matter of principle, so to speak, with no hard feelin's toward him.

"Well, s'posin' he gets uppity an' balks. What then? Why, mebbe some one shoots up his place. Then, if he don't take the hint, mebbe they start shootin' in earnest. Nobody believes in unnecessary killin', ma'am, 'cept some real gunmen an' killers. But it all depends on the feller that delivers the invite, an' how the ranger'd take it. Naow, if the messenger'd get lit up a mite, an' mebbe think he was a woodtick an' it was his night to tick, an' if the ranger got nasty, why, anything might happen."

Mariel shuddered and said: "I think it's a cowardly thing to do."

"Mebbe so, ma'am, mebbe so," grinned the old cow-hand, shrugging. "I reckon you aint the only one thinks so, either. The boys drawed lots to pick who was to run the ranger off'm the range. The one they picked wasn't there. When they told him about it, that was just what he said. He give 'em h— I mean, ma'am, he said it didn't look right to him. But I reckon he was just scared out, ma'am. Left in a huff, he did, sayin' he was goin' over to the cabin of Gus Bernat, the trapper, to look for rustlers. Said the Gov'ment had a right to collect grazin'-fees an' to limit the range, an' that it was all for the cow-man's good in the long run. Next thing, I bet he'll be standin' up for the nester an' his damn bob wire—beggin' your pardon, ma'am. Bobbed wire is goin' to strangle the cow-man, if he don't look aout."

Mariel glanced at the tiny watch strapped to her wrist. Seemingly she was deeply interested in Simple's discourse on the cow-men's feud with the rangers, rustlers, nesters and barbed wire. But despite this apparent interest, she displayed evidences of impatience.

"It's nearly nine o'clock," she announced, almost petulantly. "I wonder if—"

"I shouldn't wonder, ma'am," Simple interrupted, grinning, "if that's him comin' naow."

A dashing figure on a white-stockinged chestnut had rounded the corner of the bunkhouse, and was approaching the corral at a trot. With almost a single motion he halted before them, leaped from the saddle and stood, hat in hand and bridle looped over his arm, smiling and bowing slightly before Mariel. She returned the smile.

"This is indeed a surprise, Mr. Bledsoe," she told him brightly, smoothing a fold in her riding habit. Simple chuckled.

"Just thought I'd drop over to see if the Footstool's got any line on those rustlers," Bledsoe began pleasantly. "Didn't think I'd be so fortunate as to find you, Miss Lancaster." Then, turning to Simple: "H'lo, Simp. Where's Otis?"

"Howdy, Jess," the cow-hand responded. "Reckon Otis is out some'ers down Gros Ventre way."

"Wonder if he's heard about the trouble up at the ranger cabin?" Bledsoe asked. "Some of the boys says the Sheriff got a hurry-up call from the Red Rock station."

CHAPTER III

OTIS CARR, bending over the kneeling officer in the ranger cabin, seemed fairly stupefied with astonishment as Lafe Ogden read the words which branded him as the murderer of Ranger Fyffe. Even when the Sheriff turned and looked up at him, condemnation in his keen gaze and his hand instinctively seeking his gun, Otis stood petrified, oblivious of everything but the scrawled and blurred inscription on the floor. He still bent forward, eyes staring, pale beneath his tan, his mouth agape.

Deputy Seth Markey whipped his revolver from its holster. He did not train it upon Otis, but stood with arms crossed, eying him narrowly, alert for the slightest hostile move. Sheriff Ogden rose slowly to his feet, his gaze intent upon the younger man.

Through Otis' mind flashed a picture of Joe Fyffe, wounded, rushing into the ranger cabin, staggering toward the table, clutching at the telephone, frantically calling for help, and then slowly sinking to the floor, where he lay in agony. And then the ranger, knowing his life was measured by minutes, had striven to set down a message that would reveal the identity of the man who had shot him.

In the scene as reënacted in Otis' mind, Fyffe fumbled with stiffening fingers at his shirt pocket, searching for the stub of his pencil. Fighting down his agony, he scrawled his damning indictment of Otis—his friend!

And Otis, still standing there, bent for-

ward, staring down at the floor, seemed to see the ranger's body suddenly go limp, the pencil dropping from nerveless fingers. And then the pool of blood slowly widening under the motionless body.

"Otis Carr shot me because—"

What would the rest of the sentence have been? What if Ranger Fyffe's heart had pulsed a few more beats? What would he have written?

And why—why had he written that Otis Carr shot him, when Otis had been fifteen miles from the ranger station throughout the night?

GRADUALLY Otis became conscious of his surroundings again. He straightened, and looked from the Sheriff to his deputy, and back again. He saw nothing in their gaze but cold conviction of his guilt.

Why didn't they say something? Why did they stand there, silent and impeaching? They had him on the defensive, at their mercy. He cleared his throat to speak, with no definite idea of what he would say. But the words would not come, and the sounds that issued from his lips were stammering and unintelligible. At last he made an awkward little gesture of helplessness with his hands, and dropped his head.

Sheriff Ogden, without taking his eyes from Otis, spoke to his deputy.

"Take his gun," he directed shortly. Otis remained motionless while Markey lifted the weapon from its holster, and rapidly passed his hands over Otis' body in search of other arms.

The deputy glanced at the revolver and turned it over to the Sheriff with the remark: "Been fired twice."

"How come, Otis?" asked the Sheriff, not unkindly, but with the air of one with an unpleasant duty to perform.

Otis suddenly found his voice.

"Shot at a rattler, just before I reached the Buffalo Forks road."

The trace of a smile hovered about Sheriff Ogden's lips.

"And I s'pose whoever shot Joe Fyffe come into the cabin afterward and wrote them words on the floor, just to throw suspicion on you?"

Otis raised his head and looked Ogden squarely in the eyes.

"No, Sheriff; Joe Fyffe wrote that. I've seen his writing before. This is a little bit shaky, but it's Joe Fyffe's writing."

The Sheriff raised his brows and emitted a low whistle of surprise.

"How do you account for his scribbling that on the floor, then?"

"I tell you I can't account for it," Otis admitted. "I own up that it struck me all of a heap. I was as much surprised as you when I saw it. You know I never had any quarrel with Joe Fyffe. We were friends. Why should I kill him?"

"Now, just between you and me, didn't your daddy say, like all the rest of the cow-men here, that the Gov'ment wasn't going to collect a penny of grazing-fees, and that the ranger ought to be run out of the country?"

Otis, who had regained his color after the first shock of the discovery, paled visibly again at the Sheriff's question. He hesitated an instant before he answered.

"Why, yes," he retorted, "there's no use denying that. You know as well as I that the Government rangers aren't any too popular in the cattle country. But you admit that *all* the cow-men dislike the rangers. Why should that indicate any motive on *my* part?"

"I aint saying it does," Ogden remarked. "I'm asking for information. Now, isn't it true, Otis, that just because you was particularly friendly with Joe Fyffe, you thought you could talk to him better than anyone else? Wasn't that the reason you come over here last night—not with any notion of killing him, mind you—but just to tell him he'd better clear out, before somethin' happened?

"I'm supposin' that you came here to do him a service—to warn him to git out before there was trouble, 'cause I know you and him was pretty good friends. Now, Otis, tell me straight—wasn't that about the way things sized up? One word led to another. Maybe he pulled a gun on you first, and you had to do it, or get killed yourself. If you'll say it was self-defense, now, maybe that'll go a long ways with the jury. Between you and me, haven't I hit it about right?"

Otis, staring at Ogden, his eyes narrowed and his lips compressed, shook his head.

"I tell you, Sheriff, I didn't kill Joe Fyffe. How could I claim self-defense when I was fifteen miles from here all night? And if I were the one who really killed him, do you think I'd have shot him down like this, without giving him a chance?

The Sheriff shrugged and turned away.

"Remember, Otis, I'm tryin' to help you. Of course, I can't make you say what you don't want to say. But if you think you'll ever get away with an alibi defense, in the face of that writin' on the floor and those empty cartridges in your gun—why, you've got another guess comin'. But a self-defense plea may get you somewheres. I'm just tryin' to give you a tip, that's all. It's none of my funeral."

Otis, who had regained his composure to some extent by this time, cried out with some display of eagerness:

"Well, there's one way we can settle this whole thing, Sheriff. Let's ride over to Gus Bernat's cabin right now, and if he tells you I wasn't at his place last night, then I'm willing to go to jail."

The Sheriff frowned and shook his head.

"No chance, Otis. It's too far. I'm afraid we'll have to take you to Jackson under arrest, and investigate the evidence afterward. But I'll send word to Gus to come to town tomorrow. If his story fits in with yours—well, then it will be up to the prosecuting attorney to decide what to do. Seth, you telephone the coroner. Then we'll cut that plank out of the floor as evidence, and get started back to town."

WHILE the deputy was carrying out the Sheriff's instructions, Otis seated himself at the table, and rolled and lighted a cigarette. He made note of the fact that there was not the slightest tremor in his fingers, and was glad, for he knew his every act was being observed closely, and that evidences of nervousness would not help him.

He had banished the panic which had possessed him at first when he read the dead man's accusation. Now he reflected that all that was needed to tear asunder the veil of suspicion which enveloped him, was Gus Bernat's alibi. His spirits rose with the thought, but he did not neglect to study every feature of the room as he waited. For he knew that even though Bernat's alibi would free him from facing trial, nothing but the discovery of the identity of the real murderer would absolve him from suspicion in the minds of the residents of the community. And there was one person in particular whose regard had come, within the last few days, to mean far more to Otis than he had realized until he had been snared in this trap of Fate.

"All right, Otis, let's go," Sheriff Ogden called when the deputy had ripped from the floor the plank containing Joe Fyffe's dying words. He permitted the door of the ranger cabin to remain unlocked, explaining that the coroner would fasten it after removing the body.

Otis' chestnut pony, a rugged little mountain animal which had gained the name of "Pie-face" because of the splotched white star between his eyes, turned an inquiring look at the approach of his master. Like all Western saddle-horses, Pie-face had been taught to stand as though hitched as long as his reins were trailing on the ground. As Otis passed the reins over the animal's head, he threw one arm about the neck of his loyal little mount and patted him affectionately. Here, at least, was one friend who would always believe in him!

"Looks like rain, Sheriff," Otis drawled with assumed nonchalance. "Look at those clouds rolling over the Tetons. By the way, are you going to use your—er—handcuffs?"

"Handcuffs?" repeated the Sheriff almost indignantly. "What'd we want with handcuffs? We got our guns, and you aint armed. You wouldn't dare make a break. We know it, and you know it. No, Otis, I aint going to rub it in. But if you'll give me your promise you wont try to make a break, it'll make it a whole lot easier for me."

Otis laughed shortly. Already they had started down the narrow trail which led from the ranger station to the Buffalo Forks road. Markey was in the lead, and Ogden brought up the rear.

"Sure, Sheriff—I'll promise you I wont try to get away. If I tried to escape, that would be a mighty good sign that I'm guilty, and that I'm scared to face a showdown, wouldn't it?"

They were nearing the road, which skirts Red Rock creek, when Markey suddenly reined in his mount and directed Ogden's attention to a moving figure in the aspens beyond the stream. For a moment Sheriff and deputy eyed the figure and conversed in undertones.

"Looks like one of the Radley boys," Sheriff Ogden announced at length. "Wonder what he's doing over here, so far off his own range. Guess we'd better find out."

CHAPTER IV

"WHAT'RE you going to do with me?" Otis inquired, the trace of a smile playing about his lips.

The Sheriff, puzzled, turned to his deputy.

"You better stay here with Otis, Seth," he directed. Then he glanced at the spot across the stream where the moving figure had disappeared in the trees. For an instant he pondered, uncertain.

"No," he announced in a moment, "that wont do. It would take two of us to get him, now that he's in that timber. Guess we'll have to let him go."

"Wait a minute," objected the deputy. "I'll fix it so we can both go."

He swung from the saddle, reached in his saddlebags and drew forth a pair of nickel-plated handcuffs.

"Hate to do this, Otis," he began hurriedly, "but we wont be gone long. Just step over by this tree."

Otis dismounted, not at all pleased that his pledge not to attempt to escape had not been accepted. He resolved, however, to make no protest, knowing that were he in the place of his captors, he would take every precaution to prevent the escape of a prisoner, if he deemed that prisoner guilty of murder. So without a word he stepped to the tree.

The deputy snapped one of the steel circlets about his left wrist. Then he brought Otis' right hand about the trunk of the tree, a fairly large lodgepole pine, and snapped the other end of the handcuffs about his right wrist. Otis was left standing, facing the tree, his arms about its trunk, and his wrists pinioned on the other side of the pine.

"Sorry," the deputy told him shortly as he flung himself into the saddle again. "We'll be back pretty soon."

The Sheriff had said nothing while Markey had been fastening Otis' arms about the tree. Otis watched them ford the creek and plunge into the timber on the farther bank. He was glad that the tree was far enough removed from the road that none of his friends, who might be passing, could discover him in his humiliating predicament. Pie-face stood on the creek bank, a few yards distant, cropping the grass by the water's edge. Otis knew that so long as his bridle was dragging there would be no danger of his straying away into the timber.

FOR perhaps five minutes Otis struggled vainly to work himself into a position where he might draw his tobacco and cigarette papers from his vest pocket. Finally, with an exclamation of impatience, he desisted in his attempt to prepare a smoke, and devoted his efforts to devising a means whereby he might sit down.

This, too, he found to be impossible. The base of the tree-trunk was too large, and the roots sloped off over the creek bank at such an angle as to make a sitting posture out of the question.

Otis was curious to know the result of the expedition of Sheriff Ogden and Seth Markey in pursuit of the figure which had melted into the timber. He too had caught a fleeting glimpse of the man, and believed it to be "Soggy" Radley of the Jackson's Hole country. Soggy had gained his sobriquet through his ability to enjoy his own flapjacks, which no one else, even his brother Ginger, could stomach.

The presence of one of the Radley boys so far from his own range was full of meaning to Otis. Coupled with the recent brand-blotting from which various stockmen in the vicinity had suffered, it meant that Soggy would have much to explain—particularly in that he was not keeping to the open trail, but was skulking through the timber afoot.

A chipmunk approached Otis over the rocks in a series of quick advances and shorter retreats. The little animal finally reached a point within a yard of his feet, and for a moment sat erect on its haunches, eying him curiously from beadlike eyes. Presently it discovered a seed fallen from a pine-cone, and retired to a near-by rock, where it sat nibbling away and flirting its tail, but keeping a wary eye upon him.

Otis wondered what Sheriff Ogden would do if he should discover Soggy Radley in the act of using a running-iron on a Footstool calf. He believed that the Sheriff would relish making such an arrest far more than he had relished making the arrest of Otis himself on the charge of murdering Ranger Fyffe.

The capture of one of the Radley boys, with sufficient evidence for a conviction, would meet with popular approval, and would make many votes at the next election. Otis knew Sheriff Ogden to be an easy-going official of the type which makes a good politician, eager to please everyone, if possible, and loath to make enemies.

Although the Sheriff was likable enough, and when the occasion demanded it, a fearless officer, Otis knew that most of his official acts were accomplished with an eye to their effect at the next election.

He believed, also, that Ogden would have been reluctant to cause his arrest, had he not been convinced of Otis' guilt. And in view of the circumstances of the damning bit of writing on the cabin floor, and the empty shells in his revolver, he could not hold it against the Sheriff that that official was so confident he had committed the crime.

"Wait until he talks to Gus Bernat," Otis said aloud, frightening the chipmunk, "then I'll have the laugh on him."

It would be odd indeed, he thought, if the Sheriff should return with Soggy Radley as his prisoner, charged with the theft of cattle from Otis, whom he held on a charge of murder.

A COLD wind, sweeping down from the snow-covered Tetons, set the leaves of the quaking aspen atremble, and sung through the branches of the pines. Otis glanced at the sky, and uttered an exclamation of exasperation.

"Looks like I'm in for a good drenching," he remarked to the chipmunk, which scuttled away among the rocks again. "It's a wonder they didn't take a look at the weather before they left me chained up like this. But then, I suppose prisoners can't be too particular."

The wind ceased. A big drop of rain splashed on the rock where the chipmunk had sat. Then, with a rush, the storm broke. The wind lashed the aspen grove, until Otis, peering through the sheets of rain, could see nothing but the silvery under side of the leaves.

He shrank against the tree, circling to the east so the trunk might afford him some measure of protection from the driving rain. He was thankful for the little shelter that the spreading branches of the pine gave him.

There was a flash of lightning—the lessening roll of thunder echoing from the rocky walls of the gulch. He could barely make out the trees on the far side of the creek. Pie-face, his back humped to the storm, stood head down, now and then casting a curious glance at his master, who made no move to lead him to shelter.

Suddenly there was a terrific report. Otis believed he could feel the earth tremble beneath him. He knew that the lightning had struck a tree somewhere in the gulch near by.

Then, for the first time, he was assailed by a questioning fear for his own safety. He remembered coming upon the bodies of a score of sheep that had sought shelter beneath a huge tree in the highlands near Two-Gwo-Tee pass two years before, only to be electrocuted in a mass when a bolt of lightning struck the tree. He cursed the deputy for his thoughtlessness in chaining him to the pine, when it was plain that the electrical storm was approaching.

Tied to his saddle was his slicker, which might have saved him from the chilling rain. He called to Pie-face, but the animal, true to the tradition of the range horse, would not stir so long as his bridle was dragging.

Presently he raised his head and sniffed suspiciously. He thought he detected the odor of burning pine. He wondered if the lightning had set fire to the tree which it had struck. He edged about his tree and swept every portion of the narrow gulch with a searching glance.

What if the lightning had started a forest fire? He had known of fires started by lightning which had swept through the timber for miles before they had been checked or had burned themselves out. Was he chained and helpless in the path of such a fire, to be burned to death without a chance for his life?

Presently, however, the storm subsided. A few minutes more, and it had gone as suddenly as it had come. The sun broke through over the jagged crest of the Tetons. Otis watched the black rain-clouds as they swept on rapidly eastward.

Still there was no sign of the return of Sheriff Ogden and his deputy.

OTIS edged about the tree into the sun light. He became conscious, presently of a low hum which seemed to pervade the air. Pie-face pricked up his ears nervously and stood gazing up the gulch. The chipmunk emerged from the rocks and scuttled away up the mountainside.

The hum grew into a roar. The roar became like the crash of artillery.

Otis shot one glance up the narrow gulch. He saw a brown wall of twisting, turning and crashing timber sweeping down upon him. He could see no water. Yet he knew that the twelve-foot wall of smashing tree-trunks and rubbish was the forefront of a brown and swirling flood.

He threw himself backward with all his weight in an attempt to break his bonds. The handcuffs bit deep into his wrists, but held. He was insensible to the agony as

he threw himself backward again and yet again.

Twice he had seen sudden floods caused by mountain cloudbursts sweep down a narrow gulch, carrying everything before them, eating away at the mountainside and tearing out great boulders in their path. He had seen a stanchly built log cabin blotted out in an instant, and had aided in the search for the body of its occupant, which was never found.

Terror conquered training in Pie-face. The horse broke and ran, striking diagonally up the rocky slope, struggling upward with the agility of a pine marten.

Even as he struggled, Otis, white-faced and gasping, could picture himself crushed beneath the crashing wall of logs. With a tremendous heave, he threw himself backward for the last time. The handcuffs held.

He swung himself about the tree. It flashed through his mind that its sturdy trunk might protect him to some extent against the shock of the impact. But even if he were not crushed like a bear in a deadfall, he felt that, chained to the tree, he would be drowned beneath the chocolate waters. In a last frantic effort to escape he began awkwardly to climb the tree.

The cold breath of the flood engulfed him. The smashing of the timbers drowned out all other sound. He closed his eyes and clung to the trunk.

Then the flood struck.

CHAPTER V

"ON the level, Miss Lancaster," Jess Bledsoe was saying as they jogged along the Buffalo Forks road, "Otis Carr is a mighty fine chap. All the boys hereabouts like him. A little retiring, sometimes, and mighty awkward all the time. But he's pretty level-headed, except once in a while when he lets his temper get away with him. And he knows the cattle business from hoof to ears, and range to stockyards."

Mariel smiled. "Margaret worships her big brother," she volunteered. "She used to show me his letters while we were at school together. From what she told me about him, I rather expected to find him a sort of superman. He isn't at all as I pictured him."

Jess glanced at her curiously. "You aren't disappointed, are you?" he asked with just a trace of jealousy in his query.

"Indeed I'm not," Mariel replied, looking away. "He isn't a superman by any means. He's very human." And then, as an afterthought, she added: "And modest!"

Jess looked at her a trifle suspiciously. "You know," he said, "there's grown to be quite a friendly rivalry between Otis and me." Mariel shot a doubtful and inquiring glance at him. "Each of us wants to be the first to catch the rustlers who have been getting into our stock," he went on; and Mariel breathed a sigh of relief.

"We both believe the Radley boys over in Jackson's Hole are the ones responsible for all this rustling, but so far, we haven't been able to prove a thing. If the boys ever catch them at it—well, it's going to be pretty tough on the Radley brothers."

"But isn't cattle—er—rustling just plain stealing?"

"Some say it's worse than that, Miss Mariel."

"Well, then, why don't the police, or whoever enforces the laws, arrest these people and bring them to trial?"

Jess laughed good-naturedly.

"Well, there's several reasons for that. The penalty provided by the law isn't stiff enough to worry the rustlers much. So the cattle men sort of figure that they can attend to the situation without bothering the Sheriff about it. And they can, usually—if they're smart enough. But it seems that none of us hereabouts is quite smart enough to catch them in the act. They do say that sooner or later they all get caught. But as long as these rustlers don't overplay their hand, they may continue to get by almost indefinitely.

"They say that a good many of the ranches in this country were built up by the—er—foresight of their owners in keeping a keen eye on mavericks, and in not being too particular as to what stock they placed their brands on.

"Now, maybe these rustlers are just following their example. Maybe they intend to build up a herd the way the others have done, and then quit rustling and operate—er—legitimately.

"In the second place, the Sheriff can't go out and arrest Soggy Radley or his brother just because Otis Carr or I or anyone else happens to entertain a suspicion that they're cattle rustlers. Remember, such a charge would have to be tried before a jury, and so the Sheriff would have to have something more than suspicion before he made an arrest. And maybe the jury

would include one or two cow-men who hadn't been so particular themselves in slapping their brands on stray stock. So, even if you've got pretty conclusive evidence, that doesn't necessarily mean a conviction.

"No, the boys figure on handling the situation themselves, and I guess it's just as well. Sooner or later Otis or I or some one else is going to get something on these Radley boys. And then they'll decide to drift along through the Tetons to Idaho or somewhere where the climate's more agreeable. If they don't—well, they'll get what Ed Gunn the outlaw got, when he shot this finger off. They hanged him afterward."

MARIEL, puzzled, shook her head.

"I don't know that I quite get your point of view out here," she told Jess soberly. "At home when anything like this happens, we go to the proper authorities, and they do something about it. Here you seem to take things into your own hands, without regard for authorities—that is, if you don't actually oppose the authorities, as in the case of the forest rangers."

Jess turned in his saddle and peered at her searchingly.

"Did Otis tell you about our trouble with the ranger here?"

"That picturesque old cowboy, Mr. Sample, told me about some bloodthirsty plot which was being concocted to frighten the ranger into leaving this region. I think it's a cowardly thing to do!"

"Old Simp?" Jess laughed. "He shoots off his mouth just to hear himself talk. I wouldn't believe everything he says, Miss Mariel."

"Then it isn't true?"

"Well—" Jess hesitated. Without answering her question, he asked: "Did old Simp mention—er—anyone in particular?"

"I think he spoke of their drawing lots to choose one of their number to deliver the threat to the ranger. But I believe he said the man refused to be a party to the outrageous proceeding."

"Did he mention any names?"

"No, I think not. Why? Do you know the man?"

Jess grunted. "Now, Miss Mariel, you're asking me to tell you something I shouldn't."

Mariel lifted her eyebrows. "I beg your pardon, Mr. Bledsoe. I have no desire to pry into any of your secrets. . . . . Look at those black clouds. Don't you think we'd better turn back to the far—ranch, I mean?"

Jess was worried, and showed it.

"You wouldn't want me to turn tale-bearer, would you, Miss Mariel?" he asked her.

"Not at all," Mariel replied coolly, reining in her horse. "Don't you think it's going to rain?"

Jess laid a gloved hand on her bridle.

"Now, Miss Mariel, I didn't mean to offend you," he pleaded. "Can't you see the position you put me in?"

Mariel turned her back on him—perhaps that he might not see the smile playing about her lips.

"But you admit there was such a conspiracy?"

"If you want to call it that—yes."

"And Mr. Sample wasn't stuffing me, then?"

"In the main he was right, I suppose. But old Simp does love to paint things in lurid colors."

"And you don't think it's going to rain?"

Jess scanned the black clouds which now obscured the Tetons.

"These mountain showers don't last very long. We can find shelter under some of these overhanging rocks."

"I think I prefer to start back to the ranch. Isn't this thing rolled up behind my saddle a raincoat?"

"It's a slicker, Miss Mariel. If you really want to turn back, you'd better put it on before we start."

AT a glance from her he leaned over, untied the thongs which held the slicker, and without dismounting, held it while she thrust her arms in the sleeves.

Mariel, unaccustomed to the foibles of Western horses, drew the yellow oilskin forward with a widespread flourish. Instantly Dynamite, old but temperamental, leaped forward and bolted. Ears laid back, his body close to the ground, he started down the Buffalo Forks road, bent on outrunning the flapping slicker which had frightened him.

His first leap had almost dislodged Mariel from the saddle. She did not scream, but a startled cry of alarm burst from her lips as Dynamite bolted.

She had let the reins drop as she had raised her arms to don the slicker. Now she clutched at the pommel, and clung to it with every ounce of her strength.

Instantly Jess had dug his spurs into his

white-stockinged chestnut. He was but two lengths behind old Dynamite, and the chestnut was a far fleeter animal.

Jess might have overtaken Dynamite, and forced him to stop by crowding him into the embankment on the far side of the road. Or he might have grasped the bolting horse's bridle, causing him to slow down gradually.

But Jess was nothing if not dramatic. He spurred the chestnut forward until he was racing neck-and-neck with Dynamite. He leaned over and grasped Mariel about the waist. He threw his weight back and dragged her from the saddle, meanwhile reining in the chestnut, which came jerkily to a halt.

Jess lowered the girl to the ground. He leaped from the saddle, and an instant later was supporting her with an arm about her waist.

For a moment Mariel clung to him, gasping. Slowly the color returned to her face. Presently she moved away from him uncertainly. He made as if to follow her, but was fended off by an outstretched arm.

"Oh!" she panted, speaking for the first time. "That was splendid of you, Mr. Bledsoe! Why, I might have been killed!"

"It was nothing," Jess assured her with every appearance of modesty. "I'm glad I could be of service—Mariel."

It was the first time he had addressed her by her first name. She affected to take no notice of it.

"I don't know how I can ever repay you," she protested. "If it hadn't been for—"

"Forget it!" Jess interrupted magnanimously. "If you feel faint—" He stepped forward again.

"Oh, I'm all right now," she assured him with a little laugh. "Look at Dynamite. He's cropping the grass as if he'd never in the world thought of running away."

Jess knew better than to attempt to press his advantage too far. He stalked forward with jingling spurs and grasped the bridle of Dynamite, who had come to a halt a score of yards away.

"I—I guess we'd better start back. It's starting to rain," she faltered, plainly a bit afraid of her mount, who eyed her innocently when Jess led him back.

"Don't let him see you're scared of him," Jess advised, cupping his hands to help her into the saddle. "Just keep that slicker from flapping, and he wont try it again."

The pounding of hoofs became audible down the road. Both turned, and presently a horseman rounded a turn in the road at a full gallop. He drew in as he came abreast them. It was Spider Ponsonby, a lanky member of the Footstool outfit.

"Heard the news?" he called. And then, without waiting for a reply: "Ranger Joe Fyffe was murdered last night. And the Sheriff's got Otis Carr under arrest!"

CHAPTER VI

OTIS felt the trunk of the tree tremble and give at the first shock of the flood. Almost instantly the rushing waters overwhelmed him. Their icy grip clutched and tore at his arms and legs as he clung to the trunk. All sight and sound was blotted out by the chocolate flood.

Abruptly he became conscious that he no longer was in an upright position. Still clinging to the tree, he felt himself turning over and over with it. He remembered that the roots had been partly exposed in the creek-bank, and knew that the pine had been uprooted by the flood.

For a mere instant he felt himself above the surface. He gasped for breath. Immediately he was plunged beneath the rushing waters again. He clung to the tree with all his strength. He knew that once his legs were torn from the trunk, he would be hurled about by the torrent until his arms, still pinioned by the handcuffs, would be snapped in a dozen places.

Strangely enough, his terror of the instant before had left him. His brain was remarkably clear. He knew that what little chance for life was left him depended upon his clinging to the tree.

His first impulse had been to struggle. Instinct urged him to release his grip, to strive to break his bonds, to fight his way to the surface. But reason conquered. He gripped the whirling tree with every atom of his strength.

With a jar that racked every bone in his body the tree stopped. For just an instant he felt the swift current tugging at his body again. Then he felt the tree lifted from the water.

He shook the water from his eyes. At first he saw a jumble of rocky walls and green trees and blue sky and chocolate water. Then he realized that he was upside down. He saw that the tree-top had collided with a huge boulder. The force

of the water was hurling the trunk, roots uppermost, through the arc of a huge circle. The tree-top, jammed against the boulder, formed the axis of the arc.

It seemed ages before the tree was upended, and crashed down again through the lower half of the arc. Clutching leech-like, upside-down, he had time to note that the tree-top was now but a mass of jagged branches, broken off close to the trunk. But although it seemed ages that he was being hurled through the air with the tree, in reality he had barely time to gasp again for air before he was plunged beneath the surface. Once more he felt himself whirling and turning with the tree as it was swept down the rocky gorge.

Otis had feared that he would be crushed in the maelstrom of milling logs and débris at the forefront of the flood. A quick glance while he hung suspended in the air showed him that the boiling surface of the waters was free of all except the smallest branches. He knew that the tree must have withstood the first shock of the flood —the wall of water he had seen bearing the swirling mass of timber.

BUT the peril of being crushed in the tumbling conglomeration of débris was far from being the only risk. He knew that at any instant he might be battered against a boulder, or ground between the trunk and the rocky walls of the gorge. True, the jagged stumps of the branches at one end of the trunk, and the spreading mass of roots at the other to some extent served to protect him from the rocks. Once, indeed, he felt a shock and became conscious of a numbness in his right leg. He never knew whether it was a jutting boulder or a log which had struck him.

He was becoming dizzy from the ceaseless whirling, and from the repeated necessity of holding his breath. He feared he would become so dazed that his grip on the tree would relax. The tree collided with another rock, and the shock left him breathless.

Strangely enough, he had no fear of drowning, so long as he could remain conscious. He knew that unconsciousness meant drowning, or else being beaten to a lifeless pulp against the rocks. But every few seconds he would find himself thrown above the water as the trunk revolved in the murky maelstrom. And each time he managed to gasp for breath before he was again submerged.

Suddenly above the roar of the flood came a terrific, wrenching crash, accompanied by a shock that left his senses reeling. There was a rending and a tearing of splintered wood. He felt his grip loosen on the rough trunk. The lower part of his body was torn away from the tree.

"This is the end," was the one thought that emerged from the confusion of his senses.

The flood clutched at him, dragged him along the trunk, his manacled wrists jerking and tearing along the rough bark. Darkness overwhelmed him. He felt that he was floating away on billowy clouds. The roar of the flood grew dim. . . . .

RETURNING consciousness found Otis Carr lying on a high gravel bar. He started to raise a hand to his eyes; but he had forgotten the handcuffs.

He sat up. He still heard the roar of the flood. As his brain cleared, he saw the brown waters rushing past, less than a yard from his feet. A chocolate fountain spurted high in the air where the rushing waters encountered a submerged rock. The tree—

He looked about for the tree that first had been the means of pinioning him in the path of the flood, and then had been the means of saving his life. Thirty yards upstream he saw a mass of roots jammed between two boulders. An immense splinter was all that remained of the bole. The branches and upper portion of the trunk were nowhere to be seen.

Otis rose slowly to his feet. His right leg was still numb. The sleeves of his coat, above the manacles, were ripped and frayed. Blood trickled in a thin stream from beneath one cuff. His clothing was saturated with the muddy water. Every muscle in his body was stiff and sore. He felt of a good-sized lump above one ear, but noted that there was no abrasion.

Gradually, as he stared at the mass of roots jammed in the boulders, it dawned on him what had happened. The tree—his tree—had collided with the boulders with terrific force. The impact had been so great that the trunk had been shattered. The upper part of the tree had been swept downstream by the current, which had dragged him along the splintered portion of the trunk until it had swept him free. It had carried him, too, downstream, to cast him up on the high gravel bar as

if he had been but another fragment of driftwood.

He wondered how far downstream he had been swept by the flood. The time he had been buffeted about by the onrush of waters had seemed interminable. He cast about to get his bearings—and to his surprise, he found he was barely three hundred yards from the spot where he had been manacled to the tree.

Slowly, because of his stiffened limbs and handcuffed wrists, he climbed up the rocks and out of the gorge. He made for the Buffalo Forks road sixty yards away, and started back upstream. Rounding a bend in the road, he beheld Pie-face standing, ears upraised inquiringly, not one hundred feet above the spot where Otis had been swept away with the tree.

Otis swung into the saddle, and immediately Pie-face started down the road at a trot. Unlike the cavalry horse, which is trained to stand after the rider mounts until a touch of the heels gives him the signal to go, the range horse moves the instant he feels the weight of the rider in the stirrup. So Otis without directing the horse, found himself headed back toward the Footstool ranch.

FOR the first time he realized that it might be unwise to return to the ranch, particularly with his wrists in manacles. His narrow escape from the flood had driven from his mind, for the time being, all thought of his predicament resulting from his arrest for the murder of Fyffe. Now it was brought home to him forcibly by the instinctive course of his horse.

What should he do? Undoubtedly he could make his way to the ranch and rid himself of the handcuffs. Any of the ranch employees, he knew, would assist him in filing them off, and would aid in his concealment from the Sheriff, if he asked it. For that matter, virtually any of the cattle men between Jackson and Two-Gwo-Tee would do as much, if they knew he was sought for the slaying of the ranger.

It would be easy enough to make his escape. Nowhere in the United States were conditions more favorable for flight from pursuing officers. Jackson's Hole lay but a few miles to the west, and beyond the Hole lay the Tetons, offering a secure and inviting sanctuary. More than that, he knew the pursuit would be far from diligent. Undoubtedly Sheriff Ogden, to save his face, would follow him as far as the Tetons. But he knew the Sheriff, if he possessed any sort of an excuse, would probably prefer to have him escape.

And then, the Sheriff might believe him drowned, swept away in the flood, which was still roaring through the gorge. Again, Otis could, if need be, bring pressure to bear upon Ogden if he became too conscientious, simply by revealing that he had left a prisoner, chained and helpless, in the path of the flood.

On the other hand—why should he flee from a charge which he knew to be groundless? Flight would convince the entire rangeland of his guilt—if it retained any doubt, after it heard of the murder. Cowardice was worse than being the object of unfounded suspicion—worse even, than paying the extreme penalty for the crime of some one else. Besides, there was Gus Bernat, who would swear to his alibi—

So Otis fought with himself his first great battle. Two hours later Ogden's chief deputy, sitting in the Sheriff's office in Jackson, brought down the forelegs of his chair in startled surprise as he saw Otis, still handcuffed, dismount and approach stiffly.

"You're dead!" the chief deputy called out at his approach. "Lafe phoned a hour ago that you was drownded in the flood. He's still huntin' for your body."

"Not quite drowned, but almost," Otis grinned. "You see, I'd promised Lafe I wouldn't attempt to escape, so here I am."

"Damn fool!" snorted the chief deputy. "Why didn't you beat it while the beatin' was good?"

"I preferred to have the Sheriff turn me loose himself," Otis replied, smiling. "He'll do it, too, when he hears what Gus Bernat has to say."

"Gus Bernat?" repeated the chief deputy. "Why, he was drownded in the flood hisself. The coroner stopped for his body on the way back with Fyffe's."

CHAPTER VII

BERNAT was dead! His alibi was gone! With Bernat had died his last chance for freedom—for life itself, perhaps! What chance remained for him to convince a jury of his innocence? He was enmeshed in a net of overwhelming circumstantial evidence. Who would believe his story now? Who, in the face of Fyffe's written message, of the empty shells in Otis' re-

volver, of the widely known enmity between the cattle men and the rangers, would hold his weak defense as anything more than a crude and hastily conceived fabrication?

The shock of the discovery of Fyffe's condemning scrawl and of his subsequent arrest had been great, indeed. But through it all he had been buoyed up by the confidence that Bernat could provide an iron-clad alibi.

Years before, one of his father's cow-hands had been cornered by a grizzly in the Snake River valley south of the Yellowstone. The man had raised his rifle to fire, and the rifle had jammed. Otis, then a boy, had been one of the party which had found the torn and mutilated body, with the jammed rifle by its side.

Now he knew how the cow-hand must have felt at the instant the rifle jammed, with the towering grizzly approaching. For he, Otis, was left helpless before the blind fury of the law.

Sheriff Ogden had returned to Jackson an hour after his chief deputy had led Otis to his cell.

"Yep, Gus Bernat's dead as a doornail," he announced with some evidence of sympathy. "Between you and me, looks like you're outa luck."

Otis shrugged, and tried to smile.

"It can't be helped," he replied. "Guess things aren't breaking my way."

An embarrassing pause was broken by the Sheriff, who began:

"Say, Otis—are you goin' to say anything about bein' left handcuffed to that tree?"

"I don't see why it's necessary," Otis replied. "Why?"

"I was just thinking," Ogden went on, "that maybe I could throw a few favors your way that might help a lot when it comes time for the trial. I wish you'd just forget about that part of it, if you can. I don't suppose you tried to advertise the fact that you was wearin' handcuffs when you rode into town. Everybody knows you was caught in the flood, and that you came in and gave yourself up. It was mighty white of you, because I know you could have made a clean get-away. It took us longer than we thought to trail Radley, and he got away. But no one knows about the handcuff part except you and me and the boys in the office—and they'll keep their mouths shut."

Otis found that he could laugh. "I wouldn't worry about that, Sheriff. I tell you I don't hold it against you that you arrested me. You were just doing your duty."

STERLING CARR called at the jail in the afternoon to visit his son.

"It aint so bad that you shot the ranger, son," said the old cattle man as he gripped Otis' hand. "But I wish you'd tell me it aint true that you plugged him in the back."

"But I tell you that I didn't shoot him," Otis protested. "I was fifteen miles away at Bernat's cabin when it happened."

"That's all right to tell the jury," the old man returned. "I'll get you the best lawyer in Wyoming, and he'll make 'em believe it. But I wish you'd tell it to me straight."

Otis went through the story from the time he had left the Footstool ranch until his arrest. At its conclusion Sterling Carr shook his head sorrowfully.

"I'm sorry you feel that you can't confide in your own father, Otis," he said. "You ought to know I aint going to tell on you."

"But I tell you it's true—every word of it!"

"Son, as soon as we heard at the ranch about your arrest, I learned from the boys about the meeting last night. They told me how they'd drawn lots to choose the man to run the ranger out of the country. And they told me it had fallen to you, and you'd gotten hot under the collar and told 'em to go to blazes—that you wouldn't do it."

"Doesn't that bear out what I say? I told 'em I wouldn't do it, and I didn't!"

Sterling Carr shook his head.

"How about what old man Foster says?"

"What's that? I didn't know he had anything to do with it."

"Just this: he saw you early this mornin', ridin' down the trail from the ranger station to the Buffalo Forks road. Couldn't be mistaken. Described your hat and your shirt and your vest and your hoss. And that isn't all. Frog-legs Ferguson of the Flying A saw you farther down the trail. Now don't you think you'd better tell your old Dad the truth?"

Otis was dumfounded.

"It's a lie!" he burst out. "I tell you it's a lie. I was never near the ranger station till I went there with Lafe Ogden. Who told you about Foster and Frog-legs

Ferguson? Did you talk to them yourself?"

"No, but Sheriff Ogden did. And he told me about it just before I come in here to see you."

A SUDDEN suspicion leaped into Otis' mind. Was the Sheriff trying to "frame" him with manufactured evidence? And if so, why? Why had he come to Otis, begging him to say nothing of the incident of the handcuffs, but concealing the information about the identifications which Otis knew were false?

Why should Sheriff Ogden seek to "railroad" him? What could be the man's motive? He and Otis, while not close personal friends, had always been on friendly terms.

Could it be that the Sheriff was in some way identified with the cattle rustlers? The thought startled him. Perhaps the Sheriff deliberately was trying to get rid of him, because of his activity against the rustlers!

And mightn't that theory explain the action of Ogden in chaining him to the tree in the path of the flood? Maybe he had done it deliberately, hoping Otis would be drowned. Maybe he feared that Otis possessed some information against him in connection with the cattle-rustling, which Otis might disclose if he ever came to trial.

But had the murder of the ranger been part of the plot? Otis could hardly believe that the rustlers would kill Fyffe merely to "frame up" a case against him. It would have been too easy to have gotten rid of him by a shot from ambush.

And then, there was the writing on the floor of the ranger cabin. Otis knew beyond any possibility of a doubt that the scrawl had been written by Ranger Fyffe himself, and by no other. No, that by no stretch of the imagination might be called a frame-up.

Otis was completely at a loss.

"I'm sorry, Dad," he said at length, but without revealing any of the suspicions which had come upon him so suddenly. "I guess the Sheriff knows what he's doing. I've told you all there is to tell, and I've told you the truth."

Sterling Carr slowly shook his massive head.

"But why did you pick on Gus Bernat to give your alibi, son?" he asked uncomprehendingly. "There's lots of others just as good, and better. Now, I have a hunch that if you'd remember, even now, that it wasn't Gus Bernat, but Jess Bledsoe that seen you at the time of the killin', that Jess would step right up at the time of the trial an' give 'em all the details."

"Dad," began Otis, very soberly, "I know Jess would do it in a minute. But I'm not going to ask anyone to perjure himself to save me. I believe I could clear this thing up myself, if I had half a chance. Maybe I can, anyway. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your standing by me, because I know you feel that I'm lying to you. But I tell you again, and I'll tell you every single time I see you, that I didn't do it—I didn't do it, and that's all there is to it. How can I make it any stronger?"

His father gazed out through the barred window, across the rolling, wooded slopes of the Gros Ventre.

"Blamed if you don't talk like you meant it, son. I know one person who wont ask more than your say-so to believe it, and that's your sister Margaret."

OTIS was on the point of asking if Mariel had faith in his innocence, but a sudden feeling of diffidence restrained the question even as his lips were framing it. After all, why should Mariel, a comparative stranger, have any reason to vary from what seemed to be the opinion of the entire community? He kept silent.

Sterling Carr went on: "It may take every penny I've got, son, but I'll see you come clear of this charge. There's more ways than one of handling a thing like this. But why in the name of Sam Hill did you come back here and give yourself up after you'd gotten away once? That's what I can't figure out."

"I tell you I promised Lafe I wouldn't try to escape," Otis replied simply.

His father snorted. "You're mighty p'ticular. But I don't know but that I'm glad you done it, even if it turns out that it costs me a pretty wad to clear you. I would hate to think you'd light out after you'd passed your word. Do you know why? Because it aint like a man that'd shoot down an unarmed man, to give himself up to the Sheriff after he was free, just because he'd told him he'd do it. That aint very clear, but I guess you know what I mean. Well, so long, son. Don't you worry, 'cause the old man aint the kind to lay down just 'cause he draws to a bum hand."

Otis gripped his father's hand.

"And say, Dad—if you're going back to the ranch, I wish you'd take Pie-face with you. I guess they haven't got any charge to hold him on."

When his father had departed, Otis threw himself down on his bunk to go over again and again the events of the day, seeking a clue which might lead to the solution of the mysterious slaying of Ranger Fyffe. Before the torrent of circumstance which was sweeping him onward toward what seemed certain destruction, he felt more helpless than he had while being tossed about in the flood of Red Rock creek.

He knew that his father would move heaven and earth to bring about his acquittal. Yet, in face of the evidence against him, which seemed incontrovertible, he knew that even the finest legal talent in the State would be of little avail with an impartial jury.

And even so, such an acquittal would not mean vindication in the eyes of the rangeland. He would still be known as the man who had shot the unarmed ranger through the back. In the eyes of Mariel, for instance—

He wished that he had found courage to ask his father if she had expressed an opinion as to his guilt.

CHAPTER VIII

IT was night. Far away, Otis could hear the mournful wail of a coyote. By this time the folks at the Footstool ranch must have extinguished the big oil lamp, and have retired. The bunkhouse would be dark. He imagined he could hear the occasional sound of hoofs from the corral, with now and then a nicker or a squeal—the same sounds he had heard a thousand times before. He wondered if it would ever be his fortune to hear them again.

Presently he became conscious of a vague murmur from without the jail, which resolved itself into the sound of scores of pattering hoofs, thudding in the deep dust of the street.

"Some of the boys come in to paint the town," he thought. And then he remembered that pay-day was two weeks distant, and that "the boys" seldom had occasion to come to town in force at any other time.

He rose leisurely from his bunk, and stepped to the bars of his cell-room, which were some three feet from the barred window. He peered out into the darkness, but could see nothing but some vague and shadowy forms milling about in the gloom.

Suddenly he started at a crashing knock upon the outer door of the little jail. He had heard the knock of a revolver-butt before, and believed he recognized the sound. Three times the knock echoed through the barren interior of the darkened jail. Silence, and then three more knocks, more violent than ever.

Then, in the quavering voice of the old jailer:

"Ye've got the wrong place, boys. This aint no saloon. This is the county jail."

"We know it's the jail!" Otis thought he remembered the voice. "But it's going to be a bunch o' junk, with you in the middle of it, ef you don't come outa there damn quick. We mean business."

"Don't you get fresh with me!" piped up the voice of the old man indignantly. "They aint no bunch o' pie-eyed cowpunchers kin bullyrag me, I tell ye. G'long about yer business, 'fore I call the Sheriff, an' ye wake up in the mornin' on the inside lookin' out, 'stead o' the outside lookin' in!"

"Smash down the door!" came the gruff command from outside.

A moment of silence—a rush of spurred boots—and the whole building shook with the weight suddenly thrown against the door.

And then, in a booming but breathless voice, Otis heard Sheriff Late Ogden.

"What's the trouble here, boys? What d'you want?"

"We want Otis Carr!" came from the midst of the crowd. "Unlock that door, an' there wont be no trouble. If you don't, we're goin' to tear your dinky little jail to pieces."

OTIS heard a sound of muffled cheering from the crowd. A strange shiver ran down his spine.

"Oh, I guess you wont do that," came in the voice of the Sheriff from a point immediately outside the door. Otis thought he detected, if not fear, a note of hesitation in Ogden's voice. He was afraid the Sheriff was bluffing. "Seems to me I have a little to say as to what happens to this here jail."

"We don't want no trouble with you-all, Sheriff," came from the crowd. "Just give us them keys, peaceable, and there wont

be none. We don't want to muss up your little jail."

"I know you, Simp!" responded the shrill voice of the jailer, from behind the door. "I can see ye! An' you too, Jess, an' Slim, an' Spider, an' Pink, an'—"

"Shut up!" boomed the gruff command of Lafe Ogden. Then, addressing the crowd:

"Boys, it seems you dont know what you're tryin' to do. I aint goin' to let you have Otis, an' you might as well know it now. What do you want with him? He's goin' to have a fair trial, and if he's guilty he'll swing for it."

An ominous silence greeted the Sheriff's words. He went on:

"There aint been a lynchin' here since I was Sheriff, and I don't intend that this'll be the first!"

Lynching! A shiver ran down Otis' spine. Was that, then, the object of his erstwhile friends? Was he to be dragged out of the jail and unceremoniously strung up to a pine? He listened with bated breath as the Sheriff continued:

"You may be able to break into the jail, all right. I'm not sayin' you can't, 'cause I'm just one against forty. But I can promise you this. I can promise you that the first six or eight that start for this door will get punctured proper. I—"

"Where's that rope?" came from somewhere in the crowd. The words struck home with chilling effect upon Otis. "All ready? Yip—yip—ee-e-e!"

Otis heard the rattle of spurs and the rush of feet. A shot rang out from the jail door. It was followed almost instantly by another. He heard a sharp cry of pain—from the lips of the Sheriff, he thought. Then the sound of raw oaths, grunts, and the trampling of feet on the wooden platform outside the door.

He heard a clanging slam from the rear of the jail. He knew that it must have been caused by the fleeing jailer as he banged the rear door behind him.

NOW there was nothing but the confused murmur of hushed voices. Otis could catch but a word here and there.

"Too bad. . . . . We had to do it. . . . . He might 'a' known better. . . . . No, there's no use o' smashin' it now—git them keys outa his pocket. . . . . Here, gimme that—turn him over. . . . . That's right. . . . . Gimme a hand here, Slim—don't leave him lay here—we'll dump him inside. . . . . You git that horse ready, Spider—that's the ticket. . . . . Shut yore mouth an' get busy, Curley."

To Otis, locked within the cell, it seemed many minutes that the murmur of lowered voices continued outside the jail door. He threw himself against the flat steel bars of the cell door, but succeeded only in bruising his shoulder sorely. With one foot braced, waist-high, against the jamb, he wrenched and tugged at the door.

Was this to be the end? Was he to be dragged out and strung up without a chance for his life? Well, if need be, he hoped that he could meet even the horrible death of lynching like a man. Then, perhaps, when they learned the truth of the murder of Joe Fyffe, they'd remember that he'd met his fate without flinching.

A key grated in the lock of the outer door. A moment later the door of the cell-room was flung open, and a dim mass of human figures surged in. Otis conquered his first impulse to shrink back against the bars, and stepped forward to meet them.

"H'lo, Otis," came in the unmistakable voice of Simple Sample. "Jest dropped in to pay you-all a social call. Thought mebbe you couldn't he'p gettin' lonesome like in this here dump. I bet you're 'bout ready to move, aint ye?"

What sort of a farce was this? Was this the way the victim of a lynching bee was taunted before he was dragged out to his death? Otis could swear there hadn't been a trace of animus in Simple's words.

"Wake up, Otis! Are you dumb?" It was Jess Bledsoe speaking. "Don't you know we've got Pie-face waiting for you outside, honin' to take you through the Tetons to Idaho?"

"What—what?" stammered Otis, astounded. "What are you going to do? What—"

"Shut up an' git out o' here!" commanded Spider Ponsonby joyously. "Like as not, some o' the honest citizens o' this town will think we're holdin' a necktie party, and'll take a pot shot at us in the dark."

"But I don't underst—" Otis was being hurried out of the jail in the midst of the throng of cow-men. From time to time he was dealt enthusiastic slaps upon the back. In the dim light he discerned Sheriff Lafe Ogden, reclining against the wall just inside the outer door. The Sheriff's left wrist was shackled to his right ankle with his own handcuffs. His holster

swung empty at his thigh. He was fully conscious and unharmed, and was shaking his tingling right hand, from which his revolver had been sent spinning by a well-directed bullet.

"But I thought you shot him!" exclaimed Otis in surprise as he saw the Sheriff.

"He fired in the air to scare us," explained Simple. "So Jess Bledsoe, thinkin' he might hurt somebody next time, shot the gun outa his hand. Jess could hit a dime in the dark at forty paces!"

They were outside now. Otis heard a familiar whinny. Pie-face was being held by a grumbling cow-hand, indignant because his duties as horse-holder had caused him to miss part of the fun.

"But why—" began Otis, not entirely recovered from his astonishment. "Why did you—"

He was standing with his bridle in his left hand, which rested lightly on Pie-face's mane, preparatory to mounting. A dozen of the cow-hands clustered about him, striving to grip him by the hand or to slap him upon the shoulder in token of their approbation.

"'Cause we didn't think you had the guts to do it," answered Simple, who appeared to be their spokesman. "Otis, when you beat it last night after we-all had picked you for—for that job, you had us all plumb fooled by your talk. When you said you wouldn't do it, we thought you was scared.

"But you was a sight smarter than we was. You wasn't goin' to run your neck in no noose by agreein' to no such conspeeracy. No sir. We figured it all out today. You jest went over to the ranger cabin an' done your duty, without sayin' a word to nobody. You don't s'pose we was goin' to let you rot in jail after that, do ye?"

Otis raised his hand. "But I tell you I didn't kill Joe Fyffe. I—"

A chorus of laughter greeted his words.

"That's good—plumb good, Otis," Simple cried. "All right. We onderstand. You didn't do it. Oh, no, you didn't. You're sure plumb up on the law, Otis. Don't catch you confessin' to no such crime. That's right, Otis. I reckon we onderstand. Don't worry; we wont admit you done it, neither.

"But remember, Otis, you didn't make no promises to the Sheriff this time. You can hit the trail an' go as fur as you like, an' we'll guarantee nobody aint goin' to stop you."

Otis was exasperated at the stupidity of the cow-men, which would not permit them to believe him when he said he was innocent of the slaying of the ranger. But his heart went out to the loyal men who had flocked to his aid, endangering their own lives to rescue him from the jail. He swung into the saddle.

"Boys," he called, one arm upraised as he strove to quell the eagerness of Pie-face, "boys, I sure appreciate what you've done for me. It was mighty white of you. You don't believe me when I say I didn't kill Joe Fyffe. You tell me to hit the trail and keep going.

"All right. I'll do it. I tell you I'll not come back—" he stopped to calm Pie-face with a stroke of the hand—"until I've found out who really did kill Joe Fyffe!"

CHAPTER IX

THE sun was an hour above Two-Gwo-Tee pass when Otis dismounted in front of the Red Rock ranger station. He looped Pie-face's bridle over a post of the barbed-wire fence and made for the cabin. The door was unlocked. He remembered that Sheriff Ogden, as they had departed from the cabin the morning before, had remarked that the coroner would fasten the door after removing the body.

He stepped inside, and swept the interior of the principal room with a quick glance. Nothing had been disturbed. The body had been removed. Nothing else, apparently, had been touched.

He stepped across to the combined office and sleeping-room. It too appeared to be exactly as he had last seen it. He returned to the other room, seated himself upon one of the log stools, and rolled a cigarette.

He had been moved by no definite plan of action when he had determined to return to the cabin. He hoped only that, undisturbed, he might discover some clue which would lead to the solution of the murder. Now he felt that he might conduct his investigation in a leisurely manner. The Sheriff, if he were at liberty by this time, without doubt would start his pursuit—if, indeed, he made any pursuit at all—in the direction of the Tetons. He would never dream that his prisoner had returned to the scene of the murder.

He wondered if the Sheriff had been liberated from his own handcuffs. Certainly, he thought with a smile, he could not have been freed by the jailer, for that valiant person undoubtedly was still running. Probably some of the residents of the town, aroused by the shooting but loath to leave their homes at the time of the one-man jail-delivery, had discovered the Sheriff shortly after the departure of the cowpuncher rescuers, and had found another key to the handcuffs or had filed them from his wrists.

For a time he had feared that a coroner's jury might be impaneled and might visit the cabin during the morning. This fear he dismissed, however, upon reflection that the plank bearing Fyffe's message, and his revolver, the two most damaging bits of evidence, were in the hands of the Sheriff and could be exhibited to the coroner's jury where they were impaneled, thus obviating the necessity of their visiting the scene of the murder.

Could it be possible that Fyffe might have written something else on the floor—some message that later had been obliterated by the pool of blood, and thus remained undiscovered during the investigation by the Sheriff and his deputy?

He doubted it. Yet, determined to investigate everything that promised a shadow of a clue, he knelt on the floor, near the spot where the plank had been ripped from its fastenings.

What remained of the blood-pool on the adjoining planking was now a brown stain. He scrutinized it minutely. For some unaccountable reason the interior of the room grew darker. He wondered absently if the sun had been obscured by the clouds. He raised his head and turned toward the door. There he saw—Mariel Lancaster.

HE uttered an exclamation of astonishment and dismay. She too cried out in alarm, shrank back a step, and reached out a supporting hand which she placed upon the door frame.

"Mariel!" he burst out, struggling awkwardly to his feet. "What are you doing here?"

"What—what are *you* doing here?" she demanded in return. "I thought you were in—in jail."

"I was," he grinned, "until a few hours ago, when some of my very good friends induced the Sheriff to release me. I thought perhaps you'd heard about it."

She smiled and advanced a step. "I left the ranch very early—before daybreak," she explained. "I talked to no one before I left. In fact, I wasn't at all eager for them to know what I planned to do."

"And that was—"

Mariel colored slightly. "We'd been hearing so many stories about this terrible affair. I couldn't believe them all. So I—I just came to see for myself."

"You didn't believe I murdered Joe Fyffe?" Otis inquired eagerly.

Mariel dropped her eyes. "No," she said, "I didn't."

"Why?" Otis persisted, thrilling oddly at her words. "Haven't you heard about what Fyffe wrote? And haven't you heard about my revolver, with the two empty shells? And haven't you heard how I was chosen to—to run him out of the country? Have you heard a single thing that would indicate that I didn't do it?"

"I've heard all those things," she admitted. "And I must confess I haven't heard a thing that indicated your innocence."

"Then why," interrogated Otis, "why do you believe in me?"

Mariel shrugged. "Woman's intuition, I suppose. And in this case that means something that the law doesn't consider. That's character. Somehow, Otis, I can't conceive of a man of your character doing such a thing, and doing it in such a way."

"Mariel, you're the first, and the only one of my friends who has shown that much faith in me. Hasn't it occurred to you that you might be mistaken in your estimate of me?"

Mariel stamped her foot. "I haven't even asked you if you did it," she announced, eyes flashing. "And what's more, I don't intend to. I know you didn't. That's why I left the ranch before dawn to come out here to the ranger station. I'm going to prove that you didn't. I don't know how I'll do it, but I will."

OTIS longed to pour out the flood of heartfelt appreciation that swelled up within him. But, untrained in the use of such phrases, his lips failed him. He could only stammer, "Th-thanks, Mariel," as he reddened beneath her direct gaze. But his eyes told her more of the feelings that surged within him than his words could express.

"As a matter of fact," he went on awkwardly, "that's just why I came back here.

That is, I mean that I came to search for some clue that might lead me to the discovery of the real murderer. And, like you, I don't know just what it is, but if it's here I mean to find it."

He went on, sketching briefly for her the incidents of the discovery of the murdered ranger and his arrest, touching lightly upon his escape from the flood, and ending with a condensed version of his rescue from the jail.

"Now, let's reason this thing calmly," Mariel began in a businesslike tone when he had finished. "First, what could have been the motive for the murder?"

"I don't know," Otis admitted frankly, "unless it could be the same motive they've charged to me—that is, the natural enmity of the cattle man toward the Government ranger. No one, so far as I know, had any personal grudge against Joe Fyffe. He kept pretty much to himself, and never quarreled with anyone here, except possibly when some of the ranchers protested at the necessity of applying to the Government for a grazing-permit. His spare time was spent mostly in the pursuit of his hobby, which was wild-animal photography."

"Could it be that some enemy of yours, Otis, knowing that you had been chosen to—to invite him to leave the country, had killed him with the object of throwing the blame on you?"

"I've thought of that," Otis replied. "For a time I believed that might be the real solution of the case. But the one thing that disproves it is Fyffe's own writing on the floor. I can swear that's his writing. Then why, if the chief or even the incidental motive was to cast suspicion on me, should Joe Fyffe himself name me as his murderer?"

Mariel, puzzled, shook her head. "Let's go over this thing bit by bit. Let's recreate the scene of the crime, just as it was at the time you entered the cabin. Please show me just where and how the—the body lay, and what details of the room, if any, differ from the way you found it when you entered."

Otis flung himself face down upon the floor over the hole in the planking.

"This is where we found him," he explained. "You can see part of the outline of the pool of blood, under my arms here. The message, which was covered with blood at first, was, of course, written here upon the plank which the deputy tore up."

HE rose to his knees and went on: "Right about here, say eighteen inches from his hand, we found the stub of the pencil he had used.

"It seems he had rushed into the cabin, clutched at the phone, knocking his camera off the table, and then had sunk to the floor, probably with the telephone instrument still in his hands.

"We found the telephone hanging from the cord. The camera was on the floor under the table—at least Deputy Markey told us he had found it there, and had replaced it on the table."

"Then the actual shooting happened outside the cabin?" Mariel asked.

Otis nodded. Then he led her outside, showing her where they had traced the trail of blood and had found the ashes, and telling her how the Sheriff had deduced that the fire had not burnt itself out, but had been quenched with water.

"And you found no tracks—no other signs of any nature?"

"Tracks a-plenty, but they were meaningless. You see, this is part of the forest grazing land. Cattle have milled over this land outside the fence both before and after the shooting, I suppose."

"Why couldn't some of you have thought to preserve some of the footprints you found about the fire? You could have placed a box or something over them to protect them from the weather. That might have solved the whole mystery. Here's where the shooting took place, and here's where you should have looked for your clues."

"But Mariel, you couldn't keep a footprint—granting we had found any—under a box and then present it in court months later."

"No, but you could have photographed it. You could have used the ranger's own camera, if necessary. And photographs sometimes reveal things the human eye can't see. You know, Otis, I think it might be worth while even now to photograph the ground here, so we can study it at leisure, through a magnifying glass, perhaps. And the interior of the cabin, too. It's only a bare chance, but it might aid us. Run back to the cabin and get the camera, will you, please?"

AS Otis turned his back and made for the cabin, Mariel knelt and made a hasty but careful examination of the earth about the remains of the fire.

Otis appeared presently, fumbling the camera. He walked toward her slowly, lowering the extension frame and extending the bellows.

"Right over here," Mariel directed. "I think we'll take this ground surrounding the fire, first."

"Just a minute," Otis returned, looking up. "The plate-slide's missing. We'll have to find it before we can use this."

Mariel glanced up at him quickly, her lips parted, as if a significant idea had flashed upon her.

"Let me see it," she commanded, holding out her hand for the camera. "Um-m. Just as I thought. Look at that plate-holder. One plate has been exposed. The slide hasn't been inserted, and the holder hasn't been reversed. It looks as if—"

"I've got it!" Otis exclaimed eagerly. "It was the last picture Fyffe ever took! And he must have taken it hurriedly, or he'd have replaced the slide and reversed the plate-holder. Maybe—maybe that last plate holds our clue! Maybe it will reveal something about the murder!"

CHAPTER X

FOR a moment they stood, eying each other in silence. Was this really the clue for which they had been searching? Did the plate hold the solution to the murder? Mariel met Otis' eager glance with shining eyes.

"But we mustn't raise our hopes too high," she protested. "Remember, the camera was knocked off the table in the cabin after Fyffe had run inside. It was closed, too. Wouldn't that show that the ranger hadn't used it since—well, since some time before the murder?"

"That was merely our—my conclusion," Otis reminded her. "The deputy found the camera on the floor under the table. In reconstructing the crime, I leaped at the conclusion that it must have been knocked off the table as he reached for the phone, or when he fell to the floor. Maybe he brought it into the cabin with him as he ran to the telephone after being shot. It's possible that he dropped it as he reached for the phone."

"But," Mariel reasoned, seeking to prevent him from building his hopes too high, "assuming that he had it with him out here when he was shot, and assuming that he had taken some picture that might throw light on the murder—then how did it happen that it was closed when you found it? A man who had just been mortally shot would hardly stop and calmly close his camera before running to summon aid."

Otis' face fell—for just a moment. Then he replied:

"But I'm not sure that it was closed when it was found. Deputy Seth Markey was the one who discovered it. The Sheriff and I were in the other room at the time. As I remember it, it was some time after our return, while we were speculating as to Fyffe's manner of dragging the phone from the table, that the deputy mentioned that Fyffe had knocked the camera off the table.

"It was closed when we noticed it. Seth hadn't said whether it had been closed when he found it. Maybe he closed it himself when he picked it up and restored it to the table."

Mariel, still holding the camera and regarding it curiously, asked suddenly:

"At what time yesterday was Fyffe murdered?"

Her abrupt question took him by surprise. "We got here pretty early in the morning. From the condition of the body and the pool of blood, he must have been dead several hours. As I remember, Lafe Ogden didn't say at just what time the forest supervisor had received the call for help from the ranger station. But we can learn that easily enough. It would fix the exact time of the murder. But what's that got to do with it?"

"Only," Mariel replied slowly, "that if it was dawn or earlier, he couldn't have been taking pictures without a flashlight. Did you find anything of a flash-pan, or flash-powders?"

"Not a trace," Otis replied, beginning to lose some of his enthusiasm. "Of course, we weren't looking for anything of the kind."

"Did you see anything of the plate-slide for the camera?"

"No, we didn't notice that. Fyffe kept most of his materials in the other room of the ranger cabin."

"But if he'd been using the flash-pan and plate-slide at the time he was shot, he'd hardly have taken them back there, would he?"

"No-o. Usually a photographer, when he takes out the slide preparatory to making a picture, places it on top of the camera, if he's using a tripod. If he isn't,

and it's a small camera, he'd be apt to thrust it into his pocket. We didn't search his pockets. The coroner could tell us if it was there."

"Well, the next thing to do, Otis, is to develop the plate. Shall I take it to Jackson and have it done? Or do you happen to have facilities at the ranch for developing it?"

Otis laughed, and reached for the camera. "Do you think Fyffe trusted his developing and printing to anyone else? I forgot to tell you that the other room of the ranger cabin was used by Fyffe as a dark-room, for developing his animal pictures. I tell you we can develop this plate and make a print within thirty minutes!"

MARIEL gasped out a little exclamation of elation, and started for the cabin.

"But don't be disappointed, Otis, if it's nothing but one of his wild-animal pictures," she told him after he had lowered the blanket over the dark-room window, and had lighted the ruby lamp.

With trembling fingers Otis removed the plate from the holder and placed it in the tray of developing solution. But he was unprepared for the shock of the discovery they made when, at length, the process completed, Otis lifted the blanket from the window and held the negative up to the light.

Mariel looked at it, and gasped. She looked again, and one hand clutched her throat.

"Why, Otis!" she exclaimed in a voice suddenly low and husky. "Why, Otis! It's you!"

Otis was stunned. He brushed his eyes with the back of his hand, as if to dispel a hallucination. He held the plate up and looked again.

"It's you!" Mariel repeated. "Your hat—your vest—those boots and trousers! I could tell it was you in an instant. It's your build, and everything. And there, behind you, stands Pie-face!"

Otis could not find his voice. He gulped once or twice, striving for words to express his astonishment.

"Why, oh, why didn't you tell me in the first place?" Mariel was moaning. "Why did you deny it? If you'd only confided in me! Maybe there was some reason—some extenuating circumstance! But Otis, Otis, I didn't think you'd lie to me! Couldn't you have trusted me?"

Otis found his voice.

"There's something wrong, Mariel. It looks like me. Under any other circumstances, I'd say it was a picture of me, even if the face is hidden in shadow. But Mariel, it can't be! I tell you, something's wrong! Pie-face and I were miles away from this cabin when that picture was taken. Of course you wont believe me. Nobody would, now. With Fyffe's dying message, and the empty cartridges in my gun, and now this picture—well, it looks like it's all up with me."

"Perhaps," put in Mariel hesitantly but hopefully, "perhaps he had taken your picture at some other time, and hadn't developed it."

Otis shook his head. "No, to my knowledge Fyffe never took my picture. He never bothered about pictures of anything except wild animals, so far as I know. I still think this was the last picture he ever took. I still think it was taken before he was shot. But I know, as well as I'm standing here, that the man in that picture, however much he looks like me, isn't Otis Carr!"

Mariel reached for the negative. For many moments she stood at the window, scrutinizing its every detail.

"What is it," she asked finally, "that you—I mean the man in the picture—has in his hand?"

Otis took the plate again and examined it. "It looks like—Mariel, I believe that's the clue we've been searching for! Look at the horse—there! I've got it, Mariel—the solution of everything! Wait until I make a print of that negative. I tell you if that doesn't prove the whole thing—well, then I'll be ready to accept the blame without a protest!"

After soaking the plate in alcohol, they placed it outside in the strong dry mountain wind; and in this way dried it in half an hour. Then awkwardly, with unsteady fingers, Otis placed the negative in the printing-frame. Mariel waited with bated breath.

"There!" Otis exclaimed when at last the print was finished. "Look, Mariel! Isn't it astounding? I've suspected it, but I've never breathed a word of my suspicions to a soul. This solves everything—*everything!*"

Twenty minutes later, having made an additional print, and with the negative carefully wrapped to protect it from breakage, Otis announced his readiness to leave the cabin. Both were jubilant as they

mounted their horses and started down the trail. Suddenly Mariel broke out with an exclamation of annoyance.

"I've forgotten something," she told Otis ruefully. "No, you needn't bother. You ride on down the trail. I'll go back to the cabin, but I'll be with you again in five minutes."

Otis was puzzled, but he did not question her. Mariel galloped back to the ranger station, flung herself from her horse, and ran into the cabin. She seized the telephone, and called for the forest supervisor in Jackson.

"Call the Sheriff and tell him that if he wants Otis Carr, he can get him at the Footstool ranch in two hours," she directed without preliminaries. "Phone the Footstool ranch and tell Sterling Carr that Otis is coming home. Tell him to have all the boys there to meet him—everyone who was at the meeting the other night. He'll understand. What? No, I haven't time to explain. Come to the Footstool ranch yourself, and you'll learn everything. That's all. Good-by."

WITHOUT giving the puzzled supervisor time to question her about her startling directions, she hung up the receiver and ran from the cabin. She remounted, and rode down the trail to ejoin Otis.

"It's all right," she smiled at him. "We can take our time. There's no great hurry to get back to the ranch, now."

"I don't think I'll go back to the ranch," Otis announced. "I think I'd better look up the Sheriff first thing, and place this evidence in his hands."

A shadow of annoyance flitted across Mariel's face.

"Oh, let that go until you've shown it to your father and Margaret," she protested. "Don't you think they're entitled to be the first ones to know the good news?"

"It will be a surprise to them both," Otis grinned. "I know Dad never suspected for a moment."

"I suspected," Mariel volunteered.

"Why?" demanded Otis in surprise. "You've only been here a week. What foundation did you have for your suspicions?"

"I admit they were only of the vaguest kind," Mariel smiled. "They had no basis, except intuition. Do you remember what I told you my intuition was based upon?"

Otis colored slightly. "I think I'd better go on to Jackson," he remarked without answering. "I'll come back to the ranch later on."

"*I* am going straight to the ranch," Mariel announced positively. "Are you going to let me ride alone?"

"Oh, all right," Otis laughed. "I guess the Sheriff can wait."

CHAPTER XI

"AND I tell you if I don't prove to you who killed Ranger Fyffe, I'm ready to go in court tomorrow and plead guilty!"

Otis was standing in the living-room of the Footstool ranchhouse, facing a silent and grave-faced assemblage of more than a score. It included Sterling Carr, stern and impassive; Sheriff Ogden, who thus far had made no move to place Otis under arrest again; his deputy, Seth Markey; Jess Bledsoe, resplendent in white goatskin chaps; the forest supervisor from Jackson; Margaret Carr and Mariel, whispering in one corner of the room; Simple Sample and Spider and Slim and Curley and Pink and Tex and possibly a dozen others from the Footstool, Flying A and other outfits, all solemnly curious, awkward and embarrassed. Otis, unaware of the dramatic setting arranged by Mariel for the dénouement, had taken the bull by the horns and now was determined to bulldog him to a fall.

"And what's more," he went on, gazing intently at the Sheriff, "I'm going to tell you, Lafe, just who's responsible for the rustling that's been going on here, and just how it was done."

The Sheriff stirred uneasily. "Fire away, Otis," he remarked. "Between you and me, if you've found that out, I'll give it to you that you've done more'n I could."

"All of you boys know how this rustling has been going on here for months," Otis commenced. "All of us have reported losses from time to time—the Lazy Y, the Flying A, the Footstool and others—but mostly it was the Footstool calves that seemed to be the favorites of the rustlers.

"Now, most all of us seemed to hold a grudge against Joe Fyffe because he was in the Government service. We seemed to think the Government wanted to run us off the range. We couldn't see that the forest service is keeping us from ruining our own range by overgrazing. We couldn't

see that it's keeping the sheep on the sheep-range, and keeping the nesters where they'll be better off and we'll be better off. We thought all a ranger was good for was to fight forest-fires.

"I've kept my mouth shut up to this time, principally because I knew how Dad felt about these things. But now I'm going to talk straight, and I'm going to say a mouthful.

"You thought you could run Joe Fyffe out of the country, and that would be all there'd be to it. You didn't realize the Government'd keep sending in rangers, and that another one's due to take Fyffe's place at the Red Rock station now.

"The other night you got together, and decided you'd scare the ranger out. You drew lots, and picked me for the job. I told you I wouldn't do it, and I didn't.

"When he was killed, you thought I'd changed my mind, and done it. That's why you yanked me out of jail last night. Even then you wouldn't believe me when I told you I hadn't killed him. Boys, you're the best friends a man ever had, but you've got the wrong slant on things.

"After I left you the other night, I tell you I was feeling pretty mean. I wanted to get out alone. I started up the river, figuring I'd lay out and have a look for the rustlers. I ran into Gus Bernat, and he asked me to stay at his cabin overnight. If Gus hadn't been drowned in the flood, you'd never have had to get me out of jail last night.

"Along toward morning, Ranger Fyffe heard a noise outside his cabin, I judge, from the way things turned out. He figured it was a lion, or a cat or something. Maybe he'd planted bait outside, and had waited all night—but that doesn't matter.

"You all know Joe was a nut on taking wild-animal pictures. He got his camera and his flash-powder, and sneaked outside to grab off a picture of this animal that was making the noise. He made his way through the dark of the scrub pines toward the sound. He didn't take a gun, 'cause he knew there isn't an animal left in these parts, outside the grizzlies on the edge of Yellowstone, that'll attack a man unless they're cornered.

"He crept up toward the spot where he'd heard the noise—where he probably heard it then. He couldn't see the man's fire, because it was beyond a group of rocks. In a minute I'll tell you what the fire was for. He took the plate-slide out of his camera, and got his flash-gun ready. Then, like as not, he whistled so the animal would turn toward him, and shot off the flash.

"But it wasn't an animal making the sound. It was a man. Maybe this man was pretty badly scared—you or I would be if that flash went off near us in the night. Anyway, he'd faced around when he heard Joe whistle. He dropped what he had in his hand, and jerked out his gun, and shot.

"Joe was wounded. He hadn't known it was a man. He hadn't expected to be shot. He turned and started to run for his gun in the cabin. The man fired again. The bullet hit Joe in the back.

"He ran into the cabin, dropped his camera, and grabbed for the phone. He gasped a few words into the receiver, and then dropped to the floor. He knew he was dying. He got his pencil and wrote on the floor—you've all heard what he wrote.

"Maybe the man followed him into the cabin. I rather think he did, because it would have been hard for Joe to have seen him when the flashlight went off. But that doesn't matter. He saw him.

"That's the way the Sheriff and Seth and I found things yesterday morning. Isn't it, Lafe?"

"That's about right," the Sheriff replied uneasily, "though I didn't know about any flashlight."

"Now, the whole solution of this thing rests in that last picture the ranger took," Otis went on. "It shows who did the shooting. Miss Mariel got the plate this morning and developed it. Here's the print."

HE passed the photograph to the Sheriff, who glanced at it, whistled softly, and passed it on to Sterling Carr. Others in the room crowded about him, eager for a sight of the picture.

Sterling Carr glanced sternly at Otis.

"Son, this picture shows *you!*"

"Sure, that's Otis!" came the bewildered tones from those crowded about the picture.

"Looks like you, all right," the Sheriff said to Otis.

Otis smiled indulgently.

"That's what Joe Fyffe thought, too," he remarked. "He got one glance at the man, and thought it was me. That's why he wrote on the floor that I killed him. He died thinking I was his murderer.

"And can you blame him? Look at that

hat. Just like mine. Look at that vest. Just like mine. Pants the same. Boots the same. Build the same as mine. Horse looks a lot like Pie-face.

"All right. We'll let that ride for a minute. Let's get back to the rustling. No one ever saw the rustler, did he? No.

"Now look at the picture again. See that calf? Looks like it just happened into the picture, like any of the calves on the range around the cabin, doesn't it? Notice its feet? Just like its been hog-tied, and slipped its hind foot out of the knot, isn't it? Look at the brand. Not like any brand hereabouts, is it?

"What's that the man's got in his hand? That's right. It's a running-iron. That's what he dropped when he grabbed his gun. He must have recovered it after the murder, when he doused his fire and beat it. Take a look at the horse, now. He hasn't got a star-face, like Pie-face, has he? And notice those white stockings. Never saw white stockings on Pie-face, did you?

"Now we're getting down to cases. You've guessed most of the rest of it. The man's the rustler that Fyffe surprised while he was working over that calf with the running-iron. Dressed like me. Did it intentional, too. If anyone saw him at a distance, they'd think it was me, and they'd never suspect anything. And he didn't aim to let anyone see him close.

"Sheriff, you told Dad about old man Foster and Frog-legs Ferguson seeing me near the ranger cabin after the shooting, didn't you? Well, I guess what they said was true enough. They *thought* they saw me. But I tell you, whom they saw was this man, dressed like me, and riding a horse that looks a lot like mine. Just what this brand-blotter had figured on."

"But who," interrupted Sterling Carr, "is the man in the picture? His face doesn't show."

Again Otis smiled.

"Look at the calf again," he directed. "Now I'll hide the top of that brand with my thumb. What's the bottom of it look like?"

"By God!" Sterling Carr burst forth. "It's the Footstool!"

"Yes," Otis concurred. "And that part I've hidden with my thumb shows that one of the legs of the footstool had been extended with the running-iron, over the seat of the stool, doesn't it? That leaves the changed brand only half complete.

"Now, what brand would result if he extended the other leg of the footstool until both legs met above the seat of the stool?"

"Why," exclaimed Sterling Carr, "it's the Flying A!"

"Exactly," grinned Otis. "Now, look at the fellow's hand. Who on the Flying A has a finger missing? If—grab that man!"

THE last words were shot out explosively. Otis leaped toward the figure which had shot toward the door. A dozen of the cow-hands closed in upon the fugitive. Margaret Carr screamed. There were grunts and oaths from the tangled mass of figures near the door. A set of elk antlers was knocked crashing to the floor.

"All right, boys," came in muffled tones from beneath the mass of figures. "Leave him loose. I've got him!"

The heap of bodies untangled. From its midst arose Sheriff Lafe Ogden. One hand gripped the sleeve of Jess Bledsoe of the Flying A. His wrists were manacled in handcuffs. He glared wildly about the room.

"I guess," drawled the Sheriff, "that we don't need to see the face in the picture now, to know who's been rustling the cattle on this range, or to know who killed Joe Fyffe. Pretty shrewd, while it lasted. Dressed like Otis, and complained to me every so often about the rustlers, so it would look like he was losin' calves too. Well, he wont ride that chestnut horse that looks like Otis' Pie-face chestnut for a while, I'll guarantee."

"I suspicioned it all the time," broke in Simple Sample. "But Otis, how about them rangers? Cain't you-all figger out some way to get rid of them, now that you've figgered this out so purty?"

"I don't think you'll have much trouble with the Red Rock ranger station after this, boys," Otis laughed. "You see, I put in my application for a job as forest ranger months ago. Fyffe's death leaves the first vacancy.

"I was talking it over with Mariel as we rode down here from the ranger cabin this morning. You can be sure of a square deal all right from some one who has the stockmen's interests at heart. She and I decided that I'm going to take the Red Rock ranger job just as soon—"

He reached out and took Mariel by the hand.

"—just as soon as we're married!"

THE END.

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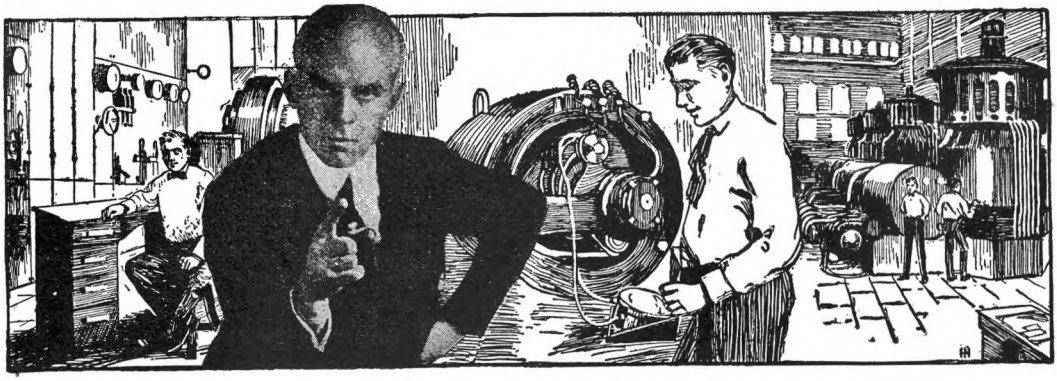

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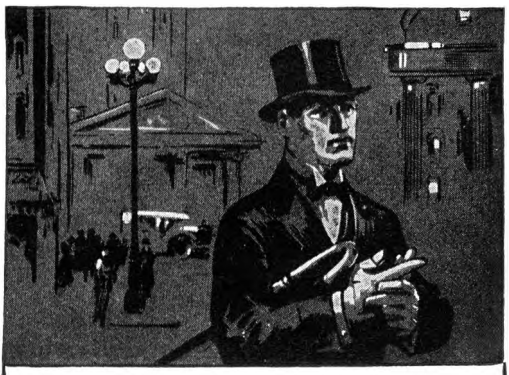

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Agents sell Wolverine Laundry Soap. Wonderful repeater and good profit maker. Free Auto to hustlers.
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Plays, musical comedies and revues, minstrel music, blackface skits, vaudeville acts, monologs, dialogs, recitations, entertainments, musical readings, stage handbooks, make-up goods. Big catalog free. T. S. Denison & Co., 623 So. Wabash, Dept. 104, Chicago.

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PATENTS—Trademarks. Write for free Guide Books and "Record of Invention Blank" before disclosing inventions. Send model or sketch and description of your invention for our free and prompt opinion of its patentable nature. Terms reasonable. Victor J. Evans & Co., 695 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS who desire to secure patent should write for our guide book, "How to Get Your Patent." Send model or sketch and description and we will give our opinion of its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., Dept. 177, Washington, D. C.

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TOBACCO HABIT Cured or No Pay. Any form, cigars, cigarettes, pipe, chewing or snuff. Guaranteed. Harmless. Used by over 350,000 people. Full treatment sent on trial. Costs $1.00 if it cures. Nothing if it fails. Superba Co., S-4, Baltimore, Md.

If New Hair Doesn't Grow After Using My Method —I Don't Want a Penny!

I mean just exactly what I say! I don't care how thin your hair may be—I don't care how many treatments you have taken without results. If my new discovery won't restore your hair, I don't want to keep a cent of your money! Furthermore I'll send you the proof of what I have done for others entirely FREE! Just mail the coupon below.

By ALOIS MERKE

Founder of Famous Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York

AFTER 17 years' experience in treating baldness—which included long years of experimentation in Heidelberg, Paris, Berlin, and other centers of scientific research—I have discovered a startling new way to promote hair growth.

At the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York—which I founded—I have treated scores of prominent stage and social celebrities. Many have paid as high as $500 for the results I have brought them.

Yet now, through a series of ingenious inventions, I have made it possible for everyone to avail themselves of my discovery—right in their own home, and at a cost of only a few cents a day!

My Unusual Guarantee!

I know you are skeptical. I know that you have tried perhaps dozens of different remedies and treatments without results. All right. Perhaps my treatment cannot help you, either. I don't know. But I do know that it has banished falling hair and dandruff for hundreds of others. I do know that it has already given thick, luxuriant hair to people who long ago had despaired of regaining their hair. And I am so downright positive that it will do the same for you that I absolutely GUARANTEE to grow new hair on your head—and if I fail, then the test is free.

Actual Results

(Dozens of letters like the following are received every day by the Merke Institute.)

"Ten years ago my hair started falling. Four years ago I displayed a perfect full moon. I tried everything—but without results. Today, however, thanks to your treatment, I have quite a new crop of hair one inch long." F. H. B.

"The top of my head is now almost covered with new hair about one-half inch long. I have been trying five years, but could never find anything to make my hair grow until your treatment." T. C.

Entirely New Method

What is my method? It is entirely new. It is entirely different from anything you ever heard of. No massaging — no singeing — no "mange" cures — no unnecessary fuss or bother of any kind. Yet results are usually noticeable even after the very first few treatments.

Many people have the idea when the hair falls out and no new hair appears, that the hair roots are always dead. I have disproved this. For I have found in many cases that the hair roots were NOT dead, but merely dormant! Yet even if the scalp is completely bare, it is now possible in the majority of cases to awaken these dormant roots, and stimulate an entirely new growth of hair! I KNOW this to be true—because I do it every day.

Ordinary measures failed because they did not penetrate to these dormant roots. To make a tree grow, you would not think of rubbing "growing fluid" on the bark. Instead you would get right to the roots. And so it is with the hair.

There is only one method I know about of penetrating direct to the roots and getting nourishment to them. And this method is embodied in the treatment that I now offer you. The treatment can be used in any home in which there is electricity.

Already hundreds of men and women who only recently were bald or troubled with thin falling hair, have through this method acquired hair so thick that it is the envy and admiration of their friends. As for dandruff and similar scalp disorders, these usually disappear after the first few applications.

Remember—I do not ask you to risk "one penny." You try it on my absolute GUARANTEE—and if after 30 days you are not more than delighted with the growth of hair produced, then I'll gladly return every cent you have paid me. I don't want your money unless I grow hair on your head.

Free Booklet Explains Treatment

If you will merely fill in and mail the coupon below I will gladly send you—without cost or obligation—an interesting 32-page booklet, describing my treatment in detail.

This booklet contains much helpful information on the care of the hair—and in addition shows by actual photographs what my treatment is doing for others.

No matter how bald you are—no matter if you are completely bald, this booklet will prove of deepest interest to you. So mail the coupon now—and it will be sent you by return mail.

ALLIED MERKE INSTITUTES, Inc.
512 Fifth Avenue, New York City, Dept. 762

ALLIED MERKE INSTITUTES, Inc., Dept. 762
512 Fifth Avenue, New York

Please send me, without cost or obligation on my part, a copy of the new booklet describing in detail the Merke Institute Home Treatment.

Name.....
State whether Mr., Miss or Mrs.

Address.....

City.....State.....

Neglect of Home-Study Training Cost This Man $47,424!

How much are you paying to stay untrained?

The other day we received a letter which every man working for a living ought to read—whether he's making $20 a week or $200. Here it is:

"During the forty years that I have been working, my salary has averaged less than twenty-four dollars per week with the exception of the last two years while I have been acting as foreman of a department. I made good in this position on a small scale and saw, thru the failings of others, what would happen to me unless I found a way to train for larger responsibilities.

"I had read of correspondence courses and began searching for that which I thought would benefit me. I found it in the LaSalle Modern Foremanship course, and benefited by it, my salary being nearly doubled, and I was promoted from foreman to factory superintendent.

"This happened in a period of about ten months, and by devoting only about four or five hours per week to the studies.

"I am now enrolled as a member of the Industrial Management Efficiency course, and find the work very interesting and beneficial. It can be applied every day in the factory, and brings results.

"I regret that I put it off to so late a day in life to reap the benefits I am now enjoying, and can truthfully say to younger men that if they would only profit by the experience of others they can gain more knowledge thru one year's training by LaSalle methods than can be obtained in ten years' practical experience by hard work."

SHERMAN C. WOOD, Maryland.

We quote the above letter not because Mr. Wood is now making a staggering salary as a result of his training, but because it illustrates so clearly the principle behind LaSalle training.

Here is a man who all his life had accepted the thought that he was compelled to work for little or nothing.

For one thousand, nine hundred and seventy-six weeks the writer of this letter *paid at least $24 a week for the doubtful privilege of staying in the ranks of untrained men.*

Can anyone doubt that training would have doubled his salary just as easily when he was thirty-eight years younger—when he could attack his work with the abundant energy of a younger man?

Yet his neglect of this one main avenue of business progress cost him—leaving simple and compound interest out of the reckoning—the appalling sum of $47,424—a fortune in itself.

If You Could Use $47,424, Pause Before You Turn This Page

Perhaps you are now making quite as much as Wood—perhaps more. Perhaps, on that account, you may think that Wood's experience does not apply to YOU.

But if training in Higher Accountancy—or Modern Salesmanship—or Business Management—or Law—or Business Correspondence—or any of a dozen other branches of business could change your forty-eight dollars into *$96 a week*—and if you now NEGLECT to advance yourself thru the training you need—will you not find it difficult, thirty-eight years from now, to explain to those who are dear to you why you threw away—not $47,424, but *fully $95,000?*

We're not going to moralize. We're not even going to cite you any of the thousands of letters from men who have not merely doubled but tripled and quadrupled their incomes thru home-study training under the LaSalle Problem Method. We *have* the letters. We will *show* them to you, if you like. But understand, please, that they would not *alter* the facts—they would merely *emphasize* them.

Below this text there's a coupon.

We believe that if you will re-read that letter from Sherman C. Wood and will face your problem of advancement squarely, you will not turn this page until you have clipped the coupon, filled it in, and by placing it in the nearest mail-box placed *yourself* on the road to real success.

LaSalle Extension University

The Largest Business Training Institution in the World

Dept. 2369-R **Chicago, Illinois**

Upon request, the book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," and material completely descriptive of the course and service that interests you, will gladly be sent without cost or obligation. Indicate your choice by checking, and write below your name and address.

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Modern Salesmanship
- ☐ Higher Accountancy
- ☐ Law—Degree of LL.B.
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Railway Station Management
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ Industrial Management Efficiency
- ☐ Banking and Finance
- ☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
- ☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
- ☐ Personnel and Employment Management
- ☐ Expert Bookkeeping
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Commercial Spanish
- ☐ Effective Speaking
- ☐ C. P. A. Coaching

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

Doubled His Salary —then Doubled it AGAIN!

Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it?

Nevertheless, it *is* true—and that's the wonderful thing about the field of Higher Accountancy, once a man is ready to take advantage of his opportunities. What's more, many a LaSalle-trained man will *tell* you so—from his personal experience.

W. A. Twelkemuir, of Missouri, writes as follows:

"As a result of my taking the LaSalle course in Higher Accountancy, my salary has increased 400 per cent, and through your training in Income Tax I have made as much on the side in consultation fees as was my annual salary when I started. It has meant a tremendous thing to me in mental development and financial profit."

Charles S. Jones, of Texas, was earning only $100 a month when he undertook LaSalle training. Three years later, on the letterhead of Henry & Jones, Certified Public Accountants, comes the following enthusiastic message:

"My income is a trifle in excess of $8,000, and I am just beginning to grow. I can hardly find words to tell you of the inspiration that the course has given me."

Men like Twelkemuir and Jones are pointing the way to business leadership. They are making good not because of "pull" or "luck" but because of *training*.

Send today for our book entitled "Success Reports," showing hundreds of letters from LaSalle-trained men who are making good in the field of Higher Accountancy. With it we will send you full particulars of LaSalle training, together with details of our *convenient-payment plan;* also your copy of that inspiring book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation.

Nothing is so important to your future happiness as real achievement. Will you "put it off"—or "*put it over?*" Mail the coupon NOW.

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The Largest Business Training Institution in the World

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Please send me catalog and full information regarding the course and service I have marked with an X below. Also a copy of your book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One," all without obligation to me.

☐ *Higher Accountancy*

Training for positions as Auditor, Comptroller, Certified Public Accountant, Cost Accountant, etc.

Other LaSalle Training Courses

LaSalle is the largest business training institution in the world. It offers training for every important business need. If more interested in any of these courses, check here:

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☐ Modern Salesmanship
☐ Traffic Management
☐ Railway Station Management
☐ Law—Degree of LL.B.
☐ Commercial Law
☐ Industrial Management Efficiency
☐ Modern Business Correspondence and Practice
☐ Banking and Finance
☐ Modern Foremanship and Production Methods
☐ Personnel and Employment Management
☐ Expert Bookkeeping
☐ Business English
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☐ Effective Speaking
☐ C. P. A. Coaching

Name.....

Present Position.....

Address.....

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Easiest of all wind instruments to play and one of the most beautiful. With the aid of the first three lessons, which are sent free (upon request) with each new saxophone, you can learn the scale in an hour's practice and play popular music in a few weeks. You can take your place in a band within 90 days if you so desire. Unrivaled for home entertainment, church, lodge or school. In big demand for orchestra dance music. The portrait above is of Donald Clark, Soloist with the famous **Paul Whiteman's Orchestra.**

Free Trial You will be allowed six days' free trial of any Buescher Grand Saxophone, Cornet, Trumpet, Trombone or other instrument. Easy terms of payment can be arranged. Mention the instrument interested in and a complete catalogue will be mailed to you free.

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Everything in Band and Orchestra Instruments

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Gentlemen: I am interested in the instrument checked below:

Saxophone.....Cornet.....Trombone.....Trumpet.....
(Mention any other instrument interested in.)

Name.....

Street Address.....

Town.....State.....

Again She Orders — *"A Chicken Salad, Please"*

FOR him she is wearing her new frock. For him she is trying to look her prettiest. If only she can impress him—make him like her—just a little.

Across the table he smiles at her, proud of her prettiness, glad to notice that others admire. And she smiles back, a bit timidly, a bit self-consciously.

What wonderful poise he has! What complete self-possession! If only *she* could be so thoroughly at ease.

She pats the folds of her new frock nervously, hoping that he will not notice how embarrassed she is, how uncomfortable. He doesn't—until the waiter comes to their table and stands, with pencil poised, to take the order.

"A chicken salad, please." She hears herself give the order as in a daze. She hears him repeat the order to the waiter, in a rather surprised tone. Why *had* she ordered that again! This was the third time she had ordered chicken salad while dining with him.

He would think she didn't know how to order a dinner. Well, did she? No. She didn't know how to pronounce those French words on the menu. And she didn't know how to use the table appointment as gracefully as she would have liked; found that she couldn't create conversation—and was actually tongue-tied; was conscious of little crudities which she just knew he must be noticing. She wasn't sure of herself; she didn't *know*. And she discovered, as we all do, that there is only one way to have complete poise and ease of manner, and that is to know definitely what to do and say on every occasion.

Are You Conscious of Your Crudities?

It is not, perhaps, so serious a fault to be unable to order a correct dinner. But it is just such little things as these that betray us—that reveal our crudities to others.

Are you sure of yourself? Do you know precisely what to do and say wherever you happen to be? Or are you always hesitant and ill at ease, never quite sure that you haven't blundered?

Every day in our contact with men and women we meet little unexpected problems of conduct. Unless we are prepared to meet them, we suffer embarrassment and keen humiliation.

Etiquette is the armor that protects us from these embarrassments. It makes us aware instantly of the little crudities that are robbing us of our poise and ease. It tells us how to smooth away these crudities and achieve a manner of confidence and self-possession.

Do You Make Friends Easily?

By giving you a wonderful new ease and dignity of manner, the Book of Etiquette will help make you more popular—a "better mixer." This famous two-volume set of books is the recognized social authority in half a million homes.

Let us pretend that you have received an invitation. Would you know how to acknowledge it? Would you know what sort of gift to send, what to write on the card that accompanies it? Perhaps it is an invitation to a formal wedding. Would you know what to wear? Would you know what to say to the host and hostess upon arrival?

Unless you are absolutely sure of yourself, you will be embarrassed. And embarrassment **cannot be concealed.**

Book of Etiquette Gives Lifelong Advice

If you want always to be sure of yourself, to have ease and poise, to avoid embarrassment and humiliation, send for the Book of Etiquette at once. Take advantage of the special bargain offer explained in the panel. Let the Book of Etiquette give you complete self-possession; let it banish the crudities that are perhaps making you self-conscious and uncomfortable when you should be at ease.

Mail this coupon **now** while you are thinking of it. The Book of Etiquette will be sent to you in a plain carton with no identifying marks. Nelson Doubleday, Inc., Dept. 1742, Garden City, New York.

A Social Secretary for Life!

The Famous Book of Etiquette, Nearly 500,000 Sold for $3.50

NOW ONLY $1.98

We have on our shelves at the present time several thousand sets of the Book of Etiquette in the regular $3.50 edition. To clear the shelves quickly and make room for new editions now being printed, Nelson Doubleday, Inc., makes this unusual offer. To the next few thousand people who order the Book of Etiquette, the special bargain price of $1.98 will be extended. In other words, if you act without delay you can secure the complete, two-volume set of the Book of Etiquette at practically **half** the usual cost.

Use the special coupon. It will bring the Book of Etiquette to you promptly, at the special bargain price.

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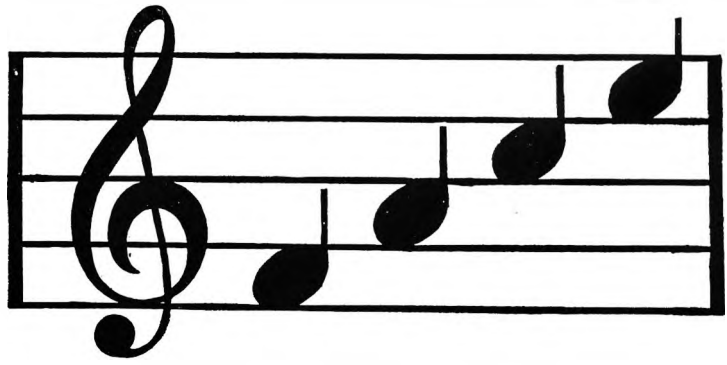
I accept your special bargain offer. You may send me the famous two-volume Book of Etiquette in plain carton for which I will give the postman only $1.98 (plus delivery charges) on arrival—instead of the regular price of $3.50. I am to have the privilege of returning the books within 5 days and having my money refunded if I am not delighted with them.

Name.....

Address.....

☐ Check this square if you want these books with the **beautiful full-leather binding** at $2.98 with same return privilege.

(Orders from outside the U. S. are payable $2.44 cash with order. Leather Binding, outside U. S., $3.44 cash with order.)



See How Easy It Is To Learn Music This New Way

YOU KNOW how easy it is to put letters together and form words, once you have learned the alphabet. Playing a musical instrument is not very much different. Once you learn the notes, playing melodies on the mandolin, piano or violin is simply a matter of putting the notes together correctly.

The first note shown above is F. Whether you are singing from notes, playing the piano or banjo or any other musical instrument, that note in the first space is always F. The four notes indicated are F, A, C, E, easy to remember because they spell the word "face." Certain strings on the mandolin, certain keys on the piano, represent these same notes—and once you learn them, playing melodies on the instrument is largely a matter of following the notes.

Anyone can now learn to play a musical instrument at home, without a teacher. A new simplified method of teaching reduces all music to its simplest possible form. You can now master singing, piano-playing, or any musical instrument you wish right at home, quickly, easily, without endless study and practice.

LEARN TO PLAY ANY INSTRUMENT

Piano	Mandolin
Organ	Drums and Traps
Violin	Harmony and Composition
Banjo	Sight Singing
Clarinet	Ukulele
Flute	Piccolo
Harp	Trombone
Cornet	Saxophone
'Cello	
Guitar	
Hawaiian Steel Guitar	
Automatic Finger Control	
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Practice is essential, of course—but it's fun the new way. You'll begin to play melodies almost from the start. The "print-and-picture" method of self-teaching is fascinating; it's simply a matter of following one interesting step after another. You learn that the note in the first space is F, and that a certain key on the piano is F. Thereafter you will always be able to read F and play it whenever you see it. Just as you are able to recognize the letters that make a word, you will be able to recognize and play the notes that make a melody. It's easy, interesting.

You don't have to know anything whatever about music to learn to play a musical instrument this new way. You don't have to pin yourself down to regular hours, to regular classes. You practice whenever you can, learn as quickly as you please. All the intricate "mysteries" of music have been reduced to a method of amazing simplicity—each step is made as clear as ABC. Thousands have already learned to play their favorite musical instruments this splendid new quick way.

You Can Play Your Favorite Instrument Three Months From Today

If you are dissatisfied with your present work, let music act as the stepping-stone into a new career. If you long for a hobby, a means of self-expression, let music be the new interest in your life. If you wish to be a social favorite, if you wish to gain popularity—choose your favorite instrument and, through the wonderful home-study method of the U. S. School of Music, play it three months from today.

You can do it. Youngsters of 10 to 12 years have done it, and men as old as 60 have found new interest and enjoyment in learning how to play a musical instrument. You don't have to listen while others entertain any longer. YOU can be the center of attraction, the talented person who holds the audience fascinated.

Is it the piano you wish to play, the mandolin, the violin, the saxophone? Do you want to learn how to sing from notes? Are you eager to be able to play "jazz" on the clarinet, the banjo?

Free Book Explains All—Send Today

Send for our free book called "Music Lessons in Your Own Home." Everyone who is interested in music should send at once for this valuable book. It not only explains the wonderful new simplified method of learning music, but tells about a special short time offer now being made to music-lovers. With it will be sent an Illustrated Folder which proves, better than words, how delightfully quick and easy the famous Print-and-Picture Method is.

Mail this coupon at once for your copy. But act now before the supply is exhausted. U. S. School of Music, 3962 Brunswick Building, New York.

Please Write Your Name and Address Very Plainly, so that there will be no difficulty about the booklet reaching you.

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Please send your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," Illustrated Folder, and particulars of your Special Offer. I am interested in the following course:

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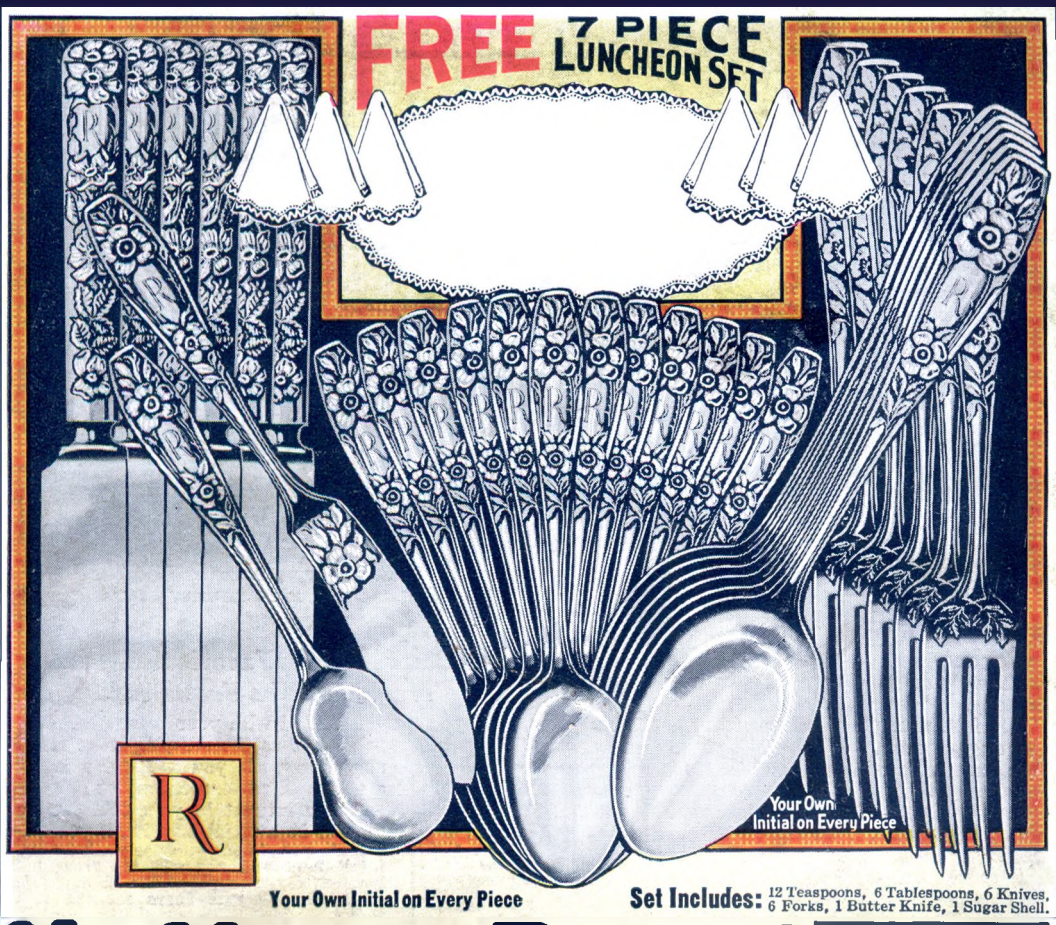
(Name of Instrument or Course)

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....



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Genuine Wallace 32-Piece Silverware Set, "Briar Rose" Pattern

IMPORTANT!
This set is genuine silver-plated and guaranteed for 10 years. It is not nickel silver. Beware of cheap imitations!

FREE Handsome **7-Piece Luncheon Set** pictured above comes free with Silver Set. Includes 36-inch centerpiece and six 12-inch doilies to match, all of "Indian Head" linene with scalloped edges embroidered in colors. Limited offer. Send today.

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Over 800 pages (of which 68 pages are in actual colors) of the world's greatest bargains in **home furnishings;** jewelry; also farm implements and accessories, etc., all sold on easy monthly payment terms and **30 days' free trial.**

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This book explains how you get glassware, jewelry, table linens, etc., FREE with purchases. **Send a postal today.**

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This is the famous "Briar Rose" pattern—exquisitely beautiful and of superb quality. No design more pleasing or popular. Every piece is extra heavy silver-plated and guaranteed **for ten years' service.** A complete set—32 pieces—12 Teaspoons, 6 Tablespoons, 6 Knives, 6 Forks, Butter Knife, Sugar Shell—**with your initial on every piece.** You will be amazed and delighted with your bargain. Mail the coupon now.

Order No. 317FMA39. Bargain Price $9.85. No money down. $2.00 on arrival. Balance $1.50 monthly. Luncheon Set is FREE.

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Send the

32-Piece Silverware Set No. 317FMA39, Price $9.85,

prepaid, and with it the 7-Piece Luncheon Set. On arrival I will pay $2.00 on the Silverware Set. Luncheon Set is FREE. I am to have 30 days' Free Trial. If not satisfied, I will ship both sets back and you will refund my $2.00. If I keep them, I will pay you $1.50 monthly until the price of the Silverware Set, $9.85, is paid. Title remains with you until final payment is made.

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Town _____ State _____

Occupation of Head of Household _____

How long have you lived at present address? _____