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JANUARY 1925

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

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By J. E. GREENSLADE

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THE BLUE BOOK

KARL EDWIN HARRIMAN, Editor

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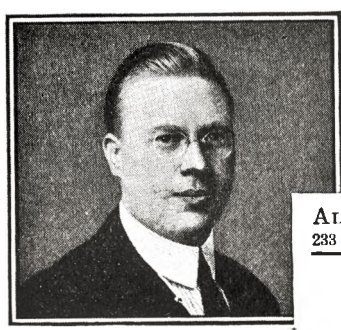

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 40 JANUARY 1925 No. 3

The CARTWRIGHT GARDENS MYSTERY

Here we have the most fascinating of all the novels by this master of detective fiction—the author of "Black Money" and many others that pleased you well.

By J. S. FLETCHER

CHAPTER I

THE MAN WHO SAW

CARTWRIGHT GARDENS lies in the far east corner of Bloomsbury, somewhat south of the dreary Euston Road, and somewhat north of the still drearier quarter that fringes on the western confines of Clerkenwell. Whoever knows nothing of it and goes thither on a voyage of discovery must not expect what the name, taken literally, would seem to suggest; here are neither bushes nor brakes, flowers nor fruits. What is here is a drab and dismal crescent of houses, fronted by an inclosure wherein soot and grime descend on the London plane tree and the London turf—an oasis, perhaps, in the surrounding wilderness of shabby streets, but only for the brave sparrow and his restless stalker, the lodging-house cat. The houses look as if they accommodated lodgers; the men who come out of them early of a morning look as if they were lodgers; the women, who at one hour of the day or another stand at the doors to traffic with wandering greengrocers or itinerant fishmongers, look as if they lived by letting lodgings. And the young man who saw a certain extraordinary thing in Cartwright Gardens, at precisely fifteen minutes before midnight on Monday, October 25th, 1920, was a lodger, and he saw it because, being a bit of a rhymester, he had been sitting up

late to write verses, and to cool his brow had at the moment mentioned opened the window of his room, on the top floor of No. 85, and thrust head and shoulders into the silence of the autumn night.

The name of this young man was Albert Jennison, and by calling he was a clerk. He was at this time one-and-twenty years of age, and he had been a clerk for four years, and as far as he could see, he was going to be a clerk forever. There are clerkships and clerkships; Jennison's job was lowish down in that scale. Its scene was a warehouse—dry goods—in the Gresham Street district of the City: he was in that warehouse, adding and subtracting, from nine o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon. He had begun, at seventeen, at a pound a week; now he got three pounds ten; and his relatives, who lived in the country and thought rustically, told him that he ought to consider himself well off, and that when he attained to just double his present stipend, he would be a gentleman for the remainder of his days.

But it was not gentility that Jennison craved, and it was not money. Three pounds ten a week enabled him to live quite comfortably, but it was that easy, uneventful, smooth-running comfort that something in him objected to. He wanted adventure, any sort of adventure. Nothing ever happened to him, either at the warehouse or at the lodgings; he was one of several at the first, and a veritable hermit at the second. With him one day was as another day, and Sundays and bank holidays were worse than the rest. Sometimes, of course, he got a little excited over his wooings of the muse; now and then his heart jumped when he got an oblong envelope from some magazine-editor or other, and for a few seconds allowed himself to wonder whether it contained a proof or an oft-rejected manuscript. And sometimes he dared to let himself think of giving the firm a month's notice, drawing his small store of saved money out of the savings bank and going boldly, rashly, adventurously into a world of which he dreamed much and knew next to nothing. But though Jennison had been four years in London, his brains were still essentially rustic, and they cooled at the motive when he fairly faced it; after all, seventy silver shillings, paid regularly every Friday afternoon, is something that you mustn't sneeze at—besides, there was the annual rise. No, he was tied to the warehouse, and the grip of the knot didn't hurt; still, he longed for adventure, wished that things would happen—something—anything.

IF Jennison had only known it, something was just about to happen in Cartwright Gardens when he put his head out of his window and looked round. It was a clear night, for London, and the moon was at the full. Cartwright Gardens was quiet and deserted; a light shone here and there in a window, but there was not a soul to be seen on either pavement or roadway. Suddenly a man came round the corner, out of Mabledon Place. The moon shone directly upon him; Jennison saw all of him distinctly. He was a tallish, well-built man, agile of movement; he walked well and smartly; Jennison thought he was in a hurry. He carried a walking-stick, and as he came along, he was swinging it jauntily. But all of a sudden, when he was some ten or twelve yards away from the house out of which Jennison watched him, he cast the stick away from him, let out a strange, half-stifled cry, and lifting both hands, began tearing at his necktie, as if he were being throttled. For a second or two his actions were frantic; then, still more suddenly, his uplifted hands dropped at his sides, his figure swayed this way and that, and with a scarcely perceptible moan he plunged straight forward on the pavement and rolled over into the gutter. And there he lay as still as the stonework beneath him—and Jennison made a dive for his door and rushed headlong to the street.

All the folk who lived in No. 85 had gone to bed by that time; and the landlady, knowing that there was no latecomer to arrive, had locked and bolted her front door. It took Jennison a minute or two to turn the key and draw the two bolts, and all the time something was pulsing and throbbing in his brain and saying over and over again: *"You'll find the man dead! You'll find the man dead!"* And when at last he had got clear of the house, and had rushed along the street to where the man lay, quiet enough, in the gutter, and had bent down and laid a hand on him, he knew that the man was dead—dead, Jennison informed himself, in non-original fashion, as a doornail.

Jennison was puzzled. He knew that a man can be all alive one minute and all dead the next. He had read—being inquisitive about such things—many news-

paper reports of executions. But these things weren't close at hand—*this* had been. Three, or at most five minutes previously, he had seen this man marching jauntily, bravely along, swinging his stick; now he lay there at Jennison's feet as dead as—again he caught at a hackneyed phrase—as dead as Queen Anne. And Queen Anne, reflected Jennison, had been dead—oh, no end of time! But she wasn't any deader than this chap!

THERE had been no noise, and so no windows went up in Cartwright Gardens. And just then no one came along, in either direction; Jennison was alone with the man who lay there so quietly. He bent down again and looked more closely at him. As far as he could judge, in the light of the street-lamp and the glow of the moon, this was a man of about thirty-five years of age, a good-looking, even handsome man—a man, evidently, of some position and means, for he was well dressed in a smartly cut suit of dark blue serge, and had good linen and a gold watch-chain across his vest. His hat had fallen from him when he fell, and lay a yard or two away; Jennison picked it up and looked abstractedly into the lining. There he read the name and address of a Liverpool hatter, and turning the hat about in his hands, noticed that it was quite new—perhaps its wearer had just come from Liverpool? But anyway, there he lay, statuesquely still—dead.

"Must ha' been a fit!" mused Jennison, unable to run to great heights of speculation or theory. "A fit—sudden. People do fall down and die in fits—die quick, too, so I've heard. And what am I to do next?"

As if in immediate answer to this question, the sound of a heavy, regular step came to Jennison's ears. He knew that sound—a policeman was coming; he was coming into Cartwright Gardens from Marchmont Street; he came every midnight, almost to the minute, as Jennison, who often sat up late, tediously wooing the muse, knew well. Presently he appeared, and Jennison hurried to meet him and arrived at the point of contact, breathless. The policeman halted—staring but impassive.

"Oh, I say!" began Jennison lamely. "I—the fact is, there's a dead man lying up there, nearly opposite our house. I—I think I saw him die. From my window, you know."

THE policeman quickened. He might have been a war-horse, sniffing the battle, or a foxhound catching a whiff of scent. His eyes opened wider, and he looked along the pavement, following Jennison's ink-stained forefinger.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "Just so! And—"

At that moment he caught sight of the dark heap lying in the gutter, and he relapsed into official silence and strode off, Jennison ambling at his side.

"Yes!" said Jennison jerkily. "I—I saw him! I was looking out of the window—my window—No. 85, I live—third floor. He came along, walking quickly, swinging his stick—I've an idea he was whistling or humming a tune. Then—suddenly he stopped! Tore at his throat—extraordinary motions! And then he fell—and rolled into the gutter. And when I got down to him, he was dead—oh, quite dead. What do you think it could have been?"

But all the policeman vouchsafed to say was in the form of a question—put staccato fashion:

"When was this?"

"Just now—two or three minutes since," replied Jennison. He heaved a deep sigh—a sigh of speculative surprise. "Lord!" he muttered. "It doesn't seem—it isn't—more than five or six minutes when I first saw him!"

"Doesn't take long to die!" observed the policeman sententiously. "Thing is—cause of death." Then having a bright notion, he added: "P'raps you're mistaken? Maybe unconscious?"

But they were close to the fallen man then, and the policeman, after a hasty examination, looked up at Jennison and nodded.

"You're right," he said. "Dead enough! And—nobody with him, eh? No attack on him?"

"Attack?" exclaimed Jennison wonderingly. "Of course not! There wasn't a soul about."

The policeman fumbled for his whistle.

"Then it must ha' been a fit," he said. "And there's fits *and* fits! However—" He raised his whistle to his lips and blew. The silence seemed greater than ever when the sound had died away. Jennison stood, still staring at the inanimate thing in the gutter: the policeman fidgeted, shifting his weight from one foot to another. Suddenly he spoke, nodding at the dead man.

"You don't know him?"

Jennison started and looked up sharply.

"I?" he exclaimed. "Good Lord, no! Don't know him from—anybody!"

"What I meant was," said the policeman slowly, "what I meant was—you saying as how you lived—where? No. 85? And it being latish, and him here, I thought maybe you'd know him, say, by sight—dweller hereabouts, eh?"

"Never saw him in my life before!" declared Jennison. Then he caught sight of the dead man's hat, which he had carefully placed aside. "That hat," he continued, pointing to it. "I picked it up. Liverpool, it says in it—maker's or seller's name, you know. P'raps he's a Liverpool man. You'd think so, wouldn't you? Liverpool being in the hat?"

"Oh, well, his clothing'll be examined," remarked the policeman easily. "There'll be something on him, likely or not. Papers—cards—such like. He'll be taken to the mortuary—as soon as we can get the ambulance. Doctor'll have to see him, too. Then—"

HE broke off as men came round the near corners: Jennison wondered that so many came so quickly. One—two—three—four—five policemen, a sergeant among them. He had to tell his tale to the sergeant; he told it in detail while others went for an ambulance. And when that came, the sergeant asked Jennison to go with them; the police-station and the mortuary, he said, were close together, and Jennison, as the only eyewitness, had better tell his story to the inspector. Jennison was nothing loath; here, at last, was an adventure, a mystery.

But it had drab, dismal settings, he thought, presently. The mortuary was a cold, repellent place, and it looked all the colder and more repellent, somehow, when they had laid the dead man there. A police-surgeon came and examined what they had fetched him to see; he was one of those men, thought Jennison, out of whom you're not going to extract speech if they don't want to speak; he did his job in a silence which none of those standing by cared or dared to break. But when he had done it, he turned, looking round.

"Where's the man who saw him fall?" he asked sharply.

Jennison, who had remained hidden by the big forms around him, was shoved forward: the police-surgeon sized him up in a quick glance.

"Well?" he said.

Jennison had to tell the tale again—this was the third time. The medical man listened in as grim a silence as he had kept before. But again his lips opened.

"Lifted his hands to his throat, you say?" he asked. "Suddenly?"

"All of a sudden!" answered Jennison. "One second he was walking along, ordinarily; the next, up went his hands, clutching, snatching, tearing at his throat! Like this—only worse!"

"Scream? Cry out?" asked the doctor.

"No-o," said Jennison, "not what you'd call by either name. Made a bit of a moan—in his throat—as he went down."

"Face first?"

"Face first, it was—fell right on his face, I think. Then," concluded Jennison, "then—well, he just rolled over into the gutter! And—lay still."

He looked round as he said the last word, and became aware that two other men had come into the room and were listening intently. One was a tall, soldierly-looking man in an inspector's uniform; the other was a quiet-looking but sharp-eyed young man in civilian clothes. The surgeon turned to them too, and after some muttered conversation about an inquest, went away. Jennison gathered that there would be a lot more to be heard about this affair—a lot more! And then, as nobody told him to go, or indeed, took any particular notice of him, he stood by while the quiet-looking young man, whom he presently discovered to be a detective, and who answered to the name of Womersley, examined the dead man's clothing, going through pocket after pocket and laying out the various contents. There was nothing very remarkable. Money was there, in some quantity; a good watch and chain; a pocketbook, in which were clippings from American papers, all relating to trade matters; a cigar-case; a silver match-box; a pocketknife. But there were no letters, nothing to give any clue to the man's identity, until Womersley drew from a waistcoat pocket a crumpled visiting card which, after a glance at it, he handed to the inspector.

"That's the only thing there is that's any use to us—now," he said. "See? *'Thomas Bradmore, 157-A Hunter Street.'* Is it—*his?* Or has it been given to him?"

"Close by, anyway," remarked the inspector. "Better go round there at once."

The detective moved off toward the

door, without further words. And Jennison quietly slipped after him. It was his adventure—and he was going on with it.

CHAPTER II

The Man Who Came Back

NOBODY offered any objection to Jennison's departure. He had already given his name and address to the sergeant, and since his last statement to the police-surgeon, nobody had taken any notice of him. He felt, somehow, that he was unimportant, a very minor pawn in the game. All the same, once outside, he made up to the detective.

"May I go with you?" he asked, half afraid of his temerity. "I—I'd like to, if you don't mind."

Womersley, who seemed somewhat abstracted, half paused and stared at his interrogator. In the light of the neighboring lamp, he sized up Jennison and smiled.

"Oh!" he said. "You're the chap that saw, aren't you? Just so!"

"I saw!" assented Jennison. "Everything!"

"Why do you want to go with me?" demanded Womersley. "Eh?"

"Because I did see!" answered Jennison. "Now I want to hear."

Womersley laughed. The laugh was half satirical, but the other half was wholly indulgent, and he nodded his head and turned along the pavement.

"Well, I don't know why you shouldn't," he said. "And as it happens, I'm not quite sure where this Hunter Street is. I'm new to this quarter of the town—I only came here, on special business, yesterday. Now up crops—this!"

"I know where Hunter Street is," remarked Jennison, eager to be of use. "Two minutes' walk—as a matter of fact, it's close to Cartwright Gardens. I'll take you straight there." Then, when they had crossed the road and walked on a little, he said timidly: "I suppose you're a detective, aren't you?"

"That's it!" answered Womersley. "Detective-sergeant, Criminal Investigation Department, Scotland Yard—now you've got it."

"It must be very interesting work," suggested Jennison.

"Sometimes!" said Womersley with another laugh. "And sometimes—t'other thing. Dull!"

"I should have thought it could never be that!" remarked Jennison.

"Dare say!" replied Womersley. "Fact, though! Horribly dull, at times. Prosaic!"

Jennison ruminated over this. He had a conception of detectives—formed entirely from his own imagination; he also had an idea of what a detective ought to look like. And Womersley wasn't a bit like it—he was quite an ordinary young man in appearance; Jennison saw thousands and thousands of his type every day in the City. But there being no doubt that Womersley was a genuine detective, he proceeded to cultivate him.

"What, now," asked Jennison, in the accents of a disciple who finds himself admitted to the presence of a known master, "what, now, would you say is the particular gift or faculty that a detective ought to possess?"

Womersley laughed again. Then he threw two words over his shoulder:

"Common sense!" he said.

"Nothing beyond?" asked Jennison in surprise.

"If you like," laughed Womersley, "still more common sense—and still more common sense after that. I'm not defining common sense, you know. But—common sense all the time: that's the ticket. This Hunter Street? Well, the number's 157-A."

The house was close by, and it was all in darkness. But there was a bell and a knocker at the front door, and repeated recourse to each prefaced the throwing up of a window-sash on the second floor and the protrusion of a head. A man's voice sounded above them.

"What is it? Who's there?"

"Is this Mr. Bradmore's?" inquired Womersley. "Mr. Thomas Bradmore?"

"I'm Mr. Bradmore," replied the man. "What do you want?"

Womersley glanced up and down the deserted street. Then he looked up.

"Sorry to rouse you, Mr. Bradmore," he answered. "A man died very suddenly in Cartwright Gardens about an hour ago. We found your card on him. Can you come down and tell me if you know anything of him?"

The voice spoke one word: "Wait!"

The window snapped with a click, and Womersley turned to Jennison.

"That settles that!" he murmured. "The dead man isn't Bradmore. Next thing is—does Bradmore know who he is?"

BEFORE Jennison had had time to speculate on the chances for and against this, the door opened, and Bradmore himself appeared, clad in an old dressing-gown and holding a lamp above his head. He was a tall, middle-aged man, somewhat worn and melancholy of aspect, whose dark, straggling hair and beard were already shot with gray, and who looked, somehow, as if he had known trouble and anxiety. He made a steady inspection of both men before speaking; Jennison he passed over quickly; at Womersley he looked longer.

"Police?" he asked.

"Scotland Yard man, Mr. Bradmore," replied Womersley. He drew out the crumpled card which he had found on the dead man, and thrust it into the rays of the lamp. "That's the card I spoke of, Mr. Bradmore. Yours, isn't it?"

Bradmore nodded, and motioned his visitors to enter. He closed the door after them, and leading them into a room on the right-hand side of the passage, set his lamp on a center table, pointed the two men to chairs, and himself took one facing the detective. And he immediately put a direct question to Womersley.

"What was this man like?"

"Good-looking, fresh-colored man, Mr. Bradmore," replied Womersley promptly. "About thirty-five years old, I should say. Well dressed—dark blue serge suit. Plenty of money in his pockets. But no papers—at least, none giving any name or address, except, of course, your card. That was in the right-hand waistcoat pocket."

"And you say he died suddenly in Cartwright Gardens?" asked Bradmore. "Of —what?"

Womersley shook his head and pointed to Jennison, who was listening with all his ears.

"That's a question for the doctor, Mr. Bradmore," he answered. "This young man saw all there was to be seen. He saw the man come along the street, apparently in the best of health and spirits, suddenly throw up his hands and clutch at his throat, and then fall to the ground and die—at once!"

Bradmore gave Jennison a glance. But it was no more than a glance. His attention went back to the detective.

"What exact time was this?" he asked.

"According to our friend, there," answered Womersley, again indicating Jennison, "just about a quarter to twelve. But —do you know who the man is, Mr. Bradmore? That's the important thing just now."

Bradmore nodded, slowly.

"Yes!" he answered. "It'll be Alfred Jakyn—Alfred Jakyn!"

"Yes?" said Womersley. "And—who is Alfred Jakyn? Was, of course, I should say. Who was he, exactly?"

BRADMORE began to stroke his beard, looking reflectively at his questioner.

"Do you know Holborn—I mean, do you know it well?" he asked.

"No," replied Womersley, "I don't; my work, as a rule, is at the other end of the town."

"I thought not," said Bradmore, "or you'd have known the name of Jakyn. If you go along Holborn tomorrow morning, you'll see, at the corner of Counsel's Passage, a chemist's shop—well known—with the name *'Daniel Jakyn'* over it. As a matter of fact, Daniel Jakyn's dead, and I'm his successor: I took over the business, of which I'd been manager for several years, when he died, last spring. And Alfred Jakyn was his son—only son. Only child, in fact!"

"Just so," said Womersley. "And what do you know about Alfred, Mr. Bradmore? I mean, of course, in relation to his sudden death?"

"I can soon tell you all I know about Alfred Jakyn," replied Bradmore. "As I've said, he was his father's only child. As a boy and a young man he was a wild and extravagant fellow—he gave his father a lot of trouble, and caused him no end of expense. About ten years ago he disappeared, and as far as I know, his father never heard a word of him from that time until the time of his own death. I never knew of anyone who ever heard of him; I certainly never did—until yesterday evening. Then, about a quarter to eight, he walked into my shop—"

"You're speaking of last evening—present night, as you may call it?" interrupted Womersley. "Same night as that in which he died?"

"Just so," assented Bradmore. "Last evening—the evening that's just over. He came in, greeted me as if he'd seen me only the day before, told me he'd landed at Liverpool yesterday morning, from America—New York, I think—and asked for news of his father. He didn't know, until I told him, that his father was dead. Hearing that, he sat down in the parlor

at the back of the shop to hear all I had to tell him."

"You'd no doubt have a good deal to tell, Mr. Bradmore?" suggested Womersley.

"Well, yes!" replied Bradmore. "He seemed to know nothing. He looked prosperous, as far as you could judge from outward appearance, but I couldn't make out where he'd been most of the time during the ten years' absence, for in addition to not knowing anything about his father, he seemed to be remarkably ignorant about things in general—I mean things that have happened of late years."

"Um!" murmured Womersley. "Maybe he's been where news doesn't run."

"I told him all there was to tell about his family affairs," continued Bradmore. "I told him, to begin with, that his father died intestate—left no will at all."

"Much to leave?" asked Womersley.

"Yes, a great deal—he was a well-to-do man," replied Bradmore. "Of course, as Alfred had turned up, it would all come to him. He recognized that. But I also told him that his relations were already taking action to have his death presumed, as he hadn't been heard of for ten years, so that they could succeed to Daniel's property—"

"There are relations, then?" interrupted Womersley.

"Yes! Daniel Jakyn had a sister-in-law, Mrs. Nicholas Jakyn, widow of his younger brother. She has two children, a son Nicholas, and a daughter with the odd name of Belyna. Mrs. Nicholas Jakyn and her children—they're both grown up—live with Mrs. Nicholas' brother, Dr. Cornelius Syphax, in Brunswick Square, close by here. If Alfred Jakyn had died during his absence abroad, the Nicholas Jakyn family, of course, came in for Daniel's money. And they're now—believing Alfred to be dead, abroad—in process of trying to get it. I took over the business under arrangement with them—sanctioned by the courts, of course."

"You told him all this, last evening?" asked Womersley.

"Of course! He laughed at it, and said that as he was very much alive, all that would come to an end. And," continued Bradmore, "after talking things over a little more with me, he went away to call at Brunswick Square, to let Mrs. Nicholas Jakyn and her children know that he was living and had come home again. That was the last I saw of him."

"Just so," said Womersley. "Um! Well, a few questions, Mr. Bradmore: To start with—what time did he leave the shop in Holborn?"

"Just about half-past eight."

"To go straight to Brunswick Square?"

"So I understood."

"Why did you give him your card—the card with your private address on it?"

"Because he said that he'd likely want to see me after he'd seen his aunt and his cousins, and as I was going home, I told him where I lived—gave him the card you've brought here just now."

"I see! Did he tell you where he was staying in London?"

"He did—at the Euston Hotel."

"Did he ask you anything else, Mr. Bradmore—anything that we ought to know? Because, I may as well tell you that the police-surgeon who made a preliminary examination of the body is highly suspicious—he thinks there's been foul play, and naturally, we want to know all we can. Did Alfred Jakyn ask you about any people he'd known in the old days? Did he give you any idea that there was anybody he wanted to see again, or wanted to find?"

"Well," answered Bradmore, after reflecting a moment, "there was just one question he asked me, as he was leaving. That was if I knew anything of the whereabouts of a young woman named Millie Clover, who at one time had been employed at the shop in Holborn as a clerk. I didn't—hadn't heard of her for years."

"Nothing else?"

"Nothing!" answered Bradmore with decision. "I've told you everything."

WOMERSLEY nodded, rose, and began to button his overcoat.

"Queer business, isn't it?" he said in matter-of-fact tones. "You say he seemed to be in first-class condition—as regards health?"

"I should say he was certainly in the very best of health and spirits," assented Bradmore. "Alert, vigorous, cheerful—all that. Oh, yes!"

"And then he goes and dies in the most mysterious fashion, all in a minute!" said Womersley. "Well—they'll want you at the inquest, you know, Mr. Bradmore; you'll be hearing about it, in due course."

"I imagine that we shall all hear a great deal about a good many things, in due course," remarked Bradmore as he led his

visitors to the door. "I know what I think, from what you've told me!"

"And that's—what?" asked Womersley.

"No—no, I'll keep that to myself!" said Bradmore. "Maybe the coroner's jury will eventually be led to the same conclusion—we shall see!"

He closed the door on them, and Womersley and Jennison turned again into the night. The detective produced and lighted a pipe.

"Well, that's a beginning!" he said as they moved away. "Easy start, too!"

"What will you do—now?" asked Jennison, eagerly. "What next?"

"Drop in at the police-station for a minute or two, and then—bed!" answered Womersley. "Just that!"

"You can sleep—after this sort of thing!" exclaimed Jennison.

"Try me!" said Womersley. "Oh, yes, I can sleep! Well—good night."

Their ways parted there, and Jennison moved forward alone, through Compton Street to Cartwright Gardens. Very soon he came to the spot, close to his own house, whereat the mysterious Alfred Jakyn had fallen and died. He stood staring at it, wondering, speculating, thinking how queer it all was. Suddenly he saw something that lay in the gutter, near the place from which the policeman had lifted the dead man's body, something that gleamed white in the moonlight. Stooping and picking it up, he found it to be a scrap of paper, tightly twisted into what is called a cocked-hat. There was writing inside—plain enough that, when he had untwisted it. But Jennison's eyesight was not over good, and in that light he could make nothing of what he saw to be there. He let himself into the house and hurried up to his own room. The light still burned above the mantelpiece and he got beneath it, smoothed out the crumpled bit of paper, and read what was written on it. The handwriting was a woman's—pretty, well-formed writing, even if it looked hurried. And the words were just nine in number:

"West corner of Endsleigh Gardens in half an hour."

CHAPTER III

The Witness-box

ADVENTURES were crowding thick and fast on Jennison, but this scrap of paper business was more to his taste than any that had preceded it during that eventful night. This, he said to himself, was a bit of all right; it was the sort of thing you read of in newspapers and novels. He read and reread the nine words, reveling in their mystery, gloating over the fact that it was he, and he only, who had found this paper on which they were written. Suddenly a terrible suspicion overclouded the brightness of his ideas—how did he know that this bit of writing had anything to do with the dead man? It might have been dropped into the gutter whence he had rescued it by somebody else; it might have nothing whatever to do with Alfred Jakyn and his strange death. But considering everything, Jennison believed that it had, and he cast his doubt aside. No!—the note had probably been thrust by Alfred Jakyn carelessly into the edge of a pocket, and had fallen out on the street when he fell. And it might prove a thing of high importance—what, he believed, the detectives call a Clue.

He began to wonder what Womersley would say when he showed it to him. But at that point temptation assailed Jennison. Why should he tell Womersley anything about this discovery? Why should not he, Albert Jennison, take a hand himself in the solving of the mystery? Why not? Why not, indeed? He went to bed on that, and turned and turned half the night, inventing theories and planning campaigns.

And when he woke in the morning, Jennison wished that he had nothing to do but to follow up this affair. He would have liked to go round to the police-station to find Womersley and persuade that phlegmatic person to let him share in his investigations; perhaps, if Womersley had proved tractable, he might have let him into his own secret and shown him the scrap of paper. But he was a slave—a miserable treadmill slave—and nine o'clock found him, as usual, in the City. There he toiled all day, doing his work badly, for once, because his mind was otherwhere. A thrill ran through him, however, when, as he entered his lodgings that evening, his landlady came up from her region in the basement bearing an official-looking piece of paper.

"There's been a policeman here after you, Mr. Jennison," she said, eying him closely. "He said to give you this here as soon as you came in."

Jennison glanced at the document and held his head a couple of inches higher.

"Ah, yes, Mrs. Canby," he answered. "Yes! It's about an inquest tomorrow morning. I'm a witness, you know—the most important witness, I believe. That poor fellow who died outside here last night, you know—I told you about it before I went out."

"You did, Mr. Jennison, and a turn it did give me, too!" said Mrs. Canby. "To think of a feller-being falling dead outside there, and us all warm and snug in our beds, close by! Leastways, you weren't, Mr. Jennison. And how will it turn, Mr. Jennison, do you think?"

BUT Jennison didn't know; his only answer as he repaired to his tea-supper was to shake his head with dark and solemn meaning. What he did know, and highly appreciated, was that he was going to have a whole holiday next day. The inquest was set down for ten-thirty in the morning; of course he would have to be there, and probably the proceedings would last over several hours; anyway, being specially commanded by the Law to be present, he would certainly not be able to attend to his usual duties. It gave him an exquisite pleasure to write a letter to the manager at the warehouse, explaining why he should not be at his desk next day; and for the rest of the evening, instead of writing poetry, he rehearsed his evidence, and even studied, before his mirror, the pose and attitude he would adopt in the witness-box. Next morning he spent much time over his toilet, and when he finally reached the coroner's court, a quarter of an hour earlier than he need have done, he was disgusted to find that all the other people assembled there seemed to have arrayed themselves in their oldest instead of their newest clothes: the prevailing tone of things was shabby, sordid.

Jennison had never been in a coroner's court before. He was not impressed. The coroner seemed to him too matter-of-fact and practical in his remarks; the jury, twelve good men and true, looked as if brains were much wanting amongst them; the police, the legal folk, the newspaper men, the spectators—all were common, vulgar, material; there was too much of business about it altogether, and none of that romance and mystery which Jennison had hoped for.

And at first the proceedings were very dull, because Jennison already knew all that came out. He heard everything that Bradmore could tell, for instance—Bradmore, who gave formal proof of the dead man's identity, now retold it; Jennison knew every word that was to come from him. And somehow, when he himself got into the witness-box, his performance there seemed dull and flat, and things weren't what he'd hoped they'd be. He had wanted to thrill the court with a thoroughly dramatic story; instead, he found himself giving affirmatives and negatives to cut-and-dried questions. There were no thrills, no sensations; some of the reporters actually whispered and laughed among themselves while he, Jennison, the only man who had actually *seen*, was being examined. It was all as lifeless and sterile as the voice of the man who thrust a Testament into the hand of a witness and bade him or her repeat a babble of phrases.

BUT Jennison, once more relegated to inconspicuousness among the herd of spectators, became conscious that the court was waking up when the police-surgeon went into the witness-box. He had closely watched this functionary on the night of Alfred Jakyn's death, and had said to himself since that he knew as much about it as he, the surgeon, did. What Jennison did not know, however, was that since that hasty examination at the mortuary, there had been an autopsy. But the coroner knew, and the jury knew, and the legal folk present knew; so did the reporters, who, on the medical man's appearance, began to pay close heed to business. And in a couple of minutes Jennison found himself gasping at a suddenly sprung suggestion. It hit him full, as the result of a brief question from the coroner and a sharp reply from the witness. They had already exchanged a good deal in the way of question and answer before this came along, but when it came, the atmosphere changed from heaviness to the quick instinct of surprise.

"And the result of the post-mortem examination, now? Have you formed any opinion as to the cause of death?"

"Yes! I am firmly of opinion as to the cause of death. Poison!"

The coroner glanced at his jury. But each juryman was attentive enough; the twelve pairs of eyes were fixed steadily on the police-surgeon.

"Poison!" repeated the coroner. "What particular poison?"

"That I cannot say. It is a question for

experts. We have already called in their aid. But I am convinced that the man was poisoned."

"From what you saw, you don't feel justified in particularizing?"

"I may say this: I believe the man was poisoned by something with the nature of which I—and I should say most medical practitioners—am unfamiliar. Judging from the evidence of the witness Jennison, I think that the poison was administered to the deceased some time—probably two or three hours—previous to his death, and that the effect came with startling suddenness."

"Causing instantaneous death?"

"I think so."

The coroner hesitated a moment, again glancing at the jury as if he wondered whether any juryman wanted to ask a question. But the jurymen were all staring silently and speculatively at the witness, and to him the coroner turned once more.

"When will the experts you mentioned be able to report?"

"Possibly in about a week or ten days."

"We can adjourn for a week, and then again, if necessary," said the coroner. "But there is another witness—oh, two witnesses, eh?—that we had better hear this morning." He bent from his desk to speak to the chief police official. "Oh, just so!" he added. "A relative of the dead man, eh!"

The police-surgeon stepped down from the witness-box; the man who stood by it lifted a loud voice, staring into the crowd:

"Belyna Jakyn!"

UNTIL that moment Jennison had paid little attention to the people around him: he had been too full of himself, too much preoccupied of his own part in this act of the drama. But now, hearing some slight commotion and murmuring among the crowded rows behind him, he turned and looked in the direction to which the coroner's officer had directed his summons. And there he saw four people sitting together, and was quick-witted enough to set them down at once as the relatives of Alfred Jakyn of whom Bradmore had spoken to Womersley and himself. There was a tall, elderly man with a clever, clean-shaven face, a mass of dark hair, turning gray, an aquiline, aggressive nose and a pair of peculiarly bright and burning black eyes; him he took to be Dr. Syphax, of Brunswick Square. Next him, and closely resembling him, and if possible of an even more intent cast of countenance and expression, was a woman who affected an old-fashioned style of dress and was accordingly conspicuous among those about her; this, thought Jennison, must be Mrs. Nicholas Jakyn, aunt-in-law of the dead man. At her side sat a young man, smartly dressed, very ordinary of looks, who was assiduously sucking the knob of his walking-stick and scowling at the things in front, as if he considered the whole affair a rotten bore; he, doubtless, was Mrs. Nicholas Jakyn's son. And next to him was a young woman, who, as Jennison looked, was rising from her seat in response to the call, and who, of course, was the person called—*Belyna Jakyn.*

Everybody in court was staring at Belyna Jakyn. There was reason. Nature had been anything but kind to her. She was deformed; it was evident that she had been deformed from birth. She was a hunchback; one leg, it was obvious, was shorter than its fellow; she walked with some difficulty. But she was calm and self-possessed, and the face which she turned full on coroner and jury was distinguished by good features, superior intelligence and alert eyes; misshapen as the body was, any observant person could see that Belyna Jakyn had excellent brains. And she showed no sign of nervousness as she waited to be questioned; eyes and lips were calm and composed; the thin white hands which rested on the ledge of the box were wholly at rest. The crowd of people, seeing all this, became as quiet as this new figure in the drama, listening intently.

BELYNA JAKYN, daughter of Mrs. Nicholas Jakyn, and niece of Daniel Jakyn, deceased, and therefore cousin of Alfred Jakyn, into the cause of whose death the court was inquiring—to all this the witness assented, quietly. The coroner, nodding his head at each answer, bent more confidentially toward the witness-box as he launched into more pertinent questions.

"I understand that you and your mother and your brother live with your uncle—maternal uncle I think—Dr. Cornelius Syphax, in Brunswick Square, Miss Jakyn?"

"We do!"

"Did Alfred Jakyn come to Dr. Syphax's house on Monday evening?"

"He did."

"Were you all at home?"

"No. There was no one at home but myself."

"You received him?"

"Yes."

"Did you recognize him as your cousin Alfred?"

"Oh, yes! I remembered him quite well. It is eleven years since he went away—ten or eleven, at any rate—but I was then twelve years old. Yes, I knew him at once."

"He entered the house?"

"He came first to the surgery, at the side of the house. I was there alone, making up medicines—I act as dispenser to Dr. Syphax. As soon as I saw who it was, I took him into the house, to the dining-room. We sat down there, to talk."

"Yes? And what did you talk about?"

"He did most of the talking. He told me he had been knocking about all over the world and had been in some strange places and seen many strange things. He appeared to have heard very little of English, or even of European affairs, of late years. He said that he had only landed in England, at Liverpool, early that morning, and did not know that his father was dead until he called on Mr. Bradmore on reaching London, in the evening. Then he said that Mr. Bradmore had told him that my uncle—his father—had left no will, and that, of course, everything would come to him, and he added that he would see that my mother, my brother and myself were not forgotten."

"He was very friendly, then?"

"Very! He seemed in good spirits—high spirits. He joked and laughed about things, and said he would call again next day at a time when we should all be at home, and that then we would go into family matters."

"Did he tell you anything that made you think he had prospered during his absence?"

"Not particularly. He did say, half-jokingly, that he hadn't come back empty-handed."

"Did he say whether he had married during his absence?"

"No—he told me nothing of that sort, nothing about his private concerns, beyond what I have told you. He was not with me very long."

"That's what I'm coming to, Miss Jakyn. Now, what time was it when he came to your surgery?"

"About a quarter to nine o'clock."

"And he left the house—when?"

"About ten minutes past nine."

"Did he give you any address in London?"

"Yes; he said he was staying at the Euston Hotel—simply because it was at hand when he got out of the train. He said he should stay there for a week or two, now he'd got there."

"Did he mention any appointment for that evening—or his having to meet anybody?"

"No! He only said he'd come back and stay longer next day."

This was all that was asked of Belyna Jakyn; she was followed in the witness-box by a young man who described himself as a waiter at the Euston Hotel, and testified that having seen the body of Alfred Jakyn he recognized it as that of a gentleman who was in and about the hotel on Monday evening last. He had seen him in the dining-room from six-thirty to seven o'clock that evening: he saw him again in the smoking-room later in the evening.

"Can you be sure of the exact time on the last occasion?" asked the coroner.

"Yes sir," replied the witness. "The gentleman came into the smoking-room about half-past nine; I got him a whisky-and-soda. He sat down for a while. There was nobody much about just then, and while he was there, I noticed him particularly."

"For what reason?"

"Well, sir, he seemed restless. He fidgeted, first in one place, then another. He walked about the room, muttering. In the end, a bit before ten o'clock, he pulled a bit of paper out of his waistcoat pocket, and seemed to read something on it."

"Yes? And what then?"

"Then he suddenly turned on his heel, sir, and went very quickly away. That was the last I saw of him."

CHAPTER IV

The American Photograph

AT this stage of the proceedings the coroner adjourned his inquiry for a week, warning his jurymen that when they once again assembled, there might be another immediate adjournment, and that in any case they were to keep their minds open and not to pay too much attention

to what they read in the newspapers about the affair which they were investigating. Then the spectators began to go away, most of them grumbling that there had not been more of it, and Jennison drifted out with them, convinced that the scrap of paper now in his possession was identical with that of which the waiter from the Euston Hotel had just spoken.

He was still undecided as to whether he would tell Womersley about that or whether he wouldn't. He looked round for Womersley: the detective, near the outer door of the court, was giving audience to the newspaper men, who were putting eager questions to him; Jennison sidled close up to the group, and nobody reproving him for his intrusion, he stayed there and listened.

"I may as well tell you fellows all that it's necessary you should put in your papers —at present," Womersley was saying. "Save you asking me a lot of questions, anyway! Just this, then: this man, Alfred Jakyn, came to the Euston Hotel on Monday afternoon, late, and booked a room there. He dined in the hotel, and went out—you've heard about his movements during the evening. We know where he was between, say, eight o'clock and ten o'clock. First, he was with Bradmore, in Holborn. Then he was with Miss Belyna Jakyn at Brunswick Square. Then he was for half an hour or so in the smoking-room at the Euston Hotel. The problem is—where was he between ten o'clock, when he once more left the hotel, and a quarter to twelve, when the witness Jennison—who's standing behind you—saw him fall dead in Cartwright Gardens? Did he go to meet anyone? If so—whom? If he was poisoned,—and the doctors are sure he was,—who poisoned him? Did he poison himself? That's not likely. If somebody else poisoned him, he was murdered. Why? There you are—plenty of copy for you!"

"Go on!" murmured one of the reporters. "There's more than that, Womersley. Of course, you've examined his room and so on?"

"Yes, you can have that," assented the detective. "At his room in the hotel, two suitcases, with plenty of good clothing, linen, and so on—the things that a well-to-do man would have. No papers of any importance, no private letters, nothing much in that way, except that in a wallet is a draft on the Equitable Trust Company of New York, at their London branch in King William Street, for ten thousand dollars. Nothing to show what his business was, nor any business addresses. But in one suitcase was a packet of recently taken photographs, taken in New York—and I'm going to hand over a couple of them to you fellows; you can manage about reproducing them as you please. Somebody, seeing them, may recognize the man, and be able to tell something about him. Here you are—and that's the lot."

THE reporters seized on the photographs, and Womersley thrust his hands into his pockets and sauntered off. Jennison made after him.

"Do—do you happen to want me for anything?" he asked. "I—"

Womersley scarcely looked at him as he replied, flinging the words over his shoulder.

"Not that I know of, my friend!" he answered. "Done your bit in there, haven't you?"

He went on his way; and Jennison, feeling distinctly snubbed, shrank back, hurt and mortified. But he revived quickly when the youngest of the reporters, catching sight of him, and recognizing him as the man who had actually seen Alfred Jakyn die, approached and began to question him. The reporter suggested an adjournment to the nearest saloon bar; there, under the influence of a glass of bitter ale or two, Jennison's tongue wagged freely. He gave his new friend a full and elaborate account of what he had seen, and exhibited what his listener generously called unusual histrionic ability in acting the part of the dying man. The reporter, youthful and ardent, and attached to a paper which catered for a horrors-loving public, welcomed Jennison as a distinct find. But even Jennison became exhausted at last in the sense that he could tell no more—to that audience, at any rate.

"Queer business?" mused the reporter. "And likely to work up into a first-rate mystery. Poisoning, eh? We haven't had a really first-class bit of poisoning since—well, since I came on my job!"

"You think it will be poisoning?" asked Jennison.

"Should say so, old man, after what the police-surgeon said," replied his companion. "Sort of chap that wouldn't say anything that he didn't mean. My notion, of course, is that he and the other doctor he mentioned, know already that the man was

poisoned, but they want the verdict and backing of these big bugs—experts, you know—toxicologists. Lot of fine stuff to be got out of an A-1 poison case, my boy! I know a chap who's a medical student—and he tells me that there are poisons that you can administer to a man, and that he'd know nothing about it for hours, never feel any ill effects, you know, and go about as chirpy and fit as you like, and then, all of a sudden—all over, my boy—quick as having a bullet through your brain! Or—quicker!"

"That's what must have happened in this case," said Jennison. "But—who gave it to him?"

"Ah—that's *the* question!" exclaimed the reporter. "A question for the police. Well—the press will do what it can. That is, as far as I'm concerned. Press and police—a mighty combination. Well, so long, old man—going to write it up now."

HE went away hurriedly, and Jennison, finding that the morning had worn to his usual dinner hour, repaired to a restaurant which he occasionally patronized, and on the strength of his holiday, did himself very well. And while he ate and drank, he thought. It began to strike him as a queer and significant thing that, granting the cause of Alfred Jakyn's death to be poison, nearly all the folks with whom it was known he had been in contact on the evening of his death were people, who, from the very fact of their professions, must have poison at their disposal. There was Bradmore, a chemist: chemists have no end of poisons knocking about. Then there was that Miss Belyna Jakyn, poor thing! Didn't she say in the witness-box that she was dispenser to her uncle, the doctor with the queer name? Of course, she'd have poisons in Dr. Syphax's surgery.

Well, but why should Bradmore poison Alfred Jakyn? No motive at all for that—no! But as regards the young woman—ah! According to Bradmore, the Nicholas Jakyn family, just before the recent event, were taking steps to have Alfred Jakyn's death presumed, and to establish their claim to Daniel Jakyn's estate; the sudden arrival of Alfred, all alive and kicking, would upset their plans. Now, supposing—supposing Miss Belyna, alone with cousin Alfred, and knowing that he stood between her and her family and a nice fortune, took the opportunity to give him a fatal dose of something—eh? It might be that Miss Belyna had made a special study of poisons, and was an expert in their use, or possible use. After all, said Jennison, you never can tell, you never know.

AT this point a brilliant notion occurred to Jennison. How did he know, how did the coroner know, how did the police know that Miss Belyna Jakyn told the precise truth in the witness-box in which she had made such an odd, pathetic figure? She had said that nobody but herself saw Alfred Jakyn when he called at Brunswick Square. Was that true? Nobody, of course, could prove that it wasn't, for Alfred was dead. But perhaps Miss Belyna's evidence had been carefully cooked by the family. Jennison knew enough to know that as a rule doctors are in their surgeries of an evening—you were pretty sure to find them there, anyhow, between seven and nine. Now, supposing Alfred Jakyn got into the hands of Belyna Jakyn and her uncle, Dr. Syphax—eh? There was something very queer about Dr. Syphax, thought Jennison. His eyes were like lamps, and how he could stare! Odd man, very—and probably capable of poisoning anybody who stood in his way or interfered with his plans. And his sister, Mrs. Nicholas Jakyn, was a queer-looking woman. She reminded Jennison of a bird he had seen in a big cage at the zoölogical gardens—a condor—yes, just that! Queer lot, altogether, that Jakyn-Syphax combination. And Jennison, by this time warmed to his self-imposed task, began to wonder how he could get into the Brunswick Square house and see these people close at hand. Rubbing his forehead (which he usually called his brow) in deep thought over this, Jennison suddenly became aware of a fine excuse for calling on Dr. Syphax. For some little time past Jennison had been troubling himself about a small lump which was growing about an inch above his left eyebrow. He had thought little of it at first, when it was no bigger than a pea, but it had steadily increased in size, and was now almost as big as a cherry, and only the other day one of his fellow-clerks at the warehouse had said to him, lugubriously, that if he were Jennison, he'd have that seen to—he'd known a man, he said, who had a lump like that on his head, which, neglected and suffered to grow, became as big as an orange. Surgical advice, said this counselor, was what Jen-

nison wanted, and sharp! And now, as he smoked a cigarette and sipped his black coffee,—a drink that he loathed, but considered the correct thing to have when lunching at that particular restaurant,—Jennison decided that his lump would furnish an excellent excuse for calling on Dr. Syphax.

Forthwith he strolled round toward Brunswick Square, and very quickly discovered the Doctor's dwelling. There was an alley at the side of the house, and a brass plate on the railing: there Jennison saw what he wanted—"*Surgery Hours 9* A. M *to 10:30* A. M*; 6:30* P. M. *to 9* P. M." Having ascertained that, he looked inquisitively at the house. Its windows were all heavily curtained, and it seemed to Jennison that it was essentially an abode of mystery.

At a quarter to seven that evening Jennison, with a beating heart, tapped at the door of Dr. Syphax's surgery, opened it, walked in, and came face to face with the Doctor, who was just about to let out a patient. He stared hard at the newcomer, and then suddenly smiled; it was the sort of smile, thought Jennison, that takes a devil of a lot of thinking about. There was a word for that sort of smile—what was it? Enigmatical?

"Hullo!" exclaimed Dr. Syphax. "Seen you before today, young man! The witness of this morning, eh? Jennison!"

"Yes!" assented Jennison. "That's why I called. At least, I mean—not because of that affair—nothing to do with that—but I heard you were a doctor, and living close by, and I want a doctor—never employed one before, though!"

"You're a lucky chap, then!" cried Dr. Syphax. "And what's the matter?"

Jennison walked under the center light of the surgery, and removing his cap, pointed to the lump above his eyebrow.

"I want to know what that is?" he said ingenuously. "That's what!"

"That's a cyst, my friend," answered Dr. Syphax promptly. "A cyst is a hollow growth filled with liquid secretion—sebaceous matter."

"Will it get bigger—if left alone?" asked Jennison.

"Rather," said Dr. Syphax heartily. "Big as—well, a walnut! Perhaps bigger. Might grow as big as the head it's on—if permitted."

"What's to be done about it, Doctor?" asked Jennison.

"You must have it removed, of course," answered Syphax. "The sooner the better. When I've removed it and extracted the root, then it'll be done with. Do it now, if you like."

But Jennison thought not. He saw some scalpels and things lying around, and he didn't like the looks of them.

"I could come next Sunday morning," he suggested. "Would that do?"

"Quite well," assented Syphax. "Come at ten-thirty. Wont take long—nor hurt you much either. A bit, of course."

"I'm in a City office," remarked Jennison. "Shall I have to take a few days off?"

"Oh, well—" said Syphax. "No particular need, but of course you'll have to wear bandages for a few days till the scar heals, you know."

JENNISON silently decided that he would secure a week's holiday on the strength of that operation—perhaps a fortnight's. He picked up his cap.

"I'll come Sunday morning, then," he said awkwardly. "Ten-thirty. I thought it would have to be done. A—a friend of mine said so. Good night, Doctor—I suppose you haven't heard any more about that matter we were engaged on this morning?"

"Nothing, my lad, nothing!" answered Syphax. He was making an entry in a book that lay open on his desk, and he turned from it to glance at his patient with another queer smile. "Strange affair, eh?"

"It gave me a turn," said Jennison solemnly. "Of course, I'd never seen anything like it! A man living—all alive, as you might say—one minute, and next as dead as—as—"

"As ever a man can be!" suggested Syphax. "Startling, to be sure—if you've never seen it before. You heard anything else?"

"I did hear a bit—when I left the court," answered Jennison. "I heard that detective, Womersley, telling the reporters that he'd searched the dead man's room at the Euston Hotel and hadn't found anything much there beyond a bank draft for ten thousand dollars. And some recently taken photographs."

"Oh!" said Syphax. "Dear me! Well, I suppose there are a lot of things to be found out. Lots! Always are in these cases, you know, my friend."

"Do you think he was poisoned?" asked Jennison.

"Might have been! Why not? The police-surgeon seemed to think so—to be sure of it, in fact," replied Syphax. "Of course, I can't say; I wasn't present at the autopsy. That'll come out." He hesitated a minute, watching Jennison good-humoredly. "I suppose you didn't see anybody following Alfred Jakyn, did you?" he asked suddenly. "Nobody looking round corners, or anything of that sort?"

Jennison jumped at the mere suggestion. "I?" he exclaimed. "Good Lord, no, Doctor! I'll take a solemn affidavit there wasn't a soul about! Neither up Cartwright Gardens nor down Cartwright Gardens. Why—why—do you think somebody was following him—watching him?"

Syphax was now busily engaged in compounding a bottle of medicine; Jennison watched his long, slim, white fingers moving among the drugs, and his lips mechanically whispering some formula. He repeated his question.

"Do you really, Doctor?"

Syphax, filling up his bottle with distilled water, began to shake it violently. What was inside it gradually assumed a beautiful opalescent tint.

"Shouldn't wonder—shouldn't wonder at all!" he said at last. "No doubt you didn't see 'em, my lad—attention engaged elsewhere—with *him*. Very deep, black mystery indeed, Jennison—thousand feet deep—take a long time to touch bottom. Well—ten-thirty, Sunday morning."

FEELING himself dismissed, Jennison went out. At the top of the square he bought an evening newspaper—the paper of which the young reporter of that morning was representative. He swelled with pride and importance as his eyes encountered the columns of stuff about the Cartwright Gardens affair and saw his own name in capitals. And there was the interview with him—and the reproduced photographs of Alfred Jakyn—and lots more.

Jennison flew off to a favorite haunt of his. In a small side street off the Euston Road there was a quiet, highly respectable tavern, the Cat and Bagpipe, whither he often repaired of an evening for a glass of ale and a chat with the barmaid, Chrissie Walker, a smart and lively young woman. He marched in now on Chrissie, and finding her alone, laid the newspaper before her, pointing to his own name. But Chrissie's eyes went straight to the photograph of Alfred Jakyn, and she let out an exclamation that almost rose to a scream.

"Mercy on us!" she exclaimed, pointing to the reproduction. "Why, that man was in here on Monday night—he came in here with a lady!"

CHAPTER V

The Hotel Notepaper

DURING the last day or two Jennison had been slowly acquiring knowledge in the art and science of crime-investigation and had learned that one who desired to become a proficient should never show himself surprised, not allow himself to be startled. He was also learning to think very quickly; and as soon as Chrissie Walker spoke, he remembered that the Cat and Bagpipe was close to Endsleigh Gardens, the place of appointment mentioned in the note which he had picked up on the scene of Alfred Jakyn's death, and that both were within a few minutes' walk of the Euston Hotel. So he merely elevated his eyebrows in a politely inquisitive glance, as if just a little mildly interested.

"Oh?" he said. "That so? You recognize him?"

"Should think I did!" replied Chrissie fervently. "Good-looking fellow, isn't he? Oh, yes, no mistaking that—knew that photo as soon as I set eyes on it. That's the man!"

"And he came in here Monday night?" asked Jennison.

"Came in here, Monday night—as I say," responded Chrissie. "With a lady. Looked in himself first, through that door, and seeing there was nobody much about,—we were very quiet, as usual, at that time,—he brought her in. They sat down in that alcove there. Oh, yes!"

"What time would that be?" asked Jennison.

"A bit after ten o'clock," replied Chrissie. "Just about the time when I usually begin to yawn—five or ten minutes past ten."

"Did they stay long?" inquired Jennison.

"Twenty minutes or so," answered the barmaid. "He'd a couple of whiskies; she'd a small glass of port, which she scarcely touched—I noticed that. They were talking all the time—confidential talk, it seemed—whispers, you know. It struck me they'd turned in here on purpose to talk. He appeared to be explaining some-

thing—he did most of the talking, anyhow."

"Seem to be friendly?" asked Jennison.

"As far as I could see," replied Chrissie, "—quite friendly. I should have said they were talking business. Of course, I didn't catch a word of it. But that's the man, sure as anything!"

"Interesting!" remarked Jennison. "Credit to your powers of observation! And what was the lady like?"

CHRISSIE laughed and gave her questioner a knowing look.

"Well, I'll tell you!" she said, leaning over the counter. "She was a pretty little woman, I should say a bit over thirty—p'raps a year or two more. Dark hair, dark eyes—quite pretty. She'd a big, very plain, but good cloak on, that wrapped her right up, and she'd a veil, though not a thick one. But I noticed this: she undid her cloak to get something, a handkerchief or a smelling-bottle, or something of that sort, and I saw that she'd a dinner-dress on, and a very smart one, too! I only saw it for a second, mind you, but I did see!"

"Ah!" exclaimed Jennison. "Just so!"

"He wasn't in evening dress," continued Chrissie. "He'd a dark suit on—blue serge, I think. And I'll tell you what I thought: I thought she was some lady who'd been dining at one of the big hotels close by, or at one of the houses in one of those big squares at the back here, and that they'd met, and wanted to have a bit of quiet talk, and so they'd turned in here. But fancy it being that man, and his being dead—actually dead and gone—an hour or so after!"

"Life's a very uncertain thing, you know!" answered Jennison with the air of one who utters a solemn truth for the very first time. "That's a fact! Well—I wouldn't mention this to anybody else if I were you, Chrissie! Just keep it to yourself—see?"

"Why?" demanded Chrissie.

"Well, if you like—as a personal favor to me," replied Jennison. "Don't tell anybody else that you saw Alfred Jakyn in here. Leastways, not without telling me—I mean, really, don't tell anybody unless I say you can."

"Why—what've you got to do with it?" asked Chrissie. "No affair of yours, is it?"

Jennison pointed to the newspaper account and to his own name in capitals.

"As the principal witness in the case," he replied loftily, "and as the one person that witnessed—actually witnessed!—the unfortunate catastrophe, I should say it is my affair! But between you and me, there's more than that in it. I'm doing a bit in my own way to unravel this mystery—there's more mystery in this business than you'd think; and I should like to keep what you've told me to myself. It may be of—well, what they call supreme importance."

"Oh, well!" said Chrissie. "I don't suppose anybody'll come asking questions at the Cat and Bagpipe! So you want to find things out, do you?"

"You shall know more later," replied Jennison with a significant look. "In the meantime, be a good girl, and say—nothing! In these cases, silence—ah, you don't know what a lot depends on silence—properly applied!"

HE drank his bitter beer and went out—to think. So Alfred Jakyn and a lady—veiled, and in evening dress—had been closeted together in a quiet corner of the saloon-bar of the Cat and Bagpipe between ten and ten-thirty on the night of his death, had they? Very good—that was a valuable addition to his score of knowledge. Of course, the lady was the writer of the note which he had found, the note making an appointment at the west end of Endsleigh Gardens. That end was within a minute of the Cat and Bagpipe. They had met, these two, and turned in there—to talk. It was close to the Euston Hotel—and the waiter from the Euston Hotel had said at the inquest that he had seen Alfred Jakyn examine or read a scrap of paper just before leaving the smoking-room. That, said the waiter, was about, or close on, ten o'clock: well, said Jennison, it would only take a smart walker two or three minutes to walk from the Euston Hotel to the end of Endsleigh Gardens. Things were smoothing themselves out—becoming connected; there was a clue. And with the idea of getting a still firmer hold of it, Jennison crossed the Euston Road, made for the big, gloomy portals of the station, and turning into the hotel, looked for and walked into the smoking-room.

It was a room of considerable dimensions, this, but when Jennison entered, it was almost deserted. Two elderly men sat talking in a corner; a younger man was busy at a writing-table. It was with a writing-table that Jennison was first con-

cerned. There were several in the room, placed here and there in convenient corners; he went across to the most isolated, took from his pocketbook the scrap of paper which he had picked up in Cartwright Gardens, and compared it with the hotel letter-paper stored in the stationery rack. It required no more than a glance to assure him that the paper on which the mysterious message had been written was identical in material, color and weight with that before him. Without doubt, the scrap which he had preserved so carefully, and the existence of which he had kept secret, had been torn from a half-sheet of the Euston Hotel notepaper.

JENNISON returned his treasured bit of evidence to his pocketbook, inclosed in a full sheet of the hotel stationery, and leaving the writing-table, went over to a seat in a corner and rang a bell. He hoped that the waiter who had given evidence at the inquest would answer that summons. His hopes were fulfilled: that very man appeared, and what was more, he recognized Jennison at once, and looked at him with unusual curiosity.

"You know me?" suggested Jennison. "Saw me at that inquest, didn't you? I saw you, of course. I say, I want a word or two with you—on the quiet. Get me, say, a bottle of Bass, and when you come back with it—eh?"

The waiter nodded comprehendingly, and retired. In five minutes he was back again with the Bass, and Jennison opened fire on him without delay.

"Look here!" he said, glancing round to make sure that they had that quarter of the room to themselves. "That affair, now—I'm inquiring into it, and if you can give a bit of help, it'll be something—maybe a good deal—in your pocket. You know what you said before the coroner? That Alfred Jakyn, the dead man, came into this room about nine-thirty that night—Monday night? To be sure! Well, now, who was in it when he came in?"

The waiter had been considering Jennison. He too looked around. And he sank his voice to a pitch that denoted confidential communication.

"You aint doing this on behalf of the police?" he asked. "Just so—private, like—reasons of your own. I see! Well, when Jakyn came in that night, there were only two people in this room—a lady and a gentleman. Together—husband and wife, they were. Staying in the hotel, you know: I'd seen 'em two or three times before; they were here over the week-end—Friday afternoon to Tuesday morning. He was an elderly man—seventy, I should say, by his looks. She was a great deal younger—half his age."

"Who were they?" inquired Jennison.

"Names I can't give you—at present," replied the waiter. "But I can find 'em out for you in about five minutes. Now, if you like."

"Wait a bit—that'll do after," said Jennison. "You say they were in this room when Jakyn came in? What were they doing?"

"The old gentleman was sitting over there, in that chair, smoking a cigar and reading a magazine. The lady was at that table, close by his chair, writing."

"How was she dressed?"

"Evening dress—dinner dress; they'd turned in here after dinner. He was in a dinner jacket. I'd served 'em with coffee not so long before Jakyn came in—they'd dined rather late."

"What happened after Jakyn came in?"

"Happened? Well, nothing—but that he asked me to get him a whisky-and-soda. He was sitting across there, near where the lady was writing."

"Did he seem to know these two—or her—or they, or she him?"

"Not that I saw of. Took no notice of each other. Can't say, of course, what went on while I was fetching his drink. When I came back with it, they'd gone—the old gentleman and lady—and Jakyn was alone."

"And you say—at least you said at the inquest—that he was a bit restless?"

"Well, he was—in a manner. Walked about the room, you understand—talked to himself a bit, muttered, seemed uneasy, upset. And as I said, I saw him pull out a bit of paper, folded up, unfold it, put it back in his waistcoat pocket when he'd read it, and then—well, he walked out rather sharply after that, as if—well, as if he'd just made up his mind about something or other."

"That was just before ten o'clock, wasn't it?"

"Just before, it would be. Five or ten minutes to ten, I reckon."

"You never saw him again?"

"No—till I saw him at the mortuary. They took me there, you see, after that detective chap had been here."

JENNISON had money in his pocket; what was more, he was minded to lay it out. He quietly slipped a couple of pound-notes into the waiter's palm.

"That's to be going on with," he murmured. "You keep this to yourself, and there'll be more—maybe a good deal more—to follow. Now look here—can you get me the names of that elderly gentleman and the lady? And address?"

"Easy!" replied the waiter. "Two minutes!"

He left the room, and Jennison ruminated. He had no doubt, now, after hearing the waiter's story, that when Alfred Jakyn walked into that room on the evening of his death, he had recognized in the lady at the writing-table somebody whom he had known before, and that she had recognized him. Nor had he any doubt that neither of them wished the elderly gentleman to know of the mutual recognition. He fancied that he saw exactly how the thing was done. The lady tore off a scrap of paper from the sheet before her, scribbled a message on it, and either dropped it on the floor near Alfred Jakyn's chair or placed it in some position after attracting his attention to it. Then she and the old gentleman retired, and probably he went to bed, while she put on a wrap and went out to keep the appointment she had just made.

"That's how it's been worked!" mused Jennison. "Fits in like—like one of those jigsaw puzzles. Brains—that's all you want, to put these things together. And I aint wanting in brains, I believe!"

THE waiter came back. He had a bit of paper in his hand, and he laid it before Jennison with a nod. Jennison read what was penciled on it:

"Sir John and Lady Cheale, Cheale Court, Chester."

"Know who they are?" he asked.

"Not particularly—I'm new to this place," replied the waiter. "The head-waiter says they're well known here, though—turn up now and then for a few days. Big pot in the North, the old gentleman, I understand—millionaire, or something."

Then some men came into the room, calling for drinks, and the waiter went off, and Jennison left. He had now two pieces of paper to take care of—and he hadn't the slightest doubt they were closely related.

Jennison thought a lot that night. The mystery surrounding the circumstances of Alfred Jakyn's death centered, he felt sure, in Jakyn's meeting with the woman with whom Chrissie Walker had seen him—in company at the Cat and Bagpipe—the woman who, if he was putting two and two together accurately, was Lady Cheale. Now, who was Lady Cheale? That, of course, could be found out. But what had she to do with Alfred Jakyn? Were they old acquaintances? Was the meeting at the Euston Hotel an unforeseen, accidental one? And why did the lady fix upon a place outside, a rendezvous well removed from the hotel, though of easy access?

And then another question shaped itself in Jennison's inquisitive mind: where was Alfred Jakyn between half-past ten and a quarter to twelve on the night of his death? According to Chrissie Walker, he left the Cat and Bagpipe in company with his lady companion at or before ten-thirty. Where was he until eleven forty-five, when he suddenly appeared in Cartwright Gardens, and fell dead?

"Devil of a lot of things to find out in this affair!" mused Jennison. "One thing at a time, however. And first—Lady Cheale!"

He had some idea that you can find out these things from books—books of reference. What books, he was dimly uncertain about, but still, books. And next day, when his luncheon hour came round in the City, he went to a reference library, and began to search. Jennison's notions of titled folks were very vague; he thought he should find Sir John Cheale's name in the "Peerage," and was astonished that he didn't. Nor was he in the "Baronetage"—which, in Jennison's opinion, was still more astonishing. Eventually he asked a librarian to help him: the librarian suggested "Who's Who." And there Jennison got light. "Sir John Cheale, son of John Cheale, of Manchester. Born 1850. Educated Shrewsbury School and Trinity College, Cambridge. Knighted 1918. Principal partner and chairman of directors of Cheale and Company, Ltd., chemical manufacturers, Chester. Deputy-lieutenant for the County of Cheshire. Married, 1918, Mildred, daughter of the late William Colebrooke, of Cheltenham; no issue. Collector of books, pictures, antiques. Clubs: Grosvenor, Chester, and Constitutional, London. Residences: Cheale Court, Chester, and Ardrechan, Braemar, Scotland."

Before he had got to the last word in

this informing paragraph, Jennison had made up his mind to go down to Chester and waylay Lady Cheale; for Lady Cheale meant—money.

CHAPTER VI

Face to Face

JENNISON'S notions as to precisely how Lady Cheale meant money were vague, shapeless; but they were there. To carry them out, or to make a beginning in the process of carrying them out, or attempting to carry them out, he had no objection to spending money of his own, and next morning he drew funds from his savings: nobody, reflected Jennison, can expect to make money unless he lays out money. That done, he sought the presence of the manager at the warehouse and pulled a long face, at the same time indicating the lump on his face.

"Got to have that off tomorrow," he said lugubriously. "Operation! The doctor says I ought to have had it done before. Serious business, as it's been neglected. Might be some danger about it, too—strict quiet and rest necessary anyway after the operation. I shall have to take a bit of time off."

"How long?" asked the manager.

"He said, a few days, at least, the doctor," replied Jennison. "Depends! Shock to the system, you know."

The manager didn't know, and he glanced at Jennison's lump.

"It certainly does seem as if it had grown a bit," he remarked. "Well, we aren't particularly busy—you'd better take a week. If that's not enough, you can write and ask for another. Put you under chloroform, I suppose, eh?"

"He didn't say," answered Jennison. "I reckon he will, of course. Beastly nuisance! Still, one's got to get it over."

But he had no intention of getting it over—none whatever of going near Dr. Syphax and the surgery in Brunswick Square; his plans were far otherwise. And when he left the warehouse at noon, he turned into the nearest public telephone box, and ringing up Dr. Syphax, canceled the appointment for next morning, saying that urgent business compelled him to put off the operation for a day or two—he would call, later, and fix things. That done, he went home to Cartwright Gardens, arrayed himself in his best clothes, packed a small suitcase, and repairing to Euston, ate a hearty lunch at the refreshment bar, and caught the next train to Chester; as the autumn afternoon drew to an end, he was walking the streets of that ancient town, fully alive to the delights of his adventure.

Jennison knew nothing about that corner of England, and cared less; its sole attraction to him lay in the fact that Lady Cheale, who, he was convinced, was an important factor in the Alfred Jakyn affair, lived somewhere in it. He could not, of course, find her that night, but he knew how to make inquiries about her. He came of country-town stock himself, and knew where, in country towns, you can always get hold of information. And though, being minded to be comfortable, he put himself up at a good hotel, and ate his dinner there, he took good care not to spend his evening in its highly respectable purlieus. You don't find gossips nor local talk in places like that, mused Jennison, knowingly; they're all very well to sleep in and eat in, but if you want to know things about a town and its people, you must frequent a good old-fashioned tavern where tradesmen go when the day's business is done, to enjoy pipe and glass and pass the time of day. And when Jennison had dined, he went out to find such a tavern, and had no difficulty in his search, for every ancient English city and market town possesses an almost puzzling wealth of such resorts.

THE house into which Jennison turned was a quaint, Old-World place wherein was a big, roomy bar-parlor furnished with antique, worm-eaten, highly polished chairs, tables and long-settles, ornamented with old glass, brass, copper, sporting pictures, pictures of stagecoach days, and playbills of the era of the Kembles, to say nothing of a fire big enough for the roasting of an ox. Jennison got himself into a snug corner, ordered a drink and observed things. There were several men in the room, all obviously regular customers; Jennison listened to their conversation. It was all about local matters: local politics, local money affairs, local horse-racing, local trade; he knew, from his own experience of his own native place in another part of the country, that every man in that room would be as well up in local knowledge as he would be ignorant of anything outside his own little world. He knew, too, that before the evening was over, he would get into conversation with one or other of these

men, and would find out all he wanted to know. And that was easy when a middle-aged man dropped into a chair alongside his own, remarked that it was a coldish night outside and warm enough in there, and fell, bit by bit, into friendly talk. Jennison, artful and designing, led the way to talk of local trades and industries, letting his neighbor know that he was a stranger.

"Lot of big chemical works hereabouts, aren't there?" suggested Jennison. "Sort of principal industry, isn't it?"

"Considerable lot of 'em in the district," assented his companion. "Chemicals—soap—iron—coal—that sort of thing. Big affairs, you know—employ a lot of labor."

"Isn't there a big chemical works called Cheale's?" inquired Jennison. "I'm interested in chemical works—indirectly."

"Cheale's? Oh, yes!" replied the other. "Yes—one of the biggest industries hereabouts. Flourishing concern, that—they do say that Sir John Cheale, the principal shareholder,—founder, he was, originally,—is a multimillionaire!"

"Local man?" asked Jennison.

That question set the informant off. In a few minutes Jennison knew all about Sir John Cheale, the big business, and where Sir John Cheale lived. Cheale Court was a fine old house a few miles out of Chester, in the country; nearest village was Wilsmere—nice walk out there. Wilsmere belonged to Sir John, and it was a model village, worth going to see. Great collector of books and pictures, Sir John was; they did say that he'd one of the finest private libraries in England, and his pictures were famous—these old masters and that sort of thing. Been an old bachelor, Sir John had, most of his life; but lately—well, within the last year or two—had married. Rare pretty bit of womankind, too; deal younger than he was—oh, yes, quite a young woman. Not of these parts, Lady Cheale—no, Sir John married her while he was away somewhere—caused a good deal of surprise when he brought her home. Often to be seen in Chester, Lady Cheale—came in a good deal in her motorcar—smart little woman, Lady Cheale!

JENNISON took it all in, determining that he would see Lady Cheale closer at hand. He contrived to get hold of a map of the district that night before he went to bed, and by diligently studying it, made out that the village of Wilsmere, of which his informant had spoken, was only three or four miles from Chester, and that Cheale Court was on its immediate confines. Arguing that Lady Cheale probably attended the services at Wilsmere Church, he determined, the next day being Sunday, to walk out there in the morning, and see if he could get a glimpse of her. And if he did—

Next morning, then, Jennison, looking for all the world like an innocent, well-dressed young gentleman, presented himself as a stranger at the church door of Wilsmere and was duly shown to a seat. He was very well behaved and quite devout, but his eyes saw without seeming to see, and before the officiating clergyman had said many words of the service, Jennison was certain that there, in a sort of family pew close by his own seat, was the woman described by Chrissie Walker. She was now in far different surroundings, and in the purple and fine linen befitting her position as wife of the great local magnate, but Jennison felt instinctively that if the barmaid of the Cat and Bagpipe had been at his side, she would have lost little time in nudging his elbow and whispering that *that* was *her!*

HE had no doubt about Lady Cheale's identity when the service was over and he got a still closer look at her near the church porch. Dark hair, dark eyes, pretty, taking, not much over thirty, if that—bet your life, swore Jennison, this is the woman! Nor had he any possibility of doubting that this woman was Lady Cheale. Although this is the twentieth century, there are villages in England where the squire's lady is still somebody, and the pretty woman who passed down the churchyard path had her due meed of obeisance and courtesy from the rustics who lined it. A great personage in her own parish, Lady Cheale, evidently! But never mind, said Jennison; he knew things that would bring haughtier and grander folk than Lady Cheale to their knees—perhaps to his knees!

Instead of returning to Chester, Jennison sought out the village inn and got a midday dinner there. Later he lounged round Wilsmere and took a look at Cheale Court, a fine old Elizabethan house set in the midst of a big park. And finding that there were public paths through the park, he took one that led him near the house, and suddenly, as he turned the corner of a shrubbery, he came face to face with the woman of whom he was thinking.

LADY CHEALE, evidently, was out for a constitutional in her own extensive grounds, and she was alone, save for the presence of a large dog, which at sight of Jennison, rushed forward, growling. His mistress called him to heel.

"He wont harm you!" she added to Jennison smilingly. "He's quite safe—"

Jennison lifted his hat in his best manner.

"I'm not afraid of dogs," he said. "Been used to them all my life." And then he looked steadily at the pretty woman now close to him, and again raised his hat: "Lady Cheale, I believe?" he inquired politely.

Lady Cheale looked a little surprised, and took stock of her questioner. Jennison was quite a presentable young man; Lady Cheale bowed in response to his question.

"May I have a word or two with Your Ladyship?" continued Jennison. He looked round, and seeing no one anywhere in sight, and that they were in a lonely part of the park, pressed his advantage. "The fact is, I came down from London specially, last night, to see you, Lady Cheale. But this seems a good opportunity—if you'll listen to me."

Lady Cheale also glanced about her. There was some slight alarm, more wonder, in her eyes when she turned again to Jennison. But he looked harmless enough. Still, Jennison saw a slight paling of her cheek.

"To see me!" she exclaimed. "I—I don't know you! I saw you in church this morning—a stranger to the village. Who —who are you? And why—"

Jennison nodded.

"Yes," he said quietly. "Of course you'll want to know that, Lady Cheale. But I think you'll know my name well enough when you hear it. No doubt you're quite familiar with it. For I'm sure you've read the reports in the newspapers about the inquest on Alfred Jakyn!"

There was no doubt then about the change of color in Lady Cheale's pretty face. The healthy glow on her cheeks died out, was extinguished, came back just as suddenly in a vivid flood. A startled, frightened look flashed into her eyes; her lips trembled.

"Who—who are you?" she faltered, moving a little away. "Why do you come here? Are you a—a detective?"

"No!" answered Jennison. "I said you'd know my name, Lady Cheale. And please don't be afraid—there's nothing to be afraid about. My name is Jennison—Albert Jennison. I'm the man who witnessed Alfred Jakyn's death!"

Lady Cheale stood watching Jennison for the better part of a moment in silence. Jennison, on his part, watched her. Her color was becoming normal, her eyes suspicious rather than afraid; he saw that she was taking guard against whatever might be coming.

"Of course you read the account of the inquest, Lady Cheale," he continued. "You'll remember my evidence. I'm the man who, from my window in Cartwright Gardens, saw Alfred Jakyn, walking on the pavement in apparently the very best of health, suddenly collapse and fall. It was I who ran down to him and found him dead. But you know all that—you've read it in the newspapers, haven't you, Lady Cheale?"

Lady Cheale was still watching him fixedly. She made no answer to his question; instead she put a question herself, in a hard, dry voice.

"Why have you come here to see me?"

Jennison smiled, for the first time. It was a smile that Lady Cheale did not like; it suggested unpleasant possibilities.

"I'll tell you, Lady Cheale. I came here to ask you what you know about Alfred Jakyn! Just—that!"

ONCE again there was an interchange of straight, questioning glances. When Lady Cheale spoke, her voice was harder than before.

"How do you know that I know anything about Alfred Jakyn?" she demanded.

Jennison once more looked around. But they were alone; the house lay a mile away among the trees; not a soul was in sight.

"I suppose we can talk here as well as within four walls," observed Jennison, "—perhaps better, with more safety. I'll tell you, Lady Cheale, now I know that you know something—perhaps a good deal—about Alfred Jakyn. I've taken an interest in this case from the moment in which I found Alfred Jakyn dead; all the greater interest because, do you see, I'd seen him as alive and lively as a man can be, only two or three minutes before. And I determined to find things out—to get at the bottom of the mystery which I felt certain was there. I wanted to *know!* And there are certain things I know already—"

"What do you know about me?" inter-

rupted Lady Cheale sharply. "Something —real or imaginary!—or you wouldn't be here! What, now?"

Jennison looked her straight and hard in the face.

"I know that you were with Alfred Jakyn during the evening on which he died, Lady Cheale!" he answered. "That's what!"

Lady Cheale bit her lips, in obvious perplexity. A slight pucker appeared between the delicate arch of her eyebrows; she seemed to be thinking, to be endeavoring to recall something. Suddenly she snapped out another question.

"How do you know that?" she demanded. "Perhaps you know something, but—"

Jennison stopped her with another of the confident smiles she did not like.

"Look here, Lady Cheale!" he said. "I'm the sort of player that'll lay his cards on the table. I'm quite willing to lay mine before you. So, listen! At ten o'clock of the evening on which Alfred Jakyn met his death, you met him at the west end corner of Endsleigh Gardens. You and he went into the saloon-bar of the Cat and Bagpipe tavern, close by. You remained there about half an hour, in close conversation, in an alcove. Then you left, going away together, Lady Cheale: that's—fact!"

He looked at her with a certain air of triumph, as if expecting her to throw up the sponge. But Lady Cheale shook her head and said slowly:

"You may have acquired some information, but you've no proof—"

"Oh!" exclaimed Jennison. "There you're wrong, Lady Cheale! Proof!"

And this time laughing gently, instead of smiling, he drew out of his pocket, and held unfolded before her, the scrap of paper which he had found in Cartwright Gardens and had treasured so carefully ever since.

CHAPTER VII

Hush-Money

FOR the second time during their interview Jennison saw Lady Cheale's color sweep clear away from her cheeks. And the dog with that strange canine telepathy which senses a threat to a beloved master, again leaped at Jennison with bared teeth. The brute was again jerked back by its leash; and Jennison recovering his aplomb, saw that her face had grown tense, and her lips parted involuntarily as she stared at the crumbled sheet of paper which Jennison held up to her. And when she spoke, her voice came in a husky whisper: Jennison knew, hearing that whisper, that at last she was thoroughly frightened.

"Where—where did you get that?" she faltered. "Where—how?"

Jennison carefully folded the paper and restored it to its resting-place in his pocket.

"I said I was the sort to put all my cards on the table, Lady Cheale," he replied slowly. "I'm going to be as good as my word. But first—you know that's your writing on that paper? Isn't it, now?"

"Well?" she muttered. "Well?"

"Of course it is!" exclaimed Jennison cheerfully, as if he were emphasizing some joyous announcement. "We both know that! Very well—how did I get it! I'll tell you, Lady Cheale. You know already that I was the only person who witnessed the death of Alfred Jakyn. The police came—on my summons. I went with them to the mortuary; I saw and heard all that took place there; the police-surgeon hinted at foul play; I knew he meant poison. I accompanied a detective, Womersley, to make inquiries of Bradmore, whose card had been found on the dead man's body. Then I went home—alone. As I reached the spot at which Alfred Jakyn fell, I saw a piece of twisted paper lying in the gutter where he'd lain. I picked it up and took it to my room—it was the piece of paper I've just shown you."

He paused, as if expecting Lady Cheale to speak. But she said nothing; she was watching him steadily, expectantly. And Jennison went on, in the same level tones, watching her as steadily as she watched him.

"I saw that the handwriting was a woman's, and I felt certain the piece of paper had been given to Alfred Jakyn by some woman. But I kept the knowledge to myself. I said nothing of my discovery to the police; I said nothing about it when I gave evidence at the inquest. Lady Cheale, if it's any relief to you, there isn't a soul in the world but me knows that I found and that I have that paper—written by you!"

A whisper came from Lady Cheale's compressed lips:

"No one?"

"No one!" assented Jennison. "As I say—not a soul in the world! It's never been out of my possession; nobody's seen it; I've never mentioned it to anybody;

nobody has the least suspicion that I have it, or that there was ever such a document for anybody to have! Get that firmly impressed on your mind, Lady Cheale. But —how did I connect you with it? Because this is a much smaller world than people think! On the evening of the inquest, Lady Cheale, a portrait of Alfred Jakyn appeared in one or two of the evening newspapers. I handed one such paper to the barmaid of the Cat and Bagpipe; she immediately exclaimed that the man whose portrait was there had been in her saloon-bar on Monday night, with a lady. I showed no surprise; I let her talk. She described the lady; she gave me the facts. When I left her, I'd put two and two together, and I went across to the Euston Hotel. Alfred Jakyn had put up there— and I believed that it was there that the note I had found had been handed to him."

ONCE more Jennison paused. But Lady Cheale made no comment. The color had come back to her cheeks again, but the unusual brightness of her eyes and her quick breathing betrayed her suppressed excitement. She was wanting to know all —and Jennison realized it.

"I went to the Euston Hotel," he continued. "I examined the hotel notepaper in the stationery stands in the smoking-room; I saw at once that the note in my possession was written on a piece of paper that had been torn from a sheet of the hotel stuff; there was no doubt about that. Then I got hold of the waiter who had given evidence at the inquest as to Alfred Jakyn's having been in the smoking-room from about nine-thirty to close on ten that Monday night. He told me, privately, of certain facts. A lady was writing at a table when Alfred Jakyn entered; an elderly gentleman sat near, reading a periodical; the waiter left Alfred Jakyn with these two while he went to get him a drink. When he returned, the lady and elderly gentleman had gone. Alfred Jakyn seemed excited; he wandered about the room; he seemed to be thinking; finally he consulted a piece of paper which he took from his pocket, and just before ten he went hurriedly away. Now, Lady Cheale, it didn't take many minutes to find out who the elderly gentleman and the lady were, and I found out. Sir John Cheale and Lady Cheale, of Cheale Court. You, Lady Cheale—and your husband—who probably suspects nothing!"

Jennison threw a peculiar emphasis on his last words, and he saw Lady Cheale start and the color deepen in her cheeks. She gave Jennison an angry look.

"Leave Sir John out of it!" she said.

"With pleasure!" answered Jennison. "I hope he may never come into it. But— what have you to say to me, Lady Cheale? It was you, you know, who wrote that note to Alfred Jakyn, you who either slipped it into his hand or dropped it near him as you left the smoking-room, you who met him a short time afterward at the west corner of Endsleigh Gardens, you who went with him into the saloon-bar of the Cat and Bagpipe. Now—why?"

"What's that got to do with you?" demanded Lady Cheale. "What business is it of yours? What—"

Jennison stopped her with a look and tapped the breast of his smart overcoat.

"Don't forget that I've got that bit of paper in here, Lady Cheale!" he said warningly. "If I hand it over to the police—"

Lady Cheale's momentary flash of anger changed to a look of sullenness.

"What?" she asked resentfully.

"Goodness knows!" answered Jennison with a deep sigh. "But that chap Womersley, who has this case in hand, and who firmly believes that Alfred Jakyn was murdered, by poison, is one of those fellows who don't allow sentiment to interfere with their professional duties. Hard chap, I think. He's not like me; I'd hate to cause pain or annoyance to a lady—especially," he added with a grimace and a bow, "to a young and charming one, Lady Cheale!"

Lady Cheale's lips curled.

"How can I rely on your word that you've never told anyone of this?" she asked almost contemptuously. "I mean— of that note?"

"You can believe me or not, as you please," retorted Jennison quietly. "But it's a positive fact that I haven't! I repeat—nobody else knows anything about it!"

LADY CHEALE looked down on the path on which they were standing, and began to make holes in its gravelly surface with the point of her walking-stick. Jennison waited.

"Well," she said at last, still looking down, "I did meet Alfred Jakyn. I knew him—sometime ago. I wanted to discuss a business matter with him—privately. But

I know nothing whatever about the cause of his death—nothing! And I do not want my name to be dragged into any proceedings; I don't want to be brought into the affair at all!"

"Of course not, Lady Cheale!" said Jennison heartily. "Of course not! That's precisely why I came down here to see you. Remember—you only could be drawn in through me!"

"That barmaid?" suggested Lady Cheale.

"She knows nothing of the note—and never will!" assented Jennison. "And it's a million to one against her ever setting eyes on you again!"

"The waiter?" she said.

"He too knows nothing of the note," replied Jennison. "And of course he hasn't the slightest suspicion that anything occurred between you and Alfred Jakyn. The note, Lady Cheale, the note is the thing! And that it exists at all will never be known to anybody if—"

Jennison stopped. He knew now, had known ever since an early stage of the conversation, what he was really after, but he had still some diffidence that was really akin to a constitutional delicacy of feeling, in actually saying it.

"If—what?" asked Lady Cheale.

"Well, if—if you and I could come to an understanding—terms, you know," he answered. "It's a—a secret! And secrets are worth—something!"

Lady Cheale gave him a searching look.

"You want money?" she asked quietly.

"I could do with money," answered Jennison. Then, gathering courage, he added: "You see, Lady Cheale, it's this way: I'm a clerk—a clerk in a London warehouse; I've been there years—dull, dreary years! In reality, though I'm pretty well paid as things go, I hate it! I want adventure! I want to travel, to see things—abroad—"

Lady Cheale interrupted him, almost eagerly.

"You'd go abroad, if you had money?"

"I would that!" exclaimed Jennison.

"At once?"

"As soon as—yes, it would be at once. Immediately—nothing to stop me."

Lady Cheale hesitated a moment and then took a step nearer to Jennison.

"Listen!" she said. "If I give you money, will you hand over that piece of paper to me, and give me your solemn word that you'll never speak a word of all this as long as you live?"

"I will!" he exclaimed. "Honor bright!"

"What part of the world are you thinking of?" asked Lady Cheale.

"Oh," said Jennison almost rapturously, "if you want to know that—Italy! The fact is, Lady Cheale, I'm poetic! If I could have a year or two in Italy, and perhaps in Greece—"

"Listen to me again," said Lady Cheale. "On the conditions I've laid down, I'll find you in money. You give me that paper, you hold your tongue, and you leave England at once. I'll give you a thousand pounds in cash, and I'll send you another thousand on hearing from you that you have an address in, say, Rome."

"Done—and immensely, greatly obliged to you, Lady Cheale!" exclaimed Jennison. "I hope—I sincerely hope you'll feel I've done you some little service. I'll keep my part of the bargain to the letter, and I assure you—"

"I don't want any protestation, if you please," interrupted Lady Cheale icily. "This is a business matter. Now, are you staying in Chester? Very well—tomorrow morning, about eleven o'clock, go into Bollands, the confectioners; everybody knows Bollands. Go upstairs to the tea-rooms and sit down in a quiet corner and order a cup of coffee. I shall come to you there—and that's all!"

BEFORE Jennison could say another word, she had turned and marched swiftly away, the dog at her heels. Jennison watched her for a minute or two before he went off—and his first thought was not one of elation but of regret that Lady Cheale hadn't said good-by to him.

"She *might* have shaken hands with me!" he murmured as he watched Lady Cheale's graceful figure out of sight. "By George, sir, she's a damn fine woman—a prettier woman than I'd expected. And—two thousand pounds! Her own terms! Generous! And it means that she doesn't want her name to come out, anyhow. Well—it wont! Not me—with two thousand pounds and Italy and Greece in front. And all because of a scrap of paper!"

He walked back to Chester in a whirl of jumbled ideas. Of course there was going to be no more warehouse—he'd chuck that without ever going back there; there'd be nothing to do but resign his post. And he'd take no further interest in the Cartwright Gardens affair; indeed, so that Womersley and the police couldn't come worrying him about it, he'd leave his pres-

ent lodgings and go elsewhere, somewhere in a more fashionable part, say a West End hotel or boarding-house, until he went abroad, and he'd forget to leave any address with his old landlady. Of course, he couldn't go abroad immediately—he'd want an outfit, and he'd have to consider where to go first. Well, it was certainly an ill wind that blew nobody any good, and if that eventful Monday midnight had brought death, swift and sudden, to Alfred Jakyn, it had also brought good fortune to yours truly Albert Jennison—rather! Two thousand—the figure, fat, rotund, impressive, shaped itself before him in the midst of rose-tinted clouds all the way to Chester, and during the whole of the evening, and when he retired to bed he dreamed of it.

ELEVEN o'clock next morning found Jennison in a quiet corner of the fashionable tea-shop which Lady Cheale had mentioned; and there, a few minutes later, Lady Cheale, very elegant in expensive furs, joined him. Everything about her manner that morning betokened a business-like attitude, and after a greeting which Jennison considered unnecessarily chilly, she went straight to the point.

"You have that note with you?" she demanded.

"Precisely so, Lady Cheale!" replied Jennison. "In my pocketbook, where it's always been."

"You can hand it to me in a few minutes, and I will give you the promised money, in bank-notes," she said. "But first, a question or two." She leaned nearer to him across the tea-tray which had just been put before her. "Can you tell me this: have the police, has that detective you spoke of yesterday afternoon, found out anything more about Alfred Jakyn?"

"Not to my knowledge!" declared Jennison promptly.

"You have heard nothing of that sort?"

"Nothing!"

"Another question: Do you know whether they have had any news of him, or concerning him, from New York?"

"I don't know that, either."

"I read in the papers that there was a bank draft for some thousands of dollars found in his suitcase, payable to an American bank in the City. Do you know if the police made any inquiries there?"

Jennison smiled, and lowered his voice, though as a matter of fact no one was near them.

"I don't know!" he answered. "But *I* did!"

"You!" she exclaimed.

"Yes—out of curiosity. They knew nothing whatever about him."

Lady Cheale hesitated a moment. Then she leaned still nearer.

"Do you know if the police have found out where he was between ten-thirty and eleven-thirty that Monday night?" she asked.

"No, by George!" exclaimed Jennison. "I don't! I believe they've found out nothing—I'm sure they haven't. I wish I knew that particular thing—where he was, at that time."

"You!" she said. "You have nothing to do with it—now! You are to take no further interest in it—you're to know nothing. Now give me that paper!"

Jennison handed over the treasured scrap; and Lady Cheale, having carefully examined it and put it into her bag, gave him an envelope full of crisp bank-notes.

"That is the first installment I promised you," she said. "Send me an address in Rome, and the second will be sent to you at once. And now—silence! That's all. You'd better go away—I'm staying here awhile."

Jennison felt himself dismissed. He had to go, and he saw that his polite adieux were not wanted. He turned and looked back when he had reached the door of the room—Lady Cheale was calmly pouring out her tea and had not even a glance for him.

"And yet I aint such a bad-looking fellow, either!" mused Jennison. "And I've done her a good turn! These high-and-mighties—manners like icebergs! However, the money's all right. And now for Italy—eh!"

He went back to the hotel, and in the privacy of his bedroom counted his bank-notes. Then he packed his suitcase, paid his bill and went away. Instead of going straight back to London, he traveled across country to his native place, and spent a day or two there, swaggering. He told all and sundry that he had just had a stroke of luck—done a wonderful deal, business deal, but nobody got any particulars from him. Eventually he started out for London again—and within five minutes of getting into his express, he was staring at two big black headlines in the morning newspaper:

THE CARTWRIGHT GARDENS MYSTERY:
SENSATIONAL DEVELOPMENT!

CHAPTER VIII

The American Cablegram

IT was characteristic of Jennison that before reading further he glanced at his fellow-passengers. There were only two of them—smart-looking, keen-faced men; some indefinable quality in their appearance made him think them to be connected with the law—solicitors or barristers. Inspecting them more closely, his conviction was strengthened; they were. But neither took any notice of Jennison; each man was deep in his newspaper. And Jennison turned to his, and beneath the staring headlines which had already caught his attention read what followed, in bold, conspicuous type:

> We have received the following communication from the authorities at Scotland Yard, with a request to give it a prominent place in our issue of this morning:
>
> "The Commissioner of Police received, on Monday, by cable from New York, a request from the president of the Western Lands Development Corporation of Northern America to cable him at once information as to the details in the case of Alfred Jakyn, who died suddenly in Cartwright Gardens, London, about midnight on October 25, and whose death is believed to have been caused by poison. This information was duly cabled to the inquirer, and the following reply has just been received:
>
> "President, Western Lands Development Corporation of Northern America to Commissioner of Police, New Scotland Yard, London. Your information concerning death of Alfred Jakyn duly received. Jakyn was sent over to London by us on secret financial mission of utmost importance. We believe him to have been murdered in order to prevent this being carried out or even begun. We consider critical questions to be settled are: Where was he, and with what person or persons between ten o'clock and eleven forty-five on evening of his death? We will pay five thousand pounds to anyone giving accurate information to your police on these points. Please communicate this offer to every principal London and English provincial newspaper. Our accredited representative leaves on personal investigation by today's boat for Southampton."
>
> Any person or persons able to give information on the points referred to above should communicate personally with the authorities at New Scotland Yard, or at any police-station.

JENNISON read all this over two or three times, considering it. One part of it stood out from all the rest—to him. ***"We will pay five thousand pounds to anyone giving accurate information to your police!"*** Well, he was the person, he only, who could give such information. But he already had a thousand pounds in his pocket, received on account from Lady Cheale, who was to send him another thousand. He began to wonder which would be the most profitable cow to milk—Lady Cheale, who, to be sure, was the wife of an enormously wealthy man, a millionaire or a multimillionaire, and who, obviously enough, had some reason for keeping her name out of this affair, or this American financial company with the long name? Yet if he approached the police with the idea of getting the five thousand pounds' reward, could he tell enough? Would they, or this chap who was already on the Atlantic on his way to make personal investigation, consider his information sufficient? For, after all, he said to himself, he knew a lot, but he didn't know everything—worse luck! He knew where Alfred Jakyn was between ten o'clock and ten-thirty: he was with Lady Cheale at the Cat and Bagpipe. But where was he between ten-thirty and eleven-thirty! If he only knew that! One of his fellow-passengers threw down his paper and glanced at the other.

"Queer development in that Cartwright Gardens affair!" he remarked. "This American company seems remarkably keen about getting a solution. A reward like that—five thousand pounds!—ought to bring somebody forward."

But the other man shook his head.

"Doubtful!" he said. "If Jakyn really was poisoned—murdered—for the reason they suggest in their cablegram, it would almost certainly be done in such a fashion that no one but the people concerned would know anything of it."

"Just so, but he must have been somewhere, somewhere in London, between the times mentioned," replied the first man. "I read the account of the inquest carefully, for it's a deeply interesting case. Alfred Jakyn left the Euston Hotel smoking-room just before ten o'clock, according to the evidence of the waiter on duty in that room. Nothing more is known of him until he falls dead in Cartwright Gardens an hour and three quarters or so, later. He must have been somewhere in the interval!"

"I too read the evidence," answered the second man. "Strange case, indeed."

"Anyhow, it's certain he was outside the hotel," observed the first man, "and, according to the evidence of the witness who saw him fall and die, marching right away

from it, just before midnight. The senders of the cablegram have got the bull by the horns—the thing to be discovered is where and with whom was Alfred Jakyn between ten and eleven forty-five that evening? That's it!"

"More may come out at the adjourned inquest," remarked the second man. "That's about due, I think."

"It was yesterday," said the first man, nodding toward his paper. "It's in this paper—you'll find it in yours. Nothing much—except that the experts are convinced that the man was poisoned, only they're not quite certain by what! Another adjournment, of course."

THE second man picked up his own newspaper and began to search. So too, after a while, did Jennison. The adjourned inquest—he had completely forgotten that, though he had fully meant to attend it. But he found, on turning to the report, that he had not missed much. The proceedings had been brief, and entirely confined to hearing some cautious, guarded statements, or, more strictly speaking, suggestions or theories, by a Home Office analyst, who said that he and his colleagues were satisfied that Alfred Jakyn died from the effects of poison, but what poison, and when administered, they were not yet prepared to say.

"There's one thing very certain, to my mind, in this case," suddenly remarked the man who had just picked up the paper to read the account of the adjourned inquest for himself. "And it's this: whoever poisoned Alfred Jakyn was no ordinary criminal! He's an adept at this sort of thing! You can see—for all the scientific jargon he talked!—that this Home Office expert is puzzled. So, no doubt, are his associates. Otherwise they'd say, straight out, what it was."

"Some poison they're not familiar with, either in nature or effect," observed the other. "I dare say there are plenty that our best men don't know of. Queer case altogether—but there must be people in London who saw Alfred Jakyn between ten and eleven forty-five that evening—must!"

Jennison listened to all this and wondered what his fellow-passengers would say if he told them all he knew. It was a temptation to manifest his importance and his cleverness, but he had no difficulty in withstanding it; silence and secretiveness might mean a fortune, and certainly meant at least another thousand. He sat in his corner planning and scheming, and by the time his train ran into the London terminus, he had settled his future—and immediate—action. The American cablegram, of course, had altered everything, and now he was either going to have that five thousand pounds out of its senders, or he was going to have it from Lady Cheale.

The most careful and astute of schemers is liable to forget some small point in his plottings; and, Jennison, crafty as he was, overlooked a certain thing completely. As soon as he reached London, he ought to have gone straight to the Cat and Bagpipe and seen Miss Chrissie Walker. But he forgot Chrissie. Instead of repairing to her presence, he left his suitcase in the luggage office, hired a taxicab, and drove down to the City warehouse in which he had spent so many weary days. The manager stared at him; there was a new air about Jennison.

"Hullo!" said the manager. "Got it over?"

Jennison wondered for half a minute what his questioner meant. Then he remembered the lump on his forehead.

"Not yet!" he answered. "There's some complication—the doctor says it'll have to be put off a bit. No—I came down to tell you—well, that, I'm not coming back!"

"N o t—coming back?" exclaimed the manager. "Chucking your job—a good job like that! What's this mean?"

"Fact is," replied Jennison, lying glibly now that he had fairly addressed himself to the task, "I've come into money. Unexpected—death of distant relation."

"Oh!" said the manager. "Lucky chap! Much?"

"Fair lot, thank you!" answered Jennison. "Enough to chuck this, anyhow!"

"Well!" observed the manager. "You know best. But you were about due for another rise, you know. And a job like this—a permanency—eh? However, as I say, you're best judge. Don't go making ducks and drakes of your money, now!"

"You bet!" said Jennison. "I know how to take care of money, as well as anybody. Ought to—after making a small salary go as far as I've done, all these years! No, I sha'n't make ducks and drakes of it, not I!"

"What are you going to do?" asked the manager inquisitively.

"I'm going to travel," declared Jennison. "Improve my mind, you know. I'm leav-

ing England at once. France first, I think —get a knowledge of the language and of commercial matters across there. Then, if I come back, I might go in for something big."

"Well, good luck!" said the manager. "Of course, if you're going in for that sort of thing,—languages, foreign correspondence and so on,—you might keep in touch with us; that line's always useful."

JENNISON said he'd certainly consider that if necessary, in the future. He collected a few things of his own, left in his desk, said farewell to his fellow-clerks, and went away. And from the City he drove off to Cartwright Gardens, and there told his landlady another tale, varying somewhat from that he had spun to the manager. The legacy from a relative figured in it, but now he was going to get married and take up his residence at a nice little place in the country, near his native village, which formed part of the legacy. He gave the landlady a couple of pounds in lieu of a week's notice, and proceeded to pack his belongings. That did not occupy much of his time, for they were few, and went easily into a couple of old trunks. And with these Jennison presently made his departure from Cartwright Gardens, saying to himself as he drove away that it wouldn't bother him greatly if he never stuck his face inside that dreary neighborhood again.

He was working on his plan, now, and in the station where he had deposited his suitcase, and reclaiming it and adding it to his trunks, bade the driver take him to a certain depository in the Tottenham Court Road district. At that he left the trunks, saying that he was going abroad for a time and wished them stored. That accomplished, he repaired to a smart outfitting shop, purchased another suitcase, and stored in it a stock of necessaries in the way of linen, footwear, neckwear, and the like. He was already wearing his best suit, almost brand new, a new overcoat and a new hat; he knew himself to be thoroughly presentable. And early in the afternoon he drove up, accompanied by his two suitcases, to the Great Western Hotel, at Paddington (carefully chosen for reasons which he had resolved on after much thought), and booked a room in the name of Arthur Jennings.

Jennison stayed no longer in that room than was necessary to unpack his suitcases and make things tidy. He went down to the smoking-room when this was done, and seating himself at a writing-table, gave himself up to serious consideration of an idea that had been simmering in his brain all the morning. After some time and much cogitation, during which he scribbled meaningless diagrams on the blotting-pad before him, he came to a decision and wrote the following letter:

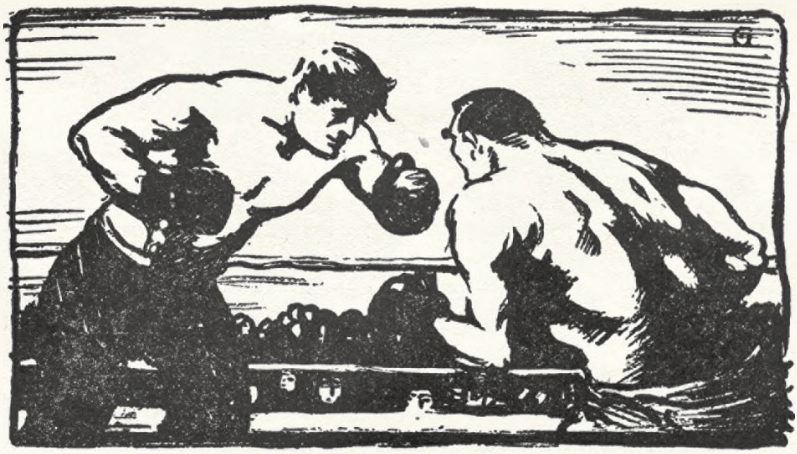
Dear Madam:—

You have no doubt already seen the paragraph in the newspapers relating to the affair which you and I recently discussed. I think you will admit that the offer made in that announcement makes a considerable difference as regards the arrangements I made with you. In view of the much more advantageous terms therein made, I think you will agree that it would pay me far better to place my services at the disposal of these people than remain tied to the terms settled between you and me.

Of course, if I had known that these people were going to offer such handsome terms I should have placed my information before them instead of before you. I feel sure, however, that you will not wish to stand in my light, and that you will be anxious to discuss fresh terms with me. This, of course, must be done at once, as there is no time to be lost. I therefore respectfully suggest that (as you will receive this letter early tomorrow morning) you should come up to town immediately on receipt of it and meet me. I will be waiting at the principal book-stall at Paddington Railway Station at six o'clock sharp tomorrow evening, when I shall expect the honor of seeing you. It will be well, however, to send me a telegram as soon as you get this, addressed to me at Spring Street P. O., London, W., saying if you are coming or not. I may remark that delay will be dangerous, as the matter must be attended to at once.

Jennison (who had carefully cut off the heading of the hotel notepaper, and had provided himself with a plain envelope) addressed this epistle—unsigned—to Lady Cheale, at Cheale Court, Chester, and took it himself to the branch post office close by the hotel. He there ascertained that it would be delivered by the first post next morning, and then dropped it into the box with something of the feeling enjoyed by a gambler who flings down a master card. And shortly before noon next day, calling at that same post office, he was handed a telegram, the message part of which contained but one word: *"Coming."*

Mr. Fletcher's engrossing mystery novel comes to even more interesting episodes in the next installment. Watch for it in our forthcoming February issue.



Kid Weber Does His Best

The gifted author of "The Fighting Industry" and "Battling Bunyan Ceases to Be Funny" here offers a very real and impressively human story of a gallant fighter and one of the strangest battles ever staged.

By RAYMOND LESLIE GOLDMAN

THE KID fingered his cap uneasily, his eyes squinting down at it as he crushed it into folds and smoothed it out again. His attitude was that of the schoolboy called before the head master for reprimand because of unsatisfactory scholarship; and to One-round Kid Weber, the pugilistic pride of the Middle West, that attitude was incongruous.

"And that's why I'm not jumping at the chance to put you in a main event," concluded Jem Canby, promoter of the Midland Sporting Club, leaning back in his chair and resting clasped hands on his well-rounded-out vest. "You can't expect to stay up at the top, Kid, if you don't give the fans a run for their money. That last fight with Tod O'Shea was plain rotten, and you know it. You were mighty lucky to get a draw out of that; and Tod would have licked you good and proper if he hadn't been more afraid of your rep' than of the punches you managed to land on him. Now, isn't that a fact?"

The Kid continued to play with his cap, his averted gaze on it.

"Well, just like I was telling you, Jem, I—I guess I wasn't just right that night. I—something seemed to slow me down, I guess. But that was a month ago, and I been training hard since then. Don't I look in condition, Jem? Not an ounce of fat on me—trained down to the edge. Why don't you try me once more?"

There was a pleading quality to his voice that went well with his manner, but was not in keeping with his ugly, battle-scarred face. A person not easily intimidated, meeting the Kid in a dark street, would have experienced a sensation of anxiety, if not actually of fear. For the Kid looked tough and hard and morally unscrupulous.

Ten years ago he had been quite a presentable youth, of amiable mien and with pleasing features. But ten years of pugilism had altered those features as efficiently as the remodeling hand of time or the ravages of disease. The nose, once strong and straight, was flat and misshapen, with a leftward twist to it. His mouth was equally awry; and behind the battered lips, bridge-work and gold replaced the teeth that he had from time to time spat out on a canvas floor. His left ear had become that amazing monstrosity known as cauli-

flower ear, a weird curled lump of white flesh. And his eyes, poked at by left jabs, hammered by swinging fists, cut and discolored and puffed and closed again and again—his eyes were mere slits between gashed, overhanging brows and lids.

He had never been one to care about a little thing like a broken nose, a few lost teeth or a bleeding eye. It was only the final decision that had ever counted with him. His chief accomplishment was not clever boxing, a dexterous dancing, ducking, shifting, blocking; it was endurance, the ability to assimilate punishment, the fortitude to bear up under every blow of his adversary until he himself could land solidly the powerful right swing that had earned for him his reputation.

He was no boxer, but a slugger, a fighter. And for that reason he had been for ten years the pugilistic idol of Midland and all the surrounding countryside. The fans wanted action, and he gave it to them. They wanted to see at least a trickle of blood, and he showed them blood, sometimes a perfect gusher of it. They wanted to see a knockout; and in nearly every one of his two hundred and twenty-seven bouts either he or his opponent lay helpless on the floor of the ring before the final gong.

PERHAPS the realization of this came to Jem Canby as the Kid pleaded for another chance. Perhaps he remembered how well this man had served his public, how much he had uncomplainingly endured, how valiantly he had fought and suffered, to please it.

"Well, Kid," said Canby, "I'll put you on once more."

The Kid looked up with a start, a light of hope brightening his face.

"Once more," repeated Canby, emphasizing the words with a pudgy finger. "But no stalling this time, Kid. Understand? When I give you the main spot on the card, it means that I'm promising the fans a look at the old Kid Weber, the boy who fills every second of the time with action, and plenty of it. That's what I promise 'em, and that's what they come to see, and that's what you will have to give 'em."

"You bet!" agreed the Kid a bit flatly.

"Now, I'll be frank with you, Kid. If I thought you were out of condition or going back, I wouldn't put you on. But I can see that you're in just as good shape as you ever were in your life. And as for going back—why, you're only about twenty-eight, aren't you?"

"Thirty."

"Even so. Not as young as you used to be, but—"

"Good for a few years yet, anyway," finished the Kid in the same dull voice.

"If you keep on trying and doing your best," added Canby. "That's all what was the matter in your last two fights. You didn't try hard; you didn't do your best. You were stalling, Kid, and everybody knew it."

"Well—maybe that's so," admitted the Kid. "But this time it'll be different. I'll promise you that they'll be a knockout in this scrap. That's straight goods, Jem. Either the other guy or me. Now, who will you match me with?"

Canby stroked his lower chin thoughtfully.

"That's the question. A return bout with O'Shea wouldn't do at all after the way you two looked last time. They wouldn't fall for it. Then there's Matt Diest. He's a likely boy, but he doesn't like to mix it, and you and him wouldn't look good together. Then there's Young Fenton—but I don't think he could make a hundred forty-five pounds in time. So I don't see anybody I could use with you unless it's Jimmy Morgan. How about Morgan?"

"Suits me," agreed the Kid. "I aint fought him in over two years."

"Then Morgan it is. The fans will probably remember that last fight you two had, and it will be an attractive card. All I ask is that you put up as good a scrap as you did that night."

"I'll do my best."

"That's good enough," said Canby. "Just be sure you do it. I'm going to tell Morgan to forget you ever knocked him cold and go at you from the first gong. I'm going to have the papers play this up as an action fight—and action it's got to be."

"A knockout in it," declared the Kid earnestly. "I promise you a knockout."

Canby turned to his desk and reached for a blank contract. For a moment he was busy with his pen; then he spread the paper before the Kid.

"On the dotted line, Kid," he laughed, handing over the pen.

The Kid took the pen and bent low over the paper.

"Two thousand?" he inquired.

"There it is—read it!" said Canby.

The Kid studied the paper a moment and scratched the back of his neck.

"You may as well sign and be satisfied, Kid," said Canby, "because I wont pay a cent more than twelve hundred. I can get plenty of good boys at—"

"Twelve hundred? Oh, all right then." And he laboriously signed his name at the bottom of the paper.

Canby glanced over the document and folded it.

"You signed in the place where I'm to put my name," he grinned, "but it's all right. You're getting dumber every day, Kid."

The Kid answered the grin, sheepishly. "Never did have much brains, did I, Jem? Well, I'd better be going." He put on his cap and turned toward the door; then he hesitated and turned back to Canby.

"That was for next Wednesday, wasn't it?"

"A week from Wednesday!" shouted Jem. "For the love of Mike, Kid, how could next Wednesday be June 4th like the contract says, when this is only Monday, May 26th. Use your head!"

"I got all mixed up," laughed the Kid. "Well, so long."

OUTSIDE, in the clear white sunshine, the Kid threw back his head, pinched shut his eyes and drew a deep, quivering breath. Another fearful ordeal had been met and successfully endured. He had secured another fight.

"It's a dirty trick to play on Jem," he reflected as he made his way slowly up the street. "I wouldn't 'a' done it for myself; but for Annie—God! I just had to!"

He lived in a four-room frame cottage on Kent Street, not so desirable a dwelling as the yellow-brick house on Beechwood Avenue where he and his wife had lived a few years when he was in the heyday of pugilistic glory and providential favor. It was in the Beechwood Avenue house that he and Annie had joyfully awaited the coming of their first child.

"It's going to be a boy," Annie would say to him. And he would reply: "Well, if it is, he'll never be a prize fighter. He's going to keep the face God gives him."

Then Annie would laugh in a particularly light-hearted manner and say, "Unless he wants to trade his good looks for twenty-five hundred a fight," because she knew that the Kid, deep down in his heart, bemoaned the loss of his face—for he had indeed lost it—and that his only consolation was the comparative affluence that his fighting brought to them.

It was a boy, but it lived for only an hour; and for many weeks Annie stayed at the hospital, hovering between life and death. At last she was brought home, not to the Beechwood Avenue house, but to the cottage on Kent Street; for whatever sum they had been inclined to save had dwindled amazingly; and the Kid, after a poor showing in several fights, found matches harder and harder to secure. The hospital, doctors, trained nurses—it was heart-sickening to the Kid to see how the money flew.

"I should 'a' saved more," he told himself bitterly. "I should 'a' saved more."

HE spared Annie nothing that might bring back the glow of health to her wasted body; but it seemed, as month after month passed, that she was never to rise from her bed. One thing after another—tumors, pneumonia, and then, three weeks ago, the doctor had uttered the fearful word, "Tuberculosis." She must be taken West, to Colorado or Arizona, or he would surely lose her within six months.

The Kid faced a problem—how tremendous a problem, he alone knew. Only a little money in the bank, bills yet to be paid, railroad fare for two across the continent, and then a living to be earned by a stranger in a strange land. He could do nothing but fight, and he knew that his fighting days were over. He knew!

"If I can only get away with it, once more!" he thought as he paced the front room with his hands over his battered eyes. He needed one more fight to tide them over the months they would have to live in the West.

This morning he succeeded once again in coaxing a match from Jem Canby. Twelve hundred dollars. Not as much as he wanted, but enough, perhaps, to see them through.

Yet he was not able to feel the keen jubilation of success. He had a furtive sensation of a swindler, a criminal.

"But I promised him I'd do my best," he tried to ease his conscience as he let himself into his house. "I promised him a knockout—and there'll be one. I'll give 'em their money's worth."

But he knew. He knew!

THE sport writers for the four Midland newspapers, encouraged by Jem Canby, made much of the forthcoming bout between Kid Weber and Jimmy Morgan. Morgan was a youngster who was earning a name for himself, locally, as a "willing mixer," a lad who would stand toe to toe with his opponent and trade punch for punch. The papers said that he was "Kid Weber's meat," meaning that the prospect of a battle between these two men was most alluring in its promise of swift action, of many powerful blows to be landed, of a possible knockout before the tenth and last round of the bout. The fans were pointedly reminded of the previous battle between these men, two and a half years ago, a fight that had brought the spectators to their feet during the seven stirring rounds before Morgan took the conclusive count of ten. But Morgan had advanced far since that time—and had the Kid gone back? He had not been fighting so frequently during the past year, and in his last two bouts at the Midland Sporting Club he had proved to be a disappointment to his followers. Would Kid Weber of two years ago climb into the ring again? Jem Canby put himself on record as believing that the Kid was as good as ever and that he would duplicate his victory over Morgan. The Kid was quoted as laconically and somewhat ambiguously declaring, "There will be a knockout in this fight!" And Morgan stated confidently: "I'm going at him from the first tap of the gong. There will be action in this fight and plenty of it. But this time I'm going to turn the tables on Kid Weber."

Fed thus upon artful and alluring propaganda, the boxing public of Midland gorged its imagination and developed an appetite for the event itself. Memories, promises, the titillating element of uncertainty—each played its part; and to the carefully prepared stimuli the fans reacted in a manner pleasing to Jem Canby. Every one of the stadium's six thousand seats was sold, and before the start of the first preliminary bout, the doors were barred against those who would purchase standing-room.

It was a noisy, eager throng, merely tolerating the six-round preliminary and the eight-round semifinal in keen anticipation of the much-heralded main event—good-naturedly argumentative, assertive, boisterously bandying the praises of Morgan or Kid Weber. Beneath it all ran a seething undercurrent of expectation, of excitement and strain. Jem Canby and the sporting writers had done their work well.

In his dressing-room the Kid lay stripped on the rubbing table and submitted to the skillful manipulations of Midnight Jackson.

"Yo' sho is in grand condition, Mistah Webah," grinned the rubber, whose critical eyes were in his finger-tips. "Outta make quick wuk of dat Morgan boy. Yessuh!"

The Kid grunted noncomittally, lying passive and inert, his eyes closed and his ears tuned to the shouting voices that drifted in from the stadium.

"I must get to see Jimmy," he kept thinking. "I got to see him before we get in the ring."

HE did not know that Canby had entered the room until he heard the promoter's voice:

"Well, Kid, how do you feel? All set?"

The Kid opened his eyes and nodded. "All set, Jem."

"Packed house tonight," Canby beamed. "Complete sell-out."

"That's good," replied the Kid.

"You've got to come across with some of the old stuff. We've got the fans licking their lips, Kid. It's been a long time since I've been able to work up a fight as well as this one. You saw how the newspaper boys came to the rescue."

"Yeh!"

The promoter eyed the Kid's body critically, noting the long, pliant, rippling muscles that rose and sank under the surface of hard white flesh as the rubber plied with knowing fingers.

"You look prime, Kid."

"I'll say he does, Mistah Canby," indorsed Jackson. "Nevah see him look bettah in six yeahs I been rubbin' him."

"Well, we'll show 'em tonight, eh, Kid?" laughed Canby. "No funny business tonight, you know. Action from the first gong! We've got to make good to the fans, remember."

"They'll see a knockout." The Kid repeated the phrase he had so often used. "And—and I'll do my best."

"Be ready in twenty minutes," said Canby as he left the room. "We want to get started at ten promptly."

"I got to see Jimmy," was the Kid's frantic thought. "I got to see him, somehow, alone."

"Dar y'are," said Jackson with a few

final slaps. "Dat'll loosen up de ol' wallop-muscles, I reck'n."

The Kid rose from the table. "Yes; that's fine, Midnight. Now you can beat it awhile till I get into my togs. I want to be alone a few minutes."

"Yassuh." And the man, used to satisfying the whims of fighters, left the room.

THE KID hurried into his fighting clothes and put on his bathrobe. Then he made his way out into the narrow hall that ran between the several dressing-rooms.

His silent prayer was answered, for a head was poked out through the doorway of the room opposite him, and Jimmy Morgan called out: "Hello, Kid."

"Hello, Jimmy," the Kid replied, holding out his hand; and more of Jimmy emerged to clasp it.

"I'm gonna get even with you tonight for that last scrap we had, Kid. Wait and see."

"There's got to be a knockout tonight," the Kid declared earnestly. "I promised Canby."

Jimmy Morgan grinned broadly. "Can't throw a scare into me that easy. If there's any knockouts tonight, I'm gonna be the one standing up."

"Jimmy," said the Kid in a low voice, "I got to talk to you private for a minute. It's terrible important. Right away."

Jimmy nodded, called back into the room, "Be back in a minute," and stepped out into the hall, closing the door behind him.

"What is it?" he asked. "Shoot!"

WHEN, at precisely ten o'clock, the Kid climbed through the ropes into the ring, and after stamping in the rosin box seated himself in his corner, the stadium rocked with lusty cheers and shouts. It was an old-time greeting, reminiscent of days of glory, of supremacy; for glory had been the Kid's, even in defeat, and in the hearts of the people he had, even then, reigned supreme. Win or lose, he had always given of his best.

The Kid's throat closed; but he grinned and waved gloved hands into the air. His robe fell away, and the spectators, glimpsing that perfect body with muscles rippling beneath tight-drawn skin, swelled the chorus of their shouts in vast approval.

"Look at the Kid's condition, would you!"

"It's the old One-round, all right!"

"Oh, ba-bee!"

Casey, his chief second, standing beside the Kid with a hand on his shoulder, leaned over suddenly with an anxious question.

"What's the matter, Kid? Feel cold?"

The Kid controlled the shudder that ran through him, and shook his head. "Feeling fine, Casey."

But Casey's hand had felt the quiver, and he regarded the Kid with puzzled eyes.

"Right at the start," he advised, "you better take it a little easy, till you get warmed up. Don't forget."

"I'll do that," said the Kid.

Jimmy Morgan, receiving his share of encouraging cheers, sat in his corner with perplexed, worried eyes fixed on the Kid opposite him. The battered face of his opponent held his gaze in a sort of fascination, and his seconds, noting his apparent nervousness, plagued him with advice.

"Don't get a scare throwed into you, Jimmy! You can lick him this time. Just take it a little easy in the beginning—and watch that right of his!"

"I'm not scared," replied Jimmy, his eyes still fixed on the Kid's face. "I—I know what to do."

The familiar ceremonies which always precede an important bout—photographers climbing into the ring with their cameras, and the fighters posing for flashlight pictures; other boxers introduced by the announcer as challengers of the winner; the needless introduction of Kid Weber and Jimmy Morgan to the spectators—all these were at length concluded; the ring was cleared, and the referee called the men together for his brief instructions.

The eager, restless spectators, cast suddenly in shadow, strained forward in their seats, their subdued voices humming into the smoky air. The gong clanged.

"Do your stuff, Kid!"

"Whoopee!"

"Get him quick, Jimmy, old boy!"

"Hey! Mix it! Mix it!"

"Awwww!" A groan of disappointment. "What they scared of? Why don't they mix it?"

FOR the fight was beginning slowly, the men walking around each other cautiously, both pawing with extended left hands and neither venturing a solid blow. A minute passed; and to the throng yearning to hear the thud of glove on face and

body, a minute of comparative inaction is a long period of time.

"Well, whatcha know about that!"

"Can you beat it? They don't *do* anything!"

"Rotten! Rotten!"

A minute and a half. Then suddenly the Kid rushed forward, his right arm swinging as he leaped. But with astonishing ease Morgan sidestepped the blow, sidestepped it completely, so that the Kid vaulted past him and headlong into the ropes.

A shout filled the stadium. Action at last! The Kid was warming up!

"But did you see how *far* he missed? For the love o' Mike! Where's his judge of distance?"

"Look! Jimmy's scared of him! He's keeping away! What a chance he had when the Kid was on the ropes!"

"Wow! There he goes again!"

Again the Kid leaped forward, his right arm flying, and again he missed. Morgan countered with his left, the light blow landing on the Kid's shoulder, and the men fell into a clinch.

"For God's sake, Jimmy!" the Kid had time to whisper in Morgan's ear. "Don't stall! A knockout! I promised—"

"Break!" said the referee, prying them apart; and as they backed away, the gong sounded.

The Kid lay back against the ropes in his corner while Linton massaged his legs, and Casey, applying the sponge, whispered words of advice.

"You won that round, anyways. I think he's scared of you, Kid. But measure him before you rush in with your right. I never seen you miss like that before."

"Yeh—yeh—" replied the Kid; and a groan, that Casey did not sense, lay over the words. "Yeh—all right—"

The second round. . . . . The third. . . . . The fourth. Each was a dull repetition of the first—the Kid rushing forward from time to time, and missing again and again, Morgan keeping away easily and safely, landing a few blows that lacked power and landed on the Kid's gloves or arms or shoulders.

The stadium echoed a chorus of angry boos, the measured clapping of hands and rhythmic stamping of feet that denote the fight-fan's displeasure and disgust—the thumbs-down of boxing that has meant the pugilistic death of more than one hopeful gladiator of the prize ring.

The Kid managed to rush into a clinch, and again he whispered frantically into Morgan's ear.

"You're killin' yourself, Jimmy. Don't you hear—they're hollerin' to stop it! I'm doin' my best, but you—you're stallin', Jimmy! For God's sake, make it look good! Help me make it look good—"

"Break!" ordered the referee.

The Kid rushed back into a clinch immediately, landing his right glove over Jimmy's heart.

"Jimmy, if they stop this fight, I'm done for. I got to have that money, like I told you. Put it over on me when I come in next time! Hard, Jimmy! Let me go out honest, like a man—"

"Break!" ordered the referee.

AGAIN the Kid rushed, both arms swinging, one of his fists reaching Morgan's nose. A thin trickle of blood brought the stamping and clapping in the stadium to a momentary halt. But Morgan backed to the ropes and caught the Kid's arms in a clinch.

"You didn't do it," groaned the Kid as the men wrestled to the center of the ring. "Help me, Jimmy!"

"I can't—I can't," muttered Jimmy. "I just can't do it, Kid!"

"For the love of God!" begged the Kid. "For the love of God—"

"Break!" ordered the referee; and as they parted he warned them: "You got to quit this stalling, boys! You hear?"

"Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!" screamed the angry spectators. "Rotten. Put 'em out! Chase 'em out of the ring!"

Jem Canby, standing at the head of an aisle in the rear, muttered curses under his breath. He fumed with rage, which was an unusual emotion to the genial promoter. This fight was a smirch on the clean reputation of his club. The fans, after this fiasco, would lose their confidence in him; and he, in turn, would lose their good will and patronage. This fight looked "fixed!" The men were plainly stalling through it. Morgan was overlooking every opening in the Kid's defense—and there were many—and refusing to strike a single hard blow. And the Kid was only rushing, aimlessly, ridiculously, futilely. Oh, the Kid was trying to make it look good! But didn't everyone know the Kid's reputation for his accuracy in landing blows? He was stalling, too!

"The rats!" Canby muttered furiously

as he started down the aisle. "They can't put over anything like this on me! Not after all their promises, and the way I worked up this match in the papers. Damn 'em! I'll stop this, and hold up their purses. Not a nickel will they get out of it!"

The gong, ending the fifth round, sent the Kid back to his corner. He staggered rather drunkenly, his arms dangling at his sides, his shoulders slumping forward, and his chin dropped dejectedly upon his chest.

The measured clapping and stamping began again. Howls, shouts and catcalls.

"What you so tired from, Kid? Hitting the air?"

"Tired from makin' love to Morgan, Kid? Oh, you big cheese!"

"Kick 'em out of the ring! They aint no fighters; they're sweethearts!"

"Slap him on the wrist next time. Don't hurt him."

"Cheese! Cheese!"

The Kid sank upon his stool and covered his face with his gloved hands.

JEM CANBY crawled heavily through the ropes into the ring and made for the Kid's corner.

"You double-crosser!" he cried; and the Kid raised his head and lowered gloved hands from his face with a gesture of despair. "I'm stopping this fight, Kid! No more of this! And you get no money —not a cent. And what's more, I'll fix you for pulling a stunt like this on me. I'll fix you, Kid!"

"I—I'm sorry, Jem," the Kid replied huskily. "I—I done my best."

"Best—hell!" cried Canby; and hurried over to Jimmy's corner.

Jimmy awaited his coming with an expression of mingled resignation and defiance. He listened to Canby's ultimatum and judgment, his eyes narrowing and his jaw thrust forward.

"And you'll never get a fight here as long as you live," the promoter concluded. "Remember that!"

"Mr. Canby," said Jimmy, rising suddenly to his feet and laying a restraining glove on Canby's arm, "I got to tell you something. I promised the Kid I'd never tell, but—"

"So! You *did* fix things together! And you want to try to pass the buck to—"

"Listen! I'll admit I was stallin', but the Kid wasn't. I'd swear he wasn't. He was doin' his best!"

"What! His best! What do you take me for, anyway? Isn't it as plain as—"

Jimmy lowered his voice, and a look of untold pity crept into his eyes.

"His best, I tell you! He can't do no better than he done tonight. Mr. Canby—the Kid's almost blind!"

Canby started back, his hands lifted and his fingers spread.

"Blind!" he murmured.

"Yes, blind, Mr. Canby—not all blind, but almost. He's been that way for months, and gettin' worse all the time. He told me about it before the fight near the dressing-rooms. He asks me to make it look like a real, honest-to-God fight, and to knock him cold in about the second. He says he promised you a knockout, and he wanted to keep the promise. But he says he had to tell me first because he wanted me to lay off hittin' him in the eyes. Any place but the eyes, he says, 'cause he hadn't much left."

"My God!"

"I asks him why he wants to fight at all for, and try to put over anything like this—I wanted to call it off, Mr. Canby—but he says he's got a wife dying from T. B., and he's got to get this money to take her West. He says it's the last he'll ever earn until he gets his eyes back, and he says the doc told him a year's rest and a operation might do it. So I says I'll go through with it. I didn't have the heart to back out on the Kid."

"I see," murmured Canby, staring into space.

"But when we got started—great God, Mr. Canby, I couldn't hit him! I just couldn't! I wanted to make the fight look good, but—don't you get me? How could I hit a guy when he's—he's—"

Canby turned suddenly and ran to the Kid's corner. He stooped low over the Kid's bowed form and then slowly sank to one knee before him, catching him by the shoulders and gently raising him from the huddle of his anguish.

"Kid! Is it true? Is it true that you're —you're—"

"Jimmy told you? . . . . Yes, it's true, Jem. I tried to put it over just this once more. I—had reasons, Jem. It—it was a dirty trick and—and I'm sorry, Jem. Damned sorry I done it to you."

"Why, Kid! Say, can you see me now, Kid?"

"Oh, a little, I guess—"

"Can you see, Kid, that I got tears in

my eyes? It isn't only pity; it—it's something more than that. You didn't do me a dirty trick. You didn't do the crowd a dirty trick. Forget that, Kid. You did your best—and by God, no man can do more than that!"

"Jem, you make me feel a lot—easier."

"You sit right here, Kid, and wait," said Jem, rising to his feet. "You'll hear the boys out there change their tune."

"No, Jem! Don't—"

But Canby walked to the center of the ring and held up both arms for silence.

"Throw them bums out, Canby!"

"That's the stuff! Throw 'em out!"

"Shut up! He wants to say something!"

"Sh-h-h-h-h!"

SILENCE fell at length, and Jem Canby spoke. He was no orator, but the words he uttered came straight from his heart, and there were honest tears in his eyes as he spoke; he used the simple, slangy language of the people; so his was a great oration. And as he spoke, a deep hush fell upon his audience, and the swirling tobacco-smoke gathered into motionless clouds above their lifted heads.

He told them of the Kid's affliction; he told them of the Kid's reason for trying to fight when he was nearly blind; he told them how the Kid had taken Jimmy Morgan into his confidence, so that the fight would look good and please the people—the people whom the Kid had pleased so many times during the past ten years.

"You may call that fixing a fight, ladies and gentlemen, but he was fixing for his own defeat, a real knockout, a real blow—so that he'd pass out honestly and like a man. He could have laid down and just taken a count; but it wasn't in him—it isn't in a man like Kid Weber to take the count unless he's hit, and hit hard, so that he can't get up again before ten.

"He tried his best for you this evening—his very best. We know now why he missed; he couldn't see! But he did his best, just as he has always done. He gave the sight of his eyes for always trying his best. Did he ever slink away from a blow? Did you ever see him cover up to save himself from a beating? Did you ever see him stall and hold on? No, fellows! He always did his best.

"And now, because he tried so hard all these years to please you and fight the way you liked to see him fight, he's nearly blind. He's suffered and bled, and given you his nose and his teeth—and now the precious sight of his eyes. And in return we gave him a little money. But it wasn't only the money that bought those things from him. It was something that meant more to him than all the money in the world—it was the glory you gave him, and the cheers of praise and the love you held for him. That's what it was!

"Ladies and gentlemen, we unfortunately witness tonight the passing of a great fighter. You'll see him no more in a ring, because he's through with it for good. But when he comes back from the West after his wife is well and strong again, and after he has that operation to restore his sight, I'm going to take him with me to be my matchmaker and help me run this club.

"The purses of the men go through tonight, because I know that there isn't a man who would want me to hold back the money of either man. But excepting the twelve hundred dollars I'll give the Kid for this last fight, he's very likely broke. Fellows, we wont send away the Kid like that! I'm going to pass around some baskets among you, and I want you to put in as much as you can spare for the Kid. Not charity nor pity! But a token of love and affection and gratitude for a great fighter who always did his best."

Jem Canby stopped and whipped a handkerchief from his pocket to wipe his eyes and brow. For a full minute the silence held; and then the stadium rocked again with the shouts of many voices.

"Good old boy! Good old Kid Weber!"

"We're with you, Kid!"

"The gameness of him! He tried his best, and him nearly—"

"And we razzed him! We razzed him—"

"Nothing's too good for a boy like that! We'll show him what we think of him."

Sitting in a huddle in his corner, his arms on his knees and his face buried in his gloves, the Kid sat, his shoulders rising and falling with the sobs—the sobs of sheer happiness—that tore through his throat. Incongruous sobs—unmanly sobs—for a fighter.

But he was thinking of Annie, lying there at home, waiting—Annie, who had never known!

Another impressive story of the prize-ring by Raymond Leslie Goldman will appear in an early issue.

The Light in the East

An attractive story of the famous Buried Alive Club—that strange organization of Government scientists whose picturesque activities Mr. Stockbridge has tellingly described in other memorable Blue Book stories.

By FRANK PARKER STOCKBRIDGE

NINE members of the Buried Alive Club arranged their leather-covered easy-chairs in a semicircle before the great fireplace and prepared to spend the entire evening, if necessary, in getting Seth Halliday to talk.

That was not easy. His habit of silence, inbred through generations of New England ancestry, was so pronounced that he was affectionately known among his intimates as "Silent Seth." Yet those who knew Halliday best, and most of them were in the group this evening, knew that there were few men in the Government service whose mental equipment functioned more accurately than that of this awkward, lanky, rawboned Yankee field-agent of the Department of Agriculture.

Halliday was a single-hand worker. The same pioneering spirit that had brought his ancestors across the ocean to wrest a scanty subsistence from the rocky hillsides of New England was the driving impulse behind his venturesome journeys into strange and often wild corners of the earth, in the search for new and unknown plants which might add to the food-supply of his own country and enlarge the prosperity of its farmers.

But Halliday had a way of bringing back from his expeditions something more than plants. Sometimes his pack included new thoughts germinated and brought to fruition in the long solitudes of travel; sometimes he had thrilling tales of strange lands and curious people to tell. Always, if he could be induced to speak, what he said was well worth listening to. But he was not a conversational self-starter, and his particular friends had long ago learned that the only way to set him off was to get him among the crowd and talk of anything that happened to come up, until some chance remark brought a response from Halliday.

Halliday sat at one end of the semicircle on this spring evening. At the other end was his physical and psychological antithesis and warmest personal friend, Ralph Calverley of the Geological Survey. In the center, the keystone of the arch, sat old Robert Wallace, ethnologist of the Smithsonian, smoking, as usual, a particu-

larly atrocious black pipe. Elliott Shotwell, of the Bureau of Mines, and Arthur Wellington, the linguistic phenomenon of the State Department, sat on either side of him. Captain Bill Cottrell of the Coast Survey, Paul Davis of the Bureau of Standards, Steve Windsor of the Patent Office, and quiet, unobtrusive, almost insignificant little David Elgin of the Bureau of Chemistry, made up the rest of the group. It was a representative cross-section of the membership of the Buried Alive Club, that unique organization composed of men who have devoted their lives to the poorly paid, often unrecognized service of the people of the United States.

No politician, no man whose name gets into the headlines, has ever stepped foot inside of the exclusive precincts of the Buried Alive Club. Its membership is composed of those who actually do the things for which the statesmen and near statesmen take the credit. Their work goes on from administration to administration; without them, the Government would cease to function; yet they themselves are unknown. In their ranks are scores to whom great industries would gladly pay many times the insignificant stipends to which Congress restricts them. Among them are some millionaires by inheritance, a few who are millionaires by their own efforts. Yet these, like their fellows who have to practice the utmost economy to live even decently on their Government salaries, are bound together by the tie of their common devotion to their country and its welfare. They find their happiness in service; and the motto of the Buried Alive Club is: "No Publicity."

IT would be difficult to find anywhere a group of keener minds or more highly trained intellects than were assembled in the great hall of the Buried Alive Club on this particular evening. Over their pipes and cigars they discussed all manner of topics, from the latest scandals revealed by the investigators on Capitol Hill, to the influence of propaganda on the masses.

"I get disgusted, sometimes, with the so-called intelligent American public," said Ralph Calverley. "They seem eager to believe any plausible lie."

"I don't know what the argument's about," spoke up Tom Sheehan, of the Bureau of Criminal Investigation, who had come in and joined the group while Calverley was speaking, "but you're right when you say the crowd will believe any well-told lie. We've got a problem on our hands right now." He paused and let his eyes wander from one side of the fireplace to the other as if to assure himself that there was no one present before whom he could not speak freely.

"It's these damned Reds," Sheehan went on. "The Department has received reports, in the last few weeks, from every part of the country—reports which prove, beyond a doubt, that the most widespread and active Bolshevik propaganda that has ever been set on foot in America is now at work. How they do it I don't know, but it is a crime, the way these half-civilized Russians can take a crowd of sober, intelligent American workmen and just turn 'em into crazy anarchists. When I see that sort of thing going on, it doesn't surprise me that some of these nuts up on the Hill can get themselves elected to Congress."

"That's something I've been thinking about, Tom," said Seth Halliday, speaking for the first time since the conversation had started, half an hour before. The others settled back in their chairs. Halliday tapped his pipe on the fender and went on:

"I've given a lot of thought to the problem of how to influence the herd-instinct, which the human race shares in common with all other gregarious animals, to follow really intelligent leadership."

"I don't think they want really intelligent leadership," Ralph Calverley interrupted. "Why, this bunch of us, sitting around the fire here, could remodel the world and give every man, woman and child in the universe a better chance for long life and happiness than they have ever had; but do you suppose they'll let us do it for them? No; they'd rather listen to some loose-tongued demagogue who tells them the millennium is right around the corner, but who hasn't any more idea than they have how to reach it, than take their knowledge from men who know the difference between what is possible and what is simply superstition."

"I don't know how those other guys do it, as I said before," said Tom Sheehan. "That's one of the things that gets my goat—to have one of these dirty foreigners make a play for our people and get away with it. If only some of you wise guys could spellbind 'em, the way these Bolsheviks do, there wouldn't be anything to worry about."

There was a moment of silence, during which Halliday emptied and refilled his pipe. He glanced again around the semicircle. His eyes came to a rest upon the face of Arthur Wellington.

"I ran across something curious on this last trip of mine," he said, "and it has a bearing on the thing we have been discussing. —Arthur," he went on, fixing the State Department man's eyes with his own, "did you ever hear of the 'Light in the East'?"

Wellington shot him a quick glance of amazement. "Yes; I have heard of it," he replied. "What do you know about it?"

THE others seemed to sense something interesting behind this exchange of questions. Old Professor Wallace's blue eyes glistened, as if the expression was not totally new to him.

"What do *you* know about it?" Halliday countered Wellington's question. "I wish you'd tell the crowd here everything you know about 'the Light in the East.'"

"Why, it's an expression you sometimes hear, among Russians of the more scholarly and studious type," replied Wellington. "I was in the embassy there for a number of years, you know, and on special service in various parts of Russia for several years longer. I got acquainted, intimately, with all sorts and conditions of Russians; and there, once in a while, I would hear a more or less guarded reference to 'the Light in the East.' Nobody would give me a direct answer, when I asked for further enlightenment. All I know about the meaning of the phrase is what I was able to piece together, by inference and deduction, from the scattered hints I picked up.

"My understanding of the expression is that it refers to some mysterious source of knowledge in the East,—east of Russia, that is,—where there is supposed to be a group of men who have solved some of the mysteries of Nature by different methods than those which Western science has pursued; and involved with this belief there is an implication, in the phrase, of a hope or expectation of a day coming, when this mysterious body of knowledge shall be made available, by some means which I do not clearly understand, for the liberation of the Russian people. I have never taken the idea very seriously. What do *you* know about 'the Light in the East,' Seth?"

"I have seen it," replied Halliday simply.

THERE was a moment of surprised silence, then a chorus of amazed questions:

"What is it?"

"Where did you find it?"

"What is it all about, anyway?"

Old Professor Wallace was the only one who did not fire an explosive interrogatory in Halliday's direction.

As the botanist hesitated, seemingly greatly embarrassed at finding himself the focus of such active interest, the white-bearded old *savant* of the Smithsonian came to the rescue.

"You followed Marco Polo's route into Sinkiang, didn't you?" he asked.

"For a thousand miles or so east of Samarkand," responded Halliday. "Have you been there, Professor?"

"Far enough to know that that's the route one must take who seeks the Light in the East," was the Professor's answer. "I got as far as the Temple of a Thousand Buddhas, but my old bones, and the time at my disposal, would not permit me to go farther. I heard enough, however, to make me believe that anyone who had the courage and enterprise to turn southeast from the caravan-route, at that point, might find something at his journey's end which would repay him for the discomforts and dangers he would have to face."

"That is what I did," said Halliday. "On this particular trip I was hunting for new textile fibers that will grow in high altitudes, and the trail seemed to lead in that direction. You fellows remember that it was nearly two years ago that I went away. I believe they had me reported lost, at the Department. I would like to go back there and stay twenty years; I might be able to bring back something really worth while. As it is, about all I have brought back with me is a rather discouraging conviction that we, in the West, have only scratched the surface of knowledge, that there are powers of the human mind of which we have no conception, that we do not utilize ten per cent of our latent energies."

"You mean that those wops have got something we haven't?" asked Tom Sheehan. "I hope you took it away from them, Seth."

"Those wops, as you call them, Tom, certainly have something we haven't got—that is, a few of them have. As for bringing it back: well, I was there only a little over a year, and about all I can say that

I really brought back are a few parlor tricks."

"This is all news to me," Sheehan resumed. "Where is this place, anyway? Light in the East, eh? I suppose Edison knows about it."

THE general laugh which ensued broke the tension. Everybody in the Buried Alive Club liked Tom Sheehan, and respected and admired his ability in his particular field. Although he was the only member of the organization who did not have a university degree, his capacity for human friendship made him perhaps the most widely popular of all the members. And Tom had a level-headed good-nature that enabled him to laugh without rancor at a joke on himself, even though the joke was based upon his own ignorance of things scientific.

"I'm trying to get down to cases, Seth," he said, when the laugh had subsided. "You say you have seen it in the East, and that it is something we haven't got. Can't you tell us what it is?"

"I have been fishing for words with which to express it," replied Halliday. "That's one of the mysterious things about this knowledge, which has been preserved and developed there in Central Asia—the absolute impossibility of expressing very much of it in words. You see, once you have the key, you do not need words to get it across. I've got it, roughly and incompletely, in my own mind, and if I were as fluent as Ralph Calverley, perhaps I could explain it to you. I'm almost sorry I said anything about it, but it did seem to me, and does yet, that it furnishes a clue to the thing we started talking about a few minutes ago."

"You've got me guessing," confessed Tom Sheehan. He settled back in his chair, extracted one of his favorite big black cigars from his waistcoat pocket, lighted it, and started blowing smoke rings toward the ceiling.

"They get the idea across without words?" asked Paul Davis. "You are not talking about telepathy, are you, Seth?" The physicist extraordinary of the Bureau of Standards turned the cold and skeptical eye of the practical scientist upon Halliday.

"Something like that," admitted the explorer. "Not trickery, but the power of conveying thought without verbal expression—or at least without vocal expression."

"I've thought about that, some," piped up little David Elgin from the depths of his easy-chair, over the arms of which his tousled head was hardly visible. "There isn't any physical reason why waves can't be generated by other means than those we have developed. I think even Davis will agree with me, that every physical or chemical action and reaction is caused by what we call, in the absence of any more precise term, an electrical discharge. If that is true, then even the processes of human thought must set up waves. And if that is true, it is certainly conceivable that these waves can be intercepted and detected, by minds properly adjusted to do so, if we could only find out how to bring about that adjustment."

THE others looked at Elgin with varying expressions of surprise. Of the whole group, only Steve Windsor of the Patent Office and Arthur Wellington of the State Department had reason to know how deep and how far in advance of all the rest of the world was David Elgin's knowledge of the forces, still a mystery even to scientists, whose commonest manifestations are seen in radio communication.

"That comes as near as I can explain it," said Halliday with a respectful glance toward Elgin. "There is a great deal more to it than that, but as I said, I simply cannot find the words to explain it. Of course, I do not know it all; it would take a lifetime to learn it all."

"I'm beginning to see it a little," Tom Sheehan admitted. "As near as I get it, you ran across a bunch of guys back there in Mah Jongg, or whatever the name of the place is, that made you think they had some sort of dynamos inside 'em, and could broadcast without any machinery, just by turning on the mental juice. Is that what you mean? Sounds kind of gooffy to me. I think there's a catch in it somewhere. Go on, Seth. What's the joke? I'll be the goat."

"I'll fall for it," countered Bill Cottrell of the Coast Survey. "There was an old Chink—that was when I was on the *Thetis*, a good many years ago. We were wire-dragging for pinnacle-reefs off Unimak, up in the Aleutian Islands. Somehow I got the strongest kind of a hunch—that's the only way I can describe it—that there was somebody in trouble, about fifty miles southwestward. The hunch got so strong I couldn't stand it any longer, so I pulled in the wire, called in the boats, and steamed

down that way. Well, there was trouble, all right. A Chinese junk had struck a reef and gone down. We picked up about a dozen of the crew, who were clinging to pieces of wreckage. The rest of them had got chilled and let go. One of them was this old Chink I am telling about. They couldn't, any of them, speak English, but we had a Chinese mess-boy, and something about this old fellow made him almost get down on his knees and worship him. I tried to pump out of the boy what there was about old Chop Suey, or some name like that, that made him act that way. All he could tell me was that the old fellow was a very wise man, and had been signaling to us with his thoughts. The old fellow died, from exposure, and I never did get to the bottom of it; but every time since, that I have thought about that hunch, and the mysterious way it came through, I have wondered what there was in it."

Old Professor Wallace nodded smilingly at Cottrell. Halliday sat silently observing the Coast Survey man, with a fixed intensity in his look. Cottrell smiled responsively. "I get you, Seth," he said, although Halliday had not spoken a word to him. "I—"

WHATEVER it was that Cottrell was about to say was interrupted by the voices of Tom Sheehan and Ralph Calverley.

"What I want to know," said Sheehan, "is how these Chinks, or wops, or whatever they are, got this and kept it to themselves all this time."

"And what I don't get, Seth, is what bearing this has on the thing we've been talking about—the susceptibility of the mob to demagoguery and propaganda," said Calverley.

Halliday turned to Professor Wallace. "I can't answer Tom's question," he said. "That sort of thing is out of my line. You know a little about this, and you know all about those people. What's the answer?"

"If the thing you found, Seth, is the same thing I have in mind, I imagine the folks you got it from are Mongols," replied Professor Wallace.

"I'm not an ethnologist," said Halliday. "Of course, a fellow traveling around learns to recognize the superficial racial characteristics, and I should call these people Mongols."

"Chinks?" put in Tom Sheehan.

The old ethnologist beamed on Tom Sheehan. "You think of Chinese—Chinks, as you call them—whenever you hear the term 'Mongol'. It would surprise you, I presume, if I told you we have at least two Mongolian members in the Buried Alive Club."

There was a questioning murmur from the rest. Professor Wallace, seemingly enjoying the mild sensation which his words had created, went on:

"You all know Heikki Lönnrot of the Weather Bureau? Well, he's a Mongol."

"Why, he's a Finn," protested Paul Davis.

"Precisely," replied Professor Wallace. "The Finns are of Mongol stock, and so are the Hungarians. Szemelenyi, who fiddled for us last night, is a Mongol. The Turks are Mongols; so are the Tatars, including the Cossacks.

"Now, all of these peoples have something in common with the Chinese and the rest of the Asiatic Mongol stocks—something we of the Aryan stocks haven't got. It is a certain inherent mysticism, which the Western mind finds it utterly impossible to grasp.

"I'd like nothing better than to talk the rest of the night on the theme, but I am as anxious as the rest of you to see if we can pump out of Halliday just what it is that he found out there in Eastern Turkestan. The reason the Mongols have something we haven't is because they are the oldest race of human beings. Somewhere in the general neighborhood where Seth has been is the cradle of the human race."

"Why, that's where they found the Dinosaur eggs," suggested Wellington.

"And what the Andrews expedition is hunting for are traces of early man," responded Professor Wallace. "I believe that some day we shall be able not only to prove that the human race had its first origin in Central Asia, but also that the vanished civilizations, which we know existed before our Aryan ancestors had acquired even the beginnings of social life, reached a stage of knowledge and culture as high as anything we have touched—higher in many directions—but by entirely different methods and processes from ours."

"You mean that these old ginks found out how to do things with their heads that we do with machines—is that it?" asked Tom Sheehan.

"Something like that," was the Professor's reply. "If we can imagine that fifty thousand years ago, let us say, the peoples

then living in Central Asia had mastered the physical forces of Nature to a degree exceeding, in many directions, our present mastery of those forces—that they understood something, for example, about the control of atomic energy, that hypothesis would account for a number of things. It would account for the mysticism and fatalism of the Mongols—for their belief in things we regard as superstitions, because from our Western point of view they relate to the supernatural and therefore the impossible. We could account in this way for many of the racial traditions which historical research has been unable to verify. We could account not only for the existence of the belief, which Wellington tells us he encountered throughout southern and eastern Russia, in the Light in the East, but also we could expect to find a real basis for that belief, such as Seth seems to have stumbled upon, if he can find the words to tell us about it."

"Is there any basis for belief in the existence of such a tremendous prehistoric civilization?" asked Bill Cottrell.

"Of course, it is largely speculative as yet," responded old Wallace. "There are many men, however, who combine scientific knowledge with imagination, who admit the possibility of something of the sort." He turned toward Halliday. "Have I answered Tom's question, as to how these people got something we haven't?" he asked.

"I'm glad to get that myself," replied Seth. "You have answered some of the questions that have been running through my own mind ever since I stumbled onto this thing."

"But you haven't told us yet what you found, or what bearing it has on the subject we were discussing," insisted Calverley.

"What I found," replied Halliday, "was a little group of old men, who know more about some of the powers of the human mind than I believe anybody on this side of the Atlantic knows. I haven't an exact word by which to classify them. They are not priests of any religion; I wouldn't call them monks, although they live in a sort of monastic communism, by themselves. They regard themselves simply as the custodians of a small part of the ancient knowledge; and I gathered, from what I learned while I was there, that there are many other such monastic communities, each of them perpetuating and transmitting some other part of the body of knowledge, which, as a whole, seems to be what is meant by the phrase 'the Light in the East.'

"Men spend their lives in acquiring this knowledge; some spend a lifetime as students in a single branch of it. Very few, I was given to understand, have ever acquired the whole of it. It is quite possible that no one individual, in modern times, has lived long enough to get it all. When I tell you that in nearly a year which I spent trying to master the small portion of this knowledge which is in the custody of one of these groups, I came away convinced I had scratched only the surface of that particular phase of the whole, and that to master that part of it alone would take me at least twenty years, you may imagine how unlikely it is that the whole of it has ever been mastered by any one human being."

THE others nodded in comprehension.

"You haven't answered my questions yet," Calverley persisted. "What did you get, and what has it to do with Bolshevism?"

"All I got, as I said awhile ago, is a few parlor tricks," replied Halliday, with a smile. "I tried one of them on Cottrell, while we were talking here. You're a very receptive subject, Bill," he went on, turning to the Coast Survey man. "You understood the message I transmitted, didn't you?"

"I sure got it," replied Cottrell. He swung around so as to face the rest of the group. "I am a poorer hand at putting my ideas into words than Seth is," he said. "I cannot give you fellows anything except my word for it, but when I finished telling about the old Chink and that strange hunch I had about him, Seth looked me squarely in the eye, and without saying a word, he made me understand exactly how the old fellow's thought-signals had come to me. I don't know how you did it, Seth, but if that's one of your parlor tricks, I'll say it's a good one."

"That's one of them," Halliday admitted. "I haven't a name for it. I suppose *telepathy* is the best word we've got. It isn't exactly telepathy, because as I understand that word, it implies a communication between two detached minds, of definite ideas or definite mental pictures. And the thing I got across to Bill wasn't a definite idea; it wasn't anything concrete—I suppose you

might call it just an understanding. Our minds met; that's as nearly as I can express it."

"You hypnotized him," suggested Tom Sheehan.

"That's getting pretty close to it, Tom," assented Halliday. "Hypnotism is, as I see it, the one faint vestige of this Eastern knowledge that we of the Western world have been able to put a finger on and do anything with. Hypnotism—check me if I'm wrong, any of you fellows you know more about it than I do—is the influencing of one mind by another. It operates on the subject by setting at work the submerged nine-tenths of his mental equipment, the latent powers we do not use because we don't know how to use them. We have to go through long and laborious processes of reasoning to reach a conclusion, and the parts of our mental machines which we use are so imperfectly geared that we are all of us likely to slip a cog at any step of the process, so that there is no guarantee that anyone's conclusions are in the least degree accurate. If we could use our whole minds, instead of only ten per cent of them, or some such proportion, reaching a conclusion would be a practically instantaneous and always accurate process. Instead of the painstaking labor of formulating our premises in words, and building up syllogisms by the laws of logic, we would reach logical conclusions by alogical means.

"Now, we just do not know how to use our minds that way. Those faculties are dissociated from the parts of our brains that we do use. But the funny thing about it all is that, although we cannot operate that part of our mental machinery ourselves, it can be set in operation by the minds of others."

"I fancy what you are driving at," said Calverley, "is the suggestion that the trouble with the people is that they do not know how to use their minds to reach accurate conclusions. I don't see that that gets us anywhere."

"I don't think that is what Seth meant, exactly," put in Tom Sheehan. "I'm getting interested. You mean that these so-called spellbinders really *are* spellbinders? How about that, Professor; does that sound reasonable to you?"

PROFESSOR WALLACE glanced inquiringly at Halliday, who nodded back at him with a smile.

"I wonder if Seth hasn't turned up something we have none of us ever thought of," he said. "Contrary to the popular impression, almost everybody can be very easily hypnotized. I believe that the best scientific information on that subject indicates that not less than ninety per cent of all individuals upon whom hypnotic experiments have been made yield readily to the influence of an external mind. There we have proof positive that there is such a thing as Elgin here suggested—the setting up of waves, by the operation of one mind, which are intercepted and detected by other minds. But how it is done is one of our unsolved mysteries."

"It isn't a mystery at all, in the place where I've been," Halliday replied. "They know how to do exactly that thing, with a precise understanding of how it is done. It is being done all the time, everywhere; but most of the rest of us who exert that power do not know we are using it, and most of us who are influenced by it don't know we are being influenced. That explains why certain men—many men of limited intelligence and with inadequate or distorted ideals of honor and responsibility—are able to influence the actions of large numbers of other people.

"They possess, without realizing in any way that they have it, and without clearly understanding its use, the ability to set in motion waves which are intercepted by the dissociated mental areas of the masses, and which influence them to conclusions which are not only reached without logical reasoning processes, but which are in themselves illogical."

HALLIDAY paused again. It was evident that all the members of the group were deeply impressed. All had their eyes fixed upon his. Suddenly he spoke again, and for the space of several minutes they listened in intent silence. When he again paused Arthur Wellington stared at Halliday, then scanned the faces of the others.

"Have I made my point clear to you all?" Halliday asked.

There was a chorus of assent.

Halliday smiled and turned his eyes toward Wellington, who was again staring at him in amazement.

"Why, that was positively uncanny, Seth!" he said. "You were speaking in Russian, and everyone here thinks he understood you!"

"Russian?" The interrogation burst

simultaneously from the lips of all of the others.

"What are you trying to do, Arthur; kid us?" asked Tom Sheehan.

"Not at all," responded Wellington. "Seth was giving us a wholesale demonstration of the trick he played on Cottrell at retail. Isn't that it, Seth?"

Halliday nodded. "I wanted to see whether a hard-headed group of men, of high average intellectual development, could be influenced to grasp thoughts expressed in a language with which they were unfamiliar," admitted Seth. "Of course, Arthur knows Russian. If that were not the case, I probably would not be able to convince you that I did not use a word of English in what I was just telling you; yet you all indicated that you understood it.

"Ralph, I wish you would tell the others the sense of what you got from what I was just saying; and you, Arthur, check up on him. You understood the language I was speaking,—at least I hope so, though my Russian is rather poor,—and you can tell whether the thoughts I was trying to convey got across to the others who do not know Russian."

"Why, Seth, I hardly know how to put it into words. I got a very definite impression, while you were talking, but I am having difficulty in formulating it in language. As near as I can state it, the thing you were saying was that in any group of human beings there is bound to be a certain percentage whose dissociated or latent and unused mental equipment is peculiarly sensitive to waves or influences from sources external to itself. I gathered that you think that the presence of these easily influenced individuals, in any group, when they are acted upon by this external force, results in they themselves unconsciously setting up and sending forth similar waves, multiplying the force and effect of the original impulse and so impressing it upon the entire group."

"Like the regenerative receiver in radio," suggested Paul Davis.

WELLINGTON nodded. "You don't understand any Russian at all?" he asked Calverley. Receiving a negative reply, he turned again to Seth.

"What Ralph has just said is the exact sense, although somewhat elaborated, of what you said in Russian a few minutes ago," he said.

"I'm getting scared," said Tom Sheehan. "I think I'll drop around and have a talk with Father Kelly before I go home. This is too much like witchcraft."

"You had to get us all pretty well worked up, before you undertook that particular parlor trick, didn't you?" asked Professor Wallace.

Halliday smiled his acknowledgment of the imputation. "That's right," he said. "I see you understand the principle of the thing. I had never tried it before, and was not at all sure I could work it. Of course, I don't suppose I could teach anybody else how to do it, but I was not the only one who learned this and a few other trifling things up there in the mountains of Sinkiang."

"It all simmers down, then, to the proposition that anybody who can do that trick, consciously or unconsciously, can make people believe anything he wants them to be lieve," said Calverley.

"If it isn't too far outside the range o. their own experience, yes," replied Halliday.

"Then you have simply proved my thesis," retorted Calverley. "The people are like a flock of sheep, ready to follow any plausible demagogue."

"I insist that the trouble is not with the people, who, if let alone, would be fundamentally right nine times out of ten," Halliday replied. "The trouble lies in the fact that unintelligent and unscrupulous men have found it possible to set up these regenerative thought-waves, while few really intelligent, well-informed and honorable men know how to exercise their latent power of leadership, or attempt to do so. The responsibility rests, not on the masses, but upon us, we who can rightly lay claim to the possession of knowledge and intelligence—which are not always the same—and who have no selfish ends to serve."

THERE was an interval of silence as Halliday made an end of speaking. Tom Sheehan was the first to break it.

"I'll say you'd be some spellbinder. Listen, Seth: I've been getting more than an earful here tonight, and while a lot of it has gone clear over my head, you've given me a couple of hunches. Let me get you straight: you say these Chinks, up there in Mah Jongg, can teach anybody how to do this trick you just pulled?"

"What's the idea, Tom? Thinking of making a pilgrimage to Eastern Turkestan?" asked Steve Windsor.

"That wouldn't be so bad, either," re-

joined Sheehan. "That wasn't what I had in my mind, though. What's been getting me, as I told you fellows awhile ago, is how these dirty low-lifes from Russia, that haven't got hardly any English, can come in here and fill the American workers' mind with their rotten Bolshevik propaganda. Now, Seth has made it clear how they do it, and I'm wondering whether they didn't learn the trick the same place as he did. You said there were some others up there where you were. What kind of ginks were they?"

"Russians, mostly—some Hindus, some Chinese; representatives of almost all the Eastern races, I should say, but mostly Russians. There was one fellow, a Greek, who had been twenty-five or thirty years going around from one place to another to gather up all he could about 'the Light in the East.' All I got was just a pin-prick to what he had."

"You didn't hear any of those Russians say anything about coming to America, did you?" asked Sheehan.

"I see what you're driving at, Tom," replied Halliday. "No; but they naturally wouldn't have taken me into their confidence. Is that your hunch?"

"Somewhere there is a source from which these Red agitators all come," said Sheehan. "We clean up one bunch and deport them. Before we've got them all rounded up, there are others pulling the same stunts. They get in under all sorts of aliases, and we are always a few jumps behind them. They've got their poison injected and working before we get to them. The Department has put it up to me to mop up. What's the use of mopping up when the faucet's still open? Now, what I want to know is, isn't there some way you could work that trick to offset the dirty work these Bolshevists are doing?"

"There might be," replied Halliday, "if I could get into their meetings and set up some counter-currents to offset what they were saying. But I'm afraid I couldn't disguise myself, plausibly, as a Bolshevik orator, so that's rather out of the question. If there were some way of broadcasting thought-waves by radio, it might be done. But that, of course, is impossible."

THE others smilingly agreed that there did not seem to be any practical method whereby Halliday could apply the "parlor trick," as he termed it, which he had picked up in his brief contact with "the Light in the East," to Tom Sheehan's problem—all but David Elgin, that is.

The little man's thin, high-pitched voice barely made itself heard above the others as they launched into a general discussion of the possibilities which complete understanding of the mysteries of Eastern science might bring to the Western world.

"I don't know that that's so impossible," Elgin piped up.

Ralph Calverley caught his words indistinctly.

"What's that, Elgin?" he asked. The others paused to listen, and the little man, seeming somewhat embarrassed, wriggled to an upright position in his big chair and appeared to be groping for words.

"I don't know but what Halliday just suggested could be done," he said, at last. "I've been thinking, while we were talking, of the analogy between these impulses which we must call thought-waves, for lack of a better term, and the radio waves which we set up by mechanical means. I don't say that it can be done, but theoretically, I believe it is possible."

The others looked at David Elgin with expressions varying from incredulity to respect.

"Whenever David Elgin says anything about radio waves, you fellows want to listen," said Steve Windsor. "There's nobody living who can do as much with them as he can. I know what I'm talking about."

"If you could make a machine that would broadcast thought-waves, you'd have the world by the tail," Tom Sheehan put in. "On the level, do you think it could be done?"

"I'd like an opportunity to make the experiment," replied Elgin modestly.

"What does it need—money?" asked Calverley. "I've got plenty of that."

"Some money, some time—I can't guess how long—and Halliday's coöperation," Elgin answered.

"And secrecy," added Professor Wallace. "As Sheehan has expressed it more forcibly, the success of such an experiment would place those who knew how to use it in a position of tremendous power, and of tremendous responsibility. I am willing to contribute to the necessary expenses, if the rest of you will do the same, and I propose that we agree now to say nothing to anyone not here present, about what Halliday has demonstrated tonight, or about the pos-

sibility which Elgin has suggested, except by unanimous mutual agreement."

He looked from one to the other as he spoke.

"I'm agreed," said Halliday; and one by one the others gave their assent. What Professor Wallace had said of the responsibility which would rest upon them if Elgin should, by any magic of science, succeed in devising means of broadcasting the occult influence which Halliday had found in the East, seemed to have struck home to all of them. As Calverley rose, and the rest followed his example, there was an interchange of silent handclasps which spoke more forcibly than words. Every man's face wore a solemn, thoughtful expression as they parted.

TWO months after the amazing demonstration of Seth Halliday to a little group of his fellow-members of the Buried Alive Club, a powerful automobile picked its way precariously through the gathering darkness over a rocky, deeply rutted wagon road in the mountains of West Virginia. There were four men in the car. At the wheel sat one whom his companion on the front seat addressed as "Tom."

"Pretty near time to run across some of your men, isn't it?" the other asked.

"There ought to be one of them here or hereabouts, Arthur," replied the driver. "We'll have to stop soon if we don't meet them. I wouldn't risk showing a light unless I knew there was no danger, and I don't want to take a chance of having your necks broken by traveling this road in the dark."

He turned his head so that his voice would carry to the men in the back seat.

"How are you and Dave standing it, Seth?" he asked.

"We're all right, but Elgin is worrying about this darned machine," came a voice from the rear. "It weighs about a ton, I guess, and it wont do it any good to get many more jolts."

"I'm only concerned about the difficulty of readjusting the works in the dark, in case anything has been shaken out of adjustment," came the thin, piping voice of David Elgin, out of the darkness.

He had hardly finished speaking when a man appeared on the road ahead. He seemed to have come from nowhere. At one instant he was not there; the next instant he was there. He wore the garb of a coal-miner, with an electric mining-lamp strapped to the front of his long-visored black cap. As the car slowed down, the stranger raised his hand to his head, and the lamp on his cap flashed intermittently for a few seconds.

"That's McCurdy," said Sheehan. "He's the best man I've got on this work. We're all right now."

He brought the car to a standstill as the man approached it.

"Hello, Chief," said McCurdy. "I've been expecting you for the last hour."

"Had a little tire-trouble down in the valley," explained Tom Sheehan. "Where are they going to meet?"

"It's in a little glen down just the other side of the ridge," replied McCurdy. "Don't think you'd better try to take the car any farther. There's a place a couple of rods on, here, where you can back into the woods and be pretty well covered. Follow me and I'll show you."

HE led the way to a point where the forest had been cut away from the roadside, leaving a deep bay in the midst of the woods, and into this opening Tom backed the car cautiously. He shut off his engine, and driver and passengers climbed out to stretch their legs.

"We're safe enough up here, but don't make any noise that you can avoid," cautioned McCurdy. "They'll all come up to the glen from below. Nobody uses this road."

"Can we hear from here?" asked Seth Halliday. "We're going to try a little experiment, and we really ought to be within hearing distance of what is going on."

"I doubt if you'll be able to hear much from here," replied McCurdy. "The glen is nearly half a mile farther on down the hill. Flynn and Sheridan will be in the crowd, and I'm going to slip down and join them myself."

"You think Schatsky himself will be here, do you?" asked Sheehan.

"That's the dope," McCurdy answered. "They're all expecting him, and this'll be the biggest meeting they've ever had. Do you have to be within hearing distance? I don't know what you've got up your sleeves."

"Is there any place closer than this to the glen where we could safely hide this contraption?" asked Halliday. He indicated the square black box in the tonneau of the car.

"It weighs about five hundred pounds,"

David Elgin explained. "It would be quite a job to carry it very far through the woods in the dark, and more of a job to bring it back."

"Don't worry about that," said Tom Sheehan, chuckling. "I thought of one thing you scientific guys overlooked."

He lifted up the cushion of the front seat of the car and took out a small box.

"This is one of the things we use in the detecting business, sometimes," he said. "It's a dictograph, with about a mile of wire on this reel. Mac, slip down through the woods with this thing and hang it on a tree, facing the glen somewhere, and that will enable us to hear and keep tab on what is being said."

He turned to the other three. "That'll work all right, wont it?" he said. "If you can hear through that, you'll know when to shoot, just as well as if you were right down there, wont you?"

"If the thing works at all, it ought to work that way as well as any other," Halliday assented.

"It'll work, all right," said Elgin.

McCurdy took the little, round, disk-like transmitter of the dictograph in his hand and vanished into the forest as stealthily as he had emerged. Only the continuous unrolling of the fine insulated wire from the reel which Tom Sheehan held, gave any indication that he was moving at all. Not a sound could be heard as he threaded his way among the trees toward the glen.

For twenty minutes or more the reel continued to unwind. Then it ceased to turn, and except for their own voices and movements, the only indication the four men who had arrived in the car had that there was anyone else within miles of them, was the tiny strand of green-covered wire, to their end of which Sheehan proceeded to connect listening devices, in the form of telephone earpieces with clamps for attaching them to the head. Meantime, Elgin was busily engaged in doing something, which the others only vaguely comprehended, with the apparatus inside of the big black box in the tonneau. When he had finished, a faint glow of light of a slightly greenish tinge was visible upon looking down into the box.

"This gives just the same effect as the glowworm lamps they use down in Yucatan," said Halliday. "They put a lot of fireflies in a bottle for domestic illumination."

"I think we'd better keep that light covered," suggested Sheehan. "It isn't very bright, but we don't know who might be scouting around here. Of course, we've got to take a chance on being overheard—that is, unless you can pull this stunt without using words, Seth."

"I don't know about that," replied Halliday. "Theoretically that might be done; practically, I don't think I am enough of an adept to generate and focus the thought-waves without formulating the thoughts in words. So there is a contraption here for me to talk into, although the words that are transmitted, and the talking, have no effect upon the operation of the machine."

"My old granddaddy used to believe in witches and banshees and all that sort of thing," said Sheehan. "Damned if I don't think he was pretty near right. I'm feeling sort of shuddery, myself. Do you fellows really think this is going to work?"

"Elgin thinks it will, and that's enough for me," replied Wellington. "I'm not sure, Seth, that I just got the idea of the talking part. I didn't understand that you were going to do anything that anyone could hear."

"That's right," spoke up David Elgin. "The waves which this device sets up are precisely like radio-waves in that respect. The talking part is only to enable Seth to concentrate his thought. Now, if a couple of you fellows will take this aërial and stretch it between two trees, as high up as you can conveniently put it, we'll be all set."

HALLIDAY and Wellington unrolled a long, narrow strip of wire mesh, to each end of which stout cords were attached, and from the center of which a wire led to an electric connection on the outside of the big black box. While they were stretching the aërial, Sheehan put on one of the headpieces which he had connected with the dictograph.

"McCurdy's all set," he said to Elgin. "He's whispering in the other end now. The miners are beginning to gather. I can hear a lot of jabbering, in some sort of wop talk. I guess we're going to get it all."

Halliday and Wellington rejoined the others, and Wellington put on the other headpiece, while Halliday seated himself in the back of the car and picked up the end of a speaking-tube, with a mouthpiece similar to that seen on the ordinary dictati phonograph.

"This thing has no real value," said Halliday, indicating the speaking-tube. "It's effect is in a sense self-hypnotic. Do you hear anything, Arthur?"

"Sounds are coming through wonderfully," replied Wellington. "Apparently they are not talking very loud, but I've already heard fragments of half a dozen of the eastern European languages and at least three Russian dialects."

"The idea is that if we are going to get any effect at all, we will get it when the crowd is in a receptive mental state," Halliday explained. "When Schatsky begins to exhort them and gets their attention focused on what he is saying, it will be time for us to shoot."

Elgin picked up a curious-looking device which he proceeded to adjust about Halliday's head. It was a metal cap or helmet, fitting closely to the contours of the skull, and from the back of which depended a long metal strip which Halliday inserted inside his shirt-collar and which evidently lay flat along his spine. A couple of straps around chest and waist held it tightly to his body. Elgin attached this odd armor, by means of two wires, to a connection inside the big black box. In order to do so, he raised the lid of the box, and the instant that the wires were connected, the others observed a change in the luminous glow from within the receptacle. The greenish light was intensified and took on a pinkish tone.

"All set," said Elgin. "That's the real works. Your nervous batteries are well charged tonight, Seth."

Wellington climbed into the car and took his seat between Elgin and Halliday. Sheehan, on the front seat, turned the ear which was not covered by the dictograph receiver toward the three in the rear. Suddenly he lifted his hand.

"That's Schatsky's voice," he said. "I've heard it before."

"He's speaking a very badly mangled English," said Wellington. "They're applauding him."

THERE was a moment of silence in the car. Then Wellington spoke again.

"He's beginning to gather their attention. He's clever; I've got to hand it to him. There must be at least half a dozen nationalities besides Americans in that crowd, and he's giving each group a few words in their own language. . . . . Now he's off. He brings them a message from their brothers in Russia," Wellington went on. "I'm translating and paraphrasing roughly, Seth. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Just the points he makes, as he makes them," replied Halliday. "If you catch what he's leading up to, anticipate it for me if you can."

" 'The Russian workers are happy and prosperous,' he says," said Wellington.

As he paused, the faint sound of Halliday's voice speaking into the tube could be heard:

"It's a lie. I've been there. I've seen their misery, starving, oppressed. The worst paid laborer in America is better off and happier than the best of them."

"Damned if that machine isn't working!" exclaimed Tom Sheehan. "Some of them were starting to applaud when Seth began to shoot, but that applause died off too quick to be natural."

"Their brothers across the sea call on them to follow their example and rise against their oppressors," repeated Wellington.

Halliday's voice sounded faintly again. *"Oppressors, hell!"* the others heard him say into the tube with an intensity of utterance which testified to the genuineness of his emotional reaction. *"Who's oppressing you?"*

"That's getting 'em, too!" cried Sheehan.

"He certainly isn't holding his audience," remarked Wellington.

"That's the best spellbinder the Reds have got in this country," added Sheehan. "Say, I'm glad my old granddaddy died before this happened."

FOR fifteen minutes more Wellington repeated to Halliday the substance of the Bolshevik orator's impassioned appeal; and point by point Halliday met his arguments by even more earnest appeals to the underlying common-sense and sober judgment of the man's auditors. It was a weird duel of minds. As his audience grew more and more stubborn, under his efforts to inflame their passions and prejudices, the Russian lashed himself into a fury of denunciation and ridicule of America and its *bourgeois* ideals, as he termed them.

"He'll be talking treason in a minute," said Wellington.

"McCurdy and the others know what to do, in that case," replied Sheehan dryly.

"That regenerative effect we were talking about is getting in its work now,"

Wellington resumed. "The crowd, from the mutterings and fragmentary remarks that are coming through, seems to be thoroughly infected with the thought of opposition. How are you holding out, Seth?"

"Still going strong," replied Halliday. "It's really working, is it?"

"Something's working," replied Wellington. "*Ssh!* He's off again! Why, the man's going crazy. He's calling on them to arm themselves and destroy the Government!"

"That's McCurdy's signal for action," said Sheehan, as faint sounds of distant voices reached the ears of all four of them.

"Something's happening," said Halliday. "I don't need a dictograph to hear that."

"Sounds like they were giving him the razz," said Sheehan. "Wow! What a racket!" He lifted his hand and removed the dictograph receiver from his ear, which he proceeded to massage vigorously. "Pretty nearly broke my eardrum, that rumpus," he said.

"They're telling Schatsky where he gets off, in a dozen assorted languages," said Wellington. "I wish we were down there. I'd like to see this. They're mobbing him! Say, Seth, your dope worked too well; somebody's crying 'Lynch him.' Wait a minute. Something's happening. That's McCurdy. Good boy! He's flashed his badge on 'em. . . . . He's got Schatsky!"

"Can you beat it?" cried Sheehan, who had replaced his listening apparatus. "They're cheering McCurdy! I don't think we're needed here any longer. Let's see if we can get back to Wheeling before midnight."

Halliday stripped off his armor, Wellington his headpiece, and the two proceeded to take down the aërial.

"I'm afraid we're going to lose one end of a perfectly good dictograph," said Sheehan. "I don't suppose McCurdy'll have a chance to bring it in now."

ALMOST as he spoke, a tug on the wire indicated that some one had taken hold of it, somewhere along the line.

"Mac or one of my other men is trying to signal," Sheehan said. "Let's wait a minute and see what happens."

The four sat in silence in the car, the engine turning and ready to start, when they heard a distant crashing in the underbrush. A moment later McCurdy's voice came to them from the edge of the clearing.

"Can you take care of this rat, Chief?" he called.

Sheehan switched on the automobile's headlights.

"Bring him around where we can look at him," he ordered.

McCurdy, still in his miner's costume, but with the bright badge of Uncle Sam's Secret Service glittering on his breast, stepped into the circle of light, dragging with him an undersized man who, in spite of the handcuffs which adorned his wrists, was struggling violently. McCurdy swung the man around so that the others could inspect him under the glare of the headlights. He was a bearded, shock-headed individual, whose lineaments were clearly and distinctly those of the type of Russian which has led the ignorant populace to acceptance of the Marxian doctrine.

"That's one of the fellows I saw in Sinkiang!" exclaimed Halliday.

"We'll truss him up a little and take him down to the lock-up in Wheeling with us," said Sheehan.

Five minutes later the car was descending the rocky mountain road up which it had climbed an hour and a half before.

"Well, Seth, it works," said Wellington, turning around toward Halliday and Elgin, between whom the captive was propped up on the back seat.

"Better not talk about it now," continued Sheehan. "We don't know how much this bird can understand, and there's no use tipping him off to anything."

So it was not until after Schatsky had been safely deposited in the Wheeling jail that the four members of the Buried Alive Club had an opportunity to discuss and evaluate the night's work.

NINE members of the Buried Alive Club met again the night after the incident in the West Virginia mountains. It was a balmy evening in late May, when Washington is at its loveliest. The nine men foregathered on the broad upper veranda, whence one obtains a panoramic view of the blue Virginia hills, with the silver thread of the Potomac winding through the middle distance, and the slim, white spire of the Washington monument lifting heavenward in the foreground.

"Every time I've sat here lately and looked out this way, I've wondered how long this monument, or what it stands for, is going to stand," said Ralph Calverley. "Tonight, for the first time, I find myself

less inclined to pessimism. What you fellows have done opens the door, at least, for the salvation and preservation of American ideals."

"If we can do the same thing in other fields, we can certainly give democracy a chance to function, uninfluenced and untrammeled," said Seth Halliday.

Old Professor Wallace, who had listened intently without comment to Tom Sheehan's dramatic and pithy recital of the adventure in the mountains, and to Elgin's thoughtful and precise explanation of the scientific principles which he had found a way to apply for the broadcasting of thought-waves, spoke now for the first time.

"This is the time to search our hearts, gentlemen," he said. "We have, almost by accident, suddenly found ourselves possessed of such power as human beings, in our time at least, have never wielded. How are we going to use this power? To what end? What right have we—this little group of us here—to set up ourselves as arbiters of human destiny? Who are we, to set a standard to which we would make the rest of mankind conform?

"I don't question the integrity, the good faith or the sound intelligence of any one of you. But I want to sound a warning, which seems to me to be called for, against overenthusiasm and desire for immediate results which might readily lead any of us to propose or undertake the utilization of this power in ways which unbiased reflection might disapprove."

"That's a point very well taken, Professor," said Halliday. "Something of the same thing has been running through my mind. I, for one, would hesitate to shoulder the responsibility which the uncontrolled use of this new force would put upon me. I don't believe we're justified in making use of it, except under such safeguards as shall insure that the only effect produced is to leave men's minds free and unbiased, to form their own judgments and direct their own actions. And I think it goes without saying that we must never, under any circumstances, permit even the knowledge that such a device exists, much less its operation, to get beyond our group here."

THERE were immediate expressions of assent from all the rest.

"I'd rather destroy the apparatus and bury the secret forever than to run the risk of what might happen should it fall into dishonorable and unscrupulous hands," said Elgin.

"Let us, then, regard ourselves as bound to adhere to that basic principle," suggested Calverley. "Better limit ourselves and go slowly, knowing that we are right, than to put ourselves, with all the good intentions in the world, into the same class with Schatsky and other revolutionists of his type."

"You're right, all of you," said Arthur Wellington. "We're playing with fire if we let ourselves even dream of making use of the thing Elgin and Halliday have developed, except in some great national emergency, when we are unanimous as to its necessity."

"There is but one thing to do, then, as I see it," Professor Wallace offered. "There is a vault in the crypt under the Smithsonian in which more than one secret for which the world is not yet ready, reposes. I propose that we seal Elgin's black box and deposit it there, with the rest, until the emergency of which Wellington just spoke shall arise."

"And may it please God that that be long delayed," added Tom Sheehan.

Again there was unanimous agreement. And once more the group parted, with a mutual reiteration of the Buried Alive Club's motto: "No Publicity."

Gun Play

Wherein a nickel-plated bad-man runs up against a chap of the blue-steel variety, and powder is burned.

By MICHAEL J. PHILLIPS

"YIP! Yip-yip-yip yoo—ooo!"

The thick-shouldered counter man, who looked as though he might have been a bartender once, raised his head with a smile meant to placate and excuse. He nodded toward the flyspecked window.

"That there's young Chihuahua Pete," he explained, mopping the barlike lunch-counter. "With a coupla shots o' hootch under his belt! Just don't mind him. He's all right unless somebody steps on his toes."

The five or six men sitting on the tall stools, eating a hasty midday lunch while the stagedriver changed a tire, turned curiously at the yells and the explanation. They saw a pinto horse, irregularly patched with brown and white, coming out of the sagebrush and greasewood to the southward at a dead run. A "warbag," in which the cowboy carries his personal belongings when he changes jobs, bounced wildly on either side. There was a rifle in the boot under the rider's left leg.

The rider was tall, young and cone-hatted. A purple silk handkerchief was knotted at the back of his neck. The free corners fluttered under his chin above a red shirt which was blocked off with black lines. He wore a vest, without which a cowpuncher considers himself only half clad, but no coat. His chaps of cowhide were luxuriantly covered with black hair.

The spotted horse did his best. Nevertheless the driver beat him right and left and fore and aft with a quirt. Supple-wristed, he swung it viciously. The pinto, pink nostrils stretched wide, swooped like a swallow over the railroad track a few yards in front of the Last Chance.

"Suppose some one steps on his toes?" queried a traveling man in a derby.

"He's a shootin' fool," returned the waiter, with a final sweep across the counter. He spoke in an undertone, for the wild rider, with a final "Yip-yip-yip!" pulled his horse to a stop in a cloud of dust at the door. "Killed two men the last three years. Got off on self-*dee*-fense."

"Whee-ee-ee!" The rider stepped down lightly as a dancer, dropped the reins over the panting pinto's head, and walked to

the open door. His black boots were absurdly small and high-heeled. He was pigeon-toed and bow-legged. He strutted slouchily. A cartridge-belt, filled to the last loop, encircled his slim waist and sagged to the holster on his right thigh.

The holster held a nickeled, bone-handled, frontier-type revolver, its curving hammer gleaming in the sunlight. The gun was of heavy caliber. Here was a Westerner who took no stock in the automatic, apparently.

HE leaned against the door-jamb for a moment, surveying the party within—a handsome youth, but with a thin-lipped mouth given too readily to sneering. His eye, the cool, keen gray eye of the killer, never opened very widely, turned but little, yet saw everything.

"Hello, Sam, yo' old polecat!" he greeted the man behind the counter. "Rustle me a quart of moonshine. And good stuff, too, or I'll come back and brand yo'."

Sam Turner smiled nervously. Everybody in Rodeo and vicinity knew the lunch-counter as only a mask for his real occupation, which was selling bootleg stuff. But he hated having it bellowed to the world. Even one of the harmless-looking gang in front of him might be a dry agent. His reply was intended to turn the subject.

"Hello, Pete. You leavin' the Bar-X?"

The cowpuncher grinned. "Leavin' 'em flat. McCaleb got gabby because I take a drink, the—" His profanity was more impressive because it was low-voiced and drawled. "I beat him up with my six-gun and come away."

He strolled along the line of stools. At the lower end on the last stool sat a mild-appearing little man of perhaps fifty. He wore olive-drab cotton clothes, belted jacket and trousers, and a floppy-brimmed, homely brown canvas hat. His eyes were protected by sun-glasses.

"Come on, you sawed-off, climb down," commanded the youth.

"Who, me?" queried the little man. "Why should I?"

"Because I tell you to," retorted Chihuahua, a nasty smile on his lips, a scowl on his brow. "I admire to set down on that stool. I'm tired o' standin'."

The other smiled amiably. "Aw, forget it," he advised.

As he took his empty cup from his lips, Chihuahua Pete, still with the sneering, contemptuous grin on his face, laid an ungentle hand on the collar of the ill-fitting coat. He jerked backward. The little man's hands flew up wildly. His coffee-cup clattered inside the counter and crashed on the floor. His feet thumped on the rough pine boards. The stool tipped over. The olive-drab shoulders jolted against the wooden wall of the Last Chance.

"My, my, I have an awful time teachin' yo' manners," observed Pete, evil in his sleepy gray eyes. "When you see a gentleman come in, you better offer him your chair, next time, stranger." He righted the stool, drew it to the counter, and sat down. "Come on, you Sam. Let's have a egg sandwich and some coffee. I'm a wild wolf from Battle Mountain. And this is my day to howl."

The little man did not seem annoyed, or even fussed. He sauntered forward, smiling a little, and took his place at the end of the counter, near Chihuahua's right hand. He rested his arms comfortably on the oak.

"Don't mention it," he said cheerfully. "I was through, anyway."

The cowpuncher searched his face swiftly for evidences of insolence, and seemed to find none. "That's the idee, tenderfoot," he patronized. "When yo' come to a he-man's country, you better keep yo' place. And dodge trouble!"

THE others were silent. It was evident to all of them that the lank young puncher was a bad one, inflamed by poisonous liquor, potentially as dangerous as a rattlesnake. He showed a characteristic of one type of half-drunken man—a bitter and unreasoning dislike of an utter stranger.

A still tongue: that was it. The same thought was in every mind. They must truckle to this deadly young bully, truckle and grovel, to get away from Rodeo without a tragedy. He was ripe for murder.

"Uh-huh," agreed the little man. He surveyed Chihuahua through his amber glasses. "Yes; I try to keep my place. But I don't like anyone to shove me out of it."

"For God's sake, Henry—" began another speaker, a larger one, at Pete's left hand. His clothing was like the little man's, except that he wore an army campaign hat instead of the ugly brown canvas.

Chihuahua Pete laid down his knife and fork. A sort of unbelieving jubilation in his manner and his repressed voice, he ignored the man sitting beside him and spoke to the smaller one:

"Say, you little runt, you meanin' to hint anything?"

"Not hinting—trying to tell you," was the good-natured reply. "So you're a bad wolf, are you? And you're Chihuahua Pete. I suppose they call you that because you skipped to Chihuahua to dodge the draft—hey, Peter! Keep your hand on the counter!"

There was a surprising change in the tone of the last sentence, a whiplike bite of command in it. Chihuahua's right hand twitched involuntarily, and came up again.

"I don't know what your game is, Henry," said the other khaki-clad man, "but I'm playing it." He tapped the counter gently with a black, squat, ugly-looking automatic. "Don't reach for that gun again, kid, or I'll blow your ribs out."

Chihuahua Pete gave him a quick, sidewise look and again turned his attention to the little man, standing almost at his elbow. His face was a trifle pale. Sam and the travelers were immovable and tense.

"Thanks, Ed," returned the little man placidly. "My game's to teach this young bully some manners. He demonstrated on me just now. Turn about's fair play.

"Now, you Chihuahua, I understand you're a killer—shot a couple of men in the back awhile ago, or something like that. You're all set to pick a fuss with me and drop me. Well, you get your chance. But so will I. Guess we better have that revolver off you while I make my proposition. That's fair, isn't it?" He appealed to the others.

A border booze-peddler has his failings, but a yellow streak is not one of them. Sam spoke up promptly: "Fair enough, stranger. No snap-shootin' in this place while I'm runnin' it." He lumbered round the end of the counter, brushed by the little man and approached Chihuahua. "Pete, I'll just take your gun." The cowpuncher sullenly permitted him to withdraw the pearl-handled weapon. The larger khaki-clad man, without waiting to be asked, surrendered his automatic.

"All right," announced Sam, disposing of the weapons under the counter. "Now, stranger, what you got on your mind?"

"Well, our young friend seems to have his fighting-clothes on today. He wants to hear some popping. I'm willing to oblige, so long as two pop, and not one." He turned to Pete, who sat immovable, hatred in his narrow eyes.

"I see you have a rifle on your saddle. I happen to have one with me. You take your gun and get down behind that log I saw out here by the road as we came up. That gives you an advantage. I'll lie out in the open a couple hundred yards away, say.

"When these boys give the word, we shoot. Start advancing whenever you feel like it. We keep on shooting till one has enough, or"—he shrugged his shoulders—"somebody gets hurt."

"For God's sake, Henry!" burst out the larger khaki-clad man. "That's murder! Think of your family."

"He started thinkin' too late!" gritted the cowpuncher, sliding off his stool. He confronted Henry balefully for a moment. "Go get your gun, you little— You've bought somethin'! I aint killed a jack-rabbit this week yet. But here's where I start."

"Just a minute," interposed Sam. "This play is on your own deal, stranger. But you ought to know what you're up against. Pete's a good rifle shot. He won the turkey-shoot over to Escandero last Christmas. You should be behind that log, not him. Or we'll dig up another one for you."

The little man was so ineffective, so insignificant-looking, so—so puttery, that they felt sorry for him. There was a chorus of assent from the travelers. He thanked them with a smile, then turned and led the way to the door.

"Oh, I'll worry along with old Betsey," he said cheerfully. "A log's such a nuisance to carry when you start to run!"

RODEO, smelling the trouble somehow, walked en masse up the railroad-track with the travelers. The town, looking for all the world like a movie-set, with its short line of one-story, false-fronted frame buildings, was left alone. The spectators took station midway between the antagonists, and perhaps fifty yards off the line of fire. The roadbed was somewhat above the general level, and they could see clearly.

Chihuahua Pete rested on one elbow behind the center of a fire-blackened log. The log was thick and substantial-looking. The little man, seemingly smaller and more

helpless than ever, sprawled on the open sand. His coat was off; it lay beside him, a heap of cartridges in clips of five, upon it. His left arm was in the sling of his rifle. Both men watched the group on the railroad, for a signal from Sam was to start the battle.

"Say, this aint legal!" declared the derby-hatted drummer to Ed, the smaller man's friend. "Why, this is duelin', contrary to the laws of these here United States! Yes sir! Why don't you do something about it? Why don't you stop it? What did you let him goad this drunken cowpuncher for?"

Ed turned a bitter eye on him. "Do something?" he echoed. "Say, I've been trying to do something with that little worm for forty years! He jumps from one trouble to another like a mountain-goat! Always jumps out again, though; I'll say that for him." This in grudging afterthought.

The traveling man clawed his sleeve. "But this is murder!" he protested. "He hasn't got a chance. This cowboy'll stiffen him, first shot."

Poor little Henry did seem pitifully exposed. From where they stood, he was clearly outlined in the bare sand. Ed grunted.

"The only way this bad man can hit him is shoot straight up in the air," Ed explained impatiently. "Henry's protected. There's thirty inches of sand in front of his head. That isn't what bothers me: I want to know what that little devil's going to do. I'm worrying about the other guy."

"Protected?" The traveling man squinted against the white, glaring light of sun on sand. "Say, he does seem to be behind a little riffle, at that. But thirty inches—gosh! That isn't much."

"He'll keep on fussing till he gets into a proper jam, sometime," went on the gloomy Ed, following his own train of thought. "You can't get away with funny-business forever. What's that? Aw, thirty inches is plenty. This crazy man's gun only shoots through fourteen."

"Oh," said the traveling man, opening his eyes. And "Oh," he said again, in enlightenment. "He knows, hey? That's the reason he looked at the cowboy's gun and ca'tridges, was it?"

"Sure," replied Ed, in scorn at the obviousness of the question. He returned to the puncher's original remark. "Do something with Henry? Say, you don't know what you're talking about! He's as stubborn as a mule. You'd think being turned down by three examining boards'd be enough for anybody. Now, wouldn't you —at his age? But no sir—"

"Ready?" roared Sam, and raised his arm.

A HURRYING series of reports rolled out over the desert wastes. The cowboy's gun spoke with the signal from the railroad track. The rifle was over the log; he worked it savagely. The spectators shuddered. It looked like certain death for Henry. Bullets kicked up the sand in front of his nose and to either side of him, and went tearing off down-country with the urgent whine of the ricochet. Ed chuckled.

"See?" he said gleefully to the traveling man. "Notice twigs falling from that dark-green bush about twenty yards in front of Henry?. Thought he'd do something like that. He's lined up behind it so this Chihuahua can't see him at all. Has to feel for him."

"But he can't see either, can he?" protested the traveler, mopping the sweatband of his derby.

"You bet he can see! He's low—under the branches. Now watch!"

Chihuahua's gun was empty. He started to reload, after a swift glance in the enemy's direction. There was a flat, brisk report from the little man's rifle. The watchers saw the bullet raise a spray of sand in front of the log. Then the hoarse note of a ricochet, as though there were a frog in the throat of the bullet.

"Cripes!" ejaculated Sam. "She went through!"

"Of course," retorted Ed. "Anyone could see that log was only a shell."

The cowpuncher was flurried. A burst of splinters on his side of the log and a few feet from him, made him unsteady. The long magazine of his sporting-rifle was only half-filled. But he threw the gun across the log and fired again, rapidly, frantically. This time, the onlookers noted, his aim was poor. The sand fountained up a long way from where the little man lay tucked in his hollow.

Again the quicker, sharper report of Henry's rifle—the long, splitting after-crack as the air closed behind the hurrying bullet, a dull interruption, and the ricochet in diminishing crescendo. Another

report, and another, and another at intervals reasonably close, but unhurried.

"The son-of-a-gun!" crowed the admiring bootlegger. "See what he's doin'? He's pushin' Chihuahua right out from behind that log!"

They looked, slack-jawed and swaying in their intensity, and saw that it was true. Henry's first shot pierced the outer end of Chihuahua Pete's barrier, well beyond his left elbow. But with each succeeding report the bullets crept closer, until splinters showered the puncher.

Busy as he was reloading, he gave ground. When he tried to take aim over the log, a bullet nudged him. He shifted a little, sidewise, wriggling his body on his elbows, and brought the barrel down again. The log ripped wickedly beside his sleeve. He hunched again. And again the remorseless Henry drove him over.

The last move thrust his right leg out from the shelter. There was a report from the Springfield, a gout of sand from just under the cowpuncher's boot, apparently, and a yell from the puncher himself. He crawled to his feet, bringing his rifle up with him. He aimed half-heartedly at Henry, threw the gun down in fright, and ran away. He limped as he ran. Though that, of course, might have been due to his boots hurting him.

HE fled directly to the rear, toward a friendly rise of ground. He was accompanied, shepherded and steered by the offerings of Henry. *Crr-ack*—and a bullet struck close beside him on the right. *Crr-ack*—and another threatened his toenails on the left. So it went, right and left, right and left, until the ridge intervened, and he flung himself headlong to safety.

A rush of cheering, babbling spectators engulfed the little man, who stood up to brush the sand off his clothes and put the remainder of his ammunition in the pockets of his ill-fitting jacket.

Ed's long legs brought him quickly. He grabbed his friend by the shoulder and shook him, half in fondness and half in vexation. "Henry," he said, "Henry, you damned little scoundrel!"

Henry's face was alight with a big idea. "Say, Ed, I'm going to ask the N. R. A. to stage a moving-target thing at Perry next year—you know, a silhouette on a sledge going off down the range away from you. It's bully sport. Keeps you busy raising her for increasing distance."

"Say, *hombre,* you sure can shoot!" panted Sam, thrusting out a beefy hand.

"Of course he can shoot," agreed Ed, impatience merely a cloak to his pride. "He was instructor in rifle-practice during the war. And he's just won the Governor's Trophy at the State Rifle Association matches over at Mineral Springs."

Henry's face fell. "Shoot, nothing!" he denied. "See the first one? Say, it hit the ground a foot this side of that log—yes sir, a foot! I was afraid to let myself out after that. Might have hurt that cowboy if I did."

"Maybe it's the gun, Henry," suggested Ed thoughtfully. They were oblivious now to the milling spectators.

"Well, maybe it is," said Henry pensively. "I got an unaccountable in the National Individual—and a couple of threes in the Palma tryouts that looked all right when they left. Maybe old Betsey's gone, at last." He smoothed the stock of the squat brown rifle caressingly.

"Say, mister," began the derby-hatted traveling man, elbowing his way forward, "you're a professional, aint you? You give exhibitions around the country, don't you?"

"Hell, no," replied the little man. "I run a grocery-store in Palmdale. And my friend here's a banker. Say, you ought to see him shoot! He's the boy that—"

"Aw, shut up," interrupted Ed, dragging Henry off toward the stage. The driver was honking impatiently.

"I don't get it," complained the derby-hatted one, falling into step with Sam. "He says he aint a profesh. A grocer, and shootin' like that! An amateur!"

"Ayah," replied Sam, wiping the sweat off his fat red forehead with a once-clean apron. "I've seen 'em, them kind o' birds, froggin' around, shootin' at paper targets out in the cactus. And I laughed at 'em for crazy fools. But I don't laugh no more, *hombre.*"

He looked after the pair ahead with a sort of proprietory pride. "Just ordinary citizens, but it shows what kind o' people us Americans are. Is it any wonder we won that damn' war?"

Watch for "Two-Fisted Administration," a splendid story of the Western forest rangers, in an early issue.

Easy Street Experts

"Wine-Vaulting Ambition" deals with a specially exciting adventure in rascality and includes a quaint assortment of crime and criminals.

By BERTRAM ATKEY

"IN our life a man must have a little stimulant now and again—as well as good food," said the Honorable John Brass emphatically, as he set down an empty liqueur glass. "And there goes the last of the old brandy," he added sadly.

Ex-Lord Fortworth—now his partner—nodded fiercely. Although some months had elapsed since he dropped his title in favor of the more modest name of Colonel Clumber, he found it difficult to bring himself to think economically before he spent money.

The two had not made a *coup* since they obtained the bulk of Lady Fortworth's jewels on the occasion of their bolting from the Fortworth mansion in Park Lane, and money was getting tight. They were holding the jewels until the hue-and-cry had died down sufficiently to enable them to get a fair price, and although, between them, they had some fifteen hundred pounds or so in ready money, that was not a large sum for men who dined in the thorough manner to which they had become accustomed, and who had a big motor, a flat in town, and a quiet, unobtrusive little country resort on the Hampshire-Surrey border to keep up.

It was at this stage that they discovered that the stock of "stimulants" at the flat was running out.

"What we ought to do is to lay in a thoroughly good supply of wines and stuff in the cellars at Purdston. We can supply the flat from there as we need it," said the Honorable John. "Only it'll cost us a thousand pounds that we can't afford."

"But we must have something to drink," said Lord Colonel Fortworth Clumber across the luncheon table.

"Well, then, we shall have to commit sacrilege, and rob a brewery," suggested Mr. Brass luminously.

The Colonel nodded.

"Sure," said he, "that's it. What's the matter with taking the car down to Purdston, running out from there one night to the wine-vaults at Andover, and bringing away a load or two of the pick of the stuff?"

The Honorable John's eyes brightened, and he raised them from the empty liqueur glass he had been wistfully regarding.

"Fort—Colonel, you're a man of ideas. I always knew that a man who'd gone through a course of financial work in the City would make the finest crook in the w o r l d—the—finest—c r o o k—in—the—world," he said enthusiastically. "Why haven't we done it before? You ought to know those works like a book—they belong to you by rights, if it wasn't for that lot of creditors. Brewery, distillery and wine-vaults, all in one, aint it? We might have a look at the safe, too, when we're there." He pressed the bell for Sing. "Pack our bags for a week in the country, Sing, my son," he commanded, "and order the car to be round from the garage in an hour's time."

"Yes, Master."

The bright, beady eyes of the saffron scoundrel twinkled as he remarked this sudden activity.

"You needn't look so delighted," commanded Mr. Brass genially. "You'll probably end by getting ten years. Hook it, now."

Sing let out a flicker of teeth as he smiled and noiselessly hooked it, while his masters proceeded to finish their cigars and take a short nap each, for sake of their digestions.

SOME three hours later the big, luxurious motor slid along the drive of the lonely and retired old house outside Purdston, which the partners had fitted up according to their own ideas of what a headquarters should be.

It was a convenient place from which to rob the huge brewery of which, in his palmy days, Lord Fortworth had been chairman and controlling shareholder. The works were at Crayton, just outside Andover, and Purdston was some twenty-five miles or so away.

A stout, very polite manservant of about thirty years received them at the door and took the car round to the garage. This was Mr. Bloom, an ex-butler of Fortworth's, who had been surprised halfway through an ingenious little forgery scheme involving the borrowing of his master's name. He had escaped in the nick of time; but shortly after Fortworth's failure the ex-millionaire had encountered him, very poverty-stricken, on the pavement, and had put him and his wife into the house at Purdston to look after the place, at the low figure that the lack of a reference made Bloom only too anxious to accept.

The partners had discussed their plans on the way down, and after an unambitious dinner and a couple of cigars, they had the motor round, and with a final injunction to Bloom to keep sober if he valued his job (and liberty, for Fortworth still held the attempted forgery over his head), they started for Andover, planning to reach the works at about twelve o'clock.

There was a bright moon; the roads were good; and the car ran silent and tranquil as a happy dream.

Mr. Brass sniffed the cool night air appreciatively.

"I feel good tonight," he said, "good and lucky and greedy. I've got an idea we're going to make a haul. I suppose there's some pretty hot stuff lying idle in the vaults, aint there?"

Fortworth nodded solemnly over the steering-wheel.

"There's a bin of '42 brandy in the spirit vaults, worth pounds a bottle," he replied reverently. "We used to try it at board meetings sometimes. And there's some wonderful East India Madeira. It's not a wine that's so very popular, for some foolish reason or other, but—well, you and I know all that's necessary to know about Madeira. And some of the white wines—particularly an '81 Château d'Yquem—are worth attention. The best of the champagne is good,—I'm talking of the cream of the vaults,—and there's a curious old port that we paid a fancy price for; there was only fifty dozen, and we'll grab the lot, if the directors have left any for us to grab. It's a heavy wine—a very heavy wine to an ordinary man. I guess we shall find it a nice, reasonable port."

The Honorable John sighed regretfully.

"I wish we had a motor pantechnicon," he said, "and were able to take our time."

Clumber-Fortworth agreed.

"Still, this is a big car," he added, "and if all goes well, we'll call again some day. We turn in here."

HE switched off his lights, and the motor swung silently off the main road toward a number of big buildings that stood up blackly in the moonlight.

"They're working in the brewery,—that big place with the lights away to the right, —but we turn off for the wine-vaults before we get very near the beer department," muttered Fortworth. "We shall have to chance the watchman. If we meet him, leave him to me. I did him a good

turn in the wealthy weather—when he needed it."

He turned again, ran right up under a long, low building, and completing a circle, backed the car into the heavy shadows of a paved courtyard. They alighted quickly as firemen, and silent as only fat men and thieves when they wish.

Fortworth led the way along the side of the building, and stopped some fifteen yards from the motor at a small door.

"Here we are!" he said. "It's locked; but there are no bolts on the inside, if I remember rightly."

Mr. Brass bent to the keyhole, taking a bunch of rather thick skeleton keys from his pocket. Before starting work on the lock, he tentatively turned the handle, and —the door opened!

"It's not locked," said the Honorable John, and stepped in.

"Ought to be," grunted Fortworth, following.

Sing was about to enter in his turn, blandly smiling at the thought of the opportunity to quench his patient Celestial thirst, when Mr. Brass leaned back and, over Fortworth's shoulder, gave him his instructions in a sharp whisper.

"You mind the door, Sing, and keep your lamps trimmed for the watchman. If he comes along, keep inside till he's past. If he spots the motor, hop out and stop him from giving the alarm."

"Killee him, Master?"

"No, you ape! I've spoken to you about your 'killee' tricks before. You start killing anybody while you're in my employment, my primrose coon, and I'll put a magazineful of bullets into your clockwork. See? When I say 'stop him,' I mean trip him up and gag him. When you hear me whistle, come quietly on down the passage for a bit of weight-lifting."

He flashed a discreet ray from his electric torch through the gloom ahead.

"Lead on, Magog!" he said, with a dim idea that he was quoting poetry to Fortworth; and the two moved quietly down the passage. At the end of it—some six yards along—they came to a small square recess. The Honorable John flashed the light in, and both men stiffened. In the recess was a plain deal table and an ordinary Windsor chair with wooden arms. A man was sitting in the chair, his arms sprawling across the table, and his head on his arms, dead asleep. On the table was a bottle of milky-looking tea, half empty.

"The watchman," whispered Fortworth.

The Honorable John tiptoed up to the table, took up the bottle, and smelt it.

"It's tea, all right," he said, and looked curiously at the sleeping man, listening to his slow, heavy breathing. "But not the kind of tea I care about myself!" He craned over the man's flattened shoulder and sniffed. "Drugged!" he said.

"Gee!" muttered Fortworth softly. In the white light of the flash-lamp the two looked at each other interrogatively. "Queer, aint it?" whispered Fortworth.

"Maybe some one else on the same business as ours," replied the Honorable John. "I've known it happen before. But—we'll soon see."

He backed down the passage and uttered a low, soft whistle that resembled the sound of wind passing a keyhole as much as anything. Sing floated noiselessly up, and Mr. Brass flashed his light over the sleeper.

"See that man?" he said. "It's the watchman—and he's drugged, Sing. You stand here in the dark and watch the watchman—until I want you."

Sing took up a coldly businesslike position behind the watchman, ready to grip him the instant he stirred, and the Honorable John turned away. Fortworth was already moving to a door facing the recess. But he did not touch the handle. He waited for his partner. All that sort of delicate, soundless business was in charge of Mr. Brass. When Fortworth had been one of the money-captains, he exacted obedience from his assistants, and now he was an assistant, he had the sense to extend obedience to his superior—his superior in practical burglary, at any rate.

UNDER the Honorable John's firm but suave manipulation the door opened into a room in pitch darkness.

"The General Manager's room," breathed Fortworth. "There's a door opposite, leading into the counting-house—where the safe is. The entrance to the cellars is on the far side of the counting-house. If there's anybody here, they're at the safe."

"Listen!" counseled the Honorable John sharply.

His fingers closed on Fortworth's arm like steel hooks. They stood in the dark, listening. Then, very faint, came a quiet, unexpected sound—as of someone sobbing quietly in the counting-house.

It is a very disconcerting noise to hear

at black midnight in a huge, echoing building—the sound of grief. The Honorable John lighted up the door for half a second and then crept across. Fortworth waited where he was. He heard nothing, but presently he saw a faint, perpendicular knife-edge of light appear on the blackness. His partner was opening the door with the silence and infinitesimal movement of a cat stalking an unsuspecting prey. The sound of subdued weeping grew louder, and the light-streak broadened fractionally, until it was some two inches wide. Then it ceased, and Fortworth suddenly became aware of a shadow at his side.

"Go over and take a look," came the Honorable John's keen whisper in his ear. "This is a new kind of puzzle to me."

Together they stole over and peered through.

All they saw was the slim, black-frocked figure of a woman bending over a big roll-top desk near the fireplace, hiding her face in her hands and crying hopelessly to herself. Her hat was off, and the gleam from a small bicycle lamp on the top of the desk fell full upon her hair, burnishing it to a bright gold.

"Why, it's Eily—poor little kid!" whispered Fortworth to himself. "What's wrong, anyway?"

"That's Eily Desmond—the most reliable little dame at figures I've ever struck. She came to me, and I liked the look of her and the way of her. Gave her a trial, and she knocked spots off most of the men. So I made her assistant cashier—though crying here at midnight by the light of a bicycle lamp is no part of her duties."

"How about those a c c o u n t-books, though?" whispered the Honorable John. The desk at which the girl sat was piled with big businesslike books.

"Don't know. Let's ask," said Fortworth, and walked into the counting-house as though he were still monarch of the place. He placed his hand on the girl's shoulder. "Why, Eily, what's the matter? You mustn't cry like this," he said, more kindly than he usually spoke to any woman—not excluding his wife that had been.

THE girl looked up with a start. The Honorable John, his electric lamp in full flood, saw that she was very pretty, in a sweet, wistful, clinging way—only now her face was pale and drawn with weeping.

"It—it's Lord Fortworth!" she said incredulously.

"That's right, Eily Desmond—bankrupt old Lord Fortworth come back again," said the ex-baron.

But he spoke absently, for his eyes were skimming a sheet of foolscap paper that lay on the desk before the girl, starred with tears. His brows were drawn together in a black frown.

The girl started again, and reached out for the sheet of paper.

"Oh, please, please don't look—" she began.

But Fortworth caught her hands quickly, though not ungently.

"I must, Eily. It's my business, I think."

The girl lost control of herself suddenly. She fought to free her hands.

"You mustn't—you mustn't," she panted.

The Honorable John reached swiftly under her arms and switched the paper off the desk. Fortworth dropped the girl's hands and turned to his partner. His eyes were suddenly bloodshot, and Mr. Brass saw that they glittered with a pale mad light that sent a thrill through him. His hard mouth and jaw were set like stone.

"Give me the paper, Brass," he said. "I'm ripe for murder!"

Eily Desmond covered her face with her hands again and groaned. It was a queer, plaintive little, hunted sound, such as a hare coursed to the limit of its strength—with death ravening a yard behind it—might utter, and it went to the heart of the Honorable John Brass like a knife. No man ever was more ready to help those who needed help (or to help himself from those who needed no help) than Mr. Brass.

"Don't cry, Eily, dear," he whispered. "It'll all come right—we'll see to that, Fortworth and me. Come on, Eily." He patted her shoulder. "You mustn't mind Fortworth. That's his way—besides, he wasn't thinking of you when he spoke about murder. You've got nothing to worry about. I'm here—and Sing's in the corridor outside," he added desperately, as the grief of the girl showed no sign of abating.

"Sheldrupp, by God! Sheldrupp!"

The name came from behind them like a snap from a whip. The girl raised her head with a start, and both she and Mr. Brass turned to Fortworth, who was smiling cruelly at the paper in his hand. He looked across at Eily Desmond's frightened face, and his lips softened.

"I say, Eily, tell me why you came here

like this—midnight, bicycle lamp, drugged watchman, and all that—to get out this list of—things?" he asked.

His tone was kind, but his eyes pierced her.

Suddenly she flushed—flushed from the curls at her forehead to the lace at her slender throat. She said nothing. Fortworth drew his own conclusion from the flush.

"Come, Eily—I want to be friends with you. You're in love with Sheldrupp, and don't know how to tell me. Is that it?"

She nodded slightly, and Fortworth made a little sound of regret with his tongue.

"The man's a thief," he said. "You must learn to forget him—he's not good enough for you. Is he still general manager—under the liquidator?"

The girl nodded again.

"And he's been faking things." His eyes skimmed over the list once more. "Why, the grafter must have been dipping up the money with a bushel measure! But why are you getting out this list, Eily? Every item is an I O U for penal servitude. Didn't you know that? Oh, you can't go on loving a crook like that, my dear. I thought he was planning to marry the rich old widow woman the other side of Andover—Mrs. Whatsername—Melford. He told me so months ago. Is that all off?"

"No." The girl's reply came very faint. "They are going to be married next week."

"What!" Fortworth looked puzzled for a moment; then his heavy face lit up with a sort of savage triumph. He winked ferociously but furtively at Mr. Brass. "I see. Poor little Eily!" he said gently. "The fool threw you over for Missus Moneybags—not knowing that you knew about these secret commissions and things he had been taking and faking, and at the last moment you lost your head a little and decided to let him see that you had him in the hollow of your hand. Only we came and interrupted you—and saved you, Eily. We saved you sure from Sheldrupp, for he would have married you rather than risk this list—and you'd have been done for. You'd have hated him in a week—for the man's a swine, my dear. You're miles too good for him." He took the limp hand of the girl in his own. "Give it up, little Eily Desmond," he said. "We'll look after you—find you a nice boy, straight like an arrow, and blue eyes and curly hair, for a husband. —Wont we, Brass? You mustn't think any more about these brewery hogs. You'll give him up now?"

Very slowly she nodded.

"That's a good girl." He shook her hand and became businesslike. "Now, Eily Desmond, I want you to do me a small favor. Give me out the books and letters and anything you've got relating to this list, and let me run through 'em. While I'm doing that, you show my friend here the way to a few wines." He took a catalogue from a table close by, and rapidly ticked off a number of items therein. "There, Eily,—now you show him and his servant the way to the wines I've marked. I'll take all the responsibility. . . . . Yes sir, and all the wines if I could carry 'em," he added under his breath.

THE girl obediently brought him the books and documents he asked for, supplementing them with a thick package of letters which were the outcome, apparently, of her own private inquiries, and leaving him alone poring over these in the light of the bicycle lamp, she led the Honorable John and Sing through the wine vaults.

For the next half-hour Mr. Brass kept the Chinaman busy giving a mighty lifelike imitation of an overworked baggage camel. Case after case of expensive wine was carried swiftly, silently and gladsomely out to the big motor, until at last the car would take no more. It was filled to the brim with bottles, quickly but carefully packed in straw. A shallow hole had been left for one passenger,—for appearance's sake,—and two fur rugs were flung carelessly over all. Then the Honorable John and the girl went back to Fortworth. He had almost finished what he had set himself to do. He asked one or two quick questions, and then folded up his papers and put them away.

"And now you must run away, Eily. It's past two o'clock. Have you got your bicycle? Yes. All right, then. How about your landlady? You've arranged all that, have you? Thinks you're at a party, eh? Well, the sooner you're in bed, the better for those white cheeks, my dear. So good-by. Say nothing at all about tonight to anybody, and it'll all come right. We shall write to you or come and see you soon—when we've found that boy." He chuckled. "Good night, Eily."

They escorted the girl to the door and watched her ride away. Then they re-

turned to the watchman, poured away the remainder of the drugged tea, removed all traces of their visit, closed the doors, and climbing into the car, glided silently out into the main road, with Sing sitting like a Chinese Bacchus amidst the wine. A little way along, they switched on their lamps, and without a hitch or mishap boomed home to a supper which both honestly felt they had earned. They wound up with a bottle of the Imperial Tokay. Its jolting had not improved it, but nevertheless it was imperial enough to enable them to perceive that the staircase seemed to have taken a Futurist angle as they went upstairs to bed.

FORENOON of the following day they devoted to figures—clouds of them, like gnats in a sunbeam. And the sunbeam shone full upon one Gregory Sheldrupp—general manager of the Imperial Supply Breweries Company, Limited, of Crayton.

Briefly, it was abundantly clear that Mr. Sheldrupp had for some years past been laboring under the delusion that the I. S. B. Co. Ltd., was in business to act as a kind of automatic annuity-supply to Gregory Sheldrupp. He had robbed the Company with both hands. Secret commissions, faked purchases, discounts that came back to the giver like a boomerang, advance payments on account for visionary plant, contracts renewed (for heavy secret payments) for months beyond the time-limit, and a score of similar subterranean thefts, some of which had appeared in the books—as, for instance, purchases at prices considerably above market value, and some of which did not appear in any of the firm's books at all. But the letters which Eily Desmond had received from various people and firms shed daylight on these latter transactions. The girl must have worked desperately to find out what the letters proved.

At last, just as Bloom ballooned silently into the room and announced lunch, Lord Fortworth put down his pen and stood up.

"Well, that hippopotamus-mouthed hog has taken a bite the size of a new moon out of the Company—as near twenty-four thousand pounds as you can get. Proved pinchings, mind you! It's made up in about forty items,—some big, some small,—but the penalty of each is sure penal servitude. We must have him pulled, Brass."

The Honorable John smiled.

"Pulled!" he said. "I do not *pense*, as they say in France. You leave this to me from now onward. There's money in it. Let's have lunch now, and when we've taken the edge off our appetite, I'll tell you the way we must get it."

THAT night Mr. Gregory Sheldrupp was dining at "Missus Moneybags'," as Lord Fortworth had so coarsely put it. The lady, certainly, was distressingly wealthy, even as she was likely to be profoundly intolerant of the lapses of her fiancé from the straight but narrow path of rectitude; but save for these little idiosyncrasies she was an average, ordinary, everyday woman, kind, fond of entertaining, interested in her clothes, and fond of the homage of good-looking, youngish men. Practically every hard-up "stiff" (from Lord Fortworth's extensive vocabulary) in the south of England had proposed to her. But the happiness of settling down within easy reach of that bank-balance seemed to have been reserved for Gregory Sheldrupp—who, when he had seen the opportunity, had incontinently broken off his engagement to pretty Eily Desmond.

There were some fifteen guests, including Sheldrupp, at Crayton House, the residence of the wealthy Mrs. Melford, and they were just toying with their dessert in the faintly flushed and slightly overfed manner for which these country-house spreads are not infrequently peculiar, when a big, powerful motor drove up to the door, with two burly, official-looking men in front and a hard-looking yellowish companion behind.

One of those in front, and the tough-featured gentleman at the back, alighted in a quick, businesslike style. The driver—goggled and peak-capped and heavily coated—remained in his seat. Without hesitation the two proceeded to the door, and while one knocked peremptorily, the other played a short but doubtless effective solo on the door-bell push.

Just before they did so, the burlier of the two leaned over to the other, whispering:

"Sing, my lad, if you mess this up I shall take a chisel and mallet to you when we get back to Purdston. See? So mind your orders—and stick to 'em."

Sing, in regulation boots and clothes which, although quite plain, had a pronounced official look about them, nodded and squared himself. He did not speak.

It was one of his orders not to speak that night.

The door opened, and a footman framed himself in the doorway. The Honorable John and Sing stepped in without words.

MR. BRASS fixed the footman with an eye of steel.

"Mr. Gregory Sheldrupp here, my man? If so, fetch him. Tell him quietly that Detective Inspector Irons, of Scotland Yard, would like to speak to him."

The footman opened his mouth, observed that in the face of this peremptory caller with the sinister name that caused him to close it, and with a muttered, "Yes sir," departed, leaving them alone in the hall.

The Honorable John's swift eye fell on a gold-mounted jewel-set fan lying slightly under an oak seat at one side of the big hall. Obviously it had been dropped unnoticed by some one who had been sitting on the seat. He picked it up, with a muttered comment on the untidiness of the rich, and put it—in his pocket. He was a most fastidiously tidy man, was Mr. Brass.

Presently the footman returned, followed by Sheldrupp, a tall, fair fellow, handsome in the florid, full-faced style that in the long run develops into terraces of double chins and a port wine complexion, with blue eyes that were bold enough in a watchful sort of way. He had just reached the age when a man begins to speculate in hair-tonics as a sort of insurance against the time when the leaves begin to fall, and and he looked precisely the sort of man who would be likely to get a sixty-horsepower clutch on the heart of a rich widow with a bias towards plainness of face. He came forward briskly enough—the color on his cheeks going a little patchy as his quick eyes took in the grim, unfriendly aspect of the callers.

"Ah, Inspector!" he said quickly. "You want to see me about that insurance case, I suppose?" His eyes implored Mr. Brass to avoid a scene before the footman, and another of his kind who had arrived from nowhere. "Will you and your assistant come this way?"

The Honorable John nodded dourly, and Sheldrupp led them to a small room opening off the hall. He carefully closed the door and turned—very pale now.

"Well, Inspector Irons?"

"I have a warrant for your arr—" began Mr. Brass metallically, but Sheldrupp threw out his hand defiantly.

"Oh, never mind the *recitative!*" he said cynically. "You can do it well enough for an encore, I don't doubt. What do I do now?"

"Oh, you just come along—that's the usual thing nowadays," said the Honorable John. "You come along with me—I've got a car outside."

He put his hand in his pocket and withdrew a pair of well-polished handcuffs that shone evilly and suggestively in the electric light. Sheldrupp's face changed.

"Oh, hang it all—can't you manage without those beastly things?" he said, agitated. "Look here, who has put you on to all this?" he added quickly. "At whose instance are you arresting me? The Board of the I. S. B. Co.?"

The Honorable John shook his head.

"No—Lord Fortworth."

"Lord Fortworth!" echoed Sheldrupp. "Why, he's bolted! Absconded! The police want him as well."

"That's all right, my friend. The police know where to find him when the time comes, but we want a few of the crooks that robbed him first. You leave the police to attend to their own business—which at the moment is to land you in the refrigerator."

SHELDRUPP made one more effort. He came close to Mr. Brass and whispered furiously in his ear.

"Look here, Inspector," said Sheldrupp. "This is hard luck. I've had about thirty thousand quid from the Company all told. If I go to jail, the Company'll get nothing—not a farthing. If they wait till next week, I shall be controlling nearly half a million of money—I'm marrying it. And the Company will get back every penny, plus interest. Give me a week—I'll make it worth your while, too. I'll see the Board tomorrow and fix them. They stand to make thirty thousand quid by calling you people off. They'll not get an oat by putting me in jail. It's too well hidden, I assure you. And you're on a thousand quid to nothing if you can fix it! Say you couldn't find me—anything. I'll lie low till I fix the Board. Come now, is it a go?"

The Honorable John pondered it with deliberation that must have been maddening to the man watching him.

"Well, is it a go?" demanded Sheldrupp.

"I've got my job to think of," Mr. Brass reminded him.

"Oh, well, say two thousand for you, then!" snapped Sheldrupp impatiently.

The Honorable John looked at him heavily.

"And my pension," he said.

"Three thousand!"

Detective Irons slowly shook his head.

"Then there's my wife," he mused aloud.

Sheldrupp stamped with impatience.

"Oh, say four thousand!"

But still Mr. Brass shook his head.

"Well, how much do you want, you shark?" demanded Sheldrupp, and the Honorable John's face brightened up a little.

"I want the lot," he said frankly.

Sheldrupp looked dazed.

"But how about the Company? If I give it to you instead of refunding to them, I'm no better off. I shall only get another detective down for me," he said.

The Honorable John raised his hand.

"Now, I ask you—is that any of my business? Is it? Your debts to the Company is your business. Your debts to me is my business. Please yourself whether you pay the Company or whether you don't. But if we do business, I've got to have my little bit."

Sheldrupp glared at him.

"It means paying twice over—once to the Company, once to you. Sixty thousand quid!"

"What do you keep on dragging your private affairs into it for?" said Mr. Brass.

Sheldrupp gave in—not gracefully.

"All right, you wolf!" he said. "How do you want it? I must have time."

"I'm no wolf," replied the Honorable John. "I'm your best friend. I'll give you time. I want ten thousand down—first thing tomorrow. And five thousand a month—kindly close your phonograph till I've finished speaking—five thousand a month for four months. And I'll fix him—no extra charge!" he indicated Sing. "I'll keep off arresting you for a week," he said, "and it's for you to arrange with the Board within that time. After that you will be safe enough—unless you try any funny business with me," he added with sudden menace. "I'll take your promissory notes now—so that it doesn't slip my memory."

He produced a packet of stamped forms and a fountain pen.

"I've sold my reputation cheap," he said regretfully as he handed them over.

"Your what?" sneered Sheldrupp.

But he filled in the forms.

"And now get out of my sight," he said, his voice thick with rage.

The Honorable John read the notes, folded them, and tucked them away in his pocket.

"Yes," he said blandly, "I expect you feel as though you would like to be alone for a little while, don't you?"

SHELDRUPP rang the bell for the footman without answering. The servant appeared.

"Well," said Mr. Brass, taking his hat, "good night, Mr. Sheldrupp. I will keep in close touch with you—and shall hope to see you at least once a month—until the affair is settled. You may rely upon that. Good night."

Sheldrupp growled "Good night!" and the pair followed the footman. Not till the motor was halfway down the drive did Fortworth speak.

"Get anything?" he muttered.

"Thirty thousand—ten down and five thousand a month."

"Good Lord, you're a genius! Don't speak. Let it soak in! And I wanted to waste the man on Dartmoor."

"We shall only get the ten," said the Honorable John. "He'll bolt as soon as we draw the ten tomorrow. We must warn Mrs. Melford. Can't let a woman marry a crook like that without warning!"

"True—true," agreed Fortworth. "Still, ten thousand looks good to me."

Presently he added ruminatingly:

"Eily deserves a share—and she shall have it. How about a share for the Chink—Sing?"

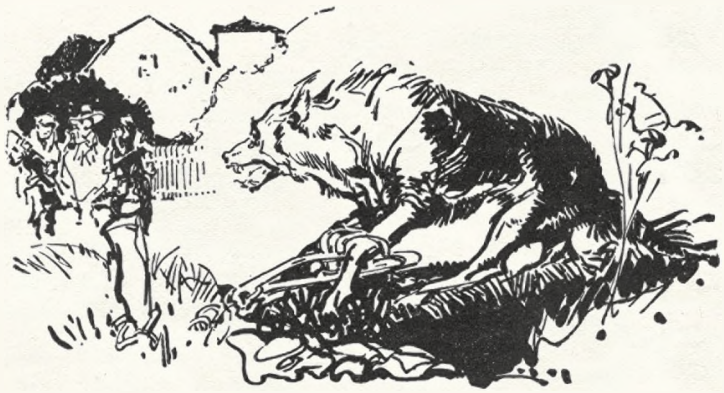
"Sing!" echoed the Honorable John. "That lemon! Sing can go to the devil. What do I pay him eight bob a week for?"

Sing, sitting behind, heard, for he had ears like a bat—both in size and quality. But he only smiled blandly. He knew all about his master. While the Honorable John lasted, Sing was perfectly aware that he was provided for—both as regards work and money.

He chuckled a heathen chuckle, and settled down to take a short nap.

And the big car slid silently on through the night to the comfortable retreat at Purdston.

"The Deed Hannaford Settlement," another amusing demonstration of the gentle art of living by one's wits, will be Mr. Atkey's contribution to our forthcoming February issue.



Lobo's Return

A grim little Western episode without sugar—but a story you will recall with lively appreciation.

By FORRESTINE C. HOOKER

LOBO limped painfully over the sharp rocks. His head swung low; his eyes were bloodshot, and his dry tongue lolled between his gleaming teeth.

Two days and nights had passed since he had found water. He was not hungry. Jackrabbits are easily caught when a wolf is not heavy from drinking. Lobo was very, very thirsty. He sniffed the hot air. No scent of water rewarded him.

Wearily he plodded along.

Over the crests of high mountains, down the slopes into dry cañons where horned toads scurried, or the whirr of a hidden rattler sounded, he padded stubbornly. His sharp nose was pointed toward the north—pointed toward a place where he knew that he would find water.

The lame paw grew more painful. He stopped and lay down so that he could lick and soothe the place where no hair covered an old scar. But his hot, dry tongue scraped the tender spot. Lobo arose slowly and went on his way. The stones burned his feet; sand sifted between his raw toe-pads and cut the sensitive flesh. The dry air in his lungs increased his thirst.

But he knew that each step, however painful, was bringing him nearer a small adobe house where a gaunt, flapping windmill creaked complainingly as it sent spurts of water into big troughs.

Last summer green grass had covered valleys and mountains, and water had filled the rock tanks in the cañons. Cattle had wandered contentedly, or rested in shady places, chewing their cuds and watching sleek calves that romped in groups.

It had been then that Lobo, for the first time, had ventured curiously from the mountains and down into the heart of a wide valley, lured by the gleam of a lake.

SMOKE drifted lazily from the chimney of a little house. Lobo feared men, but he was very thirsty and knew that he would have to travel a long distance back to the nearest rock tank. Cautiously he sneaked to the edge of the pond, keeping his eyes steadily on the house, until he had slaked his thirst. Then satisfied, he turned with dripping jaws to seek once more the shelter of cañons and mountains far from the trails of his enemy, man.

Crash! Snap!

Lobo leaped and yelped in agony. Sharp steel teeth clutched his front paw. With all his strength he jerked to free it, but each struggle caused the points to sink more deeply into his flesh. Maddened by the pain, he bit and chewed his slender leg just above the jaws of the trap. His white teeth scraped the bone and the tendons.

A man stood at the cabin door.

"A wolf! A loafer wolf!"

Lobo heard the shout. He saw three

men running toward him. Something that was like a long, shining stick was in the hand of one. Lobo saw and understood.

He stopped chewing his leg and squatted on his haunches, while his green eyes turned slowly, fearlessly from one grim face to the other. The men talked. He read their faces. Lobo was only a wolf, but he did not cringe.

Something fluttered back of the men. They stopped talking. Then a voice different from anything Lobo had ever heard began to speak quickly. Lobo looked at the pink flutter, his eyes traveled upward until, for the first time in his life, he saw a woman's face.

"You shall not kill him!" she cried defiantly, pushing between the men. "It is cowardly to trap, then kill! You shall not do it, I say!"

She stamped a little foot. Her outstretched arms made a barrier between the men and the animal. Lobo's wonder made him forget the ache in his paw. She turned and looked at him, saw the mutilated flesh where the teeth of the wolf had cut beside the teeth of steel.

"Oh, you poor thing!" her voice quivered, and her eyes filled with tears.

Then he who held the gun smiled at her and nodded. "All right! The boss says to turn him loose!"

Very cautiously two crowbars were inserted between the steel teeth that gripped the animal's leg. Lobo paid no attention to the men. He watched the woman's face. He knew men.

Click!

He leaped away free and darted toward the distant hills, glancing back often as he ran. He saw the men walking back to the house, a flutter of pink with them.

And after that night, he had returned again and again, unafraid, because the woman was there. He soon learned that when she fed her dog she would toss a bit of meat for the wolf while she would hold the dog's collar. After that, she would bring out a deep dish and place it on the ground, and then a crow with a broken upper beak would fly from the top of the mud corral and eat the soft food while she and her dog kept the chickens away.

Winter screamed on the tops of the mountains and rushed down the broad valleys. Lobo sought the shelter of the deepest cañons, and the spirits of his ancestors drove him along distant trails. His mate traveled with him.

Then spring passed by, and summer returned. Lobo trod the trail alone. He had lingered beside his dead mate until the drought had forced him to search for water. Slowly he had groped his way. Sometimes he found water, but more often there was only a dry mud-hole with shriveled carcasses of cattle lying beside it.

NOW Lobo pressed on. He was going back to where the woman lived—to where there were water, food and safety.

The sun was setting as he reached the place where he could look down upon the house. Eagerly he pushed forward. His body was drawn and gaunt; his legs trembled with weakness. Sometimes he stopped and stood with head hanging low; then with an effort he would stumble up the rugged hill. At intervals his tongue twisted around his gray nose. He gained the top of the hill.

No smoke curled from the chimney of the home. No windmill rose high against the angry red sunset.

Lobo limped nearer.

The doors of the house were gone. Black holes yawned where window-curtains had fluttered. He crawled warily past brown stalks that had once been masses of gay flowers. Lobo peered into a room. Nothing was there—nothing but bare walls.

As he shivered and turned wearily away, he stumbled, and stopping, sniffed at a bunch of draggled black feathers—the crow with the broken beak.

Then the wolf skulked slowly toward the pond. Only a dry mud-hole was there. The troughs were empty. Withered leaves fluttered from the bare branches of a dead willow tree. They fell upon a recently made mound. The wolf nosed it curiously, but the leaves did not tell him that the woman slept beneath the mound.

The sun dropped below the horizon. Twilight and pale stars beckoned the night.

Lobo squatted beside the mound of earth, and his hot tongue twisted crookedly over his nose. His sunken green eyes looked at the mud-hole, looked at the deserted home; and fear—fear of something he could not understand—shriveled his heart as the hot, dry wind had shriveled the leaves on the mound of earth.

The hair on his back rose in a stiff ridge.

Everywhere was silence—silence, desolation and death.

Lobo lifted his sharp nose toward the gray sky and pale stars, and howled.

In the Path of the Liners

A splendid story of adventure with the swordfishing fleet off Georges Bank, by the author of "East of the Lightship."

By WARREN ELLIOT CARLETON

"SUFFERIN' nursefish! The ile's tormented low ag'in!"

Cap'n Sam Doane's keen brown eyes snapped as his well-built, tall, erect figure rose from the oil-tank in the cabin which supplied fuel for the *Agatha's* engine. He chewed rapidly at the fragments of a tobacco quid, his grayish mustache contrasting with his sun-bronzed, honest gaunt face and prominent nose. Although in the fifties, he looked much younger.

"Good Lord—dry ag'in?" asked Mel Frost, standing behind the skipper among the seven fishermen who had shipped with Cap'n Sam for the season's first swordfishing trip off Georges Bank. "That's queer. You found the ile low twice before the past month, aint you, Skipper?"

"Yeah—but not so low as 'tis now. Somebody's either been swipin' the ile, or —or usin' the *Agatha* unbeknownst to me," mused Cap'n Sam, his voice a little husky with the cold that had kept him in bed the previous night. He caught cold easily when he was ashore. But he knew it would disappear when the *Agatha* was out of sight of land. She was now tied up at Robbins' Wharf, in Freetown.

"Funny goin's-on along the coast the last month or so," ventured Lew Crane. "I've heerd yarns told 'bout vessels bein' seen sailin' out nights, s p e c i a l l y in thick weather. You don't s'pose—"

"I can't keep track o' my schooner nights," broke in Sam. "'Twould be an easy matter for some one to take her out without me knowin' it—last night, f'r instance. Even with her hold loaded with ice an' grub, she's got a big deck space—enough for smugglin', I cal'late, if that's what you're hintin' at."

The *Agatha,* to Cap'n Sam's knowledge, had not left her dock in Freetown, her southeastern Massachusetts home port, for a month or more, when Sam finished flounder-dragging with his new crew. His old crew had shipped from Gloucester a few months ago, winter fishing on the southern edge of Grand Bank, all but Perry White, who had shipped from Boston for the same

kind of fishing—the most heartbreaking seafaring since the old whaling days. They would return from Gloucester, and Perry from Boston, that very day to ship with Sam until September during the swordfishing season.

BUT Cap'n Sam had a surprise in store for his old crew when they arrived in Freetown. He was still a little disgruntled because they had not stayed with him that winter to drag for flounders, thus necessitating his breaking in a new crew. That was not the reason, however, for his turning his old crew over to Cap'n Ben Weston as the new crew of Ben's new schooner *Sunflower*.

He hoped his former crew would be satisfied with the change, that they would have the same sympathy for Cap'n Ben that Sam had. Early the previous fall, Ben had lost his old schooner *Voyager* on the treacherous shoals of Sable Island. Although none of his Bluenose crew were lost in that disaster, it had almost ruined Ben financially. The small insurance he had collected from her enabled him partly to buy the new two-masted *Sunflower*. But he had been forced to mortgage her and his Freetown home heavily to pay for her. Ben was crushingly in debt.

Cap'n Sam wanted Ben, his old schoolmate and neighbor, to own the *Sunflower* clear. And it was wholly for making Ben's first swordfishing trip that season a triumph that he had turned his old crew over to him. Ben had been unable to get an experienced crew for the new *Sunflower*. He and Sam were both growing older, and when seafaring men are in the fifties, debts are harder to pay off, somehow, than when they are younger.

"You take my old crew, Ben," Sam told his old neighbor, "an' stick close to the *Agatha* on your first trip o' the season. You an' me will be first in the Boston market with the first swordfish o' the season, an' collect for 'em the season's top price. I've been doin' it now for three years, 'cause I've got the best nose for fish in the fleet. The price you git for them fish will more'n put you on your feet."

Ben objected at first. Not only did he think Sam was making too great a sacrifice by giving him the experienced crew that had helped Sam keep up his record as high-liner of the fleet; but he also knew that Sam did most of his fishing directly in the path of the eastbound transatlantic shipping, and that any schooner in that path stands a mighty good chance of being run down and blotted off the face of the waters. Ben had lost one schooner. He shuddered to think of the *Sunflower* being crushed by a liner.

"Shucks, Ben!" Sam scoffed. "It's all in the game—an' I haint been run down yet. Think o' the money they is in fetchin' in the season's first swordfish."

And Sam would have it no other way. Plenty of swordfish for both of them out on his "fishin' preserve," as he called that particular locality where he made his big hauls annually. And his new crew were as good as his old. Better, for they wouldn't desert him winters as the old crew did.

Of course, he would keep Perry White—Ben couldn't have him. Even if he had deserted Sam that winter too, Perry had a certain right to be temperamental and independent. He was a sort of mate to Sam during the swordfishing season, the best wheelsman in the fleet. He could get the *Agatha* down on a swordfish so accurately that Sam couldn't possibly miss him when he struck the harpoon.

THUDS of boots sounded on deck. Sam stuck his head out of the cabin and recognized the familiar faces of his old crew —Seth Wall, Bart Ripley—all six who had sailed out of Gloucester. He scrambled up on deck to greet them, followed by the members of his new crew.

He told them of the arrangements he had made with Cap'n Ben—how they were to ship on the *Sunflower* instead of the *Agatha*. They seemed to be a little sober and resentful at first, but it soon wore away, and they reconciled themselves to the change of schooners. It was too late for them to protest such a change and join some other swordfishing crew. All the vessels of the fleet were fully manned. And they liked Cap'n Ben.

Cap'n Ben came over from the *Sunflower* and greeted them. Ben was a little shorter than Sam, thick-set, with a round, kindly face, and tender blue eyes, one of them slightly crossed. In spite of his reverses of the previous fall, he appeared cheerful, and listened to the account of the fishermen of their adventures—their tales of terrific storms that swept men to death from the decks of schooners, of vagrant small icebergs or "growlers" that strayed

down from the Arctic, menacing the fishing craft with their glassy bulk.

Then Perry White, short and stalwart, his smooth-shaven face almost black from weather and sun, his dark eyes dancing excitedly, hustled aboard from the wharf.

"I jest come from my gunnin' shanty down on Scusset Beach," he announced to Sam. "Went there the minute I got back in town from Boston, 'cause I've heerd reports somebody's been livin' in my shanty all winter. An' some one has, too—damn' rum-runners, I cal'late. An' while I was there, I met one o' the Coast Guard men. An' guess what he told me: He says the *Agatha* was reported las' night smugglin' in Buzzards Bay."

Over Sam's face came an expression of mingled surprise and wrath.

"What? The *Agatha*—smugglin'? Good Lord—she was here—in her dock—an' I was sick abed—"

He thought of the drained oil-tanks. It would be easy for a crew to sneak her away at night, especially with him favoring a cold at home.

"The Coast Guard folks got the cargo she smuggled in," Perry went on. "But the *Agatha* got away. That means they'll prob'ly seize her today. Sam, with my shanty busted into an' occupied, an' your schooner ketched smugglin', there's dirty work goin' on—right in this town."

"You sure—you didn't have a hand in that smugglin', Sam?" Ben asked the question innocently as a child.

"Me?" Sam's eyes flashed ominously. "Hell, Ben—me, a smuggler? Hell, Ben, if I was smugglin', I'd be doin' it a night I wasn't laid up with a cold. An' I'd tell you soon enough if I was. But I aint. I don't know anything about smugglin'."

"Looks like the Coast Guard will make you prove it before they admit you wa'n't smugglin'," put in Perry. "But it don't seem right for the *Agatha* to have to stay in port while they're questionin' you. It will mean a loss of consider'ble money if we aint first in the market."

SAM did some quick thinking. To have the *Agatha* seized, would mean that he and his shipmates would be detained indefinitely ashore. It would spoil Ben's chances of sharing with Sam the profits of being first in the market. If the Coast Guard detained only Sam and not his crew and the *Agatha*, Perry could skipper her. Perry put Sam's thought into words:

"If you want to stay ashore, Skipper, I'll command the *Agatha* for you, an' I cal'late I can fetch her pretty close to your fishin' preserve. P'raps you'd orter do that, seein's you're facin' such serious charges."

Sam was thinking of how he hadn't missed a swordfishing trip in twenty years. And he thought how difficult it would be for him to establish an alibi for the previous night. Nobody but himself was aware that he had been laid up with a cold.

"You aint been served notice on, Skipper," suggested Bill Alden, cook of the *Agatha*. "My advice is for you to act nat'ral, an' sail out in command, Coast Guard or no Coast Guard."

Both crews voiced Bill's opinion. Perry was still skeptical. Ben did not commit himself, but seemed absorbed in deep thought. Sam guessed that he was thinking of the money loss he would suffer if Sam didn't guide him to his fishing preserve. Ben's reticence determined Sam.

"We're goin' to beat the Coast Guard to it, boys," he declared, "before we're held up. We'll take no chances on *that*. We're goin' to start for the Banks soon's we can rouse our stuff on board the two schooners. Make ready to clear for Georges!"

The men of both crews cheered. They knew Cap'n Sam's temper—that when he made up his mind, there was no changing him. But Perry didn't cheer. Perhaps he had been so eager to impart the news because he relished the idea of commanding the *Agatha* on that first trip of the season, and thought Sam was too law-abiding to sail out under a shadow.

But if Perry had reckoned so, he had not taken into consideration the indignation that Sam experienced while the two crews got busy. It was up to him to clear for the fishing grounds before he was really hounded by the law. For the law had no right to deprive him of that first trip.

Sam's old crew, except Perry, hastened aboard the *Sunflower*, which lay at an adjacent wharf, and Sam's new shipmates rolled onto the *Agatha* the two barrels of crude fuel oil that he kept in reserve in the small storehouse across the narrow street from the wharf.

In short order both schooners were ready, the crews moving quickly, talking little. The holds of each had been packed with eighteen tons of ice apiece, and plenty of food, the day before. In less than an hour after Perry White had arrived with

his warning, the *Agatha's* lines were cast off, and her engine was moving her down Freetown harbor to Nantucket Sound and Muskeget Channel. In her wake followed the *Sunflower*.

"SWORDFISH! There's an ol' whacker! Hard aport! Hard over there, Perry! Now—stead-ee!"

Leaning against the waist-high iron rim of the "pulpit,"—the harpooner's little platform on the tip of the bowsprit,—Cap'n Sam poised with the fifteen-foot harpoon-pole lifted a few feet above the rolling sea-surface under him, the shaft of the pole gripped in his left hand, his right closed over its butt, prepared to dart the "lily-iron" on the downward-pointing tip into the back of the "finning" swordfish toward which the *Agatha* was steadily moving under the power of her engine.

The swordfish, its projecting dorsal fin and tail cutting a leisurely ripple, appeared to be lazy and unaware of the impending danger. With a sudden heave of body, arms and pole all at once, the skipper buried the deadly lily-iron into the bluish back of the unsuspecting monster. A huge swirl in the water—an unsuccessful jab of the four-foot sword at the gliding keel of the schooner—and the iridescent, infuriated fish shot toward the ocean depths, hauling out the "warp," or harpoon-line, which ran from the detachable lily-iron along the starboard side of the schooner to a black buoy keg and one hundred fathoms of its own length coiled amidships. Cap'n Sam pulled back the pole, from which the lily-iron had detached itself upon piercing the swordfish, and amidships Bill Alden, in the cook's white apron and cap, paid out fathom after fathom of flexible warp, and finished by throwing over the remaining coils and the keg. The keg, floating on the surface, marked the position of the harpooned fish.

Down the ratlines from the foremast head, where four of his shipmates kept up a vigilant lookout for the appearance of more swordfish, Mel Frost hurried. Perry White, at the wheel, hauled up a dory dragging astern, and into the little boat Mel jumped. Perry cast him the painter, and the schooner left him to pick up the keg, haul and kill the fighting fish struggling at the end of the warp, and finally be taken aboard the *Agatha* with the fish when the stubborn battle was finished.

Only one other fishing schooner was in that locality—the *Sunflower*. Cap'n Ben was also having great luck with the swordfish, as was evidenced by the frequent circling of his schooner and the putting out of a dory from her, showing that another swordfish had been ironed. Most of the fleet that had sailed from Gloucester and Boston that June were farther to the north.

"There's another one!" sang out Danny Hines from the masthead. The skipper wearily picked up the pole and stood ready to sink the lily-iron into the back of another victim. No wonder he and Bill Alden were tiring. It would be the thirty-sixth swordfish ironed and hauled that day. Already one hundred and six were iced down in the hold, and they had been on the Banks only a week. The *Sunflower* had almost as many. The *Agatha* and *Sunflower* would unquestionably be first in the market with the season's first swordfish.

Cap'n Sam smiled when the iron plunged into the swordfish and the warp shot out again. One more day of fishing, and he and Ben would head for Boston. Once they were drawn up at the fish-pier, Sam would look into that smuggling accusation further. That was all he wanted—to get his fish, and Ben's, into Boston. Then the Government could do what it darned pleased with him. If he was detained ashore, Perry could skipper the *Agatha* the next trip.

IN the south a fog-bank was rolling up. But they could get a few more before it shrouded the waters. Perhaps, rather than chance being run down by a liner, he and Ben would start for market that night. They had enough fish. Yes, he'd start that night. He gloated as he looked back at the huge cylindrical bodies lying on deck, waiting to be dressed down and iced. That trip would put Ben on his feet. It would be—

"Revenue cutter—off thar to the norrard!" shouted Lew Crane from the masthead, pointing toward the northern horizon, whence spiraled a thin thread of black smoke.

Cap'n Sam leaned on the harpoon-pole, slung diagonally across the pulpit, and shading his eyes, squinted in the direction of the smoke. Lew's keen eyes were younger than his. Sam could not make out the ship, although he discerned the smoke plainly enough.

"Sou'!" he shouted at Perry, and Perry obediently twisted the wheel, loudly repeating the course the skipper had ordered. "Pick up both dories. We'll run for that fog-bank. We're takin' no chances on *them* fellers!"

That cutter might be hunting the *Agatha*. He could not, would not take a chance on being overhauled by her and forced to go ashore—not until his fish and Ben's were safe in the market. There was no telling what red tape he would have to go through before his fish were landed. He wanted to dicker with the fish-buyers himself, not trust bargaining to the easy-going Ben and the inexperienced Perry. For the fish-buyers are a shrewd lot, and many a good catch has been undersold because of the skippers' l o o s e selling-tactics. No—he would not let that cutter even speak him, if he could help it.

So the *Agatha* picked up Mel Frost and his two-hundred-pound swordfish, t h e n circled, picked up Caleb Paul and his, and headed for the fog-bank approaching rapidly from the south.

Now Sam could make out that it was the cutter. And it did not look like the cutter *Massasoit* that follows the fishing fleet each season to render medical aid to the fishermen when it is required. The gray ship was putting on more steam. It was evident that she was bent on overhauling the *Agatha*.

Cap'n Ben also observed that the *Agatha* was making a run to outdistance the cutter, for he opened up his engine and set out to keep the *Agatha* company. Little by little the dense fog encompassed the two schooners, until both vessels were completely blotted from sight, their proximity to each other marked only by the rhythmic throbbing of their engines. To the north the cutter faded from Sam's vision, and he went aft to talk the matter over with Perry White, whose advice he valued in important matters. Perry was level-headed, very conservative. The crew, observing that the chase was on, met with the skipper and wheelsman at the helm.

SAM expected the advice which Perry gave him. "If I was you, Skipper," counseled Perry, "I'd give up peaceful. No use gittin' you an' us in wrong with the Gover'mint. An' I cal'late they'd let us take our fish to market. They don't want the schooner so much as her skipper."

Sam reflected that Perry's advice was good. But he had an answer ready for him. "The hell I will give up peaceful!" Sam burst out. "I'm takin' no chances on not gittin' my fish an' Ben's first in the market. I'd ruther slip into Gloucester or Portland than have that cutter ketch us. I haint never vi'lated the law, an' I aint doin' it now. I'm jest playin' safe—that's all. You boys want to take a chance with me on givin' that cutter the slip?"

"Sure!" they all cried—all but Perry. He still demurred, and insisted that the only becoming thing for Sam to do was to meet the cutter man-fashion, and surrender, as law-abiding citizens should. But his voice was drowned out by the rest of the crew, who seconded the skipper's decision to lose the cutter in the fog and slip into a port where they were not expected. They could surrender after the fish were unloaded, repeated Cap'n Sam. Perry said no more, but considered himself voted down in his usual stoical manner of accepting reversals.

For over two hours they sped through the fog, which now was as thick as a bottle of milk—one of those impenetrable Georges fogs, wet and chaotic. Night was falling, and its starless gloom was added to the vapor enshrouding them. Astern throbbed the *Sunflower*. But although Ben with his more up-to-date engine could easily have overhauled the *Agatha*, he made no attempt to do so and speak Sam. He knew well enough the cause of the *Agatha's* flight, and was sticking to Sam on general principles, taking no chances on perhaps being apprehended himself, and losing out on marketing his fish.

For another hour the two schooners ate up distance to the southward. Sam knew that the cutter would never locate them now unless it blundered upon them by sheer accident. He stopped his engine, lashed the wheel hard aport, hoisted the jumbo staysail in addition to the riding sail and foresail, and prepared to spend the night "jogging," as the swordfishing schooners usually do in preference to anchoring, owing to the imminent danger of being called on deck in the night to sheer the vessel out of the proximity of an onrushing ocean liner.

Sam knew the fog would probably last all the next day, unless the wind suddenly hauled to the northward. By shutting off his engine, he would throw the cutter off his trail. Then along toward morning he could start for Portland, slipping past the

cutter, which would have in all probability worked far to the southward during the night. Every hour he could gain between now and morning meant so many miles between him and the southward-steaming Coast Guard greyhound. Of course it was a gambling chance, but it was one worth playing.

Keeping a one-man watch on deck, which was to be changed once every hour and twenty minutes, Sam and the other six members of his crew went down into the forecastle to engage in their regular game of pitch before turning in. They sat quietly grouped around the unfolded triangular table, the skipper dealing out the grimy cards of the well-thumbed pack.

"It's Saturday night," spoke up Perry. "It's the night all the liners leave New York—most of 'em, anyhow. How fur are we from the eastbound steamship lanes, Skipper?"

"Why, plumb in the middle of 'em," answered Sam, surprised that Perry should ask such a question—he who had spent a good part of his seafaring days fishing night and day in that very locality with Sam, and in all sorts of weather. "Why—what's wrong about it? Scared?"

"Hell, no!" shot back Perry. "Only I was thinkin' how damned foolish it is to run the risk o' bein' run down when we've got a full trip o' fish. Aint it better to take a chance on surrenderin' an' trustin' to luck that the Gover'mint will let us dispose of our fish, than to take a chance on losin' fish, schooner an' all—an' perhaps ourselves? It's a wicked night to be layin' out here—"

"We stay right here," replied Sam with finality. He lighted a cigar, gripped it firmly in his teeth. and played his card in his turn.

THEY played until nine o'clock. Perry was visibly nervous, making a number of misplays and receiving a call-down from the skipper each time he did so. But that was a usual occurrence at card-games in the forecastle. There was always a good measure of horseplay between the skipper and the wheelsman at those games. But tonight the skipper did all the kidding. Perry only received it stoically, but made no comment, as he usually did.

Before he turned in, he urged the skipper again to reconsider and surrender rather than jeopardize their safety and that of the fish by evading capture.

"We're defyin' the Gover'mint," he protested, "an' that don't pay."

"We aint defyin' the Gover'mint," denied Sam. "What we're doin' is postponin' our surrender till we've landed our fish. How many times have I got to remind you o' that, Perry?"

Soon the snores of the tired fishermen reverberated from the shelflike bunks ranged along the walls of the forecastle. Mel Frost went up to relieve Lew Crane on watch. The skipper was awake when Lew came down the ladder and "mugged up" on bread, cold ham and tea from the cook's lockers.

"Heard any steamers?" asked the skipper. He could not deny that Perry's dread of liners with so many fish iced down in the hold worried him also.

"Two—went by to the s'uth'ard," replied Lew, nonchalantly munching a cold biscuit. "Lord, but it's thick! Never see the fog any thicker."

"Cap'n Ben anywheres nigh us?"

"Heard his foghorn blow once—time the second steamer whistled. Off to port, Ben was then."

Now the skipper was truly vexed with himself for eluding the cutter and taking such unnecessary chances directly in the path of the eastbound liners. True, the *Agatha* was accustomed to dodging liners on foggy nights, and so was Cap'n Sam. But never before had he risked lying in their course when the *Agatha's* hold was loaded with as pretty a trip of fish as any swordfishing vessel ever stocked.

For a long time he half dozed. He heard Perry White roll out of his bunk prepared to relieve Lew on watch. Then Sam dropped off to sleep, and was awakened by his own labored snoring. He glanced at the alarm-clock hanging on the base of the mast. Two o'clock. The crew snored in their bunks. The bilge-water swished back and forth rhythmically under the floor of the forecastle.

PERRY WHITE came down the ladder. Sam knew it was Bill Alden's watch. He had relieved Perry, for the wheelsman began to haul off his boots preparatory to returning to his bunk and resuming his broken sleep. So far, so good, in the matter of passing steamers. Sam turned over to finish his sleep, hoping the fog would be thick about five o'clock, when he intended to start the engine and make the run to Portland. . . . .

He gave an involuntary start. He had heard it—the far-off, deep-throated bellow of a steamer. Although ordinarily he would have dropped off to sleep and waited for the watch to sing out if the sea-tyrant approached too close for comfort, that distant voice seemed to vibrate every nerve in his body. He listened intently for the repetition of that warning blast.

And after a minute or so it came—much closer this time. He knew the oncoming steamer was a giant of the seas, a fast one, rushing across Georges Bank after leaving Nantucket Lightship, her turbines grinding, tearing off twenty-four knots to break a transatlantic record in her run to Europe. For the proximity of the great ship proved that she had covered the distance since she had first whistled in amazingly short time.

Cap'n Sam rolled out of his bunk, not waiting for Bill Alden to sing out his warning.

"Come on, boys!" he yelled to the slumbering crew. "There's an ol' hell-bender of a liner comin' up from the west'ard—travelin' faster'n a speerit through a boneyard!"

Out of their bunks scrambled the boys of the *Agatha,* Perry White landing on the floor first of all, and following the skipper up the ladder onto deck while the other agitated fellows were still drawing on their sea-boots. Cap'n Sam ran through the thick fog to the wheel, Perry close on his heels.

"Bill!" shouted Sam, not discerning Bill Alden on deck, keeping up his watch. "Bill—where the devil are—"

He stopped in his tracks. At his feet lay Bill Alden, motionless, to all appearances dead.

But Sam had no time for Bill now. He quickly turned on the little electric light in the binnacle. It illumined the face of the compass, and Sam, his finger resting on the compass-card to trace the course of the steamer when she whistled again, shouted at Perry:

"Look after Bill Alden. See if he's hurt bad. The rest o' you git ready for a close call. That damned liner aint whistlin' frequent enough—"

A swish of steam off the port bow—and onto the deck of the *Agatha* flashed a weird yellow light, increasing rapidly in intensity as the towering prow of a gigantic steamship loomed through the fog, seemingly bearing straight toward the imperiled little fishing craft. Other lights from decks in tiers like the stories of a skyscraper pierced the fog, and over the whole diabolic monster rolled black smoke, while ahead of that huge prow hissing white water seethed in a smooth arrow-shaped phosphorescence that cleft the waters like an unimpeded furrowing plowshare of molten glass.

"Steer sou'—sou'!" yelled Sam, as Perry grasped the wheel, and the skipper sped down the ladder into the cabin to start the engine and endeavor to sheer the *Agatha* out of the path of the onrushing liner. He tried to start the engine. There was no compression. He fumbled in his pocket, found a match, lighted it, and examined a cylinder head. The exhaust valve was gone! He turned on the electric light, and unmindful of the liner, examined the other two cylinder heads. On all three the exhaust valves had been removed! The engine was worthless!

Up on deck he dashed, just in time to be wrenched off his feet by the zigzag motion of the *Agatha* as she pitched and tossed in the great wave that encompassed her. He grabbed a shroud, and hung on helplessly, while astern the after lights of the great steamship died away in the fog as suddenly as her yellow headlight had flashed out of it. And as she did so, she let out a belated blast of her whistle that deafened the *Agatha's* skipper and vibrated the schooner as if her deck planking and rigging were constructed of mica.

FOR a brief space of time, so violent were the convulsions of the *Agatha* that Sam thought the liner had struck her. Some of the crew had run forward to ascertain whether any damage had been done there. The skipper staggered to the wheel. Bill Alden, conscious, clung to the wheel-box. He looked up wild-eyed at Sam, like a man who has been suddenly awakened from a nightmare.

"Dirty work here!" he gasped. "What happened? Where am I?"

"You're on the *Agatha*—praisin' the Lord like the rest of us that that liner didn't send us to Kingdom Come," excitedly bellowed Sam. "And what the old Harry happened to *you?*"

"I dunno. I come up on watch to relieve Perry. He started for the fo'c's'le—went down the ladder. An' the fust thing I knowed, I didn't know nothin'."

"Yeah—I know that. But how—what happened?"

"We must 'a' been boarded," declared Bill solemnly. "I can't account for it no other way. I thought I heard a blackfish puffin' alongside jest afore I was knocked cold. The more I think of it, the more I'm inclined to cal'late it was a dory with muffled oars, an' some one boarded us an'—"

"The exhaust valves are gone off the engine," Sam enlightened him. "Somebody evidently wanted to cripple the *Agatha.*"

"Good Lord Christopher!" ejaculated Bill. "Who—what'd they do that for?"

The rest of the crew had gathered around the two, and were looking on, open-mouthed.

"What'd they do that for?" mimicked Sam. "Why, to keep us from makin' a quick run to market—that's why. An' the only vessel in this locality that would be interested in doin' that is Cap'n Ben's *Sunflower!*"

HIS mention of Cap'n Ben came out before he realized fully what he was saying. But it was the truth. He couldn't believe Ben would do such a thing. But he knew that his old crew were a little peeved because he had turned them over to Ben for that trip. If the *Sunflower* came into market alone, her crew would stock even greater shares than if the two vessels came in together, for the number of swordfish brought in would be smaller and the opening price consequently higher. One of them—or several of them—might have slipped away in a dory from the *Sunflower* and done this thing without Ben's knowledge. Without the power of her engine, the *Agatha* would have to go to port under sail. And she was a slow-sailing vessel. Now the cutter would be sure to catch her.

"Daylight will tell, boys," Sam tried to quiet the indignant, blasphemous crew. "We'll see whether Ben puts for market an' leaves us behind. But we may as well prepare to give up to the cutter if she overhauls us, as she likely will."

"We'd orter given up to her in the fust place," put in Perry regretfully. "If you'd listened to me—"

A small foghorn sounded to port. Perry pumped out a wheezy blast from the small boxlike foghorn of the *Agatha.* An oil-burning engine chugged in the fog, and after another blast of the stranger's foghorn, which the *Agatha's* answered, a shadowy schooner hove to, and the voice of Seth Wall of Sam's former crew called out:

"Hi, Skipper! I need help! Liner hit us—took away our bowsprit! Cap'n Ben an' the rest o' the crew took to dories—rowed off in the fog. I stayed behind. Lord, I was scared paralyzed! Thought we was run down sure! But Sam—I've lost their bearin's. I can't find 'em nowheres!"

"The damned fools!" snapped Sam. But wouldn't any sensible skipper and crew take to dories when they feel the impact of a giant liner smashing the woodwork of a fragile fishing schooner? Sam's indignation shifted from Ben's desertion of the *Sunflower* to the disaster which had befallen his own engine. "They'll have a chance now to think how clever they was when they boarded me, knocked out Bill Alden, an' lifted the exhaust valves off my engine," he mocked Seth. "The fog's a great place to remind folks o' the deviltry they've done."

"Sam—what do you mean?" asked Seth bewilderedly.

"Jest what I say," retorted the skipper of the *Agatha.* "Somebody's boarded us, an' made my engine so much junk till we hit port. And whoever done it come from the *Sunflower.*"

For a moment Seth did not reply. Perry and Bill, the latter now fully in possession of his faculties, particularly the power of speech, swore emphatically.

"It's no time to arger over busted injines," said Seth quietly in the calm of the listless ocean. "Seven men are out somewhere in this fog in two dories. The fust rule o' the sea is to save human life."

"The hell with 'em!" cried Bill Alden hotly, and the others of the *Agatha* seconded his opinion.

"Give 'em a taste o' their own medicine," suggested Perry.

"See here, boys," spoke up Cap'n Sam. "Whatever hand Ben and his boys had in this, Seth's right. An' I've no reason to believe Ben aint my friend until my case is proved ag'in' him. Our first duty is to save them fellers out in them dories."

"All I'm askin' o' you is enough men to handle the *Sunflower,* seein' the *Agatha's* injine is busted," shouted Seth against the young breeze that was now springing up.

"You'll have 'em," consented Sam. "You'll have my whole crew. We'll board ye in dories."

In spite of their dissension, Sam's crew pulled up one dory from astern, lowered another, and prepared to carry out Sam's order.

"Somebody's got to stay aboard the *Agatha,* Skipper," Perry reminded Sam. "'Taint goin' to do to abandon her completely."

"You stay, then," said Sam. "I guess you're keenest of the boys to do it." And he added as he stepped into a dory: "Keep your foghorn tootin' reg'lar. We wont be gone long. Them fellers in the dories are just confused on direction, I cal'late, an' misjudged the sound o' the *Sunflower's* foghorn."

ON board the *Sunflower,* Sam and his crew went about the search for the missing men with that quiet deliberation characteristic of fishermen. Seth started the engine, and Sam maintained a stoical silence near him aft, while Seth held the wheel. Forward and amidships the boys of the *Agatha* stood watch, peering off into the fog while the schooner moved slowly in ever-widening circles, Sam pumping the foghorn and listening for answering voices.

Farther and farther away sounded the piercing *ya-a-a* of the *Agatha's* foghorn, Perry pumping it regularly. Then, as the circle swung toward Sam's schooner, the wheezy note came closer. Once Sam thought he heard voices, but they turned out to be the screams of startled hags, and those big seabirds, fascinated by the lights of the moving schooner, hovered around her and made such an outcry that locating the castaways by their voices became a matter of grave doubt.

"Funny we didn't pick 'em up the second circle we swung," commented Sam. "But then, in a fog there's no tellin' what'll happen. The waves from that liner prob'ly carried them a good ways from the schooner, an' a foghorn often sounds like where it really aint. You sure—the liner didn't run *them* down, Seth?"

"Don't see how it could," replied Seth with a shudder, as if this idea had come as a shock to him. "They rowed off to port. Liner went by to starb'ard."

The breeze was now stirring the ocean and was constantly picking up, and in the lights on deck the fog spiraled in weird figures. Overhead the canvas flapped, and the fore-block beat back and forth with the swing of the fore-boom.

"Wind's hauled to the norrard," commented Seth. "That means the fog will likely clear away. Thank God for that much!"

But Sam was not interested now in the clearing of the fog. He was resigned to whatever fate awaited him in the overhauling of the *Agatha* by the cutter. After all, Perry had been right; he had been wrong. If he had surrendered to the cutter in the first place, everything that had happened would have been avoided. Just now his whole interest was in finding the men who were lost out there in the fog. Human life was more important to save than a cargo of fish. And perhaps the cutter would not detain him from landing his fish after all. It might—

Another steamer whistled to the westward. Even the wind did not drown out that vibrant sound so familiar to the practiced ears of swordfishermen. The *Sunflower* cut a wide circle. He could barely hear the *Agatha's* foghorn now. The only sound on the *Sunflower* was the tireless chugging of her engine.

Again the steamer whistled. He could imagine Perry White standing close to the compass, trying to get the steamer's course. But it would do him no good. He was absolutely helpless in the *Agatha.* He had no power to sheer her out of the great ship's path if, indeed, the liner were following the same course of the previous steamer. Sam's conscience plagued him more and more, while the advice Perry had given him and he had not heeded dwelt hauntingly in his memory. Why hadn't he heeded it? Perry had fished with him for years. His advice had always been infallible—had proved to be in this very instance. And Sam had stubbornly ignored it.

Oo-oo-oo-ooh! Dead ahead roared the liner. She had cleared the *Sunflower.* Sam could dimly make out her lights, as she ground her way into the oblivion of the dancing fog. But how about the *Agatha?* Sam could not hear her foghorn now. Up to the time the liner came up, Perry had been pumping it with more or less regularity, the sign that he was still on the job. Now, if the liner had not run him down, he would surely be pumping it, showing that the liner had cleared his schooner and he was unhurt.

SAM jumped to the *Sunflower's* foghorn and pumped out a prolonged blast. All hands listened. No foghorn answered. Sam pumped out another *ya-a-a* from the foghorn, and they listened again. Still no answer.

"Sounds bad," commented Seth. "Lord —I hope—"

The wind, now blowing mightily and kicking up a heavy sea, whisked away the rest of Seth's remarks. Rollers broke over the *Sunflower's* plunging bows, drenching the men on lookout. The fog lighted up with the first rays of dawn. But still the whirling mass held thick.

Borne on the wind sounded a weird siren screech, like the wail of a malevolent spirit of the deep.

"The cutter!" exclaimed Seth.

"Head for her!" demanded Sam. "This thing's too big for us now, Seth. It's disaster all-round, and the cutter's the only human agency that can help us find Ben an' his boys—an' the *Agatha*. God—it's awful!"

Seth turned the wheel, and the *Sunflower* sped toward the sound of the cutter's whistle. Again the weird siren screech rose and died away closer off the schooner's bow.

And then, without warning, the fog cleared away!

TO one who has never experienced a Georges Bank fog, let it be told that no stage curtain rises and falls with greater rapidity than this common deep-water phenomenon. A southerly wind usually brings more fog, but a northerly "blow" brushes it away as a strong hand the lacework of a spider's web.

And that fog upon which Sam had gambled the night before, under the cover of which he would now have been heading for Portland miles away from the cutter if the events of the night had not forestalled him, cleared away almost instantly. Its sudden lifting disclosed two important objects on the water—first the cutter, two miles or so dead ahead, steaming toward the *Sunflower*. And second, the *Agatha,* a mile or less off the port quarter, and moving toward the *Sunflower*—moving under the power of her oil-burning engine!

"Look! Look!" shouted the men on lookout on the *Sunflower,* pointing excitedly at Sam's schooner.

But Sam saw what they did—two dories loaded with men, clinging with boathooks to the side of the *Agatha,* endeavoring to board the schooner, but frustrated and battled off by an active individual on the *Agatha's* deck who moved about rapidly, clouting the men who were fighting to scramble aboard, a boathook wielded in his flailing hands.

Sam opened up the engine, and looked up in time to glimpse one dory lose the hold by which it adhered to the *Agatha,* and slip astern of the moving schooner. But the men in the other dory—three in number—succeeded in forcing their way onto the schooner, and they floundered over the rail, but lay prone on deck, felled by blows of the boathook.

The men in the dory astern rowed fiercely to overtake the *Agatha.* The fellow with the boathook dragged his felled antagonists farther onto the deck of the schooner, and raced to the wheel, apparently observing for the first time that the fog had cleared and that both the cutter and the *Sunflower* were speeding toward him.

"Good God!" shouted Sam. "Them dories are the *Sunflower's!* Yeller with black gun'ls! And that feller on deck—it's Perry White!"

Sam shoved Seth away from the wheel with the irascibility of one who accepts nothing short of full command.

"Looks like you're right, Sam," admitted Seth ruefully. "Ben an' the rest have got a hand in this somehow. I hope you wont think *I'm* in it."

"They boarded the *Agatha* in the fog," mused Sam. "An' Perry beat 'em off—likely after they'd put the exhaust valves back on the engine. Good old Perry! God, can't he fight! Seven men, an' him takin' the schooner away from 'em! He likely took 'em aboard, then beat 'em off after he found 'twas them that done the dirty work."

HIS heart sank to think that Ben had betrayed him. There was a possibility that the crew had taken off the exhaust valves without Ben's knowledge. But it would have availed them nothing if Ben hadn't put them up to it and promised them a quick run to Boston without the *Agatha.*

The men who had boarded the *Agatha* were coming to, and Perry was forced to let go of the wheel to quell them again. Now Sam could make one of them out as Ben, and the next second Ben and Perry were engaged in one of the most thrilling fist fights he had ever witnessed.

Now the two schooners were only a few lengths apart. Astern the cutter was burning up distance, now not over a half-mile away. Ben and Perry clinched, and both fell to the deck of the *Agatha.* For some time they were lost to Sam's sight. Then

Ben rose slowly, and ran to the wheel. He slowed down the *Agatha's* engine. But Sam increased the *Sunflower's* power, and he shouted at his men forward:

"Make ready to board the *Agatha!* We're goin' to ram her—then put that damned Ben an' his men in irons!"

Straight toward the *Agatha* he headed the schooner, knowing that the impact, if he handled the wheel properly, would damage neither vessed.

From the wheel of the *Agatha* Ben Weston shouted:

"Open her up, Sam! Keep on! Run for it! I'll 'tend to that damned cutter!"

"The hell I will!" Sam shouted back. Ben's shipmates who had boarded the *Agatha* with him were rising to their feet. Sam and Ben swerved their schooners at the same instant, Ben to avoid contact, and Sam to graze the *Agatha's* rail, thus permitting the crew on the *Sunflower* to leap onto the *Agatha's* deck.

BUT Ben outguessed or outgeneraled Sam in that maneuver. The *Sunflower* missed contact with the *Agatha* by fully two fathoms. Past the *Sunflower* the *Agatha* sped toward the oncoming cutter.

Before Sam could bring the *Sunflower* about, the *Agatha* was within speaking distance of the Coast Guard greyhound.

"Good Lord Christopher!" Sam ejaculated, bitter at Ben's clever manipulation of the older schooner. "That damned turncoat! He's got Perry triced up on deck —an' now he's—he's turnin' the *Agatha* over to the Coast Guard—himself! Presentin' 'em the ship that done the smugglin'. Then they'll come back, an' git me!"

He jabbered more—he knew not what—as he opened up the *Sunflower's* engine and with its greater speed bore down on the *Agatha.* And he gained on her fast. Ben was speaking the cutter as the *Sunflower* slowed down alongside the two ships.

"I'm your smuggler!" Ben sang out. "It wa'n't Sam Doane. I swiped his schooner, an' I done the smugglin' myself. I give up. Let Sam an' his boys go in peaceful to market!"

Sam, completely mystified and speechless by Ben's utterance, saw through tear-filled eyes a whaleboat lowered from the cutter. With amazing speed the white-clad sailors manned her—that efficiency in handling small boats which has classified the sailors of the United States Coast Guard cutters among the finest seamen of all time. And he glimpsed Mel Frost and Bill Alden getting a dory overside from the *Sunflower* and excitedly beckoning Sam to join them.

Sam jumped into the dory. Mel rowed Bill and him to the *Agatha,* and all three scrambled onto her deck just before the cutter sailors boarded her. Sam rushed to the bound form of Perry White, but Ben and his shipmates held him back. Sam struck out at Ben, but the cutter sailors interfered, and held the two apart.

"By God, ye damned ongrateful, tormented whelp, Ben Weston!" Sam fumed. "You—the man I was befriendin'—cuttin' my throat—"

"Looks to me, Sam, like the throat-cut tin' was bein' done by Perry White," quietly interrupted Ben. "Leastwise, when we blundered onto him, mistakin' his foghorn in the fog for the *Sunflower's,* an' he tried to fight us off—an' him with the engine runnin', an' the *Agatha* deserted all but him, it looks to me like he was runnin' the *Agatha* into port on his own hook, an' claimin' her for his own prize because she was abandoned under sail."

SAM was confused. Could it be that Ben, eager to take advantage of Sam, had made up this story to protect himself? But he asked Ben:

"Then—then the *Agatha's* engine was runnin' when you tried to board her?"

"Sure was," returned Ben, "runnin' smooth's a mole. So smooth we couldn't board her, an' come nigh havin' our dories crushed under her. Lord knows how long we was fightin' there in the fog. A damned mean man it is who wont let castaways come aboard."

"You onchristian liar!" burst out Perry, now recovering from his surprise and seeing an opportunity to defend himself. "They boarded me—fixed the engine, Sam —an' I fought 'em off—"

"White, you've spoken your piece." It was the petty officer from the cutter talking. "Your trickery is evident, and so is Cap'n Ben's honesty. Cap'n Weston,"—he addressed the skipper of the *Sunflower,* —"your taking the blame for the smuggling was very kind of you to protect Cap'n Doane. I think Cap'n Doane's words to you were rather harsh in the face of such a sacrifice on your part. For if the men who received that smuggled cargo hadn't been captured and turned State's

evidence, suspicion would have fallen on Cap'n Doane. It looked bad for him till the smugglers confessed."

And to Perry he said: "White, we were sent out here for you—not Cap'n Doane. You've been exposed by the land-agents of your smuggling outfit—how you lived in your gunning shanty all winter when you were supposed to be fishing off Grand Bank, how you've been sneaking Cap'n Doane's schooner out nights, smuggling in her with a crew of landsmen."

THE other dory full of the *Sunflower's* castaways came aboard. To the Coast Guard and swordfishermen they corroborated Ben's story, how they tried to board the *Agatha,* but couldn't because the engine was running and Perry fought them off. For a time everybody was talking at once.

"Good Lord Christopher!" exclaimed Sam. "An' Ben—you never done that smugglin'—in the *Agatha?"*

"Me? Smuggle? Huh—I aint got sense enough," grunted Ben. "But Sam, I'm sure relieved to l'arn *you* wa'n't the smuggler. Course I'd 'a' stuck by ye through hell an' high water, me owin' ye what I do. But it jest makes me feel better to know ye wa'n't bustin' the law—like I had a suspicion ye might be, an' keepin' it from me. An' if one of us had to go to jail, I reckoned I'd better—me owin' you what I do an' allus will."

"Well, who *did* take the exhaust valves off my engine?" asked Sam impatiently.

Perry heard the question, and ceased his arguing with the cutter officer.

"Well, seein's the game's up, I may's well admit that I done it," confessed the hapless wheelsman of the *Agatha.* "I sneaked on deck las' night after my watch, an' rapped Bill Alden over the head. An' I done it not to delay you from gittin' to market, but so's the cutter'd ketch you an' take you ashore, seein's the evidence was all ag'in' you till them damned landsmen up an'—"

"You! Holy prophets an' etarnal damnation!" gasped Sam. "You—Perry White—the man I had more confidence in than I ever did in my own brothers! You—you damned, tormented—"

"There's one satisfaction," leered Perry, while the cutter sailors kept the infuriated Sam and Ben at a safe distance. "An' that is that I'll have them damned land-agents o' our smugglin' crowd for comp'ny behind the bars. Wisht I'd had 'em on board the *Agatha* when that fust liner come up, an' they was scared as I was. Lord, I even forgot that I could 'a' fixed the engine! I had them exhaust valves in my pocket all the time!"

THE Coast Guard cutter *Squanto,* sent out expressly to capture the smuggler chief Perry White, had just steamed away with its prisoner. On the deck of the *Agatha* Cap'n Sam and Cap'n Ben watched the gray craft depart, until it became a mere thread of smoke on the northern horizon. In the distance to the south a freighter, and behind it a tanker, were grinding their way to Europe.

Cap'n Ben looked into Cap'n Sam's face. Sam noticed tears in his old friend's blue eyes.

"Ben," said Sam huskily, "I—I might 'a' knowed you wouldn't do nothin' like what I accused you o' doin'. I done wrong, Ben, to even suspicion that ye'd board me an' bust my engine—to accuse you of all men o' tryin' to—to beat me to market that way. An' the same holds for my old crew. Good, trusty fellers all—all but Perry. An' I can't reconcile myself to believin' he's bad as he seems. But I s'pose I got to."

"Well," drawled Ben, "that was why I never told ye that Perry's been livin' in his shanty all winter an' not fishin' from Boston like he said he was. The Coast Guard boys on the *Sconset* patrol have kinder kep' their eyes on him the last week 'fore we sailed. But we didn't tell you for fear you an' Perry might be smugglin' partners. We didn't want to accuse Perry—me an' the Coast Guard didn't—till we got a clear case ag'in' him. You know blamed well you wouldn't 'a' believed me if I'd told you Perry was a rascal. Now would you—now he's been exposed?"

"Well—I got to, like I say. But Ben, the nex' time, you tell me the moon's made o' Hubbard squash, an' I'll believe it—I've got that confidence in ye. They're waitin' on the *Sunflower,* Ben, for you to take command an' clear for Boston. First in the market—top price o' the season! Lord, we're a whole week ahead o' the time I'd set for us to be bound in!"

The Strike at Too Dry

Young Percival came out of the East to a Montana ranch, and a pleasant time was not had by all—though the reader will be much diverted.

By WILLIS BRINDLEY

THE postmaster at Too Dry poked his head out of the door of the shack which served as combination of post office, real-estate office and residence, spat generously into the dusty road and yelled to the big man who had drawn up at what might in a city have been called the curb.

"Letter for you, Dog."

"Who? Me?"

"I guess it's for you. Came yesterday. It's in a thick envelope and the address is Percival John Bigelow, Too Dry, Montana."

"That's me," agreed Dog, and added mournfully: "Well, if that don't beat the scratch. That's two letters I got so far this year. If this keeps up, I'll have to hire me a secretary. Bring it out to the car, Steve. What did she say?"

But the postmaster had returned, with the popping suddenness of a prairie-dog, to his hole of an office, and Dog saw that he must follow or do without his letter.

"You tote your own in this town," he grumbled to the little man beside him. "You stay here, Ducky, till I come back, and don't go wandering off anywhere. We gotta be traveling. It'll be dark as the ace of spades, time we get home, as it is."

"Don't we meet the stage or nothin'?" whined Ducky.

"No, we don't meet the stage or nothin'," answered Dog, pushing back his wide hat and swinging a booted foot over the edge of the coverless Ford. A stranger would have known at once why he who had been named Percival John was known to his fellows as "Dog." He looked like a dog—very much like a bench bull, with his button nose, his underslung chin, his sharp little eyes and forehead that was almost no forehead at all. As for his partner, he came quite readily by his nickname—not through any facial resemblance to a duck, but because, with his short bowlegs, he walked like one. A preacher in a day long past had baptized him Elbert Spence.

MINUTES passed, during which Ducky dozed, slumped low in the front seat, and when Dog finally came and climbed over into his place slowly, the face which

Ducky opened his eyes on, was drawn and sober.

"You remember that I had a sister," Dog said at last. "I don't often speak of her."

"Uh-huh!"

"Married an artist guy."

"They're never no good."

"Not generally, but this one wasn't so bad, take him altogether. Used to draw waterfalls and such, but he gave it up. Now he makes pretty pictures for tooth-powder ads."

"Uh-huh! What about it?"

"Well, they had a son, named after me —Percival Bigelow James. I got a letter from my sister. Seems he's turned out bad."

"That so?" Ducky roused himself into a sitting position. This was better. "Rob a bank or something?"

Dog shook his head.

"Nope. Turned poet."

"Good gosh!" Ducky slumped again. Dog went on with it.

"He must be about twenty-five or -six years old now. You remember when we were in Klondike we got a letter from my sister about her having a kid, and I made him a nugget watchchain."

"Oh, yes. You bummed most of those nuggets off me. But what about it? Ten minutes ago you were in a tooting hurry to get home, and now you sit here drooling like a new calf."

"I'm breaking it to you gently," said Dog. "Fact is, Ducky, this letter says the boy's health aint been any too good. Threatened with T.B., I reckon, though she don't come right out with it. My sister wants this Percival to come out and pay us a visit."

"Huh?"

"Yea-ah. I'll read you the finish of it." He pulled the letter from the pocket of his shirt, shucked the many closely written leaves from the envelope and read the concluding sentences. "'And so, because I know that you would refuse, yet dare not give you an opportunity to refuse, I have arranged for Percy to start West on the day after mailing this letter, and of course you will arrange to meet him; and while your life must be rude and living-quarters of the roughest, we are sure that the change will be just what he needs. We have bought his ticket and berth and shall furnish him with funds to pay for meals and incidentals, but he must work and earn and stay with you until he has earned enough to bring him home again. This is part of our plan —a return to health, and the necessary discipline to make a man of him.'"

"Good gosh!" Ducky sat bolt upright now. "This letter came yesterday. That means he'll be here on today's stage?"

"That's it," said Dog. There was nothing more to be said. When things happen to people, things happen to them, and that's all there is to it.

THEY summoned courage, finally, to discuss details. He could sleep in the loft—up there with Spud Dugan, the man-of-all-work about the place. Spud wouldn't like it, and the boy wouldn't care for Spud's snoring, but they would have to put up with one another. He probably smoked tailor-made cigarettes. Ducky went to get a carton. He probably would be one of those fellows that's always got to be washing himself. Dog went to buy some white soap, and then, remembering something, bought a dozen cakes of laundry soap as well. Time for the stage any time now, and presently it came, in an enveloping swirl of gray dust—a big truck, with an extra seat crosswise behind the driver, and the back end filled with freight.

"Here he is," bawled Duke Envers, the driver, and added to the slim youngster at his side: "There's your uncle over there, him with the face like a bench bull."

The young man climbed down, stiffly. He wore a flappy hat that had been pearl-colored, tweed knickerbockers, and boots of that golden yellow shade peculiar to New York outfitting shops.

"He's got a couple of bags that was made from a cow apiece," added Duke, "and they's a crate of mail-order stuff for you, Dog."

Percival stepped forward, blinking in the strong light. Dog, swallowing hard, strode toward him and shook hands with a heartiness at which the visitor cried out.

"My partner, Ducky Spence," said Dog. Percy nodded, his right hand safely behind his back. Ducky went for the bags, and presently returned, staggering.

"Don't forget that mail-order stuff," Duke Envers bawled to Dog, climbing back over the freight. "It's here in the hind end. I'll hand it down. Looks like a washing-machine to me."

He handed it down, and Dog carried it to the Ford, lifted it over the side and snugged it in, between the back and front seats, on top of sundry supplies. The

stranger and Ducky followed, Ducky swaying under the grips, his legs moving with that strange waddle which had given him his moniker. Dog lifted the grips, plunking them down on the back seat, which they completely filled.

"Maybe we better eat first," he suggested. "It's a good forty mile, and the road's a bit rough in spots. What do you say?" This last to nephew Percival.

"What does it matter? What does anything matter?" squeaked Percival.

Dog looked at him, looked at Ducky. Ducky looked at Percival, looked at Dog. It was worse than they had feared.

"Well, if you don't want to eat, what do you want to do?" Dog asked.

"I want to go back."

Dog grabbed him by the arm. "That's the one place you don't go. We eat."

He lead the Easterner across the street to the Ideal Café, Ducky following, sundry acquaintances staring. They mounted stools at the counter.

"Ducky and I are having ham and eggs. How about you?"

Percival shivered,—perhaps shuddered, —gazing straight into the fly-specked mirror of the back bar.

"I think I shall just have some thin toast, without butter, some bar-le-duc jelly and a pot of oolong tea, very weak."

Red Leonard, cook and waiter, treated himself to half a snigger. The second half died at the look Dog gave him.

"That makes three ham and eggs, Red," Dog said, "with some fried potatoes and a slab of pie and plenty of coffee. If you've got any comparatively modern eggs, we'd like to be favored with 'em. And snap out of it. This is my nephew. Going up to our place for a while with Ducky and me, to pay a visit to Spud Dugan."

He grinned, and Red grinned back.

"Spud Dugan is our cook," Dog told Percival, by way of conversation. "Used to wash dishes for Red, here, but we got him to come up to the ranch and work for us. Ducky likes to cook, but he can't, and I'm a good cook, but I wont, so we figured we'd better get in a neutral party."

They ate, then, with that whole-souled attention to food which makes conversation impossible, Percival nibbling at first, but getting in some pretty fair work himself toward the finish, for he had not broken fast since morning. Observing this, Dog felt encouraged, very slightly, but his courage fell when he attempted to draw Percival into conversation on the long ride home, while the lad sat beside him, with Ducky perched precariously on the luggage in the rear.

"This is a fine country," he hazarded. "Gets a bit dry at times, of course."

"I don't like it," said Percival.

"You will, all right. Probably the name sort of prejudiced you—Too Dry."

"What does a name matter?"

Dog stuck to it.

"Of course you heard about the big Too Dry Gulch Dam. I imagine they talk about that a lot back East."

"No."

"We had a project to dam the creek in Too Dry Gulch, above our place. Wasn't going to cost only thirty million dollars, but that no-account Congressman of ours fumbled the cards somehow and fell down on the appropriation. Steve Martin, that runs the post office, he come out here to go into the real-estate business, and he did too, and he's in it yet, but the boys kind of schemed around to get him made postmaster so he wouldn't starve to death while he was waiting for the real-estate boom to start. You ever interested in real-estate?"

"No."

DOG gave it up for a while. He was pretty busy, anyway. Driving a Ford that has no front bushings, on a road that is composed chiefly of ruts with a generous sprinkling of crags that must be leaped, is a man-sized job by itself. When he finally resumed, it was via a third party. He addressed his remarks to Ducky, hollering them from the side of his mouth.

"You didn't know I was getting a washing-machine, did you?"

"No, and I don't care for it any," came a jolted answer. "Seems to me we're getting all-fired civilized lately. Next thing I know you'll be sending away for a woman."

Dog laughed. Percival suddenly sat up straight and looked at him anxiously.

"Are there no women?"

This was, of course, as funny a thing as he could have said. Dog and Ducky laughed noisily, and the Ford, unattended for a split second, leaped into a ditch, and then, in answer to a savage jerk, hopped back onto the road, quivering from her nose to the place where her tail-light once was.

"Well, I wouldn't go so far as to say that," said Dog. "There's a nester in beyond about twenty miles that's got a

woman. He got her off the reservation near Parma, summer before last. They say she's a pretty good cook for a squaw. We could go over and see her some time if you want to."

He looked at the lad by his side, but the lad was looking straight ahead, tight-lipped, silent and unutterably sad. Dog gave it up, and they made the last twelve miles, which, incidentally were the worst, in a silence broken only by the never-stopping rattle of the Ford. The Ford had lights, of a sort, but after darkness set in, Dog made small use of them, driving by a sixth sense that enabled him to steer the crazy vehicle in its rock-strewn course. Twice the car broke loose and dived down dry watercourses, and Ducky had to get out and push to help get it back onto the track that Western courtesy called a road.

BUT all things, even bad roads, come to an end, and finally they arrived, and Spud Dugan, a sour wisp of a man with a bald head and fierce mustaches, met them with a lantern and helped tote things in.

"What's this?" he demanded abruptly, when Dog lifted out the heavy, crated washing-machine.

"Little present for you. I'll open it up when we get into the house."

They went in, Percival Bigelow James following, carrying nothing. It was a house of goodly size, made of native Montana timber such as is found along streambeds, with a kitchen and bedroom on the first floor, and a loft above, reached by a ladder nailed to a side wall. Percival dropped onto a bench in the kitchen. Spud set about putting away stores in a cupboard. Dog found a hatchet and tore the crate from the washing-machine.

"What-in-the-hell-is-it?" demanded Spud testily.

"Washing-machine," Dog told him. "Genuine Old Faithful, twenty-four fifty, F. O. B. factory. She's a peach. Swishes the clothes back and forth, and the dirt settles in the bottom."

"Hump. What's this thing?"

"That's the handle you work it by. Just pull the handle back and forth, and the wheels go round, and the clothes get washed in no time and all the dirt falls to the bottom. You'll like it."

Spud shook his head.

"Not me. Take her outside. I pull no handles. We wash in the creek like always —what washing we do, which aint much; and I might add that your little friend here does his own or it don't get done, and that's that."

Apparently that was that. Dog, mustering a grin, set the machine outside, under the leanto-porch, and suggested that they all turn in.

"Where?" asked Percival in a dead voice.

Dog told him, upstairs, in a fine comfortable bunk with a buffalo robe to throw over him if it got cold. Percival still sat on the bench which he had found upon entering the house.

"I want three hundred dollars," he said suddenly. "I must have three hundred dollars. You let me have three hundred dollars and take me back to where I can get a train for New York. Mother'll pay you back."

Dog shook his head.

"You get no three hundred dollars from me. Your mother gave me positive instructions. You'll like it fine here after you get used to it, and you'll get strong and hearty. Why, in a month, you wont want to go back, not never."

"I want to go back now," whined Percival.

"Aw shut up," said Ducky suddenly. "You make me sick. It's going to be hard enough on us to have you around here at best, and if you're going to yowl around all the time, it'll be a lot worse. Get up to bed and sleep off your grouch."

"Ducky's right," added Dog, picking up the big grips, which he carried to the foot of the ladder. Leaving them on the floor, he climbed halfway, and at a signal Ducky handed them up one at a time, and he boosted them through the ceiling hole onto the floor above. Percival watched this performance, but made no move to help.

Out of deference to company, Spud Dugan lighted a lantern and carried it up into the loft, and still Percival sat. Finally, Dog took him by the arm, led him to the ladder, and pushed him up. Just before his head disappeared through the hole, he turned and spoke:

"I'll bet I'll make you give me three hundred dollars."

"You lose your bet," said Dog sullenly. "Good night."

PERCIVAL was not up when Dog and Ducky left next morning on a long trip to the North Cañon country. Returning, dog-tired, at dark, they found him on the

bench in the kitchen, sitting perfectly still, eyes straight ahead, looking at nothing.

Spud Dugan whispered to Dog:

"Just like that all day. Wont do nothing."

"Let him alone," answered Dog.

The next day, as reported by Spud, was just about the same, and the next no better. The third day was, in fact, slightly worse, because Percival had brought to his bench a book bound in limp leather. Books always irritated Spud.

"He'll die on you, sure. Remember that dog the nester's squaw brought with her from over by Parma. Just sat around and died. Same with him."

"Aw, dry up," Dog told him. But he was worried, and next morning he made excuse to stay at the house, and determined to have a talk with Percival. He drew up a backless kitchen chair and filled a cob pipe.

"Montana's not such a bad country, son," he began.

No answer.

"I've seen lots of places—Texas, New York, Klondike, and for just plain satisfaction, Montana beats 'em all."

No answer.

"Take it, now, down around Bozeman and Belgrade—there's as fine irrigated land as there is in the world. And the Gallatin Valley. Then we've got oil, some places, and lots of mining around Butte and Anaconda."

The boy on the bench lifted his head.

"I want to go home, and if I had three hundred dollars, I'd go."

It was pretty tough.

"Come on outside a minute," Dog said finally, and Percival reluctantly rose and followed.

"Now, if you're a poet, take a look at that valley. Ever see anything prettier than that? That's why we're here—this valley. Cattle graze in the free range, and there's always water in the creek."

The boy looked up at him.

"If there was three hundred dollars in that creek, I'd care for it. Otherwise not."

He turned and dragged himself back toward the house. An idea came to Dog, who had racked his brain for three days for one—came with that suddenness that is characteristic of ideas. Anything was better than the present situation. He called the boy back, spoke to him in hushed tones.

"There might be."

"Might be what?"

"Three hundred dollars in that creek. I'm not saying there is, but I'll say that it looks an awful lot like a creek that Ducky and I took thirty thousand dollars out of in the Klondike, and I might add—"

"How do you get gold out of a creek?"

Hooray! There might be a chance yet. Get the lad interested in any kind of outdoor work, and give the good old Montana ozone a chance on him.

"I'll show you."

He ran to the house, dived into a cupboard and returned with a deep pie-pan. It was not shaped just right, but it would answer. He picked up a shovel from where it leaned against the corner of the house, and led Percival up the creek, and showed him how to wash gravel. And the third pan showed color—just a trace, but enough to show. Of course, Percival did not know that color and gold in paying quantities are things often as far apart as Montana is from New York. But Dog knew that the sight of color will edge a chechahco, rouse lust within his soul, stir him to feats of physical endurance undreamed of. He sneaked away and joined Ducky in a fence-mending job.

THAT night a very tired Percival, but a Percival with a real appetite, joined them at dinner, stoked himself with beans and fried pork, and retired immediately afterward to the loft.

"He's gone cuckoo now," Spud Dugan told Dog and Ducky, jerking his bald head toward the ceiling-hole. "Been out up the creek all day, panning for gold."

"You let him alone," said Dog.

"Don't worry." Spud stacked a precarious load of dishes in the nightly chore of clearing off. "Letting him alone is what suits me best."

"You'd better salt that creek some," Ducky suggested. "Long about ten o'clock tomorrow morning, that kid'll get tired of mining. We got three-four old Klondike nuggets somewhere, aint we?"

Dog nodded, grinning. He went to an old trunk in a far corner of the sleeping-room, rummaged in it profanely and finally came back with a small chamois sack which, upended, spewed forth five pieces of rough gold, each about as big as a shriveled pea.

"We gave away too many souvenirs," he commented, "but I'll plant one of these tomorrow, maybe two the next day, and that'll leave two for the day after, and

he might just happen to pick up one or two on his own account."

"Fat chance, on that creek! You gotta salt it. Get up there first thing, and put one in the gravel where he's left his shovel stuck in. A man always pans that shovelful."

IT worked beautifully. Next evening, Percival was hungry again, tired, but there was about him an air of elation, elaborately concealed. Dog, getting an early start again, planted two more nuggets, and on the following day, the final two from the pouch. At the close of each day upon which a planting had been made, Percival was hungry, tired but elated, and elaborately concealing his elation.

Ducky had another idea, an idea unique for sheer craziness. He led Percival, with elaborate caution, onto the side porch, and pointed to the washing-machine.

"I understand you've been digging up the creek," he whispered.

"A little," admitted Percival.

"Get much?"

"Not much."

"Thought so. I've got an idea. Your method is too slow—you don't get over enough dirt in a day. We'll start in the morning, early, just you and me, and we'll take this washing-machine up the creek a bit and plant her solid, and shovel dirt and gravel into her. She's rigged, you see, so that the dirt from the clothes will settle in this place at the bottom. Well, now, suppose we take a saw and make some slits in her sides—get me? No? Why, the idea is simple enough, and practical. The water and dirt and little rocks slip out of the slits in the side, but the gold settles in the bottom, where the dirt is supposed to settle when you use the rig for washing clothes. How's that?"

Percival nodded, and for the first time since coming to Too Dry, he smiled.

"Don't tell anybody. Nobody's interested in this washing-machine and it wont be missed. You slide in now, and up to bed and get a big sleep, and I'll call you at daybreak and we'll eat a cold bite for breakfast and sneak up the creek before Dog and Spud are stirring."

When the boy had gone, he told Dog.

"The scheme is crazy, of course, but it'll keep him interested a few days longer, and if he once gets used to this country, and gets a little flesh on him, he'll be a man, and we're going to need a man bad before long to help in the branding."

Dog nodded. The scheme was good—for what it was meant to accomplish.

"We need a little more salt, though," he added. "Wait a minute."

Again he went to the trunk and engaged in profane search, returning at last with a nugget mounted on a pin.

"Forgot this one," he said, and wrenched the pin from where it was soldered to the back of the nugget. "Take this and plant it."

THE washing-machine rocking device kept Percival happy all next day, and his eye was lighted by a particularly bright gleam of elation as he settled to the fried pork and beans at dinner next night.

"If we just had about one more piece of salt," mourned Ducky, after Percival had climbed the ladder, but Dog shook his head. The stick-pin had cleaned the place of nuggets.

"We've done all we can," he said. "I wish he'd find something of his own."

But Ducky shook his head at this. No chance. And yet, come dinner time next night, here sits Percival again, looking as cocky as a cat that's eaten a canary. Throughout the meal Dog and Ducky cast anxious eyes at him. Percival finished, pushed his plate toward the center of the table, got up, thrust his hand deep into his right-hand trouser pocket and brought forth something wrapped in a bit of paper. He unwrapped the paper and held out for inspection a nugget twice as large as any that the conspirators had planted for him.

"I worked in new ground today, farther up the creek. Good night."

They watched him, fascinated, as he climbed the ladder to the loft.

"Suffering crawfish!" hissed Ducky, after he had safely gone.

Dog said nothing at all for a full minute, and then:

"You remember that Swede at Dawson that took a million dollars out of the place we gave up as no good."

"I remember," said Ducky. "Probably nothing to this."

"Probably not," agreed Dog, but without conviction. "We'll see what he brings home tomorrow night."

NEXT night Percival stoked as usual, pushed back his plate, got up, fished into his right-hand trouser pocket and produced two nuggets about the size of the one he had displayed the night before.

Dog cleared his throat and spoke with elaborate casualty.

"Just where are you working now?"

"Up the creek. Around that second bend. Good night."

Again they watched him climb the ladder. Ducky spoke first.

"That takes him out of our land, onto the free range. All he's got to do is stake his claim."

"I know it. Let's wait one more day."

At the end of the day that followed, Percival again ate his dinner, pushed back his plate and dug into his right-hand trouser pocket, producing this time three nuggets.

"Getting better," he said, and started toward the ladder, but this time Dog called to him.

"Of course a nugget now and then don't really mean anything."

"They're good for money," said Percival calmly. "After I get enough of them, I can trade them for three hundred dollars, and that's what I need to get back to New York."

Dog looked at Ducky, and Ducky at Dog. Dog spoke.

"That's all you want, is it? Three hundred dollars?"

"That's all."

"Well—" Dog seemed to hesitate. "If that's really all you want, maybe Ducky and I could scrape it up between us."

"All right. Take me to town tomorrow, and give me three hundred dollars. Good night."

Again he started for the ladder, and this time they let him go. Dog looked at Ducky, and Ducky looked at Dog. Spud Dugan, who had been standing by, put in an oar.

"You're going to put this over on him, are you?"

"It's his own proposition," said Dog decisively.

"Looks raw to me," answered Spud. "All I got to say is that money or anything else that's come by through sharp practice don't ever do nobody no good. I hope you never find a thing after that kid's gone."

"Oh, dry up," said Dog. "What does a poet want with money, anyhow?"

THEY got an early start for town, to catch the stage, and made it. Dog and Ducky held brief but effective converse with old man Kellifer at the store, who always had money, and came out of the conference with a roll of bills, which Dog handed to Percival, just as the stage was ready to start. Percival gave brief thanks, ran across to the Ideal Café for a moment, then climbed aboard the stage, while Ducky heaved his big bags into the freight compartment. Duke Envers, the driver, cranked the big truck, and the engine burst into a violent coughing. Envers got aboard and started his stage, and Dog and Ducky watched it, until all that was visible was a fine swirl of dust in the far distance.

"Well, that's that!" said Dog. "He's gone, and gone for good. Couldn't call him back if we wanted to. Couldn't catch him."

"Well, let's not worry," answered Ducky. "All I want to do now is to get back to that creek and find out what we've got. How rich do you suppose it is?"

Dog shook his head.

"Hard telling. The blamed fool didn't bother to save anything but big nuggets. No telling how much fine stuff there is."

Red Leonard stuck his head out of the Ideal Café and called:

"Oh, Dog."

DOG went over, Ducky trailing. Red Leonard handed Dog an envelope, addressed in a fair hand to Mr. Percival John Bigelow, kindness of restaurant man.

"That sissy kid left it with me, to hand to you after he'd gone."

Dog tore open the letter, Ducky crowding for a look. They read:

> Dear Uncle:
> I had to have three hundred dollars. At first, I thought there really was gold in the creek, although it seemed strange that I found a nugget or more in the first shovelful and nothing after that all day. Of course, when I found that stick-pin nugget, with solder on the back of it, then I knew. So I broke up the nugget chain you gave me when I was a baby, and found nuggets for myself, just as easy. I had to have three hundred dollars.
>
> PERCIVAL.

"What does he say?" yelled Red Leonard from the doorway.

Dog tore the letter, viciously, into very small pieces and heaved them into the wind. Then he steadied himself for an appropriate reply to Red Leonard.

"He says that he thanks Mr. Spence and me for the nice entertainment we provided for him during his stay in Montana, and when he gets back to New York, he's going to tell all the folks there what a wonderful State Montana is."

Free Lances in Diplomacy

In this extraordinary story, "The Man Who Forgot," Mr. New has written one of the most unusual and powerful stories we have ever printed. Do not fail to read it.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

COMING down from a thousand meters in one of his new-model 'planes, Earl Trevor made a perfect landing near his private hangars in the Croydon neighborhood. Leaving his mechanics to overhaul the 'plane, he quickly changed into street clothes in a little bungalow at the end of the hangars, and was just stepping into his car when the 'plane from Le Bourget came down. He had passed this Paris air-service craft some distance the other side of the Channel, and noticed a man sitting just behind the pilot who didn't look to him like one of the regular assistants. Some touch of curiosity prompted him to have his Afghan chauffeur drive over near enough to look at the six passengers as they climbed down; and presently the pilot of the passenger 'plane, came over for a word with him.

"I was tempted to speed up a bit when Your Lordship passed us so handily—but knew it was no use! Our old busses are built for safe, every-day flying, and they do very well if they mark a hundred miles, on the wind. We fancied you must be doing a hundred and eighty, at least?"

"Prob'ly a shade over two hundred. I usually make it from Le Bourget in fifty minutes, unless I'm using one of the heavier 'planes. I say! Was that a new assistant, sitting behind you? I don't seem to recall his face."

"No—chap is a stranger who's been strolling about the Paris flying-fields several days. Been up a few times. Fancy he must have been an ace in the war—he's a wonder when he gets hold of a joy-stick! Seems to be a bit out in his mind—shell-shock, I suppose. Doesn't appear to know where he lives or where he's going, from day to day—except upon one point. The idea's been fixed in his mind that he wished he might get to London—somehow, anyhow. I took a chance on letting him come along in Jenkins' place this morning. Fact is—I'd rather Your Lordship wouldn't mention this Bradley's coming over with me as he did—the men here at the field suppose he's an extra man we've taken on,

and they're paying no attention to him. When I go back, I'll take my relief-pilot with me."

"But if Bradley's a bit dazed, as you say, what'll become of him? Is he able to look after himself?"

"Oh, in a general way—aye. Has money enough to keep him going for a bit, anyhow—an' sense enough to stow the stuff where it'll not get away from him easily. He's in Lunnon now, d'ye see—place where he's been wishing to come; and whatever he wants to do here, or whoever he'd like to see, will possibly come to him after a bit. Still—I'm not altogether easy about him, sir!"

"H-m-m—suppose you were to introduce me as a well-known aviator who'll be glad to take him home as a guest for a week or more—talk 'planes and mechanics a bit, you know? Would he be likely to come along and accept the invitation in good faith, d'ye think?"

"My word! I may say I've heard a lot about Your Lordship's doing little things like this just out of kindness! You may fancy I was partly suggesting something of the sort, sir—but I'd no thought of it in mind! Of course, d'ye see, I can't answer for the way Bradley'll take to the idea, but from what little I've seen of him, I fancy he'll go along like a lamb—take it as a matter of course. The chap was by way of being a gentleman once—that's to be seen, you know. An American, I fancy—though I'm by no means sure as to that. He might be Canadian."

THE man's greeting was instinctively courteous when he was introduced—so unconsciously so that it classified his earlier breeding without question. Somewhere, at some previous time, he had belonged among cultivated, well-bred people, and the breeding was either English or the best American, not Continental. At the mention of the Earl's name, he gave no sign that he had ever heard it before. After a second glance at His Lordship, however, a puzzled expression came into his face, as if he were trying to recall something.

"There was a man—who flew from a battle-wagon in the Ægean across the mountains to Sofia in the second year of the war. It hadn't been done before—over such a distance or terrain. I saw him in the city just after he had killed two Bulgarian brutes who were about to cut his throat in a cellar. Then he disappeared—presumably in the service of the Entente. I never heard of his being captured again, or killed. Your Lordship resembles that man, though he had another name at the time."

"Were you in our service yourself, Mr. Bradley?"

"Why—I—I think so. Not sure, you know. At all events, I wasn't going about Sofia openly. There's some recollection of a Prussian uniform, credentials at the Prussian Legation—and yet I'm positive I wasn't in sympathy with that crowd at the time."

"Have you any definite plans here in London?"

"Naturally! Else why should I have come? But for the moment, they're gone from me—just temporarily, you know. I—I can't seem to remember just what I had decided to do first—" His voice trailed off in a wondering, speculative way—rather tired, a trifle sad.

"Well—that happens quite fortunately for me, old chap! You see, I was hoping you might be willing to come and stop with us for a week or so while you're considering just what you wish to do. We're by way of being rather comfortable, up there in Park Lane. What say? Eh? Come along! We'll go over those days in Bulgaria—compare notes—all that, you know! Talk about flying and mechanics—what?"

"Why—there'll be ladies in your family, of course? I brought no luggage, you see. Came away from Paris a bit unexpectedly. All my stuff's at that little hotel in the Rue de l'Echelle—"

"That's a matter quite easily remedied. We're of practically the same build. My man will fit you out in any togs you require—"

"Mighty decent of Your Lordship, I'm sure! Of course I'll be only too pleased to accept if you really mean it. Er—just a moment, please? There was something I was to ask Mr. Griffin, here—but—hanged if it's not gone from me! Prob'ly something about our trip over. Er—would you let me settle for my transportation, old chap?"

"Nothing to settle, Bradley! I fetched you along as my guest—or tempo'ry assistant, if you like. Fact is, the shoe's on the other foot—I'm under obligations to His Lordship in the matter, you know. His invitation is a courtesy to me as well as you, old top! And I'll wager you'll enjoy your stop with him—what?"

UNDER cover of casual chat as they drove into the city, Trevor studied his guest to see about how much responsibility he was likely to show if permitted to wander about by himself. His eyes betrayed no definite recognition of familiar streets or buildings, but one sensed an instinct in him which would have led his steps, like those of a somnambulist, to whatever locality had been in his mind at some previous time when he felt the urge to be in London. Left to himself, the man probably would have walked the streets until pretty well tired out, then stepped into the first restaurant he passed, for a meal, and asked his way to a small but clean hotel afterward—some inconspicuous place within his means.

Upon reaching the Earl's famous Jacobean mansion in Park Lane, Bradley walked into it in a matter-of-fact way as if accustomed to that type of house all his life, and went upstairs in the wake of the deferential Afghan, to whom Trevor gave a few low instructions in the hall. The man spoke excellent English with a slight accent, and was unmistakably efficient in everything he did—one knew he would have to be in order to hold his job. In an airy, sunny room on the third floor, Achmet looked his charge over critically—then fetched a dressing-robe to be put on after he had removed the flying-clothes.

"If the Sahib will permit me to take his measurements, it will be easier to select a few suits that will fit him perfectly. I recall some tweeds that will do very well for a stroll in the Park, opposite, or for lounging about the house if he prefers. Before dinner I shall have some evening things ready." The man glanced over his charge reflectively. "If the Sahib permits a suggestion—the hair and beard are a trifle long—eh? One understands, of course, that the Sahib has been traveling. Would it not be an improvement if I trimmed them somewhat?"

"Why—er—I fancy it might. I'm in your hands, you know. Turn me out as you think proper."

"Has the Sahib a preference in the shape of his beard? It suggests the Prussian just now, I think—a bit square, you know—and the last time the hair was cut, it was *en brosse.* Neither of which suits the Sahib's face—not his type at all."

"Er—all the same to me, you know—I seldom think of matters like that. What do you suggest?"

"The Van Dyck, by all means! Close-clipped on the cheeks. It is the Sahib's type. The hair short—yet not too close over the ears."

"Sounds rather attractive. I fancy it may give me quite a different appearance. Do as you please, Achmet."

Bradley's manner was very far from being that of a weak-minded man or of one lacking in intelligence; it was more a suggestion of having his mind so crammed full of other matters that it was difficult for him to concentrate upon trivial ones. Dressed in the well-fitting suit of tweeds, with hair and beard neatly trimmed, he presented a startlingly different appearance—so much so, in fact, that none but a trained observer could have recognized in him the unkempt individual in aviator's coat and helmet who had accompanied the Earl from Croydon. This was a result which His Lordship had instructed Achmet to bring about if possible—for a few good reasons of his own. He thought that the self-respect which accompanies a decent appearance might assist in restoring bits of memory to the man, and (a remote contingency, but still worth keeping in mind) if anybody had been shadowing him with sinister motives, it was quite likely to throw such a person off the track.

DESCENDING to the ground floor, Achmet found for him a fedora hat and stick in keeping with the suit; then Bradley strolled out, alone as he supposed, to sun himself in Hyde Park and get his plans in more definite shape, if he could. He failed to notice, as anybody would, the unobtrusive, dark-complexioned man apparently strolling about the Park like himself, yet never letting him get out of sight for a moment. This was Hassan, another Afghan of His Lordship's household, and a cousin of Achmet. (All of them were related, one way or another, to Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, G. C. S. I., who had been Trevor's intimate friend and companion for many years.) And the object of this espionage was twofold—His Lordship had too strong a sense of responsibility for his casually assumed charge to risk his wandering away into difficulties by himself, and he wished to test out, if possible, the chance that the man might be an object of interest to persons unknown.

As it happened, by a strange coincidence, some color was given to this possibility, and Bradley became of more definite in-

terest to the Earl himself, through a casual incident in the Park. Three men strolled past as he was sunning himself on a bench, pipe in mouth, entirely oblivious of them. They were discussing something, absorbedly. Two of them didn't even notice the man on the bench. The third slowed up a little and glanced at the rather fine-looking stranger in a puzzled way as if reminded of something. He nudged his companions. They also looked around with searching glances—then shook their heads. Hassan was by this time near enough to overhear what they said, and managed to keep stalking them from behind the shrubbery until they sat down on another bench farther on.

"Nothing familiar about him to me, Albrecht! Never saw the fellow in my life! Who did you think he reminded you of?"

"That iss of what I am not sure. It iss somepody I've seen undt talked wit'. Wait! Der bosition of der headt undt shoulders wass like t'at of our friendt Pradley, I t'ink. *Ja!*"

"Mebbe like him—yess! But that man wass not Pradley!"

"Vell—I didn't say t'at, didt I? Where wass Pradley—last?"

"Paris. Loafing around the flying-fields—room at the little old Normandie—picking up an occasional stake as expert mechanic when he runs out of funds. That's something he can do any day in the week—make quite a decent living at it if he kept busy; but he can't concentrate any more on the larger abilities that would net him thousands instead of hundreds. We tested that out in Russia, you know—on the clerical end of intelligence department work. He'd unconsciously give us valuable hints by sheer flashes of inspiration—but when it came to working out what he suggested, his mind appeared to slump. Doktor Skoffel told us exactly how he expected the case to develop—and it did. He said if there wass any bossipility of the man's recovering his former faculties *undt* mental soundtness, it would be in the third year after the case wass brought to him. (We kept him in Russia that year, just on the chance of this.) But that if he didn't recover then, he never would. According to Skoffel, he wass likely to dewelop a lower, more crippled form of intelligence—sufficient to earn some sort of a living, but little beyond that."

"Look you, Borgfeldt! Subbose this Pradley efer didt come back—eh? He wouldt pe most dancherous—not? I haf said all along t'at he shouldt pe eliminated shust so soon as we squeeze out of him der last bit of genius which he certainly hadt at one time—shust to pe sure he nefer come to life again so he couldt tell what he knew petween fourteen *undt* nineteen. Nopody knows how much he didt find out—but it wass blenty! If der old memory shouldt come pack—eh?"

"Well—the Herr Doktor-Professor Skoffel bets his professional reputation that it wont come back. He says his course of treatment wass final after that third year—and the medical profession accepts Skoffel's statements as beyond question. The man iss a scientist who believes that a mistake is a criminal offense. In his earlier years, he made some—yess. Now that he iss the learned Herr Doktor, he cannot afford to—he iss much more careful! Still, I'm of Albrecht's opinion—that it will be simple common sense if we kill Bradley at first opportunity—"

"T'at, you cannot do wit'out der permission of der Junta, Borgfeldt. T'ey still haf some ulterior object mit der man—some way of using him in his bresent condition w'ich iss to our adwantage. When t'ey say t'ey are through, we kill him—right away. *Ja!*"

Hassan had managed to hear all of the talk up to this point, but he now saw his charge get up from the bench to stroll on, and was about to follow when he got a glimpse of Achmet, seemingly coming in search of him. Motioning his cousin to keep track of Bradley, he decided to stalk the Berliners as far as he could and find, if possible, where they could be located afterward.

AS the Earl was dressing for dinner that evening, Hassan returned—and came up to His Lordship's room at once. Trevor became so absorbed in what he heard as almost to forget that dinner would be served in half an hour—Bradley's case appeared to be assuming a shape which entirely justified the Earl's curiosity in stopping to ask about him at Croydon, and the inexplicable hunch which had prompted it.

"Hassan—thy father's son hath shown forethought and resource, as was to be expected. Go thou, and tell the tale to His Lordship of St. Ives—saying also that I will step around to his room before the meal is served, that we may speak of this thing before we go down."

In a few minutes Achmet looked the Earl over with a final nod and brushing—satisfied that he was immaculate in his appearance, groomed to perfection. When a man is dressed as well as this it often cramps his style somewhat, if it isn't lifelong habit—but one of the subtle impressions about Trevor is his unconsciousness of clothes. You find his manner exactly the same whether in dinner-clothes or a bathing-suit. Presently he was in Earl Lammerford's room on the upper floor—and his friend looked around while fastening his collar:

"You seem to have struck something int'resting, George. I've had no glimpse of your find as yet, but doubtless I'll recognize something familiar about the chap if he's been in public life at all. What prompted you to stop and have a look at him when you came down?"

"Why, I fancy anyone would say just idle curiosity, but it was possibly a bit more than that. He was not one of the regular assistant pilots in the Paris service—I noticed that when I passed them, rather close aboard. Yet there was no reason to suppose him anything but a new man just taken on. Possibly he betrayed the born aristocrat even as he sat there in flying-togs."

"You think he's American—or Canadian?"

"Not! He was, sometime, an Englishman of good birth—and no renegade, either! Says he can't remember whether he was in the boche service or that of the Entente—not positively. But I know without any question! I'll wager a thousand quid that he was in our service with a pretty high record, if we could but trace it out."

"What do you infer from the talk among those fellows whom Hassan overheard?"

"Oh—a dozen different possibilities. What they implied would fit a good many combinations. Hassan traced them to a house in Bayswater near the yards of the Great Western—evidently where two of them are stopping. Sets back from the road in grounds behind a high wall—just the place for a political rendezvous or almost any outrage that such fellows might possibly carry out. I've given orders, however, that others of our household are to watch the place for several days and follow everyone else who visits it. There may be houses which they frequent in other parts of London that we'd never locate unless we took some such precaution as this. All three of those bounders were apparently convinced that the man they saw over yon in the Park was not Bradley, even if some motions or expressions vaguely suggested him—but it's quite possible that some of them may run across him another time and wonder if he really isn't their man after all. No telling, you see, where our friend may stray to if we let him go about town unaccompanied, and we've no right to make a prisoner of the chap, you know."

IN the drawing-room Bradley, who wore his dinner-clothes as if born to them, was presented to Lady Sibyl, and asked to take her in. This he did with the unconscious manner of one who has no fear of making a slip of any sort or even thinks of such a possibility. It had been thought safer, at his first dinner with them, to assign the daughter of the house as a dinner-partner, inasmuch as she was clever enough to flag him in an imperceptible way if there were occasion for it, and to put him more thoroughly at ease. One of her many admirers who had been unexpectedly switched in consequence wasn't overpleased with the arrangement, but he got a few extra dances afterward by way of reward—and Bradley proved a rather brilliant success in an absent-minded way, keeping up a subconscious flow of witty small-talk, automatically, and occasionally making a general remark across the table which pleasantly scored.

Among the few outside guests was a former Cabinet minister who gave it as his opinion that, while the Central Powers were always to be reckoned with as to certain national traits, there was no chance of their producing any marked impression upon world-affairs for several generations at least—their political leaders being too much at loggerheads and there being no dominant party in control. The total loss of their overseas possessions, he thought, had been a staggering blow from which it would take them a century or more to recover. When he had finished, a quiet voice from farther down the table asked:

"Does Your Lordship know or realize what is happening at this moment in practically all of their former overseas possessions—particularly those in Africa and the Indies?"

"Why—er—fancy I'm as well informed as the next man, sir! Unusual facilities for coming by confidential information—

all that sort of thing, ye know. Had you any particular occurrence in mind, sir?"

"Been through most of them—recently, I think. When our people took over the possessions, we—er—found the various activities in the hands of Prussian managers —superintendents—foremen—very well organized—beggars spoke the local dialects fluently. Well, d'ye see, it was a question of scrapping their organization an' methods —starting fresh all over again and going on from there—or availing ourselves of the existing conditions. Naturally, it was economy and common sense to go on with their organizations—keep on a good many of their managers and foremen—proceed with the systems they had developed. Well, consequence has been, you know, that the beggars have built up intensive Prussian organizations right under our noses. It would take years gettin' the blacks and brownies to work our way, if we started all over again—cut into the export-trade to a prohibitive degree. Their merchant-marine is increasing to an astounding extent, getting back a lot of the carrying trade from those former colonies—and every Prussian in them is helping one way or another to ship in Teutonic bottoms. If we don't jolly well come to our senses pretty soon, they'll be doing the bulk of the business in our outports and laughing at us! Just through sheer incessant, intensive organization while we're napping! Of course there's a good bit more of this I could give you—but—so many things on my mind, you know—forget a lot at times. What?"

FOR a moment or two the table was silent while the guests digested these statements from a man whose quiet manner assured them that he knew exactly what he was talking about. It had not occurred to any of them—particularly, the former Cabinet man—that such conditions were possible in territory which had been wrested from the enemy during the war and turned over to the British Empire as part of its indemnity. Presently the ex-minister asked:

"But—but, my dear sir—if such conditions exist in our conquered territories, and of course I do not question your word in the matter, what's the remedy? What would you do to block the menace before it gets worse?"

"Get rid of every Teuton in authority—naturally. Even down to the lesser foremen and interpreters. Then build up a British organization throughout—with our own interpreters and managing staffs."

"But—wouldn't that disorganize the whole present trade from each locality?"

"Unquestionably. A falling-off of exports that would run to millions. But I fancy a year would see matters going at more or less profit under straight British management—and when the interpreters talked with the blacks or brownies, we'd know what was being said to them! At present, we don't—when the interpreter is a foreigner. Can't you see the opportunity for propaganda and milit'ry organization in such a condition?"

"Aye—unquestionably! But, d'ye see, our commercial men, who've money invested in the trade, will never consent to such an upheaval as you propose, with its inevitable loss of millions while the change is being made!"

"No—they'll not. Well, at some future time they'll wish they had—that's all! I'm quite well aware of the fact that nothing will be done about it. There should be a row in Parliament that would get some action in the matter, but there wont be. Not a chance of it—any more than there is of stopping the flooding American markets with goods from Central Europe when such flooding causes the shutting down of one American factory after another. None of the leading nations excepting France and Japan seems able to learn anything by experience—"

Bradley stopped abruptly when it seemed to others at the table that he was about to launch into a tirade unpleasant to hear, the raving of a man who was not quite balanced, mentally—and there was a sense of comfortable relaxation from growing tension. After all, Mr. Bradley was undoubtedly better informed concerning the matters touched upon than any of the others, but it was seen that he was also courteous enough, instinctively, to know just when it was pleasanter to stop. So with nods of appreciation in his direction, the guests went on with other discussions as the courses appeared. Only Lady Sibyl, who had been closely watching his face, noticed the beads of perspiration, the deep wrinkles between the eyes, which indicated suffering that he was trying to cover up. Gently placing one hand upon his, she whispered:

"You are suffering, Mr. Bradley! Is there anything one might do or suggest?"

He turned a grateful look upon her while evidently struggling with what must have been torture.

"That is most kind of you, Lady Sibyl. It's only one of these frightful headaches which come whenever I try to concentrate upon remembering anything. Gets one all across the forehead, you know, and clear up to the top of one's skull. I should have had the sense to let Lord Cranby's remarks go unchallenged. In trying to show him just what conditions really are out there, I had literally to force myself into recalling what I had seen. Most of it eluded me—fortunately, or I should be raving by now. But the effort has put me simply out of it for half an hour at least. If—if you would be—so—so very kind—as to cover me—a bit! Just—just flag anyone who—er—speaks to me, you know. What? I shall be—very grateful!"

A squeeze from the dainty hand and a warm glance of appreciation for his courage reassured him.

LATER she described the occurrence in detail to her parents and Earl Lammerford when their guests had gone and they were in the big library, where there was no chance for interruption.

"You say you can't place him at all, Lammy?"

"I really can't, you know—and it makes me wonder a bit if my own old bean isn't going balmy after all these years! Chap's face seems to have a vague illusive suggestion of familiarity—as if I'd known him at one time, somewhere, but next moment I fancy it pure imagination, just because I'm trying to see a resemblance where there really isn't one, don't you know. Doubtless Bradley was one of us—once. Quite possibly in the peerage, but I can't seem to hit upon any missing peer who might fit his case. Of course I'm no walking Burke or Debret—there are scores in the Peerage whom I dare say I've never seen. And yet, taking the portraits in the gazettes and news-sheets, it's a question if the features of any particular one wouldn't be somewhat familiar to me."

"It's quite possible that he may not have worn a beard in the days before the war, you know."

"Well—if I'd never happened to meet or talk with him, that might make recognition a lot more diffic'lt, now. But if he were some one I'd known rather well, it would make no diff'rence at all because one may easily visualize any particular face clean-shaven, if the trick is once acquired."

NEXT morning the Earl's secretary made an appointment for him by telephone for eleven-thirty with Sir James MacBirnie, the greatest mind-specialist in London; and arriving at the physician's house in an aristocratic quarter of the city, was requested to place a check for twenty guineas in the hands of his secretary before the Earl was ushered into the consulting-room. The celebrated specialist's time was worth every penny of the fees he received, and more; but the twenty guineas made His Lordship smile a little as he cordially shook hands with the man. He would have paid ten times the amount for the information he hoped to obtain, and never missed it—because his abilities lay in a far more remunerative line.

Sir James was inclined to be a little testy for a moment when he saw that the famous peer was unquestionably in the best of health—he had been considerably pleased with the request for an appointment, hoping to add a most distinguished patient to his list; but after a few moments' explanation of why His Lordship had come, his professional interest was aroused in the case described to him.

"Will Your Lordship, verra carefully and in detail, go over every symptom ye've noticed in the man from the first moment ye saw him—every little trick o' manner, of forgetfulness—every little scrap o' unexpected memory?"

This the Earl did in a systematic manner, adding in conclusion:

"Since my daughter's account of the man's suffering at dinner, last evening, I'll admit a growing conviction that the boches did something to him—presumably at a time when he was a prisoner in their hands—which was the original cause of the torture he now occasionally experiences, and that it was done quite deliberately, with the object of destroying his memory."

"Weel—that is possible, ye ken. It might be done—though I doot that it actually was, because it would seem a much seempler matter to hae killed the man as a spy or for any one of a hundred reasons which the Huns would hae conseedered quite sufficient. What would be the object in letting him leeve—taking a deal of trouble to destroy his memory?"

"Suppose I answer that objection by put-

ting a question or two, Sir James? I'm asking for information, you understand—as a layman, who knows nothing more than the rudiments of medicine, surgery or brain-diseases. It seems to me that I recall being told by a specialist, some time ago, that a person suffering from certain forms of amnesia occasionally gets a reflex nerve-action which causes him unconsciously to blab every blessed thing stored in his mind at some former period of his life in some such way as a thoroughly drunken man babbles of everything he knows—not with the slightest effort at concentration or attempt to remember, but more like the relaxing of certain muscles which have been automatically holding something back as their particular function in normal health, when they suddenly let go. The sort of unconscious outpouring which is perhaps illustrated by a man talking in his sleep of matters which he guards most carefully when awake. Now, is there such a phase of amnesia, reacting in that way—or is the idea merely unproved theory?"

"FRANKLY—I canna say, positeevely, because such a case has never come under my pairsonal observation. But I'm of the impression that cases like that hae occurred in circumstances where there was little opportunity for obsairving them scientifically. Aye—I may say that I've heard of them. Ye fancy, then—if your theory as to intentional injury at the boches' hands is correct—that it wair deleeberately done wi' the expectation o' obtaining some such reflex action at a future time, an' thereby getting at certain data or secrets the man wair supposed to hae locked in his brain?"

"Suppose it turns out that he was at some former time an F. O. man in our diplomatic service—who had once been in position to know a great deal concerning the data on file in Downing Street, and specific plans concerning our foreign policy? Wouldn't they consider that a good enough reason to let him live and go where he pleased, under constant surveillance—instead of killing him out of hand, and thereby losing all chance of prying his brain open to see what might be in it?"

"Aye—it's conceivable they'd reason along those lines. Verra guid! Let us now coom to a mair definite understanding o' Your Lairdship's object in consulting me? Ye weesh, as I understand it, to know if I conseeder there is a possibeelity o' alleviating the man's occasional suffering—if not restore him to normal health completely—eh?"

"That is the first and most important part of it, Sir James. We've all taken a liking to Bradley—wouldn't for a moment consider any question of expense if medical science can do anything for him. But—in confidence of course, as you can well understand—there's more to the case than that. If Bradley was the Huns' prisoner for, say, five or six years,—if, during that time, he managed to obtain information vitally important to Downing Street, before they blotted out his memory,—the restoration of that memory is likely to be a seriously desirable matter to the British Government! From even the little he said to Lord Cranby last evening, it's to be seen that he has stored in that brain of his a mass of information most valuable to us if we can but recover it from the wreck they made of him."

"H-m-m-m—Your Lairdship is quite right! I'd no' conseedered that aspect o' the case befoor. Er—would ye fetch him here for an examination?"

"Not at first—no knowing just how the chap would take to the suggestion. Might alarm him so that he'd attempt to leave us at first opportunity. We've no right to detain him against his wishes, you know. What evening this week have you and Lady MacBirnie disengaged—if any?"

"Why—I fancy we've naething booked for Thursday, as yet. My secretary will ken—" He asked the question from his desk telephone. "No—no acceptances for Thursday at the moment—though we may hae an hoor hence. I was keeping the end o' the evening open for a look-in at the hospital boord meeting."

"Would you and Lady MacBirnie have the kindness to dine with us in Park Lane, then?"

"At your famous old mansion—which I fancy must be known half aroond the warld? Faith, we will so! Your family and your hoose hae been on her tongue mair than once—she'll enjoy that dinner immensely, I'm quite certain. An' if happen your case is anywhere in sight, I'll study him closely enough posseebly to venture an opinion befoor leaving."

In discussing the matter with his wife that evening, the specialist expressed some doubt as to whether he should not have returned His Lordship's check for twenty guineas—but this was straining her Glasgow thrift a bit too far.

"Nae, nae, Jamie! Ye gae him an hoor o' your time, did ye no'? An' 'tis worth the money, these days—as a' the warld kens. Had ye gi'en him back his bank order, he might hae ta'en back his inveetation—an' that would hae made me greet like a bairn! Nae, lad—let be as it is!"

WHEN Thursday evening came around, as our engagement-dates have a way of doing, Sir James and his wife drove up to the Park Lane mansion in their stylish landaulet half an hour before dinner was served—finding among the other guests a couple of old friends who occasionally consulted the specialist professionally. Earl Lammerford of St. Ives and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan were also known to them, but were at the Trevor mansion so much of the time when in London as to be considered members of the family—Sir Abdool's own house, in fact, being situated upon that portion of the Earl's property which gave upon Park Street in the rear. Bradley, of course, was an inmate of the house for an indefinite time.

During the meal Sir James—who was seated next to the lady on Bradley's right, just around the corner of the table—had plenty of opportunity for studying the man at a distance of something less than three feet, close enough to see quite plainly the texture of his skin, with whatever lines or scars there might be in various places. It was but a few moments before the specialist's attention was fixed upon two slight depressions, one over each eye and about an inch above it. From these, his searching glance traveled to the scalp, where the roots of the hair began. Half an inch above the front margin of hair—which was of thick, heavy growth, but parted cleanly wherever the masses fell away from each other—his keen eyes presently made out a slight ridge in the scalp running across from one side to the other, as if it had been cut at some former time and stitched together again. At each end of this ridge was a vertical extension of it which ran down an inch or more. If turned down over the forehead, that portion of the scalp would have resembled the inverted flap of a coat-pocket, but so well was it hidden by the thick growth of hair that nobody would have noticed it unless looking for that particular sort of thing.

While the others were having their coffee and cigars in the big library, Trevor, Sir James and Earl Lammerford went down to Trevor's sound-proof radio-room for a private consultation. After examining the place a moment or two appreciatively, the specialist sat himself down in a big Tudor chair, lighted a fresh cigar—and gave them his professional opinion.

"At some time within the past foor or five years, Mr. Bradley was operated upon by a surgeon who pairfectly understood his business. If he wair in the boches' hands at the time, it might hae been Skoffel, o' Dusseldorf, or Hauptner o' Berlin. Either o' them is capable of doing a job like that wi' such preceesion as to accomplish whate'er his object might hae been. The periosteum hae been incised and toorned doon over the eyes; then the frontal bone hae been trephined an' buttons ta'en oot exactly ower that portion o' the brain at either side which controls the function o' memory. What was done beyond that, only anither operation would reveal, defineetly—but frae the man's seemptoms, I would say that sma' layers o' fungus wair inserted ower the brain in those openings—the periosteum toorned back an' steetched in place again—a new layer o' bony structure forming ower the holes in the coorse o' seex months or so. The pressure o' the fungus or anything else upon the brain at those pairticular spots would cause intense suffering wi' every attempt to foorce those portions o' the brain to function normally. If ye look closely at Mr. Bradley's forehead, ye'll notice the slight deepressions produced by trephining and the ridge under the hair, where the scalp wair cut an' peeled doon."

"H-m-m—that seems to corroborate the impression I'd been forming, Doctor. Do you think another operation might be successful—permit the removal of whatever is pressing on the brain—restore Bradley to normal health and memory?"

"There'll be little question as to that, Your Lairdship. Remove the cause o' the trouble, and nature does a deal o' restoring on her own accoont."

"How serious a risk would it be for Bradley? What would be his chances for recovery?"

"Depends, of coorse, upon how greatly his seestem hae been weakened by suffering an' driftin' aboot in an abnormal condeetion—improperly nourished at times, I dare say. Also upon what fever or ither germs he may hae ta'en into his seestem during several months in Africa. But judging as weel as one may frae his ap-

pearance this evening, I'd say that the reesk o' his no' recoovering is scarcely a serious one. The cause o' inflammation and blood-infection will be removed—everything cleansed thoroughly an' sterilized. The shock effect, while under the anesthetic, is negligible. Speaking professionally, I'd no' by any means conseeder the risk a proheebitive one."

"Very good! We'll have Bradley down here and suggest it to him—with the agreement, of course, that he's to do exactly as he pleases about it. What?"

BRADLEY, it should be understood, had no knowledge of Sir James' profession or reputation, the subject having been tacitly avoided by the other guests on the ground that professional men, especially physicians, dislike talking shop when they are out for an evening. It savors too much of fishing for professional advice without paying for it. So, until he went below with Trevor to the radio-room, he had no suspicion of any object upon his host's part beyond wishing him to hear bits of conversation with the big Chincoteague station on the other side of the Atlantic. When this was finished, and they were sitting there comfortably over their cigars, the Earl asked Sir James if he would mind giving them some details of a recent successful operation which had attracted world-wide newspaper comment. This the specialist did—drifting into it casually and explaining the technical terms so that none of them should lose any of the points. It was really a description of a hypothetical case very similar to that of Bradley's—so much so that it caught and held his attention from the start. In a muttered aside to Lamme ford, he said:

"I didn't know Sir James was a surgeon—evidently a most successful one, if he performs operations like that! Is he by way of being known in the profession—outside of London?"

"Hmph! He has the reputation of being the greatest brain-specialist in the British Empire—one of the greatest in the world! And yet, like all big men, you notice that his manner is as simple and unaffected as a child's. Tell him of some case which has baffled the profession, and you enlist his interest at once—but try to say anything about what a great man he is, and he gets testy—thinks you're trying to have him on."

"H-m-m—I wonder what his fee would be for an examination?"

"Depends a lot upon whether he was int'rested in the case or not. To the average person with a trouble which is partly imaginary, I fancy his fee would be rather stiff. Trevor was describing you to him after we came down here—your headaches, diffic'lty in remembering—all that, you know. An' blessed if the chap didn't say he'd been observing you closely at dinner, diagnosed your case as the result of some operation a few years ago, an' told us exactly how it had been performed. Seems he was looking for little traces that nobody else would see."

"The deuce! Did he—er—suggest any remedy for the—er—frightful headaches—and all that?"

"Yes. He said you'd have 'em—probably getting worse as time goes on—until the cause is removed—which means another operation like the first one, only reversed in some respects."

"Dangerous operation?"

"Not unless your whole system were badly out of shape. He said that unless you have the scars of old wounds, you're prob'ly in excellent condition—and could think of no injury which you might have received during the war that would have warranted or excused the operation you had. Apparently it was done willfully—with some definite object in view."

"Gad! If one but had a little extra tin—eh? I'd take the chance of another operation under the knife of a man like that in one holy second! But I fancy there'll not be over a hundred pounds in my luggage back there—somewhere—the last place I left it—can't seem to remember. And I've not over sixty or seventy quid here in London! An operation performed by Sir James would prob'ly run to a thousand at least."

"Something like that—in the average case. But he was int'rested enough to observe you closely, seemed to feel that he'd like to undo that former work if he could. I'd not be surprised if he named a merely nominal sum and gave you a couple of years to pay it, if necess'ry. —I say—Sir James! Would you be good enough to repeat for Mr. Bradley what you told us about his case—describe the former operation? Eh?"

THE great specialist did this, smilingly—leading Bradley's finger along the crescent-shaped ridge in his scalp and over the two little forehead depressions.

"Now obsairve! I'm going to gie ye a tough bit o' headache—but 'twill last only a moment or two."

Placing the tip of his forefinger over one of the forehead indentations, he pressed upon it firmly though not very hard, and the man could scarcely repress a groan of torture—his face showing the relief he felt when the pain subsided.

"Ye pairceeve? I increase the pressure o' whate'er substance is lying against the brain under that thin disk o' new bone, and there's enough local irritation—posseebly inflammation—to make the effect seemply excruciating. Weel, Mr. Bradley—whate'er substance there is in there must coom oot befoor there be any prospect o' relief for ye."

"Would an operation of that sort restore memory besides removing the pain—give me back the sort of mind I had before?"

"In time—wit'oot much question. The superfeecial injury to the brain-cells must be healed up—and that canna be done in a moment."

When Bradley, rather haltingly, raised the question of cost, Sir James told him he need not consider it—that he would be interested in the case and see that the patient got proper hospital care subsequently, until convalescent, whether there was ever a penny paid or not. While the man was naturally hesitating about accepting such a proposition, Earl Trevor slipped a penciled memorandum into his hand:

Don't consider the expense, Old Chap. I'll lend you five thousand in the morning—give you twenty years to pay it back if necessary—or find some service you can do for me to cancel the debt entirely.

WITH the money and influence at the Earl's disposal, it was a simple matter to get action in much less time than with the average case. Bradley was taken around to the private sanitarium in the rear of Sir James' house, next morning, and operated upon that afternoon.

Upon the following day there was a curious incident which might not have occurred once in half a million times. Bradley was lying in a private room, his head swathed in bandages—partly conscious, but slightly drugged to deaden the soreness resulting from the operation. His hair had been shaved off to an inch beyond where the incision was made in his scalp, the rest of it being closely clipped, and his face completely shaved—so that, from the eyebrows down, his face was uncovered. While he lay there alone, the attendant nurse having stepped out for something, a handsome woman in costly furs came along to the opposite room, just across the little side hall, and glanced in at him before knocking upon the opposite door—where the friend whom she had come to see was convalescing from a major operation. Catching sight of Bradley's face, she staggered back against the jamb of the door and leaned there as if almost fainting. Slowly—her glance wandered from one feature to another. Then the nurse came softly down the hall, and the woman grasped her arm before she could go in to her patient.

"Nurse! Will you tell me, please, who that man is?"

"A Mr. Bradley, Baroness. Most interesting case! Operated on by the enemy during the war—for some beastly purpose of their own, I suppose. And Sir James has undone the mischief they did! The patient is doing very well indeed—we really feared complications of some sort. Came out of the ether beautifully. We're keeping him under a sedative to ease the soreness and pain from the operation, but he'll feel easier in a few hours."

"Bradley? Bradley! That can't be his name, possibly! You say the enemy did something to him? Then he must have been captured by them during the war! A prisoner with them ever since! Yes—that would explain—some of it, at least! Not all—but some of it. Tell me! You must have bathed him—changed the bedlinen? Has he a small triangular scar upon the outside of his right thigh—as if a point of barbed wire had torn it deeply and the wound had healed unevenly?"

"Why—Baroness—I—I think I do recall some little mark in about that position. I say! He's not sufficiently conscious to know what we're doing—he'd take you for another nurse, I fancy! Suppose you come in while I look? Eh?"

Gently pulling up the bedclothes until a few inches of the man's thigh were uncovered, they saw a small livid scar of exactly the shape Her Ladyship had described. Dropping the counterpane back over him, she stood by the bedside examining closely the handsome features on the pillow—then beckoned the nurse out into the hall and asked if she might talk with Sir James at once. As he happened to be disengaged at the moment, she was taken

through the rear grounds to his house and shown into the consulting-room.

"Sir James—you probably don't know me, though I've been seeing my friend, Mrs. Seton-Bayley, every day since her operation."

"I don't forget people as easily as Your Ladyship fancies; Baroness Windercombe's charities hae becoom too well known since the war to mak' recogneetion diffeecult in any case. Ye wished to consult me aboot yourself, perhaps? Aye?"

"No. About your patient Mr. Bradley. There is a monument to him in his family burying-ground upon our estate in Cornwall—killed at second Ypres when six boche 'planes sent him down in flames after he had dropped four others. His posthumous D.S.O., Croix de Guerre and other decorations were sent to me after the Armistice. Well—your Mr. Bradley is my dear dead husband—Lord Francis Windercombe of St. Orway! There is no question about it whatever! The nurse has been giving me some details of his case—his loss of memory—his wandering about with no recollection of his identity. What's to happen now, Sir James? Will he remember me at all—ever be anything like his old dear self again?"

"I theenk I can promise Your Ladyship that wi' some chance o' making my word guid—but it may take time. In a few days we'll test him oot wi' ye at his bedside. Meanwhile, as a pairsonal favor, will ye accoompany me to Park Lane for a chat wi' the Earl and Countess o' Dyvnaint? They hae a much greater eent'rest in your husband than appears on the surface. In fact, but for them, he ne'er would hae been placed in my hands for treatment, in all probability—so I fancy ye owe them some obligation upon your own part. They will tell ye much that ye will weesh to know as to how Lord Windercombe happens to be in England at a', and under protection as their guest."

DURING the next two months Lord and Lady Windercombe were guests at Trevor Hall, the Earl's beautiful estate in South Devon, while the Baron was recovering and growing enough hair to hide the scars from the operation. Then he dictated to the Earl's secretary a detailed report of everything he had seen or heard while in Central Europe. At Trevor's suggestion three copies were made and duly attested—with a certificate from Sir James MacBirnie that His Lordship was in perfectly sound mind and body when the reports were executed, and that his mind was unquestionably clear upon every experience he had been through. These three copies Earl Trevor had filed, through his personal influence, in as many different vaults at the Foreign Office—and subsequent events proved it a wise precaution. A week after Windercombe returned to his wife's townhouse in London, he was attacked on the street one foggy night after leaving his club, and bundled into a limousine at the curb, where he was effectually chloroformed by men who recognized him as "Bradley" and thought he seemed much clearer in mind than when they last saw him in Paris.

When he regained consciousness, he found himself in an upper chamber of a villa in what seemed to be a respectable neighborhood, though not far from one of the railway yards, but there was a high wall inclosing the grounds and two large police-dogs in evidence. Presumably he would be shot as a supposed burglar before he could shake them off in any attempt to escape. The Baron's mind was now working with all its old-time precision when he had been one of the most efficient officers in the service and one of its most spectacular aviators. Trevor had explained his theory as to why the enemy had not killed him out of hand when they began to suspect how much he had learned as to their future plans—the idea appearing to be an exceedingly probable one. He knew, from the moment he was attacked, that he was certain to be disposed of unless he somehow convinced his captors that his mind was in the same clouded condition that it had been in during the past three years. So when two of his captors entered the room, his manner was the same vague, undecided one with which they had become familiar. He seemed at first to partly recognize one of them—then turned to look out of the window as if they were strangers in whom he had no interest.

"Your Lordship will probably recall the last time we met in Charlottenburg? Eh?"

"No—though I fancied at first that I'd seen you before. And why the title? If we have met, as you say, you know that I'm Bradley. 'Burke's Landed Gentry,' if you like—but not the Peerage. I—you'll have to excuse me, I fancy! Beastly headache, you know!"

Again His Lordship quietly turned and looked out of the window. Presently his

headache appeared to be letting up a bit—a cheerful grin deepened the corners of his mouth.

"I say, you chaps! Did I ever tell you what the English have up their sleeves in Downing Street? Managed to get a berth in the F. O. some time ago, d'ye see. We know a deal more about your plans than you fancy! Two of our best men went through a lot of the secret archives in Wilhelmstrasse one night—got the vault combination, somehow. Odd that you never considered it necessary to put time-locks on that vault! Of course most of it is old stuff now—plans discarded, your best operatives dead and gone. But you'd blocked out your policies in detail for the next fifty years, and there are men still living who will undoubtedly carry them out—eh—what? I—er—ah! . . . . That rotten headache again! Tell you—whole story—some other time! Want you—understand—can't bluff us as much as you—er—think!"

AS his voice trailed away, Albrecht and Borgfeldt glanced at each other and then at a third man—whom they had summoned from Paris to examine the sometime "Bradley" and decide whether he knew too much to remain alive. They turned and went quietly out to another room for a consultation.

"Gott, Hauptner! It pegins to look as if der Herr Doktor Skoffel wass right! Der man iss chust itching to spill all he knows apout t'at time he wass in der Pritish Foreign Office! *Ja!* It seemed crazy to t'ink efer he wouldt work his mindt like t'at—but Skoffel iss a scientist mit der human prain, *undt* he wass sure, if we take time enough. Like ignorant fools, we wass going to kill der phonograph pefore he sing to us! *Ja!*"

At the end of another half-hour the house was surrounded by Scotland Yard men and the three Berliners arrested. They claimed to have been sent for to come and identify a supposed friend who seemed to be out of his mind—produced an unsigned letter to that effect, giving the Bayswater address. And when His Lordship was questioned, he failed to identify either of the three as being among those who had attacked him the night before—knowing that if it were Trevor and his friends who had succeeded in locating him, as he supposed, they would have secret-service men from the Foreign Office shadowing the Berliners wherever they went. He knew it had been a rather near thing for him, but was convinced that he had completely bluffed them for the time being.

A week later one of the undersecretaries at the F. O. handed a copy of Lord Windercombe's report to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs who had come in with the new government. Leaning back in his chair, the minister pursed his lips, noted what the document was, flipped a page or two, reading a sentence here and there—then laid the document on his desk.

"H-m-m—this is one of those papers, Hammerford, which ought to quietly disappear—so completely that it never turns up again! Here is a man who admittedly has been wandering in his mind for three or four years, claiming to have fully recovered his memory and all of his mental powers, asking His Majesty's Government to believe a long list of incredible, utterly preposterous things which he claims to be future plans for world-conquest, both commercial and military, which a certain government has worked out and is determined to put through. We are at peace with it now—reëstablishing trade and commercial relations which are absolutely necessary to both countries. If we paid any attention to this mess of trash, it would make us view with suspicion every act of that government—the boards of trade in that country—clog all the reconstruction machinery—lead us to throw away good business and look for trade almost anywhere else in the world! H-m-m—I fancy I'd best put this document where it can't possibly start further trouble in the future!" Getting out of his armchair, he stepped over to the little fireplace and laid the papers upon the glowing sea-coals.

This action was reported by telephone at Trevor Hall within the next two hours, as the Trevors and Windercombes were chatting out on the cliff-brow. A faint smile of sarcastic amusement appeared around Lord Windercombe's mouth—but there was a gleam of purpose and determination in the partly closed eyes which looked out over the waters of the Channel.

"Some day we shall have another government—another secretary who is more of a statesman and less of a tradesman. Then those other copies of my report may serve their purpose—thanks to you, Trevor!"

Another story of the Free Lances in Diplomacy will appear in our next issue.

A stirring novel of pioneer adventure in the Rocky Mountain West. Even if you missed the earlier chapters you can easily pick up the simple essentials of the story in the summary below.

WHITE

By Edwin

(What Has Already Happened:)

A WILD, wild life they led, those pioneer trappers on the beaver-trail in the old Rocky Mountain West—a life of grim privation, bitter hardship and imminent deadly peril. But it was a free, free life also, where a man was his own, and the bloom of dawn lay over the virgin wilderness wherein these gallant hearts ventured.

What a coterie they were! The Mad Britisher, old Jim Bridger the unlettered captain, big Cross Eagle the Swede, Mariano the Spanish 'breed from New Mexico, Markhead from Kentucky, Laforey the French Creole from St. Louis, the well-educated Thompson from Illinois, the quiet Kit Carson from Missouri (youngest of all, but one who had made many an Injun "come"), Kelly the Irishman, Black Harris the reckless wag—all upon equality and all united for fur, fight and frolic.

They had "wintered in" with a band of Crows for mutual protection. But a roving party of Blackfoot warriors appeared near them. And while by a daylight attack the trappers strove to drive off the enemy, the Blackfeet raided their own camp and destroyed it. In the foray upon the Blackfeet, however, the blond British giant (his real name his companions did not know) picked up a Blackfoot baby and brought it to his squaw—a Nez Percé girl who was grieving for the recent loss of her own child. And that alien infant, strangely birthmarked, brought continued difficulty.

For the child seemed to rouse an inexplicable interest among the Indians. The ally Crows demanded that the Mad Britisher abandon it; he refused, and in consequence the Crows parted from the trapper band. The Blackfeet attacked again, striving to recover the child, and Laforey was killed. Likewise there was a difficult encounter with the Sioux; and when at last the trapper party found sanctuary for the remainder of the winter with the main band of the Crows, the Crow chieftain sought to buy the child—sought, indeed, to buy from the Mad Britisher his Nez Percé squaw.

The winter passed. The trappers assembled at the annual fur-trading rendezvous on the Green River. And there appeared two missionaries, Whitman and Parker,

The truly epic quality of Mr. Sabin's fine novel has evoked most enthusiastic comment from our readers. And this concluding installment contains episodes of even more variety and interest.

INDIAN

L. Sabin

bound for Oregon. One of them approached the Briton and offered him a letter addressed to one "Ralph Stockbridge, Esquire—Somewhere in the Rocky Mountains."

He accepted the letter, which proved to be from Alice Colton, an American girl whom he had once known and, it was implied, had once loved. Perhaps, indeed, she was the cause of his exile; but—he did not answer her letter.

Another year of freedom, hardship and peril upon the beaver-trail. A savage battle with the Bannocks and Blackfeet, in which Stockbridge and Harris were rescued in the nick of time, and in which Thompson was killed by the Blackfoot chief Le Borgne. The Briton swore vengeance, but rendezvous time came again and no opportunity had offered. And at this rendezvous in the Valley of the Green strange tidings came to him.

For with a company of missionaries bound for Oregon, and a band of Hudson's Bay fur dealers, appeared Duncan, the Scotch solicitor of the Stockbridge family, with the news that Ralph's older brother Reggie had died; Ralph was the heir to title and lands and was expected back in England to claim them. Stockbridge, however, refused; and he even refused when Duncan produced another argument: Alice Colton, who had ventured the journey with him and the missionaries' wives. *(The story continues in detail:)*

CHAPTER XV

So Be It

"WHAT!" The Duncan mouth remained open; his hearty countenance froze into blankness.

But the girl's tone was all matter-of-fact and explanatory.

"Yes. He prefers his life here. I don't blame him, now that I've seen. Other society would be very humdrum after one has grown accustomed to trappers and Indians. He would find no such dancing and gayety in England—or New York. And he'd sorely miss the wigwam and the scalping knife. Indeed, I wish I were a man, to share his privileges."

"No!" at last Duncan blurted, focusing upon the one announcement. " 'Tis a jest. You cannot mean that you are still of last night's mind, Ralph lad? Impossible!"

"Here I stay, nevertheless, Duncan." They should not know how sorely the dictum was wrung from him. "I am a white Indian, and that I shall remain."

"A white Indian, you say? God save us! Are you daft? The title and the estate, man! What of them?"

The girl chided gayly:

"He already has title. Chief Yellow Buffalo, is it not? And estate? This is his estate. Six million acres, didn't we hear? Splendid! Oh, a baronetcy in England can appeal little to Chief Yellow Buffalo, of Western America!"

He answered Duncan:

"The title I forgo. There is no Sir Ralph Stockbridge. I wish nothing of the estate. There is Reggie's widow, I believe, to be supported. You will know of measures to be taken. Very well. Take them."

" 'Tis impossible—'twas never done, in all my experience!" gasped Duncan. "A willful break in succession? No! And besides, this lass! After all these wearisome miles, do you send us away empty? What am I to do?"

"But he has no need of us, or of England, Mr. Duncan," the girl laughed. "Can he not start a succession here—an American Stockbridge? He will marry a princess—there are charming belles among the Indians, as foil to him—"

"Stop!" he broke in. And his sudden cry and his sudden wince set her aback, half frightened.

"Your pardon," she offered. "Am I too romantic?"

HE hauled himself together, and addressed Duncan:

"Miss Colton can travel out safely with the returning caravan. I'll engage her passage under Fitzpatrick, if you're for Oregon."

"I know not where I'm for," Duncan gabbled. "Nay, nay! I'll not listen to you, lad. I had made arrangements, never doubting. 'Twas we three to follow on after the missionaries and the Hudson's Bay company—with Captain Shunan, that is, for a bit of hunting. I would try my Manton. Twenty pounds sterling it cost me. And I could transact my business at the farther end. The Captain knows the country well, he says."

"Delightful!" applauded the girl. "You'll join us, Ralph?"

"If you will travel with the missionaries and company, I can only wish you a pleasant journey," he replied. "But you shall not risk with a small party under Shunan or anybody else."

" 'Shall not?' " said she. "Why so?"

"You'd run great danger. I'll not permit it."

" 'Permit it!' Fie, sir! You and Captain Shunan would protect us; and we have Mr. Duncan's wondrous rifle—very much like yours."

"I do not go—I say again I do not go," he declared. "You must return east; Duncan may do as he pleases."

"And you, sir?"

"I trap the beaver. That is my employment."

"Oh, oh!" she cried. "Of course! You have no time for idling. And I forget. You pursue—who is it?—the great chief Le Borgne, and must seek him, to kill him, perhaps to take his scalp. Other pleasures are not for you. But we are here, and Mr. Duncan's wondrous rifle—very much and I have mind to accept the services of Captain Shunan."

"Never!"

"You don't like him, but we find him very entertaining," she retorted.

Duncan queried:

"So you counsel against a westward journey, lad?"

"Flatly, unless under large escort. The Blackfeet dog every trail."

"Aye? But Shunan assures us the Hudson's Bay people are *personæ gratæ* with the wild Indians; and he himself is in favor with the Blackfeet, as the name has it."

"He lies. The Blackfeet make no distinctions; neither do the Sioux. I tell you not to go."

"Strange that you and Captain Shunan so differ in opinion!" scoffed the girl. "You're at feud with them; he is not," she triumphantly pronounced. "But we're keeping you. Your beaver wait, and you're eager for the warpath. The camp is about to break up, is it not? Will you wish us good journey?"

"I wish you safe journey—"

"No, no!" deplored Duncan, all perplexed and in a flurry. "What a coil, what a coil! I cannot part in this manner, Ralph, lad. You'll see us again? 'Tis not good-by! We'll talk further."

"We are detaining the Yellow Buffalo," said she. She stood erect, and held out her hand, and her face was brilliant with a hard brightness. "He should be packing his lodge and his traps. He may have some dark beauty waiting for him in her father's wigwam. The paleface is not for him. He agrees with Byron—I believe you used to quote Byron, Sir Ralph:

> She walks in beauty, like the night
> Of cloudless climes and starry skies;
> And all that's best of dark and bright
> Meet in her aspect and her eyes—

"Does that recall?"

"Good-by," he rasped. "I'll see Fitzpatrick, Duncan." And not knowing whether or no he touched her extended hand, he rushed blindly on, mounted, and rode.

HE halted beside Captain Shunan, complacently posing.

"Mr. Duncan gives me to understand there's been talk of him and Miss Colton traveling west with you. Is that true?"

"Why not, monsieur?"

"Are you mad, Shunan? Or will your party be large?"

"Large? I teenk not so large. *Le gentilhomme* desire to hunt; *la belle dem'selle* desire to see country. *Moi,* Shunan, will show ever'teeng. I know all dat country. A beeg comp'ny mek too much work, an' scare game."

"They sha'n't go, Shunan. You'll all end in a Blackfoot lodge."

"Les Pieds-Noirs? Bah!" The fellow laughed, airing his insufferable assumptions. "I am Shunan. I am Nor'west man. De Nor'west men an' de Hudson's Bay men not Américains; dey go w'ere dey please, by gar. *Sacré diable! Un Pied-Noir* lodge? *Comment donc? Moi,* I send word to Le Borgne himself. Le Borgne say: 'Come an' eat. My men help you hunt de boof'lo, de deers, de antelopes.' Mebbe you come too, beeg man," added Shunan, easy and insolent. "I no let War Eagle hurt you. You bring you' *jolie* leetle squaw an' fine *enfant* to show *la belle Américaine, n'est-ce pas?* Somebody you used to know, eh? She be much interest', sartin. She *très belle;* she like to leesten to Shunan. But I tell you: white squaw no shine on beaver trail. Mebbe den I tek you' Nez Percé, you tek *l'Américaine,* an' we be ver' happy. W'at you say?"

"Damn you, Shunan!" the Briton cried furiously. "I say if any harm befalls my friends yonder, at your hands, I'll kill you. The trail west is closed to them."

"All trail open to Shunan." The insistent bravado of this swaggerer was maddening. "I am at deir sarvice. *La belle* desire de wil' life; *le gentilhomme* wish to shoot hees two-shoot fusil. I say: '*Avec grand plaisir.* Shunan will tek to plenty meat, plenty fur, plenty sight *étonnant,* by safe trail.' "

"Never! You've a black heart, Shunan, but I'm watching you."

"Why should we quarrel, beeg man? My heart is good. *Sacré nom!* I get pay. I mek you offer. Mebbe you—w'at you call?—jealous? You want white squaw an' Injun squaw both? *Non!*" He hectored with a grin. "I teenk you better gif me you' Nez Percé, an' we all go an' you mek lof, 'stead of me, to *la belle Américaine,* an' I say not'ing. *Hein?* She do not know yet. *Moi,* I haf many squaw, so *n'importe*—no matter."

"You cur!" The blond giant was tempted to strike the rascal down; but restrained himself and turned away. Presently he came upon Fitzpatrick checking over accounts in his tent.

THE ruddy Bad Hand listened to the proposal, ran fingers through his thick white hair, and returned honest answer.

"By all means! Welcome, of course, either or both. I'll engage to take 'em through to the frontier—to St. Louis, even; and furthermore, I'll speak with 'em myself. They have their own outfit?" His tired gray eyes in his square, weather-bitten face searched the other inquiringly. "Those are friends of yours, are they?" he put direct. "By thunder, a rare handsome gal, from the States! Why in hell don't you do your possible and take her out, yourself, instead of passing her on?"

"I stay."

The response was curt; but Fitzpatrick, Scotch-Irish and fearless, was not to be rebuffed.

"Stay? Why so? I think I know where your stick floats—I've eyes and ears. Pack your squaw and her Injun cub off to her people, and take what's likely offered you, if I'm not wide of mark."

"I'm a white man."

"So are we all of us. It's been done a thousand times. Eh? I see." And Fitzpatrick questioned bluffly: "The gal's not up to trap? You're afraid on that score?"

"It's my private affair, thank you."

"Tut, tut! She may never know, or in due time you can tell her. If she's right sort, she'll understand you're no worse for having had brown skin in your lodge. That's mountain custom—nothing more, nothing less."

"We'll drop the subject, if you please. My affair," warned the other. "If you'll grant them passage out, I'll be obliged."

"You're a fool," Fitz rapped. "But if you're bent on living pore and losing your hair to the Blackfeet, that's your medicine. Yes, I'll look after your friends, and keep mum, besides."

THE flaxen giant leaped upon his horse and went galloping, obtuse to hails and sights, across the three or four miles to his lodge. But on his course he was aware that the rendezvous was breaking: tides of business and pleasure, in this Valley of the Green, had widely receded. Only the fervor of departure remained.

The Nez Percé awaited him, with meal prepared. Downcast she was, saddled by abasement further announced in her timid words:

"The Yellow Buffalo has been gone long. He sees me ashamed. Is he angry with me because I would have danced my baby?"

"No."

"They were jealous. It is not bad medicine. The old man lied."

She led away his horse, and returned.

"The Yellow Buffalo was with white friends. He stood beside a young white woman. She is like the dawn. Is she his sister?"

"She is not my sister." With nervous fingers he stuffed his pipe, and she brought a coal.

"Maybe he thinks to have two wives," she said demurely. "That is good. He is a chief. He would fill his lodge with children."

"White men do not marry two wives," he answered. "The woman and the man go; we stay. So say no more."

"Well," she remarked, "white-God men say two wives bad. Say that to Nez Percé; tell Nez Percé they must throw away all but one wife. But Black Bear" (that was Harris) "say in Good Book white men have many wives. Chief named Solomon have ten, twenty—I do not know, but very many. I wonder what white-God men think about that. If you want to take white wife, I do not care. I be happy in same lodge, with my baby. Here comes Black Bear now," she added. "He will tell you about Solomon."

Black Harris pulled up his horse and bawled hilariously:

"Fat doin's, hey? Didn't we come it proper? If we didn't, I'm a beaver. Wall, how's sign, an' what's the trail? Rendezvous is bustin' up, an' I aim to tell my old squaw to be packin' possibles."

"I stay awhile, Harris."

"Why's that?"

"To see my friends off."

"That thar Britisher an' his niece? Tell ye, now, she's some! Makes a coon's heart go floppety, danged if she don't. But I'm for brown skin; I'm feared o' white. Couldn't take lodge-pole to white skin. White skin makes this chil' see wet. When do you start, yoreself? Blackfoot are bad, says the word. I reckoned we'd jine Bridger an' Carson, for Jackson's Hole."

The master of the lodge replied calmly along his pipe:

"I wait, Harris. I've affairs yet. I'll follow."

"Hey? Affairs be chawed!" quoth Harris. "Foller alone?"

"Aye."

"Hell's full o' trappers alone, else why'd they get thar?" denounced Harris. "Nope! Missioners are goin'; we're all goin'. Down with yore lodge, pack possibles, leave Britisher an' gal to Fitz, an' take fur-trail. This nigger's knife is itchin' for old Pehta's topknot, an' if Pehta aint cached on the Jackson Hole trail, then I dream lies, for I see him last night an' only jest missed cold-throwin' him."

"I've said, Harris. You go on."

"Alluz knowed you was crazy," Harris grumbled. "But I don't risk scalp that account. I tell ye ag'in, Blackfeet are bad, an' trails are closed to all excep' sizable parties, an' you'll lose ha'r. We got to make war proper this year, or it's gone hoss an' beaver, an' Carson'll say that's better gospel than the missioners fetch in."

HE rode on disgruntled, a rude but honest comrade. The Nez Percé addressed him:

"Food is ready."

So now he rapped the ashes from his hot pipe, and ate. The sun had definitely crossed the noon line. By the bustle outspread before him, the end of day would close upon the end of the rendezvous. The

Nez Percés and Flatheads were striking their lodges and moving down to the missionaries' camp; the trappers were packing; Fitzpatrick's mules had been herded in, for loading; the Hudson's Bay contingent were infected—squads raced valorously hither and thither, in a last display of horsemanship and of other animal spirits.

"We go pretty soon?" his wife asked, mystified by his inertness.

"Yes. We wait a little, first."

He must wait, and make sure. Wait here. He had no need to go there again, and would not. Fitzpatrick had promised —Fitz was the man to overrule that utterly insensate scheme of a westward tour with Shunan. Shunan, and she! 'Twas monstrous, and unthinkable.

Harris must have told Kit, for Carson presently rode in with query and protest.

"You airn't packin', Glory? Time to move out."

"I stay awhile, Kit," he repeated. "Told Harris so."

"But we're all for the north, and Bridger wants to start 'arly."

"Go. I'll follow."

"You hadn't ought to do that, Glory. 'Taint right. The Blackfeet air on the rampage. Their head war chief, that thar War Eagle, 'lows to clean the country of all white men, and he's sent word straight. You've heard that. O' course it don't go down. A hundred men can teach them devils a lesson and show 'em we'll march whar we please, but 'taint no time for small parties. You're like to get rubbed out."

"My affair, Kit. Sorry. I've business of my own."

"Wall—" Carson reluctantly turned. "I've made my talk. Our trail'll be plain, for we don't aim to dodge nary scrimmage. Up Grey's River for the Hole, and the Grand Teton country."

CARSON rode away. The company continued preparations. The stragglers came ramping riotously from their farewell look upon the white women in the active missionary camp. "Ketch up! Ketch up!" That had been the command. The cavalcade formed.

And to whoop and cheer they filed away —a long line of well-packed animals, and of rough-and-ready horsemen going as gayly to a fight as to a feast. Bridger, Carson, Black Harris, Markhead, Kelly, Mariano, Joe Meek, Squire Ebbert, Jake Hawkens, Doc Newell, more than four score others, panoplied in their fringed buckskins and their broad hats of wool and beaver, rifles across high knees, away they rode, care-free but resolute, up the valley and on, for the hostile north.

The Crows closely followed. With them the Briton had had little to do—Red Moon had maliciously avoided him, his wife and the baby, as if consigning all to Blackfoot reprisal. The Nez Percés and Flatheads and kin were gathered far down the valley, attending upon the missionary camp, so that now his domain was greatly amplified, and seemed saddened by the exodus.

"White women go; God-men go." His wife had murmured with patient resignation.

Aye, see! Away they also wended—the missionary party, their cattle and animals and their wagon—to a faint popping of guns from the Hudson's Bay and Indian escort. Who else? He peered for better view; the site of Duncan's tent was hidden by a rise of land, but he kept his eyes upon a gap and strained to glimpse the cart—if cart, and she, were setting onward likewise.

But no cart dotted the tumultuous file undulating into the red West, for Oregon. A few lodges of the Frenchmen still remained adjacent to the camp ground; and whether Shunan's was of the vestige he could not know, because of the unequal landscape, nor whether Shunan was one of those horsemen caricoling around the fur company's mustered caravan.

Had Duncan—and she—chosen Shunan, after all? That should be found out, even at risk of further humiliation. He had to see her again, through any excuse, come weal, come woe thereby!

"My horse!" he said quickly, his eyes fixed. Something in his tone sped his wife, without a word, to the grazing animal; and he mounted, and galloped out, possessed indeed, by hope, by fear, by avid desire dominating all purpose.

Midway he pulled in sharply. He was too late, for the caravan had strung into march; it had brought one cart in; it was taking two carts out, but not together—the one should be Duncan's—he gazed so intently that he fancied he saw her, her very figure, ahorse—aye, he did see her, and he saw Duncan.

Fitzpatrick had prevailed; he himself was of no use now; but he did not feel relief; his lips foolishly quivered, and a surge of protesting chagrin so unmanned

him that he well-nigh cried aloud. Had they thought of him? Had they—had she, had worthy Duncan looked for him and misunderstood his tardiness? He had said good-by, and had not meant it, but they would never know.

So he sat, immobile, too deeply committed for dashing after like a child, too proud to betray a false start by turning back. And if somebody waved, he had no response to make. He had said. But there went England, there went all America, there went the world, good earth and blue heaven, leaving him to his Avernus, the Blackfeet, the beaver, the five-skin lodge, the Indian wife and the nursling in whom flowed not a drop of his blood. The ass to his thistles. Aye, he was an ass. He had thought to live free!

The final prospect of the caravan had faded into the dun east. Immersed in this other, savage prospect, he rode for his lodge.

THE valley this evening was strangely quiet, relaxed from the ferment and paroxysms of the past two weeks. It may also have been repining after that miracle which had forever sweetened its soil and changed its history: the miracle of gently bred women from sunrise marching to sunset and bringing the dawn of a new America. Never again would the Valley of the Green be the same. White home and white family had crossed the mountains, and the pack-trail of barter and temporal profit had definitely widened to the trail of empire.

But Yellow Buffalo recked little of this. He did not thrill to the birth-pangs of a promised land. His vision comprised only what might have been and what could not be. Then while he moodily sat like a Gothic monarch surveying a barren realm, he checked breath at sight of two centaur figures careering up the valley, on straight course through the twilight dusk.

Returning? He dared not credit; he feared to hope, for hope was shot with dread.

"White friends come here." His wife modestly retreated, dropping the flap, and he faced against the deluge.

Duncan stopped short of the bivouac; the girl posted on with a rush and the thud of hoofs, leaped to earth and ran in, flushed and impetuous, to the very spot where he stood rooted upright, shaken by the miracle repeated.

"Ralph! I had to come—I couldn't leave you that way," she poured out passionately. "No, no! There were things unsaid. Maybe you didn't understand. Will you speak to me?"

"But I thought I saw you with the caravan," he stammered. "You had started—I thought—"

"You thought never to see me again. Perhaps you hoped. But you do see me and you shall listen. I am unmaidenly—I do not care. I'd written you—I'd gone that far; then I came, because you didn't answer. Rather than part in such cold fashion, I go farther yet, for you sha'n't think meanly of me."

HER words tumbled one after the other, and she was all lovely and glowing in her brave confession.

"I did wrong you, Ralph, or seemed to—that time in England. But why were you so blind, so stupid? You fancied I loved Reggie. No, I didn't, I didn't! My parents would have persuaded me; they would have thrust me at him; they were determined; they wanted a title for me, and I was a little vain and silly. I think," she said, "my head was turned, for people made so much of me. But I knew I would not marry him. I—I refused him, Ralph, after you left. Why didn't you ask me again? I expected you to be stubborn in that—you've been stubborn enough now. I was a flirt; I wished to be asked twice, maybe three times. You were so big, so honest and amusing! It was my first season in England, and I was having a good time. But you asked once, and then you ran away."

"You said no."

"A young girl's no!" she scoffed. "Was I not worth trying for? I had no idea of hurting you so deeply. Men in America are different. Well, you've hurt me cruelly since, sir. You ignored my letter. Did you think me forlorn and setting my cap in desperation, to call you back? Forlorn I was, but not through lack of offers, Ralph. Am I changed? Yes, and you hurt me again when I came to you and you coldly put me aside. How stubborn you are! The road here wasn't easy, Ralph. I am a girl.

"You made me rude to you, down there. I was terribly mortified. But I'm sorry I acted so, teasing you and twitting you. I really came to make amends." She lifted her head with a proud little motion, and her eyes were dewy bright, and her

cheeks red but not with shame. "I don't blame you any for preferring this life and not wishing to go back. You shall stay. If—if you still care for me, Ralph, I will stay too.

"Did I touch you more closely than I knew, when I reproached you, down there? Why," she wildly pleaded, "they tell me that many trappers have Indian women to do their housekeeping. So what if you may have hired an Indian woman to wait on you? What if you were lonesome and sought company, that way? I'll not seem to reproach you again. But I'll be the one to help you. I'll love this life as you do. We can overtake the missionaries and be married. That is all I ask. Then I'll go wherever you choose to go. You see," she added, "I drove you here by my wicked vanity, and since you wish to stay, I'll share it with you. Or am I too late, and you've forgotten?"

"No!" he answered. "What are you saying? Impossible!"

"And why so?" she demanded. "Am I not strong? I think I would stay if I were a man. Wouldn't you like to have a white woman to talk with, Ralph? Somebody you know, and once—wanted? Will you ask me again, Ralph? I am Alice Colton. An American girl can learn to do whatever an Indian woman can do. I should fear nothing, with you. I could make friends of the Indian women with the other trappers. And if you're under obligations, and have somebody now, why, I wouldn't be unkind. She could stay, too, and teach me, and help me with the work, as long as we needed her."

"Great God!" he cried harshly. "You don't know! You don't understand! You —in this life—my life—as it is lived? Never!"

"Your life would be my life," said she proudly. "Your home is my home—if you want me."

He had a flitting mad hope, fantastic as his maddest dreams. What should he do, what should he say?

"Want you!" With that he choked, but he dared not touch her, for to touch her would have been to desecrate her. He stepped back and with ruthless hand flung open the lodge flap. "Aye!" he rasped. "Then see my lodge—that home!"

She advanced at once and peered within. The Nez Percé sat suckling the child, for although it was past eighteen months of age and was lusty, she still gave it breast, as her only babe, according to Indian custom. Her timid gaze met the wide blue eyes trespassing upon her. And, nerved for the issue, he heard the poignant cry that racked his soul and proved how mad indeed his hope.

"Oh, I had not guessed—I hadn't thought of that! Now I know what to do."

She had turned; she had fled; she was running to her horse; she mounted in frantic haste and she went galloping, back through the dusk, down the valley, with Duncan in astonished pursuit. They disappeared. . . . .

He sank trembling, and gave no ear to the expostulations of his curious wife.

CHAPTER XVI

That Good Greenwood!

"NOW I know what to do," she had cried. For him, he thought, the worst was over; but that little wail bothered him. It conveyed a sudden purpose, and a resolution wrung from her by despairing knowledge.

He had not seen her and Duncan leave the valley by way of those distant upward slopes upon which the wake of twilight had been lingering. And yet they might have left, for the spaces were great and shadowy.

Forthwith in early morning he said: "Today we go. I will be back soon." And he rode down for the camp spot of the Hudson's Bay men, where activity was again manifest.

The stocky figure of Duncan? Rounding into near approach, this he surely saw! Oh, damnation! What now? For the camp was packing, and here was Shunan, and here they were, although her he did not glimpse.

He went right in, pausing not to the Shunan cheerful *"Bonjour,* beeg man." Duncan met him a little apart from the clutter of preparations.

"How now, Duncan? What are you doing here, I ask." He knew that his tone was peremptory. But he was all in a boil with these successive cataclysms.

"I am sheer distraught," cried Duncan. "What indeed! She will go on—I canna help. 'Tis the matter of last night. Oh, lad, lad! Come back she would, and so would I, for we were loath to give you up. The coil is one past my understanding, but there's yet a way out. Cruelly hurt

she is, and she'll not listen to me. She's for going on immediate."

"On! Not with the caravan?"

"She sent Captain Shunan to bid the caravan continue; and he brought back what few chattels we need. Last night, that was."

"Then where now?"

"To Oregon, she says."

"With Shunan?"

"Aye, as far as to overtake the missionaries. She'll not return to New York, she says, and I cannot move her."

"Where is she, Duncan?"

"In that skin tent that's left standing. But I doubt if she'll speak with you."

"She shall speak." And dismounting, he stepped for the lodge.

As if sensing his purpose, she appeared at the doorway, to stand upright and positive, her eyes feverishly bright, but her face dry of all animation.

He summoned voice, and spoke without preamble:

"Duncan says you're determined to go west instead of east."

"Why, yes. And why not? Are you come to forbid, sir?"

"I do forbid. I will take you and him on to the caravan. We can catch it by noon."

SHE smiled—there was confuting mischief in that wan smile and its dimple.

"With your family, sir?" she reminded.

He replied with foolish rancor, but he was set wild by the fling against which he had no defense.

"My family can stay till my return. I'll not intrude them on you. But go with me and Duncan you shall."

"Go with you and Duncan I shall not," she flared. "Captain Shunan will be good enough to escort me as far as the missionaries, and I will continue with them."

"To the Columbia?"

"Yes, to the Columbia, if seems best."

"And what then?"

"I am deeply grateful for your interest," she alleged. "There is no place for me here, as you have shown me; the East would be very, very dull after my experiences in your chosen West; in Oregon, I too may live among the Indians. Will I not make a good missionary?"

"Missionary! You?"

"Even I. Your own work of proselyting rouses my enthusiasm." That was biting sarcasm. Her words came more rapidly. "Why not? Other white women have gone. I shall go. They'll be glad of me. I can teach if I cannot pray. I can busy myself—I can forget that I'm Alice Colton Who will know Alice Colton, out there? Would you expect me to return to Ithaca, sir? Would you put that further shame upon me? Well you shall not. You have done as you pleased to do; I shall do as I please to do—oh, I don't know, I don't know," she cried, with a break like a sob. "Whether I please or not, it is what I must do." She steadied. "Will you leave me! I say good-by—I have to get ready, and I'm sure the beaver—and your family—wait on you. How fortunate you are!"

With that, whether of sarcasm or not, she plunged into the little lodge again and dropped the flap behind her to shut him away.

WALKING somewhat dizzily by reason of the hot blood in his head and the derisive glances cast his way, he went back to Duncan.

"I told you how 'twas," Duncan deplored. "You cannot move her. What a coil, what a coil! Not the ending I expected, Sir Ralph. God help us!"

" 'Tis time you started, then," said this Sir Ralph Stockbridge. "You will see her safe to the missionaries, Duncan?"

"Aye, and farther. But you'll be coming? Surely!"

"You ask that? After what you know?"

"Well," Duncan stammered, "I ken you're a bit encumbered, but—my soul! Is there no way you can free yourself? I hope you're marrit; I'd think naught else; but they are not bonds subject to the *jus commune*. I'll warrant that."

Stockbridge forced answer, with a short laugh:

"*Cui bono,* Duncan? My life! You know all, so why do you ask? The matter, I think, has been settled. Would you have me play the coward? It's all over with, and things might be worse. You'll have no difficulty catching the missionary caravan if you travel straight. Thence on, you and she'll be safe. You can transact your business; she wills to be of the missionaries. And I'm not needed, thank God."

"So you're glad of that?"

"Do you think I wish to cut poor figure further?" the giant retorted. "Pray credit me with sense. I'm a white Indian, and that's proven."

Duncan groaned in anguish renewed.

"No, no! To leave you here! She's a brave lass—you'll admit she's a brave lass?"

"Aye."

"The grand spirit of her! The sore shock to her! Mind that." Duncan pleaded eagerly. "She was ready to marry you, man. For that she came, to make amends, said she—though I'm not saying myself," he added, "that she was under such obligation. Give her only a wee bit o' time, and do you free yourself of that blackamoor alliance (which I dare maintain is but the fashion in these outlandish precincts), and all will be right yet."

"I'll not ask her, Duncan. I'd not insult her. They're waiting for you. Good-by, and safe journey."

"But what will I say in England—what shall I say at Hermitstone?" babbled Duncan. "Will ye not claim *jus deliberandi?* Ye have a year by that to enter your heritance."

"Say there is no Ralph Stockbridge. You'll not far miss." And he vaulted upon his gray, whirled about and headed upon the back-trail, ignoring the faces of Canadian and 'breed.

AS if directed at his hasty passage, Shunan's rondo, light and meaningful, fell upon his ears:

Tous les printemps,
Tan' de nouvelles—

Gibe or boast? At any rate, the fellow should hear last word. He halted beside the sleek bravo.

"You are to take the lady and gentleman on to join the missionary party, I understand?"

Shunan, accoutered cap-a-pie in all his finery, opened wide his bold black eyes, and flashed his white, animal teeth.

"Oui, m'sieur. We haf *le plaisir* of you' company? *Bon!"*

"No. But mark my words, Shunan: you are hired as guide, and they are my friends; if you don't serve them as true man, I'll hunt you down even if you're in the lodge of Le Borgne himself. No trickery, remember!"

"Oui, m'sieur. Sartin." To his vehemence Shunan responded with exasperating affability. "Sorry you not come with you' *jolie* leetle squaw. We will haf one grand march. Dey can trust Shunan. Mebbe see fine country, mebbe shoot boof'lo, deers —ketch de missionnaires soon. W'en you find Le Borgne, you tell heem you friend of Shunan, an' he will gif you *la bienvenue* —one beeg good time."

"I'll 'tend to Le Borgne. Do you catch the missionaries, and make no delay to see country and hunt."

"Oh, sartin. Ketch de missionnaires! Dey travel slow; we travel fast," smiled Shunan. *"Très bien, m'sieur.* Mebbe *au revoir, hein?* Next rendezvous?"

"Or sooner," the giant warned. "For I'll read your sign. Remember that."

And he galloped on, pursued (he fancied) by a bantering laugh.

HE had done his duty, and was far from satisfied. Nevertheless he spoke abruptly to the Nez Percé:

"It is time to pack. We travel out."

"To the beaver?"

"Yes. We follow the Blanket Chief men."

"All right. That is good," she prattled. "My man has been troubled. Now we run away from bad medicine. Find beaver, be happy again."

She sang as she worked, helped by him in striking the lodge—a heavy task for one woman.

Those others down there in the Shunan camp were expeditious too. Before his own details had been dispatched, the Shunan party had filed away for the west; almost he heard again the Shunan ditty (that cursed reiteration triumphant in his ears!), and he may have seen the dejected Duncan wave as though still deploring, still obsessed with obstinate hope.

So closed this chapter. But, by the Eternal, Le Borgne was in the book, and that chapter had opened. Therefore—ho, for the beaver-trail and the blood-trail! Away with the flag of love, up with the flag of war! Thank heaven, or hell, for the medicine of action!

"All ready," his squaw summoned.

He mounted his gray, and followed by her, in saddle with the baby on her back, driving the pack-horse, he led for the northwest and the Bridger trail.

THAT evening they camped. He had thought in this freedom to be free, but upon the contrary he found no ease of mind and little of person. Le Borgne! Could he not concentrate upon that one-eyed murderer and chief of murderers? Should Tommy's ghost haunt in vain?

Aye, he had been weak to let them go like children at large, with Shunan. He owed Duncan better than that; he owed better than that to her, for she was woman and white woman. What had so confoundedly swayed him? Pique? Stubbornness? Jealousy? Jealousy! He had forfeited the right to jealousy. Egad, it was to save his face, as though he still had face to save; and by that he was twice a renegade.

He had not trusted Shunan; he did not trust him now, for the fellow was a wolf and a braggart. They must accept his, Ralph Stockbridge's, company whether distasteful or no.

Having steeled in this resolve, he ceased his tossings—looked forward to daylight and prayed that he would not be too late. No trail between the Green and the first Hudson's Bay post was a safe trail. . . . .

"We go more south," he said only, after breakfast; and led again, this time to cut in upon the trail to Oregon. His wife followed wonderingly, he knew, but she offered no query nor note of protest.

They plodded through a country extremely rough, upon the hypothenuse of a great triangle and a course lined out as by the instinct of a homing animal. It was the second noon when, by guidance of signs not old, he sighted before them the smoke of a midday camp, and believed that he had arrived. Riding in, he did see familiar faces—the faces of Shunan's men; but he saw no Duncan and no Alice, and no Shunan.

"*Bonjour, m'sieur!*" That was the gay greeting to him, tired, upon tired horse. The tone and the looks were quizzical. Of that, however, no matter; and he responded with demand quick:

"Where is Shunan?"

"Shunan not here, m'sieur."

"But the lady and gentleman? They are here?"

"Not here, m'sieur. Dey haf gone *aussi*."

"What?" he accused. "On ahead? Alone with him?"

"*Non, m'sieur. Le capitaine* tek one man; dey mek *petite journée pour* gif *le gentilhomme* to shoot hees *deux-coups* fusil."

"They hunt? No!" Oh, plague upon Duncan and his new gun! Was the man so childish as that? "What direction?"

The speaker shrugged and spread his hands.

"Nort', m'sieur. Mebbe de Jackson Hole. *Sais pas.* Dey meet us *encore,* leetle furder on. *Oui.* Haf fine hunt, I teenk. *La dem'selle* see country *très belle.*"

Alarm and wrath shook him: alarm at the mad venture, wrath at Shunan and at the serenity of the announcement.

"Is Shunan crazy?" he burst out. "The Blackfeet will find him. When did he go?"

The other laughed—

"Les Pieds-Noirs, m'sieur? *Sacré nom!* Shunan no fear de Pieds-Noirs. *Non!* Dey frien's of Shunan. He haf slep' in deir lodges. He know Le Borgne ver' well. Sartin, m'sieur. W'en go? Yest'day *le matin.* Dey march fast. *Un petit détour comme ça.*" And dismissing the topic, he added: "Will m'sieur rest an' haf to eat? Café? Plenty meat? *Avec grand plaisir.*"

THE beasts required nooning; so did he and Dawn Star and the baby—but this was of small account. The Shunan trail cried to him. However, he dismounted, with word to the Nez Percé.

The animals were turned out to graze. He ate; his woman ate and fed the baby; he smoked, annoyed by the vivacious chatter, and sternly curbing that hot mood which urged him for the north again.

Shunan! What were the designs of the fellow now? Did he play the guide, or the gallant, or the knave? Had his overweening impudence no limits? Already gone upon wanton jaunt, he was; and whether to indulge the fatuous Duncan or himself mattered little, for he challenged death and worse than death.

Death it might be, to Duncan; but what to her—a white woman, a chief's prize, beautiful and spirited?

Did Shunan aspire to keep her? Bah! She was not for him. Did the fellow so far stoop as to think of selling her? No, no! That was so fantastic as to beggar credence. Or had his vanity so inflated him that he saw only the sky and not the ground—strutted without perspective and without sense enough to fear? Aye, likely this; but he was an infamous scoundrel, proven by whatever charge. Shunan, and they, should be overhauled and made to turn back. Thank God he had come!

The animals had grazed; he and his had rested. Time nudged him, and he decisively rapped the ashes from his pipe. The Nez Percé obeyed the signal.

"You come with us, m'sieur?" inquired the 'breed spokesman. The camp had roused and begun to pack.

"I find Shunan."

"Comment?"

"His trail. Captain Shunan's trail."

"Oui. Très bien, m'sieur. Eet ten mile back. I teenk you see, at one leetle camp we mek. I fear you no ketch heem, dees day."

"If not today, tomorrow."

"Mebbe so. He be ver' glad, sartin." The smug rejoinder bore irony, and there were grins. But he left the swart 'breeds to their enjoyment of him, and rode back, seeking Shunan.

Anon he found the trail—not worthy of notice before, but now clamorous with reproach for the hours lost. Six horses. Which horse carried her? The hoof-imprinted soil, and the twigs along the way and brushed by her skirt, seemed still marveling, but whether they were sentient with beatitude or fears he could not read. For one horse did carry her, a girl all too fair and lovely; one carried Duncan; the others, Shunan and his helper, and the packs.

HE followed until dusk; the trail had not freshened. With wife and child he made camp. Then the Nez Percé at last voiced her curiosity.

"We ride, ride, this way, that way. No beaver, no Blanket Chief men, no anything. Where does the Yellow Buffalo go now?"

"We hunt the man Shunan," said he. "It is his trail."

"Ho!" She turned the announcement over and over. "I count six horses. He has men with him. Do we go to kill Shunan?"

"He has the white girl and the white man her uncle with him. He takes them into Blackfoot country. That should not be."

"Wah!" she exclaimed. "Shunan is a fool. What is his mind, that he does this?"

"He thinks to find meat for the white man and to show the girl fine country. We will turn them back."

"Good!" she said. "You will kill Shunan. We know his heart is bad. He thinks to steal the white girl. You will kill him and take the girl before the Pahkee catch them. We must hurry."

"Shunan says the Pahkee are his friends," he hazarded. "The one-eyed Pehta is his brother."

She laughed scornfully.

"Does he claim to be a Blackfoot, that he talks that way? The Pahkee are hungry wolves. They will eat him up when they see him with the white girl. We must get there first," she declared. "Then you will kill Shunan and take the girl and she will be safe."

"The white girl and the white man go to the Columbia," he said. "They will be safe there with the Hudson's Bay people."

But she shook her head, while fondling the child in her lap.

"No. The Yellow Buffalo wants the white girl. I can read his heart. He has been unhappy ever since the white people came. Their medicine is strong. That is right. He is white; she is white; Chief Solomon was white; you should have two wives, and I shall not care. I have my baby, and I will be sister to her. My man knows that Dawn Star is good woman."

Her artless conceit frightened him. Out of the mouth of innocence! Aye, intuition had spoken. He was a weakling. But he did not argue. Only—

> Oh, Alice Brand, my native land
> Is lost for love of you.
> And we must hold by wood and wold
> As outlaws wont to do—

Those nagging lines! He had thought never to sound their depths again.

THEY slept. They were up early, the Nez Percé as eager as he. The trail ever beckoned, on and on. They passed the first camp. Here she had slept also—in that little circle marked by the pegs of the tent. The small park basked raptly silent like a crypt steeped in the memory of a precious trust once committed to it.

And the way had been so peaceful, and the camp was so reassuring in its aspects, and the route onward was so confident, that his fears began to lull. Moreover, the signs were freshening; he should overtake the party tomorrow morning, if not tonight. Therefore he threshed out within himself what he should say to Shunan; and having said, what he should do.

Dusk closed down again, and the trail had not ended, but the end waited not far ahead, now. He had gained shrewdly. Morning would resolve all. In this belief he responded idly to the buoyant chatter of his wife, and slept; and they were up betimes, and they set on, and he calculated distance, with eye roving before through every vista.

The morn was languorous and quiet; the streams purled blue and innocent; the

great hills meditated above the sumptuous valleys, and the snow crests, seeing all, beamed benignly in a sky benign. He jogged comfortably but alert through a world at ease.

In time he came upon another camp, should be pressing upon a trail fresher, if indeed they had not delayed to rest. Such were his ardor and assumption that he was into the place before he had realized the warning of that sudden prickling chill—that tense horror which paralyzed the sunny glade.

Here death had been, and death still was. His stubbornly braced gray snorted; the Nez Percé uttered a cry shocked and lugubrious; shadows appeared to flit and threaten among the starkly stockading trees.

The signs were too many for the eye, although he seemed to have the eyes of ten, so surfeited he was with ugliness all in one frightful moment. A camp pillaged, prone and bloody! Then a carcass resolved into that of Shunan—the gay Shunan, now low and grinning ghastly and crimsoned. Ho, Shunan! What of this? Quick! And the farther carcass was that of Shunan's helper, for it had belonged to another dark man. Where were the others? Where was Duncan—where was she? By heavens—oh, God in heaven! Was there nothing animate here, to help him clear his whirling brain?

The Nez Percé was wailing: "Pahkee! Pahkee!" As he stumbled hither and thither, in order to read, then to act, he heard a feebler voice, like that of a ghost:

"Ralph! Will ye na come?"

He went across, to find Duncan lying in a thicket and desperately sapped of life.

"Duncan!"

"God's mercy! I knew ye'd not desart us, lad." The Duncan hand, clutching for him, was cold in his two. "'Twas the blackamoor Injuns, after all. They descendit yester at glint o' morn. I hae been gleg an' hangin' on, for I saw you comin'. I was no scalpit, ye obsarve. That was my wig—they couldna 'bide my wig. Oh, Ralph, lad! Sic a fechtin' an' skirlin'! I dinna blame the man Shunan. A fule, I harkit to him, for I did pine to gie ane bit fling to my twa-shoot gun. An' the lass—"

"Yes! Where is she? Where's Alice?"

"Gane awa' wi' the blackamoors. A fearsome big dour man, who haed ane e'e—'twas him as haddit her. Ye'll follow? Ye'll not leave her to sic unchancy weird?"

"I'll follow into hell, Duncan."

"So I kenned. Gae on wi' ye, then!"

"But you, old friend!"

"I must dree my own weird. She loves you, lad. She'll be lookin' for you. Sheer daft she was—I dinna say but what she was as blithe as I to gae upon this fule errand. Awa' wi' ye, now. 'Tis a great muckle black-avised man who hae but ane e'e, remember."

"I'll have to leave you, Duncan."

"Ye maun, ye maun. 'Tis a lone place to dee, but ye canna help. I hae my death, an' far from hame wi'out a windin' sheet. But ye'll be the waur off, for I'll be dead in this collieshangie country, an' ye'll be livin'. Nay!" In last energy Duncan sat half up, his eyes strange. "Are ye there, lad? I read better weird for ye. I see you wi' her—ye're for England, or as guid. God be praised! I didna come in vain. Awa' wi' ye!"

And he died.

The Briton arranged the limbs a little more seemly, closed the eyes; with final touch laid hand upon the anxious forehead, found a robe to throw over, carefully tucked it, and then as if chafed by such details, ran for his horse.

Thus he left Duncan, for he could do no better. Only a little circling was required before he found the trail—that trail of despoilers triumphantly outgoing, elated convoy of treasure beyond price. Or what price? Le Borgne should answer. By the Eternal, again Le Borgne!

He called to his wife, wrenching her from her despair. She came, driving the pack-horse.

"We go," he said. "Follow."

"Where?"

"To the Blackfeet."

Her frightened cry he let pass unacknowledged, for he was already upon the way. He sensed, however, that follow she did.

CHAPTER XVII

A Chief Laughs

HIS rage was not of the hot kind. Rather, he was of temper cold and hard, like one who has dismissed all contingencies and with single mind goes straight forward, his calculations made and approved. This is the temper that endures.

He jogged fiercely, with his wife whimpering behind him. The Blackfoot trail was clear and unequivocal and arrogant, disdainful of questioning eye. Fifteen warriors had ridden it. And Shunan had learned their brotherly regard for white trespassers. Oh, the damned fool! Of what value was the lesson, now?

Still the trail, without break or falter, without deviation except as it bent for easier course. How she must be suffering, as she also rode—a girl snatched up, maybe from bright dreams, into an inferno and borne on by the painted fiends who had conjured the pandemonium! He had provoked her to that fate. The idea was atrocious; it swept him into a flurry of caustic wrath so that he burned with impatience for the end.

Still the trail. The views ahead promised nothing, and he began to fear that he would not arrive this day. The Blackfeet had traveled too rapidly. She was doomed to suffer, uncomforted, for yet a night.

So at length he was obliged to halt, in the fading twilight, rest his animals again, and wait for another day. The Nez Percé gave utterance, as several times before.

"The Yellow Buffalo goes to the Blackfeet!"

This time he answered.

"Yes. I seek the Blackfeet of Le Borgne."

"No!" she cried. "Why is that? That is death."

"The Pahkee have taken the white woman," he replied. "That should not be. I am a man and must help her."

"You can do nothing. She will be kept; you are only one, and the Pahkee will shout joy when they see the Yellow Buffalo. He knows they hate him, because of the warriors he has sent upon the ghost trail. I hear the Pahkee singing the scalp of my man," she wailed. Then she asked quickly: "Have you medicine that will save you?"

"White medicine tells me to go. I have said," he declared. "But you need not go. You shall turn back for your own people, and some day I will come to you."

"Dawn Star is the Yellow Buffalo's wife," she rebuked. She had spirit, that Nez Percé. "Where he goes, she goes. She will offer the Pahkee her baby. But if the Yellow Buffalo dies, she dies. She will never be woman to a Pahkee. Maybe the Yellow Buffalo thinks to run away with the white woman. Let him save her. That is good. Dawn Star will be glad for him, if only he lives. I also have said."

HE could make no rejoinder; and indeed she had answered just as he had expected, even had hoped. Somehow she heartened him with her stanchness. A dog would have been grateful company upon this forlorn errand; a comrade woman who believed in him was immeasurably so. It is hard to ride alone to death. He did not think that the Blackfeet would harm her; she would, of course, be a Blackfoot prize —a wife to a chief or warrior, and a slave to the venomous squaws. Her notion of "offering" the child was a fondly foolish notion. They would be glad enough to have the child again, but unbought. They would know that the vicious Crows had lied; and they would doubly rejoice.

Assuredly the child was bad medicine. It seemed to link him to the Blackfeet, and the links were shortening; it had fired Alice to that repugnance which had driven her to these red hands, and now it was hurrying him to join her. Confound his misapplied mercy! He should have turned the little cub over to the Crows.

His wife, too, had misgivings, for sitting with her blanket over her head she mourned in a chant, line welded to line with Indian fancy:

O my baby!
There is death.
Why should you make
Bad medicine for him,
Yellow Buffalo your father?
Why should you make
Bad medicine for me,
Dawn Star your mother?
You were a Pahkee.
We took you from the snow.
My man took you—
A great chief took you.
My breasts fed you.
With my flesh I warmed you.
We did not sell you
To the Crows or the Dakota.
Now what have you done?
You angered the Bannock.
Fire chased us to the Pahkee.
You angered the white-God man.
You angered the white woman,
So she fled our lodge,
Which she might have shared.
To the Pahkee you sent her;
To the Pahkee we must follow.
O-ho! You bring us trouble
For the good we would give you.

To this refrain he finally slept. It served to divert his thoughts somewhat. When

they turned to the Blackfoot camp, and her the captive in its midst, he was distracted by that picture; he would have run on, shouting through the darkness. But he had to keep his strength and senses for the morrow.

The trail led out. The wolf is faster than the nosing hound; nevertheless the wolf is overtaken at last. And they themselves had jogged again only a short distance when they came upon other signs that halted him.

Here trappers had passed; along this stream beaver had been sought—men afoot and men ahorse had followed it up, but the sign was older than the Blackfoot sign. The Blackfeet had halted also—briefly bunching, then proceeding.

By this, the trappers might be far. By this, the Blackfoot camp might be far, or near. While his squaw watched with mien expectant, eager hesitancy swayed him. There were trappers to the north: Bridger's men, Bridger's men! There were Blackfeet to the northeast, and there Alice Colton waited in what wretched hopeless plight?

To push rapidly now upon the trappers' trail, rally good men and true—aye, that was the powerful urge. It spelled safety for himself. But how many the white men, how many the Blackfeet, and would they yield? Safety for himself, for her, the hostage in Indian camp, what? Victory and revenge might be at his bidding, but he had to think of the possible price. This ugly factor would not down. Death for the captive? Aye, such things had been. Indians drove hard bargains. And meanwhile?

By the Eternal, he would not turn aside. So he spoke to the wide-eyed Nez Percé:

"Listen! You see the beaver-hunters' trail. I think they are the Blanket Chief's men. Ride fast. Tell the men you find that I am in the camp of War Eagle. War Eagle has a white woman. Let them come quickly into the east. That is where the Pahkee trail goes. Hurry!"

Her eyes filled, but she dashed away. He had shot an arrow into the sky. Forward, again!

AFTER no great time the signs gave more encouragement. Presently, from a rise in the clear, he believed that thin smoke, as wafted above a distant basin, colored the broken horizon before. And having stopped not again, just on the noon side of mid-morning he emerged into the basin itself and beheld the camp of the Blackfeet clustered in all its armed security.

The usual stream, narrowly wooded, winding through the broad bottoms; lodges uncounted, well removed from the high slopes and sentinel ridges; men, women and children lazing, working and playing; a great horse-herd busily feeding upon the pasturage of the camp outskirts; babble of voices, flashes of color.

A rich camp, brave in vandal comfort, and of a certain wild glory, there, amid the green and blue, under the bright sun.

He rode on. The stripling horse-guards had seen him; after first whoops and fluster to round up their stock, they waited, for he seemed to be only one. The camp saw him; voices shouted; dogs barked; warriors sprang to weapons—then relaxed as in he rode, flaxen and massive and emotionless, his pack-horse ambling behind him.

While he shaped course for the upper end of the camp, the men, in careful repression, gave him only looks of sullen hostility not lacking astonishment.

They knew him, this huge yellow-haired trapper. They yearned to kill him. Kill him they would (that was their hope) after he had announced his errand.

So, escorted by death in voice and gesture and gaze, unmoved of seat and countenance, and with grave eye cast among the gaudily painted lodges favored by the Blackfeet, he rode past many stands of arms—lance and shield proclaiming, before doorway, "Here am I"—until he sighted a large, a twenty-robe lodge emblazoned with eagles.

He dismounted in the cleared space before its threshold, to await the recognition demanded by his coming.

The spiteful crowd had fallen back. The dogs had quieted. The big man sitting upon a robe, in the sunshine, at the closed doorway, while a young squaw combed his hair, rose not, spoke not, lifted no hand, changed no muscle of visage, but he surveyed with his one eye at first smoldering and haughty, then beyond control, lighted with unquenchable joy.

A big man—an exceedingly big man, bare to his waist, so that chest and shoulders and sinewy arms published his strength. The dark face of him was pockmarked, and generously beaked like the eagle his name-source, and thin-lipped, full and broadly browed, so that nobility

over-sat passion. One eye-socket was orbless, but the other eye, black, intelligent and ferocious, reigned supreme.

This face, with that eye, had last blazed upon the Briton above the body of Thompson. Here was Le Borgne.

The hand of the young squaw, wielding the bristle comb, trembled; curiosity held the onlookers, respectful in their distance. And the Blackfoot war-chief, having surveyed and measured, gave utterance, curtly challenging:

"What does the Yellow Buffalo want at the lodge of Pehta?"

The blond giant responded steadily in the Shoshone tongue:

"He claims the protection of a chief and wishes to talk."

The chief's ready laugh promised ill.

"A bird sings, but the ghosts of the Blackfoot cry louder. You have come in. I think you will stay. What protection can I give?"

"You are head chief. I am at your lodge. That is the law."

"There is only one law for a mad wolf," the chief retorted. "If my lodge covered all the earth, it would not cover you. But if you have something to say, you may sit down and say it."

AT sign from him, the squaw brought another robe. The Briton sat upon it. A boy led away his animals; but he observed that he was not offered food or water, and this was ominous.

"Where is the white woman you have taken?" he asked.

The War Eagle betrayed possible surprise by never a token.

"Does the Yellow Buffalo expect to find a white woman?" was his answer.

"Listen," bade the other. "I have seen a bloody camp of white men. A white woman had been there. She is gone, and the trail leads here. I have come to find her."

"What do you want?" Le Borgne again demanded, admitting nothing.

"I ask you to send her away. You cannot keep her."

The chief rebuked haughtily:

"Why should I send her away? You speak like a fool."

"When the white people learn you have one of their women, they will make such war that the Blackfeet will be burned up."

"You have come to tell me this?" laughed the War Eagle.

"I have come to offer you pay for her."

"What pay?"

"Horses, powder, lead, to buy her."

"Is that all?" The tone flayed with irony. "Where are they?"

"I will get them. You have my word."

The chief jerked his head from the squaw's touch, as if repudiating all constraint. His eye kindled to the hot contempt flowing from his tongue.

"You talk to War Eagle. The Blackfeet are not afraid of the white nation. This is Blackfoot country. There is war between the Blackfoot and the white man until the last white is dead. You saw that camp. Very well. A fool thought to come in, and he stays with the other white ghosts. Now you are here. I have long wanted you alive; I have hunted you, but your medicine has been strong, and only once I almost had you. You think to take a white woman from the Blackfoot lodges? Your hands are red with Blackfoot blood." He launched a query sharp and sudden: "Dog, where is the baby you stole?"

The baby! That brought light. So the Blackfeet had missed the baby, had been informed upon it, still cherished it in their minds! He had come without settled plan of action, knowing only that here he should be, at the service of her while at the service of the Blackfeet also. His floundering hopes had been dashed by the tenor of the replies. Hate mocked at him and his proposals.

But if the baby was to be the agent! He foresaw no difficulty if matters hinged upon the baby. Perhaps the way had opened; and he employed all his wits, for he dealt with a crafty, forceful mind and a searching eye.

"There is a baby that you want?"

"Answer me, and we will see."

"If there is a baby, what then?"

"We will talk," said Le Borgne.

"Tell me where the talk would lead."

"To the thing dearest to you. What is your answer?"

"I hear you. It is said," pronounced the white chief. "Listen, then: if a baby is to be found, you will set the white woman free."

The red chief tartly rebuked:

"Where is the baby? Find it, and you shall take your life and go."

What? He too rebuked, holding fast.

"That is not my choice. The woman goes. The War Eagle promised, and I have spoken."

"And so have I," the Blackfoot railed. "The thing dearest to you. What is dearer to a coward than life? Find me the baby; take your life. I have said."

The other passed the insult, summoned his stubbornness and made firm retort:

"I do not ask my life. The woman is the thing dearest. She shall go."

The one-eyed chief darkened.

"You dog!" he rated. "Do you argue with reason against reason? Does lead argue with the powder? These are my words: If the baby is to be found, I will send men with you to get it. Then you shall be free. I have vowed your death, but you shall be free. The woman is another matter. Think quick."

Aye! Think he must, and quickly. To send for the child, and be free? To go, and leave her? He had hoped for better solution. His life was little; yet it should weigh in the balances.

To go, in order to return with rescue for her? White blood would respond to the call; he knew those mountain-men. But upon this he had debated before, and had then decided. Aye, she would fare ill if attack threatened, and more ill when rifles cracked. The future was too uncertain as compared with this certain present. By the Eternal, he dared not leave her; and by the Eternal, he would not. The Dawn Star was doing all that he could do if free; and here he was, inside, a moral, possibly a physical support if chance permitted. He replied:

"Send her out with me and your men, to find the baby. You wanted my life. You have it. I will come back, but she shall go free."

The War Eagle laughed with malice now revealed in full.

"Why should I send her out, or you and my men? Let us be done with foolishness. I know you are lying. The baby is dead. I have heard the truth, but not from you. Your mind is muddy, but I read your thoughts, and their tracks make turns like a frightened rabbit. There is no baby except the one your Powder Paint woman carries. You cannot blind me with that. You waste lies. You double around to gain time, like any white man. You look for your trappers. But soon you are to die. You will be long dying, too, for you are a big man, and strong."

"You break sanctuary," the yellow-hair accused. "Of my own will I rode to your lodge—the lodge of a chief. What, then, will buy the white woman? You have wished my life. Here it is. You do not want the child which you say I had?"

"Nothing that you have or that the white nation has will buy the woman," the Blackfoot asserted. "It makes me glad to know she is so dear to you. And for you there is no sanctuary beyond this day. I give you a little time for your heart to grow weak with thinking; but you shall die as surely as the sun rises to see. You talk to closed ears."

PALAVER was at an end. The flaxen giant sought defiant answer, while bitterly aware that again he had played all wrong, all wrong. He should have gone first to the trappers; he would have had the baby to offer, for her, and good men behind him—Bridger or Carson would have negotiated. Even yet, the baby; but it might not come in time for him, and if it did, this one-eyed Blackfoot had spoken—his mind was single, like his eye, and he knew his advantage.

But still there was the baby. Hope glimmered in this. The baby in exchange for her! That looked to be feasible when he no longer was a pawn in the Blackfoot game. So he added the taunt:

"When the American trappers come, you will eat your words."

"If you wish to see the American trappers, pray that they come soon," the chief gibed. "Maybe you have sent for them. We know all about them. Do you think my young men have no eyes? The Blackfeet are many. The Americans are few, and their scalps have been counted."

The response had not been reassuring.

"Has the Yellow Buffalo anything more to say?"

"I wish to speak with the white woman. There can be no harm in that."

"There can be no harm in that," nodded the chief. "You are only one; tomorrow you will be nothing. You say she is dear to you. Go. Look your last upon her, and she upon you." Springing up, he tore the lodge flap aside. His imperious gesture bade: "Enter!"

CHAPTER XVIII

Life

SHE was alone, sitting dully amid these spacious walls and many household chattels of a rich chief. She sat as if she

had not recognized his voice. The tongue she of course had not understood. And she was listless even at the intrusion—until the bulk of him and the guise of him impinged upon her. Then amaze whitened her staring face whiter, and lifted her to her feet.

"You!" It was his own word, transferred to her lips from that other time.

"You are here—here?" And that also was reproach.

"Yes," he said. "Why not? I came as quick as I could."

"How did you know?"

"I tried to overtake you. I was too late, but I came on. I've been talking with the chief."

"For what purpose?" Her cheeks were centered with red. The level demand itself staggered him.

"You mean?"

"I mean why did you come, why do you talk with the chief?"

"To get you away," he said. "Do you think I or other white men will let these Blackfeet hold you? Not while there's an American rifle in the mountains!"

"Or a British, perhaps you'd say."

"They're the same, here."

"Did you come alone, sir?" she quizzed.

Her attitude was baffling. It repulsed; it challenged and gave no opening. That he had not expected. The situation called for weakness, and he had found her strangely hard. Nevertheless—

"I came alone—I thought you might need me," he said. "But there'll be others. I'm sure you'll be freed, somehow."

"Alone," said she. "It was very noble of you, and I thank you. You have seen me; I'm quite safe. So you may return. I would not keep you from your duties."

Again he was dazed by her inexplicable rejoinders.

"If I return, I return with you," he declared. "I'm doing the best I can; you may have to wait a little—"

"The chief has consented? That one-eyed man is chief, is he not? But what if I don't choose to go?"

DID he hear aright? She saw the incredulity in his face, and she laughed through a sudden flame of scorn.

"Yes, if I do not choose to go! Do you say I wouldn't make a good squaw? Once you appeared to doubt, and once I doubted; but a woman can change her mind. Is it the privilege of only the men to be white Indians, as they call it? You take to yourselves Indian women; you find the life among savages very fascinating. Supposing I am enraptured with the life and would form an alliance with an Indian husband. Do you deny me, sir? There is no other way."

With that she sank down, her physical strength at ebb; and huddled there before him, she rocked and shuddered and moaned, as though crazed by tragedy.

"It's the only way. What else can I do? I'm sure I will make a good squaw. Why, I understand I belong to a great chief. I would not call him handsome. You see," —and she laughed more wildly,—"I have foolish fondness for large men. That is my fate. I must be brave," she sobbed. "They shall not know I am afraid. The Indian women shall not dare to twit me. But that morning was so terrible—the attack, the yells, the blood! If I could only forget! Is there nothing I can forget?"

Then she actually composed herself, in manner; and raised her drawn face and tried to smile.

"It is romantic, is it not, Sir Ralph! You have your Pocahontas; I have my—who might he be? Red Jacket? Brandt? No, no. But was there some Indian chief with a white wife? Perhaps I have set a fashion! At any rate, you may go. I'm sorry you came a long way just to see me, but I came a long, long way just to see you, so we are quits. Poor Duncan! Will you bury Duncan? We owe him that, at least."

Every word had stabbed him, now here, now there. Out of his distress he endeavored to give coherent answer and make her understand.

"I would not go if I could," he said. "That is, not without you. I came to get you freed, remember."

"You've talked with the chief?" she flared. "Does he think so poorly of me that he sells me in such short order? I know better. And you've talked with me. You see I am well, and resigned—oh, even quite determined to shine, as you trappers would say, at being a 'white Indian,' myself. My lodge is larger than that lodge you could have offered. I do not think the other women are as charming as yours, but there should be babies. Will you go!" she cried, again frenzied. "Go, go—do leave me and go! I wish to be alone."

"It's useless to tell me to go," he stammered. "I wouldn't go if I could, I said; but I couldn't go if I would."

She slowly gained her feet, gazing transfixed, her eyes widening, every trace of hectic color wiped from her face.

"Not a prisoner—not you too!"

"Aye," he confirmed. "That is it, as seems."

"The chief says so?"

"He does. But no matter as to that. It could scarcely be otherwise."

"No!" she exclaimed. "I sha'n't allow it. I'll talk with him myself—or you'll talk for me. He'll not keep you; I forbid. He daren't keep you against your will and mine. You shall go as freely as you came. Where is he?"

"Wait!" he ordered, and barred her frantic step. "The chief would simply laugh at you. You'd accomplish nothing —except make things worse. I did claim sanctuary by riding to his tent. But these are Blackfeet; this War Eagle is a powerful chief, and I happen to be in high bad favor with him. Now, according to him, I stay."

"Not as a guest?"

He smiled; and she caught at the enigmatical response.

"A prisoner!" she faltered. "He is a monster. He must hate you—how long will he keep you?"

"Possibly not long. Until tomorrow. Then we shall see. But I've sent word to the trappers, and you'll be released soon, anyway. I'm certain of that."

THE careful reply failed. Somehow she penetrated beneath its smooth surface, for she flashed whitely:

"He will kill you! Do you mean that? Tomorrow? What?"

To this there was no answer adequate. He could not say no; he would not say yes. Her surprise vaguely astonished him. She should have known. How ignorant she was, of Indians! But she was moaning:

"Oh, oh! It cannot be! I brought you to this. What can I do—what can I do?"

He found voice.

"Alice! Be brave. You can do nothing, absolutely nothing. My affair! I took the chance. You shall not blame yourself. Besides," he clumsily essayed, "does it look as if I were to be killed? The chief sent me in here. Let him threaten. He knows he can't keep you, or me either. I said the matter will end tomorrow, and so it will."

She shook her head.

"You're to die. You don't deceive me. He's playing with you. I've been a little mad, Ralph. I really didn't mean that I wanted to stay; but I do now. I'll be his squaw—I'll work—I wont try to run away; I'll promise him anything, anything, if he'll let you go. Where is he? Find him for me."

She beseech of Le Borgne—a girl petition her Indian captor for the life of his enemy long condemned and evidently of value to her! Indian jealousy! He wondered that, after his admission, the War Eagle had so readily let him enter. But that was the beginning of the torture. Oh, the fiend!

And she would make promises! God, no! Not to that one-eyed ravisher.

"Wait!" he hastily uttered. "I tell you you can do nothing. You must believe me. I know Indians. Tomorrow—you'll be freed tomorrow—"

"Tomorrow!" She smiled wanly, looking frightened. "I shall not promise; I can see it would be of no use. I am so helpless." Then she flamed again. "Yes, I do promise. As long as you stay, I'll stay, if only to kill him in his sleep should he kill you. Oh, he'll find me a dutiful wife, he!"

"But that would get you nowhere except into worse pass," he chided. "Promise me you'll go, whether you leave me here or not. I'll settle with Le Borgne."

"I said once I wished to be where you are, Ralph," she owned, somewhat pleadingly. "I rather hoped you'd follow me, to be where I was—I might even have a little hoped you'd follow me here; but not into danger for yourself! If I were sure you could get away— I don't want to seem ungrateful for your coming. I do thank you. Tell me," she demanded, "would that Indian chief really kill you, you think? As soon as tomorrow?"

"The best way to thank me, if you please," he answered quickly, "is to take any help that offers. As for that other matter—threatened men live long." But he refrained from the modification that this was a saying not in favor among Indians.

She caught at it also.

"Yes, yes! You've proved that, haven't you! By your very life as a trapper! I'll do anything that's best, Ralph. Why, maybe we'll get away together. I'll go on to Oregon—I'll go back to Ithaca if you tell me to—I don't care, as long as I know you're safe. I sha'n't bother you. You've plans? I'm ready to listen. Will—"

THE lodge-flaps had opened. It was remarkable that they two had not been interrupted before! He whirled about, to stand between her and Le Borgne, but saw only a squaw. She sourly beckoned him out. He voiced a last admonition:

"Till later. Be brave."

"I am, Ralph. I am, now. I'll help you all I can."

She help *him!* The self-abnegation hurt him. But at any rate they had parted in less discordant fashion than before. It inspirited him to face Le Borgne again.

The sunshine was very bright. The War Eagle's toilet had been finished. He was equipped with a redly bordered robe, and a pipe. A subchief stood near. He commanded, with a short gesture:

"Sit down."

He resumed, after puffing at his pipe—that in itself an insult—and contemplating the white man with basilisk eye:

"It is not fitting that a guest should sit with arms in his hands. Give your gun to that man. You will not need it in the camp of War Eagle."

The double-barrel was handed over.

"It is a gun that will kill no more Blackfeet," the one-eye remarked.

"There are other guns in this country," said the Briton. "Pretty soon the air will be blue with their smoke."

The War Eagle laughed disagreeably.

"You are like a coyote that shows his teeth while his tail is between his legs. Let your woman bring the guns. I know you sent her for them. My young men have eyes. If your brothers come, they come to see you die. Already your heart is weak. I felt happy when I heard you talking with the young white woman. She spoke in several voices, and she troubled you. Now you may eat, for I want your death song to be loud. After that, you may walk where you please and count the Blackfeet. No one will harm you."

He called for food. Stockbridge accepted the platter from the squaw, and ate—ate, if only not to gratify by any sign of weakness. He produced his pipe, and smoked.

The noon had passed. War Eagle stretched himself for sleep. The great camp basked indolent, although sentinels were stationed upon vantage points, and warriors now and again rode in or out. The offered freedom of the camp was but a taunt. A prisoner could not stir a step unnoted; wherever he went, he would be followed by a train of abuse.

Yellow Buffalo smoked on, a white Indian apparently as stoical as any red Indian. And ever his thoughts raced around and around without relief. Was Dawn Star finding the trappers? She might have to go far. When she did find them, what then? What would be the minds of Bridger, Carson and all? Would the men come, if small in number? Or gather forces first?

Presently a crier began calling through the camp. The War Eagle wakened, rose, gathered his robe about him and with never a glance aside stalked off as if to a council. He left an old squaw seated at the door of the lodge. From her withered lips there began to flow a stream of carefully selected personalities not flattering. As answer to her aspersions the white man rapped his pipe empty and in deliberate bravado composed himself for sleep. If she had hoped to put him to flight, she was disappointed. Here he would remain while he could; and she would not dare to stir from her post.

Not a sound had issued from the lodge. If Alice was trying also to sleep, so much the better. Sleep was a good medicine—barring accident of dreams. That she should know he was here, he responded in good round English to the squaw:

"Might as well save your breath, granny. You've none to waste, at your age."

He closed his eyes; a medicine drum was booming; the harpy hag intoned on, and as if compliant to the hum of bees, sleep he did, by very habit.

IT was a sleep longer than a nap. Confusion roused him. His wits sprang on guard in an instant. Mechanically he sought for his gun. Gone, aye? He remembered. The Blackfoot camp seethed with excitement; men and women were running, arming, shouting and shrieking; the horse-herd was tearing in. The sun was low; from their stations sentinels were rapidly signaling, by the evolutions of their mounts: "Enemies!" And right upon the heels of their messages they came, too—so little span of time elapsed between the bolt and the thunderclap, between the match and the explosion.

"White men! Americans! Beaver-hunters!"

He heard the words, laden with scurrility but sweet to the ear. It was worth while waking up, for this, even if his next sleep should be his last: Dawn Star had

done well; mountain-men neared—they would not have marched without purpose settled.

Dark specks had filed into the basin. While they enlarged, the Blackfeet waited upon peace or war. The air was clear and calm, pensive with the thought of evening; and the level, golden rays of the sun brought every object into sharp perspective.

There in the distance beyond the creek a rider made the blanket-signal for a talk; and he and a squad of others came on at canter, while the remainder continued more slowly. They also were comparatively few, a scant battalion out of the Bridger brigade.

Yet the Briton, his rapt eyes traveling from the stormy Blackfoot ranks to that small levy of hope, thought that he never had viewed so fair a landscape. Bridger was there! In the blanket-signaler he saw Bridger. This made of hope a host—it capped best calculations, for what might not Jim Bridger do when up to trap?

Le Borgne spoke beside him:

"Does the Yellow Buffalo wish to say good-by to his brothers? Come."

He submitted to being tied upon a sorry nag; and paralleling the stream they set off: the one-eye, his selected retinue, and their captive on display. Behind, toward the camp, the dark tide of Blackfeet broke upon the shoals of indecision, beneath cresting war-bonnets, brave plumes and eager weapons.

The squad of mountain-men had halted. Bridger and—aye, that was Black Harris—and Black Harris, dismounting, had advanced a little way afoot, to pause and strip.

The War Eagle vented contemptuous approval.

"Go!" he bade, aside. "Bring me the words of the dogs. I am a chief."

FORTHWITH two subchiefs vaulted down right willingly; they dropped their weapons; they stripped and with alert bold steps forded the stream, to meet the two white men midway in the open beyond.

An odd sight, this: those pairs of ceremoniously naked men, in promise of truce, advancing upon each other amid the sunset plain, while Saracen and crusader watched aloof. Bridger, lean and angular, scrawny and pale, and Harris, thick and squat and hairily black, were as ribald as two satyrs; whereas the Blackfeet, erect, bronzy, smooth of muscles and unconscious of flesh, moved with the swift grace of stalwart fauns.

A heavy quiet, smothering all sound, had weighted the basin when the high commissioners met, red man fronting white man, form opposed to form, eyes querying eyes, wile calculating wile. The fate of a white girl, fevered and alone in a cold lodge, now depended upon Jim Bridger; this other man had tried and had failed.

Jim was speaking by word and sign, the latter of import clear. Two hundred yards from either company they were, those four. The War Eagle, reading, burst with furious "No!" and the twain subchiefs, with shake of heads and emphasis of gesture, cast the overtures to the ground. The Blackfeet did not give up; they kept. Let the Blanket Chief take his words back to his men. If he wished to fight, the Blackfeet were ready.

Bridger spoke again, while eyes and ears strained to follow. He—

Ha! The whoop of Black Harris pealed across the spaces—a chorus of shouts and answering whoops volleyed back and forth, to echo from the hills—shouts exultant, whoops infuriate; and Yellow Buffalo straightened, surcharged with glad hosanna.

Carson, Kelly—another, another—how had they got there?—were out of a tributary wash across the stream—were between the two Blackfeet and this startled cluster. Their rifles barred the trail.

Almost could he see Carson's firm color—he imagined his blazing eyes and his determined smile; he heard Kelly's joyous laugh.

Cut off! Fire had backfired fire. Good old Jim Bridger!

The two naked Blackfeet stood motionless, erect and cold, steadily gazing at the rifle-muzzles. The pandemonium lulled. Now Bridger paced forward, masterful at last, but upon his grisly face a mischievous grin, until his voice carried through the shortened distance.

"Listen! If you want war, let us begin. Your two men die. Are the lives of your two men worth anything to you?"

The War Eagle had been a curious study: of astonishment, of wrath, of foaming hate. He choked; he quivered; and with superb effort forced reply:

"What do you wish, you American dog?"

"For these two, the two you hold," said

Bridger. "They shall come to us as you found them, and during the space of one sun you will let us alone."

The chief hesitated not at all. He had iron will, and Indian reason.

"It is agreed. The lives of two Blackfeet are worth more than ten times ten Americans. You will get war soon enough," he proclaimed. "Wait, dog. It shall be as you have said."

He spoke rapidly to a chief. And such was his power that the warrior host still kept back in murmurous array, and the chief dashed, without dissent, upon headlong mission to the camp.

The stentorian shout of Black Harris applauded.

"Hey thar, Glory! Aint this doin's? Wagh! I'm froze for skin."

And Harris made bearlike retreat, to don clothes and armament.

Time sternly dragged amid vigilance by enemies watchful for one least false move. And then—thank God, thank God, she was coming, riding wildly and like the wind, upon the gray, at the side of the messenger chief, with the pack-horse following in their wake.

So she arrived in the early gloaming—she, white and bewildered, her hair loosened, her blue eyes as startled as if suddenly opened from sleep.

He could say only: "You are free."

"And you?" she cried.

"Both."

For his bonds were being cut; hands hauled him from his seat; his rifle was thrust into his fingers, and the bridle line of the gray was added. The pack-horse bore the pack complete. This Blackfoot chief was a meticulous man. Having performed, now he gave utterance in voice that shook.

"Quick! Go! All white men are liars, but I keep my word." A gust of black passion convulsed him. "As for you—the ground between us is red with blood. No mountains are high enough to part us. What the Blackfeet have lost to you, you shall lose. Go, you dog, and on the trail look behind you for War Eagle."

CHAPTER XIX

To the Bitter End

WITH a smile his retort, leading the gray and trailed by the pack-horse, the Briton passed from the opened rank of foes for the inclosing rank of friends. On the way he met the two subchiefs haughtily returning, naked and unashamed. He met Bridger, standing advanced with welcome ready.

"I tell ye, now, that war close call. If hadn't been— Gol-durn yore skin!" Bridger broke off. "Thar's a white lady, and I'm slick as a peeled beaver!"

Amid mighty laughter he turned and ran, galloping for his clothes. Carson covered his retreat.

"Howdy, ma'am. You're shet of those fiends, but you'd best ride a piece yet." He continued bluntly: "That war close call, Glory. We had to be up to trap. Yore squaw found us. She's yonder."

The girl leaned slightly, to address the man beside her:

"You did this, Ralph?"

"I did nothing but bungle," he said. "The Dawn Star sent them."

"The Dawn Star?"

"Aye, my wife."

"She must be very brave."

"She is a good woman," said he.

"You see it war this way, ma'am," Kit explained. "We airn't many, but thar warn't no time to lose, 'cordin' to his squaw, so we reckoned to out-Injun 'em. Giner'ly man treats with man, case o' this kind, but we sent in two, knowin' they'd send out two to make the powwow ekil. Then we sprung the trap. White skin air prime to Injuns, but red skin of their own air primer. They never lose men if they can help it."

"Oh, I thank you all," she quavered.

With Bridger clothed and in his right mind but suspicious, and the flaxen giant walking beside the gray, they hastened on through the evening while the defiance of the outraged Blackfeet pursued.

The Nez Percé was waiting at the impromptu camp. She lingered timidly, the child in her arms, as if she wooed the approval of this her lord. So to his words, gravely granted, "The Dawn Star did well," she beamed her happiness. And then Bridger spoke:

"The gal can have ch'ice o' sleepin' quarters, which aint much. But I 'low she'll be more easy in with yore woman, Glory. That's the best of the lot."

"You're tired, Alice," he said. "Will you go with the Dawn Star? She'll know what to do."

"Whatever you say, Ralph," she answered. "I wish to be no trouble. Yes I'll go with your wife."

Before he could help her she swung down, for a moment to waver with the reaction, but to follow the understanding Indian woman into the rude tepee.

THIS night they held council at Bridger's quarters. There were Bridger, Carson, Harris and several others, all of seriousness becoming such a situation: the disposal of one white girl in a camp of homeless men.

"It's only luck we happened to be whar we war," Bridger said again. "The main party air waitin'. We're too few to fight, and if we don't jine 'em, thar's gone hoss and beaver."

"Twenty-four hour, that chief agreed," nodded Carson. "He'll keep his word. Arter that—"

"Sauve qui peut," the flaxen giant murmured.

"Hey?" queried Black Harris. "Wagh, now! Quit it. What's sign? This hyar's time for plain American. Ute or 'Rapaho lingo don't shine, I tell ye—nor white gal in trapper camp, neither."

"You needn't worry, Harris. My affair. I'll take her on."

"How's that?" Carson demanded.

"It's my affair, Kit. I'm responsible. You fellows can't stay here. You and Bridger'll need every man. I'll take her out of the way."

"No!" Carson declared. "We're white. O' course she can't stay, but I'll help you put her safe if I never ketch another beaver."

"Hyar's a chil' as says 'Owgh!' to that," announced Harris. "He goes too, else why was white man made?"

"Faith, count me," Kelly chimed in. "Sure, I can fight Injuns anny day. Them an' the beaver be domned when there's a purty colleen to sweeten the trail wid a smile. Haint she a drop o' the Irish in her, man? I'll swear she has."

But the flaxen giant firmly answered while he sucked his pipe:

"Those Blackfeet are *fâchés*. You outwitted them—and no thanks to me. They'll want hair for that."

"Aint they alluz wantin' hair an' askin' us to do 'em the favor of it?" laughed Kelly the light-hearted.

"They'll be hot for you now—aye, and too many for you. Move quick, or you're wiped out. Your hair's not safe till you join the rest of the brigade. I'll not take a man—I'll 'tend to my business; you 'tend to yours."

"Wall, what's float-sign, then?" Harris growled, combative.

"I go with Miss Colton."

"Whar?"

"To the Missouri, on into Oregon, whichever she wishes."

"Wolf-fodder," growled Harris. "But hyar goes, too, lock, stock an' bar'l. She'll better have two wipin'-sticks to her gun, in case one busts. You carry bad medicine, an' you know it."

"My affair, I said," the big man warned. "The Blackfeet will scarcely look for my trail when yours is plain, Bridger."

"I d u n n o but what I hear sense," Bridger conceded. "Thar'll be brown skin humpin' on our trail, sartin; they'll likely miss his'n. Gal can't go with us. Seen enough o' white woman in varmint country, I have. Dinged if she haint seen too much o' me already, she has. We mought spare a man or two, but 'cordin' to my jedgment, he'll do as well alone as with a passel—'specially if he travels on west."

"You hadn't ought to try for the Missouri, Glory," Carson asserted. "Trail east is closed. But thar aint no Blackfeet west o' hyar, fur as we know. That trail's open, and the missioners air ahead. You go thataway, whilst we're standin' in the road. If you'll take my advice, you'll start 'arly. You'll have a full day, for I never yet heared o' War Eagle breakin' his word. If you'd like company for a spell, you've only to say so."

"Give me but the nod, Glory," Kelly pleaded. "Sure, now, a bit o' blarney helps amazin' when ye have two women an' both of 'em different."

The giant shook his head.

"It will be west," he said, "till I've put her in safety. White women are there."

THE camp was prompt to the dawn, and Alice with it—duly up and out, this fair white girl as phenomenal, here, as Amphitrite rising before the eyes of sailors upon a tempestuous sea. She appeared, caparisoned as though she had overheard, and knew. Somewhat drawn, she was, and dark of eyes, but she greeted Stockbridge with a smile bravely speaking.

"I'm ready," she said. "You all have disposed of me?"

"It's decided that I'm to take you on," said he.

"Alone, that is?"

"If you'll accept. Other men offered, but Bridger agrees that we'd perhaps do

better without. Beside, he needs them; we don't."

"Of course," she said. "Where do we go, may I ask?"

"For Oregon. I propose to place you with the missionary company. That is the quickest trail now."

She assented meekly.

"Yes, I suppose so. You are right. We must start at once. I'm sorry to trouble you, Ralph. You have your wife and baby, and your business, but I'll travel as fast as I can and try not to be a bother."

Bridger urged haste.

"Ketch up, ketch up. We'll be standin' yere in the road a spell. Aim to toll them Bugs Boys on to whar thar'll be poppin' plenty, or I don't know Injun. It's time you war movin', yoreself. We'll take keer of yore traps for you."

Leaving Bridger, Carson and all to "stand in the road," against the "Bugs Boys" (that cant term for the Blackfeet, Devil's Own), they set out, traveling light: he upon his gray, his wife and the child upon their Flathead horse, the girl upon a mount lent by Carson (a good animal it was), and the pack-horse sparingly laden.

Peace apparently accompanied them; but on the third day he felt that something sinister hung upon their trail.

CHAPTER XX

Something Sinister

HIS trail heretofore had been his own, trending ever, as country permitted, for the west and that trader and missionary trail which bored up from the southward, to the Columbia of farthest Oregon.

Fort Hall of the Hudson's Bay Company lay yonder beside the trail and the Snake River; the missionary women could scarcely outtravel him and his women into Fort Hall.

And the first two days had been benevolent.

"My *hama* is a great chief. He should have wives. Black Bear says Chief Solomon of the Good Book had many wives. If the Yellow Buffalo takes the white woman into his lodge, it is all right. We shall be happy together," the Nez Percé pronounced.

And inasmuch as she clung to the idea, and Alice did not understand the words, rather than draw attention by arguing, he let the matter stand in its innocence.

Indeed, they got along together very well, those two, the red woman and the white. The brunt of the camp work fell to the Indian, of course, by training and tacit custom; but it chafed him to observe how the white girl tried to help—with a docility and an eagerness even pathetic, so awkward she was, so unskilled in these primitive measures and simple expedients which to the Nez Percé were second nature.

She, Alice, had pride too. For although she voluntarily joined in the routine, and submitted without question to the guidance of him and of the Dawn Star, she was only with them, not of them—maintaining a pleasant but high reserve that baffled like the line of caste. They were three, and she was one.

The child she did not touch. As if in new modesty his wife had ceased to give it breast; but her fondling and crooning, and her shy glances, jealously provoking, brought no responsive gesture beyond a friendly smile.

The two women, and the child, slept under shelter, and he outside.

DURING the second night the Carson horse vanished. When Stockbridge went out upon morning gather, he found only the three horses where four should be. This puzzled him. It was a strange forbearance that had taken one horse and declined the others. He revolved the problem in his mind while leading the animals in on return to camp.

"Your horse has gone on the back-trail, I think," he announced to the girl.

"Oh!" she cried. "Can't you find him?"

"No. They sometimes do that." He said nothing about the cut picket-rope.

"I'm sorry," she deplored. "But you'll follow him? He may not be far."

"He's probably traveled a long way by this time. We'll do better by keeping on."

She repeated:

"I'm sorry. I see I'm to be a bother, but I'll walk as fast as I can."

"There's no need of anybody walking," said he. "I'll put your saddle on the pack-horse. It's a good animal too."

"But the pack?" she objected.

He smiled indulgently out of mind still casting.

"That shall be attended to."

"How ingenious you are!" she murmured, with gratitude uncalled for. "I don't wish to be a burden—indeed I don't."

He managed to stow aside, unseen by her, the equipment that she displaced, and he saddled the pack animal. The eyes of the Nez Percé constantly sounded him, but she also had to be satisfied with the brief explanation that she, like him, knew to be false.

And all this day, while they rode ever through vale and pass and timbered stretches of a lone country he had that sensation of hostile espionage challenging him to the right-about.

IN the evening they made camp again. The way had been undisturbed except by his thoughts and by those monitions plucking at his back. Forsooth, the camp, amid tasseled spruces beside the joyous little stream, with its shelter, its two young women, both comely of their kind, its child, its further domestic attributes of food-preparing and couches spread, shed from its genial fire vibrations of content.

Therefore, taking what good the gods provided, he dismissed the bogies of the day, but not without mental reservation. And after they three, the two and the one, were asleep beneath cover, he withdrew, to sit apart from the fire, with eyes and ears intent upon the night.

After a long time the moon, in the wane, drifted up, as evidenced by a pale light that deepened the blackness of the shadowing trees. A wolf lifted its rally-call and was answered, so that from point to point the waiting silence broke into lamentation with the anguish of lost souls.

And his vigil, and the wolves, somehow took him back to another camp, and other wolf guises on a Christmas Eve; and this connected with the baby, and Thompson, and the Blackfeet, and Laforey—wiped out, he. That Christmas day in the Sioux camp, he recalled—Harris singing Injun, a brave Christmas night, of food, warmth, wife, child, good company, Christmas truce, England forgot, all past forgot and the future of small concern when the present was satisfying. Then the ensuing train of other camps, of marches, of Crow overtures, Red Moon's spleen, the beaver trail, the Sioux again, rendezvous, Shunan, the annoying Parker, that letter; then the Bannocks, Tommy, the Blackfeet: this had been his life, which he had thought to lead, until—this white woman!

Facilis descensus Averni—easy the descent. Yet not so easy after all; aye, Tommy? And to get out, a fellow named a creek. That seemed to be the way, in these parts. Well, he should interview Pluto, Pehta, whatever the devil's title, and see. If Alice only first might understand that he knew himself an ass—

The horses had been restless. The wolf howls seemed still ringing in his ears. There was a flurry, a snort, a rush. He sprang forward, just glimpsed a dark shape coursing through the trees—and the red blast of his rifle jarred the night with thunder.

THE women were up. Even while he peered, straining his senses, one of the two came running, calling—

"Ralph! What is it? Are you hurt?"

"No. Keep back!" he ordered.

But in a moment more she stood at his side, panting with haste and disheveled from sleep rudely shattered.

"You're not hurt?"

"No, no. Go back."

"But somebody shot—"

"I did. Will you please go back?"

"I didn't know—I was afraid—" she faltered. "How was I to know? So I came. What was it?"

"A wolf," he said. "There's nothing to fear. Shall we go back?"

"Oh, fear?" She laughed weakly. "You mean for myself? Yes, I'll go back now. You need not come. I can at least be glad you're unharmed." She flitted away. "Your wife will be anxious," she dropped over her shoulder.

The Nez Percé was no doubt lying close, holding the child, and waiting upon events. She knew better than to make a frantic sally into alarms.

The echoes of the shot had died; the horses were quieted; by the position of the moon and by a feel in the air, he perceived that this was not night, but morning. The stars should tell of dawn. And the conviction that he had drowsed vexed him mightily.

Another horse was gone. He knew without query. It proved to be the pack-horse. His snap-shot ball apparently had missed mark; but this vexed him less than did the fact that the petty persecution seemed directed against one Alice Colton. The pack-horse had been her second mount. In what had she, a white girl, a bonny girl, a stranger in the land, offended more than he? Or was it only the accident of choice? At any rate, he would have to report the loss, after further investigation by daylight.

SEARCHING then in the track of his bullet, he was savagely gladdened by blood signs; and following through the misty glade alive with the twitter of birds, he arrived at the trail's end. Here he stood, over the body of the foe. Amid the brush of the open fresh with the morning lay a Blackfoot warrior. Aye, in beaver country one learned to shoot by sense when sight lacked.

It was no man that he had ever known. The fellow had been hunting afoot; of horse—pack-horse or other animal—there was no trace. And whether this would be the last of the pilferers he could not say; he could only hope. Therewith he left the rascal, fixed face to the sun, and made return to camp and questioning gazes.

He informed the Nez Percé:

"The wolves frightened away the white woman's horse. I give her mine."

The Nez Percé replied:

"A man does not shoot at wolves in the night."

He addressed the girl:

"The horse you rode has broken away. But no matter. You shall ride the gray."

"My horse again?" she queried. "Was it the wolves?"

"Aye. They were bold last night."

"But what will you do?"

"I shall walk. We'll make just as good time in rough country."

She pondered—and said simply:

"I seem to bring you bad luck. I'm sorry."

"No," said he. "I'm the one to blame—I should have been on watch. Horses are always uncertain when wolves are about."

"On watch!" she answered. "But you were on watch, out there alone, while we slept. You accused me of being afraid. Well, I think your opinion no compliment."

In the midst of packing and mounting, His wife spoke to him:

"Where do we go today, Yellow Buffalo?"

"We keep on."

"Into the west?"

"Yes."

"No," she implored. "The Yellow Buffalo sees. It is a bad-medicine trail. Every night something. Let us leave this country and turn south for the white trail. Maybe we shall run away from the bad medicine."

"I will think of it," he said. The blanched look in her face, and the quaver of her voice, as she stood cradling the heavy child, struck him through. "Pretty soon we turn south," he promised.

In truth she had voiced his own thought also. The quicker they entered upon the main trail, perhaps the better; for evil had been exorcised from that by hymn and Book. And there might be company more substantial.

THEY marched, with equipment reduced, he footing it before, in lead of his household. A short distance out, halting to close the file, he caught the Indian woman looking back; and as she passed him, he heard her comment:

"It was not wolves. My man shoots straight."

She had noted what he had noted: the buzzards circling low over a spot of brush, and still wary of the object there. . . . .

On, through a solitude now hill-locked, now prolonged into sweeping views transcendent. His range had never carried him here, but there were landmarks far removed that suggested regions more familiar. To his annoyance, nature kept forcing him into the west, but at last the trail of traveling elk invited him into the south. One could trust those skilled wayfarers, the elk and the buffalo. Turning sharply, he headed into the trail and heard a little cry of joy from the Nez Percé.

The trail eventually fanned out in a meadow; but all this remainder of the day they made on without rebuff or hostile sign, so that at evening the illusion of security almost convinced him. His wife chattered more contentedly, and sang to the child. He heard the clear laugh, and now and again the American accents of the Alice Colton whom he had known. Beneath the bubbling pot, their sole utensil, the fire crackled lustily, to cook their supper, and with dancing fingers to caress the brown hair and flushed fairness of the one, the black hair and even swartness of the two. The horses grazed, free in appetite. And he cherished all this as augury that the "bad medicine" had given final quittance—the gantlet had been run. But he was very tired.

Nevertheless he was much awake, this night, mindful of the animals (picketed closer in), of the brush shelter harboring (for him) the old world and the new, of the hushed air, of the dark coverts, of the gibbous moon. Once a startled movement of the animals stifled his breath and tightened his hand upon his rifle; but they

subsided, and he heard nothing more. When he went over, presently, the gray horse was lying down.

In the safe gleam of morning it was still lying down, with nose low. That should not be. What now? A sick horse? Dismay gripped him. Then, walking to inspect, he cried out with pain at the crimson pool. Here was a horse that would not rise again. His gray was cold and stiffening.

He had loved that comrade. The knife, embedded to the hilt, had virtually pierced his own flesh; and he chilled with the thought that it might have done so in very fact. Then, stooping to draw the weapon out and examine the message attached to the hilt, he straightened, for the appalled voice of the girl spoke at his shoulder.

"Dead?"

He crumpled the soaked eagle feather in his palm. He had no need to examine this gage. Indians did not lightly part with eagle feathers.

"Yes," he answered, stunned into the monosyllable. And he wished that she were not seeing the grievous sight.

CHAPTER XXI

A Bullet Flies

"IT'S been killed! Your horse! Oh, the coward!" she exclaimed. That was not fear, but indignation. "Then we're being followed. On account of me?"

"I hardly think so," he said.

"Then they're striking at you through me. The first horse didn't stray; the other horse wasn't frightened by wolves; somebody killed this horse with a knife. Now I see. Is it that chief—the one called War Eagle?"

She wrung the admission. Indeed, he was not loath to make it, for he had to talk with some one, and she, his own kind, stood beside him like a tower of strength.

"Yes; I think Le Borgne's at the bottom of it."

"Each time my horse—or the horse I ride," she uttered. "He does want me. He's letting you know. He may have me, then. Where is he? Leave me with him, and you go."

"Impossible! That's wild talk again."

"But why not?" she demanded. "It's better I than all. I only bring danger to you. He might have killed you—he may yet; and I'd be left to him, and nobody'd know. Well, what are we to do, then, Ralph?"

She had professed to partnership. That and something gallant about her quick precision heartened him in his maze of pro and con while the war-eagle feather scorched his palm. "We'll go on," he said. "Dawn Star's horse will carry you both." He dropped the feather and set his foot upon it.

"We can't stay here and wait," she agreed. "How far now, Ralph?"

"To the missionary trail?"

"Yes: to where you leave me."

"Not far, once we get out of rough country. We'll make south as fast as we can."

"We'll lead him on—that chief and his bullies!" she cried. "He thinks to wear us out and take us alive. Maybe we can ambush him. He daren't fight in the open. But he sha'n't steal in upon us again. I'll help you keep watch, Ralph. You can't stay awake night after night, and your wife has to tend the baby. Let me have your knife."

"My knife!" he stammered.

"Yes. You've that other, now." She quavered, as if a little frightened at last: "I should have something. I'd feel better, with a knife."

So he passed his knife to her, from his belt, and sheathed the other, red with the blood of the gray. Blood, he grimly accepted, called for blood.

The future, however, did not look red, but black, as with the two women and the child upon the Flathead horse, and him trudging, they all set onward before the sun rose.

The Nez Percé had broken under the haunting menace of that peril which struck in the night, for she was Indian. She rode plaintive and cowering, with many a fearful glance to rear, the were-wolf Pahkee ever in her searching eyes. It had not been necessary to tell her anything. She knew as well as he did—had known all along—in spite of him had stolen out and viewed the gray.

The white girl, clinging behind her, without a word of suggestion had discarded her skirt and rode in a short plaid petticoat, as if the better to sit astride. Surely she was helping, at her American utmost. Aye, that was white blood, Anglo-Saxon blood, the more indomitable when crossed by fortune. It was Alice Colton in a new light. He did not wish to forget her now; never would forget her.

THE way continued rough; more sparsely timbered now, but frequently cut off by those high, forbidding ridges, snow-seamed, that completed a washboard of shallow valleys. The Flathead horse labored under its doubled burden. Of pursuit or of escort there was no token.

After noon he issued, by instinct as much as by judicious choice, through a last pass into sudden view of open country. By a long, gravelly slope of low, stiff brush they descended for a great basin that lay shimmering in a space too vast for eye to measure. And although the basin appeared to be a desert, sterile of creature-comforts, it was like a calm succeeding a storm. In there a man had a fighting chance against man, for he could see and prepare.

Down they went, and on, fully exposed; but the trailing enemy who followed armed white man here would have to be of courage more reckless than that which hid in the forest night.

Near sunset he called halt beside a stagnant pool, and they camped. It was time. Here were wood and water, and the cramped child cried its animal pangs. The Nez Percé set about preparing food—a small business, for they were reduced to dried meat and domestic essentials very meager.

"Are we safe?" the girl asked.

"Safer," said he. "We've done well."

"He'll not follow—they'll not follow? We've shaken them off, you think?"

"It hardly would be Indian nature to follow into country as open as this and face a white man's rifle," he said, "especially when he knows we know—that is, unless he has plenty of warriors. There's been no sign of that."

"We've seen nobody all day," she said. "They've let us go, I think. Perhaps it's been only the one-eyed chief. Why, he wont dare to do anything now," she declared proudly. "Not when you're ready for him."

The Nez Percé also spoke:

"I think maybe we all right now. Too far for Pahkee. Pahkee do not like this country. That is good. Pretty soon we get out, other side."

So she too, of the sharp eyes, had not seen that which he had seen by hasty look behind as they had entered upon the level: a single figure outlined blackly against the sky of the rimridge that they had left—and there stationed, large, inimical, like a Cyclopean genie of the land drinking his fill of satisfaction that now he held them in the hollow of his hand. It had been Le Borgne; no doubt of that. And next, he was gone.

Why mention this, however? The girl had resumed:

"We'll have to mount guard tonight, of course, anyway. After you've eaten, you can sleep awhile, and I'll watch." She would listen to no protest. "I'm not tired—not as tired as you. You've got to sleep. I brought you here—I've nothing, and your wife has the baby. She's tired with that. But I'll wake you. Do you know where we are, Ralph?"

"The trail to the missionary party and the Columbia is at the other side of that range in the southwest. Once beyond those mountains, we'll be within striking distance of Fort Hall, the new Hudson's Bay post, where we'll likely fall in with the white women."

"And where you'll leave me?"

"Aye," he answered.

"You'll be glad, I think," she said. "Then if we get through the night and travel all day tomorrow, we'll be safer still." She was calm in her reasoning, with a simple directness and steady purpose as refreshing as cold spring water. "Could we reach the mountains tomorrow?"

"They're farther than they look. We can only try," he replied.

"We ought to be up early again." And she applied herself to helping the Nez Percé.

THEY ate amid the beatific shrilling of frogs in the sink pool. He consented to sleep for three hours. His whole corporate system swung about the pivot of sleep. So he resigned her to the company of the Indian woman; whether either of them slept he did not know, but it was she who wakened him.

"Everything's all right still," she said.

The stars were shining, so that the slumberous plain lay outstretched in weird glamour that mystically revealed shrub and rock. The girl crept in beside his wife and the child; and as he sat, with senses strengthened, apart from the dulled fire, presently he heard nothing, in the lulls of the frog chorus, except their breathing and the sighs of the dozing horse.

The night passed in peace unchallenged, if false or true. Possibly the War Eagle had turned back—but thank God for these

persistent gleams of dawn putting the shadows to flight. Another day! Then a day or two more, and good-by to Alice Colton. Then what? The query loomed again, but this time he had the answer: Wife, child, the trail, the beaver, and the feud. It was not within manhood to countenance other thought.

They breakfasted at speed. With the scarlet of the sunrise unmarred behind them, they faced on into a plain that constantly expanded as the day heightened. As deceptive as a treadmill, this plain, the bed of a sea long extinct, and rough to the foot if not to the eye, being upheaved and rumpled into island outcrops and petrified surges. A breeze, at first fitful, increased, until by midmorning a wind full from the southwest and gushing from the exhaustless bellows of creation tore at them so that they toiled like puny swimmers buffeted among the gale-swept billows.

Thus, parched, sometimes blinded, sometimes breathless, with the Flathead horse sorely stressed, they fought on, to the droning of this tempest beneath a clear sky. Anon he made halt in the lee of some rocks. The two women tumbled off stiffly; they sank down, overtired for words, but invoking her stamina to the surface, the white girl smiled at him. The Flathead horse stood with head drooped and legs spraddled.

The rock-pile, narrowly shading as the sun inclined to the west, was drenched with the hot rays. The wind, arid and hot also, shrewdly whipped past above and upon the flanks, but (he fancied) was lessening as they had neared the mountain walls. Or else it had blown itself out in its fury. At any rate, the worst was done; they had come a distance more than he had estimated before; the water, a lake, lay fair in sight, and beyond it the land rose promising in timber and vale, to prosper him and his upon the final stage. For beyond the lake and beyond the noble hills there wended the white-woman trail to the Columbia.

White woman to white woman, then; and white Indian to his traps and lodge.

NOW as they briefly rested in the lee of this outcrop bulwark happily detached from other outcrops, the lake tugged at him. It appeared to be sweet water, cradled in rocks and sand, whereas the tepid fluid of the frog-pool had been flat to the taste. The basin here had become more broken, and the upheavals continued; but directly onward there opened a smoothed way like a little pass, which invited eye and foot.

As though reading his desires, Alice gave utterance in agreement:

"We must go on pretty soon? Do we camp by the lake? How far?"

"The lake's not far. You're tired, aye?" he responded.

"Rather tired, but very thirsty."

"We'll find good camping-spot before dusk," he said.

The Nez Percé seized upon the words and intonation.

"First drink, then go again," she bade earnestly in her own tongue. "Not stay this side of lake, Yellow Buffalo. This side bad, I think. Other side good. Bad medicine here. My heart tells me. Let us go quick."

Then the Flathead horse died. The wind had suddenly dropped, so that the basin held breath upon the impending tragedy; sped through the vacuum and punctuating the squaw's anxious appeal, a bullet thwacked smartly—the horse sprang, bawled, and sank with a groan of life surrendered, even while the thin report of the piece drifted in upon the bullet's wake.

The crack of doom, that, out of sky as clear as the sky from which the gale had rushed. The wind had resumed instantly, dissipating any whiff of smoke. What covert concealed the distant marksman (and distant he was, for the report had been tardy) eyes could not say, although they roved with mountain-man keenness. The desert had lapsed into its treacherous tedium; the final quivers of the horse had quieted; the Indian woman, cowed abject, was hugging the child and wailing miserably; and his gaze met that of the girl, half erect, like himself. White she was, and aghast, but it was to question of him with blue eyes vivid and burning.

"Our horse! Oh, that coward! Did you see him? Where? Can't you shoot him?"

"He's somewhere among the rocks—maybe in a wash. I've had no glimpse yet."

"What are we to do?"

His mind acted quickly. The whole situation crowded in review like a dream dreamed between the ticks of a clock. They were here afoot, with little food and soon to be without water; the crisis had to be handled rapidly while an enemy gloated.

"We've got to get out of here before we're shut in," he decided. "Can you make a run for it?"

"Yes," she said. "Why not, if we can't fight? Where? To the lake?" Her cheeks had flamed angrily; her eyes were bright with battle light.

"Straight to the lake. There we'll fort if necessary. Don't move, but ready! You first. We may surprise them." He spoke to the Nez Percé. "We must run for the lake. This is death." He saw her tense herself, gathering the child.

The girl had queried:

"But you?"

"I'll cover you both, close behind. Don't pause. Now—go!"

CHAPTER XXII

Sanctuary

SHE darted out boldly, his wife at her heels. And in a moment he too was in the open, facing about and about as he closed the rear, his double rifle hungry for a sight of the foe.

The bullet had come from the east. If, by that, the skulker was still couched in that stand—if it was only Le Borgne, if there were two, or even three, he would answer pursuit. But he seemingly had taken them by surprise, for there was no immediate pursuit, and following the women he ran on, and on, without one rift in the suspense.

And that very suspense exasperated—really alarmed him, almost sickened him, bearing upon him, as it did, with an impression of studied cruelty.

The girl was running free of head to the breeze, her short petticoat flattened in her strides. The Dawn Star gradually fell behind, for she was less sprightly of limb and was impeded by the child. The way, not so closely hedged by the rock-piles as he had feared, bore straight and sandy to the beckoning lake.

So they ran. And then, halfway, Alice turned about, and urged the Indian woman on; and wresting the child from her, carried it, staggered with it until the Nez Percé fiercely tore at it and took it again, and gestured her on, on. Once more they made best speed, with the lake shore now near.

And then, when he was reaching for goal, suddenly hopeful, the view halloo, repeated from lake and mountain ramparts, echoed in wild acclaim.

There were two: Blackfeet, ahorse, issued as from some byway to his left, and careening in with gusto to cut the course at the shore of the lake itself. This was not to be. Just a trifle late had that charge been timed—the two women were running stanchly, abreast of each other, down for the shore. He rapidly overtook; crazed, he delivered a shot at venture. "Into the lake!" he was roaring—and they seemed to understand, for they were in.

He was there at last; near blinded by passion and the throb of blood, he whirled to search with his rifle-muzzle for a mark made sure. . . . .

So quickly events towered and toppled! The Nez Percé had cried, agonized: "Bad medicine! It is bad medicine!" She had thrown the child away with all her strength; she had darted back, splashing through the shallows, and with arms extended to bar the road, she stood against the Blackfoot charge.

There was no grace in which to reload. The fellows came, lashing in: the chief and a warrior, with the warrior in the lead. Possibly he failed to note the man at the end of a ledge and saw only the Indian woman upon the shore and the white girl in the water. *Fâché* he was, with lust for spoil. But the man saw him, and the chief, partially covered, behind him, and that small figure opposing in vain crucifixion.

The rifle trembled with desire. Would the two never get in line? For this he prayed, since the chief did not ride first. Now! Opportunity twinkled—the alert muzzle crashed in a jet of smoke, to drive the ball through both.

The warrior tossed high his bow-arm as his horse swerved; the huge chief was beside him with a rush, picked him from his seat and reining at right angle, lifted his own mount sheer over the rock escarpment—bolted like an elk from the hunter's scent.

WITH a clatter of hoofs, the warrior's horse had raced on in frenzy, over the Dawn Star—aye, fairly through her, regardless of her arms—leaving her in a pitiful heap when it had passed, to veer at the lake edge and go galloping along the brink.

The rifle-report was stilled in horror. For the moment oblivious of everything except this inertly huddled form, Stockbridge ran in, to stoop above it, with heart crying.

At his word and touch, the Nez Percé

stirred. She was helpless below the waist, and there was pathetic languor in her dimming eyes.

"Go! Quick!" said she.

He raised her. Tottering with her and his rifle, he made for the troubled waters. As he lunged in, he saw Alice floundering as though upon return. With rifle-hand he ordered her on. Now he heard the child cry, and he saw it, feebly afloat in its garment and due to drown by the choppy waves.

By the Eternal, it should not perish like a hapless beast cub! Waist deep, he defied the shore; and for eyes to see if they wished to see, he flung his rifle from him, whirling it end for end into a watery sheath. Take that now who could! There had to be sacrifice of rifle or wife or child; so the true gun went.

The footing fell off abruptly. With a word he swung the Dawn Star to his back; he felt her arms encircle his neck, and her body stiffen as with resolve. She was plump, this little Indian woman, no lightweight.

The waves slapped him, took his hat, while he swam, trying for the child, with the Nez Percé, ever grown more limp, dragging at him, and the Le Borgne bullet doubtless already lined for pursuit.

Where Le Borgne? The expected bullet did not strike? He glimpsed Alice, much nearer, and he again shouted at her. The Nez Percé had been murmurous. Now her voice came in a tired sigh as her clutch relaxed.

"I was good woman. White woman be good too. All right." She slipped from him, so that by the impetus (unwittingly given) he lurched forward only in nick of time to grasp the sinking child. He desperately faced about; but Dawn Star was gone, leaving not a swirl nor a bubble as his guide. It was a grave clean of scavenger hand or claw.

So he swam on, aware that he scarcely could have managed her and the child both. In ascending scale good horse, good gun, good woman—these he had lost. Now he had the child, and the girl named Alice Colton.

She struggled up the shore, ahead of him—to wait, pale with exhaustion, in her soaked and clogging garb. In he forged, bringing the child; and as he clambered out, weary also, she gave stark lament:

"Is that all?"

"All," he panted.

She swayed.

"Your wife, Ralph—is she—"

"One of the horses struck her," he said. "She was fatally hurt, I think. I tried to bring her. She let go. It was all I could—"

"Oh!" she shuddered. "I might have helped. You see I did swim. You should despise me. What can I do now?"

The self-accusation he let pass. Hysteria could best expend through action, and action ruled the minutes.

THE lake was a quarter of a mile wide, two miles long. He scanned the eastern shore. No moving shape of life appeared amid the contours plain in the low sun's rays. Upon this side the cedared, somewhat rocky hills formed inlets and cliffs; and with increasing timber flowed upward and on until they merged into the mountains of the west and southwest.

The sun hovered above the snow-ranges. It would set for these hill bases considerably before it set for the desert across the lake. The girl was shivering like the child in his arms. She, and it—yes, and he himself—should have fire and shelter and food, at any hazard. This pebbly beach was no sanctuary.

"We'll have to go on a little," he said. "Can you?"

"Yes. Where?"

"To make camp out of sight, before dark."

"Out of sight," she chattered. "Will we be out of sight, you think? They wont follow now? Hurry!"

She started at once, straining and determined. The child in his arms wailed incessantly while he caught up with her. Together they trudged, bedraggled, for the mouth of the first valley.

No whoop of Indian derision damned their flight. It was as though Bedouin vengeance had subsided at the lake, recoiling impotent from a barrier that by heroic gift had been rendered forever insuperable to evil. There the Dawn Star held the trail, signaling to the one, "Back!" to the others, "On!" A calm, of breathless, watchful silence, had poised over the sunset world.

Throughout the way the girl's shuddering words proclaimed how near she was to breaking.

"I'm sorry, Ralph! You loved her. I'm glad she's not—over there, though. With them!"

"Aye. It's better so."

"Your baby! The poor little motherless thing! . . . . Will they follow?"

"They stopped at the lake, I think," he made answer.

THE valley received them. All sweet and lovely it was, with the sunset filtering in, and grassy bends, and bottoms lush with springs, and game-trails traversing it with sign of plenty. So they pushed up, the girl stubborn against distress, he carrying the child, for full a mile, when with a sob she sank, to crouch and shake.

"I can't go on. Isn't this far enough? They wouldn't find us now." Her face was woeful, with eyes feverish and cheeks dead of color. "What can you do with me?"

The look of her frightened him. She was so unlike Alice Colton. His eyes made swift survey of place and resources.

He laid the whimpering child down and without ado lifted her, despite her weak protest, carried her on and stowed her against a sunny ledge, upon a windrow of dried cedar fronds.

Then he went back for the child, and brought it.

Fire, shelter, food: these devolved upon him. No Indian woman had bent to work making ready the lodge, the fire, a meal, and meanwhile had quieted the babe. This was a white girl.

The hatchet was with the Dawn Star, in the lake. He plied his knife, cutting brush and cedar. The fire should be first; and with flint and steel he kindled it, so that soon it was snapping briskly before the quaking girl and miserable child, to reflect back upon them from the ledge itself.

"You'll be warm now," he encouraged. "You're hungry; you shall eat. I'll find food. Never fear." A rabbit to be killed with a rock, roots to be dug, Indian fashion; surely he was equal to these straits, as he had been equal before. Were this not a white girl, so utterly dependent, he would have been less in a quandary.

The sun was due to set early behind the mountain ridges. He found relief in work, to outpace the dusk. With trapper skill he built the lean-to shelter of branches propped upright, thatched with cedar fronds, and opening from the ledge, with the fire at the threshold.

Thus he housed her and housed the child just as the last sunshine left the valley, in retreat from the swift line of shadow rushing like death up the slopes. He was sweating; her garments were steaming; his mind now upon food, he vaguely heard her faint thanks, when—

"What is that?"

CHAPTER XXIII

Illusion Camp

SHE was sitting half up, wide-eyed, stricken again, to appeal with frenzy and snatch at the child. The twilight rang to a horrid uproar close following upon that first high scream of terror. What now? He had leaped to the fore, the knife his weapon—and scarcely was he planted when the chase swept by: a young cow elk in last desperate spurt, with three wolves tearing at her flanks.

They passed, unheeding him. The harried brute screamed again; she would never reach the lake; two hundred yards below, she plunged to earth, and the beasts were upon her instantly, tearing at her convulsive carcass.

At that, he was away also—snatching a heavy brand from the fire and running, with one glad word—"Meat!"—cast behind him to reassure the girl. What horrors she had been fated to witness!

At the menace of him, large and yellow and human, and of his shout and his flourished brand, the wolves sullenly gave place, their hackles raised, their bloody fangs bared. So while they sat at a little distance, like jackals waiting upon a lion, he fell to, butchering with all speed, his sleeves rolled up.

For the first time in many a day the wilderness gods had nodded to him. This stroke of fortune should portend that the onward trail was favorable. She at least deserved that.

Therefore, slashing and hewing with dispatch while the wolves snarled from slavered jaws adrip, very soon he had dismantled the carcass, and loading his meat and a section of the paunch upon the hide, he tugged and hauled, dragging his spoil to the fire. The wolves slunk in, to finish.

Daubed he was, to the elbows, and redly stained of leggings and shirt when he arrived, a hairy savage, at the fire, and her, sitting braced against fears.

"You drove off the wolves! They might have attacked you!" She quickly laid the child aside.

"They're cowardly brutes," he answered. "There's enough for all, and I've left them plenty. Now we'll fare well."

"How quick you were!" she said, and shivered. "Was it an elk? The poor thing! I don't believe I can eat, Ralph."

"You will, you will," he declared. "You must. I know of something. It may help you."

"Your baby is starved," she faltered. "You should feed him soon."

He laughed rudely. Drat the child! Nevertheless he knew of a remedy there.

"I'll stop his song." And to the girl's shocked gasp, the urchin presently was champing upon a slice of raw liver—sight not pleasant. But that also had to be. They all were down to the primitive.

Then he busied himself; he washed at a spring; he prepared what he had in mind; he returned with a piece of paunch fashioned into a cup—and he wondered if Alice Colton would submit to this added indignity.

"Will you try to drink this, Alice?"

She impulsively shrank.

"What is it?"

"In the mountains we call it 'trappers' bitters,'" he explained. "Gall mixed with water. Buffalo-gall, usually. We find it a sovereign tonic. It will bring back your appetite."

"You have tried it, Ralph?" she asked.

"Aye, and with good results. There is nothing better."

"'Bitters,' you say," she murmured. "It can be no more bitter than other things I've had to endure." She sat erect. "I'll drink it, Ralph, if I may shut my eyes."

She quaffed, tense with repugnance, and finished.

"You're a brave girl," he praised. She smiled faintly as she sank back.

"Brave? What else is possible?"

HE busied himself further, cutting slices of meat, raking the fire and posting spits over the coals, replenishing the fire itself, arranging his powder-horn to dry, bringing in more fuel, pegging out the section of elk-hide, stowing the extra meat in the branches of the tree; and all the time he was conscious of her eyes marking his movements.

On a sudden she said:

"I'm better. I believe I'm hungry."

That gladdened him. He could have shouted his joy.

"Aye!" He saw that she was really better. Her voice showed spirit, and the wanness had fled from her face. "The bitters often benefit. I knew of nothing else. An Indian might have found herbs, more pleasant to take."

"The Dawn Star might, you mean? We miss her. But I thank you for the bitters, Ralph. Most medicine is bitter, is it not? It seems as though it had to be bitter, to do good." She sat up again. "I'm famished, sir. I'm envying those wolves. Hear them! Can you trust me to turn the meat? I must do something."

"It is camp custom for each person to tend his spit," he said. "You choose yours, and can be eating while cooking."

"I have it." And forthwith, side by side, they held their meat to the coals.

The darkness surrounded. The wolves were crunching bones. The child slept upon the cedar needles in the reflected warmth. What with the fire, the shelter, the meat, a woman, a child, a man, the illumined circle was home. But the woman was fair, the man fair, and the child dusky.

It struck him also with wonderment. He was he, the Yellow Buffalo, the Mad Britisher; if not Ralph Stockbridge; and yet he was Ralph Stockbridge, sitting beside Alice Colton, in the beaver country where Alice Colton had been only a dream! Could such things be? But she was tangible; he could touch her; he had touched her; he saw the fire flicker upon her hair—he heard her ravenous little exclamations while she tore at her roast.

He had thus sat many a time before, and had wakened to find her gone. Possibly that was why she fitted in so well now. Had the gods of this new world been kind to him? Or did they mock a fool?

He was not certain, even after she had cried "Enough!" and with her drowsily lying, half bolstered, upon boughs before the rock, he had returned to the elk-hide, and she uttered her thoughts while watching him.

"What is that for?"

"These are the brains. They soften the hide."

"You're going to use the skin?"

"It ought to be saved if I can dress it."

"And can't you?"

"That is squaw work," he said. "It takes the proper tools, and patience. I may wear it down after a fashion."

"Oh!" she cried. "How you'll miss the Dawn Star! You loved her, Ralph?"

"She was a good woman to me," he said gravely. "She always had warm water ready when I came in; she kept the lodge clean and the fire burning—her pot was always full; she complained of nothing. I had only to eat and sleep and go out again, and I never lacked."

The girl gazed at him as if debating his even reply.

"I think you're very strong," she said.

"In the mountains we are accustomed to sudden death," said he. "That is something we learn to face and accept."

"She was a good mother, too. Now you have only the baby. You'll have to find some one else to help you care for it." And she asked, as if not wishing to pain him: "What will you do with the elk-skin, Ralph?"

"It will serve us for moccasins, at a pinch, if I can flesh it and soften it in spots. Elk-hide is poor moccasin stuff—it gets soggy when wet. But your boots are worse gear for this country, and they're almost gone."

"When I started, I hadn't expected to inflict my boots with such work," she reminded. "Can you make moccasins?"

"Aye; I've done so."

"How much you know!" she praised again. "You've put up this camp; you prepared the meat; you fed me and the child; you're dressing a skin; you intend to make moccasins of it; and you've only a knife and your hands. And you speak the Indian languages! You talked with that chief, and you talked with your wife."

"I know a smack of Nez Percé, and a little Blackfoot," he made shift. "A few words, and signs, go a long way. But most of the mountain Indians understand Shoshone, and the plains Indians employ the Sioux. Those are easy for a white man to acquire."

She fell silent, and he scraped at the skin and knew that she was looking at him and past him. And she queried:

"I'll need moccasins, Ralph? We've far to go?"

"It may be two or three days yet to the trail, through a rough country. How far ahead the missionaries are I can't say."

"When do we start again?"

"In the morning, if you're rested."

"We must hurry? We're in danger still?"

"I think the Blackfeet have turned back, else they'd have pressed after at once. But we ought not to lose time. Every day takes the missionary women farther. I aim to place you with them the soonest possible. Then you'll have more comfort."

"Comfort!" she repeated, with a certain shadowing daze in her eyes. "Will I find comfort? There? Yes," she added, "we'll start early. I'd better sleep now. I'm so tired. Thank you for all you've done for me, Ralph. I'll think of you often, leading your wild life and contented in it. How strange that we should be here, like this, when we parted last in England!"

"Aye," he assented, a dumb dolt but all quivering.

SHE said no more. He worked on at his moccasin supply; and pausing to renew the fire, he saw that she was asleep, her cheek upon her hand. She faintly smiled, as if to reassure his eyes; her bosom gently heaved. If this was an illusion, it was perfect, entreating him with presage of generous nights and days yet to be. And then he saw the child, and that confounded him.

He attacked the hide again; and having done his utmost, he sat on guard, sometimes dozing, sometimes listening, occasionally feeding the fire, and always alert. She did not stir, although the wolves prowled, seeking more bones.

The night of peace promised well. There was no one-eyed foe; the War Eagle had declared truce. Not a sound disturbed the valley dawn when he stood, and moving softly lest he waken her (still sweetly asleep), he began the preparations for the day of travel.

He washed; he laid apart meat for breakfast, he freshened the fire with cedar in order to provide coals, and taking the remainder of the meat and sections of the elk-hide, he withdrew a little distance and bound the meat in parcels—wrapping it and tying it with hide thongs, for easier carrying.

And then (all this in the gray, with an eye upon her), as the danger hour had passed, he started upon a circuit, to reconnoiter for signs. She would like a time to herself, he thought, when she woke; for she was a white woman.

When he again came in sight of the camp, she was already up—not only up, but busy and had been busied, for she greeted him with happy mood challenging. The meat was sizzling from the spits; debris had somehow been brushed away; the child had been cared for; and bright

and buoyant herself, she laughed triumph at his astounded visage.

"You see, sir, I have learned. You have given me no lodge to make neat and no pot to keep filled, but I have tidied up; I am cooking your breakfast for you; I've done my best with what I have. Ought I to warm water for you? But what in?"

He smiled.

"A piece of the elk-hide gathered at the corners to form a basin, with a hot stone thrown in, has been tried before."

"You didn't tell me," she reproved. "But I'll remember, for the next time."

"Never!" he exclaimed. "Never, never!"

"Why? Am I so awkward?"

"I'll not have you doing the work of a squaw," he pronounced.

"Nevertheless," she said, "a squaw seems necessary to you."

"Aye, if so," said he dourly. "But she would be an Indian woman, wonted to that kind of work. I think you've washed the child too," he added, accusing.

"Yes, I have." That swept the brightness from her face. "I—had to. I don't believe it liked it. Hasn't it a birthmark on its shoulder? Was the mother frightened, once, Ralph?"

"The mark has always been there," he shortly answered. "About the mother I know nothing. It is not my child."

She stared upon him, and her ejaculation burst:

"Not your child?"

CHAPTER XXIV

Up from Avernus

SHE said again:

"Not yours!"

"No. I found it in a scrimmage with the Indians."

She flatly sat down, still agog.

"You didn't tell me! I didn't know!"

"I saw no reason to tell you. What difference? It should be less to you now than ever. I gave it to the Dawn Star for one she had lost, is all. My affair. I'll keep on attending to it."

"Oh, oh!" she exclaimed. "No, you wont understand. What difference, you ask? Why!" She leaped up, all flushed with excitement. "What shall we do? What *can't* we do! It isn't yours? I've tried not to hate it—I've tried not to be shamed by hating it. Do you think I haven't suffered by seeing it—your child, with an Indian wife its mother? Yes, any mother! I've suffered. You can call me jealous, Ralph. I needn't be jealous now, even of her own baby. She is gone, too; but this —this remained. Oh, it seemed to stand between us forever. Why don't you speak? Have you nothing to say?"

"Alice!" he stammered. Dared he believe? Could he read such sign?

"Of course you can't care for it—unless you get another wife," she resumed. "Are you very fond of it? We'll take it out with us, to the missionary women. Then you can leave it, with them, and me. I'll look after it for you. Missionaries are supposed to train Indian children, aren't they?"

"I wonder if you're mocking me," he slowly said.

"And I wonder if you're still as stupid as you were years ago," she flashed. "Am I to say all? Endure all? Venture all that a girl can venture? And being not an Indian, be nobody? Are you Ralph Stockbridge, or Yellow Buffalo?"

Thereupon he showed her in very fact, and earth and sky for a moment vanished.

SHE murmured:

"I feared you despised me."

"Despised you! You should despise *me*."

"You threw away your gun in the lake; you were burdened; I did wish to come to you—I would even have taken the baby, but how was I to know that I could swim?"

"Swim? You couldn't swim?" he cried. "But you went in!"

"You ordered us to. I was with another woman—your wife. She went right in."

"Aye?" he indulged her.

"I started learning to swim when I was a little girl. But that was a long, long time ago. The lake did look very wide, and the water very deep; and for a while I wasn't sure. I don't think I could have helped you much, but I should have tried again when I saw the Dawn Star had left the baby to you, and was hurt."

"No!" he bellowed, aghast. "You should have called—you should have warned me! I'd no idea! It was brave and foolish. Supposing I had lost *you!*"

"Or maybe Dawn Star left the baby for me," she trustfully said. "So as to help you! Why did she drop the baby, Ralph?"

He saw the Blackfeet, he heard the War Eagle, and the despairing cry of the Nez

Percé. But this hour should not be clouded by that constant threat.

"I think she was bewildered," he made answer. "I know she didn't leave it for you. She turned back; she stood in the way—and they killed her."

Alice Colton freed herself of his arms.

"Oh!" she cried. "How wicked I am! Tell me," she demanded earnestly: "Did you love the Dawn Star, Ralph?"

"She was a good woman—"

"Yes, yes. So you've said. There was a little baby—but she was your wife? You were married to her? I wish to know."

"As truly as man may marry woman in these parts, we were husband and wife. She desired the baby. It lived scarcely an hour. But I have loved only one woman, and that woman is white."

THIS set her to flaming; and still she debated.

"What must she think of me, and you!"

"She knew from the beginning," he said. "She was Indian. But I made her happy, and she is happy now."

The girl murmured:

"Somehow I feel so. The Lake of the Star. Our Star! We'll never forget her, Ralph. But yesterday seems so far away. 'Land of hate,' you said. No! Love is here as everywhere." She roused to energy. "We must go on! How different the night might have been! How you have suffered, too! You said we should lose no time, sir. Can't we go? There's so much ahead."

"Aye," he smiled. "The world. And a missionary preacher who is like to lack his first marriage fee."

She bravely met his eyes.

"I'm glad we wont have long to wait. One of them is a minister of the gospel. He'll not refuse us. And after that, what? Oregon?"

"I don't know," he said.

"England?"

"I don't know."

"America?"

"I don't know, nor care."

"It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter!" she exclaimed. "Anywhere."

"Anywhere together, except here. I'm done with the beaver. There is another world," he said. "But I can think of only the one thing now. Oregon, England, America—all are you."

They ate. She spoke yet a little fearfully.

"Then you'll not need to look for another gun, nor bow and arrow, Ralph."

"If gun and bow and arrow don't look for me, I hope not to meddle with them," he replied honestly.

"You'll give up your feud. What does that matter, either? And surely nobody'll try to stop us now. Would that chief hate you so? Why? Have you injured him? Is there something he still wants? Me?"

"He has killed men of mine; I've killed men of his. Blood calls for blood; that is the law of the country," he gravely explained. "A law without end, as seems."

"I see," she said. "It is a law of hate. But love is stronger than hate. Nothing shall stop us. How glad I'll be when we're through with this bad medicine!"

This reminder alarmed him. To what did she refer?

"Bad medicine?" he questioned. "Who taught you that?"

"Why," she said, with little laugh, "I heard it among your trappers. At least, Mr. Duncan did. Even Captain Steuart used it, maybe to amuse us. Am I not right? Hate is bad medicine, I should think. Love shall be our good medicine—like your cure-all bitters, only more agreeable to take."

THE sun was just flooding the higher slopes when he had slung the meat upon his back and against her remonstrance lifted the child.

"I can carry it—I will carry it, now," she pleaded. "Do you leave nothing?"

He fondly answered:

"You shall not play squaw. I leave you to bring the most precious thing of all, and that's yourself."

So she made a piquant mouth and followed him. The valley smiled at this spectacle of a great and yellow-locked Viking, clad in leather and laden with the plunder of the country, upon trek now with his captive princess, through the new, complacent Vinland.

The birds twittered; the chipmunks scampered; the deer fled unpursued; the sun shone; the earth and heavens rejoiced in a day innocent of evil like the first day of a world remade.

The sweet valley narrowed as the trail gradually ascended. In about two miles it appeared to be ending, with promise of open country before, and near survey of that mountain jumble which alone separated them from the blessing of the Book, and

bliss thereafter. A night, and part of a day, yet, thought he, to the missionaries and Fort Hall. Once into those mountains and he could throw last care aside. Safe byways awaited there. Thus he saw the brightening goal dispatched to meet him.

But caution was not entirely to be doffed. That, as Jim Bridger would say, "warn't human natur in Injun country." Nudged by this reminder and by his own monitor instincts (would he ever get done being a mountain-man?) he stopped ere leading through the debouchment sentineled by a rocky shoulder.

"Now will you hold this bantling a moment, dear heart?" he bade. "I'll not be long."

That dismayed her, paling the glow of her cheeks and deepening the blue of her eyes.

"You're going on? Without me?"

"Just to view the country beyond the pass. We must omit no chances."

"Yes," she said; "we must omit no chances. So much depends—on you, it seems." She took the child and smiled tremulously. "But I'm not afraid. Life can't be so cruel, when we've such a little way yet. What do you hope to see, Ralph?"

"Buffalo. There should be buffalo grazing."

"Oh!" she cried, "I understand. You'd kill one?"

He smiled too, but at her simplicity.

"With what, dear heart?"

"You've a knife, sir. So have I."

"Aye, that might be done," said he, confirming her brave spirit. "But we've all the meat we can carry. I ask buffalo, for where buffalo graze at ease there are likely no Indians."

Her hand detained him still.

"If there are Indians—"

"Why, we'll have known in time. We'll seek another route."

"You are wise," she breathed. "Go, and tell me if I'm to come."

HE went right forward. The pass from the valley was not far, fifty paces, and she might watch him. In the pass he stooped, stealing on amid silence, hearing only his pulses, to peer through and out.

The vista opened. There was a flat, of a mile width, extending to the haven mountain bases, and darkly speckled with the forms of grazing buffalo. He erected, the load soared from his heart, he almost shouted, almost beckoned her in—and did not. By his actions she would know, and he stepped a little on, amid that silence oddly questioning him, to clear the buttress for a broader view

Then chaos engulfed him. A dark and Cyclopean figure leaped; a club whirled; a pocked fierce visage glimmered; an eye blazed; a laugh sardonic echoed, and the club flailed crackling through his hasty guard so that he sprawled in an explosion of golden stars, while he fumbled for his knife.

He writhed aside; he was up, knife out, to grapple. Again that laugh, again the club, again the blow, again he was down. This was death upon the threshold of life. The knife had snapped under him. The blood of the craven elk had blighted the blood of the gallant gray. But he had his hands, and the enemy within reach. He was up, half blinded, one thought dominant, to kill ere he was killed and she fated, when she herself hied in.

He had not heard her scream, but here she was, flung to her knees between them, at the chief's very feet, forgetful of her knife (this girl, white, not Indian), only to hold up the child in arms supplicant and cry:

"Take me! Take me!"

His own voice screamed, shouting pent in his dry throat. Then while fettered with dizziness he strove on, the monster Blackfoot had spurned her backward and pounced upon the child, ripping its garment in his zest; and with a great laugh of glee rapacious, had swung it by the arm to dash it upon the rocks.

For an instant its frog body pended betwixt sky and earth—but it did not fall. The Blackfoot sprang away, with palm opposed to the frantic charge by man and woman.

"Wait!" he ordered.

The flaxen giant wavered after, with a curse, his fingers groping. The one-eyed chief again gave ground, and again repulsed.

"Wait! Fool!"

Word and sign prevailed. He did wait—leaning against the rocky buttress, while his chest heaved, and his head throbbed underneath its mat of hair, and the warm blood of his bruised scalp slowly trickled, and the girl clung to him as if to cover him with her shaken frame.

Strength returned. There stood the foe, in the path to life. He heard himself say,

panting: "Your knife, Alice!" He heard her sobbed reply: "No, *no!* I dare not. For your sake. And what if he takes me!" And he heard the War Eagle:

"This is it."

CHAPTER XXV

The Medicine Is Strong

THE Blackfoot stood with child and club in one arm. He laid a finger upon the birthmark of the naked shoulder. He accused:

"The child is not yours."

"It is not mine."

"Let us talk straight," said the War Eagle, "for I think I shall not kill you. You are the Yellow Buffalo. This is the child you stole?"

The man Yellow Buffalo answered steadily:

"I stole no child. This child I found in the snow. It was freezing; now it is fat. Do you say the child is your child?"

"The Great Spirit sent it to a wife of my brother, for the Blackfoot people. It is sacred. The mother offended medicine, and died to a bullet. We looked for the child. My brother took five men and went after you, to find it. They did not come back. Where are they?"

"Six Blackfeet attacked in the night. That was war. We killed two. The scalps of the others have dried in the Sioux fires."

The War Eagle's eye gleamed, but he replied without rancor:

"That is the truth. In war men die. But the Blackfeet were told the child was dead by you. How is that?"

"I think the Crows told you," said the other.

"The Crows told us; the Sioux told us; many told. For that we vowed you should die. But the child lives. I see it."

"You see it, so they lied," said the other. "They tried to buy it. My wife loved it; I would not sell the child. I knew nothing about its medicine. Those who told you are your enemies. They were glad to say that the child was dead and cause you grief."

"At my lodge you did not tell me the child lived," the chief accused again.

"Why should I tell you when you closed your hand and would not pay?"

"You are white. I thought you lying. The Crows said this child was only your child. I had you and that white woman both. So I played with you, to make your heart weak, and learned nothing except that white men are never to be trusted."

THE huge Blackfoot pondered, as though weighing the child in his arm. The girl's form had relaxed a little; she had stilled her spasmodic sobs, and hung upon the words that she did not understand. The War Eagle made decision—at his utterance infinite relief laid a balm over pain.

"Listen: It is peace between us. The Blackfeet had vowed to kill you because you had killed the child. Once I told you that mountains should not part us. You should suffer what you had made the Blackfeet suffer. What the Blackfeet had lost, you should lose.

"With two men I set upon your trail. You did not know, but you found out. One by one I took your horses. You shot well. One of my men you killed in the night; another you killed at the lake. Me you did not kill. I had made a vow to the sun, if the sun would give me your life.

"You ran for the lake before I was ready. I would have been glad to keep you from water—you and your women and your child. At the lake my man might have done you mischief, for he was hot to get your woman. I stopped to carry him away. You should not count coup, and I feared your medicine gun which has saved you many times.

"Then I saw you in the lake, like a chased elk, and I was glad. There you lost one woman and your gun. You saved the child. Why did you save the child that was not yours but a Blackfoot, and give up a gun to do it?"

"The child was drowning. My wife loved it."

"She threw it behind her and spread her arms," the War Eagle nodded. "I could have shot you in the water but I let you go. You were wet and poor. I knew where to find you. You made a fire and I waited for you to come out. Just a little way now, you were thinking. It warmed my heart to know that I stood in that little way. Your woman had died, your baby should die, you should die, this your white woman should be given to the squaws. Why did the white woman come running and hold up the baby to me? Did she want to give it back to me?"

"She knows little about the baby. She held herself up to you, to stop our fight."

"She must love you, I think," the War

Eagle said. "Love is a strong medicine. Take her and go on. I see the child of the Blackfoot people was not killed by you. Instead, you treated it like your own. You threw away your gun, so as to swim with it across the lake. I give you another gun. It is a two-shoot gun like that other, and shoots far. With it I killed your gray horse and you did not even see the smoke. You will find it in my camp. I did not need it here. You I would have killed with my club, little blow on little blow, while your woman looked on.

"You will find a horse there too. I have another. The camp is around this rock. Go! You have the permission of War Eagle."

"I ask nobody's permission to travel through this country," the flaxen giant retorted.

The Blackfoot briefly smiled.

"The Yellow Buffalo talks big. Just the same he shall go. The sun gave me your life. I give it back. Evil made me almost destroy the child. Good kept me from letting it die, with you, in the desert or the lake. I shall not offend Good with blood. The sun sees. The trail I think you seek is one day's march through that gap beyond the buffalo. White women travel it. The War Eagle takes the Great Medicine child to the Blackfeet. Their hearts will be glad. It is a sign. Now they will conquer the white men. If the Yellow Buffalo comes again he will find the War Eagle ready to fight him."

The chief turned about and carrying the child strode away.

THEN the girl spoke at last, breathless with amaze following upon suspense.

"He is gone? He lets us go?"

"Aye." And he himself was weak in the reaction.

"Why is that? I don't understand. He would have killed you."

"It is a Blackfoot child, and long wanted. He gives life for life. The medicine, he says, is too strong."

"The medicine, Ralph?"

"Aye, dear heart. The Dawn Star, the child, you running in."

"Oh!" she cried. "Love is stronger than hate. I said that. How noble he is!"

"He is Indian. They told him I'd killed the child and he found I hadn't. He makes thank offering."

"You had cared for it. The Dawn Star had cared for it—she loved it, she loved you—"

"And you came, dear girl. You shouldn't."

"I had to. I didn't think of it, I thought of you. Then he snatched it. That was terrible!"

"He saw in time, and his heart grew soft."

"He struck you!" she exclaimed, with quick passion. "Let him go, but I'll not forgive him for that. You're hurt, Ralph?" Her eyes searched him. "You're bleeding!"

He smiled.

"One blow may have cut the scalp a little. But my hair is thick. The club glanced on the meat, I think. We find his horse and Duncan's gun in his camp yonder; and likely water. Come."

So, finding the camp, they found a spring there, and she washed and bound his head.

"The trail for us leads through that gap," he said. "One day, is all now. We should catch up with the missionaries soon."

"One day! I didn't think we were so near—and yet how far it might have been! Can't we go?" she cried. "We may be losing time!"

So they set on, she upon the horse, he beside. They would change off, she protested, when he tired; at which he smiled again. The buffalo opened passage, as if bidding them speed. Part way across she looked back.

"He wont follow? Surely not now! He'll keep his word?"

"The War Eagle keeps his word." That was grim gospel. "He's in a hurry to kill only the other white men. Between us there is truce, and the medicine of a gun in my hand. But the next time—"

"You would master him," she said proudly. And then—"but there'll be no next time. Oregon, England, America—we have all that. What more do we want?"

"Each other," said he. "That is everything, all else nothing."

"Even your five-skin lodge and your six million acres," she chided. "Your paradise! My foolish Yellow Buffalo!"

"Aye," he said. "A fool's paradise."

With a little murmur in her throat she held out her hand to him, this big wild man upon a level with her. He hungrily clasped it; and thus making certain again of each other they hastened on.

THE END.

Flood

This splendid story deals with a mining engineer and a great crisis he met out in Sumatra.

By WARREN HASTINGS MILLER

"MARINE engines—good grief!" It was little Prentiss' first view of the power-plant, and in vexed disapprobation he hopped about like a hen. "And high-speed, too! I hate 'em, Bentham! I hate 'em! I hate 'em!" he yelped vindictively. "Give me a grand old Corliss-valve slow speeder!" He made grand and slow revolutions of his arm to illustrate.

Bentham grunted, a solitary grunt that might mean either agreement or denial, and replaced in his mouth the briar pipe that was his solace when other people grew heated. Nature had as it were left him tongue-tied from birth. He never could defend himself by argument. Facts spoke for him—always did. They were self-evident facts. Bentham had a splendid reputation as a tropical engineer. His plants had a way of running, no matter what cataclysms Nature saw fit to inflict upon them. He looked down silently on the irate little secretary of the Sumatra Gold Corporation and puffed in peace.

The engines in question were running silently and at a high speed, driving the centrifugal pumps which furnished water to the process-plant up on the hill. Bentham was sorry that Prentiss did not approve of them, but he had selected marine engines on purpose, and he was the engineer on the spot here and knew what he was doing. He had been sent out here to put up this plant according to natural conditions as he found them. He had been given *carte blanche* as to what to install and where to install it. And now, after everything was running smoothly, to have this little popinjay come out by steamer to Padang and find fault with everything he had done! The big silent Bentham had tasted injustice before and found it very bitter, but his plants had always vindicated his judgment. He kept his peace now and let Prentiss rave on. The secretary was his superior officer in the Corporation and was responsible for all the manufacturing end, according to the Company's constitution, and so he had a perfect right to talk.

"And good heavens—totally inclosed casings, too!" went on Prentiss, turning to inspect the offending engines some more. "Can you give me any sensible reason at

all for that, in this hot climate? And why the boiler-plant up the hill, with that long steam-line coming down here?" The secretary's tones were filled with scorn. It was obvious that their engineer was an ass and never should have been intrusted with this job!

BENTHAM took the pipe out of his mouth. This little man had talked long enough; it was time he faced a few facts! He pointed down at the swift and clear waters of the Bungulan River flowing down out of the mountains of Bencoolen which line the Sumatra west coast.

"You'll admit, Prentiss, that we have to have water for the process, no matter what else happens? If that stops, we lose the value of the plant in wasted chemicals alone. All right: These engines are down here because their pumps cannot suck water up higher than thirty feet—no pump can! The pumps are good high-speed centrifugals, simple, strong, and able to deliver the water up to the reduction plant, come hell or high water. The engines will deliver the goods and keep right *on* turning those pumps too. You can't beat a marine engine for reliability! That's why steamers run, no matter if it's blowing a typhoon."

Prentiss shrugged. He was not at all convinced of anything except that the pumps ought obviously to be down here. "Why have you the boiler-plant up there on that rock ledge instead of down here? And why the long steam-line, on what appear to be masonry piers fit for a bridge?" he asked contemptuously. "And why, of all things, these casings for your engine-frames in this hot climate?"

"Flood," grunted Bentham. "Read Marsden." He subsided and went on puffing the pipe.

Mr. Prentiss looked around him incredulously. Flood! Why, that boiler-plant was set at least seventy feet above the river! Ridiculous! He could not conceive of this placid little stream ever reaching anywhere near up there. Why, it would have to fill the whole ravine and far back into the mountains! There was no sign of flood, ancient or recent, anywhere along the river-banks. The tropical verdure covered both flanks of the ravine as far as he could see, apparently undisturbed for centuries. Look at those sago palms and banyans and mangoes! Look at the hillsides and bougainvillæas and flame-of-the-jungle and hibiscus, tender bushes that could never survive even an ordinary rising! The cane and bamboo in the river-bottoms showed traces of freshet, such as might be expected from thunderstorms in the rainy season upcountry, but—seventy feet! He shook his head and muttered something about foolish expenditure of money on those piers and engine-casings. Then his manner changed to a placating friendliness and his green eyes looked up sidewise at Bentham as he pawed at the pointed iron-gray beard which terminated the close-cropped whiskers of his jaw.

"Who's Marsden? An authority on gold-process works?" he asked, filled with curiosity. "I'd like to borrow his book if you have it, Bentham."

By that request a suspicion already half-formed in Bentham's mind took root. Why this eagerness to get hold of a volume by a supposed authority on reduction process-plants? To read so that he could talk learnedly thereon ever after, Bentham surmised. He had heard of Prentiss through engineers at the big city clubs at home. The little man knew superficially a good deal, and could talk fluently enough to impress his hearer as a real engineer. The ambition of his life, Bentham had heard, was to be known as *both* a business man and a competent engineer. With both professions lodged in his mighty brain, he could pose as Authority at all meetings of promoters of jungle enterprises, men who put their money into mines, water-powers, railroads, in the far places of the earth. Bentham began to suspect that all this dissatisfaction with his work was not altogether disinterested. For Prentiss to build up his own reputation by a triumphantly adverse criticism of the work of a famous tropical engineer like Bentham would not be altogether bad business!

BENTHAM grunted sardonically and blew out a huge billow of smoke from the pipe. "Sorry, Prentiss. Marsden's no process authority. He was just the British Resident in Bencoolen before the Dutch took over Sumatra," he informed the little man wearily. "The statistics in his reports might interest you. Go to Bencoolen and look 'em up—as I have done."

Prentiss' face fell. He could see that this engineer was not going to tell him anything, and it made him angry. He looked once more up the valley of the Bungulan. It was absurdly peaceful, all this Sumatra

landscape! Nothing exciting ever happened here. The two volcanoes, Indrapura to the north and Kaba back in the hills, were lazily pouring out smoke from their summits, peaceful as sleeping lions; hadn't erupted since goodness knew when and might not again for a century. As for the Bungulan, it would take months of heavy rains for it to rise even up to these engines. Casings on them now represented cautious foolishness. There would be plenty of time to put them on if the river ever looked threatening. He saw his advantage and pressed it.

"Mr. Bentham," he said decisively, "as your superior officer I regret that it becomes my duty to send home a totally adverse report on all that I find here," he began severely. "I don't like any of it. Your power-plant scattered all over the lot, money spent like water on totally unnecessary precautions, your engines cased in so that they will run hot on the slightest provocation under this tropical sun, your reduction plant up there on the hill and far from any possible wharves we might build in this river—" He stopped for breath and a search for further criticisms.

Bentham sighed wearily. Knowing Prentiss, he had been expecting something of this kind after this going over his plant. It was galling to be under the power of this little popinjay, and that adverse report worried him. It was unfair and unjust, but how could you stop it?

"Sorry you don't like it, Mr. Prentiss," he said. "The layout represents my best judgment as a tropical engineer. I know what I am doing."

"Quite right, my dear fellow!" soothed Prentiss. "Only in my judgment most of it was entirely unnecessary. And I'm the one finally responsible to the Company, you know," he smiled. "But in spite of the report I shall have to make—an entirely disagreeable duty, you understand—it's not too late to improve matters. I shall make, first, certain changes." He stopped and eyed the big engineer to see how he would take that. If he could once begin actually altering things, the battle was won. Bentham's reputation would be irrevocably shattered. At home they would understand nothing but the fact that Prentiss had found the job so bad that he had been obliged to do it all over again. Nothing hit a man below the belt so hard as did that!

The fighting bristles rose on the back of Bentham's red neck as he listened. He saw through and through Prentiss, was entirely aware of where all this was leading. But beyond that lay the very solid fact of his own loyalty to his Company. It would be far more serious to let this little whiffet make changes here and now, undo his good work, jeopardize the very existence of the plant with foolishness born of ignorance and conceit.

"What changes?" he growled, the choleric glare of battle leaping into his blue eyes, fixed now steadily upon the little hairy secretary.

"I'm going to take off those engine casings first," declared Prentiss with conviction. "Entirely unnecessary, my dear man, since, even if we have a flood, there will be plenty of warning. In my judgment they're a danger to the entire plant. The bearings might run hot any time, and we'd have no water and be ruined. These high-speed engines are always giving trouble anyhow—"

"Indeed you'll not take them off!" broke in Bentham heatedly. "Look up Marsden, I tell you! You'll find that this river can rise seventy feet without warning. It has done it more than once. There'd be no time to put the casings on again. Not while I'm engineer here, Mr. Prentiss!"

A HOT anger was flaming within him now. Why, the fellow was actually dishonest! He ought to know, and probably did know, that bearings running in oil are in no danger of heating up. Every gasoline engine in the world is built that way, and a great many steam engines. The tropical sun had nothing to do with it. The whole thing was just a move to push him down as a competent engineer so that Prentiss could climb up on the wreck of his reputation. An honest man, facing honestly the facts, could not have made such a criticism with any conscience whatever. It was obviously no case of an honest difference of opinion. Prentiss' next reply bore that out:

"Wont I?" he retorted excitedly. "We'll see about that! Either you agree to whatever changes I think best, or I'll pitch in a report on your work here that will leave you *glad* to get a job in some engineering office as a mere draftsman, Mr. Bentham!"

"Pitch away," retorted Bentham doggedly. "Only, so long as I'm the responsible engineer here, those casings stay *on!*"

Prentiss exploded instantly into a violent and somewhat ludicrous rage: "Very well,

sir! I'll stand for no insubordination here, Bentham! You may sever your connection with this Company, *here and now!* Is that clear?" he shrieked.

Bentham smiled grimly. "Meaning that you want me to resign?" he asked. "That, Mr. Prentiss, is fortunately beyond your powers. Until I get a written dismissal from our president, I shall remain here and run this plant. And you'll make no changes in it without my orders."

They faced each other, the irate little secretary full of venom but recognizing his own impotence, the big engineer eying him grimly, inflexible, steadfast in the knowledge that he was right and knew what he was doing here.

"*All* right!" yelped Prentiss. "I shall cable home a report on this at once—and we'll see! You've had your own way long enough out here, and it's time some one showed you up!"

HE pranced off downhill to a small corrugated iron motor-shed on the river-bank where he had established a kind of office. Bentham looked after him, silently and wonderingly. How did these little pint-pots get that way! It seemed somehow indecent to him for a little whiffet like this even to try to pose as an engineer. Bentham had a vast respect for that profession of his. It demanded, first of all, a stern and absolute honesty to the facts. There was no room in it for guesswork, bluff, assumptions based on mere opinion. No man could bluff Nature. You met her possibilities of flood and drought, of tempest and landslide, with measures that were sure—or you went down and out before her. For Prentiss ever to be intrusted with such work seemed appalling. The little fool could never do much but talk!

Bentham turned away slowly, his heart full of worry and a sentiment very like hate growing within him. He looked up for a moment at the sturdy marine engines which rose high above him on their narrow and earthquake-proof bases. They were real and true and dependable, running on and on in the blazing heat of the day, throwing up vast volumes of water from their centrifugals to the process-plant up on the hill. A contrast—like himself—to the eternal falsity of that little man down in the motor-house, the vindictive click of whose portable typewriter could now be heard distantly. False to plain facts, false to all the ideals of engineering, false in the superficiality of his knowledge, was this little hairy ape! The engines were real and true, and Bentham felt a sort of comradeship with them, a blessed relief in something dependable and reliable as he watched their silent, spinning flywheels.

He walked up to the boiler-house perched on its rock escarpment. The steam for his engines was made up here, safe above the highest record of any flood of the Bungulan. The boilers hissed and hummed as they sent steam down the long pipe-line on its stone piers. The rays from their fire-doors glowed redly on the glistening backs of the Malays who served them. Bentham puffed reflectively on the solacing briar in his mouth. It was good work, all of it; would be likely to stand, no matter what happened. Aggravating the thought of the abysmal ignorance, the unfair and malignant criticism, that was going into that report down there! But he knew Nature in the tropics, and her treacherous and catlike quiet—serene but untrustworthy, and always unexpected in her lashings out at man and his works. No man dared assume that anything was safe from her; no experienced engineer trusted in her *not* doing a second time what she had done once before! You were lucky if she did not bring on something entirely new! Bentham walked on up to his office at the process-plant, musing worriedly. He could see nothing to do but carry on.

SEVERAL hot and blazing days went by with neither man speaking to the other after that clash over the engine-casings. Prentiss was all over the works, notebook in hand, finding one thing after another not to his liking. The typewriter clicked vengefully in the little iron motor-house. It was cool and pleasant down there, but an unsafe place to work in, Bentham saw. The river could trap the little busybody easily in there with one of its sudden rises. There was only the steel door—a tiny window too small for escape and no means of escape by the roof. A man shut in there and working absorbedly at a typewriter, for instance! He felt moved to break silence and warn him, more than once, but he could not; his dislike was too great.

And then more serious aspects took his attention. Bentham came upon some of his own men changing a motor on Prentiss' orders. Not content with the infamous report, the sneak was trying to establish an authority over the personnel by issuing or-

ders over his head! That would never do! Not with native workmen! He hunted up Prentiss wrathfully and protested.

The little man fumbled at his beard as Bentham laid down the law to him passionately. Characteristically he made no direct opposition now. "Very good, Mr. Bentham!" he replied noncommittally. "You're in charge here, of course, until we hear from my cable. And then we'll see—I *think!*" He pawed the beard and pinched the lips of his lower jaw, entire satisfaction gleaming triumphant in his eyes. Bentham growled huffily. He had won his point, for a time; but how exasperating was all this! Give him a man who would fight back, straight from the shoulder! You got nowhere with this fellow!

Several more days passed. Evidently no satisfactory reply had come from the president, for there was no exulting announcement of his discharge for "insubordination." They had confidence in him at home and wanted to know further, but the situation here was becoming intolerable. Bentham found himself virtually guarding his plant, day by day, from this pestiferous meddler. And then came a new development, typically subtle and underhanded: A Dutch lieutenant presented himself, with Prentiss at his side, at the works office. The little secretary was smiling down upon him malevolently as he began to explain:

"I've been investigating your fiscal records here, Bentham, and regret to say that I have found certain irregularities which made it necessary for me to swear out a warrant against you. Officer, proceed with his arrest!"

The Dutchman breathed thickly as he drew out a paper and served it on Bentham. The latter felt an empty, sick helplessness overwhelming him. What the deuce! Visions of double-entry, credits and debits, all the machinery of accountants and of a world foreign to him, rose before his eyes. What had he managed to do amiss there? He had kept just straight books, the best he knew how. An expert at all the mazes of corporation bookkeeping could easily trap him there, honest as day though his intentions might have been. Nothing lied like figures, particularly dollars and cents!

He rose quietly, his face flushed red. The bare fact of that warrant seemed to fasten somehow the slime of guilt upon him. Even knowing his own innocence, it clawed upon him, preyed on his soul. He felt bleak and forlorn. The law was cruel and unjust, and business was heartless. It was a terrible thing to get within the toils of *both* of them! Prentiss had struck well.

But there was the plant. He hated to leave it now, at the mercy of this learned ignoramus. Nothing might happen while he was gone, yet anything might. You never knew when Nature was going to strike, never had warning. Everything was peaceful and summery as he looked out of the office window after reading the warrant through carefully. There was a sultriness in the air and black clouds were massed up there in the highlands around Kaba, but that might portend nothing more than the usual violent thunderstorm, with perhaps a small rise of the river. The lake up in the plateau at its headwaters would overflow, as usual, giving them a freshet of perhaps six feet. Nothing much.

Prentiss had disappeared, leaving him alone with the lieutenant. "Very well, sir, I'll be right with you," he said. They went down the hill together. The sound of the typewriter going again was coming from the motor-house. Bentham excused himself a moment and stepped to the motor-house door: "Better watch out, Prentiss!" he warned him. "I don't like the looks of things much. Feels sort of earthquaky. We have them often, here; and Kaba looks bad to me. And I wouldn't work here either. You're liable to get caught in there. Good luck to you while I am gone!"

Prentiss vouchsafed no reply. They had reached the relation of criminal and injured employer now, his uncompromising back seemed to say. He merely sniffed at the warning, then rose and slammed the door and locked it within, in a pet of temper.

BENTHAM turned away and rejoined the waiting lieutenant. He smiled grimly, for he knew that lock of old. It was so rusty with jungle moisture that a man had a time ever getting the thing open again. A real danger, now, to the little hairy monkey—but he was through!

The trail led off down the works bank of the Bungulan to the coast, where it turned east for Bencoolen. Bentham and the lieutenant picked their way gingerly through its green and muddy tunnel under the riverside bamboos and canes. A typical Malay trail, uncared for, ingrown upon by

the voracious jungle, filled with muddy wallows which the sun never succeeded in evaporating dry. They were both glad when the trail came out on dry and volcanic soil once more.

The sea was in sight now, the blue Indian Ocean whose islands had been the scene of Bentham's jungle labors for many years past. Tin mines, mercury plants, antimony, bismuth—a long and successful list he could look back upon. Somehow the sight of the sea lifted from his mind the aggravations of this last job, the worry that any report by that malignant gnome of a secretary could ever harm him much. Pity for the helpless corporation whose engineer he was filled him, mainly. The "Sumatra Gold Corporation"—grandiloquent name! Typical of a pint-pot like Prentiss was that title for a small gold plant operating one lode! As if Sumatra had no others! But it all was fading now from the intense feeling in its defense he had when at the works. Prentiss, his report, the Company itself, all did not matter much. He would resign when he got to Bencoolen and had a clear bill from the Resident's accountant. There were plenty of good openings for a tropical engineer waiting for him in Singapore!

AND then—a slight tremor shook the earth. Bentham and the lieutenant both stopped and looked back. An enormous burst of black smoke was ballooning up above Kaba! Red flames filled its base, and up through them was shooting a lurid jet that would reach ten thousand feet before it curled over on the soft monsoon breeze. The volcano had broken out once more, with the familiar total unexpectedness of Nature's events!

Both men jumped instinctively for small ironwood trees and clung fast. They knew what was coming! This small tremor was only preliminary, for the big crack up there had already started. Then—*Rrrearpp!* The gnashing, tearing sound of a fissure opening up through the mountains swept down, passing them with a noise like that of a vast whiplash. With it came a stone-wave which rocked everything under foot crazily, lashing both men about as they clung to the trees. Earthquake—then that lake up there spilled over like a basin!

Bentham was the first to recover. The plant! In an instant he had darted up the trail, back to the works, the lieutenant pounding along after him. As they entered the green tunnel, Bentham caught a glimpse of white waters up at the head of the ravine and heard the distant roar of them. Kaba had tipped up that lake again, as in Marsden's records, and the whole spill of it was flooding down through the mountains!

The sight that presented itself as they shot out of that leafy tunnel was magnificent, appalling in the grandeur of Nature's disdain for man and his works. The whole V of the mountains was filled solid with what might be a glacier moving down upon them, a seething, foaming, white avalanche of living waters that bellowed and roared and leaped with gnashing crests, sweeping down in one mad rush into the valley.

"Quick—the motor-house!" barked Bentham as they raced toward it. "The little ape's locked in there, I'll bet!" A continuous pounding and screaming was coming from within it as Bentham dashed uphill to the engine-shed for a crowbar. The sturdy marine engines were running as swiftly and smoothly as ever, blind to the fact that all the waters in the world were now rushing down upon them, and Kaba in violent eruption. Bentham gave them his blessing and ran down to the motor-house, where the lieutenant was madly trying to burst in its door with his shoulder. He swept him aside and aimed a judgmatical jab at its corrugated surface about where the lock should be. The door was of tough angle-iron and corrugated steel, not to be opened by any random battering. The crowbar jabbed and went through. There was a hole, and instantly a green and terrified eye appeared at it, while the screams within redoubled. Bentham shouted, implored, commanded the eye to take itself away so that he could jab again, but it remained there, witless, or else was replaced by a mouth screaming "Help—help—help!" in a raucous whisper.

There were not three minutes left before the foot of that current would be upon them, sweeping all before it, submerging the motor-house out of sight! Bentham whacked the door with the side of his crow, hoping to drive away the panic-stricken man within. The eye reappeared, again the shrieking mouth. Ass! Had he *no* sense! Desperate, he put his own mouth to the opening:

"For God's sake," he yelled, "take your head away or I'll drive this bar clean through it!"

HE leaped back and poised the bar. Up the ravine not a hundred yards was a foaming breast of water roaring down swiftly at them and coming on with the speed of a galloping horse. Bentham cursed and let drive with the bar. There was a crack of cast iron, and the door gave way, slamming inward. He wasted not a second longer, but leaped in, collared Prentiss, and with the lieutenant helping, they rushed him up the hill. Below them the white waters swept by in a boiling torrent. The banks of the Bungulan disappeared. Trees, bushes, rocks, logs, jungle flotsam of all kinds, whirled by. The motor-house disappeared, its roof sinking out of sight as if some unseen hand were lowering all the land foot by foot. Up the ravine was still that vast watery slope, and behind it Kaba raging like some huge fireworks. A pall began to cloud over all the sky, and there were continuous minor tremors under foot as crater explosions let go distantly up there.

Presently they had to abandon the engine-shed. The flood welled up there steadily, rising higher and higher inexorably and swiftly. The volume behind it up the ravine was inexhaustible. Bentham bade his engines good-by and called away the Malay oilers. The sturdy marines were on their own now. They could not be swept from their foundations, and cased in as they were, would plow right on even if submerged, he hoped. On them depended now the future of the whole plant.

They retreated to the rocky escarpment of the boiler-house. Prentiss had not uttered a word as yet. A deep and ineradicable terror had settled in his eyes. He could do nothing but stare and stare at Dame Nature's gnashing teeth down there, at her voracious waters which were steadily and swiftly engulfing everything his Company owned in the world. She was teaching him something of the meaning of tropical engineering, Bentham surmised!

The flood had reached the engine-shed now. Bentham glanced up the valley. Oh, yes! There was lots more! It would fill this ravine of the Bungulan far higher than this before it would attain anything like a reasonable slope down to the sea! The flywheels were taking the water now, showering it up in vast and ceaseless pinwheels against the roof of the engine-shed. Higher and higher rose the level up their circular faces. They vanished out of sight, and the hungry torrent lapped swiftly along the casings just below the cylinder-heads. Bentham watched with his heart in his mouth. Those cylinders were lagged with good asbestos and then sealed watertight with polished Russia iron and marine cement. The steam-line, too, was protected in the same way. A useless expense, Prentiss had noted in his report. Yes, yes! But it happened that now it would protect the live steam from condensation by the flood-waters strumming around the pipes!

The roof of the engine-shed disappeared. Bentham studied uneasily the valley above. He was not nearly out of danger yet! This thing would rise until it put his boiler fires out. Eighty feet had been the last high record, but had Nature *any* records that she felt minded to respect!

He rose and went into the boiler-house, where hung a huge India gong. Its troubled snarl rang out, shivered, filled all the valley with a resounding din. Men came running from everywhere about the plant. Malays, Chinese, Europeans, Hindoos. The gong was the signal for all hands except those in shift at the process. Bentham waved them to work energetically.

"Bags! Rocks! Lumber! Gravel!" he ordered. "Get a dam going, boys! Hop Yee, catch'm carts—fill! Si-Ayap, you drive posts!"

He was hastily marking out the limits of that dam around the boiler-house with a stick-point drawn across its cindery soil. Posts went in where the rock would permit them. Rocks and bags of volcanic rubble appeared in a low double line. Men with spades shoveled in between them hastily all the topsoil that was loose.

THE waters kept on rising, but less swiftly now. A marker driven in at an old surveyor's benchmark showed seventy feet, with little hope of its subsiding for at least an hour later. The murk from the eruption, and a sift of fine ashes had obliterated all the mountains of the back country and was filling the ravine with darkness. Men worked and groped in a kind of brown fog. The river continued to rise, foot by foot, swirling down out of that inexhaustible volume of it sloping back under the black pall. Kaba was draining the whole lake, this time!

Bentham worked furiously at his improvised dam, directing the force, manning a shovel himself. The lieutenant was helping, all worked up by this disaster common

to them all. Only Prentiss sat inactive, his chin in his hand, his fingers twisting and twisting at his beard, his eyes still on that flood below. He was not a man of action; in the face of all this his mind could only turn in upon itself, lashing him, sounding him, proving out the unstable depths that had no foundation in sure knowledge and experience. He would only be a nuisance in this dam work, he seemed to assume. Whatever he did would only have to be done over again by those who knew how.

The seething edge of the flood crept up to the foot of the escarpment, lapped hungrily along its stratified rock base. Bentham redoubled his efforts. It had only six feet more to rise to be at the fires under the boilers; and then everything would stop, the faithful engines, the process, everything. Only the chemical reactions would go on, ruining tons of priceless salts. That would bankrupt the Company for good, Bentham knew, and the dam was his last guard against it. His orders flew like bullets; the force with him worked like maniacs. Malay masons were piling stones against the outside of his bulwarks now and troweling the chinks with neat cement in the hope that it would set sufficiently to prevent scouring before the flood reached it. Bentham was finishing the abutments against the hill on each side, and had all the firemen that could be spared piling coal from the bins within the embankment.

Prentiss came back and took up a new seat above the boiler-house as the waters drove him in. The river was flowing past the base of the dam now, and a good deal was leaking in so that the workers plashed around in it, chinking up threatening spots here and there. Bentham glanced up at the little unhappy secretary looking out over it all like some small and hairy Thinker musing upon the eternal struggle of man against Nature. He felt sorry for him. They had both come to the verge of crime over this disagreement on matters that were after all purely professional. How men *did* quarrel over the best and most economical way to do a thing! That was what it really amounted to, in point of fact. Nothing to work up the passions of personal dislike and hate over! He felt now that he had been almost criminal himself in not insisting that Prentiss keep out of that motor-house, knowing as he did its danger in case of flood. And the rusty lock episode, too; that was not good to think upon! And on his side, Prentiss had been so full of ambition to be known as a business-man-engineer as to stoop to a whole series of ignoble acts—unjust and unwarranted criticism of his plant, a damning report on it, and finally this having him arrested on a charge that would not hold one instant in the eyes of any competent accountant! Hard to forgive, but—

He shrugged his shoulders and set his men to baling out the water which was now steadily gaining depth within the boiler-house area. The flood outside the embankment was several feet higher, but now rising so slowly that it gave him hope. The course of the whole thing down to the sea from far back up the valley had now established itself at such a slope as could not rise much farther. It would soon begin to lower, draining itself out into the ocean. If they could hold out half an hour longer.

IT was ten minutes later when the hail he had been expecting came from Si-Ayap: "She falls, Tuan! She falls! Look! The mark!"

Bentham hurried over. A small stick jutted out horizontally from his embankment. Si-Ayap had been hovering over it for the last forty minutes, moving it up from time to time as the water rose. Now a scant quarter-inch showed under it. Nothing much, but it spelled one big word —*Victory!* He turned to the lieutenant, who had stuck to him valiantly through it all. "Looks as if we had won, old chap!" he cried, wringing the Dutchman's hand. "She's dropping! It will be all over in another hour."

The Hollander gurgled his satisfaction. He had enjoyed hugely this fight to save property, a thing always of importance to the Dutch. This plant, too, was a matter of concern to the Resident at Bencoolen; one more industry to develop Sumatra and bring in settlers and wealth. But he eyed Bentham with embarrassment after that first heartfelt congratulation; there was a warrant, issued by the little man on the hill, to go on with, his eyes seemed to say. How about it?

"You'll excuse me, just a moment?" queried Bentham. "On parole, of course. I've just *got* to go up and see if everything is all right with the process."

The lieutenant nodded. "I go too," he said, "the Resident will want to know."

They climbed up hurriedly. Prentiss

rose and followed afar off. He had not been consulted about this nor invited. Nor could his cowed and chastened soul see just how to get in right with these men of action again. He was a useless and unnecessary thing. Talk would sound hollow, no matter what he tried to say. The bald fact that he had been of no importance whatever throughout this catastrophe, but rather a nuisance and a hindrance, stared down any assurance he tried to summon up. And now he was being ignored. He didn't count at all in crises like these!

The first thing Bentham made for was the spillway of all the waste process water from the reduction-sheds. His heart stopped as he and the lieutenant neared the brow of the hill which would give them their first glimpse of it. For a moment he hesitated, fearful to learn the truth. If no water was running there, it meant that those engines down out of sight in the flood had succumbed, stopped, and ruin was upon them. It was almost too much to expect that they had plowed right on through it all—but then, what do you expect of marine engines in a hurricane aboard ship!

"Come on, man! Might as well face it!" he said hoarsely to the lieutenant as he grabbed his arm and started for the brow of the hill.

They topped the rise together. Over the spillway still dashed the chalky refuse-water of the process.

Bentham looked and looked and looked at it, happily. The lieutenant gave vent to a guttural *Hoch!* of delight.

"Can you beat it!" laughed Bentham. "The damn things *are* running, even yet!"

THEY both looked down the valley incredulously, somewhat awed over the power of the things that man has made. The swollen flood of the Bungulan swept on and on in Nature's ceaseless brown torrent. And under it, buried at least twenty feet below the surface, those machines of man were still running, running, running!

They went on to the process-house. The silent chemical reactions were going on as usual under the eyes of Malay watchmen, who had no notion that all this, their jobs and this plant, was continuing to run in spite of the big flood below, all because of the brains and foresight of one man.

That one man turned with haggard and helpless eyes to the Dutch lieutenant who had a warrant for his person. "I'm at your service now, Lieutenant, I think," he said. "Everything's all right here. But we can't set out for Bencoolen for a while yet until the water goes down, can we?"

The lieutenant looked upon him pityingly. *"Bei!* It was too dom bad, diss warrant, no?" he said regretfully. "I likes not dot liddle vipperschnapper down dere. Wait! I go look at your books *mein*self!"

Bentham left him in the office and went down to be near his engines until they emerged from their trial. The water had fallen below the boiler-house escarpment when he returned. Presently the engine-shed roof appeared. The water was falling rapidly, even though Kaba bid fair to keep on erupting for several days yet. He had done his worst for them by spilling over that lake up on the plateau. Bentham watched for his engines, fascinated. Their cylinder tops were appearing now, the steam-valves smoking with white clouds of vapor. In half an hour more, at this rate—

The water dropped steadily, and the flywheel rims appeared. The glistening arcs of them were spinning on and on, churning up a foam of water-suds. They grew larger and larger, began throwing up a pinwheel of spray against the roof again as the water lowered. Bentham searched with his eyes all over the casings, the polished Russia iron of them all brown with mud now. Good old sewing-machines! Nothing short of an iron safe hurled into their crank-pits could stop marine engines —that or a shell from a naval gun!

Slowly the water dropped below the lowest rims of their flywheels, and they were running in air again, running on and on endlessly as if those engines had never even suspected that for more than two hours they had been completely submerged under a tropical flood.

"By Jove, that's *great!*" came a voice behind Bentham, heartfelt in the admiration of the man of words for the things of action.

BENTHAM did not reply. For the first time his mind was relieved of the anxieties of his plant and he was able to look upon all this vast cataclysm of Nature undisturbed. There was a bigness about it all that satisfied. This mighty ravine filled with a hurtling brown torrent, those tremendous mountains rising in a volcanic murk up from the sea, jungle-clad to their towering summits, and back there a vol-

cano belching out fire and smoke and lava and ashes. It was all magnificent, terrible, Nature in action, as Bentham had often seen her before when bursting suddenly from her catlike quiet.

And he had conquered again. *Conquered* was not the word—*survived,* rather, and still in command of himself above the turmoil of the elements which no man could control. He drank in greedily the enormous scene, thankful that the work of his hand was still his.

Prentiss had come around beside him now. "It's splendid, Bentham! Brilliant engineering and capitally conceived! And I've been a mere swine," he added, holding out a small hand timidly.

Bentham grinned. It all didn't matter. All this quarreling and petty-mindedness was human and insignificant before the majesty of Nature's acts all around them. They had been all lucky to survive! He took the little secretary's hand in a big paw but said nothing.

And then laughed heartily, for another hot-head was charging down into the scene. It was the Dutch lieutenant, who had the works' books under his arm and was heading menacingly for Prentiss.

"Bei Gott!" he was growling wrathfully as he came up. "It wass an oudtrage, dis! You comes vit me, Mr. Prentiss, *bei* der Resident! I serves no warrant—but you explains him before der Resident, *bei Himmel!"*

Bentham grasped that the lieutenant had found nothing worthy of a warrant in those books and felt that the majesty of the Netherlands law had been flouted. It lifted a big load from his mind, but even that was little before the vastness of this tropical catastrophe which had just missed by an inch destroying everything that man had built here. He protested indulgently as the lieutenant laid wrathful hands on the secretary.

"Better tear up the fool warrant, Lieutenant, and forget it," he advised. "We've got lots to do here, for the ashes are getting bad and all our motors need protecting."

"No! Der Resident iss not to be made pig-tail monkey!" the lieutenant insisted passionately. "He issue a warrant—*und* I serve him on *you,* Mynheer!"

He led Prentiss away to Bencoolen, where, shortly after, one secretary, somewhat damaged, was shipped home via Padang from the Dutch East—where only real men are wanted.

Hercule Poirot Solves

The Missing Will

By AGATHA

THE problem presented to us by Miss Violet Marsh made a rather pleasant change from our usual routine work. Poirot had received a brisk and businesslike note from the lady asking for an appointment, and he had replied, asking her to call upon him at eleven o'clock the following day.

She arrived punctually—a tall, handsome young woman, plainly but neatly dressed, with an assured and businesslike manner—clearly, a young woman who meant to get on in the world. I am not a great admirer of the so-called New Woman myself, and in spite of her good looks, I was not particularly prepossessed in her favor.

"My business is of a somewhat unusual nature, M. Poirot," she began, after she had accepted a chair. "I had better begin at the beginning and tell you the whole story."

"If you please, mademoiselle."

"I am an orphan. My father was one of two brothers, sons of a small yeoman farmer in Devonshire. The farm was a poor one, and the eldest brother, Andrew, emigrated to Australia, where he did very well indeed, and by means of successful speculation in land became a very rich man. The younger brother, Roger, my father, had no leanings toward the agricultural life. He managed to educate him-

an Extraordinary Case

CHRISTIE

self a little, and obtained a post as a clerk in a small firm. He married slightly above him; my mother was the daughter of a poor artist. My father died when I was six years old. When I was fourteen, my mother followed him to the grave. My only living relation then was my Uncle Andrew, who had recently returned from Australia and bought a small place in his native county, Crabtree Manor. He was exceedingly kind to his brother's orphan child, took me to live with him, and treated me in every way as though I were his own daughter.

"Crabtree Manor," she pursued, "in spite of its name, is really only an old farmhouse. Farming was in my uncle's blood, and he was intensely interested in various modern farming experiments. Although kindness itself to me, he had certain peculiar and deeply rooted ideas as to the upbringing of women. Himself a man of little or no education, though possessing remarkable shrewdness, he placed little value on what he called "book knowledge." He was especially opposed to the education of women. In his opinion, girls should learn practical housework and dairy work, be useful about the home, and have as little to do with book-learning as possible. He proposed to bring me up on these lines, to my bitter disappointment.

"I rebelled frankly. I knew that I possessed a good brain, and had absolutely no talent for domestic duties. My uncle and I had many bitter arguments on the subject, for though much attached to each other, we were both self-willed. I was lucky enough to win a scholarship, and up to a certain point was successful in getting my own way. The crisis arose when I resolved to go to Girton. I had a little money of my own, left me by my mother, and I was quite determined to make the best use of the gifts God had given me. I had one long final argument with my uncle. He put the facts plainly before me. He had no other relations, and he had intended me to be his sole heiress. As I have told you, he was a very rich man. If I persisted in these "newfangled notions" of mine, however, I need look for nothing from him. I remained polite, but firm. I should always be deeply attached to him, but I must lead my own life. We parted on that note. 'You fancy your brains, my girl,' were his last words. 'I've no book-learning, but for all that, I'll pit mine against yours any day. We'll see what we shall see.'

"THAT was nine years ago. I have stayed with him for a week-end occasionally, and our relations were perfectly amicable, though his views remained unaltered. He never referred to my having matriculated, nor to my B. Sc. For the last three years his health has been failing, and a month ago he died. I am now coming to the point of my visit. My uncle left a most extraordinary will. By its terms, Crabtree Manor and its contents are to be at my disposal for a year from his death—'during which time my clever niece may prove her wits,' the actual words run. At the end of that period, 'my wits having proved better than hers,' the house and all my uncle's large fortune pass to various charitable institutions."

"That is a little hard on you, mademoiselle," commented Poirot, "seeing that you were Mr. Marsh's only blood relation."

"I do not look on it in that way. Uncle Andrew warned me fairly, and I chose my own path. Since I would not fall in with his wishes, he was at perfect liberty to leave his money to whom he pleased."

"Was the will drawn up by a lawyer?"

"No; it was written on a printed will-form and witnessed by the man and his wife who lived in the house and looked after my uncle."

"There might be a possibility of upsetting such a will?"

"I would not even attempt to do such a thing."

"You regard it, then, as a sporting challenge on the part of your uncle?"

"That is exactly how I look upon it."

"It bears that interpretation, certainly," said Poirot thoughtfully. "Somewhere in this rambling old manor house your uncle has concealed either a sum of money in notes, or possibly a second will, and has given you a year in which to exercise your ingenuity to find it."

"Exactly, M. Poirot, and I am paying you the compliment of assuming that your ingenuity will be greater than mine."

"Eh, eh! But that is very charming of you. My gray cells are at your disposal. You have made no search yourself?"

"Only a cursory one, but I have too much respect for my uncle's undoubted abilities to fancy that the task will be an easy one."

"Have you the will, or a copy of it with you?"

Miss Marsh handed a document across the table. Poirot ran through it, nodding to himself.

"Made three years ago. Dated March 25, and the time is given also—eleven A. M.—that is very suggestive. It narrows the field of search. Assuredly it is another will we have to seek for. A will made even half an hour later would upset this. *Eh bien,* mademoiselle, it is a problem charming and ingenious that you have presented to me here. I shall have all the pleasure in the world in solving it for you. Granted that your uncle was a man of ability, his gray cells cannot have been of the quality of Hercule Poirot's!"

(Really, Poirot's vanity is blatant!)

"Fortunately, I have nothing of moment on hand at the minute. Hastings and I will go down to Crabtree Manor tonight. The man and wife who attended on your uncle are still there, I presume?"

"Yes, their name is Baker."

THE following morning saw us started on the hunt proper. We had arrived late the night before. Mr. and Mrs. Baker, having received a telegram from Miss Marsh, were expecting us. They were a pleasant couple, the man gnarled and pink-cheeked like a shriveled pippin, and his wife a woman of vast proportions and true Devonshire calm.

Tired with our journey, including an eight-mile drive from the station, we had retired at once to bed after a supper of roast chicken, apple pie and Devonshire cream. We had now disposed of an excellent breakfast, and were sitting in a small paneled room which had been the late Mr. Marsh's study and living-room. A roll-top desk stuffed with papers, all neatly docketed, stood against the wall, and a big leather armchair showed plainly that it had been its owner's constant resting-place. A big chintz-covered settee ran along the opposite wall, and the deep low window-seats were covered with the same faded chintz of an old-fashioned pattern.

"Eh bien, mon ami," said Poirot, lighting one of his tiny cigarettes, "we must map out our plan of campaign. Already I have made a rough survey of the house, but I am of opinion that any clue will be found in this room. We shall have to go through the documents in the desk with meticulous care. Naturally I do not expect to find the will among them, but it is likely that some apparently innocent paper may conceal the clue to its hiding-place. But first we must have a little information. Ring the bell, I pray of you."

I DID so. While we were waiting for it to be answered, Poirot walked up and down, looking about him approvingly.

"A man of method, this Mr. Marsh. See how neatly the packets of papers are docketed; and the key to each drawer has its ivory label—so has the key of the china-cabinet on the wall. And see with what precision the china within is arranged! It rejoices the heart. Nothing here offends the eye—"

He came to an abrupt pause, as his eye was caught by the key of the desk itself, to which a dirty envelope was affixed. Poirot frowned at it, and withdrew it from the lock. On it were scrawled the words *"Key of Roll-top Desk"* in a crabbed handwriting quite unlike the neat superscriptures on the other keys.

"An alien note," said Poirot, frowning. "I could swear that here we have no longer the personality of Mr. Marsh. But who else has been in the house? Only Miss Marsh; and she, if I mistake not, is also a young lady of method and order."

Baker came in answer to the bell.

"Will you fetch Madame your wife and answer a few questions?"

Baker departed, and in a few moments

returned with Mrs. Baker, wiping her hands on her apron and beaming all over her face.

In a few clear words, Poirot set forth the object of his mission. The Bakers were immediately sympathetic.

"Us don't want to see Miss Violet done out of what's hers," declared the woman. "Cruel hard, 'twould be, for hospitals to get it all."

Poirot proceeded with his questions. Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Baker remembered perfectly witnessing the will. Baker had previously been sent into the neighboring town to get two printed will-forms.

"Two?" said Poirot sharply.

"Yes sir, for safety like, I suppose, in case he should spoil one—and sure enough, so he did do. Us had signed one—"

"What time of day was that?"

Baker scratched his head, but his wife was quicker.

"Why, to be sure, I'd just put the milk on for the cocoa at eleven. Don't ee remember? It had all boiled over on the stove when us got back to kitchen."

"And afterward?"

" 'Twould be about an hour later. Us had to go in again. 'I've made a mistake,' says old Master, '—had to tear the whole thing up. I'll trouble you to sign again.' And us did. And afterward Master give us a tidy sum of money each. 'I've left you nothing in my will,' says he, 'but each year I live, you'll have this to be a nest-egg when I'm gone;' and sure enough, so he did."

Poirot reflected.

"After you had signed the second time, what did Mr. Marsh do? Do you know?"

"Went out to the village to pay tradesmen's books."

THAT did not seem very promising. Poirot tried another tack. He held out the key of the desk.

"Is that your master's writing?"

I may have imagined it, but I fancied that a moment or two elapsed before Baker replied: "Yes sir, it is."

"He's lying," I thought. "But why?"

"Has your master let the house? Have there been any strangers in it during the last three years?"

"No sir."

"No visitors?"

"Only Miss Violet."

"No strangers of any kind been inside this room?"

"No sir."

"You forget the workmen, Jim," his wife reminded him.

"Workmen?" Poirot wheeled round on her. "What workmen?"

The woman explained that about two years and a half ago workmen had been in the house to do certain repairs. She was quite vague as to what the repairs were. Her view seemed to be that the whole thing was a fad of her master's, and quite unnecessary. Part of the time the workmen had been in the study, but what they had done there she could not say, as her master had not let either of them into the room while the work was in progress. Unfortunately they could not remember the name of the firm employed, beyond the fact that it was a Plymouth one.

"We progress, Hastings," said Poirot, rubbing his hands, as the Bakers left the room. "Clearly he made a second will, and then had workmen from Plymouth in to make a suitable hiding-place. Instead of wasting time, taking up the floor and tapping the walls, we will go to Plymouth."

WITH a little trouble we were able to get the information we wanted. And after one or two essays, we found the firm employed by Mr. Marsh.

Their employees had all been with them many years, and it was easy to find the two men who had worked under Mr. Marsh's orders. They remembered the job perfectly. Among various other minor jobs, they had taken up one of the bricks of the old-fashioned fireplace, made a cavity beneath, and so cut the brick that it was impossible to see the joint. By pressing on the second brick from the end, the whole thing was raised. It had been quite a complicated piece of work, and the old gentleman had been very fussy about it. Our informant was a man called Coghan, a big, gaunt man with a grizzled mustache. He seemed an intelligent fellow.

We returned to Crabtree Manor in high spirits, and locking the study door, proceeded to put our newly acquired knowledge into effect. It was impossible to see any sign on the bricks, but when we pressed in the manner indicated, a deep cavity was at once disclosed.

Eagerly Poirot plunged in his hand. Suddenly his face fell from complacent elation to consternation. All he held was a charred fragment of stiff paper. But for it, the cavity was empty.

"*Sacré,*" cried Poirot angrily. "Some one has been here before us!"

We examined the scrap of paper anxiously. Clearly it was a fragment of what we sought. A portion of Baker's signature remained, but no indication of what the terms of the will had been.

Poirot sat back on his heels.

"I understand it not," he growled. "Who destroyed this? And what was their object?"

"The Bakers?" I suggested.

"*Pourquoi?* Neither will makes any provision for them, and they are more likely to be kept on with Miss Marsh than if the place became the property of a hospital. How could it be to anyone's advantage to destroy the will? The hospitals benefit, yes; but one cannot suspect institutions!"

"Perhaps the old man changed his mind and destroyed it himself," I suggested.

Poirot rose to his feet, dusting his knees with his usual care.

"That may be," he admitted. "One of your more sensible observations, Hastings. Well, we can do no more here. We have done all that mortal man can do. We have successfully pitted our wits against the late Andrew Marsh, but unfortunately his niece is no better off for our success."

BY driving to the station at once, we were just able to catch a train to London, though not the principal express. Poirot was sad and dissatisfied. For my part, I was tired and dozed in a corner. Suddenly, as we were just moving out of Taunton, Poirot uttered a piercing squeal.

"*Vite,* Hastings! Awake and jump. But jump, I say!"

Before I knew where I was, we were standing on the platform, bareheaded and minus our valises, while the train disappeared into the night. I was furious, but Poirot paid no attention.

"Imbecile that I have been!" he cried. "Triple imbecile! Not again will I vaunt my little gray cells!"

"That's a good job, at any rate," I said grumpily. "But what is this all about?"

As usual, when following out his own ideas, he paid absolutely no attention to me.

"The tradesmen's books, I have left them entirely out of account! Yes, but where? Where? Never mind, I cannot be mistaken. We must return at once."

Easier said than done. We managed to get a slow train to Exeter, and there Poirot hired a car. We arrived back at Crabtree Manor in the small hours of the morning. I pass over the bewilderment of the Bakers when we had at last aroused them. Paying no attention to anybody, Poirot strode at once to the study.

"I have been, not a triple imbecile, but thirty-six times one, my friend," he deigned to remark. "Now, behold!"

Going straight to the desk, he drew out the key, and detached the envelope from it. I stared at him stupidly. How could he possibly hope to find a big will-form in that tiny envelope? With great care he cut open the envelope, laying it out flat. Then he lighted the fire and held the plain inside surface of the envelope to the flame. In a few minutes faint characters began to appear.

"Look!" cried Poirot in triumph.

I looked. There were just a few lines of faint writing stating briefly that he left everything to his niece Violet Marsh. It was dated March 25, twelve-thirty P. M., and witnessed by Albert Pike, confectioner, and Jessie Pike, married woman.

"But is it legal?" I gasped.

"As far as I know, there is no law against writing your will in a blend of disappearing and sympathetic ink. The intention of the testator is clear, and the beneficiary is his only living relation. But the cleverness of him! He foresaw every step that a searcher would take, that I, miserable imbecile, took! He gets two will-forms, makes the servants sign twice, then sallies out with his will written on the inside of a dirty envelope, and a fountain pen containing his little ink-mixture. On some excuse he gets the confectioner and his wife to sign their names under his own signature; then he ties it to the key of his desk and chuckles to himself. If his niece sees through his little ruse, she will have justified her choice of life and elaborate education and be thoroughly welcome to his money."

"She didn't see through it, did she?" I said slowly. "It seems rather unfair. The old man really won."

"But no, Hastings! It is *your* wits that go astray. Miss Marsh proved the astuteness of her wits and the value of the higher education for women by at once putting the matter in *my* hands. Always employ the expert! She has amply proved her right to the money."

I wonder—I very much wonder what old Andrew Marsh would have thought!

The Exploits of Mr. White

"The Boss" is unquestionably the most dramatic of these extraordinary stories of a man who made a profession of impersonating others.

By CULPEPER ZANDTT

OF the eight men who sat around the long table in the Board Room of the Mastodon National Bank, but two were directors of the institution—a fact which indicated that the conference had a wider scope than mere bank affairs, and that those present had chosen this particular place as the one offering the most privacy. The distinguished-looking man at the head of the table was Mendon Barclay, president of the Mastodon, and of a trust company as well. The smiling gentleman at his right, who had no distinguishing mark to set him apart from the average of humanity, was Sam Wentworth, a power in Wall Street and the financial world. At his left, the dyspeptic individual with a scowl was Caleb F. Wattrous, known as one of the meanest men in the metropolis, but commercially, a colossus who owned mills and factories by the dozen. Frank Atchison—dignified, able, conservative—was chairman of the board. The other four were men who controlled big enterprises of one sort or another, and they had come together for the discussion of a political menace which appeared to be gripping the city by the throat. Barclay summed this up, when their cigars were lighted and they were comfortably seated:

"With the ordinary political boss, gentlemen, the city takes what it has to take during one or two administrations, and then manages to clean house somewhat, with a reform election. But Mike Costello dives a lot deeper and swims farther under water than that. Three years ago Pat Riordan controlled the lower East Side, absolutely. Jim O'Shea had the lower West Side in his pocket. If there was any vote-swapping west of the Park, for the judiciary or State officers, Mollenhauer and Nick Torella were the men our party had to do business with. On the upper East Side, Schmidt and Tony Caprella ran their party to suit themselves. In the northern districts Swenson had things pretty much his own way. Without mentioning the leaders in other boroughs, these seven will do to illustrate the present situation.

"I believe Costello first became known

as a henchman of Tony Caprella's in one of the wop neighborhoods of that section. His mother was Sicilian—his father Italian-Irish. And he 'had something on' Tony from the start—some Maffia or Camorra business in the old country, I suppose. It wasn't long before Mike was giving Tony the orders—and Tony was taking them like a lamb, because he knew his throat would be cut if he didn't. Schmidt was the next one; no saying how Costello got anything on the German, but he appears to have done it somehow. Today, Mike Costello has every one of those men I've mentioned just where he wants them—controls the radical element in every part of the city. Each of the local men is supposed to be as much a power in his district as ever, but I happen to know that when they nominate anybody Costello doesn't like, he's unexpectedly dropped with no explanation, and some other man is offered as a candidate in his place. This sort of thing is a menace at any time; this year it's specially dangerous, because word has been passed around that Costello means to have his administration control and operate all the transit-lines in the city, as a starter in the way of getting every public utility into the hands of the city government."

"WELL—discount that!" snarled the dyspeptic Wattrous. "What does it really amount to?"

"Just this: Under private management of the subways, for instance, if a motorman is drunk, jeopardizes a trainload of passengers without any better excuse than bootleg booze, he's fired! And he *stays* fired, as far as that road is concerned. They don't take chances with him again; that danger is eliminated. The men all understand this and are careful, accordingly. Accidents will happen sometimes through no fault of the motorman or any preventable fault of the management, but they've been minimized to a point where fewer lives are lost compared to the number carried than upon any other railway in the world. Now—put these same roads under political management, and you at once destroy all individual responsibility. If a bad accident happens, they pass the buck from one politician to another until you simply can't find anyone to hold for it. The drunken motorman can't be fired—because he's got a vote and a pull. He may be transferred to some other section or division, but that's the worst that can happen to him. So—he gets drunk again, kills more people—perhaps, by good luck, gets killed himself. This same letting-down of responsibility enters into every sort of utility managed by a political machine. Remember the telephone-service during the war—when the Government took it over? I don't want to do business in any city where that happens again! Watch the elections in France just now—they are voting to put the railways, telephones and telegraph-lines under private management. Italy also! The waste and inefficiency of government operation are so notorious that the people in every country where they've had it are getting dead sore—determined to get better service and operating conditions. On the other hand, no political machine wants to give them up—they represent too much power and patronage."

"I think Wattrous has got his answer, Barclay! Such conditions are indisputable—and inexcusable! We all realize that Costello is getting the city more and more in his power every month. Question is: what are we going to do about it? As a former boss once asked, what *can* we do? It happens to be a pivotal year, politically—the sort of election when the men who might change such conditions are more concerned with the Presidential ticket than local affairs. But even if we could get the exact situation before the people of this town, it's a question whether we could form a coalition strong enough to beat Costello. And the joke of it is, I don't believe those district leaders under his thumb like him any too well, at that!"

"*Like* him! I think I could mention at least five who would shoot him, or get him shot by gunmen, if they dared! They don't, any of them, quite dare try it! What Costello may have on each, I couldn't guess within a mile—but he's got it so absolutely that they obey him like whipped dogs. Of course it's his game to see that the graft is pretty tempting for them. Aside from the blow to their pride and local prestige, they have nothing to complain of. Meanwhile, this big city—full of fairly decent people, as a whole—is being run by a dictator and a holdup man who has so little sense of responsibility toward them that he puts their lives in jeopardy every day while he's putting his hands into their pockets! If Mike Costello were suddenly gathered up by the

angels, the district leaders would be where they were before he gained the power, and not one of them has nerve enough to make his management too raw. They're better politicians than that—have been through a few reform elections and know they can only go about so far without getting in bad. I'm told they've put this up to him—only to get sneered at for chicken-livered cowards who lack the nerve to take all they can get, while the taking is good.

"Coming right down to it, we've had some bosses in this town who were no pikers—men with something of the same idea, but a bit more conviction that there *is* a limit—somewhere. In the glad days of their gilded reigns, we felt about as we do now—that they were too powerful to be crushed. But we did smash those rings, one after another—the old bosses are but a memory now. Conditions today, however, are materially changed; we have a more dangerous and unscrupulous element to deal with. Costello appears to be the most dangerous of the lot—most strongly intrenched."

"I suppose we could find somebody with nerve enough to shoot that bird—"

"Undoubtedly. We could offer money enough to get a thousand men shot—but what man of decency or standing wants to risk anything of that sort! Costello would have us wiped out in a minute, without turning a hair—if he thought we were really in his way. But none of us happens to be that breed; we don't believe in such methods, even if they might result in a benefit to the whole city."

WENTWORTH, the Wall Street man, had seemed preoccupied for several moments—as if he were scarcely following the conversation or interested in it. But he now made a remark which arrested their attention.

"I know a man who might eliminate Costello, in a way not in the least criminal—if we could persuade him to attempt it. There's some doubt as to whether he'd try it; but if he once agreed—well, sooner or later, this particular bad citizen would cease to function in the way he's doing now."

"Hmph! What's your friend's particular line, Wentworth? A sort of supergunman?"

"I told you he would do nothing unlawful—even though some of his actions might appear to be so until the inside facts were known. If you gentlemen are interested, I think I might get him down here for a chat with us in half an hour—or less. Eh?"

"H-m-m—you can trust him, of course? This discussion isn't the sort of thing we'd like to have generally known; we've each too much at stake to be implicated in any such proposition as we're trying to work out. It would be misunderstood, no matter how clean our motives are!"

"Well—I'll say this by way of a guarantee. I'd hand him my check for a hundred thousand dollars without any question or security if he merely asked for it. He speaks four or five languages, and knows how to keep his mouth shut in all of them. If he doesn't care to mix in this business, he'll simply forget everything we tell him about it."

"Then for the love of Pete get him here as soon as you can! I guess we're all in a mood where we'll try anything, once!"

Wentworth called an uptown number, but was told by his friend's valet that he was probably at a certain club within a few blocks of the Mastodon Bank. At this club he was paged and located in a few minutes—agreeing to come around at once. Ten minutes later the bank's special policeman admitted him by the private door—and after brief introductions, Wentworth rapidly covered the main points of the political situation as they had discussed them.

AS Wentworth finished, White reflected for a moment—then asked:

"What sort of a looking man is Costello? I've heard a lot about him, of course, but never happened to run across a picture of him in any of the papers—never had him pointed out to me."

"No! You wouldn't! He doesn't mean to have you—or anybody else! Suits his game better to remain very much in the background—concealing his personality in a very modest way which, they say, isn't at all like the man when you know him. I happened to see a *Journal* man get a snapshot on the City Hall steps one morning—and it didn't do him any good at all. I'd no idea who the man was, at the time. A friend told me—after the circus was over. Costello is a medium-sized man who must be a bunch of muscles under his clothes, and quick as a cat. He made just one long jump, landed on that photographer before the fellow knew he'd started

anything, grabbed the camera out of his hand, smashed it to bits on the pavement—opened the holder, and ripped out the films. There wasn't a fragment left which could have been developed.

"The occurrence got me plumb interested. Costello's face and figure were branded on my mind so that I'd remember him if we met in Central Africa—but that didn't satisfy me. The man so evidently didn't propose to have any picture of himself floating around loose that it sort of stirred up all my obstinacy. I've a friend whose side-hobby is getting impossible photographs, just for his own amusement, and so I described the occurrence to him—roused his interest. How he ever located Costello under conditions where he could get a shot at him, he wouldn't tell me—I rather imagine he found it dangerous work and had some narrow escapes. But in about six weeks he came to my house one night and handed me these ten unmounted prints—showing "the Boss" in as many different positions and expressions. Anybody could identify him, positively, from them—I've studied the lot pretty thoroughly at odd times."

WENTWORTH took the prints from his pocket and passed them over. The others at the table had seen them before.

"Is there any particular assembly district which the man uses for his headquarters—or does he make a point of showing up in all of them, equally?"

"Well—you wont find his name in any directory, but he owns several houses and other buildings. I happen to know that he usually sleeps on the upper floor of a house in Forty-eighth Street—it's something rather gaudy in the way of apartments when you get a glimpse at the inside, the sort of taste you'd expect from that type. The outside of the house looks cheap and run-down. I heard the other day that he's considering a two-hundred-thousand-dollar place out on the Island. If I wanted to find the man, I'd stick around the Twelfth Assembly, especially in the morning—some of the little basement eating-places, cafeterias, saloons that are selling soft drinks, with Chianti on the side. Evenings, he's around the theater district and the lobster-palaces quite a lot—dinner-coat and all the trimmings. But you wont get any of the waiters to point him out; they've been told where they get off if they do. That's why the newspaper boys can't do much more than guess at him—even when they've been tipped off that he's dining in a certain restaurant or is in one of the theaters."

"Hmph! That sort of a bird, eh? H-m-m—let me get this straight, if I can. As I understand it, you don't really like Mr. Costello—wish he were elsewhere, or would lose his interest in politics. Eh? But tell me just why—some reason which the majority of citizens in this town would accept as a valid objection to the man?"

"If Costello isn't stopped pretty soon, forced to back down and get out of politics, the city tax-rate will be so high that nobody can afford to own real estate or live here. He'll increase the bonded indebtedness more than double, when the interest on existing bonds is badly in arrears. The risk to life and property will be greater than it is in Mexico or any mining-camp. Under pretense of administering the city government for the benefit of the masses, he will make business and labor conditions such that no employer can remain here and *do* business. The labor-element believes that somehow he's going to bleed the rich until every man and woman in the tenement-districts will have money to burn—automobiles, gilt furniture, expensive clothes, all the diamonds they can wear. It sounds pretty nice to an ignorant man—who can't see that Costello will drive all the money out of the city if he keeps on, so that there wont be a job for anybody. And of course this little burg is so darned rich, normally, that it'll take a little while to destroy the wealth in it or the business possibilities—during which time he undoubtedly will graft enough from the taxes to make a few of the laboring men rich—so rich they wont see or believe the storm of ruin which is as certain as death to follow. This man has exceptional ability—abnormal qualities of leadership and organization. None of the other leaders in his camp have the intelligence to go anywhere near as far. Consequently—he's unquestionably a menace which should be sidetracked if possible. Now do you get it?"

"Yes, I think so. You've convinced *me*—and I suppose you'd convince almost any thinking citizen. As I understand it, you believe I may be able to accomplish what you wish—in some way of my own—at a price?"

The dyspeptic Mr. Wattrous leaned across the table with a leer, pouncing upon this suggestion of compensation.

"Before discussing any definite arrangement, White, we should naturally wish to know how much we're getting let in for! It seems to me you mentioned the word 'price' as though you thought we were rather easy in that direction. But I think you'll find it a mistake! What would be, for example, your idea as to proper compensation?"

Pennington White had met one or two such men in the course of his experience—knew exactly what was to be expected from them if they entered into any business relations with him. And his status at that conference became merely that of a consulting-expert, then and there.

"Nothing—Mr.—er—Wattrous."

"Nothing! Come, come—man! You ought to know our time is too valuable to be trifled with! What do you mean—nothing? You can't afford to do business that way—and we know it!"

"I've no idea of doing any business with you, Mr. Wattrous. I was asked down here to confer with you gentlemen—I didn't suggest it, or bind myself in any way. I think I might accomplish what you wish—it's neither impossible nor so very difficult to break the influence of a political boss. But I'll have to refuse. In the first place, my services would cost you a lot of money—more than there's any chance of your approving. But the real reason is that I wont risk undertaking anything like this."

"Why wont you?"

"Because, from what you tell me, there are half a dozen men in the city who would kill Costello if they dared. Before I got through with him, some of them might very likely get their nerve up to do it. Then—suppose somebody who doesn't like me too well should whisper it about that I had accepted a big sum of money to put the man out of politics in this city? That would be just pie for the men who did kill him! I'd go to the chair, with hardly a possibility of saving myself! So let's have it distinctly understood right now that I wouldn't mention a price for such a thing—wouldn't consider it for a minute! Do you get me?"

AS Caleb Wattrous butted in, raising his question as to price and giving the impression of haggling over terms, President Barclay made an involuntary movement expressive of annoyance and disgust. Catching the eyes of other men about the table, he saw that they were affected the same way—having all found the dyspeptic a difficult man to handle. After White had quietly made his refusal unmistakable, there was a silence of two or three moments; then Barclay said in a conciliating tone:

"Mr. White, I think Mr. Wattrous may be willing to apologize for anything offensive in his manner or remarks. If you will think a moment, you'll readily see that nobody in this room could betray the slightest hint that you had accepted a price to put a certain man out of business without incriminating all of us as givers of that price—with that object. Several men, recently, have been executed for planning and paying for murders in which they had no actual hand themselves. Of course, we haven't dreamed of such a thing as trying to get this man killed—any more than you would try to eliminate him from politics that way if you have the sense with which we credit you.

"Now—Wentworth has said he was more or less positive you could do what we wish done without getting outside the law—and I'll admit right now that you impress me as a man who generally makes good on anything he says he can do. Can't we get together in some way on this proposition?"

WHITE didn't hesitate a second. He knew if they did get together, it must be in some other place—with not more than two of them dealing with him.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Barclay! I'd like to help you—and I appreciate the fact that my decision must be disappointing in the circumstances. But the risk is really too great a one! I think if any of you were in my place, you'd feel the same way about it. There is always risk in a political feud—but where the stake is so overwhelmingly big as the one covered by success or failure at the polls in this next city election, a few human lives don't amount to much."

There didn't seem to be any more point in continuing the discussion. White had the good taste to leave them when there was clearly no object in his remaining longer—and Sam Wentworth got up to accompany him. At the door, however, Barclay had a moment or two of whispered conversation with him; then, thanking White for his courtesy in coming down, he went back to resume the conference on ways and means, around the table.

IT was not until they were eating in a corner of the club dining-room that Wentworth finally asked:

"Didn't you change your mind rather suddenly, Pen?"

"I certainly did! You see, I hadn't paid much attention to that Wattrous skunk until he jumped me about the cost question. Then I took a minute to look him over—size him up. Of course I recalled his reputation, as soon as I'd placed him—dollars first, last and all the time, above every other consideration. He'd have had heart-failure if I had mentioned ten thousand for my services. And as sure as the sun shines, he would have written a note to the District Attorney, anonymously, giving away what I had agreed to do for so much money—in the hope of saving the few measly dollars which his share would come to, in case some one did kill the man. He'd have risked being drawn into it himself as something most unlikely. So the only thing I could do was refuse even to consider such a proposition—and take that stand quick, without a second's hesitation. As I left the matter, I don't think a man in that room except Wattrous could refuse to testify on oath just how unequivocally I did refuse it."

"No—they'd exonerate you, absolutely! All right! We've closed that chapter—let's go on to the next. Here's Barclay's suggestion—in confidence. Before they get through with that conference, they will collectively pledge a pretty large sum for campaign expenses in the next election, and undoubtedly place it in Barclay's hands for distribution in such directions as his judgment may indicate—because he's known to be absolutely straight. He said to me that if you cared to be a campaign-worker, he saw no reason why you shouldn't be fully compensated—he and I being the only ones to know exactly what your services happen to be, or what they're worth. Well—how about it? On that sort of a basis, do you care to play in our alley—or don't you?"

"H-m-m—that's a different proposition altogether! Legitimate employment for legitimate compensation. In case it seems attractive, could I depend upon you and Barclay dining several times, in different places, with a man whom I'll send to you—as a detail in my campaign?"

"Certainly you can—I'll answer for both of us!"

"Just a minute—there's something else. Both of you are active workers in your own party organization, I suppose?"

"You'd think so if you traveled around with us the month before election! We believe it the duty of every American citizen to take an active interest in politics, no matter which side he's on—whether he's on his uppers or worth millions. We vote before we play golf on election-day, and give a lot of pretty valuable time to organization work."

"That's about as I sized you up. Now let's get a bit of light on the practical side of it. Are there any occasions when you meet or have conferences with leaders of the other party—your political enemies?"

"THE public gets suspicious at any hint of that sort—but it's really done all the time, and it's usually safer to do it rather publicly as 'old friends of different political beliefs'—than be caught sneaking into some rendezvous to meet one of the enemy. In public, you might be friendly enemies taking a night off, just as I said—but if you're caught in dark corners with them, it smells to heaven of graft and rotten politics. Er—perhaps I haven't altogether covered your question, yet. It is sometimes to our advantage to sacrifice a weak candidate, merely nominated as a compliment to his district or friends, when by so doing we get enemy votes for some man in a crucial position where his election means a lot more to us than it does to them—particularly, in a line-up for the following year, or as good timber for a much higher office. There is always a certain amount of such trading going on under the surface, because there's no getting away from it if you're playing the game to win and have the instinct for political chess. If every citizen could be depended upon to register and vote as conscientiously as he attends to his other business, we would probably do away with such methods, but we're obliged to accept our political campaigns as they are, rather than as we would like to have them."

"Then—there would be nothing politically impossible in Costello's dining with you and Barclay at one of the big hotel restaurants—particularly if the party also included some Wall Street man known to belong to his organization?"

"Considering the fact that the man isn't known either to the public or the newspaper men—no! Nothing at all impossible about it! Even if he were quite well

known, your other man from his camp would make it all right. Barclay and I know several who'd dine with us in a minute!"

"Hmph! Guess that's about all I need to know. I'll keep you posted, more or less, on whether I'm making progress."

THE problem before White seemed to be one that, presumably, no sane man would tackle—or stand any chance of solving if he did. In a bitter political campaign, with millions in graft as the stake on one side, and efficient, conservative government on the other, there are two methods of fighting which, so far, have produced results: the usual and lawful one of vote-getting at the polls, in a thousand different ways—and the violent sort which doesn't stop at murder in a pinch. White had calmly accepted the proposition to smash the power and discredit the powerful leader of a faction which had controlled city politics, off and on, for several years—intrenched behind henchmen of all breeds, whose interest it was to protect him in every way—intrenched in a part of the city where whole neighborhoods were his admiring supporters. It wasn't a good insurance-risk, any way you looked at it. But Pennington White had peculiar methods of his own that would not have occurred to anyone else or even seemed possible to carry out.

His first move was to rent a couple of furnished rooms in Forty-eighth Street on the next block to the house which had been described to him as Costello's real home—giving his occupation as an electrician who was expecting to go in business for himself as soon as he had secured a few big contracts. That same night he walked into the Twelfth District Political Club and asked to be enrolled as a member. By examining a large-scale insurance map when he returned to his rooms, he saw that the club, on Forty-ninth Street, backed up directly opposite the rear of Costello's house on Forty-eighth Street. Next day—by showing an electricity inspector's badge which he had managed to obtain—he went up to the roof of the adjoining house, where a radio-aërial had been connected up in such a way that the "lead-in" seemed to be defectively insulated, constituting a fire-risk in a thunderstorm. (At least, that's what he told the landlady—and she never thought of questioning it.) As he had considered likely, he saw a gate in the rear fence of the back yard, next door—so that one could pass through into the yard of the club without having to climb the fence or making any disturbance. Having in mind the floor-plans of the club, he could easily determine by exactly which door such a person would come into the reading- and assembly-rooms.

Next came the question as to where Costello probably got his meals in the neighborhood. Of course, the woman in charge of the house—supposed to be the landlady—might serve breakfasts in his apartment. But glimpses of the rooms, which the supposed inspector managed to obtain through a couple of skylights, didn't reveal the sort of tables upon which a meal could be spread out unless a carelessly piled lot of papers, books and odd articles were removed each time—the dust on them indicating that they were not frequently disturbed. So the probabilities were in favor of the man's getting his earlier meals at some near-by eating-place. Of those nearest the house, two on Second Avenue were run by Germans—one, on First Avenue, by Greeks—and a nearer one, which appeared to be well patronized by Italians and Irish, had no sign indicating its nationality. It was in a basement several steps below the sidewalk level, yet looked cleaner than any of the others, and had none of the usual rancid smell of stale grease. The cooking, evidently, was Italian—with a number of dishes rarely seen in restaurants of other nationalities—and the place seemed to have a reputation. Although frequented by a good many workingmen, there was also a sprinkling of more prosperous individuals who evidently came out of their way for the cooking they got there.

TAKING a chance on the food, White got a very appetizing breakfast, served by a big waiter whom others in the place called Giovanni. Purposely biding his time until most of the others had left, the supposed electrician took another chance, presently—when Giovanni had brought him a second cup of coffee. He asked, in Italian with a Sicilian accent, if "Il Padrone" had been in that morning. Looking stealthily around the basement to see just who were still there, Giovanni muttered that it was still an hour too early for him. Either he came in about seven, when he had a long day ahead—or if up late the night before, slept until ten and came in for breakfast at half-past. The supposed "Connolly"

then said he'd been living across the river, and that one of his friends in the Third Assembly District had told him to see the Boss about getting the wiring of some new apartment-houses which would pay enough to start him in business for himself. He couldn't wait until ten-thirty—but was now living in the neighborhood and might see the Padrone sometime in the club on Forty-ninth Street. Giovanni thought that might be a better place to get acquainted, as the Padrone frequently turned up there at about eleven P. M.—and suggested that he first have a talk with Giuseppe Fornari, who was in charge of the club, evenings. Once solid with Giuseppe, he'd put him next to the "big feller" some night when he was feeling good.

In the course of his various activities, White became acquainted with more people of different breeds than the average citizen in just the one line of business ever does. He also made a point, as a matter of good policy, to put as many of them under obligations to him through one little service or another as he conveniently could. (It's surprising how much of that sort of thing a person can do without going very far out of his way.) The result was that he found himself in position, almost any time, to ask little favors in return, with the assurance of having them cheerfully granted. In the dramatic club of which he'd been a member for several years, for example, the membership was of mixed political and religious beliefs. Some of the men who liked him best were actually of strongly opposed ideas in politics, had they but known it. One of these to whom he had loaned money, for a surgical operation on his wife, lived across the river, was active in the politics of that borough, knew men in each of the different political clubs. Telling this man that his friend Connolly was moving into that neighborhood from one of the suburban towns as soon as his lease expired, and would like to extend his political acquaintance in the neighborhood meanwhile, so that he wouldn't be entirely among strangers when he did settle down there, he suggested that a note of introduction from him to some man prominent in the Third District Club might smooth the way for Connolly quite a lot. He got the note within ten minutes.

Before presenting it, White changed his appearance to impersonate the man Connolly (the character he had decided upon using in his political adventure) and called, with a second note of introduction written by himself, upon the friend in the dramatic club who had so readily given him the other one. This he did as a preliminary test of his impersonation—and so thoroughly had he changed his clothing, voice-inflection, manner of walking and moving, that the friend never suspected him for a moment. The supposed Connolly explained that he had called to thank him for the note of introduction sent through Mr. White—that he had wished to meet the writer personally, before using it, so he would know more about him—be satisfied that he was all right. This little precaution was an additional measure of safety for White—who knew that when he finally did meet Costello, inquiries about him were likely to reach back pretty far, and it was necessary to have the trail fairly straight for some distance. Then he started his acquaintance over in the Third District—m a d e himself rather popular, there, in two or three evenings, and was in position to refer to it when he took the rooms in Costello's neighborhood.

NEXT evening, with Wentworth's photographs fresh in mind, he saw the Boss slip quietly into the club through a door which apparently led from the kitchen in the rear basement of the building. As he was talking at the moment with Giuseppe Fornari, in Italian, and had told the Venetian about the kind of jobs he'd like to get through the "big feller," if he could, Giuseppe didn't really hesitate about saying: "Shaka de han' weeth Signor Costello —Meester Connolly. Mebbe he mighta know some of da building' w'ich 'aven't gotta da wirin' geeve out."

Costello was so completely "average" in his appearance that he would have disappeared had he joined any group of six or eight men in the room. He stood about five feet seven and a half, weighed something over a hundred and fifty, had brown hair, neither light nor dark, greenish-gray eyes which in some lights appeared almost blue, in others hazel—features almost exactly like thousands of other men on the streets—wore clothes exactly like nine out of ten men one passes, though they were of good material and well cut. He might have been any Costello in the directory—but to suppose from his appearance that he was really "Big Mike," the powerful and dreaded Boss, seemed too ridiculous for belief. His manner was retiring, and

the expression in the eyes was rather sleepy. But there was a suggestion of glitter under the half-closed lids as Connolly explained the sort of jobs he was looking for in the borough. They had been talking in Italian, which Connolly spoke as one does who has spent a good many months, at least, in Naples and Palermo. When some one fetched up a Hamburg friend to meet the Boss, Connolly presently switched into very good German with him. At a nudge and a whisper from Costello, the Venetian made a rather broad joking remark in French—and Connolly, over his shoulder, instantly came back at him with as good as he sent—in even better French. After this the glint in the Boss' eye became a bit speculative as he examined Connolly in occasional side-glances. Before fading out of the group, he said to him quietly:

"I think we c'n t'row a job or two your way, Connolly. Mebbe I might think of another line what'd pay you better if ye feel like considerin' it. Talk about it some other time—hey? You livin' near here?"

"Got a coupla rooms on Forty-eighth. I was thinkin' of movin' in from Pleasantville—settlin' across the river. But they told me over there in the Third Assembly that if I could land a few of the big apartment jobs this side the river, there was a lot more money in 'em. I've knocked about quite a lot—made money, an' lost it. But 'twas pikin' stuff compared to what there is here, if a man's in right!"

"How much education you got?"

"Depends on what you call education! I've been pretty much on my own ever since I was six—sold newspapers on the street when I was seven. Then a man staked me through grammar an' high-school. I worked over in a big electric plant one summer—shipped as deck-hand to Naples 'cause I wanted to see Europe—stayed over there two or three years—got enough of it, and came back. Course I picked up a good deal of mixed knowledge, one way or another. All comes under the head of education."

"Bet your life it does! Well—say—I'll see you again—round here, somewheres."

TWO days later they met at half-past seven in the morning in the basement-restaurant on First Avenue. The night before Costello had happened to think of him, casually, and called up the Third Assembly Club across the river—asking for a local politician who practically ran it. Mullaney came to the phone in a moment or two.

"That you, Mullaney? This is Mike Cos. Say—d'ye know anything about a feller by name of Connolly—'lectrician—been livin' in Pleasantville?"

"Oh-h-h—that wan! Yis. He'll be all right, I'm thinkin'. Give me a letther from wan I know over in tha Fifth Assimbly. Tha felley wants in on some av tha big apartmint work if ye could t'row it his way. I dunno is he a Roman or not—but he'll be a party man, all right—mebbe the persuadin'-kind, wit' his gift o' gab. Course ye don' have to give him nothin' 'less happen ye feel that way—but I'm thinkin' tha felley's tha makin's av a good disthrict man, mebbe."

This seemed to be as much of a recommendation as anyone needed with him, Costello thought. Mullaney vouched for him—and another leader of equally good standing before him. Apparently there was no point in tracing Connolly farther back than that. His linguistic ability stuck in the Boss' mind—he thought he could use an intelligent man like that if he came out of a few little tests all right. (Costello trusted no man until he had first "proved" him by certain methods of his own.) When the Boss saw him eating his breakfast alone in the restaurant, Connolly nodded respectfully, but made no move toward presuming upon their meeting in the club—and the "big feller" liked this evidence of common sense in him. The man seemed to be independent enough—not afraid of anybody; but he also understood that he wasn't in the same class with Costello and made no attempt to assert himself. So he was presently beckoned over to the big man's table. (The Boss was democratic when it suited his purpose—which somewhat explained the hold he had upon the rank and file.)

"Connolly—I can give you the wirin' of a new apartm'nt goin' up on the West Side, or mebbe I can give ye a chance to use your bean—if ye'd like to work with that instead of your hands. How about it? After a bit, there'd be more in workin' your bean, I'm thinkin'."

"Me for the bean if it isn't going to get me in Dutch, somewhere! I'd kinda like to have some idea about it, first. Like to do most anything for you, Mr. Costello—but I suppose there are some that wouldn't look so good to me." (This struck the Boss favorably. A man who was too anx-

ious to jump at anything offered wasn't strong enough for him, mentally.)

"Well—I dunno are you good enough, myself. I'd have to start you in an' try you out a bit. Suppose I sent you down to Pat Riordan, this morning, with a note? Pat's got all kinds in his district—an' has a man goin' about with him to explain what some of 'em are sayin'. You'll just go along with them two in Pat's car an' make out you're a new district worker I'm lendin' him f'r a bit—but you'll be listenin' to what the Dutchies an' Frenchies an' Spanish an' Italians do be sayin' to him—an' what the other man *says* they're sayin'. But you'll not open your mouth until you're alone with Pat, afterward! Will you try it out f'r me an' see is that other guy straight? You see, most o' that lot talk a few words of English, so Pat gits along with 'em after a fashion—but when they jabber among themselves, he has to depend upon this interpreter-boy, an' he might be double-crossin' him, here an' there."

THE supposed Connolly rather liked this idea. Said if that was the general line of work the Boss wanted, and if there was any real money in it, the proposition would suit him very well. He also gave additional proof of his intelligence by remarking:

"Of course I understand this is only a try-out—that what you probably have in mind is more or less confidential work among these foreigners in the way of herdin' 'em into the party an' keepin' 'em there. Otherwise, the service wouldn't be worth anything running to big money."

Costello smiled—and sent him down to Pat Riordan with a note. But before Riordan turned up in his office, where Connolly sat waiting, the Boss saw him in another place and gave certain instructions, the result of which was an apparently deliberate mistranslation upon the interpreter's part in talking with a lot of Hungarians in German. As he gave the gist of it to Riordan, it would have led that loyal party-man into doing and saying things offensive to every hunky in that crowd and thrown a monkey-wrench into the Boss' local machinery. With a party of Italians, he did the same thing—talking so fast that anyone having but a smattering of the language couldn't have followed him. Connolly afterward told Riordan exactly what had been said and the subtle ways in which its meaning had been twisted by his interpreter—a report of which subsequently went over the telephone something like this:

"Say, Mr. Costello! That felley of yours is all right! He was afther spottin' Minelli's double-crossin' every time, an' told me I betther square mesilf with them wops we saw, right away, if I didn't want throuble!"

From this outlining of his methods, it will be seen that in a very short time, by figuring out the safest and most practical ways of going about it, White succeeded in placing himself where he had almost unlimited opportunity for studying Costello at close range—observing his unconscious movements, habitual mannerisms, tones of voice, many of the suits in his wardrobe, getting acquainted with the various men who were most in the leader's confidence, and their subordinates who carried orders back and forth. Beyond this, he frequently accompanied the Boss during his evenings in the lobster-palace and theater district—obtained a lot of inside information concerning the hotel and theater-people under Costello's influence—became so well known to them in a few weeks that they gave him any tip he asked for when he came into their places alone. And word was passed down through the Police Department to get a good look at the "big feller's" new interpreter, so as to keep their hands off him if they ran across the man in any part of the city—the supposition being that wherever he was or whatever doing, he was in some way carrying out the Boss' orders, and they might better monkey with a dynamo than interfere with him.

INSIDE of two months White thought he had studied the Boss sufficiently to impersonate him. In the way he proposed doing this, there was much less risk of detection than if he attempted to confer in some private room with half a dozen politicians, as Costello. But just to assure himself that he *could* get by with it, he chanced one brief meeting where the impersonation had to be very nearly perfect. Going to a certain hotel where Pat Riordan was in the habit of meeting some of the other district leaders occasionally, he sat down in a corner of the lobby where he would not be conspicuous and waited for him to show up—camouflaged behind his newspaper. He knew the clerk at the desk and some of the hall-boys had spotted him as Costello, but gave no sign that he was

aware of this or even knew them. When Riordan presently came in with an up-State politician, the supposed Boss peeked around the corner of his paper and beckoned him over with an almost imperceptible nod. Pat would have introduced the other man, but a slight negative shake stopped him. The exchange of words was brief—but seemed to be thoroughly understood. As Riordan bent down behind the newspaper, White muttered:

"Layin' for a dame that's comin' in here with a feller I think's playin' round, some, with the other party. You aint seen me a-tall this evenin', Pat! Get that? Tip off Bill Schenk, at the desk—an' the bellhops—after I'm gone!"

"Sure! Nobody aint seen you around—nowhere! I getcha!"

Although the man had been sitting in an out-of-the-way corner, there was a good light for his newspaper, shining down from the bulbs over his head—light enough to see his face, clothes, shoes, the rings on a finger of each hand, distinctly. All of them were unmistakably those of the Boss himself. Recognizing him, beckoning to him, calling him by name without the slightest hesitation, would naturally have predisposed Riordan to be certain that he saw the "big feller." Yet so well did he know the man, with all his personal characteristics, that had there been any little detail not quite perfect, he would have become suspicious at once. As it was, he never dreamed that he'd been fooled.

A good many will claim that so perfect an impersonation is impossible—that no actor, no matter how expert in that sort of thing, could really get by with it. Without careful study of his subject at close range for more or less time, the writer admits that it would be at least very difficult. But given a similarity in height, weight, complexion, and the same general type of features, close study will enable a scientific impersonator to do it nine times out of ten. If you doubt this, consider George Billings, for example. Does anyone who has seen his characterization of Abraham Lincoln doubt that he could have presided at one of Lincoln's cabinet meetings without detection as an impostor? He studied Lincoln's life until he acted and thought as Lincoln did. One contributing factor which always helps deception of this sort is the fact that under stress of worry, pleasure, irritability, anger, we frequently present to those who know us most intimately an impression quite different from our usual appearance. In such cases they say: "So-and-so is not himself, today—he's sick—got s o m e t h i n g on his mind—so tickled over the killing he made that he's like a crazy kid!" So that there is always considerable latitude in a person's everyday appearance which we unconsciously allow for before the idea of imposture enters our minds.

White admitted to himself that when he once began appearing in public as the Boss, it would be much safer if he could get rid of the supposed Connolly altogether—but Costello was using him so frequently in that character for confidential work that if he suddenly disappeared, he knew the police would quietly turn the city inside out searching for him, urged by the Boss' impression of foul play. Just when he decided that he'd have to go on risking the double characters, however, chance played into his hands most opportunely.

HE had gone down to a tenement in one of the slum districts, at night, upon business with a man prominent in the underworld—who took the precaution of going out of the building first, leaving the pseudo-Connolly in one of the upper rooms. In a moment or two Connolly heard muttered curses through the flimsy partition, muffled sounds of a struggle, a heavy blow with a sickening, crunching sound—a jar, as of something resilient falling upon the floor, then stealthy footsteps toward the door, a cautious unlatching of it, a slight creaking of the stairs. Knowing that no "bull" in the city would interfere with him, no matter what compromising situation he might be found in, he tiptoed into the adjoining room and saw, as he had expected, a dead man on the floor—a man with his face and the front part of his head literally crushed to a pulp by a bar of iron which lay upon the floor.

As the murderer undoubtedly was safely out of reach by that time, there seemed to be no object in White's remaining there. But as he was turning to go out, something about the corpse arrested his attention. It had on a decent suit of clothes—appeared to have been a man of higher position in life than any occupant of the tenement. An empty bill-wallet lay upon the floor—one or two letters and envelopes scattered about. A buttonhole in the waistcoat was ripped—evidently from yanking a watch-

chain out of it. But what caught his attention most was the fact that the dead man was just his height and build—similar in complexion and in what there was left of the face. In another second it struck him that here was exactly the opportunity he might have asked for. Although there was an increasing puddle of blood on the floor, none of it—fortunately—had touched any part of the clothing.

Locking the door, he dragged the corpse a little farther along and then rapidly stripped it, even to the collar and shirt. As there were no laundry-marks on the underclothing or socks, he didn't remove them—but put on the dead man his own shirt, collar, necktie (stickpin torn out) and suit, with his name on a tailor's label stitched into one of the inside coat pockets. Getting into the other clothes,—though his flesh crept a little,—he then slipped Connolly's seal-ring upon a finger of the right hand, gathered up the scattered papers and bill-wallet and quietly left the building. In face and manner, he was still Connolly,—if any of the police had seen him,—but before reaching his own apartment on the West Side, even that resemblance had been obliterated. His valet Kato—knowing the absorbing interest he took in his dramatic club—supposed that, coming home as he often did in a make-up which changed his appearance entirely, he was merely practicing up some part which he was going to play and testing it on the streets to see how good he was at it. So he merely smiled at each new stranger who rang the apartment-bell and identified himself by a few words prearranged between them.

BEGINNING with the next evening, a jinx seemed to have camped on Costello's trail. Those who were most closely associated with him saw the Boss in one place or another with men known to be prominent in the other party-organization—men normally his and their political enemies. Little attention was paid to this at first because the "big feller's" methods and finesse had always been too successful, no matter how they might look on the surface. But on one particular night Pat Riordan came into a well-known restaurant with a girl of stunning appearance and saw Costello, as he supposed, at a table with the president of the Mastodon National Bank—a country-wide institution, with branches in all the larger cities abroad—and two well-known financiers, one of whom was prominent in his own party.

Riordan's table having been reserved in advance, a rat-faced Italian waiter seated him and the girl in its corner, just behind Costello—and Pat was sure that neither the Boss nor their other associate had seen him come in. Now—Pat was of the breed which becomes fussed and upset when it "loses face" in any embarrassing situation—so much so that it vindictively remembers any person who appears to be the deliberate cause of it. He was anxious to stand well with the girl, a popular screen actress of the younger lot, rather hoping to win her favor if money, standing or influence could do it. (He was known to be at least a millionaire and the silent backer of a producing company.) Without mentioning names, he had whispered to her that the man he indicated was the biggest power in city politics—and from where they sat, it was easy enough to catch some of the talk at the other table. Presently a name mentioned by the supposed Costello sharpened his ears to closer attention. The banker had been asking about the situation in one of the uptown districts where the registration was somewhat more evenly divided between the two main parties—wanted to know if there was any great objection to letting his nominee, a manufacturer by the name of Sidbourne, go to Congress. After thinking a minute, the supposed Boss said:

"No—we'll let you have Sidbourne if you want him—guess we got enough of our own men in the other districts, though I might even trade some of them with you. There's one or two leaders is gettin' too fresh—they'll be needin' a lesson to make 'em trail along like they ought to. Take the Sivinth Assembly, now—where your man Sidbourne is runnin'. That'll be Nick Torella's district. Well—Nick's a bit too independent, account of him standin' pretty high in the Camorra—thinks it makes no difference what anybody's got on him 'cause they wouldn' risk usin' it—but he's got another guess comin'! He wanted to put up Hans Gottlieb—a Dutchy, kinda independent like himself—him controllin' Gottlieb an' the patronage, o' course. But I steps on it—says he'll be puttin' up John O'Reilly or I'll be inquirin' about it—John bein' a double-crosser I'm puttin' up to get licked. That's why I'll pass the word to knife him an' throw the votes to Sidbourne. Then—there'll be

another guy I'm thinkin' of, down in the Eighth Assimbly. He's been like cream to the cat wit' me—but he's meddlin' in some personal matters an' tryin' to get some o' th' other leaders wit' him. If there was a bit o' money passin' about, I think 'twould put him outa business. nex' election."

RIORDAN almost strangled over a gulp of wine. The Eighth was his own district, and he could think of nobody outside of himself in it who might be meant by the Boss. ("So that was it, eh? Askin' a price on him, was he—the bloody double-crosser! An' he was knifin' Nick Torella, was he—him an' his Wall Street friends! An' John O'Reilly! Two o' the squarest guys in city politics!")

Just then, their own organization-man nudged the supposed Boss with a side motion of his head, whispering: "Go easy, Mike! Riordan's sitting just behind you with Irma Colville." (White knew, when he telephoned the other three to dine with him, that Pat had reserved that particular table for the evening.) The pseudo-Boss drained his glass and then slued around in his chair to look them over—bringing him squarely face to face with Pat Riordan and giving that honest politician what he thought an excellent opportunity to impress his fair guest. Riordan smiled affably—bowed in a way that was clearly an invitation to come over and be introduced—but Costello looked through him with a perfectly blank, supercilious expression as if he didn't know him from any other stranger, and deliberately turned his back again. It was done in a manner subtly insulting—not only to Pat but to the girl also, whose face turned noticeably red. If she hadn't been with him, there would have been serious trouble in about a second—but Riordan had no notion of dragging her into a brawl, and nervously apologized for the occurrence.

"Faith—I—I think I musta been mistaken! It's not the man I thought, at all, at all! But it'll be a raysimblance as would desaive his grandmother—an' her wit' her sight failin' a bit. It's askin' your pardon I am, Miss Irma. If ye like, we'll go awn to some other place f'r a dance—where we'll not be seein' things!"

"Oh, no—I like it, here! Those boors will be going out very soon—then there wont be anything to annoy us!"

This was said in clear, even tones which carried distinctly. Wentworth and Barclay inwardly grinned—but the party man felt creepy down his spine at what he thought was fool recklessness on the Boss' part. White, for the moment, was tempted to make the incident still worse, but was afraid of overdoing it—and they presently went out. Then—beckoning the rat-faced waiter to him, Riordan asked in a low tone:

"Jacopo—was that the 'big feller' or is me mind wanderin'-like?"

"Aw—sure it's heem! I t'eenk he wanta put somet'ing over on da bigga bank-man. He playa some game—*si!* Not lika know anybod' in deesa crowd. One—two—t'ree night, he come in. Somatime wit' deesa man—somatime wit' fella b'long otha crowd. Not know anybod' here. Gallagher say: 'How do, Mist' Costello!'—an' he say: 'You maka da mistak'—that notta my name!' *Si!*"

FROM this incident it is easy to picture the several others which occurred—in each of which Costello appeared to be double-crossing, right and left. Rumors began creeping about that he had purchased a country-place for a quarter of a million—some one else had seen him in the offices of a famous yacht-builder, getting estimates upon a thirty-knot seagoing yacht. He was spotted in various places peeling yellow-back notes from wads so big that they made two or three pockets bulge. Putting it plainly, he seemed to be filthy with money—and the company he was frequently seen with accounted for it perfectly, if his actions could be taken at face-value.

It is probable that the real Costello must have had some premonition of approaching trouble, the cause of which was a mystery to him—aside from the known dislike of several district leaders whom he had forced to become merely his executives. Trouble from them he had discounted as unlikely—they were too dangerously in his power and too much afraid of what incriminating papers or memoranda he might have arranged to have made public in case of his sudden death. But there was an undercurrent which he couldn't account for—nothing definite, just a feeling that lightning might strike somewhere out of a clear sky. The finding of the body, assumed to be that of Connolly, without much question, in that upper room of the Cherry Street tenement, was a severe jolt to the

Boss. His message to the other man in that building probably hadn't been delivered by his interpreter—in which case the unknown man, not receiving the money he had been promised, might squeal in a way that would result in unpleasant complications. Apparently, Connolly had been robbed of everything on him after he was murdered. Aside from this unpleasant feature the Boss had taken a real liking for him—owing to his unusual executive ability and invariable straight dealing, as far as could be ascertained. Then—several of his underlings were noticeably surly, more independent when conferring with him. The situation finally came to a show-down in the Italian basement on First Avenue.

Costello rarely went there in the evening—preferring more high-toned places, among the class of people he meant to associate with as soon as he had gotten together enough money to live as he wanted to in that stratum of society. But word came to him through some one in the club that Pat Riordan and Nick Torella would be waiting to see him in the little restaurant, that night, at half-past eleven. Sensing the possibility that some of his plans in their districts might have struck a snag, he kept the appointment—instead of designating, as he usually did, some place where *they* could see *him*.

As he came down the steps, Nick Torella sat at a corner table farthest from the door. Nick preferred to wolf his food alone, when he wanted to really enjoy it, so there was nothing suspicious in this. But when the Boss, closing the door behind him, was fairly in the room, low voices in the front under the sidewalk made him whirl about—discovering Pat Riordan, Jim O'Shea and Tony Caprella at a table there. The waiter, Giovanni, was nowhere around; there was no sound of activity from the kitchen in the rear; there seemed to be something ominous in the air. But Costello drew out a chair and sat down with them, saying: "Well, boys! What's broke now?"

Pat Riordan hotly accused him of public insult in a well-known restaurant on a certain night, and double-crossing him in his own district—which the Boss emphatically denied, and said he could prove it. Nick Torella burst into a torrent of lurid Sicilian, in which he accused Costello of selling the whole party out for a million dollars and double-crossing so cleverly that they hadn't a chance at the next election. Again Costello denied it—offered to give proofs inside of half an hour—but he now knew what he was up against, knew he hadn't a chance in the world. Jim O'Shea produced a snub-nosed "gat" which he shoved against the Boss' side—but Riordan stopped him with a touch on the arm:

"Too much noise, Jimmy! We don't want the bulls in on this f'r an hour or so, yet. We'll hold him while Nick does it! —Go ahead, Nick—finish him!"

It was cold-blooded—merciless. Torella leaned over Costello's back, placed the point of his razor-edged knife in the hollow behind the collar-bone and deliberately pushed it down in, to the hilt—working the blade up and down, once or twice, to sever the arteries.

THE morning newspapers featured the murder, to the exclusion of other news items—but the police seemed apathetic. In political circles it was generally admitted that Costello had probably controlled the most powerful machine ever known in the city—that had he lived, he would have elected a President from his own party. But the general opinion was that he'd had it coming to him—had become poisoned with the social bug and sold out for millions. No clue as to who killed him was ever found.

In discussing the case with Barclay and White, Sam Wentworth said:

"Not one of us went near the man after White had studied him a bit. None of us paid one penny for his life—wanted to have him murdered—or would have had any hand in such a thing! But I guess there isn't much question that he'd be alive today, and dangerous to the city, if it hadn't been for us three."

Strapped Poker

Wherein two losers at poker run desperate hazards—one takes a punch at a professional bad man; and the other proposes matrimony to Hair-trigger Sally: an amusing and very Western yarn.

By EUGENE NIXON AND WILSON FREDERICK

ARM in arm, the Weeping Willow and Romeo Jackson, newly arrived from the Diamond Bar round-up, rolled out through the swinging doors of the Crystal Palace into the dusty main street of the metropolis of Skull Creek.

The full moon, pouring a mellow light over the Western landscape, had long since passed the zenith. For the Weeping Willow and Romeo Jackson, a glorious Saturday night was rapidly wearing on to the less glorious dawn of the morning after.

Outside in the moonlight the errant cowpunchers stopped to imbibe great gulps of ozone, now the only form of stimulant available to them.

"Speakin' personal, I'm busted," the Weeping Willow informed his companion.

Lanky Romeo Jackson steadied himself against a hitching-post and gazed down upon his fellow-worker and bosom companion with infinite pity and contempt. Rumor had it that the handsome Romeo had been partially educated for the law before he succumbed to the lure of the great open spaces. Now he assumed his best judicial air.

"Son," he said, addressing the Weeping Willow as one might speak to a beloved but feeble-minded offspring, "son, haven't I always warned you to have your opponent play all his cards face up on the table? That way you might stand some chance."

"I couldn't 'a' been any surer what he had," the Weeping Willow protested solemnly. "I just naturally disregards the injunction of Solomon, and looks too long upon the red ace in the hole. Jack, he has five that was all green."

Having this confession off his soul, the Weeping Willow seemed slightly relieved and more optimistic. The ever-present grin, which together with his patrimonial title of Willoughby Willows accounted for his lugubrious *nom de guerre,* began to blossom anew.

"Anyhow, we can dissipate the filthy lucre you takes off'm them four miners from up the Gulch," he suggested hopefully to Romeo.

But at this generous proposal it was the dignified Romeo's turn to blush.

"Those rank-whiskered and inconsiderate roughnecks who were my erstwhile companions, are now engaged in relieving us of that onerous duty," he informed the Weeping Willow with some show of embarrassment.

THEY were silent a moment as both glanced toward the brightly lighted entrance of the Crystal Palace, whence came the droning of the bass fiddle, the shuffle of boots on the rough floor, the clink of glasses and poker-chips, and occasionally the shrill voice of some partly illuminated dance-hall queen. It might have been noted that Romeo shuddered slightly at the latter sound. His bashfulness in the presence of feminine society was so notorious that it had formed the basis for his classic title.

"Yes sir," Romeo added, "those horny-handed sons of Pluto hooked me—clear down in the esophagus. But I always back four kings, especially when there's only four aces and two royal flushes out against me."

This added confession of insolvency seemed for the moment to reduce the Weeping Willow to a state of unendurable melancholy.

"Life is a snare and a delusion," he declared, struggling to suppress his grin. "Let's end it all."

"I accept your suggestion in the spirit in which it is given," Romeo agreed. "To expedite matters, I further suggest that I shoot you first, and that you then return the compliment to me."

To the Weeping Willow it seemed that this proposal contained some inequitable features. But his protests were forestalled by a sudden and slightly profane exclamation from Romeo Jackson, who had produced an exciting object from his shirt pocket along with "the makin's."

"Come hither and observe this strange piece of metal," he invited, holding out a silver dollar. "It seems to have a mysterious inscription engraved on it." His surprise was great. "Sure enough, it says, 'In God We Trust.' Those miners were a careless and inefficient outfit. What disposition do you suggest we make of this relic?"

"Let's liquidate," was the immediate and not unreasonable response.

Romeo regarded the speaker with undisguised admiration.

"Son," he said, "I marvel anew at the natural keenness of your intellect, and your ability to attain logical solutions to intricate problems."

His glance ran up and down the street.

"Which of these emporiums do we honor with our patronage?"

"I suggests the Silver Moon as appropriate for gents of our refinement," the Weeping Willow replied. "Their poison flows more copious."

"An excellent suggestion," Romeo agreed.

BUT at the entrance of the Silver Moon they found their ingress blocked by the emerging forms of two other cow-punchers.

With picturesque cries of surprise and delight, Romeo and the Weeping Willow recognized in the dolorous pair before them Peewee Stanton and hawk-faced Pendleton Pete from the Box B Ranch.

"Well, of all the gosh-danged horse-thieves and sheep-herders, look who's here!" remarked the Weeping Willow, his voice and manner showing his pleasure at meeting old-time friends.

Romeo Jackson was equally hospitable.

"Welcome to our city, friends," he greeted with a wide and generous gesture. "And may we not have the pleasure of your company as we pour a libation to Bacchus?"

At this proposal Pete and Peewee, who had been equally elated over this chance meeting, regarded each other and the speaker with some suspicion.

"I didn't know she was here," Pete told Peewee, with exaggerated surprise.

But Peewee corrected his partner's misapprehension:

"I suspicions the Professor is askin' us to name our poison," he surmised.

This was a line of reasoning more within the comprehension of Pendleton Pete. Looking at the original speaker, he issued a warning:

"Romeo Jackson, your high-falutin' education is goin' to land you along side them other brave pioneers of the West that's buried in their boots. Sometime you're goin' to pass a remark to the effect that it's a lovely day, and then some bad-tempered acquaintance is goin' to up and make a sieve out of you because he thinks you're callin' him dirty names."

HAVING disposed of a round of liquid refreshment, the quartet drifted to a vacant table, where for some minutes they engaged in idle persiflage. Presently Pen-

dleton Pete began toying with a deck of cards which he handled with amazing deftness.

"Me and my pardner might challenge you gents to a few hands of the great American pastime," he said. "But the fact is, we pooled our capital earlier in the evening, and Peewee tries out a new system he works out this summer to bust the roulette bank."

"She's a good system," Peewee declared defensively, sensing something of reproach in Pete's voice.

The others smiled tolerantly. Pete tapped his forehead significantly.

"He's harmless," he assured them. "Delusions of grandeur is all."

"Aint there something we can play for?" the Weeping Willow inquired. "How'd strip poker do?"

At this joking suggestion Romeo Jackson glanced guiltily at a highly decorated lady at a near-by table. Then, to hide his confusion, he made a counter-proposal:

"It is imperative that we relieve the ennui," he agreed. "Let's play one hand of hard-luck poker." He began to elaborate his proposal.

After a half-hour's deep study and collaboration, stakes were arranged which promised fully to meet all requirements of interest and excitement. With flushed faces they solemnly shook hands on the bargain. To avoid possible misunderstanding, the learned Romeo stated the terms:

"It is agreed by all parties to this contract that we deal one hand of straight poker. We cut for the deal. The two men with the lowest hands are bound to perform two acts, to wit: one of them is to propose marriage to our acrimonious fellow-citizen, Hair-trigger Sally, owner and proprietress of the Crooked S Ranch, while the other is to wallop on the jaw our esteemed but evil-tempered compatriot Hank Hawkins, sometimes otherwise designated as the bad man of Skull Creek."

IT is doubtful whether in their normal condition of mind any of the four would have entered into an agreement involving such promise of violent excitement, and even sudden extinction, for the immediate participants. The Skull Creek bad man, Hank Hawkins, had developed the technique of the draw to such a degree that it was generally considered a case of suicide when anyone crossed him.

On the other hand, the unfortunate victim chosen to propose to Hair-trigger Sally faced an equally undesirable predicament. Sally had been married when she arrived some twenty years ago, but it seemed that her spouse had vamoosed shortly after in some dudgeon. Reports said that he had taken a parting pot shot at his helpmeet from the cover of a clump of sagebrush some hundred yards from their cabin. Unfortunately his aim had been bad, probably due to an excess of anger. Sally, recognizing the import of the flying glass from her kitchen window, and the nasty ping of the bullet as it punctured the frying-pan in her hand, had seized a forty-four lying handy, rushed outside and chased her affectionate partner clear over into Rattlesnake Gulch, where she lost him in the chaparral. But she was sure she had winged him, and he never came back to pester her as she worked and cussed through the years, building up one of the finest cattle ranches in the Skull Creek region.

All having agreed that Romeo had set forth the terms of their contract in most lucid fashion, Pete pushed forward a deck.

"Cut for the deal," he suggested.

EACH of the reckless gamblers selected a card. Pendleton Pete, with the ace of spades, won the deal. Rapidly and expertly shuffling the deck, he passed it to Peewee Stanton on his right, who cut with elaborate care. Then the momentous deal began.

Restraining their curiosity with superhuman will-power, the players let the cards fall in front of them till each had received his five. Gravely, and without undue haste, each of them gathered up his cards.

The Weeping Willow, sitting at Pete's left, was the first to break the silence:

"The only objection I got to this hand, gents, is that I aint really fitten to marry, nor to die neither, on such short notice. Otherwise this here is a real elegant mixture of pretty colors."

He threw down his hand face up on the table. It was the most impotent collection of small spades and diamonds, with the jack of hearts added for good measure.

"Jack high," announced the Weeping Willow.

Romeo Jackson interrupted the uproarious gibes of Pete and Peewee:

"It is extremely fortunate, gentlemen, that the conventional black is the predominating color, both at funerals and at nuptial celebrations. In my own case I look

extremely well dressed in black, so I have no regrets whatever in announcing queen high." He placed his hand on the table.

With many indelicate guffaws of triumph, Pete and Peewee laid down the winning hands, Pete a pair of kings, Peewee a pair of aces.

"Let's go find Sally and Hank," Pete suggested impatiently. "I aint enjoyed any excitement since we hung them rustlers a month ago."

"Wait till Romeo and me decides whose meat is whose," the Weeping Willow told him sharply. "First thing you know you'll git us confused, and I'll be proposin' to Hank Hawkins, and Romeo'll be bustin' Sally on the jaw."

"Your suggestion shows a logical and orderly mind," Romeo commended. "And in order further to clarify the situation, I suggest that I take the honorable Hank Hawkins, and that you take the widow—both of us for better or worse."

DEEP down in his mind Romeo felt some uncertainty as to whether he was making this proposal in a spirit of self-sacrifice, or whether this was not the way he would prefer to have the tasks assigned. He realized that for him to approach a strange lady with a proposal of marriage would probably be a more terrifying experience than to confront the bad man of Skull Creek. Then too, Romeo had had in mind for some time the idea of calling Hank Hawkins' bluff. He had a deep-seated conviction that Hank had terrorized the community long enough. As to the danger of the affair, Romeo had a hunch that the notches on Hank's gun represented men who had lacked self-confidence rather than dexterity with a six-shooter.

As for the Weeping Willow, Romeo's suggestion brought great relief. It may as well be stated that the Weeping Willow was generally suspected of lacking something in the way of courage—that greatest virtue of the West. He never carried a gun, and this could only be interpreted to mean a desire to avoid conflict His everlasting grin, and never failing good-nature, were his passports in this rough society. At Romeo's suggestion he made a few feeble and half-hearted objections, but Romeo overruled him.

"I reckon it's appropriate for me to propose to Sally," he grinned. "I don't pack no gun, but a gent can't shoot a lady nohow, so I'm all right that-a-way."

"I suggest that we now proceed with our adventure," Romeo told the other three. "And since at this early hour the lovely Sally is undoubtedly still in the arms of Morpheus, I propose that we undertake to discover the whereabouts of the worthy, but irascible, Mr. Hawkins."

The businesslike tone in which Romeo made this suggestion had a tendency to sober the others. But at that very instant further discussion was interrupted by the sudden arrival of the bad man in person.

AS Hank Hawkins kicked open the door of the Silver Moon and projected his ominous form into the room, it was evident to one and all that he was in a quarrelsome mood.

Hank had been drinking, but he was not drunk. Hank never got drunk. While others walked a sidewalk as though it were a tight-rope, and with scalding tears described their unworthiness to exist, Hank Hawkins became only slightly more morose, walked with a more catlike tread, and kept his hand nearer his six-shooter.

As the bad man entered, a silence fell over the barroom—a tribute very pleasing to Hank. As he approached the bar, there was a noticeable giving way in the immediate vicinity. There seemed to be a general spirit of hospitality present that wished by all means to give Hank adequate elbow-room.

Suddenly it came to Hank's attention that a young stranger, who might have been a tenderfoot, seemed entirely oblivious of the bad man's entrance. The stranger stood at the bar drinking reflectively. He made no move to give way as Hank approached. Suddenly a gleam of anger narrowed the bad man's eyes. Reaching out with one hand, he seized the stranger by the nape of the neck and hauled him out into the middle of the floor, while with the other hand he drew a six-shooter.

"Dance, damn you," he ordered, at the same time pouring forth a stream of lead that brought forth a most amazing exhibition of high jumping on the part of the pop-eyed tenderfoot.

At the first hostile move there had been a general scurrying, and rapid exodus, on the part of the inmates of the place.

Among those who felt it the essence of prudence to avoid the direct fire of the bad man was the Weeping Willow. Hastily arising from his chair at the first shot, he turned toward the rear of the room, where

a narrow window seemed to offer possible egress for a man possessed of a sufficient modicum of speed, agility and enthusiasm for the open country.

Now, as luck would have it, at the instant the Weeping Willow turned, a second bullet from the bad man's gun struck a nail-head in the floor, and a glancing sliver of lead of some dimension accomplished an almost direct hit on the Weeping Willow's rear elevation.

The sting of the lead against the Weeping Willow's trousers had the effect of greatly accelerating his departure. He gathered himself for a leap that would have undoubtedly landed him through the window and across the alley beyond, had he had free access to the opening.

But as the Willow launched himself into air, the sickening knowledge came to him that some one had beaten him to it. Instead of finding safety beyond the window, he collided with some heavy object and dropped back to the floor, still exposed to the bad man's fire. The object which had blocked his escape was a fat citizen whose enthusiasm for distant lands had caused him to overestimate the size of the window. Finding himself slightly larger than the aperture, he hung there struggling violently, with the sash festooning his neck.

TURNING wildly from the blocked window, the Weeping Willow, now blind with terror, made a rush for the door. In three enthusiastic bounds he was halfway across the room. And then the paralyzing knowledge came to him that in his mad rush he had almost collided with the bad man, still intent on his target practice. The Weeping Willow's hair rose in horror as he realized that he was within arm's-length of the enemy.

Hawkins had emptied his first gun, and was reaching for the second piece of artillery, while the tenderfoot, descending to the floor after a tremendous leap into the air, took advantage of the momentary lull in the firing and projected himself through the swinging doors with such abandon that he tore one of them completely from its hinges.

At this point in the proceedings the bad man suddenly became aware of the menacing presence of the Weeping Willow. With a snarl of rage he turned toward this new enemy, neither of them noticing the stealthy approach of Romeo Jackson from the other side. In the instant before he could get his second gun into action, the Weeping Willow, sensing sudden death, shut his eyes and struck out blindly with both fists, one of which landed violently against the bar, while at the same moment a set of particularly solid knuckles attached to the long arm of Romeo Jackson collided with Hank's unshaven jaw, and the bad man sprawled on his left ear, his two six-shooters clattering to the floor.

For a moment the bad man reposed in this unheroic attitude. Presently the Weeping Willow opened his eyes. Observing the situation, and presuming that it had been his mighty blow that had layed the desperado low, he suddenly felt a great surge of manly courage welling up in his bosom. Stepping forward with ostentatious deliberation, he gathered up the two revolvers, and stepped to the side of the prostrate enemy. At this moment the bad man opened his eyes, raised himself slowly and painfully on one elbow, and looked stupidly about him.

"Did the roof fall in?" he inquired inanely.

With a scornful look, the Weeping Willow prodded him none too gently with his foot.

"Git up, you big stiff," he ordered, and forthwith seized the ruffian by the scruff of the neck.

"Now, you listen careful," he continued, "while I try to penetrate your molded intellect with some valuable advice. The roof that fell on you was this." He illustrated his meaning by shoving his fist into close proximity to the ruffian's nose. "Now, you git out of here, and stay out of my sight, or I'll give you another dose every time I see you."

With elaborate nonchalance he dropped the bad man's guns into a huge brass cuspidor.

"You wont need these no more," he said. "And don't you ever let me ketch you packin' a gun again, or I'll beat you into a bran mash. Now git."

For a moment the bad man gazed at the Weeping Willow in stupid astonishment. But no evidence of the old-time bravado came into his face. Suddenly, seeming unable longer to endure the Willow's fierce gaze, he turned without a word and made his way out into the dawn of a new day.

The Weeping Willow was almost immediately surrounded by a crowd of new-found admirers. Their fulsome flattery he accepted with becoming modesty.

"I done it on a bet," he told them carelessly. "But I'd been thinkin' for a long time about bustin' that four-flusher. He's been pesticatin' this God-fearin' community long enough."

He examined his bruised knuckles with great care, making sure that the crowd observed them.

"That ornery critter's sure one tough *hombre,* or I'd 'a' killed him. Wouldn't 'a' cared much if I had."

It was apparent to Romeo Jackson that in the tumult and excitement no one had observed the fact that it was his blow, rather than that of the Weeping Willow, that had brought the bad man low. But he could see no advantage in disillusioning the Weeping Willow and his admirers.

AN hour later the four cow-punchers rode out of Skull Creek, headed for the Crooked S Ranch, the abode of Hair-trigger Sally. All but Romeo Jackson were in a hilarious mood. Romeo had refused the numerous rounds of drinks with which the others had been regaled in celebration of one of the most exciting episodes in the turbulent history of Skull Creek.

As a result of this abstinence, Romeo was now sober. His habitual bashfulness in dealing with the gentler sex now rose up to torment him sorely. He realized that he must propose to the awe-inspiring Sally, and he could see himself embarrassed, shamed and humiliated beyond measure. In his misery he hoped she would shoot him—a contingency not beyond the range of probability. That she might accept him was a horror not to be contemplated.

The three of them rocked in their saddles in ill-concealed glee over the approaching discomfiture of the dignified Romeo. But it was noticeable that their exhilaration diminished somewhat when they observed the object of their search seated in a rocker on the porch of the ranch-house. Great decorum marked their approach to the porch. The three halted at a respectful distance, while the unhappy Romeo went forward to pay his respects.

The sharp-eyed Sally had noted with some suspicion the approach of the four horsemen. Dressed in her usual male attire, she had disposed her voluminous form in comfort, and was enjoying her first cigarette of the morning. At Romeo's approach she shifted to a more alert position. Her cold and calculating eyes narrowed. Her masculine face hardened. Evidently this visit portended something out of the ordinary.

At the porch steps the determined but sadly embarrassed Romeo halted. For a moment his vocal organs refused to function. But presently he recovered his voice:

"Madam," he said, with a deep bow, "I have the honor, this beautiful morning, to offer you my hand in matrimony."

Having performed his contract, Romeo waited for the lightning to strike.

But to his intense surprise, no outburst of wrath followed. Nor did Hair-trigger Sally's expression show any violent inner turmoil of emotion, although some slight surprise might have been noted. For a moment she seemed to study him impartially, as one might a horse offered for sale. Finally she spoke:

"Romeo Jackson, you're not drunk, and I know you're not crazy, so I reckon you've been gamblin' again with them naughty boys."

Romeo blushed a deeper crimson as she studied him for another minute, taking in all his points of physical fitness and good looks.

"Romeo Jackson," she continued judiciously, "you don't drink much, and you don't run after the women, and I reckon your only vice is poker. You're not bad-looking, either."

She seemed lost in contemplation.

"If I could break you of playin' poker, or learn you to play the game right, you might do. Romeo Jackson, you come in the house with me, and we'll have some breakfast."

She turned abruptly to the open-mouthed companions of the unfortunate Romeo:

"You roughnecks can go out to the cook-shack and git your'n," she told them coldly.

Late that afternoon Peewee Stanton and Pendleton Pete pulled their freight out of Skull Creek, headed south.

"We're on our way to the Pan Handle for a season," they informed the Weeping Willow and Romeo Jackson. "You'd better come with us. Hank Hawkins will punctuate one of you, and Hair-trigger Sally'll marry the other'n, if you hang around this hell-hole of iniquity."

But the two unfortunates refused the kindly invitation, and sat crosswise in their saddles for many minutes, watching the forms of the travelers grow smaller, until they finally crossed the divide in the gathering dusk.

A YEAR passed. And then, back over the same dusty trail, rode Peewee Stanton and Pendleton Pete, approaching their old haunts of Skull Creek.

"Five dollars they've vamoosed," Pete offered, as they entered the town.

"No takers," Peewee informed him.

At that moment a short, stocky figure standing in front of the Silver Moon looked up and observed the approaching horsemen. With a quick motion he drew his companion, who wore a deputy sheriff's badge, around the corner of the building.

"Arrest them two cow-punchers," the short, stocky man directed. "Don't antagonize 'em, so as to go an' git yourself plugged, an' don't plug them. But git 'em, and put 'em in the new jail."

With this brief direction he disappeared.

The deputy sheriff met the cow-punchers in front of the Silver Moon, where they dismounted.

"Howdy, gents," he greeted. "I asks your pardon for seemin' inhospitable, but the fact is I find it my painful duty to put you gents under arrest."

At this unexpected welcome, the visitors showed some surprise, and then more than a little resentment.

"Say, what the gallopin' hell's the idea?" Pendleton Pete inquired with some asperity.

"It hurts me more than it does you," the deputy informed him with placid countenance. "But as a matter of legal formality, I reckon I'd better relieve you gents of your artillery."

He held out his hand expectantly.

For a moment the two hesitated. Then they gave in and handed over their shooting irons.

"There's some mistake here," they reasoned. "But we'll get it straightened out in a minute."

Their indignation at being thrust into a cell at the new jail was tremendous. They raved, stormed and cursed, but all to no avail. The poker-faced deputy locked them in, and left them to storm to their heart's content.

Some hours later they heard steps approaching. Some one unlocked the door, and two figures entered. It was some seconds before the incarcerated pair could realize that they were again face to face with their old cronies. There was a remarkable air of prosperity and well-being about the appearance of Romeo Jackson, but most astounding of all was the bright gold shield adorning the person of the important looking Weeping Willow, who first began to speak:

"How do you low-down characters like our new jail?" he inquired. "This here metropolis of Skull Creek has become a law-abidin' community, and we throwed you gents in here for a few hours to show you what'll happen if you go to givin' rein to your hell-raisin' instincts."

THE ice having been broken in this cordial fashion, the four cronies greeted each other in characteristic fashion. But presently Pendleton Pete's curiosity got the better of him.

"But what I want to know is what is the Weeping Willow doin' masqueradin' around with that badge?"

The Weeping Willow shrugged his shoulders, and glanced at Romeo Jackson, who supplied the answer:

"It gives me great pleasure to inform you that after the fiasco of a year ago in the Silver Moon, Hank Hawkins abandoned the community, and that in grateful appreciation of this blessing, the citizens of this county elected Mr. Willoughby Willows sheriff of this county for four years. He informs me that he intends to offer you the position of first deputy sheriff."

At this amazing piece of information the mouths of the two visitors opened automatically, and remained so for some seconds. Finally Peewee Stanton recovered himself to the extent of being able to ask:

"Did Hair-trigger Sally kill you, or did she marry you?"

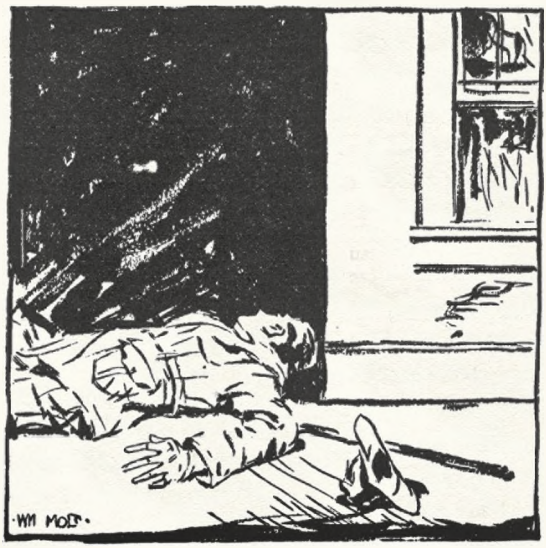
Romeo Jackson shrugged his shoulders, and glanced at the sheriff, who supplied the answer.

"She done neither," he told Peewee. "She just naturally up and married him to her niece from the effete East, and now she's deeded the ranch over to the billin' and cooin' couple, and she's took her bankroll and her six-shooter and gone to Europe to take in the sights. Romeo, here, wants you to be foreman of his ranch."

Some minutes were required for the flabbergasted visitors to assimilate this information. Both were overwhelmed. Finally Pendleton Pete rubbed his hand slowly and dazedly across his forehead. Then he turned to Peewee:

"Well, of all the lucky gosh-danged lucky stiffs," he said, his voice filled with amazement and regret. "And to think we stacked the cards on 'em that night in the Silver Moon!"

A complete novelette wherein the action proceeds at a swift pace and surprise treads close on the heels of deep mystery.



Meshes of

By FORBES

CAPTAIN OF DETECTIVES RINKER glanced up from the reports which he had been scanning, and appraisingly regarded the four members of his force who were seated across the table from him in the dingy basement room at the central police station.

"Snider and Martin," he said to the two on the left, tossing one of the reports across the table to them, "here's something big: Milton Chuven, salesman for the Rand wholesale jewelry house, was rolled for one hundred twenty thousand dollars' worth of diamonds at the Savoy Hotel last night.

"The poor idiot kept it under his hat till he'd wired his firm—said he was afraid of the effects of publicity. Told the house detective about it, but made no report to us until a few minutes ago.

"Now, ten hours after the robbery, he comes to us to find his rocks for him. Chances are, the birds who pulled the job are halfway to Kansas City by this time. There's the house detective's report, with the list of missing sparklers. I'll give a copy of the list to the pawnshop squad, and they'll watch the fences, of course—but the thieves, if they know their business, will take the stuff to some other city to peddle it.

"This job looks a little like it might be the work of the Bluebird and her gang. But she's never worked this city. The last I heard of her she was in California.

"You're working a cold trail, but do your best. If you need any help, give me a flash."

"All right, Chief," was all that Detective Snider said as he picked up the report, and with his partner, made for the door.

"KANE and Perry," said Captain Rinker, turning to the other two and tossing another report upon the table, "a woman phoned in early this morning that she heard two shots and a woman screaming in the house next door.

"A harness bull from the North Side substation investigated and reports that the woman must have had a nightmare. He says the house is locked and unoccupied. He says he was walking his beat

The author of "The Fightin' Fools," "The Ken-Caryl Case" and "The Riddle of the Rangeland" is in excellent form in this story.

Mystery

PARKHILL

within a block of the place, and didn't hear any shots.

"The chances are, he's right. But we can't afford to overlook any bets, where a shooting is concerned. I wish you boys would jump out there and have a talk with the woman and look over the house.

"But don't waste any time on the case if it looks like a bloomer. We may need you to help Snider and Martin on this diamond job."

Larry Kane, the older of the two, lean, bony, sandy of hair and freckled of face, and looking like anything but a detective, nodded gravely and pocketed the report.

His face showed none of the disappointment which was so evident upon the countenance of his younger partner, Perry. He led the way outside, drawing his overcoat about him as he encountered the bitter winter wind. He climbed into a nondescript and battered car which had been used by members of the detective force since it had been seized in a liquor raid a year before.

"I don't see why Cap Rinker always gives the Number One cases to Snider and Martin," Perry grumbled. "Seems like we always draw something like this—some one takin' a shot at a stray cat, I s'pose."

Kane made no rejoinder. In fact, he had nothing to say during the cold ride to the scene of the reported shooting, though Perry kept up a running fire of protest at Fate and the captain who decreed that other detectives should work on the big cases while Kane and he were required to trail down persons who shot at cats. He was still grumbling when they reached the house from which the woman had telephoned.

"Why, yes sir, Mr. Detective," began the woman in response to Kane's inquiry. "I says to myself when I heard them shots, I says, that's jest like the time when Cousin Amanda's neighbor heard Abner Johnson shoot at them chicken-thieves—"

"What time was it?" Kane broke in.

"Twenty minutes after four. I says to my husband, I says, 'Washburn, you git up an' look at the clock.' He says, 'Oh, go to sleep. It's too cold. That wasn't nothin' but some taxi had a blowout.' But I looked at the clock when I phoned the

police, because once Mis' Feeney heard a strange noise, an'—"

"Who lives next door?"

"Nobody lives there now. You see, old man Treverton, he owns the place. But he up an' closed the house an' went to California last fall. He says he was goin' for his health, but I says to Mis' Dumbruski, which lives on the other side, I says, 'The old fool's been readin' so much about them bathin' girls—' "

"And you heard a woman screaming?"

"Did I? Say, Mr. Detective, she screamed like all get out. I never heard anybody scream like that, 'cept once when Washburn's sister's little girl fell in the lake—"

"Where can we get a key to the house?"

"Let's see. . . . . Old man Treverton, he left the place in the hands of a real-estate agent to sell. But they'll never sell it at the price he asks. I says to my husband, I says—

"What's that? The name of the agent? It was Newcomb, or Bartels, or Grimes, or some such name like that. You'd know him anywhere, because he's a little bit of a feller. If you'll go four doors down from the next corner and ask for Mr. Epburg, you'll see a man that looks jest like this agent, except he's a mite heavier and has a beard an'—"

"Did you see anyone enter or leave the house, before or after the shooting?"

"Well, now, I can't say that I did. I wanted to set up at the window, but my husband, he says to get back into bed an' quit talkin' or I'd catch my death o' cold.

"But two weeks ago come Sunday I saw a man pass by with his cap pulled down, an' an awful mean look, an' I says to my husband, I says, Washburn— Land sakes! Where are you men goin'? Aren't you goin' to wait till I tell you about that man?"

BUT Detective Kane and his partner were already out of the gate, headed for the house next door.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the younger man. "If we had to listen to that for another five minutes, I'd pass out. What's the use of looking at the house? We might miss a chance to help Snider and Martin. It's too cold to fool around here. Let's beat it back to headquarters."

Kane, who was "sizing up" the house, said nothing, but shook his head. It was an old, stained, red-brick building of two stories and perhaps twelve rooms, the paint on the gingerbread woodwork considerably faded, and the whole bearing a down-at-the-heels appearance. He led the way through an iron gate and up the steps to the creaking porch. The door was locked.

"We'll take a look through the windows first," said Kane. "The harness bull must have been here before daylight. He couldn't have seen the inside. You take the far side, and I'll take this. And watch for fresh footprints. There may still be some snow on the north side."

Perry shook his head when, a few moments later, they met in the rear of the house.

"Couldn't see a thing out of the way," he reported. "Shall we beat it back to headquarters?"

"I hate to break into a house on as little evidence as this, but it's hopeless to try to find the agent," asserted Kane. "Get out your knife, and slip the catch on this back window."

A moment later the two were inside. But the first floor revealed nothing. They ascended the front staircase. Kane pushed open the door of a bedchamber.

There, an automatic pistol clutched in one hand, lay the body of a man, face downward in a pool of blood!

CHAPTER II

"MURDER!" gasped Perry.

Then he broke into a smile. He chuckled with elation, apparently unaffected by the sanguinary spectacle.

"Gosh! This is once we drew a bigger case than Snider and Martin. Let 'em work their heads off on their old jewel-robbery—we got a first-class murder!"

Kane said nothing. He had dropped to one knee and was examining the body. It was that of a man of less than thirty years, swarthy and clean shaven, and clad in expensive but rather flashy clothing.

Kane turned the body over. A gaping wound in the throat told where one bullet had entered. A round blue hole over the right eye marked the path of the second.

"Thirty-eight caliber," Kane commented as he examined the bullet-hole in the head. "Perry, take a look at his gat, and see if it's been fired. Then look for shells on the floor and bullet-holes in the walls."

Perry, bending over the body and loosening the grip of the stiffened fingers upon the weapon, paused for a moment.

"Plain as the nose on your face," he announced. "It's a triangle murder. He was shot in a quarrel over a woman—the one that was heard screaming.

"And the motive wasn't robbery—look at that rock in his scarf. And the woman herself didn't knock him off, because a woman can't shoot that straight. And a thirty-eight automatic isn't a woman's gun. Say, wont Snider and Martin be sore when they learn what a grand case we're workin' on?"

Kane grunted. He was occupied "frisking" the pockets of the dead man. He discovered a railroad time-table and slightly more than three hundred dollars in currency and silver. And that was all.

Not a scrap of paper which might serve to identify the man. There were no identifying marks upon his cap or clothing—merely the label of a Boston clothier. Kane threw back the coat, and disclosed strapped beneath the left arm a shoulder-holster for the pistol which had been clutched in the dead man's hand.

"This guy's gat has been fired twice, if the magazine was full when he started," Perry announced, his examination of the pistol completed.

"Here are half a dozen shells on the floor. One's a thirty-two caliber automatic. The others are all thirty-eights. That accounts for at least three guns—two of the shells from this gun, and three more thirty-eights which must have come from another; and the thirty-two.

"The grooves show they were all fired from automatics. There are two bullet-holes in the plaster near the window, from shots fired from somewhere near the door we came into the room by. But the furniture's all in place—there couldn't have been much of a scrap."

Kane drew forth cigarette papers and tobacco. He stood in deep thought, frowning as he rolled himself a smoke. Finally he said:

"Perry, you phone headquarters and report. Tell 'em to call the coroner. You might suggest that Sergeant Axtell of the Bertillon Department go to the morgue and take fingerprints and measurements of this bird. You'd better use the telephone at the old woman's, next door."

"If I phone from her house," Perry protested indignantly, "everyone in the neighborhood will know about the murder in ten minutes, and we'll be swamped."

"All the better," Kane replied. "Maybe some of 'em will know something about the people that seem to have been in the Treverton home in the old man's absence. Take a look for tracks leading from the house, or traces of an automobile that might have been standing at the curb during the night. That's all."

AS Perry hurried from the room, Kane turned to complete his examination. He strove to reconstruct the tragedy that had been enacted during the night.

The man apparently had fallen firing at his assailants as they burst through the door. The bullet-holes in the plaster had undoubtedly been the result of shots fired by the slayers, for the victim had been shooting in the opposite direction, toward the door. Kane wondered if his two bullets had found their mark. If one of the murderers had been wounded, the chances of their immediate capture were vastly increased.

He left the room, searching the halls and other rooms for telltale bloodstains which would indicate that one of the slayers had been winged, but his search was fruitless.

The unwashed dishes in the kitchen, together with the fresh food in the pantry, showed him that the house had been occupied, probably for several days. Yet the electricity had not been turned on, he found in attempting to switch on a lamp in the cellar—whoever had been in the place probably had not been occupying it by consent of the owner. By the time Perry returned, almost bursting with elation, the net result of Kane's investigations had been virtually nothing.

"What do you think?" the younger man exclaimed with suppressed excitement. "Cap Rinker says if we need any help, he'll call Snider and Martin off the diamond robbery to help us! I told him I guessed we could handle this case without any help, all right."

He was interrupted by the shrieking of the siren on a police riot car. An instant later the house was invaded by a swarm of uniformed patrolmen, followed by half a dozen eager reporters. Kane knew that within ten minutes newsboys would be shouting their murder extras throughout the city.

The woman next door had done all that Kane expected. Those of the neighbors who failed to receive the news of the murder from her excited lips came running at the sound of the police siren. Within ten

minutes two hundred men and women of the neighborhood were clustered about the doors, avidly devouring the morbid details, and overwhelming with questions the officers posted to guard the doors.

Kane stepped to the porch and surveyed the crowd. Then he called out, asking that any persons who had seen anyone entering or leaving the house within the last few days step inside.

At least a score accepted the invitation. For twenty minutes he talked with them, one at a time. He gained as many descriptions of men and women seen near the house, as there were informers. But none, when pinned down to facts, could say that he had seen anyone actually enter or leave the place.

Kane cursed beneath his breath as he completed the examination of the last. He had failed to elicit a single pertinent fact. He turned to Perry.

"Call up the coroner," he directed. "He's had time to examine the body. See if he's found any identification marks."

The newsboys were already shouting their extras outside when Perry returned, breathless with excitement.

"Body's been identified!" he cried. "It's the Diamond Duke, the jewel robber!"

CHAPTER III

"JEWEL robber!" Kane exclaimed. "I wonder—" He broke off. "The Diamond Duke?" he went on an instant later. "Who's he? Seems to me I've heard of him. But he's never worked this town."

"They say," Perry explained, still breathless with eagerness, "that he's a member of the Bluebird's mob, from California. I bet this is hooked up some way with the Rand jewel robbery last night! Cap Rinker thought it might have been the Bluebird and her bunch."

"How was the body identified?"

"Pawnbroker from 'Frisco, name of Bern, identified it," Perry explained, drawing forth his notebook. "Here's the name: Samuel Bern, 8 East Thirteenth Street, San Francisco. He came to the morgue in a taxi, with a copy of the newspaper extra in his pocket, the coroner said.

"Said he thought he recognized the man from the description of the body printed in the paper. They took him in to see the body, and he identified it positively as the Diamond Duke."

"Where can we locate this fellow Bern?" Kane snapped out.

"He left word he was staying at the Oxford Hotel, the coroner says. Said he was on his way to New York, but that he'd be in town till tomorrow, if we wanted him."

"Did the coroner let Cap Rinker know about this identification?"

"Don't know, but I suppose so. He usually calls up, first thing, in such cases."

"Better get in touch with Rinker right away, and find out. Suggest he wire to 'Frisco at once, if he hasn't done it already, and check up on both the Diamond Duke and this pawnbroker. Don't lose any time—we're going to leave here when you get back."

Perry reappeared in a few moments.

"A red-hot tip!" the younger detective burst out enthusiastically. "Now we're beginning to get action. Rinker says some guy who wouldn't give his name phoned in to headquarters and gave the address of a house on Sunset Heights, where he says the mob hangs out that pulled the jewel job last night! He says—"

"But I thought Snider and Martin were handling that case," broke in Kane.

"They were. But they aren't any more," Perry returned gleefully.

"Listen! This guy that squawked—he must have been one of the gang that was sore on the rest because his cut wasn't big enough—he says it's the Bluebird's gang that copped the rocks.

"And that isn't all! He says they're the ones who knocked off this bird, the Diamond Duke, last night—only the funny thing about it is, he calls this fellow Tuxedo Tim. And Rinker says Tuxedo Tim is the name of one of a gang of New England jewel thieves headed by the Weasel!

"Rinker says he's got a hunch this dead man is really Tuxedo Tim. That would mean that the Weasel's gang, and not the Bluebird's, pulled the job last night. Cap Rinker don't go very strong on these identifications at the morgue by some one who saw the dead man four years before.

"He thinks this pawnbroker is full of prunes. His hunch is that the diamond robbery and the murder were both part of the same job. So he's called Snider and Martin in, and he's going to send 'em over here to work under us. He says we better get over to this house in Sunset Heights right away. And he says we better take all these flatfeet with us, in case of trouble."

Kane shook his head. "I got another plan. You take the car, and check up on this pawnbroker at the Oxford Hotel. Then hop up the street to the Savoy, and talk to Chuven, the salesman who lost the diamonds. You can drive me over to Sunset Heights alone, and when you've finished checking on those two, you can join me at the house there."

Perry's face fell. "Gosh! You going to send me away while you raid the joint alone? I'd like to be in on the fun!"

"If the Bluebird's mob is hiding out in that house, you'll be there in plenty of time for any raid," Kane assured him. "And I'm going to leave the harness bulls here. And I'm going to have 'em keep Snider and Martin here, when *they* come.

"I don't put much stock in these anonymous tips. Did it strike you that it might be just a stall to get us away from this house? The rocks might be hidden here somewhere, and they might want a chance to come back and get 'em."

PERRY reluctantly dropped Kane near the house in Sunset Heights. Kane walked past on the opposite side of the street, surveying the place, which was a modern bungalow somewhat isolated from neighboring houses. Finally, prepared to represent himself to be a book-agent, he climbed the steps of the house and rang the bell. There was no answer.

He walked around to the rear of the house, convinced that there was no one within. Failing to rouse anyone by knocking at the back door, he slipped the latch of a cellar window and crawled inside.

Pistol in hand, ready for instant use, he prowled through the cellar. The one thing that caught his eye was the presence of a number of fragments of torn letter-paper scattered about on the bottom of a galvanized-iron waste paper container near the furnace. He scooped them up and carried them over to the stairs, where he pieced them together without difficulty. When he had completed the task he leaned back and scratched his head.

"Now, what in thunder!" he ejaculated, puzzled.

There were five letters pieced together upon the steps. Four were typed. The other was written in pen and ink. Each letter was of the same general tenor. Each was addressed, not to a firm or an individual, but to a number—the same number in each instance.

Kane was mystified by this at first, until he recalled that the number was of the type appended to "blind" newspaper advertisements. This, coupled with the fact that each letter was an application for employment, showed him they were all replies to a "help wanted" advertisement.

Each letter set forth the qualifications of the applicant for the position of jewelry salesman. Each mentioned references and recommendations which were enclosed. But none of the letters of reference mentioned in the applications were among the papers Kane had found in the trash-can.

His speculations were interrupted by a sound from above. Kane thought it sounded like a groan. He thrust the papers into his pocket. Then he drew his pistol again, and tiptoed up the stairs.

CHAPTER IV

NOISELESSLY he pushed open the door at the head of the stairs. It opened into the kitchen—which was empty. He stole silently across the kitchen to a door leading presumably to the dining room.

There, in the doorway, he almost stumbled across the form of a man, bound hand and foot, and gagged!

With his pistol still clutched in his right hand, Kane knelt, and with his left unknotted the gag. The man's first words amazed him.

"Don't shoot!" the fellow pleaded. "Just give me a chance. I'll—"

"I'm not going to shoot you," Kane assured him, drawing back his coat and displaying his badge. "I'm from Detective Headquarters. Anyone else in this house? What you doing here, trussed up like this? Who tied you? How long you been here? Where are the people who live in this house?"

He unknotted the prisoner's wrists. The latter immediately sat up and began to untie the ropes that bound his ankles. But he heaved a huge sigh of relief as he caught sight of the police badge.

"There's no one else in the house," he announced, and added, "Thank God!" Then he went on: "I'm sure glad you showed up, brother. I thought at first you was one of that gang, come back to shoot me. They're a bad outfit, all right, and I hope you put every last one of 'em in jail. If I can help you pinch any of that bunch of bootleggers—"

"Bootleggers!" broke in Kane in astonishment.

"Yes sir. I guess they're the worst gang of bootleggers in town. I been layin' for 'em for a month. I've shadowed 'em for a long time, I have. This house is plumb full of booze—unless they got scared when they saw I had the goods on 'em, and took it all out. I—"

"But what did they tie you up for?"

"Well, it was like this: I'd been watching this house a long time. I'd been shadowing these birds here and there, understand? But I wanted to get inside the house, so I could get my eyes on actual evidence.

"So yesterday evening I hung round till I was sure they'd all left. Then I slipped in the cellar window—same way you got in, judging from the sounds. I was prowling through the place when a couple of them came back unexpectedly.

"They caught me and tied me up, like you found me. They threatened to kill me if I told anyone a word about what I found—"

"But who are you? And why were you shadowing them?"

"Me? I'm Miltiades Miller. I'm a graduate of the Universal Correspondence School for detectives. This is my first big case, and I'm going to write a thesis—"

KANE interrupted him with a laugh.

"Miltiades, some one is going to take you for a highjacker, unless you change your methods of detecting. Now, tell me all you know about this gang of bootleggers. How many are there? What they look like? How long have they lived here? And where did they go from here, if you know?"

"There are six of 'em—five men and a woman," announced Miltiades with seeming pride at being consulted by a real detective. "The woman, she's little, and dark-haired, with snappy blue eyes. I think she's the leader of them all—the queen of the rum-runners, like you read about in the papers, you know.

"She seems to be right fond of jewelry. She wears three diamond rings and a diamond bar-pin—big stuff, something that nobody but a bootlegger could afford.

"Then there's a tall, blond fellow with a big nose and spats. He carries a cane, and talks like an Englishman. If you'd see him come stalking out of this house to get in his big blue car, you'd think he was the Count de Bilgewater himself.

"Then there's a dapper little fellow with a mustache about as big as a trout-fly, and a couple of others you might take to be traveling salesmen, and one with an undershot jaw and a big scar across his face. He looks awful mean, he does. I bet he's an ex-convict, by his looks. All he seems to do is to drive the car for the others."

"And you say they've been living in this house for several weeks?"

"Maybe longer. I know they've been here that long. I've watched 'em drive up in that big blue car many a night.

"But they never have any customers here at the house. That's a funny thing about their business. They're mighty slick. Lot of people coming to the house might attract attention, you know.

"Where were they going when they left here?"

"Wish I knew. I think maybe, knowing I'd trailed them to their lair, they decided to abandon this house altogether. They talked about killing me, but decided it would be better to tie me up and leave me here."

SERGEANT KANE was at a loss to size up the extraordinary fellow who called himself Miltiades Miller. The man's story seemed too absurd to be true. Kane thought that probably the man was a neighbor, who had become suspicious of the actions of the gang—if gang it was that was occupying the house—and believing them to be bootleggers, had broken into the place in an attempt to steal some of the contraband liquor, and had been caught in the act by his intended victims.

But again, it was entirely possible that the occupants of the house were really bootleggers, and had no connection with the jewel thieves. It was possible that the neighbors, reading in the newspapers of the jewel robbery and murder, and having become suspicious of the occupants of the house, had jumped to the conclusion that they might be in some way connected with the crimes, and had been the ones who had telephoned central police headquarters about the house in Sunset Heights.

"Well," asserted Miltiades, "I guess I can't do anything more around here, so I'll be going now."

"Wait a minute," Kane said evenly. "I'm going down to Headquarters in a few

minutes. I'd like you to come along and have a talk with Cap Rinker about this bunch."

An odd gleam showed in the man's eyes for an instant.

"Really, I'd better not go this time," he protested. "You see, I've been away from home all night, and I'm afraid my wife will be worried."

"Guess again," Kane responded. "You're going with me. Your story sounds fishy. You—"

LIKE a flash Miltiades struck out, the blow catching Kane squarely on the jaw. The detective staggered back, reaching for his gun.

Instantly the other closed with him, pinning his arms to his sides. He reached for Kane's gun, jerked it from the holster, and leaped back, snarling, and covering the detective with the weapon.

"Take off your coat!" he ordered savagely, much to Kane's surprise. "Now turn round. Put your hands behind you!"

Kane heard his coat being ripped to shreds. At that instant a series of knocks at the front door echoed through the house. The detective heard the other curse beneath his breath. He turned.

Miltiades had backed out of the room into the hall. Kane darted to the kitchen and turned the key in the door leading to the back porch. Then he leaped to the basement stairs, locking this door behind him. He removed the key, and placed an eye at the keyhole.

He saw Miltiades dash into the kitchen, Kane's pistol in one hand. An overcoat he evidently had procured in the hall was flung over one arm.

Finding both doors locked, he stood motionless for the fraction of a second. Then he dropped the pistol into his pocket, and calmly walked through the house to the front door.

Kane followed a moment later. He saw that Miltiades had opened the front door, and was speaking to the person who had knocked.

"No," he heard him say, "Detective Kane isn't here."

Kane knew that the person outside must be Perry, returned from visiting the hotels. No one else would have asked for him at this house.

"Grab him, Perry!" he shouted at the top of his lungs.

Perry hurled himself forward, arms outstretched, as the other shot across the porch. His hands clutched the coat which Miltiades was carrying across his arm.

He wrenched away, leaving the coat in Perry's grasp. In a flash he had rounded the corner of the house and was gone.

CHAPTER V

"YOU poor fool!" exclaimed Perry in exasperation. "Didn't you know any better than to tackle a house full of bandits single-handed? It's a wonder they didn't kill you! Why didn't you let me help you, instead of sending me off on a wild-goose chase?"

Kane grinned. "There wasn't a house full of bandits," he replied. "Merely Miltiades Miller, the correspondence-school detective, who thought he'd found a house full of bootleggers. At least, that's what *he* said.

"But I've a pretty strong hunch Miltiades isn't what he pretends to be. Just what connection, if any, he has with this gang of crooks, though, I haven't figured out."

Hastily he sketched the happenings of the interval since he had last seen his partner. "Now," he said in conclusion, "let's take a look through this house."

"Wait a minute," protested Perry. "Wait until you hear what I've got to tell. Real news, this trip. Things have been breaking fast. But I'm going to save the best till the end."

"Fire away. But you can talk just as well while we're looking through the house," responded Kane, heading for the door.

"To begin with," said Perry, launching upon his story with enthusiasm, "I went to the Oxford Hotel to check up on the pawnbroker who had identified the body of the Diamond Duke.

"He wasn't in his room. The clerk said he hadn't been in since he'd registered early this morning. I tried to find out all I could about him. The clerk didn't know much, but he gave me a good description. The description didn't seem to fit at all with the man's name and his occupation.

"In the first place, he talks with a decided English accent, the clerk said. It's the first time I've ever known of a pawnbroker to talk like an Englishman. He's got light hair and a big nose, and he's more than six feet tall. And to cap the

climax, he wears spats and carries a cane. Can you picture a man like that, whose name is Bern and who operates a pawnshop? I can't.

"Well, he hadn't left word as to when he'd get back, so I hopped in the flivver and went up to the Savoy to see Chuven, the jewelry salesman.

"Chuven wasn't in his room, either. So I pumped the clerk for all I could get about him. And listen to what the clerk told me:

"He said Chuven had been registered at the hotel for two or three days. He hadn't asked to keep his valuables in the hotel safe. The clerk didn't know about the robbery until long after it had been committed.

"He described this salesman, Chuven, as tall and blond, with a big nose, and the air and accent of an upper class Englishman. Can you beat that? Chuven, the victim of the diamond robbery, is the same as Bern, the pawnbroker who identified the dead bandit, or I'll eat my shirt!"

THEY were inside the house now, searching the rooms on the ground floor. Perry went on:

"Well, I thought Cap Rinker might have had replies to the telegrams he sent to San Francisco about the dead man and the pawnbroker. I wasn't far from the central station, so I dropped in to find out.

"He had a reply to his wire. Bern, the pawnbroker, conducts a shop in 'Frisco, all right. But he hasn't left San Francisco! He's there today, the wire says.

"That means this fellow is a fake, just as I suspected. But why anyone should represent himself to be a San Francisco pawnbroker, and go to the morgue and identify a body, like this bird did, is beyond me! And remember, from his description, this man who identified the body is the same man who was robbed of the jewels.

"Well, that isn't all. In reply to the question about the Diamond Duke, the police of San Francisco telegraphed that he had disappeared ten days ago. But here's the funny thing about it all:

"They described the Diamond Duke as six feet and one inch tall, blue eyes, light hair, big nose, and say he talks with an English accent, and carries a cane and wears spats!

"What do you make of that? You know the body we discovered this morning was that of a chunky, swarthy sort of fellow—almost the exact opposite of the description of the Duke. The Duke, the San Francisco police say, is the Bluebird's first lieutenant.

"It's all a muddle to me. Is the Diamond Duke the same as the victim of the robbery? Is he the same as the pawnbroker who identified the body? And if he is, who is the dead man? He can't be the Duke, if either the salesman or the pawnbroker, or both, are the Duke. Can't figure it out."

"It *is* curious," replied Kane absentmindedly, as he emptied the contents from the pockets of the overcoat Perry had snatched from the fleeing Miltiades. "But look here." He held out a pearl-handled pistol which had been in a pocket of the coat.

"This must belong to Miltiades Miller. That fellow puzzles me."

Perry was frowning impatiently. "But I haven't told you all," he went on. "I promised to save the best till the last.

"While I was at the central station reading the reply from Frisco, a riot-call was turned in from the business district. Snider and Martin had just reported in on their way to the place where we found the body. Cap Rinker sent 'em along with the riot-squad and a dozen patrolmen. I hopped into the flivver and went, too, 'cause it wasn't out of my way.

"In the midst of all the traffic downtown, a big blue touring car filled with men, and with a woman in the front seat with the driver, had driven up alongside a taxicab. They'd opened fire on the passenger in the cab, and had riddled him with bullets. He died instantly.

"But they didn't speed away quick, like they do so often in these gang murders. In full view of hundreds of persons, a man with an undershot jaw and a big scar on his face jumped to the driver's seat of the taxi, jammed the chauffeur's cap down over his eyes so the man couldn't see, and held a pistol to his ear, ordering him to shut up and remain quiet.

"Meanwhile another gangster, a little fellow with a tiny mustache, had jumped into the back seat of the taxi, and had gone through the clothes of the dead man. He jumped back into the murder car with something in his hand. Not a single one of the hundreds of witnesses could tell what he held.

"All this happened fast. Everyone who

saw it was too scared to do anything. The gangsters' car shot away and was lost in the traffic—and left panic behind it.

"But listen to this:

"The dead man in the taxi—I saw him myself—was tall, blond, and had a big nose. He'd been carrying a walking stick, and was wearing spats!

"They've taken his body to the morgue; it's lyin' there now next to the man he identified two hours ago as the Diamond Duke!"

CHAPTER VI

KANE was examining the pearl-handled pistol he had found in the overcoat.

"Well," demanded Perry impatiently, "what do you think of my story? You don't hear one like that every day, do you?"

Kane looked up suddenly. "Sure," he agreed absent-mindedly. "Odd, isn't it?

"Ever see a jewel robber who carried a gat like this? It's just the kind for an amateur detective. If the caliber was smaller, I'd say it is the type a woman would pick.

"When I see our friend Miltiades again, I'm going to land one behind his ear, just to pay for spoiling a good coat. Now, if he wanted to tie my hands, why didn't he take my belt, instead of ripping up my coat? It would have been less trouble."

Perry threw up his hands in despair, and turned on his heel.

"Say," he protested testily, "if we don't get some action in this case pretty quick, Rinker's going to pull us off and put Snider and Martin in charge. They're already working on the biggest angle—the killing of the Duke, or Bern, or Chuven, or whoever this bird is—or was."

The trace of a smile flickered about Kane's lips.

"Keep your shirt on, Perry," he advised. "We wont get anywhere going half-cocked. I wish I could solve this thing like the story-book detectives, building up the whole case from a single clue like the spats of the late lamented Englishman who just went to hell in a taxi. But unfortunately I'm merely a plugger, solving my cases by running down every lead, and never overlooking a bet.

"In working on this case, never forget one thing—the jewels. Find them, and you'll find the men who are responsible for both killings. Those two men weren't done for merely for the fun of killing. And bandits who'll risk hanging for a bunch of rocks like that aren't going away without 'em.

"But you and I are going to keep plugging away till we find those diamonds, savvy? The way I dope it out, they ought to be cached somewhere around this joint, if some one hasn't gotten away with 'em, or if Miltiades hasn't scared the gang into taking them away. We've searched this place pretty well, but if we don't find—"

HE was cut short by the ringing of the telephone.

"I'll get it!" cried Perry, bolting toward the telephone stand in the hall. "Bet it's some of the gang, thinking the rest of 'em are still here!"

"If it is, stall 'em!" Kane directed, following. "Tell 'em everything's O. K., and tell 'em to come back here."

"Hello!" cried the younger detective as he lifted the receiver.

Then his face fell, and he made a grimace of disgust to telegraph to Kane his disappointment at what he heard.

"Yes. . . . . This is Perry. Kane's here. . . . . Who? Sheriff Kerr?" He listened a moment, and his face brightened again.

"Sure. Fine stuff, Sheriff. . . . . What's the name? Fairchild? . . . . All right. At the county line. In about fifteen minutes."

He replaced the receiver and swung about, his face alight with enthusiasm as he faced his partner.

"Gosh, this is good!" he announced gleefully. "That was Sheriff Kerr of Jefferson County. He thinks he's spotted this gang in an abandoned roadhouse just over the county line.

"He's got only one deputy in that part of the county, and he's got to act quick. So he called us for help. He says he's been watching the house since early morning. Says the gang drove up at high speed from this direction about ten minutes ago in a big blue car that answers the description of the car used by the gang in killing the Englishman. The deputy, Fairchild, is waiting for us at the county line, and will guide us to the house."

Kane frowned. "How did he happen to call *us?* How did he know we were here? Why didn't he call Rinker?"

"He did," Perry answered. "He said he called Rinker first. Rinker told him everyone else was busy on the local angles of the shooting, and gave him this number, asking him to call us here."

"Why didn't Rinker himself call us and give us the orders?"

"The sheriff said Cap was too busy with a hot tip on the shooting, and asked him as a favor, to save time, to call us direct."

"Do you know this deputy sheriff, Fairchild?"

"Nope. You're an old-timer. I supposed you'd know 'em all. Not being under civil service, these deputies in the outside counties change with every election, so it's hard to keep track of 'em."

"Rinker must think we have nothing to do out here. I tell you what, Perry: I don't want to pass up a chance to find those rocks if they're hidden in this house, so I think I'll leave you here to finish the job of searching the place while I go out and see what the sheriff's got on his mind.

"After all, he may have the real gang of thieves, and these fellows in this place may be, as Miltiades said, a bunch of bootleggers. Or Miltiades may have scared 'em away from here, and they may have gone to the joint the sheriff spotted. You'd better go over every inch of this house while I'm gone. I should be back within an hour."

Perry sighed. "You never let me go along when there's a chance for some fun," he protested. "All right. I'll search the house."

KANE shivered as he opened the door and stepped out into the piercing breeze. He called down mumbled maledictions upon the head of Miltiades for ruining his coat. Then he bethought himself of the coat which had been snatched from the arm of that extraordinary person by Perry. He reëntered the house and slipped into the garment, which served to keep him warm during the three-mile drive to the city limits.

There he was hailed by a bronzed young fellow in a sheep-lined coat and high leather boots.

"I'm Deputy Sheriff Fairchild. You got the sheriff's message?" he began. "This is Detective Kane, isn't it? Where's your partner? We might need another man. This is the gang that's been running you boys ragged in town, all right.

"I'll hop into the car with you, and you can drive to the house—it isn't a quarter of a mile from here. The sheriff's watching it, to see that none of 'em get away."

Following the directions given by his guide, Kane turned into a side road. Two other cars, he noted in the windshield mirror, turned from the main highway and followed some distance behind.

"There's the place," his guide announced presently, pointing at an old frame house set back at the end of a lane some distance from the road.

"Their car is in the barn. The sheriff's watching it. I think you'd better wait here, while I go to the house and pretend to be a radio agent. I'll be back as soon as I get the lay of the land."

KANE could see no necessity for this reconnoitering. However, he was in the other's county and was without authority, so he deemed it best to let the deputy assume command. As his guide plodded down the lane, Kane turned and, with an uneasiness he was at a loss to explain, regarded the two cars approaching from behind.

But perhaps, after all, it was merely a coincidence that they had turned into the untraveled road so soon after his car had done so! Perhaps his suspicions were ungrounded, and they were ordinary travelers who would pass by without giving him a glance—

They didn't. He could see that both cars were filled with men, as the machines drove up alongside his own.

Kane drew forth the pearl-handled pistol and thrust it between the side of the seat and the cushion, ready for instant use. A roughly clad fellow climbed from the leading car and approached him.

"Say, partner," the man began, "do you know where the Wellington farms are located? I don't know whether we've missed the road, or not."

Kane replied that he had never heard of the place. But the other made no move to leave. For fully ten minutes he stood with one foot on the running-board, talking of the weather, the roads, his car, and a score of other things as inconsequential. At length, however, one of his companions hailed him impatiently, and he turned reluctantly and climbed into his machine again. A moment later both the other motorcars bumped off down the road and passed from sight around the next turn.

Kane was puzzled. He had been sure

the two machines had been following him. He could see nothing of his companion, who had walked down the lane to the frame house. For perhaps fifteen minutes longer he sat awaiting his return. At length, believing that harm might have befallen him, he resolved to go to the house himself.

He knocked at the door. There was no response. He peered through a window. At first he could see nobody. Then his glance fell upon something on the floor of the room within.

It was the form of his guide and companion, huddled in a heap, blood oozing from a great gash across his scalp!

CHAPTER VII

KANE thrust the muzzle of the pearl-handled pistol crashing through the windowpane. Then he reached in, unlatched the sash, raised the window and stepped through into the house. His finger pressing the trigger, he paused for the fraction of a second, looking about him and listening for sounds which might betray the presence in the house of his companion's assailant. Then he knelt by the side of the bleeding man.

He was still alive. Kane detected both pulse and respiration. There was no wound except the gash across the scalp, but Kane knew the blow must have been a powerful one. He wished that he knew whether it had caused a fracture of the skull, which would reduce the chance of recovery to one in a hundred.

In any event, Kane decided, the immediate attention of a surgeon was needed. He stepped into the hall and looked about for a telephone. There was none, the house having been stripped of all its furnishings when it had been abandoned. Cautiously he opened the sliding door leading to the room beyond the hall and, pistol in hand, peered within. The room was empty.

He returned to the hall, and noted that his companion must have been slugged from behind as he stepped through the door. Then he hurried through the remaining first-floor rooms and found them all deserted. He wished he had time to search the second floor and basement, but he knew that his promptness in procuring a doctor might mean life or death to the unconscious man in the hall.

He left through the back door, and ran immediately to the barn. But the sheriff, whom he expected to find posted there, was nowhere to be seen. The odor of burned gasoline told him that an automobile had been in the barn within a very few minutes.

He ran outside, and noted that the nearest dwelling was some three hundred yards to his left. He leaped a barbed-wire fence and set off across the frozen fields on a dead run, realizing that he could reach the place more quickly afoot than by seeking his car and taking the roundabout way by the road.

"Have you a telephone?" he demanded, panting, of the gardener who was harnessing a team of horses in front of the neighboring house. "I want to call a doctor. There's a man over there who may be dying!"

THE gardener called to his wife, who opened the door and showed Kane the telephone. He called the sheriff's office, fuming inwardly at the delay in making the connection.

"Hello! Sheriff's office?" he cried at length when it was completed. "This is Detective Kane. I'm down here with Sheriff Kerr and Deputy Fairchild at the house he tipped off to us awhile ago as the hang-out of the gang of crooks.

"Fairchild's been slugged, and may be dying. Send a doctor, quick. The sheriff's disappeared. I think he's chasing the gang who skipped from the house in a big car after slugging our deputy.

"What's that? This is Sheriff Kerr talking? . . . . How did you get back? . . . . What? You haven't left your office this morning? Then how about Deputy Fairchild, who met me at the county line and took me. . . . . What? You mean to say that Deputy Fairchild is in the office with you now?

"Why, I left him not three minutes ago, with a cut in his head eight inches long! . . . . Didn't you telephone Captain Rinker an hour ago that you had spotted the hang-out of the gang of diamond robbers? . . . . You didn't! Well, I'll be horn-swoggled! Say! It's beginning to seep through my skull, now.

"You better come down here right away, Sheriff. If this guy comes out of his trance, I'll hold him till you get here. And bring a doctor with you. All right."

Kane replaced the receiver with a bewildered expression. He thanked the gar-

dener's wife, and started back across the fields.

"Now what could his game have been?" he asked himself, completely mystified. "If he was a member of the gang, why did he want to lure me out here?

"And why, after he got me here, did the others knock him cold? And if he isn't a member of the mob, why did he telephone us at all? Wait! I'll bet I know the answer!

"The diamonds are still in the house on Sunset Heights. The gang somehow found out Perry and I were there. They planned this to get us away, so they could go back to the place and get the rocks. But when they found Perry had stayed there, and only I had come on this wild-goose chase, they got sore at this guy and beaned him! Wonder if they tried to get back into the house on Sunset Heights while Perry was there?"

HE climbed the fence and started up the steps of the house where he had found the pseudo-deputy, bleeding and unconscious.

"Hope he comes to pretty quick," he said to himself. "It would be a pity if he should die before I'd get a chance to talk to him. I've a hunch I can pump him for a lot of information."

He stepped through the door—and then staggered back in astonishment.

The pseudo-deputy was no longer there!

Where he had lain was a little patch of blood. But the man himself had vanished as utterly as if he had dissolved into thin air!

"Now, what in thunder!" Kane exclaimed, rubbing his eyes. "If they were sore enough to bend a sap over his head, why should they go to the trouble to come back and lug him away?"

Then he remembered his eagerness to question the fellow when he had recovered consciousness.

"I'll bet that's it!" he cried aloud. "He knew too much! They couldn't afford to leave him, to be questioned by police when he recovered. No sir—a fellow like that, who had been slugged by his pals, would be falling over himself to spill all he knew, to get back at them for the dirty deal they gave him."

And then he stopped, pondering.

"Still, why should they carry him away with them? An injured man would be a liability, increasing their chance of being caught. If they wanted to quiet him, why didn't they finish the job with a bullet when they returned? Another killing, more or less, wouldn't have troubled their consciences!"

WHILE awaiting the arrival of the sheriff, Kane made a thorough search of the premises—and found nothing. When at length the sheriff and a physician drove up to the house, he told them briefly what had happened, knowing that his story placed him in a ridiculous light.

He was glad the patch of blood was on the floor as proof of his tale; otherwise his hearers might have thought he had suddenly gone mad, and had imagined the wild tale he told them. It did not improve his feelings to see them smile.

"I guess there's nothing we can do," the sheriff announced. "We'll take you back to the city, if you want."

"Never mind," Kane returned. "My car's up on the road."

With mingled feelings of humiliation and bitterness, he watched them drive away. He closed the door in disgust, and started walking back up the lane toward the road. He had gone but a few yards when he saw that his battered little car was gone!

It was too late to recall the sheriff. He trudged on through the lane and down the road to the main highway, where he displayed his badge and commandeered a car to take him back to the city.

He stopped at the first drug-store he encountered and telephoned Captain Rinker, holding a lengthy conversation before he finally hung up and hailed a taxi to take him back to the house on Sunset Heights. He was still in an ugly temper as he climbed the steps of the bungalow and flung open the door.

He found himself gazing into the muzzle of a blue-steel automatic pistol.

"Stick 'em up!" came in grim tones from behind the weapon.

Kane lost no time in obeying the sharp command.

CHAPTER VIII

SUDDENLY the man who held the gun burst into laughter. Kane breathed a sigh of relief, and dropped his hands. It was his partner Perry.

"Why didn't you give me some warning who you were, before you pushed the door

open?" Perry demanded, chuckling. "You left me here to watch for the return of the bandits. Lucky I didn't shoot you!"

"Oh, shut up!" Kane burst out irritably, for he knew the criticism was well deserved. "Find anything in the house while I was gone? Any of the mob show up here?"

Perry, pistol still in hand, replied: "I went over every inch of the place, but I didn't find a thing. I defy anyone to take this house apart, brick by brick, and find those missing rocks.

"No, no one has come to the house except a peddler selling corn-salve. If I'd known you were coming back with corns on your disposition, I'd have told him to return later. Where'd you get the grouch?"

"You certainly sent me off on a wild chase," Kane said bitterly. "That phone-call was a fake. It was all a fake—"

He broke off abruptly, and his muscles tensed. From the door through which he had just entered came a velvety voice. It spoke but one word:

"Gentlemen!"

Kane glimpsed an expression of amazement on Perry's face. He whirled about, reaching for his gun. But his hand halted before it reached his pocket.

He saw a well-groomed little fellow whose smile of gentle amusement was belied by the hard glint in his piercing black eyes. But what arrested the detective's hand as it dived for his gun was the business end of an automatic pistol held waist-high in the little fellow's hand, but trained directly upon him.

Kane, gazing wide-eyed, saw the muzzle of the weapon jerk upward once or twice. He obeyed the unspoken command, and lifted his hands above his head.

"It is regrettable to have to disturb you," continued the gentle voice as the owner of the pistol stepped inside and closed the door behind him with his heel, never once taking his eyes from Kane's, "but—"

KANE heard a crash behind him, followed by the sound of running feet. He felt an almost overwhelming desire to turn, that he might see what had happened, but the unwavering eyes and the unwavering pistol held him.

"It is your young companion," his captor explained softly. "He leaped backward through the door, and fled. It was unwise, and foolhardy. Had the circumstances been different, I should have killed him, just as,—the little fellow paused to smile grimly,—"just as you gentlemen killed my good friend and coworker, Tuxedo Tim."

A surge of elation at Perry's escape swept over Kane. He was puzzled at the other's remark charging Perry and himself with the killing, but seized the opportunity to "stall" for time in the hope of aiding Perry's flight.

"Killed Tuxedo Tim? What do you mean?" he demanded. "We didn't kill Tuxedo Tim. I don't know what you're talking about. I think—"

"Perhaps not," smiled the owner of the piercing black eyes. "If not you or your friend, then it was some other member of your mob. By rights, you all deserve to die.

"Perhaps I shall kill you both. In fact, that's a promise, unless you choose to hand over— But let's step into the other room, so we can talk this matter over at our ease."

Kane turned, and with hands still aloft and the muzzle of the pistol pressed against his back, led the way into the living-room.

AT almost the same instant Perry appeared through an opposite door, his hands also aloft, marching in front of two burly ruffians.

"Very neatly done," commended Kane's captor. "Now, Slippery, if you'll relieve these gentlemen of their embarrassing impedimenta, we'll be ready to talk business."

One of the burly pair stowed his weapon and commenced to search Perry for arms.

"Yuh poor boob!" he commented as he took possession of Perry's pistol. "You're lucky the Weasel didn't drill yuh when yuh made that break!"

"The Weasel!" Kane exclaimed in amazement, turning to the little fellow. "So you're the Weasel!"

"Of course *you* couldn't have been expected to know that!" retorted the Weasel ironically. "I'm surprised you didn't take me for the Diamond Duke!"

"Shall we tie 'em?" the searcher asked of the Weasel, after he had removed the pearl-handled pistol from Kane's pocket and had tossed it upon a divan in the corner.

"By all means," the Weasel directed. "Their pals might show up at any moment. Or our young friend here"—point-

ing at Perry—"might take it into his head to jump for that gun, which might make it awkward for us."

HIS lieutenant, searching for something with which to bind them, came upon the remnants of Kane's coat, which Miltiades Miller had torn to shreds. He bound the two detectives, lashing their wrists behind them and tying their ankles.

"Those are very comfortable chairs," said the Weasel with a gesture of his pistol. "Pray be seated."

Kane and Perry hopped to the chairs which the Weasel had indicated.

"Now," said the latter, seating himself at the table, and toying with his pistol, "you know what we want. You kick through with the rocks, and we'll let you go. If you don't, it wont be two minutes before you're shaking hands with Tuxedo Tim in hell!"

"I wish we knew where they are," Kane replied fervently.

The Weasel's face hardened. His smile vanished. His beady black eyes seemed to bore through Kane as he leaned forward, pistol in hand.

"The time has come to quit stalling," he announced grimly. "Come—through—with—those—diamonds—or—"

He raised the pistol menacingly. A shiver passed through Kane's body. He felt a strange prickling at the roots of his hair. He had no doubt that the Weasel would carry out his threat.

"Look here," he protested nervously, "you seem to have got us wrong. You seem to think we killed Tuxedo Tim. I guess you think we've got the diamonds. I wish we did have 'em." He grinned. "If we had, you could have 'em, and welcome. But you've got me guessing." He hazarded a shot in the dark. "I thought all along that *you* were the one that got them."

"You *knew* that I was the one who turned the trick originally," retorted the Weasel. "But you know I haven't got 'em now. However, I'm through quibbling. I'm going to show you that I mean business.

"I'm going to shoot your young friend, there, right between the eyes. That ought to wake you up and show you the Weasel never bluffs.

"After I kill him, you'll have just thirty seconds to come clean with those rocks. If you don't, you'll go the route I'm sending him!"

Kane's freckled face blanched. He darted a glance at Perry. The latter was sitting erect, trying to force a defiant smile to his pallid lips as he met the Weasel's cold gaze.

The Weasel raised his pistol. Slowly he leveled it at Perry.

"Stop!" Kane screamed frantically. He had no concrete plan in mind, other than to halt the murderous design of the Weasel until he could talk him out of his evil plan, or delay him until help might come. "Stop! I'll tell you everything!"

But the Weasel pulled the trigger.

The crash of the pistol-shot in the closed room was terrific. Kane fell back in sickening horror. He heard the tinkle of broken glass. An instant later came another shot—and another.

He looked up—to see at the window the figure of a man with an undershot jaw and a big scar across his face, holding a pistol which spurted fire.

At the same instant another man, a dapper little fellow with a mustache like a trout-fly, burst through the door.

The Weasel dropped to the floor behind the table, his pistol blazing at the figure in the window. One of his lieutenants fell limply to the floor, like a sack of flour. Abruptly the firing ceased.

Four strange men had entered the room —and a woman.

Kane glanced at Perry. Perry was alive and grinning.

CHAPTER IX

"THIS is indeed a surprise!" came from the lips of the young woman, who might have been, judging from the trim, boyish suit with a gardenia in the buttonhole, the latest product of a fashionable finishing school. "The Bluebird returns to her nest and finds—this!

"Where she left a singularly obtuse young man trussed up neatly, she finds her most cherished enemy, the Weasel, with the members of his business organization, two of whom have been trussed up themselves.

"I'd suggest that hereafter you choose helpers whom you can trust. Snapper Sam, please relieve these gentlemen of their weapons. And drag that body out of my sight—I do so detest the sight of blood!"

Her blue eyes rested searchingly upon Kane for an instant. He guessed how she

had come by her name the Bluebird. The Weasel, who had come through the battle unscathed, rose from the floor behind the table, and flicked the dust from his knees with a dainty kerchief. He looked up at the young woman, and shrugged in token of his surrender.

"You would suggest," he inquired of her quizzically, "that I choose assistants I can trust—like, perhaps, the Diamond Duke?"

The Bluebird's eyes flashed fire for a moment.

"The Duke will never double-cross anyone again," she announced. "It seems I returned just in time to stop the—er—elimination of two of your assistants. May I inquire what they have done?"

"Don't you mean," the Weasel retorted uneasily, "*your* assistants?"

The Bluebird eyed him uncomprehendingly. He went on:

"Do you mean to say you don't know these men? I thought they were members of *your* little professional group!"

The Bluebird laughed lightly.

"You credit me with little discrimination in selecting my aides."

The Weasel chuckled mirthlessly. "Then you got here just in time to prevent a slight error on my part. I was about to—as you say—eliminate these two. As I prepared to fire at the younger, I caught sight of your assistant with the scar peering through the window, with his gun on me. So I shot at him instead."

"Why did you bring them *here* to kill them? It was very inconsiderate of you, though I admit I had planned something of the kind for one of my own assistants who thought he could double-cross me. You ought to know that the sight of blood is offensive to me."

"I didn't bring them. I found them here. When I appeared, the younger had his pistol on the other. I thought they belonged to you. When they wouldn't tell me what I wished to know, I determined to get rid of them."

"And what did you wish to know? Perhaps I can tell you."

"What's the use quibbling? You know as well as I what brought me here. I came for the diamonds. But I can't imagine why *you* came back, after you'd once left."

"I too came for the diamonds. I think I can tell you what these gentlemen"—she waved a tiny gloved hand at Kane and Perry—"could not tell you."

The Weasel's eyes narrowed. "Then the rocks are still here?"

"They are," announced the Bluebird, "unless these two intruders have made away with them. I'd like to turn these fellows over to the police for breaking into my house. In fact, I think that's what I'll do when I'm through with them."

She turned to Kane. "Who are you?" she inquired sweetly.

"We are city detectives," Kane announced boldly. "And every person in this room is under arrest for the theft of the Rand diamonds, and for the murder of Tuxedo Tim, the Diamond Duke and the man whose body was just dragged from this room!"

"Goodness!" exclaimed the Bluebird in mock dismay. "This is the first time I've ever been arrested. What a quaint situation! To be arrested by detectives whose hands and feet are tied! I suppose you're going to take us all to jail? Tell me, are you responsible for spiriting away the young man we left safely bound and gagged here?"

"You needn't worry about him," Kane evaded.

"Then you've taken him to jail? Lucky for him! We had, as I said, planned the same thing for him that the Weasel planned for you two. I'm curious to know what he told you."

"Everything," bluffed Kane.

"I'm not surprised in the least. And your appearance shows you're telling the truth," responded the Bluebird, but her meaning was not clear to the detective. "But it appears even your own partner was trying to double-cross you, and take the diamonds from you—if what the Weasel says is true about finding him covering you with his pistol. Stand up!"

KANE, who had remained in his chair during and after the gun battle, rose to his feet.

The Bluebird turned to the man she had addressed as Snapper Sam.

"Untie his hands," she directed.

In a moment Kane's hands were loosed.

"Take off his overcoat," she commanded.

Snapper Sam jerked Miltiades' coat from the detective's shoulders, and threw it across the table.

"Tie him up again."

Deftly Sam lashed Kane's wrists behind him.

"Sit down," she said to Kane. He did so.

The Bluebird shot a swift glance at the Weasel, and turned again to her assistant.

"I believe it would be well to tie my—er—competitor, likewise. Also his companion."

Presently the Weasel and his one remaining pal were bound, hand and foot.

"Now," announced the Bluebird, "we'll soon find out who was telling the truth—if any."

She took up the coat from the table and examined it closely. "That's the one," she said, half to herself. Leisurely she went through the pockets.

"You men," she asserted, "are certainly lacking in curiosity. Had I been in your place, I couldn't have resisted the temptation to have a look at them."

She opened her vanity case and extracted a tiny penknife. Then she took up the coat again, and holding it over the table, deftly ripped open the seams.

Ten sparkling objects, radiating flashes of fire from every facet, rolled out upon the table!

KANE groaned. And he had had the coat in his possession for more than two hours!

The Bluebird scooped up the brilliant stones and dropped them into her vanity case. She smiled at the greedy expression upon the Weasel's face.

"I think that's all, gentlemen. We shall retire, and leave you here together. When your policeman friends find you," she said to Kane, "you can turn the Weasel and his pal over to them on the charge of stealing these gems. For it's quite true they are the ones who stole them from—from the salesman."

Her companions filed out of the door, and she after them. But a moment later she reappeared, and spoke to the Weasel:

"They say," she said, "that there is honor among—among members of our profession. I am an idealist. I would like to believe that—in spite of things that have happened since last night to shatter that belief.

"I dislike to take unfair advantage of a competitor. If I take you and your partner with us, will, you promise to take the first train away from here, if we release you at the station?"

The Weasel, facing the alternative of a prison term if he refused, promised readily. The Bluebird called Snapper Sam back, and bade him cut their bonds.

"But keep their weapons," she added. "I'm afraid I'm not that much of an idealist."

A moment later Kane and Perry heard the door slam, and found themselves alone in the house, bound hand and foot.

CHAPTER X

PERRY groaned, struggling with his bonds.

"That was awful—to see those two gangs here together, and then to see them slip away with the diamonds," he said, charitably refraining from commenting on the fact that Kane had lost the stones after having had them in his possession for two hours. "But I'm all in a muddle over it, even yet. I know, by this time, there were two gangs involved, the Bluebird's and the Weasel's. But which one stole the diamonds? And who killed Tuxedo Tim and the Duke, and why?"

"I think, by this time, we can piece two and two together and make a connected story out of it," Kane replied. "This is the way I dope it out:

"Both gangs started after the diamonds, each without knowing the other was after 'em. And each used a different plan. The Bluebird planted the Duke as salesman with the jewelry house.

"The letters I found show how she did it. She simply inserted a 'blind' advertisement in the 'Help Wanted' columns of a newspaper, pretending to be a wholesale jewelry house in need of a salesman. The advertisement asked for references with the applications.

"From the applications received in answer to the ad, the Bluebird simply picked out the best set of references and turned them over to the Duke, who applied to the jewelry firm for a job and presented the references as his own. He used the name of the person whose application and references had been stolen, of course. The original application by Milton Chuven is among the papers I found in the basement. If the firm checked up on the references at all, they would find them legitimate—as they were, so far as the real Milton Chuven was concerned.

"The Diamond Duke, who got the salesman job, was to deliver the gems to the Bluebird here, and report that he'd been robbed. Of course he'd be discharged, but there could be no evidence that could be

used against him in a criminal prosecution. He'd simply join up with the Bluebird and the rest of her mob, and get his cut from the proceeds of the robbery.

"I think that's clear from the letters I have, and the fact that we know the man supposed to be the salesman was really the Duke.

"But meanwhile the Weasel, not knowing that the jewelry salesman was himself a crook and planted there for the robbery, planned a steal of his own.

"As it turned out, and as the Bluebird charged and the Weasel admitted, the Weasel and his gang actually pulled off the robbery at the Savoy Hotel, stealing the diamonds from the Duke, who they thought at that time was really a legitimate jewel salesman. He apparently never dreamed an attempt would be made to rob him, a robber himself, so he took no special pains to hide the gems.

"When he found he'd been robbed, he notified the Bluebird right off. That, I think, was one reason for the delay in reporting the job to the police. It might not have been reported even then, except they feared that, if they tried to hide the robbery, the firm would find out about it in a day or two at the most, and would put the police on the trail of the Diamond Duke—their trail. Or maybe they thought that so long as their own gang didn't get the diamonds, the other shouldn't either, if they could help it, and so notified the police for revenge.

"I think they decided that if the Duke went ahead in his rôle of jewel salesman, suspicion would be turned away from them while they were taking their own means of recovering the stones. Of course I don't know what was passing through the Bluebird's mind at the time, but that's the way I'd reconstruct what was taking place.

"The Weasel was too wise to leave the city after stealing the diamonds from the Duke. He knows that the best hiding-place is near the scene of the crime. So he and his companions went to the Treverton house—the first one we visited—prepared to stay, under cover, until the search died down.

"But meanwhile the Bluebird was on the trail of the missing rocks. How she traced the Weasel I don't know. Perhaps she knew he was in town, and knew no one else would have the nerve to try such a job.

"Anyhow, she and her mob raided the place, and in the scrap for the diamonds the Weasel's man Tuxedo Tim got his. She must have yelled when he was shot, if the neighbor's story is straight. Maybe she tells the truth when she says that the sight of blood upsets her. Anyway, she got back the diamonds, and brought them here to her hang-out.

"Meanwhile the Weasel, after reading in the papers that the body of Tim had been found, determined the Bluebird shouldn't keep the gems, even if he had to set the police on her. He was the one who phoned in the anonymous tip to Cap Rinker about this house on Sunset Heights. If you remember, the informant told Rinker the gang that had stolen the jewels had killed Tuxedo Tim—and up to that time, no one knew the dead man was Tuxedo except members of his own mob. That proves the tipper-off was the Weasel, or some other member of his mob.

"The Diamond Duke thought up a plan to throw the police off the track, should they get suspicious of Milton Chuven, the diamond salesman. He went straight to the Oxford Hotel and registered as Bern, the pawnbroker.

"Then, when the newspaper extras showed him the killing had been found out, he went to the morgue and identified the body as his own—as that of the Diamond Duke. He figured that if the police believed the Duke to be dead, they naturally wouldn't suspect the Duke of being in on the robbery—or at least, wouldn't keep up a search for such a man. But our wire to 'Frisco upset those plans.

"HE had another reason for covering his trail. He'd planned to double-cross the Bluebird, and along with another member of her gang, to get the whole loot to split between the two of them. The other gangster, who turned out to be the man we know as Miltiades Miller, agreed, but had no intention of letting the Duke get his share. According to their scheme, this other fellow was to lift the gems from the Bluebird and bring them to the Duke, who was to wait for him in a taxi on a busy street corner. The Duke, you must remember, while meeting the Bluebird and other members of the gang at night, was required to spend his days at the hotel, pretending to be the diamond salesman.

"The other gangster—the one we know as Miltiades—managed to cop the diamonds from the Bluebird, all right, and hid

them in the lining of his overcoat. But the theft was discovered before he could make a get-away.

"He owned up to the plot, but hoped to make his own escape with the rocks, and so told them the Duke already had the jewels. And he told them of his appointment with the Duke.

"But instead of letting him go, as he had expected, they tied him up and left him here while they hunted for the Duke, expecting to find him with the diamonds. They were taking no chances on being double-crossed again, you see.

"Then I broke into the house and found this fellow Miltiades. He proved he was a good liar, by sticking to the truth, except in essentials. For instance, the members of the bootlegger gang he described to me were members of the Bluebird's mob. He was afraid I might try to check up on his story by the neighbors, so he gave me real descriptions of real people.

"Perhaps you wonder how I reasoned this out. Well, to begin with, the Bluebird admitted killing the Duke—she said he'd double-crossed her. And she admitted she intended to kill Miltiades—said he'd double-crossed her too. So it's safe to assume the two were in cahoots. And their only reason to double-cross her would be to get hold of the loot for themselves.

"YOU know how Miltiades got away, and how you grabbed his coat, which had the diamonds in it, as he ran through the door.

"He was free, but had lost the jewels. What was the logical thing for him to do, under the circumstances? Why, to join up with the Weasel and get his help in getting the stones back.

"Of course the Weasel, who had everything to gain and nothing to lose, took up Miltiades' proposal. Miltiades gave him the phone-number of this house, and told him the diamonds were in this coat. They fixed a plan to get us away. If one of us took the coat, they could easily overpower him. If the coat was left behind in the house, it would just be so much the easier for them to get.

"It may have been accident or design that tolled me to the house in Jefferson County. If design, it was because they knew, in phoning us, they didn't dare represent it was Rinker or any other member of our department calling, for fear of being recognized. So whoever phoned—probably the Weasel himself—pretended to be Sheriff Kerr, and selected the abandoned house in Jefferson County as the spot to which we were to be lured. I think their plan was to get both of us away, and not me alone."

HERE Kane, who was still straining at his bonds in an attempt to free himself, gave Perry details of his visit to the house in Jefferson County. Then he continued:

"The plan worked—at first. The fake deputy who met me was one of the Weasel's mob. But just as we drove up to the end of the lane leading to the house, the two other cars pulled up behind me.

"The fake deputy went ahead, to tell them I was wearing the coat with rocks in it, and to get ready for my reception. But the Weasel saw three automobile loads of men at the end of the lane—my car and the two I thought had been following me. He reasoned that the fake deputy had given them away, and that the three cars contained police.

"So they simply knocked him over the head before he could say a word, and beat it. But I don't know yet why they came back and took him away.

"I guess that Miltiades got what was coming to him, too, for the supposed plot to turn them over to the police, which the Weasel of course would think was a little counter-plot engineered by the Bluebird to keep him from trying to get back the twice-stolen gems.

"At any rate, the Weasel had found out from Miltiades that the Bluebird and her gang had left this house, at least temporarily. So he came here, hoping to find the diamonds hidden somewhere on the premises. He found us, and jumped to the conclusion that we belonged to the Bluebird's gang.

"Meanwhile the Bluebird and her mob kept the appointment Miltiades had made with the Duke. Believing Miltiades' story that the Duke had the diamonds, they murdered him in the taxi and went through his pockets—and found nothing, of course.

"To dodge pursuit, they probably doubled back and forth through the streets, or else scattered, planning to meet here sometime later. When they did come back, they found the Weasel getting ready to blow out your brains.

"When the Bluebird found we were po-

lice, she jumped at the conclusion that we had captured Miltiades and had sent him to jail. As she knew by this time that he must have had the jewels hidden on his person, and as she saw I'd taken his overcoat, she assumed that the overcoat must be the hiding-place of the gems—which was right, except that I didn't know it. And that's about all there is to it."

"Not quite all!" came from the doorway as Kane completed his story. He started in astonishment, and turned to see —Miltiades!

CHAPTER XI

THE man was wearing an evil and triumphant grin.

"I've been listening for ten minutes," he announced, "and I give you credit for reconstructing the situation almost exactly, except for one thing: And that's what brings me back.

"When you released me from the custody of the Bluebird, and I joined forces with the Weasel, I learned many things, among them the real reason the robbery wasn't reported till long after it happened.

"The reason was because the Duke didn't know he'd been robbed, for the Weasel's gang had substituted a set of paste diamonds for the real ones. But he kept these paste jewels to himself, and said nothing to the Bluebird or the rest of us about them.

"Then, after the Bluebird's raid on the Weasel's gang had been pulled off, the Duke substituted the paste diamonds for the real ones.

"He didn't dare keep the real stones on his person for fear the Bluebird should discover the fraud and order us all searched. However, he told me nothing about this. I still thought the jewels the Bluebird had in her vanity case were the real ones.

"I think the Duke wanted to use me for a cat's-paw, or for a dummy to be captured when the substitution was discovered. But I was the one who suggested to the Duke the theft of the jewels from the Bluebird.

"Anyhow, we planned that I was to deliver the jewels to him in the taxi, under pretext of delivering his pistol. He phoned here early this morning, saying he'd forgotten the gun, and asking the Bluebird to have me bring it to him. He couldn't afford to be seen coming to this house, of course. I know now that the only reason the Duke agreed to my plan was so he could brand me as the real thief if the theft were discovered.

"As soon as I learned from the Weasel about the paste diamonds, I knew what had happened. They found no diamonds on the Duke's body when he was murdered. So I reasoned they were hidden somewhere in his hotel rooms, or here. I've searched the hotel rooms already. So they must be hidden here. That's why I've come back."

"But what happened to the man who pretended to be Deputy Fairchild?" asked Kane. He was stalling for time, for the ropes on his wrists had gotten almost loose enough for him to get his hand free.

"Him?" Miltiades laughed. "You thought the Weasel came back and took him away. I can tell you nothing of the kind happened. He simply came back to his senses and walked out while you were telephoning, and stole your car and drove away. That's all."

KANE felt the strip of cloth about his wrists give as he pried his hands apart. Pushing one hand down behind him, and drawing the other up, he suddenly felt his wrists free!

But his feet were still bound. He watched as Miltiades approached the divan in the corner and picked up the pearl-handled pistol from the spot where it had been cast when the Weasel's lieutenant had disarmed him.

"I see they didn't take the Duke's gat," Miltiades laughed. "Guess I'll keep it as a memento. I need a gun. Well, I'm going to find the real diamonds now, if I have to tear this house apart."

"No use," Perry announced. "I went over it once."

Miltiades shrugged contemptuously, and turned toward the door.

Instantly, but noiselessly, Kane rose to his feet. Miltiades was perhaps twenty feet distant—and Kane's feet were still tied. He reasoned that he could reach the gangster in three leaps, if he did not overbalance. He winked at Perry. Then he hopped forward.

At the crash caused when his bound feet struck the floor together, Miltiades whipped about.

Kane leaped again. Miltiades raised the pistol. He pointed it straight at the

face of the oncoming detective, and pulled the trigger!

There was no explosion. Kane crashed into him, head-on. Miltiades stumbled backward, tripped and fell. Kane had sought to knock him off his balance by the force of his own rush, knowing he would be no match for the fellow so long as his feet were tied and they were standing.

An instant later they were locked in each other's arms, struggling on the floor.

His bound feet proved a decided disadvantage. Kane felt himself rolled over on his back. He saw Miltiades raise his pistol, to strike him over the head.

Then Miltiades was knocked over as if he had been struck by a battering ram. Perry, unable to free himself, had hopped forward to take whatever part he could in the battle.

As the two had rolled over, Miltiades uppermost, Perry had thrown himself head first at the gangster and had literally butted him off the prostrate form of Kane.

The pistol dropped from Miltiades' hand. Kane seized it. He hunched himself forward on hands and knees and struck. Miltiades dropped to the floor limply.

"Quick!" Kane called to Perry. "Roll across that fellow and hold him down till I get my feet untied. If he comes to before I get loose, we're out of luck!"

PERRY did as directed. A moment later Kane had loosed his feet, and had unfastened Perry's bonds.

"Gosh!" the younger man exclaimed. "I thought you were a goner when he threw down on you with that gat and pulled the trigger! It must have been empty."

"It wasn't empty," Kane responded, stooping, "because here's the ejected shell." He glanced at it, and something about its appearance caught his eye.

"Somebody's been monkeying with this," he announced. "This bullet's not in line with the shell."

He worked the steel-jacketed bullet between thumb and finger, and succeeded in twisting it from its brass case.

Into his palm rolled, from inside the brass shell, a glittering diamond!

Kane cried aloud.

"Here they are, Perry!" he almost shrieked. "We've found the real diamonds! No wonder the pistol wouldn't work when Miltiades tried to kill me. The powder had been emptied from every shell, and a diamond had been hidden in each one!"

Perry whooped with joy. "Now I see why the Duke wanted Miltiades to bring him his pistol," he cried. "Pretty shrewd of the Duke, to hide the real diamonds in these cartridges, and then to induce Miltiades to bring them to him, believing the real gems were the ones hidden in the coat.

"Kane, old boy, you owe your life to the fact that these shells contained diamonds, and not powder!"

Kane extracted the cartridge clip from the pistol. He shook each of the remaining shells close to his ear, assuring himself from the rattle that each contained a diamond.

"I'm glad," said Perry with a sigh of relief, "that even if the Bluebird and the Weasel and the rest of 'em got away, we got the real diamonds back, and bagged this one bird. Gosh, wont the Bluebird rave when she finds the rocks she got are nothing but paste?"

"They wont let her take the paste diamonds with her to her cell," Kane smiled.

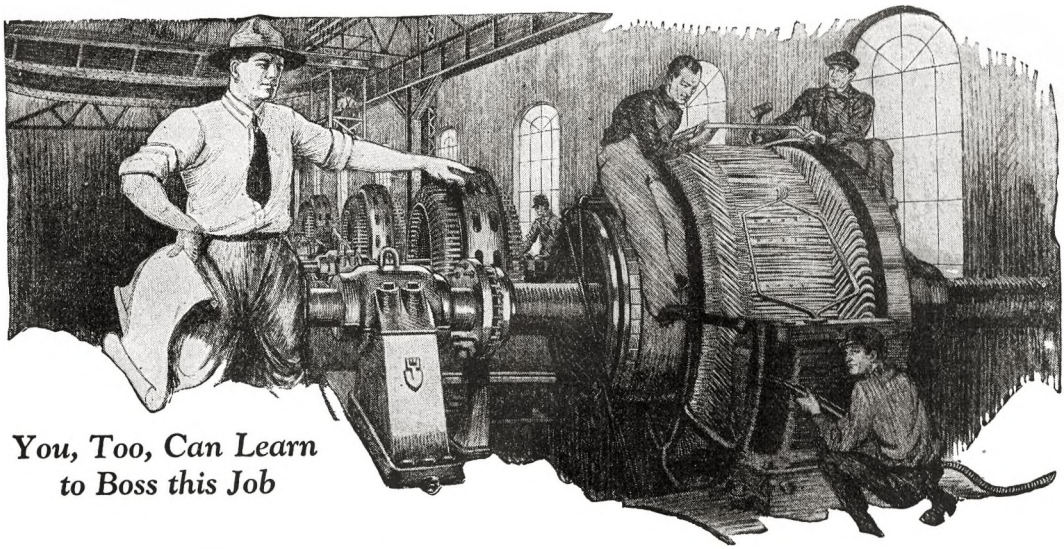
"What do you mean?"

"Simply that both the Bluebird and the Weasel and all their helpers, are in jail by this time.

"As I was coming back from the house in Jefferson County, I stopped at a drug-store and phoned Cap Rinker. So for the last forty minutes Snider and Martin and a squad of harness bulls have had this house surrounded, with orders to let anyone come in, but to pinch anyone and everyone leaving the place!

"Let's turn Miltiades over to the boys outside, and turn in the jewels to Cap Rinker, and then go have some coffee and sinkers. I don't like these cases that interfere with your meals."

THE END



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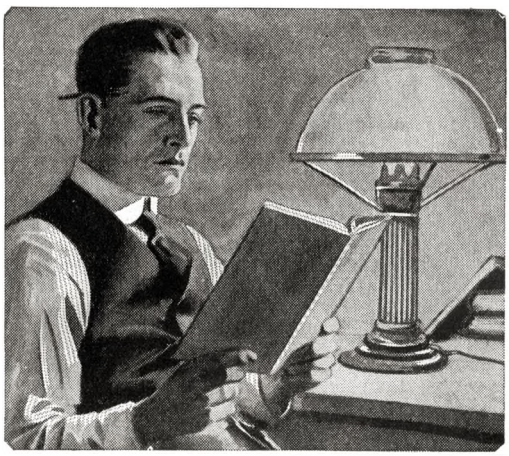

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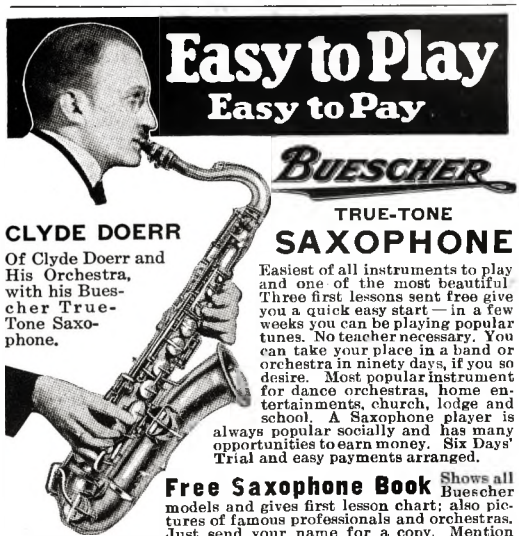

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Here's Positive Proof That I Can Grow New Hair

These are true, unretouched photographs showing Mr. Murray Sandow's hair before—and 60 days after using my remarkable new treatment for baldness and falling hair. This is not a rare instance. Many others report equally astonishing results. To try my new discovery you need not risk a cent. For I positively *guarantee* results or charge you nothing. Mail coupon below for booklet describing my treatment and 30 Day Trial offer in detail.

By ALOIS MERKE

Founder of Merke Institute, Fifth Ave., N. Y.

FOR many months you have seen announcements concerning my new treatment for baldness and falling hair. If you are bald and have tried other treatments without results then naturally you are skeptical. All right, I don't blame you.

But what better PROOF is there that I can *actually grow new hair* than these two photographs reproduced above. They illustrate a result that hundreds of others have written us they too have secured through use of my marvelous discovery. In this particular case, Mr. Murray Sandow, of New York City, started my treatment January 23, 1924—and sixty days later—as you can see—he had an almost entirely new growth of hair.

Entirely New Method

My invention involves the application of new principles in stimulating hair growth. It proves that in many cases of baldness—the hair roots are not *dead*—but merely *dormant*. The reason tonics and other treatments fail to grow new hair is because they do not *reach* these *dormant hair roots*, but instead simply treat the *surface* of the scalp.

To make a tree grow you could not rub "growing fluid" on the bark. Instead you would get right to the roots. And so it is with the hair.

No Excuse for Most Baldness

At the Merke Institute on Fifth Avenue, New York, I've treated scores of prominent stage and social celebrities—some paying as high as $500 for the results my methods produced. Yet now by means of The Merke Thermocap Treatment, adapting the same principles to home use—thousands of men and women everywhere are securing the desired results—right in any home where there is electricity—*and for just a few cents a day!*

I don't say my treatment will grow hair in every case. There are some cases that nothing in the world can help. But since so many others have regained hair this new way, isn't it worth a trial—especially since you do not risk a penny? For at the end of a month if you are not more than delighted with the growth of hair produced, you won't be out a cent. That's my absolute *Guarantee*. AND YOU ARE THE SOLE JUDGE.

Coupon Brings FREE Book

No matter how thin your hair may be—no matter how many methods you have tried without results, send at once for the 32-page book telling about this wonderful SCIENTIFIC TREATMENT. It gives scores of reports from others which indicate what this treatment will mean to you. Merely fill in and mail the coupon below and I will gladly send you the vitally interesting 32-page booklet giving full details about the famous Merke Thermocap Treatment. Clip and mail the coupon today. **Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept. 761, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.**

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Please send me, without cost or obligation on my part, the free copy of the new booklet describing in detail the Merke Thermocap treatment.

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