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JULY 1926
THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
N.S.E.

Two Great Novels of the West

"The Lost Frontier" and "A Man's a Man"

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JULY 1926 THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE VOL. 43 No. 3

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THE BLUE BOOK

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A Lively Short Novel

Twelve Memorable Short Stories

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MAGAZINE

JULY, 1926

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

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

Dear Fred:

Tomorrow is our eighth wedding anniversary — haven't the years flown by! How carefree we were, how hopefully we started out just eight years ago! You were going to work so hard and get ahead so fast, remember?

You have worked hard. I've seen the tired worried lines in your face that prove it. And I've worked hard too, since the children came — worked to make the same old salary enough for the four of us, worked to make one dollar carry the burden of two.

Understand, dear, I'm not complaining. I'm not thinking about me — I'm thinking about you. Often I've wondered, lying awake at night, why some of the men we know have gone ahead while you haven't — men who haven't any more brains and aren't half as nice as you. Remember that first disappointment when Joe Edwards was made assistant to the president? You wanted that promotion, and you were ahead of Joe. But they told you that he had the all-round training you lacked.

Dearest, it's gone on a long time now. You come home tired at night, and there are bills to pay, and we have a scene, and you say you "simply must make more money" — and then you never seem to do anything about it. Can't something be done? I want to help you succeed while we are still young. Isn't there a way?

Your loving wife,

Helen

Letters wives don't write
to their unsuccessful husbands

ON your desk, or in your heart, is the picture of your real employer—the woman for whom you work. She is your partner, but she is also your judge. She knows better than anyone else whether you have lived up to your real possibilities.

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The Institute will do just this for you: thru its Modern Business Course and Service it will give you a thoro understanding of all phases and departments of business; it will train you for increased responsibilities, prepare you for more important work, make you worth more money to your business and to yourself.

No matter what your position or income, you ought to read the famous little book called "Forging Ahead in Business." It is yours for the asking. You ought to read it; not merely for your own sake; not even *principally* for your own sake—but for the sake of the woman, and the children, who are the real judge and jury upon your career.

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THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 43 JULY 1926 No. 3

Your Best Vacation

YOUR happiest holiday is also the easiest, the cheapest and the most frequent. To drop the routine of everyday life, visit new places, meet new people: that is the vacation idea. And this so-excellent idea is best carried out—most readily, most often, at the least expense—through your favorite magazine.

In the pages which follow, for example, you may go to a real old-fashioned Wild West town with C. E. Pladwell in "The Lost Frontier," may visit France with H. Bedford-Jones in "The Cibourne Trail," may voyage to South Africa with Stephen Hopkins Orcutt in "Nerve"—may take nearly a score of fine vacation trips. And they will in no sense be mere tame tourist travels, either, but voyages of discovery, replete with excitement, with novelty and colorful experience.

And next month likewise you may travel far, wide and handsomely in these pages. In "The Fighting Love," Rosita Forbes will take you to Tripoli and the Sahara—to a great adventure and a colorful romance that you will not soon forget. And Clarence Herbert New will take you to Europe and the company of distinguished folk in his "Free Lances in Diplomacy;" and Stephen Hopkins Orcutt will offer you a fascinating cruise to the Orient in his "Tales of the Merchant Marine."

Again H. Bedford-Jones will personally conduct you to France along with his amazing detective Clancy; once more C. E. Pladwell will take you to ride the range of the real West in "The Lost Frontier." Lemuel De Bra will escort you to darkest Chinatown and reveal its fascinating mysteries in the first of a new series, "Gar Sing Makes a Profit." Homer King Gordon will carry you off on a thrilling airplane flight in "Landlocked Wings."

And there'll be many another delightful vacation offered you, by writers who well know their country and their people and their story-telling art—in the North Woods, in the Rockies, at sea, in the Arctic and where-not. For The Blue Book Magazine has long been noted for its stories of out-door life, and in this coming August issue there will be an especially notable collection of them.

Five of our readers, moreover, will tell for the rest of the family the stories of their most remarkable real experiences—and they will be really remarkable stories, too.

Vacation time? It comes every month for Blue Book Magazine readers.

—*The Editors.*

"Back away, you children! Make way for a man and his hoss!"

—to accompany "A Man's a Man," page 136

Masterson reached back to his hip and swung out the revolver.

The Lost Frontier

By C. E. PLADWELL

Illustrated by O. E. Hake

Hidden away in the mountains, Masterson found one forgotten region where the turbulent life of the old frontier still survived untamed and rebellious. He was looking for adventure—and Lord knows, he found it, heaped full and running over. You will find the real thing in this high-spirited novel.

THE engineering staff of the Rusk Construction Company of Jersey City called John Masterson the assayer—and sometimes the thinker: not that he produced nuggets of metal or philosophy, but because he had a trick of looking with ruminative brown eyes at people until they had the awful feeling that they were measured, weighed and filed away with notes about their words, manners and inmost thoughts.

"Tell me," asked President Amos Rusk, glancing at the rows of desks and drafting-tables to make sure that everybody was working well, "where did you learn the habit of staring into people the way you do? Is it concentration on their language, or thoughts, or what?"

Masterson stretched on his high chair. He was only partially conscious of the habit, and it struck him that it might have come from sheer weariness; the deadening weariness of a man in uncongenial work, given a chance to sit and listen while somebody's tongue rambled on and on; but he sensed it was a little more than that.

"I can't tell," he admitted, to his pencil. "Maybe I got it during boyhood. People lied or told me tall yarns. I tried to figure out the truth. That's all I know."

"H'm! Maybe it's logical, but it's certainly embarrassing to the other fellow!"

Masterson looked past the window toward the grimy outlines of many factories and stacks whose smoke blackened the far sky-line. He was trying not to stare at President Rusk.

"I'll tone it down," he murmured.

"Tone, nothing! I might call it your saving grace. When you deal with these materials-salesmen, it's invaluable. I think you'd better handle all the salesmen in the future. It will mean a raise in your salary, of course."

THE glass door opened, and a tall and ultra-stylish young woman entered, nodding to the office force and lastly to Masterson and President Rusk. She was the old man's daughter, a brunette of twenty-four, with delicate shadows around her eyes and the manner of a person perfectly conscious of her power to charm.

"Daddy, dear!" She glided to her sire, emanating a faint perfume. "Aren't you working our poor dear Westerner too much? He looks *so* droopy!"

"He shouldn't be," retorted the president, jouncing up and down on his toes. "I have just given him a raise!"

"Oh, isn't that just *glorious?* Isn't it perfectly *lovely?* We'll surely have to celebrate!" And she gave Masterson an oblique glance, fluttering her long black eyelashes.

John Masterson had celebrated once before with Julia Rusk. It was on the occasion of a small previous raise in salary. At that time he was enthralled by this condescension by so royal a princess; but the celebration had cost him one hundred and twenty-two dollars and a night of continuous grief trying to keep up with persons dancing jingle-jangle dances to the tune of bing-bang music.

"Certainly," he muttered. "We'll—we'll have to do something original this time. I hated that dance."

"You're not very complimentary!" she chided with a slight pout. "Still, something original sounds enticing. I'll leave it to you. I'm sure it will be *wonderful!*"

He tried to make it wonderful next week, but it wasn't and he knew it, though Julia Rusk was almost gushing in her appreciation, which rubbed it in.

"I'm run down," he explained in apology, when at last he brought her home in a rented car. "I'm going to take a course of exercises."

"Now, don't overdo it!" she cooed. "Poor boy, you *do* look tired! Take a good rest, it will do you a world of good, and I'll see you *real* soon!"

Next day he started evolutions in a gymnasium, sparring, wrestling, swimming, fencing and leaping hurdles, trying by sheer physical exertion to undo the ravages made by mental slogging from nine in the morning to seven at night. He developed a stubborn devotion to it; Julia Rusk was neglected and became aloof, as he fought to improve his physique; but the Rusk Construction Company demanded even more of his time, until at last he took his exercises frantically, like a man battling to the last ditch, refusing to surrender despite the furious demands upon his time. Eventually he came to the logical ending.

He arose from his desk on a morning when the fog held down the smoke from near-by factories so that the air outside his grimy window was like the gray of a sewer. He stretched, kicked back his chair with a bang, swayed, straightened, flexed his arms, clenched his fists, and crashed one of them on his desk.

"I'm through!" he yelled.

A DOZEN startled men swung around. The stout, bald steel-estimator peered out from under a green eye-shade.

"Sit down!" he ordered. "What's the matter with you?"

"No. I'm through." Masterson jerked out the top drawer of his desk and dumped its pens, dividers and papers into a wire wastebasket. The action brought the office up standing.

"Here—what's the matter?" bawled the steel-estimator, starting toward Masterson. "Stop that! Have you gone crazy?"

"No—sane. I'm through. I've had enough. I've been a square peg in a round hole; it's not my sort of game; these damned figures are driving me mad! Give my job to some one that likes it!"

"Jack!" pleaded the spectacled old gray-haired chief clerk, coming up on the flank. "Don't talk like that! You need a rest, that's all. A good rest! I've seen men break down before!"

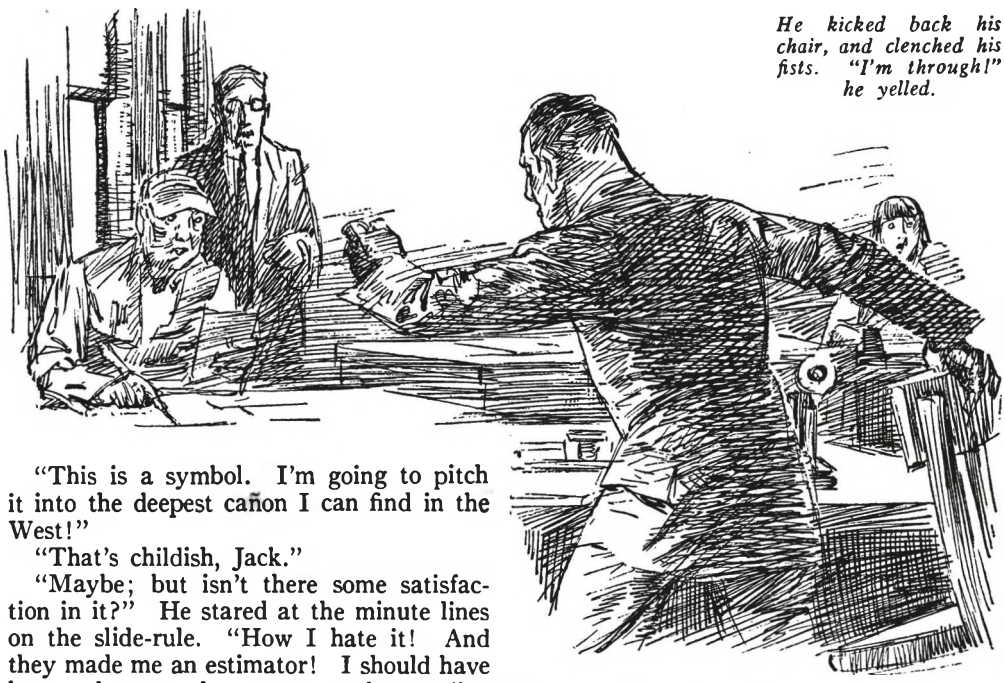
Masterson looked at him, into his eyes and beyond. That last sentence had turned exasperation to cold thought. Yes, the chief clerk, a just and kindly friend, had seen many men break down—weak men, perhaps, or strong ones in the wrong jobs; it didn't matter, for the result was the same. Masterson's eyes, gazing through the chief clerk, saw a long procession of crushed men—

"Look outside the window," he blurted. "What do you see?" They peered out, then at him in perplexity. "You see grime. We've got a continent blazing in sunshine, and yet I'm supposed to get in under this tiny patch of soot and say that I belong!"

The chief clerk took him to dinner that night in a quiet little restaurant in lower New York. The older man was soothing, like a nurse cajoling a sick child; but he found his subject obstinate.

"No, I'm not foolish, Jim," insisted Masterson. "I've only awakened to find that I've *been* foolish. I feel that a burden has fallen off my shoulders. I'm going West. I'm going to celebrate. Look here!"

He drew from an inside pocket his white slide-rule with its accurate little bluish lines of spaces and figures, crossed by a glittering clip of steel.



He kicked back his chair, and clenched his fists. "I'm through!" he yelled.

"This is a symbol. I'm going to pitch it into the deepest cañon I can find in the West!"

"That's childish, Jack."

"Maybe; but isn't there some satisfaction in it?" He stared at the minute lines on the slide-rule. "How I hate it! And they made me an estimator! I should have been a horse-trader—or a cavalryman."

The lines on the chief clerk's narrow forehead wrinkled with concern. Masterson noticed it and smiled. He was boyish when he smiled. It matched his tousled chestnut hair and the jaunty set of his well-tailored shoulders, but the weary look in his brown eyes nullified it all. The kindly old chief clerk sighed.

"If you want the outdoors, Jack, we'll fix you up in a field party."

"Field party—transits and computations, records and reports! No, Jim, my brain reels when I look at a figure; I'm saturated. I'm going out with a lot of hard-bitten ruffians on some cattle-ranch where they think a logarithm is some sort of wood. I'm going to look again for the lost frontier—the old frontier of my fathers."

"You mean, you'd lower yourself?"

Masterson looked at him.

"You don't understand, Jim. I was brought up on a Nevada cattle-ranch; I'm hankering for a smell of the greasewood again. My folks made me an engineer because they wanted their son to be a gentleman, but maybe I'm homesick." He smiled again, showing regular teeth. "Does a person have to be an engineer to be a gentleman, Jim? When his folks are gone and the obligation has ended?"

"You'd starve mentally," dissented the chief clerk. "You've been a city man. They can't go back. You'd be bored."

Masterson's stubborn jaw tightened, for even his eyes could not see his terrific future as he plunged toward it.

"You're right, Jim—right. I've got to find some place where it isn't dull. I'm going to head for the roughest place I can find. I want physical action. Maybe through it all I'm feeling the call of the mountains and valleys. . . . . Like a sick man going home! I wonder if there's any frontier left."

THE chief clerk informed the president that Masterson was incurable. The president's farewell was courteous but hasty, like that of a man patting a dog likely to bite. The president's daughter was charming though reproachful.

"You are going to miss many opportunities!" she chided in her sirupy voice.

"I'm sorry, of course," he mumbled. "That's too bad."

"But you'll write us, wont you?"

"Yes. Certainly. Of course. Certainly."

Looking back at it later, he felt it was highly ungracious; but by that time he was facing tough realities which crowded Julia Rusk out of his mind. In El Paso he met a fuzzy-faced sheep-herder who had once been a dubious roustabout in the engineer battalion of the A. E. F., where Masterson had been a dubious second lieutenant. Previous rank was ignored, especially by the sheep-herder.

"Yeh, I used to wanna shoot you birds in the Sam Brownes, but you was a pretty decent guy, and you didn't pull any rough stuff—at least on me; and I'm willin' to let bygones be bygones. Let's have a drink on it."

Masterson, trying to fall in with local customs, let himself be drawn to a prosperous edifice festooned with large awnings like canvas on a full-rigged ship. Under the awnings, the flagstones were warm; beyond them the pavement was like burning copper. He pitied the street-traffic.

"So you want to find a tough town," mused his companion. "Huh! What's the idea?"

"I need local color."

"Oh. I get you. Sure. You've got a round-trip ticket, and you wanna look at the he-cowboys for a coupla days so's you can go back to Brooklyn and write. Send me a copy, will you?"

The pupils of Masterson's dark eyes twinkled.

"Where did you get that idea?" he demanded.

"I see 'em all the time. I read about the rich color of the real West! Blah! Where do they get that stuff? In New Mexico? Say, the only fella who pulled a gun in New Mexico all last week was a guy in Albuquerque who didn't like the villain in a movie-show. He was stewed. The usher turned him over to the cops."

"How about Arizona?" demanded Masterson.

"Flivver-hospitals in every town. Tourist retreat every mile. I tell you, the whole country's gettin' so plumb good she's monotonous."

"Tucson?"

"The raspberry-ice-cream-sody business has boosted seven thousand per cent in one year. The tourists started it, but it's gettin' to the populace. The West has been swallered by the East. Why, it's got so bad that the cowpunchers wear handkerchiefs in their sleeves and call each other Gussie!"

"How about Taos, the Indian land of legend?"

"That dump? Hot-dog and sody-pop stands. The Injuns throw snake-dances for tourists at four bits per snake. Special rates for parties over twenty. Lots of the Injuns got so tired of bein' waked up at night to throw snake-dances that they've gone back to New York to get a rest among the taxicabs and trolleys. They're plumb worn out."

"How's Santa Fe?"

"Chamber of Commerce, civic pride, 'Watch Us Grow.' No, Mister—you might as well stick around here for your vacation. I can fill you up on all the Wild West bull you want. Mebbe we can make a deal. You furnish the drink from over in Juarez; I'll furnish the bull. You wont know the diff'; nobody will."

Masterson laughed.

"Why, you poor, unregenerate sheep-herder," he scoffed, unconscious that he was relapsing into the old vernacular of his boyhood, "I was born and raised in Nevada, before the gold-rush! You wouldn't be worth your drink!"

The sheep-herder's glance swept over Masterson's figure.

"Ya! Tailored clothes, tourist shoes, tourist hat, tourist suitcase, tourist! Well, if you're from Nevada, whadja come south for?"

"Nevada's too tame. I want to see wild life. I want adventure."

THE sheep-herder began to look suspicious and resentful, trying to gauge the twinkle in Masterson's eyes.

"Huh! Well, since you've started kiddin' me, mebbe I'll give you what you want. You wanna tough town, hey? All right—go up to Worth, New Mexico. They're so tough up there that they blow their dinners into their mouths with six-shooters. Every day they don't have a funeral, they go out and get one. Tourists don't go up there, because they use the hides of tourists for mops to clean the barroom floors. The Southern Pacific didn't dare go near Worth, so they sent out a branch line within fifty miles, and then they let a little crazy railroad company go the rest of the way, so there wouldn't be much damage if the trains did get blown up. If the people up in Worth don't happen to be usin' the train for kin-

dlin' wood, maybe you'll be able to get up there. If you get past the first barrage of bullets at the station, mebbe you'll be able to reach a hotel on the main street—provided they haven't burned it down lately. Then they can kill you in bed."

"Sounds like a nice town," nodded Masterson. "It's just what I want. What is it—mining camp or cattle-country?"

"Cattle, what there is of it. The town's off the railroad and off the tourist highways. They aint picturesque like Taos or the Grand Cañon, you see, so they can live their own lives. I guess it's about the last of the old free range, at that. If you want local color, go to Worth. They'll plaster it all over you."

Masterson looked at him and then through him. Beyond the sheep-herder's carefree exaggeration he caught its great, enticing suggestion.

"I'm going to Worth," he decided. "Where is it?"

The sheep-herder pointed to a map on the wall, explaining all the detail.

"Give my regards to Big Pete Kelly," he added. "He runs the town. Maybe he'll like you. If he does, you're in luck. If not, not."

Masterson took the next train, but the outline of his figure was very different. The sheep-herder's comment about tourist clothes was not lost; and the Masterson who left the vast arcade depot was a fellow in a broad-brimmed hat, a soft cotton shirt, a suit of gray-black clothes bought off the counter of a cheap emporium, and a pair of broad and heavy tan shoes whose copper lace-hooks were large and aggressive.

But there were no bullets whizzing when he arrived at Worth, carrying a secondhand bag. There was nothing to see but an old yellow sun-cracked depot which stood like a barricade at the southern end of a long street running north and south, along the base of a range of round, bare brownish hills. The upper or western side of the street was lined with buildings, as if they had all voted to stand in the dominant positions, leaving the downhill side of the street vacant except for a few shacks and several cross-roads, and a long vista of sand, tarweed and sage.

Masterson trudged to a near-by ramshackle two-story building, dubbed "hotel," from whose broad porch he observed that the whole town was aligned on a straight front which looked down upon a long cultivated valley bounded by bare round mountains, with indications that taller ranges lay beyond.

He registered at the counter in the hotel's little office, hardly bigger than a kitchen, with stairs behind the counter.

"Tourist?" inquired the gray-headed hotel man, in a sweaty checked shirt.

"Rider," corrected Masterson.

"Huh!"

"Been away from the range several years. Just got back."

"Oh."

"Do you know where I can get a job?"

"Cattle?"

"Yep."

"Huh." The hotel man fingered his stubby beard. "Now, that's funny. Mebbe you can. Stranger in these parts?"

"Yep."

"Well, that's a good thing. The Sand River outfit's in town. They're lookin' for men, but they're a leetle mite s'picious who they take. They've got sort of a feud on."

It was music to Masterson's ears just then.

"What kind of a feud?" he inquired.

"Aw, bickerin' with the Karl Kling outfit. They're always bickerin'; it don't mean much, but each side's skeered somebody'll put somethin' over. If you give 'em the right song-an'-dance, mebbe you can get on. They're unloadin' hay over at the freight-station. Tell 'em I sent you."

JOHN MASTERSON, in overalls, went to work next morning with a hard-faced gang under the hot sun, thanking heaven for the gymnasium work which had kept him in prime physical condition. His fellows—cursing this menial labor but stubbornly wearing their high-heeled boots through it all—gave him shrewd glances from eyes marked with crow-feet by sun and wind, and finally were forced to admit that he could hold their pace. Then they thawed.

They finished their long task after dark. Masterson started for his hotel.

"Stick around," offered a short, hard-faced rider. "We're goin' to Pete Kelly's place after a while. You wanna see Pete Kelly's place. Second biggest joint in the State."

"I'll be there," promised Masterson, wanting to be a good sport, despite his weariness. "Wait for me."

He cleaned himself, changed clothes, wrote a short but jovial note to the chief

clerk, and at last went down to the street, where ten different kinds of music blared out of windows of various dance-halls and other establishments aligned along the board walk. He cocked his head, trying to think where he had heard such clashing music before; and then he remembered. Coney Island, with its merry-go-rounds and automatic wheezes, all going at once! But the Coney Island atmosphere faded. Into his nostrils came the smell of greasewood; the heavy and pungent odor like a mixture of hot grease flavored with sage, which can whiff into the nose of a Westerner and tell him he has come home.

"I think I'm going to like this place," he informed himself. "It's naughty, but it's nice. The chief clerk said I couldn't go back! Huh!"

He pounded along the walk toward a gambling-hall whose myriad lights shone from a lonely eminence some distance beyond the town.

CHAPTER II

THE Imperial Club was a structure of magnificent length, enormous width and barnlike architecture, where high hanging lamps blazed down upon a crowd of moving figures ranging from reservation Indians to rich tourists.

Masterson ambled up to the wide porch, sauntered inside and threaded his way through the crowd in front of a long bar, bringing up in a quiet corner near the front wall.

Suddenly he saw the short little cowpuncher, waving at him. Around Shorty were four other Sand River men, their heads very close together. Masterson nodded and went over there.

"Listen!" whispered the little puncher. "There's some fellas from the K-K outfit ridin' to town. How about it?"

The four looked at each other and began to grin. Enterprise gleamed in their eyes. They were young; they were tough; and Masterson saw they were already well edged with liquor.

"They're comin' by the east road," urged the little spokesman with a sharp glance at Masterson. "We can lay in the ditch over by Hardman's barn and smash 'em. Are you with me? How about you, Jack?"

Masterson leaned back against an empty poker-table, tipping it. His attitude suggested reluctance.

"Well?" snapped Shorty. "Are you with us?"

Masterson frowned at the sawdust floor. Any observer could see that he was with them but not yet of them. He sensed his dissimilarity and hated to have it shown up so early; but facts were facts.

"You're drunk, Shorty," he objected. "Forget it!"

"Forget it? With them guys ridin' in from Kling's? Say, what do you think this is—a knittin'-circle? Come out of it! Are you with us, or not?"

"No. Why should I be?"

"Why should you? Aint you one of the Sand River outfit?"

Masterson, hesitated, feeling his way. Into his ears came the somber words of the chief clerk: "You can't go back—you'd lower yourself."

"I've worked with you one day, Shorty," he demurred.

But Shorty had the insistent stubbornness of a drunken man.

"Well, what of that? You signed on the Sand River pay-roll, didn't you? You're one of the gang, aint you?"

The little cowpuncher's argument was so forceful that its victim was hard put to reply. Grinning faces nodded. An urging hand was laid on Masterson's shoulder. He writhed from under.

"No!" he pleaded. "That's not square. I don't know those other men; I hardly know you fellows. I don't even know what it's all about!"

Shorty's eyes showed uncertainty, but his mouth clamped in a grim line. He didn't like to back up.

"You knew there was a war on!" he insisted.

"Yes; but that's about all."

The puncher's voice advertised that his patience was going.

"Well, what more do you want? Those crooks over at the Karl Kling ranch have busted our fences, chased our cattle, lamed our horses, beaten up our men—"

Another rider's thick bass voice tolled out the names of past victims, in memoriam:

"Red Jones, Buck Sampson, Phil O'Brien—"

"Enough!" yelped the little puncher. "We can't talk here. There's too many people around. Friend, you've gotta stand the gaff or else you'll get out. We don't want no milk-fed tenderfeet, not in *our* outfit."

The foreman's head snapped up and his body flew backward. "Wow!" gasped somebody. "Right on the chin!"

Masterson shook his head. He knew that under the coats of these men were pistols, some in holsters and some bulging from hip pockets. He had noted the bulges very recently.

"You're half jingled, all of you!" he argued. "Forget it. Let those fellows alone!"

"Ya-a! After what they done to us?"

"I guess you've done them as much damage as they've done you; it's not all one-sided; you're no weak-kneed victims. Forget it!"

"Cold feet, eh?" snarled a man who blew rich fumes from his breath.

"Whoa!" snapped the leader. "Shut up, Tom! Let him go! We aint got any time for four-flushers! Those K-K fellows are gettin' close to town. Come on!"

FOUR emphatic pairs of spurred boots followed the little leader to the door, past crowds of moving citizens who knew nothing of their affairs and cared less. Shorty hesitated at the doorway, sent a malignant glance toward Masterson, and disappeared outside.

John Masterson admitted a sense of defeat. The rumbling burr of alien conversation did not help it. He struggled to feel at ease, stuffing hands in pockets and strolling among tourists; riders, miners, Indians and tinhorns at the bar or the gambling-tables; but his sense of unpopularity —a thing which gnaws at every man who makes his own decisions—made him choose a sheltered chair along the wall near a roulette outfit where he could watch the flash of the wheel, the lightning movements of gold and chips, and the players under the smoke-filled light from the hanging lamps.

But the faces in the swirling haze seemed hard and expressionless and yellow, almost Chinese. Masterson lifted his eyes to where distance lent more enchantment.

He saw a tall Indian in a red blanket dart for the door with some one in pursuit. He saw the Sheriff of the county—a good-looking man in stylish clothes—conferring with three cattle-men. He saw two lean young men working themselves toward a fight, with a friend urging them out of the hall. He saw a crowd gathering around a town wit.

Suddenly a great dominant white figure walked through the crowd, nodding at friends. The man was gross, tough, beefy and virile—so powerful that Masterson found himself appraising the great shoulders and the bullet head, while wondering if this boss of the gambling-joint could be a benefactor of stranded men—as many people insisted—or a malefactor who stranded many men, which seemed more probable.

The giant in the coatless shirt and white apron vanished into the crowd and the

smoke. Masterson's restlessness returned. He arose and went toward the porch, peering out of the lighted doorway and down toward a great dark plain.

He looked north, east and south, into a motionless black world. The porch was built almost on a bluff at the foot of small hills, with the lights of the town southward, at its right. From a near-by house came the squalling of a concertina. The railroad station, beyond the town, echoed the mellow clang of an engine-bell. Masterson was about to take a vacant chair when he saw a vicious little flash about a half-mile below him, to the right.

He watched the black ground, hoping he was mistaken; another flash leaped out, then three; then two came at a different angle, then bursts from several directions, then two, then one; darkness, one more. A faint popping was heard.

SOMEBODY bawled alongside Masterson. Feet clattered inside and stampeded for the door. Chairs squealed back. A mob of men surged out.

"I saw it!" yelled somebody.

"False alarm!" laughed some one else, halting.

"No!" roared a basso. "It's a fight!"

The big proprietor loomed in the doorway. A group of men raced down the steps and across the road, where horses were tied to long hitching racks. The figures of horsemen, whirling their animals around, towered above the crowd.

"What's it all about?" demanded new arrivals.

"Mebbe the Sand River boys met up with Karl Kling's men!" said some one near Masterson. "It looks like this time they've got results!"

Women came down the street, some with shawls on their heads, all talking. More riders went galloping down the road, lashing their animals. The Sheriff emerged from the hall, watched the puzzled crowd, fidgeted with a big elk-tooth on his watch-chain, and then turned inside to await further reports.

A horseman galloped up the hill, crowding off other riders going the other way, then scattering the people who were afoot.

"Three fellas shot!" he yelled, at the porch. "Three shot! The darned fools had guns!"

Everybody hastened into the road except Masterson and the big gambler. The hall became quiet inside. The great white boss leaned against the doorway. His apron bulged out from his stomach, making him look like a grotesque stout dowager.

"Fat-heads!" he observed. "Well, I hope they're cured!"

"How did the feud start?" wondered Masterson.

"Oh, that? The bosses of the two ranches got to scrappin' over a branded steer. Then the hired men had to git excited about it. Funny, aint it? It aint *their* fight—*they* don't stand to win nothin' out of it; but here they are, shootin' the daylights out of each other! Funny fellas, these punchers. Anything to be doin' somethin'. By the way, I seen you talkin' with the Sand River bunch before they went out. Friends of yours?"

"I'm on the Sand River pay-roll."

"Huh. Why wasn't you with 'em?"

"I'm a new man. It wasn't my fight."

"Huh! You've got sense! Hello—see what's comin'!"

Into the dim light thrown on the road by open doors and windows appeared a great cavalcade toiling up the hill. In the lead were riders supporting three swaying men. Behind them crowded the mob, on horses or afoot, straggling out from the vague hinterland. The riders dismounted. The human vanguard reached the steps and came up. A swarm of volunteer helpers supported the three who lurched. One with a bloody shirt was coughing; one with a bloody leg was swearing; one with a bloody left arm was passionate, wild-eyed, yelping incoherent wrath while his supporters hauled him across the porch and into a chair at a poker-table near the door. It was Shorty, the little hard-faced cowpuncher.

Masterson, swept inward with the mass, found himself in a circle which formed about the wounded trio as they sat waiting for a doctor. The man with the chest wound was groaning, glassy-eyed, almost too quiet; the fellow with the leg wound stared at the floor; but Shorty was still militant:

"Ya-a-a! The bums, they think they done somethin'! We'll show 'em! They shot us, hey? We'll show 'em! Six to five! Ya-a-a! They had six to our five, but we'll show 'em—"

The bloodshot eyes of the little puncher fixed on Masterson. For an instant the rider's thick meaty lips remained parted; and then with a yowl he jumped up, hurling his three supporters away.

"You! The fella who wouldn't fight! You dirty low-down coward, you sneakin', white-livered tenderfoot—"

Masterson's muscles twitched, and he took a quick step forward, but hesitated. The snarling little puncher, half insane with excitement, was wounded, disarmed and disorganized. Masterson stood irresolute, fighting for self-control, growing conscious of three hundred pairs of eyes staring from every direction. He wondered what to do or say; he wondered why his blithe adventure had brought him to this stage so swiftly, and he felt a surge of resentment.

BUT the puncher's words struck fire elsewhere. A tall cowman with an angular face and a sandy mustache thrust himself through the crowd and stepped alongside Masterson, who recognized him as George Wells, foreman of the Sand River ranch. Wells had not been in the fight; he had stayed at the depot, checking up accounts; but now he looked worried and savage, like a man who saw his outfit in trouble and wanted to make some one the butt. He bellowed at Masterson:

"You're through! The man who wont fight for his crowd is a yellow coward!"

Having delivered that, the foreman's head snapped up and his body flew backward in a short half-circle, landing with two boots in the air. The boots gradually sagged down.

"Wow!" gasped somebody. "Right on the chin!"

Masterson's fist had been quick, violent, terrific. He was startled at its force. Its thunderclap smacked through the hall, and he stood staring at his hand, with an expression of awe and unbelief, looking around in inquiry, as if to ask if these people had seen the miracle also. They had. They were yelling.

He dropped his hands, feeling better; and then he walked over to the semi-conscious figure on the floor.

"When you fire a man," he advised, "be decent about it."

The town wit laughed:

"Haw-haw! Tha's good! Fire him polite, Wells; use your company manners or he'll git hostile!"

There was a general snicker. Wells wabbled to his knees, rubbed his chin with his open hands, blinked around, and fixed savage blue eyes upon the tall man in dark clothes who loomed above him. Then:

"You're fired, just the same; if you ever show up at Sand River again, we'll take you to pieces!"

"Thanks," nodded Masterson. "Then I'll go where there are better people."

He turned on his heel and went toward the door, shouldering through a crowd which grinned at him. In one glance he noted half-consciously that the Sheriff had the three wounded men under technical arrest; that the luckless riders' enemies—probably sober and therefore better shots—had kept going after the battle and would be hard to identify; that the comrades of the luckless trio had also made themselves scarce; that a poor tawdry painted woman had come and was patting the face of the man shot through the leg; that the drinking and games had resumed; and finally that the big boss of the hall was still in the doorway, gauging him with cryptic little eyes.

Masterson nodded and walked past him, turning toward town, where his tumbledown hotel stood among the dark buildings aligned along the deserted street. He reached the hotel, opened the door, and stepped into the rough lamplit little office. He found he had company. Six booted cowmen in store clothes became tense and looked at him sharply and then relaxed into the stolid glumness which apparently had enveloped them before.

One of them had a bandage over his head; one had a hand covered with white linen spotted with red; two had black eyes. Among them was a bottle which passed from one to another. The rite was not convivial. It was solemn, even medicinal. Only one of them showed any effects from it, and he began to talk as Masterson went toward the stairs.

"The only thing to do with that Sand River bunch is to go over there and—"

"Shut up, you fool!" rasped another.

"Aw, what's the difference? This fella's a stranger. Does he look like a Sand River man? If he was, we'd fill him full o' lead!"

Masterson slept rather fitfully that night.

CHAPTER III

IT was the Sabbath when the lonely Masterson next emerged into the street's blazing sunlight. Cow-ponies at hitching-racks stood with heads bowed. Rows of loungers sat at the edges of board walks. Soon a church-bell rang, advising the few

worshipers to prepare. The dominant baritone clang came from a whitish old board structure which, with its high porch and low belfry, lagged behind the line of stores and saloons as if dubious about joining such company; but its tocsin banged and echoed unabashed.

Masterson, loafing at the railroad station, decided to look into this clangor. He strolled along the street and began to catch up with a family procession, all in black, led by a little thin, lantern-jawed man in a frock-coat, who appeared to be poverty-stricken, but undaunted.

Toward the slow-moving family came Big Pete Kelly, hatless, careless in dress, intent on getting to the post office, near the station. A tremor ran through the little clan as if some one had whispered "Danger!" They stopped, and to Masterson's surprise the little minister went forward. He bowed and held up a finger:

"My dear sir, is there no way to lessen the noises from your institution at night? I am trying to conduct an establishment for the poor behind your place. The noises are very annoying."

"Hey?" Kelly halted in mid-step.

"It is really very annoying."

"Well, what of it?"

"You might tell your friends to be quiet."

"Aw, they forget it. Why don't you move?"

"I have four sick men."

Kelly began to grin.

"Huh! I've got forty, every night. Tell you what I'll do: I'll buy out your joint and start a hospital. See them birds along the porches there? Half of 'em's lungers. Came to New Mexico, played the wheels, and now they're broke, doin' nothin'. I'm tired of givin' handouts. Let's regulate it."

Prepared only for opposition, the gaunt little minister was forced to step backward.

"Well, really, that is very generous, my friend—"

"Sure; I know; you preach with your mouth, but it don't mean anything."

The churchman's long face turned livid at the insult. To Masterson it seemed as though the air hung in suspense, waiting for the crash of lightning or the crack of doom. Big Pete's heavy voice boomed out again, making things worse:

"You preach about forgiveness, but you give sinners the glassy eye. You preach about charity, but a poor bum who went to you got a lecture. You don't *do* anything! You're a lemon!"

Masterson held his breath during the ghastly silence. The little minister's trembling voice whispered:

"You insinuate that I am a hypocrite?"

"Naw. It takes brains to be a hypocrite. You're only a lemon!"

Masterson watched the gaunt little minister, who seemed bewildered, like a person stunned by a bolt of lightning. At last he bowed and made a little gesture to his family, which parted for the giant to go past. The gambler trudged through with exaggerated lordliness, lurching up to Masterson, snarling:

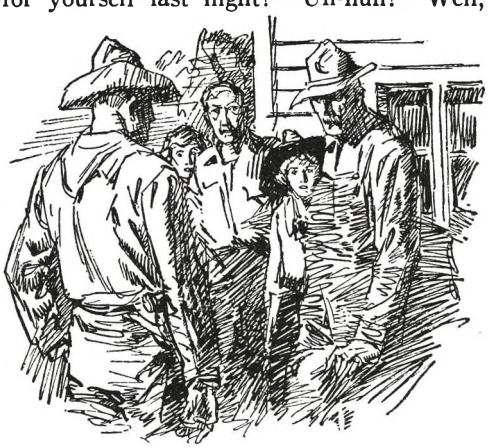
"Charitable, them people! Yeh! They know *they're* saved, sure; but say—if you was down and out, who would you go to for help, a lot o' psalm-singers, or a bunch of roughnecks who have been up against the mill themselves?"

Masterson winced at the man's stark paganism, which shocked him like cold water; but fortunately Kelly answered his own question:

"Sure. Everybody knows. This little piker thinks he's big when he herds four bums in a shanty! Huh! I'll show him! Say—"

The giant cocked his bullet head and regarded Masterson. Then:

"Say, aint you the fella who stood up for yourself last night? Uh-huh! Well,



"What's this fellow doin' here?"

I've got a job for a steady man. See me in my office at noon."

Masterson looked into the little blue eyes, trying to figure it out. Kelly showed signs of unrest.

"Well, what's eatin' you?"

"Are you going to fight that preacher?"

"Him? Naw. Why?"

"I was only wondering. You'd be in a battle."

"Yeh. I get you. Make 'em martyrs, and they come back twice as fast. Well, I wont. You've got brains. There aint gonna be no martyr. I'm gonna pull a charity stunt that'll make him look like a plugged nickel. I'm gonna beat him in his own field!"

Masterson's jaw dropped.

"But this is a minister!" he objected, struggling for the conventions.

"Sure. That's just it. If us gamblin' and saloon people don't hold them reformers down, where are we goin' to be? Time was when a preacher didn't dare show his head here. This one's the first. We aint gonna persecute him; we aint gonna make sympathy for him; we're gonna make him useless!"

Masterson looked at the back of the offended little minister, trying to make headway against a combination like this!

"Did you go into the charity business before he came?" wondered the onlooker.

"Naw. What was the use?"

"H'm," said Masterson, eyes twinkling as the dour preacher mounted the steps of his church. "Not so bad. Now I'm interested!"

"Sure. See me at noon." And big Pete Kelly slouched past and went onward.

Masterson watched him amble down the sloping street, while wondering where he had seen this barbarous figure before. There was something very familiar in the man's outline. He appraised the paunch, the great thighs, the shambling walk, the stooping shoulders and the bullet head with its sparse hair, things which matched his pinkish face and heavy chin.

And then he remembered. In memory's eye he saw again the massive cartoon figures of the Beef Trust, the Steel Trust, the Oil Trust and other supposed ponderous malefactors who looted the land gleefully for the edification of the newspaper-reading public!

A townsman came alongside, throwing his big shadow athwart the board walk. He was big and broad, with a golden beard. He sent Masterson a glance from shrewd gray eyes under bushy golden brows.

"A friend of the boss?" he inquired.

There was an air of surveillance about him despite his rough corduroy clothes, giving a hint that Big Pete Kelly was never unprotected.

"Probably," answered Masterson, civilly enough. "Are you?"

"Yes. I'm Rob Ferguson. I work for him."

"Gambling?"

"No. Outside. His properties. What's your name?"

The young man's boyish grin lighted his face.

"John Masterson. I arrived on the afternoon local, at three-thirty-two, day before yesterday. I came from Nevada via New York and El Paso. I used to know

"It takes brains to be a hypocrite. You're only a lemon."

how to ride a horse. I thought I might work on some ranch out here. I want adventure. I got a job yesterday but I lost it last night, so I'm loafing around. I've got enough money to last me a month or so. I'm twenty-nine years old, vote the Republican ticket, smoke cigars, and can mend my own socks. A sheep-herder told me that this was a tough town, so I came to see what made it tough."

Masterson's bland information drew a mirthless stare.

"Thanks," said the sober Ferguson; and then with a nod he passed on, leaving the other to gaze after him.

AT noon Masterson trudged uphill to the vast gambling-palace. As he passed within the shadowed doorway, the boss appeared behind his bar, nodded, peered around to make sure there were no watchers, and beckoned his guest into a little doorway beyond the end of the bar. It led into a small square room made of narrow blue-painted boards. One window looked upon a side-street, giving a slantwise view of the great valley below.

Big Pete locked the door and sank his great bulk into a swivel chair while jerking a thumb toward a plainer one.

Masterson, puzzled by the mystery, seated himself and glanced about, seeing a desk, a few account-books, a big safe, and a startling array of placards advising the onlooker that *"The World Loves a Cheerful Liver,"* or *"Cheer up—the Country Still Survives,"* or *"The Man who Gives Friendship Never Lacks Friends."* Above the desk a decorative sign flared out like a pistol-shot: *"Smile, damn you!"*

He looked from this into little shrewd blue eyes which did not smile. He gazed up again at the signs, wondering what piteous baffled soul-yearnings had struggled doubly within this mountain of tough flesh to cause him to seek solace in such printed hurrahs.

"You're lonely!" decided Masterson.

"Huh?" Kelly glanced at the signs. "Oh, them! Huh! That's funny. You're the first fella who ever said anything. Funny. Queer. Say, where'd you come from? Who are you?"

"Nevada. Been away from the range. Trying to get back."

"Uh-huh! Failed in business?"

"No. Succeeded too well. Brain got dizzy. Overwork."

Kelly grinned like a satyr.

"Mebbe I can use you!" He rose to his feet with surprising suddenness, while the arches of his ruined shoes sagged under the ponderous weight. "Now, listen. I've got the biggest idea yet. Listen:

"The Sand River and Kling outfits are faded to a whisper. It aint the fightin'. They've kept each other scared; that's all. No improvements, no buildin's, no paint, no big herds, no nothin'. They graze the cattle close to home. There aint much left of 'em."

Masterson's face looked puzzled. Big Pete continued:

"All right. Now, look here: What's the matter with my buyin' those two properties cheap, hey? If the ranches belong to me, there aint gonna be any feud, see? Then there's a lot o' lungers and bums around town. I'll send 'em out there. It keeps 'em away from my place at night. And then, I get their labor, see? Sensible, aint it? We stop the feud, care for the sick, get two fine ranches cheap, get plenty of cheap labor, show up that little preacher, and— What the devil are you starin' at?"

Masterson, startled, twitched in his chair. He floundered: "Why, I was wondering what's behind all this."

FAINT white ran across Kelly's pink cheeks.

"What's behind it? Dammit, aint I layin' my cards on the table? Here: I want you to go out there and take options on them two ranches. Thirty-day options, in your own name. I'm willin' to go as high as fifty thousand for both."

"Fifty thousand—for two big cattle ranches?"

"Yeh. They'll jump at it. I'll give you five thousand dollars to bind the options with. You look over the outfits and gimme a full written report, see?"

"But why me?"

"You're a stranger. If I sent Ferguson, everybody'd know who sent him. They'd boost the price on me. I'm a tender-hearted sucker. I'm easy."

"How do you know I wouldn't skip with the five thousand?"

"Oh, no! Not with me!"

The boss' little eyes showed cold glints, giving his face a savage aspect which made Masterson lean forward like a spectator watching an ever-changing show. He had seen the big man a big helpless baby, a giant breathing scorn upon a luckless preacher, a schemer, an idealist, a rich gambler, a piteous groping soul trying to gain solace from "cheer-up" mottoes; and now brutal as a bull, inflexible as a bar of iron. It passed quickly. Annoyance crept into the man's eyes.

"Quit that! That 'what-sort-of-fish-are-you' stare gets my goat! Talk business! Are you with me?"

Masterson turned in his chair and looked out of the window to a bare yellow-brown hill-slope which walled out his view to the northward.

"I'm thinking of the ethics," he confessed. "You're a heathen; you're a gambler; you're fighting a poor little preacher: still—I think you're out to benefit men who can't help themselves. That is, as far as I can see." His forehead wrinkled. "I wish I could see a little clearer—"

"You're a funny one!" grunted Kelly. "Well, what's the verdict?"

"Well, all right. You may need a moral adviser, at that!"

Up over the rim of the hill Masterson saw a flash as if the sun had struck a mir-

ror or a field glass. He jumped up and peered at a mass of rock-slabs which broke the smooth line of the mountain.

"Is anyone watching you?" he blurted.

"Maybe. Why?"

"People could look right in here. There are no curtains. But why should they?"

The boss looked weary.

"Gossips, rubbernecks—mebbe enemies. What's the difference? They can't hear anything."

"Why do they watch you?"

"Losers, generally. They want to take it out of my hide. I'm used to it. Forget it. About Sand River, now. Do you think you've got nerve enough to go there? After what happened?"

"I deal with the owner, not with the men."

Nevertheless Kelly opened a top drawer and drew out a heavy, dark, short-barreled revolver of large caliber.

"Take this. It aint the men that's dangerous, though. It's Trudy Hendricks, the owner's daughter. Blonde girl. Watch out for her."

"How?"

"She'll twist you round her fingers. Then I don't get the ranch cheap, see? Her sister's quiet, but Trudy's one of these here belles. Watch her."

"I don't like belles," said Masterson.

"Huh!"

Masterson's brown eyes became keener.

"Am I supposed to take a home away from two girls?"

"Rats! Make your offer, an' see how quick they'll jump at it. You aint gonna be a villain; you're gonna be a life-saver, only I don't want you to get reckless with my money, see? You watch out for Trudy. Now, git. Start in the mornin'. Buy a good horse. I'll send the five thousand to your hotel. When you get an option, send me news."

Masterson rose. His boyish grin returned.

"Five thousand! I must have an honest face!"

"Yeh. You have. It takes a gambler to know who to trust. Beat it!"

Strolling out, Masterson at once began acquiring things to make him look like a citizen able to buy cattle ranches. He bought high-heeled boots and the most gorgeous spurs he could find. He bought a larger broad-brimmed hat, a blue silk neckerchief, another blue cotton shirt, a fine big bay horse, a good secondhand saddle and, purely for decoration, a gorgeous hair martingale.

He took the more intimate purchases to his stuffy little room and put them on. The warped mirror over the washstand—it caused his body to look like a bad case of spinal curvature—informed him that here was a solid, serious young ranchman—a trifle pale under the enormous hat and probably uneasy in the saddle for a while, but otherwise the man for the job.

The thought of the job made him pause and finger his smooth round jaw, newly shaven. He addressed the mirror:

"Jack Masterson, you're either going to be a hero or a sucker, but I'm darned if I know which!"

His hand closed on the slide-rule which he had recently laid on the washstand. He made a wry face and tucked it in his hip pocket, under the pistol.

"Well," he decided, "I'm not going to be an estimator, anyhow!"

At dusk he joined the crowds milling around in the smoke-haze at the Imperial as he killed time picking up gossip. He learned that the Sand River riders had been released and had gone home, except the badly wounded one. He learned that the Sheriff was still trying to investigate. He learned that the boss was admired in many quarters and detested in others. He saw the boss but the latter ignored him; so he loitered about till he noticed five men playing poker in a corner, where a crowd was gathering. He joined them.

THE faces of the coatless players were stony, even harsh—all of them white under the lamplight except two who wore green eyeshades. Three of the five had the sleazy appearance of men wise to the game, professional gamblers probably working for the house, rolling cigars in the corners of their mouths. The fourth was a lanky fellow with a rustic face, eternally watching out of the corners of his eyes. The fifth was dark, round-faced, mustached, sunburned, never looking up from the cards or the table, speaking always in a dry, harsh voice which seemed to repress tremors.

The cards flicked around like flashes of light. The mustached player took two and brought them to his chest, peering at the corners, then looking with dull eyes at the table again.

"Fifty," he croaked, shoving his last chips to the center.

Three other stacks met his.

There was a swift showing of cards. The mustached man nodded. Some one else gathered in the chips. He tossed his useless cards to the center.

"Another I. O. U.," he demanded. "A thousand."

"Naw; you've got two thousand out now," said a veteran.

The mustached man sat back, drumming with a knuckle on the green cloth. A stout and jovial fellow went up to his chair, patted him on the back, whispered to him. He turned his head halfway around.

"I know I can beat 'em," he snapped with irritation. "The luck's got to change. It's not that. It's the I. O. U's."

The others shook their heads. The mustached man's right hand began to clench, then thumped on the table.

"All right. I'll give you action. My ranch is worth six thousand. That leaves me four to play. How about it?"

The others came to life. There was palaver. A man arose and went into the crowd and the smoke-haze. Shortly he returned, nodding. He seated himself. New stacks of chips materialized. The cards began to flick around.

Masterson noted that the throng was pressing close. There was a growing tension. A young fellow shoved him and looked up in apology.

"Stiff playin' tonight!" he observed. "Dick Moore's likely to lose his ranch if he aint careful!"

"Where is it?" asked Masterson.

"Down in the valley. Truck-garden. Moore's a game sport, but his old lady gives him hell about it. If he loses his ranch—wow!"

The crowd concentrated on the game. Cards flicked; hands manipulated chips; clouds of smoke rolled over the table and up to the rafters as the tension made the silent players puff like furnaces. The face of the mustached Moore became whiter, more masklike, more grim. Beads of sweat glistened on his forehead. His voice became harsher. The game stiffened. The lanky yokel arose and vanished. His chair was kicked out of the way.

Suddenly Moore's right hand shoved all his chips to the center of the table, while his left fist held his cards face-downward. The others hesitated, not looking at each other, hardly breathing. The spectators craned forward. Some were on tiptoe.

A player's chips flashed to the center. The other two sat back, watching the duel. Moore looked at the stack of chips, looked into his opponent's eyes, looked at his cards, and then slowly turned them over and spread them out.

"Full house," he croaked. "Kings on tens."

The other tossed down five cards.

"Four jacks."

Moore laid his fingers on the table.

Slowly he pushed himself back, in a trance, numbed beyond coherent thought. He arose like an aged man but carefully shoved the chair back into place while the crowd made way for him; and then he stood looking at the other three from under bushy eyebrows. He spoke at last:

"I wonder—"

The biggest of the trio stiffened.

"What?" he inquired.

Moore looked from one to the other.

"If you've got anything to say, say it!" demanded the big fellow.

Moore's numb stare returned to him.

"Not now," said Moore. "No. Not now. No. Some other time."

He turned slowly, hesitated, steadied himself, and marched through the crowd, walking with head up and eyes glassy.

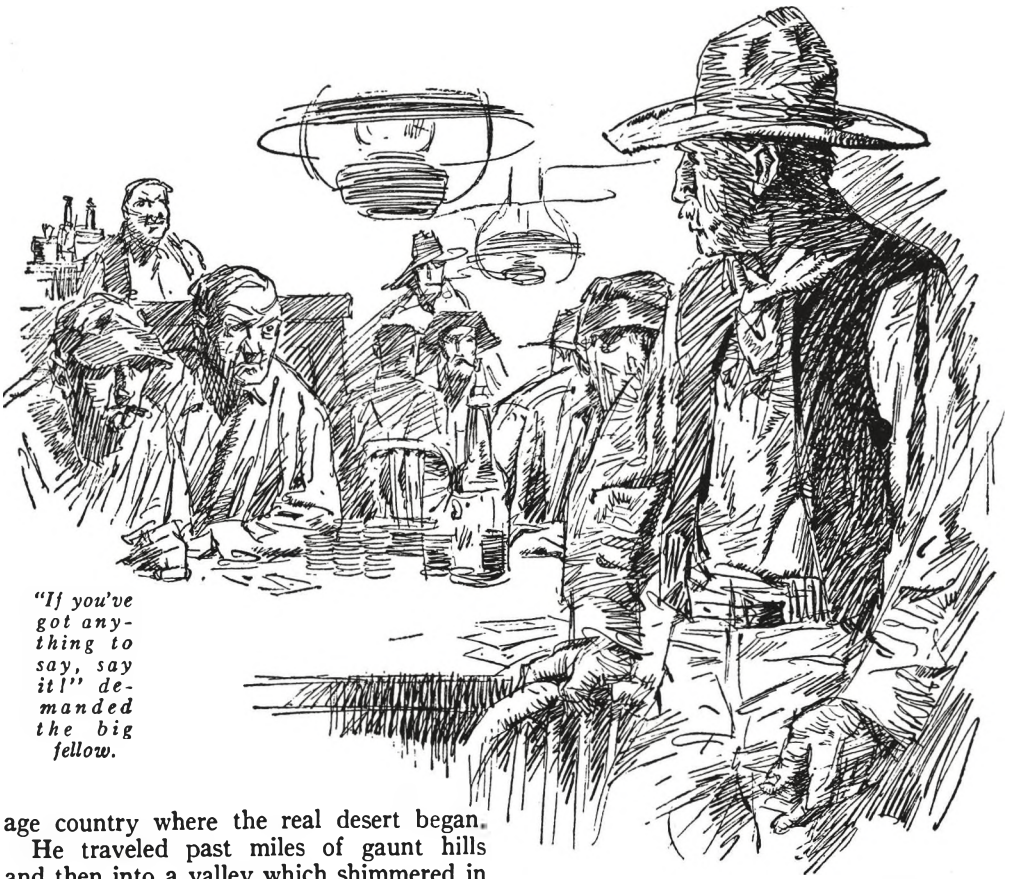
Masterson glanced at a big clock behind the bar. It was one in the morning. Frowning, he shoved through the thinning crowd and went to his hotel, where he lighted the guttering lamp and made ready for a disillusioned rest. He set the lamp on the washstand and caught the warped figure of himself in the mirror. He stared. It leered back, strained and disheveled in appearance. He nodded and grinned at it.

"I fear it's a sucker!" he concluded.

CHAPTER IV

MASTERSON and his bay horse started early for the hilly back country. Before long he was up on the northern slope of the valley where he could look back upon a distant town which appeared like a long line of toy houses along a bluff, with the railroad winding out from it like a thread making for a narrow pass in bluish mountains far to the southward.

The morning sun grew hot. The smell of warm greasewood assailed the rider's nostrils constantly. The lonely road, bordered with occasional mesquite and prickly pear, led through a divide and into a sav-



"If you've got anything to say, say it!" demanded the big fellow.

age country where the real desert began.

He traveled past miles of gaunt hills and then into a valley which shimmered in the heat-wave. The valley widened. The mountains sloped away till their jiggling tops became blurred by distance. The horse began to sweat. Masterson's coat and vest went behind the saddle. At noon he ate in a little stony gully. Then he went on.

The valley narrowed again. Bare brown mountains emerged from the heat-wave. The road went straight at them and turned to the right, up a long cañon with a hot and powdery floor. The cañon broadened. The sun glinted on strata like copper and gold, as if the rider were traveling through a vast pagan cathedral where one side was jeweled and the other was somber in shadow; but the air was like that of an oven.

The cañon grew wider. Masterson stepped out upon a great broad valley again, blurring in the heat-waves like the other valley, but this time more green. Far away, over the tops of gray-green sage, he saw trees and deeper brush. Shortly he was able to discern cattle in the distance.

Like most persons sweating on a monotonous journey under a hot sun, his mind had become numbed, so that vagrant thoughts formed themselves with such power that they became the realities and his journey the dream. He wondered why these cursed figures; why the chief clerk seemed to like him so well; why Julia Rusk made herself so insufferably charming; why the cement salesman always looked scared. Figures and ciphers came before his eyes in legions; chortling figures, column after column, stretching away to infinity—

A big red steer lurched out of a wallow alongside a clump of greasewood, backing its clumsy body away and lowering its horns. Another dusty steer loomed over a clump of sage. A voice called. A man on a black pony emerged from the brush down the road, hesitated, rode toward Masterson and reined in. It was Shorty. His left arm was in a sling, but his voice was still impetuous:

"Well, we told you not to come around here, stranger! Are you tryin' to show you're brave, or what?"

Masterson decided to halt.

"I have business here," he announced without rancor. "If I didn't have, I wouldn't come."

"Well, what's your business?"

"That concerns Mr. Hendricks."

Shorty's reddish blue eyes narrowed.

"Oh. Tattle-tale stuff, eh? Yeh. I might have known it! So that's it! Huh! Oh, Bill!" Shorty waved and Masterson saw another figure bobbing over the sage. "Come on over here!"

"You're crazy!" protested Masterson. "Do you suppose I'd ride through your whole ranch just to tattle on you?"

The third rider came up, glowering. He was tall and dark—the man who had exuded a spicy breath in the dance-hall that night.

"He's got a nerve!" remarked the new arrival.

"Yeh," agreed Shorty. "What are we goin' to do with him?"

"You're going to do nothing!" exploded Masterson, at the end of his patience, gathering his reins and pulling up the head of his horse. "If you want to talk sense, all right; if not, go to the devil!"

"Oh, no!" Shorty leaned over and with his good hand grabbed Masterson's left rein near the bit. "We aint through with you, Mister!"

"Well, I'm through with you! Get out of the way!"

"Yeh? Well, we aint goin' to. How about that?"

Masterson stared from under the brim of the great hat. He studied a tough, chunky, leather-faced little pest with a short brain and a combative disposition; not a warrior but a wrangler, an inciter, a trouble-maker with the persistence of a flea and just about as much logic. There was only one way to handle him and that was to crash through him. Argument was useless.

Masterson reached back to his hip and swung out the heavy revolver. Its muzzle leveled at Shorty and his friend.

"Take a look at this," invited Masterson, feeling melodramatic, in spite of his irritation. "Keep your hands in front of you. Thanks!" He rode around both of them, looking for weapons but seeing none. "All right. Now, get out of my way!"

"You dirty coward!" raged Shorty. "Ya-a-a! He pulls a gun, the yellow coward! Oh, we'll meet you again, Mister; we aint through with you yet! We—"

BUT Masterson shouldered through and galloped along the road, where cool green alfalfa fields shortly took the place of the blistering desert. Behind him came distant faint calls; several riders had turned into the road, and their dust arose in a slanting column while Masterson rode past a wire fence and into a lane which led to a barnyard flanking a fine old two-story wooden house of the architecture of 1875, with long arched bay windows, quite unusual for New Mexico. In front of the house was a garden, long past its prime, but giving grateful shade from big old pepper trees.

As Masterson galloped up, two men and a girl emerged from the barn, where his sun-blistered eyes saw the dim outline of a saddled black horse. One of the men was a stranger. The other frowned at Masterson, who reined in and doffed his hat to the young woman.

SHE was a startling blonde. Her skin was so fair and her eyes so blue that the yellow-gold hair under the broad-brimmed hat—it was tied down by a strap which ran under her chin—seemed hardly to heighten her vivid blondeness. The electrified Masterson saw that her face was fine-drawn, her back was very straight, and her clothes—blue waist, natty khaki trousers, high-heeled boots and spurs—combined grace, utility and lightness.

"Well," she inquired, "do you see anything?"

"Excuse me!" He dismounted. Hat in hand, he stepped past his horse's head. "I'm looking for Mr. Hendricks."

An elderly man with a white mustache came out of the barn—very leathery of face, very wrinkled, very tired, plainly a fine old cattle-king who had nearly run his race. His gray clothes were baggy. He held out a high-veined hand to Masterson, who introduced himself. The old man's smile was kindly, with crow's-feet wrinkling around his blue eyes.

"Come into the parlor," he invited. "Trudy, you'd better come too."

He turned toward a screened rear door, just as four horsemen clattered up to the lane, reined in at the open gateway and circled around in their own dust. The old man saw them and glared.

"What the devil are you doing here?" he roared.

There was silence. Then:

"Nothin'," called Shorty, swinging his horse around.

The rest of them clattered after him, stirring more dust. The old man watched them, without joy. The girl glanced from the riders to Masterson, then to her father.

"Let's go in," she invited, with a slight compression of her lips.

MASTERSON saw it. He discerned tiny lines around the corners of her mouth. He did not like people with little lines around their mouths; and somehow he felt elated at discovering this defect. Otherwise he feared he might have been charmed. Perhaps he was expected to be. As he followed through a little dark side room and into a fine old-fashioned parlor with a blue carpet and an onyx mantel, and a stairway leading out of it, he caught a little appraising sidelong glance as if to say: "I wonder what this one will do?" It made his face inscrutable. He accepted a comfortable chair alongside one of those parlor what-nots made in the Victorian era when arrays of varnished spools were quite the thing.

"Would you rather have supper before talking?" suggested the courteous old cattle-man, seating himself in a deep arm-chair.

"Business first," decided Masterson. "I came to see if you'll sell the ranch," he said aloud.

The girl sat against the onyx table and used the tip of her black boot to trace a faded pattern of the carpet, watching the operation closely. Her glowing blonde profile was very regular, but her lower lip went out, then in, then out. Masterson looked away. Up north, the near-by mountains were turning pink.

"I'd hate to quit the old home," remarked Hendricks in a slow voice. Then: "Are you buying for yourself?" The old man's blue eyes were direct.

"Yes and no," admitted Masterson, in a quandary immediately.

The ranchman's gnarled fingers drummed on the chair-arm. His face looked hopeless and weary and a trifle wistful. His heavy chin sagged low upon his chest.

"I'm willing to sell," he confessed.

Light footsteps made the stairway's old boards creak, and beyond the glinting wooden banisters descended a young woman in plain blue, taller than the one in khaki, somewhat more mature, much less blonde, more irregular of feature. She hesitated at the shadowed base of the stairway. Trudy explained to her:

"Gentleman wants to buy the ranch, Ruth." Then to the guest: "My sister, Mr. —"

"Masterson." He arose and nodded, looking into eyes which were a darker blue than Trudy's, but equally unafraid.

"I would be sorry if we lost our home," she said.

"Blah!" contradicted Trudy. "Let the old dump go. It's too poky, anyhow. We can live in town."

"Shut up!" rasped the old cattle-man. Then, more gently: "Set down, Ruth. You might as well hear it. This gen'leman wants to buy. I dunno but what we ought to consider it." He turned to Masterson with pathetic frankness. "I might as well admit that she's hard to sell. She's out of the way, you see—sort of lonely and away from everything—"

"Dad!" warned Trudy.

"Shucks, I might as well be honest about it." His eyes twinkled slightly. "And then I've got a gal always pesterin' me about goin' to town. The other one, here, she's, quiet; but this young yeller-haired buckaroo wants action. H'm! Now, about this ranch. What do you think she's worth?"

"I can't tell. The actual value may not be the market value. It rarely is. Perhaps you have some idea what you want for it."

The old man looked past the window again.

"Time was when I wouldn't take a hundred thousand, but what with drought and that damned Kling bunch— Well, never mind. I might consider forty thousand. What do you think?"

"That's out of the question."

"H'm! Well, we'll talk later. Dinner's pretty nigh ready."

LATER all four of them started out by the back way past the barn and the chicken-yard, on a tour of inspection. Masterson's gaze encountered a small orchard, a near-by field of alfalfa and then a flat brown plain extending to wrinkled pink mountains to the northward, fast fading to purple. Over beyond the cool green alfalfa he saw a flash of silver.

"That's Sand River," pointed Hendricks. "About a mile away. Runs southeast. Loses itself in a sort of sink."

"Big stream?" asked Masterson.

"Not much. It spreads out down below and mostly evaporates. Now, my land runs past it, up to the hills, straight north. The Kling ranch is over yonder, eastward. It's a smaller outfit than mine."

"How many cattle have you?"

"I dunno. Six-seven hundred, mebbe."

"And you keep seven or eight men?"

"Yes," dryly. "There's safety in numbers!"

They walked toward the alfalfa field, flanking the rear of the old home. Masterson noted a long shed-like bunk-house with several entrances beyond a barrier of brush some distance north of the main residence. A man in overalls emerged from the bunk-house and strode toward the party. Masterson recognized George Wells, the lanky straw-boss, whose weather-beaten face looked startled.

"What's this fellow doin' here?" demanded Wells.

"He's a-figurin' to buy the ranch," explained the old man, watching the herd in the brush to the eastward.

The foreman's jaw sagged.

"Buy the ranch! My gosh!" He recovered himself. "Huh! Pleased to meet you, Mister! See you later!" And he stalked away to carry the news to the bunk-house.

The little blonde in khaki saw the byplay, and her mouth twisted in a wry smile. Masterson was beginning to watch that mouth. He had decided that her features were too sharp, but the plastic mouth was an excellent warning-sign.

"When did you meet George Wells?" she demanded.

"In town. I worked for him. We disagreed."

"Worked for him? For us, you mean?" Her stare was shrewd now.

"Yes."

Her glance grew unsteady. He had also stared, without realizing it.

"I didn't know I'd make you mad!" she amended.

"Oh, it's nothing. I wanted outdoor work. Your foreman gave me a job. We quarreled."

"And then you were sent to buy the ranch?"

"Yes."

"Well, what's behind it?"

"Easy!" barked the old man. "Didn't you hear him say he wouldn't tell? That's enough."

THEY walked around the ranch and past small groups of low-grade cattle. Dusk made the whole land purple, then blue. Hendricks and Trudy led the way home. Masterson lagged and fell into step with Ruth, contrasting the plainness of her face with the vivid radiance of the other.

"I know you dislike seeing your home go," he observed, trying to be polite.

"Yes; but there are compensations. It lacks many things."

"What? You too?"

She smiled, looking at the smoke curling from a big chimney above the house.

"Why not? After all, doesn't a girl like to see life?"

"You're educated," he blurted. "Where?"

"The State University. Trudy too. Her name is Gertrude. She hates it."

They walked on in silence, into the old parlor. . . . . Late that night, while the old mantel-clock ticked and the oil lamps threw shadows beyond the old-fashioned furniture, Hendricks sat back and made a weary gesture, accepting Masterson's offer of twenty-eight thousand dollars.

"That's not much more'n the cattle's worth," he sighed.

"It's all I can give," said Masterson.

"The old ranch goin' for *that!* Why, it don't more'n pay my debts."

Masterson felt like a *Shylock.* Trudy patted her father's shoulder.

"Never mind, Dad! We'll go to town and live!"

Hendricks went to an old desk, seated himself, and started writing on a sheet of paper. Masterson joined him. Hendricks growled under his gray mustache:

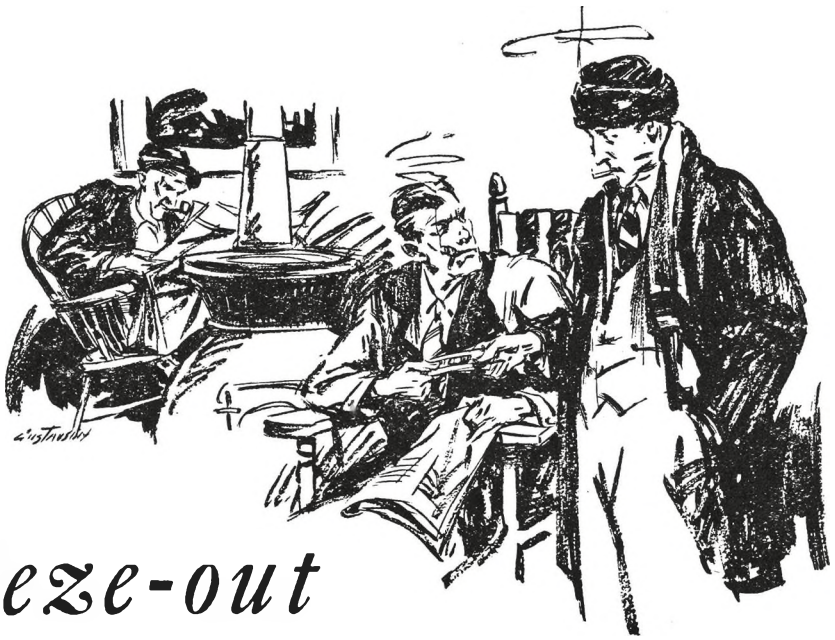
"Thirty days. Today's September sixteenth. All right. Option for the purchase of Sand River ranch, includin' buildin's, chattels and so forth. All but personal possessions. All right. Good till October sixteenth. Ten per cent down. Correct. This is the toughest job I've ever done!"

Masterson placed the option in a long white envelope and tucked it in his coat pocket.

Later he looked at it again in the privacy of a clean big room with a soft old-fashioned feather-bed and a knobby bureau whose mirror was not cracked. The mirror reflected his movements in the lamplight as he produced another sheet of paper and a pencil, to write a report. He tried to formulate words, staring at a face somewhat drawn and haggard; and then he wrote his report:

"Got thirty-day option on Sand River at twenty-eight thousand. Have been very successful, but I do not like it."

The next of the three sections into which this fine novel has been divided will appear in our forthcoming August issue, out July 1st. Don't miss it.



"Here's a five," I said, compromisin' with him.

Freeze-out

Illustrated by
L. R. Gustavson

By JONATHAN BROOKS

A strange race—but our old friend Lamentation trots her way to victory at last. The author of "The Gentler Sects" and "Efficiency Elmer" is at his best here.

"NOW I know why they call it a 'cold snap,'" says Lum Bagley.

We're sittin' in front of Mrs. Ferguson's base-burner keepin' our shins and whiskers warm—Lum, and Tommy Tharp and me. Lum's just come in, the reason bein' supper's almost ready.

"If yuh have to spring one on us, go ahead and get it over with," I said.

"Don't you notice the way the snow snaps and crackles in the cold when you walk?" says Lum. "Frost and ice, so cold, make ever'thing snap. Take off your glove, and in three minutes one of your fingers will snap right off. And even in the house, if yuh walk across the room and kiss a girl, it snaps like a firecracker."

"Oh, my gosh, Lum's got another girl," groans Tommy Tharp, who hardly ever says anything. And I quit thinkin' about Lum's wise crack on cold snaps.

"Look here, Lum," I said, "you got to cut out chasin' around with the women. The last four deals we've had, you've balled up by mixin' women with 'em."

"We wouldn't have had any deals except for the ladies," Lum argues.

"Yeah, and we wouldn't been chased out of four different county seats if it hadn't of been for the women, either," I said. "Every time we got run out, we had to come north to get away from trouble. And now, here we are, all snowed up."

"Froze up, yuh mean," says Tommy. "We could get through the snow, but yuh can't get anywhere through this cold. Eighteen below, at noon!"

"Well, well, well, warmin' up some," laughs this fool Lum Bagley. "Yesterday it was nineteen below."

"And to add to all the other trouble, caused by you and your women," I said, "poor old Lam's eatin' her head off, with no exercise. She's so fat now she looks like one of these toy rubber pigs, with four little toothpick legs. 'Fraid she'll never trot another race for us."

"Why don't yuh take her out and give her a race?" Lum asks, turnin' around to toast his back.

"On skates?" I said.

"Or snowshoes?" says Tommy Tharp.

"If you two old dodoes would get away from this fire, and go out and circulate around some, you'd find out there is real sport in these parts," says Lum. "Trottin'

races, and not on skates, nor snowshoes either. If you two guys didn't have me to scout around and find out what's goin' on, and put yuh wise, you'd starve to death."

"If we didn't have you around," I said, "we'd both prob'ly be down in Floridy right now, where it's warm, 'stead of havin' been chased by officers of the law clear up here into Michigan where the north pole comes to cool off."

"Floridy? Which coast?" says Lum, sarcastic.

"*Which* coast?" I said. "Floridy's only got one. Blame thing goes almost clear around. Fact, State's *all* coast, exceptin' what part of it's climate."

And I don't mind sayin' that as far as I can find out, now that I'm down here and have been loafin' around in the sun for weeks to get thawed out, I was just about right in the first place.

"Yeah, but what part of it?" Lum insists. "Part of the coast, diamond horseshoes is the thing; another part, just plain horseshoes."

"For trotters?" I said.

"No, for old coots like us to throw ringers with," says Lum.

"That'd be nearer my speed than the diamond horseshoes, anyhow," I said.

WELL, Mrs. Ferguson comes in and says supper is ready, so we go out and eat, and argue, and argue, and eat. The argument's cheap, and Mrs. Ferguson don't charge much for the food, either. We're livin' low, these days. All fall, ever since the county fairs quit for the year, we been trekkin' around over the country pickin' up match races for my old blind mare Lamentation. Lum is the smart guy, smellin' out the races, layin' our bets, collectin' when he can, and so on. Tommy takes care of old Lam, and I drive the races and handle the money.

Lum frames some good set-ups for us here and there, and we drive the old mare from one county seat to the next. But when he goes out and makes the acquaintance of some gal, we always get in wrong. He's awful strong for the ladies. But my idea is that women and hoss-racin' don't mix, and Lum proves it. The last four set-ups we've had, Lum's tried to mix women in, and the result is that two sheriffs, one chief of police and a crowd of tinhorn sports have been on our trail—or were, till we cut across one corner of Indiana and then got up here into Michigan.

But while we're snowed in for the winter, and old Lam's eatin' her head off, and Lum and Tommy and me the same, I've got about three thousand dollars sewed in my clothes. That's all that keeps me from killin' Lum, and lightin' out for warmer climes than these snow mountains.

"Yeah," says Lum, over pork chops and gravy and mashed potatoes, "they have quite a lot of trottin'-races hereabouts. My lady friend an' me went out and saw some of them," says Lum. "Out on a little lake at the edge of town. Great sport. And they bet on 'em."

"Now you're tellin' us some news that is of great interest," I said.

"On the ice? I've heard of that," speaks up Tommy Tharp.

"Wear tire-chains on your sulky, and carry a baseburner in your lap?" I said, sarcastic. I was kiddin', though, for I'd heard of these ice-races, myself. The idea didn't sound good to me, with the weather around eighteen below. Freeze your eyelashes right off. But on the other hand, if these dudes bet their money, it ought to be our game.

"I thought I'd circulate around and see what I can stir up," says Lum. "Goin' down to a cigar-store and pool-room after while. If yuh could let me have a ten-spot—"

"Here's a five," I said, compromisin' with him.

"Don't be so tight," he says. "Some of that three thousand is mine. And why don't we split anyhow? No use earnin' money all our lives, just to get it stitched to your shirt."

"Listen," I said: "You're gettin' your board and keep, and you get *out* once in a while, which is more'n you would of done if it hadn't been for me." I have to remind him now and then that it was me that got him away from the sheriff in Ohio who didn't like the shell-game he was workin' at the county fair. "Anyway, we're not ready to split, yet. Looks like this concern is still operatin'. Go ahead and dig us up another hoss-race, on the ice, or under it, or anywhere."

"But we oughta split up the dough," grumbles Lum, takin' the five-spot. "A third of that money is mine."

"A third?" I said. "Listen, you're kiddin' yourself, not me. I know whose old mare it is that wins these races, and who puts up the bettin' coin, and pays the expenses. It's me, and not Lum Bagley."

"Aw, Perk, if I was as tight as you," and Lum kinda laughs, to ease out of a quarrel, "I'd be afraid I'd smother myself to death."

Well, he goes on out after supper and puts in the evening over at his pool-room, or some gal's house, or somewhere—I don't know where. Next day he goes out to browse around some more, and that night he's got some news. It seems there are a bunch of fellows in the town with trotters that they like to race on the ice. The top-notcher is a man name of Wilkins, in the coal and grain business, who's got a trotter name of Jordan Wilkes 'at can step a right nice gait. Licked all the trotters in town with him. Good bred hoss, too. But a mark of only around 2:16 or so.

"He was in a race ag'in' us at Elyria, Ohio, last summer," says Tommy Tharp, who's got a memory for hosses like a dictionary. "Distanced second heat, not bein' able to keep his feet. We win that race."

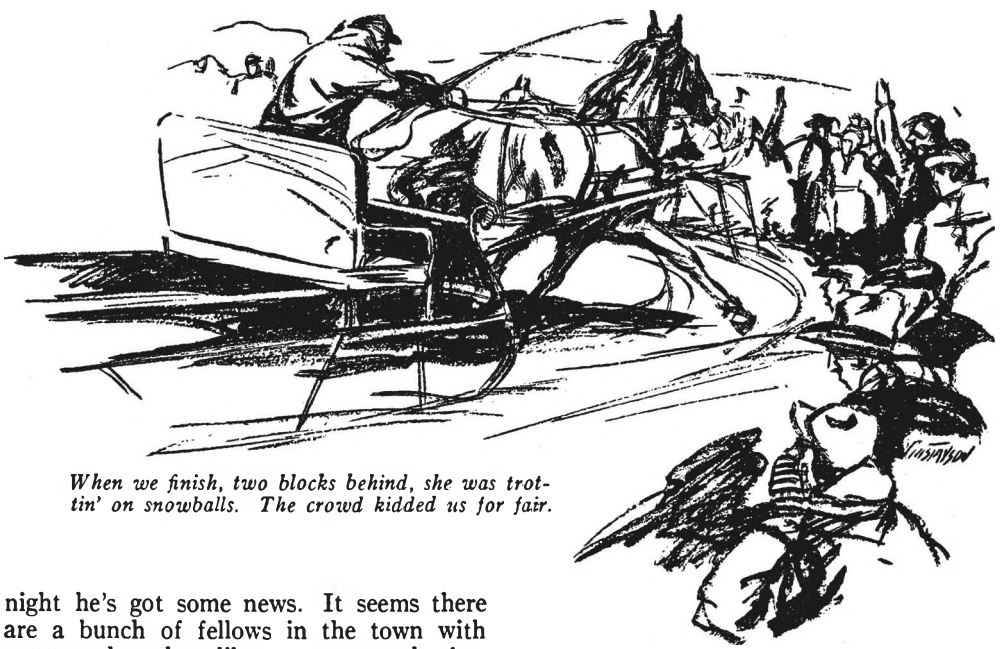
"Then we can take him again," I said. "Lum, you see what you can rig up."

"How heavy can we go?" Lum asks.

"Oh, I'd say not over five hundred," I said. "But listen, Tommy and I'd better keep out of the picture, and keep Lam out of it, too. If this guy remembers us or her, he'll not put up any dough. And I'm cert'nly not gonna go out and ride any races at eighteen below zero for the fun of it."

Well, Lum gets busy. Tommy goes down to the livery stable where we've got ol' Lamentation put up, and rubs her down, and gives orders she's not to have so much to eat. Can't win races with contented cows—I mean hosses, that are overfed.

Next day we go and get her out, borryin' a sleigh from the livery-stable man, and ride around. Tommy and I put on all the clothes we own, and borry a comfort and a blanket from Mrs. Ferguson, and take a hot brick apiece wrapped in paper to keep our feet warm. Old Lam's terrible fat, but it's so cold she steps around right lively to keep warm.



When we finish, two blocks behind, she was trottin' on snowballs. The crowd kidded us for fair.

When we get back to the house, after rubbin' her down again and bandagin' her up good so's she'll not be stiff or sore, we find Lum waitin' for us.

"All set," says Lum, excited. "Got us booked to trot with him at three o'clock Saturday afternoon. One mile, one heat. Straightaway."

"Will he bet?" I said.

"Got him to agree to two hundred and fifty," says Lum. "But look, I saw you and Tommy out with old Lam today. She looks terrible—"

"Lum, that poor old blind mare's kept us in food and lodgin's all these months," I said. "I know she can't see, and she aint much to look at, but if I was you, I cert'nly wouldn't criticise a gift-hoss."

"I mean she looks out of condition,"

says Lum. "Now, then, tomorrow at two o'clock, I'll go back to this guy's office, and you fellows drive by with Lam again. Then I'll get him up to a five-hundred-dollar bet, see? He'll think, from her looks, she can't outstep anything."

FAIR enough. So we went through all them motions. Darn near froze to death, especially my hands from holdin' onto the reins. Couldn't find any gloves warm enough. And Tommy did get the end of his nose frostbit. But when Lum reports at supper that he's got five hundred bet with Mr. Wilkins, I forget about my hands and Tommy almost forgets his nose. Five hundred for one afternoon's work is not so bad, specially when it will keep us till spring right here in comfort at Mrs. Ferguson's. We ought to beat this Wilkins and his Jordan Wilkes without any trouble.

But there's where I made my mistake. A trotter on a race-track and a trotter on the ice are the same hoss, but the conditions are all different. I went out to the lake with Tommy the next day, Saturday, in the same sleigh we'd borried from the livery-stable. Old Lamentation had on a set of plates she'd been wearin' alla time, because she's gettin' old and her feet are kinda tender.

A purty good crowd was there, lined up along the track, which was a narrow, scraped and dragged straightaway right out into the lake. Worried me, at first.

"Drive right out on the ice?" I asked a fellow on the bank.

"Sure," he said.

"Safe? What's that yonder?" I asked, pointin' out on the lake.

"Six-horse team draggin' a twelve-ton piece of granite across," he said.

So I clucked to old Lam, who couldn't see where she was goin', and we went on out on the ice. It was ice, of course, but there was a kind of cross between frost and snow on it, even where it had been dragged—not smooth, clear, slippery ice. We sorta felt our way around awhile, not payin' any attention to another race that was bein' run just then. When it was over, Lum come up with Mr. Wilkins, and introduced me. He wanted to laugh when he saw old Lamentation, so fat and ragged, but he was too polite. The crowd did razz us, though. One guy yelled 'at we oughta get a mudboat, instead of a sleigh, if we was gonna race.

"My golly, Tommy," I said, when Tommy Tharp got out of our sleigh, "look at Wilkins' sleigh, will you?"

Wilkins had one of these sleighs that's specially built for racing, a narrow, thin, spidery-lookin' thing with sharp runners, and no weight to it, and a seat just wide enough for one—where four people could ride in our old phaëton-fashion sleigh, and it was heavy as a ton. Oh, well, the story is sad, and short. The heavy sleigh was one thing. Lam's plates was another. They picked up and collected snow, so that when we finish, about two city blocks behind, she was trottin' on snowballs. The crowd kidded us for fair.

"Too bad," says Wilkins, who has pulled up Jordan Wilkes long before the end of the mile. "I'll have to give you another chance."

"Not me," I said, thinkin' fast. "This is new stuff to me. I know when I'm licked."

"Oh, now, you can get that mare ready for a race by next week," he said.

"Against your hoss? No sir," I said.

"Well, I hate to take your two hundred without givin' you a chance to get it back," he said. "But mebbe you can afford to lose it."

"Oh, I'll worry along," I said. But where'd he get 'at "two hundred" stuff? I cert'nly gave Lum Bagley *five* hundred to put up. I'm sittin' there thinkin' when Tommy Tharp hustles up and says we'd better wrap old Lam—she's freezin'.

WE bandage her good, and strap a blanket around her, clean off her plates, and go back to town, with me thinkin' heavy alla way. Of course, I knew Lum Bagley was crooked, but I hadn't figured him to trim *us*. Made up my mind to keep my mouth shut, and not say nothing, even to Tommy. At the livery-stable we rub down Lamentation, wrap her again, and bed her down good and warm. Then we go home to Mrs. Ferguson's.

"Hear you had a race with Charley Wilkins, and got beat," says Mrs. Ferguson, when we go in the door. "That's funny, if you were betting."

"Not so funny," I said. "I'm green at this thing, and we had a heavy sleigh, against his cutter, and my old mare wasn't shod right."

"I mean, it looks funny," she said. "Didn't you know Mr. Bagley is running around with Millie?"

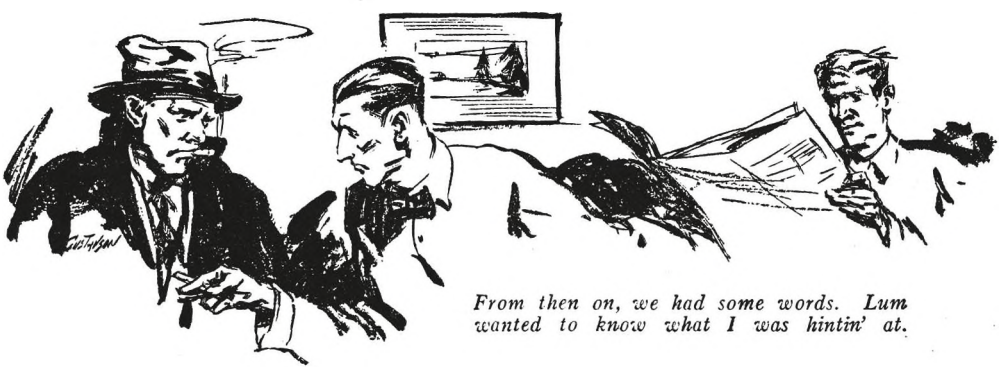
"I knew he was running around with some girl," I said, "because he always is. But I didn't know her name was Millie, and I don't know the rest of her name, yet."

"Millie Wilkins," she said. "And she's Charley Wilkins' daughter."

"Well," I said, "that *is* funny, aint it?"

But it wasn't so blamed funny, at that, to me—because the five hundred that I'd dropped had cut my roll down to twenty-five hundred. I didn't ask Mrs. Ferguson, who wasn't a bad-lookin' middle-aged widow herself, why she was so anxious to spill the news about Lum, but just supposed he'd been kiddin' her along and she was sore at his takin' up with this Millie on to him. So I kept still. And kept on thinkin'. When Lum said he guessed he'd go downtown and see what the boys at the cigar-store had to say, I knew he was lyin'. I knew he was goin' out to see this Millie. And the new clothes, bought outa my three hundred he hadn't bet, was dressin' him up for a killin'.

Made up my mind that I'd get the money back, with some interest to boot, and so I stayed awake half the night figurin' out my game. Next morning I told Tommy to stay in bed, while I went down to the livery-stable myself, to look after old Lamentation. When I got there, the livery-stable proprietor himself was in his little smelly office. I looked in.



From then on, we had some words. Lum wanted to know what I was hintin' at.

Wilkins. Let it go at that. And kept on tryin' to figure Lum's game.

He come in late for supper, when Tommy and I had already got past our share of the pounded steak and fried potatoes. Looked sorta spruced up.

"Gosh, Perk, but that was tough luck," says Lum, "losin' all that money!"

"Yeah," I said. "See yuh gotta new pair of shoes, and some more scenery."

"Yep, found a guy that let me have some clothes on tick," says Lum. "Bought me an overcoat on time, too. But, Perk, what was the trouble?"

"Oh, I don't know—old mare didn't have any foot," I said, lyin' to him because I knew what the trouble was.

"Well, I cert'nly picked a sour one 'at time," he said. "Hated to see old man Wilkins take down 'at money. Can't we get even with him? Hook him up for another race, or sumpin?" says Lum.

I wanted to get sarcastic, and tell him I'd hate to take any money away from Wilkins, who might want to leave all he could to Millie. But I decided to lay off that stuff and not let Lum know I was

"Say," he said. His name was Jones. "When you asked me for a sleigh, you didn't say you wanted a racing-cutter."

"I didn't know it myself," I said. "Never saw a race on the ice before. Didn't see much of this one, either, from where I was."

"And you never told me this old mare's name was Lamentation, either," Jones accused me, like he had a right to be sore. "Don't I know she distanced Jordan Wilkes over in Ohio last summer?"

"Do you?" I said.

"Sure I do," he says. "I read *The Horseman*. What you doin', tryin' to frame old Wilkins?"

"No, I wasn't," I said, "because I don't know anything, or didn't, about ice-racing. I learned sumpin yesterday, I'll admit. But if I *was* gonna frame him, would I go around tellin' his friends about it?"

"No, yuh wouldn't tell his *friends*," he says, winkin' at me. "But yuh might let *me* in on it. I've got the sweetest little racin'-cutter y'ever laid eyes on, 'at yuh might want to use," he says.

"Well, I guess there's no use tryin' to

kid the kidder's papa," I said. "Looks like you and me might work together a little, hey?"

"Fair enough," he says. "I don't know whose money I'd rather take than Charley Wilkins'. I've gone broke twice tryin' to find trotters to beat him. But listen," he says, "who's the guy yuh got with yuh?"

"Little guy that's been comin' in here to look after old Lam?"

"No, a tall, skinny fellow with a face like a corn-drill," he says. "Dresses like a dude."

"Oh, he travels with us. Why?"

"He wouldn't be the guy that put out a lot of talk about a swell race mare that could lick Jordan Wilkes, would he?" asks this Jones, who's a smart guinea, I can see. "And then snoop around and lay some little bets here and there on Jordan Wilkes?"

"Well; sir, I don't know whether he'd be that guy or not," I said, sore as a goat. "But he might be, at that."

I WANTED to go right back to the house and drag Lum Bagley out of his bed, and beat his head off. Held out three hundred instead of betting it all on old Lam, and then bet it against her, hey? Won some money when I got licked—but I knew I had to keep my shirt on. Not only freeze to death, but queer my own stuff to boot, if I didn't.

"What'll we do?" says this Jones.

"We'll think, mostly," I said, "and keep our mouths shut. If we do both of them things, mebbe we can get some odds."

"After the way your mare looked today—" he begins.

"It was not the mare; it was me," I said. "She's all right. I'm the boob. But I resigned that boob job an hour or so ago."

"After the way your mare went today, with that heavy old sleigh, and them plates on, and after the way the crowd joshed yuh," said this Jones, "we can cert'nly get some odds for another race."

We talked about this and that for quite a while, and I found he was a right nice kind of a guy. When I went back to the house for dinner we had a purty good idea about what we were gonna do.

"Well, Perk, been to church this morning?" says Lum Bagley, grinnin' at me and then winkin' at Tommy Tharp. Great kidder, Lum.

"Nope, I just been down to the barn to see if that race yesterday hurt old Lam any," I said.

"She didn't trot fast enough to hurt herself yesterday," says Lum, lookin' kinda blue. "Tough luck we had to drop 'at money."

"Five hundred is a lot to lose," I said, lookin' at him hard, and realizin' all over again 'at he's got a good poker face. He never batted an eye. "But what I was afraid of was that old Lam didn't trot fast enough to get warm. A horse can freeze up in this cold weather awful easy."

"And get frozen out, too," grins Lum.

"Just like a man can," I said. "Anybody's liable to be the victim of freeze-out, in this climate."

From then on we had some words. Lum wanted to know just what I was hintin' at, and I said I wasn't hintin' at anything. Did I accuse him of playin' freeze-out against me, or was figurin' on freezin' him out, he asked me. But I said nothin' of the kind. Then he wanted to know all over again why we didn't split our roll, and call off the whole works.

"I can't afford to hang around doin' nothin' alla time," he complains. "I could be makin' good money somewhere else."

"Go ahead," I said.

"But listen, Perk," he says: "I gotta share comin' to me, and I believe I'd like to settle down here."

"That's what yuh said in ever' town where yuh found a girl," I said.

"But this girl's different," he says.

"They're *all* different," I said.

So he dropped the subject, and switched around to the prospect of another hoss-race. Said he thought we could get another match outa Wilkins, and I said I should hope so, after the way we'd been licked. Wilkins'd be a sucker, I said, not to take us on again.

"Didn't he offer you another race?" asks Lum, not knowin' that I'd have a line on where he got his information.

"Yes, he did, and I told him I would not go up against him again," I said. "Oh, I might try it again, at that," I said. "But I don't think so. I'm just gonna stick here around Mrs. Ferguson's old base-burner until this weather breaks, and then I'm goin' where it's warmer."

That's all I said. But Lum got the slant I wanted him to get, and when he went to call on this Millie Wilkins 'at evening, I know blame well he hinted to old man Wilkins that I could be dragged

into another race. Because the next day Wilkins popped out at me when I was passin' the cigar-store on the way to the livery-stable, and wanted to know if I wouldn't take him on. I told him I didn't think so. That afternoon I was drivin' around in the heavy old sleigh again, and I went past his coal-and-feed place. He saw me, and I pretended to be makin' old Lam step out, which I wasn't.

TUESDAY night I went down to the cigar-store to get me a can of tobacco. Wilkins was there, and he climbed on me right away.

"Your mare looked purty good yesterday," he said. "She was steppin' it off in great shape."

"Yes, she was," I said. "Seems to be feelin' a little better. She's an old mare, though, and this cold weather sorta gets her. Hasn't got as much flesh on her bones as she oughta, to stand this cold."

"Mebbe so, but she looks more like a race every day," he said. "By George, why don't we put on another little race, hey?"

"Well, I don't know," I said, sorta stallin' along. "If I thought she had a chance—"

"Tell yuh what I'll do," he said, gettin' anxious. "I'll make you a proposition. Lotta people that didn't see us last Saturday have been around to me, sayin' we oughta give 'em a chance to see us. Good deal of interest, especially since it's got around your mare's a regular race mare. Now then, if you'll go on with me next Saturday, for a little side-bet, I'll give you five to four."

"What? Only five to four?" I said. "Nothin' doin'. If I raced yuh, I'd have to have three to one, anyway. But then, I'm not huntin' any race. My old mare—"

"I'll make it five to three," says Wilkins, gettin' bolder. A bunch of men are gathered around us by this time, and he has to show 'em he's the real stuff.

"Well," I said, "I don't know. Mebbe —would yuh make it five to two and a half?"

"That's purty long odds," he said.

"Well, I was just askin', anyhow," I said. "I don't know's I wanta take the old mare out in this twenty-below weather any more. Might kill her."

"By George, I'll do it," he exclaims, thinkin' I'm backin' out. "I'll bet you five hundred to two-fifty, that we can beat yuh, a mile, on the lake Saturday afternoon at three o'clock. What d'yuh say?"

"*Hundreds?*" I said. "Five hundred? That's a lot of money—oh, well, by jiminy, I'll just do it. Might go broke, but mebbe the old mare will step out for once."

"She'll have to," declares this Wilkins. "My horse has beaten everything around here. Now then, I'll bet you five hundred more to another two-fifty, that I win my bet. What d'yuh say?"

"My gosh," I said, pretendin' to be scared by so much talk of large dough. "Do you put up real money?"

"I will, if you like," he says, "but if you haven't got that much with you, and I'll admit I haven't, we'll just make it a word-of-mouth bet. We've got witnesses, and George owns this store here. He'll be referee of the bet, hey, George?"

"Then I'm on," I said. "Feel like I'm diggin' my own grave, but I'm hooked now. Which one is George?"

The proprietor of the cigar-store leaned over the counter and said he'd referee the bet, and see that the loser paid, so far as he was able. I said that suited me, and we shook hands on it. So I bought my can of tobacco, and drifted down to the livery-stable. Found the proprietor loafin' by his little stove in his office, and told him the story. Gave him three hundred dollars from under my shirt, and suggested he drop in at the store and see if he could pick up some bets. He said he'd slide in and ask what was goin' on, and if anybody started talkin' about it, he'd get the money down.

I lit my pipe, and sat down. Half an hour later he was back, and said he had two hundred up at two to one, and one hundred at three to one. Said if I'd lend him a hundred, he'd like to get it laid for himself the next day. So I let him have it, and went on home and to bed.

Well sir, I'm not gonna bore yuh with details, but I'm here to say that for the next three days Lum Bagley was a picture. He wanted to rig up the match, until he found it was already on. Then he wanted me to let him have some money, so he could place it. I wouldn't let him have any. He begged and begged. Finally, on Friday, I let him have two-fifty. He said he'd go down to the cigar-store, and see if he could find any hot sports. He went right out, this bein' late in the afternoon. Soon as he was gone, I went down to the livery-stable and got Jones to

take a hundred and twenty-five with him to the cigar-store, and see if anybody was offerin' two to one on Jordan Wilkes. He was back in ten minutes, sayin' he'd put up the money, and that the guy who left it to bet on Jordan Wilkes against Lamentation was my friend Bagley. But Bagley, he said, wasn't there.

So there you are—old Lum Bagley outfoxin' me again, and tryin' to trim me to his own advantage! All right, Lum, I thought. Two can play at this game of freeze-out.

SATURDAY at one o'clock the whole town laid off and went out to the lake. It was colder'n the inside of a refrigerator's mouth, bein' below zero as usual, but the town people didn't seem to mind. A cold wind was blowin', too. Tommy and I went down to the barn, and I looked old Lam over. She seemed sorta sad and gloomy, but who wouldn't, bein' not only blind but freezin' to death, and hungry too. Tommy and I'd had her on short rations all week. We'd had her draggin' that heavy old sleigh every day too, to harden her up.

I called in a blacksmith, and while Tommy was rubbin' her good with goose-grease to keep the wind from chillin' her all through, I had this blacksmith take off them heavy plates and put on lightweight shoes, with long, sharp calks. Then while I got a piece of tallow and rubbed them shoes and points, Tommy rubbed her legs with liniment to heat 'em up, and bandaged 'em below the knees. Jones hauled out his little racin'-cutter; and man, it was a beauty! Though it looked so light I was afraid to climb up on it for fear I'd break it down. Built like a spider-web. Before we hooked it up, I took my piece of tallow, and rubbed the runners good. No snow's gonna collect on these runners, or on Lam's shoes if I know it.

Then I climb aboard, Lam bein' hooked up, and drive outa there. Tommy and Jones come after me in one of his rigs. I give you my word that old Lam, fourteen years old, and all that, darn near run away with me. Feelin' fine, bein' hungry, and havin' nothin' but this light little cutter to drag! We got out to the lake, and get there at exactly five minutes to three. The crowd gives me a sort of razzin' cheer when I show up, and I'll say it's some crowd.

When they go out on the ice, at anything below zero, to see a hoss-race, I'll say they are fans. They stood up, and sat in sleighs, on both sides of that mile straightaway for purty near the whole distance. The ones that had seen me with old Lam in the old heavy sleigh must of thought it was funny this time, but the rest of the crowd only knew we'd been licked good and plenty. I let old Lamentation step down the lane to the far end at a brisk jog, right into the wind, and when I got there I found old man Wilkins waitin' for me.

"By George," he said, "you look like a different outfit."

"We are," I said. "Last Saturday we'd never seen an ice-race before. Been studyin' up since I dropped that five hundred."

"Two hundred!" he said.

"My partner double-crossed me," I said, thinkin' it wouldn't do any harm to let this Wilkins know what kind of a bird was shinin' up to his daughter. "I gave him five to bet, and he laid only two. Trimmed me, and kept the three."

"Oh, is that the kind of a fellow he is?" he says, lookin' at me hard.

"Yep," I said. "And I gave him two-fifty to lay on this race, and he's put it up against me, instead of for me."

"Say, old man, that's a darn shame," he said. "But he believes in winning, though, don't he?"

"But here's where he gets fooled," I said.

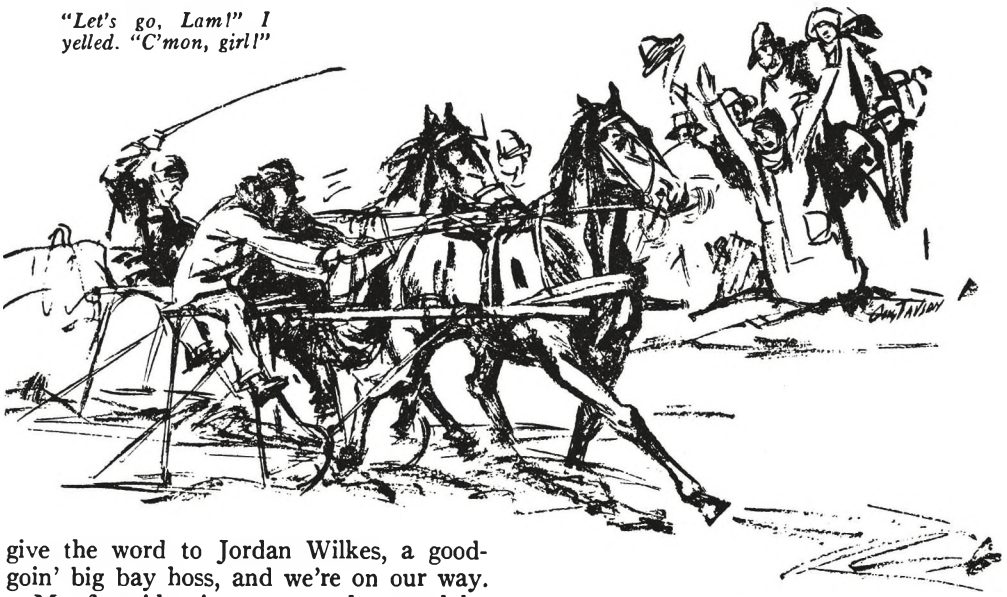
"We'll see about that," says Wilkins, settin' his jaw. "Ready?"

"Wait a minute," I said, layin' down the lines and climbin' offa this rickety cutter. Fished in my pocket, got the piece of tallow in my hand, and rubbed it along the runners. Then I inspected Lam's hoofs, rakin' out the snow, and rubbin' them points again with the tallow. Then I climbed back up again.

"All right?" he says.

"Sure," I said, grabbing a blanket and a comfort around me. Slapped old Lam with the lines with one hand, and pulled my coat-collar tighter around my neck with the other. We're off, on the hottest —no, cross that out—the coldest hoss-race I ever saw.

OLD Lam, hungry as she was, her legs burnin' from that liniment and protected some from the cold by that goose grease, stepped out as willing as she ever did on a boilin' hot August day. Wilkins



"Let's go, Lam!" I yelled. "C'mon, girl!"

give the word to Jordan Wilkes, a good-goin' big bay hoss, and we're on our way.

My first idea is to coast along and let Jordan Wilkes make the pace, because this Wilkins knows the game, knows the ice and all that. So we go along head and head, mebbe quarter of a mile on the straightaway. Old Lam steps along free and easy, with this little skittery cutter slippin' and flappin' along behind. She must think she's loose, after draggin' that heavy sleigh. Wilkins holds his Wilkes at a good clip too.

"Nice trotter yuh got," he yells. "But I'm goin'."

"Let's go, Lam," I yelled. "C'mon, girl!"

She settles down to trot, and I move up. My head's at the Wilkes hoss' hips. He's trottin' true, as good as he knows. Wilkins drives for all he's worth. He goes to the whip, careful. Wilkes comes on. We hold in that position a furlong, mebbe, and then old Lam's nerve and class begin to tell. Easy, steady, we begin to slip ahead, an inch, two inches, trottin' like a snowstorm in a gale.

Cold? I'm frozen stiff as a statue. Stuck to my seat—couldn't fall off if I tried.

Down to the finish we come, slippin', slitherin', the cutter swingin' with every stride old Lam makes, and she makes 'em long and hard and fast. The crowd's gone crazy, for it's never seen a race as fast as this, nor as close. Keeps rootin' for Wilkins and his Wilkes until it sees there's no use. Then it goes dumb with surprise, because Wilkes has never been beat around here before. Wilkins, a good, game sport, drives his string right out, whippin' to the finish. But there's good broad daylight, a length of it, between us when I flick over the line with poor old Lamentation!

Well, I could of kissed this Jones and Tommy Tharp. Why? Because instead of standin' at the finish to see the race, they've gone down the ice to where I could pull down old Lam to a stop. And there they had three blankets, and a hood, and all the wrappin's they could find for my old blind mare. They weren't gonna let her turn around and jog back, freezin' to death and mebbe catchin' cold.

"Man, that was a race!" yells Jones. "That *was* a hoss-race."

"I'll tell the world," yells Charley Wilkins, comin' up. "D'yuh know yuh trotted 'at mile in thirteen and a quarter? Held a watch on yuh. Two seconds faster'n my hoss ever went on a good track in the summer-time!"

Can yuh tie that for a sport? Holdin' a stop-watch when it was so blame cold yuh'd think a watch's hands would freeze. But then, I'm tellin' yuh, Charley Wilkins is a sportin' gentleman. I met him at the cigar-store that night.

"Congratulations, old-timer," he said, shakin' hands with me, while a crowd gathered around us. "Will you take my check, or wait till I can get the cash on Monday?"

"Your check's as good as your word with me," I said, "and that's good as gold."

"Man, that was one warm race—was your mare out?"

"A warm race for such a cold day, yes," I said. "No, she wasn't quite out, but she was as near it as I wanted to get her,

me not bein' used to perchin' up on one of these blame trick cutters. Felt like a water-spider ziggin' around. Gonna light on my neck, next minute."

"Would you drive her in a race with me, against a horse over here at Cadillac?" he said. "Guy over there has trimmed me twice, and I'd like to take him."

"Nope," I said. "I've been cold enough today to last me the rest of my life. No more ice-racin' for old man Perkins."

"Then listen," he says, "will you sell your mare?"

I looked at him, and I thought about old Lamentation, my pore old, faithful friend of a hundred battles on the track. Always goin' where I guided her, always givin' me her best, though she was blind and could only depend on me. Started to say I wouldn't sell, but then I remembered I'm not a rich man. I can't give her a home, or settle down anywhere to keep her in her old age.

"If you'll give me your word that you're a man that takes good care of hossflesh," I said, "and if you'll overlook her bein' blind, add five hundred to the check you're gonna write."

"Perkins, you're on," he said, writin' out his check for fifteen hundred, without battin' an eye. My friend Jones come in and collected his bets, and then he walked down to the livery-stable with me. In his office he gives me the two-fifty he won, which was the money I gave Lum to put up, and the one twenty-five. He gives me the three hundred he bet for me, and the seven hundred he won. Then he starts to hand me the hundred I loaned him.

"Nope," I said. "You keep that. If I ever need it, I'll write you for it."

And I paid him my bill in full to date, and walked back to tell Lam good-by. Who'd you think I found back there in her stall? Old Tommy Tharp, sorta lovin' her and rubbin' her down at the same time. And it's nine o'clock, with the thermometer ten below.

"I've sold her, Tommy," was all I said. At that, I'd of got along all right tellin' her good-by, but this old Tommy Tharp, the little fool, got some tears in his eyes, and then, well, I couldn't help it.

LUM come in my room, at ten o'clock, when Tommy and I are packin' a telescope I've bought. He looks like he's been through the big wind, but he tries to bluff himself through in his regular way.

"Well, Perk, old-timer, we put 'er over," he said.

"Yes, *we* did," I said, not lookin' at him. I'm sick of that guy by now.

"What yuh doin' there?" he says.

"Tommy and I are gonna ketch a midnight train," I said. "Floridy, for us."

"Well, for the love of icebergs," he says. "Why didn't yuh tell me? I'll have to hurry to get ready."

"Take your time, Lum," I said. "You're not goin' with us."

"But here, how about our split on the roll?" he demands.

"Tommy, you strap up this here telescope," I said. —"Now then, Lum, I figure you've had your split. You can keep that three hundred you did *not* bet on the first race. And as for the two-fifty you put up on Wilkins' hoss, I had a guy win that from yuh. I've got it, and I'm givin' it back to yuh. And except for one piece of advice, that's *all* I'm gonna give yuh."

"Aw, Perk—" he begins.

"The advice is this," I said: "Be as crooked as yuh wanta, but save one guy at least to be square with, from now on. That's all I'm gonna say."

AFTER thinkin' it over, Lum fails to get mad, like he tries to, because he knows he's guilty.

"Well, Perk, I oughta bawl you for this game of freeze-out—"

"Who started it?" I said.

"But I wont," he says. "Looks to me like I'm gettin' off better'n what I deserved. So I'll say you're a white man, Perk." And he offers to shake hands.

"If I stay around here much longer in this weather, I'll be a blame yelluh Eskimo," I said, and shook hands with him. "How about Millie?" I said.

"She flung me down, when her old man tipped her off, I guess," grins Lum, sorta sorrowful. "No settlin' down here for me."

"Just so you don't take the same train, or the same direction we do," I said. . . . .

Floridy? Sure, I like it down here. Warm, and balmy, and bright sunshine alla time. Got here with about forty-five hundred, and that's why I wish again I'll never be in Michigan at eighteen below. Tommy? That's him over there pitchin' horseshoes. Me? No, I aint got the heart to touch another shoe. Always remember how old Lam's legs trembled in the cold when I was rubbin' that tallow on her shoes, just before she won me my stake.

Springs of Thirst

The moving tale of Hilarious Howell, a melancholy old-timer who couldn't make his six-gun behave, and in consequence found himself on a hard desert trail, and in big trouble.

By J. F. M. DAY

HILARIOUS HOWELL belied his name, something which is not done by members of the best families. There was nothing hilarious about Howell but his name. Lean and long, bearded and begrimed, the man was anything but hilarious—decidedly dour, as a matter of fact. There was reason too, at least to Hilarious, as, parched of throat, he entered the "Oasis," in a little town at the edge of the Mojave Desert.

With a circular sweep of a fat hand, Sam the bartender swished a rag over an inundated portion of the bar—a gesture reminiscent of his San Francisco days when a man could keep his bar dry.

"Coin on the bar and you get your drink. No coin—no drink!" With a swish Sam flicked the damp rag off the bar and tucked it into his girdle. There was an air of finality in the movement.

Hilarious moved closer to the bar and leaned confidentially toward the hefty "barkeep."

"I've spent money here before. I'm thirsty now—drier'n alkali salt. My voice and my morale is low, partner. A little drop would work wonders. Two drops, and I might even sing!"

Sam lugubriously eyed Hilarious a second. Then he said:

"See that guy over there holdin' up that faro table with the artillery on his hip? Well, that bird is the sheriff of this here county. Cut the old fairy-tale, or I'll get out a restraining order against you and get the sheriff to execute it confidential-like after he escorts you into the street!"

Hilarious rubbed his lips with a big hand. He supported his lean face in the palm of his hand resting his elbow on the bar.

"Faith, hope and charity," he ruminated, taking care to address his remark for the ear of Sam, who showed signs of shifting his position. "And the greatest of these is charity! I have faith, and I have hope, and Sam is charity, which—who—is not

puffed up and neither does he brag, but hearkens to cow-hands in distress," he concluded.

Sam again eyed Hilarious for a solemn second.

"I'm thirsty to the point of perishin', Sam," suggested Hilarious.

Silently, Sam reached under the bar and turned a spigot.

Hilarious explored the dry margin of his lips with a parched tongue.

Then Sam slid a glass of water onto the bar.

Hope gleamed momentarily under the narrow lids of Hilarious' half-closed eyes—it might have been the drink of the baggy-trousered lowlanders. Then the glint hardened—for there had been times when Hilarious had favored Sam.

"You dirty—" whispered Hilarious across the pine bar.

A fat wrist moved with amazing speed. There was a flash of a dirty rag as the bar-towel, whipped from Sam's girdle, took Hilarious full in the face.

THE two men nearest Hilarious at the bar turned quickly and ducked backward. The sheriff ran a stack of five-dollar goldpieces together with a little whirring click.

Hilarious moved his grimy hand upward from his hip with a crisp gesture which terminated in a shattering roar of sound. But he did not wait to observe the pained look of surprise in the puffy eyes of Sam, nor did he witness that worthy as he pitched forward onto the bar and then slumped down out of sight behind the counter.

Instead, with the same sweep of firing, Hilarious swung about swiftly and covered the house.

"Hands clear of your hips!" he ordered. The air was electric. The sheriff continued clinking the coins. The other loungers were tense, not with excitement, particularly, but sensing the logic of obeying Hilarious. He had a stacked deck and they knew it. The fate of Sam had attested rather dramatically to his handiness with a gun.

Hilarious backed out quietly through the open door, without mishap. Two seconds later he was in the saddle, after the fashion of a man more at home on the leather than on his feet.

He swung his bony roan at a furious gallop into the dusty road, heading northward into Mojave. To the southward there was the menace of the telegraph wire; to the north was Red Rock cañon and water. He was thirsty. Since the night before not a drop of any drink had passed his parched lips.

Behind Hilarious, like a chase in a movie, came the sheriff—and with the sheriff were three men. The sheriff was conservative and deliberate. The impromptu posse swung along at a good gait, but not so fast as Hilarious.

STRAIGHT as the part in an old maid's hair ran the velvet dust marking the roadway. As Hilarious' big nag pounded along the powdery surface, a cloud of dust arose from the hoofs of his horse. A breeze blowing from the south carried the dust along at about the same rate of speed as the animal was traveling.

A full appreciation of this fact came to Hilarious after he had traveled about a mile; not that he had not ridden in dust before,—such times were without number,—but it was years since Hilarious had been so thirsty.

The white choking powder settled first on the broad brim of his sombrero; then it clung to his rather heavy eyebrows and lashes. It settled along his dry lips and absorbed whatever infinitesimal amount of moisture may have remained there.

The moving cloud arose like fog, yet it had the insidious quality of wind-driven sand. It filtered into the opening at his collar, unbuttoned after the fashion of his kind. He breathed dust and tasted it—all of which is bad for a thirsty man riding on the desert.

As he swayed in the saddle, an integral part of his horse, Hilarious reflected that the sheriff and his followers were in the same predicament. This gave him some solace—until he recalled that the sheriff's party had not been without water for twenty-four hours. That made a vast difference!

Had it not been for the breeze Hilarious would not have been so uncomfortable. He was a man of expediency, and an opportunist. As long as a mile or so existed between himself and the sheriff he was not particularly worried. He reasoned that he had a very decent chance to escape. As for Sam, Hilarious knew that he had far better control of his gun than of his temper. Sam had been neatly drilled through the shoulder—nothing serious for a hardy man

—might even worry a little of that excess fat off him, too.

Hilarious was not utterly dull to the excitement of the chase—but he was more acutely concerned with his thirst, for *that* was troubling him a great deal!

That brimming glass of water he had scorned as Sam had extended it over the bar—Hilarious could now imagine allowing it to trickle down his throat. The dust—he licked his dry lips with a tongue almost as dry. His big roan pounded on. The east was graying, sad with the fickle departure of the sun, while the west blushed slightly, in the knowledge of a short-lived wooing. Stealthily the long shadow slippers held their march at the feet of the mountains.

Red Rock cañon with its serrated escarpments would be his sanctuary. In those dark battlements he could easily lose himself. The two thoughts lost themselves in the arid waste of his dry imagination.

His big gaunt horse had traveled far that day, but with a thoroughbred heart which belied his ambiguous ancestry, the animal held his stride. For a minute Hilarious forgot himself, as admiration for his horse, his only means of escape, seized upon him.

"Good old boy!" he said encouragingly to the animal.

The horse pounded on.

Behind came the sheriff and his three men. Not even the report of the fugitive's gun had jarred the sheriff out of his taciturnity. The issue was as simple as lighting a cigarette. The sheriff was as economical with his words as with his thoughts.

Had a motion-picture director been detailing the escape, doubtless Hilarious would have turned in his saddle and fired four shots from his pistol. That would have eliminated the pursuers. However Hilarious was a practical man. He knew the immense futility of endeavoring to shoot from a galloping horse.

FOUR or five miles out from Mojave the desert winds began to stir the sands. Little sibilant hisses, children of the winds, gave a premonition of their brawling parents the night winds, who were to arrive shortly. Without ever having resolved his knowledge into words, Hilarious knew the desert, in his mute way, as one may know a thing one hates.

Over a hard patch of the road, the breezes sprayed a winnow of sand. Hilarious recognized the sign, and as he identified it, a more powerful gust of wind struck him on the left with a flurry of sand. He drew his revolver from its open holster and stuck it inside his woolen shirt to keep the weapon free from grit.

The dry sage crackled with the onslaught of the wind, which came from nowhere. It moved nowhere with a savage sort of futility, and it sprayed Hilarious with cutting sand in the passing. From the southwest came the storm. Under its force the seas of sand-dunes changed, slowly and almost imperceptibly, their lighter dust fogging the air and the sharper grains of sand giving the wind literal weight.

HILARIOUS cursed the wind as it filled the corners of his eyes with grit; then stopped cursing and reflected that the driving screen of sand propelled by the whooping wind might become a factor in his escape. If it became much worse he might be forced to stop. The dusk was choked with hissing sand. The sand gave a spectral dimness to the tragic after-lights of the sunset.

A hesitation came over Hilarious, and whether by coincidence or some esoteric divination of his kind, the horse hesitated too. It may only have been that the animal was almost exhausted. Hilarious thought that it might be a good move to draw aside, off the highway into the mesquite, and perhaps—with the added screen of a dune—allow the sheriff's party to pass.

He rejected the idea. His horse, or one of the sheriff's party, might give him away. What would he do after he had eluded their party—go back to the little town? That, he held, would be suicide. His thirst tortured him and decided the problem for him. He would continue on to Red Rock where a spring would give him water. Water! He touched the horse with his spurs.

The big-boned roan again picked up his pace. He was not a thoroughbred, but he had the heart of one. Hilarious turned in the saddle and then swung abruptly forward. The sand cut his face like a thousand stinging splinters of glass. No, he would not face that wind. It was worse than the sheriff and his party!

If the sheriff had been close to him it is doubtful if Hilarious would have heard him. The wind of whirling sand was too boisterous. It rimmed raw the neck of Hilarious, where he had buttoned his shirt; it grayed his hair under his hat—though he did not know it.

The horse had now settled into a steady lope, keeping to the highway after the strange manner of a cow-horse, perverse in most things, yet with some characteristics which make him the peer of all horses. For an instant Hilarious forgot his thirst and himself. He reached back and patted the horse on the rump but the animal gave no sign of response; his shod hoofs bit into the shifting sands almost noiselessly.

Choked, deathly weary, yet not so weary as his horse, Hilarious approached the cañon. The wind was either dying down or else had gone off on another quest, equally savage, after the vicious barrage directed at Hilarious and the others. Few men are abroad on the desert at night.

The children of the winds, the breezes, began their game with the sand, and then, as though tired, even the breezes stopped for night. A star or two became visible. The battlements of the cañon bulked before him. His horse was walking now.

The stealthy shadows had won. None of the amazingly beautiful colors of Red Rock cañon was visible to the eyes of Hilarious as his horse swung through the wide opening. Stars burned through the dark curtain of night, hung above the sharp cliffs.

The black dusk of evening engulfed the sheriff and his men, but they were not far behind, Hilarious knew.

Luck had clung to him with the tenacity of a sticky mantle, for as he entered the cañon his horse gave out, after the fashion of a thoroughbred who runs until he drops.

Hilarious was mad with thirst; yet he did not lash the animal as it stopped. Instead the tall cowboy swung himself painfully from the saddle and had the compassion to address his horse as a "poor old cuss." The animal seemed to have grown as gaunt as the mount of Death in the famous painting.

With sand-chapped hands Hilarious loosened the cinch a bit, but not enough to allow the saddle to slip. He removed the bridle, lashing it to the horn of the saddle.

ON the delicate current of the breeze a sound came to his ears. Hilarious listened attentively. A horse in the distance neighed, probably scenting the spring some three hundred yards north of the spot where Hilarious stood. Again Hilarious cursed, and his shoulders drooped. He heard the sound of a man's voice. The sheriff's party had followed him more closely than he had thought! Leaving the horse to follow as he would, he set off through the dark in a direction which he thought would take him to the spring.

That spring—he attuned his ears to catch its gurgle. In his mind's eye, he visioned the black splotch of water. He would throw himself flat before it and bury his face in the cool water. No matter how alkaline,—most desert springs are alkaline, —it would be sweet to his cracked lips. His tongue felt like a wad of dry blotting paper. His throat was full of dust. Never before, during an entire life spent on the margin of the desert, had he been so thirsty. If the spring had been another mile farther he believed that he would have quit and waited for the sheriff.

The sheriff—he must hurry onward! The sheriff and his party would be there in a scant two or three minutes at the most. He stumbled forward along the sandy floor of the cañon. The stars sparkled brilliantly over the saw-edge of the cliffs, but they gave him no light on his way over the cañon's carpet of clinging sand.

He fancied he heard the gurgle of water, and he broke into a shambling sort of run. He fell to his hands and knees, and turned his head to one side, listening again and trying to think clearly against the searing ache in his throat and the cry of his body for water. A canteen—how often had he traveled miles with a canteen on his saddle without ever having tapped its liquid. He would never move without a canteen again! But the spring— As he again concentrated his efforts to reach the spring, he heard the sound of horses alarmingly near him. He seemed to be surrounded by horses treading stolidly through the sand. He was still on his hands and knees. The instinct for liberty was strong within him, and suddenly, at the sound of a voice, he dropped flat on his face.

In the darkness a horse walked past within ten feet of him. Hilarious sniffed the sand and then, all at once, realized in a fury that the horsemen were between himself and the spring. In a paroxysm of rage he clawed the dry sand. For a second, he was mad with the same sort of red rage which had caused him to shoot Sam.

He rose, swaying, to his feet and continued his march through the darkness, moving blindly in a slow, mounting rage at his change in luck. There was a spring in that cañon and he must find it! Two

years or more ago he had camped by the bubble of gray water, but at that time he had not appreciated its true value.

The slowly dragging minutes found him lifting his feet, now leaden with the fatigue of weariness. He felt that he should bear off to the left a bit more—and found himself walking into the blank rocky wall of the cañon. He moved off slowly to his right toward lower ground. He must be somewhere near that spring! A rage directed at the spring began to dull his brain. The sheriff's party was temporarily forgotten.

Hilarious found himself automatically orienting his head to the left again. For a second he gazed stupidly at a little tongue of light. Then he dropped to his knees again, cursing. The tongue flickered, lapped upward, and a small fire burned into being. It shot long moving shadows into the dark night—figures of men moving about the fire. Hilarious buried his head on his arms with a sob of rage and his lean figure lay momentarily relaxed, inert, in the heavy sand, pressed flat by the burden of his despair. Then his brain, like a lash, whipped the tired forces of his body into action, and he came to his feet in the depths of the gloom beyond the fire.

The fire was searing away the fringes of night. Through the wavering curtain Hilarious made out men grouped about the fire, talking. No doubt they were by the spring—the spring he had missed.

HAD Hilarious been six hours longer without water he would not have minded it so much. He might have become physically lethargic and mentally dormant. But now his thirst was at the maddeningly acute stage. His mouth and throat tortured him like acid wounds. In his semi-delirium, he fancied that his throat was lined with dry rasping sand and salt. For an ephemeral second he wondered what had become of his horse.

Then he had a vision of the roan plunging his nose deep into the cool water and muddying it. Irrelevantly he thought next of a jail—and with the association came to his mind the phrase, "bread and water."

"Water!" He imagined himself, dusty clothes and all, plunging into a glass-clear lake and flashing downward—with a roaring whirl of bubbles shooting to the surface of the water. He would swim downward with his mouth open and swallow great drinks of the clear, cold water.

The horse came back to his mind again. He must hurry, or the spring would be muddy. He wanted clear water. Like a drunken man, he stumbled forward through the dark toward the fire.

"Who's there?" a crisp voice snapped from the fire.

Hands above his head, Hilarious lurched forward, and then fell with his head almost in the flames.

BEARDED and ugly in appearance, if not in mood, Sam the bartender reclined on a cot of dirty blankets nursing a wound in his shoulder, and read a volume of inimitable short stories by a gentleman whose true name was Sydney Porter. Something caused the heavy man to stir in his sluggish comfort. He glanced up from his book to see the doorknob turning slowly.

The door swung open and a gaunt, dust-covered figure stepped through the doorway. It was Hilarious.

Sam's jaw slackened a second and he made as if to come to his feet.

"Easy there, pardner," said Hilarious. "I mean you no harm. I've ridden back in to apologize. You once offered me the most valuable thing in the world,—water, —and I shot you."

"So they got you, did they?" queried Sam, appearing very much relieved.

"No," contradicted Hilarious slowly. "They didn't get me! They're still out on the desert somewhere—took the north road in the sandstorm, I guess. I met four cowhands at Red Rock. I was mighty thirsty, too, and the spring was dry—but they gave me all the water I wanted out of canteens. Gosh, but water is wonderful stuff! I guess I'm about the low-downdest *hombre* that ever fancied himself a man. I've come back to eat mud or do anything you want me to."

Sam leaned back on his pile of rags, relaxed comfortably and opened his book again. For two minutes he read on while Hilarious stood silently and expectantly before him.

"Well—" Hilarious finally offered, after the long pause.

"Get out, damn you!" said Sam. "This is the first decent rest I've had in four years. Get out!"

Two minutes later, Hilarious turned the roan to the southward, and with a discreetly modified whoop, departed into the night. Lashed to his saddle was a huge canteen.

Seven Anderton

The stirring story of an arrant rogue who was also a valiant adventurer.

By LABAN REYNOLDS

Illustrated by William Molt

SEVEN ANDERTON is a rogue and a rascal—but I like him, for numerous reasons. I like him for his courage, a quality no one who knows him will deny that he possesses in abundance. I like him for his contagious cheerfulness, which seems to spring from a heart that neither disaster nor disappointment can break. I like him for his unwavering loyalty to the few he calls his friends and for many other reasons that have nothing to do with this particular story.

I first met Seven one night about fifteen years ago. I was at that time a reporter on a Kansas City paper and, in company with another newspaper man, had followed my newspaper nose into a tight corner. The two of us were putting up the losing end of a free-for-all fight, in a dive in Kansas City's Little Italy, when unexpected but very welcome assistance arrived in the form of Seven Anderton and a companion, who we later learned was one Pat Cunningham. The speed with which the pair turned the tide of battle bespoke experience in that particular line of endeavor.

Later, when we had repaired the damage to skin and wardrobe, the four of us adjourned to a restaurant, my friend and myself declaring the treat to be on us.

At that time Seven Anderton was a tall, lean, weather-bronzed youth of about twenty, with a musical laugh and a worldly wisdom far beyond his years.

Today his bushy mane is streaked with gray, but he remains otherwise the same Seven Anderton who came to the assistance of my friend and myself fifteen years ago for no other reason than that his "sympathy is always with the under-dog."

The adventurous years that have silvered his temples, and deepened in his tanned face the lines that spell experience, have not changed the tone of his ringing laugh or dimmed the love of life that gleams in his blue eyes.

The bulk of his thirty-five years have been spent in wandering in the four corners of the earth, always "about three jumps out of jail," to use his own words.

The laws of men mean nothing to Seven. He says that he has neither "country, king, nor conscience," and I believe him.

Nevertheless I like him and I am always glad when his wanderings bring him across my path—and Fate seems to see fit to bring us together quite frequently.

In my newspaper work I have moved about quite a bit and in almost every town where I have worked Seven has shown up a time or two during my stay. We do not correspond because Seven never has an address—and will not write. "Too much trouble," he says.

The days immediately following the most recent crossing of our paths will linger in my memory until that memory is a thing of the past.

It happened that I had earned a vacation of two weeks from the Chicago paper upon which I was employed and I was at a loss what to do with the two weeks.

I was on my way home from seeing a movie when I ran plump into Seven on Madison Street between Clark and La Salle. I grasped his outstretched hand and asked him to come somewhere where we could have a bite to eat and tell me what he and the world had been doing to each other since I had last seen him.

You never know whether Seven is a plutocrat or a pauper, because he can fluctuate between the pinnacle of prosperity and the depths of poverty more rapidly than can any other human in the universe. Upon this occasion he did not look prosperous and he admitted, when we had found a table in a Clark Street restaurant, that he was quite the opposite.

Over our coffee and cigarettes he told me the story of his most recent rise and fall.

"You remember," he began, "the last time I saw you was nearly two years ago, in St. Louis, just before Red Jacobs and myself left for El Paso to try our luck at running in rum from Mexico."

"I remember," I grinned, "and what sort of luck did you have?"

"Not so good," laughed Seven. "Too much competition—but we had a lot of luck in another way. We went over to Juarez one night when we had a few hundred dollars velvet on us and broke out with a double-barreled streak of luck in a gambling-house. In about two hours the pair of us broke the bank. The proprietor of the joint offered to bet us the property and equipment against our winnings on one turn of the roulette wheel but we were leery of the wheel and told him we would stake the pile against the place on one hand of dice. He took us up and Red threw the dice and we won the joint.

"For a while we were sitting on the world. The place was a mint. With the heavy trade from El Paso, there was a bar in the place and we sure gathered in the pesos and good American dollars to boot.

"It was the first time either Red or myself had owned anything that had to be operated and couldn't be moved. Being tied down in one place soon began to get old. We fixed it so one of us could run the place for a week while the other jumped out on a little trip and that made things better.

"Then," continued Seven, after pausing to light a cigarette, "about three weeks ago I came back to El Paso from a little jaunt to Denver and found that disaster had overtaken us.

"The day after I left for Denver the Mexican government had issued an edict concerning the proximity of bars and gambling houses to the U. S. border that would put us out of business. The ruling was to take effect upon a week's notice.

"When I hit Juarez I found a padlock on the place. An old greaser who ran a frijole stand across the street told me that Red was in a hospital in El Paso. I found him there with a bullet through his right lung.

"Red was able to talk and he told me that, on the last night the place was to have operated, a gang of masked men had burst into the place, rounded up and robbed all present, cleaned out the safe and cash tills and then, as they were leaving, systematically wrecked the joint and took a pot shot at him for luck. Now the worst part of it was that I had taken all the money we had in the bank to Denver with me as I intended to do a little plain and fancy spending in the Colorado capital."

I smiled. Spending money—his own or other people's—is another accomplishment of Seven's at which few can equal and none excel him.

"I GOT back to El Paso," he went on, "with less than a hundred dollars—to find Red in a hospital without a penny and the goose that laid the golden egg as dead as a door-nail.

"I sold the property as it stood for three hundred bucks and began to figure out what the next move was to be. About six months ago a fellow from Chicago got stranded in El Paso and Red and I loaned him a thousand dollars. He seemed to be a pretty regular sort of a fellow—said he was a real-estate broker up here and would send the money to us as soon as he got back on his feet. We had the address he had given us, so I jumped up here to see if I couldn't collect some of the thousand. The address was phony and I haven't been able to find any trace of him—so that's that!"

"And what do you plan to do next?" I asked.

"I am leaving at two o'clock for Houston and Galveston," he answered. "I got a letter from Red about two hours before I met you and he told me in the letter that Vivian Alvarado—she is Red's girl—came to see him the day after I left and told him that the gang that held up the place and put the bullet in Red's lung was headed by José Ortega, the half-breed from whom we won the place. It seems that Vivian has been doing a little sleuthing in the matter and she has discovered that Ortega and his gang are running some guns into Mexico for the crowd that are brewing the next revolution. They are scheduled to leave Galveston, Wednesday night, with a boatload of rifles and ammunition. Red said in the letter that Vivian will be waiting for me at the Hotel Brazos in Houston and will guide me to the place where they intend to load the boat."

"And then what?" I asked.

Seven shrugged his shoulders. "That remains to be seen," he said, "but I owe somebody one for that bullet in Red's lung and I fancy I will find a way to get back some of the money Ortega and his bunch took away with them when they wrecked our playhouse."

"But are you going to tackle the gang of them alone?" I inquired.

"Well," answered Seven, "I'll have Vivian and she is not to be sneezed at in a pinch, even if she is a girl. The thing that is worrying me most is whether you are going to loan me the eleven dollars that I am shy, on the price of a ticket to Houston."

Seven paused and sat regarding me with a quizzical smile on his lean face.

I don't know what prompted me, but my answer committed me to the most hectic two weeks I ever expect to live.

"I think," I answered, "that I shall do more than that. I think I shall go with you and see if I can be of any help."

Seven pushed back his chair and rose. "What could be sweeter!" he cried. "Let's get going—it's only an hour and a half until train time!"

It was nine o'clock Tuesday morning when our train pulled into Houston, Texas.

I had enjoyed the trip to the utmost, listening to Seven tell of various incidents from his colorful career, and I confess I got quite a thrill from anticipating the sharing of one of his adventures.

From the station we went directly to the Hotel Brazos, where we were to meet Vivian Alvarado, Red's sweetheart.

Seven had, during the journey, told me something of the girl we were to meet, and the impression I had gathered was that the girl was a rather self-sufficient young Spanish woman who had made a fair success in business and owned a string of book-stores on both sides of the border. Seven had also mentioned the fact that she was well-educated and good-looking but he had conjured up in my mind no such ravishing beauty as the girl who greeted us at the hotel.

Vivian Alvarado was a small girl with the figure that is the birthright of the Spanish señorita. A mass of hair as black as a crow's wing was braided and wound around her head and her complexion was like rose leaves and rich cream. She moved with the grace of a tigress and her voice was pure melody, but by far the most striking thing about the girl was her eyes. Under the heavy dark lashes the eyes were a soft gray—they haunted one.

With Vivian we found another addition to our party—Vivian's brother Ramon, a slender but wiry youth who, as I later learned, had been employed as a croupier at the ill-fated Juarez gambling house.

VIVIAN led the way to the suite occupied by herself and her brother and, when we had all lighted cigarettes and got nicely settled, Seven explained how it happened that I had come to Texas with him.

When he had finished, Vivian laughed.

"I fear," she said to me, "that you have fallen into bad company. Seven Anderton is the one bad influence from which I seem unable to wean my future husband."

"Is he really so bad as that?" I asked, joining in her laughter.

"Worse," she answered, her face growing sober. "Where you find Seven Anderton trouble is not far away. If he were not as clever at getting out of it again as he is certain to get into it, he would have spent all his mature years and part of his youth in prison."

"Did you speak of maturity?" interrupted Seven, from his comfortable position in an easy-chair. "My dear Vivian, have you forgotten my motto: 'Be a kid all your life'?"

"No," she said, "I have not forgotten—and I must admit that you come as near living up to it as any one possibly could.

"You see," she continued, turning to me, "I do not approve of Seven—but I like him and I am bound to say that I am very grateful to him at the present time for hastening to my assistance."

"Your assistance?" exclaimed Seven, suddenly sitting up. "How do you get that way? I'll have you understand that I hasten to the aid of no damsels in distress! I am here to pull my own chestnuts out of the fire. Don't forget that half of the damage done by Ortega and his gang was done to me."

"All right," assented Vivian, "have your way, but I know as well as you do that you would do just as much for Red if every penny were his."

"By the way, just what *are* we going to do?" I queried.

"Luck is with us," whispered Seven; "that's the guns."

Seven hitched his chair a little closer to the rest of us. "Let's hear what Vivian has to tell us," he said, "and then we can answer that question better."

Vivian willingly began her story.

"After the gambling house was robbed and Red was shot," she said, "I soon discovered that it had been Ortega's band that did the work."

"Just a moment," interrupted Seven, turning to me. "For the benefit of our volunteer reënforcements, perhaps I had better do a little explaining.

"You must understand," he went on, "that Vivian is not altogether the sweet, innocent, dumb thing she appears. One of the best things she does is find out things that other folks don't want known. During the time just prior to the fall of the Huerta régime in Mexico her book-shops were headquarters and post offices for the rebels and she doubtless has in that highly decorative cranium of hers at the present time, information that would unmake any man who might be elected President of that benighted country. Further than that she has no scruples against using any of that information at any time to gain her own ends. And that is the young lady who likes me but does not approve of me! Now go on with your story."

"As I was saying before I was so rudely interrupted," she continued, "I learned that Ortega was responsible for the robbery and the shooting of Red, so I began checking up on him.

"I have learned that the object of the raid was to obtain funds with which to purchase a shipment of guns and ammunition. That shipment has been purchased and is now hidden on the island of Galveston. From there Ortega intends to run it into Mexico and double his money. I have also learned the place where the boat is to run into an abandoned wharf tomorrow and take aboard the cargo."

"And what is your plan?" put in Seven, as Vivian paused.

"I have formed no definite plan," answered the girl, "except that I can see it is up to us to take that boat and cargo away from Ortega and his crew, deliver it ourselves and collect the money for it as spoils of war."

Seven's rollicking laugh boomed out and he turned to me with upturned palms.

"Now isn't that a nice little plan," he asked, "to be figured out by a demure little lady who thinks I am an evil influence on the red-headed rounder she hopes to lead to the altar?"

For the sake of maintaining a strict neutrality I did not answer Seven's question, but asked one myself.

"Provided we are successful in capturing the boat and its cargo," I inquired, "how are we to know where to deliver it and how are we to collect the money?"

"I'll lay a dollar to a peso," remarked Seven, "that Vivian, the paragon of virtue, has the answer to that one ready."

"You win," smiled Vivian. "At least I have learned that the boat is to lay off the coast at a point about fifteen miles south of Tampico on Friday night and that she is to show three red lights, one above the other, at intervals of ten minutes. A fleet of launches will come out from the shore and receive the guns and pay for them. How we are to carry on the deal after they discover that Ortega is not aboard is a thing that we must figure out between now and that time."

It began to look as if I had let myself in for a lively vacation. I looked at Seven. He looked steadily at Vivian.

"Where is this old wharf at which Ortega intends to load the contraband?" he asked.

"About twelve miles from here down on the south coast of the island," Vivian answered. "There is a road runs past within a quarter of a mile, where we can drive this afternoon and get a look at it."

"Fine!" said Seven. "Suppose we all get some dinner and get started."

ABOUT two o'clock that afternoon we turned our rented car into a little-used road that ran westward from the main highway along the south shore of the island. After proceeding for a couple of miles Vivian, who was driving, stopped the car and pointed to the south.

"There it is," she said.

About a quarter of a mile to the south lay an old wharf. The road leading down to it was grass-grown and there was no sign of life about the place.

"All right," said Seven, as he climbed from the car, and motioned for Ramon Alvarado and myself to do likewise, "bring these baskets of lunch and the thermos bottles and we will go up there on the hill in that thicket of live oaks and wait till dark. If nothing turns up by that time we will go down and give that dock the once over."

When Ramon, myself and the lunch were out of the car, Seven turned to Vivian.

"You beat it back to town with the car," he said, "and meet us with it at midnight, at the junction of this by-road and the highway."

When Vivian and the car disappeared in the direction of Galveston the three of us made our way to the thicket Seven had indicated and, finding a spot where we could see and not be seen, stretched ourselves on the grass and took up our vigil.

It was just sundown when we heard the sound of an approaching motor. Seven sat up and motioned for silence. Peeping through the brush we saw two heavily loaded trucks come along the road and go down to the old wharf.

"Luck is with us," whispered Seven; "that's the guns!"

It was still light enough that we could count the six men who immediately busied themselves with unloading the heavy cases from the trucks and storing them in the dilapidated old wharf shed. Presently the two trucks returned in the direction of Galveston, leaving four men at the wharf.

We remained in the thicket for more than an hour, until darkness had completely fallen, and then Seven told Ramon and myself that he was going to slip down and look over the situation. He instructed us to remain where we were until he returned, unless we heard a shot from the dock, in which case we were to come to his assistance. He then examined an automatic, which had been in his hip pocket, and thrusting it under his belt where he could get at it easily he moved silently away in the direction of the wharf.

"He is the bold one—that Americano," whispered the Mexican lad, after Seven was gone.

"He seems to be," I answered, and then we lapsed into silence.

Somewhat more than an hour slipped away and then suddenly, and almost noiselessly, Seven appeared beside us.

"Follow me," he whispered, and led the way back over the hill away from the wharf.

When he had gone far enough that there was no danger of our voices carrying on the still night air Seven stopped and gave us the information he had gathered.

"It is a good thing we came today," he said, "they have changed their plans and intend to load the stuff and get away from here soon after midnight. The two who went back with the trucks are bringing the

A sharp command from Seven seemed to freeze the pair in their tracks.

boat and should be here in about three hours."

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

"Look to your gun," Seven answered, "and stick it in your belt where you can get at it in a hurry. You and I are going to go down and make prisoners of the four that are down there with the contraband. We will leave Ramon up in the thicket to bring help if anything goes wrong with our plan."

I took from my pocket the ugly blue automatic that Seven had given me earlier in the day, saw that the clip was in place and thrust it in my belt as directed.

"The four of them are playing cards in the wharf house," said Seven, "and we ought to be able to take them by surprise. You follow close behind me and don't make any noise. When I tell them to put up their hands you cover them with that gat of yours and give me moral support, as it were."

In spite of the tense condition of my nerves, I was forced to smile. Seven simply cannot be serious.

LEAVING Ramon in the thicket, Seven and myself made our way quietly down toward the wharf. As we drew near I could see light shining through the cracks of the shed and then I began to catch the sound of voices.

With the automatic gripped tightly in my right hand I followed close behind the crouching form of Seven as we moved forward through the darkness, feeling every step of the way to avoid making a noise.

Adventure is a far nicer thing to read about and to contemplate than it is to experience. I don't think that I ever felt less belligerent in my life than I did as Seven Anderton and myself stole along that old wharf toward the shed where we planned to take captive four armed men.

I don't know what other men think about at such times but I remember thinking that, although at that time I knew not a single word of Spanish, I would recognize the order to throw up my hands should it suddenly come through the darkness in that language.

Inch by inch we advanced; then suddenly Seven was standing in the light that streamed from the open door of the shed issuing an order in Spanish reenforced by the leveled automatic. I sprang to his side as he had directed.

Inside the shed, sitting on boxes of ammunition with another for a table upon which they had been playing cards, were the four men. The faces of all four were turned toward Seven and myself and I remember noting that the expressions on those faces were more of surprise than of fear. The hands of all were elevated.

Seven issued another order and the quartet rose and turned their faces to the opposite wall—their hands still in the air.

"Give me your gun," said Seven, as he took it from my hand, "and go over and take the artillery away from that bunch."

I collected four guns and three knives and then Seven gave another order and the men lowered their hands and crossed their wrists behind their backs.

"Now," said Seven, "cut some of that heavy cord off these cases of rifles and tie their wrists. Be sure you do a good job of it."

Once more I followed instructions.

"Fine," said Seven, when I had finished. "Now bring along some more of that cord and carry that lantern. We will take this crew up and leave them with Ramon."

Half an hour later our four prisoners, their ankles also securely bound, were lying in the thicket in care of Ramon, who had orders from Seven to shoot the first one of them that made a sound.

"Bring the lantern," said Seven. "We will go back to the wharf."

Back at the wharf, we placed the lantern back in the shed and then went out and sat down to wait for the boat.

"Here," said Seven, as he pointed out the projecting end of a piling, "is where they will probably snub the boat. When their friends don't answer their hail they will get off the boat to see what the trouble is. We will then add them to our collection."

It was about eleven o'clock when we heard the muffled sound of a marine motor.

"There they come!" exclaimed Seven, as he guided me into a dark niche at the end of the wharf shed.

Ten minutes (seeming an hour to me) passed and then the boat, a forty-foot coasting cruiser, loomed out of the night. She was running without lights and as she drew near the wharf a hail in Spanish came from her. When there was no answer to the second hail there followed some conversation aboard the boat that told us there were at least two men aboard.

With his lips almost against my ear, Seven whispered to me not to move until he did, as he wanted both men in sight before he started the fun. I nodded.

The boat grated against the wharf and a rope was flung out and around the piling. A man leaped to the wharf and made the mooring fast, all the while keeping up a running conversation with another aboard.

Then the one on the boat jumped to the wharf and the pair of them started toward the shed, from the open door of which the light was streaming.

A SHARP command in Spanish from Seven almost caused me to drop my gun and seemed to freeze the pair in their tracks. Then their hands went above their heads and Seven stepped toward them with me at his heels.

Seven chuckled. Evidently he was enjoying himself hugely.

"You may now hold a disarmament conference with these gentlemen," he said.

When I had taken the weapons from the pair Seven shooed them into the shed where we repeated the binding process and then took them up to the thicket and delivered them to Ramon.

"It would give me great pleasure, Ortega," said Seven to one of the last two, as we prepared to return to the wharf, "to put a bullet in your coffee-colored carcass, but being by nature a gentleman, I shall refrain."

A growl was the only answer and, laughing, Seven led the way back to the deck.

Inspection showed the boat to be a snug little vessel of the type sailors call a "pumpkin seed"—not speedy but stanch.

"Well," said Seven, when the inspection was over, "suppose you take down the road with all possible speed and meet Vivian at the highway and bring her here. In the meantime I will load the lighter pieces of our cargo."

I am a good walker but it was fifteen minutes after twelve when I arrived at the highway and Vivian was waiting. I told her briefly what had happened and we returned, as quickly as the condition of the road would allow, to the wharf.

Upon our arrival Vivian took charge of the prisoners while Seven, Ramon and myself finished the loading of the cargo.

When this was done we held a conference as to what disposition we would make of our prisoners. We decided to take them with us, since to leave them behind to release themselves would increase the danger of delivering the guns to the purchasers.

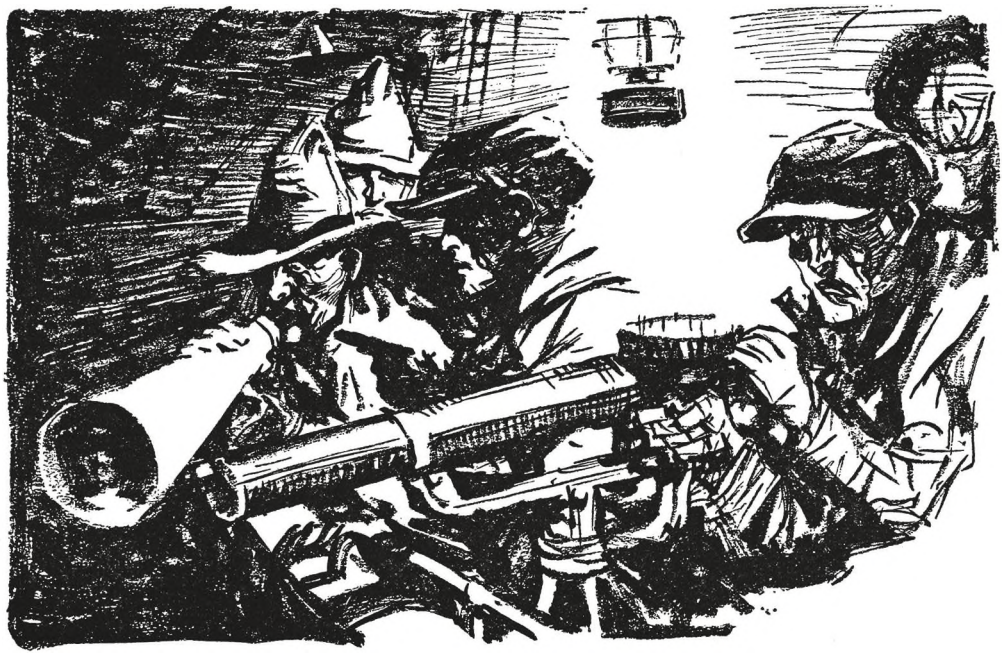
"This job isn't over by a damn' sight," remarked Seven, as we started up the hill to bring down the prisoners.

Vivian helped us herd the six prisoners down to the boat where we rebound their ankles and dumped them into the hold with the cargo. Then she declared that she was going to go with us; but Seven declared that she was not and the result was that, after a stormy half-hour, she started back to Galveston with the car.

"You beat it back to El Paso and tell Red that I am on my way to retrieve the family bankroll," Seven told her as she departed.

Detailing Ramon to stand guard over the prisoners, Seven busied himself in the engine-room with the result that the motor was soon humming.

"Do you know anything about navigation?" he asked, as he came up and started to cast off the moorings.



Seven and Ramon leaped to the rail. I took my place at the machine-gun.

I told him I did not.

"Well, I don't know a devil of a lot myself," he laughed, "but we are about to start for Tampico."

"All I can say," I answered, "is that I have read that drowning is an easy death."

"Can't believe half you read," he retorted as the boat began to back away from the wharf, "and, for that matter I have read that a man born to be hanged can't be drowned, that the Devil takes care of his own and that there is a special providence that watches over fools and children. Therefore I have a feeling that we shall in some manner arrive at the desired destination."

By dawn we were out in the open gulf with the nose of the boat pointed in a southwesterly direction and the coast a dim blur on the horizon.

Looking over the boat in daylight we discovered that she carried a machine-gun aft and that her galley was well stocked, as were her gas and oil tanks. Her name was the *Pigeon*.

FOR three days we loafed along down the coast and nothing happened. At about sundown Friday night we raised Tampico dead ahead. Seven turned the nose of the *Pigeon* to the south and slowed down the motor.

"We have four or five hours to make fifteen miles," he said, "and then we shall see what we shall see. In the meantime I have a little proposition to make to Mr. Ortega. Will you go below and unbind the gentleman and bring him up here?"

When I brought the sullen Ortega on deck Seven pointed to a deck chair and told him to be seated.

"Ortega," said Seven, "I have a proposition to make you. I am going to deliver this cargo and collect the money for it in some way—and you may gamble on that—but you can simplify matters for me if you agree to my proposition. I want you to take charge from here on until after the stuff is delivered. The three of us will act as your crew but we will be armed and any attempt to double-cross us will be your death warrant. The lack of a respectable excuse is all that keeps me from pumping some lead into you, anyhow, in return for what you gave my partner in Juarez. If you accept I will return your boat to you as soon as myself and my friends are safe on U. S. soil and you can turn your precious gang loose. If you don't accept I am going to set the bunch of you adrift in an open boat in the gulf in about an hour. What do you say?"

For a matter of five minutes Ortega sat silent while Seven stood before him with folded arms, waiting.

"All right, I'll accept," he said, at last.

"Fine!" exclaimed Seven. "You show a lot better judgment than you did in Juarez. But remember, I trust you no farther than I could throw a bull by the tail and I shall

have my hand on my gun during the entire transaction. I believe you are aware that I have something of a reputation for accuracy and I promise you that, at the first hint of treachery, I shall drill your yellow heart."

For more than an hour Seven questioned Ortega concerning the manner in which the delivery of the contraband was to be made. The result was that we set to work and brought the entire cargo out and piled it on the deck. We next rigged the red lanterns which were to be our signal lights and then, as an extra precaution, Ramon and myself went below and looked to the prisoners' bonds and gagged the lot of them so that any outcry was impossible.

Ten o'clock found us riding with the engine stopped about four miles from shore at what Ortega said was the designated meeting place.

At ten-minute intervals the red lanterns were pulled to the top of the mast and lowered again and after about an hour of this we heard the sound of approaching launches. Seven and Ramon leaped to the rail, one on either side of Ortega, who had the megaphone.

I took my place at the machine gun—my army service having made me familiar with that weapon.

Ortega had told us that, according to the arrangements, only one member of the party was to come aboard the boat and that he was to make the payment as soon as the goods were over the side. The price of the consignment had been fixed at fifteen thousand dollars in American gold certificates.

THE proceedings passed off like clockwork. The boats approached and were hailed and drew alongside. One man came aboard and showed the money to Ortega and Seven, who counted it and saw that it was all right. The consignment was lowered to the launches and pronounced O. K. The agent paid over the money and returned to the launch that had brought him and departed. I took Ortega below and started the motor and the *Pigeon* with Seven at the helm swung her nose to the north.

When I returned to the deck with Ortega, who had been granted his liberty under guard, Seven motioned me hastily to his side.

"This is too soft to be true," he said, "something is going to happen and that before daylight. Take Ortega back down and tie him up again and bring Ramon up with you."

Ten minutes later, when Ramon and myself came on deck, Seven had set one of the two lifeboats the *Pigeon* carried adrift, and had the other one all ready to lower.

"What is the big idea?" I asked.

"I am playing a hunch," he replied. "I have been edging in toward the shore and we can't be more than a mile out. We are going to run for it in the small boat. I know these guys down here and they'd never let go of fifteen thousand dollars so easy unless they have some sort of string tied to it."

FIVE minutes more, and the three of us were in the small boat pulling away from the *Pigeon*.

"What about Ortega and his crew?" I asked.

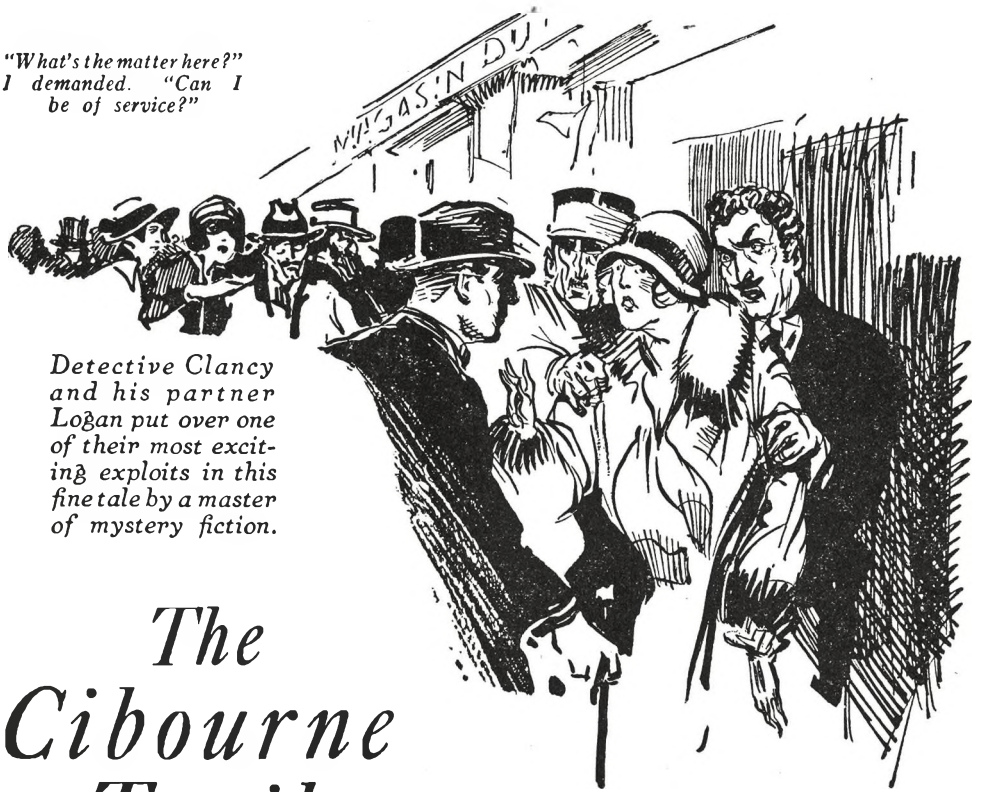
"They will soon be loose now that they are unguarded," answered Seven. "That is why I set the other boat adrift—so they couldn't follow us ashore. Now lay on these oars, because I will feel a whole lot easier when we are on solid ground with all this money."

We had just stepped ashore at the end of a hard row when the sound of a heavy-caliber gun came echoing across the water from the direction of the *Pigeon*.

"Fine," remarked Seven Anderton. "That is the rebels inviting the *Pigeon* to halt while they take back their money. They will be one rabid bunch of *hombres* when they find out that it is not aboard. I don't envy Mr. Ortega his job of explaining to his visitors what has happened."

Early morning found us in Tampico, after a weary hike through a strange country, and Seven lost no time in transferring the cash he was carrying to an El Paso bank by Western Union wire.

The rest is soon told. Two days more saw us in El Paso where we found Red able to sit up, and looking forward to getting out of bed in a couple of weeks. Seven and Red insisted that I accept a thousand dollars for the help they held I had been in the retrieving of their fortunes; and two weeks from the night I met Seven on Madison Street found me back at my desk in Chicago. Seven and Vivian saw me to the train in El Paso and, the last thing before I left, I asked Seven's permission to tell this story.



"What's the matter here?" I demanded. "Can I be of service?"

Detective Clancy and his partner Logan put over one of their most exciting exploits in this fine tale by a master of mystery fiction.

The Cibourne Trail

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

I WAS passing along the boulevard before one of the large department-stores of Paris, not far from the Madeleine, when it happened. In front of me was a woman, obviously an American tourist, extremely frightened; a Frenchman had her by the arm; another was on her other side; a crowd was collecting. I butted in.

"What's the matter here?" I demanded. "Madame, can I be of any service?"

"Oh, you speak French! Please help—I don't know what it is!" she exclaimed. The man at her arm gave me a look.

"Shoplifter," he said curtly. "Will you come along, monsieur?"

"You bet," I said. And to the woman, who was nearly in hysterics: "Better go with him and see what it's about, and I'll keep company. They think you're a shoplifter."

She was half angry, half frightened, protested the charge vehemently, but we all went along to the office of the general manager, and things were sorted out. The manager demanded to know who I was.

"Jim Logan, assistant to Doctor Clancy, the dentist in the Rue Cambon—"

"Ah, we know M. Clancy very well!" he exclaimed. "Be seated, m'sieur."

They might well know Clancy, who had been located in Paris for years—because Clancy did more detective work than he did dentistry, and was one of the best-known men in Paris in official circles.

The present affair was simple enough. The woman, a lady of position and culture from the Middle West, had been seen by three girls in the notion department to put several small toilet articles in her purse. She had not paid for them, had left the store, and the detective had promptly brought her back. Here were the articles—she had no receipt to show.

Her defense was that she was in a hurry, had given one shopgirl the money, had put the things in her bag as the girl told her to do, and had gone. She could not be sure which girl had waited on her; she could be sure of nothing—was in tears. Since I was acting for her, the manager

took me to one side and expressed his regret.

"You know, my dear sir, how shoplifters are always women of position? Kleptomania, not theft! This is our first experience with an American lady; we find many Germans, Belgians, English, but never before an American. I regret it most deeply, I assure you!"

He was quite sincere. I asked what would be done, and he shrugged.

"Nothing. It is a matter of a few francs —not worth the trouble. Perhaps you will see the poor woman on her way?"

I did so, convinced that she was a kleptomaniac. She was furious—was going to appeal to the bank, to the consulate, to the police. I saw her to her hotel, and then went along to Clancy's office.

HE was disengaged when I entered, and thrust a cigarette at me. A queer little man, Clancy—very short in build, with gray mustache and imperial, shabbily dressed, absent-minded, his gray eyes clear and keen as crystal. Laughing, I gave him an account of my recent experience, and dismissed the matter.

"What's on for today? Got any cases in hand?"

"For a newspaper man, at present an assistant detective," said Clancy dryly, "you're a stupid sort, Jim Logan!"

"All assistant detectives are stupid," I chuckled. "That's why the senior partner shines—by contrast. What are you driving at?"

"Shoplifting," he said, puffing at his cigarette. "Did you see the girl who was supposed to have been paid?"

"Yes." I gave him a curious glance. "You're not going to open up the matter and defend our countrywoman, are you? It's useless."

"Of course it's useless." And he nodded. "No, let her go her way in peace—she was neatly trapped and has no comeback. However, it might be worth our while to glance over the three shopgirls who witnessed her theft. Little things lead to big things. Of course."

"What do you mean by trapped?" I demanded. "It was a clear-cut case. You know a big store like that doesn't want to trump up false charges—"

He waved his cigarette with a derisive gesture, and I fell silent.

"Take the case of a shopgirl getting from one to two hundred francs per month wages," he observed. "Tourists flood around her, spending money regardlessly. She is tempted, and she finds one or two friends in the same department who are also tempted. *Voilà*, as the French say! There you have the nucleus."

I smoked silently. After a moment he resumed:

"This it not an isolated case, Logan—it happens every day, in every one of the big shops here. It's one of the traps for tourists, but Americans seldom fall for it, because they're too sharp. A woman comes into the store; she's alone, a foreigner, unacquainted with the way things are done in Paris. Good! The shopgirl has a possible victim. She is in a hurry and buys one or two little things. The shopgirl tells her to put them in her bag, or perhaps she does it without being told. Usually she is told—this is the trap. It's done every day in every shop.

"She pays the girl. She does not go to the cashier, so gets no receipt. The girl has not made a pencil-mark through the price-ticket. The woman starts to leave. The girl had already signaled her accomplices, to one of whom she slips the money given her. The detective is called, sent after the woman. Once the latter leaves the shop, he accosts her and brings her back. Three witnesses against her—a plain case! There's nothing to show she paid the girl. You see? I'm surprised you're not on the dodge, Logan!"

"We live and learn," I commented. "By George! The store ought to be put wise to it—"

"Bah! They stand by the employees, naturally. To check the game would be difficult—an endless system of espionage would be necessary. Well, you saw the three girls in question, did you? Good. We have a starting-point."

"For what?" I demanded. Clancy fingered his imperial and chuckled.

"For something bigger than you'd believe —perhaps. It's a long chance. You'll have a bit of real work to do, my young friend, and if you succeed there'll be some rewards in sight, I promise you!"

"Want me to get acquainted with the girl?" I said, and grunted. "Fat chance! These French business girls are smart as steel traps. The very fact that I went there using your name would spoil—"

"Did the girl see you? Did she know you used my name?"

"No," I said reflectively. "Come to

think of it, she didn't. And the woman said she'd not know the girl again—had paid her no attention. The manager was a wooden wall to her. If I'd not been there, they probably would have pinched her as an object lesson—"

OBVIOUSLY, Clancy was paying no attention to anything I said. He had the far-away look of a man who habitually loses his umbrella or gets out at the wrong station. I waited for him to wake up again, wasting no more good words on the empty air.

"Coke," he ejaculated at length.

"By-product of coal," I commented. He gave me a wondering look, then chuckled.

"Oh! Sometimes. Hm! Logan, do you know anything about the little island across the Channel—home of labor unions, dole, nonworkers and nobility?"

"I haven't the honor," I returned with a shake of the head. "Never saw England."

"There are several ways in." He spoke dreamily, as though all the while pursuing his train of thought far beyond the words. "If you take the air-route or Calais-Dover, you'll be fashionable—one way, no baggage is examined; the other, they go through the last item and your person to boot. Folkestone-Boulogne is nearly as bad. Newhaven-Dieppe is variable; you never know whether the Customs will be asleep or awake. But by Havre-Southampton, you dump down your grip, and the Customs man puts a chalk-mark on it while he's reciting the list of dutiable articles. Yes, it must be Havre-Southampton. The air-route is never examined, but the people who fly are known after the second trip."

I looked at him in puzzled wonder.

"And what," I demanded, "has all this touring information got to do with a supposed kleptomaniac and a tourist trap in Paris?"

"I told you," responded Clancy absent-mindedly. "Coke."

The connection was beyond me, and so I abstracted another of his cigarettes to assist me in puzzling it out. Clancy, with his mind on the other side of the world, sat looking like an opium fiend after the third pipe, until I shot a demand at him.

"Spill it!"

"Eh?" He started. "What?"

"The connection between kleptomania, tourist traps, and coke."

He laughed and reached for a cigarette himself.

"Sometimes I think you're something of a wizard at this game yourself, Logan," he observed, "and at other times you develop a woodenness that's something amazing! I'd advise you to turn loose on your own, this time. Your use to me is your difference of outlook and your ability to act swiftly. Now, tourist traps go into all sorts of ramifications."

True enough, as I knew. From Deauville to Nice, pleasure-seeking tourists were the prey of the harpies, despite all the efforts at protection exerted by the French government. They had themselves to thank for most of it, naturally.

"Dope-smuggling is running the Government ragged," went on Clancy. "Go to it! You know the store; you know the city; finally, there's the Havre-Southampton route. These people work de luxe, by regular steamers. Want any money?"

I knew better than to ask him for particulars; but: "Does this blind alley lead to London?" I observed with heavy sarcasm.

Clancy gestured complete ignorance with his hands, French-fashion. Then he took a wad of notes from his breast pocket and tossed it over to me.

"There's ten thousand francs—big game, big money. Government rewards will pay us back, with a profit. Unless it's too much for you, go ahead and get busy."

"Too much? The job or the ten thousand francs?" I asked, scooping it in.

Clancy chuckled. "Get to work! And keep me posted. I've a straggling idea where it'll run, but nothing to go on; however, I sha'n't be idle. Don't forget I'm rather too well known in some quarters, and if we meet, don't speak to me first. Now run along, and all good luck go with you!"

I ran, but with only the vaguest idea of what I was about.

"YOUR use to me," Clancy had said, "is your different outlook."

There was his reason for sending me blind out on the quest—of what? Drug-runners, it appeared. Three shop assistants playing a crooked game for small stakes! How could this lead to big game, I could not see for the life of me. It might be there was a general organization of crooks running from large to small—this was the only possible hope of any solution. Perhaps Clancy thought I might run down the big game by working through the small fry.

There was, in fact, nothing else I could do, therefore I set about doing it.

The department-store in question being close by, I made for it, and presently found myself at the notion counter or counters—a whole corner of the vast establishment, chiefly given over to women's articles and toilet goods. A girl came up and inquired what I wanted.

"*Je ne sais pas,*" I told her, and she smiled.

This carefully pronounced sentence, instead of the usual "*sais pas,*" was enough to tell her that I was a tourist. So was my accent. I can get along pretty well with French, though not well enough to fool any Parisian; seldom, indeed, can the foreigner manage such a feat. In this case the girl at once began to speak English, asking what sort of article I was after, and giving me a chance to study her.

Unhealthy, naturally, and as usual none too clean about the neck. Clever—watching the effect of every word on me, summing me up, evidently questioning what was behind my aimless manner. And she had the usual animal-like nostril of the lower-class French woman; pretty in a way, yet of the earth earthy. The French maxim that one need not be ashamed of anything the good God has made, leaves its mark.

Few shoppers were about, so my quest was unhurried. I bought a toothbrush and handed the girl a twenty-franc note, slipping the brush into my pocket. She was not to be so easily taken in, however—the little game was played only upon women, or perhaps one victim in a day was the maximum. She calmly led me to the cashier's desk and waited while I got my change. I had not finished with her, however.

"I'd like to look at some perfumes," I said.

She accompanied me to the proper counter and displayed the wares in a bored fashion.

"You speak English very well," I commented. "Where did you learn it?"

"In Paris," she said. "And I am here to sell, not to listen to idle compliments from tourists."

"It is not a compliment, but an inspiration," I told her. "If you learned English in Paris, why shouldn't I learn French here? Perhaps you could teach me. I couldn't afford more than a hundred francs a lesson."

Mention of this staggering sum was enough to shake anyone. She eyed me sharply, for your French shopgirl may be an unwedded wife, but she has nothing to do with strangers. However, the hundred-franc offer was a temptation.

"M'sieur," she said without anger, "my work begins at nine, and I am not out until seven. I fear you must seek another teacher. There are schools."

"And I do not like these schools," I said. "Now, I speak a little French, not much. You must, obviously, dine each evening. If you were to dine with me three evenings a week, and help with my terrible accent, it would be three hundred francs added to your wages."

She gave me another appraising look and evidently decided that I was not attempting any tourist flirtation but meant my words literally—as I did. Just then a floorwalker came along to see what all the talk was about, so I bought a cheap bottle of perfume, and the gentleman went on his way satisfied. My girl gave me a quick look and a smile, and I knew the day was won—not by *me,* however. It was won by three hundred francs a week.

"The first lesson?" she asked.

"Where and when you like," I replied. "It depends on your quarter of Paris, eh?"

She nodded, and yet hesitated. "You are very genteel," she said in French. "And yet, I do not know—"

I produced a hundred-franc note and handed it to her.

"For the first lesson, in advance," I said. "I leave the place of meeting entirely to you, mam'selle."

"You know the Boulevard St. Denis?" she asked, and I nodded. "Then, say, the Café Mairie, at eight tonight?"

"Very good," I responded, and paid for my perfume in a matter-of-fact manner, and so went my way.

I HAD done the obvious thing, naturally. It might lead me nowhere. These girls were sharp ones; perhaps, in their little tourist-trap that won a few francs from each victim, they were being sharpened still further for larger work—perhaps not. At the same time they might know more than they seemed to know, and I was out to buy information. Naturally they would not talk here in the store, and pumping would be easier work over a dinner-table.

Thinking it as well to take counsel with Clancy and perhaps worm some item of value from his stubborn lips, I looked in and found him busy cleaning instruments. He heard what I had done, and nodded.

"That's where youth and beauty score," he observed. "Now, if I had suggested dinner and French lessons to the prettiest girl in sight—whew! I'd have caught it heavy. Not to mention the hundred francs per time."

"Well," I said, "one look at me, and she could see my intent was innocent—"

"It had better be, for your own sake," and he chuckled. "You might have a look at the paper there."

I saw an English paper lying on the table, and my eye was caught by the heavy headlines of an article on the dope-traffic. It was on what passes for the front page—in England the front page is stuck away where nobody can find it.

The proprietor froze into immobility as he looked into the barrel of my pistol.

"It needs skilled labor," I commented. "The beggar who wrote this doesn't know the first thing about a lead, or about headlines—"

"No, nor about cocaine and allied products," said Clancy. "He blames it all on Hamburg and Rotterdam, talks about hollow boot-soles and umbrella-sticks—bosh! Funny what the British public will swallow from Fleet Street. I expect this chap never heard of Cibourne."

"Who's Cibourne?" I asked.

"Mystery man," said Clancy. "He's a Frenchman, but has never been seen in France—and the English police can't set eyes on him either. However, Cibourne has landed about a hundred pounds of cocaine alone in the hands of London crooks, within the past two months—not to mention heroin and other such products."

"If they know his name, they can get him," I said. "How'd they learn it?"

Clancy shrugged. "A name isn't a man, and gives no direct clue. Some little fellow squealed it, I suppose. A hundredweight of cocaine, Logan—some few hollow boot-soles, eh? Of course. Quite a few."

He wiped the last pair of forceps, and laid them away, and chortled at me.

"The girl wont turn up. Somebody in the place saw you accompany that American woman to the office of the 'grand director,' as they call him. She'll be tipped off. Counting your perfume and toothbrush, you're a hundred and eighty francs out of pocket."

"I'll bet you the hundred and eighty she turns up," I said.

"Done. If you're going to keep the appointment, you'd better go!"

Glancing at my watch, I agreed with him, and went.

Naturally, I took the underground, or Metro, as it is generally known, to the Porte St. Denis station. This station has two entrances, like most subway stations in Paris. And as I came out of one exit, I saw the girl and knew my bet was won. She was pacing up and down before the side entrance to the restaurant.

Clever, all right—but I was on the lookout. She came toward me, alone; my glimpse of the man leaving her, diving hurriedly into the other Metro entrance, gave me only a fleeting impression of him. They had seen me first. He wore the usual Parisian hat, a wide-brimmed black felt, and my hasty snapshot of his face showed it as furtive, ferret-nosed, pallid. Beyond doubt he was a drug-addict.

The girl came toward me. She looked different, here, wearing a little black dinner dress with touches of black lace. Cheap enough, yet the Parisian talent for making something out of nothing gave it a dainty touch, and she looked more attractive now. I offered my arm and complimented her on her appearance, in purposely clumsy French. She smiled a little, and we entered the restaurant.

As we came to a table, I checked her slightly, and put a card into her hand.

"One must always be polite," I murmured. "Especially pupil and teacher! Here is my card, mam'selle. You have not yet told me your name."

She laughed slightly, as though amused by my awkwardness.

"It is Marguerite," she answered readily, "—Marguerite Cibourne."

SELECTING an excellent dinner, I got rid of the waiter; then the wine-boy brought his card and I passed it to my vis-à-vis. Whether because she liked it, or from consideration for my pocket, Marguerite Cibourne picked a late vintage Vouvray.

Meantime I was hesitant between placing the blame on Clancy or on chance. Obviously it was impossible for Clancy to have known the identity of the girl I had selected as a French teacher; and yet these impossible things had a way of turning up, where Peter J. Clancy was concerned. Perhaps the little dentist had been amused by my way of worming information out of him. I was ready to venture a long bet that Clancy had been occupied for some time in quietly getting information about the dopering, doubtless for the Government. And my little adventure with the American lady had come at just the right moment to let me into the game.

My partner was very happy over the outing, for she must have concluded by this time that I had no ulterior motives in the invitation; this was typical of her class. She started to work brightly enough, asking how she could best help with my accent.

"Suppose we talk about your work," I suggested. "It will give me new words, and I shall learn by hearing you talk."

She nodded to this, and I led off by asking whether she had always been in the same department-store.

"Always is a very long time," she returned demurely. "I am not that old! No, I've been there only a year, in the same department."

"And how many of you are there?"

"Three of us—oh, *là, là!* Does M'sieur Logan wish other teachers too? Well, there is Mlle. Lebert, Mlle. Ockerts, and myself. And the buyer, Madame Lebrun."

"And you like your companions?"

"But yes! We are very good friends. It is necessary that we should be friends, working all day together, is it not?"

I agreed with this. She broke in upon the questions with the remark that I already spoke French very fairly.

"Perhaps," I assented. "Yet this fact does not prevent me from desiring to improve my knowledge, especially when I can dine with a charming companion!"

She laughed, and fell into a cheerful camaraderie. Presently our meal arrived, or at least the first essentials of it. When the waiter had departed, I reverted to questions.

"Yours is not a common name," I told her. "Is there anyone else of the same name in the department-store?"

She shook her head. "No. You are right, it is not a common name."

I was stumped. Obviously enough, a

girl such as this could not be the cocaine-dealing Cibourne, the smuggler. She was a rather weak sort, with no great force of character—one reason I had selected her almost instantly as a victim. Yet she did not seem depraved, vicious in any way, or a police character: she was merely a clever, light-headed Parisian girl.

"Have you any relatives in the store?" I asked idly, and then was astonished by the sharp look I received.

"Why do you ask that?"

"To enlarge my vocabulary." And I laughed. She nodded.

"My uncle is buyer of woolen goods for the firm."

"Oh! And you got your position through him, eh?"

She nodded. "He is very good to me."

"He would be—anyone would be! But didn't you say there was no one else of your name in the store?"

"But there is not!" and she laughed gayly. "He is my mother's brother—his name is Guilbert."

After this we both devoted ourselves to our meal.

I WAS exceedingly satisfied with myself, and small wonder—here I had the whole thing complete, cut and dried, except for details! Guilbert must make frequent trips to England in connection with his buying. The store catering largely for tourists, must carry English woolens. It would pay its employees meanly. So Guilbert could turn many a dishonest penny in his travels, without suspicion pointing to him—the more so as woolens destined for Paris or returned to England would be heavy. A regular traveler, with a definite standing, representing a large firm, the Customs officials would never dream of molesting him.

Why had Clancy called it "something big?" It was certainly one of the flattest cases we had ever tackled together. Obviously Guilbert would be known to his underworld associates, not by his own name, but by the first to come to mind—that of his defunct brother-in-law. Everything was pat.

While Marguerite got on with the Chateaubriand, I was busy with mental calculations. Assuming the three clerks caught a kleptomania client once a week, which must be the limit of activity, it meant at most a hundred francs to divide among them. Despite her Uncle Guilbert, I had no doubt this girl was in on the little game. It seemed a petty business, until the thought of blackmail came into my head. A tourist caught in Paris could be milked profitably at home—perhaps.

Was this the aim of the gang? Or as Clancy had hinted, was it an educational affair by which apt pupils were raised to greater heights of crime? Well, the girl must be made to talk. After seeing the pasty-faced man vanish down the Metro steps, I was morally certain she was in on the whole thing. Also, our pupil-and-teacher relationship would not last more than a lesson or two, and action must be prompt. I had no desire to be taking this girl out on interminable dinner-parties. Nothing ventured, nothing gained!

At the present moment she sat against the wall, facing me. She could not get away without making a scene, even if I startled her into flight. So, after vainly plying her with the Vouvray in the attempt to loosen her tongue, I started in abruptly.

"The American lady was badly frightened this morning, eh?"

Her swift glance showed she was instantly on guard, and she made no response. Leaning elbows on table and looking at her intently, I gave her a second shot.

"How much did your friend clear on the deal?"

She tried to look indignant, and failed. Bewilderment came next, and that failed. Fear glimmered in her eyes.

"I do not understand," she said, suddenly losing interest in her dinner. "What do you mean, m'sieur?"

I laughed and relaxed slightly.

"Oh, we all know how these things are done. In my opinion, it's not worth the risk. If, now, it were a matter of something like this—"

Quietly laying a folded thousand-franc note on the table, I met her gaze steadily. The implication of the purplish bit of paper was clear enough.

"M'sieur," she said coldly, "I am only a poor shopgirl, but even a shopgirl may be virtuous."

I allowed myself a grin at this.

"For the sake of Uncle Guilbert, and his admirable sister, may you long remain so!" I said. "But is it virtuous, mademoiselle, to conduct a campaign of petty thievery, rendering innocent people guilty in the eyes of others?"

She regarded me steadily, dangerously, alertly. Yet she was badly frightened.

"I have never done so," she said.

"You have connived at it," I stated calmly, banking heavily on Clancy's theory. "Those of you in the notions department work together, swear to each other's perjury."

Everything must have struck her like a blow—my seeking her out, bringing her to dinner, all the rest of it. She turned pale.

"What would you?" she demanded, without another attempt at denial. "I am junior to the other two there. If I did not assist them, they would see that I was discharged. And does it hurt anybody? The tourists, perhaps—bah! Who cares about a tourist, flinging money around like dirt? Everybody else gets their easy money. Should we poor folk not touch a bit of it, when it means so much to us?"

"I'm glad you admit it," I said dryly.

"I admit nothing, m'sieur," she retorted with sudden energy. "You have been kind, but now I understand the reason. See, here is your hundred francs. I will go, rather than be thus insulted."

She half rose, laying down my hundred-franc note.

"If you go, mam'selle," I said easily, "you will find an escort awaiting you at the door—just outside the door, I think."

At this she sank back into her seat again, and her face was swiftly pitiful under its make-up. Then her eyes flitted from me, and drove past me, at the corner doorway, as though she could see gendarmes waiting there.

"Come, Mlle. Cibourne," I said, feeling sorry for this poor little victim of a rotten system. "Come! I wish information, that is all."

"That is all!" she said in an accent of irony.

"Certainly, and reason enough for my inviting you here. Let us suppose, now, that you were given full protection from those you fear,"—and in my pause, she started slightly,—"and were paid well for your trouble. Would you tell what you know?"

FOR an instant her eyes widened on mine, in startled fear, and her lips trembled. Then:

"I know nothing!" she exclaimed.

"And I, little," I responded. "Yet the penalties in France for traffic in illicit drugs are rather heavy. And the reward, if I learn what I wish, is equally heavy."

So speaking, I quietly put the hundred-franc note under her bag, which lay on the table. The purplish thousand-franc note I half extended. She lifted her hand, but instead of taking the note, made a slight gesture.

I turned swiftly. There by the corner entrance of the restaurant stood the pasty-faced addict who had dived down the Metro entrance. He slipped away out of sight, but not before I had seen him. I turned back and smiled a little.

"Your friend was not quick enough," I said. "Next time, don't wave him off, but invite him to join us. I shall be delighted to meet him."

All pretense of conversation or improving my accent was long since past and forgotten. Marguerite, sitting back to the wall, was trapped, and looked it. Her face became yet whiter, her eyes larger. She made no attempt to get away, but looked as though she had walked into a trap and were awaiting the closing of the jaws upon her.

"Will you answer the questions I put?" I asked sharply, putting thoughts of mercy aside, as I must.

"I dare not," she muttered; yet her nerve was going fast.

"I will guarantee you protection."

"Impossible. You do not know them, or you would not say such a thing. Let me go—let me go, m'sieur, before evil comes of it!"

The request was both a plea and a sign of returning self-control, which was the last thing I desired.

"It is for you to choose," I said coldly, "whether you go with my money, or with an escort whom you may not like."

Her eyes went to the thousand-franc note hungrily. It was down beside my plate on the table. The waiter came, and I ordered coffee and benedictine for two.

"What do you want to know?" she asked nervously, when we were alone again.

Being none too sure myself of what I sought, I drew bow at a venture.

"When does your uncle go again to England?"

A shot in the dark—her expression told me instantly that it had gone amiss.

"But he does not go to England!" she said, surprised. "He interviews the travelers in woolens who come to the store!"

I tried again. "They send the stuff by Havre and Southampton, eh?"

This was better—Clancy was behind me this time, and to a certain extent the shaft went home. The waiter brought cups and glasses, and went away again.

"We do not trade with England," she said. "The tourists come to the store to buy."

About this reply was a certain shakiness, a lack of surety, giving the girl away. I smiled, as though knowing all about it.

"We are not talking about the store any longer, mam'selle. Come! I am talking of what has made your friend by the door a human wreck. You comprehend."

She did; it got her, finished her completely. Tears came into her eyes.

"Will you let me go, m'sieur?"

"Not at all," I said firmly. "I should be sorry to see you go in company of the two police agents who await us. Then I should have to attend the *proces verbal* in the morning, and you would have an unpleasant night of detention. If you speak freely, you shall have full protection; and this,"—I tapped the thousand-franc note—"is only part of the reward you will receive."

The pourer came with the coffee; another came with the benedictine. Both saw the large bank-note on the table and grinned, drawing their own conclusions, which did not trouble me in the least. When they had gone, the girl changed suddenly—she leaned across the table and spoke with a new and definite decision.

Around the corner came Bill and another seaman shoving the reluctant Norman along between them.

"If it were possible—but it is not. If I tell you all, I should not live to profit by any reward. For this reason, even if I wished—"

She finished with a most expressive gesture, and it made me pause momentarily for thought.

Clancy must have been right—it was something big! Only something big could so terrify this girl, could so fill her with the fear of death itself. Yet I had ten thousand francs to play with!

"Have you friends outside Paris?" I asked thoughtfully.

"No nearer than St. Jean de Luz," she

answered. "My mother lives there, in the south."

"The Spanish border—good!" I nodded at her. "The Sud Express leaves the Quai d'Orsay at ten every morning. If you comply with my request, you shall be on it tomorrow morning, with a through billet for St. Jean de Luz and two of these thousand-franc notes in your pocket. They may be powerful in Paris, these unkindly friends of yours, but they would dare attempt nothing so far away."

Things hung in balance. Again I saw her look past me, and I glanced around toward the entrance, but there was no sign of her companion. I had not the least idea whether her information would be worth two thousand francs, but in these ventures of Clancy's I had found it always paid to take long chances. Then her name—it meant a lot!

"Three of those notes," she suggested, cupidity gleaming in her eyes.

This was the French in her showing through, and showed me she was hooked. If I fell for it, she would probably double-cross me, for I had no check whatever on her, except that of bluff.

"I can have your information for nothing," I responded, "by requesting the two agents to enter. You know, perhaps, how one tells at the prefecture—even when one does not want to tell? Well, choose between me and the prefecture!"

She gave in.

"What do you wish to know, then?"

"When the next consignment of drugs goes to England."

"It has already gone," she murmured, rather than spoke.

"No trifling. The next, I said!"

"But I do not know, m'sieur!" she exclaimed, white-lipped. "Only that one departed yesterday, and is now waiting."

"Waiting where?"

"That too I do not know. Only that Gambin, who will take it to England, has not yet left the city. Gambin is known to the police—" She hesitated and stopped, as though she had said too much.

"You gain nothing by evasions," I said coldly, though it was a hateful business to thus torture the poor creature. "Come! Already you've said enough to hang you. The rest, if you want to win all! Otherwise, you lose all. Where is that consignment at the moment?"

"I do not know!" she breathed, her eyes tragic.

"But it goes through Havre?"

She shook her head to this, as not knowing. Her eyes said otherwise.

"Gambin—where is he?"

She looked past me to the doorway. Her glance darted about.

"He leaves tomorrow."

"Come—out with it! Give me the process of action, how he manages it!"

"He—they are all suspect," she returned, breaking down. "He goes to Le Havre, knowing he is watched. He goes to the *wagon-restaurant* and dines, and his baggage will then be searched. There will be nothing found in it."

SHE paused, her eyes flitting here and there about the room. I made a gesture, touching the crisp bank-note, and she shivered a little, then went on.

"At Havre he meets a man in an automobile—a man once imprisoned for such work." She wet her lips, and the words seemed dragged from her. "His car leaves for Dieppe, and Gambin waves him off, then goes to a hotel. The agents follow the other to Dieppe, and find nothing. At the last minute, at midnight, Gambin leaves his hotel and goes aboard the Southampton boat. He takes nothing on the boat with him."

"Yet he must have a ticket and a berth," I put in.

"It has been bought in another name, some days ago," she answered. "Search will be made of the other man at Dieppe, but it is Gambin—Gambin!" She insisted on the name, with such energy as to raise suspicion in me.

"And Gambin takes the cocaine on the steamer?"

"No." She shook her head, desperate now, as though determined to go through with it at any cost. "He receives it after he is on the steamer, for he is known to the police."

"He takes it ashore at Southampton, then?"

"No. There are three in all. One will see that Gambin receives it on board. In the morning, when they land, Gambin sees that another receives it to take ashore. But of this I know nothing—only that Gambin is the director for the consignment. He lands to make sure the money comes back. He will bring it back with him."

"And Gambin," I said, "is the man who left you just before I arrived—the man hanging around the door here?"

She started. "No, no!" she exclaimed sharply. "He is not Gambin—do not think it!"

She was a bad conspirator, this poor girl. Her eagerness to put me off gave me the idea this man was the one to get first, but for the moment I had my hands full. I had first to make sure of her.

"You will be at the Orleans station on the Quai d'Orsay at nine-forty-five tomorrow," I said. "I'll meet you there, with your tickets. At the same time I'll hand you two thousand francs. If you need anything else, tell me now. Can you give me other names than Gambin's?"

"No, m'sieur, I know none of the others."

"Where do you live?"

"Rue d'Austerlitz—*Quarante bis.*"

"Then I will now escort you to *Quarante bis,* Rue d'Austerlitz. You'll be watched all the time, mam'selle. If you attempt evasion or duplicity, the end of it is the prefecture. If not, then happiness! You understand?"

She nodded in a pale and frightened way. I did not blame her for fear, knowing thus abruptly that the prefecture loomed above her. They are devils, those French police—very efficient devils, serving a devilishly efficient master! The French law is merciless, much more merciless than our American law—and holding about one hundred per cent more justice for all concerned.

I did not try to probe farther here. If she were not lying, we could reach her again when necessary. If she were lying, then it was not worth the trouble. So, satisfied with what had been accomplished, I summoned the waiter and paid the bill, and ordered a taxi called.

She accompanied me in silence to the Rue d'Austerlitz, and I watched her go past the *concierge* with a brief greeting—proof enough that she had not attempted deceit in this. So I departed—there was a place to book in the Sud Express, and there was a report to be made in the Rue Cambon.

It looked like a good game, this time, even if a trifle flat and smugglish.

"GAMBIN?" queried Clancy. "Wait a minute."

He telephoned to the prefecture. Early as it was,—not yet nine in the morning,—Peter J. Clancy got action when he was on the line. If there was anything this American dentist wanted and could not get, it was only because the Paris police did not have it.

In fifteen minutes a special messenger arrived with a photograph and the particulars from Gambin's *dossier.* Here, at least, the girl had told the truth—the man was known to the police. He had done two years for housebreaking, since when nothing had come up against him. A large man for a Frenchman, he had an open, honest sort of face, easily recognizable. I had never seen him before.

"You'd better be hustling—it's past nine," said Clancy cheerfully. "And best not come back here, Logan. You're apt to be followed; a girl who would talk like that to you is weak. She'll have talked to somebody else before this. Lose yourself, once you see her off, and get a train for Le Havre. Go to the Hotel Central, opposite the war memorial, at half-past eight tonight. I'll put a long-distance call through for you there at eight-thirty. If Gambin is on the Southampton boat-train, I'll know it."

This arranged, I went down to the street, caught a taxi, and made the Quai d'Orsay station well ahead of my appointment. Punctually at nine-forty-five Marguerite Cibourne appeared, carrying a modest suitcase and a hat-box.

"Good morning," I greeted her. "You've no other baggage?"

"I have no other," she said, and I did not like her manner by half.

I gave her the ticket and reservation-form, and conducted her to her seat on the train. We chatted, and she seemed anything but at her ease. At two minutes of ten I handed her the two thousand francs, which Clancy had termed wasteful in the extreme, and she said good-by.

I did not. Instead of getting out, I stayed aboard. The conductor came along, got into a snarl with some tourists, and we were off. The poor girl, I could see, was on tenterhooks.

We came into the Gare d'Austerlitz, where the express stops for ten minutes before leaving Paris. She was growing more and more worried, and her fingers worked nervously. When we came out of the tunnel, she was white in the face, and demanded anxiously if I meant to compromise her by staying further. I did. I remained, inexorably, until the train was on the move—and then I dropped out to the platform, slammed the door and saw the train off.

I saw some one else off, too—the pasty-faced individual who had accompanied the girl the previous evening.

He had been waiting here. She had intended giving me the slip by getting off here at the Austerlitz station; Clancy was dead right, as usual! Now, however, the nearest stop of the train, as I remembered, was at Poitiers, and so thinking I made off after the gentleman of the pasty complexion.

He had seen me first, however, and having also seen that Marguerite had not alighted, he tailed it for the exit. There I had to stop and explain why I had no ticket of entry to the station, with a bit of palm oil. By the time I got outside my man had vanished completely.

All this gave me pause—considerable pause! The girl had meant to double-cross me, and therefore I began to doubt her story of the previous evening. She had been in dire fear, but she was a good actress. Against this, I could set the identification of Gambin; all the same, I did not like it a little bit.

So I stopped in at a restaurant and there rang up Clancy, telling him of events and asking his view of the case. Was there enough in it, as matters now stood, to warrant my leaving Paris and going on to Le Havre? I already had my ticket, but—

"Hotel Central at eight-thirty tonight," said Clancy serenely. "Get on with it and don't borrow trouble."

He rang off, and I got on with it as ordered.

MINDFUL of instructions, I took a taxi out to Longchamps and enjoyed a walk in the Bois de Boulogne, a pleasant orderly forest. Nobody seemed to be following me, and I sauntered along until a stray taxi came past, when I hailed it and told the driver to make for the Etoile. Once in the shadow of the Arc de Triomphe, I slipped into the Metro entrance, took the Italie line to the Trocadero, changed off there to the Chaussée d' Antin, and got out at Saint Augustin, satisfied that any possible pursuer had been thrown off the track.

I walked over to the Gare St. Lazare and was in time to catch the midday express for Le Havre, with only the one stop at Rouen ahead. At the last moment I almost changed over to the Deauville express for the sake of seeing the resort, which lies just across the bay, but decided I had best follow orders. I paid for it; too much fidelity is a bad thing sometimes.

I made the train with perhaps thirty seconds to spare, stood in the door of a first-class compartment, and gasped for breath—it had been a run. The train started, in the gentle way of French trains; and there before me, on the platform, appeared the pasty-faced man again.

No mistake about it. He saw me, and wild astonishment leaped into his face. He made a jump for the train, but his rush was too late; looking back, I could see him struggling in the arms of an official—who, no doubt, was nobly preventing the would-be suicide. Unfortunately the suicide did not take place. Nor did the pasty-faced man make the train.

I guessed at once he must have gone direct from the Austerlitz station to the Gare St. Lazare, without troubling his head about me; therefore my doubling must have been to no purpose. He was not interested in me, but in Marguerite. Past doubt, then, Marguerite had told me much of the truth! Well, she could not get back to Paris for some hours, and meantime I was gone.

Reposing in the compartment, which I had to myself, I wished I had thought to get a line on the girl's uncle, the unknown Cibourne. Too late now, yet I felt certain of recognizing Gambin if he turned up, and he would lead me to the others concerned, or some of them. It must be a pretty big gang, all told. Uncle Guilbert, the pasty-faced beggar, Gambin and three others all sharing the profits from this one load—well, it was a big affair, though it still seemed rather flat.

I had lunched in the dining-car by the time we came to Rouen, about two, and felt placidly comfortable, enjoying my pipe and a magazine from home the rest of the trip. Somewhat after three we rolled into Le Havre. I caught a tram at the station, and left it at the big square where the flower-market is dominated by one of the few magnificent monuments left to us by the war. The Hotel Central, I found, was one of the very good hostelries fronting the square, not too conspicuous.

I obtained a room, slept, bathed and dined. This brought me to eight-thirty, and going to the reception-desk I informed the madame there that I expected a telephone-call from Paris. She was incredulous. No calls came through from Paris. It was too expensive. And at such an hour—

The call came while she was protesting. Clancy's voice greeted me.

"Any news at your end, Logan?"

"Not a scrap. What about you?"

"Our friend is not on the boat-train."

I grunted. Then I had my trouble for my pains.

"Can you hear me?" demanded Clancy.

"Yes. Shoot!"

"See the train in, then go right down and watch at the boat. I'll have the line cleared at eleven tomorrow and put through another call for you. I'm inclined to believe the consignment has gone, at least to Havre; they may delay a day or so to throw us off the scent. If so, sit tight. You'll hear from me at eleven tomorrow. Any queries?"

"None."

The click of the replaced receiver finished it. Clancy wasted nothing, especially words, unless he were in one of his absent-minded fits.

I had to kick my heels for another hour or more, then went to the station and bought an entry ticket, watching the boat-train slide up alongside the platform. The train was not very full. A few tourists, chiefly English, commercial travelers, and numerous French for the town. It was easy to see all who came down toward the exit, and also to watch the side exit leading off to the tram for the boat and quay.

I scanned them all. Clancy was right—no sign of Gambin anywhere. Then suddenly I jerked wide awake. Among the last to emerge came my pasty-faced man. He was looking around anxiously enough as though for any possible watchers. I was not particularly surprised to see him, but must own to surprise at seeing, hanging on his arm, no other than Marguerite Cibourne.

She had left the Sud Express at Poitiers and had come to Paris in time to make this train, then!

NEAR a pillar were a couple of big bales covered with burlap, and around these I dodged to keep the girl and her escort from having sight of me.

The pair did not turn out to the tram, but headed for the barrier and the main exit. Giving them plenty of time to emerge, I followed, for their appearance had quite driven Clancy's orders out of my head. Although I had no hold on either of them, and no reason to think they could have anything to do with the drug-shipment, they constituted a definite link, and I was after them at once.

Those two muscular sailors dropped on the man Gambin like a bolt from the blue.

Out in the square before the station I saw them bargaining with the driver of a four-wheeler. I slipped back to the platform and out to the tram entrance, where a couple of taxicabs were standing. No fear of losing my prey—the driver of their growler had the only gray horse on the rank.

Instructing my driver to follow the gray-horsed vehicle, I gave him ten francs in advance and climbed in. We came around to the square in time to see the four-wheeler turning the corner that leads to the quays, and dragged wearily along after them; not until one tries to keep after an ordinary cab-horse with a taxicab does the difficulty of the feat appear.

Presently our quarry bore away from the tram-lines off to the left, and crossed the bridge of the inner basin where the yachts tie up. They led us now into the quarter behind the Southampton quay—the quarter

crammed with cabarets, with seamen's resorts, with petty hotels and worse. These narrow little streets, paved with rough cobbles, were dark except for occasional flickering lights and the gleam from lighted windows, but they were not at all silent.

I had a fair acquaintance with Le Havre, and felt glad of the pistol in my pocket. There was nothing nice about this part of town, in the shadow of the old church though it was. Ships of all nations crowd the port, and here, on pleasure bent, gathered men of all races and colors—Hindus, Frenchmen, English, Americans, negroes, Algerians, Swedes. Our quarry halted before the widely lighted window of a cabaret or restaurant—these places were anything and everything, from hotel to boozing den.

My driver stopped, at a little distance. I watched the girl descend and enter the place; her companion stopped to pay his driver, then followed. I gave my driver a cigarette and another ten francs, telling him to wait. He nodded, lighted the smoke, and settled back in his seat. I was not sure of needing him, but if the need came, it would be in a hurry.

I walked on to the café, narrowly missing a bucket of garbage emptied from an upper window. Quiet enough outwardly, this quarter of town was no safer than Limehouse in London, Grey Street in Durban, or any other haunt where vice is preferred to virtue. However, I need not have worried much. Gaining the entrance and finding the windows curtained from sight, I opened the door and strode in, to find a very tame sort of place.

Three separate groups of seamen, all foreign, regarded me with semi-tipsy gravity, and a red-headed Norman turned from the aluminum-covered bar to see what the wind had blown in; of the pair whom I sought, there was no sign. I went up to the bar and ordered a demi of beer; whereupon the man behind the bar commented in English that it was a fine night, and one of the seamen said something about a blooming Yank.

I inspected the place. There was no exit, save behind the bar, and a narrow staircase at the back, leading upward. A light shone from somewhere above on the stairs, and the absence of shadows showed no one was lurking there. My two friends must have gone up those stairs, and they must have gone rapidly and without any questions being asked.

Therefore this joint was in the game too, and the man and girl were known here. I sipped my beer and reflected that I was very neatly blocked. A glance at my watch showed me it was just turned eleven. The Southampton boat left sharp at midnight, so if the consignment was to get off this night, little time remained. And then, suddenly and sharply, Clancy's orders hit me like a blow in the face.

"See the train in, then go right down and watch at the boat."

And here I was, wasting time that might be precious! I lifted my tall beer and was about to drain the last of it when my eye caught a shadow on the staircase. Following the shadow came a pair of feet descending—the feet of Marguerite Cibourne, bringing the girl herself. Now she carried a cloth-covered suitcase instead of her cheap cane article, an expensive and incongruous bit of luggage.

She came to the bottom of the stairs, looked up, saw me standing there. She reeled as though struck; in this instant the pasty-faced man descended the stairs after her, and then stood petrified at sight of me. The man behind the bar, seeing them stare at me, flung me a sharp word:

"What do you want? Who are you?"

"I'm through," I said, and flung down a coin to pay for my drink.

"A police spy!" shot out the pasty-faced man, then turned and bolted up the staircase with Marguerite Cibourne after him.

THE proprietor of the place reached down behind the bar, but froze into immobility as he looked into the barrel of my pistol. Feet pounded on the floor above—the pair were making off while I stood here, barred! For I knew well this pistol of mine would be of slight avail once I turned my back and dashed up the stairs.

"Come out of there," I said to the barman, gesturing.

He dropped the bottle he had seized, and moved to obey. Until now I had quite forgotten the red-headed Norman seaman, to whom my back was partly turned. I sensed a quick movement from behind, and half turned—but not swiftly enough!

"Look 'ere!" came in startled, angry fashion from one of the seamen, and a *crash!* And that was all. The Norman had neatly crowned me with a heavy glass.

However, I was far luckier than I knew or deserved. There must have been a

fine, quick little row. When I woke up, the proprietor was backed against the wall with two seamen holding him; the Norman was knocked out on the floor, and another seaman was lifting me.

"Did 'e 'urt yer, mate?" he demanded with beery kindliness. An Englishman, this.

I managed to sit up. "Some. You chipped in—eh? Why—"

"Blimey!" he exclaimed. "Think we was going to sit 'ere and see a blarsted frog knock yer out from be'ind? English, mate?"

"American," I said, dizzily getting to my feet.

"Told yer so!" said somebody. My friend gave me a frowning glare.

"Goin' to tell me yer won the war?" he growled.

"Not much," I said, and laughed. "Those two who ran upstairs are a pair of crooks, and I'm after them. Dope-smugglers."

"Good enough," he responded. "Want 'em, do yer?"

"I want their baggage."

IN reality I had nothing against either of the pair, and questioned the wisdom of detaining them, but those suitcases were different. The two bags might be—indeed, probably were—filled with cocaine or kindred stuff.

"Right," said my seaman promptly. He turned to his mates holding the landlord. "Bill, jack up 'is front wheel if 'e tries any parlor tricks! Right back."

In five seconds he was out of sight, pounding up the staircase. I looked at my watch—eleven-fifteen. None too much time to finish here and get down to the boat. One of the seamen came to me with a glass.

"Brandy—it'll pull yer square, matey."

I sipped the cognac, and it did pull me together amazingly. From overhead came sharp cries and the heavy pounding of feet. The noise increased, lessened, and came on again. My seaman came clattering down the stairs.

"Skipped, and the bloomin' door locked!" he said. "What next?"

"Southampton boat—I've a taxicab waiting outside."

"Right! What say—want any 'elp? We got leave till midnight."

"Fine!" I returned. "Come along to the quay, then—"

"Wot about this 'ere feller?" spoke up Bill, jabbing the landlord in the stomach. The Norman stirred and sat up, blood streaking from his nose.

"Let him go, and fetch this redhead along after us. I'll go after him for assault, if you'll witness against him."

"Righto," exclaimed my seaman. "Bill, let's make a lark of it—might be something in it, if it's only beer! I'll go down the quay with the Yank, and you can fetch the bleedin' joker along after us."

"Cheerio!" agreed Bill heartily.

In another moment I was in the taxi with my seaman, and we were speeding down toward the quay, not far away. Arrived there, I paid off my driver, and the seaman followed me into the entry shed and the oblong of the Customs benches. One or two tourists were being perfunctorily passed; another was having his passport examined. I turned to the agent on duty at the doorway of the shed, and described Marguerite and her companion.

"Have they gone aboard yet?"

The agent assured me they had not, while my seaman whistled. Two other agents strolled up, interested. At a sudden thought I pulled out Gambin's police photograph intrusted to me by Clancy. Its prefecture stamps and marks were at once recognized, and I was accorded a very sudden respect by the agents. I demanded whether they had seen the man.

"That man is aboard the steamer," said one agent promptly. "He went aboard half an hour ago, m'sieur."

AROUND the corner of the shed and into the light came Bill and another seaman, shoving the reluctant and bleeding Norman along between them. Immediately the agents betrayed a quick and active interest in all the proceedings. They called an officer, to whom I handed Clancy's card. He shrugged slightly, looked at Gambin's police photograph, and beckoned me to one side.

"Perhaps, m'sieur," he said loudly and accusingly, "you have a card of identity?"

"Certainly," I said, and produced it. To my astonishment, he only returned it with a slight smile, then spoke very softly.

"We have received instructions to cooperate with you, M. Logan," he said. "May I ask as to your errand?"

Good old Clancy! I might have known he would have arranged matters here for me in case of any hitch or mix-up. It may seem rather incredible that an Amer-

ican should go about France accredited with practically full powers from the prefecture in Paris—yet if this American were the assistant of Peter J. Clancy!

"Cocaine-smuggling," I said, and the officer nodded.

"It is a bad business, that," he said quietly. "We have our own methods of cutting off the supply to the victims in France,—they center in Paris, Deauville and Nice,—but it is another matter of cutting off the supply that comes through France to England. Just what do you want, m'sieur?"

I indicated the Norman.

"I want this man detained on a charge of assault on me—these men were witnesses. Whether or not he can be implicated in anything graver remains to be seen."

He summoned two of the agents; notebooks were produced; and evidence was at once jotted down. I broke in with word that there might be other work aboard the steamer, but the officer turned to me with a gesture of helplessness.

"We have no jurisdiction aboard the steamer, m'sieur. Here we can give you all assistance, but there—"

"Very well," I said. "Then arrange for me to go aboard."

HE accompanied me to the gangway, spoke to the agent on duty there, and I was passed. I went on, and had a steward get me audience with the captain. This took some time, and time was getting perilously short. An automobile was being swung inboard to be stowed on the forward deck, and hatches were being battened down, the heavy loading being obviously finished.

The captain was an obdurate Briton, stoutly refusing to admit any French police aboard, although sympathetic enough in my behalf. He accompanied me to the purser's office, and they speedily found the man Gambin was aboard, occupying the lower berth of a promenade-deck cabin. The upper berth was not taken.

"Unless you can prefer a definite charge against this Gambin, Mr. Logan," said the captain, "I cannot allow you to interfere with him. The best I can do is to see that he gets special attention at Southampton —after what you've told me, he'll not be allowed to land. My authority does not include search of a passenger's property."

Another blank draw! However, I had it from Marguerite that Gambin himself would not bring the drug aboard, so I guessed it to be in the two expensive suitcases, which had not yet turned up. I thought to ask for a look at the passenger-list, and it was produced. No Cibourne figured in it, but I put my finger on the name of Guilbert.

"Here we are. Do you know this man?"

The purser's brows went up.

"Regular traveler, sir. Represents one of the big Paris houses—comes over with us rather regularly."

This did not jibe with Marguerite's story. Yet there was no proof anywhere, nothing on which I could lay a finger. Neither Gambin nor Guilbert would bring the stuff aboard. Guilbert, known to the officials at both ends, following a known avocation for years, could easily enough land it. . . . . Ah! I guessed the pasty-faced man and Marguerite had the task of getting it into the hands of Gambin, who would then turn it over to Guilbert at the end of the trip. But how? Unless I could discover the means employed, I could touch neither Gambin nor Guilbert.

"I'm afraid we cannot help you further, Mr. Logan," said the captain. "You see how we are placed. And now, if you'll excuse me—"

He left the purser's office, and I followed helplessly. Going on deck, I stood at the rail and looked over at the quay under its high white lights.

It wanted eight minutes to midnight. Under the Customs shed were my three friendly seamen, with the Norman and the agents. A couple of tourists paced the deck by the first-class entrance. I hoped against hope to see Marguerite and the pasty-faced man coming through the Customs shed, but there was no sign of them. I felt sure they were charged with getting the shipment into Gambin's hands—yet they had not come. I decided to wait until the very last instant. Men were grouped about the gangway, awaiting the word to swing it away, but I could jump to the dock if need were, for the tide was running out and the ship was low against the quay.

Five minutes! I crossed over to the other side of the boat, desperate, utterly at a loss. Gambin was here, then, despite Clancy—had probably taken an earlier train, as I myself had done. Here, out across the black water of the Channel, was the mole, with the high lights of the farther quays stretching on to the left.

On this darker side of the deck was little movement. A man and a girl, apparently going through all the silent agonies of the old, old story, stood at the rail, arms entwined. A little farther forward, in a patch of deep shadow from the bridge, another single figure leaned over the rail, as though lonely, perhaps homesick for England. Ahead of us rose a sound of

Solander stood against the wall, hands in air, while Marguerite crouched beside him.

voices—some sort of work was being done to the ferry, tied up there, that plied across the Seine estuary to Deauville-Trouville. Down below, a dot against the black water, was a small skiff, probably coming from one of the many fishing-craft swinging at anchor. One of its occupants rowed; the other sat in the stern. It was coming toward the steamer.

I heard a bell ring, and looked at my luminous-dial watch. Three minutes more. An officer bawled something from forward, repeated from aft and bridge. The lonely man in the shadow leaned far out, looking downward—

Cursing my own blindness, I turned and raced for the bridge. A wheeler met me and called something about not being allowed; I brushed him aside and leaped up the ladder. His cry drove ahead of me, and the captain himself stepped out as I came to the top.

"Not ashore yet, sir? The gangway's off now—you'll have to jump for it—"

"Hold up your boat five minutes, Captain!" I exclaimed. "I've got the whole game now—the stuff is just coming aboard—"

He looked over the bridge rail at the quay, where the gangway was just being lowered out.

"Coming by air, perhaps?" he said with heavy irony.

"No, by boat. Take my word for it—bring along a couple of men! It's coming up the side now, I tell you—"

"Hold up for five minutes—hm! Want to get your man ashore, eh? Go ahead." He snapped an order, and two helmsmen came on the jump. "Your move, Mr. Logan—"

I lost no time moving.

Those two muscular sailors dropped on the man Gambin like a bolt from the blue, and I followed them closely. He had been hauling in a line, sure enough, and for a moment he gave all three of us a bad time. Knowing the game was up, Gambin fought like a fiend, but had no chance to get out a gun. It was hammer and tongs across the deck, all four of us.

From below came a startled cry in a woman's voice, and I darted to the rail to see the skiff go leaping away over the black water. Gambin was at length stretched out, senseless. A fine cord was tied to the rail, and the captain came up while I was hauling it in. Over the rail came a large cork float, followed by a heavier line, as the deck lights were turned on.

"Here we are!" I exclaimed triumphantly, feeling the dragging weight.

Next instant came in, of all things, a pair of footballs!

For an instant I stood holding them blankly, then comprehended the whole game. Another pair followed. Getting out my pocketknife, I stabbed one of the four inflated balls, and as it collapsed, a fine white powder came trickling out.

"Good work," commented the captain. "Now, sir, time's running short—what do you want done?"

"Run my man ashore, and give me your names as witnesses."

"Willingly." The captain jerked out pencil and paper, flung an order at his men, scribbled down his name and theirs.

"But the man Guilbert—you've nothing against him?"

I shook my head regretfully. "All you can do is to tip off Southampton that he's a suspect. Afraid I can't touch him—yet. Thank you immensely for your help, Captain! If you'd play a searchlight around as you go out, we might pick up that skiff."

"Right. Good night!"

He went hastily for the bridge. Bearing my captured plunder, I followed the prisoner ashore—the agents had already pinned him, like terriers on a rat.

Here ensued a busy five minutes, while the steamer was pulling out. My Customs officer took charge of prisoner and evidence, with high praises for the way I had landed both, and then we stood on the quay searching the water, while the steamer's searchlight reached across the channel and flitted hither and yon. The skiff had vanished.

"No use, m'sieur," said the officer, disappointed. "She's hiding somewhere—before the police boats could get after her, our birds would be flown."

I was forced to assent. We had captured the consignment; we had one and possibly two members of the gang—and no more. A flat little smuggling deal. Clancy's "something big" had not materialized, and there was no prospect of it in sight.

However, there remained Marguerite and the pasty-faced man, name unknown. They must have made for safety somewhere down the line of quays, and I had little doubt would come back to the tavern up the street. Since they had brought the stuff from Paris, we might as well gather them in—they could not get away from Havre in any case, with their descriptions known. I said as much to the officer, and he nodded.

"Very good, m'sieur. What do you suggest?"

"Suppose you come with me, and a couple of your men, and we'll see what we can see."

He agreed. I turned to my three seamen friends, and handed them five hundred francs beer-money—a cheap price for their assistance. They were loud in their joy, and at once made off up the quay.

The officer picked out two of his huskiest Normans, and we left the shed. As we were crossing the street, an automobile showed up bearing down on us with lights going full blaze—an infraction of all French ordinances. The officer exclaimed angrily, and stepped out with hands extended in signal to halt.

No danger—the car was already braking down. It was a big car, and as it drew beneath the street-lamp, I was astonished to see the insignia of the Paris police decorating it. Then it opened—and out stepped Clancy.

"Evening, Logan," he said. "Am I late for the party?"

CLANCY chuckled as he lighted a cigarette. A Paris prefecture man, who had accompanied him, was gesticulating and talking to my Havre officer.

"Very simple," said Clancy, after I had briefly sketched events here. "I could make better time in a police car than by train, especially at night, so I came along. We believed our men would all be here tonight—your activity in Paris had evidently put them on the jump. One of them came to Havre today—Solander, the Hungarian. He's supposedly a Pesth banker, who has a fine villa at Deauville and so forth."

I was staggered. "Your men?" I demanded. "Who the devil are your men, then?"

"Solander," said Clancy. "The unknown Cibourne. Last and not least, an American business man resident in Paris—his name is Coster. We've nothing against any of them, at the moment. You'd better move along if you want to get any action on Marguerite and her friend, Logan! I don't think they'll go back to that cabaret. They'll probably report direct to Cibourne and the other two, since Gambin is nabbed."

"I'm in out of my depth," I said. "What do you mean to do?"

"It's your game—play it!" snapped Clancy. "This business will put you in solid with the authorities, and I don't want to spoil your play. Find that crowd!"

Throw a chap head over heels into the water, and he'll swim if he has any duck blood—that was Clancy's motto. It made me angry, and I snapped him up on it.

"All right, confound you! Trail along." I turned to my Customs officer, and he joined me with his men, leaving the others to follow.

Judgment being lost in irritation, I headed straight for the cabaret or hotel, whichever it might be. As we approached, up the narrow little street, I saw the proprietor leaning in the doorway, smoking a

cigarette. Quickening my pace, I went on ahead of the others, came up to him, and without a word took him by the collar and jerked him toward me. My knee in his stomach doubled him up before he could strike a blow or give a call.

Inside, the bar was empty. We hauled him in, and he came to his senses with uniformed gentlemen all around. He was a badly frightened man, also most unhappy in body. I leaned over him.

"Where is Solander staying in town?" I snapped. "Speak out, quickly!"

"He is upstairs now," stammered the man. "Second room back—"

"Is Cibourne with him? And Coster?" I staggered him anew with these names.

"Not Cibourne. Coster—yes. Mercy, m'sieur! I will tell everything—"

"Get him out of here in a hurry and let him tell," I said to my officer. "Quick! So you didn't think the other pair would come back here, eh?" And I gave Clancy a triumphant look. "Well, they'll be back. Suppose we slide upstairs and see what we can see."

Clancy and the Paris official, my officer and his one man, remained, after sending the proprietor of the place away under guard. Five of us were enough, obviously. Clancy, who was immensely delighted by the way luck was playing into my hand, clapped me on the back and told me to lead on. We could safely leave the cabaret deserted, so that Marguerite and her pasty-faced man might walk into the trap unsuspecting.

I led on up the narrow stairs, walking very gently. This little den among the stews of the waterfront would be the last place where anyone would expect to find a Deauville celebrity, not to mention an American-Parisian business man; obviously they were the men higher up in the ring, and yet I was keenly disappointed over the whole affair. A smuggling game, even on a grand scale, seemed rather a petty affair to employ Peter J. Clancy.

AT the head of the stairs the door of the first room stood open—it was dark, evidently untenanted. I motioned the others in there. The second doorway was topped by a transom, showing light, and voices came from within. The remainder of the hallway was dark and empty. Clancy joined me, and for a moment we stood by the second door, listening, his hand on my arm.

"That is all right," came a heavy guttural voice—Solander, no doubt. "The reports all seem excellent, my friend. By these accounts, we should clear a million francs this month, eh? But I do not like this cocaine business. It must be stopped. No more after tonight."

There was a short laugh, from Coster. "That's bad luck, in America," he said. "You're right about it, though. We'll quit it for a few months. So these reports from Nice suit you? Then jot down the figures and burn them."

Clancy's fingers tightened on my wrist. I obeyed a jerk of his head, and we softly left the doorway, going to the other in which waited the officers.

"Those reports—at all costs!" he breathed in my ear. "We must break in on them—"

"Wait," I said. "Duck in—quick!"

A swift shuffle of feet came from the sanded floor below, and steps on the stairs.

"I don't like it!" came a panting voice. "Where's Lebrun?"

"Probably closing up for the night." This was Marguerite's voice. "Hurry!"

They hurried, while we slipped aside into the darkness of the first room and waited. The two came up, went past our door, knocked on the second door. It was opened, and there was a babel of voices. I jerked out my pistol.

"All right, messieurs!"

Before the second door could be closed behind the pair, I jumped into it with my pistol covering those in the room—Marguerite, her friend, a dark gentleman of heavy build, and a lean, wolfish American.

"Hands up!" I snapped.

The American took a chance and dived for me. I fired and missed—we came to the floor together. Next instant the place was pandemonium.

Another shot sounded, then a woman's keen scream, while I battled the furious Coster. We rolled across the floor, slammed into the wall, and I managed to get a short-arm jab to the throat that knocked him gasping. I followed it with another, laid him out, and came to my feet.

Solander stood against the wall, hands in air, while Marguerite crouched beside him. The pasty-faced man was being handcuffed by the Paris official. My Customs officer was holding a gun on all concerned, while his man lay on the floor with a knife in his throat; the pasty-faced man sprawled above him with blood dripping

from his shoulder. Clancy was calmly flipping over some papers he must have taken from Solander. A police whistle shrilled below, and feet were on the stairs.

"A fine business!" I said to Clancy in disgust. "We've got Marguerite's friend for murder—and your little smuggling ring is broken up. And that poor chap with the knife in his throat was worth more alive than the whole gang! This is the sort of police work I don't care for, by half."

"Yes?" said Clancy absent-mindedly, while police flooded into the room.

"Yes," I snapped at him. "And I'm a bit surprised at you mixing up in it, too!"

"Perhaps, perhaps! But this rather vitally concerns us, my friend. Who do you think we've landed, tonight?"

"Who? Your smugglers, of course."

"Not a bit of it." Clancy chuckled, took out a cigarette, and watched as our victims were taken from the room one by one. "Look, now! There's Marguerite Cibourne—her husband, that chap with the pasty complexion, is the mysterious Cibourne at the head of the coke traffic. He's in for murder as well, now. Count one."

I grunted. Clancy held a match to his cigarette, and jerked his head.

"There goes Solander—he's the big man in the blackmailing crowd, the head of that section. Works badger-games, smuggling, and so forth, on our gentle tourists from America. Exit Solander. Coster follows; he's at the head of the gang in the south, with Nice for his headquarters. An accomplished blackleg, this Coster—he works gambling and other side-lines, gets the victims in shape for Solander to milk."

Clancy's sharp gray eyes bored into me maliciously.

"So you don't like smuggling work, eh?" he observed. "Well, I told you this was something big, and it is. The biggest organization of crooks in France, their activities directed against English and American tourists. And we climbed to them, Logan, from that petty training-ground of the department-stores in Paris—you see, now? Tomorrow there'll be a round-up of a couple of hundred gentry from Deauville to Nice, lesser members of this gang; we'll bag the whole works from soup to nuts. Feel better about it?"

I swallowed hard, and mechanically took the cigarette he extended to me.

"Well, this time," I said meekly, "you win."

"Exactly," said Clancy.

Ride 'Em And Weep

By

RAOUL FAUCONNIER WHITFIELD

IT wasn't that this red-headed bird didn't know ships. He did. In the first place he had those goggle-cuts around the eyes—and I figured from the first second my baby-blue eyes glimpsed his firetop, that he'd crashed them far and wide. Bert Billings, who runs the "Billings Air Circus," looks up from a pile of high-test gas bills, and greets the new arrival cheerfully.

"I'm betting you're Happy Hennessy," he says. "—Sometimes known as Red. An' you're down in Texas to tie up with the roughest ridin' air circus what is. Am I right?"

This red-headed boy never blinks an eyelash. He's tall and thin, and his face is a perfect brown.

"What is, *right now*," he says slowly. "But not what *was*. I just come from an outfit, man, where we landed the crates upside down, an' did outside loops to cool our toes off. Out in California we used to zoom 'em with the engine throttled down just to get a kick out of it. I can remember the time that—"

Bert interrupts with a chuckle. "That you fell out of a loop into two airholes an' a dozen left-handed cotter-pins. Happy, you've come to the right outfit this time.

Wherein the rivalry of Happy Hennessy and the parachute-jumper for the favor of fair Mary starts new excitement at a rough-riding air circus.

Where that bunch you left stopped—that's where we *start* down here! Tell him, Gus!"

"Happy," I says, innocent-like, "the boss is right. I can tell by your face that you've set 'em down fast and furious, an' that more than a few has nosed over on you. But you don't know nothin' yet, Red. We always land cross-wind down here—an' the boss has a set rule that we gotta side-slip to within six inches of the ground. We got a master mechanic who hates engines to hit smooth-like; and the boss gives a grand prize for the guy that takes a ship off with the most cylinders missing—"

"That," this red-headed bird interrupts, "aint nothin'. Out in California we flew 'em without usin' the controls unless we was in a sixty-mile gale, an' we never—"

And right there the boss got sore. Bert's like that. He can stand just so much—and no more. I guess he had visions of a two-months' no-crash record being shot to pieces. The Billings outfit was sane and safety-first, and this red-headed bird had the boss' wind up from the start, even if Bert did try a bluff.

"Happy," he says slowly, "you got a sweet rep back of you. Since Jake 'went West' last week we've been short-handed. But none of the boys has even strained a landing gear in the last month—not countin' the tail-spin that Jake neglected to come out of—an' we don't want no epidemic brought along by you. Am I getting across?"

Well, this lean bird looks serious-like for several seconds, an' then just grins.

"Boss," he says slowly, "I got right sick of them excitin' times in California. An' I like the Texas scenery. I'm a safety-first pilot, an' I really handle a stick as careful as a maiden-lady handles an honest-to-God marriage opportunity."

The boss stared, and then nodded his head. But this red-topped bird didn't fool *me* none. I'd seen 'em like that before. It takes a neck-crackin' crash to cure the wild ones, and then the only kind of flyin' they do is with harps.

"Apple soup!" I mutters (very much to myself) and clears out of the office to put the rest of the gang wise to what's with us. It looks like things aint going to be so quietlike—with Happy on the pay-roll.

We sure had a queer-lookin' bunch of ships out in the canvas hangars. They were rambling wrecks with wings on, but the boys handled them gentle-like, and the boss kept them out of the rain as much as business allowed. There was two D.H.'s, a couple of ancient Curtiss two-seaters, one Nieuport and a few mixed breeds. We was doing sky-writing, plane-to-plane jumpin', wing-stuff, and the ordinary variety of stunting and passenger joy-hopping. In them days there was coin in the game. There is yet—for a few.

Well, I made it my business to be among them present when Happy Hennessy gives the ships the two-eye. An' it sure was worth it.

The red-headed one looked with his eyes and felt with his long fingers—an' rambled off a past history of each plane that was so close to the mark that it was scary-like. An' finally, with Pack Kennedy right behind him, he reaches the Curtiss two-seater with "Mary" painted in big, black letters on her fuselage sides. I seen trouble comin' then—with that slow grin spreadin' on Happy's face.

"Now aint that sweet!" he says in that drawl of his. "Whose particular little pet is *she?*"

Pack Kennedy scowls. Kennedy gets his leadin' name because of the fact that he's our "chute" man. Seventy-two parachute

drops in three months—an' not even a twisted ankle! Not so bad, I figures, and it looks as if Happy has picked the wrong bird this time.

"She's my hop-off ship," Pack says, calm-like—but I knows he's boilin' inside. "Gus here—he flies her. Got any kick?"

The red-headed one just grins all the more. He winks at me.

"I'll bet your girl christened her with a bottle of vi-o-let perfume," he says, lookin' at Pack again. "Where I come from they numbers their ships—don't name 'em pretty-like."

"If you like that system," shoots back Kennedy, "why the hell don't you go back to where you came from?"

Which, I figures, was straight to the point. But this Happy Hennessy wasn't gettin' the least bit flustered. Nothin' like that. Instead he just grins at Pack.

"Maybe," he says casual-like, "I can teach you guys a few new tricks. Mind if I take *Mary* up for a loop or two—or is she just for you, private-like?"

Pack's face is kinda white. You see, Happy aint wise to the fact that Pack's crazy over this kid Mary. She's a looker, and it aint no secret that Pack and she is figurin' on gettin' hooked up before the outfit clears Texas.

"Mister," says our star jumper, "I been readin' about you in some old papers. You seem to be some wild sky-stunter. An' maybe you are. The boss here lets any pilot on the payroll take any ship up above. That's his business method. That includes—" Pack kinda swallows hard—"this two-seater, here. Take her up, Mister. Personally, I hope she bounces you out into plenty of non-supportin' air! I don't like you, Mister. You strike me like a fresh guy. There's the ships." Pack gestured with both sun-browned hands. "An' all I gotta say is ride 'em an' weep!"

Which I figured was a pretty good-sized mouthful. But Happy didn't seem to figure things that way.

"Roll this sweet-named one out!" he instructs the ground crew. "I aim to see if she's got what them opery guys call temper'ment."

Right then and there we all knew that Bert's outfit was too small to hold both Pack and Happy. And when we seen what the red-headed one did to *Mary,* while Pack stood near the hangars and muttered to himself, we commenced makin' little bets with ourselves as to the exact length of time required before the two boys would tangle.

Stunts? Say, the lanky one from California put the two-seater through every trick a ship can do, and keep her wings—and a few others, too. He pulled a pretty falling leaf coming down, went into a vertical slip at five hundred feet, and held her in it until I closed my eyes. When I opened them she was landing sweet and pretty.

And while the ground crew's getting the two-seater in her hangar again Happy strolls over to where Pack is tryin' to calm his nerves with a cigarette.

"She aint bad," Happy says, calm-like. "Considerin' the name you tacked on her she aint *half* bad."

Pack says nothin'. For myself, I don't think that silk-hopper *could* have said anythin'. He was too sore. In fact, he was even sorer than that. He just *looks* at Happy. I seen a killer look at a judge that had just sentenced him to life, a few years back—an' the look that killer gave the judge was mild compared to the one Pack gives Happy. It was one of those looks that means trouble with a capital T.

MARY THOMAS is one of these good-lookin' kids, slim and tall and athletic. She drives a blue roadster out to the hangars every day or so—an' what I mean she *drives* it! Pack is crazy about her, an' she seems crazy about Pack. At least that's the way the crowd had things figured. But she's a woman—and there aint no *real* way of figurin' a woman.

She drives out the day after Happy blows in, and just by luck that bird is up above givin' the little ship her daily dozen. Well, the kid's eyes is turned high, and she spots that kind of flyin' as somethin' else again. Not that the rest of us can't fly—but Happy can and does.

"Who is up in the sky, Gus?" Mary says to me, I bein' the nearest to the blue roadster.

I grins. "That," I says, effective-like, "is the California Comet—Happy Hennessy. When it comes to ridin' them high and wide he's hotter than the color of his hair—so *he* says."

"The gentleman," Mary observes with a certain grimness, her eyes watching two sweet Immelmans and a barrel-roll, "has reason for such an observation."

Well, that afternoon I was slated to take off the two-seater, with Pack as the hop-

per-off, at some sort of a convention holdin' out in the ball-park on the outskirts of Dallas. An' I was busy prayin' that Happy didn't crack her up. She's a good ship, patches an' all.

Happy gets her down pretty, an' the first thing I know Tex Connell is introducin' him to Pack's girl. Aint that sweet? An' the answer is—it aint! Pack's in town buyin' a gross of his favorite chewin' gum, an' he don't see the eyes the two of them make at each other. But I see—an' I know right then that Mary Thomas aint slated to help things along none.

I been wrong a few times in my life—but not this time. Pack is in a bad humor—and he makes a rotten jump at the Dallas convention. He gives me a scare as I circle around him on his way down. Pack can guide a 'chute when he wants to—but this afternoon he don't even hit the convention field. He misses the ball-park—and lands twenty feet from the right-of-way of the Texas and Southern Railroad, with a train roaring along. An' he gets a badly sprained ankle out of it.

That's where Happy comes in. The first thing I know *he's* doin' the jump stuff for the "Billings Air Circus"—and he's doin' it good, too. Pack's just grouchin' along. And the girl's smilin' at both of them.

"Pretty quick now," says Tex Connell,—who's been tied up to a woman twice, an' should know,—"there's goin' to be a smash."

I nods at the time. But the smash comes sooner than I figures, and from a different direction. I sets a D.H. down a bit fast, a week before we're slated to clear out of Dallas, an' she blows a tire an' noses over on me. I'm slow gettin' my head away from the cowl—an' when I come back to things Bert is tellin' the boys that I'll have to rest up a bit. Then he pulls it.

"Pack's ankle is all right now," he says easy-like. "The way I figure things, an' with us short-handed, Happy'll fly the Curtiss hop-off ship—an' Pack can make the last jump in this here vicinity."

I groans at that, but the boss thinks it's on account of my head. An' it aint up to me to say nothin'. Happy flyin' the two-seater—an' Pack making the leap! The two of them together—up there where there aint no traffic cops to butt in!

"Ride 'em—an' weep!" I mutters to myself, but Bert hears me.

"He's off his nut," he tells the gang. "An' I thought he had a hard head, before he got this bump!"

The boss is sympathetic like that.

PACK an' Happy wasn't speakin' when they climbed into the two-seater to get into the air for the final hop-off. Dallas was celebratin' Old Home Week, or one of them things that cities like to celebrate to take the citizens' minds off taxes for a day or so.

"Take it easy," I advises, but knowin' that neither of 'em will pay any attention to me. "We've been havin' a few unhappy landings around the outfit, an' a change of atmosphere will do us all good. An' if you guys—"

"Tell Mary," says Happy in that loud voice of his, "that I'll take good care of any of her boy-friends that the boss sends up with me."

I frowns at that. Pack, fumbling with his parachute-pack, kinda hisses between his teeth. But he says nothin' until he was ready to climb into the rear cockpit.

"Too bad you aint flyin' me, Gus," he says then, plenty loud enough. "I always did enjoy the stuntin' you pulled before I got loose. Guess it'll be kinda mild this trip."

An' Happy, in the front cockpit, tunin' up the engine, just grins. Which hits me hard an' gives me the first real idea I've had in a couple of years. I goes close to Happy, an' he bends his head down.

"Be yourself!" I mutters in his ear, above the roar of the engine. "If you get Pack rattled on his jump I'll—"

"Yeah," the red-headed one comes back, interruptin' me, "the air sure is quiet. Nice day for stuntin', aint it?"

Pack was to make his jump over the ball-park, same as he'd done several times before. An' the ball-park bein' only about two miles from the field in which we was hangin' out, we had the day-glasses ready after the two-seater got into the air.

I was wonderin' where the girl was. She always came out to the field before Pack made a jump, but today she hadn't shown. Lately, for that matter, she had come out to see Happy about as much as Pack. Maybe more—I aint up on the signs, not bein' an expert.

I was pretty worried—an' I'll admit it. Them boys up in the sky wasn't spillin' over with love for each other. An' the outfit had been gettin' some bad breaks lately.

Well, at five thousand feet, almost directly over our hangars, an' a couple of miles from where he should have pulled a few stunts, Happy let loose. I groaned when I seen him start. Barrels, Immelmans, loops in succession, slips—two tight spins. And then a zoom into a stall.

"Hell!" I heard Tex mutter, beside me. "That Curtiss can't stand the gaff. If he doesn't lay off the sharp stuff pretty quick—"

TEX broke off, an' I stiffens. The two-seater engine is missin' badly. Then there's a sharp clatter—back-fire. Back-fire aint nice in the air. Too risky.

I hears Tex mutter again—and then, with the ship fallin' off into a spin, I sees the black cloud of smoke—comin' right up off the engine. The ship is burnin'!

There's no roar from the engine now. She's dead. The nose comes down, an' I can see the smoke cover up both cockpits as it streams out an' up. Then the ship's comin' down, an' I can see that this bird Happy is usin' his noodle. He's tryin' to slip her down, an' keep the black stuff and flames away from the cockpits.

At three thousand I see the wing surface start to go—an' I figures then that the game's up. The ship's out of the slip an' in a spin, with black smoke trailin' back of her an' remindin' me of the "flaming coffin" D.H.'s of the war.

"Pack can jump for it!" I hears Tex mutter. "Why the hell aint he over the side by this time?"

She's out of the spin, plungin' straight down now, two thousand feet off the ground. An' then we see it!

Two figures close together, through a break in the smoke—both of 'em half out of the cockpit! An' as the black streams over them again, Tex groans.

"Fightin'!" he mutters. "Can you beat it? Fightin' with the ship fallin'—"

The ship's plungin' straight down now, an' behind her she leaves that trail of smoke, thinner than right around her. Then, out of the smoke, we see 'em. Two figures—two dark streaks! Tex lets out a yell.

"They got clear!" he howls. "If the 'chutes open—"

An' they did just that. The two-seater crashes to earth with a dull roar as the bunch hops into the two flivvers on the field, and drives toward the gently falling 'chutes. I takes a good look with the glasses. Pack is movin' in his harness—but Happy is just danglin' below the white silk of his.

"Closer to the engine!" I mutters, grimlike. "The smoke and flames got him an'—"

I breaks off talkin' to myself. That thought gives me a jolt. I'm standin' there thinkin'—when the flivvers gets away—an' I'm left. An' that's why the kid hands me the letter, a couple of minutes later, when he drives up in a light truck. It's addressed to me—an' I reads it in a daze, wonderin' how bad the boys is burned, an' tryin' to get over the kick the whole business has handed me. An' the letter hands me another wallop. I read it twice—and then twice again.

Three hours later I reads it to two boys whose faces an' hands are bandaged tighter than one of them hospital dummies the young docs practise on. When I finish Pack mumbles a few words:

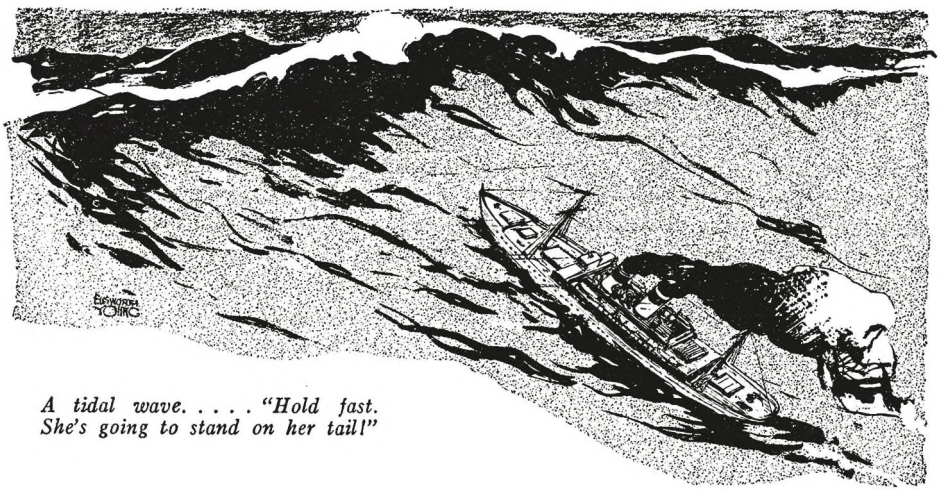
"Eloped with a kiwi! Can you beat it? One of them second-louie instructors over to Kelly Field! Well, I'll be damned!"

"A ground bird!" Happy mutters, with more difficulty, because of more bandages. "I bet he never flew higher'n a kid's kite! Aint it hell?"

AN' me, I just grins, thinkin' of the girl throwin' the boys over for a ground instructor with a nice shiny uniform. An' I'm thinkin' of Pack helpin' Happy get clear of the front cockpit, stickin' to him until they *both* could get out of that flamin' mess. An' then I'm thinkin' of the girl again. Safety first—for her.

I can see Pack grinnin' through them slits in the bandages—grinnin' at Happy. An' Happy's tryin' to grin back. It takes a sense of humor to sky-chase, I figures. But it's Pack that makes me sure of that little point. I guess he's thinkin' of that louie—an' the girl.

"Ride 'em—an' weep!" he mutters, an' Happy pulls somethin' that sounds almost like a chuckle.



A tidal wave. . . . . "Hold fast. She's going to stand on her tail!"

NERVE

By STEPHEN HOPKINS ORCUTT

Illustrated by Ellsworth Young

This second of Mr. Orcutt's absorbing and authentic stories of life at sea today is a worthy successor to "The Second Mate," which evoked such enthusiastic comment last month.

LOOKING southeast from the vine-shaded veranda of the villa, up near the Ridge Road in Berea, one had a magnificent panorama of Durban and the Bay: small craft around the Yacht Club floats, deep-water steamers at Congella Wharf, and various ocean tramps coaling at the Bluff wharves in the distance, with the lighthouse standing out at the edge of the high ground and the two entrance-jetties below it. Outside of the Point, he bathing inclosure with its semi-circular pier—possibly the only thing of its sort in existence.

The girl had been day-dreaming in a deck-chair—resting her half-open eyes upon the loveliness spread out below her. On a low table at her side a Sumatran monkey sat drowsing in the cooler shadows, his tail wrapped carelessly around a leg of the table; on the girl's lap lay a big tiger-cat with fawn-and-black stripes and a snowy waistcoat. From the drawing-room, just inside, came the rustle of paper as Mrs. Burns ripped the wrappers off newspapers which had come in the morning post. Presently she came out upon the veranda with a gazette in her hand.

"Margie! *Margie!* It *was* Ned Coffin, after all! Look! Here are the gazettes just in from Capetown with pictures of him being presented with the silver cup and the Lloyd's medal for stopping a plot to sink the steamer, and saving a couple of millions for somebody! You said it couldn't be Ned when that piece was in the Natal *Witness* the other day because he was only third mate instead of second, and was on the *Chilean Liberator*—not the *Argentine*. But here's his picture, exactly as he looks—with the two stripes on his whites!"

The girl took the weekly issue of the Cape *Times* and for several minutes was absorbed in reading the captions under the pictures, and the column descriptions of

the ceremonial proceedings. Then, looking out across the Bay again, she jumped up and held a telescope against one of the veranda-posts while she focused it on a white steamer coming in.

"Lloyd's station had the signal flying an hour ago for a Capetown boat. That one has the Brock house-flag and funnel—big enough to be one of the new boats! Why—why, Mother! She must be the *Argentine Liberator*—and—and Ned's on her! There was nothing said in the gazette of his leaving at Capetown. Why—why—he'll be up here today!"

BURNS, père, had been a master of steam for years, and knowing—as do all who have traffic with seafaring folk—the work and detail connected with docking, neither of the women expected to see Coffin much before late afternoon if indeed he got there in time for dinner; they wouldn't have felt hurt if he didn't turn up until the next day. But they had scarcely finished tiffin when a well-built young fellow in crisp white linen, with a pith helmet, came hurrying along from the corner where the Dutch Road tram stopped, and around through the compound to the veranda at the rear, where the cat and the monkey jumped into his arms with evidence enough of recognition to satisfy anyone who moves in the best animal circles. Hearing some of the talk between the three, Margie came running out with both hands extended:

"Oh, *Ned!* Isn't this just topping luck—having you back so soon on the new boat instead of having to wait for the old *Chilean's* regular trip! But—but—I *say!* Where is your lovely uniform?"

The handsome young fellow had been upon the point of hugging and kissing the girl after the manner of the sea—but at this question, his lips curled sarcastically.

"Hmph! If that's all you care about seeing, I'll go back to the ship and send one of the Lascars up here with it! You can stuff it and hang the thing up like a joss, somewhere, if you like!"

"Just a minute—*please!* Which do you fancy me in, best—a new ball-gown which makes me look my very best, or the clothes I wear to the green-grocer's in the morning? Even an ugly man looks better in a clean white uniform than in common street-clothes—but a good-looking man is vastly handsomer—and I fear I must admit that you're not as ugly as some I've seen. What's the matter with you, Ned? We've been so proud of you ever since we read the accounts in the gazettes—and saw the pictures! Feared you might be too grand for us, now that you're such a great man!"

"Oh, say, kid—cut that out, will you? *Can* it! Don't you see I'm just half crazy with all this damn' nonsense! A fellow doesn't object to getting medals and watches and cups—kinda likes to keep 'em in his sea-chest and have 'em out for an occasional friend to see, like the service-stripe from the war. But why can't they just send 'em in a package to the Company's office for me and let it go at that? Why must the whole town make a blithering ass of me with their presentation ceremonies—pictures of me reaching out for the damn' cup and looking like a dying calf—passengers and ship's outfit lined up on either side of me. Town people and presentation officials on the other side—camera-men grinding away even when I spit! Newspaper gang coming aboard the ship to get shots at me in my pajamas—waylaying me on the streets with their cameras—getting my friends in Capetown so they want to 'entertain' me every minute—stuff me with so much chow I'd be in the sick-bay if I ate it! The whole darn' thing's tommy-rot, anyhow! I just happened to get the dope in New York by pure accident—did anything I could think of to keep those crooks from sinking the boat under our feet and murdering one of the passengers after they'd stolen his jewels—just merely what any other officer or Lascar on the boat would have done after getting the information I had—try to block it! That's actually all there was to the whole proposition!"

After dinner Mrs. Burns strolled out for a chat with some of her neighbors while the second mate and Margie lounged comfortably in deck-chairs and looked down across the moonlit Bay. Presently Ned Coffin took a small box from his pocket and handed it over to the girl—a gold bracelet from New York. His English stepfather made him a decent allowance which more than doubled his mate's pay, and on Eastern voyages it was his habit to fetch bracelets or some jeweler's trinket for the girls he liked in various ports—Margie's cat "Sammy" being an exception because she had expressed a wish for a Yankee puss. Going home from the Orient, his gifts usually were the more easily obtainable monkey, parrot, mongoose or toucan—he had blazed a trail of animals and brace-

lets around the globe. If all his girls ever had happened together in one spot, there would have been a many-braceleted menagerie—probably for sale.

Margie was interested in everything connected with his promotion—speculation as to where the boat might go for cargo after discharging at Manila—Ned's plans for the next year or two. As Brock & Co. had little difficulty in fixing outbound cargoes for the Cape and Eastern ports, it was likely that Coffin would turn up at Durban again once or twice a year, but after getting a master's ticket and a ship of his own, his movements would be less certain. He smilingly joked her about the uncertainty—which, as a shipmaster's daughter, she knew quite as well as he.

"I suppose if I happened to miss Durban for a year or two, Margie, I'd probably find you married to one of these fine Natal chaps? Eh?"

"Would you *like* to find me married, Ned?"

"Why—if you were really happy, I s'pose I'd have to like it, wouldn't I? A woman who cares a lot for a sailor is taking far too big a chance. He may go to Davy Jones a few weeks after he leaves her, you know!"

"How about just loving the boy when he does come to see her—loving him all to pieces—and—well, having that to remember if—if she never sees him again?"

"H-m-m. Margie—you're truly a sailor's daughter. You know the game."

COFFIN was in a better frame of mind when he went down to the ship, after midnight. As he came up the gangplank, Tommy Swain—chief steward and acting-purser—was standing under the lamp in the gangway. With a broad grin he told him that the ship had been infested with camera-men and reporters all day, getting what they could from Captain Ludd and the passengers—inclined to be angry over the way the second mate had given them the slip. They were told by somebody that Coffin had gone up the line to visit old friends about fifty miles away, and might not return before sailing-time. When Coffin had peeled off coat and sun-helmet in his own room, Swain followed him—closing the door and sitting down on the transom.

"I suppose you'd no word of anything about the coolies, Ned—wherever you were? Eh?"

"Coolies! *What* coolies?"

"The two hundred-odd we're shippin' for Sourabaya. We're to rig up Asiatic steerage for 'em tomorrow before we haul over to the Bluff for coal."

"How come? I know Sir Jason Brock has no intention of carrying coolies on the three new boats unless there's some exceptional reason for it! Did Sanderson Brothers cable him?"

"Not as I understand it. Just put it up to the old man. We've discharged everything in the Number One Hold, and there's no cargo offering for Java. But the comprador who ships coolies in and out of this district has something over two hundred who want to go home, or to some Eastern port from which they can go up in the junks when they've worked out a contract there. He leased 'em by cable to a Sourabaya planter who has land under cultivation on Lombok. Offered Sanderson a very decent price to ship 'em over—rather more than cargo in that hold would fetch—and is sending along four big Sikhs to police 'em."

"And the old man agreed—without cabling the owners?"

"He did. You know what Ludd is! None of us fancy his superior attitude with us, because there's been no occasion for it. You've a mate's ticket in your pocket,—doubtless you'll have a master's, come Christmas,—but Ludd constantly gives you the 'high-and-low' as if you were his inferior in more than rating. I'll not question his seamanship, because I've had no reason to do so—but he didn't once take the sun coming out from New York—left the entire handling of the ship to you mates an' the chief, while he played cards with the women in his cabin. He made the morning inspection with me—oh, aye!—in his best uniform. Social calls in the saloon—petty fault-finding everywhere else, forgetting what he'd objected to five minutes afterward. Of course he's quite within his rights, technically, in consenting to ship those coolies when no cargo offered."

"Yeah! But if he arbitrarily acts upon those rights once too often, he'll hear from Sir Jason very much to the point—from what my stepfather tells me about the owner. A boat must earn her way on deep-water—no disputing that. But coolies are a much better proposition on a straight cargo-boat than on a 'half-and-half' with twenty white passengers in the midship-house. Do your best with the sanitary ar-

rangements—and you'll not entirely overcome a certain amount of reek if the wind is for'ard."

"Why not have a bit of a powwow with James Sanderson tomorrow? He's keen on seeing you—sometime in the morning. Requested Ludd to let you know—"

"Which he wouldn't do on a bet! I'm only a junior—and he hates the time they've been making over that circus in the Atlantic almost as much as I do. I'll drop in on Sanderson, if he requested it. That removes any possible appearance of my going over Ludd's head. If he *asks* me anything about the coolies, I'll give him Sir Jason's ideas in the matter—then he can do as he pleases."

COFFIN was in the agents' office at ten next morning—and was very pleasantly received by the senior partner, who laughingly approved of his efforts to dodge the reporters. Sanderson presently brought up the coolie question and asked the second mate if he saw any objection to shipping them—reminding him that all three of the new boats had been fitted with a lower deck and latrines in the forehold with the view of temporarily converting the 'tween-deck space into an Asiatic steerage if it happened to be advisable at any time. And this appeared to be one of those occasions.

"On the face of it, sir, that's quite true—it's profit instead of loss for the owners. But I've been told by one of his most intimate friends that Sir Jason's intention was to handle coolies only for portions of a voyage when the saloon is practically empty—as happens possibly on one out of three voyages between distant ports. I understand he said he wouldn't ship coolies with even six whites in the saloon unless the boat carried a doctor. As you know, we don't ship physicians unless they also rate as one of the navigating staff. There's frequently one among the passengers, but you can't compel him to prescribe unless he feels like it. What did Captain Ludd say?"

"Oh—there was no argum'nt at all. When I mentioned the four Sikhs to police 'em, he said that removed any objection there might be."

"Hmph! I hope Sir Jason gets that, some day, just as you told it to me! Understand, please, that I have no say whatever in the matter. I'm merely a junior—supposed to keep my mouth shut. But confidentially, Mr. Sanderson—you know as well as I do that there are objections to coolies in this case. One thing I *know* Sir Jason would approve of, absolutely—ship a good doctor as far as Manila, at least, and tell Captain Ludd it's understood as owners' orders—"

"But my dear chap, that would cut into the profit on the Chinks!"

"Just a moment, sir. I met an old friend here this morning—a doctor who served in France—rather low in his funds, can get a good berth in the Manila Hospital if he manages the transportation. Take him across, and he'll jump at the chance of contributing his professional services as far as the Philippines. It's merely his chow and the use of an empty stateroom—practically no cost to the owners beyond a medicine-chest stocked according to his orders."

"Fetch him in here, Coffin! I'll accept that proposition—if he makes it!"

Doctor Bob Thayer agreed to the second mate's suggestion with scarcely a minute's hesitation. Said that coolies probably wouldn't keep him awake much after what he'd been through in the French base-line hospitals—but he personally supervised everything stocked in the steamer's medicine-chest, ordering what they thought pretty large quantities of certain remedies and antiseptics.

Nearly all the officers except Captain Ludd had girl-friends down to see them off, and even he wasn't entirely neglected, as two of the saloon women who had booked from New York to Manila fancied that it gave them semi-official standing if they hung about the Captain whenever he wasn't on the bridge. Just before the whistle blew, Sanderson showed him a cable from the owners in Liverpool appointing Coffin acting-mate as far as Manila. Murdock, who had left New York as mate, had proved one of the crooks who attempted to sink the ship near Ascension—and in the course of a fight with Coffin had fallen overboard and been drowned. So it was supposed that another mate would join the steamer at Durban. But the owners adhered strictly to seniority rule in promotions, and the next man eligible was on one of the other boats in the China Sea.

THAT evening, when he came below for dinner, Coffin shifted over to the seat at the head of the mate's table—and when the passengers saw the three stripes on his

white coat-sleeve, there was much hand-clapping. Later, in his own room at the end of the main-deck starboard gangway, Doctor Thayer came around to him from Murdock's old room, which, being vacant until the new mate joined, the purser had given him.

"Ned, I reckon I'd better get a little dope on the passengers and crew. When somebody's tummy goes wrong, I can prescribe better for him or her if I know something of the bird's disposition. Catch it?"

ing an eye on Ludd and watching his reactions.

"Miss Betty Stevens is one of the coolest, most level-headed young women I ever met. I understand she's secretary to John W. Hollis, the railroad colossus—on this trip to give her nerves a rest, but into everything which looks interesting to her. Miss Brandt, Capetown to Manila—Miss Heathcote, Durban to Java or Manila—are nice healthy English flappers. Not overstocked with brains, but quite a lot of common-sense. Mr. and Mrs. Manner-

One of the Lascars and a steward who had waited too long before taking shelter—were gone.

"Lost your old ability for reading character at a glance, have you?"

"Not that I've noticed—but I like to check up and be sure I'm on the right track. The skipper, for example? Is he neurasthenic?"

"Well—I hadn't thought of his trouble being anything like that. I've been calling it cerebral-enlargement when I was talking to myself. You mean that his up-stage manner and disinclination to be more active in the general handling of the boat may be something he really can't help?"

"No—I didn't mean to give any such impression. Of course this is only snap-judgment in which I may be partly wrong—but I'd say the man has in him, somewhere, a streak of yellow a foot wide! Mind you, he might command his ships at sea for several years in the ordinary course and not have anything come up which would serve to bring that streak to the surface. He's got to know seamanship or they'd never have given him his ticket—but that isn't saying he wouldn't go to pieces if things got to coming too fast for him. All right! I'll be interested in keeping—real folks—fine as they make 'em. Same with McTavish the chief, and Jennings his first assistant. Bradley-Fyssher, a typical case of little Henpeck—London from his golf-cap to his sports-stockings—too assertive for his size, in the smoking-room—entirely submerged when his wife's around. Mrs. Bradley-Fyssher—a sixty-gun frigate with all canvas spread—British Respectability personified—a constant mixer in other folks' affairs—'for their own good.' That about right?"

"Far as you've gone, you've said it, Bob!" replied Coffin. "But that aint the half of it! That meddling fool hen can make more trouble with her tongue and her convictions in five minutes than three fleas and a wool undershirt. She wouldn't know what tact was if she took the tinfoil off and had it explained to her! Ludd accepts her at her own valuation—if you want a side-light on the sort of intelligence he's got. Stands for her self-appointment as censor of proprieties on this man's ship. You ought to hear the Mannerings and Betty Stevens being excessively polite to her—leading her along to making a pea-

green monkey of herself with nearly every answer to their innocent questions. It's a scream! She got after McTavish, once, because he didn't turn up at Ludd's Sunday morning services when there was really nothing to keep him below. (This was afterward—on deck.) He puffed and puffed until that reeking old pipe of his was a malodorous furnace of longshoreman's delight—then he said, with that quaint drawl:

" 'Woman—ye should no be fashin' yersel' aboot tha condeetion o' anither body's sool—that bein' a matter betwixt himsel' an' his Maker. Verra posseebly tha gude Laird may ha' book't him for a paradise wi'oot a woman-body in it. Ye canna tell.' "

"I'm strong for McTavish, as I said! Fortunately, I've always been interested in mechanics—knowing something about geared-turbines put me on Mac's good side at once. I'll be spending some of my spare time with him below—profitably, I reckon. He'll tell me anything he knows—if I seem to be getting it. By the way, don't overlook your four Sikhs, for'ard! I've watched that breed in Singapore and Hongkong. These are about the finest specimens I've yet seen. Dignified—carrying out their orders regardless of any risk or obstruction—dependable, anywhere you put 'em! They exemplify the old and rather vulgar saying in the British Army—they've got the guts! Which means, as our profession translates it, that their digestive organs function so perfectly that the quality of fear, which essentially is a stomach and liver symptom, has no chance to stampede them into a panic. Show me any man who keeps his head,—acts coolly, intelligently, efficiently, in a sudden and overwhelming emergency,—and I'll bet you more than I can afford that his digestion is in first-class condition."

AS acting mate, Coffin was virtually in control of the boat—the Captain making no attempt to interfere with him in any way until he stopped Mrs. Bradley-Fyssher from an excursion of pure idle curiosity below, into the Asiatic steerage, her professed object being to give each of the Chinese a tract published by her pet mission in London. He told her, courteously, that she couldn't go—that he couldn't permit it—and she promptly took up the matter with Ludd, who came out on the bridge with her and asked why Coffin had refused so reasonable a request. There were reasons enough, as every ship's officer knows, for keeping white and Asiatic passengers of the coolie class as far apart as possible—reasons which no woman of sense even would have asked, knowing from the officer's manner that they must be good ones. The acting mate's paramount desire was to shut up the trouble-maker in the brig for the rest of the voyage, but he scored with a tactful reply which kept everybody on board snickering for days afterward—the only argument that would have stopped her.

"If you'll think a moment, sir, you'll realize that Mrs. Bradley-Fyssher almost certainly would see things which no respectable woman is supposed to see. My refusal was merely to save her from being shocked, unnecessarily—just as I would refuse any other lady on board for the same reason. Coolies form the lowest working-caste in China—their habits are quite different from ours."

It worked. The woman's face grew a dull purple as her cumbersome imagination began to function. What she might have seen, she had no idea—but it must be something pretty awful when the mate wouldn't even give it a name. She stammered—she bridled—then she archly wagged a finger at him:

"Young man—I see now that you were acting in the interest of propriety. I—I'm sorry I didn't understand how good your reason must have been to refuse my request. Let us say no more about it."

The Mannerings, Miss Stevens, McTavish and the Doctor were laughing over it that evening in the saloon when the other passengers were on deck—but a more sober look presently came into the chief's face as he quietly remarked that any such question would have had to come to a showdown, sooner or later, and that Coffin's prompt refusal had forestalled a lot of misunderstanding, if not trouble. Then Thayer said:

"Take the question of fleas and cooties alone—I've seen nine different varieties of insects picked off one coolie in a hospital. Of course he was dirtier than the average—I've also seen reasonably clean ones. Probably any white woman might go below among 'em and see nothing that really ought to shock her—but Ned was clever enough to hit upon the one argument such a woman would consider. I've seen Chinks in a fo'c'stle squatting on their heels and playing fan-tan as quietly and harmlessly

as kittens, one moment—the next, screaming and sticking knives into anyone near 'em all over the place, all started by a row between two of 'em. Well—passengers shouldn't be exposed to that sort of risk—not even the once when nothing happened—or the twice—or the three times. Keep the two sorts apart on shipboard, and you know where you're at."

The most weighty reason of all Doctor Thayer didn't mention. No ship's officer

Coffin picked him up and unceremoniously heaved him into his berth.

ever would mention it. But, with coolies forward, the thing is always more or less in their minds.

The first two days out from Durban were very sultry—little or no air stirring—great mother billows, quarter of a mile long, with a surface like glass. With the awnings over the boat-deck, the passengers in their long chairs were as comfortable as they could have been anywhere—with cooling drinks for the asking. Forward there were awnings over the well and the Number One hatch-cover was off—giving a little shade for the Lascars and ventilation for the Chinese. On the morning of the third day the air was lifeless—sky like a copper dome overhead. Captain Ludd was playing, fairly well, on a violin in his own cabin abaft the wheelhouse. Fortunately the impulse had seized him but once before since leaving New York—when the weather had been cold enough to keep his windows closed—so that none of the deck-hands had noticed it. But in weather like this, on the Indian Ocean, he couldn't have done anything more likely to upset the morale of his crew. It wasn't that he played badly or that he had a weakness for adagio movements. He was, in fact, practicing the scherzo from "Midsummer Night's Dream"—to which any sailor can dance a hornpipe, with fancy steps of his own. But in the circumstances it simply was asking for trouble according to the superstitions of the sea. The chief bo's'n—acting as fourth mate—nodded with an "I-told-you-so" expression when he stepped along from the port end of the bridge and glanced at the glass. What he saw was no matter of casual interest—it called for prompt action.

He hurried over to Coffin at the starboard end.

"Would you mind 'avin' a look at the glawss, sir? Hit's dropped han inch, sir, in the lawst hour!"

Coffin took one look—then shouted to the Lascars, forward:

"On deck, there! Get the awnings down and stow them as quickly as you can! Lash everything fast! Get those hatch-covers on—lash the tarpaulins over them with extra marline! Wash-boards in all the gangway doors!" Then, to a deck-steward at the foot of the ladder: "Stow the deck-chairs below! See that everything is made fast in the mess-saloon and galley!" After another quick glance forward and aft, he ran along and stuck his head in at the master's door. "Excuse me, sir, but we seem to be in for a cyclone, and the deck-stewards have their hands full! Can you stow things in your cabin so they'll not shift—especially your violin? It's too good an instrument to have smashed in a blow—could never be repaired as good as it was, you know!"

"Eh? Bless me! You're quite right, Coffin—I'd be very much put out if anything were to injure it! Typhoon, eh? Never happened to run into one, myself. Outside edge of a West India blow—oh, yes; but we easily steamed away from it. As a matter of fact, no storm at sea can do much to a well-found modern steamer—I'll be out on the bridge, presently, and have a look-see!"

"You'd best make it snappy, sir! I don't think you've ten minutes to stow your dunnage—then we'll be getting it—with a tidal-wave like the Woolworth Building coming on ahead! She'll manage to get over it, if we have luck—but everything loose will go! Get inside and bolt your door before it strikes!"

TO anyone who never has seen an Indian Ocean tidal-wave with a cyclone behind it, the thing becomes more appalling with every moment of its rapid approach and increasing height. To one who has been through the experience, it is always a gamble with violent death—a magnificently terrifying gamble, with more than even chances that a modern steamer may live through it if she is in seaworthy condition. It was just about ten minutes before Captain Ludd came out on the bridge and got his first look at the white line of foam racing toward them with an ominous black monster wave following close upon it. For another moment, he looked in absolute fascination—then screamed to Coffin, who stood with his hand upon the lever of the engine-room telegraph:

"Put her about, man! Put her about! Ring for full-speed! You're running her right into the thing. Damn you—put her about!"

The waves about them were still glassy—the air seemingly motionless—yet they had to shout at each other to be heard above a volume of droning which didn't seem like sound at all.

"We'll have to get over back of that wave first, sir! If we try to run, it'll poop us—turn her turtle! Traveling twice as fast as the best we can do! Once over, we can head due east and work away from the vortex! Cyclones travel with the hands of your watch south of the Line, as you know—by heading east, the vortex will pass astern of us! Better get inside, sir—at once! *Here she comes!*"

As Ludd jumped for his door, Coffin rang for full-speed ahead and motioned the quartermasters at the wheel to head directly at the approaching monster; then he sprang inside of the wheelhouse and barricaded the door. It always is difficult to estimate the exact height of a tidal-wave in midocean. Maury gives the greatest recorded height as thirty-eight feet—but those were the days of sailing-clippers with decks not over twelve feet above the water. Today, with bridges forty to sixty feet above the water-line, it is easier to get a level estimate between trough and crest—many reliable observers being fairly positive as to heights of these mountainous combers ranging from seventy to ninety feet before a cyclone or typhoon. The sensation of climbing one in a deep-sea boat is similar to that of going over a big beach comber in a dory, only on a terrifically greater scale—the mass of water leaving no doubt in the observer's mind as to what will happen if it breaks before the ship is well up the incline. Putting his face into the funnel-mouth of the engine-room speaking-tube, Coffin shouted:

"Start your bilge-pumps, Mac! You'll be getting tons of water down the funnel-gratings in a second or two! Stand by! *Hold fast! She's going to stand on her tail!*"

EVEN with the engines racing at full speed, the boat seemed barely crawling as the greenish-black mass of water towered higher—higher—over her bow—lifting it until she was literally standing on her churning screws. It seemed as though nothing could prevent the bow from being forced over and backward in a somersault that would send them all to the bottom. Then—it seemed that the boat was gaining—up the incline. Her bow disappeared in the smother of foam and cascading water at the top—a roaring torrent which swept the length of her like the Rapids in Niagara Gorge. She teetered upon the crest—plunged down on the farther side into a yawning abyss, black and bottomless, it seemed. But the following wave presented an easier slope, with a much less formidable crest. The boat won over it easily, though swept again from stem to stern. The wheelhouse windows—of the new armor-glass in heavy copper framing—had withstood the pressure when the outer plates of the wheelhouse itself had been dented in with the overwhelming impact of the water, so that barely six inches had squirted in through the door-cracks; but one door of the saloon companion had been smashed in bodily, and the water was even with the tops of the tables. In the stokehold there was enough water to have put out the furnaces if the great bilge-pumps hadn't been sucking it out almost as fast as it poured down the gratings. When they were again plowing eastward through nothing worse than a very heavy sea which sent tons of water over the bows

and well-decks, Coffin glanced at the ship's clock in the wheelhouse—his first impression being that it had stopped from the knocking about they'd had. Then he looked again—saw the second-hand steadily ticking its round. From the time the great wave had loomed directly over them, a scant three minutes had passed.

Knowing that they would be worse than useless in such a smother of water, Coffin had made no attempt to go below for his oilskins or have them fetched up to him—in fact, there had been no time even to think of such a thing. Everyone but the coolies in the steerage was drenched—the tarpaulin-covered hatch had kept them dry save for the few bucketsful which had come down the ventilators. Some of the ports in the passengers' staterooms had managed to hold—some had not; there was more or less water on the floor of all. The saloon-ports were intact, and the carpenter soon rigged a makeshift door for the companion, so that the stewards were able to get the water out and spread tarpaulins over the soaking transom-cushions. Tiffin was two hours late, but was hot when they served it, with plenty of curry, and did more to quiet the nerves of the passengers than anything else.

ON deck rain was coming down in sheets—might keep it up for two or three days, depending upon just where the areas of high and low barometric pressure happened to be. As the glass had gained a quarter of an inch, standing above 28°, the mate knew they were clawing away from the cyclone-center—the wind also had a trifle less force. He went below on a round of inspection and found the damage, if anything, less than he had feared. One of the Lascars and a steward who had waited a moment too long before taking shelter—fascinated by the frightful thing looming over the boat—were gone. Even had they managed to keep afloat twenty-four hours, their chance for being picked up was negligible, and they probably couldn't swim at all. A lot of the deck-gear and two of the boats were missing—torn bodily from their lashings. The main-mast had snapped flush with the after well, taking the antennæ with it; but the third mate, who was radio-man, thought he could rig up makeshift aërials from the foremast to the after rail by next evening.

After making his rounds, Coffin went up to see the Captain and report—but when he knocked there was no answer. It seemed to him that Ludd must have unbolted his door and looked out after they had gotten over the great wave, if only to get some idea of the damage; so Coffin turned the knob and the door opened an inch, the bolt not having been shoved home into its socket. A bunk-board was braced against the inner knob, but this was easily worked aside—and the mate stepped in. Captain Ludd was seated on the floor by his bunk—braced into a corner where the motion couldn't dislodge him. Rolling with the ship, on the planking, were two empty whisky-bottles. In one of Ludd's hands was a third one—in the other, a glass which he seemed to be filling at regular intervals, while incessantly muttering:

"Not zhance in zhe worl'! . . . . All goin' bottom! Nozhing c'n zhave ol' girl—zhe goin' down—down! Ev'rybody drown'! I'm drown'!"

Coffin picked him up and unceremoniously heaved the man into his berth without bothering to remove his clothes—he had something else to do. Shoving the bunk-board into its sockets so that Ludd couldn't be thrown out upon the planking by any motion they were now likely to get, he flung a blanket over him and left the Captain to dry out gradually in a heavy drunken sleep. From what, apparently, was filling his mind, Ludd had simply gone to pieces.

WHEN Fowler took the bridge at four bells, Coffin went below for dry clothes and a meal which he badly needed, washed down by cups of scalding hot coffee. Most of the passengers were sitting around in mackintoshes after their tiffin, while their staterooms were being dried out with the electric heaters—and presented various types of reaction from what they had been through. It is frequently noticeable at sea that after a really serious danger has passed, leaving nothing worse than heavy weather and more or less violent motion, most of the passengers are more apprehensive than during the crisis. Being thoroughly drenched with salt water is uncomfortable; irregular meal-hours somehow convey the impression that things are a good deal worse, somewhere, than the officers will admit. The good sports, with depth of character, stand out against such a background like so many bright lights and do much toward getting others back to normalcy—the Mannerings, Fernshaw

the Londoner, and Betty Stevens, were of this sort. But it was uphill work to put the pessimists who were regretting that they ever came aboard such a ship into a more cheerful and reasonable frame of mind. Some one remarked that Doctor Thayer hadn't been seen after the monster wave so nearly sent them to the bottom, and asked Coffin if it were possible that he might have been swept overboard. The mate said he had been talking with the Doctor less than half an hour before, when he had gone below to set a broken arm for one of the stokers. Then they wanted to know if the passengers who hadn't turned up for tiffin were injured or sick—and the general atmosphere of gloom returned. Coffin presently lost his patience.

"Look here, you folks! Let me set your minds at rest, and then see if you can't behave yourselves! We are steaming away from the cyclone-center as fast as this heavy weather permits—there is no danger whatever of another tidal-wave between here and Java Head, judging from the way the glass is rising. Of course, anything of that sort naturally carries away a good bit of deck-gear and knocks people about rather roughly. Naturally, there are bruises and broken bones. A few of the crew may be out of business for two or three days at least—which makes us a bit short-handed until they're all right again. We've plenty to keep us busy without listening to any growling from those of you who have little to complain about—everything considered. Even if you had any cause, growling wouldn't get you anywhere, because we're all up against the same proposition and must make the best of it!"

IT was by this time after three in the afternoon—Coffin was anxious to get the Doctor's report in order to know just how short-handed he was likely to be. He went below for a short, much-needed sleep—having to be on the bridge again at eight-bells. As he left the saloon, Betty Stevens whispered to Fernshaw, in one corner:

"I wish Doctor Thayer *would* turn up! Hope he's not sick or knocked out, himself. It's not that I'm doing any needless worrying—but Mrs. Bradley-Fyssher is about due to put on another show of some sort. Heaven only knows in just what direction she'll explode—but she could start a panic if somebody didn't muzzle her in time, don't you think?"

"If she does, she'll get the surprise of her life! Coffin has been amazingly tactful with her ever since we left New York—but that young man can handle anything without gloves if it appears necessary, and he's carrying a little more than he ought to, now, I fancy! Ludd hasn't shown up or been of any assistance whatever, as far as I know. I've an impression you feel much the same as I do about our mate—eh?"

"He's what John W. Hollis, my employer, would call one real two-fisted man! I'll see that he sends a pretty strong letter of commendation to Brock and Company when I get home!"

Dinner was served more nearly on time—the wooden table-chairs being thoroughly dry, and several thicknesses of awning-canvas taking the place of the wet cushions along the transom-seats. Still Thayer hadn't turned up—but the passengers had now accepted the probability of his being professionally busy, somewhere. At the end of the second dog-watch, Coffin came below for his dinner and was stopped for a moment at the door of the purser's office by Tommy Swain—who, in a whisper, wished to know where the Doctor was. Coffin thought he was probably up forward, somewhere, and would be along presently for his chow—but he really was as anxious as Swain. After he had finished eating and chatted reassuringly with the passengers a few minutes, he went below, intending to get another hour's sleep. He had scarcely closed the door of his room, however, when there came a tapping on the glass of his forward port—as the curtain was pulled aside, his desk-light fell upon the dripping face of Thayer, who had plenty of color but looked fatigued, and as if he had been overboard. When the mate opened the port, he got a vague impression in the outer darkness of a man stripped naked.

"I say, Ned! Run around to my room and pass some pajamas out to me through my port—that's a good chap!"

Without wasting time in fool questions, Coffin jumped to carry out the Doctor's request. Five minutes later, having asked one of the stewards to pass the word for Swain, Thayer came into his friend's room and was loading his pipe when the purser appeared. Then Coffin asked:

"What happened to your clothes, Bob? Shark get 'em?"

"No. The Lascars have boiled them

"Come-come! I'll permit no subordinate to speak to me like that!" He raised the pistol.

thoroughly in the fo'c'stle-galley and are now getting 'em dry—I'll be wearing 'em again next time I come aft. And—Tommy! I want, at once, twenty suits of dungarees from the slop-chest—for the Lascars. Fortunately, the bo's'ns, stokers, quartermasters and engine-room gang, bunk amidships, or under the turtle-deck, aft!"

"You get anything you want, Bob—of course! What's up?"

"We've cholera on board. Seven cases, so far—three deaths. Among the coolies, of course. It's a good deal of a mess, down there! I'm looking for at least twenty cases by morning—though I've loaded all of 'em up with preventive medicine."

THERE was a moment or two of stunned silence as the three looked at each other. Swain muttered something about its being "a bit thick, don't you know—on top of the tidal-wave an' cyclone." But it was merely a passing remark brought forth by the way it struck him. There was no suggestion of being bowled over by the announcement. Coffin's first reaction was to load his pipe and light it—there being not the slightest trembling of the fingers which held the match. Then—after calling down the gangway for McTavish, who promptly joined them from his room at the other end—he began thinking aloud, and what he said was understood to be orders.

"We four have been expecting something of the sort—cholera or plague—ever since we left Durban; so it's merely facing the fact instead of the possibility. First thing to keep in mind, no matter how bad the mess gets, is that nobody comes down with Asiatic cholera unless the bug is actually inside of him. Fear, panic, often produce cholera-morbus, which isn't serious except in the case of a weak heart or badly deranged nervous system. On the other hand, panic *can* kill everyone on the boat if it's let go far enough. So—nobody must eat a morsel of anything which hasn't been thoroughly cooked, nor drink a drop of water that hasn't been thoroughly sterilized or boiled. Tommy—have your deck-stewards stretch a triple line of inch-rope from the saloon-companion to the rail on both sides—no passenger allowed anywhere along the sixty feet of gangways for'ard of those lines on either deck. I'll have the bo's'n cover the outside of the for'ard saloon and stateroom-ports with white

paint, so that none of the passengers can look down into the for'ard well or across to the fo'c'stle-head. We'll tell 'em some of the coolies are sick and will have to be fetched on deck in good weather—bathed—taken care of—all that. Not the sort of thing to look at before or after eating. Everyone who has business for'ard to put on dungarees—to strip and be thoroughly bathed with antiseptic solution before he's allowed up the ladders and has his dry clothes handed to him. Dungarees or clothes boiled when he takes 'em off. Our Lascars are a pretty level-headed lot—unless in very heavy weather, they wont need to come aft very often—they'll obey orders about clothes and bathing when they do come. There mustn't be a hint of blabbing as to what we've really got, below. We bury the deaders at night if possible—over the fo'c'stle-head. Any other suggestions occur to you, Bob?"

"None that I can think of at the moment—those are precisely the orders I'd have given myself! You must have been shipmates with cholera before, Ned?"

"Once—in the China Sea. Can't say I wanted it to happen again! We lost forty-eight, but none of 'em white—due to the fact that none of the whites permitted a bug to get inside of 'em. That's the whole point—judging from my experience."

WHILE the Doctor was getting his dinner and a couple of hours' sleep, Coffin stripped, put on dungarees—and went below into the Asiatic steerage, forward, where the way Thayer had spent his afternoon was at once apparent. From the hatch-combing to the port-side plating a space had been roped off—the deck-plates scrubbed, chloride of lime sprinkled along the scuppers—and the sick men laid in a row on their sleeping-mats, which had been disinfected as far as possible. On the starboard side, and in the space aft of the hatch, the rest of the coolies were either lying on their mats with their bamboo opium-pipes or squatting in little circles, playing fan-tan. The dying or dead men in the roped-off space on the port-side appeared to be of no interest whatever to them. Two of the Sikhs were getting their sleep in the fo'c'stle, above, with the Lascars. The other two were making regular rounds among the coolies every twenty minutes or so—silently, their keen eyes darting from one yellow face to another as they watched for symptoms of the dread disease—dullness of the eyes, sagging down of the body, expressions of terror which even the Chinese found it difficult to conceal. Without hesitation, they picked up such a one and carried him over to the port-side—thoroughly sterilizing the place where he had been sitting.

The acrid tang of the chloride of lime was strong enough even in that close atmosphere to overcome the worst of the stench from the sick men. Owing to the Doctor's prompt action with the first cases, and the absolute efficiency of the Sikhs, that 'tween-deck space was considerably less of a horror than the mate had expected to find it—but he knew there was only a hair-trigger between the orderly and sanitary arrangement which enabled them to hold the disease in check, slowly stamping it out, and sudden panic that would turn the place into a bloody, loathsome hell. The Sikhs had their hands more than full. Let a quarrel over one of the games among the coolies lead to knifing,—knocking other close-packed groups about, with their stakes flying out of hand—and every coolie in the place would be infected if he escaped being knifed.

As Coffin went on deck, he stationed two of the Lascars where they could look down the ladder and go to the assistance of the Sikhs if they were needed. Then he tossed his dungarees into the boiling-tank—had one of the Lascars give him a scrub with antiseptic solution—and went out across the well in his pelt to where a suit of "whites" hung at the end of a line for him. He even took the precaution of cleaning his nails with permanganate before going up into the saloon.

As yet, none of the passengers had the least suspicion that anything serious had happened.

In the morning the white paint applied on the outside of the forward ports naturally aroused their curiosity—it admitted considerable light, but made the saloon slightly darker. The stewards repeated the story agreed upon the night before and given them by Swain—having, themselves, no other information. And when Coffin came below for his breakfast, Mrs. Bradley-Fyssher wanted exact information from him at once. Upon getting the same story, she wanted to know how sick the coolies really were—whether he thought there was risk of their dying. He told her that four or five either would be getting better or dead before night. Then she insisted that

she be allowed to go below and read the Bible to them—that, as a Christian woman, she could overlook things which decent women were not supposed to see, but she certainly would not permit human souls to drift away into outer darkness instead of life-eternal when she was able and more than willing to point the way.

"Mrs. Fyssher!" (She had insisted upon the hyphenated name a hundred times—but he deliberately forgot it.) "These men are Chinese who consider you as much of a heathen—your religion as outrageous—as you consider theirs. Some of those men are dying. They've made their own perfectly satisfactory arrangements for their souls and expect to pass out comfortably that way. You can't be permitted to go below and torment them with what they consider 'foreign-devils' lies' while they're dying—and that's all there is to it! Just forget it!"

"Forget it! Mr. Coffin—I'm amazed that you as a Christian man should say such things to me! I shall go up to Captain Ludd at once!"

"He'll say exactly what I've said—and you'll find it goes!"

"Then I shall write to the *Times* and have his ticket suspended!"

"That, nobody wants to prevent your doing—if it amuses you. But you wont go below among those coolies—that you may gamble on!"

AS soon as Coffin had finished his breakfast, he went up to the Captain's cabin—and found him with a hang-over, irritable as a sick bear. Having concluded that responsibility for the ship was on his shoulders, until they reached port at least, he didn't bother to break the news gently—simply stated that there was cholera in the steerage and that, for the moment, they seemed to have it in hand. Ludd's backbone appeared to cave in. He sank down into the swivel-chair by his desk.

"*Cholera!* My word! This is frightful, Coffin! What's to be done? You don't need me below, I take it? No, no! At least one navigating officer must be isolated to look after the ship! You—you don't fancy I'm liable to take it up here, do you? Of course, you know—if there is real necessity for it—I'll go below among the beggars at any time—but, d'ye see, looks like a foolish risk for the master of the ship, don't you think? Responsible for everybody—all that! I suppose we'd best radio for assistance as soon as possible—eh?"

"What for? What ship would get any volunteers to stay aboard of us even if she stood by? What could she do beyond supplying us with some of her food and coal—which we don't need?"

Just then, Mrs. Bradley-Fyssher yanked the door open and stumbled inside—the gale slamming it shut behind her. (In one quick glance, the mate noticed that the windows were bolted shut to keep out the spray.) She made her complaint, vindictively, and demanded permission to go below among the coolies—but she couldn't have picked out a worse time even if there was the slightest chance for Ludd's considering such a request.

"Madam, are you crazy? That steerage is reeking with *cholera!*"

Coffin threw up his hands with a gesture of utter disgust and exasperation.

"You damned drunken fool! Now you certainly *have* spilled the beans!"

Ludd slowly pulled out a drawer in his desk and took from it a long navy revolver.

"Come, sir! . . . . Come, come! None of that, now! I'll permit no subordinate to speak to me like that, you know!" He raised the pistol.

Coffin deliberately stepped across the cabin to him with outstretched hand:

"Are you sure that's loaded, sir? Will you let me have a look, please, to make sure?" Things were coming too fast for Ludd—this quiet suggestion was too much for him. He permitted the mate to take the gun.

"Yes sir—this is the loaded one, but it's pretty foul in the barrel. I think it's the other that sticks when you pull the trigger. May I look at that also?" Ludd took out an automatic and passed it over.

"I'll just take these below, sir, and clean them for you—"

This had taken not over a minute, during which Mrs. Bradley-Fyssher had been gasping like a fish sucking air, the color fading out of her mottled cheeks. Finally, the screech worked its way upward from the soles of her feet and became audible—rather more than audible.

"*Cholera! Oh, my God!* Lower the boats at once and let us get away from this plague-ship with our luggage! At *once*—do you hear!"

"In this sea? Look out of the window! And suppose, when you are away from the

plague-ship in those little boats, one of you comes down with the disease? No doctor—no facilities of any sort—contamination until you neither could eat nor drink what you had!"

Coffin had jabbed his thumb on the Captain's bell and kept it there while he was speaking. When the steward came running up as fast as the heaving decks permitted, he was told to pass the word for Doctor Thayer and his medicine-case. In five minutes Thayer came in—closing the door. Nodding toward the pair, the mate said:

"They've both had a pretty severe shock, Bob—nerves badly frazzled. Lowers their resistance to disease if they're not bucked-up in some way. Can't you give 'em a hypodermic that'll quiet their nerves for several hours, at least?" Catching his friend's eye, the Doctor comprehended the situation perfectly.

"Why—of course! That's what we doctors are for! Fortunately your sleeve will unfasten, madam—I'll put the hypo in just above the elbow. . . . . There you are! Really didn't hurt at all—did it? Now, Captain!"

COFFIN thought he never had seen a drug work quicker. The woman already was nodding on the transom before Thayer had finished with Ludd—and he was "out" in barely three minutes. Then the two men looked at each other.

"Well—where do we go from here, Ned? What next?"

"Which can they stand the longest without serious after-effects—your drugging, or whisky? It's one or the other! Ludd's completely shot to pieces—he'll never get another command after this! As for the woman, if we let her get back into the saloon for five minutes, we'll have panic spreading all over the boat like prairie-fire! There's no place to put her where she'll be as comfortable as up here. Stewardess can wait on her. We can rig a canvas curtain between her side and Ludd's. But we can't let either one entirely regain consciousness until we're in Sourabaya Roads—possibly seven or eight days."

"How do we keep her husband quiet?"

"That little shrimp! Tell him his wife has collapsed with a nervous breakdown—must have absolute quiet—no talking with anybody! Tell him he's a bachelor for the rest of the trip and can do as he pleases without any censorship. I'll get Betty Stevens to sick the two flappers on him—he'll have the time of his life!"

FOR another week the passengers and crew looked on at an exhibition of seamanship—of resource and cold unbreakable nerve—which they never forgot. Until the day before they reached port, not one of them was certain as to what the disease in the steerage really was—but the strict regulations were evidence enough of its seriousness. It would have been difficult to say that Ned Coffin was more to be admired than Doctor Thayer, McTavish, Swain or the four Sikhs. All seemed to be of the same breed in emergency. Coffin's position was the more outstanding one from his being in command and taking the supreme responsibility; but it was magnificent team-work—always cheerful, no evidence of anxiety to shake the sense of security among the passengers.

On the third day there was but one new case of cholera—sixteen bodies having gone over the bows at night with pig-iron lashed to their feet. On the fourth night a gambling riot started among the coolies—but Coffin happened to be below at the moment. He and the Sikhs stopped it with belaying-pins. Six casualties—who went over the bows like the others—and subsequent quiet.

Came Sourabaya Roads—the yellow flag at the forepeak. Two weeks of quarantine—anchored well out from the hospital for contagious diseases at the end of the east mole. Removal of the coolies, fumigation of the ship, permission for the passengers to go ashore—permission to ship cargo.

There were several press-launches and camera-men circling the steamer at a respectful distance—very well satisfied that permission to board her was refused by the authorities. So the men who had borne the strain of that twelve days—coming through it honorably, successfully, with the world's respect—slept peacefully forty-eight hours at a stretch. Betty Stevens spent some of those hours gently fanning the sleeping Ned Coffin—occasionally dabbing her eyes, for no reason at all.

"Pirates and Politics," another of Stephen Hopkins Orcutt's fascinating Tales of the Merchant Marine, will appear in the next, the August, issue.

From the Bad Lands came a cry—a triple yelp.

Illustrated by O. E. Hake

The Coyote

The life story of a sly killer who has withstood civilization all too well—by the gifted author of "The Field of Amber Gold" and "Captain Jack."

By BIGELOW NEAL

THE scoria-crowned crest of Coyote Butte gleamed orange and red in the light of the setting sun. Halfway down its sides, where the waters from rain and melting snow had cut deep into the white and yellow clay, small flakes of mica caught the sunlight and shot iridescent beams which flickered like jewels among the grotesque forms of weathered clay.

To the east lay the valley of the great river, dotted with squares of black and green. Across the squares moved cumbersome hulks of iron and steel that erupted white blotches of smoke and steam on the evening air. Those lands are the prairies.

To the west lay miles of splashing hills and peaks, more scoria, more veining, more wind- and frost-carved buttes. Those are the Bad Lands.

Coyote Butte sits astride the borderland where East meets West. The successive waves of civilization have broken in helpless impotency against its barren slopes. Standing on the crest, one may look out over the lands of tractors and schools and waving grain, or turning about, see low-flung clouds of dust where the cow-puncher drives his herds among the coulees of the Bad Lands.

It was springtime. The anemone had gone and the clusters of fragrant white among the thorn-apples and buffalo-berries were turning brown and fluttering to the ground. Along the crests of the hills, small clumps of bluebells were beginning to open, and prairie chickens were lining their nests with the softest sprigs of sage.

On the brow of Coyote Butte, at a point where a sandstone ledge cropped out above the clay, a mat of creeping cedar had grown out from its common center, until at the edge it overhung the ledge and served to hide the entrance to a tunnel beneath. At the tunnel's mouth, it was possible to lie hidden from view and see out over a small empire of river valley and farm land.

AS the last rays of sunlight touched the butte, a little fawn-colored coyote pup crept up the sloping entrance and crouched

on his belly. For a long while he lay, gazing over the lowlands. His sharp-pointed ears stood erect and his eyes fairly snapped with interest in the things he saw. Sometimes he moistened his nose with a pink tongue and wrinkled it, first in one direction and in another, as do the animals who trust largely to their sense of smell for food and life.

From the den he heard the puppy-like whinings of his brothers and sisters and occasionally he caught the deeper warning of the mother coyote. Once or twice she had taken them out in the darkness of a Dakota night, to give them lessons in the art of catching mice, the first prey of baby coyotes, but never had they seen the light of day except that wee portion which filtered down the tortuous windings of the tunnel.

NOW for the first time this youngster was out alone, and he was amazed at everything he saw. He watched the maneuvering of a tractor almost at his feet, but of such things he had no fear. He knew too little to be afraid. He only knew that these creatures of motion in the panorama before him were the most fascinating things he had ever seen, and as such, would stand investigation. After a while he became restless. He had seen much but his inquisitiveness was not satisfied, he must see more. Instinct warned him back to his mother. Curiosity tugged hard the other way. He succumbed to temptation and thrust his nose through the curtain of cedar.

From somewhere he caught a scent. It was of something he had eaten, something his mother had brought home when she came from hunting under the cover of darkness. He remembered he liked the taste then, and the same scent made him hungry now. At last, by the combined use of eyes and nose, he discovered the source of the odor—a cottontail rabbit, sitting under a sagebush only a few feet away. Here, then, was his supper. Nothing to do but go and pick it up! Parting the cedar, he stepped out into the open and approached the rabbit. There came a flash of gray and brown, the noise of rolling gravel and then silence. With a small whine, half fear, half disappointment, the coyote sat down suddenly in his tracks. He had learned his first lesson.

He soon forgot the rabbit, however, and resumed his study of the country below. Had he known that, sitting up straight, he was a perfect silhouette of a coyote against the skyline, he might have become suspicious when the tractor below came to a sudden stop, and two men started across the field on foot. He watched them but they did not come in his direction, and when they disappeared behind a shoulder of the butte, he let his attention wander back to the valley again.

Minutes passed. Twilight was deepening into dusk when he heard something behind him. Wheeling about, he found himself face to face with one of the men and a terrific blast of fire and smoke. Giving vent to a terrified yelp, he sprang straight out over the abyss below.

He struck fairly into the outstretched arms of a giant sagebush which snapped under him and left him hanging over the brow of another chasm. In a spasm of fear, he raked the sage and clay for a foothold. Something held fast under his claws and with a great effort, he drew himself up and onto the clump of sage again, only to face another blast from the shotgun. This time there was a hot throb in one of his paws and he sprang away along the face of the butte. Jumping one washout, he looked into another and found a shallow hole, one of the sort jackrabbits back into for protection from eagles. At the bottom of the hole he began to dig desperately and only when the pain in his paw became unbearable, did he crouch, whimpering, on his belly.

For a while, there were strange noises above—the sound of men digging and the rumble of clay sliding by his hiding-place. Then came yelps of fear, a savage snarl merging into the report of a shotgun, the trample of feet; and voices dying away into the night.

Toward morning he could endure it no longer. He was hungry and cold and lonely.

Backing slowly out of the hole, he began to climb up the cliff. He wanted his mother and something to eat and the warm nest in which he could curl up with his injured paw. He found the tunnel entrance, but it was only a yawning hole in the side of the butte. Around it was the smell of fresh blood and the danger scents of his kind. He knew then that he was alone and he began to whimper. From far to the west, in the Bad Lands, he heard the long-drawn cry of the timber wolf. It came through the night air car-

By Bigelow Neal

rying the anguish of a soul in torment. He sat down and holding the injured paw in front of him, pointed his nose to the stars and sang as best he knew how. His vocal cords were not developed, for there had been no lessons, but he was very small and the world was very large and his mother was gone; so he made funny little gurgling noises in his throat while water gathered in his eyes and ran down his cheeks, one drop after another.

But hunger is no respecter of persons; it thrusts a coldly inquisitive nose into the business of sentiment; it makes heroes of the timid; and sometimes it becomes an antidote for pain, either mental or physical. In time the youngster ceased his blubbering and fell to licking the injured foot. The taste of blood, even his own, had a curious effect upon him. It set up a strange, gnawing pain back of his ribs, a pain that must be satisfied. His eyes lost their look of fear and loneliness. In its place came a cold glint—an expression of calculation and cruelty. That night the playful, inquisitive soul of the puppy died, and the germ of the killer was born. Not very efficient, perhaps, for he knew nothing of killing; embryonic, as yet, but nevertheless, from that time forth, he became the potential enemy of everything that walked, crawled or flew over the prairies. To live, he must eat; to eat, he must kill. Nature had spoken and her word is the law of the wild.

He drew himself up, only to face another blast from the shotgun.

Down the slopes of Coyote Butte and out onto the prairie below, the little fellow hobbled, hopping as best he could with the wounded paw held out in front. Like all of his kind, including dog-puppies, there is a decided tendency for the hind legs to outrun the front ones. With the injured foot the condition was aggravated and, occasionally, when he attempted to run, he found himself heading back on his own trail.

FOR an hour he wandered aimlessly about, looking for something, he knew not what. More by luck than anything else, he found a spring. He was feverish from his wound and the cold water soothed his mouth and throat. From the spring he passed on to the edge of a plowed field and here luck began to turn his way. Following the outer furrow, he saw a small black object darting along the furrow ahead. He knew the scent of mouse, and bounded in the air. When he came down the mouse was under the uninjured foot. So far so good, but the coyote, like the dog, is extremely self-conscious. Instead of following up his advantage, he looked around to see if anybody was watching.

Suddenly a stab of agony ran through the foot holding the mouse and again he went into the air. He sprang after the retreating rodent and pinioned it once more to the ground. He had learned that delay was fatal and he would take no chances. He ran his pointed muzzle under his paw and gingerly grasped the mouse between his teeth.

THE second lesson was even worse than the first. Something shut down on his tongue with the force of a pair of pliers. Emitting a sharp yelp of terror, the coyote started skyward once more. By the time he returned to earth, his anger was deadly, but he had learned much. Overtaking the mouse this time, he changed his plan of warfare. He rolled his tongue as far back as it would go. Next, he contracted the muscles of his lips, until the lance-like teeth shone like ivory under the starlight. Lastly, he struck with the savagery and precision of a bolt of lightning. He closed and opened the needle-like fangs, with a sharp metallic click and was back out of danger. That time the snap had told, for the mouse moved but slowly and its course became erratic and undecided. Again the coyote sprang, a flash of gray; there was a low angry snarl, and again the delicate tap as of needles. Now the mouse lay on his back while the miniature killer stood at a safe distance and watched. He had learned another lesson in the scroll of life.

By daylight the little coyote had collected more than a dozen of the brown and gray field mice. He felt much better. The gnawing in his stomach had ceased and with the coming of day he crawled into a clump of buckbrush where he lay snug and quiet until night. Mostly he slept, but at times he licked industriously at the swollen paw. Nor was the time wasted, for out of the pores of his slender pink tongue came the most potent of all healing agents. With it, he could do in a matter of hours, that which man cannot do in as many days.

During the following month, the little fellow lived mostly on mice. Once he found the nest of a prairie chicken, and the eggs furnished a welcome break in his diet, but he was afraid to go far afield, the nights were so full of strange noises. Sometimes, too, there were shadows of other wild things moving in the darkness.

June came and with it the young rabbits. Mousing became too slow and he devoted his time to the rabbits. On this new diet, he waxed strong and fleet. Gone was the puppy fat. He grew clean-limbed and slender: his color changed from fawn to a dark tan and the gray hairs began to show under the outer coat. By midsummer he had developed to the size of a half-grown setter and with the increase in size and greater speed had come confidence.

One night he followed a path through the timber. He had been to the river for water and was returning to take up his nightly search for food. A queer little ball was hanging from the slender branches of a young ash and because there was no mother coyote to warn him of danger, he sprang and grasped it in his mouth. . . . . All through the night he lay in the path, whimpering and working at the quills in his mouth and nose. On the prairie there are three animals protected by nature from the coyote and the wolf. The puppy had met the porcupine and thenceforth he would give members of that tribe the right of way.

One other time, he decided to go out into the world and explore the hills and valleys he had, so far, been content to contemplate from afar. After catching a rabbit for supper, he struck boldly out into the unknown.

Following a road which led across the prairie, he came to the foothills of the Bad Lands and then on into the land of antiquity. It was a ghostly place, even for a coyote, but the spirit of adventure ran high. In time, valleys became cañons and hills became buttes. Strange, freakish drafts sucked between the weird formations of clay and the moving air moaned in the stunted branches of petrified trees. The buffalo grass of the prairie disappeared and in its place he found bunch-grass and soapweed, cactus and barren reaches of blue-white alkali.

Moving across an open place where alkali forbade the growth of grass or cactus, he was startled by a harsh buzzing sound. He had heard the song of the rattler, but this was decidedly off the key. Advancing cautiously, he came to the bleached skeleton of a long-dead horse and the buzzing sound was the humming of dried, wind-driven tissues on the gaping ribs. For a while he gnawed among the bones, but it was dry work and he made slow progress. Then something across the coulee attracted his attention and caused him to drop flat on his belly. His lips drew back and his eyes glared with the savage light of the killer.

Now only a few rods away and coming

directly toward him, was a small black and white animal, very little larger than a house cat and behind were several more, though much smaller. Evidently a mother of some kind, taking her family out for a walk. As they came closer, he saw they possessed another feature in common. Each carried a bushy tail curled up over its back.

Small and defenseless, there could be no

A small black-and-white animal, taking her family out for a walk. He sprang and struck.

escape for them. The coyote had learned to kill. On they came and as they passed, he sprang and struck. But something was wrong. He had selected the mother—but somehow she avoided him, and presented a defense of unquestioned potency. . . . . For a long while he was in darkness, for his eyes were out of commission and the trail he left behind him was an irregular thing of loops and circles. Staggering, gagging and frothing at the mouth, he made for the river. Sometimes he lay down and dragged himself in the grass; sometimes he ate dirt and clay and alkali; but when he came to the water he fell in and stayed in until morning. During all the years of his life, he never molested a skunk again.

AFTER that experience the coyote deserted the Bad Lands, and went back to the prairie and to the mice and rabbits. Then came a time, late in the summer, when the rabbits were nearly full grown and with their growth had come the speed for which they were noted. Sometimes the coyote kept up the chase for miles, only to lose the rabbit on the sides of a clay butte, though he caught one occasionally by heading it out onto the prairie and away from the hills; but his successes became fewer and fewer until, at last, he gave them up altogether and turned his attention to other game.

That was how it happened he was following the road one night, looking for prairie chickens, for they sometimes bedded down between the wheel-tracks and the coyote was able to catch them before they could clear the ground. Suddenly he found himself confronted by an animal he had never seen before. It was a queer, pudgy-looking thing of gray, with a wide, flat body and short stubby legs. The triangular head was of gray and black stripes and ended in a sharp, black snout.

The coyote saw nothing of which to be afraid, for the physique of the stranger was misleading. His short legs created an altogether false impression of his size for, as a matter of fact, he weighed as much, or perhaps even more than the coyote. They were only a few feet apart when the coyote stopped and sat down. The other animal sat down too, or rather sat up, for he lifted his fore feet from the ground and rose until he became a black-tipped, conical form of gray. Then without warning, he emitted a sharp, sibilant hiss, which had the metallic ring of the reptile.

The puppy had never seen a badger and there was no one to speak a warning word. He only knew that he was hungry and that rabbits were hard to get. Here was something which offered, at least, a dimensional promise of a square meal and enough left over to bury for another occasion. Very slowly and very cautiously he began to circle for an opening.

A badger possesses one property in common with few animals. He can do almost anything with his skin except to go off and leave it. The skin on his back may be pulled over either ear, without discommoding him in the slightest and his body will turn within its leathery sheath, like the startling contortions of a hoot-owl's neck. In addition, the skin itself is tougher than the finest rawhide and is impervious to almost everything but a rifle bullet.

These things the coyote did not know and because his mother—his teacher—had

been killed, he had no way to learn, other than in the bitter school of experience.

Still the coyote circled about in an effort to get behind his opponent, but the result was not satisfying. The badger pivoted within himself and turned like a gun turret, never allowing any part but his forepaws and teeth to face his rapidly shifting enemy. In time, however, he disclosed the one weak point in his defense. It lay in the fact that he could only wind up just so far and then, was obliged to reverse like a suddenly released watch spring, and begin all over again. The first time he unwound, the coyote was too surprised to take advantage of the operation but the second time the badger was not so fortunate. His opponent had been waiting for a repetition of the maneuver. With lightning-like speed he lunged in and struck for the badger's throat. He got it too, or at least he had it until the small bundle of flesh and muscle slipped out from between his teeth and left with him only a mouthful of skin. Finding his prey puncture-proof so far as his throat was concerned, he shifted his attack and tried for the fore-shoulder, with identically the same result. He had the shoulder in his mouth. He could feel the bone between his teeth, then it simply wasn't there and he was chewing, again, on hide as tough as sole leather. At about this time the coyote made another discovery: he found that the dangerous end of a badger is not associated with his hiss—like a mule, whose defensive apparatus is a long way from his bray. When the coyote lost his temper as well as his sense of caution and started off dragging the badger by the tail, he was raked on either side of the nose with the venom of red-hot needles.

The coyote withdrew and sat down to think it over. Obviously he was in nothing, and out much. The badger appeared as fresh as ever, while he himself was out of breath, out of patience, and out a good share of his upper lip. After a period devoted to panting and licking his wounds, he returned to the attack, but this time in a more experimental frame of mind. And now to his surprise, the victory was, apparently, won without an effort. As he approached, the badger stuck his nose under his forelegs and drew his tail up to meet the nose. In that position, he was nothing but an inoffensive bundle of gray hair. Nothing loath, the coyote fell to chewing. He ripped, he tore, at that bundle of badger until his jaws ached, but without result as far as anyone could see; he chewed until his tongue was sore and swollen; he chewed at intervals until the first streaks of dawn appeared. Then he went down to the river and drank long and deep.

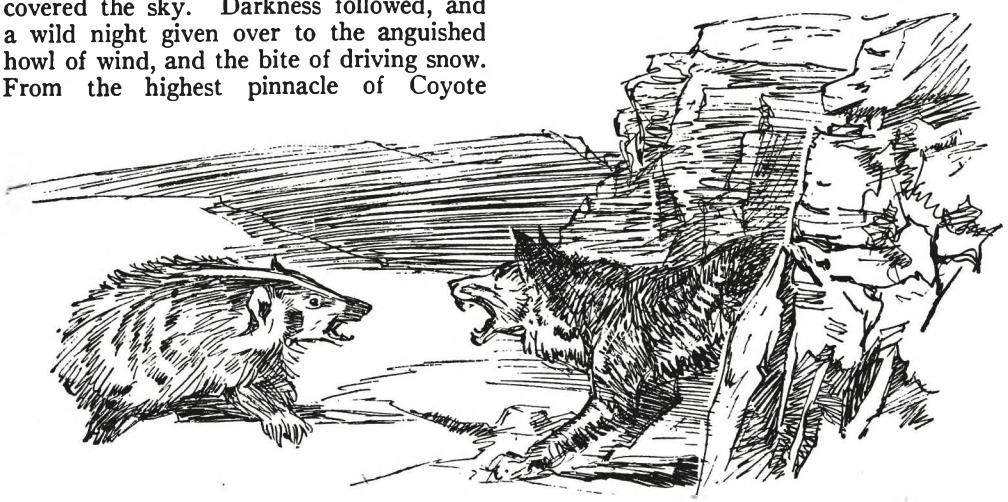
From then on, he came to associate badgers with skunks and porcupines, as something to be avoided.

WITH fall, a change came over the prairies. The soft, summer carpet of buffalo grass turned from green to brown. The leaves of the cottonwoods withered and fell, to form a golden mat upon the ground. Where the bittersweet and Virginia creeper grew, masses of orange and crimson flamed, and countless splashes of red marked the seed-pods of the wild rose. One day a soft breeze came in from the southeast and carried across the prairie the warm breath of Indian summer. For weeks the Bad Lands and the prairie shimmered under the heat waves of a second spring, but the wild folk were not fooled. The big jackrabbit sleeping his days away under the sage on Coyote Butte, took advantage of the warm weather and shed his coat of brown and gray for one of spotless white, for soon he must merge his color scheme with the snow, or fall an easy prey to the eagles.

Then came the last sunset of fall, the evening of the day which marked the death and birth of seasons. The wild folk knew, for they were out in force. Gophers scurried back and forth, their mouths full of grain and artichokes. From the top of a small conical mound, a prairie dog gave vent to funny little barks, working his tail up and down like a pump-handle, as though to punctuate and emphasize his remarks; high on the sides of Coyote Butte, the gray and blue and bronze sides of a giant bull-snake glittered in the last rays of sunlight; the blue dome above became a background for V-shaped lines of geese and mallards, moving swiftly to the south. Then the sun set and the breeze from the southeast fell to a murmur, to a breath, to silence. And now from the west came the cause of it all. A tumbling, twisting mass of black, stretching from horizon to horizon, racing on and on with the relentless fury of fate. On the ground before it glided an area where daylight changed to night with no twilight to intervene.

The gophers darted down their runways; the prairie dog gave one last defiant bark

and dropped from sight; the great snake glided into a crevice between the rocks; and the long, V-shaped lines in the sky spiraled upward to new altitudes above the storm. Now came the wind, a cold blast from the northwest, bringing a rasping protest from the prairies and a low moan from the rocks and peaks in the Bad Lands. The black thing from the west swept on and covered the sky. Darkness followed, and a wild night given over to the anguished howl of wind, and the bite of driving snow. From the highest pinnacle of Coyote Butte came the first yelp of the one-time coyote puppy, now changed even as the face of nature and season had changed. He was now a full-grown wolf of the prairie and when the winds began to moan about the peak and he sensed the challenge of hunger and cold and storm, he pointed his nose to the clouds above his head and sent the song of the coyote down upon the crest of the storm.



The badger pivoted and turned like a gun-turret.

With the coming of winter and deep snow, the nightly problem of food became more and more difficult. Rabbits were out of the question. They darted across the snow, hardly denting the crust, while the coyote broke through and floundered away his energy. Even the mice were hard to get. They moved from burrow to burrow through miniature tunnels under the snow and were protected from marauders of every kind.

One night, however, when the snow was drifting before a biting, cold wind, he lay on a great drift which had formed where the prairie dropped into the Bad Lands, and quite by chance learned a new source of food. On such nights, prairie chickens sometimes come to the big drifts and dig themselves in, and now as he lay flat on the brink of the drift, he heard a clucking whir, ending in a fluttering sound as an old cock dropped to the drift only a few feet away. Watching with an interest sharpened by the pangs of hunger, he saw the chicken scratch in the snow, at the same time turning around and around. Little by little the cock worked himself down until he was below the level of the drift. Then he thrust his head under one wing and waited for the snow to fill in the hole above him. At first thought this would seem a dangerous procedure, for the snow might drift deeply enough to imprison him beyond hope of escape, but the prairie chicken knew his safety. He knew the drift might build out indefinitely but that it would never rise higher than the prairie above. The hole he had dug would fill level full but no more. In the morning he would simply stand up, shake himself and go about his business. That was the theory but it did not take into account the presence of a hungry coyote. . . . . When morning came, no chicken stood up and shook himself—but the coyote had eaten his fill and cached half a dozen fowls in a hole dug deep in another drift.

For a month or more the coyote waxed fat on a diet of prairie chickens. Then came another change. A thaw set in, and when it turned cold again a crust formed on the snow and the chickens were unable to break through, so they took to roosting in plum thickets along the river. At last the killer became by force of necessity a scavenger, searching for dead horses or cattle.

In a coulee a mile from the Four X ranch there was a place men called "the

boneyard"—a place where dead horses and cattle were hauled and left for the coyotes. The coulee makes a sharp turn there and forms a natural amphitheater.

The coyote caught the scent of dead meat, one night, and followed it upwind for miles. At last he came to a semi-circular drift above the Boneyard and looked down into the valley below. But he was not alone, for at intervals along the drift were others of his breed, dozens of them, sitting erect and silent. Far down the valley a twinkling light marked the position of the ranch buildings.

A dog barked down the valley and a coyote answered. At first he contented himself with short yelps in imitation of the dog but when the moon rose he began to sing in earnest. One by one the others joined in the chorus until the evening air became a hideous jangle of yelps and cries and moans. For an hour the clamor continued and then suddenly ceased. With the last note one of the coyotes made his way down into the Boneyard, the rest watching intently. Finding no traps, he fell to eating and the others soon joined him.

SOMETIME later, a coyote with sharper ears than his comrades heard a sound that told of danger. With a low warning snarl, he set off up the coulee. The others followed, clinging to the shadows of buckbrush and boulder. Rounding a bend the leader came face to face with a merciless charge of buckshot. All but the leader turned and retreated. He lay and threshed about on the valley floor while the snow under him slowly turned to crimson. Frightened now, and plunging recklessly, they raced back the way they had come, only to meet more men and more buckshot. There was one hope left and that led up the face of the big drift where the moonlight had full play. As they took to the open and began the ascent, the roar of a dozen guns greeted the attempt, but this time they kept on—that is, some of them did. Others, overtaken by the leaden pellets, rolled back down the slope, to kick and die as their leader had done. Those who reached the top of the big drift scattered, each to shift for himself.

Miles out on the prairie, the coyote found himself gaining on a fleeting form of gray. From the scent he knew it to be a female of his kind, and he knew also that she was wounded, probably in the leg or foot, for there were miniature spots of red in some of her tracks and he could smell the warm blood from the wound. At last, exhausted from the long run, she lay down to rest and chew the snow from between her toes and pads. The coyote overtook her then and sat down at a distance, to watch her. Finding she made no objection to this, he moved closer and, by degrees, approached until he too could lick the bloody place where once had been a toe. Still she made no objection and when she moved on again, he followed, until they came to the Bad Lands. Here he stopped, for he had no liking for the hills. She tried to coax him then. She even licked his nose and whined for him to follow, for she had a den of her own, deep in the Bad Lands, and the mating season had come.

At last she went on alone while he sat on the top of a high rock and watched her disappear among the peaks. Almost he was tempted to follow, but as yet the call of the prairie was too strong.

They had parted near a farm where the turkeys were wont to roost on the fence. It was across the river but he had already made several trips, each of them successful, and he was minded to try again. Tomorrow or maybe later he would answer her call and they would set up housekeeping in the Bad Lands.

The great river lay cold and silent under a blanket of ice and snow. Overhead a yellow moon, floating against a background of coldly scintillating stars, emitted luminous rays of light to shimmer and sparkle among the frost crystals. Over all lay silence—the quivering, vibrating silence of intense cold.

From the northern shore came a shadow —a creeping, gliding thing of gray; a shape merging with the shadows along the shore and moving without sound, as silent as the night. Far out on the river, the trunk and roots of a drifting cottonwood had caught on the upstream end of a sandbar and now, held fast in the grip of the ice, the roots cut into the skyline like the webless ribs of a giant fan. Behind this protection the coyote stopped, and from its shadow studied the ice before him, the farmyard on the bluff and the line of black dots on the fence by the barn.

At last he moved into the moonlight again, but he moved haltingly, cautiously, as one in the presence of danger. At intervals he stopped and sniffed the air; sometimes he crouched low and for long moments, studied the ice ahead.

Below the farmyard a strawstack, built over-high, had toppled and its sliding crest now formed a slope, reaching down to the river's edge. Around it cattle munched at the powdery chaff, or dozed, half buried in the protecting straw. The coyote could see the slender columns of steam rising from their nostrils.

A hundred yards from the shore he stopped again and crouched in his tracks. His sharp eyes had detected a movement in the straw. So slight it was, it might easily have been a miniature slide caused by a roosting prairie chicken, or it might have been the natural settling of the stack where undermined by cattle—but for an hour the coyote lay motionless, every sense alert, every muscle ready. Then from the timber came the sharp report of a breaking branch and the cry of a lynx. The super-strained nerves of the coyote reacted and he sprang into the air.

Now, fifty yards from the shore, he stopped and listened again. There was a low metallic click, and once more he saw a movement in the straw and caught the glimmer of moonlight on the blued steel of a rifle-barrel. From the stack came a crimson stab of dripping sparks and the sharp crack of a rifle. Something struck the ice under his feet with a terrific impact and the wild scream of ricocheting lead and steel sounded beyond him. Splinters of ice drove through the skin on legs and belly, and again he sprang high in the air.

The man in the stack was now on his feet and the coyote heard the rattle and click of the breechblock as a new cartridge slipped into the barrel. There seemed no chance of escape—the trap had sprung!

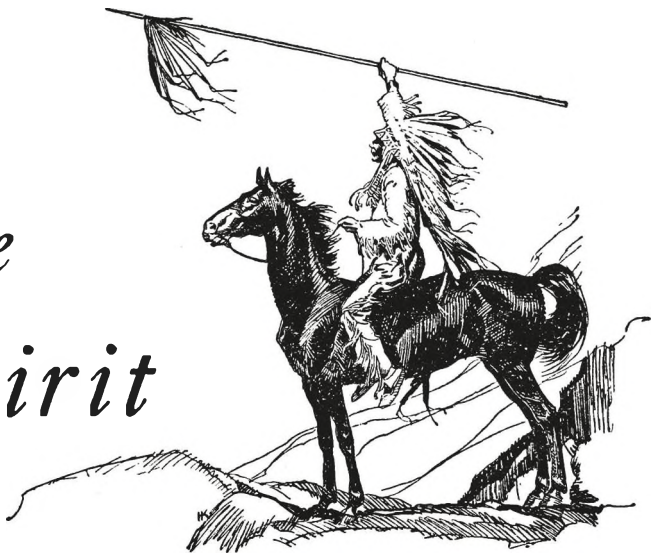
At this time of all times, when he should have used his splendid muscles in a final effort for self-preservation, he stood still, apparently rooted in his tracks. The mind which should have driven his limbs to action seemed numb, his muscles refused to act—for he stood in the presence of a new power, a seemingly supernatural something more terrifying even than the fear of death. He sensed a motion that was neither up nor down, forward nor back, and yet he recognized the stirring of titanic forces beneath his feet. In front of him the ice bent and swelled in a great blue wave. How was he to know of the laws of contraction and expansion under the influence of heat and cold? How was he to know of countless tons of pressure, pushing shoreward from the channel? Paralyzed with fear, he crouched again and whimpered. The man at the stack slowly tightened his finger on the trigger. A fraction of a second more would send the soft-nosed messenger of death on its mission, but there is a power, greater even than the trigger finger of man. One instant the shadow of death hovered over the coyote, the next there came a report, a crash, louder than the broadside of a battle fleet.

UNABLE longer to withstand the awful pressure of its own expansion, the ice had given way and a sheet of water shot skyward. Up and up it rose, until at last losing momentum, it hung for a moment, suspended in the cold of the night. Then came an all engulfing burst of steam, the silvery tinkle of frozen drops and a low, shuddering moan of relief from the great river.

Under cover of a nature-made smoke screen, the coyote turned and ran for the northern shore over ice and snow and sand; up into the timber and out again; onto the slopes of Coyote Butte; up and up, until, exhausted, he reached the summit and dropped on his belly in the shadow of a rock. Looking back, he saw the ice covered with billowing waves of vapor; above and beyond, a man with a rifle, moving across the plain. A savage snarl broke from his throat; the muscles of his lips contracted until his fangs, dripping with froth, gleamed white in the moonlight.

The moon sank slowly down the western slope. The coyote lay as he had dropped. In time the look of hate and fear died from his eyes and the tense muscles of lip and jaw relaxed. Then, from the Bad Lands, came a cry—a triple yelp, followed by a long-drawn note that rose and fell, drifting out on the night air like a wail from the soul of the damned. At the first note, the coyote pricked up his ears and listened. To him and to him alone, it carried a message. Again it came out of the chaos of buttes and peaks, and a thrill stirred deep within his shaggy breast. A third time— He got to his feet. He remembered the skunk, and the moan of the winds, and he hated the Bad Lands. He looked again to the prairies. He wanted to live in the open where the wind blew strong and clear—but the call of the mate is the clearest call. When it came again, he turned and trotted into the west. The days of his puppyhood were over.

The Evil Spirit



By

ROLLIN BROWN

Illustrated by Kennedy Yale

The stirring story of a wild day in the West and of a gallant old ruffian who saved it.

AT sunup the bugle blew the call to saddle.

Lieutenant Keenan, crossing the tiny adobe-walled parade-ground on his way to the captain's quarters for final orders, indulged in a brief nod of satisfaction. The stiff military precision of the handful of men obeying the bugle was to his liking. Lieutenant Keenan was less than a year out of West Point.

"There is this, Mr. Keenan," said Captain Garfair, a bit later, "and that is, that you never can tell. 'Pache Smith's been along with me for eight years, off and on, and when he senses something, I put my ear to the ground. If Bleeding Face is stirring, our Indians are deadly."

Lieutenant Keenan stood stiffly straight before the Captain. "Then I shall include Scouts Smith and Gillifin in the detachment, sir?"

Captain Garfair bit off the end of one of his stogies, imported at three times their value from San Francisco.

"I would," he said in his easy manner. "No harm's done by it—and you never can tell."

"Those two scouts, sir, utterly destroy the discipline I have drilled into the troop—utterly. That scout 'Pache Smith is particularly an evil spirit among the men."

"I know—I know. I spoke to 'Pache about it this morning."

"You spoke to him, sir?" Lieutenant Keenan coughed slightly; then continued: "And upon this occasion, sir, I particularly wished my command to be all it should be."

Captain Garfair appeared to consider. "I know," he observed. "Still, the Major aint such a hog for discipline. But he's hell on results. 'Member that when you see him."

LIEUTENANT KEENAN nodded, and although a certain dislike was attached to it, remembered. That night, down the pass and out on the plains, forty miles south and east from the little adobe barracks and fort, he recalled the Captain's words. He reflected, nevertheless, that the Major, like himself, was a West Point man.

The detachment was centered before Lieutenant Keenan, the outposts placed, the mounts picketed. The camp was orderly; the relaxed men, moving in the flickering firelight, trim in uniform and bearing. Half a dozen were clustered at a far fire around two silhouetted figures. And those two figures were buckskin-shirted and long-haired. Lieutenant Keenan sniffed perceptibly, as he gazed at them and recalled his conversation with the Captain.

Those two had their place, he considered. But it was not here—with an honorary detachment to effect a meeting with Major Colton on a tour of inspection, with the Major's wife and a daughter accompanying him through a country peaceable for the two years past.

As Lieutenant Keenan watched, he saw one of those long-haired figures draw off his buckskin shirt and stand in the firelight naked to the waist. The night was warm. 'Pache Smith, from long experience, used the means he had found applicable in this situation, to combine the delight of a trooper's fire and a warm night. It was a trick he fell back upon when the troopers' stiff coats became damply saturated in the desert's midday. His body to the waist was a deep walnut-color. In the firelight the long strands of his hair played about his shoulders. Three of the troopers followed his visible suggestion, and their bodies in the fire-glow were white as candle wax. The drawl of the voices came faintly to Lieutenant Keenan.

"Aint thet an old fule,"—and he saw 'Pache Smith gesture toward the other buckskinned figure, a figure with long locks of grayish blond hair,—"with the waddin' he wears without? If he'd ever had et an egg since he's been West, it would have hatched in him into a full-grown chicken dinner."

" 'Taint so," came the other's piping voice. "I et three aigs less'n a year ago. It's insulation I'm wearin'. On a hot day, I says to meself: 'Incubator Gillifin, how was it when ye was a lad back home thet they kept ice from meltin' in the summer?' An' the answer comes quick: 'By wrappin' it well against heat. Correct, Incubator,' I says, an' puts on another shirt. I never feels the heat thet-a-way."

Lieutenant Keenan turned and motioned to an orderly. "Bring Scout Smith to me."

HE watched the long-haired garrulous figure, at the orderly's word, detach itself from the others and stroll toward him, the half-naked body gleam into dull brown high-lights passing a nearer fire.

"Scout Smith!" he said sharply.

'Pache Smith saluted, palm forward.

"Scout Smith, I do not mean to conflict with your behavior tonight; but tomorrow night Major Colton, his wife and daughter will be with us. At that time the camp must be held in strict order and discipline. I hope you understand. There must be none of this—nakedness, and loud talk. I'm held responsible for this being a disciplined military unit in every sense of the word."

"Yore troopers, sir, would sartain be better mannered than to become naked before women."

"Yes, and in the midday heat I wish every man to maintain his military attitude—and clothes."

"I'll ride back. Incubator can ride forward, showin' hisself to the women."

"Women do not always gaze forward."

" 'Tis true. In my youth they was a schoolmarm—"

"That's all, Scout Smith!"

Lieutenant Keenan felt his irritation snap; at present he was not in company with Captain Garfair.

TWO days later 'Pache Smith, at the tail of the little cavalcade riding its way back into the first shallow curls of the long pass leading up to the home barracks, was remarking on education to the trooper at his side.

"Now, eddycation, trooper," he said, "is what I got an' you aint."

With that he took off the heavy buckskin shirt he wore and tied it behind his saddle. His oiled bronze body glistened in the sun, and his long black hair lifted rhythmically with the rise and fall of his pony's gait.

"Some day," remarked the trooper, "you'll get shot fer an Injun."

"I reckon as much," said 'Pache laconically.

A hundred paces ahead, the clumsy ambulance-wagon, loaned from a station far to the east because the request came from no less than a major, rattled over the rocks of the pass' dry stream-bed. It contained the portly Major Colton, his wife and his daughter, all cheered by the prospect of beds at the barracks that night. At the side of the ambulance, stiffly erect in the saddle, rode Lieutenant Keenan.

Two miles passed; the little column drew higher. The pass narrowed, the walls steep and towering, cut down from their summits by precipitous little brush-clogged ravines. 'Pache Smith, as they entered the narrow cañon, saw Incubator Gillifin make a little gesture with his right hand.

"Incubator's takin' it on hisself to maneuver a bit ahead," he observed to the trooper. "Good idear. They aint nobody present this-here trip to protect you blue-

swaddled babes 'cept Incubator an' me. Incubator feels responsibility a heap."

Thereafter, through the winding pass no long-haired blond figure, clad in the thickness of three buckskin shirts, moved in sight before the column. Lieutenant Keenan noted this. His face twitched slightly.

Miss Colton, jolting in the ambulance's seat beside her mother, also observed it.

"Oh, Father," she said, "I've been watching for eight turns now, and that nice old man who wears so many shirts has disappeared. And that other odd man—'Pache, don't you call him?"

"Scout Smith," corrected Lieutenant Keenan.

"He's taken off his shirt and looks for all the world like an Indian."

A stunned expression came to Lieutenant Keenan's face. It was followed by dull mounting red.

Miss Colton had spoken out of the window, and her voice had carried clear and sweet.

At the end of the column 'Pache Smith dolefully began to loosen the saddle-strings that held his shirt.

"Women," he remarked cheerlessly, spitting out a stream of tobacco juice, "is the sharp-eyedest critters! Now, once in my youth they was a schoolmarm—"

A single rifle-shot echoed down the twistings of the pass. 'Pache's face froze, and he dropped the buckskin shirt. Lieutenant Keenan halted his mount, apparently mildly startled. Miss Colton uttered a little scream.

Above the noise of shod hoofs, suddenly fretting in the rocks, came 'Pache's shrill voice:

"Ride fer thet patch of willers ahead, troopers!"

The lead trooper, who had been riding at the side of Incubator Gillifin, shot his horse forward. The column jerked ahead, swerved and clattered over the rocks. Those of the troopers, veterans, who had seen much action two years before, suddenly swore in monotones to themselves.

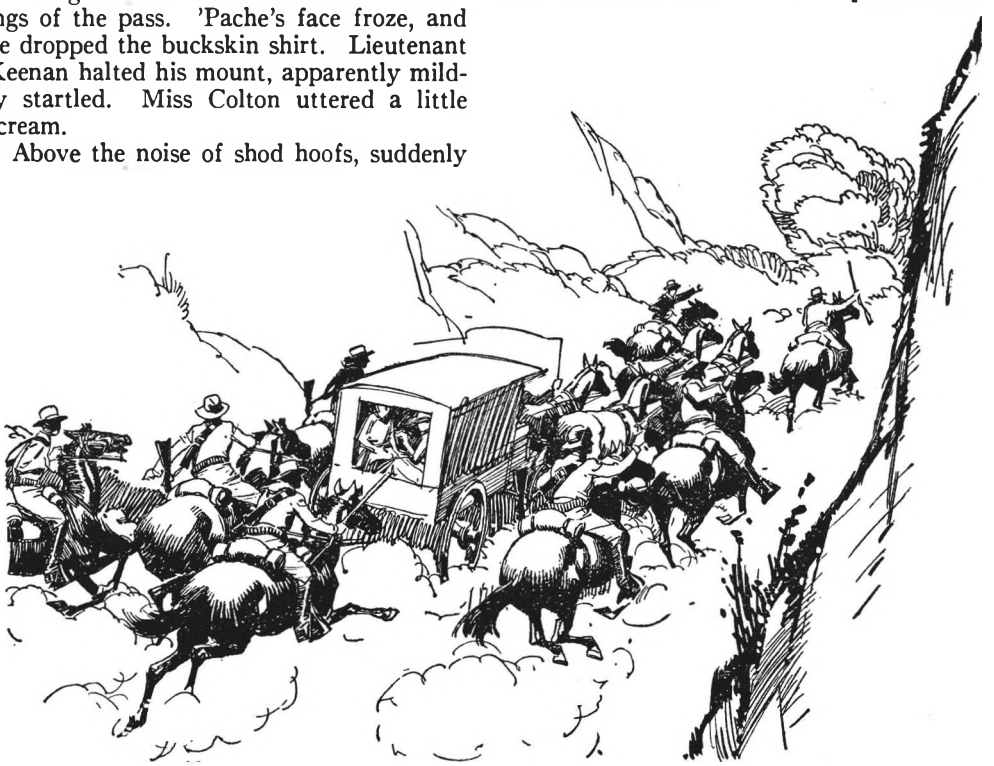
Lieutenant Keenan found himself riding at the tail of the column.

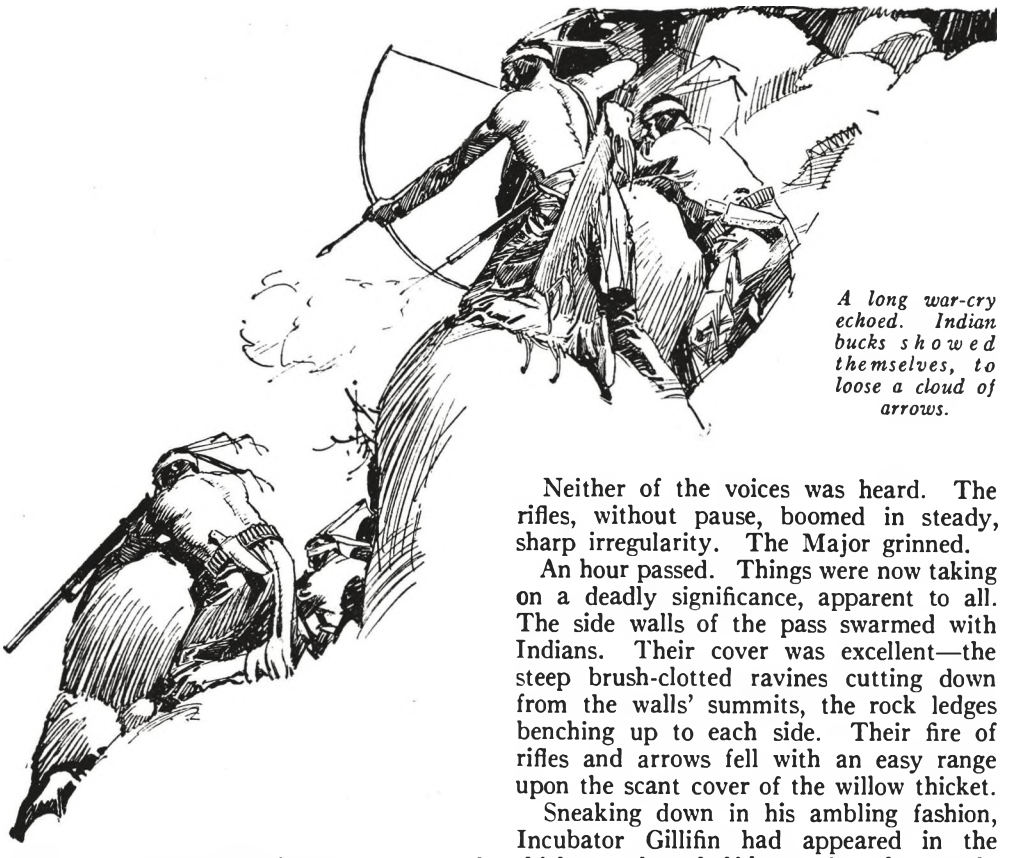
"Halt!" he choked. His voice carried no farther than 'Pache Smith. 'Pache halted, briefly.

"Incubator don't give alarms at seein' prairie-dorgs," he explained.

As though in proof of his words, the pass suddenly became alive. A long, trembling war-cry echoed through its canon. Half-naked Indian bucks, high on the side walls, their bodies glistening in the sunlight, momentarily showed themselves, to loose a cloud of arrows. A scattering of gun-fire came down simultaneously, for some of the Indians were armed with rifles. An ambulance mule fell in the traces. Dead, it was dragged on.

Three hundred yards, and the lead trooper cut into the willow thicket with the column behind. The disciplined mili-





A long war-cry echoed. Indian bucks showed themselves, to loose a cloud of arrows.

tary unit, honorary detachment to meet and accompany Major Colton midway from the next post east, fell into action without command. Disheveled blue-coated figures cut the mules loose, and pushed over the ambulance to sling Miss Colton and her mother bodily under its shelter. Major Colton ripped loose the fastenings of his jacket, and squatted behind a boulder with 'Pache Smith.

The troopers' rifles began to boom with staccato irregularity. A warrior far above toppled out into space and fell slowly, end over end.

'Pache Smith drew out a gnawed plug of tobacco from a hip pocket.

"Chaw?" he asked of the Major.

The Major nodded.

"I likes it damp, this-a-way," said 'Pache. "Allus keeps my chawin' close to the skin fer dampness."

The Major shot a long stream with a nice accuracy.

"Hold fire!" came Lieutenant Keenan's voice. "A volley now, men. Ready, aim—"

"Fire at will!" bellowed the Major's voice. "They're Injuns, not practice targets."

Neither of the voices was heard. The rifles, without pause, boomed in steady, sharp irregularity. The Major grinned.

An hour passed. Things were now taking on a deadly significance, apparent to all. The side walls of the pass swarmed with Indians. Their cover was excellent—the steep brush-clotted ravines cutting down from the walls' summits, the rock ledges benching up to each side. Their fire of rifles and arrows fell with an easy range upon the scant cover of the willow thicket.

Sneaking down in his ambling fashion, Incubator Gillifin had appeared in the thicket a short half-hour after the attack. He reported direct to Lieutenant Keenan.

"Wall, now, warn't them-there Injuns clever-like?" he began.

The Lieutenant glared at him. Keenan's brain, skilled in the theory of military tactics at West Point, had long since grasped the deadly strategy of the ambush. If he might have prayed, he would have asked no more than that the foe be granted the true feeling of brotherhood and human love, so that he might surrender his force. A trooper with a bullet through the shoulder cursed dully at his feet.

"How many of the devils are there?" the Lieutenant gasped.

"Wall, now, thet is a reasonable difficult question. I estimate nigh onto five hundred."

"Five hundred! God, man! And I've seen five fall. We'll be out of ammunition by sundown."

The mild blue eyes of Incubator Gillifin blinked slowly.

"I reckon as much," he said, and continued on to the rock that sheltered 'Pache Smith and the Major.

He greeted the Major easily: "Howdy, Cap'n."

" 'Taint a cap'n; it's a dang good major," said 'Pache Smith tersely.

"Howdy, Major."

"Howdy!"

" 'Pache— "

"What ye want, white-skin?"

Incubator hesitated. An arrow, glancing from the side of the rock, neatly took off the small flat-crowned hat he wore with a flutter of yellow, grayish locks. It was unnoticed.

" 'Pache—Bleedin' Face is above, commandin'-like."

"Incubator, ye lie. Commandin'!"

" 'Tis the truth, or I'm a stiff-neck."

"Bleedin' Face is a medicine man. Where was ye raised? An' d'ye think Injuns has West P'int stiff-necks with a book fer tactics and toppygraphy maps?"

"Bleedin' Face is above, commandin'-like with great medicine. I might, if perlitely requested, p'int him out to ye."

"Where?" asked 'Pache Smith suddenly.

The thin arm of Incubator Gillifin, padded by the layers of three shirt sleeves, pointed above. To the west, silhouetted on a far-jutting point of rock, was the form of an Indian astride his pony. The pony, it could be seen, was jet black. Both figures were motionless; and from the Indian's hand rose the shaft of a war spear, festooned at its peak with a great tuft of feathers. The shaft waved with a gentle undulation, rhythmical and even, toward the sun.

"I was close enough to know him," said Incubator.

"Makin' medicine," said 'Pache thoughtfully.

"I reckon as much." The mild blue eyes of the old scout snapped.

Then Incubator fell silent again. The occasional spitting of rifles sounded about him. There was a lessening to this fire now; the troopers were nursing the store of ammunition, which would give out by nightfall. Incubator glanced toward the ambulance-wagon, with its upturned bed stuck with a half-dozen arrows, and below the frame, the white, peering face of the Major's daughter.

"Incubator," said 'Pache Smith, "if I warn't to see ye this evenin', ye'll find another shirt a bit down below, which'll be your'n."

"Thankee," said Incubator, squatting by the Major.

Ten yards above, 'Pache Smith crawled in beside Lieutenant Keenan.

"I'm leavin'," he announced.

"Leaving?" An understanding suddenly flashed through the Lieutenant's mind. " 'Pache," was all he could say for a moment, "make it through!" In that moment he forgave 'Pache all that had ever occurred. "You're the one man in the force—"

"I reckon as much," said 'Pache; "else Incubator would of did it hisself."

" 'Pache, our lives—Miss Colton's—hang on your making it. May that give you strength, man! Tell Captain Garfair—"

'Pache Smith drew back. "Captain Garfair? They aint men enough at the barracks to make any difference to this-here congregation of Injuns." He suddenly seemed to decide that the Lieutenant had attempted to give him advice: "Hey, don't try to teach yore grandpap to suck his tobaccer!"

'Pache swore beneath his breath, and sullenly crawled on. The Lieutenant looked dazed. The trooper at his feet moaned dully.

Behind the boulder the Major said: "Good shot! Incubator's your name, aint it, scout?"

TIME passed. The shadow of the pass' west wall moved out to fall across the willow thicket, the men barricaded in its cover and behind rocks, the horses and mules drawn into its thickest shelter. The spitting of the rifles lessened to an occasional barking. The warriors above pressed down into closer cover, increasing the deadliness of their aim. . . . . The dark silhouetted figure on the far point of rock sat his coal-black mount motionless; and the spear waved its gentle unvarying undulations toward the sun.

"What's become of 'Pache?" asked the Major of the long-locked blond figure at his side.

" 'Pache—him? Thet's Bleedin' Face above makin' great medicine and commandin' fer the tribe."

The sinuous old arm again pointed out the figure on the head of rock.

"Yes," said the Major. "The devils! Where's 'Pache? We got to get somebody out of here for help, or we're all done."

The old figure at his side nodded. "Yep," he agreed, respectfully.

" 'Pache's the man!"

Sorrow welled up in the blue eyes of Incubator Gillifin. "I knowed it, Cap'n, when I first sized up the situation. They

warn't no help fer it. An' 'twere my idear first. Me, ye see, Cap'n, am white—whiter'n a incubated aig."

"Where's 'Pache?"

Incubator suddenly grasped the Major's arm.

"Lookit thet, Cap'n! Squint thet!"

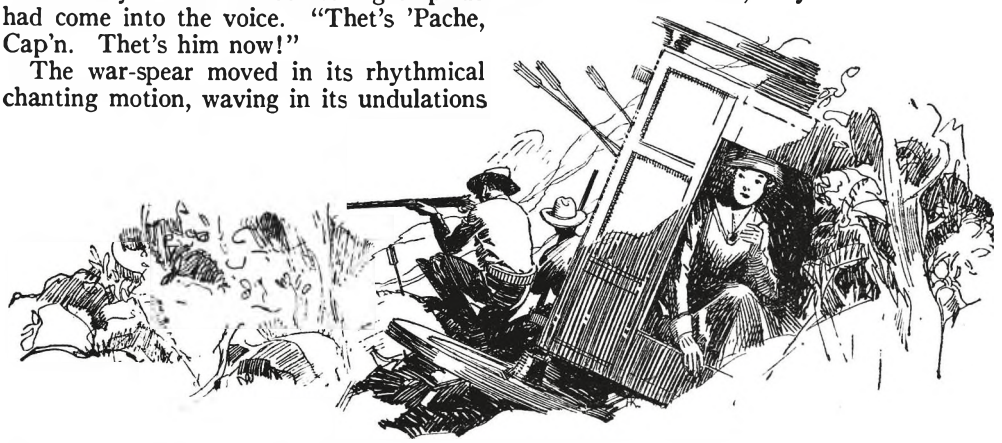
The Major looked again to where the old arm pointed—up to the head of rock.

"Squint thet!"

The figure on the coal-black mount had suddenly dropped. Something moved beneath the standing animal's feet, struggling. Then once more a figure was mounted, darkly silhouetted; and the spear moved again in its gentle undulations toward the afternoon sun.

"Thet's 'Pache," said the piping voice at the Major's elbow. Something of pride had come into the voice. "Thet's 'Pache, Cap'n. Thet's him now!"

The war-spear moved in its rhythmical chanting motion, waving in its undulations



The rifles sounded about the ambulance-wagon, its upturned bed stuck with arrows.

slower and slower. The figure astride the horse drooped, slowly. The spear with its festooned tuft of feathers drew back in an arc, skyward, over the figure, to point down into the pass—down, waving in its motions to the side walls.

"Heap medicine, Cap'n," said Incubator. "Thet 'Pache has lived with these-here Injuns, Cap'n. He knows sure enough what signs the Evil Spirit makes."

"He knows their medicine?"

"I reckon as much."

An Indian buck, high on a side wall, cried shrilly. Suddenly a low chant filled the cañon. There was movement above. Five hundred warriors moved up the side walls, chanting, to appease the wrath of the Evil Spirit which had suddenly pointed upon them.

Bleeding Face had not become the greatest of medicine-men for nothing; his people had learned carefully the sign the Evil Spirit made when wrathful.

CAPTAIN GARFAIR had prepared a welcoming dinner in his quarters at the fort. Major Colton, his wife and daughter, and Lieutenant Keenan were the guests. The dinner was in parts much overdone, in others, soggy. It had waited on serving something like five hours. The fact went unnoticed, however.

"Captain Garfair," the Major was saying in the pompous way he had of addressing other officers, "in the light of what has happened, I do not mind mentioning that at first sight I was unfavorably impressed by your detachment. Your men were too trim; each button of their uniforms had been too well shined; they sat their mounts too stiffly. Experience, sir, has shown me that a troop too greatly disciplined lacks initiative. They do not think for themselves; at the crucial moment they become merely a mass of arrow-fodder. Our Indian warfare, sir, requires tactics and a resourcefulness unknown to any other."

Lieutenant Keenan, seated at the side of Miss Colton, stared down at his plate. The Major, pausing, absently chewed at an end of his mustache, which during the afternoon had become stained a golden brown.

"My men, I think, Major," said Captain Garfair, "were not totally unprepared. Some of those men fought in Charcoal Creek two years ago. My scouts, sir, realized perfectly the strategy that Bleeding Face was capable of, if he should become active, and his hold over the tribe."

The Major appeared not to have heard the Captain's words.

"At the attack, Captain, the defensive

efficiency, and the individual initiative of your men was without flaw. At the time when a moment's hesitation would have meant heavy loss, they instantly, as one man, defensively intrenched themselves in the best cover available. I say, Captain, that it was an example of defensive efficiency against overwhelming odds. Personally, I found myself kneeling in cover at the side of that scout 'Pache Smith."

The Major paused again. Miss Colton had started to cry softly.

"There, there," he said, across the table to her. "There, there, my dear! Overwrought nerves."

Miss Colton choked. "It's not; it's not that. It's to think of—this poor 'Pache—after the rest of us got in safely."

"Never mind, my dear—"

"Miss Colton," said Lieutenant Keenan, at her side. His voice held a sad earnestness. "Miss Colton, do not weep. There is a magnificent nobility in the spirit which will sacrifice itself for others—magnificent—"

Outside, there was a quick, soft thud of hoofs, and a barbarous figure slid from the back of a jet-black pony. An orderly saluted at the door of the room; then the figure stood full in the glow of candlelight. Miss Colton lifted her tear-wet face, mouth half open, staring.

'Pache Smith, naked down to his buckskin breeches, his face and body marked with grotesque savage streakings of war-clay, his long black locks festooned with various feathers, saluted Captain Garfair, palm forward. In his left hand he held a war-spear, heavily tufted at its peak with a mass of feathers; and among the feathers were dried fangs of rattlesnakes, strung like beads; the cured shriveled tongue of a white man; the moth-eaten scalplock of a savage traitor—the evil-omened staff possessed of the Evil Spirit, favorable when pointing to the sun, dealing infinite disaster toward whom thereafter it should sway. The great omen of the great medicine man, Bleeding Face!

One of 'Pache's cheeks bulged with a mass which he shifted with his tongue. From a side of his belt hung three long tufts of hair.

He hitched up his breeches, and with a sturdy pull drew out the longest and most luxuriant of these tufts.

"Bleedin' Face's, Cap'n," he vouched.

"Oh!" choked Miss Colton, closing her mouth suddenly.

Shades of the Underground

There is real drama in this impressive story of a mining man and his devoted wife, by the talented author of "The Lost Adventure."

By TURBESE

IT happened the same way each time: the pulsing of the hoisting engine would grow heavier and heavier; the grinding of the drum paying out the cable became shrill, menacing; and then suddenly would come that sharp jangling of the hoisting-signal that meant peril, death, perhaps, brought home to some one, as twice already the mines had brought it home to her. And crying out and sweating with that old terror, she would waken in Ben's arms.

"Honey, Jeanie—wake up!" That was Ben, of course—thank God for him! It was easy to laugh at it when Ben had you in his arms; it made you feel so safe, so sure, and he had such a way of reminding you of the bright things, the things that were going to be. "The little house on Pendleton Road, hon," he would say; and there would rise up in her mind the quaint little cottage in town that ever so soon they would be able to buy, far from the mines. "And a hammock under the arbor, hon, and babies—fat, pink, round ones, one for under each arm, huh?"

It was a picture that made one wriggle with a feeling of delight (as when you play with puppies and they waddle so), under which lay a sharp little sweet woman-pang and a wish for that time to hurry and appear; yet sometimes there came a queer prickle that made one cling to him saying: "It *will* come true, Ben? Noth-

LUMMIS FISKE

ing'll happen to stop us getting away? Oh, Ben, you will be dreadful careful, and not let anything happen to you—you wont work underground?"

The underground, that was it, full of shadow and peril, where already she had lost two that were dear to her, her cousin, her father—that was what ran through the dream.

But Ben would laugh reassuringly. "Sure I wont let anything happen to me! Didn't I promise you the day I married you that I wouldn't work underground any more?"

And she would nod, comforted, holding to him. Yet there was never a mine at which there was not something a little brooding, a little ugly, something always to fight. Now it is balky machinery, now labor conditions, now the force of the earth itself. At the Deep Strike it was that last.

IT was an old mine, the Deep Strike, had been worked off and on ever since the days of the Apaches. The last man who worked it had drawn the timbering and caved the drifts; the new operators had had to sink a fresh shaft and drift anew. Up to the last two months it had been worth it; they had been on a rich ledge; but eight weeks ago they had lost it, and rushing work in the six-hundred-foot level in the effort to recapture it, they had struck added difficulties and formidable risks. The drift had run into soft clay and water in which there was constant peril of cave-ins. Even with the pump going night and day it was a fight to hold the water down.

Ben, in his capacity of mechanic and shift-boss, had to be on the jump to make sure that the pump was in perfect condition. The camp was on a tension; it took Ben's big, easy laugh to lighten things, to keep Jeanie unaware of the danger. He was not afraid; he knew that he would be all right; nothing could happen to him. But the men, mostly Mexicans, were a little unstrung. They liked to have Ben about them, liked to listen to his jokes, to feel the slap of his big strong hand upon their shoulders. He took to going down with them on the hoist when the shifts changed, jollying and heartening them for the long eight-hour grind in the dark and the wet below.

Jeanie knew nothing of all this. Ben did not mean to let her worry when there was nothing to worry about; what harm could come of his merely going down so? There was nothing for him to fear from the shades of the underground; it was only a foolish nightmare, that dream of Jeanie's, of something terrible rising out of the dark on the crosshead. He laughed her out of it, reminding her that every day brought them nearer to the little house on Pendleton Road. And at the end of October their goal was only three weeks away.

Jeanie hummed happily about her work, bubbling over with talk of the things they would do in the little house, the curtains they would hang, the garden they would grow. And the October sky looked so bright, so promiseful, above the desert green. She ticked each day off on the calendar. "Just think, Aunt Hitty, only three weeks now!"

The gray-haired aunt looked out over the camp, saying nothing, but never forgetting, never forgetting—the strange voiceless Aunt Hitty she had always been since losing her boy in the mines. Jeanie went on babbling: their own little house, hers and Ben's—wouldn't it be wonderful! Aunt Hitty looked at her abruptly, foreboding. "Had that dream again last night, didn't you?"

Jeanie was startled, and the laugh she attempted was a little shaky. That dream —what a hold it had on her! The dark

hoistway, the covered figure being drawn up it, the strained white faces waiting there for knowledge that seemed years and years in coming.

Ben—dear old Ben!—was all merriment that night, all jesting. Jeanie went to bed rested and soothed. He had not told her that the water flow had increased and that they were dredging it out with the bailer as well as the pump. She fell asleep early, snuggled in Ben's protecting arm; her last thought was of how she loved him, laughing Ben!

ABOUT two o'clock in the morning she woke with a confused sense of being called. But everything was as usual; the hoisting engine's steady beating throbbed on the desert air with comforting regularity; there was no other sound. She put her head back by Ben's, happily closed her eyes. And then the signal began to ring.

It was just as in her dream, but so weak and faint that it was almost like a dream now. She could not even be sure that it was not the echo in her ears, that seventh clang. But she roused Ben. He sat up swiftly, listening. There was no other noise but the beating of the engine, then two strokes—"Hoist away!"—and the grinding of the cable as the engineer complied. "Ben, I think it rang seven!" she stammered in an agony of dread.

"There, honey! It was probably six and one—don't shake so, Jeanie. Nothing's the matter. Mebbe you only heard it in your dream."

"But, Ben, you're getting up."

"Sure, I'll run up there a minute, just to show you it was only a dream. Do me good to get a little fresh air." So easily he spoke, so casually, laughing as he drew on his boots, a big chuckling laugh that was hushed lest it wake Aunt Hitty. "Seven!" he scoffed gently. "You got seven on the brain, hon."

She caught at him with cold little hands. "Ben, if it is anything, you wont go down?"

" 'Tisn't anything—I'll be right back. You'll see! Quiet now, Jeanie girl." He kissed her and tiptoed out, keeping up that semblance of calm as long as he could be seen.

Jeanie sat up, trying to call back the happenings of the past few moments. She was cold and confused; she could not even tell whether she had dreamed that ringing, or whether it had been real. She wished Ben had not gone; it was so lonely here, so still. Jeanie rose and began to dress.

THE head-frame and the engine-house were outlined against the peaceful sky; the lantern of the Mexican top-man twinkled on its platform. No, it was coming down. Ben broke into a run. He knew that something had happened. From the south side of the dump the foreman was hastening. Davis had on only his trousers, unlaced shoes, and a coat half donned. Ben met him near the head-frame; they greeted one another in harsh sharp phrases brusque with the tension of the hour. "Rang, did it?"

" 'Fraid it did."

"Who's down?"

"Enrique, Chapo, Pete Menas."

They reached the hoistway, stared down at the slow rise of the crosshead. "Will that damn' crosshead never come up?" Davis growled.

The top-man joined them, his face wet with perspiration even in the chill air. Grind—grind—grind went the drum winding the cable; up—up—up came the light on the crosshead, unbearably slow. Whose light—which of the men? It was the top-man who first saw, and gave the bare, dread word with the name: "Enrique—alone!"

The hoist came to a stop; a man stumbled off. He caught, ghastly-faced, at Ben. "A cave-in—the boys—are there!"

FROM the bunkhouse another miner came hurrying, pulling on his clothes; it seemed as if the night air was alive with fear. Davis spat out orders; Enrique and the second miner ran to obey. The top-man went back to his platform; Ben hustled for picks and shovels, carbide lamps, brought them back to the shaft. The foreman was already on the crosshead. "Ben—" He put out a dissuading hand. "It aint goin' to be nice down there." As though he had not heard, Ben stepped quietly up beside him. "You don't have to go, Ben," Davis said.

"Think I'd stay away?" said Ben. Davis said nothing more—only put his hand for an instant on Ben's shoulder.

Enrique and Ramón came out of the change-house, carrying something, a sinister, reminiscent burden. And that was the first thing Jeanie saw when she came up over the dump—hospital stretchers.

Cold horror came over her; then she saw Ben, standing on the crosshead.

He stepped out to halt her. "Honey, you shouldn't have come up here. Go on back to the house. You'll only be in the way."

"Ben! You—you're going down!"

"Honey, that's nothing to frighten you. They're just having a little trouble, and I'm going to help straighten it out."

"But Ben, the stretchers—some one's hurt!"

He took her hands. "Jeanie, this aint no time for me to stand here and talk. I got work to do."

All the terror of the dream seemed beating about her. "But Ben, not *underground!* Let some one else go down. You know how it frightens me—how I hate it down there!"

"Jeanie, you're my woman, my brave little woman—you wouldn't want to make it hard for me? Then smile, honey, and show all your teeth. That's my girl! Now go along home—I'll be needing some coffee when I come up."

SHE turned as if to obey, passed the change-house, stopped where he could no longer see her, and stood shivering in the shadow of the wall. Ben stepped onto the crosshead with Davis, joined by Enrique and Ramón, rang the bell for the engineer, and they began to glide down. Jeanie felt herself getting sick as she thought of that black, giant maw which had swallowed up everything which heretofore she had held dear, and down which Ben too was now dropping.

Other miners had collected at the hoistway. She came out of the shadow to hearken. Scraps of Spanish reached her with stabbing intensity. "*Dios,* but it is bad down there! Water rushing in—whole wall of the timbering caved—the far end of the drift. The pump is broken —if they do not get the boys out quickly, they will be drowned—"

Suddenly she understood, and like a flash of some real vision the picture was registered on her mind of that damp, oozing place below, the walls deadly soft, the timber buckling under the strain of the saturated earth, the men penned in, the pump disabled, nothing to hold back the rise of the underground flow.

The stop-signal rang; the men had reached the six hundred. Six hundred feet below her—how dreadfully far that was away! Moments of silence followed, awful speculation. The oppressive talk which is rife at such times went on in broken murmurs. Then it was the signal to hoist again. The ascending cable began to wind over the sheave—but oh, so slow, so slow! Six hundred feet to come; there must be no jerks or quick starts, lest the strain be too great on wood or steel. But how desperate to wait and wait, no progress visible but the sliding upward of the white marks on the cable, bringing who knew what from below!

TWO women joined the group, one a wife, the other a sweetheart, of the two men prisoned beyond the fallen timbers below. The little wife, Jeanie saw, was close to the term of motherhood. She led them into the change-house where the fire was going. One of them caught at her. "You have heard? It is *our* men—they live? They will be safe?"

Jeanie was blinded with tears as she came away. What was the answer to that? God knew! "Oh, Ben, Ben," she whispered, "why did you go down there?" The crosshead rose slowly; for a moment it was like the thing of her dreams, and the fright of it choked her; but the platform climbed above the level of the ground, rose high in the head-frame until the bailer dangling beneath was within reach of the top-man. It was dripping with water. That meant they were trying to fight back the flow by bailing; but how could they ever work with enough speed?

Persistently Jeanie brushed away the picture of the crosshead rising, blanketed figures lying on it prone. "It's all right —it's all right. They'll get the men out safe. Nothing's going to happen. Didn't I promise Ben to smile?"

The bailer was emptied, released by the top-man, and swung back into the shaft under the crosshead. Now they would fill it again, it would come up, be emptied, go down, and all the while the men were digging, digging, under those oozy walls.

An hour passed—an hour? A section of endless time! The death-talk went on. Suddenly, three bells—"man aboard"—and the signal to hoist. Man aboard—what now? How they all gathered, stricken into voicelessness now, waiting with that pale look of people on the edge of catastrophe! The tiny light of someone on the crosshead rose and rose; all strained to see. A cry, loud after the si-

lence, broke from some one. *"Jesús!* It is they!"

The crosshead came toward the surface, two collapsed figures—alive, dead?—lying there. The foreman sprang off before it had stopped. "Hustle them into the change-house, there—yes, yes—they're all right—knocked out, that's all. Chapo's arm's broken—look cut how you carry 'em!"

Alive! That wonderful word. God made it for the transfiguration of women whose men work on the edge of death. Jeanie's heart swelled. But Ben—where was *Ben?* She cried out at the foreman.

He was brusque—or was it nervous? "Down below. He and Ramón and Enrique got a little more work to do. Be up after a while, Mrs. Tenny. You better get back to the house." He went swiftly into the shack to see to the rescued men.

Jeanie stood staring. Down below! Ah, did she not remember what that underground devil could do? The crosshead was just sinking below the level of the ground; it was in shadow; everyone was at the change-house—if she was quick, the engineer would not see her. She ran around to the front of the shaft, jumped onto the crosshead, crouching low. It kept on going down; she had not been seen.

THE shadows seemed to rush over her head and shut down, like a trap-door that would bar her forever from light, as her cousin, her father, had been barred. This great, implacable underground darkness—was it going to swallow them all?

The beat of the engine sounded fainter and farther away. Cold wind reached out at her as the crosshead passed the levels that burrowed into the earth; the drop seemed interminable, irrational as a dream. But here was the six hundred at last; the platform stopped considerably above the level, but she jumped down unheeding, passed the astonished Enrique without halting to explain. She was all at once frightfully afraid, tense with the need of getting Ben out of here. All the shadows and echoes seemed to be calling, shouting warnings, reminding her of the dream, sinking her heart with dire foreboding. The little lights by which Ben and Ramón were working shone so far ahead, the way was so icy deep with water, so slippery-hard to travel! But she must get Ben, get him away from this stealthy darkness. How peopled it was with the shades of the underground—like hostile spirits always lying in wait, always lying in wait.

She saw Ramón coming toward her. Why was he leaving, Ben staying? Ben was doing something too perilous—that was it; he was sending the miner out of danger. She began to run faster, passed Ramón, came into Ben's view.

"Jeanie!" he shouted. "Keep back! Jeanie, get out of here!" He threw down a bit of timber he was holding, and ran toward her. "God's sake, girl, you must get back up!"

"Ben, you come too!"

"Can't yet, girl—but you must go!"

"Ben, come away—*please* come away! I can't leave while you're here!"

The voice of Ramón, far back, came in a burst of fear. *"Cristo!* Look out!"

Ben jumped, pulling her with him, back toward the end of the drift. "God in heaven—Jeanie!" Just south of where they had stood a tremendous weight of sodden earth and timber crashed down.

JEANIE stood perfectly still, looking at that sodden mass, filling up the drift between them and the shaft, ten feet, fifteen feet—who knew how thick? She knew now what the dream meant, why it had come. Overhead gaped a great raw space of soggy muck, falling, falling, as though the whole roof must eventually cave in. She stood trying to get hold of herself, to choke off that panic terror that reached out from the shadows, the clutching shadows clawing at her very heart.

"Jeanie—darling!" Ben crushed her hands in his.

"Yes, Ben—I—I'm all right, Ben."

He held her tightly, forcing himself to speak levelly. "Honey, you see how 'tis. We're shut off between two cave-ins. I don't hardly know what to do, dear. The shovels are buried—we've got nothing to dig out with. If we move much, it's likely to bring the rest down on top of us."

"I can stand still, Ben, just as long as you say."

He groaned. "Why did you come, girl?"

"I'm glad. It'd have happened just the same, and you'd have been here alone."

"God love you, girl!"

He caught up the lantern and hung it out of the water's reach on a projecting jag of timber. The water squelched in their shoes; it was rising, rising; this small space would not take long to fill. Now

it was at their ankles, climbing, climbing, then it would be at their knees; their chests at last; their chins; and then—And there was nothing she could do. Yes, one thing; she could keep Ben from knowing that she knew.

She smiled up at him. "I'm not scared, Ben—I'm with you."

If she had never loved Ben before, she must have now; his voice rang so steadfast and clear. "Lord bless you, honey—course you're not scared. Damn' good boys, those Mexicans—just give 'em a little time, and they'll dig through."

Dig through—and the water rising like this! But Ben should not guess that she knew. Again she smiled bravely.

NOW the water had climbed above her ankles; the chill of it made her shake. "Cold, girl?" He held her to the warmth of his body, ran on with cheering chatter; the house on Pendleton Road, all the things they would have and do. . . . . Two hours passed—hours cruelly barren of any outward hope; but Ben kept up his gallant encouragement, and Jeanie pretended to believe. It meant so much to him to think that she did. . . . .

"Guess you'll have something to tell to the kids—when there are kids, eh, hon?"

The water was up to her knees. They had been there so long, and not a sound, not a sign from beyond, to tell them that some one was working on the other side, fighting for their lives. A despair came over her. Kids! What kids wou'd there ever be now? He felt the sobs that she could not control. "Honey, Jeanie—don't!"

Her voice rang out so forlorn. "I'm trying—not to, Ben—but I did want us to live—we love each other so!"

He must grit his teeth, then, and pretend—Lord, how he must pretend! "Laws, hon, it wont be long now! Hear 'em slammin' into her on the other side? There's old Gonzales—swings the pick like it was into taffy. And that—hear it? That's Enrique. Slow as cold tar, but by glory, he's strong! We'll be out o' here in time for Aunt Hit's hot cakes and coffee—you'll see! Buck up, honey girl!"

She tried to buck up, but there was something holding her back; the water was above her knees. When he looked down at her, she was white; her eyes were closed. "Jeanie—Jeanie—for God's sake!" He tilted her face up to his.

That was Ben—he liked her to smile. She smiled faintly. " 'M all right—Ben—'m not scared."

He cursed to himself. The earth was so hopelessly thick, and he could not hear one sound, nothing but the drip, drip of the water and the ominous falling of the clay. If they could not get out inside of an hour, it would be too late. And the west wall looked so deadly unstable, as though it were giving. It *was* giving! "God Almighty!" He caught her up in his arms.

She saw it sliding with tired eyes—the west wall quivering, running into the water, throwing the water waist high. It was the beginning of the end, she knew; why not smile, then, and accept it so? But suddenly Ben broke out in a cry.

"By the gods! We've busted into an old drift—see that hole?" Back of the slide a small opening gaped at them, three feet above ground. "It aint long—caved at the other end—but it runs into solid ground. If it don't cave at this end, it'll keep us safe till help comes. It's a chance, Jeanie—by glory, a chance, hon! You'll take it?"

She was not quite sure whether she was standing or lying down; the water was so chill above her knees; she was sure only that her head was warm against Ben, and so she smiled. "Anything—Ben—so long's—I'm with you."

ENDLESS waiting, trying to keep her warm, alive. And then—was that not a sound? Yes, but not only that—a light! "Jeanie, girl, can you hear? It's the boys! The boys, they've broke through!"

Now the run for it; could they make it—that thirty feet under the shuddering ooze? He ran staggering, with Jeanie half-conscious in his arms, trying to pick his way, calling in shouting response to those cheers from without. Mud struck him, water—here was timber in the way—under it—over it—a few feet more.

Jeanie felt it, half sensed it, as though it all ran in with her dream, saw it as though from afar, dreamily questioned whether those two, muddy, bedraggled, could ever escape from the shadows. And then suddenly, colder air—a great shout—the triumphant ringing of a signal bell. She looked dizzily up at Ben. "Ben—what—why, we—we're going up—on the hoist!"

"Yes—God love you, girl—we're out! It's the house on Pendleton Road now!"

"I would like to make one book," I says. "Do you think I could do this?"

Illustrated by Maurice Greenberg

The Governor Objects

By CALVIN BALL

Ed the garage mechanic was a rough guy, sort of; but he loved his sweetheart Caroline. When she pulled the uplift stuff on him, however, there was trouble. Don't miss this one.

THE way to keep up-to-date these days is to read the new books written by what they call the highbrows. How I know this is that I always had a habit of not reading anything, until lately when Caroline insisted I have got to have some food for the mind, which I then brought home a armful of detective stories from Junction City. When she looked them over I came in for a roasting that I will remember.

"It makes no difference if you are an auto mechanic," she says to me, "there is no excuse for reading such stories of amusement. The trouble is that you don't know the difference between good stories and literature. You have got to pull yourself up to a higher standard by reading something that is classy; and here is the first book for you."

I took the book which Caroline handed me, and kind of eyes it over, it looking like the sort of reading that I always been skeptical about, and when I fingered over a few leaves I see it was a fact that it was another one of these slow-motion affairs where you don't see much happen. When I read, I always have a idea something ought to take place in it, but the people who make books, especially the highbrow element, have a different viewpoint on the subject, their plan being to give you plenty of chapters, but don't let much take place. I flipped over a few more pages while Caroline stands watching.

"It's a new novel," she tells me. "It's popular, and the name of it is 'Dust'."

"It looks pretty dry," I says, turning over to the back of it. "I see it's got five hundred pages."

"And they're all good," she says.

"It's extra thick, Caroline. You think I am going to like this?"

"The principle of reading such books, Ed, is because they are literature, and not because you like it. You have got to get educated, and you couldn't start younger."

Caroline has been harping to me on this subject of books for some time, telling me how I need a education, and asking me why don't I take a interest in uplifting myself, until it has got to the point where it looks like I would have to make a show of doing something. The fact is, I board with Caroline's family and am a mechanic in her father's garage. I am also engaged to Caroline with prospects of matrimony sometime in the future, this being another main

reason why she takes a interest in pushing a education on me, and on account of living in the same house, she has plenty opportunity.

THE next evening after she handed me this book called "Dust," she walked back of my chair, and caught on that I was instead reading one of the detective books which I was hiding behind the other one. The row she started over it was a warm one. As long as you read something I always figured it doesn't make much difference what it is, and I finally stated that fact to her.

"You haven't got culture," she claimed. "I don't see how I could marry anybody of this kind; and you're trying to wiggle out of reading 'Dust'."

"I have read the first chapter, Caroline, and if you call this a good book I will be frank to say that you are not so shrewd in sizing things up as I figured you are. And who made this book?"

"It's an author who is well known; and it took him three years to do it. It's an unfortunate condition that you are just finding out that this author can write."

"I have not yet found it out," I says, "as the first chapter don't prove it. And also, Caroline, I don't like to hear personal statements about how much I know, and I would like to say at this point that even if I am by trade a mechanic I could write a better story than 'Dust,' and it wouldn't take me three years to do it."

It is not a good plan to talk at random about what you can do until you have done it, and when I finished the last remark about how I could write a book, I figured it would of been better not to have said it. It was a bluffing statement anyhow, and I didn't have intentions of starting a racket of that kind, but after Caroline handed me a frozen look and then walked away on me, I begins to wonder what kind of a effect it would have on her, if I would show her that I could make a book, as I claimed I could. When you see what they publish these days it looks like there ought to be a chance for somebody like me.

I squints in through the kitchen door to where Caroline was working. "Caroline," I says, "how much you think they pay a author to make a book like 'Dust'?"

"Maybe ten thousand," she says.

This statement kind of surprised me. I began to think hard.

By asking questions in the afternoon from garage customers, I got the information that there is a bona fide author living in Junction City for the summer months. The customer who told me about him stopped to talk a while, trying to find out why I was asking about a author, and when I finally tells him that I was figuring to start the author game myself, he says go ahead.

"I can see you have got a solid head on you," he tells me; "and you could write as well as the rest. All you need is to talk it over with a author who will inform you about the fine points."

The more I investigated into the book-writing business the more reasonable it looked, and when I got the address of the author in Junction City, I drives the flivver down to see him. He was a tall one with glasses, and looked like he must have plenty culture, except his hair was red, and he also had a red mustache.

He gave me a good welcome, and after I told him who I was and that I follow the auto line, he invites me to sit down where we could talk in a sociable way. I didn't beat around a bush much but got down to the subject, telling him who Caroline is and how she insisted that I had to read "Dust" and what I thought of it, and also explaining how I was figuring to do a little work in the literature line myself, for the benefit of showing Caroline.

"She tips up her nose when I mention I could do it," I says, "but on the other hand if I couldn't turn out something with more motion in it than 'Dust,' then I am not the high caliber mechanic I think I am."

He kind of blinked his eyes at me when I makes this announcement, but took it in a friendly way.

"There's no doubt about it you could do it," he agrees. "Everybody is doing it these days, and the more the merrier."

"I don't want to start any extra competition against you," I says, "as I figure the writing line is pretty well filled up the same as auto mechanics, and I am not the kind to crowd out somebody else; but on the other hand I would like to make one book, so it would have the right effect on Caroline. Do you think I could do this?"

He leans back in his chair, holding his finger points together in front of him, and looking at me as though he was interested.

"Why don't you make it a short story?" he suggests finally. "That is the way to get started."

"I could do either," I tells him. "I am

going to have some spare time during the next week and if you advise a short story, then that's what I will do. Who will print it?"

"It is a delicate subject you are now getting on," he says, "but if you do the kind of story I think you will, you could send it to any magazine and they wont make any mistake on it. All you do is write it out and send it to them, and they will do the rest."

"My handwriting is not so good," I says. "You think I better have it copied on a typewriter machine?"

"I wouldn't bother about it. These magazines can read anything, even if it's Greek. Also you get a better personality in handwriting which you couldn't get on a machine."

"I will pick out a good subject," I says, after he gave some more good pointers; "and I wouldn't brag that I could do as well as some others, but it anyhow ought to be easy to outshine a story like 'Dust'."

I DIDN'T lose any time about getting started, as my motto always is: If a thing is worth doing, go ahead and do it. Having a spare evening on hand I locked the door of my room, taking with me a supply of paper from the desk in the garage, and after a couple hours I had a excellent story written out. I figured it would make a big hit on account it was written like the author claimed it ought to be. It had a Governor in it, with also a duke, and some highway gunmen that it would raise your hair to think about. These gunmen had hatched a plot to blow up the Governor, using a explosive bomb of high power which they sneaked into his house at nighttime. The name of this story was "The Governor," and I wrote it out in good-size letters at the top of the page.

Figuring that the best plan was to work a surprise on Caroline, I didn't tell her what I was doing, and it being so late at night that I couldn't mail it, I put it away until morning.

The garage had a hustling spell of business the next morning, but I had the story with me, waiting for a chance later on to mail it. I was still a little worried about whether they would be able to read it, but as the author claimed it wouldn't make any difference so long as the story was a good one, I figured my handwriting would be plain enough, especially if they could read anything like Greek.

The name which I had signed was John Brown, the reason why I signed such a name instead of my own being that many authors have a habit of not signing their own name, and when you read their stories you couldn't blame them. It looked like a good plan for me to do the same so that if it didn't turn out O. K., then my name would be clear, and nobody would know who John Brown was.

I was surprised to see that business kept running brisk, and when it gets to the middle of the afternoon with still no chance of getting away, I finally took the story over to Joe. Joe is a new helper around the garage, and as he is kind of young and doesn't know much about the mechanical end, we run him on errands. Also Joe is a little light upstairs. They couldn't get him out of the fifth grade in school, so they finally gave it up and turned him loose, which he then took a job at odds and ends in the garage. Joe wouldn't hardly know what a story is, if I did tell him; and as it's anyhow no use to weigh his mind down with extra thoughts, I didn't explain to him the details. I wrote out the address of the magazine on a paper, telling him how to buy a envelope with stamps, and mail these papers at the post office like I directed.

"This a letter?" he asks.

"Don't worry about is it a letter, Joe. Keep your mind on the important subject which is to mail it like I am telling you."

I watched him while he folds it up careful and puts it in his pocket, and as there was by this time a couple more customers hollering for me, one of them with a blowout and the other needing oil, I left Joe to do the mailing business.

Work was booming in the garage for a few days, and I didn't have time to think much about the story, except in the evening when Caroline would get going on the subject of literature. She kept pushing the "Dust" book in my hands, insisting I have got to go through it, which I finally opened up another chapter, but skipped the pages when she wasn't looking. The more I read, the more sure I was that the governor story would look pretty good by comparison.

THE information which was a surprise, came to me one day at meal-time; and Herman was the one who I heard it from. Herman is Caroline's father, but I always call him by the first name on account it is the custom in a garage. While he was eating, I noticed Herman mentioned in a cas-

ual way that the sheriff in Junction City was looking for somebody.

I never get excited when I hear the sheriff is looking for somebody, because it's his business to look and he's always at it; and so long as he don't ask me to help, I don't worry. After a few minutes Herman added a statement which was the one that surprised me.

"There's some writing been going on in this neighborhood," he says. "They are trying to locate who did it."

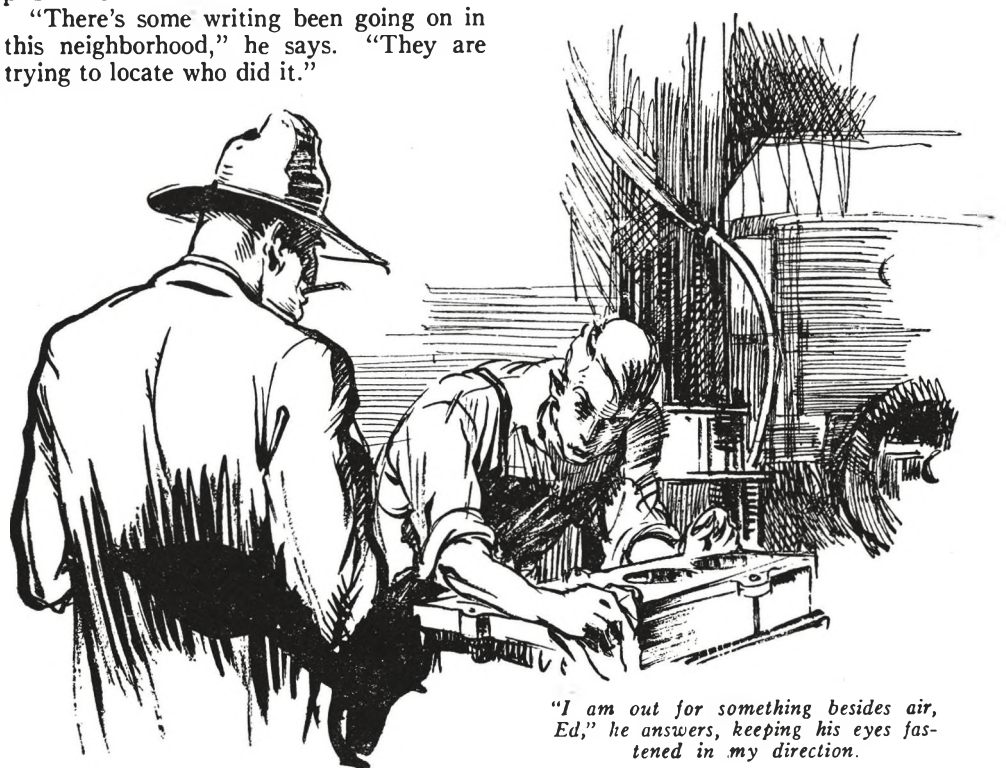
"How could it be a crime?"

"The Governor is raising a hot time about it, so it must be a crime."

"What's the Governor got to do with it?" I asks.

"That's who the threat was sent to, Ed. What you looking surprised about?"

On account that Herman was eying me



"I am out for something besides air, Ed," he answers, keeping his eyes fastened in my direction.

I kind of stopped eating when he mentions about writing. My thoughts jumped back to the story, but I didn't at first figure there would be a connection.

"What kind of writing you mean?" I inquires.

"I didn't hear details," Herman answers. "But they are looking for somebody named John Brown."

I didn't answer anything for a few seconds and kept on going through the motions of eating. The information took my breath though, and I couldn't understand it.

"Why is he looking for John Brown?" I asked finally. "Is it against the law for him to write something?"

"What this fellow wrote is a crime, Ed. And they can't find him."

I lays down my knife and fork.

in a sharp way, I again began to eat, but didn't feel like it.

"Did somebody send a threat?" I mentions.

"It's a threat, all right. They can't make it out plain on account it's scribbled in poor handwriting, but it is anyhow a letter to the Governor, with a threat that somebody is going to commit a crime by blowing him up with a bomb."

I quits eating and sits there staring at Herman.

"You say the Governor got such a letter?"

"He received it, but the sheriff here has now got it. There's a desperate customer in the neighborhood somewhere, Ed, or maybe he is cuckoo. The letter is a long one."

I could hear Joe hammering down in the

garage where he had some rods to straighten, and after listening to the facts that Herman gave me, I got up and started downstairs.

When I walked up to Joe he puts down the hammer, looking at me interested.

"Joe," I says to him, "did you get a envelope and mail those papers last Monday like I told you?"

"I mailed it," he answers.

"Who'd you mail it to?"

"The Governor," he says.

If looks had power behind them Joe would have felt something. I couldn't believe my ears that this statement from him was a fact, but when you are dealing with anybody who is in the mental class that Joe is, you can expect the worst.

"Joe," I says, "you made a bad mistake."

He shakes his head like he was denying it.

"You had it marked on top," he says.

"I marked the name of it on top of the page, which it was 'The Governor,' Joe. But did I say to send it to him? This is a unlucky mistake you have made, and when I gave you the address on paper, I don't see how you mixed it."

"I asked," Joe answers.

"Who'd you ask?"

"I met a man at the post office, and I asked; and when he looked it over, he says it was marked for the Governor, so there's where it goes. I asked where is the Governor, and he says he is at the capital, and showed me how I could write it with no mistake."

"Who was this man?" I inquires.

"He came in accidental, and he was a tall one with glasses; also he had a small mustache."

"What color was the mustache?"

"Red," Joe answers, "and also red hair."

I KIND of blinks at Joe when he mentioned the details about red hair, but the next statement was the one which jumped my nerves. Joe was looking out the window when he said it.

"Is that the sheriff's flivver," he says, "driving up the road?"

I glances through the window where Joe was pointing, and saw it was the truth. It was the deputy's flivver, and he was turning in at the garage. I didn't have any doubt about what kind of a errand he must be on, but I kept a cool head on me long enough to tell Joe that he has got to keep busy at the rods, and if the deputy asks questions, don't tell him facts.

Since I caught the deputy sometime back in a bootlegging deal which I tried to prove it on him but couldn't, he has had a eye on my affairs, and has only been waiting for a chance to catch me at something against the law; but as I am one who always goes straight, he so far couldn't trump up charges against me. When I see he was at the door and coming in, I was thinking fast, my first idea being to tell him the facts of how the mistake happened. On the other hand I am sharp enough to know that the only explanations he would listen to would be the part about I am guilty. After getting the guilty statement out of you, his style is to begin nabbing, and give you advice to tell the rest in a court. Having a good reputation, I never like to get mixed in the law whether guilty or not, and as nobody had any proof about who John Brown is, I figured it's worth taking a chance to deny it.

THE friendly look on the deputy's face when he walks across the garage didn't fool me, because I been acquainted with him long enough to know that you can't depend on the way he smiles. When he has got it in for somebody, a smile wouldn't cover it up.

I begins fiddling with a valve-grinding job that was laying on a bench, acting like I was busy and didn't notice him. When he reaches the spot where I was working he did not speak, but stands there in a quiet way looking at what I am doing. I finally pushes the valve to a side.

"I am surprised to see you, deputy," I says, looking up at him and finding that he is still watching me, while he keeps twisting a cheroot back and forth in his fingers.

"You just notice me, Ed?"

"I am pretty busy, and didn't hear you," I says. "You are looking fine, deputy, and are maybe out with your flivver for the air."

"I am out for something else besides air, Ed," he answers, still twisting on the cigar and keeping his eyes fastened in my direction.

I kind of picks up some tools on the bench and puts them in the drawer, doing it careless, like I am not much interested in what's happening.

"Somebody else break out of jail?" I asked finally.

"Nobody has broke out, Ed. But we

have a good idea that somebody is soon going to break in."

I looked surprised.

"Who we are looking for," he adds on, "is an individual named John Brown. Do you know him?"

Reaching into a inside coat pocket, the deputy pulls out a envelope; and when he shakes out the papers I see it was the story. I opened my eyes at it like I hadn't seen it before.

"You know anything about this?" he inquires, holding the papers so I could see them, but not handing them over.

While I blinks at what is happening, she takes the story off the desk.

WHEN he mentions John Brown I see there was no doubt about why he is here. I made a quick decision to bluff it.

"I don't know any John Brown, deputy. What you want him for?"

His gaze sharpens down at me.

"You ever hear the name before?"

"It's the first time I heard it, except I read it in history. You think you might find him here?"

"Ed, we are pretty well acquainted with people in Junction City, and a case like this can be simmered down to a few. Maybe I am on the wrong trail, but I have got a opinion that we will land the one we want before long, and his name wont be John Brown either."

I turns around square toward him when he says this.

"Look at here, deputy," I says; "it looks like you might be hinting it's somebody on these premises. What did John Brown do?"

I shakes my head.

"It looks like some writing, deputy. How could I know about it?"

"What this is, Ed, is a lengthy letter written to the Governor by probably a bolshevik who is threatening to blow him with a bomb. It is scribbled in a bad handwriting, but there being a word here and there which is plain, we can make out what he means. The name signed is John Brown, and the postmark Junction City. Now maybe I am wrong, Ed, but I figured you might throw us a little light on the subject."

The way the deputy was looking at me was enough to show which way his suspicions were going, but on the other hand he didn't have proofs, and I have had experience in bluffing out of a bad situation. Keeping a calm appearance on me, I takes my time in lighting up a cigarette.

"Deputy," I says finally, "the only subject I can give you any light on is the mechanic business; and if you think you are goin' to find anybody by the name of John Brown in this garage, then you have no doubt made a mistake."

The deputy didn't answer, but instead he stood up and walks across to the desk which we have in one corner, and which Herman uses to keep his papers on with records of the business. He lifts around the books and finally opens a drawer from which he pulled out a handful of writing paper. I noticed he was looking at the writing paper, also he was comparing it with the paper which the story was on. It was the same kind, and he was quick to see it.

"You notice it's similar?" he inquires.

"We buy it in Junction City," I says. "Many others buy from the same place."

"Where's your pen and ink, Ed?"

"It's in the pigeon-hole, deputy. Everybody buys ink at that store also."

The sheriff uncorks the ink-bottle, and dipping the pen into it he hands it over, pushing out a blank piece of paper.

"Would you let me see a specimen of your handwriting, Ed?"

"Look at here, deputy," I says; "do you think I am the one who did this writing?"

"We only want to be sure about it, Ed. Law is law. If you didn't do it, then you wouldn't object to letting us see what your writing looks like. Write out the name of John Brown."

The kind of handwriting which I do is a peculiar style, and I didn't like the way he was digging to the bottom of things. If I objected about writing the name as he asked, it would look suspicious for me, so I finally took the pen and writes it out. When I finished it the sheriff held up the paper to look.

"You write everything in this backhand style?" he inquires. "Maybe we could find some other writing of yours around the garage, and is it all backhand?"

"I write both ways, deputy. It depends on how I'm sitting."

HE pushes the pen back in my hand. "Sit down straight then, and let's see you write the name again, Ed, and this time keep out the backward motion."

While I was writing, the deputy watches.

"Faster," he says. "You trying to draw it?"

"I am not speedy with the pen, deputy."

"You could go faster, Ed."

The deputy is a hard case to get around, and I could see he was sticking to the point. As he insisted on it, I finally wrote it out with quick motions, but put in a few extra kinks that wasn't natural.

He picked it up to compare it, giving it a close examination.

"Well, Ed," he says, "this cooks your goose."

I LOOKED at him without speaking, but could see he was closing the net down on me.

"Deputy," I says at last, "this matter is a mistake and I can explain it."

"I am not making a mistake, Ed, and there's a courthouse for explaining things. You admit you done it?"

"I wrote it, deputy, but it's a story, and not a letter and was sent to the Governor by accident."

"This sounds fishy, Ed."

"It's a story," I repeats, "and I could prove by a author who lives in Junction City that I am the one who wrote it."

"You don't have to prove you wrote it, Ed. If you admit it, it's enough for us. You turned bolshevik?"

"Wouldn't the author be proof?" I says.

The deputy looks kind of thoughtful.

"I heard about this author," he says, "as he is the one who wrote the book they are talking about called 'Dust'."

I opened my eyes surprised.

"I didn't know he wrote it," I says. "But if this is the case, then his word ought to be good that I am caught in a mistake."

The deputy looks toward the telephone on the wall.

"You could take it up in a legal method, Ed," he says. "I will call the sheriff and ask advice, but in the meantime you could put on your hat for a trip to town."

While the deputy stands at the telephone getting the sheriff, I looked toward the back stairs and there stands Caroline looking through the doorway like she has for some time been listening. I hadn't noticed her before, and neither had the deputy.

Caroline motions with one finger for me not to speak and then begins walking in a quiet way up toward the desk. The deputy couldn't see her on account he was turned sideways at the phone so he could keep a eye on me, and by the time she reached the desk I had a understanding of what she is up to. The story was still there on the desk where the deputy had dropped it. I

have got to give Caroline credit for being a shrewd one in a emergency, and while I blinks at what is happening she takes the story off the desk and in a couple seconds has disappeared with it up the stairway in the back.

The deputy has the sheriff on the wire and was talking to him while he watched me, the conversation being a short one, and when he hangs up the receiver I saw he was pleased about it.

"I am sorry to say it, Ed," he says, "but the sheriff demands me to bring you in, and duty is duty."

When he turns around to the desk a blank look came on him. The silence which followed was a long one, his eyes sticking out at the spot where he left the story, and his hands in the middle of the air without motion.

"Ed," he says finally, turning to me in a slow way; "where'd it go?"

"You lost the papers?" I inquires.

He focused down his eyes like he was trying to look through me.

"You didn't get them, Ed. I was watching you. But somebody here is guilty."

THE search which the deputy put across was a thorough one, and he didn't miss my pockets while he was at it. I helped him look, which he didn't care much for my help, but I looked around a little anyhow, also noticing that the worried expression on his face was getting more so. He at last went upstairs where I could hear him looking through the rooms and asking questions of Caroline. As Caroline had plenty time to hide it, I figured he was wasting efforts in this direction, but at the same time I didn't feel safe until he finally comes downstairs with empty hands.

Without talking to me he picked up the phone and gave the new developments to the sheriff, the conversation this time lasting longer, on account the deputy was throwing in plenty explanations, the receiver buzzing back at him like the sheriff must be excited. When the deputy finally hangs up he had a beat appearance.

HE started a new search and it was a half-hour before he quit lifting boards, peeking into corners and making examinations of the floor like a detective, but when he finally saw it was hopeless he gave it up.

"Ed," he announces to me, "you are a slick customer. With the evidence lost, the sheriff says it's no use to take you in, and I am up against a roasting for losing it. Some day I will catch you at something where I have got proof, and if I ever do, you can depend on it will be a hot time."

When he left he shut the door hard after him, and as I saw through the window that he had started his flivver for town, I hustled back to the stairway and up to where Caroline is waiting.

"Caroline," I says, "what'd you do with it?"

"I have it, Ed. It's hid. And this is something new to me when I hear that you are now turning a hand toward writing fiction."

I looks toward the kitchen stove where a hot fire was going.

"I am going to burn it, Caroline," I says, "and quick."

"Not so quick, Ed."

"What you mean?"

"Did you finish reading 'Dust'?"

I meets her in the eye.

"What you hinting at, Caroline? Two chapters is my limit in such a book, and culture or not, I wouldn't read more."

"You could do as you please, Ed," she says. "What is the telephone number at the sheriff's office?"

This statement was enough to stop me.

"You going to tell the deputy where you hid it?" I demands.

Caroline picks up the "Dust" book, and pushing it across the table towards me she stood waiting.

I opens it up and settles into a chair.

Butch had shaken his manacled hands at Mason and vowed that he would kill him.

Mountain Mail

An old Western trapper and his enemy clash in a conflict that is dramatic indeed: One of a gifted writer's best stories.

By REGINALD BARKER

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

FOR twenty years old Dave Banning had been obsessed with a fear that he would meet with an accident while following his trap-line; for twenty years he had been in the habit of writing a note before he left his cabin, so that if he did not return to Rugged Center on the day he had promised to be in town, a rescue-party would know where to look for him.

This habit of Dave's was known to all the mountain folk, and was the subject of much good-natured banter; but one and all the mountaineers agreed among themselves that Dave's idea was the right one, and might serve as a lesson in self-preservation to less methodical-minded men.

So one after another the lonely trappers and prospectors of the Big Hills began to follow Dave's example, until it was the usual thing to find a note lying on the table when the owner of a cabin was away.

That is how Butch Simpson happened to find a note on the table of Dave Banning's cabin at the mouth of Sinker Creek, when after an enforced absence of ten years he returned by a circuitous route to the hills in which he had been born.

Butch Simpson had not expected to find a cabin at the mouth of Sinker Creek, for the cabin had been built while Butch was in the State penitentiary, serving a sentence for the killing of Harve Mason's son —Harve Mason, who had sworn away ten years of Butch's life.

As Butch had been led from the courtroom, he had shaken his manacled hands at Harve Mason and had vowed that when he came out of prison, he would kill him.

That was why Butch Simpson had returned to the Big Hills.

BUTCH SIMPSON knew the owner of the cabin was absent, as soon as he sighted it; for the stovepipe glistened with frost, and a pine squirrel on the roof chattered angrily at his approach; therefore

he pushed open the door and boldly entered.

Pinned to the little hewn table by a butcher knife was a penciled note:

Am setting traps over on Summit Creek. Back tomorrow night.
Dave.

Butch grinned into his stubble of black beard as he realized that he would have the cabin to himself that night; but his grin changed to a growl of anger when he saw that somebody had written other words beneath Dave Banning's message:

Stopped in to say howdy. On my way back to my cabin. Will be passing this way again next week.
Harve Mason.

"Not if I know it, you wont," snarled Butch. "You'll never pass this way again, unless your ghost takes a notion to stay here overnight."

Suddenly his eyes dilated with anger, for from Dave Banning's table his own face stared up at him from the page of a week-old newspaper. Beneath it was an account of his release from prison. With an oath Butch snatched it off the table and shoved it into his pocket.

After Butch had eaten, he opened the door and stood for a long time gazing at the sky; for there was as yet no snow in the Big Hills, and Butch was hoping that there would be none until he was beyond the reach of pursuit.

Utterly beyond the comprehension of Butch Simpson was the starlit beauty of the mountain night. To him it meant only that there would be no snow to carry his tracks, that they would be invisible on the hard-frozen ground. Entering the cabin, he closed the door and seated himself on a stool by the red-hot stove and gave himself up to thoughts of the terrible revenge he planned.

Then as his gaze fell on the note which still lay on the table, he slapped his thigh in sudden exultation.

Why not throw the blame for his crime on the shoulders of old Dave Banning?

By the light of one of Dave's candles, Butch studied the old man's handwriting. Not hard to imitate, that unformed writing scrawled by gnarled fingers more used to holding an ax than a pen. Yet there must be a motive too for Dave's supposed crime. What motive could Butch furnish?

Suddenly it came to him as he gazed around the spick-and-span cabin, and at the few furs which hung from the rafters. Having been brought up in the Big Hills himself, Butch knew something of the ways of old men who dwelt alone. He chuckled as he arose to his feet.

When Butch left the cabin at dawn, there were dirty dishes lying on the table, a burned-out frying-pan on the stove; and the furs were gone, burned to ashes. On the table lay a note in a handwriting so closely like old Dave's that he himself would have been hard put to swear he had not written it himself:

Am on my way to Harve Mason's cabin.
Dave.

That was all; for with a craftiness which he thought could not be equaled, Butch had destroyed Harve Mason's note.

Naturally, when Dave Banning returned that evening and found the note, he would hurry over to Harve Mason's cabin to demand an explanation, and he would have a hard time convincing Sheriff Muldane that he himself was not guilty of the murder of the dead man he had found.

There was but one more thing to do for Butch to insure his own safety: that was to get word to the sheriff at Rugged Center and to put him on Dave Banning's trail. However, that would be easy, for with a memory worthy of a better cause, Butch recollected that there was a Forest Service telephone on the summit he would have to cross before reaching Harve Mason's cabin.

He reached the telephone at noon.

"That you, Sheriff?" he asked in a muffled voice which he knew could not be readily identified. "Yes, this is Dave speaking. Say, Sheriff, I want you to come out and arrest Harve Mason. He busted into my cabin and raised merry bells with my outfit. What's that? You'll be right along—can't get there till tomorrow morning, you say. All right. I'm on my way there now. I'll be at Harve Mason's when you get there."

As Butch turned away, unnoticed by him the newspaper containing his picture fell from his pocket.

Simpson chuckled evilly as he hung up the receiver; then swiftly he strode down the summit in the direction of the little ranch on Crooked River, where, since the death of his only son, Harve Mason had dwelt alone.

Hardly had Butch disappeared before

the bushes beside the road parted, and on his hands and knees, with a crushed foot dragging behind him, old Dave Banning dragged himself to the telephone. As for a moment he rested, he chanced to see the paper Butch had dropped. For a few minutes he glanced at it; then he took down the receiver of the phone.

"That thar accident has happened at last, Bill," he said when Sheriff Muldane answered his call. "Got a busted foot; rock rolled on it. . . . . What's that?" Dave's voice grew shrill with pain and surprise. "Me call you up just now? No sirree! I been four hours trying to reach the phone."

For a few moments old Dave listened intently; then:

"Better come out as quick as you can, Bill. There was a paper laying under the phone, saying that Butch Simpson has been turned loose. Can't figure how it got there. Maybe it was Butch that phoned. I'll try and get to Harve's place in time to prevent any dirty work. Don't know as I can on all fours."

WITH beads of agony standing out on his furrowed cheeks, and an unspoken prayer on his bearded lips, old Dave Banning dragged himself down the summit on his hands and knees. Every now and then his crushed foot would bring up against a stone or a root, causing the old woodsman to squirm with pain; but though every yard seemed a mile, and every mile an eternity, he would not give up. In vain he tried to make himself believe that somebody had been trying to play a practical joke upon him. One by one in his mind he enumerated the men whom he knew, only to arrive at the conclusion that there was not one among them who would have gone to the trouble to play such a silly joke upon an old man—for Dave Banning was seventy-one years old. . . . .

An hour passed, and another. Still, with his knuckles rubbed raw and bleeding, and great holes in the knees of his overalls, old Dave dragged himself painfully along, until he came at last to a soft piece of ground where a tiny rill of water crossed the road. Here was the track of a man's shoe and the track was that of Harve Mason—but it led away from his cabin.

Had Dave not been crippled, he knew that he could have caught up with Mason in a few minutes; as it was, the man might as well have been a hundred miles away as a hundred yards. Useless it would be for Dave to shout, for Harve Mason was stone deaf—so deaf that he could not have heard the report of Dave's forty-five.

Keenly Dave studied that patch of moist ground in the hope that he would find tracks also of the man who had phoned in his name. But for some minutes the old woodsman saw nothing; then, just as he was about to give up, he saw a place where a man, in trying to step across the little rill, had misjudged the distance, or possibly slipped. For on the other side of the tiny stream was the deep impression left by a boot-heel. By the fact that the depression was filled with water, Dave knew that the stranger was a full hour ahead of him; and this meant that if it was Butch Simpson, he had already reached Harve Mason's ranch, for it was less than a mile distant.

For a moment Dave hesitated. What chance would he in his crippled condition have against Butch Simpson? None. Maybe it wasn't Butch Simpson, though; perhaps it was just some wandering prospector or trapper who had left that strange track in the mud. Anyhow, Harve Mason was not at home. Dave found himself wondering where Harve had been going.

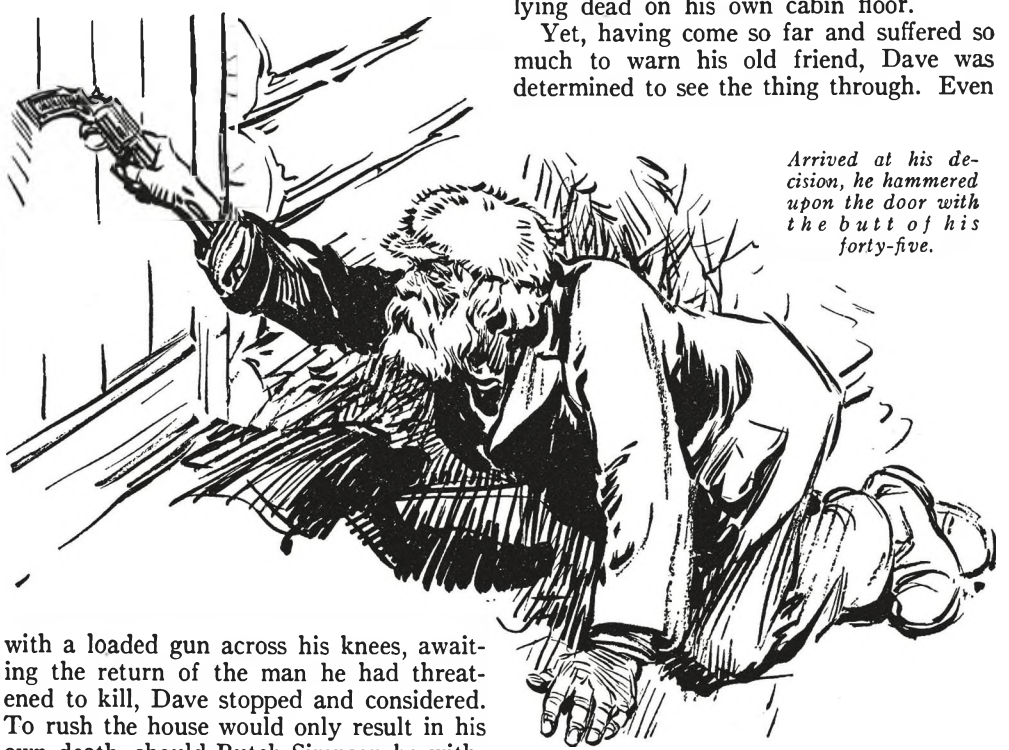
A mile yet to Harve Mason's ranch—only a mile. Dave guessed that having come that far, he might as well keep on to the ranch. If he found Butch Simpson there, he would have to take his chances of holding off the desperado until the arrival of Sheriff Muldane, for Dave suffered under no delusion as to the desperate character of the man who had threatened in court to have Harve Mason's life. Yet, Dave told himself, it would be much easier and safer to lie beside the road and await the arrival of Sheriff Muldane in his high-powered car.

Yet what of Harve Mason? Suppose he should return to find himself ambushed by the man he feared. A shot from the dusk that already made Dave seem more like a bear than a man, and Harve Mason would drop into eternity. No, Dave must somehow drag himself over that endless mile and uphold the code of the Big Hills.

Yard by yard he forced one hand ahead of the other, and his crushed foot dragged limply alongside his sound leg, as one by one four more hours of agony brought him within sight of Harve Mason's ranch.

No light gleamed from the little log cabin beside the river; indistinct in the deepening twilight, it seemed to Dave's pain-distorted fancy to hint of Death that had passed that way, or of Death lurking within its gray log walls.

Thinking that perhaps Butch Simpson was sitting in the darkness of the house with a loaded gun across his knees, awaiting the return of the man he had threatened to kill, Dave stopped and considered. To rush the house would only result in his own death, should Butch Simpson be within; yet somehow Dave knew he would have to draw the man to the door.



Arrived at his decision, he hammered upon the door with the butt of his forty-five.

As Dave crouched there in the dusk, far away a wolf howled. Lonely and menacing the sound drifted through the dusk like the wail of a wandering soul. It was a sound to bring terror to the heart of an old and crippled man. Yet instead of terrorizing Dave, it caused him to chuckle; for it had given him an idea.

Cupping both hands to his bearded lips, the old woodsman mocked the wolf in such a lifelike manner that as his own voice died away in a slow diminuendo, the wolf howled again in answer.

But no sign of life was evident in the darkened house by the river, although Dave's howl must have been heard by Butch Simpson if he was lurking within. Slowly Dave dragged himself a little nearer, then he howled again in a voice realistically savage with pain.

The door of the house remained closed, the windows dark.

Still Dave was not satisfied that the house was vacant. Perhaps Butch Simpson suspected a trap; maybe he had detected the difference between the voice of the real wolf and that of the old trapper. And possibly he had left Harve Mason lying dead on his own cabin floor.

Yet, having come so far and suffered so much to warn his old friend, Dave was determined to see the thing through. Even should it cost him his life he meant to gain an entry to Harve Mason's house. Having arrived at his decision, very slowly indeed Dave dragged himself along until he was at one side of the door. Then stretching forth his arm, he hammered upon the door with the butt of his forty-five.

In the evening stillness the sound recoiled upon his own hearing in hollow mockery; otherwise there was no sound.

Edging a little closer, Dave shoved the door open, then dodged back out of reach of a possible shot.

But silence persisted.

Satisfied at last that there was no living person within, Dave grasped a door-jamb in each hand and gradually raised himself onto his sound foot; then, supporting himself by placing his hands against the wall, he hopped around the cabin until he ran against the table.

Taking a match from his pocket, he

struck it and lighted a little tin lamp which stood on a shelf above the bunk. Then as the light flared up, he gave a sigh of relief, for there was nobody in the cabin, either alive or dead.

But true to the custom which Dave had inaugurated, Harve Mason had left on the table his mountain mail:

I gone to stay a few days with old Dave Banning. But being scared that I'll meet up with Butch Simpson, I'll take a short-cut across the hills.

Harve.

By the side of the note lay a copy of a newspaper a week old. On the front page was a reproduction of Butch Simpson's photograph and a "rewrite" of the trial. Evidently the newspaper item was the cause of Mason's departure.

"So that's why Harve's tracks were pointing east when they should have pointed south," muttered Dave. "Now aint that just my luck to have had my trip for nothing at all!"

STILL, Dave could not have been better off in his own cabin; he realized that, as he made a fire in the stove and set some water to heat so that he might bathe his injured foot, now swollen so badly that he had to cut off his shoe with his knife. As he looked at it, he wondered how he had ever found strength to crawl so far, and a fear grew upon him that he might be a cripple for life. Would Harve Mason have done as much for him? He was not so sure about that.

Having bathed his foot, Dave cooked a pot of coffee and ate some of Harve Mason's baked beans; then after placing his gun beneath his pillow, he lay down on the bunk to think matters over. He hadn't the faintest intention of sleeping, for he still had a suspicion that Butch Simpson might come to carry out the threat he had made ten years ago.

Ten years! As Dave lay on the bunk, he seemed to see again the scene in the courtroom at Rugged Center. He thought once more he could hear the grave voice of Judge Aiken as he commanded the prisoner to stand and receive sentence.

Seemed like a man would be willing to go straight after having been confined behind gray stone walls for ten years. Seemed like—drat that foot! Would it never quit throbbing?

Dave's thoughts veered here, there and everywhere in an effort to forget his pain, until at last his eyes closed and his breathing became regular. He had had a hard trip, and he was old.

He awoke suddenly. A man was bending over him with a gleaming knife in his hand. It was Butch Simpson—heavier of build than he had been in the days gone by, and with a queer unhealthy color in his coarse black-stubbled face.

"Get up," ordered Butch curtly.

Dave strove to obey, but fell back with a groan.

"I can't," he whispered shakily. "I'm crippled."

With a muttered oath Butch snatched the covers off Dave; then as he saw that the old man had spoken the truth, he swore again.

"How did you get here, old man, with a foot like that?"

"Crawled," replied Dave simply, "—for four mile."

"Where's Harve Mason?"

Old Dave knew, but he would not say. Sufficient was it that his old friend was beyond the reach for the present of the man who sought his life.

But Dave had no chance to tell the white lie that was hovering on his lips, for just then Butch Simpson caught sight of the note and the newspaper which lay beside it.

"So," snarled the desperado, "the white-livered skunk skinned out! Gone to Dave Banning's cabin, has he? Say,"—he peered more closely at the old man on the bunk,—"aint you Dave Banning himself? Seems like I remember seein' your face."

"You saw it at the trial," said Dave, "ten years ago."

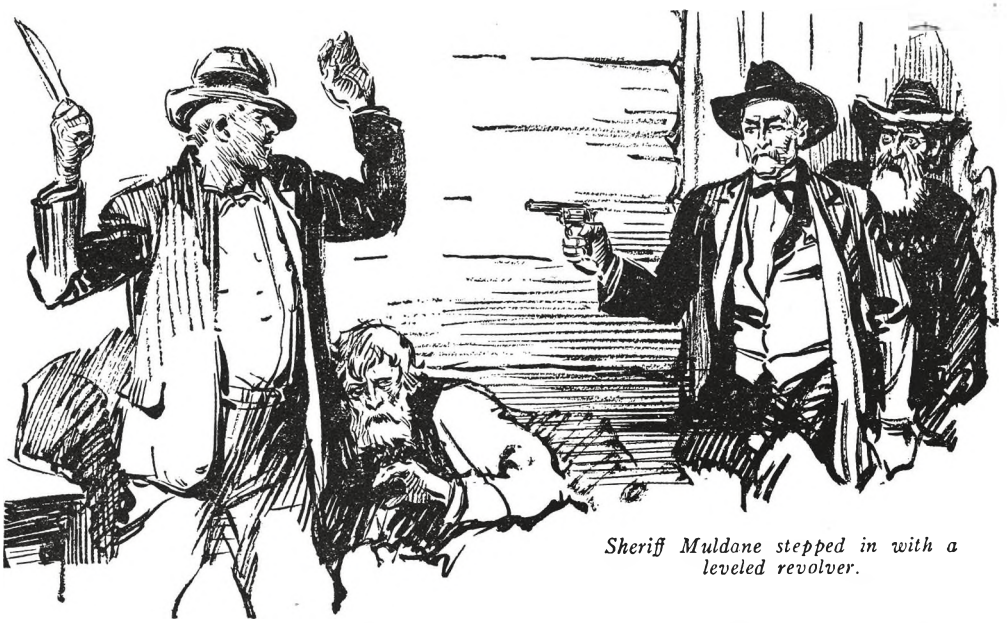
"If you are Dave Banning," snarled Butch, "how does it happen you are here? You left a note in your cabin saying you was setting traps over on Summit Creek."

THE lowering expression on the bad man's face changed to unwilling admiration as he listened to Dave's story, simply told.

"You are a man," said Butch grudgingly when Dave finished. "The first real man I've seen in ten years. . . . . Ten years behind prison walls, 'cause a man who wasn't a man at all chose to swear my freedom away!"

The same old story! thought Dave.

"I never killed Harve Mason's son intentionally," said Butch. "Him and me



Sheriff Muldane stepped in with a leveled revolver.

was trapping together. One day we had a dispute as to who was the best pistol-shot; so we set up a can in front of our cabin. Jack Mason had fired six shots; then just as I fired, he run to see how many times he had hit the can. My first shot took him in the back. Just then Harve Mason happened to come along. He took me in to Rugged Center at the point of a gun and swore me into the pen for ten years."

"Ten years," echoed Dave. "But killing Harve wont right the wrong he did you."

"I said I would," replied Butch Simpson, "and I will."

"How did it happen that you didn't get here sooner?" asked Dave. "I saw your tracks where that little creek crosses the road."

"I figured on laying up until Harve was asleep," replied Butch, "and while I was resting way off the road, I went to sleep myself. I aint so young as I used to be. Ten years is a long time."

"And four miles is a long way," said Dave, "for a man to crawl on his hands and knees."

WHILE he talked, he was listening intently, for he thought that outside he heard stealthy footsteps.

Butch arose to his feet and picked up his knife from where he had laid it on the table—a knife of the Bowie type, with a six-inch blade that glittered in the lamplight.

"Guess I'll be going," he snarled. "I've got a cinch on Harve Mason now. I know where he is at; and you, old man, you are crippled. You can't follow me."

He was too late, for as he spoke, the door of the cabin burst open, and followed by Harve Mason himself, Sheriff Muldane stepped into the room with a leveled revolver in his hand. Over his shoulder the bearded face of Harve Mason stared fearfully.

"Up with your hands," snapped the Sheriff, "in the name of the law."

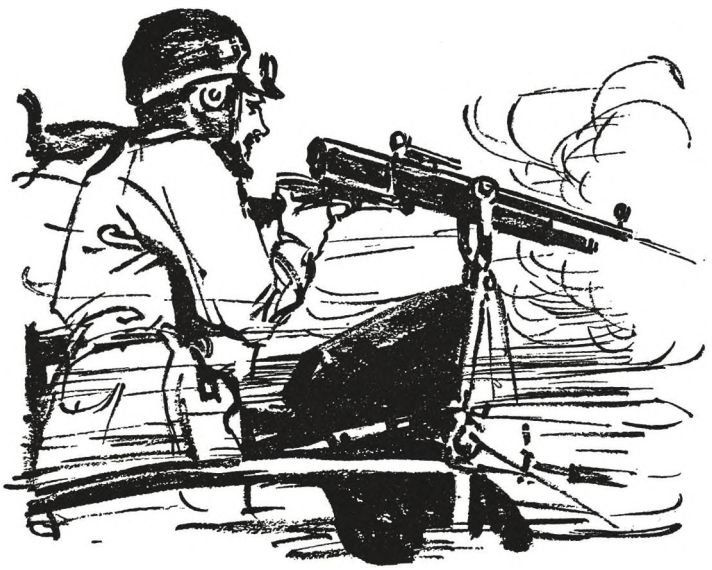
As Butch raised his hands, the Sheriff ducked; then the lamp went out suddenly to the crash of his forty-five, and Butch Simpson slumped to the floor beneath a streak of orange flame.

In the succeeding silence, Dave could hear himself breathing. Then as the sheriff lighted the lamp, he gave a gasp, for with Butch Simpson's knife driven clean through his shoulder, Harve Mason stood pinned to the cabin wall.

"That was a close call," said the sheriff as he helped Harve Mason to a chair. "You can thank Dave Banning that you aint dead too."

"I met Harve on the summit," he explained, turning to Dave Banning. "We left the car there and sneaked down here afoot. I was afraid Butch would hear the engine and get away."

Unable to hear a word of what was being said, Harve Mason watched the speaker's lips with the curious intentness of the stone deaf; then slowly he staggered over to Dave Banning and put out his hand.



Free Lances in Diplomacy

"That Boasted Isolation" vividly describes one of the most exciting of all the Free Lances' adventures —and again reveals Mr. New's astonishing fund of "inside" information on international affairs.

By CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by William Molt

TELL the men who breed horses, dogs or cattle that the dangerous viciousness of any particular beast is entirely the result of bad treatment or bad associations, and they'll laugh at you. They will immediately ask for data on dam and sire—pedigree for several generations back. Presently they will put a finger upon the exact cross of strain where there was a mixture of bad blood with the good—figuring, invariably, that it is much easier to break a thoroughbred's heart than to change or spoil his disposition.

The mother of Dimitrivitch was Ukrainian—very close to the soil. Good-looking, in a heavy, stupid way—fond of dancing at the village fairs and with enough sense of rhythm to follow the music more or less accurately with her feet. Had anatomists dissected her head after death, they would have found possibly a dozen brain-cells, imperfectly formed and with walls too thick to be resilient—the remainder of the cranial cavity filled with fatty tissue. At one of the annual fairs a young chemist and metallurgist from Uralia, who had been investigating mineral deposits near the village, was attracted by the girl—danced with her, spent the night at the moujik cottage in which she lived. Himself originally of the masses,—he'd worked his way up through an iron foundry and managed, somehow, a technical course at the University,—his requirements in the way of womenkind were then entirely primitive. So he married the girl and took her home to Striev-gorod in Uralia, where his parents admitted that she was no useless doll and probably would be worth her keep—the girl and her own family congratulating themselves upon a most excellent match, rather above their station.

A few generations back in the Dimitrivitch family there had been a copious mix-

ture of noble blood—bar-sinister, of course—which gave the young fellow the ambition which spurred him on to get that technical study—to make of himself a good chemist, a very excellent metallurgist, and a violin-player with some knowledge of the best composers. Back in his wife's family there had been Tartar and Hunnish mixtures in which none of the parties concerned was of sufficient mental capacity to understand the bar-sinister if he or she ever heard the words. Eastern Europe and Central Asia always have been like that—so it is quite understood that no reflections are being cast upon Mrs. Dimitrivitch or her estimable family.

IT was perhaps ten years before it occurred to the metallurgist that there might be room for little improvements in his marital companion, here and there—the boy would have been then something over nine. Perhaps the need for some one close to him who could set down certain formulæ at his dictation, and then forget entirely what had been written, suggested the idea. Anyhow—he taught her to read and write, very laboriously, and to calculate in figures up to the limits of primary arithmetic. It proved so exacting a job, requiring more patience and perseverance than ever he had devoted to his own studies, that he stopped "improving" his wife after that initial attempt was reasonably successful—recognizing what he was up against.

So much for background. You now have in a general way some idea of the ingredients from which the boy was gradually formed. He was of medium height, but with the build of an athlete. Rather handsome—if you like the Slavic type with occasional suggestions of Tartar and Hun—and up to a certain point, ambitious. For all of which he could have thanked that strain of aristocratic blood. His taste for music would be, concededly, handed down from both sides—but the slant in his earlier years toward good music, from the paternal, only. His utter savagery, lack of restraint in quarrels with other boys, might have come partly from the aristocratic side as well,—the nobility all over that neck of woods never having been celebrated for angelic temperament,—but it came straighter and more viciously from the distaff branch. (Funny, how that sort of thing will skip a generation! Until she was thirty-five, Ekaterina had shown nothing but a phlegmatic, good-tempered disposition.)

Constantin—the boy—followed his father's course until he was a very fair chemist and had the makings of a most unusual metallurgist. But at that point the general flabbiness of mind on the maternal side made him vacillating, undecided whether to go on with his father's work or give it up for a musical career which seemed easier and far more attractive. His father was disappointed, but enough of the musician himself to understand the pull and drag of the thing in the boy's mind. Ekaterina was all for the musical career. So Constantin went up to Berlin, where he had the best teachers for both the violin and piano until he played each instrument better than the average student. Then to Paris, where he studied harmony and composition under Farneuil—who saw enough talent in the boy to spend a good many extra hours in trying to break him of the obstinate slant toward radicalism in everything he did. Farneuil frequently became enraged enough to cuff the young fellow's ears—and finally told him he must either eradicate that propensity for assembling horrible tonic combinations or study under some other master if he could find any willing to put up with him.

This threat produced in Constantin Dimitrivitch a brief reform and attention to harmonic construction which marked the highest point ever reached in his music studies. Under Farneuil's patient, exacting supervision, he produced a little sonata which he played at a matinée of the Paris Philharmonic, and won favorable comment from the critics and reasonable notice in the newspapers. After that he returned to Striev-gorod where it was understood he would remain until he had finished a "Symphonie Uralien" that he had been working on for some time. And that brings us to the night when—after such good-natured preliminary comment as the Paris press accorded to him—an orchestra of his own assembling was to give the first public rendering of his symphony at the Conservatoire.

THE usual Conservatoire audience of music-lovers with a scattering of famous personages in the *loges* was in its seats before the conductor mounted his stand—a buzz of speculation filling the auditorium concerning this new composer and the nature of his work, which he had

announced as a departure from the conventional symphonic idea in music. It appeared that no fragment of the "Symphonie Uralien" had been heard by anybody in the music-circles of Paris or London, that the orchestra had rehearsed it privately in Striev-gorod, and that it typified the aspirations of the Uralian race to be freed from monarchical oppression. Presently, the conductor lifted his baton, and the first movement—*adagio lamentabilmente*—began.

Now, *adagio lamentabilmente* is usually in a minor key, very slow—an impression of sadness, mourning, grief, with a few lighter touches, here and there. By imperceptible changes in accenting different instruments in a symphony orchestra, it can be made to sound like something more revoltingly different—the brutal murder itself, with the strangling gurgles of the victim, instead of the restrained grief of mourners at the subsequent funeral.

Before the movement was finished, it was admitted throughout the audience that Dimitrivitch certainly had made good his promise of something widely different from conventional symphonic harmony. There was even some question as to its being harmony at all—and yet, when experts among the audience commenced to analyze it, they were not so sure about actual discordant violation of harmonic principles. The one point upon which there was no argument was that a more offensively unpleasant composition never had been played at the Conservatoire in all the hundred and thirty years of its existence. At least a quarter of the audience walked out before the next movement was played. Among the music-critics, however—and quite a number of those who liked to interpret, as far as possible, what they heard—curiosity and a spirit of fair play kept them in their seats through the second and third movements —*andante* and *scherzo,* respectively. But judging from these what the composer probably would do with the last movement, *allegro fortissimo,* most of them were afraid to risk it.

Among those who remained until the last, in one of the lower boxes, was a party of distinguished personages including a cabinet minister, the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint, Earl Lammerford of St. Ives and the famous maestro Farneuil, whose pupil Dimitrivitch had been. In the eyes of the old composer there had been at first tears of impotent rage—succeeded by impatience for the final curtain which he knew would consign to everlasting oblivion one musical career. After the second movement, he said with impressive dignity to the Countess:

"It is to be observed by Madame that me, I have not responsibility for this! *Moi,* Farneuil, who never during a career of many years in music offended my public with such as this nor countenanced it among my pupils! A hundred times did I cuff the face of that moujik for attempting little radical departures from harmonic laws in no way as offensive as this! One thought the little beast had been cured—his 'Sonata à le Soir' was commendable, *oui!* And he then retires to his own capital, to a mining-hut of his father in one of their mountain gorges, to produce—*this!* Let us hope that he may have a different conception of metallurgy when he returns to it! The world of music, hereafter, is closed to him!"

TO the courteous rear-guard, the sole remaining eleven of the audience who still were in their seats at the close of the performance, Dimitrivitch made a few brief remarks from the conductor's rostrum. He thanked them for staying—said his symphony, as he conceived it, had been a cry of protest from the Uralian masses against the tyranny and oppression of monarchical rule, that the debacle when they finally threw off the kingly yoke would closely resemble the music they had just heard in its radical difference from all conventional procedure—and prophesied that after his symphony had been heard a few more times, it would be accorded its proper place among epoch-marking compositions—like the "1812" of Tschaikowsky, for example.

As the party in the box were preparing to leave, after the composer had disappeared, Earl Trevor remarked:

"That fellow is insane enough to be put away in some asylum! In all the history of Europe, Uralia has had rather less of monarchical oppression than most of the neighboring states—and for the last twenty years the people have had more cause for congratulation than complaint. King Alexis is one of the best educated, most progressive rulers on the globe; he has given his subjects a representative parliament, upon the legislation of which he merely reserves the right of final veto if

"Oh—very good. I resign! I'll make you dance to another tune."

it seems to him detrimental to the country's best interests. I'd say that Dimitrivitch has rather gone bugs from his musical temperament, and on top of that, has been associating with Bolshevists until every note of his music looks red to him. If I'm not mistaken in his temperament, he'll not take this failure like a sport and determine to do something more acceptable—he'll sulk and brood until he's absolutely dangerous!"

HOW close His Lordship was to the mark in his estimate of young Constantin may be inferred from the Uralian's reaction to what the critics said in the morning journals. Jules Florian of the *Figaro* was courteous or not—as you took him. Said that he had heard the first two movements of the symphony, which differed from anything in his previous experience—and had then left the Conservatoire. That was all. Dorrington—in the Paris edition of a leading New York paper—said the "Symphonie Uralien" was the most inexcusably offensive mess of discordant rot he ever had listened to. One movement had been more than enough. In a café of the Boul' Miche', at noon, this was read to Dimitrivitch by one of his acquaintances. Leaning forward in his chair with a venomous hiss like a coiled snake, Constantin dashed his glass of *vin ordinaire* upon the tiled floor—and screamed:

"It needed but such an expression from the cursed Yankees to make this little experience perfect! They do not like my music—eh! This little insect, in his ridiculous journal, has what he thinks the courage to say so in the most insulting manner—to me, to Constantin Dimitrivitch! They will not have me as a composer! Oh—very good! I resign! I bow to the opinion of these capitalistic profiteers! I will retire from the world of music—go back to my trade of making metals! And some day, Messieurs Yankees, I will make you regret that you could not see in me a great musician! I'll make you dance to another tune!"

By the merest accident two old friends of Earl Trevor—the Honorable Raymond Carter and Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan—happened to be sitting in a corner of the café when this occurred. When Dimitrivitch and his cronies left the place, the waiters told the two what they wished to know about the party—which was repeated at dinner, that evening, in the Maison Dyvnaint on the Avenue de Neuilly. After considering this and their impressions at the performance, Earl Lammerford said:

"George remarked last evening that this young radical was near enough insane to be put away somewhere—which would seem pretty close to the truth. What he alone can manage to do that might be a serious menace in international politics seems rather negligible—and yet he's yellow enough to nurse vindictive feelings for years—he's a rotten sport—and he has education enough to let him dip into most anything. I fancy

I'm beginning to have enough curiosity as to his personal history, associates an' surroundings, to make a month's trip through Uralia—see what the underlying conditions really are. To the best of my knowledge, the people are contented—I fancy it wouldn't be easy to stir up revolution. But after all, it's close enough to get infection from Ukrainia."

In a few days, the Earl left for Striev-gorod in Uralia. In a few months, the World War broke out. In its second year came the Uralian revolution with its sickening butchery of King Alexis, and the establishment of a Soviet dictatorship similar to that in Russia. During all this welter of blood and horror, Dimitrivitch was among the submerged—appearing, once, as a lieutenant in the Red army—popping up a few years later as a deputy commissar—and turning up in Paris during the summer of 1925 with a curious sample of metal to be tested in the Sorbonne laboratories.

OF all who were in Europe from 1914 to 1920, there probably is not one who does not bear in face or personality marks left by the experiences of those years. Probably nine-tenths of the men and women have an appearance so much older, more reserved, more suspicious of everything and everybody, that in many cases they are almost unrecognizable. The Dimitrivitch of 1925, for example, looked a good thirty years older than the young Uralian radical of 1914. Outwardly he was more suspiciously reserved, more everlastingly upon his guard, as so many learned to be when a grain too much knowledge or one unconsidered word might get him shot in some filthy cellar at any moment.

In the chaos after the revolution, a few British and Frenchmen who had been *liaison*-officers from the Entente during the first year of the war remained in Uralia as temporary commissioners to look after their own nationals as best they might—receiving, when matters had settled down a bit, credentials from their respective governments to stay on in an equivalent civilian capacity. And Lammerford, in talking with one of these who happened to be an old friend of the Trevors, requested that cipher reports be sent him from time to time concerning the ex-composer Constantin Dimitrivitch. So he and his friends had on file more detailed information about the Uralian than even the commissars knew—were informed as to the moment of his departure and his train-reservations when he left for Paris with his samples of a new metal which he had developed in what were now his own laboratories. Consequently an old acquaintance, whom he vaguely recognized as having been with him in Striev-gorod before the war, got into his compartment just as the train was pulling out of the Vienna station.

The stranger recognized him first, asking, in a somewhat doubting way, if he were not the composer who had produced the "Symphonie Uralien" at the Paris Conservatoire in the spring of '14? His memory thus jogged, Dimitrivitch had no difficulty in recalling the cosmopolitan Muscovite who had been interested and complimentary in regard to his music—comparing it to the more forceful bits of Mussorgsky. He recalled the mutual interests which had induced him to describe something of his previous life as chemist and metallurgist—even to suggesting that Kolanoff accompany him to some of their mines and reducing-plants in the mountains. So in the mutual reminiscences, as the train pursued its snail-like course toward Switzerland and France, it was natural enough that the Uralian's present business in the French capital should be touched upon—that he, presently, should take from a portmanteau four pieces of metal, differing in shape, which ought to have added at least ten or twelve pounds of additional weight to his luggage. To the supposed Kolanoff's amazement, however, when the four pieces were laid upon one of his hands—the weight couldn't have exceeded two pounds.

"Ah! A new-process aluminum—with more compact crystallization!"

"No—my friend. It has no aluminum whatever. The original base is iron-ore, like steel—with very small percentages of other metal-ores and entirely new reduction processes. It more closely approaches steel in its properties than anything else; and yet—it is not steel. It is far lighter and considerably tougher than steel. For the present, it has no name—unless, merely for identification, one called it Dimitrivitch metal. It certainly is that—produced in one of my laboratories at the largest Dimitrivitch iron-mine in the mountains—"

"And your object in Paris? To interest foreign manufacturers, of course—with the view of building up a large export trade?"

"Au contraire! Not one single ounce of this metal is for sale outside of Uralia! You have not yet comprehended, Kolanoff, what this metal really is and how completely it revolutionizes every class of machinery manufactured throughout the world. Look you, my friend! You are practically one of us—like ourselves, you are Sovietized and stand alone against the world. But Russia is of such vast extent that none of the other powers will commit acts of aggression against you if they can possibly avoid it. Uralia, on the contrary, is a minor state—with practically no seacoast, no navy, an army far too small for any protection. We are in a position where, to compel the respect due us, we must invent and perfect yet unknown means of defense which the great powers will not disregard. Like Russia, none of them will recognize us as having a stable government with which diplomatic relations may be established. Well—we will change that point of view, presently. The cholera-mosquito and the bubonic-plague-flea are microscopic insects, individually—but they have a way of making themselves respected! Yes?"

"This metal, then, is intended to bear some part in your national defense—if I catch your point?"

"Precisely! And I, Constantin Dimitrivitch, whom the capitalistic world spurned as a composer of great music, have devoted seven years of my life—after going through the hell we all knew—to the development of this metal as a gesture of patriotism. It is not for sale—except to the Uralian Soviet, to be used under my personal direction."

"And you are taking it to Paris—for what?"

"To have it put through the most exhaustive tests of which the Sorbonne laboratories—the French Academie des Sciences—are capable. In the presence of as many scientists and leading manufacturers as may be gotten together within the next fortnight!"

KNOWING the supposed Kolanoff to have been, in everyday life, the Right Honorable Earl Lammerford of St. Ives, as the reader has surmised, there is nothing surprising in the fact that among the assemblage of noted scientists and personages gathered to witness the testing of the metal submitted by Dimitrivitch at the Sorbonne, were the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint, Earl Lammerford, Sir Abdool Mohammed Khan, the Honorable Raymond Carter, formerly of the American Embassy. Before commencing upon the tests, the metallurgist made a few remarks which at first were accepted and applauded as coming from a good sport who had turned defeat of one sort into victory of another. At the close of the evening a brief statement gave them a somewhat different, more sinister impression.

"Messieurs—et Mesdames: If you permit me a few words in the line of personalities—you may recall the time, some years ago, when I had aspirations toward the composition of great music. You courteously gave me a hearing—but convinced me that I had been mistaken in my vocation. I was not stupid enough to consider your verdict a hasty one; it was apparently final. I accepted it—returning to the profession of metallurgy in which my father and I had received exhaustive training; and I determined that if I could not be a great composer, it was not impossible that I might contribute enough toward science to be considered a great metallurgist." (Applause.)

"It seemed to me that the greatest need in the manufacturing world of today—the world of mobile vehicles and machinery—was a metal which possessed more strength and durability than steel, but with far less weight. I need not tell you what such a metal means; you will be going over that in mind for some time after this evening. At the beginning of this year the so-good M'sieur Ford of Detroit commenced the production of airplanes constructed of a metal which he called duralumin—with all the strength of steel and of much less weight. Two months ago a report from Switzerland stated that the inventor Mossharad had perfected a metal forty per cent lighter than steel—effecting a saving of thirty per cent in construction-cost. This metal which I've developed possesses twenty-five per cent more strength than steel, *and weighs but one-sixth as much!* I have tested it dozens of times in my own laboratories; but in order that there may be no question as to its properties, I have requested the Sorbonne to make these exhaustive tests—for comparative weight, for tensile, torsional and compressive strength. And they have courteously acceded to my request upon the ground that if this metal actually meets the tests as claimed, it is something which the world of science and

manufacturers should know." (Prolonged applause.)

The tests showed in each case that the inventor's claims had been most conservative. His metal bore out his statements in every particular; and a final test, at his suggestion, was the most impressive of all. He had sent by express from Strievgorod two sheets of his metal which measured four by six feet and were one-eighth of an inch in thickness. These he placed at opposite ends of a boxed-in gallery thirty feet long, with its sides protected by inch-thick sheet-iron. In one of the sheets was an opening just large enough for the muzzle of a high-powered elephant-rifle which its manufacturers claimed would penetrate half-inch steel at a distance of two hundred feet. Placing the muzzle in the hole, Dimitrivitch fired the five shots in the magazine in one continuous "*b-r-r-r-r*" of explosions. The ricochetting of the bullets on the two metal plates was deafening for a moment or two. When they were taken down and examined, twelve dents were found on the inner face of one, and fourteen on the target-plate—showing that the bullets had glanced back and forth from one plate to the other two or three times.

Dimitrivitch called attention to the fact that with an overcoat and helmet of the new bullet-proof metal weighing not over six pounds altogether, any man could walk in front of a machine-gun battery in action without suffering injury. Then, to the chorus of questions as to when the metal would be placed on the market, and its probable cost, he merely answered unsmilingly:

"The metal is not for sale, messieurs. It has been placed at the disposal of the Uralian government."

It took a moment or two for the idea to penetrate. Then the natural inquiries were made as to why the assemblage of scientists had been put to the inconvenience of spending their valuable time merely to witness a series of tests for which there seemed to be no point? If the metal was not placed upon the market, why should it be considered of general public interest? After a moment or two of silence, Dimitrivitch condescended to answer this.

"The point is, messieurs: that there exists a metal which has successfully met the most severe tests which can be made upon it—and that it is to be used in various ways by the Uralian government. A scientific fact—and a political one. The more you consider them, the more I think you will find them 'of general interest.'"

AFTER leaving the building, half a dozen men prominent in commercial and scientific fields, knowing the Trevors' reputation for hospitality at all hours of the night when occasion seemed to warrant it, asked if they might go home with the Earl and Countess for some discussion of the matter. Half an hour later they were in the billiard-room of the beautiful residence on the Avenue de Neuilly—being served with various midnight refreshments by the Afghans of the household. Sir James Wentworth, a very wealthy manufacturer and member of Parliament, asked how soon they might expect world-wide competition from Uralia with the new metal. While the others were considering this, Earl Trevor said:

"I fancy you need be under no apprehension upon that point for several years to come, Sir James. Dimitrivitch has no idea of using his metal that way. Too much chance for outside analysis and experimenting."

"You think so—really? My word! It's a relief to hear Your Lordship say so, because you've been through every kink in the trade yourself—your opinion carries a good deal of weight. If it proves you're right upon this point, I fancy we may as well forget the bally metal an' go about our business!"

"If you do, it would prove the most short-sighted decision you could probably make. As I see it, the world's leading nations have a possible six months in which to do one or all of three things: Develop a metal which will do as much or more than this one—produce some acid or substance which will instantly corrode it upon contact—or perfect missiles with enough force behind them to pierce the Dimitrivitch metal at five hundred feet. I'm stating cold, stark fact—and I very much doubt if either of those things will be done in the next six or even twelve months. You see, that crew of murderers who control Uralia today—a dictatorship or oligarchy, fattening upon the blood and vitals of the people they claim to serve—has not been recognized as a responsible government by any other nation, though there has been talk of it in several countries, merely to get world-trade relations going

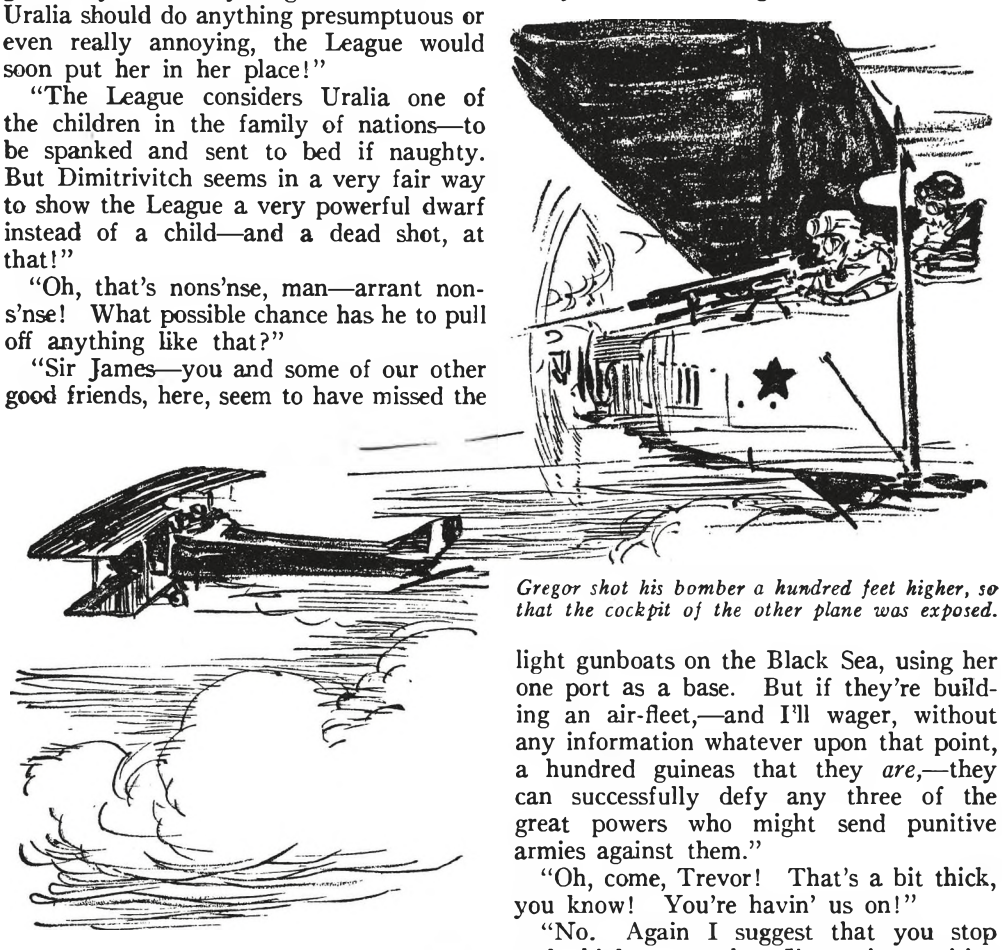
again. Well—that oligarchy means to compel recognition by one means or another—and nobody ever has claimed that they were overscrupulous in method."

"But—but—Uralia isn't Russia, you know, Trevor! And even Russia couldn't get away with anything like that! If Uralia should do anything presumptuous or even really annoying, the League would soon put her in her place!"

"The League considers Uralia one of the children in the family of nations—to be spanked and sent to bed if naughty. But Dimitrivitch seems in a very fair way to show the League a very powerful dwarf instead of a child—and a dead shot, at that!"

"Oh, that's nons'nse, man—arrant nons'nse! What possible chance has he to pull off anything like that?"

"Sir James—you and some of our other good friends, here, seem to have missed the



Gregor shot his bomber a hundred feet higher, so that the cockpit of the other plane was exposed.

point of what we saw this evening—altogether. Stop and think—from your own experience as a steel-worker and machinery-builder—just what this metal will do! For one thing, it completely revolutionizes the construction and performance of every mobile vehicle that is built. Less weight means more fuel-carrying capacity—more powerful motors per pound of load. It sends to the scrap-heap every sort of aircraft which has been constructed up to this time! Do you realize that, with that metal, airplanes can be built which cannot be set on fire or stopped at any altitude by machine-gun or ground fire—that the wings of such planes will not buckle from any actual service strain? Take the case of petrol motors—more strength at one-sixth the weight of those now built—which means, with the structural saving in weight, the carrying of sufficient fuel for a non-stop flight of at least five thousand miles. Uralia has merely an opera-bouffe army—we've all laughed at it—and two light gunboats on the Black Sea, using her one port as a base. But if they're building an air-fleet,—and I'll wager, without any information whatever upon that point, a hundred guineas that they *are*,—they can successfully defy any three of the great powers who might send punitive armies against them."

"Oh, come, Trevor! That's a bit thick, you know! You're havin' us on!"

"No. Again I suggest that you stop and think over what I'm quite positive you've followed in the political news-reports. We're all of us—England, France, Italy, America—more apprehensive than we'd like to admit over the potential destructive quality of the air-fleets now in existence. Yet we've drawn some reassurance from the fact that one air-fleet is the most effective if not the only defense against other air-fleets. Well—that reassurance is no longer warranted. With this new metal, aircraft built of it can sail through all other fleets, safely—front, back and sidewise—destroying as they go. As I said before, we have a possible six months in which to duplicate this metal or produce something effective against it!"

"Surely you don't imagine that such an insignificant speck upon the map of Europe as Uralia has any notion of declaring war against the world, or even the major nations?"

"No—I think they've sense enough to avoid any such attempt as that because, after a frightful amount of shocking butchery, we'd overwhelm them by sheer force of numbers and blot them off the earth. But they may do an appalling amount of damage to one or two nations before others would decide to interfere. We are now a world of republics, you know. Republics are much slower about voting a declaration of war than monarchs used to be—even though their next-door neighbors may be getting pretty badly cut up. It's a heap safer to watch the proceedings over the fence and say, 'Dear, dear, this is awful!'—than it is to climb the fence and mix in the trouble. So—I have some idea of getting a little information, if possible, as to just what the Uralians have in mind—what they are doing with that metal."

UPON the Boulevard Serge Protopin in Striev-gorod, a few weeks later, Dimitrivitch happened to meet his friend Kolanoff and another Muscovite whom he introduced as a man of influence with the Council of Commissars—a man who, originally from the *bourgeoisie,* had been permitted to live because of his entire adhesion to Soviet principles and rather exceptional organizing ability—Paul Gregor, by name. As Gregor proved to be much the same type as Kolanoff, though with a far more practical knowledge of mechanics, the metallurgist found himself liking the man at once—liking him better the longer they chatted. (Earl Trevor was known by his more intimate friends to be an exceptionally powerful hypnotist—due, possibly, to the perfect physical condition in which he kept himself.) He readily agreed to Kolanoff's suggestion that they adjourn to one of the cafés, which would be almost deserted at that time of day, for a chat in some corner where nobody would overhear what they said. When they had found the place, and wine was on the table, the supposed Muscovite referred to the tests at the Sorbonne.

"As Gregor happened to be in Paris at the time, getting information for the Council, I carried him off with me to see those tests made, Dimitrivitch. With his knowledge of mechanics and smattering of chemistry, he said that what your metal did was almost unbelievable—wouldn't have believed it if he hadn't been watching—and whispered to me that you shouldn't export a pound of it in manufactured articles of any sort because of the certainty that the metal would be exhaustively analyzed and tested until somebody came pretty close to duplicating it. Of course your statement that it was not for sale immediately relieved our minds upon that score. But it aroused in my mind speculation as to how thoroughly your Soviet recognizes the fact that, with the sole exception of our Soviet, it stands alone against the world? None of the other powers has recognized either of us—or is likely to unless we submit to their impossible demands.

"Naturally we're not such fools as to imagine you might make an exception in our favor and sell us some of your metal for defensive use. But—though Gregor thinks you would be equally averse to it—I am convinced that it would be for the mutual protective interests of our respective countries if you would consider building for us a certain number of planes and war-tanks, using your metal throughout. It is very doubtful that we could hit upon your formula if we tried—most of the scientists in Russia who might have worked it out have been shot, for the safety of the whole people. They belonged to the super-educated class, always secretly in sympathy with the capitalists, and we had to make a clean sweep—get all of that poisonous blood out of Russia while we had the power to do so. With planes and tanks and ordnance such as you can build from your metal, we can defeat the armies of the world, between us—and I think we might reciprocate by supplying you with quantities of our recently isolated lethal gas—the most deadly thing in existence—"

"I doubt it! You'd scarcely expect me to develop anything like this metal and overlook the gas-proposition, would you? I have something which I will match against anything in Russia—any sort of test you care to make. H-m-m—as for your other proposition—well, our Soviet will be strongly influenced by any recommendation I make. So the point is really up to me for consideration. I can see mutual advantage in what you suggest. Also, I can see that it easily might be our undoing if Russia ever should desire to annex Uralia—"

"With what object? As our closest

ally, you are a most excellent buffer state —the first point of attack before western armies could get at us from that direction. And it's obvious that self-interest would bring us promptly to your assistance. Aside from all that, Uralia hasn't a thousandth part of the natural resources—oil, minerals, timber, agricultural territory—that we have. It will take generations before we can develop any appreciable part of our own resources—there's no object whatever in coveting yours!"

"That's all pretty good argument, Kolanoff. I don't think I'd considered the buffer-state condition, before. One readily can understand that there is political advantage in having such a thing on one's borders, because you are in no way responsible for any overt act it may commit. Even if you instigated it, you couldn't be called to account unless the fact were clearly proved—a most difficult matter. Yes, if your Soviet has considered all the points you mention, I see no point in annexation. For the present, we'll let your suggestion remain under consideration. Meanwhile—undoubtedly you would be interested in seeing a demonstrated use of my metal? I wouldn't consider it much of a risk if some of the secret-service men from other powers happened to be where they could see it at the same time. Next week my first all-metal airplane will be fully equipped—ready for a pretty grilling trial over at the foot of the mountains, near our mines. . . . . Apropos—does either of you happen to know anything about handling a plane—pretty well up?"

"Gregor was as good as any of the Entente aces during the war—he served with the engineers, and they transferred him at once to the air-service. Why?"

"That makes him exactly the man I was looking for! I want him to go up in a French plane we have just purchased —a bomber of the most powerful and recent type—carries three machine-guns in addition to its load of gas or high-explosive bombs. Want him to find out what the ceiling of that plane is—loaded—and then pepper my plane with all the machine-gun fire he pleases—"

"You'll really take a chance on that? Gregor can put that plane where the gunners'll rake you!"

"All the better—if he can—which I very much doubt. We have a number of first-class gunners—but pilots who can do what you say he can aren't so easy to obtain at short notice, and of a nationality which I know would be friendly to us. Very good, Kolanoff! Can you and our good friend Gregor arrange your engagements so as to run up as far as the mountains with me on Thursday of next week? Call it twelve hours of motoring over roads which are pretty rough in spots—there's no railway. We send everything down from the mines by motor-lorry."

THE two supposed Muscovites thought they could manage it. When they reached a small stretch of level ground at the mouth of the gorge in which the mines were located, they saw a group of three hangars with machine-shops at the back of and communicating with them. In the first was the big French bomber—a magnificent ship, tuned up by her manufacturer's men to perfect cruising condition. Twice, during the afternoon of their arrival, the plane was taken up a thousand feet or so to warm her motors and test out the various controls. The Russians went up with her the second time, studying the complicated control-board while aloft, until its real simplicity to any experienced pilot became apparent. On the ground, Paul Gregor seated himself in the cockpit and tested the controls, one after the other—then climbed out, tapping struts and guy-wires for any sound of unseen "faults" which might let go under severe strain. It was a three-motor machine—carrying a load of seven tons in addition to fuel and crew.

In the morning, after a comfortable night in the mine-owner's bungalow, he took them into the middle hangar, where his own machine was ready to be rolled out. In the dazzling sunlight outside it looked ghostly; there was no spot of bright metal visible, though the control-boards and seats were the only bits of wood or canvas in the whole ship. It had been painted throughout in a blue-gray something like the "horizon blue" of the French uniforms, but even less visible at a short distance. There was but one motor—different in shape from anything they had ever seen, and smaller than a twelve-cylinder engine. Behind it was what looked like a small reservoir force-pump of six cylinders, and an immensely strong pipe leading into what evidently was a pressure-chest made of the new metal, an inch and a half thick. Pump, chest and motor, the Uralian said, weighed forty-five

per cent less than the usual type of airplane motor—and of course there was a saving of weight in every part of the entire plane. Grinning at their puzzled looks, he asked:

"Never saw that type of motor before —did you? Something entirely new—eh?

"Not entirely. I've seen a good many Parsons turbines, in various places—but never saw the principle used for airplane propulsion. Compressed-air, of course. You couldn't carry enough water for steam. I've seen some powerful Clayton air-compressors—but this one of yours looks as if it might have double the power, with its six cylinders. The only doubtful points to me would be whether you could compress the air fast enough to keep up the pressure on your turbine, and whether it doesn't take more petrol to run the air-compressor than it would for the old type airplane motor?"

"Thirty-five per cent *less*. Of course more gas is used in each cylinder—but I only have to get a piston-thrust on six instead of twelve, and air-compression is at vastly less speed than turning a propeller-shaft. As for pressure, you will notice that the proportions of my turbine are a third more diameter for the length than the steamship type. Much less force required on the blades at a diameter of four feet than at one of less than three—more leverage. I can use a muffler on the slower motor-exhaust, cutting out the noise altogether, and the pitch of the screw is adjusted so that it is almost as noiseless as a ventilating-fan. The motor-saving alone on fuel enables me to carry a third more in proportion to mileage. Other savings in weight make the cruising supply more than double that of the motor-driven plane. And a turbine-drive—for absence of vibration or jerky motion of any sort—is the ideal one for air use."

"I see you're pretty well protected in the cockpit by metal shields."

"Yes—I'm safe against machine-gun fire —or shrapnel."

THAT afternoon, with everything in readiness for the test, both planes got into the air shortly after luncheon and climbed until Gregor reached what appeared to be the "ceiling" of the bomber at fifteen thousand meters. Twice he tried to crawl higher on a long slant, but the specific gravity of his loaded plane returned to its limit for the power he had. In the meantime Dimitrivitch had climbed entirely out of sight in a few moments. He could easily make out the bomber, far below him, and had his plane been painted black, the other crew might have seen him —but the blue-gray blended so perfectly with the clouds and sky that only by accident could anybody have picked him out with prism-binoculars.

Dropping down level with the bomber, his *mécanicien* told them by radio to put on full speed and see what they could do. At this the French machine was a good deal better—easily reaching a hundred and eighty miles an hour, its weight giving it the momentum of a fly-wheel once it struck a fast gait. But the Uralian boat walked away from it as if the bomber were still on the ground—they estimated that Dimitrivitch must be doing better than two hundred and eighty. He flew around them in circles, both vertical and horizontal—then came up abreast and signaled for them to cut loose with the machine-guns.

Whatever hesitation the two disguised earls might have had over the risk to a less dangerous man was completely wiped out by the determination to send this particular individual crashing to the ground if it lay in their power. But they considered it only sporting to warn him by radio that some overlooked weak spot in his plane easily might make it a tragedy —and ask if he really wished them to fire as they would in war-time. Never dreaming that they were not Russians or could have any possible animus against him, he sent back a sharp order to do as they were told. Explaining to the men at the guns exactly what he meant to do, the supposed Gregor unexpectedly shot his bomber a hundred feet higher, so that a part of the cockpit in the other plane was exposed—and a stream of bullets poured into it.

The Uralian was taken entirely by surprise, but he had studied the angles in that cockpit to good purpose—and had prepared what proved to be adequate protection. Barring a slight graze across the back of one hand, incautiously exposed, neither he nor his plane appeared to be even annoyed by the hail of bullets. But when they came down a few minutes later, there were dents enough on the shields of that cockpit to indicate what would have happened without them, and lead-

marks on two of the propeller-blades showed where bullets had been sliced in half as they struck—bullets which would have caused a laminated wooden blade to fly apart and wreck the plane in midair. The Uralian complimented his Russian friend upon the excellent strategy he had shown in attacking—saying it was exactly the sort of war-condition test he had been

As they passed over the gulf two bombs struck him.

hoping to get, and then asking what they thought of his plane.

"It is impervious to any attack which, so far, has been developed, Dimitrivitch—simply outclasses everything else that has been turned out. We couldn't have gotten within a mile if you hadn't obligingly come down and offered yourself as a sacrifice. Really, you know—we didn't like to cut loose on you with those guns! I thought I probably might trick you as I did—but you'd given pretty straight orders to put the game on a war basis, so I tried it—and rather expected to see your plane out of control in another moment."

A few days afterward the two supposed Russians left for Paris—stopping in Switzerland on the way to see the other inventor who claimed a forty per cent reduction in the weight of steel. The Swiss never have feared attacks from their powerful neighbors, because their country is too perpendicular—and they are all qualified marksmen—and no other power could use Switzerland for anything except the tourist business anyway. So the inventor was not unwilling to consider an amazingly big purchase of his steel for immediate delivery on board ship at Genoa—the one sale making him independent for life as long as he didn't venture into more expensive countries than his own. A forty per cent saving in weight, with greater strength, was by no means equivalent to around eighty per cent—but with their long experience in airplane construction, Earl Trevor was of the impression that he and his skilled mechanics—his own laboratory men—could build something that would far outclass any other plane in existence save that of the Uralian, and he had been figuring over a scheme of attack which might have some reasonable chance of downing even him.

Within the next thirty days came a few minor events which caused no great stir in diplomatic circles or even the newspapers—but which gave the Trevors and their friends much anxious thought. First—a commission had been sent by the Uralian Soviet to Washington demanding recognition as a bona-fide existing government—of course, with a good deal of backing and propaganda from radical sheets in the United States and even a few Senators who, otherwise, had been considered reasonably sane in whatever they advocated. The commission reiterated the Uralian refusal to assume any prewar debts of any sort. It claimed that while their country was in a reasonably settled condition for the transaction of business, their treasury was much too empty to provide absolute police protection for individuals of *any* nationality—but that if they were successful in obtaining the big loan they asked, this condition might be remedied to some extent. As for outside concessions, the country was too small to permit of anything but native development. As all this was the same old story with no evidence of improvement, the commission was told—as they might have expected—that there was absolutely nothing doing in the line of recognition. And in taking their leave, there were some rather poorly veiled

threats that Uralia would not accept such a decision without some attempt at reprisals—which provoked rather contemptuous laughter in many quarters.

IT is doubtful if even the State Department—which is often supposed to know a good deal more than it actually does—kept tab upon all the members of that commission when they separated in New York to return home by various different routes, or knew that one of them—M. Constantin Dimitrivitch—took a Ward Line steamer which might have dropped him in Havana but permitted him to prolong a delightful voyage as far as Vera Cruz. From Vera Cruz to Mexico City is but a few hours' ride. To a man with the proper letters, that capital is wide open and hospitable. Selecting but one of a dozen pressing invitations, Dimitrivitch was quickly housed with the politician who had the most influential portfolio in the Mexican cabinet at that time. And upon the first evening—in rattan chairs upon a cool upper veranda—there was pleasant discussion of world politics among a group of three or four officials.

The Uralian asked if they had followed reports of the rebuff his commission had received in Washington? They gravely admitted that they had—that they considered the Washington decision a diplomatic outrage and that Mexico would recognize the Uralian Soviet at any time it was requested to do so. The talk drifted on to general feeling in Mexico concerning the "gringoes" to the north of it—and there was quite evidently active dislike for the United States, though all of them pointed out that any serious difference between the two countries was to be avoided if possible. This the Uralian considered all the encouragement he needed.

"You will agree with me, señores, that my country has received an outrageous affront from those cursed Yankees. Yes? Precisely! You will not be surprised if I say that my countrymen do not quite like to accept such an affront tamely—without some sort of a gesture serious enough in itself to express our attitude? I see that we have your sympathy upon that point. Now—the Yankees have the habit of boasting a good deal about their isolation from European affairs—considering that with a broad ocean upon either side, they cannot be successfully attacked. Well—perhaps yes, perhaps no. In these days, that boasted isolation is a figure of speech which means less than it used to. Suppose, for example, that some cargo-boat flying the Italian, Japanese or Norwegian flag drops anchor in a small cove along a more or less uninhabited stretch of the Mexican coast? I could point out several on the chart. Suppose she has aboard of her an airplane or so of a most recent and practically indestructible type, quickly assembled on deck—and that one of them goes up from where she is lying? Crosses the American border—drops gas enough to put half a dozen Yankee towns completely out of business—quietly returns to her steamer, which immediately proceeds to her destination with no knowledge of the occurrence? Er—just what would your government do in the circumstances, señores? What could it do?"

"Deny all knowledge of the occurrence, to be sure, *amigo!* We can't police every foot of our coast with its many little hidden coves—no nation with our limited resources could be expected to do so!" . . . .

Now, certain individuals in Paris were much better served by their agents in the western hemisphere than the authorities in Washington. They knew by radio exactly when Dimitrivitch landed at Vera Cruz and with whom he stopped in Mexico City, because they made it their business to know, and had serious reason for doing so—serious enough to make the Trevors and their three most intimate friends leave at once from Salcombe Harbor in Devon on their famous deep-water yacht *Ranee Sylvia,* with a new and powerful type of airplane carefully stowed on her deck. Upon arriving in Baltimore after a four-day run over smooth enough water to keep up the yacht's speed, the Honorable Raymond Carter at once left for Washington—returning in the afternoon with a party of five, including two Cabinet secretaries, an officer of the General Staff and two Senators. After dinner in the saloon of the *Ranee* that evening, Earl Trevor described as briefly as possible the knowledge they had of Dimitrivitch from the night at the Conservatoire when his musical career ended. They described conditions in Uralia—the insane animus against outside nations, focused most sharply against the United States—the metal and the plane which Dimitrivitch had worked out—and his mysterious errand to Mexico.

"Now, gentlemen, please get one certainty fixed in your minds. This paranoiac,

nursing a hatred of everything American for the past eleven years, means to commit some outrageous act of reprisal just as a gesture to prove that Uralia is on the map and considers herself quite able to declare war against the United States if she feels like it!"

"Oh, come, Trevor—are you out of your head? *That* little grease-spot! With the Atlantic Ocean between us!"

"Faith, I fancy it may be a bit clearer as to who's out of his head before we get through! Atlantic Ocean be damned! Can't you gentlemen get this idea of 'isolation' out of your systems? With the mileage along the Mexican and Canadian borders! The Mexicans couldn't stop a raid across the Rio Grande if they wanted to. The Canadians would if they could—but any cargo-boat with several planes can get into Hudson's Bay during the summer months and start a raid from some place on the southern shore in spite of anything the Canadians could do! Why, you've actually no more 'isolation' than any state in Europe! This crazy Uralian means to cross the Mexican border in one of his new planes—wipe out hundreds of people in a few small towns with gas. And the hell of it is—*you can't stop him!* There is no available means at the disposal of the American Government to stop him! Even if you knew just where he's coming across, you couldn't stop him—and you haven't the faintest idea. We are having the man shadowed at every step; I've come over here to do the best I can for you. I have on deck a faster, more powerful plane than any other in existence except the Uralian's. I want Government orders to give me every possible assistance in the way of refueling or repairs at any of the air-fields along the Mexican border. If you wont give me that much, I'll have to use this yacht for a base—which means longer flights against an enemy with plenty of reserve fuel and a much nearer base."

THE argument lasted until three in the morning. Until after midnight three out of the five refused to accept the possibility of any such occurrence as the Earl described—talked about an adequate barrage of anti-aircraft guns, until he mentioned the length of the Mexican border—in miles—fifty-two guns to the mile. Finally, however, they agreed to give him the facilities he asked, provided he paid for whatever he requisitioned.

As Trevor had daily reports of the Uralian's movements, he knew exactly when the man boarded a Norwegian cargo-boat which apparently had been waiting for him at Panama—and had a final report from Guaymas, on the Gulf of California. That night, he went up from a field two hundred miles east of the Gulf and scouted toward it.

In the morning he and Lammerford were up again, around the head of the Gulf—and presently spotted a plane against the sun, apparently coming from some cove along Lower California. The stranger's speed might have been a shade better, but Trevor doubted it. The other pilot, however, was so confident upon this point that he paid no attention to them—flying east until he crossed the border near three small towns.

Trevor knew that his only chance against Dimitrivitch had been to build as fast a plane if possible, and then maneuver until he could drop high-explosive on him—being a far more experienced aviator. Twice, as they approached the first town, Earl Lammerford was almost sure of his shot—but each time there were people on the ground who would have been killed if his bomb had missed the quarry. They could see a spray under high pressure dropping from the Uralian plane as they passed over the town—and, still unhit, this was repeated over the second. But the fourth high-explosive bomb missed him so narrowly that Dimitrivitch suddenly banked and headed back for his ship. To his amazement and growing apprehension, he couldn't get out from under that relentless ship, driven by a pilot who had forgotten more than he knew about aviation. As they passed over the first stretch of the Gulf, two of the bombs struck him. What dropped into the water was merely fragments.

Concerning the deaths of more than four hundred people in the two little towns, the newspapers and press-syndicates evidently acted upon a quiet hint from some one in authority. Their version was that a subterranean upheaval had opened slight fissures in the earth's crust—(the seismographs having recorded a minor earthquake somewhere)—which released sulphur-fumes that, presumably, had caused the deaths.

It seemed inadvisable to admit that the "isolation" of the United States was not complete.

Aflame with action, this splendid novel of the West will hold you fascinated to the last page—for it's the best story yet written by the man who produced "A Thunderin' Thriller," "The Return of Stiletto Sofie," and other stories that have won high praise.

A MAN'S

By LEMUEL

ABOVE the frightened bleating of the calf, a husky slick-ear who had just been honored with the brand and ear-mark of the Circle-Star ranch, Curly Williams, top hand, heard sudden shouts of warning. Still on his knees by the calf's neck, he looked around. Through the cloud of dust that hung over the corral, he saw, scarcely a dozen feet away, something over a half-ton of beef and hoofs and sharp horns bearing down upon him like the wind.

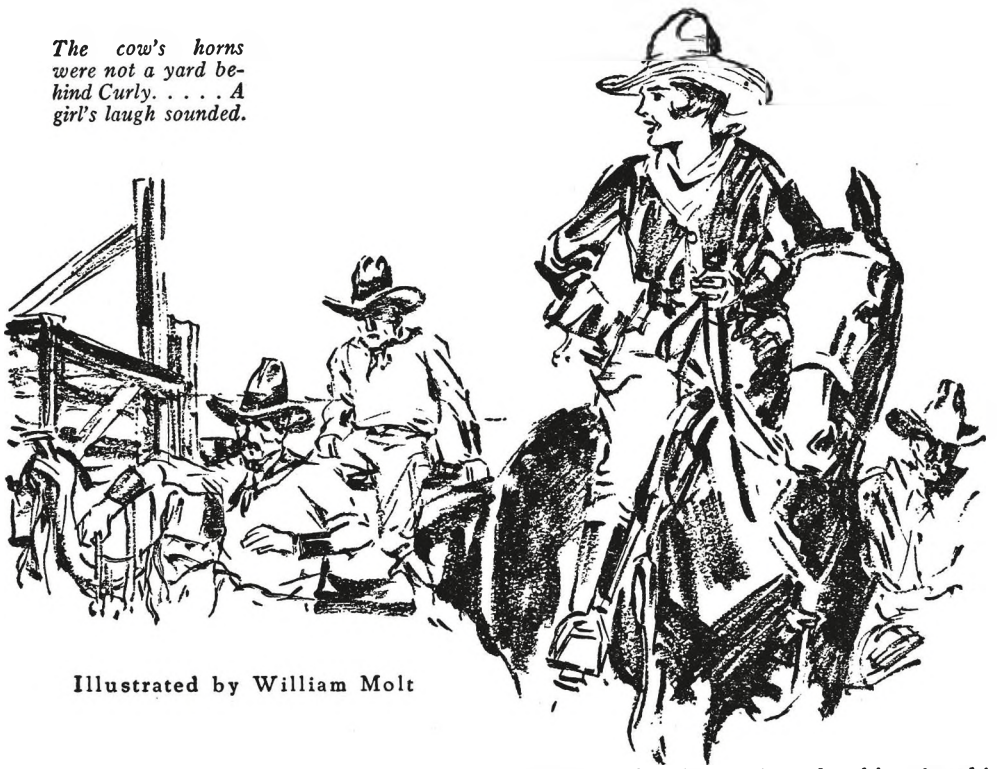
Curly was only twenty-four; but he had lived too long on the open range to underestimate his danger. He had often dodged the blind, stupid charge of a conceited male; but this long-horned lady, bent on saving her offspring, was coming at the cowpuncher with her blazing eyes wide open.

There was only one thing to do—or rather, two things that had to be done at once. Curly did them. The horn-points were not three feet away when Curly dashed a handful of dust into the cow's eyes, and hurled himself over backward. When he landed on his feet, his long legs were reaching out for the fence.

The corral fence was some forty feet away. Curly did not pause to wonder how the old cow had broken away from the other punchers; neither did he look back. Previous experiences, and the shouts of the punchers atop the corral fence, apprised him of what was going on. The cow had plowed to a stiff-legged halt and pivoted on her front feet. Shaking her head furiously, she spotted her quarry, and was after him again.

The range cow's long, sharp horns, one thrust of which could kill a man, were not

The cow's horns were not a yard behind Curly. . . . . A girl's laugh sounded.



Illustrated by William Molt

A MAN

DE BRA

a yard behind Curly's southern exposure when he made a flying leap for the fence and flung himself across the top rail.

There was an instant of silence; then, above the whoops of the men, sounded a girl's laugh. It was a laugh that gave the big puncher a queer feeling around his heart, a laugh full of music, vibrant with youth and the freedom of the rangeland.

Curly draped his long legs over the rail, rested his right elbow on his knee, and poked the stubby fingers of his other hand through his curly, blond hair. Little knots of muscle stood out on his lean jaws as he turned sharp gray eyes to the girl—a strikingly pretty girl who sat her black mare with the grace and ease of one born to the saddle.

Bessie Evans was at home in the saddle. Her garb would have looked queer in Central Park, but it was just the thing for this rough Arizona country. Her dark blue wool waist, open at the neck, was light but warm; her chaps, studded with conchas, showed the marks of more than one wild dash through chaparral. A light sombrero shielded her eyes from the sun. Gauntlet gloves protected her hands and wrists. Hung loosely about her neck, knotted at the back, was a bandana; while from her waist depended a belt and holstered pistol that was obviously not a toy.

" 'Pears like you enjoyed the exhibition," drawled Curly. "Howsomever, I aint answerin' no encores. Savvy?"

Suddenly the girl checked her laugh. The black danced restlessly, and swung nearer the corral fence. Bessie Evans laid a gloved hand on the big puncher's arm and looked up at him.

Ah, but she was pretty, thought Curly. Eyes the misty blue of the lupine, lips as red as the roses that grew by the ranch-house door, and face as smooth and creamy as the yucca blossom! Curly began groping for his tobacco-sack.

"Oh, Curly!" the girl laughed again. "You looked so funny! Your head and shoulders seemed to be trying so hard to keep up with your long bowlegs!"

"Is that so?" A smile came to Curly's lips, but he suppressed it instantly. "Well, I seem to remember that you've made previous *re*-marks about me bein' slow in the head."

"You aren't angry, are you?" Bessie's blue eyes were flashing a challenge.

"Oh, no! I'm highly complimented, ma'am, that you could laugh at me when you saw me facing death!"

"I didn't!" Bessie denied quickly. "I laughed at the way you looked when you were running away from it!"

CURLY looked away. No need to argue with this girl. She knew how near the big puncher had been to death, or serious injury; but she knew also that such things were all in a day's work. Because Bessie Evans met everything with a laugh was one of the reasons that every puncher in Tuscarora Valley loved her.

"I aint angry, Bessie, girl," said Curly. "I never get angry with a lady." He glanced over his shoulder at the range cow industriously licking the dust off her calf while keeping one eye on the men on the corral fence. "When I see a lady wants to fight, I allus—well, I try to be a—a diplomat."

The girl drew her hand away, sighing. "Yes, that's just the trouble with you, Mr. Curly Williams."

"What do you mean?" demanded Curly.

Bessie made an impatient gesture. "There's no use. You wouldn't understand. Well, I just came to tell you that Daddy wants to see you right after dinner. 'By!" she flung over her shoulder as the black whirled and dashed away.

A frown puckered Curly's brow. He watched the girl until she was lost among the string of punchers now riding toward the ranch-house; then, as a breath of icy air struck his cheek, his gaze wandered thoughtfully to the mountains far to the north. Mad Mountains, they had been named by some poetic pioneer; no doubt because of their glowering aspect. Just now they were still coldly beautiful with the winter's snow, for spring was late that year in Tuscarora Valley.

"They allus make me think o' Bessie," mused Curly. "Purty as a picture, an' looking like I could just reach out my hand an' touch them, but still too far away for me. I wonder—"

"What yuh moonin' 'bout now?" a booming voice broke into Curly's thoughts. It was Nick Peters, the foreman, a huge, black-haired man with twinkling, black eyes. As always, a wheatstraw cigarette drooped from beneath his ragged mustache. Rain or shine, on the wildest rides, always a cigarette hung there, as much a part of Nick as his bandana or spurs.

Curly made no reply until he had jumped down off the fence, tightened the cinches on his peg-pony, and was riding leg to leg with the foreman toward the ranch-house. Then Curly Williams spoke with a seriousness that was most unusual for him.

"Nick, you an' me have been closter'n brothers, an' I'm goin' to speak right out in meetin' an' ask you square. You're a married man, so, of course, you know all about women."

Big Nick turned his head the other way, and said nothing. Curly went on.

"I reckon I don't need to tell you how I feel about Bessie. You know, an' every bean-eatin' puncher in Tuscarora Valley knows I'm plumb crazy 'bout her. What I want you to tell me is—how can I make Bessie feel toward me like I do toward her?"

"So that's it!" Big Nick turned his shaggy head and smiled at Curly. "Well, son, that's easy! Women—God bless 'em—is just like bronc's. Either you're goin' to boss 'em, or they're goin' to boss you. There aint no halfway house."

THE horses were walking. Curly got out tobacco-sack and papers, and rolled one. He lighted it, smoked half a cigarette in silence.

"Grantin' that you're right," said Curly at length, "I don't just see how I'm goin' to make use o' your advice. Everybody knows that everybody on this ranch, includin' the old man, dances to Bessie's music. She leads us around by our noses just like we was all spring colts in hackamores. Now if I try to throw my string on her—"

"Wait a minute, son!" Big Nick interrupted. "I see you don't get the hull drift o' my talk. Now I got an idee how you can work this thing out so's you will *see* it work. You heard 'bout that New Yorker that's comin' here with his sister to look over the ranch with the idee o' buyin' it?"

"I sure did! An' I took a violent dislike to that man quick as I heard his name. Think of a man wearing the brand o' *Porter Eldridge Hathaway!*"

"Yes," said Big Nick, giving Curly a significant look in the eye. "It's almost as bad as *Archibald MacKinney Williams.*"

"Go on!" said Archibald MacKinney Williams testily. "You was sayin'—"

"I was about to say that when they come, the thing for you to do is to shine up to the sister, name of Esther. Make Bessie jealous—mad jealous. Savvy? If you do it right, show Bessie that you're your own boss, and can be hers if you want to, you'll have Bessie comin' to your whistle in less'n a week."

"Ah!" Curly flung his cigarette away and looked around eagerly. "Now that sounds like real business; but how is a common, bacon-chewin' cowpuncher like me goin' to get a chanct to shine up to a lady from New York?"

"That's easy!" chuckled Big Nick. "This mornin' the old man told me he wanted some one to entertain the lady while her brother looks over the ranch, an' he ast me who I could spare that was fitted by nature for the tryin' task o'—"

Curly yanked his pony to a halt. He faced the foreman.

"Nick! You damn' old tick-eaten maverick! You didn't name *me,* did you?"

"I shore did! An' why not? It gives you just the chanct you want."

"But, Nick, for God's sake, think o' me tryin' to talk to a lady from New York! Why, I don't know nuthin'—"

"The hell you don't! You just buck up! Because Miss Esther Hathaway was born in New York an' forks horse-cars 'stead o' cow-ponies is no reason why Mr. Archibald MacKinney Williams, of Arizona, should turn tail an' run. Besides, out here, this is *your country*—an' she wont know nuthin'. Moreover, remember, you're doin' it just to make Bessie come to time—which wont take long."

They rode on, Curly silent and thoughtful. Presently he looked up. They were nearing the ranch-house.

"By thunder, Nick, I'll do it!" Curly said with sudden vehemence. "I'll do it!"

"Atta boy!" chuckled Big Nick.

CHAPTER II

WINTER had lingered so long that Circle-Star ranch had not yet moved into summer quarters. The punchers still ate in the big room just off the main kitchen. In this room were a large fireplace, a long dining table that on winter evenings resounded to the thump of excited card-players; and, on the wall, a small row of books, a gun rack and trophies of hunting trips in the cañons of Mad Mountains. "The old man," as all the punchers called Bert Evans, believed in giving his employees all the reasonable comforts of life, which may have accounted for the fact that he never had to hunt for men.

One thing after another delayed Big Nick so that by the time he got to the "feed-stall" all the other punchers had "got it" and left. Nick was sitting at the table, waiting impatiently, when he saw the kitchen door move slowly inward. A head showed in the aperture—first a stiff, barbaric pompadour of hair, then a dark saffron face set with slant bronze eyes, eyes that held always a tragic, terrified look.

"Come on, Chun!" Big Nick sang out reassuringly. "It's just me. *They wont come today!*"

The head vanished. A moment later the white-aproned Chinese cook appeared bearing a platter of bacon, and others filled with beans, spuds, and stewed tomatoes.

"Them folks comin' today are white folks, Chun," Big Nick spoke up. "You needn't be afraid of them."

Chun looked up, his eyes gleaming.

"You talkee old Chun stlaight?"

"Sure, I talkee you straight! Get my coffee, then get out o' here. You make me nervous as a spring colt in a cactus patch."

"Sometime they come," said Chun, shaking his head hopelessly. "Sometime they come—shuah. And then—" He raised his hand, drew a long-nailed forefinger across his wrinkled throat in a violent and savage gesture.

Big Nick frowned impatiently.

"You poor old devil! Damned if I don't think you're half nutty! Who is it that—"

A STEP sounded outside on the porch. Chun drew up, a startled breath hissing between his drawn lips. Snatching the long bread-knife off the table, he began backing toward the kitchen door. As he disappeared in the kitchen, the porch door opened—and Bessie Evans entered.

There was an odd, wistful look in her blue eyes as she sat down opposite the big foreman.

"Nick," began Bessie cautiously, "you've been my friend ever since I toddled around here as a baby. Because I know you're

my friend I'm going to ask you a very personal question. I know you'll keep this to yourself, and I know you'll give me a straight answer."

"I shore will, Bessie," declared Big Nick. "Just like yore own daddy. But if it's about crazy old Chun, I'll tell you right off that I don't know any more about what's eatin' him than you do."

"It isn't about Chun," said Bessie quietly. She was silent a moment, her fingers picking nervously at a crumb on the table. "I—I haven't any womenfolks to talk with, Nick, so I'm—I'm going to talk to you. I want you to tell me how I can make Curly feel toward me like I do toward him."

BIG NICK ducked his head over his plate. Four heaping knifefuls of spuds were slowly and carefully stowed away before he ventured to look up.

Bessie met his look squarely. Although a touch of crimson colored her cheeks, the look in her eyes told unmistakably that she was going through with this at any cost.

"That's easy," the foreman said. "You ast me straight, an' it's up to me to give you a straight answer; but if I do, I'm scairt you'll get hoppin' mad an' tell me I'm a dodderin' old fool an'—"

"No, I wont, Nick! I'm no baby any more. And I have a little pride. Besides,"—she lifted her chin saucily,—"I'm merely curious to know what you'll say. I don't really *care* whether Curly Williams likes me or not. I don't care *the least bit.* You know that, don't you?"

"Oh, sure," mumbled Big Nick, again busy with his knife; "but why do you think he don't fancy you?"

"Why, anybody can see that by the way he shies off all the time. Nothing I ever say or do gets under *his* hide. Just a moment ago as he came out of Daddy's office, I snubbed him cold—and he laughed! When I pretend to be angry, even when I *am* angry, he just grins and talks sweet. Bah! He rides too slow a gait to care!"

"Mebbe you're right," admitted Big Nick, spearing another slab of bacon. "An' if you'll promise you wont get mad at me, I'll tell you just why Curly is so offish an' careless-like. Is that a bargain?"

"I promise," said Bessie eagerly.

"All right. Now listen: The trouble with Curly is that *he's too plumb sure of you!*"

Bessie gasped.

"You mean—you mean he thinks that I'm too easy?"

"That's about it, although that isn't exactly what I mean, either. You see, Bessie, men are strange critters. In a way, they're just like bronc's. Now you can take a bronc' an' put everything in the world he wants right down in front o' him an' then just let him look up an' see something else *he thinks he wants but can't have,* an' the dad-blamed fool will bust his rope an' kick out the end o' the stable an' jump the fence to get it."

"I've seen bronc's like that," admitted Bessie.

"Sure you have! But when the fool bronc' gets it, an' sees that he can have it, he sort o' sniffs scornful-like, an' raises his fool haid, an' looks around for something else he thinks he wants but can't have. That's bronc's, Bessie—an' that's men! I'm tellin' you!"

"Maybe you're right—about the men," said Bessie after a long silence. "But I don't see what I can do more than I have done to make Curly realize that—that I'm not falling out of the saddle for *him.*"

Big Nick put four teaspoonfuls of sugar in his coffee and stirred it thoughtfully. He picked up his knife again. He was about to shove the blade beneath a piece of bacon when, suddenly, he looked up. Slowly, he raised the knife, pointed it at the girl. Six times he waved the blade up and down in a deliberate and emphatic gesture before he found his speech.

"Bessie, that's easy," he said quietly. "I've got just the idee how you can make that conceited top hand come to time. You know that a New Yorker, name o' Porter Eldridge Hathaway, an' his sister Esther, are comin' this afternoon to spend a month lookin' over the ranch? Well, you just shine up to that city feller an' make Curly jealous—mad jealous!"

"Nick! I—I can't do that!"

"You darned whistlin' you can! All you got to do is to look at him an' smile an' if he's a human bein'—which same he might be spite o' comin' from New York—he's a goner, sure. Then you play him ag'in Curly, an' in less'n a week you'll have Curly eatin' out o' your hand. Savvy?"

Bessie Evans leaned back in her chair, her eyes shining.

"It—it would be heaps of fun! But, Nick, I—I don't even know how to talk to a city man!"

"The hell—er—yes, you do! Didn't you go to school down in Phoenix for two hull months afore your ma died? Aint you read every one o' them five books up there on that shelf? Besides,"—Big Nick's eyes twinkled reminiscently,—"this is your

In midair the bronco twisted almost half around.

country, and here that New Yorker wont know nuthin'. Moreover, remember you're doin' it just to make Curly come to time."

Bessie's open hand struck the table.

"Nick, I'll do it! Just give me half a chance to be nice to Mr. Hathaway and I'll make that conceited Curly Williams so mad jealous it'll take the curl out of his hair!"

"Atta boy!" chuckled Big Nick.

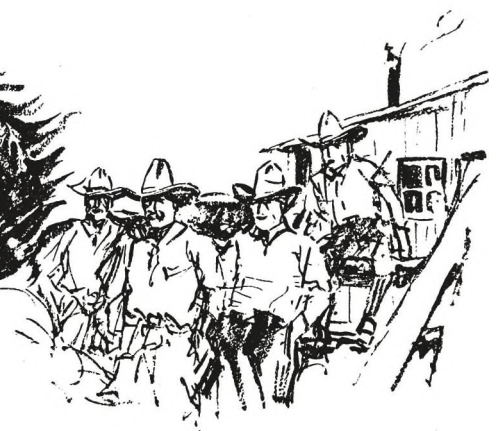
BESSIE arose. With a laugh, she turned away, but halted as the door opened. A man stepped in. It was a man of around fifty, with strangely white hair and tired eyes. He stood for a moment looking first at the girl, then at the foreman.

"What's up now?" demanded Bert Evans in his gruff but kindly voice. "When you two old cronies get your heads in the same feed-bag it means trouble for some one, sure."

"Not unless they deserve it, Daddy!" cried the girl. She patted him on the arm as she skipped by him and out of the room.

Bert Evans saw the door close behind his daughter; then he took the chair she had vacated.

"I been looking for you, Nick," he said quietly. "I want to talk with you—about



her. I guess you can understand how I feel—since you got three youngsters of your own."

Big Nick nodded silently.

"I want Bessie to know something better'n ranch life," went on Evans. "This is a man's country—it's my country—I like it—the hills, the deserts, the heat, the cold, the dry-spells, the storms, an' every damned thing about it just suits me; but it's a hell of a place for a woman. It's too lonesome, an' there's none o' the fine things o' life that mean so much to a woman. Understand?"

"I never thought about it before," admitted Big Nick, thoughtfully; "but yo're sure right. Still, Bessie don't seem to mind."

"That's because she's never known any other life to speak of. I've been thinkin' a lot about that lately, Nick; an' what I'm goin' to tell you now is in confidence between you an' me. Now you listen close:

"This man comin' out here from New York is the son of an old friend o' mine. His mother an' me once thought a lot o' each other; but she had ambitions, for which I never blamed her, of course. So she went to New York. I was to save

up a thousand dollars an' follow her. Then, if we still loved each other, we'd marry. That was the arrangement, an' talkin' over our plans fired me with ambition so that I went to work to save that thousand as soon as I could.

"Well, I made it; but on the very day that I was to take the train for New York I got a letter from her telling me that she had found her ideal—an' married him. That was all.

"I took my thousand dollars an' came West. Here I made money, married, an' have been happy. If I hadn't got that letter from New York the other day I never would have dug up old memories.

"That letter was from the girl who did not wait for me. She was too proud to write much, but I could read between the lines. She asked only one favor—that I invite her son and daughter out here for a visit. She wanted me to know them, and she wanted them to know me an' Bessie.

"I couldn't refuse that request—an' it started me thinkin'. So, Nick, I've given everyone the impression that young Hathaway is coming to look over the ranch with the idea o' buying it. The truth is that I'm bringing him here partly because his mother asked it, but mostly because I want him an' Bessie to meet.

"Now, I'm not goin' to urge them, understand; but I want them two young folks to see a lot o' each other. That's why I'm tellin' you. You an' Bessie drive over this afternoon an' meet the stage. That'll give them a start. Then, while they're here, you see to it that Bessie an' young Hathaway have every chanct in the world to—to—oh, well, they're both young an' this is springtime in Arizony—so I aint worryin'. Understand?"

Ten minutes later Big Nick was hitching the mustangs to the buckboard.

"Hold still, you danged old buzzard-baits! As I was *re*-markin', you never can tell how deep a bog hole is until you get stuck in it; but it sure looks to me like that little kid with the arrows is goin' to have one hell of a time on this ranch for a while!"

CHAPTER III

IT was forty miles from the Circle-Star to the nearest railroad station, but the stage that ran between the station and Calvert City cut across one corner of the Evans holdings, passing within seven miles of the ranch-house. Here Big Nick and Bessie, with the mustangs and the buckboard, went that afternoon to meet the visitors from far-off New York.

"City folks is queer people," Big Nick remarked to Bessie when they were waiting for the stage. "Of course, they aint entirely to blame. Get 'em out where things is open an' the wind don't smell o' dirty streets an' coal smoke an' in time they become human bein's same as other folks."

"I wonder what Miss Hathaway will be wearing," said Bessie, glancing down at her fringed khaki skirt and tan boots deprecatingly.

"A lot o' frills an' dewdads, you can be sure," replied Nick, making a wry face. "You know, I don't mind the men so much as I do city women. They're turrible fussy. Miss Hathaway will want a bath *every mornin'!* She'll want *her breakfast in bed!* An' what's worst of all, a man wont dare to even mention smokin' or drinkin' in her presence. The strongest she'll drink is tea; and she'll want that *in the afternoon!*"

"She'll be company, anyway," sighed Bessie; "and I guess if she can put up with me I can put up with her—for a while, at least. I—I wonder what Mr. Hathaway looks like?"

"I never even seen his picture but I can tell you that," replied Big Nick. He lighted a freshly rolled cigarette, then set his heel on the burning match. "They're all alike, these city fellers. He's got a pale face an' thin hair. His legs will be straight, but they'll be skinnier than mine; an' he'll say that bacon an' beans makes his stomach sick. His hands, Bessie, will be softer an' whiter than your'n. Why, do you know," Big Nick went on impressively, "I actually heard oncet that in New York they's places where men go an' let women wash their hands an' cut their nails *an' shine 'em!* I'd believe most anything of 'em, but I just can't believe that. Do you, Bessie?"

Bessie turned her head to hide her smile, and a cloud of dust down the road caught her eye.

"The stage is coming!" she cried, eagerly. "Don't say anything more!"

A moment later, as Big Nick stepped up and opened the stage door, a man in crinkly new khaki, shiny leather puttees, and a broad-brimmed hat, sprang to the ground. He was almost as tall and broad-

shouldered as the big foreman, although he did not appear to be over twenty-five. Bessie caught just a glimpse of his eager, boyish smile, his flashing brown eyes, then he turned to help a young lady alight. Bessie Evans, who never waited for anyone to help her get down off a stage, or up on a horse, instantly concluded that this pretty, brown-eyed girl must be something of an invalid.

There were no other passengers. The driver handed Big Nick a package of mail, then he started unloading the baggage. Big Nick was gazing uncertainly at the two strangers.

"I—I reckon that you're Mr. Hathaway," he spoke finally, extending his hand.

"That's me!" smiled Porter Eldridge Hathaway, shaking the foreman's hand. He glanced at Bessie, and swept off his hat—a courtly gesture, Bessie thought. "And you are Miss Evans, of course! I am very glad to meet you. This is my sister, Miss Esther Hathaway."

Bessie felt her face coloring furiously, and it made her angry at herself. She resented Miss Hathaway's swift look of appraisal, and the way Porter Eldridge Hathaway continued to look at her curiously. She bowed stiffly as she shook hands with Miss Hathaway.

"Oh, what a pretty girl!" exclaimed Esther Eldridge Hathaway. "Miss Evans, I'm so glad to make your acquaintance! And this gentleman—" She turned to Big Nick.

"I aint no gentleman, ma'am," mumbled Big Nick, shifting his feet awkwardly. "I'm just the foreman. Folks call me Big Nick."

"That's what I'll call you!" Miss Hathaway declared, smiling. She put out her hand, which Big Nick took in his huge paw, hesitantly. He dropped it almost instantly, and turned away to help with the baggage. The driver, Charley Watkins, led him to the other side of the stage.

"Them three suitcases—young trunks I calls 'em—and the two drums is all I could take this trip," Watkins said in an undertone. "Three heavy trunks still down at the station. Some folks, eh? Musicians, are they?"

Big Nick peeked around the end of the stage at two huge drum-shaped affairs encased in shiny black leather. "I reckon so," he answered.

"That Chink still with you?" went on Watkins quietly.

Big Nick looked around. "Sure, Chun is still on the job. Why?"

THE driver spat thoughtfully. "There's two Chinks over at Canon City from San Francisco. How they got there, I don't know. I didn't haul 'em. One of 'em is an edjicated cuss with spectacles. Both of 'em look mighty cussed to me. Reason I'm tellin' you is that these Chinks purtend to be takin' a census of the Chinks livin' in Arizony; but Hank Reamers, the postmaster, told me he'd bet a year's pay they was looking for one certain Chink. Maybe they are. Mebbe that census business is all a blind. An' mebbe old Chun aint so crazy, after all."

"Did anyone tell 'em about Chun?" demanded Big Nick quickly.

"Sure! A couple loose jaws told 'em they was a Chink on the Circle-Star, that his name was Chun, an' that he was supposed to be a little off, allus scairt o' some one comin' after him."

Big Nick frowned. Watkins got out his plug, eyed it a moment in silence, then bit off a huge chew.

"Oh, well," concluded Big Nick, shrugging his shoulders, "mebbe it don't mean nuthin'; an' if it does, I reckon Chun's safe enough where he is. Nobody can get within a mile o' the ranch without bein' seen. But I wonder what it's all about?"

"You never can tell 'bout Chinks," replied Watkins, shaking his head. "They're danged near as mys*teer*ious as—as women! Well, s'long!"

The stage rolled off down the dusty road. Big Nick turned to the visitors. "Well, pile in, folks!" he called out. "I can shove the suitcases under the seats after you're loaded; but I'm plumb worried to know where I'll put them drums."

"Drums?" echoed Miss Hathaway, laughing. "Oh, that's funny! Big Nick, didn't you ever see a lady's hat case before?"

Big Nick stopped short. He stroked his chin while he eyed the drum-shaped things. He could have put all his belongings in one of Miss Hathaway's hat cases! For the love of Mike, how many hats did she have? And what did she have in all those other "war bags?"

MEANWHILE, Bessie had stepped to one side, waiting. Accustomed to being perfectly cool in any situation, she was provoked to find herself so confused in the

presence of Mr. Hathaway and his sister. She had been quick to notice Miss Hathaway's dress, a rich gray material, perfectly tailored; and it made her conscious of her own rough garb. Just now she was wondering how she could avoid sitting in the back seat with this fine-looking young man with the easy manners of a prince. He would expect that, of course. There wasn't a man in Tuscarora Valley who wouldn't fight for the privilege. And Bessie didn't want him to sit with her; neither did she want to sit with Miss Hathaway. She wanted to be with Big Nick whom she understood and with whom she felt at home.

Hathaway took his sister's arm. "Esther, you sit back here with Miss Evans. You two are about the same age and this is a good chance to get acquainted. Hang on, now!" Smiling, he turned to Bessie. "All right, Miss Evans!"

But Miss Bessie Evans ignored the outstretched hand. She set one foot on the iron step and sprang up into the seat.

Hathaway pursed his lips and looked up at her, surprised and a bit taken back. Then, with a laugh, he turned away to show Big Nick how to stow the "drums." Bessie watched him, not knowing whether to be angry or pleased. Why, he hadn't even thought of sitting with her! Or was it that he was more thoughtful of the pleasure of others?

A hand touched her knee and she looked around.

"Don't you just love it here!" exclaimed Esther Hathaway, with an all-embracing sweep of her arm. "So big—so clean-looking!"

"Yes—I like it," Bessie admitted; "but, of course I—I've never known anything else."

"What! You've lived here always? But, of course, you have neighbors—nice girls, like you?"

Bessie colored at the compliment. There was a frankness, a sincerity, about Miss Hathaway that was charmingly disconcerting to the range girl.

"We have neighbors—yes," she replied hesitantly. "There's Millie Thompson, on the Flying Crescent ranch. She—"

"The Flying Crescent! What a romantic name for a ranch! Is that ranch far away?"

"Oh, no. It's only forty-two miles to Millie's house. We—"

"Forty-two miles!"

"Yes ma'am. Millie and I visit often. Sometimes three or four times a year. Then there's Hazel Dexter on the Bar-X ranch. That's sixty-five miles. I saw Hazel twice last year."

ESTHER Hathaway looked into Bessie's blue eyes, then her gaze wandered out over the vast, unbroken sea of semi-desert. Presently she removed her hat and with a graceful toss of her pretty head, shook out her bobbed hair.

Impulsively, Esther seized Bessie's hand. "I like you," she said with quiet sincerity. "You and I are going to be friends. And I just love your West. May we, some morning, walk over to those big, scowling mountains?"

Bessie drew her gaze away from the marvelously white and pink hand of Miss Hathaway and looked up at her. No, she really meant it. The brown eyes were entirely serious.

"I'll take you there sometime, Miss Hathaway," Bessie promised; "but, really, we couldn't walk. It's all of thirty miles to Mad Mountains."

"What! And they appear so close! What a land! The bigness of it!"

"This is the land for me!" sang out Porter Eldridge Hathaway. As he sprang into the front seat, Bessie noticed that *he* didn't need any help! "It's a big land, all right, sis," he rattled on. "The real wild and woolly West where—*whup!*"

The mustangs had started. Hathaway sat down with a snap that almost threw him over backward into Bessie's arms. He postponed any further efforts at conversation.

Almost a mile had passed before Big Nick got his team quieted down to a sensible gait. Hathaway looked around cautiously. Yes, the ladies were still there!

"Si-sis," he began, as the buckboard bounced over the rocky road, "I'd like to paraphrase my friend Arthur Chapman and tell the world that—*whup!*—that we now seem to be out where—*whup!*—*'out where the worst begins!'*"

Again Big Nick shook the reins and the mustangs leaped forward, almost unseating Hathaway. For the next mile no one spoke. Presently the mustangs slowed down to drop into a dry wash.

"Port," said Miss Hathaway, "you make me nervous. Half the time you're up in the air flapping your wings like a lost loon. I never know whether you're going to land

back on the seat or fall overside. If Miss Evans and Big Nick do not object, let's change places."

Hathaway did not wait for objections. He clambered back over the seat and helped Miss Hathaway move to the seat by the driver. As he sat down by Bessie, he turned to her with a smile.

"A thoughtful sister, eh?" He closed his left eye slowly.

"Oh!" cried Esther. "He—he threw you!"

Bessie bit her lips. There was something about Hathaway that removed all offense from that impudent wink.

"I think," she said slowly, her chin up, "that you should have stayed where you were. Now that your sister can't see you, there's no one worrying about you falling out."

Hathaway chuckled at the thrust. He looked around and as his gaze lingered on the girl the mischief in his eyes changed slowly to a look of open admiration.

"That's too bad, Miss Evans," Hathaway said soberly; "for something tells me that—that I'm going to fall. I—I feel myself slipping—right now."

THE girl of the range did not catch the double meaning in Hathaway's words. She looked around quickly. They were bumping down the rocky bank of another wash. As the two-seater lurched perilously, Bessie seized the man by the arm and held him close to her side until they had mounted the opposite bank and were on level ground.

"Wa-wait, Miss Evans!" begged Hathaway as Bessie let go of his arm. "Do you think it's really safe—now?"

Bessie saw the mischief in his brown eyes and turned away, blushing.

"No, it's *not* safe," she replied evenly; "that's why I let go!"

"Ouch!" exclaimed Hathaway, chuckling. "Lady, just for that I wont fall. That is, I wont permit myself to become dislodged from your charming presence. No, ma'am! Not even if the bumps become as hard as —as a woman's heart."

Again Bessie Evans turned and looked thoughtfully at the man, yet she hardly saw him for thinking of him. Already he had done more "soft-talking" than Curly ever did in six months. It seemed to be so easy for this city man. Bessie did not know whether she was provoked, or if she liked him for it.

There was one thing, however, that greatly surprised her; and she wondered about that. She had not been conscious of it at first; but now it was coming to her that when she gripped Hathaway's arm her fingers closed on something that felt as big and solid as a table-leg! Big Nick's idea of this New Yorker had been wrong on every point!

"Look at that!" cried Miss Hathaway suddenly, pointing to something growing by the roadside. "What on earth is it? It looks like a lot of thorny sticks stuck in the ground!"

"That," replied Big Nick, "is a Devil's Chair."

"Devil's Chair! What a queer name!"

"Their correct name is *ocatillo,*" spoke up Hathaway. "Down around Yuma, where you see many more than you will here, some call them 'candle cactus.' That name was given them by Father Junipero Serra, the founder of the California missions." Hathaway paused to glance at the snow-clad mountains to the north. "In a few weeks the ocatillo will be in bloom and then you'll see a sight. Look down a field sprinkled with the ocatillo in bloom and you'll think the valley is afire."

Bessie Evans turned wide blue eyes to the city man. Why, he knew more about that homely Devil's Chair than she did,

And Big Nick had said that New Yorkers knew nothing—outside of New York!

"Look over there, sis!" Hathaway called out. "That group of grayish trees that look as if their branches had been crushed to the ground then tried to grow straight again! That's the famous mesquite, the tree the desert travelers always go to for shade. The mesquite will be leafing out before long. In fact, you'll see a marvelous transformation in this desert when spring breaks. I've never seen it here, but I've had the good fortune to see the deserts in Mexico, North Africa, and several other parts of the world. It's unbelievable!"

"It's wonderful here just as it is," declared Miss Hathaway. "It's so big, so roomy."

"I'll say it's roomy!" laughed Hathaway. "There are more people living on one floor in our apartment house in New York than live in the three counties that form Tuscarora Valley. This is a big land, my dear, the land of big men and—and—beautiful women."

BESSIE felt his gaze on her face but she did not look around. She was surprised that she could not feel annoyed at his flippant compliment. He could change so swiftly from a serious and sensible subject to nonsense that she found herself wishing that she could talk like that. The men she knew were so silent and reserved. She knew it was their lonely life that made them that way and she felt that she understood them; but in spite of that she discovered that her woman's heart was hungry for light chatter and harmless banter. Deep within her she felt strange stirrings.

So she listened to him, falling more and more under the spell of his voice. He knew many things, many places, many people; and he had a way of telling about them that held no savor of boasting but sprang, instead, from a desire to please others, to entertain. Occasionally he turned to Bessie with a question; and she was astonished and delighted to find how easily she responded, and that he seemed interested and pleased with everything she said.

So—they came suddenly around a mesquite-covered bench and were at the Circle-Star. As Big Nick sawed on the reins to bring the mustangs to a halt by the ranch-house door, a strange creature emerged from the door and sauntered toward them.

It was a man with a most gorgeous and barbarically colored shirt, wool chaps, shining spurs, and a hat that made him look seven feet tall, notwithstanding his ridiculously bowed legs. Dangling from his loose belt, one on each side, were two huge and very dangerous-looking .45's.

A tinge of color swept into Bessie's cheeks. Why had she so completely forgotten Curly?

Big Nick pressed close to her as the four climbed to the ground. "Play yore hand like they was all aces!" he whispered.

Bessie suddenly lost all sense of confusion. She would play the game! In her excitement she did not think to introduce Miss Hathaway first. Instead, she took Mr. Hathaway by the arm and with sprightly, dancing step, drew up in front of Curly.

"Curly, this is Mr. Porter Eldridge Hathaway, of New York City. He has been everywhere and knows everything. He—he is a direct descendant of the first white family that settled in New York. Mr. Hathaway—Mr. Williams."

Hathaway stared, a puzzled, embarrassed expression on his face. Then, with a quick smile, he held out his hand.

Curly did not see the hand. He was staring at Bessie.

Then, slowly, Curly turned and looked the New Yorker in the eye.

"I'm glad to meetcha!" he rumbled, his gray eyes glinting like the sun on ice. "Allus glad to herd with my own kind. Yuh see, they call me Curly here; but my right brand is Archibald MacKinney Williams; an' I'm a direct descendant o' *the first white man hung in Arizony for murder!*"

There was an instant of silence; then Esther Eldridge Hathaway doubled over, clapped her hands, and burst out in peals of laughter.

But Bessie did not laugh. She sensed the clash of wills between these two men—and knew there was trouble ahead.

CHAPTER IV

ANYONE who has made a twenty-five-hundred-mile train journey, ending with a rough forty-mile stage ride, will understand why Porter Hathaway and his sister were willing to stay around the ranch-house for several days. Moreover, the north wind, blowing steadily off the snow peaks of Mad Mountains, made the blazing mesquite in the big fireplace unusually inviting and pleasant. By this fire,

Mr. Evans, Bessie and their two guests spent much of their time. Hathaway and his sister talked of the places they had been, of the things they had seen, of books and plays. Both showed a keen interest in Mr. Evans' cattle business, and Mr. Hathaway a surprising knowledge of the cattle industry in general. Evans found it easy to talk with Hathaway, but with Esther he was not at all at ease. It may have been that he saw in her the girl he once loved, and who had not waited for him. On Hathaway, however, he put the brand of his whole-hearted approval, much to Curly's very evident disgust.

What went on in Bessie's mind, not even her father could guess. Watching her, Hathaway detected a queer change in her attitude toward him. She spent a great deal of her time with Esther; in fact, the two girls quickly became fast friends. That was only natural; but Hathaway could not help noticing that Bessie never joined them at the fireplace until Esther arrived, and that she left when Esther left. On the afternoon of their arrival Bessie had shown a natural embarrassment before these two city-bred strangers; but she had also shown flashes of frank—and promising—comradeship. Now her cool reserve puzzled him. Accustomed to the smiles and flattery of women, Hathaway grew more and more puzzled by Bessie's utter indifference to him.

"Sis, I like that girl," he told Esther one day. The two were having a quiet chat in Miss Hathaway's room. "Can't keep my eyes off her."

Esther nodded. "She's sweet—and attractive. Give her about a month with a modiste, a manicure, hairdressers, beauty-parlors, and—"

"And she'd be utterly ruined!" Hathaway cut in. "I like her *as is!* In that little house-dress she wears mornings, she's—she's heavenly! Her complexion doesn't need any of your confounded dry-cleaning or steam-laundering or any of your drug-store paint and varnish. As for her hair, it's got a natural fragrance to it that —that makes me weak in the knees."

Esther said nothing to that, but she eyed her brother shrewdly.

"Queer, the dislike she's taken to me," he continued musingly, as he lighted a cigarette. "She was real cordial the first day; now she's so cool and offish that I wonder what I've said or done to offend her."

Esther, wise in the ways of women, and the stupidity of men, appeared to be only mildly interested.

"A smoke, sis? No? Well, that's a good girl! Save it for your wayward brother. As I was saying, I don't understand Bessie. For instance, I was to go riding this afternoon with that good-natured bear they call Big Nick. Just after lunch he came in and, right before me, asked Miss Evans to go in his place. Said he had to do something or other to get ready for the big spring round-up. Of course, Bessie was too polite to refuse her guest; but anyone could see that she wasn't pleased. I wonder if she's afraid of me."

"No," replied Esther, shaking her head slowly; "it's not *you* she's afraid of."

"Then who is it? That rough-neck Curly?"

"Whoever it is," Esther evaded, "I advise you to be very careful. You've made love to scores of women. You didn't mean it, and they knew you didn't mean it, but they liked it just the same. This girl is—different."

HATHAWAY leaned back in his chair, suddenly thoughtful. He had a wholesome respect for his sister's judgment.

"I doubt very much if Bessie has ever been in love," Esther went on. "She probably thinks she has. Most girls do, until they meet *the* man. Now if you should pretend to be in love with her, she would undoubtedly take you seriously. Not because it's you, understand; but because she's too simple-hearted and honest ever to suspect that otherwise honorable men think nothing of making love just for the fun of it. So I warn you. Trifle with her —and you invite tragedy."

Hathaway whistled softly.

"Heavens, sis! You're getting melodramatic. But seriously, if I'm not to talk love to that lovely wild creature, what on earth can I talk about that will interest her?"

"Don't be silly! You know very well that *you* could make the Congressional Record interesting to a woman. You also know very well that you could never love that little girl. She interests you for the moment because she is a novelty. But be careful. And now, run along. I must get into my riding-suit."

"O-ho! And pray tell, my dear sister, with whom are you going to trifle?"

Esther raised her dainty hand in a protesting gesture.

"Don't suspect me of having anything to do with the arrangement," she said. "I don't even understand it. It almost smacks of intrigue. While you and Miss Evans are riding south to Silver Spring, I am to ride north toward Mad Mountain Cañon with that wild, gray-eyed Adonis, Curly Williams."

Hathaway arose. He wagged a warning finger at his sister.

"Well, just you let *me* give *you* a little advice! I've seen bigger and wiser men than that gun-toting cowpuncher fall and break their hearts over you; but he's different. *Trifle with him, and you invite tragedy.*"

"Tune that out, brother!" exclaimed Esther, turning to glance out the window. "Here he comes now! He has the horses for you and Miss Evans. Oh, he's so uncouth! And just look at those bowlegs!"

Instantly, Hathaway was on the defensive.

"Lucky for you that I know you don't mean that like it sounds. You know blamed well that punching cattle is no parlor job; it's a man's work. And you know that lean-jawed, hard-eyed Curly is a man for all his bowlegs and stiff-hipped walk."

"I suppose so," said Esther, with an admiring glance at her brother's trim figure and tailored riding-suit. "One is so quick to criticize anything radically different from one's accustomed standards. Perhaps that is why you and Curly—"

"*Good-by!*" Hathaway cut in. He slammed the door behind him.

Surprised, Esther looked out the window again. So that was it! Hathaway had seen Bessie. For the first time since the two New Yorkers had arrived, Bessie wore her cowboy costume. Esther's sharp eyes took in every detail, the wool blouse, the chaps with their shining conchas, the trim little spurred boots, the sombrero, the bandana, the belt and pistol. Then, by a mental trick that only a woman knows, she dismissed all those details and saw only the completed picture—a very pretty girl in a becoming and picturesque cowboy costume.

"Stunning, absolutely stunning!" breathed Miss Esther Hathaway. "And poor me!" She turned away from the window and flung open the closet door. There was a riding habit from one of the finest shops in London; there was another she had had made in Paris; and still another bearing the label of a fashionable Fifth Avenue tailor. "Poor me!" she sighed again; "I haven't a thing to wear!"

HATHAWAY did not pause until he was within ten feet of Bessie and Curly; then he discovered that he had blundered into what seemed to be a quarrel.

"But you told me plain," Curly was saying emphatically; "you told me plain that he couldn't ride an' that I should saddle the quietest hoss I could find. This is it."

Hathaway glanced quickly at the two horses. One was a splendid black, head up, eyes snapping, slender feet nervous. Hathaway knew this was Bessie's saddle-pony. The other horse stood humped over its feet, its head drooping dejectedly, apparently the most dispirited and harmless animal one could imagine.

"Curly Williams!" cried Bessie angrily. "You know very well that this bronc' is almost an outlaw and that Mr. Hathaway couldn't possibly ride him. Why—" Bessie halted, suddenly aware of Hathaway's presence. She looked up at him, her cheeks reddening.

"Miss Evans," said Hathaway, stepping forward, "please don't make any trouble on my account. If this horse is the one Mr. Williams wishes me to ride, then this is the horse for me."

"But you—you don't understand!" Bessie objected. "You—"

"Of course," Curly broke in with his slow drawl, "if he's afraid, why—"

Curly Williams fell silent as Hathaway raised his hand.

"That settles it, Curly! Say no more! And Miss Evans, I understand perfectly. Don't you see those punchers stringing out between the corral and ranch-house? The boys want a little sport. I'm happy to oblige."

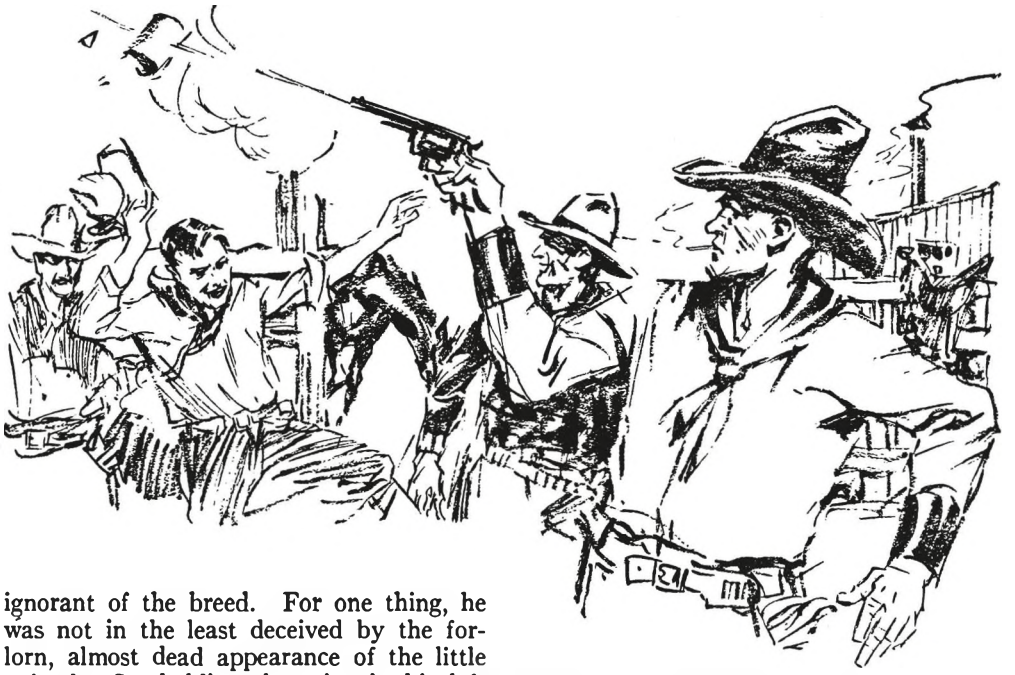
"But—but you may be killed!"

Hathaway laughed lightly.

"It pains me, Miss Evans, that you must witness my tragic and untimely demise; however,"—he lowered his voice so that none but Bessie could hear,—"don't you understand that even to favor you, I couldn't back down before these boys?"

A swift change came over Bessie's face, and as she looked up at Hathaway there was a light in her eyes that made his heart leap. He turned quickly and snatched the reins from Curly's hands.

Hathaway had never tackled a real pitching bronco, but he was not entirely



With one inconceivably swift movement, Curly went into action.

ignorant of the breed. For one thing, he was not in the least deceived by the forlorn, almost dead appearance of the little animal. So, holding the reins in his left hand, the left rein some shorter than the right, to prevent the bronco whirling away from him, he turned the near stirrup halfway around. Holding it there, he caught the saddle-horn. At the same instant his left foot caught the stirrup. Like a shot out of a gun the bronco sprang forward; and Hathaway, because he knew the trick, was literally thrown into the saddle.

As abruptly as it had started, the half-outlaw came to a stiff-legged halt, almost snapping the rider from the saddle. Then, in spite of Hathaway's shortened grip on the reins, down went the little beast's head, and up went his back. At the same time, all four feet left the ground. In midair, the bronco twisted almost half around.

Hathaway saw the ranch-house swing in a crazy circle; he saw the yelling, hat-waving cowpunchers bobbing up and down as the landscape heaved and rolled like a rough sea; then—the saddle dropped from beneath him.

Unfortunately, Hathaway's ascent was halted too soon. His right foot caught in the stirrup. It came free almost at once, but the sudden wrench swung the rider's body beneath the pitching horse.

Instantly the yelling ceased. The bronco, hating all men, had flung forward on his front feet, drawing his hind legs far up beneath his shaggy trunk. Hathaway, stunned by his fall, saw that he could not save himself from the downward, savage drive of those hoofs.

The last thing he remembered was Bessie's scream.

IT was Bessie's white, tense face he saw close above his when he opened his eyes. "You are hurt here," she was saying quietly as her fingers passed ever so lightly over the left side of Hathaway's head, "but it isn't serious. Are you hurt anywhere else?" She began lifting his arms, feeling the shoulders.

Recalling that scream, Hathaway marveled at the girl's calmness, at the efficient way she went about her examination. With her help, he sat up, wincing as a sharp pain stabbed the side of his head.

"I'm all right," he said. He got to his feet and looked around. A puncher was holding the bronco's reins; others were gathered around, silent. Curly Williams stood some distance behind them.

"I'm right sorry, Mr. Hathaway," said Curly. "I figured you didn't have the nerve to tackle that brute; and when you did, I thought the wust you'd get would be a hard fall."

Hathaway smiled. He could see plainly that this half-apology had cost Curly a tremendous effort.

"I did get a hard fall, but I have no hard feelings," he said. "I hope—" He broke off as Esther came running from the house.

"What is it?" Esther demanded. "Bessie, why did you scream?"

Bessie did not answer at once. She looked at Esther, then turned slowly to Curly, her eyes as cold and blue as the sky over Mad Mountains.

"This man,"—nodding at Curly,—"has just played a despicable trick on Mr. Hathaway. Most of our horses will pitch a little when first mounted. I shouldn't have minded if Curly had brought Mr. Hathaway an ordinary mean bronco; but he brought out a wicked beast that Curly himself is *afraid to ride!*"

There was a dead silence. Slowly, Esther turned to look at Curly Williams; then her gaze shifted to the bronco, again humped over its feet, its head drooping dispiritedly.

"Looks like the original of Trail's End," remarked Esther. "Are you really afraid to ride him, Mr. Curly Williams?"

Curly hitched up his belt.

"Ma'am, there aint nothin' on hoofs that *I'm* afraid to ride. It makes me plumb happy to show you-all just how I do it. Back away, you children! Make way for *a man and his hoss!*"

EVERYONE obeyed quickly enough. Curly took the reins in one hand. He did not touch the stirrup. About to lay hand on the saddle-horn, he changed his mind. He looked around at Bessie, at Hathaway, then back at Bessie.

"I don't see you worryin' none about *me* gettin' kilt," he drawled with significant emphasis.

"Why should I?" Bessie retorted. "It would serve you right!"

"Is *that* so? Well, I allus like to accommodate a lady. Also since you're allus so squeamy 'bout such things, I'll try to get it over pronto and not make a messy job of it. Billy!" He raised his voice. "You can have my silver spurs. Jim, you can have them Sunday chaps o' mine you allus wanted. The rest o' you boys can divide what's left. As for my *re*-mains, if this bronc' don't throw me clean off'm the ranch, you can plant me any place where I wont be in the way. Well, so long!"

With that, Curly, without touching stirrup, sprang into the saddle; and the outlaw bronco was off the ground.

Esther had seen exhibition riding at various rodeos; but never in her life had she witnessed anything so frightfully spectacular as what followed. Screaming with pain and rage as Curly dug cruel spurs into his side, the bronco leaped and whirled and pitched and twisted so swiftly that Esther could not follow the movements. And all the time, Curly was yelling like a madman and swinging his hat, while around them raged a small pandemonium as the cowboys danced and shouted and fired their pistols.

"Ride 'im, Curly! Do your stuff, ol'-timer! Whoop-e-e-e!"

Then, suddenly, Esther screamed. With all its mad plunging, the bronco had not been able to dislodge the swaying, yelling, hat-slapping wild-man on its back; so it tried another trick. With a savage bellow, the bronco rose on its hind legs, deliberately threw itself over backward.

"Change cars for Tucson!" shouted Curly as he leaped from the saddle just in the nick of time. The bronco crashed to the ground.

Swiftly, Curly jerked up hard on the reins, set his left foot on the saddle-horn and bore down with all his weight. The bronco made several frantic efforts to get up, then lay still, panting hoarsely, its eyes glaring wickedly.

"Folks, I ask you-all one last dyin' favor," Curly drawled, as with his free hand he flipped a cigarette-paper from his vest pocket. Squatting over the saddle, he laid the paper on his knee and drew out tobacco-sack. "This bein' my last day on earth, I reckon you wont object to me enjoyin' my smoke." He poured tobacco over the paper. Still using but the one hand—the other hand gripping the reins—he made a deft, rolling sweep of the thumb, and the finished cigarette was between his fingers. He flipped the cigarette into his mouth, drew out a stub of a match, struck it on his trousers, and had his smoke going.

"Thank you," drawled Curly. "And now—all aboard for the funeral!"

Curly stepped back and eased up on the reins. Instantly the maddened bronco was on its feet—but Curly was also in the saddle.

As the bronco whirled, Curly caught sight of Miss Hathaway. Her face glowing, her brown eyes wide, she was watching him as though entranced.

Here was an opportunity that Curly's boy heart could not let pass. The cigarette drooping nonchalantly from his smiling lips, Curly caught Esther's eye. As the pitching bronco shot high in the air, Curly swung off his hat and bowed grandly, like a conqueror bowing to his queen.

But alas! The bow was ill-timed. In midair, the bronco twisted sideways. Curly's graceful bow ended in a slow, but equally graceful, heels-over-head flop out of the saddle. With a grunt that was almost a groan, Curly landed on his southern exposure—at Miss Hathaway's feet.

"Oh! Oh! *O-oh!*" Esther cried in shrill crescendo. "He—he threw you!"

Curly struggled to his feet. He cast a reproachful look at the bronco.

"Beggin' yore pardon, ma'am," Curly drawled; "he did *not* throw me. I was

"Looks like he crawled in here an' died," muttered Evans.

just showin' that triple extract o' compound dynamite an' streak lightnin' that I could get off any time I damn' please. Also I—"

A shout from the ranch-house saved Curly any further explanations. Mr. Evans was at the door. He was pointing north, toward Mad Mountains.

CHAPTER V

A STORM was brewing over Mad Mountains. Above the snow-white peaks the air was a quivering sheet of steely gray. Already the black ridge of pinon pine in the lower foothills had been blotted out.

"It's miles away," said Esther. "And anyway, what's a little snow? Let's have our ride."

"I don't know what a little snow is in New York," said Curly; "but I'm sayin' that when that gray devil hits us you don't want to be ridin' no hoss out on them sand-hills."

With that, Curly turned abruptly and started for the main corral. The other punchers followed, taking the bronco and Bessie's pony with them. Esther, plainly disappointed, walked with Bessie and Hathaway to the house. There Bessie left them. Hathaway and Esther went to the latter's room.

"Sis, I have a suggestion," said Hathaway. "It's getting cold already. Nothing like being prepared. Supposing we have a couple o' hot toddies to ward off chills, colds, pneumonia and other bronchial afflictions? All right? Well, I'll get out the good old likker, as Big Nick calls it, and you see if you can coax Chun to lend you a little hot water and sugar."

A moment later Hathaway was startled by a shrill outcry. It came from the region of the kitchen. He listened, then as the scream was repeated, this time louder and shriller than before, he dashed out of the room.

In the kitchen Hathaway found Esther, Chun, Bessie and Big Nick. Bessie and Big Nick had evidently arrived just ahead of Hathaway. Esther, very pale, stood with her back to the kitchen work table. Chun was just around the door with his back to the wall.

"It was so silly of me to scream," Esther was telling Bessie; "but he frightened me so! I saw no one in the dining-room, so walked right into the kitchen. At first I didn't see Chun, for he was behind the door. Then I heard him, and turned around. He was standing right behind me. When I saw that horrible knife, I screamed. When he stepped toward me and raised the knife, I screamed again."

"Velly solly," Chun mumbled. "I no hu't leddy. I sha'pen knife. When she come quick, I think—"

"He didn't intend to hurt you none, Miss Hathaway," spoke up Big Nick. "He's allus lookin' for some one, an' I reckon you scairt him 'bout as much as he did you. Chun, let's see that sticker!"

Chun had been holding one hand behind his back. Now, shamefaced, he slowly brought the hand into view, showing something that made Bessie gasp. It was a long-bladed dagger, ground to a razor edge, the hilt wound with a cord of red silk.

"Where in the name of heaven did you get that, Chun?" demanded Bessie.

"Long time I hab, Missie Bess. Ketchum—my brother. Jus' now I makem sha'p."

"Why you 'makem sha'p?' " demanded Big Nick. "Mr. Hathaway,"—Big Nick turned apologetically,—"I don't know what to make o' him. Been here goin' on six months now, an' 'pears to me he's gettin' nuttier every day."

Hathaway had been a silent witness, but a closely observant one. Now he stepped forward and touched Chun on the arm.

"Ko sing a?" he said sharply.

Chun started as though he had been struck, the breath hissing between his lips as he shrank back. For a long moment he stared hard at the white man. Then he bowed.

"I am of the family of Chun, named Kee," he replied slowly, in guttural Cantonese.

Then, while Bessie evidenced pleased surprise and Big Nick stared in open-mouthed admiration, Hathaway and Chun carried on an animated conversation in Chinese. At last, to one of Hathaway's questions, Chun did not reply, only shook his head. And nothing Hathaway said could get another word out of the old Oriental.

"He's got something on his mind," Hathaway explained; "but I don't think it's anything serious, or anything that will affect us except that we may wake up some morning and find we have to bury a dead cook. Sis, I'm going to the room. And," he added meaningly, "I'm not going to wait for hot water."

As Hathaway turned to the door, he discovered that Curly had slipped in unnoticed. There was a look on the puncher's face that Hathaway had never seen there before, and he went out, wondering. He could not help overhearing Bessie's remark.

"Curly! Did you hear Mr. Hathaway speaking Chinese?"

"Yeah; but that's nothin'," drawled Curly disgustedly. "Chink talk aint a language—just a jabber. I'd like to see *Mister* Hathaway try to talk Spanish!"

"Habla Vd. Español?" asked Esther, smiling up at Curly.

"Si, señorita!" Curly replied, beaming. "I can say *muy bien,* an' *poco tiempo,* an' about nineteen cuss-words."

"Splendid!" exclaimed Esther, and patted Curly on the arm as she went out of the kitchen, followed by Big Nick.

"Miss Hathaway," said the foreman quietly, "I think I'd better tell your brother something I heard that day you came."

"Come right up to the room," Esther invited promptly. "Brother is about to perform a most important ceremony, and I'm sure he will be delighted to have you join him."

"I—I was wonderin' if there was any left," Big Nick said, and grinned guiltily.

THE "ceremony" over, Big Nick told Hathaway what the stage-driver had told him about the two Chinese who claimed to be taking a census of the Chinese in Arizona but who the postmaster thought were looking for a certain "Chink." "It might be Chun they're lookin' for," he concluded; "an' I thought I'd better tell you. Besides, while I didn't savvy a word o' that jabber you two was makin', I do savvy signs an' I know Chun let somethin' slip that's worryin' you more'n you're lettin' on."

"I'm glad you told me," Hathaway evaded. "There's no need to worry Mr. Evans or Miss Evans, but it would be a good plan for you to pass the word to the boys to keep their eyes open for strangers. Do you think this storm will last long?"

Hathaway's sudden reference to the storm seemed to puzzle Big Nick. "Mebbe three hours," he replied; "an' mebbe three days. But what's the storm got to do with it?"

"Maybe nothing; and maybe a whole lot. Have another drink?"

"Mr. Hathaway," said Big Nick in an aggrieved tone, "out here no gentleman ever asks a gentleman if he wants *another* drink. All references to any *preev*-ious libations are politely omitted."

"I apologize!" laughed Hathaway. "Mr. Big Nick, will you have *a drink?"*

"Mr. Hathaway, I thank you!"

"A little ginger ale in it this time?" suggested Esther.

"No, *ma'am!* I take my likker *stark naked!* Say,"—he paused with glass in hand,—"do you reckon I'd better take that knife away from Chun?"

Hathaway debated a moment. "Not just yet. But be sure to let me know when this storm has blown out so Miss Evans and I may have our ride."

Big Nick started to reply, then silently raised the glass to his lips. Over the glass he studied Hathaway's face. Evidently

what he read there satisfied him for, with a brief word of thanks he set his empty glass down and left.

"Well," said Esther, "it certainly looks like we're in for a storm. Tell me, Porter, what's on your mind?"

"Nothing that you need worry your precious head about now."

"Oh, very well. Then listen: I don't want you to let Curly hear you speak any Spanish, and don't let him know you spent two years in Mexico. Understand?"

"No, I don't. What's the idea?"

"Nothing that you need worry your precious head about now. Just please respect my wishes. And now, if you think you've fortified yourself sufficiently with that Scotch you've been drinking, we might go downstairs. I'm cold."

They found Mr. Evans sitting before the fireplace gazing dreamily into the blazing mesquite. Bessie stood beside him, one hand stroking his white hair. She started suddenly as Hathaway and Esther approached, and hastily drew up chairs for them.

It was by this fire that Hathaway and Esther with Bessie, and sometimes Mr. Evans, spent most of the following four days while the last storm of the late spring blew itself out. Occasionally there were card games around the big table, in which Curly, much to his delight, was invited to join. Mostly, however, the long evenings were spent in talking over conditions on the ranch. Evans, usually a silent man, talked to Hathaway as Bessie imagined he would to a son on whom he was glad to lean. And Hathaway, with superb tact and keen sympathy, responded in the same mood.

Penetrating the old cowman's half-bantering manner, Hathaway shrewdly guessed that for some reason he was disheartened. Something had crushed the spirit of the man. What that was, Hathaway could not imagine.

DURING that time of enforced confinement Hathaway lost no opportunity to cultivate Chun's acquaintance. Two years with an oil corporation in South China had taught Hathaway discretion in the matter of dealing with an Oriental. So, for two days he talked a great deal with Chun, yet asked not a single question. He told Chun of his experiences in Canton, related many humorous incidents, and finally had the extreme good fortune to name as a friend of his a Chinese merchant in San Francisco who proved to be the owner of the store where one of Chun's distant cousins was employed as clerk. With this basis of friendship and confidence thus established, Hathaway cautiously led up to the subject uppermost in his mind.

"By *the Honest Gambling Shop of Lim Gee,* in Shanghai Alley, is a store where one may purchase many ancient things from China," Hathaway said, speaking his best Cantonese. "I have been wondering, Chun, if it was there you purchased that handsome knife you were making sharp the other day."

Chun took three puffs on his evening pipe before answering.

"That knife, my friend, belonged to my elder brother, he whom I told you had been a searcher of the streams where one finds precious yellow metal. When he died, the knife was sent to me as previously directed by him."

Hathaway lighted a fresh cigarette, trying hard to restrain his eagerness. The present of that knife struck him as significant.

"I suppose your brother, Chun Sing, while a placer miner, had many thrilling experiences. I imagine he had need of such a knife in those days."

"Hi lo! And yet it was not a thief by night against whom he had to use his blade! It was his own partner, one Moy Yet, whom he trusted, and who tried to slay him that he, himself, might have all the gold they had found. It was one night after they had gone to Calvert City and were living as poor men to deceive the robbers who were abroad in those days. That night Moy Yet crept upon my brother; but my brother was suspecting and before Moy could strike, my brother's blade was through Moy's wicked heart. *Haie-e!* It was a good joke on him!" cackled old Chun, his gaunt face wrinkling with glee.

"It was," Hathaway admitted; "but how unfortunate that Chun Sing then had to flee, and never had a chance to go after the gold that was his. Would not the foreign devil officials believe that your brother did right in slaying Moy Yet?"

"My brother fled from Calvert City to escape the *fan quai* police, but after that it was not the police but the vengeful sons of Moy who forced my brother to wander like a Hakka beggar. Moy had written a letter to his sons in Los Angeles, saying

that he had found gold enough to make them all rich and that soon he would be with them. When he never reached Los Angeles, and they investigated and learned that he had been slain, the sons of Moy set out to find my brother and avenge their father's death and recover their father's treasure. They were still seeking when word reached them that my brother was in Los Angeles hiding from the police but waiting to make an honorable settlement with them. So they hastened back there.

"But the sons of Moy, like their father, were greedy. My brother explained that he had slain Moy to save his own life but that even so, he was willing to give them as blood money the sum of five thousand gold in addition to their father's half share of the gold that Moy and my brother had found, but they insisted that they must have all of it or they would slay my brother to avenge their father's death. When they threatened him with torture to make him tell where the gold was hidden, he called them thieves, and tried to leave, but they attacked him. To save himself, Chun Sing drew his knife, the same that he had used to slay Moy, and struck one of the sons.

"The blow, unfortunately, did not kill; so the two sons soon were again on my brother's trail. For ten years they gave him no peace, hounding him from Los Angeles to Fresno, to San Francisco, Sacramento, Seattle, and from city to city until finally he shipped with a fishing boat to Alaska. There—there he died."

"That was very unfortunate and very sad," said Hathaway after a respectful silence. "But I understand now why Chun Sing sent you his knife. He knew that the wicked sons of Moy would learn that he also had sent you a paper telling where to find the gold."

CHUN jerked the pipe from his lips and his slant eyes narrowed frowningly as he looked hard at the white man.

"You are clever," he said finally, smiling. "I had not spoken of such a paper; but it is true. When I got it I sent word to the sons of Moy that I was ready to go in search of the gold and that I would give them their father's half if they would pay half of the expense of finding it. They sent back word that they agreed to that but wanted to talk it over. However, a friend warned me that it was a trap, that they intended to get the paper my brother had sent me, then slay me. So I fled, and came finally to Calvert City.

"And now, my friend, I am going to tell you something more because I trust you and need your help, and because you are a man of wisdom and discretion. The gold that Chun Sing and Moy Yet found is—"

Both Chun and Hathaway started as the kitchen door was swung suddenly open. Bessie, a pretty pout on her lips, stepped in.

"Oh, here you are, 'chinning with Chun,' as you call it! Well, why not give us a little of your time? We're just starting a game. Come on, please, Mr. Hathaway!"

Hathaway managed to conceal his disappointment. "I shall be glad to join you," he told Bessie, and arose. "My friend," he said to Chun, speaking Chinese, "the lady insists that I accompany her. At another time, which I hope will be soon, I will be glad to hear what you started to tell me."

"At another time," spoke Chun, scowling, "I no doubt shall have decided that it is folly to use an ox-knife to kill a fowl, and that I have already told you too much. *Ho hang la!*"

CHAPTER VI

HATHAWAY saw nothing more of Chun that night. He talked with him the next day but deemed it wisest not to bring up the subject of the hidden gold and the sons of Moy. The result was that on the fourth night Chun brought it up himself.

"One cannot go through life without friends," said Chun in his harsh Cantonese; "and I have the misfortune to be a very lonely and friendless old man. Maybe you are a thief and a liar, like most of the white foreign devils who have courted my friendship; but I do not believe it."

"I am your friend, Chun," Hathaway assured him; "and I seek only to help you, if I possibly can."

Chun nodded slowly over his pipe, stuffed the bowl, then lighted it with a glowing ember from the kitchen fire.

"Have you any money?" he asked.

"A little," Hathaway smiled. He knew the Chinese habit of asking questions that Occidentals consider very impertinent.

"I am glad you are not rich, for then you would not consider my proposition. I am afraid. I cannot sleep nights. I fear I am

losing my mind, thinking always of the vengeance of the sons of Moy. If you will save me from them, I will gladly give you all my brother's gold."

Hathaway could not conceal his astonishment. This was about the last thing he had expected Chun to say.

"It wouldn't be right for me to take it, Chun. Besides, you need it."

"Haie!" cried Chun with sudden vehemence. "Of what good is gold to a dead man?"

"Nonsense, Chun! I think you are needlessly alarmed. Have you any reason for thinking that the sons of Moy know where you are?"

Chun smoked for a moment in silence.

"When I came to Calvert City, I did not have much money; so I went to work in a restaurant owned by a white man. You see, my friend, I needed money—and advice. Supposing I found the gold, what would I do with it? All my life I have been an honest cook. I knew nothing of mining. If I should go into the mountains and come back with fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold and—"

"Fifty thousand dollars!"

"Ah! Now that you know it is so much, you are interested?" Chun grinned exultantly.

"Interested? I'm astounded! How could two Chinese miners wash out that much gold?"

"I know nothing about that. All I know is that in his letter my brother told me the gold would bring about that much money, and that therefore I should be very cautious in disposing of it. I wish that the sons of Moy would show a little judgment and accept their half and leave me alone, for there is enough for all of us. Still, they are quite right in wishing to avenge the slaying of their father. So—I am willing to buy them—or you."

Hathaway did not know what to say. He began to wonder if this whole story wasn't just a delusion of the old fellow's mind.

"As I was saying," Chun went on, "I spent some time in Calvert City trying to find out what I should do. While there, a family cousin in Los Angeles sent me word that the sons of Moy had located me and were coming. At the same time I heard that Mr. Evans was seeking for a cook, so I came here where I would be near my brother's hidden gold, and where it would not be so easy for the sons of Moy to find me. But they are coming. Maybe —tomorrow. Then—" Chun drew his long, bony forefinger across his wrinkled throat in a savage and ghastly gesture.

Hathaway shuddered. Certainly something was preying on Chun's mind. What Big Nick had said now came back to Hathaway with sinister significance: "Chun's gettin' nuttier every day."

"I'll be glad to help you, Chun," he said kindly. "And I wont take any of your gold either, unless, of course, you wish to make me the customary present, which I could not be so discourteous as to refuse. May I discuss this with Mr. Evans?"

"No, no!" Chun shook his head emphatically. "You are my friend. I shall trust you; but I have not said that I would trust your friends! And remember that I have not yet showed you the paper telling how to find the gold."

"Very well, Chun. I will not mention this to anyone. I will think it over and will talk with you again. Meanwhile, I think you need not fear. There are many white men around the ranch, all armed. The sons of Moy will have a hard time to get to you—if they should come."

With that, Hathaway said good night to Chun, and left. He could not throw off the feeling that after all he had been wasting his time, that he had been made a fool of by a crazy old Chinese cook. As for those two Chinese who claimed to be taking the census of Chinese in Arizona, probably they were doing just as they claimed.

Nevertheless, Hathaway had a talk with Mr. Evans. Without betraying Chun's confidence, Hathaway impressed Evans with the advisability of watching Chun and of warning the boys to keep their eyes open for anyone found sneaking around the ranch. With that, Hathaway tried to dismiss the matter. This he found not so easy, for again and again his mind went back to the question: if those two old Chinese miners really had hidden fifty thousand dollars' worth of gold up in the mountains, *where had they got it?*

THAT same night the wind and icy rain that had swept the country for four days subsided as abruptly as it had come; and that morning Hathaway was aroused by the sound of men shouting, and the roar of big revolvers. He jumped up, annoyed to find that the sun was already shining. Running to the window, Hathaway was immensely relieved to see that the noise was

nothing more than the boys "breakin' loose" after four days of enforced quiet. At the moment they seemed to be holding a shooting-match, with Curly Williams the star attraction.

Standing with his back to the others, a cigarette between his fingers, Curly had all the appearance of being half-asleep. Then, behind him some distance, some one tossed up a tomato can, and shouted. With one inconceivably swift movement, Curly went into action. Four bullets struck the can while in the air; two more sent it spinning over the ground, while the other punchers yelled like Indians, hopped around like men gone wild, and fired a deafening salvo of praise to Curly's marksmanship.

"Splendid!" cried a voice just below Hathaway's window. "Perfectly splendid!"

Hathaway looked down. It was Esther. And the look on Esther's face was one such as Hathaway had never seen there before.

Disgusted with himself for having overslept, Hathaway hurried through his sponge-bath and rub-down, his morning shave, and dressed for riding. He reached the dining-room just as Mr. Evans, Bessie and Esther were finishing. Chun appeared at once with Hathaway's breakfast, and shortly afterward Curly came to the door. Curly was as delighted as a schoolboy with new pants when Bessie invited him to sit down and have "second coffee" with them; but when Esther poured for him, he became so embarrassed he almost choked.

"Will you have one sugar or two?" Esther asked.

Curly looked at the dainty hand poised over his cup, then up into the radiant face of the girl smiling at him with such evident friendliness. "Ju-just one," he stammered. But a moment later, Bessie, who knew Curly's habits, found a chance to slip in the other three.

"Fine mornin' out this mornin'," Curly said, talking fast as though to hide his confusion. "Lot o' snow on Mad Mountains. Air's as cold as a day in January, but the sun's as warm as a day in June. Reckon the water in Mad River Cañon will be up. Storm's over though, I guess. Funny the way we gen'rally have a bad one 'bout this time of the year!"

"It's the spring equinox," Hathaway said.

"Sir?"

"The spring equinox," Hathaway repeated patiently. "When the direct rays of the sun cross the equator going north—about March 20th—we have the spring equinox. It generally causes severe storms; but when they're over, we know it's spring."

Slowly, and with elaborate care, Curly set down his cup, took out the spoon and placed it in the saucer. He leaned back in his chair.

"Well—mebbe," he drawled. "But out here we don't need none o' them *springy kinnoxes* to tell us nothin'. When I get up in the mornin' an' find the sky's as blue as—as Bessie's eyes, and when the air's so blamed full o' sweet an' spicy smells it makes me drunk, and way out in the sagebrush I hear a plover a-callin' to his mate, then—well, then any damn' fool knows it's spring in Arizony!"

CHAPTER VII

IT was eight o'clock when Hathaway and Bessie stopped at the ranch-house to get their lunch and canteens which they had prepared and left on the porch, also the belt and revolver that Hathaway had decided to take with him that day. When he had the belt on, the holster on his left with the pistol butt to the front, he looked up to see Bessie watching him curiously.

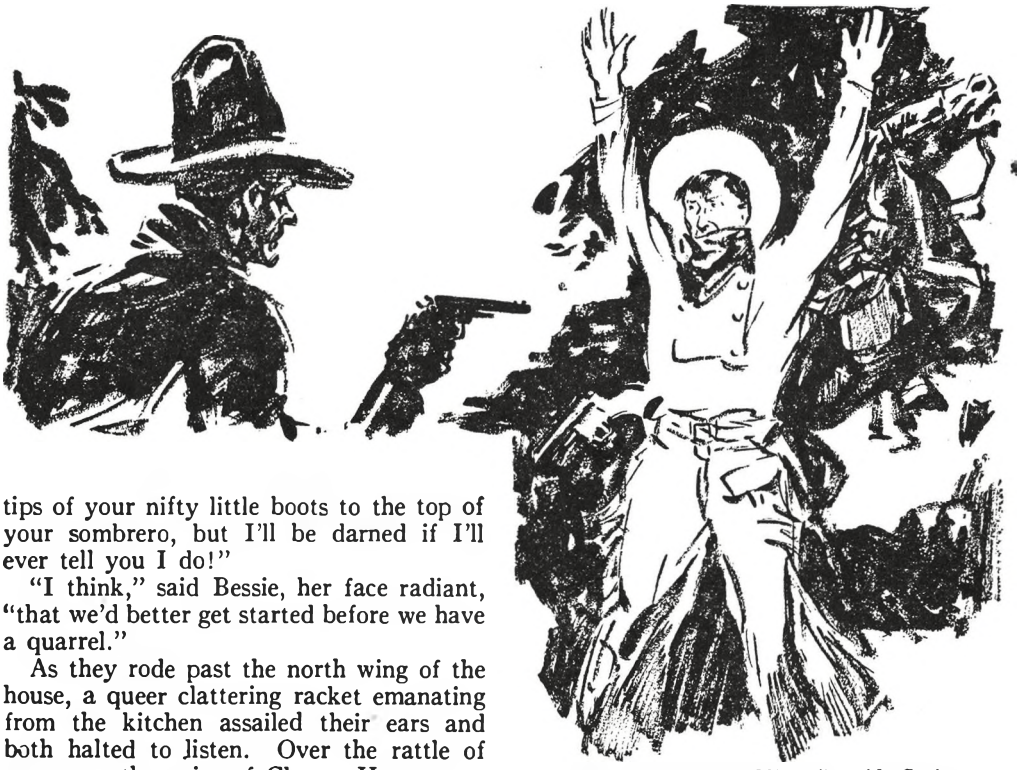
"I know what you're thinking," Hathaway said, smiling. "I formed that awkward habit in the army. Somehow I can't get used to packing a gun on the right side, butt to the rear, like you do in the West."

"Maybe that wasn't all that I was thinking, Mr. Hathaway. But then, no doubt you know you're a very handsome man, especially in your riding togs. Lots of girls must have told you that."

"That may be; but why are *you* saying it, Miss Evans? To be perfectly frank, I'm disappointed. Somehow I expected you to have—well, a keener insight and a little better understanding than to think I would be pleased by flattering comments on my personal appearance."

"I beg your pardon, sir!" Bessie said mockingly, but there was a pleased light in her eyes. "Nevertheless I think your rebuke was undeserved. I tried to say something to please you, and you scold me. Just for that I wont even *think* anything nice about you ever again."

"Very well," Hathaway smiled. "And I'll get even by *not* telling you how absolutely stunning and lovely you are with your natural 'schoolgirl complexion' and your cowboy costume. I like you from the



"Get your rope, Mister," said Curly quietly.

tips of your nifty little boots to the top of your sombrero, but I'll be darned if I'll ever tell you I do!"

"I think," said Bessie, her face radiant, "that we'd better get started before we have a quarrel."

As they rode past the north wing of the house, a queer clattering racket emanating from the kitchen assailed their ears and both halted to listen. Over the rattle of pans rose the voice of Chun. He too was feeling the thrill of that spring morning; and what his vocal cords lacked in musical tones they made up in strength and range.

"Oh, bell-ee me not on the lone plail-ee,
Wha' the wild ki-yotes howl ova' me-ee;
In a lonely glave jus' six by thlee;
Oh, bell-ee me not on the lone plail-eee—"

Bessie laughed; but Hathaway remained strangely silent.

"What's the matter?" Bessie asked finally. "That old cowboy song always makes me sad when I hear the boys singing it at night; but Chun's singing is too funny for anything. You look like it gave you a—well, something like a premonition."

"I'm sorry," Hathaway said, and straightened in his saddle. "I was only thinking. Just where are we going?"

"We were going south to Silver Springs; but since you asked that we change with Curly and Miss Hathaway, we'll go north to the Seeps." As they started on, Bessie pointed toward the mountains. "Do you see the black strip where the piñon cover the foothills? And do you see above that, the snow? Well, follow the snow-line and you'll discover a gap where there's no snow. That's Mad Mountain Cañon. We're not going clear there, but we'll head for it, and about fifteen miles from the ranch we'll strike the Seeps. There we'll eat our lunch and refill our canteens."

"Fine! And just what are the Seeps?"

"That's where the fag end of Mad River spreads out, breaks up into half a dozen little streams no bigger than mountain brooks, and finally vanishes in the sand."

"Sounds interesting," said Hathaway, then fell silent as the trail dropped into the sandy bed of a dry wash. Here Bessie's spirited black took the lead while the cowpony Big Nick had picked out for Hathaway cantered along behind.

So they rode on, the silence broken only by an occasional bantering remark. Overhead the sky was a cloudless blue, with a sun that seemed very near and steadily grew hotter and hotter. Already the upper rim of the valley through which they were riding was hazy with shimmering heat-waves. Hathaway was grateful for an occasional breeze that wandered down to them from the snow-clad mountains in the north.

AS they neared the foothills, the bunch grass and gramma gave way to sage-brush, lupine and desert palms; now and then giant sahuara rose majestically above

their heat-stunted neighbors. Looking back, the valley appeared to Hathaway an unbroken vista of gray and monotonous desert. It did not seem possible that spring with its riot of colors was sleeping just beneath that winter mantle of dull and lifeless gray.

It was past noon, and Hathaway was both tired and hungry when they reached a rough gravel-bed over a mile wide and reaching back two or three miles to narrow gradually to a gulch in the center of which ran what was left of Mad River. The gravel-bed was cut with gullies in some of which were tiny streams of water. Along these streams were willows and arrowweed, while on the higher spots mesquite had somehow found and held a footing. Close to one of these streams, and in the shade of a clump of old mesquite, Bessie and Hathaway dismounted for lunch. While Hathaway watered and unsaddled the horses, Bessie started "camp." She was throwing a rock at a lizard when he joined her.

"A lone gray lizard on the dark gray sand;
A rock, a short gray tree—"

Hathaway quoted, his gaze wandering appraisingly over the none too inviting surroundings.

Bessie tossed her head, but her smile took the sting from her tone. "I'm sorry, Mr. Hathaway, but it's a matter of supreme indifference to me whether you like my country or not."

"I do like it, Bessie. I like many things about it just as it is; but the thing that appeals most to me is its wonderful possibilities. However, let's not start an argument just now. I'm hungry."

"I'd rather fight than eat," pouted Bessie, "but I suppose I'll have to give in and feed you. Will you have a ham sandwich or an egg sandwich?"

"I will," said Hathaway, reaching for both. When Bessie tried to fend him off, he caught her hands in his and held them. For a moment they looked deep into each other's eyes.

"You're very strong," Bessie stammered, trying to free herself.

"I'm not so sure about that," said Hathaway, and instantly released her.

Lunch was finished in silence. With Hathaway this was due mostly to his hunger and preoccupation; but he thought he sensed a change in Bessie. In the saddle she seemed the very embodiment of self-assurance and poise; on the ground, in the intimacy of sharing their lunch, she seemed suddenly to have become shy and embarrassed. When they were finished, Hathaway arose.

"I have something to show you, Bessie. I didn't want to worry you and spoil your lunch, so I waited. Have any of the boys from the Circle-Star camped here in the last four or five days?"

Bessie sprang to her feet. "Absolutely no! Why—"

"Come on," said Hathaway, and led Bessie to a heap of ashes near where he had put out the horses. "Three men camped here," Hathaway said quietly, pointing to the remains of three bunks. "This morning—before dawn—they rode south—toward the ranch."

CHAPTER VIII

CURLY'S experience with women lacked many things, but never before had that matter caused him so much concern as on this morning. Women, with Curly, fell naturally into two classes: those who were "hoss-wise," and those who were "hoss-shy." Bessie, of course, belonged to the first class. She knew all their saddle-horses as far as she could see them, and she could ride all of them except the worst of the outlaws. But as for "this here Miss Esther Eldridge Hathaway, of New York—"

"I reckon she'll find a way to get on," Curly told Big Nick as he tightened the cinches on the little pinto selected for Esther; "an' I reckon further that she'll find seventeen different ways o' fallin' off. Nick, I'll sign over the hull o' my summer's wages to you if you'll go ridin' with her in my place."

Big Nick shook his head so emphatically he almost dislodged the cigarette that drooped beneath his mustache.

"Bein' a friend o' your'n, I'm refusin' your offer, Curly. Remember, this ridin' with Miss Hathaway aint for your pleasure, and it aint altogether for hern. It's to make Bessie jealous."

Curly straightened aggressively. "Now, see here, Nick! I'm warnin' you that deal is all off. It's all right to bluff in a poker-game an' make believe you have somethin' you aint, or haven't somethin' you have; but I'm not goin' to play no such tricks with women."

Big Nick's cigarette traveled slowly to

a new parking place on the left side of his mouth while he eyed Curly shrewdly.

"I reckon you come to that virtuous state o' mind just since you seen Bessie ridin' off with young Hathaway, eh?"

"No sir-ee!" Curly denied emphatically. "I don't care what Bessie does. I don't give a whoop 'bout her ridin' round with anybody that suits her. I'm thinkin' only of the—the *ettics* o' the matter."

FURTHER conversation was prevented by the approach of Miss Hathaway. She was smiling happily; and even though her Paris-made riding habit did look queer on the range, she was, as Big Nick put it, as "purty as a picture."

"Everything is ready, and I'm dying to get started! Curly, how long will it take us to get to Silver Spring?"

"That depends," replied Curly soberly. "The hoss can walk it in—"

"Walk it! Can't he run?"

"Yes'm; but—"

"Well, help me on, Curly, and let's go!"

The sun was high when they reached Silver Spring. Esther found the place disappointing. It was nothing but a shallow pool edged with alkali and fringed with stunted willows and arrowweed, badly trampled on one side where the cattle had a clear way to the water. But it was shade and rest; and Esther was tired and hungry. She was glad to let Curly tend the horses while she bathed her face and hands. Then she went back from the pool to a clump of mesquite where Curly had said they would eat lunch.

For some reason Curly was a long time returning, and finally Esther stepped up onto an outcropping of rock and looked around for him. She saw the horses, and presently located Curly. He stood with head bent, peering intently at something on the ground. Presently he started walking slowly. He went perhaps thirty feet, then stopped, raised his head and looked to the north. After a long moment he turned and walked slowly to where Esther waited.

"What were you looking at?" Esther asked with frank interest.

Curly started. "Oh, just where some—some o' the boys camped, I guess."

The girl regarded him a moment. He could not hide the fact that he was puzzled and somewhat uneasy; but Esther decided not to question him further.

"Well, let's eat," she said. "I'm about starved. Aren't you?"

"I can allus eat," Curly admitted, seating himself in the shade. "Likewise I can most allus go without eatin'."

Esther sat down beside him, removed her hat and shook out her hair. "Shall we have a drink first?"

Curly was gazing thoughtfully at the short brown tresses. "Oh, sure!" he exclaimed. "I'll get a canteen. Reckon you wont like this spring water."

"Sit down!" Esther spoke quickly, smiling. "I didn't mean water. I meant Scotch. I know I can't drink this water, and that's one of the reasons why I brought a flask."

Unwrapping the lunch, Esther brought forth a small leather-covered flask. Into the cups they had brought she poured two good drinks. "I have a toast for you Curly," she said, raising her cup. "Listen, my friend:

"Here's to my friends!
May they live a thousand years;
And I, a thousand years—less one.
For who would care to live
When all one's friends are gone?"

"I like that," Curly said, sipping his his drink slowly. "The feller that made up that piece was a regular man. An' I bet you have heaps o' friends."

"A few, Curly. Don't you like the Scotch? Drink it down. It'll do you good."

"I—I like it, ma'am, thanks. But I don't need nothin' to make me feel good, though I reckon some folks do. There's Pinky Arnold, on the Flyin' Crescent. 'Bout oncet every two weeks Pinky gets all out o' sorts, as cross as an old he-bear that's been eatin' raw Gila monsters. Then he says to the boss: 'Boss, I reckon I got to go to town an' get drunk.' Says it just as natural-like as I'd tell the old man I needed a new pair o' overalls. But me—I don't need likker. I allus feel good, so blamed healthy I could take a bite out o' my bronco's neck."

Impulsively, Esther dropped her sandwich and with both dainty hands seized one of Curly's big paws. "Good for you!" she applauded. "Curly, I—I like you for that!"

The girl's tone was so frank, so sincerely friendly, that the big puncher went red with embarrassment. He looked down at Esther's hands as though they were something that actually hurt him, yet left him powerless to move. Presently he managed

to squirm aside, a frown on his face as he glanced up at the sky.

"That sun keeps a-movin', don't it? Right shady here when I fust set down. Queer how such a little thing can be so all-fired hot."

Esther, for all her sophistication, was at heart wholesome and simple. She saw Curly's confusion, and guessed the cause. For a time she gazed thoughtfully into the patch of gnarled mesquite; then she glanced up at the sky.

"When must we start back, Curly? Do you have to help with the milking?"

Slowly, Curly rose to his feet. Not a muscle of his face moved.

"Ma'am, did you ever see a man on hossback milkin' a cow?"

"Heavens, no! Why—"

"Well, Miss Hathaway, I'm a range rider, born, bred, an' branded. An' in accordance with the ettics o' my perfession, *I don't do nothin' I can't do on hossback!*"

"Splendid!" cried Esther, clapping her hands. "Curly, I hope I didn't offend—"

She broke off, alarmed by the look that had come suddenly over the man's face. His sun-wrinkled eyes narrowed; he was peering over the stunted willows—to the north. Esther started to rise, but dropped back and clapped her hands over her ears. Curly pointed the muzzle of his big .45 at the blue sky and fired twice.

CHAPTER IX

"THREE men camped here," echoed Bessie, her gaze darting swiftly around the heap of ashes. "And they left before dawn. You say they went toward the ranch? What do you think it means?"

"I don't know," admitted Hathaway. "It may mean that Chun's friends, whom he is so afraid of seeing, have come at last. At least one of these three is a Chinaman."

"How on earth do you know that?"

"I found several stubs of a very slender brown-paper cigarette made of Chinese tobacco. I've never known of a white man smoking the things."

Bessie said nothing. She looked around the ground for a moment, then glanced up at Hathaway questioningly.

"Yes," said Hathaway, "I suppose we had better start back. However, we may as well look around a little more first. If they really went to the ranch, they probably reached there about the time we were leaving. And if they were Chun's friends, they were hiding out in one of those ravines waiting for their chance. Between Chun, who is always looking for them, and your father and Big Nick, whom I warned to be on the watch for any strangers, they'll have a long wait. So, let's look around."

They started on, following the little stream back through the gravel-bed toward the mountains. About a hundred yards from the horses they came to a spot where they had to pass between a willow tree and the bank. Here, Hathaway took the lead. He had passed the tree and was turning around to wait for Bessie when he saw that she had walked too close to the edge, causing the bank to crumble beneath her foot. With a cry of exasperation, she pitched forward. Hathaway caught her in his arms, laughing as he drew her away from the bank.

Then, abruptly, the laugh died on Hathaway's lips. His face went suddenly white and tense. With a low cry, like that of a man desperate in the clutch of some mad impulse, he crushed the girl in his arms, held her gasping and helpless while tenderly, almost reverently, he kissed her again and again.

When, finally, he released her, there were tears of anger and of humiliation in Bessie's eyes. Swift as the dart of a bird, her little fist shot out, struck the man squarely on the mouth. Then she was back out of his reach, standing with shoulders bent and head thrust forward, her face white with fury, her eyes blazing, her pistol aimed at Hathaway's chest.

For a long moment the two stood thus, the only sound their labored breathing. Hathaway met the girl's infuriated gaze with steady regard. Presently he put his hand to his lips, then looked down at his fingers. They were wet with blood.

For a long moment the man stared at her silently.

"Listen to me!" he said then. "You're misjudging me. I don't blame you for that. Hereafter I'll keep a guard on myself and that wont happen again. But—"

"I didn't ask you to apologize. If your apology was worth anything, it never would have been necessary."

"Well said! However, I'm *not* apologizing! And you're the one who doesn't understand. But I'm going to make you understand—in time. Until then you'll

have to take me on faith. And now are you going to put up that gun, like a good girl? Or must I take it away from you?"

"You—take my gun—"

"Certainly. Why not? I—"

ABRUPTLY Hathaway broke off, a startled look in his eyes. Snatching out his revolver, he sprang past the girl. "Back to the horses!" he flung over his shoulder.

If Bessie made any reply, it was drowned by the roar of Hathaway's .45 as he fired into the mesquite. She found him standing by the horses, gun in hand, a queer look on his face.

"Mr. Hathaway," said Bessie after a long silence, "is—is this just a trick?"

He turned and regarded her keenly.

"Bessie, if I were the sort to try any such trick, would my answer to your question be worth your consideration?"

There was another silence. Hathaway's gaze seemed to be on a clump of mesquite by one of the other streams.

"What did you see, Mr. Hathaway?" the girl asked, apology in her tone.

"I saw two men sneaking toward our horses. When I fired, they turned and ran—over there." He pointed to the mesquite. "Look! There they go! All three, now!"

Bessie ran to the man's side. For just a moment, three riders were in view as they rose out of a gully to vanish behind a patch of willow. They were headed north—toward the mountains.

"One of those horses is limping," said Bessie. "That's why they intended to steal ours. The man in the lead is a white man. He rides like a puncher. The two behind him ride like—something like Indians."

"They're Chinese," said Hathaway.

"Chinese! Then—then they're back from the ranch—or wherever they went this morning! But where are they going? What possible business can they have in Mad Cañon?"

Hathaway made no response. He was thinking of what Chun had said about that hidden gold.

"I just wonder," said Bessie quietly, "if those men are going up to the old mine?"

Hathaway swung around. "The old mine? Then there *was* a mine!"

"Yes. If I had thought to bring my field-glasses, I could show you the dumps from here. The mine is on the right-hand side of the cañon—the east side. But why are you so excited over my mention of the mine?"

"I'll explain all that as soon as I can, Bessie. Right now, tell me as quickly as you can all about that mine. It may be more important than you think."

"The mine never was very important," said Bessie; "yet it has been a mighty important thing in our lives. It has been a nightmare. A friend of Father's located it on our land and they went into partnership. Every so often Mr. Marley—that was the partner—would report that they had struck a pocket and that with a little more money for machinery and labor they would be on a good-paying vein. But they never found it, and finally the mine was closed down. About ten years ago all the machinery was moved away, and the rattlesnakes and lizards moved in."

"And Marley—what became of him?"

Bessie paused. "I wonder what made you ask that?"

"I don't know. Maybe just a hunch."

"Father doesn't like to talk about the mine, and of course I've forgotten some of the things he did say about it, for I was quite young then. But I remember that not long after the mine was closed down, Mr. Marley told Father he was going to San Francisco to go into business and that he would very shortly begin paying what he owed Father. That was the last we ever saw or heard of him. The whole affair just about broke Father. He lost every dollar he had, including twenty thousand dollars he had borrowed on the ranch—a total of close to sixty thousand dollars. When—when Mr. Marley never wrote, Father took it pretty hard. He has really never been his old self since."

SO that was it! Hathaway guessed that it was not so much the loss of the money that broke Mr. Evans as it was the dishonesty of his faithless friend. For that, Hathaway could see no remedy, and his sympathy went out to the old man, and to the girl whose loyalty was so unquestioning and uncomplaining.

"But what," began Bessie, "has all this about Daddy's old mine got to do with two Chinamen and a white man trying to steal our horses?"

"That's exactly what I want to find out as soon as possible!" declared Hathaway. "I hope we aren't too late, already. Let's see how soon we can be on the trail home."

Bessie, accustomed to such work, had her black saddled by the time Hathaway was ready. With the black in the lead, they struck out.

Down the trail, some five miles or so, they were forced to slow down for a strip of deep sand. Bessie edged her mount close to Hathaway's.

"Mr. Hathaway," she said quietly, "I'm glad you saw those men."

"So am I! We'd been in a nice fix with our horses stolen!"

"Yes. . . . . But I didn't mean that."

Hathaway turned quickly, and Bessie looked away, her face coloring.

"At first I—I was frightfully angry at you," she said. "Then I was angry at myself for being so angry, and especially for striking you. Finally, I wanted to laugh. It was so silly, you and I, standing there like stubborn children! And I even was ready to shoot you! Tell me: would you really have tried to take my gun away?"

"I would have taken it! Yes, even though you shot me."

"I believe it! And—all over a few kisses that meant nothing!"

"Bessie," said Hathaway seriously, "they meant more to me than you have any idea."

"Then—then I suppose you'll repeat your—your—oh, what shall I call it?"

"Whatever you choose to term it, it shall not be repeated," Hathaway assured her. "The next kiss I have from you—*you are going to give me.*"

Bessie gasped. She started to speak, but instead, suddenly drew rein. Hathaway, following her gaze, also drew up.

"Some one is coming! Far down the trail! It—it can't be—"

"They wouldn't send just one man after those three," said Hathaway. He drew his revolver and fired twice.

The rider drew up. He began riding in a small circle. Three times he made the circle, then he stopped. Faintly, over the silence, came the sound of three shots.

"The old Indian signal!" cried Bessie. "Something's happened at the ranch!"

CHAPTER X

IT was growing steadily warmer on the north porch where Bert Evans sat in his easy-chair, his stocking feet resting on the railing, his gaze wandering dreamily over the shimmering valley and the snow-white mountains far to the north. Alone in the bright warmth of the spring morning, the old cattleman felt a delicious drowsiness stealing over him when he was startled by a voice at his elbow.

"Boss-man, you likee me bling'em cold tea?"

Evans frowned. "Tea? Hell, no! What d'ye mean, sneakin' up on me thataway?"

The smile vanished from Chun's gaunt face. "Velly solly," he said contritely. "I make heap nice cake fo' Missie Bess. You likee me bling'em piecee?"

"Cake? Dang your old yaller hide, you know I never eat 'ceptin' at meal-time! What's ailin' you?"

Chun's slant eyes narrowed as he looked out at the glittering white-and-gray valley. He spoke dully:

"I think today—they come. I talkee you—Chun velly solly make boss-man heap damn' tlouble. Velly solly! That's all."

Evans' feet hit the floor. He twisted around in his chair the better to look at Chun. But Chun had vanished.

"Pore old devil!" muttered Evans. "Scared stiff o' havin' his gizzard slit, yet he's sorry for me! Wants to bring me tea and cake! I wish—"

Evans' words died away in a meaningless mumble. Far out in the sage-brush some moving object had caught the rays of the sun and flashed across his vision. Evans knew that none of the Circle-Star men were in that direction. Bessie and Hathaway might be coming back for some reason, but why should they be in the gullies a quarter of a mile west of the trail?

Evans estimated the location of the moving object to be about four hundred yards from the ranch-house. If that was some one coming toward the house, they would very soon emerge from the shallow ravine and be in plain sight. When almost a half-hour passed and no one showed up, Evans pulled on his boots and went into the house. He took his belt and gun from its hook by the fireplace. The belt fastened, he drew out the old wooden-handled .45, saw that it was loaded, and returned quietly to the porch.

Evans was wishing he had thought to see if Bessie had taken their field-glasses, when out of the corner of his eye he caught another flash. This time it was on his left, and the cause was now in full view. Two riders were coming in from the west. One of them wore glasses—hence

the flash. This puzzled Evans, for at first glance he saw his mistake.

"Dang my eyes if they aint Chinks!" he muttered, moving to the steps to meet them. "Mebbe old Chun aint so crazy after all!"

His thumbs hooked in his belt, the fingers of his right hand hovering significantly over the butt of his .45, Evans sized up his visitors. The one with glasses was a round-faced Chinese with thick, sneering lips. He was clad in a white shirt, new khaki trousers and a broad-brimmed hat of white felt. In spite of the heat and the sweating horse beneath him, he appeared

With a vicious swing the rider aimed the butt of his empty gun at Curly's head.

marvelously cool and comfortable. His companion was an exact duplicate except that he was younger, did not wear glasses, and had been badly wilted by the sun.

"Hullo!" the man with glasses snapped off the word surlily. "You have—ah—cook named Chun Kee?"

"Mebbe I have an' mebbe I haven't," replied Evans, none too graciously.

At that, the two slid awkwardly to the ground. The younger man took the reins of both horses and led them back around the corner to the hitching-rail. The other approached Evans.

"My name Moy," he said in his curtly clipped English. He bowed stiffly from the hips but kept his eyes unblinkingly on Evans' face. "This man,"—he indicated the Chinese who had taken away the horses —"my brother. We friends Chun's from Los Angeles. We like speak with him."

"Los Angeles, eh? Is that why you sneaked around an' come in from the west? You was up north there awhile back."

"We got lost," said the elder Moy, smiling. "Waste lots time."

"Come in from Calvert City?"

"Yes."

"Well, Chun's been a-lookin' for some one he aint hankerin' to see. I got an idee you're the ones. As his employer, lookin' out for his interests, I ast you what your business is with him?"

Again the elder Moy bowed stiffly, but without taking his glittering black eyes off Evans' face. "I am ver' pleased to tell. Chun Kee has papers and money belong my father. He wrote letter for us to come here for them. Please do favor tell him sons of Moy are here."

Evans hesitated. His sole experience with Chinese had been the good-natured, trustworthy type of servants like Chun. Something about these two aroused his antagonism, and he wondered why. It wasn't because they were Chinese, he concluded. It was something in their attitude.

The younger man, especially, made Evans feel like kicking him off the place. As tall as his brother, he stooped slouchily, his long arms dangling, his broad, flat face thrust forward, his eyes on Evans with a look of open insolence.

"I'll tell Chun you're here," Evans said; "but also I'll tell you right now that if for any reason whatsoever he don't want to waste his time with you, he don't have to; an' if you don't like it you can go to the devil."

WATCHING the two, Evans backed through the living-room door, then turned and passed through to the kitchen. Chun, evidently, was not here. The fire was out, but kindling for the next meal lay in a neat pile on the floor. On the wall, shining clean as usual, the kettles and pans hung in orderly array.

Passing on through the kitchen to the lean-to in which Chun had his quarters, Evans found him lying on his bunk. Something in his appearance stopped the words in Evans' throat. Quickly he sprang to the side of the bunk. Chun lay on his back, his thin gray hair neatly combed, his face shiny from a recent scrubbing, his hands folded across the front of his best satin blouse. And on his gaunt face was stamped a look of ineffable peace.

"Chun!" cried Evans, seizing him by the shoulders. "For God's sake, Chun! What's the matter?"

But Chun did not answer.

Slowly Evans straightened. A peculiar odor, bitter yet subtly sweet, drew his attention to the little stand by the head of the bunk. On it was a tin cup. Picking it up, Evans found in it the dregs of some black liquid. At the same instant he discovered the two letters.

Both were sealed, both addressed in Chun's rude scrawl. One, Evans saw with some astonishment, was addressed to Hathaway. This he put in his pocket.

The other was addressed: *"For the sons of Moy."*

Without hesitation, Evans tore it open. In the envelope were two papers. One, apparently very old, bore, across the top, several rows of crosses with a line running crookedly from top to bottom between the crosses. Beneath this were four or five Chinese characters.

Frowning, Evans unfolded the other paper. It had the appearance of being freshly written. But it was all in Chinese.

THE old cattle-man's fingers shook as he put the papers back in the envelope and again looked down at set calm face of Chun. Then, jamming the letter into his pocket, he strode back to the porch.

"You're too late," Evans told the two Chinese bluntly. "Chun is dead."

"Dead?" Both Moys exclaimed in unison, staring at Evans incredulously.

"Took poison o' some kind. I'm thinkin' mebbe you hounded the pore old feller to death. If I find out—"

The two Chinese were jabbering excitedly in their own language. Now they stopped abruptly. The elder spoke.

"Chun Kee left a letter—some papers—for us?"

"Y-e-s, he did," Evans growled, as though reluctant to make the admission. "I don't know what he said, but I'm hopin' he told the both of you to go plumb to hell, which same I'm thinkin'. Mebbe I oughtn't give this to you, but it's addressed to you, an' anyway, it's Chun's business. So—here. An' now, damn you, *get off'm my land!*"

Moy's long, slim fingers literally snatched the envelope out of the old cattleman's hand. He made no comment on finding that it had been torn open; but when he had drawn out the papers and unfolded them, he snapped up with a hissing intake of breath. As his glittering eyes flashed over the papers, he spoke in excited, throaty gutturals to his brother. Then, thrusting the papers in his pocket, he looked up at Evans. Mocking lights glittered in his black eyes as he bowed stiffly. "Many thanks!" he said curtly. "G'by!"

The two vanished around the corner, mounted and rode north. Evans watched them until they dropped out of sight in the broken foothills.

Drawing his .45, Evans fired three evenly spaced shots. Big Nick was coming on the run by the time Evans got through the house to the south porch.

"You tell Petie to ride hell-bentin' up the north trail and get Bessie and Mr. Hathaway back here damn' quick," he instructed Big Nick. "Send Chris the other way after Curly and the girl. Then you come back here. I got somethin' to tell you."

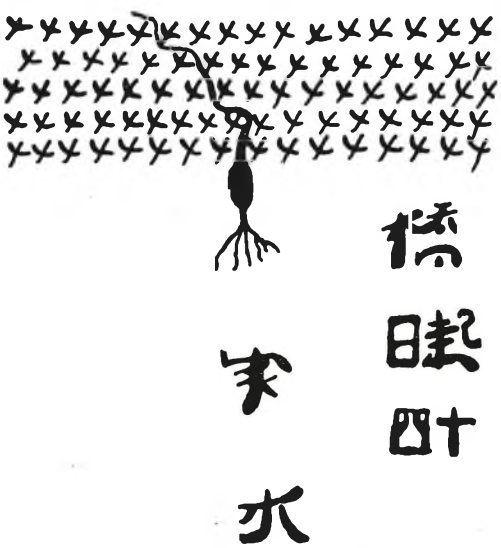
CHAPTER XI

AS Hathaway and Bessie galloped down from the north, they were relieved to see Curly and Esther riding furiously up

the south trail. Since the rider who had signaled them had not waited, there had been some misgivings in their minds as to what had happened. Bessie was quick to notice that the three horses, saddled and waiting at the hitching-rail, were fresh; but that could mean one of several things. She uttered a glad cry when she saw Evans, followed by Big Nick, emerge from the front door and cross the porch to meet them. "What's the matter?" Bessie cried, swinging to the ground and tossing the reins over her black's head.

"It's Chun," Evans replied quietly, looking at Hathaway. Briefly, but fully, he related what had transpired—the visit of the sons of Moy, the finding of Chun, the two letters. "Here's your'n," he concluded, handing Hathaway the letter. "I sent for you 'cause I thought mebbe you ought to know right off what Chun wrote you."

Hathaway tore the envelope open. In it were two sheets of paper, folded. Unfolding one, he saw, across the top of the sheet, several rows of crosses. Through these, a line wandered crookedly from the top to bottom. In the white field beneath that was a Chinese character; over on the right-hand side were several more.



Evans' voice boomed in Hathaway's ear. "Why, that's the same danged thing Chun gave them Chinks!"

Hathaway swung around. "Are you certain of that?"

"Looks just like it to me," Evans asserted. "Crosses an' a crooked line an' a handful o' hen-tracks!"

Quickly, Hathaway unfolded the other paper. For a moment he bent over this, studying it intently. Then he looked up at Evans.

"Let's take no chances, Evans. Get a couple of men off right away. Can you?"

"You're damn' whistlin'! Petie an' Chris got up fresh hosses when they came back from signalin' you an' Curly. They're ready to go after them Chinks an' bring 'em back dead or alive just as you say." He turned to Big Nick. "Get Petie an' Chris. On the jump, now! You can stay with Chun awhile."

Big Nick displayed surprising agility. Hathaway, with another glance at the map Chun had given him, turned to Evans with a question.

"Is there still a bridge across Mad River —up in the cañon?"

"No. That was washed out five years back. Who told you—"

"Do Chris and Petie know where it used to be?"

"Sure. An' here they are! Boys, listen sharp now! Hathaway, tell 'em what you want done!"

Whatever opinion Hathaway may have formed from the names "Chris" and "Petie," he was quick to observe now that here were two seasoned riders who were perfectly capable of going after quite a number of Chinks and bringing them back "dead or alive."

"Boys," said Hathaway, "Mr. Evans wants you to look up the two Chinese who called today to see Chun. There is a white man with them—"

"White man?" broke in Evans. "He didn't show his face around here!"

"He probably had good reason to hide out in the sage while the two Moys called on you. Anyway, he's with them now. Bessie and I saw where they had camped at the Seeps; and we saw them at the Seeps after they'd returned. They were headed for Mad River Cañon. I'm quite sure you will find them near where that bridge used to be. As soon as you get them located, one of you stay and watch while the other returns to the Seeps to wait for us."

"To wait for us?" echoed Evans. "How many men do you think it takes to handle a couple o'—"

"There's more'n that," spoke up the quiet voice of Curly Williams, who had joined them. "Three *hombres* have been campin' down at Silver Spring for four or five days. This mornin' they struck out north, headed straight for the ranch-house.

When Miss Hathaway an' me was comin' back, I picked up their trail again an' seen where they swung off west. Looked like they was headin' for the mountains but didn't want to go too clost to the ranch-house."

HATHAWAY considered this carefully before he spoke. "I don't think they can have any connection with Moy's party," he told Curly. "I can see why the two Moys would hire one white man as a guide; but three other men stationed thirty miles away wouldn't be of any use to them."

"You're smart," said Curly evenly, "but you're all wrong, an' I'm goin' to prove—"

"Shut up, Curly!" Evans broke in. "This is no time for argument. Chris, you an' Petie got grub an' water ready? All right! Fan along!"

"An' look out for them three white men," said Curly stubbornly.

"Dang yore eyes!" exploded Evans. "Curly, you're wusser'n an' old woman, sometimes. Get along now an' have hosses ready in case we do have to follow Chris an' Petie. Hathaway, just what's the idee?"

"I don't know for sure," replied Hathaway slowly. "It will take me a few minutes to read this. Chinese is very difficult, and Chun was not an expert in caligraphy. Also I have to ask you a few questions. Let's go in the house."

On the porch Bessie and Esther stopped them. "Are you going to—to—"

"Yes," replied Hathaway. "Then we're going to the living-room to talk. I'd like to have you there with us."

Hathaway did not remain long with Chun. There was nothing that he could do. The dregs in the tin cup he recognized as smoking opium dissolved in water. Deeply touched, nevertheless Hathaway was glad that Chun had found peace at last. He left the room eager to learn fully what Chun had written him. Bessie, Esther and Evans were waiting for him. Without a word Hathaway sat down and began studying his letter. Presently he laid that aside, got out a pencil, and began working over the map.

"Mr. Evans," said Hathaway a few minutes later, "this is a map telling where quite a sum of gold is buried. The sons of Moy have the original copy. Chun gave me this so that, if I desired, I also could go after the gold."

"Gold!" exclaimed Evans in astonishment. "How much?"

"About fifty thousand dollars in gold-dust and nuggets."

"Fifty thousand dollars!" gasped the old cattle-man, leaning far over the table. "Where is it? Who does it belong to?"

Hathaway moved the map out to the center of the table. Bessie, Esther and Evans bent over it eagerly.

"These lines of crosses represent Mad Mountains," Hathaway explained; "and the crooked line running through them is Mad River Cañon. You will see where the location of the old bridge is marked. This"—Hathaway indicated the character directly beneath the crooked line in the white field—"is the Chinese ideograph for *'house'*—in this case, your house. This, at the bottom, signifies *'water'*—that would be Silver Spring."

"Plain enough now," admitted Evans. "Go on."

"These other characters, reading from top to bottom, signify as follows:

"Bridge
Sun rising
Forty."

"Bridge—sun rising—forty!" muttered Evans, his face blank. "What the devil—"

"That's easy!" cried Bessie. "We start at the old bridge and walk forty feet—or maybe forty yards—toward the rising sun. And there we are!"

"You've got part of it, Bessie," Hathaway said. "You're wrong where you say it may be feet or yards. The Chinese are strict on accurate detail; yet in their writing they hate superfluity. In the absence of any specific mention of what the forty means, it can mean only one thing—the most natural means of measuring distance that would occur to two Chinese hiding a treasure. That is—forty steps."

"To the devil with your arguin' whether it's feet, steps or footsteps!" exploded Evans, pounding the table with his big fist. "What I want to know is this: You say that near the old bridge is fifty thousand dollars in gold-dust an' nuggets. How did it get there, an' who does it belong to?"

"It was buried there by two Chinese," Hathaway replied. "One of them was Chun's brother; the other one was the father of those two Moys. As to whom the gold belongs, I don't know. But—I have a growing suspicion, Mr. Evans, that it belongs to you."

EVANS snapped back his chair, staring at Hathaway in open-mouthed amazement. Before he could find his voice, Hathaway went on:

"Tell me something, Mr. Evans: Did you ever know of any Chinese placer-mining up there in Mad Mountains?"

"Yeah! Most every summer they used to be a Chink wastin' his time along Mad River. They never got more'n enough to pay for their grub."

"Then you don't think it likely that two Chinese miners could wash out fifty thousand dollars?"

"Hell, no! Not in a hundred years!"

"Then—where did they get it—up there?"

Evans did not reply, but as his eyes narrowed and his lips set, the expression on his face told more emphatically than words what was in his mind.

"Of course," went on Hathaway, watching the old cattle-man's face, "if all this gold was really stolen from that mine, and we recover it, half of it would belong to your former partner Mr. Marley."

At that juncture the door opened. One of the Circle-Star men stepped in.

"Hey, Ben!" Evans fairly shouted. "Bust down to the corral an' tell Curly to hustle up an' get them hosses ready; then both o' you come up here."

"I met Curly 'bout a mile out," said the puncher, "an' he told me to tell you he has gone after them three men that camped down at Silver Spring."

"He did! The damn' locoed, stubborn idiot! I hope he gets the north side o' his pants shot full o' holes while he's runnin' south." Evans paused for breath, ran a big hand through his gray hair, then went on: "How many came in with you, Ben?"

"Five."

"Good! Now listen to me, an' if you forget anythin', damme if I don't shoot your worthless ears off! First, go down to the corral and tell one of the boys to get three hosses ready. Second, have two men hitch the mustangs to the wagon, put in a couple shovels, an' drive round to the kitchen lean-to. I'll meet 'em there an' tell 'em what to do. Meantime you come back here an' give us a hand. Savvy? All right—git!"

Ben left at once. Evans turned to Bessie.

"Me an' Hathaway an' Nick are goin' as soon as we can get ready," he said. "You see that canteens an' grub are fixed for us."

"Daddy, you shouldn't go!"

"I'm goin' if it kills me!" snapped Evans. "No argument, now!"

"Then Esther and I are going with you. We—"

"You're not goin' tonight! We got to catch them Chinks right off and come to some understandin'. That might mean trouble, an' I don't want you there. In the mornin' a couple o' the boys will have to foller us with picks, shovels an' sacks. You can pack up some more grub an' come with them."

"About riding off in such a rush," interposed Hathaway. "Will you permit a suggestion? There's nothing to be gained by getting to the Seeps before Chris or Petie have located the Chinese and one of them has had time to get back there to meet us. Of course we might go right ahead and try to find this gold first, but I think it wisest to catch the Chinese at it and then have a talk with them. So, I see no need for us to rush off in the dark. About nine there'll be a moon and—"

"He's right, Daddy," said Bessie. "We'll have a good supper, a few hours' rest; then you can start at moonrise, meet Chris or Petie, and still get to the bridge by dawn if you wish to."

"They's two o' you ag'in' me!" sighed Evans with feigned peevishness. "And anyway, I reckon you're right. But get things goin'!"

BESSIE started in the direction of the kitchen. Esther called after her that she would join her in a very few minutes; then, beckoning to Hathaway, she started for her room. There she got out a bottle and handed it to Hathaway.

"My last," she said. "Call Mr. Evans and give him a good drink. He needs it."

"I was thinking of that very thing. Besides I want to tell him a lot of things I haven't had time to tell yet—things Chun told me. Stay and have a drink with us."

Esther shook her head. "No, Porter. I've decided to cut out that stuff. Curly doesn't like it, and—and—"

Hathaway's eyes went wide. He drew a long, astounded whistle. Then, to Esther's surprise, he fell strangely silent.

"Well," she said finally, "proceed with the lecture!"

"Esther," Hathaway said with quiet seriousness, "I'm going to marry Bessie."

Esther gasped. A long moment she gazed searchingly into her brother's eyes. "You mean it," she said finally. "But—"

"I certainly mean it. Esther! Bessie doesn't know yet that I'm so much in earnest. But I am. I may have made love to a thousand women—as you say; but before God, I never loved one as I love Bessie Evans."

Esther turned and looked thoughtfully out the window. Far in the west, over the gray and green valley, the world was ablaze with the glory of an Arizona sunset.

"Porter," she said softly, "isn't it queer—you and I—all the places we've been—the men and women we've met—after all that—it was the West—*our West—that got us!*"

"Yes, but I haven't got Bessie—yet," said Hathaway with some of his old flippancy.

That evening Hathaway was alone on the south porch, enjoying his after-dinner smoke when there came a quick, light step behind him. "What are you doing here alone, Mr. Hathaway?" asked Bessie.

"Thinking of you."

The girl was silent a moment. "What—what will you think of me if I tell you what I have decided to do?"

"I couldn't think any more of you—and I wouldn't think any less."

"Well, I suppose I'm foolish—but I was thinking that—suppose something happened to you—tonight. It wont, I know; but if it did—well, you remember what it was that you said the next time I—I'd give you—"

She got no farther. Hathaway had her in his arms.

After a while, out of the silence, the crunch of steel on gravel pierced Bessie's consciousness, and she tore herself free. Hathaway, following her gaze, saw lanterns bobbing down the road. Out of the dark floated voices, clear and sharp.

"Boys, can't we sort o' fall in line behind the wagon? . . . . That's better. And now, Jabe, you ought to sing a hymn."

"Hymn! I don't know no hymn!"

"Mebbe that cowboy song'll do."

"He allus liked it."

"An' say, boys, mebbe if we sing it sort o' like he usta, mebbe, some way, he'll know."

Low and brokenly at first, their voices rose; then full and strong, rough, untrained, but throbbing with a crude reverence, poignant with haunting melody:

"Oh, bell-ee me not on the lone plail-ee,
Wha' the wild ki-yotes howl ova' me-ee.
In a lonely glave jus' six by thl-ee,
Oh, bell-ee me not on the lone plail-ee-e."

JUST above the horizon, where the moon was due to rise, there was a trifling patch of pale gray when Evans, Hathaway and Big Nick, with food enough for the next two meals, started out for the Seeps. Since they would find plenty of water in the mountains, they carried only enough for that night. All were well armed, and Hathaway carried his flashlight. They reached the Seeps in good time and without anything happening, but neither Chris nor Petie was there. Disappointed, and somewhat uneasy, they settled down to wait.

Dawn was not two hours off when Evans announced they would wait no longer. Chris and Petie were not men to fall down on a job, he asserted. Since neither had returned, something had gone wrong.

They pushed on steadily, and just before daylight reached the mouth of the cañon. Here Evans called a halt. "Look at that, will you?" he cried. "That raises hell with our plans!"

Hathaway was thinking the same thing. Since leaving the Seeps, they had not seen the river, although several times they had been near enough to hear it. Now they saw it where it was released suddenly from the narrow rock banks in the cañon and shot out fan-like for a width of over two hundred feet, a brawling, treacherous, swift-moving stream, spotted with white where rocks tore it to silvery spray.

"Hathaway," said Evans, "they's no bridge up the cañon. The only chancet we got o' gettin' to a spot forty steps east o' where the old bridge used to be is to cross right here an' go up the east bank. It's one hell of a trip, but we got to do it. So come on!"

EVANS dug cruel spurs and forced his horse into the water. The bronco reared, stumbled, went to his knees, got up—and went on. Hathaway and Big Nick followed.

The three were across and were riding abreast up the wide gravel bank, dotted with brush, when suddenly their horses stopped, then reared, snorting and quivering. At first, what with the frightened horses, and the gloom, they could see nothing; then Hathaway made out a dark shadow on the ground. Drawing his flashlight, he saw it was a horse—dead.

"Douse that light!" ordered Evans. "An' scatter!"

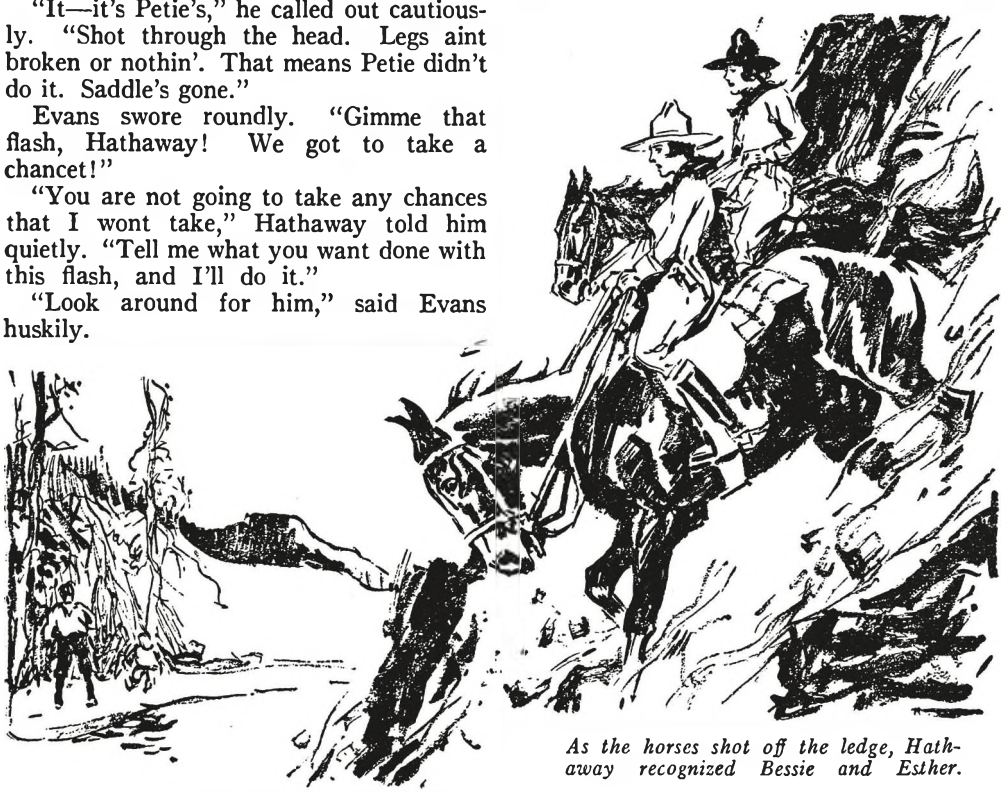
They sprang to the ground, left their mounts with hanging reins, and cautiously crept forward. While Hathaway and Evans watched, Big Nick examined the horse.

"It—it's Petie's," he called out cautiously. "Shot through the head. Legs aint broken or nothin'. That means Petie didn't do it. Saddle's gone."

Evans swore roundly. "Gimme that flash, Hathaway! We got to take a chancet!"

"You are not going to take any chances that I wont take," Hathaway told him quietly. "Tell me what you want done with this flash, and I'll do it."

"Look around for him," said Evans huskily.



As the horses shot off the ledge, Hathaway recognized Bessie and Esther.

Hathaway was already doing that. Holding the flash at arm's-length from his body, he was sweeping the ground around the dead horse.

"There he is!" cried Big Nick. "In that brush!"

Together they ran to the spot, tore the brush aside.

"Looks like he crawled in there an' died," muttered Evans brokenly. Let's turn him over, boys, an'—"

At that instant, Big Nick, with a swift blow, knocked the flash out of Hathaway's hand. It struck the gravel and went out.

CHAPTER XII

BEFORE Curly was a quarter of a mile from the ranch-house his sense of fairness told him he had acted churlishly, that his jealousy of Hathaway's knowledge and tact for leadership had prompted him to do a very foolish thing. Now he began to cool down and face the facts.

"I reckon," Curly communed with his bronco, "that Hathaway aint to blame that he knows so many things, any more'n you an' me are to blame for knowin' nothin'. We should 'a' stayed on the job; but now that we've busted into this mess, we got to do somethin'. S'posin' we back-trail them Chinks a ways? S'posin' you an' me look into that—eh, bronc'?"

The bronc' offering no objections, Curly swung off to the right and soon picked up the trail of the two Chinese. He followed that back a half-mile or more, then cut across a bench to intercept several of the Circle-Star riders coming in. Instructing Ben to tell Evans where he had gone, Curly rode northwest again and soon picked up the trail. He followed it to where the two Chinese had emerged from a gully, and there made a discovery.

Curly remembered that Hathaway had said there was a white man with the two Chinese when he saw them at the Seeps, but Evans had declared the white man was not with them when they came to the ranch-house. Tracks in the gully showed that he had ridden that far with them; but

that wasn't what excited Curly. His discovery was that while the two Chinese were loping off east to the ranch-house, the white man had ridden out of the gully, dodged around a brush-covered knoll, and then had ridden furiously straight west!

Curly worked his horse to the top of this knoll and from that vantage-point looked around the valley—far south toward Silver Spring, far north toward the Seeps and Mad Mountains, back toward the ranch-house, then over the broken lands to the west—and gave a shout.

"Bust along, you old-timer, an' foller them tracks!" he cried, giving his horse a touch of the spurs. "You an' me don't know how to say 'Pass the pancakes' in Chink talk, but we can read signs! An' what I see gives me an idee so danged big it hurts!"

CURLY estimated he had gone close to two miles when the tracks slid down a steep bank to the sandy bottom of a deep but narrow ravine. Here he drew up short. Clearly marked in the sand were the tracks of three horses that had come up from the south and passed on north. The white man had stopped, then turned to follow these tracks. Curly, his narrowed eyes gleaming, his jaw set, swung in with the tracks and forced his puzzled mount to a mad pace.

He had not gone far when he came to a sharp bend where old mesquite overhung the abrupt bank on the east side of the ravine. Here, in the forenoon, it would be shady; and here it was plain that the three men had stopped for several hours. Curly dismounted to look around.

Again the signs were clear. Leading his horse, the white man, and another man afoot, had gone far enough up the ravine to be out of earshot of the other men. There they had spent some time; then the white man had ridden out of the ravine and struck off northeast in a line that would cut the Seeps trail about five miles north of the ranch-house.

Then the man with whom he had been talking had gone back to his two companions. They had moved around in the shade of the mesquite until the middle of the afternoon; then all three had ridden north. Curly, chuckling to himself, and telling his horse he was having a fool's luck, rode furiously up the ravine on their track.

The trail presently left the ravine and then on from gully to gully; but held steadily to the northeast. This course, Curly saw, would take them to the west of the Seeps and on straight to the mouth of Mad River Cañon. When he became certain that this was their destination, Curly, who had no reason to conceal his movements except from the men he was following, took shortcuts across open country, picking up the trail again without much difficulty. He was about four miles south of the Seeps, and it was almost dark, when he caught sight of a wisp of smoke above a clump of mesquite some distance ahead. Dismounting, he concealed his horse in a thicket, removed his spurs and went on afoot.

Working his way quietly, he managed to locate the horses without disturbing them. At the same time he recognized the place—a shallow ravine masked by a dense growth of mesquite.

Striking out in a wide circle to reach the ravine above the horses, Curly wormed his way through the brush to the bank of the ravine just above the spot where the men were camped. Here, lying flat on the ground, he looked down into the gloom, seeing nothing at first but the glow of their dying campfire. Gradually he made out the forms of three men lying on the ground.

Curly sat back and debated what he should do. If the men had gone into camp for the night, nothing was to be gained by waiting there. But if they were going on again at moonrise, which was only a few hours off, Curly would be there to keep on their trail. If they did not move at moonrise, he would still have plenty of time to ride north to the Seeps and join the party from the Circle-Star. That decided, Curly went back to his horse, unsaddled and lay down to wait.

When it was light enough so that he could see clearly, he went back to the ravine. The three men were saddling. Hastening back to his horse, Curly saddled and prepared to follow.

AIDED by the moonlight, and the way sounds carried in the still night air, Curly found it easy to stay far enough behind to avoid discovery, yet close enough to keep the three in sight most of the time. As they proceeded, Curly became more and more convinced that they were heading for the mouth of the cañon.

"That white man an' the two Chinks have gone on up the cañon to the place

where that bridge used to be, I s'pose," Curly mused. "These three *hombres* got instructions from the white man to foller. Bronc', we're sure headin' hell-bentin' for trouble!"

It was half-past ten by Curly's watch when from a low hill he saw the three men draw up where Mad River shot out of its rocky cañon bed and spread out, fan-like, to a width of over two hundred feet. And after a few minutes' delay the three riders forced their horses into the water and started across at the wide but shallow ford.

Curly waited until they were on the opposite bank. He was about to start on when he saw something that brought him up short. Where the three riders had merged into the gray shadows on the east bank of the stream, there were red, swift flashes. Then, the crack of guns—voices of men cursing!

Headlong, Curly rode down the brush-covered slope toward the ford. He was within fifty yards of the stream when he saw a riderless horse splashing madly through the water toward the west bank. Behind the animal some distance, a mounted man was swinging his rope. Curly whirled into the brush, dismounted, and hugging the shadows, crept hurriedly forward to the edge of the rocky clearing by the river-bank. Cautiously he stuck his head out and looked around.

Now the mounted man was not fifty feet away. He was looking back across the river toward the east bank, where the shooting had taken place. All was quiet over there now. And the riderless horse was nowhere in sight.

For perhaps ten minutes the man did not move; then, just as Curly had decided to start something, the man turned his horse and rode straight at the Circle-Star man. Back into the shadows Curly slipped, his hand on the butt of his .45. The man rode on. Just when it seemed that the horse must sense Curly's presence, the man drew rein and dismounted. Leaving the horse, he walked to within ten feet of Curly, then sat down facing the river.

THIS struck Curly as too much of a good thing to let go by. Quiet as a cat, he edged out of the brush. Half a dozen feet from the man, Curly spoke softly:

"Jus' put 'em up, Mister, please!"

At the sound of Curly's voice, the horse flung up its head, snorting. At the same instant, the man leaped to his feet like he had been shot out of a gun. His revolver flashed in the moonlight; but, quick as his hand was, his eye and mind were quicker. He saw Curly, and Curly's gun, and knew what he was facing. He let go of his revolver as though it burnt his fingers, and shoved his arms high.

Curly stepped up. The man was a stranger to him, and a hard-looking customer. Watching him closely, Curly picked up the gun and put it in his own pocket. Then he searched him, finding nothing.

"Get your rope, Mister," Curly said quietly.

"Get it yourself!" the prisoner snarled. "I don't—"

He got no farther. Like a flash, Curly's left fist shot out, caught him on the jaw and knocked him sprawling.

" 'Pears like you didn't understand me," Curly drawled. "I said for you to please get your rope."

Without a word the man struggled to his feet, got the rope from his saddle, and handed it to Curly who promptly and expertly tied him up and rolled him into the shadows of the brush.

"Now," said Curly, standing over his prisoner, "you're sure in one hell of a fix, but they aint nothin' interferin' with you workin' your jaws. So I'm askin' you: who are you, what are you doin' on the Circle-Star range, an' who was you shootin' at over there?"

The man hesitated. Probably he was thinking that if Curly could lay him out so easily when he was standing up, what would he do when he was already down? At any rate, he presently found his tongue and spoke civilly.

"I don't know much about it. Orn came to me an' Jack Tubbs an' said that Mart Hastings was goin' to guide a couple o' Chinks to a lot o' gold up in the mountains, an' that Mart was goin' to get us in on the game. Today Mart told Orn for us to camp just across the ford. We get over there, an' a damn' Circle-Star man bobs up a-shootin'. He gets Jack, but—"

Curly broke in, his voice steely: "Did the Circle-Star man get hit?"

"I—I'm afraid he did. You see, Mart told us he'd be up the west side o' the river near where the old bridge was. That's

as far as the Chinks had told him. So when we bumps into this *hombre* just as we pull out o' the river, Orn an' Jack draws quick—an' the shootin' starts. The Circle-Star man an' his hoss both drop; an' then just behind him, who should bob up but Mart! Orn says to me then: 'Andy, you—' "

Savagely, Curly tore off his prisoner's bandana and shoved it between his jaws. Then he put on Andy's hat and started for the horse. Speaking to the bronco, he got close enough to catch the reins. The next instant he was in the saddle, the horse pitching furiously. Curly gave him a good roweling and forced the enraged brute headlong into the river. By the time he reached the other side, the bronco realized that there was a man in the saddle who knew his business. He quieted down.

Just back from the low gravel-bank, the bronco shied. Curly, out of the corner of his eye, saw that it was a dead horse. A little farther on, two men were sitting their horses, talking in low tones. Hearing Curly, they turned. "That's Andy," one said, then raised his voice: "Did you get Jack's hoss?"

Curly, the rim of Andy's hat shading his face, rode on. "No," he answered shortly.

"Well, why didn't you wait over there as I told you?"

Curly was now within ten feet of the two men. "I aint waitin' tonight," he drawled, and his big .45 fairly leaped to his hand. "Put 'em up, you two!"

There was an instant of stunned silence; then, with an astounded oath, one of the men whipped out his gun. Quick as he was, Curly was quicker. With deadly accuracy, he sent a bullet crashing through the man's wrist. At the same instant the man's horse reared. The shock of the bullet, and the pitching horse, threw him out of the saddle headlong into the brush. The horse made a wild dash for the river.

The other man thought this confusion gave him a chance, and he reached for his gun. Again Curly's revolver roared, and a lead slug ripped through the man's hat, knocking it off. With both horses pitching savagely, Curly thought for a second he had missed his mark and actually hit the man in the head, for the man went over with his hat; but instead of leaving the saddle, the man swung far over beneath his bronco's neck and emptied his gun at the Circle-Star man.

Curly's bronco went down, dropping so suddenly Curly had all he could do to leap clear. As it was, he stumbled and pitched headfirst into the brush. With a yell, the mounted man dug spurs and sent his horse leaping at the prostrate puncher.

JUST in the nick of time, Curly sprang aside. With a vicious swing, the rider aimed the butt of his empty gun at Curly's head. Curly caught the arm and jerked the man out of the saddle. The horse crashed on through the brush toward the river. With an oath, the man flung himself at Curly, reaching for his throat. Backing away, Curly slipped his gun into his holster, and struck with his fist. With a startled grunt, the man went to his knees.

Again Curly backed away. He drew his revolver again.

"You're the plumb damndest fool I ever seen," he observed coolly. "I didn't have the heart to shoot your hoss, but if you aggravate me much more I'm shore goin' to pump moonlight clean through *your* gizzard. Now get up an' do what I say. They's another rope on Andy's hoss over there. Get it an' tie up your friend before he gets that gun he's huntin'."

"To hell with you!" the man growled. "I—"

Flame leaped from the muzzle of Curly's gun. With a shocked cry, the man flung up a hand to his torn and bleeding ear.

"I hope you don't make me clip off the other one," Curly drawled. "Did you understand that I wanted you to get that rope?"

No further urging was necessary. While the man got the rope and tied up the one whom Curly had shot through the wrist, Curly found the gun that the wounded man had dropped. "I reckon you're Mart Hastings," he said, addressing the chap with the clipped ear.

"Mebbe I am an' mebbe I'm not," came the growling answer. "Who are you?"

"Don't get excited," replied Curly. "I reckon you're Hastings or you'd 'a' said you wasn't. Well, I'm Curly Williams, o' the Circle-Star." He made a swift examination of the job Hastings had done, then with the other end of the rope tied Hastings' arms behind his back. "Now that you're fixed comfortable, I'm askin' you where that other Circle-Star man is?"

"Damned if I know!" snarled Hastings. "Still a-goin', I reckon."

"You mean—he got away?"

"He went down with his hoss, but got up quick an' dived into the brush like a jackrabbit. We found his gun where he dropped it when he hit the ground, but we couldn't catch him."

Curly was thoughtful a moment. "If you're a-lyin' to me," he told Hastings coldly, "I'd hate to be in you're boots—what I'll do to you will shore be a plenty."

With that, Curly walked over quickly to the dead horse. It was the one Petie had ridden. Half believing that Hastings was telling the truth, Curly nevertheless began a search of the brush. He stopped short, a sickening feeling gripping him, when he discovered a body. From the position it appeared that the man had crawled under the brush and died there.

"That's Jack Tubbs," Hastings called out. "The Circle-Star man got him. We dragged him over there an' hid him."

Curly said nothing. He was starting on when a movement in the brush caused him to whirl around, gun ready. A surprised exclamation broke from his lips, and the gun went back into its holster. The bronco Curly had taken from Andy was staggering to its feet. Curly caught the reins, and while the bronco stood quivering, made an examination. He found the bullet had gone through the cartilage just above the bone, stunning but not seriously injuring the horse. "Creased him!" muttered Curly, and swung into the saddle.

A fifteen-minute search of the brush along the river-bank failed to disclose any sign of Petie. Realizing that he might have been seriously injured, yet could walk, Curly decided to keep up his search.

Hour after hour he rode the brush, peering in all the shadows. Two hundred yards down the river he found tracks in the sand—and a piece torn from a blood-stained shirt. The tracks led back into the brush and upstream. This puzzled Curly, who had concluded that Petie had started to walk to the Seeps.

Curly had heard Hathaway tell Chris and Petie to follow the Chinese to their camp; then one of them was to stay while the other went back to the Seeps. Petie, evidently, was on his way back when he ran into the three riders Curly had been following. If Petie did not reach the Seeps within a reasonable time, Curly felt sure that Evans and the others would come on without him.

It was nearing daylight when Curly gave up his search and started back to the ford, intending to cross and wait for the party from the Circle-Star. Near the ford, he caught the sound of voices, saw a light flashing through the brush. Dismounting, he went forward cautiously. Three men, one holding a flashlight, were bending over the body of Jack Tubbs. Then the flashlight struck the ground and went out.

Curly spoke in his slow drawl: "I hope one o' you *hombres* has got the makin's of a couple o' cigarettes. I'm shore wantin' 'em."

"I KNOWED them three *hombres* who camped at Silver Spring was mixed up in this business some way," Curly was explaining a moment later to Evans, Hathaway and Big Nick. "So I trails 'em here; but Petie, comin' down the river to tell you where the Chinks has camped, bumps into them, plugs that *hombre* you was lookin' at, an' leaves only two for me to handle. I got one tied up over there acrost the river, an' the other one is out there in the brush. With him is that white man who was guidin' them Chinks. He—"

"You captured all three?" exclaimed Hathaway. "Splendid work! But you must have had some fight?"

Curly took a big bite out of the sandwich Evans handed him. "Not much," he drawled. "I wasn't really started yet. Would 'a' gone on up an' got the two Chinks, but I wanted to find Petie first. You didn't see him?"

"No," replied Evans. "Is he hurt?"

"I found a piece o' his blood-stained shirt down the river a piece, but Hastings told—"

"Hastings?" echoed Evans. *"Mart Hastings?"*

"That's him," Curly nodded. "He's the one who was guidin' the Chinks. I got him bundled up over there with a crony o' his'n, name o' Orn. They was—"

"Mart Hastings!" repeated Evans, turning to Hathaway. "He worked for Marley at the mine. The two was thicker'n molasses in January. I never liked Hastings an' purty near had a fallin' out with Marley over him. Aint seen much o' Hastings in the past ten years. I just wonder—Say, Curly, let's take a look at him!"

"Right this way, gentlemen!" Curly gestured proudly. He led the way to where he had left the two men, bound and gagged.

They found the man named Orn tugging frantically at the rope that bound him,

his eyes wild. Mart Hastings, however, sat with bowed head, apparently sound asleep. Curly, about to kick him on the foot, stopped short, the breath hissing through his lips. Swiftly he bent over Hastings; then slowly he arose and turned horrified eyes to the other men.

"He's dead!" gasped Curly. "Stabbed clean through the heart!"

CHAPTER XIII

IN another moment they had Orn freed. "One o' them Chinks done that!" he spluttered at Curly, rubbing his cramped jaws. "Just after you left, he come sneakin' through the brush. He told Mart that he had suspected him o' treachery when he saw him leavin' camp without sayin' nothin' to them, an' that he had follered. He hid in the brush until that fight was over, then crept up an' heard what me an' Mart was talkin' about—"

"What was that?" demanded Evans.

Orn considered this a moment, his narrowed gaze on the old cattle-man's face.

"I'm goin' to tell you everything, Evans," he said finally. "I aint done nothin' yet, an' I don't intend to. Mart was tellin' me that the Chinks had a map but that it was in Chink so he would have to wait an' let the Chinks find the gold. Then Mart says he would put a couple o' slugs through them an' chuck 'em in the hole where they got the gold out of.

"I told Mart he was goin' too far, but he was out for blood. You see, Evans, it was Mart an' Marley that stole that gold from your mine—pockets they struck an' kept to themselves. Mart an' Marley hid the stuff up the cañon to wait till they dared move it. Then a couple o' Chink placer-miners discovered it by accident an' moved it to another place. Right off, one of the Chinks is killed an' the other skips an' never comes back. Marley, he goes away an' aint never heard from no more, but Mart stays around thinkin' that some day that other Chink would show up an' try to move that gold.

"So when them two Chinks come along an' ask for a guide to take them up that cañon, Mart gets wise right off an' hires out to them dirt cheap. The more he is with 'em, the surer he is that they know where that gold is; so, to play safe, he hires me an' my two men to help him, promisin' us a thousand apiece if he gets the stuff. We done our part—an' look! Jack's dead, an' I got a busted hand. I'm through! All I want now is to get out o' here before I meet them Chinks again, because that yaller devil said if I told you anything, he'd give me the same's he gave Mart."

"You don't need to worry none," Evans told him. "But we're not goin' to turn you loose—yet awhile. —Nick, you an' Hathaway see what you can do for his hand while Curly an' me go acrost the river an' see if the other prisoner is—"

Evans broke off as they heard the sound of hoofs on gravel. Some one was coming down the river, hurriedly, careless of who might hear him. In a moment the rider showed above the brush. It was Chris. Evans waved to him, and he rode up and dismounted. He started to say something but broke off with a startled cry when he saw Hastings.

"We'll tell you all about it soon's we have time," said Evans. "Have you seen them two Chinks, or Petie?"

"No—an' yes," replied Chris. "That's why I'm here. Me an' Petie trailed the Chinks an' him"—he indicated Hastings—"up the cañon yesterday. They came back on account o' high water, crossed here at the ford, an' went on up 'bout three mile an' camped. Petie waited for moonrise, then struck out to meet you at the Seeps. I aint seen him since."

"He got into a little trouble," Evans explained. "We'll start a hunt for him in a minute. What about the two Chinks?"

"Well, after Petie left, I seen everything was quiet, so I unsaddled an' took a little snooze. I woke up a dozen times, I guess; but there was nothin' stirrin'. Then—I think it must 'a' been 'bout two or three o'clock—I seen one o' the Chinks comin' *up the river,* an' all the time I had thought he was in camp asleep! He gets the other Chink up right off, but I don't see nothin' o' the white man. They act queer, I think, so I gets closter but can't make nothin' o' their jabber. When they busts up camp in a hurry an' rides up the cañon, I foller. I see the river has gone up a lot durin' the night, an' I'm pretty sure they can't go far on this side o' the cañon. Sure enough, 'bout an hour ago I hear 'em comin' back. I duck out o' sight an' they go by like a ghost was after 'em. I follers 'em, an' purty soon I figures they're headin' for the ford. So I slow up to let 'em get acrost; then I bust along

—an' find you," Chris finished abruptly, a perplexed look on his face.

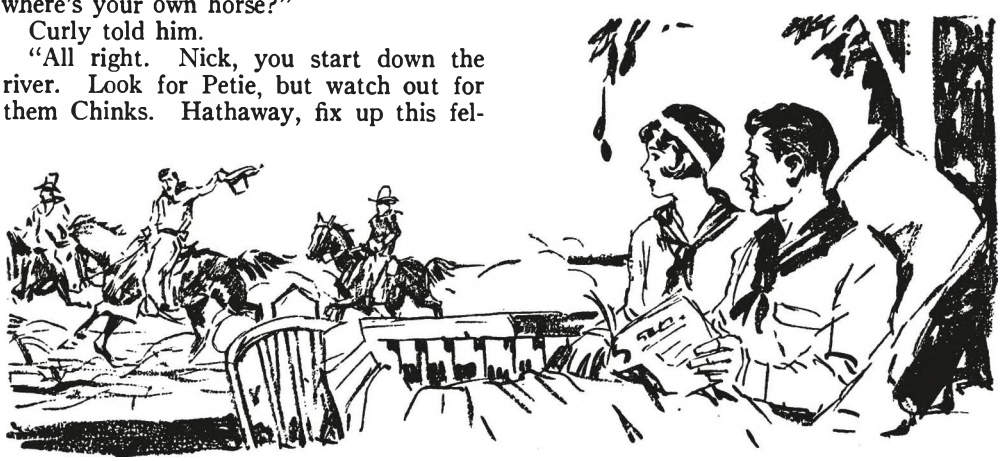
"They didn't go by here," Orn declared positively.

"An' I didn't see nor hear nothin' of 'em," spoke up Curly. "If they aint hidin' in the brush, they must 'a' swung off east an'—"

"Listen to me!" interrupted Evans. "Curly, where's that other prisoner, an' where's your own horse?"

Curly told him.

"All right. Nick, you start down the river. Look for Petie, but watch out for them Chinks. Hathaway, fix up this fel-



"There they go!" groaned Curly. "Hell bent for the round-up. An' look at me!"

ler's hand; then you an' Chris take him acrost the river, pick up Curly's bronc' an' that other prisoner, an' go on back to the Seeps. Meantime, Curly an' me will swing out an' look for sign o' them Chinks. We'll all meet at the Seeps—for another start, if necessary. Savvy?"

"I understand—but I object," Hathaway demurred politely. "You've had a hard night. You're in no condition to ride after those two Chinese. So you go with Chris. Curly and I will go after the Chinamen."

Evans protested, swore, but all in vain. Hathaway was courteous but determined, and he won out. While Curly and Chris located Orn's horse in the brush, and roped it, Hathaway bandaged the man's hand. Then Evans and Chris, with Orn on his own horse, rode across the river, which was now so high and swift as to make crossing dangerous. Curly told Nick where he had found that piece from Petie's blood-stained shirt and started him on his way. Then Curly and Hathaway struck out to pick up the trail of the two Chinese.

"If we don't have no bad luck, we'll be seein' 'em inside o' six miles," Curly told Hathaway as they rode slowly through the brush seeking for tracks. "That's because they got to go south six miles before they can turn. They can't turn east before that, because they don't know how to get through that mesquite thicket an' over them cliffs; an' they can't turn west because below this ford they aint no place where a sane man would try to cross in that water until you get purty nigh the Seeps. So keep one eye on the trail an' the other on the brush ahead. I s'pose them Chinks is packin' guns?"

"I suppose so," Hathaway answered, but his mind was on other things. He had remembered suddenly that Bessie and Esther were to be at the Seeps this morning. True, several of the Circle-Star punchers were to be with them, but not realizing that there might be danger, it would be like Bessie and Esther to venture on ahead.

THE young men did not go far before picking up the trail. The Chinese were riding hard; but because they did not know the country, they were wasting a lot of time. They would turn toward the river, ride along the bank as though seeking a place to cross; then they would strike out due east and wind up in a blind gap. Curly, who knew every foot of this ground, did not follow the tracks into these gaps. Knowing that the Chinese would have to come back out, he cut straight across the mouth of the gap until he picked up their out trail. "We're bound to catch them before long!" he flung over his shoulder at Hathaway.

Curly and Hathaway had gone perhaps four miles when they saw the tracks lead-

ing once more down to the river. Here the river swung sharply to the west for a hundred yards, turned at a high, rocky bank, doubled back east a hundred yards, then flowed on south. This formed a narrow tongue of land surrounded on all sides by the impassable river—save at the east end. Here Curly drew up short.

"Look!" he said quietly to Hathaway, pointing toward the river. "If they aint come out o' there yet, the blamed fools are in a trap. But you be careful! That gravel-bank is dangerous, an' you can bust your neck slidin' down that brush slope. No need to hurry, 'cause if they're out there on that sand flat, we got 'em!"

Curly urged his horse to the edge of the gravel-bank. There the brute balked, rearing, then with a sudden dive shot down the bank with a rattle of rocks and a cloud of dust. Hathaway, some distance on Curly's left, got down with better luck.

They were picking their way cautiously down the rough slope tangled with brush when Hathaway saw Curly draw up and rise to his full height in the saddle. Following his gaze, Hathaway saw they were within ten feet of the bare sand flat. This was some hundred feet or more wide and half again as long. It was dotted with scrubby willow on which driftwood had anchored, indicating that at times the river overflowed the sand.

On this sand flat, not far from the edge of the brush slope, were two horses. The Chinese were not with them. Hathaway, his revolver in his hand, began looking around.

Then, of a sudden, two shots rang out. Down by the river's edge, just above a clump of willow, two wisps of smoke rose in the air. Swift on the heels of the shots, Curly's bronco went crashing down the brush slope and rolled out onto the sand.

Hathaway's horse reared and jumped, tore out of the brush and into the open. Two more shots—and he went down. Hathaway jumped clear, but he got a terrific jolt as he landed sprawling in the sand. Dazedly he got to his feet. His right arm was numb, his revolver nowhere in sight. The two Chinese, with their refilled canteens, were making a dash for their horses.

Hathaway ran to head them off. *"Teng!"* he shouted. *"Pa lok! . . . . Teng!"*

They did stop—but only long enough to empty their guns at him. Then they ran on; but Hathaway, who had not paused, was now between them and their horses.

"Stop, and listen to me!" he shouted in their own language. "You have—"

"Get out of my way!" cried one of the Moys in savage English. "Who are you, anyway?"

THE two had stopped, then started slowly toward Hathaway, moving farther apart from each other as they neared the white man. They did not look much like the men Evans had described. Their clothing was torn and soiled; one of them had lost his hat, and neither of them wore glasses. Both of them, but especially the one with the long arms, displayed a savage temper.

"You have committed murder," Hathaway said. "For that you must answer. Understand?"

"We understand only that we have been betrayed by the man we trusted, that all of you mean only to rob us!" was the snarling reply.

"That gold does not belong to you," Hathaway declared. "It did not belong to your father, nor to Chun Kee's brother. It was stolen from the man you talked with yesterday at the ranch. You—"

"That is a lie!"

"That is the truth! If you—"

"We will not listen! And you are not going to take us to jail! Get out of our way! Be quick, or—"

He did not finish the sentence, but his right hand moved to his open shirt-front. Hathaway held his ground. He had been talking for time, and was now suddenly alarmed over Curly's silence. He had supposed that Curly had been stunned by his fall, but he should have been up by this time. Now Hathaway ventured to look around. The horse, and Curly, were still on the ground.

The two Chinese stepped nearer. "Curly!" shouted Hathaway, backing away. "Are you hurt?"

At that, Curly broke out in a string of highly colored and highly explosive oaths. "Watch them damn' Chinks!" he groaned. "I got a busted leg, but if I can get my gun—"

Something flashed in the sunlight. Hathaway leaped aside, the long blade grazing his arm. "You're crazy!" he flung at the Chinese. "You can't escape! You had—"

"I've no time to listen to your lies!" barked the man with the knife. "Get out of our way! This time I wont miss!"

Hathaway, looking first one then the other in the eye, stood his ground. He did not intend to take any foolish chances; that wasn't his way. Neither did he intend to let the Chinese get to their horses. Barehanded, he faced them, waiting for them to make the first move.

He did not have to wait long. With a snarling intake of breath, the man with the knife sprang at him from one side. From the other side the one with the long arms leaped in, swinging his empty revolver at Hathaway's head.

Hathaway dodged the knife and parried the long arm that swung the gun; but although he realized his peril, he could not avoid the ensuing clench. Strong, wiry hands gripped him; knife and gun flashed up for swift, vicious blows. It seemed that Hathaway could not escape them. To try to jerk loose from one man would only throw him closer to the other.

Perfectly cool, his mind and muscles working like trained machines, Hathaway executed a desperate maneuver. Full length he dropped to the ground, hurled himself at the nearest pair of legs. With startled, wheezy grunts, the two Chinese crashed into each other. Both went to their knees.

Hathaway, free again, sprang up and swung around. At that precise instant the chap with the knife was rising from his knees and turning toward the white man. Straight from the shoulder, Hathaway launched a blow at the Chinaman's head. His fist caught him just below the ear, a smashing blow that knocked him in a heap against his brother's legs.

As bad luck would have it, that blow proved almost disastrous to Hathaway. The brother, the long-armed one with the gun, pitched forward as his legs were knocked from beneath him. One hand clutched desperately at Hathaway and caught him by the shirt collar. The other hand, the one holding the empty gun, swung in a short half-circle. More by chance than from good aim, the butt of the gun caught Hathaway between the eyes. With the Chinaman hanging to him, Hathaway staggered back, dazed and half blinded.

Before Hathaway could recover, the man with the knife was up again. Mouthing fierce curses, he sprang at Hathaway's back. Hathaway leaped aside. The Chinaman followed. Flashing in the sun, the long blade darted in and out in lightning-like thrusts that no human being could long escape. Not two inches from the white man's heart, hot, sharp pain seared across his side. The shock of it cleared Hathaway's brain like magic.

ABRUPTLY, then, Hathaway ceased trying to free himself from the desperate grip of the man with the pistol. Instead he closed in, caught him about the waist and swung him around. It was done so swiftly that one of the dagger-thrusts intended for the white man caught the Chinaman in the shoulder. With a scream of rage and pain he pitched forward against Hathaway, throwing him back. The gun dropped from his hand; but this, as Hathaway quickly learned, was a trick. Dropping to his knees, he flung both arms around the white man's legs and jerked them from beneath him.

Hathaway went down like a falling house, striking the hard sand full length. Before he could rise, both Chinese were coming at him. And each of them had murder in his eyes. Realizing that he could not escape both, Hathaway flung up his legs. There was a yelp of pain as one foot caught the Chinaman in the face; but the kick could not stop that mad lunge, and Hathaway felt the blade bite deep as it slashed across his left leg just above the knee. At the same instant the other Chinaman struck, his knees driving into Hathaway's chest, his hands groping for the white man's throat.

Ignoring everything else, Hathaway wound his fingers in the man's shirt-front and over the belt of his trousers. With one swift upward lunge, a move that called for all his strength, Hathaway sat up, drew his feet beneath him and, lifting the Chinaman with him, stood up. High over his head then, he lifted him, hurled him like a rock straight into the face of the Chinaman charging with the knife.

DOWN they went; and before either could rise, Hathaway was upon them. The man with the knife he caught by the arm, twisted the blade from his fingers, and flung it over the willows into the river. Then, with expert thoroughness, Hathaway knocked him down, whirled and knocked the other one sprawling across him.

Streaming with sweat from that battle under the hot sun, bleeding from half a dozen bruises and cuts, his clothing torn, cut, and dirty, Porter Eldridge Hathaway,

late of New York, stood with clenched fists and looked down at the two men.

"You started this," he observed with deadly calmness. "I didn't want to fight you. Now I warn you. With my bare hands I'll kill the first man who tries to get up!"

Neither man spoke nor moved.

Then, of a sudden, the silence was broken by a wild shouting from Curly, shouts mingled with oaths and frantic appeals. Behind him, above the muffled roar of the river, Hathaway heard a startling noise, and swung around. At what he saw, he could not restrain a gasp of dismay and consternation.

Down the steep and rough side of the thirty-foot rock bank on the other side of the stream, in a cloud of dust and a storm of flying gravel, two horses were sliding headlong toward the river. Ten feet or so above the water was a ledge. Here, just as the two horses shot off the ledge, Hathaway recognized the riders—Bessie and Esther.

Then he saw only the upflung water as the horses dropped, and sank. And then—the plucky little animals were up again, swimming desperately toward him.

It was Bessie who, gun in hand, ran to Hathaway's side. Esther, with but a glance at her brother, sped swiftly to where Curly lay on the sand.

CHAPTER XIV

FOR more than two weeks the Circle-Star hummed with unusual activity. The two Chinese and the two white men had to be taken to Calvert City to be held for the sheriff; a doctor had to be brought out to treat the three nasty but not serious bullet wounds Petie had carried with him all the way from the ford to the Seeps, where he met Bessie and Esther; and the whole Circle-Star family, including every puncher on the place, had to drop everything else and with willing hands and a great quantity and variety of advice help the doctor set Curly's broken leg.

Thus it was some time before Hathaway, Evans and several of the boys rode out on a three-day trip to Mad Mountains. Hathaway had no difficulty locating the gold; and a week or so later Evans had the check in his bank. It was several thousand dollars more than Chun had thought, and almost enough to make up for the sixty thousand dollars Evans had lost in his mining venture with Marley.

"It's enough," he told Bessie one afternoon as he sat on the porch staring dreamily at his stocking feet perched on the rail. "It's enough that now I could make the old Circle Star the best damn', up-an'-comin' ranch in the hull o' Tuscarora Valley. I could—only for one thing."

"What's that, Daddy?" Bessie asked quickly.

The old cattle-man looked up at the girl, his eyes crinkling with a knowing smile.

"I need a superintendent, Bessie—a young man an' a square man; a feller who's got both book-learnin' an' experience; a chap with a level head an' a damn' good pair o' fists; an', moreover, a man whose heart will be where his work is."

"Huh!" retorted Bessie, her face crimsoning. "Some folks want an awful lot!" She fled into the house, leaving Evans chuckling.

BIG NICK was at the table, eating a belated dinner. Bessie sat down facing him. For five minutes she talked about inconsequential things, or sat silent, picking with nervous fingers at the tablecloth. Then, looking Big Nick straight in the eye, she spoke out:

"Nick, Mr. Hathaway wants me to marry him."

"He does!" Big Nick gasped over a mouthful of bacon and beans. "Why—why, I can't believe it! Whoever would 'a' thought o'—"

"You're laughing at me!" Bessie scolded. "And I'm serious. Also I want your help. You got me into this and—"

"Me?"

The look of injured innocence on Big Nick's face made Bessie smile in spite of herself.

"It's all right, Nick," she told him. "I—I want to marry Mr. Hathaway. But I—I can't—I simply wont—hurt Curly. You know how things were between us. So, Nick, I've been thinking that maybe you could talk to Curly, tell him that I love him as much, even more, than I could love my own brother; but that I realize now that I don't love him, and never did love him, like I—like I do Mr. Hathaway. I'm sure that you could tell him so that he would understand that it's all for the best, and so that he wont feel hurt."

"I'll do it, Bessie," Big Nick promised solemnly. "But"—he shook his head sad-

ly—"you don't know what you're askin'. There is somethin' 'bout this hull blamed affair that I can't tell you. So don't be s'prised if that hot-headed Curly up an' plants a mess o' lead in the place where I orter have brains." He rose to his feet, sighing. "That naked kid with the arrers shore orter be spanked good an' plenty for the mess he's got me in!"

FOUR days later Big Nick, his pockets bulging and his arms loaded, ventured out on the south porch where Curly had persuaded them to move him. Seeing Esther with him, Big Nick paused.

A group of riders, singing and shouting, tore up from the corrals and galloped down the south trail.

"There they go!" groaned Curly. "Hell-bentin' for the spring round-up! An'—an' look at me! I got to lay here all day *in a nightshirt*—with a book in my hand—an' a half a ton o' rock roped to my busted peg!"

Esther looked at the riders, but she did not see them. "I—I am very sorry," she spoke in a low voice. "I know you want to be—with them. But you will have to be patient. Is there anything more I can do for you?"

"You've done too much already, Miss Hathaway," declared Curly, gently apologetic. "A feller with a broken leg orter be shot—jus' like we would a bronc'."

Esther did not smile.

"Say," Curly went on after a silence, "tell me somethin', will you? If your brother should take a notion to—well, to stay in Arizony, would you go back to New York?"

"I don't know, Curly."

"Well, I wish you'd stay."

"You do! Why?"

"Well, you see, everybody here likes you a heap, an' you're mighty good company for Bessie. See?"

"Yes. I—I see."

Something in the girl's voice made Curly turn to look at her. "Big Nick is coming," she said, quickly averting her face. She walked away silently.

Amazed, Curly stared down at the various things Big Nick heaped on the bed beside him. There were several dozen packs of cigarette tobacco; sacks of oranges and candy; magazines; newspapers; a box of cigars; a fancy hand-mirror with comb and brush; a pearl-handled pocketknife; and so many other objects that the bed took on the appearance of a bargain counter in a notion-store.

"What's all this truck for?" demanded Curly. "Looks like there's been a fire—or a robbery."

"Is there anythin' else you're hankerin' for?" asked Big Nick sweetly. "I hope you're comfortable an' feelin' yourself. I got a little matter—"

"I knowed you was figgerin' to bribe me!" Curly accused. "Well, I wont listen! Where you been hidin' your ornery self the past four days? I got somethin' to say to you an' I want to say it quick before anybody comes. Savvy?"

"I'm listenin'," said Big Nick, glad for a further respite.

"It's about Bessie. I—I love her. You know that, damn your ornery hide, an' you know I want to make her happy. But listen: I been gettin' my fool eyes open to the hard an' cold fact that I don't love Bessie the way a feller orter love the woman he hitches up with for life. Why, I see her an' Hathaway together an' I aint a bit jealous. An' I know that he could make her a heap more happier than I ever could. So I want you to tell her for me that—well, that I'm wantin' to back out if it wont hurt her feelin's too much. You savvy?"

VERY slowly and thoughtfully Big Nick rolled a cigarette. "I'll do it if you insist," he said solemnly. "But it's shore some job you're a-givin' me."

"I know it, Nick," Curly admitted; "but I figger that you, bein' a —a diplomat, can handle it so she wont be hurt none."

Big Nick lighted his cigarette. "Purty sweet on Miss Hathaway, aint you?"

"No!" Curly exploded. Then he fell strangely silent. "Nick," he said soberly, "all I got to do is to get a smell o' Miss Hathaway's purty hair an' look in her purty brown eyes an' I'm damned if I don't feel just like Pinky Arnold looks when he's drunk an' glad of it!"

"Huh!" Big Nick grunted. "I reckon she likes you a heap."

For a moment Curly Williams gazed wistfully far down the trail where a patch of yellow dust hid the Circle-Star riders. Then he looked at Big Nick and smiled.

"Well," he drawled, "I reckon worse things could happen to a man with a broken leg."

THE END

The Phantom Call

By

Arthur L. Mefford

There's a big thrill as well as a real mystery in this boomer telegrapher's strange story.

I HAVE never been a believer in the occult. After the weird and uncanny experience which I am about to relate, however, I am forced to admit that some mysterious influence, which I cannot, and will make no attempt to, explain, warned me of impending evil, and is the direct cause of my being alive today to tell this story.

My narrative goes back almost a score of years. At that time, as a youngster still in my early teens, I was a railroad telegrapher—a "boomer" telegrapher, if you will, having for several years made a practice of working only a few weeks on a job; just long enough to earn sufficient money to pay my fare to another job, in perhaps another State.

During these wandering years I had worked on forty or more different railroads, and in practically every State of the Union, as well as Mexico and Canada.

It was after a particularly hard jolt I had received in the great Northwest, when after resigning from a telegraph job on the Northern Pacific and blowing my pay-check, I discovered that I was broke and without prospects of a job and two thousand miles from home, that I awoke to the fact that it was about time I thought of settling down.

As I had not visited my home in Kentucky, which was about one hundred and fifty miles northeast of the scene of my story, for almost three years, I decided to try and locate somewhere in the vicinity of home, get a good position, and give up my roving habits. Having reached this decision, I wired my father to send me carfare.

That was how I came to apply to the chief dispatcher of the Cincinnati, New Orleans and Texas Pacific Railroad. He had no permanent position as telegrapher open at the moment, but said he would take me on as an extra, "subbing" for various telegraphers and station agents along the line who might wish to take a day off. Then, he said, as soon as a vacancy occurred, he would place me on the regular pay-roll.

For two or three months I worked at various points along the road between Cincinnati and Chattanooga. Then I was

ordered to relieve a man who for no apparent reason had suddenly resigned at a little switching and train-order tower a few miles north of Nordale. I was to work the late night trick, ending my labors at seven o'clock in the morning, when I would be relieved by the day operator.

Nordale is a division-point on the Cincinnati, New Orleans and Texas Pacific Railroad. It consists of a railroad Y. M. C. A., and a few houses and stores perched precariously on a steep mountain-side, while between the foot of the mountain and the rushing, tumbling waters of the beautiful little Cumberland River, is a level space barely broad enough to accommodate the railroad tracks.

Several weeks passed, and I held the job. While it was very lonesome, there not being a habitation within several miles, —and no place to build one should a person have so desired, because the railroad tower was already on the only available level spot not appropriated by the railway track itself,—I liked the place. I had to walk the distance between the tower and Nordale twice a day, living at the Y. M. C. A.

Notwithstanding these drawbacks, I had a fairly good time in spite of the loneliness of the job and the graveyard shift. There were several pretty girls in Nordale with whom I managed to scrape up an acquaintance, and who helped me while away my idle hours. I managed to save a portion of my salary, and I began to look forward to the time when I would have saved sufficient money to enable me to purchase a farm near my home—the goal of almost every telegrapher.

The telegraph tower was perched high above the tracks on the mountain-side. A steep flight of stairs led up the side of the building to its only door. Inside, it was probably eighteen by twenty feet. Its only furniture was a dilapidated yet comfortable chair, a small cannonball stove, and a telegraph table measuring perhaps four feet long by two feet broad. This was built securely into the northeast corner of the office in such a position that the operator commanded a view of oncoming trains from both directions as he sat attending to his duties.

The three windows in the front of the tower were approximately thirty feet above the tracks, while none of the side windows could have been less than fifteen feet above the ground. In the rear of the building there were no openings. To the left of the telegraph table were a set of six or eight steel levers which operated the switches a short distance north of the office as well as the block and train-order signals.

After a few nights on the job I learned that from the time a southbound fast express train passed the office about one o'clock in the morning until almost half-past four, I had nothing to do, except on rare occasions when a delayed or extra freight-train might temporarily demand my attention.

As all operators do, despite the fact they are supposed to stay awake, I soon seized upon the idea of utilizing this interim to make up for some of the sleep I lost in the daytime because of my multifarious social obligations in the village. By lying on the table on my right side with my face in the corner and my legs propped up on a heavy cardboard register-book placed across the the gap from the edge of the telegraph-table to the steel levers, I could rest quite comfortably.

After this discovery, the passage of the southbound express train at one o'clock and its being reported safely "by" to the dispatcher, was the signal for my pulling down the shades, locking the door as a safeguard against tramps or other prowlers, climbing upon my improvised bed and taking a snooze.

Let me explain here that every railroad telegraph office is designated by some combination, generally of two letters, known as a "call." And early in the career of every railroad telegrapher is formed the habit of responding instinctively, almost instantly, to his own office call, although to a layman no difference in the monotonous clicking of the instruments can be noticed. So highly developed does this instinct become that no matter how soundly an operator sleeps, he will almost invariably awaken instantly and respond, should his "call" letters be repeated on his wire. Oftentimes he will reach for his key and acknowledge his call while as yet only half awake.

ALL went well with me for several weeks. Then, three nights before Election Day, the queer and horrifying incidents which make up my story began to take place.

I cleared the southbound express as usual. Then I lay down in my customary position on the telegraph table for my

morning's nap. In those days I possessed the happy faculty of being able to go to sleep almost instantly, at will.

So I did upon this occasion. An hour or so later I was aroused from my slumbers by the urgent, almost frantic repetition of my "call" letters, *"GF—GF—GF—GF,"* on the train-order wire. I raised myself to a reclining posture on my left arm, and started to acknowledge my "call" on the telegraph key with my right. Simultaneously I began to scramble down from my bed, and urged by some unaccountable impulse, I glanced backward and sidewise over my left shoulder.

There I beheld a sight that froze the blood in my veins, chilled my bones to their marrow and paralyzed me with fright. I tried to scream but could not utter a sound.

Not six feet distant, almost directly in the center of the room, stood a huge negro. He wore a demoniacal grin which spread from ear to ear, displaying the most hideous array of teeth that I have ever seen. He was as black as the ace of spades, and to me appeared fully seven feet tall. In his upraised right hand he held a heavy bludgeon with which he menaced me.

Somehow I managed to get on my feet and swung around to face the monster. And—as I did so, he vanished instantly, in thin air.

Everything in the office was in a normal condition, except myself. I stood with the perspiration pouring down over my face, and trembling as though stricken with palsy. My right hand still rested on the telegraph key which I had left open. I closed the switch. Immediately the dispatcher began to call me on the wire, and I responded with the letters of my call.

"Say, you big ham," he began, "after this when you go to sleep, don't leave your key open. If it happens again, you're fired."

"I wasn't asleep," I managed to tap back shakily. "I heard you the first time you called and answered promptly, but left the circuit open by accident."

"That's the worst yet," he snapped back. "You must have been drunk as well as asleep. I didn't call you until this moment, and then it was because you *had* your key open!"

GRADUALLY I began to regain my composure. By the time daylight came, I was able to convince myself that I had had a nightmare and dreamed of the monster negro. I decided to say nothing to the day man of my experience, for fear he would make fun of me. So, when he relieved me, I merely picked up my lunch-basket and departed for my boarding-house. Finally, I entirely dismissed the occurrence from my mind.

I slept most of the day and reported back for duty at the usual time. Traffic was heavy during the early part of the night, and one o'clock and the southbound express came before I was fairly aware of the passage of time.

With it reported safely by, the previous night's horrible experience recurred to me. My nerves became very shaky. I laughed off my fears, however, and just to convince myself that I wasn't afraid, again crawled up on the telegraph-table and eventually went to sleep.

SOMETIME later, I again awoke with a start. I was positive I had heard my "call" letters repeated on the train-order wire. Then to my horror, the previous night's weird performance was duplicated: The same negro, grinning in the same devilish manner, with the same uplifted arms and their menacing club.

I sprang to my feet, and even as I did so, the apparition vanished instantly as it had done the night previously.

This second time, however, the phenomenon left my nerves in a terrible condition. I was near a collapse from fear. Finally I was able to walk around the inside of the office. The window-shades were drawn, the door locked, and everything in its accustomed place. Not the slightest trace of my nocturnal visitor remained.

Even now, almost twenty years afterward, the recollection of my terror during the hours remaining until dawn of that morning brings cold chills up and down my spine. In some manner I kept on the job until the day man came in. He noticed my pale and drawn manner and my evident distraction, and kidded me:

" 'Smatter, kid—see a ghost, or something?"

"No," I finally stammered. "I just don't feel well. I didn't sleep yesterday, and I've got a sick headache."

"Better watch your step, kid," he counseled. "Those dames down in town will cause you to lose your job yet, if you don't look out!"

That whole day I remained in a state

of misery. I was restless and could not sleep. I counted the minutes until the time came for me to go back to my torture-chamber. I fairly dragged my rebellious feet along the ties the last few hundred yards of my journey to the tower.

I was afraid to go to work, yet still more I feared the gibes of the day man, should I confide to him the cause of my fright.

The night wore on slowly. To me it seemed like a century until the south-bound express flew by. After it had gone, I sat in my chair and endeavored to get my mind off my fears by reading an old magazine. I couldn't keep my mind on the story, however, and eventually got up and began pacing the floor.

Then a sense of stubbornness seized me and I resolutely set out to conquer my fears. "I will lie down and force myself to go to sleep," I reasoned, "just to prove that my 'apparition' was nothing but a nightmare."

I did lie down, though I could not refrain from repeatedly glancing over my shoulder to the spot where I expected the monstrous negro to appear. Gradually the monotonous clicking of the telegraph instruments caused me to lapse into a doze.

"GF—GF—GF—GF." I was brought back to consciousness by the frenzied repetition of my office call. Wildly I reached for the key, at the same time with a feeling of despair glancing over my shoulder to the spot where the vision had appeared on the two preceding nights.

There he stood, glaring at me with such an air of venom and hatred as I never have before nor since beheld on a human countenance. I could distinguish the yellow stains on his crooked teeth and the gnarly knots on his hands. His sinewy arms held aloft the heavy bludgeon he had brandished above me on the two preceding occasions.

For the first and only time in my life, I fainted.

WHEN I came to, daylight was just beginning to break—it was about half-past four. I was aware of a strange clumping sound outside. My heart almost stopping from fear, I rushed to the window.

There I beheld the most welcome sight of my life. Four tall and lanky mountaineers, each with a rifle over his shoulder, and a jug under his arm, were tramping down the track on their way to Nordale to vote. It was their heavy boots on the ties that made the clumping noise.

I ran down the stairs and engaged them in conversation, meanwhile purchasing several swigs of the powerful liquid contained in their jugs. I detained them on one pretext or another, for several minutes, until it was broad daylight.

NO sooner had they left, however, than my terror again gripped me. I resolved I would never spend another night alone in that little office which had proved such a torture-chamber to me.

When the day man arrived, I told him I was sick and would have to be relieved. He got into communication with the dispatcher, telling him he had found me desperately ill. He requested a leave of absence for me, and a pass that I might go home to recover. The dispatcher wired me a pass as far as Cincinnati, from where I would have to pay my fare to my home on another road.

I collected my belongings and breathed a sigh of relief as I boarded the first north-bound train. Six hours later I stepped off the train in Cincinnati. I had missed my connection and was forced to remain there overnight.

The following morning—the day after election—I left the cheap hotel where I had spent the night and started to the station to catch the local train home. On the way I bought a morning newspaper. The first headline that attracted my attention read:

TELEGRAPH OPERATOR SLAIN.
MURDERED FIRST NIGHT ON LONELY JOB.
NO CLUE TO ASSAILANT.

The station referred to in the article, where the poor unfortunate met his untimely demise, was the little tower which had proved such a torture-chamber to me! The man who had relieved me had been shot through the head and instantly killed. Apparently, according to the newspaper, the shot had been fired from high up on the mountain-side, opposite the tower.

Whether the slayer resembled in any way the apparition I had seen on three different occasions, I never knew, as he was never apprehended.

So far as I know, the railroad company's records may still carry me on their list of employes as being absent because of illness. I have never applied for reinstatement on the job.

THE war produced some humor along with the tragedy — as witness this joyous tale of the underdog who got even.

The Rooky Pays Off

By J. A. Rohan and William Purdy

"A ROOKY'S like a green horse. You've got to break both of 'em to harness, but it doesn't pay to hurt the feelings of either of 'em too much. They might get you within kickin'-range some day."

The philosophy was dispensed by First Sergeant Jim Ryan to his messmates at Fort Sheridan. As his voice carried around the table, the buzz of chatter stopped. When Ryan talked, men listened. He knew the army. It had been his life. He had joined it as a kid in his teens. A top-sergeant's berth had been his for years. In the World War he had served as a captain and had done a good job of it, then accepted his discharge as captain gracefully and betook himself, his wound-stripes and his decorations, back to his old job of top-sergeanting.

"I saw a gent get the hoof-marks on his moleskins in the late lamented war," he continued. "All because he didn't use a little sense back in the days when we were chasin' gu-gus up and down the merry little jungles of the Philippines. And believe me, when the ceremony was over, the blisters were all where they belonged!

"I wont name any names, because the gent who wore the horseshoe marks aint parked a thousand miles from here. The ex-rooky who presented 'em could be found without a search-warrant, either.

"It came off about the time we were chasing Fritzie up Argonne way. I was playing around as aid to this gent who got the horseshoe decorations—and who, at the time, was a colonel in command of a brigade, there being a shortage of generals.

"We're pegging along in a big, high-powered car when we get held up by a convoy that's hogging the road. While the old man is telling the louie in charge what he thinks of him, an officer on a horse flashes past us. When we get under way again, he wheels his nag and holds up his hand.

"Our bus stops; he climbs off his trusty steed, and when he sticks his head into our taxicab, I pipe his brigadier's star. It happens he's commanding the division. And he has a hankering for space in our

chariot. It appears I'm the goat, of course. Says the colonel:

" 'Captain Ryan will take the horse—'

"I don't know what else he intended to say, but that was as far as he got. The general makes it short and snappy.

" 'You take the horse, Colonel,' says he. 'I'll take the car and the Captain. I'll send 'em back to you when I'm through with them.'

"NOW, that didn't cheer the colonel much. He hadn't had a horse under him since he was a second louie in the Islands. But he climbed aboard and finished his journey and limped for a week. It was a sight for sore eyes to see the old boy walking bowlegged.

"The general climbs in with me and gets chummy, and I find he really hasn't any particular pressing business with the old bus. I have a lingering suspicion I've seen him before somewhere.

"He talks about the Philippines, and we seem to have been a lot of places together. He knows me, but I can't make him. I rack my brain, but I can't place him among any of the officers I ever served with. We get to talking about New Year's Eve in the Islands in 1900, when the insurrection was supposed to be over and we were pretty sure it was going to break out again. He knows all about that celebration.

" 'Do you remember,' says he, 'the rooky that was walking post along Malacon Drive, by the ramparts of old Fort Santiago? Remember what a laugh he gave the crowd?'

"I remember the kid well enough. He'd run away from home to escape college and had the makings of a fine soldier, so I'd been doing my best for him. I can see him yet as he walked post in the moonlight, soldierly as old J. Cæsar himself.

"It was a pleasure to watch him, which I'm doing from one of the bastions of the old fort along with some odds and ends of officers and non-coms. One of the features of that celebration was to be a big salute. They'd loaded up all the old brass cannon on the ramparts, and any other cannon they found lying around, along with our own artillery, with the idea of waking up the villagers at about a minute after midnight. The idea was to fire off the whole caboodle at once.

"Now, mind you, we were expecting the little brown brothers to go on the warpath any minute, and had warned the guards to keep an eye out for any natives on murder bent.

"It's about time for the show to start when I'm in the bastion sort of absent-mindedly watching this rooky. The second louie who was officer of the guard has made it his business to be there alongside me. The kid is taking his soldiering seriously, as I remarked before. He's doing a bee-line parade, gun at exact angle, and system all keyed up to do his duty and then some.

"*Bang!* The celebration cuts loose. It's some jolt when a hundred or so old brass cannon loaded with black powder cut loose just a few feet above your head—especially when you don't expect any such doings.

"That rooky jumped about six feet. His rifle flew about the same distance, but somehow they lit together, and when he picked himself up he had the old Krag at the ready and was in a skirmishing crouch, looking this way and that.

"Then our own field artillery gets busy with some more racket, and my rooky drops into the shadow of the wall. He isn't makin' a target of himself, and I give him credit for sense. I can see he's still on the job as he ducks in and out of the bright spots where the moon hits the wall. The old Krag is still at the ready. The kid's scared stiff, but he isn't running none. Yet I know darned well he'll be a nervous wreck for weeks.

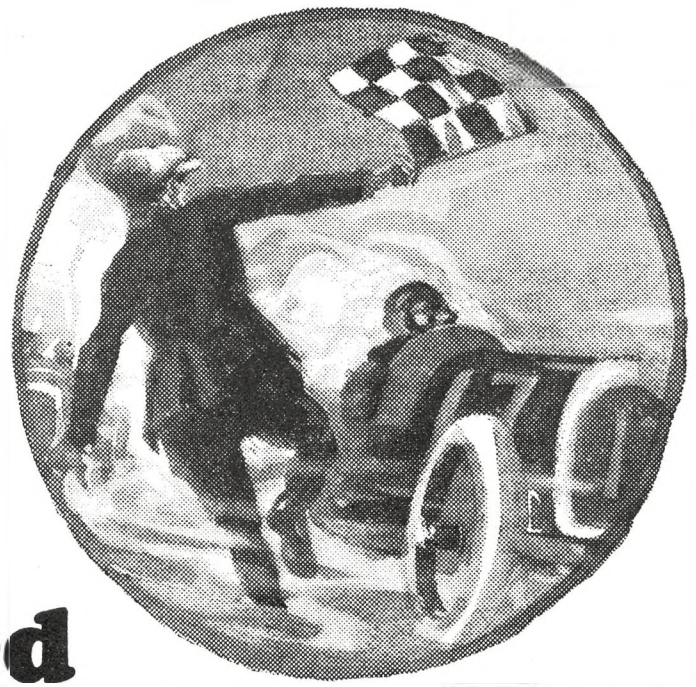
"I take a look at the officer of the guard, and he's laughing fit to kill. That second louie had purposely neglected to tell the kid about the celebration—thought it would be a good joke to see him scared into jumping into the bay and trying to swim to the United States. The kid was scared. But he didn't run. And he didn't see the joke when the lieutenant gave him the horse laugh about an hour later.

"The general remembered all the details and got a lot of fun out of it as we rode along. I never had seen it as funny, because I figured it was hurting the feelings of a rooky when it wasn't necessary to do it. And the general stacks up as such a regular honest-to-goodness soldier that I can't figure him doing a trick of that sort.

" 'You weren't the officer that night, were you?' I inquires finally.

" 'Oh, no,' he comes back at me, 'I was the rooky. The gentleman now riding the horse was officer of the guard. That's why he's riding the horse.' "

One of the most curious events that ever happened in the Sport of motor-racing is vividly described here.



Speed Goeth Before a Fall

By Walter Greenough

I CAN hear, already, what you will whisper to yourself—you of this flashing age of jazz and youth and unholy speed—when you read this bit of hitherto unwritten history. "Coward" will be the name you give me as you ride in a strange, unadvertised race with death over that famous old brick roadway of the Indianapolis Motor Speedway, where Ralph De Palma and Ray Harroun and Howdy Wilcox and Tommy Murphy and Pete De Paolo and a hundred others have faced death, oh, so many times, unflinchingly, just to "come home in front."

For I didn't come home in front. I wasn't even trying to. But I believed, that awful minute or so, that I was going to come home in front—of the remainder of the funeral. Was I a coward about it all? Well, you know I was! Listen:

I was the Statehouse man for my newspaper, and if my memory doesn't fail me, I had just come back to my "run" from the National Convention that had started in to write America's story of participation in the World War. You know—Baltimore, in 1912. The long deadlock there, you remember, with Bryan dominating the howling thousands on the floor of the convention for days and nights in that bitter struggle he made against the nomination of Champ Clark: a struggle so bitter that one night a friend of mine, watching the drama unfold there around the high platform in the old Armory, had time to wrench a pistol from the grasp of an infuriated zealot who had come plunging up the rear steps toward the man in the black alpaca coat, planted there so defiantly. Bryan never knew about that—how near he came to missing the Evolution Trial and other important happenings in his career—so my friend says. But that's another story.

Well, I had returned to the Statehouse at Indianapolis. Tom Marshall was there,

the Governor of Indiana in those days, and the nominee of the Democrats for Vice-President of the United States: a fellow whose life couldn't be snuffed out swiftly without somewhat of a commotion resulting. I had grown to like him immensely, quite without regard to politics. He went over to another little Indiana city about that time to see me get married. And his secretary was my "best man" on that occasion. You see, I didn't wish to see Tom Marshall killed—not for a moment. And yet—oh, boy, how close death came to him in that wild race, which is my story.

Somebody in the far West and Northwest had determined that the East and Central West didn't know enough of the glories of the Pacific Slope, and so they had framed up a special trainload of exhibits from out there, including seven governors of Pacific Coast States.

Well, they got in—special train, Oregon apples, California grapes and oranges, Utah salt, silk-hatted executives and all. It was a real delegation. Spick and span! Spats and pin-striped trousers for morning wear, and white linings for the vests, and everything. You know how it is.

The program started. I've forgotten what all the Hoosier metropolis did show them of itself, but it was plenty. And the West obtained a lot of free publicity, which was the main point, as we of the Fourth Estate understood the matter.

Along at the end of the program of entertainment—after we'd shown the Westerners our Soldiers and Sailors Monument, and where Jim Riley and Booth Tarkington and Meredith Nicholson lived, somebody decided that the party should be ended with a big smash—and that's just what happened. Only the sort of smash that came wasn't on the program.

LATE one afternoon the delegation, headed by Governor Marshall, and ensconced in a long caravan of the most highly-powered racing cars the Indianapolis auto factories could boast of, was taken to the Indianapolis Motor Speedway. It leaked out to us of the newspaper clan than a special automobile race had been arranged on the historic track for the edification of the visitors. We'd show 'em some speed, Indiana would! Our Speedway! We'd make 'em understand that there wasn't anything like that in the West.

And so a lot of us hurry-up boys trailed out there with that Western cavalcade, scenting maybe a story. The story was there, all right. But it was never written—at least not as it really happened. That wouldn't have done—not with eight governors—one a vice-president-to-be—as the principals in it. The country wouldn't have understood the taking of such chances. Anyhow, that's what our editors told us afterward.

It was perhaps an hour before sundown when the long line of cars moved slowly in between two big white stands at the Speedway, and the pilot car, bearing Tom Marshall, crept over the outside rim of the great bowl of the track. Shadows were beginning to slant across toward the starter's stand and the press-boxes. There were some excited whispers in our press-car when the pilot roared a bit and then plunged off down to the south turn. We followed, looking back to watch perhaps a dozen of the following cars slide into high speed and come roaring after us. Almost instantly we all were going at speeds which left no breath in us.

It turned out afterward that one or two auto-manufacturing concerns had supplied all of the cars for the afternoon, as a matter of advertising. They'd picked boys who knew how to get seventy or eighty miles an hour out of 'em, too. But I guess at least one of them had never raced on the Speedway before, or he wouldn't have done what he did.

WELL, after about twenty seconds of that speed I couldn't even have remembered what size collar I was wearing. All I knew was that I wished the blamed thing was off my neck. The wind rushing against it tried to jam my necktie right through my appetite, if you know what I mean. And as for my weak and cowardly heart—well, it's never "hit" right with the left ventricle since. Broke its spark-plug in the first half-mile. Finally I just crouched down behind the driver's seat, with my head out of the wind, and prayed to the Lord and the boy in front.

So this was the race they'd scheduled! If I had known it, I certainly would have R. S. V. P'd unfavorably quite early in that day. My soul yearned for a stern traffic-cop. Once, way over on the back stretch of the black bricks, I thrust my forehead up above the cushions of the driver's seat and shot a wicked glance at

the speedometer. It registered "700" as sure as you're born. I guess maybe it was only "70," but that other zero was all through me.

I'd always heard that when you face death you see a panorama of your own misspent life swiftly unroll before your eyes. Well, you do. I remembered the time I'd shot my brother with the air-gun, and the many, many times that Mother had washed out my mouth with soap.

It seems we didn't have much of a driver for the press-car. Two other cars already had passed us at the north turn into the stretch! But our driver was a game scoundrel. He got sore, when the cars went past, and pressed down another foot or so on the gas. The speedometer quit registering after that. I saw it. And I couldn't understand why the wind left a little thing like me there in the car. Everything else had gone, hats, neckties, blood-pressure, everything. Say—that wind, up there above the driver's seat, would have blown the shoe-laces off a mule!

I remember the roaring as we went under the bridge across the track halfway to the judges' stand. And then it happened!

I've never known who it was pulled the boner. I think he escaped in the gathering gloom as quickly as he saw what he'd done. It was plenty. The fool leaped out from beside the judges' stand, and waved a black-and-white checkered flag at the first hurtling car!

NOW, in the big races, they make a lap or two after they get the flag, and break down their terrific speed gradually before they roll into the pits.

But the driver of that first car put on his brakes! I guess he didn't know any better. I saw it swerve drunkenly and go into the retaining wall at the left. With the second car a scant fifty feet behind! And us on the heels of them! Well, I felt our own brakes go on, and I sank right down on the floor of that "skiddin' six" and gave up the ghost—what was left of the ghost, anyhow.

And the thought struck me that Tom Marshall was in that first car! Good-by, Mr. Vice-President! I even saw the two-inch type on the front page of our paper the next morning. I tell you I saw everything, including all of Jupiter's satellites.

I saw the car in front of us stop, then—jammed into the side of that first reined-in Pegasus, with its nose blunted against the retaining wall. And we were slowing down all this time. Laugh that off—all this time! About as long as it takes a goldfish to open his mouth when he's feeding. But anyhow we'd come down from eighty or something to about forty-five when we hit! And I'll say this: That retaining wall knew its business. We didn't even make a dent in it!

THE first thing I really saw, after I'd started up the Golden Steps and bounced back down again, was a tall silk hat resting jocundly on the right foot of a pop-eyed colored boy, who had been sitting on the retaining wall, "jest to see de finish." He was regarding the hat in some amazement. I think he wore it home, eventually.

We climbed out, and one of the inmates of our car—the most profane and ungodly police reporter I ever knew—slid right down on his knees in the middle of the wreckage and began to pray. It was that bad. He didn't break for a telephone, with the story, for five minutes. And when he did, the office "played it down" on him. *You* know, didn't give it the space or the headlines it was entitled to. Cause too much unnecessary worry over the country, they said. And everything had turned out all right, anyway. Only two governors hurt, one with a broken arm and the other with concussion of the brain. His silk hat had been crushed right down over the head of the latter until it was stopped by his Adam's apple. Yes sir—and he got well, too. The hat really saved his life. Tell me there's nothing in keeping yourself well-dressed!

Oh, yes—Tom Marshall. Bet on old Tom! A lot of folks in his early political days called him a fool, before he pulled that one in the Senate during the War about America's greatest need being a good five-cent cigar. Well, Tom's car came sliding in quietly around the north turn just about dusk. Crawlin' along at maybe thirty-one an hour.

When his driver had started to beat it there at the start, Tom had arisen calmly and leaned over the front seat, so the driver couldn't miss the import of his words, and remarked: "Just a minute, son. You get into second gear and stay there." You see, there were other timorous people in the world, too, beside me.

As I remember it now, the Western governors' trip broke up at our town.

The extraordinary Adventure of a white boy taken captive in battle by the Indians and brought up as a member of the tribe.

By

Chelan McGlenn

When I was an Indian

ALL my life except the first six years, I have lived among the Indians. I am now a very old man, with long white hair, but I still walk as erect as I did in the days of my prime, when, as a willing captive among the wildest of the interior Indians, I, a white man, shared the strange life of my fellow-tribesmen.

I was born in the mountains of Kentucky, and have a faint recollection of my birthplace among the wooded hills, but do not know even the approximate locality. Our family consisted of my father, mother and myself. Of my parents, I have often thought with fond memory; and from what I now know, they were rugged, untamed types, imbued with the pioneer spirit of adventure.

My father was a good shot with the rifle, and with a longing to penetrate the untried West, and out of its difficulties, to found a home, my parents joined a westward-bound emigrant train.

That is to me an unforgettable memory: the long, slow-moving emigrant train, and a blurred recollection of camp-fires, buffalo, desert wastes, skirmishes with painted Indians, and of a big red-headed man with two arrows in his body, though he rode back to the wagons still firing his rifle at the enemy.

On a number of occasions, my father had permitted me, at home, to shoot at a small white patch, for a mark, with his long, hair-trigger rifle, using a rest. We had an extra gun, and when I asked my mother to let me shoot at a very large Indian on a knoll, at long range, directing the charging redskins, Mother was already aiming the gun at him, firing a moment later. To my intense joy the Indian threw up both hands and almost fell from his mount. A moment later he disappeared, and the attack was soon halted. I beg permission here to pass over briefly the saddest incident of my life and the one

which radically changed the course of my future.

In what I now know to be the State of Wyoming, our train was attacked by an overwhelmingly large body of Indians, the result of a junction of several tribes and bands.

Our horses, with the exception of but a few, had been stampeded in the night. Some of the guards were struck down by arrows in this surprise attack, while arrows rained upon the wagons and their occupants. No general charge had been made yet, in conformity with the Indian trait of caution, which fact gave our party time to arrange the wagons in a circle of defense, barricaded as well as our limited equipment permitted.

I have been in many frontier battles since that fateful morning of my youth, but I have never yet seen greater bravery and purer fighting spirit displayed than was shown by our defenders.

While the Indians were forming in a great line, my father and mother kissed me, while mother prayed that her son's life would be spared.

"Be a brave little man, my boy, and you will come out all right," my mother whispered, and I replied:

"Mamma, I will be brave and fight like you and Dad."

THERE were probably sixty fighting men in our train. It seemed that there were many hundred Indians. On they came, with but little of their bodies showing as they rode around the wagons, yelling like devils and discharging their arrows. Then the long rifles cracked in deadly fashion, not by volley, but two or three at a time, and horses and riders went down.

Here for the first time I heard the death-chant, when a brave raised himself on his elbow and poured forth a doleful howl. A rifle-ball from the wagons completed his dirge.

As yet the Indians kept at a fair distance, retreating, re-forming and advancing to the attack. Their sheer force of numbers emboldened them, and the circle slowly narrowed. Our numbers were sadly thinned; the Indians' losses were also very heavy.

I was hidden in a pork barrel, but climbing up to look over the battlefield, an arrow tore through my little brown coat, scraping the flesh and pinning me to the barrel. A butcher-knife had been left in the barrel, and I picked it up, sensing the frenzy and desperation of the few survivors awaiting the death-charge. My father was wounded but still firing. My mother lay dead or unconscious beside my barrel, her face bloody, the long rifle across her body. Leaning out, I tugged at the rifle until I could lay it across the top of the barrel, the knife still clasped in my hand.

Though I did not know it at once, the final rush had been made. Yells arose all around me, and Indians streamed into our wagon. The aimed rifle spoke, and the foremost fell. I clung to my knife while an Indian picked me up by my waist and rushed ahead in the awful carnage. Wishing to die fighting, as did my brave parents and friends, I drove the butcher knife with all my strength, through the wrist of the Indian who carried me. With a fiendish yell he circled me about his head and threw me fiercely against another Indian several yards away, and for me the battle had ended.

I was knocked senseless and carried away by an Indian on horseback while their yells of victory and gruesome exhibits of the victors, with such spoils as they wanted, added to my terror and dismay.

Long afterward, it was reported among the Indians that two or three of the party escaped. I never knew for a certainty, because thereafter all I ever knew or experienced was from the viewpoint of an Indian, except my love for my parents, my friends, my race, and the noble blood that has brought love, wisdom and civilization into the wild places of the world. Perhaps my life may present some data to the student of environment. According to my chances, I have tried to carry out my dying mother's request: "Be brave and you will come out all right."

MY life among the Indians for the first few years, while a startling revelation to me, was not materially different from that of the ordinary captive who has been adopted into the tribe. My grief and tears ran their natural course; but I was, for the most part, treated almost as well as the Indian children. I became a "blanket" Indian boy, and lived in a "wick-i-up" with "Soft Heart" a brother of Chief Konappah.

Four sturdy boys and a tiny girl com-

prised the family of Soft Heart, into whose arms I had been violently and then domestically thrown. Soft Heart's squaw was a stern disciplinarian, but kindly in her way, and my attachment for her grew. I asked her how Soft Heart got his name, and she said:

"Soft Heart very brave warrior—kill many enemies; but him always good to prisoners. Very brave warrior."

My first year among the Indians seemed longer to me than all the balance of my life. We had feasts, and we had famine. There were half a dozen Indian children of about my own age who were slightly disposed to be hostile to me. I learned to understand the language readily, and their taunts about my color were unpleasant.

A CAPTIVE Ute Indian named Nepoots, also about my age, came in for his share of taunts too. To make matters worse, a cayuse had kicked me on the cheek and had left a ragged hole. Nepoots and I held long talks together and exchanged experiences. The hostile crowd of boys would follow us about, and one of the largest had the boldness to put his fingers upon my sore cheek. It happened that, unobserved by us, Chief Konappah had been watching us, and he called our tormentors in one word: *"Ipswiche"*—"Come." Then the Chief picked out the largest two of the boys and placed them in a large circle. He then bade Nepoots and myself, now known as "Long Knife" or "Chelan," to fight the two while the others watched.

Cheered by Konappah's fairness, and smarting under our heavy load of grievances, we gave battle with all the deadly venom of trapped animals. No holds were barred, and we struck, kicked, choked, scratched and pulled hair. Once I fell from a blow and slippery footing. As I arose, a rock hurled by the larger boy tore my ear, while blood spurted over the side of my face. It was a glancing blow, and a cruelly foul one, but luckily it was the turning-point of the fight.

My ferocity was aroused. I seemed twice as strong as I had ever felt before, and I sprang at the throat of my foe, bore him down and choked him until his red face turned black, while I pressed my knee into his stomach. His cries of *"Mahwa"*—"Stop"—would scarcely have prevented my giving him the right of way to the long trail; but the Chief smilingly pulled me away, as he did Nepoots, a moment later, while two cowed and whipped antagonists slunk off.

The Chief took both Nepoots and myself to his "wick-i-up," made us a dignified speech about our bravery, told us there were great things in store for us, that we were as sons to him, and would sometime be among his greatest warriors. Chief Konappah then presented me with a beautiful suit of buckskins and a pair of moccasins, which had belonged to his only son, who had died, together with a small bow and arrows. To Nepoots he promised a duplicate of my outfit as soon as they could be made ready.

Thus were born love, loyalty and deepest friendship for this really great, wise and fair chief, and this esteem was mutual. His words proved prophetic, for over a long course of life, amid deadly peril, battle and direst danger, when Death stalked the trail, the seal of this friendship was never broken. Needless to state, Nepoots and I were secure in our position after this incident.

My little Indian sister bound up my wounds, praised my bravery, brought me presents from the stores of the wick-i-up and said I would be her own brave warrior for life. Beautiful she was to me, and true as the stars in their course then, as she is now; and my love grew for her until that happy day when tribal customs made us man and wife in the coming years. Ripe in years and faith, she is still my companion, while our children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren, following the changes of time, join the ways of the wilds with the customs of my own people by race, and the school bells ring for our posterity. For we have learned to keep the faith of friendship and honor in the destiny designed by the Great Spirit for all his children.

WERE a volume to be written of my life, it would include scores of gory battles, the longer tests of friendship on the wide frontier; but to my own credit let me say that despite the life deal Fate has given me, my instinct of love for my own race has been a sacred shrine, kept burning on the coals of my dear brave parents' memory; and through scores of years of Indian warfare, I have never pointed a gun at my own people.

Our Indians say that our dead look

down upon us from their happy hunting-ground, and it is my hope that the spirits of my dear father and mother, viewing their orphan boy on the gory sand dunes of the dark frontier, may know that I remembered my mother's last words to her son, whose ways could not be his people's ways.

Manhood came. My Indian friends were pleased that Long Knife became one of the best shots among the tribes. In one battle I dragged up behind me on my horse the wounded antagonist of my boyhood days, after shooting a hostile Indian who was bent upon scalping him. I now had no better friend than he.

Nepoots and I, still chums, ran many daring risks and twice we saved our chief's life in desperate, hand-to-hand battles with Indian foes.

I was once captured by the Utes while on a lonely expedition. Splinters were stuck in my skin, and a torturing death by fire prepared, when Nepoots, captured from the Utes when a boy like myself, appeared in the nick of time, and pleaded for my life, with good effect, with his former tribesmen, one of whom was his father. They appealed to him to remain, but he declined, having married the pretty daughter of Chief Konappah. The scars of the splinters I still bear to this day.

Those who were active on the frontier will remember, if still alive, how my influence was turned toward the benefit of my own race, and in many instances to their material good. Nepoot's influence caused a friendly alliance with the Utes, and we bore struggles in their defense, echoes of which answer from the blood-stained valley of Vernal, Utah, Green River, Bridger, and Fort Du Chesne.

Today I am on the borderland of the past and the present, facing the rising, beneficent tide of my own race, with the background of people whom I have also loved and served. The toot of the locomotive cannot yet reach us; but I am happy.

According to the best standards I know, I have kept the faith of honor and friendship. We are now pleasantly situated, while the star of my life fades from the skies and I dream of a useful future for children and grandchildren, in whose veins runs the blood of my fathers and my friends of adoption. They are playing "My Old Kentucky Home." I am thinking and dreaming.

Ransom Money

Wherein one of the directors makes an inspection trip in Mexico and discovers that Business may have its peculiar hazards.

By LEON BLACK

A NUMBER of years ago I was employed on a Mexican railway as general auditor. Ours was one of those crooked little mountain railroads in Mexico which tapped a poorly developed timber and mineral district. Our earnings were not great, our prospects nothing to make a financier envious, and we were the sport of the stock-market. Our board of directors changed like the weather, and we were continually subject to having new officers popping in on us and demanding unheard-of things.

That was how Smith (as I will call him) came among us. He became chairman of the board through a stock deal, and our first intimation that such a person existed was a telegraphic order for a thorough inspection of the whole road. Smith of course would make that inspection, personally.

As I swung aboard, I encountered Jimmy Warren, the private secretary of Johnson, the general manager.

"Everybody here?" I asked.

"Everybody but Mr. Johnson and His Nibs the visiting celebrity."

His tone was ironical, in fact bitter.

The new chairman of the board proved to be clever, all right, and he made it apparent at once. He had a marvelous grasp of detail and delighted to parade his ability. There were piles of statistics, dozens of reports, interpretations of laws and all the thousand and one things incidental to ex-

planations of business in a foreign country. Jimmy Warren proved his worth in answering questions and looking up data, and by his quick, accurate explanations. But in Smith's eye there was no glint of admiration. Instead I noticed a hard, cold look that I was at a loss to understand.

As the day wore on, Smith turned his attention to the consideration of the superficial aspects of the country through which we were traveling. He was not at all favorably disposed toward it nor its inhabitants, and he displayed a prejudice and uncharitableness that offended some of us.

In the course of the dull afternoon we came to the colorful little town of Sierra Blanca, a division point, where the train always made quite a stop.

"Let's get out and stretch our legs," suggested the general manager.

This we proceeded to do. As we descended from the train, our attention was drawn to a group of half a dozen Tahumara Indians standing in a solid row against an adobe wall, watching the train. Scantily clothed, as was their custom, in breech-cloth and coat, they added a picturesque note to the scene. But Smith, with a muttered remark about filthy savages, passed by them.

As we strolled up the single dusty street of the village, hungry-looking dogs and half-naked brown urchins scurried before us to the cool, dark interiors of the flat-roofed adobe houses. Innumerable scrawny chickens squawked from underfoot, and a half-dozen hogs lying grunting in the sun required us to walk around them. There were polyglot smells, but we were accustomed to them, and our trained senses held steadfastly to the all-pervading odor of the burning *tornillo*—the hard, dense wood of the mesquite bush which the Mexicans use as firewood.

Smith's nose was indeed affronted. He made no effort to disguise his vast disgust, but took from his pocket a handkerchief—which I, being near, knew to be scented—and frequently used it. We came to another group of the Indians. These were standing in front of the *cantina.* As we approached, they turned and bowed with their simple dignity. A moment later their grave faces lighted, and they extended their hands in greeting to Jimmy Warren, who was bringing up the rear of our party.

"A man and his associates," grunted Smith as he gave a backward glance. "Come on—is this all there is to this beastly place?"

"Let's have a drink here," suggested some one.

"Sure," came the chorus, and we entered the *cantina,* leaving Jimmy outside with his Tahumara friends.

The little saloon was not large, and our party, with the dozen or more natives lounging about the two rough board tables set in the middle of the clay floor, very nearly filled it.

Smith's reactions were unfavorable and he gave vent to them freely. His expression registered disdain as we approached the crude bar, behind which a few shelves held the scanty stock of bottled goods. "You fellows used to drinking in a sty like this, with a bunch of dirty natives? Well, thanks, I'll not have any."

"Here, Smith," warned Johnson quietly, "better be a little careful how you express

yourself. You'd be surprised how many of these people understand English."

A glance from Smith about the room showed him that he was the recipient of not a few scowls and flashing glances. He brought his eyes quickly back to the bar. Just then the tavern-keeper came in.

"The best tequila you have, all around," ordered Johnson after a friendly greeting.

A dusty bottle was brought out from under the counter, and a moment later we were toasting *"saludes,"* and with evident reluctance Smith did the same.

"By George, that's good," he cried as the smooth, powerful liquor found its way home. "Let's have another!" And have another we did.

"Once more," came the enthusiastic cry from Smith.

Some of us did and some of us didn't. That tequila is deceptive, and most of us knew from experience that two was enough for us. But Smith disregarded warnings to "go slow" and drank several more. With each glass he became more boisterous and offensive. He could not refrain from more remarks concerning "this hell of a country and its people." We endeavored to get him back to the car. The sound of his own voice bellowing in that small room seemed to embolden him, and he turned toward the Mexicans at the tables and made his insults personal.

If he was looking for trouble, he got it, *muy pronto*. A long brown hand shot out and slapped him across the mouth. With an oath Smith snatched a small automatic from his pocket and turned loose with it. Fortunately I was standing near enough to strike up his arm, and he hit nothing but the ceiling. In an instant everyone in the place was on his feet, and several knives were gleaming.

The crash of the shouts were still reverberating, when through the acrid pistol smoke Jimmy Warren bounded into the room. I was still holding Smith's arm upraised, and he was struggling to free it. Jimmy took in the situation at a glance, and one big hand reached and tore the little gun from Smith's grasp, while with the other he caught him by the collar and with a heave sent him spinning through the door into the street, where losing his balance, our august chairman of the board rolled in a cloud of dust.

Johnson and some of the others rushed to his assistance, and getting him to his feet, hurried him to the car. We watched them from the *cantina* doorway. "There goes my job," Jimmy said ruefully. "Let's get back to the car and see how soon it happens. I don't like suspense."

The young fellow was pale and grim-lipped, and a peculiar smudge on his left cheek-bone stood out startlingly. At first I thought that Smith had struck him in their encounter. Then I decided it was merely a blemish usually indiscernible through his healthy tan. I felt sorry for the youth, for in the main I liked him, and I knew that his job meant a lot to him. His father had lost a fine ranch property in this district during the revolution in Mexico and had died shortly thereafter, a pathetic and broken figure, whose career had always been pursued by ill-luck and disaster, those closest to him declared.

ENTERING the private car, we were confronted by Smith, who on catching sight of Jimmy lurched to his feet and pointing a wavering forefinger at him, stuttered thickly: "You're fired—fired, right now, you are! It's the only way to treat people of your breed, it is." Apparently he would have said more, but the effort was too much and he subsided wearily into his chair and a few minutes later was snoring loudly.

Jimmy answered not a word but retired to his little office at the rear of the car. A few moments, and he reappeared bearing in his hand a typewritten letter which he laid before Johnson, who read it and tossed it back to his secretary with a grin. "Keep it for future reference, Jim. That drunk will have forgotten everything about it when he comes to."

But Smith didn't forget. He was awake by sundown, and in an ill humor. With persistence that surprised us, his mind went at once to the question of Jimmy.

"Did you fire that secretary?" he growled to Johnson the moment he caught sight of him.

"No," answered Johnson shortly.

"Well, I will, then," he snarled. "Call him in here."

"It is too late. He's resigned already," replied Johnson.

"Is he gone?" demanded Smith.

"No."

"Well, get him off this car at the first stop. I don't want him around me at all," stated Smith shortly.

"All right," answered Johnson, as much

in astonishment as in anger. Clearly there was no understanding the workings of this tyrant's mind. The rest of us had listened to this dialogue in amazement. We could only exchange glances of bewilderment in the ensuing heavy silence.

We did not see anything of Jimmy till the slow little train crawled into Bauche. He strode into the car, his grip in his hand, and bade us good-by. Though Smith had retired, we all felt constrained and gloomy, so that our *"adios"* was far from cheerful or heartening. We were a glum crowd that crawled into the berths that night.

When we arrived at the end of the line the next day, we did not tarry long. Smith soon saw to all that concerned his business there. The return trip began in dreary fashion with a cold drizzle of rain that matched the spirit of the party. It was a relief to try a desultory game of cards that evening, but it was such a good night for sleeping that we all turned in early.

I don't know how long we had been asleep when I was brought up standing by a fusillade of shots from outside the car. The train was motionless. As I was pulling on my clothes, I saw Johnson rush past me and out to the rear platform, where I heard him a moment later vehemently demanding of the darkness: "What the blankety blank was the meaning of this?"

With two or three others I immediately followed him out. The rain was still falling. We stood shivering in our scanty clothing awaiting a reply. Finally it came in Spanish from the darkness.

"We are sorry to disturb you, sirs, but Mexico's liberators need funds, and we ask you to contribute. You are helpless and at our mercy. The engine has been cut from the train. You are surrounded."

"We have very little money here," replied Johnson.

"You are railroad officials, we know. Who is the highest in authority among you? We wish eighty thousand dollars American money. We will take the highest among you for hostage."

Johnson tried to get them to take him, but they were not to be bluffed. They were out after bigger game, and wanted "the other gentleman, the one from Nuevo York," and no other would do.

Finally, bundled up and wearing a raincoat, Smith, very white of face and staring of eye, gave himself into their hands, tremblingly. A tall dark fellow in vaquero's jacket and trousers, wearing a big sombrero and a black handkerchief over most of his face, stalked to his side, caught Smith's arm, and tossed a folded paper on the car steps. Together they disappeared into the darkness.

The paper proved to be the demand of the bandits, together with the directions and instructions for the delivery of the money—the place, messenger and time. There were threats of death to the prisoner in case the money was not forthcoming. It was signed by "Simon Gomez, champion of liberty."

THERE was a lot of excitement, newspaper comment and whatnot; but eventually, within the time-limit of the bandits, a messenger with a red bandana about his upper arm was making his weary way in the dusk along a lonely mountain trail out of Sierra Blanca. That messenger was I. Much against my inclinations I had been chosen. My saddle-bags were bursting with currency, and the bandana on my arm was my identification. I was beginning to fear I had strayed from the road when a gruff voice behind me demanded that I throw up my hands. A masked bandit rode up and after asking me to dismount, blindfolded me and bound my hands. Telling me to wait, he disappeared. When I was almost perishing with the cold, I heard a slight noise and recognized the voice of Smith. Our efforts at conversation met with a *"Callase"* (which is Spanish for "Shut up!"), from our masked Mexican friend, so we rode along in silence till he told us to halt and be unbound and unblindfolded. We were in a well-defined road and were told to keep moving till we got back into the village. Smith was taciturn and disgruntled, and we exchanged very few words. Catching the first northbound train, less than twenty-four hours found us in Juarez, and Smith and I parted and I never saw him again. I'll bet he's never ventured west of the Hudson since.

A week or so later I saw Jimmy Warren in El Paso and commiserated with him on the loss of his position under such unjust circumstances. I remarked that Smith's absolute ferocity over such a trivial incident had been inexplicable to the rest of us. Jimmy's face darkened as he replied:

"Oh, the dirty cur wanted to ruin my

chances just as he ruined my poor father. I could tell you quite a story of our friend Smith; but to be brief, twenty years ago, he and my father were partners; Smith crooked Father out of forty thousand dollars, destroyed his good name and practically hounded him out of the country. The little cheat recognized me at once and lost no time trying to knife me too. But I'm not worrying; the laugh will be on my side yet. By the way, I'm on my way to New York, leaving tonight. I'll collect that debt before I leave there, too."

I could scarcely hide my skepticism. Alas, his innocence in believing his task so easy.

SHORTLY thereafter I was offered a position with a new road in the Orient. I went out, but the climate disagreed with me from the first and I only stayed a year with it. At Hongkong I boarded a steamer for San Francisco. Among the passengers we picked up at Kobi, imagine my surprise to find Jimmy Warren and a charming young wife. At first I decided he had married money, as I learned that they were just completing the last lap of a trip that had taken them around the world in a luxurious, leisurely manner. But later the idea was dispelled by a casual remark of Mrs. Jimmy's concerning New York and the stenographic position she had held there before Jimmy's advent into her life.

One day a remark on Mexico brought up a mention of Smith's name.

"Recall seeing me in El Paso on my way to New York? Well, I went up and collected all right from that bird Smith, to the tune of forty thousand dollars. I waived interest. Told him that if he'd fork over the forty thousand I'd be able through my connections in Mexico to recover and deliver to him his ransom money."

My jaw must have dropped clear to my chest. The audacity of him! "And then?" I inquired.

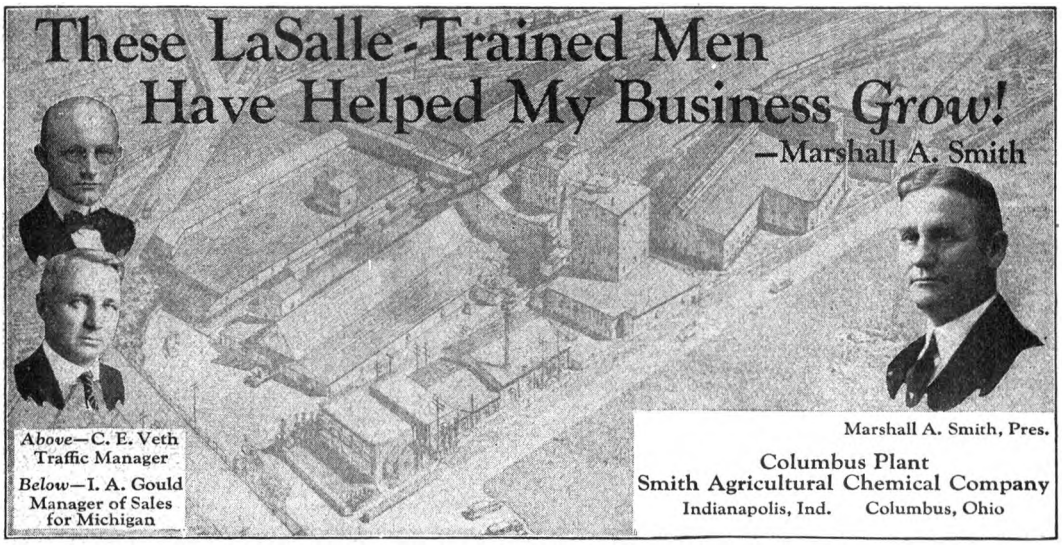
"And then I did it, of course. I could handle old Simon Gomez, you see. I delivered the eighty thousand dollars intact to old man Smith."

My bewilderment was quite beyond words to express, but I managed to keep my poker face as Jimmy looked down at me quizzically for a moment; then we spoke of other things.

A few days after that we were having rough weather, and Jimmy being indisposed, Mrs. Jimmy and I were entertaining each other. Time was dragging; neither of us cared much for cards. At tea-time she came up from their stateroom, saying: "I thought maybe I could inflict this kodak book on your attention; we've kept quite a pictorial record of our trip."

Well, it was pretty nice as such things go, and I tried to act interested, but it wasn't till she came to the back and disclosed some views of Mexico that I really became interested thoroughly. She started to close the book, saying, "Oh, *you* wont care for those. Jimmy says what you don't know about Mexico has been erased from the book. These are just some of his old things."

But my eye had caught a familiar figure. It was a tall, dark man dressed in vaquero's jacket and trousers, a big sombrero on his head and a black handkerchief over the lower part of the face. Idly turning it over, I saw lightly penciled on the back: *"Simon Gomez, Amigo mio."* On the left cheek-bone, just where the light struck the face, I discerned a certain peculiar smudge that the quick, keen eye of the camera had relentlessly caught and recorded. "Yes," I said slowly to myself, "I guess Jimmy could handle Simon all right—don't doubt it for a minute."



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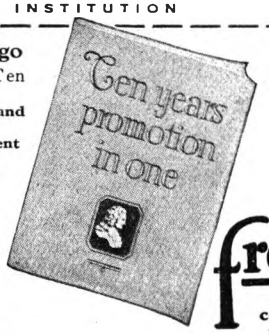

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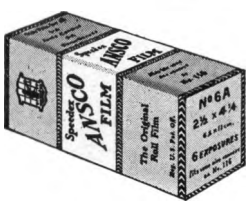

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