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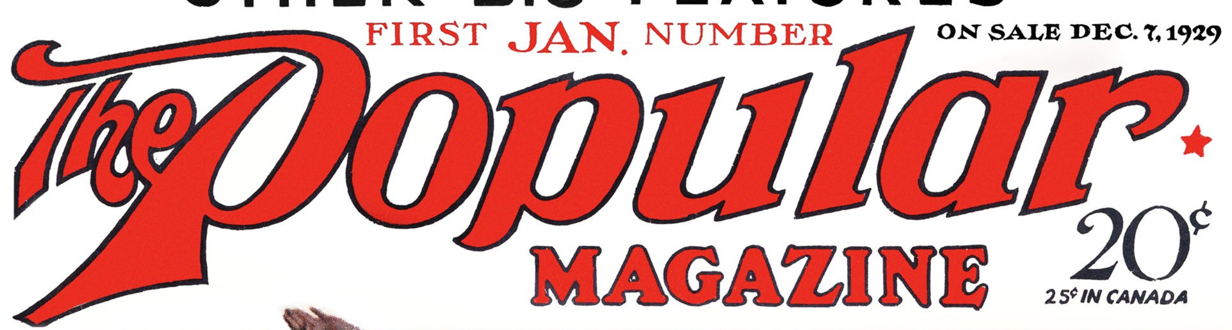

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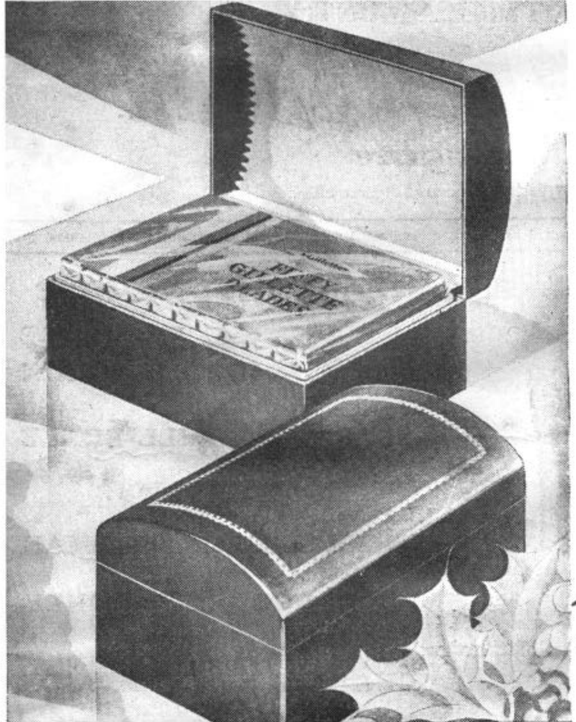

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Volume XCVIII | Number 2

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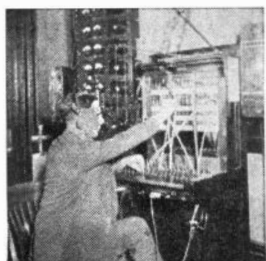

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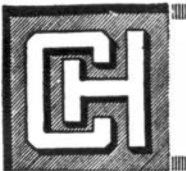

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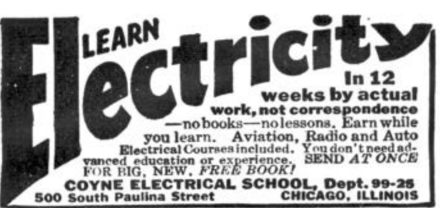

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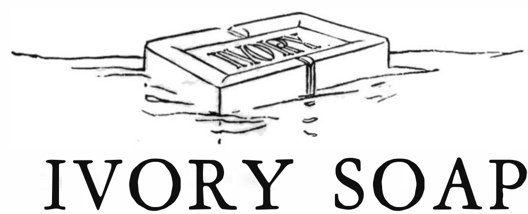
Perhaps your household angel wonders why there are just as many puddles after *your* bath as she'd expect from an urchin son. Doesn't she realize Ivory's bobbing challenge to act like a boy? Doesn't she know that bank presidents, august chairmen of boards and such have never outgrown one pure delight—they still sail Ivory boats?



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A MINUTE WITH—

JOHN D. SWAIN

OH, FOR THE MEN OF OLD!

AT a period before John L. Sullivan had decided to refuse any more drinks, he paid a visit to his home town of Boston; and as was his habit on such occasions, he wended his way promptly to a famous saloon down on Atlantic Avenue, operated by a good friend of mine—now, of course, retired, but, I am happy to say, in excellent health and spirits. He was a lifelong pal of the "Boston Strong Boy."

On his Boston visits John was usually accompanied by a retired captain of police, a colossal giant weighing some three hundred, a terror to gangsters in his prime, and not, even in his retirement, one to take liberties with. The two spent a long, moist afternoon and evening in the tavern of my friend. Closing time came; but the pair felt that it was as yet merely the edge of the evening. The thought of bed was abhorrent!

Much against his best judgment, the proprietor closed up, leaving John L. and the ex-captain of police, inside, and alone. That night the sleep of the publican was broken by horrid dreams. It wasn't that he feared any financial loss; he knew that John L., generous to a fault, would pay double for any damage done to premises or contents. But inasmuch as he conducted an admirably neat and well-ordered resort, he dreaded what he might behold next morn. He rose early, and opened the place himself.

Anxiously peering into the gloomy interior, dimly lighted by the cold, gray dawn, he witnessed a scene of tranquil peace and camaraderie. Before the long bar stood the former captain of police. Behind the bar, a white apron adorning his front, and a magnificent battalion of flagons, bottles, glasses, shakers, lemons, and other equipment on either hand, was John L. himself, engaged in inventing a new kind of high ball for his friend, and for himself. Thus had they whiled away the long, silent watches of the night!

As the proprietor entered, John L. beamed upon him with a genial smile, and remarked:

"We was just thinking we'd knock off long enough to stow away a nice, thick porterhouse steak! How about it?"

Down on Atlantic Avenue, such steaks were easily obtainable. Also, plenty of nice raw onions, a loaf or two of bread, and a pot of coffee. The two old-timers finished everything but the T-bone. And John L. pushed back his chair, sighed and remarked:

"That sure tasted fine! Makes me thirsty. Got some of that old Medford rum left?"

In those days, there were giants in the land!

The FIDDLING CROOK

By WILL BEALE

Author of "The Gilded Weakling," "The Unknown Trail," Etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE BUNGLED GET-AWAY.

STEALING in from out the early-morning blackness a clock struck four—somber—measured—impassive—slow. Down in a cell of the Bluffs City jail the sounds slashed across the tenseness like a lash. A certain wide-awake prisoner quivered delicately with every stroke. Bolt upright in the inky gloom he sat staring fiercely into the velvet void, striving to jam down into something like calmness the hot, surging impatience of his nerves.

The window was open a bit. Outside in the soft darkness, outside in the world of the footloose, spring was stirring; life, new, regenerate life, was germinating out there in the blackness and stillness.

A tiny streak of cool, moist air crept into the cell. It smelled of damp mold, but pleasantly; of damp mold that might have been stirred to fragrance by the mounting, springing new life seeking its way to light and beauty from out the muck. It did things to the already chafing spirit of the man in the cell—softening things, and maddening things.

The prisoner sprang up, and walked.

In his bare feet he padded back and forth in his utterly black cage like a leopard. He knew its every inch of surface even in the blackness. Now, a little twitter of sleepy sweetness came in through the window. It told the prisoner that dawn was around the cor-

Casting Exotic Musical Spells upon Them All With His Violin, the Mole Insinuated His Way into the Depths of Corrupt Docktown, and No One Suspected that He Was the Man of Destiny Who Would Clean It Up in the End.

ner of a mere half hour, and his heart took on an added speed. In a half hour more, if all went well, he would be free. He would be out again in that world of light, of fragrance, of new-springing life.

It was all planned out with faultless accuracy, the details of the get-away set for the dawn. It was a scheme of his own clever brain communicated to a jail mate, Sinwitz, to the corridor boss who had long been a trusty, and thence to four others. The plan could not fail.

He stopped dead. A slight sound had rustled. His body stiffened. His heart battled madly with its pounding blood. The sound came from a cell located across the corridor, and with a slow shudder of agonized relief the prisoner relaxed. They had run a big Gulf coast black man in there late the night before, a protesting, badly beaten-up creature who had straightway lapsed into coma. Now, evidently, he was coming to.

The prisoner flung up restless, protesting arms in the dark. This was the sort of thing that had always killed him from the soul out—confinement, jails that would violate the decency of beasts, association with low-order human animals of all kinds, of all races, true denizens of the jungle places of the earth!

He resumed his pacing. The law—how he was coming to hate it!—with its smug, inflated virtue, its one-sided jus-

tice. It had never let him get away from his own past, although there had been times when he had tried with all that was in him.

His father had been a crook. Consequently the law held that he himself must be a crook. And although, a sensitive, helpless kid, he had years ago run away from his father and had never seen him since, the law had remembered, and in a very first case, a case based on sheer circumstantial evidence, it had showed its virtuous malice in his punishment. And the thing had turned him bitter. And thereafter had come times when he had fought, stung, bitten back.

Half across a continent, in one bitter outburst or another, had he pursued a vindictive course, the hidden underground trail that had won him the name of "Larry the Mole—Kansas City, St. Louis, Chicago. Blazoned on the dark, the prisoner was seeing sharp-cut, colorful episodes of his past like brilliant imagery on the black enamel of a jeweled screen.

The black man across the corridor was growing audible. He seemed rambling, wandering. Little guttural murmurings at half breath were issuing from his cell. And now—the Mole listened again, his vast restlessness stilled for the moment in alarm. In a little threadlike tenor of husky wistfulness the delirious derelict began to sing, a little chant of the everglades, of the bayou country; and down there at one stage of his wanderings the Mole had heard it.

In spite of his uneasy fear, a little responsive thrill came to the Mole. The odd little singing touched a still-sensitive spot in his nature. Years back, if he hadn't become involved with the law, he might have become something real—a musician, for instance, of some distinction. Music had been born in him, he had fought to develop it——

Something jerked him sharply out of it; he froze to a breathing thing of steel. It was the signal, a signal from Sinwitz telling him that the corridor boss and the others were ready and waiting for his own first move that was to result in the get-away. Already did his overstrained ears pick up the soft footfall of the corridor boss coming along to let him out of his cell.

Two minutes later the Bluffs City jail was a stirring, rustling cage of sinister activity. Six men were invisibly loose through its corridors, ranging swiftly, silently.

Slipping hurriedly along, the Mole stopped suddenly. Ahead of him had sounded a shot. His heart dropped to lead. The shot told him that they were late. Some one was about—had discovered them. The Negro's delirium had evidently started something. Gripping his gun—arms had been smuggled in to them by a brotherhood of Sinwitz's—he started on.

Came a shout, another, and then weird outcry. From all sides arose the cries of prisoners.

Tearing along a remote corridor the Mole came upon a man on the floor—the warden. He was lying along the wall in the pitiable manner of a wounded animal dragging half-dead members. The Mole's gun was on him in a flash, instinctive as his running. But something in the eyes raised to his pierced him, held him. And then:

"Larry, help me, will you?" It came from the thing on the floor, pitifully, simply.

The prisoner tore his eyes away. He himself held the keys from the trusty that were to let the others out of the outer gate. But again came that plea to halt him:

"Larry, help me, will you?" And in a thick, throaty tone wherein manhood battled with agony: "If you leave me I'm sure bleeding to death before they find me here."

In all his life thereafter the Mole

never knew what happened within him. Perhaps, first, there flashed over him his own father's superstitious lifetime dread, imparted to his son with his earliest remembrance—the haunting horror of a man's dying in jail, cooped up, alone, away from his kind. Perhaps it was a shaft of swift human pity for the warden who had always been decent to him.

Whatever it was, it halted the Mole. And halting brought the most blinding realization of his life; in another moment he would have killed the warden; in one single instant more he would have been—a murderer.

Shivering coldly, he crouched low, threw the warden's arm across his shoulders, dragged him to his office, placed him on a lounge and, leaving him there, started to run.

In that one moment, however, destiny had shut down. The whole jail force seemed aroused and rallying from every direction. The get-away was—off.

The Mole leaned back against the wall. His eyes went shut while he felt a crisis of his life having its way with him. The incident in the corridor had placed a mental looking-glass before his mind. In it he saw himself struggling with the circumstances of his own life like an insect struggling in a basin of water. He had been perilously near to taking a life. And taking a life was still, to him, the one thing that placed a man forever outside the gates. After the first time it would be easy to take life deliberately. And then, sooner or later, his own life would be taken. And he had never yet lived.

Already men were outside the door. The Mole groaned in inner futility. Life sprung all sorts of jolts on a man. Good grabbed at a man unexpectedly the same as bad. Life tapped him where he least expected it. Life was a rotten mess!

Two minutes later, white faced, blank, emotionless as a man of wood, he was being hustled back to his cell. From another section came two other guards dragging along a hissing, frenzied, scuffling creature that was Sinwitz. And this one snapped himself erect in the hands of his captors and, facing the other prisoner, cried out hotly:

"You're to blame for this! And I'm going to get you for it before I die!"

The other stared back at him evenly, passionlessly. The light of dawn was all through the place. It showed the Mole a sobered, good-looking young man with a pale, interesting face, and eyes of unusual intelligence under waving, dark hair.

"If you do you're going to get me up out of underworld trails, for something tells me I'm going straight."

"Yeah!" Sinwitz screamed in insane derision. "Trying to go straight has landed many a man in hell! But that won't faze me; I'm going to follow you right there!"

"It's a long way," said the Mole.

CHAPTER II.

THE MAKING OF A FIDDLER.

TWO years later. The Mole was heading east along a broad road through the country. He had been free for hours. Life lay before him all over again, but as yet he didn't know what to do with it. This first morning, however, something in him rejoiced. He was young, he was free, he was unafraid. Striding along, the outlook stirred certain finenesses in him that in the past had been suppressed.

It was the stripling month of May. The whole world of open country was a splendid thing of resurrected youth and beauty—new-lifed, newly dressed. Little play-boat clouds voyaged gallantly across a radiant sapphire sky; a dozen greens of hill and vale revealed moist, brown checkerboards of steaming, new-furrowed earth; the hollows were mists of bloom.

Just beyond an old stone wall a brave little meadow lark was mounting upward like a tiny vessel of joy, spilling downward a ravishing little cascade of rejoicing. The ex-convict jerked his head up at it in complete understanding. It, too, was happy, it was free, it was unafraid; he could get its singing.

He passed on, with his odd transformation of the last two years going over and over in his mind. The weeks after the attempted get-away had found him passive, subdued—thoughtful. Calmly he saw himself at twenty-four, hopelessly outside of things, fighting along in a precarious profession that might any moment bump him out of life before he had even lived. At best it was a rotten break—nothing to it. Thinking things over, he wanted to *live,* wanted to be able to play the game as it was played.

Then, too, as the days went on, did he begin to know something better in all this than mere security. He had brains. He had a self-acquired education that would pass him anywhere. He could bluff the thing of manners like a leading man. There was going to be a great big kick in playing one's own part in the great big show. Already had he been late in making it.

Curiously, then, had he begun to review the incidents of his early life which had led to his crooked outlook. He had been a young boy of more than usual high aspirations, secretly sensitive like most such youngsters, and concealing much. No one had understood him or had tried to with the exception of his mother, and she had died when he was ten years old.

His father himself had been a radical from the day he was born, an inherent outlaw from restraint and law and order. To the Mole's father, well-ordered society was a thing to be smashed. At the same time he had moments of intense humanity when he craved morosely the place held by the ordinary man. There were times when even he seemed to envy his own offspring. He had always been jealous of the sympathy that existed between the child and his mother. At her death he had had the boy's development all to himself. And it was but natural that this should follow his own development. The boy's first night job had been undertaken with his father—the big thrilling excitement of it, and of working with the other noted men of the underworld, quenching all else within him. His father was still alive, so far as he knew, although he had not seen him since childhood.

It was nearing noon. The Mole took off his coat in the growing heat and stopped a moment to survey the landscape. Down below at one side the flashing silver of a river gleamed enticingly through the trees. It appealed to him with the old appeal of his kidhood. He went down, took off his clothes, and plunged in.

The dip focused things. The Mole came out hungry, which brought to him the one big problem. What was he going to do for a living? The thought struck him broadly funny. He couldn't think of a single possibility for the life of him. Dressing, he reviewed himself eagerly, inside and out. As a possible apprentice, at anything, he was a total loss. Manual labor? Rotten! He was lithe and strong—other than that there was nothing of the draft horse about him, body or soul. Business? Laughs! He had no training in any branch that he could think of whatever.

In pulling on his socks his long, brown fingers, inexpressibly *living,* caused a tiny click in his consciousness. His mother used to tell him when he was little that they were the fingers of an artist, that they were molded to make beauty out of life rather than ugliness. His mother had been a small-town music teacher. She had early recognized

herself in her boy, and had spent her life fighting to bring out the fineness she knew to be in him. Clearly now, the young man by the river was recalling her passionate striving to develop the music in him as a safeguard against the influence of his father. She had got him a little violin, had taught him the notes, had made a secret contract with an old fiddler to teach him to play —clearly he recalled her trembling happiness over his remarkable progress.

And, somehow, music had later got him of itself. In all the vagrant years that followed his mother's death he had made it the one peerless, though guarded, motive in his life—knocking off a portion of every year to hide away in some distant city and work hard with the best musician he could find, till his precariously earned money was spent.

The Mole began grinning dryly down at the shoes he was lacing. He wondered if somehow he could make his playing serve to support him, at least until—— It was absurd. He laughed at the very idea. At the same time, what else?

He wheeled about. He was ravenous. There was a meal to overtake, and he was going to earn it; never again would he receive what he had not earned.

"Yon's a road," he observed to himself. "Let's see what's on it."

Two hours later he was entering a small manufacturing town farther down the river. He was fed and satisfied—washing a car in an outlying garage had provided a plentiful meal. He moved leisurely along the main street looking in at shop windows. Suddenly he stopped. Standing before a shop window of more than usual dinginess he came to know an odd little quickening of his heart. Lying in the window among the dismal jewelry, the dusty harmonicas, and the sallow silverware, lay a—violin.

Something within the young man yearned toward it. It had been over two years since he had touched one. He slipped in at the shop door.

"I'd like to look over that fiddle, my friend," he smiled to the old man who came to wait on him.

The man handed him the fiddle indifferently, taking down a bow from a shelf.

The Mole held it in his hands a moment, plucking its strings into tune, and then put it to his shoulder. Instinctively he ran through the bright little meaningless improvisations that he had made use of to start himself playing years before. At his first notes the old man started, his eyes alive with sudden interest. The Mole tested the fiddle's tone, trying out his bow arm half fearfully. He had a glass wrist from disuse, he reflected. He essayed an upbow staccato. The bow chattered crisply over a half dozen notes and then became quite garbled. His forearm, too, was shot to pieces, he told himself. As for his left hand, the fingers about the neck of the violin passed through their swift evolutions stiffly, consciously, as though from pained surprise.

Nevertheless the Mole began to play. In sudden vast loneliness he played the first thing that answered his mood—an exile's lament from "Souvenirs of Moscow." And somehow, in his youthful solitude on the outside of life, the heartbreaking simplicity of its appeal shook him. The big lament over, the flying variations flitted from his fingers poignantly—they darted here and there like a baffled flight of seeking swallows, finding no abiding place, ever. He stopped.

The Mole emerged. His face was dead white. He was smiling shiftily, his lips poorly controlled. His long, brown hands with the wonderfully educated fingers trembled visibly. Three or four years ago he had worked on the thing—months. Now, as to execution, he had played faultily, at times incoherently, but with a certain exaltation that tempered all shortcomings.

The Mole passed the violin back. Playing had helped him, but as a possible asset just at this time it was all absurd. He had no more practical training in that line than in—— Something halted him. A ring of children from the street had herded in about him, and now one curly haired child standing before him solemnly dropped two moist pennies in his hand. "Play more," she requested.

Some little twinge of coincidence struck the Mole. He stared at the coins almost skeptically, his face breaking up into a slow grin. Already had some one paid him for his playing. "Gee, kid!" he said, staring down into the grave little face. "You've started something, and"—full realization breaking upon him—"and finished something. You've junked a hobo and created a fiddler—and whenever I need special luck I'll play to these coins!"

He caught up the violin, rocketed through a burst of jazz that electrified his tiny listeners, put the instrument down again on the counter and vanished out the door.

Three weeks later, keeping east, always east, walking, riding the trucks, "thumbing," guest riding, the Mole drew near to a city on the coast. He had come to the end of his pilgrimage—the old life lay far behind him, he was about to start the new.

And in that city his future gripped him with its first hour.

CHAPTER III.

DOCKTOWN.

ALL along its length Dock Street roared and clanged and clattered in the crowded activity of midafternoon. Here and there, however, stood oddly silent groups—attentive knots of men who had oozed forth from the traffic to collect intently about printed notices posted in conspicuous places.

$1,000 REWARD!

Docktown shipping is being gnawed into by constant warehouse thievery. Perhaps YOU know something about it. Perhaps YOU would be willing to open up. The above reward will be paid for information that will convict.

HUNTLEY SHIPPING CO.

Emerging from a side street the Mole stopped on the curb a moment to stare about him in eager interest. He had made the outskirts from the west a half hour ago, a sun-browned, keen-eyed young man with the adventure of youth upon him. His course through the city had marked nothing unusual, but here in the Docktown section was varied human richness such as he had never seen before. As was probably true of every great city on the sea, the dock section held in its broken mazes a quota of human life representing half the peoples and customs of the earth, and this was noticeable everywhere he looked.

Moving along, the Mole came upon one of the silent little knots of men. He joined it and read the notice. Despite the noisy confusion, it sent a hush through him. With all such behind him it seemed odd that crime, big crime, should be the very first thing to greet him on his arrival east.

He read the notice again. To the ordinary reader it told nothing. But to the Mole it suggested efficient gang work that only an experienced craftsman might understand. At length he laughed and moved away. But in his down-and-out state, the placard might have spoken to him in a tongue all its own—offering money to set a thief to catch a thief.

He crossed the traffic-roaring street and made down upon one of the older piers. Out upon the water there was a brisk activity. Every conceivable kind of harbor life seemed to be functioning busily in a clear, crystal light. It had been a day of changeable early summer mood with bright sunlight alternating

playfully with streaming rainbow showers. The sun had marched forth triumphantly at last and turned all to an appealing, living glitter. Things seemed brilliantly interesting, but yet——

The Mole's mind was back with that notice. Something in it called to him. Keenly he wondered as to the story behind it, wondered curiously until it was blotting out the appeal of all about him. Unable to stand it longer, he glanced about him swiftly for some one who might tell him. He was simply going to know.

Just down the driveway from the street a huge-shouldered old sea dog sat in a decrepit armchair at one side of a dingy junk-shop doorway. As an informant he looked promising. The Mole slipped over beside him and, with a perfunctory nod, sat down on a weather-bleached coil of rope.

His first advances met a stone wall of surly indifference. His attempts to draw the old man into conversation brought but one-syllable replies, none too encouraging at that.

A final still moment and then, staring absently at the glory on the bay, the younger man said:

"What's the meaning of the reward notices posted up along the street?"

He was unprepared for what followed. The old man faced him quickly, his manner now one of undeniable interest.

"Who are you?" he demanded gruffly.

A laugh. "I'm a new man around here. Just now I'm a hobo of the world looking for a place in life to light."

There came a somewhat ominous rumble in the old man's chest. "The notices mean that some more of the under dirt of this place of Docktown is breaking loose and coming to the surface."

The Mole turned his head and met the wise old eyes curiously. "Is Docktown, as you call it, so rotten?"

The old man was nodding slowly, conclusively. "It is that." A reflective moment, and: "I've been in all the hell ports of the world. And I've been here ten years. This place holds the deviltry of them all, and adds a lot of its own." The booming old voice grew suddenly raw in its vehemence. "And lately it's got to be deviltry that's organized!"

"How do you mean?"

The old man's eyes narrowed. "There's an organized system—say of robbery—say of graftin'—say of worse—going on in Docktown that no other port I know about ever saw before."

Before them now, the light was working the surface of the bay into molten silver, into a thousand faring, burnished moods; it held eddying blues and tones of gray, and streaks and sheets of glass-like brilliance that slit the glance like a knife. One side of the Mole's nature attended the beauty all about; the other side listened to the crime tale of the old man beside him.

The voice of the old seaman was going on, mellow with feeling. "In cases like this, there's always one mind that plans deviltry; there's always plenty to carry it out. I'm believin' we've got that one mind right down here in Docktown." Silence, and then in a change of voice quite startling: "If I'm right, I hope I'm by when they gits this man!" A long hoarse oath of Satanic ingeniousness, and: "Oh-h—I hates him like hell!"

The Mole never stirred. "Who is this man?" he asked quietly, encouragingly.

Some final restraint gave way in the other. His eyes blazed with sudden determination.

"If you're what you say, I'm going to take a chance and tell you. I've got a reason. The man I've spotted in this is an Americanized Hungarian. He learned craftiness a thousand years ago back in the old country. He's got a

place up on Dock Street, and he controls about all Docktown."

There came a pause.

"I ain't the only one that suspects him, but he's got me dead along with the rest. Just because my eyes *have* to see what goes on round these docks, he's got me lashed hand and foot and made fast to a ringbolt. To show you —he's seen the notices, and he's just been to tell me he's bought this building I've occupied for years, so as to be holding something over me." The old man jerked his head in the direction of the wharf. "He's just left here. You must have passed him."

A long silence. The Mole's inner eyes recalled passing a big, dark, foreign-looking individual with a dangerous look about him; his outer eyes were regarding the glory of the bay, making rendezvous with its flashing sapphire, its gleaming turquoise, its swirling iridescence. Here and there floated misty, pearly sails, like wisps of gray velvet, drying in the sun.

Behind his back the old man was studying him calculatingly, as though taking in the vital, abounding youth of him, noting the travel-worn clothes, the many signs marking him as the adventurer of life. And then the question so startling as to well nigh cut the Mole's feet from under him:

"Why don't *you* earn that thousand dollars? I can help you on the quiet—and God, I'd like to! No one round here would dare to tackle it even if they knew anything. But you're a stranger. You could work round here unsuspected. To tell the truth, I've told you all this while I was crazy mad enough, hoping to get you to take a chance."

All in a flash was the Mole seeing it, although it was this big Hungarian gangster's technique rather than the reward that had appealed to him. Then—it died. "It isn't possible by a million miles, my friend." He turned, and gazing squarely into the deep-searching old eyes, he dispelled the old man's uncertainty with a smile. "I'm going to come clean with you as you've done with me, so that you'll understand. I couldn't take a chance on tackling this thing, for the reason that my own past isn't one that would let me mix in with something like this."

"But you're an honest man," said the other with deep conviction.

"I hope so." The Mole laughed. "But perhaps I'm so new at it that a mere scratch on my surface would show me up underneath, and no thousand dollars would pay for that." A moment, and: "But don't worry about having told me what you have. You can see now how your talk is all safe with me." He stood up with his hand outstretched. "Good-by, old-timer. I'll probably stick round this town, so I may see you some more." He turned, moved up the wharf and plunged into the traffic.

Something happened—one of the swift, trifling incidents that sometimes change all life. In a single instant it seemed that the roaring, clattering, living stream about the Mole was suddenly tying itself in prodigious confused knots. In the heart of the tangle right ahead appeared the cause—a terrified urchin who had lost his head.

Grinning with excitement, the Mole squirmed, darted, ducked through, seized the boy from under the very wheels of a great truck, and yanked, twisted, threw him back to safety.

And then, while the grin of victory was still spreading on the Mole's face, a gleaming roadster came skidding down upon him himself with set wheels and screaming brakes. In a flash he went down, his head struck a passing mudguard, and the world crashed out in a fiery whorl.

A few minutes later the Mole opened his eyes. He was back in life again, but dazed, confused. Flat on his back he felt the hard surface of the pier be-

neath him. And it seemed his head was incased in ice that yet burned like fire.

Now he knew that he was seeing faces in a ring about him—some one bending over him. And suddenly he was conscious of a pair of eyes that somehow seemed more marvelous than any eyes his own had ever met. They were calm eyes and deep. A second later he was knowing them for greenish-gray; following that, with clearing consciousness, he knew them as very beautiful, belonging in a lovely young face, the face of a young girl. And with that they held him body and soul.

Now, this girl spoke. "You are feeling better." It was a quiet statement of fact.

The Mole glanced around then. Above the kneeling girl ten or a dozen people were ringing him in where he lay in his dust-clotted clothes on the pier. And an officer from Dock Street was shouldering in among them. The Mole struggled up to a sitting posture. His head hurt horribly.

And now the girl was speaking again: "Let me take you home. The car is right here."

Even in his bodily discomfort the Mole smiled. He shook his head. "Thanks, but I cannot let you."

The girl stared at him evenly. And then coolly, impersonally: "But you can't lie here. It was I who knocked you down. I am simply trying to be decent."

"You are decent. You're—you're wonderful to want to do it. But I cannot let you—take me—*home*."

Home! Back in the Mole's mind something laughed derisively. He wondered how far she would be taking him and in what direction she would be driving to find that—home.

Some one put powerful old arms under his and swayed him up. It was the junk dealer. "Don't worry about him, miss," he said to the girl, who had also risen. "He's stopping here with me." And swinging one of the Mole's arms about his massive old shoulders, he lurched away with him into the shop.

Half an hour later, the Mole sat at a table in the little loft kitchen of the old man's shop, sore and lame but with life flooding on sturdily through every fiber. And now it seemed centralizing about some new motive in him, something new and big.

He looked across at the old man busy with a cookstove.

"Who was the young vision who wanted to be 'decent' to me?" the Mole asked. "Have you any idea?"

The old man answered without turning round. "Yes, I have an idea—the right one. She's the daughter of John Huntley, of the Huntley Shipping Company, them as is advertising for a life-saver. Sometimes she drives down here into Docktown to take her father home."

He stared amazed at the big thing like a light that was flooding this young stranger's face. And, at length, the young man was speaking to him like a man trying out a new idea in a new language. "Say, old-timer, I—I think I'm going to change my mind about that proposition of yours. Perhaps—after all—I can be that life-saver. But I'm—I'm seeing more in it than the thousand dollars."

CHAPTER IV.

THE SHIPPING MASTER.

TWO weeks passed. Leaving all caution and apprehension behind, the Mole was on his way to interview the Huntley Shipping Company itself. From the start the workings of the thievery proposition had baffled him to a standstill, although he had given it every voltage of shrewdness and experience he possessed.

Meanwhile, he had established himself. Deciding from the start to locate right there in Docktown, he had found promising quarters in back of Dock

Street—a neighborhood, as it happened, which old Bart Cobbett, the junkman, claimed would be a good section to know.

This was a more or less crowded retreat called Atlantic Court, the home of stevedores, dockmen, truckmen, and shipping workers. There in a big, bare attic room the Mole had founded his first home.

The place comprised four fairly well-battered walls, a roof, not wholly weather proof but easily remedied, and a broad, knot-worn floor. That was all. But it had big, old-fashioned windows, four of them, that let in wonderful sunlight, and from their lofty outlook commanded surpassing bits of sky, of rooftop, of distant mast-growth and harbor, that attracted him always.

Within a week the place had achieved furniture, a debilitated old stove holding a few cooking utensils, a table with three fairly good legs, a cot, and a single chair. And all these he had earned. The first day he had set out determinedly, with a hock-shop fiddle on which he had managed the first installment, to play on the streets. Playing a fiddle would let him in, unsuspected, to the inmost retreats of Docktown. Also it would serve to retrain his wrist, his bow, his fingers into something of their former ability, so that soon he might be justified in seeking a steady playing job.

On the street he made good from the start. His unusual appearance—a good-looking, inscrutably smiling young man of mystery—together with his amazing proficiency for a street performer, aroused no end of curiosity. Often shoppers stopped to speak to him. In the better-class sections far back from Docktown he was a hit.

Meanwhile, on the very first day he got to work on a possible campaign. About the first thing he did was to locate the place of Max Gorya, the Hungarian. He had seen him twice—an impressive figure of power one did not forget. Along with that, he set out systematically to know Docktown.

He began with Atlantic Court. Here it had turned out that the youngster he had saved from being killed was the young son of a big Russian truck driver, Nick Potosky, who lived right near by—a great, stolid figure of brooding silence.

Near Potosky lived an equally outstanding character, although of a radically different type—a stevedore, Dan Lacrosse. Lacrosse was not the giant that Potosky was, but he had a far nimbler wit. The pair seemed, in some vague way, to head the colony of stevedores and truckmen, and early the Mole seemed to sense their prominence. For the rest, he met here a Dock Street officer, Blaney, whom he distrusted exceedingly, a half dozen or more dockmen and seamen, and occasional factory workers.

Many of all these people he encountered frequently on Dock Street. At noon he noticed some of them ate in Canavan's. The Mole wanted to know them on a common ground, be one of them. So at noon, one day, he strolled into Canavan's and began to play. He played the stuff Canavan's would want—broad jazz, old-time dance music that laughed engagingly, an occasional popular ballad, preferably not too new. As the days went on he felt that they were accepting him.

As to the rest, he studied Docktown day and night.

Daytimes, for instance, the shipping drew him powerfully. Shipping such as this drew *men,* big men, fighters, man-animals. Their instincts were primal instincts; they knew no codes. The Mole had known men without codes before, but they had been men of brain and craft and guile. These men were jungle beasts.

Nighttimes? Nighttimes, Docktown hovered close with its assorted evil.

Nighttimes, the beast in its denizens stalked free. Dives along Dock Street offered ready entertainment—ministered to the beast with food and drink, and with liquor of peculiar horror. Seamen from every corner of the earth wandered seekingly at large.

Every day the Mole felt the presence of this strange, hidden thing of organized thievery holding below the life of Docktown like a gnawing, cancerous growth. From talk with old Bart Cobbett, from casual gossip along Dock Street, the thing loomed bigger and more forbidding with the passing of each day. But from the start the Mole could learn but little of the actual working, the method, the scope of it. Now he was on his way to find out.

The huge dock plant of the Huntley Shipping Company loomed among its neighbors like a great towering fortress of industry. It dominated its section of Dock Street for blocks. Watching his chance, the Mole threaded his way across to the water side of the street, and passed on into the great echoing caverns of the company dockhouses.

Adrift in the thundering sea of traffic he was washed along to a little island of safety by an upright support.

Then, a slight distraction. A couple of young men with sheaves of papers—clerks of some kind—shot out of the mêlée to the momentary safety of the Mole's little island. They gave scarce a glance at the figure around at one side but began cheerily screaming warehouse gossip at each other.

The Mole caught some of it. "Old Man's wild this morning . . . biggest deal yet . . . woolens . . . twenty cases . . . gone . . . vanished. . . . I'll say it's strange! . . . Search *me!* . . . They say the Old Man's out for blood!"

The Mole looked across at the long row of offices. A clerk came out of a door at the far end from the general offices. In a promising opening in the traffic stream, the Mole shot across to this man. "Do you know which is the Huntley private office?"

The clerk indicated the door near by. "But you had better go down and make him through the general offices," he suggested meaningly.

Already the Mole's grip was on the handle. He opened the door and went in.

Inside there was a man behind a high desk, half hidden, a man speaking in a voice brusque and irritable.

"Good morning," observed the Mole quietly to the man's back.

John Huntley wheeled about—a compact, sinew-wrapped figure, with the face of a man-master. His eyes fell on the Mole in steely surprise. "Good morning!" he snapped.

The Mole came forward a step, his hat in his hand.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you, sir," he said quietly. "But I wanted to ask you about this freight-thievery proposition."

The man jerked an almost insulting gesture toward the general office.

"They'll tell you about the thousand dollars' reward out there."

It stung. "Your thousand dollars doesn't interest me."

The man by the desk was glaring at him in something of the outraged amazement of a mastiff yapped at by a terrier. "Who are you?" he demanded angrily.

The Mole picked up the other's stare calmly enough. "I'm no one in particular," he said in reply to Huntley's challenge. "But I have a real interest in coming to get your story."

The man's wrath was palpably mounting. "Oh, I'm being interviewed, is it?" He thundered a summons noisily on his desk. "Here!" he shouted to the outer office, and a startled clerk appeared in the door. "Who let this man in here?" he cried out. "What's the

matter with you out there? Show him out!"

A flare of hot young wrath swept the Mole. "Wait a minute!" He had raised a hand, but he stood immovable. "I found the way in; I can find the way out—when I'm ready." And then: "Look me over. Do I look like some one that had drifted in here just to waste your time?"

The other's eyes were probing deep into the cool young face, with its clean-drawn lines of latent power. And as he gazed, the well-cut, though worn suit, the soft-collared, still fine shirt, the limp felt hat, seemed to clothe a different individual. The shipping master replied, but with a mock humility. "My apologies." He bowed ironically. "Now if you would please be so good as to say——"

"All right," the Mole interrupted. "Here's the answer: I'm living in Docktown. I've come to know about all this thieving business. I think I can help wipe it out."

"Yes? Fine! Do you plan to go out and beat up Docktown—shake this mystery out of it, as it were?" asked Huntley with stinging sarcasm.

"I feel I can help clean it up. The 'how' is up to me."

John Huntley's impatient face reflected his complete disbelief. "What do you want to enter into it for?"

"That wouldn't interest you." Suddenly the Mole burst forth impetuously: "Here, you can get this, can't you? I've simply set myself to do this thing—as a sort of debt I owe!" And in a moment he added: "I'm ready to try it out if it takes what little I've got to give! I live and hive in Docktown. I'm getting to know its people; to a certain extent I have their confidence. I live in Atlantic Court." He gave the number. "Noons I play the fiddle in Canavan's eating house. I feel I know whose is the mind that is behind all this. And—and certain experience of a previous time in my life puts me in a better position to help you unearth things than any one you know." The Mole's hand came up in a convincing gesture, the wonderful nervous fingers extended and quivering. "I've told you who I am, and what I am, and where I am." He gave the telephone number of Canavan's, and the shipping master suddenly turned and barked in a call.

He faced about a moment later. "All right!" A tense, scrutinizing moment, and the shipper was on his feet. "Listen: you're probably a nut, and I a fool, but things have reached a stage where I'm willing to try anything!" He strode to the door of the adjoining office and swung it shut. "I can see where some one on the inside might help us unearth this organization. You may or may not be that man. But I just want to remark right here that if you're planning something to double-cross us"—the veins on the man's neck took on an added distension—"I'll never rest till I've got you where I want you, this side of hell! Now, what is it you want to know?"

"I want to know the straight story of it all. You see, up to now I feel it all about me, and I have some actual dope on it. But I *know* very little. What are the real facts, the extent of it?"

"Extent! Great Heaven, it's ruining us! It's running into thousands." The shipper ran agitated fingers through his already upstanding hair. "Yesterday's returns show twenty cases of woolens simply vanished." He swept out his arms eloquently, to end in a dramatic snap of his fingers. "Gone! Gone—just like that!"

The Mole's face showed a deep wonderment. "What do you feel to be the working system?"

"Ask me! Shippers show their delivery bills signed by our receiving clerk. Truckmen have their own receipts from us. No one ever recalls the shipments going aboard, and at destination they never come off! Vanish! Simply van-

ish! So much for stuff we never seemed to have had on the docks." He paused a moment, and went on: "But stuff that we have had, that we *know* we've had, has disappeared overnight. Cases of clothing, boots and shoes, food truck—gone!"

"But how about your own people? They must have been in on it." The Mole now was vigorously alive within. Vaguely, he was scenting thief-craft of the highest order in all this. "Your dock employees—have you thought of that?"

"Of course. And we've fired watchmen, clerks, dockmen—every one almost but the stenographers! The thing goes on just the same. And some of the other shippers are beginning to tell the same story."

The man drove on for a full half minute. It was a tale of clean-cut outlawry more extensive in its scope than the Mole had ever imagined. The shipper finished:

"I'm convinced the thing is incubated right here in Docktown. If, as you say, you're hanging out among them, you're in a position to learn much." There came a pause. The master of shipping stared full into the eyes before him. "Now I don't know what you've got up your sleeve, but if you can help put this thing over, I'll see afterward that you get your own idea of a reward."

Until long after, he never understood the whimsical little gleam that came into his visitor's eyes, or the slow smile that came about his mouth. In the dead silence the Mole was saying: "I'm going to ask you to remember that—that you'll see I get my own idea of a reward. Some time I may ask for it."

"It goes," said John Huntley. "On my honor." There was an unwavering exchange of glances. "All right. I'm trusting you till I learn different. Good day!"

Emerging from the thunderous presence of the shipping master, the Mole stood a moment on the curb with the thrill of this thing humming within him. It was a hundred times bigger than he had ever guessed. It awed him a little. But—if he could clean it up he would be paying well for all the irregular years out to one side. And, too, he was seeing a pair of gray-green eyes, lovely, understanding, brimming now with kindness, admiration.

CHAPTER V.

LORNE HUNTLEY.

DEEPLY engrossed, the Mole stepped down from the curb into the stream of traffic. A terrific instant and he had leaped back. The bark of an automobile horn right at his back had about exploded him out of existence. He faced about angrily.

A long, glittering roadster of impeccable smartness had skidded to a stop by the curb. In the seat was the young girl who had offered to take him home from the old junk dealer's a few days before, and the wrath in the Mole's face died out to a comical apology.

On the other hand the face of the girl in the car evidently masked a very considerable fright by a scathing look of hot anger.

"Listen," she was saying with cutting directness, "if you're really insisting on deliberate suicide, why not try the strychnine route? You could do that off by yourself where you wouldn't be a nuisance to other people." Her flashing gray eyes held a very real feeling.

The Mole's cap was off. He was laughing good-naturedly now.

"I'm sorry," he apologized; "I really am."

The blaze of anger died down in the girl's eyes. A silent moment, and then, "All right," she conceded. "So am I. But I hate to be jolted like that."

Her eyes passed swiftly over the well-poised youthful figure, met his really

ingratiating grin and, half reluctantly, she smiled back.

"I suppose," she conceded, "when I come to realize that on two separate counts I've almost batted you out of existence, I should really feel I owe you a great deal for consenting to stay alive instead of being disagreeable to you about it. To prove it to you—where are you going?"

"Home."

Her eyes flickered the merest trifle. "Home?" she echoed amusedly. "Well, if I were not afraid of being insulted again, I would offer to take you there."

"If you were to offer to take me home to-day I should jump at it."

She hesitated not an instant. She opened the door, said, "Jump at it," and he slid in beside her.

In a moment, with the motor purring, she asked: "Which way?"

"South along Dock Street."

The girl slipped deftly into the traffic. In the constantly engrossing tangle of vehicles the Mole made no effort at speech that might distract her. Here beside this girl he felt himself thrilling keenly, sensing powerfully her fineness, her easy intelligence, her sureness, her poise. At length a few blocks along he said in a low voice: "Turn right at the next corner. I live in there."

"Do you mean it?" Half incredulous, the girl had spoken without turning her head.

"Yes."

It was a broken little side street leading back into the swarming tenement habitations back of Dock Street.

And now the girl spoke. "Just as a matter of record, why wouldn't you let me drive you home the other day when apparently you needed it so badly?"

It came with startling directness: "I had no home."

A silent moment—then: "Is that supposed to be funny?"

"No. It's supposed to be true."

The car moved along past several dingy doorways, threading slowly through a precarious horde of racing children.

"That door is mine," announced the Mole, indicating a doorway.

The girl pulled quietly up to the curb before the doorway and sat facing along the street in silence. The Mole stepped down to the sidewalk, his hand lingering on the door. Staring into the beautiful young face set calmly ahead, he said on impulse: "You're not believing me."

She turned to regard him with cool directness. "Not intensely. But it doesn't matter."

The Mole burst forth with an eagerness that surprised even himself. "But it is true." And then swiftly: "Come, I'll show you. Or are you afraid?"

They stared at each other a silent moment and the girl swung over on the seat and out upon the curb.

"Lorne Huntley isn't credited with being afraid—of anything," she said, and followed him in.

A moment later, up in his great attic room of cheerful bareness, the Mole might have been an enthusiast displaying an apartment of priceless significance.

"This is it"—sweeping his hand about in a broad, inclusive gesture—"*home*. This is the first home I have had in ten or fifteen years. To me it is so much more than four walls, a ceiling, and a floor, that I can't hope to make you understand."

The girl's face showed nothing of what she felt. "You might try," she observed. "I'm considered fairly intelligent." Her eyes were roaming about curiously.

The Mole was off. He was talking to the first understanding confidant of his life, and he knew it.

"For reasons I am not going into, I decided suddenly to have the home I had never known. It was going to be mine in its every detail. Moreover,

nothing was going into it that I had not earned of my own hands."

The girl glanced at him swiftly then. "You're not one of these neuro-crazy sons of the brutally rich—brain outlaws with high-powered educations and an entire lack of horse sense."

"Hardly." The Mole laughed with a world of strange meaning. "There's been no riches in my life. I'm coming from the other direction. And I'm making a long jump."

The girl turned away. This young man and his line was something she could not work out. And at the same time she was interested—annoyingly so. "I suppose you're expecting me to blurt out helplessly, 'Please, who are you?'" she announced with droll frankness. "But I'm not that sort. I do want to know, perhaps. But perhaps I'm finding out in my own way."

She swept out of existence a little situation that was beginning to hold embarrassment. She asked carelessly: "Did you earn this stove?"

The Mole nodded.

"Yes, I have found a junkman with a marvelous stock."

"And did he sell you this—this—saucepan, is it?"

"No, the saucepan is a reincarnated tin dipper. I salvaged it from the basement and put a handle on it."

The girl was smiling now. The whole situation evidently struck her as so bizarre—so absurd. "What ware is this teapot?" she asked, lifting the thing in her beautifully kept hands.

"That is genuine Peachcan, Lemon Cling dynasty—a very rare bit." The Mole wheeled to a shelf. "This cup is a real find. It is Royal Docktown. Later I'm going to have a saucer." His eyes caught fire suddenly. "And a real table with a cloth, and some decent chairs, and pictures on these walls, real ones. And over there, by the windows, a piano."

Her glance engaged his swiftly. "A piano"—incredulously. "Why not a power plant—or a rhinoceros?"

He did not even laugh. "I mean it all right," he said. "A piano is a good friend of mine."

"Are you a musician?"

"Inside, yes, I'm a good musician—violin. Outside, rusty—rotten."

The girl was standing very still; her face had lost its almost distant carelessness completely.

"But you're something else beside a musician, aren't you?" There was the faintest tinge of disappointment in her voice. "Something—oh, I don't know, something heavier, something that fits in better in a world of enterprise? Music's all right. I suppose it's the greatest humanizer in the world when it's anchored to a make-up that's sound, sane—when it's part of a *worker*. But by itself it's too fine grained for the firing line. You're really bigger than music alone?"

The young man himself was lost now. "I wonder," he said, in slow reflection. Then he came to sufficiently to direct at her a stream of statement that almost swept her off her feet. "You probably know of the Docktown warehouse thievery that is bleeding the shipping companies white? I'm going to clean it up or die. Cleaning it up may mean the bigness you mentioned; to die is little enough—every one does it. The combination of the two, though, might be a world beater. I cannot tell you of all that's behind all this. I have simply set out to do it. I decided that since knowing you."

There was a startled silence. "But you don't know *me*. That part of it is absurd."

"I know you better than you think." He was very earnest. "And, just to fix the matter in your mind, there's nothing absurd about it at all. Don't let yourself believe it."

In spite of herself the girl's face softened. "But what you plan is hope-

lessly big and hard and dangerous. Have you really the courage to tackle anything so difficult as that?"

He laughed, oddly boylike, "Probably not—really. Perhaps I'm just crazily foolish. You see"—a soft little shaft of inspiration striking him—"you see, a man must be part fool to tackle really big things."

A moment later down on the curb he had opened the door of the gleaming speed machine. On the driver's seat the girl sat quiet a moment, staring absently down at her slim hands resting on the wheel.

"I suppose you know you have put yourself over with pretty big interest!" she reflected, with a slow smile.

"I wasn't attempting to put myself over. And I wasn't attempting to be interesting," he smiled back at her. "*You* know that in turn."

"Perhaps I do." She started the motor, adjusted her gears. "About your playing, I like music myself although I am not a musician, inside or outside. I've got a friend, however, who could play accompaniments for you, and, perhaps because of what you're planning to do for the Huntleys, I'm tempted to some day pick you up, take you to my home and see how much of you is really real."

His face had gone gravely sober. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes."

"All right," he said almost in awe. "It's a bet."

CHAPTER VI.

THE FIRST CLEW.

THE cold, stealing chill of the fight in Atlantic Court—an outburst of blood and horror in a peace-set retreat of warm evening softness—remained in the underlife of the Mole for days. The incident stirred him and chilled him.

It gave him his first real clew to the thievery operations; at the same time it made him realize the deadly type of man-stuff against which he had set himself—and what would happen to him if he failed.

As to the clew, he had probably been prepared for this by the young son of the Potoskys, Kolka. Since the Mole had saved his life in the traffic the boy had found his way often up to the Mole's big attic room, it being a particular delight of the child's to listen when he played the violin.

The Mole was playing one evening about dusk, intensively working out fingers, hands and arm as was his custom. The boy crouched on the floor, his head on the windowsill, staring out across the rooftops to the harbor. This night it seemed the child had something on his mind. When the Mole finished playing the boy announced gravely in the silence:

"My father gotta new job."

The Mole pricked up his ears instantly. The days had brought him little of active encouragement. He had haunted the warehouses, he had lurked round the docks for hours, watching for the first thing that might lead to a clew. He had made cautious attempts to sound out some of the stevedores in Atlantic Court, with but scant success. In fact, following his visit to the John Huntley office, he had the strange feeling on one or two occasions that he himself was being sounded out by Atlantic Court.

"Bully for father," he remarked encouragingly. "What is his new job?"

"He's gotta new truck. Now he drives mostly nighttimes. Sometimes he drives almost all night."

Something clicked in the Mole's mind. He remembered that Bart Cobbett had mentioned Potosky meaningly more than once. His interest in the child's conversation leaped.

"Who got him the truck?" he asked, with assumed carelessness.

"'Hungarian Max.' He come to our

house after I was in bed, and I listened. Father makes a lotta money," the boy continued. "Mother she buy a lot of new dishes, curtains from lace, and a machine that washes clothes." There was silence. When the boy spoke again it was on another theme: "Dan Lacrosse has got an awful mad on my father—says some time, perhaps, he'll kill him."

"What's it about?"

"I don't know. Mamma don't know. My father says nothing. But it's since the new truck came."

The boy talked on. His talk strengthened the thing that had long been active in the Mole's mind. Since his arrival in Atlantic Court he had noted that several families seemed to have come into recent affluence. It convinced him that, no matter how far reaching the system that conducted the warehouse thievery, its headquarters was undoubtedly in Docktown, possibly right here in Atlantic Court.

The boy Kolka departed, and a little later the Mole was down on his doorstep. Serenity brooded sluggishly throughout the court as though a hard, laborious day had folded its wings. Men smoked quietly on their front stoops; children played contentedly in every direction; women leaned from first-floor tenements to talk with neighbors outside. As usual the Mole sat alone.

The new prosperity was noticeable all about. On her doorstep Marya Potosky was proudly displaying the new washing machine to admiring onlookers. Below, a grubby little girl wheeled along a baby in an absurdly ornamental new perambulator, mincing along behind her new possession with an important air of supremest hauteur. Out from a doorway farther along came Toinette Lacrosse, the young wife of Dan Lacrosse, the stevedore. She made along the curb in the direction of Dock Street, costumed like a manikin of a French modiste. Passing the Potosky woman she eyed her in what seemed like cool contempt.

But Marya Potosky was a woman of more amiable humanities. She glanced down at the smartly clad young figure and said, pleasantly enough: "Such a fine dress it is, Toinette!"

Toinette transfixed the woman with spiteful malevolence.

"It's nothing to what I ought to have," she avowed vindictively, "if my man got what was coming to him, like yours." And, once started, she poured forth on the woman a scathing torrent of abuse that pulled big Nick Potosky to his feet and brought him stumbling down the steps.

"My woman don't take such talk from cheaps!" growled Nick dangerously, and he took the girl by the arm to move her along.

At that Dan Lacrosse, smoking by his own doorstep in the distance, stuffed his pipe in his pocket and came running swiftly down along the curb with the sinister lightness of a panther.

The Mole heard one tense, low-toned exchange of words between the two men, and the next instant it seemed they were locked together in a knot of scuffling humanity that might have been molded from a common striving material.

And then in the soft evening twilight Atlantic Court blew up. Serenity became confusion.

Standing on his doorstep the Mole knew that he was watching the working out of big, underlying discontents, hatreds, animosities. And, too, he felt himself swamped with waves of grim outlandishness. These people of Old World temperament were proceeding to adjust their differences on true Old World impulse, which demanded first of all that injuries should be wiped out by blood. And blood came to stand forth on the peace of evening like crimson smears on a tranquil sunset.

The raw brutality of the battling pair swept the Mole into action. He leaped down his steps and clove into the crowd. Some one on the outskirts gripped him powerfully by the arm and slatted him to one side with the low-toned injunction: "You keep out of this!"

And now other partisans of one side or the other were paired off in combat. And in a moment it seemed the whole inner court became a writhing, scuffling herd of hopeless madness. The Mole watched from one side with the cold thrill of awe that steals through a man watching others of his kind revert to animals.

Women on the outskirts were uttering short shrill yelps of terror, of admonition. Here and there men's faces jerked upward into the yellow light with features completely blotted out in glistening, black smears. There was sickness in it all. Once the Mole found himself staring determinedly up at the thin, peaceful evening sky, to avoid seeing about. Atlantic Court had become thick with horror.

Suddenly a man near said in deep-toned excitement, "Here comes Gorya!" and he spat in vast relief. Others repeated the announcement.

The Mole wheeled. Coming into Atlantic Court from the direction of Dock Street the tall Hungarian was swinging along swiftly toward the rabble, his face set, his glittering, black eyes sliding about him wickedly. He penetrated the throng like a javelin of steel. He thrust a shoulder between the chief contestants and with two arms of unbelievable power thrust them apart. Strangely, the fighting all about dropped at once to sullen inactivity. One look into Gorya's face and even the chief contestants seemed to subside a long way toward calmness.

And now came a new arrival. Officer Blaney had hurried in. He moved across the court with swift authority, gripped a contestant in either hand and shouldered them out through the staring throng.

Standing alone at one side, the Mole found himself trying to straighten out puzzling points of the whole affair. First, the dissatisfaction over the new truck that had been awarded to "Big Nick"; the boy Kolka's statement that it had come to his father from Max Gorya; the bitter spitefulness of Lacrosse's wife over what sounded like some division of spoils; Max Gorya's power to quell the fight with a few words; and now—Officer Blaney.

A swift impulse seized the Mole and shot him in back through a hidden alley to intercept Blaney. Some shrewd instinct in him had always distrusted this man Blaney. A moment later, unobserved in the dusk, he came out behind the officer and the two contestants. He strained his ears to Blaney's swift, low-toned speech, and in that moment knew beyond all doubt that he had planted both feet firmly on the trail leading toward success.

Blaney was saying: "You bozos want to lay off airing your family troubles in public or you'll be blabbing the whole works to the populace. You'll both get your right split at the right time." He released them in the darkness with a parting injunction: "Now beat it and lay low for a day or so. The next time I'll be running you in for fair."

It was the young stevedore Lacrosse, who nailed the thing finally in the listening Mole's mind. In answer to Blaney's threat he gave a short bark of derision. "*You'll* run us in—*you?*" he scoffed. "Say, Blaney, when that time comes you'll be on the inside with us, and Gorya with you. If my head wasn't so sore I'd laugh it off!"

The Mole stood stock-still in the darkness. It seemed all trails led to Gorya. His next move was the Hungarian. Somehow, he was going to get to know him thoroughly—and from the inside.

CHAPTER VII.

GORYA.

MAX GORYA, the Hungarian, stood in his doorway smoking somnolently, and watching the noonday life along Dock Street. Max's doorway opened into one of the older buildings—a grim, gaunt, terrible old building that had probably looked on at the travails of Docktown for more than a century. Standing in the doorway noontimes noting the new faces was a habit of his, for Dock Street represented Max Gorya's own domain. Sooner or later, in some form or other, he checked up on its every man.

To-day, for instance, he was looking for a chap recently new to Docktown, an oddity, a clean, good-looking young man with a very wise face who, posing as a fiddler, had come to hang up among the dockmen in Atlantic Court, and about whom no one there seemed able to learn a thing. At the same time, from certain tips lodged with Max it became necessary to learn all about this young man, so Max had undertaken to accomplish this himself.

And now, as he watched, a tiny gleam of interest came beneath Gorya's lids. Around a corner a couple of blocks away came a young man carrying a violin and bow under his arm. He entered Canavan's, the eating place across the street, and a moment later, Max Gorya heard the man begin to play.

The Hungarian reacted to musical sound as unerringly as might—a king cobra. The playing was not at all the guttural little rasping of a street fiddler. The man in Canavan's was playing, "Chickens What Don't Roost," sheerest jazz, but he was playing with the expert enunciation and the free, powerful bow of a veteran first violin. There followed a little pause in which the crockery came into its own again, and then the violinist began playing, "You Hold the Pass-key to My Heart," one of the popular songs. Again Canavan's teamsters fell silent. The man played the cheap little treacly ballad with exaggerated sentiment—fed it to them sugar sweet and sob coated, the notes winging out shrilly clear and lovely. And a great racket of applause followed.

Across the street Max Gorya's eyes narrowed reflectively. Whatever else the young man might be, he was actually a musician and a good one. And suddenly the half-closed eyes lit with a gleam as of inspiration. It had come to him with startling clearness how he could use this young man in order to find out all about him.

He lit his pipe—and waited.

A knot of idle listeners had gathered on the curb in front of his own place. The fiddler came out from Canavan's across the street. He was scooping a generous handful of coins out of his cap. His face was quiet, businesslike. He looked across the street to where big Max towered in his door above the line of loiterers. To a close watcher the quiet abstraction of the fiddler's face might have lit with a sudden interest. He slapped on his cap, came directly across and began to play. And—an odd thing—as he raised his violin two copper pennies dangled from a string about his left wrist.

To the loiterers it was sort of crazy music, that he played now, but fascinating somehow. The man on the door alone understood. It was the "Son of the Puszta" the fiddler was playing, and it was the *puszta,* the broad, lonely Hungarian plains, that grew in the vision of the man in the door. Away back in his life Max Gorya had been a *csika* and had rounded up horses on those very plains. They were before him now. There came an allegro, a wild *csardas* that might have marked an orgy of frenzied Cossacks; then the theme once more, repeated in tiny, whistling harmonics like the fluty purl-

ing of quail; the fierce jigging dance of the *csardas* again, mounting to a hoarse, chattering frenzy, and—it was finished.

The man in the door stood immovable. His eyes glittered a trifle. The music *had* stirred him. But, what was of deeper interest, he felt in his crafty shrewdness that he was being played *to*—played to with more than the cursory interest of a street player.

Why?

He faced the fiddler levelly. The fiddler was facing him—levelly.

Then the Hungarian spoke. "Come in," he said simply.

The fiddler went in, simply.

Inside Gorya's shop, the Mole found himself rather tense. He had finally got next to the man at the top and already was he appraising him at his full value. In Max Gorya he was encountering a master in his craft—a crook of supremacy, of distinction. Something in him knew that his own cleverness was to be pitted against an adversary of relentless power, that he was never to lose sight of this for one single moment, that to fail might mean—the ultimate disaster. But he stared about him in an interest convincingly careless.

From behind him came the voice of the other. "I recognized your music. You play the fiddle well—not?"

Gorya was knowing deep satisfaction. Already did he sense that this was a young man of altogether too shrewd a cleverness to be in Docktown without a mission, and it was well to take him in hand early.

At Gorya's remark, something relaxed a bit in the Mole. The other's voice seemed free from suspicion, but the Mole knew for a certainty that this man was weighing him carefully, curiously. So he grinned deprecatingly, and wagged his head in modest denial. "Oh, no. I'm pretty rotten at it." The grin didn't get over. He knew it, instinctively.

The deep, intensely black eyes of the other were regarding the Mole soberly. "How is this?" It sounded faintly like "How es theez?" Otherwise Max's English was decent enough. "You play like a *mester* and yet you play in the streets."

From his remark the Mole gathered no clew as to the other's intentions. His answer was swift, instinctive with truth. "Playing is the only thing I know, and I'm still too rusty at that to look up a *real* job." That, too, failed to convince, he felt it.

Gorya remarked:

"Your playing should put you nearer a real job than Canavan's."

The Mole considered this. "Perhaps," he admitted wonderingly. "But I guess I'm fussy—I want to feel sure I can first back up a real job." He was gazing intently at the deep-set black eyes that revealed to no man the things that lay behind.

The Hungarian's next question was casual enough:

"What part of the country are you from?"

"I'm from the West."

"And why in Docktown?"

The Mole grinned, not too genially. He hated sparring without a ray of light.

"This sounds like a cross-examination," he observed dryly.

To his surprise the other came back flatly, his statement unmistakable truth:

"I have a special reason. I am not wasting your time."

The Mole considered swiftly—and told the truth:

"I have been in other work. I got out of it. I took to the road. I always wanted to know the east coast country, and so"—a little conclusive gesture—"here I am."

The Hungarian's face revealed nothing. He was speaking again, and the Mole's mind veered anew. "Canavan is doing a big business—not?"

"Looks like it."

"You have done it for him—is it not so?"

"I suppose I have helped some."

"I want you to do it for me," the Hungarian announced quietly.

The Mole started. "What do you mean—do it for you?" His eyes passed curiously over the face that was like an inscrutable copper idol—the half-closed, brooding eyes, the massed, oily ringlets of heavy, black hair.

"I have a moving-picture house," Max indicated with his head, "just along out of Docktown. The music is very bad. But it is not easy to change. The people may not know what the trouble is, but once or twice when the music has been good, the business has been good—very good, too."

It struck the Mole forcibly. In his intense surprise he plucked abstracted little pizzicati from the neck of his violin. Here, offered to him, was the very solution of all he had wanted, coming so easily as almost to seem prearranged. Here was a chance for association with this man, a chance to know him, to watch him—to undermine him. A big jolt of mounting excitement swept the Mole.

"The movies is a new game to me, but"—recollecting himself—"about how much are you paying?"

Gorya mentioned a sum.

It was fair enough. In a second the Mole had snatched at the full significance of all it meant. "I'll try it out," he said.

"*Jol van.* It is well. Be ready to begin Saturday. It is our best day."

Out on the sidewalk the Mole lit a cigarette and drew big, regaling whiffs deep into his lungs. "Gee!" he muttered. "What a pipe! When I get through with this man Gorya I'll be nexter to him than his own skin!"

Inside the shop the Hungarian lit a pipe quietly.

"If this young man is not all right," he reflected, "when I have finished with him he will be as a letter that is written—and"—he tamped down his pipe—"a letter that is written—and lost."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SYSTEM REVEALED.

THE Mole's association with Max Gorya was to stand always the most significant feature of all his life. First, with conscientious musicianship the Mole tackled Max's show. Playing for the movies proved hard, horribly hard! Max had not yet considered the talking movies, and the Mole conducted a hard-worked little team of five, playing constantly.

That first night the Mole never forgot. Sitting so close to the screen pulled his eyes out of focus. And the pictures flying on—on—on, never tarrying, never lagging, strung him to a tremendous pitch of nervous excitement. If he missed so much as one figure on his cue sheet, he was liable to find himself synchronizing jazz to a death bed, or a dirge to slapstick. It brought the sweat out on him. An entire week it took for the Mole to get accustomed to it.

From then on the Mole set out to solve his employer. And from the first was he baffled. He would try to be friendly. Gorya would allow him. But very soon in the course of things it would strike the Mole that it was he, himself, that was being solved rather than his unfathomable employer. It was very strange. Sometimes the oddity of it startled him. Try as he might he could never get into Max's own quarters—or at least farther than the shop. Try as he might he could never lead the man, either in thought, talk or action. And with the passing of the days the Mole grew desperate.

And then, when things loomed almost hopeless, the Docktown problem burst open—revealed its inmost feature.

Late one afternoon, the Mole was

down in the Huntley Company warehouse. Hoping constantly to be able to present him a complete case, the Mole had never communicated with John Huntley since that first day. But now he had begun to feel it wise to see him, if only a brief moment to let him know that he was still active. But John Huntley was away—in New York.

The Mole had just left the shipping office. He was standing on the sidewalk near the entrance, waiting a chance to cross the street. Traffic was slowed up in the afternoon congestion just before closing. Suddenly in the slowly moving mass before him came something familiar, something that brought him out of his brooding. Big Nick Potosky was moving along in the jam, his great new truck loaded with bales of wool.

As he turned out of the traffic stream to make the entrance to the Huntley dock, the Mole noted the officer, Blaney, standing along by the great opening, and—something sprang alert in the Mole—he saw an obvious signal pass from Nick to Blaney, who turned and sauntered inside.

A swift moment slipping through the throng, and the Mole himself was back inside, standing out of sight, watching the officer. He saw Blaney speak guardedly to the receiving clerk, and the clerk straightway left him to attend to Big Nick who had just driven in and had passed over to an obscure stand at one side. The clerk reached up, took the big truckman's warehouse receipt and signed it. The truck of wool passed on, losing itself in the labyrinth of traffic below.

The Mole relaxed. There was nothing to excite any suspicion in the transaction; a little disgustedly he asked himself what it was he had expected to see. Idly he passed through the great crowded cavern to the exit on the far side, and there——

The Mole could not believe his own eyes. In the confusion of outgoing freight before him was Big Nick, calmly manipulating his truck, and blandly carting away the load of wool intact.

One instant the Mole stood, gripped in revelation. He had seen a whole truckload of goods driven in on the Huntley Company premises. He had seen the receipts signed that would prove the Huntley Company had received it. And then, after a few moments of maneuvering through the vast crowded place, he had seen the entire load quietly driven off—looted, stolen! Its loss would not be discovered until some ship was checked at destination. The receiving clerk would deny all knowledge of it after it came on the dock. The shipping clerk would, of course, never have seen it. And no power on earth could deny Nick's delivery evidence of that shipping receipt.

Running swiftly, the Mole was out in the Dock Street traffic clinging to a passing taxi at the risk of his life. "Follow that truck!" he had commanded the driver.

The taxicab was one of the three or four ancient relics that plied along the Docktown section. The Mole fell into a corner of the driver's seat and sat staring ahead like a man in a trance. And now the inside details of the system were dawning on him. The receiving clerk was an accomplice. Probably also the shipping clerk. Goods could be signed for, relieving the shipper from any liability, also the truckman. The receiving clerk could even verify his signature. But the goods would be gone, vanished without leaving a trace. The Mole's eyes, straight ahead upon the speeding truck of wool, grew wider.

And Blaney, himself, was a more important factor than one would guess. And he probably managed his own night man, and also any dock officer he desired. With a police "plant" of this sort, with freight clerks on the inside,

with two or three truckmen and a number of longshoremen in on it also, the thing was endless in its scope, and absolutely untraceable.

Now the Mole wanted to see how the goods were disposed of, wanted to learn the other end of the scheme. At just that moment it seemed to be the one desire life held.

The traffic was thinning. They were half a mile along into a less congested section of Dock Street. The shipping done here was mostly to local points. The craft seemed to be lighters and small freighters. Sharply, the truck ahead turned off Dock Street down upon what evidently was a private wharf. The locality was familiar; the wharf in question had been pointed out to him one day by old Bart Cobbett as being one of Gorya's properties.

The Mole got out of the car, paid the driver, and the taxicab vanished around a corner. Standing in a hidden angle, the Mole watched. Big Nick had driven into a shed. A couple of men, one the youthful stevedore Lacrosse from Atlantic Court, mounted Nick's truck with freight hooks, and began unloading it. A third man, a seaman of some sort, stood below and helped load the bales on trucks which ran them swiftly down across the gangplank of a small freighter.

And then—another truck was driving in swiftly, and the Mole had to start out of his place of obscurity and back to the street.

He set out to walk back along Dock Street. Somehow he was tremendously exalted. The thing was so monstrously simple after all. And he had unearthed it. Moving along, his mind became filled with thought of the girl, Lorne Huntley. He had seen her but twice—once, a chance encounter in the shopping district, the second time when, with a young girl friend, she had driven down to a matinée at Gorya's Theater and had talked to him a few minutes after the show. She had asked him what progress he had been making and he had little to offer. Now he could tell her he was beginning to win. He swung along, neither seeing nor hearing.

And behind him the taxicab driver came hurriedly out of a lunch cart and sought Big Nick.

"Listen," the driver said guardedly; "that guy that fiddles in Gorya's got aboard me back at the Huntley Company shack and trailed you down here. Looks to me like he hid in a corner to watch the works." In an opening between the buildings the Mole was visible passing along Dock Street. The taxi driver pointed. "There he goes now."

CHAPTER IX.

DINNER FOR THREE.

THE next two or three days, in a way, were the hardest of the Mole's life. He had solved the problem of the Docktown thievery, and, for the moment, there was no one to help him proceed. Early the first morning he had gone back to the Huntley office. Huntley had not returned but was expected daily.

The clerk, noting curiously the inquirer's tense concern, asked if there was anything the office might do for him, and received a silent shake of the head. Strong in the Mole was the fear that he might be revealing things to a confederate of the system, and he came away.

The unexpected setback dragged at his spirit like a weight of lead. He had no actual evidence whatever. Until John Huntley came back he could neither open his mouth nor stir. No one else knew anything about him; no one else could guarantee him the protection necessary to round the thing up. And he needed powerful backing.

All that day the Mole was consumed with restlessness. All that day he watched, and all the next. Persistently,

at some point or other in Docktown, did he spend his every spare hour in watching—Big Nick, Blaney, the receiving clerk, whose name he learned was Kenyon, or some of the henchmen in Atlantic Court. And each hour, be it known, at every station of his vigils, in the case of every man he watched, was he himself watched in turn by some one put upon his trail by Max Gorya.

The second day it seemed to the Mole that he could not stand it—the mental explosives he seemed carrying about. With John Huntley once squarely at his back he ached to leap into the situation headlong. More, he wanted to go to John Huntley's daughter and say: "I have won out. I have squared myself for much. Doesn't that help?"

His craving to see the girl now was like unsatisfied craving for stimulant. And then, while drifting along a busy section of Dock Street that very forenoon, there came a chuckling little *honk-honk* of a motor horn right beside him and he wheeled to face the smartly glittering roadster with the girl Lorne Huntley in the driver's seat. The Mole's delight at seeing her swamped his abstraction, overflowed into his face. With his cap in his hands he stood regarding her, with a smile almost stupidly happy.

"I have been following you a block," she was saying, "trying to tune in on you, but you seemed so preoccupied I was out of luck."

"You see, I didn't know it," he laughed.

"Listen," she began; "you remember once I said I would like to have you come to the house for dinner some night and then play. To-night is the night. Do you care to come?"

The Mole had thought of it a great many times, but now that it was at hand it struck him with an almost guilty sense of strangeness all through. The thought of himself, Larry the Mole, being received honestly into such an atmosphere swamped him now with its apparent deception.

"I—I—I would be very glad," he hesitated, "but I play from seven on, and——"

"Arrange it"—decisively.

"But, even so, you see—I—I——"

"Don't tell me you're going to say you've got nothing to wear," the girl broke in at random. "You're as bad as a woman. You can come as you are and forget the rest." She watched the hesitation still lingering on his face and went on: "Dad's away, if that means any reassurance to you, and there will be no one but myself and Pendy. Pendy is, or was, my music teacher. She's a wonderful little woman, she's a wonderful musician. If you're another she wouldn't care whether you came in a dinner coat or a surf suit."

The Mole was laughing frankly now. An adventuresome thrill was upon him, and with it a feeling of keen anticipation. Besides he wanted to talk to this girl so badly that it was misery.

"Thank you very much," he said. "I shall be glad to come."

"Fine!" And she gave him the address.

At seven o'clock the Mole stood in the vestibule of the Huntley home with a manservant taking his hat and violin case. Apparently calmly at ease, he was deeply impressed with the house about him. Some well-developed sense in him knew fineness, reacted keenly to things of value and of beauty well assembled. Life had placed him more than once in splendid surroundings temporarily, but there was a big kick in realizing that now, for the first time in his life he was coming upon such surroundings as a guest.

In a living room that might have been an Old World drawing-room readapted to American comfort, Lorne Huntley came forward to meet him, frankly welcoming. Detached from her motor car

she seemed about as beautiful a creature as he had ever known, although she was dressed simply in deference, he suspected, to his own lack of evening clothes. Behind her stood a woman approaching middle age—small, dark, but emanating a certain quiet force that gave her distinction.

Lorne Huntley was saying: "This is Mrs. Prendiville. She is going to play your accompaniments. If you're good you can have anything she's got. If you're blooey don't dare pretend you know her if you should ever see her again."

The woman's face had lit with a slow, quiet smile. "Please don't worry," she said to the Mole.

"I'm not," he returned, his own smile answering hers.

They went in to dinner.

At the piano later the Mole made his first selection with something of uncertainty. It was always difficult to estimate in advance the musical status of others. From the music he selected a Brahms Hungarian dance.

"This may be hackneyed," he said, "but it's pretty well-placed violin stuff to loosen up on, and it always serves to get me going right."

He leaped into the thing abruptly, dinning through it almost hysterically with a mad abandon that was wholly startling. He forgot both women. He forgot himself. He did not realize that he had turned from the piano and was walking about the room, eyes closed, completely lost in the music he was making, the things he was seeing, the ecstatic frenzy ignited within him. The thing had flashed Gorya the Hungarian before him. Its mad rhythm was no longer simple folk dancing, it was an orgy of exultation over a beaten opponent, a worth-while opponent beaten desperately in sweat and striving and passion and blood.

He finished in silence as before. He glanced swiftly at the girl in the chair. She sat quite still but a very vivid little gleam had come beneath her eyelids.

"That's real, at least," she said.

But the woman at the piano had turned half about.

"You played that splendidly," she remarked quietly. "So few Americans, young Americans, can grasp the real spirit of many of these things."

A couple of other characteristic violin things, and his accompanist herself looked through his music now with a real eagerness. She selected a Beethoven sonata for violin. "Will you do this, please?"

The Mole was alight now in the flames of his own spirit. No longer was he crook or even semblance of one. He was securely a part of all about him. He was a man who was going to put over a big fine thing, which would give him decency, give him place—give him the right to love. He paused, oddly, to slip a string holding two copper coins over his wrist.

In its movements the sonata might have depicted all life—that smiled a little, that danced quaintly, that grew sad and above all loved greatly, the deep fervent love of it soaring forth sonorously to wing a fearless way across untried depths as of eternal solitude. And it crossed the solitude, found the girl stilled in her place across from the player, wrapped her fervently about with sheer devotion. It was a performance to stir emotion deeply, and the young man lived with it all.

When the sonata was finished, he turned to see the girl's head against the back of her chair, her lids closed, her face pale and stilled and stately like a lily under the moon. She did not speak.

The woman at the piano was now like a small, lighted flame.

"You are really exceptional!" she cried out in frank surprise. "Do you mind if I say that to grasp music like that you must have fineness and sheer cleanness far above the ordinary?"

Fineness, cleanness! She had caught the Mole aloft. He could not speak.

The girl stood up. She looked oddly white, subdued.

"That's enough," she said quietly. "I really can't stand any more to-night." She was moving about the room without looking at either of her companions. "I'm going to order up the car. We'll take Prendy home, and then I can drop you whenever you like."

The Mole was putting away his violin. In the silence he felt it—the certainty that he had aroused certain things in this girl.

CHAPTER X.

THE WINE OF BADACSONYI.

IT was the very next day that Max Gorya made his move. Into the headquarters of the Gorya place had been coming disturbing reports as to his orchestra leader from the men who had been set to watch him. The fiddler seemed to be shadowing Blaney, Nick Potosky, Lacrosse, or the dock operations constantly. He had gone to the office to inquire for John Huntley, several times. Also he had been seen more than once with Huntley's daughter.

And Max Gorya had been going over certain puzzling incidents in connection with this young man. They now seemed peculiarly significant. He recalled that this fiddler had played to him, that very first day out in the street, noticeably Hungarian things. He had felt at the time that he was being played *at;* now he was sure of it. He recalled all the various times the young man had tried to sound out him, himself—Max Gorya. And now his trailing the load of wool in the taxi——

Max had finally talked with his subordinates on all these matters, and outlined certain proceedings to be carried out for the good af his traitorous violin player's soul. And all day had Max studied and perfected these plans.

And now, late at night, he waited.

In the great rear room buried in back of the cavernous place on Dock Street, the Hungarian sat, almost immovable, staring into the fire. Somewhere deep beneath his still exterior lay a spark of intense alertness, wariness, of animal-like craftiness. He was chillingly suggestive of a big, black panther, waiting.

The place was huge and gloomy. There was an austere bleakness about it, a primitive crudeness in its few appointments. At Max's side was a great table, solid, heavy, benchlike. Upon it was a litter of half-empty boxes, bags, and packets of tobaccos; a big iron candelabrum; and flagons that at times held eccentric wines. Upon the black, shadowy rear walls appeared fantastic-looking prints in big, dingy frames—oddly enough, of religious subjects. In one corner the firelight revealed the odd, irregular outline of a *cimbal,* a great, many-stringed zither standing on ancient, unwieldy legs, and beyond it stood an old harpsichord. The latter had gathered dust, and old garments. Just above it on a wooden peg hung a pair of Cossack boots.

The great, flickering fireplace was the life of the whole apartment. There were smoke-blackened iron fittings in the fireplace. At times Max cooked in it.

And now the sound of a distant door closing. The waiting man's fingers tapped almost imperceptibly on the arm of the wooden chair—something like the tiny, nervous twitching of a waiting panther's tail. Then the door opposite opened and the violin player stood before him.

A vast change had swept across the man brooding by the fire. It was as though somber abscuring clouds had been suddenly swept aside to reveal a warm, genial sun. He was on his feet, smiling unctuously, his hand closing as though unconsciously on the glass of liquor that had been at his elbow. "Enter, my friend, enter!" he cried.

The Mole stared at him in surprise. When the Hungarian had left the theater a couple of hours ago, after having asked him to come in on his way along Dock Street, he had been stark sober. In fact, Max's violin player had never seen him anything else; the man was not the type that liquor muddled. Something deep down within the Mole stirred uneasily. He wondered.

The Hungarian tossed off his drink and held out the glass and flagon. He seemed swiftly conscious of the other's hesitation.

"Wait, my friend. I know what you would like."

Cheerily he strode to a closet over the grim old fireplace, and took down a long, earthen bottle in a wicker casing. With this came a strange glass device, new to the Mole, a sort of tall caraffe set in a glass standard, which Max placed upon the table and filled with an amber wine from the wicker bottle. Then he held a glass beneath the vent of the device which filled it automatically, and handed it to the Mole. As if divining the other's suspicions he drew a glass himself and drank it off with gusto.

"You will like it, my friend. It is Badacsonyi, and very old."

The Mole tasted it. It was quaint, spicy, peculiar. Somehow he felt that much of it might be deadly. "Probably holds a kick like a mule," he counseled himself. He merely sipped it. The other made no attempt to encourage him; he was already talking, strangely free for him. He was in a mood undoubtedly mellow, and gradually the Mole relaxed.

The Hungarian was speaking of the theater, the music, the way the business had picked up. And he drank. The box office receipts had nearly doubled in the last few weeks, he said. He was almost boisterous over the prospect of a bigger house, a *real* place, with talking projection machines, a silver screen, and, of a certainty, other men, a Sousaphone and a second saxophone perhaps, in the orchestra.

He drank.

And then he drifted into a more remotely temperamental mood. He revealed a bit of the eternal soul hunger of his race, for things of action, of expression, of delirious emotional color. He knew Brahms music; he had the peasant's worship for musical greatness. He grew infinitely softened; the gentleness of his nature grew and expanded and blossomed like flowerets among the rocks.

He drank again.

The Mole had ceased to be suspicious. He regarded the man curiously. What temperamental freaks some of these foreigners were! They were like children in the way they played their emotions! Then he came to attention sharply.

The Hungarian was wandering on happily about his own success in this so splendid country. His eyes were actually growing limpid with the tenderness of his feeling. And in Docktown! Here he laughed significantly. It needed but a man of vision to cultivate a place like Docktown in order to reap a great harvest, great beyond all computation.

He drank.

Did the violin player know, for example, that he, Hungarian Max, held a hand in the destinies of Docktown of as great importance as the shippers themselves? Well, he did. More than one family owed great good fortune to Hungarian Max, to his strength, his foresight, his cleverness.

He was sunk slouched back in his great chair staring into the big, soft-fluttering flames. He was limp, relaxed, a final prey to his emotions. He even drooled a bit, and made inaccurate jabs at his sagging, wet lips with uncertain hands.

In the shadows, across, the Mole's eyes were pin points. Every suscepti-

bility of body and mind was alert. He spoke, very softly, very gently, his words flowing smoothly in upon the other's mood: "How are you managing all this?"

"Huh!" It seemed an expression of supreme disdain for the frailties of human perception. "It is easy! So easy! Like that!" He snapped his fingers. "Now to-morrow——" He hesitated, then raised his hand to mark his esteem. "You are my friend, my good friend! And I tell you. You see, m'friend, wealth it is all divided wrong. Now to-morrow Hungarian Max borrows a trifle." He made a deprecating gesture. "Oh! just a trifle, from the rich who have so much. To-morrow Max will—oh, even things a little—a very little—and by night——" His head relaxed a little; he seemed to have lost the drift of his thought.

"Go on," came gently, encouragingly. "How?"

The other roused, and laughed warily. "No, no! I reveal no secrets. As you say, 'my ship comes in' to-morrow. That is all I say, even to my friend!"

He drank again. His head dropped back. In a moment he snored—delicately.

The Mole's body was thrilling. He sat staring at the lax body and massive head of the figure in the chair. A hand rolled off the arm of the chair and dropped heavily, pendulumlike. The head lolled inertly down toward one shoulder. The Hungarian was sodden.

His visitor rose and stood a moment staring down at the lethargic, snoring drunk. "To-morrow when your ship comes in," he muttered, "I'll be there." He passed out.

And behind him the eyelids of the man in the chair flew open, and when the street door closed he stood up, tall, erect, sinister in the coldness of his absolute control. "That is as I wish, my friend," he observed in answer to the departed violinist's remark.

He swept together the flagons and bottles and thrust them up into the closet. He kicked the fire, until it flamed gorgeously. He strode on about the room, padding like a great, black, surfeited panther.

CHAPTER XI.

WHAT GORYA DID.

THE day broke glitteringly. Leaping up from sketchy sleep, the Mole saw that the clock marked the hour of dawn. He dressed forthwith.

Hurrying about his morning preparations, a strangely impish malice seemed rife among his little household effects. In his haste he stumbled heavily over a chair. The stove smoked sullenly. Later, he scalded the back of his hand, painfully. He had forgotten to buy bread. There seemed something ominous afoot, but the Mole laughed at it all. He was strung taut as the E string of his violin.

He gave up breakfast. He was too uplifted, too eager, to give himself to little things.

He passed swiftly out of the house. He knew that down at the docks John Huntley was being expected hourly, but it was too early for the docks. He made far along Dock Street toward old Bart Cobbett's section.

He found the old junkman about, and exultantly told him something of his hopes. The old salt was glad in his soul. But he was skeptical of the Gorya incident of the night before. "You can't get a wine-cask drunk," he counseled sagely. But the Mole only laughed.

Later, down along Dock Street the traffic roared along it seemed in unwonted vehemence. The Mole made for the dock of the Huntley Company. He did not know just what shape the plans of the Hungarian would take, but he felt sure some big coup was planned.

He made down through the ware-

house and entered the offices. John Huntley had not yet arrived. The Mole sat down to wait. But he could not stand inaction. He rose and went out. He waited around restlessly. A little tinge of apprehension crept in. He wanted guidance, he wanted coöperation —with an army of honest police behind it. Without this he would be helpless.

All through the day did the Mole haunt the dock of the Huntley Shipping Company. His unrest grew. He had discovered nothing of a suspicious nature. Big Nick had evidently been driving all day on another route.

Toward night the Mole was faint, burned out with the fires of his restrained excitement. He had not been home. He had not eaten. John Huntley had not come to the offices all day. It was almost six, but the Mole could not make himself believe that nothing would happen. In making down the dock he passed Blaney, the Dock Street officer, who stood talking to the special dock police come on for the night. As he passed they looked at him oddly, he thought, even in his excitement. Afterward he recalled that look.

In the cavernous warehouses behind him the lights came on, and the watcher faced about. Under one of the big arc lights came a big, empty truck. It rumbled along slowly, its motor purring softly on a muffled note. The Mole noticed that it was an ancient, ramshackle affair, but its driver was Big Nick. The Mole stood fixed in his tracks. The car was bearing right down upon him. Its big driver was evidently somewhat lit, for he appeared to recognize the man beneath, and waved a hand to him in jovial greeting.

The Mole watched. All his alertness of the day was back, intensified a hundredfold. He saw the big vehicle draw out and roll along over to the vague regions of the outward freight. He hurried after it as fast as he could. The car rolled over alongside a shipment of tea in chests. And the big driver began loading them aboard. The delivery clerk was nowhere in sight.

The heart of the Mole sped up. "If this is crooked it's going to be a big haul," he breathed to himself. Other than a few trucks, the warehouse over here was deserted. The lights were partly out on this side. What he had waited for all day was going on now right before his eyes and he had no plan of action ready.

He turned and sped hurriedly away in the direction of the office. The offices were closing.

He turned back. Far over in the shadows the big truck was almost loaded. The Mole started out toward the street. The broad thoroughfare was almost empty now. There was not a conveyance in sight that might help him follow Big Nick. He started back; he must keep the truck in sight somehow. And now the big vehicle, high piled, was emerging from the farthest door coming directly toward him.

With a suddenness to confuse, came the unexpected. Big Nick rolled to a stop, leaned down and spoke to the Mole: "Ride? I'll take you by Atlantic Court."

The oddity of it did not strike the Mole until later. A daring thing had seized him—the resolve to find out the truck's destination at all costs. When he clambered up, the alcohol of Nick's breath tinged all the upper air.

Nick leaned over. He switched his lights on and off twice, his head screwed round as if to see if the tail light was working. Behind in the yawning blackness of the warehouse three men saw that tail light blink and, as the car rolled on, set out to follow it.

The truck turned south. A few blocks along it pulled up at a resort well along Dock Street and, with a half-muttered mention of a drink, the big driver climbed down and disappeared inside. And then——

It happened so suddenly that the Mole seemed functioning in a nightmare. He was seized and dragged down by two men in police uniform. A pair of handcuffs was snapped on his wrists and he stood, stunned and helpless on the curb.

"What's the big idea?" he asked levelly.

"The judge'll tell you all about it in the morning," the officer replied. "You're a game little lonester to be stealing a truckload of tea."

They had moved along into a light. The taller of the officers had given an order to a third man now mounting the battered old truck. "Drive it to the Esther Street Station." He yanked at the Mole. "Come on! We'll walk!"

The Mole stared at him, in a great wave of dawning comprehension. The officer was Blaney; the other was his henchman, the special dock policeman. All the promising glow and glitter of the last few days went out in the Mole. God knew what the future would hold now.

He had been framed!

CHAPTER XII.

BATS.

HEY, there!" It barked along the corridor of the Esther Street jail on a note of almost frenzied earnestness, but the jailer kept on.

"Say, come back here, will you? I want to send out for some one!"

The uniformed figure of the jailer melted out of sight around a corner.

The Mole's hands dropped listlessly from the bars of his cell. In the drawn ivory of his face his eyes burned for a moment desperately. Then his body dropped a little, and he moved across to his cot and sat down.

The night had been terrible. The fact that he had allowed himself to be "framed," like a veritable hick, filled him with a miserable chagrin, shamed his self-respect well nigh to desperation. And the jail itself! It turned the thought of the attractive little home he had made for himself into an agony of homesickness. The sordid old cell was filthy. It reeked from the tenancy of a hundred sottish seamen. Strangely, these things stirred him first.

Then he became a prey to apprehension, that blotted out bodily discomfort. Uncertainties, doubts, fears, came to hover and wheel about him like bats in the darkness. What was to be the outcome now? John Huntley would hate his very name. What chance did he have to defend himself? Just how deep did they intend to sink him? All through the long, dead hours, the flitting, wheeling, batlike crew of his apprehensions had their way.

He welcomed the morning. And the morning was worse than the night. At nine o'clock there had been a hearing. It was farcial in its mockery. He was held for an accomplice in the matter of warehouse thievery that had been agitating Docktown. He had been caught in the act. A deputy had been sent to search his house. And, they found it full of stolen goods of various kinds, of bogus warehouse receipts, of bills of lading of every shipper in the section.

This last touch was so wretchedly raw that the Mole could well-nigh have smiled above the sickening tide of his amazement. But at length he yielded to the bitter rage of the old-time radical that broke loose in his heart; he could have strangled them all for their smug counterfeit of virtue.

He was hustled back to his cell.

And now for an hour had the bats of his fears been at him again. Like a man buried alive he stared upward at the square of light opening out to the world without. He had just begun to really live in that world, to feel the power of strong young life forging ahead successfully among its kind. And he had an incentive, a mighty incentive.

All through the night when he had thought of Lorne Huntley, it seemed as if he must lose his head completely.

The prisoner sprang to his feet and swung back across the cell to the door. Something like the very surging battle of life was flooding him anew, some constantly rising thing of deathless determination. He shook at the bars of his cell door. He called out again. All in an instant a wildly desperate plan had flashed into his mind: if he could but get John Huntley to come to him! Again he shook. Again he called.

He turned away from the bars. His mind was running on now with a cold, mechanical precision. He knew clearly what he wanted to do.

Voices along the corridor—one a heavy, hoarse voice full of suppressed feeling, and the old junkman, Bart Cobbett, stood before his cell. In his great relief the prisoner seized the man's hands, thrust through the bars, and gripped them tight. His eyes when they came up were flaming almost reverently.

"Listen, old man," he said before the other had a chance to speak. "Don't stop to talk. You've got to go down to the Huntley Shipping Company dock. Make them let you into the inside offices. Find John Huntley and bring him here!"

The weatherbeaten old face regarded him solemnly.

"Anything you say I'll do," replied Cobbett.

"Well, get him, if you have to bleed yourself dry trying. Tell him I said it's life and death, and not my life and death either."

What seemed like ages afterward the Mole, gripping the edge of his cot, sat erect. He had heard nothing, but somehow he knew that the chief of the Huntley Shipping Company was approaching. A long, tense moment. There came a little *frisk-frisk* of footsteps along the corridor and John Huntley was let into the cell.

In a single second the icy chill of his countenance filled the place, turned it into a vault. He stood, his arms folded, staring into the dimly white face before his own. Then, "What do you want of me?" he asked. Now, apparently, the strangeness of his being here, following the interview—almost the battle—with the old junkman who had come for him, struck John Huntley forcibly.

The prisoner stared back. It had been his desperate plan to tell John Huntley everything, even the part played by his own employees. Now, however, he hesitated. His mind was working in a fierce blaze, almost of clairvoyance, and he knew now that to make accusations and have the case brought to trial without actual proof would be but bringing his own destruction.

Blaney and his accomplices would look up the Mole's own past the first thing, which would kill him where he had begun to live; he himself would be sentenced, and John Huntley would be but a laughingstock. The only solution was to seek to have the charge killed, or action delayed with himself out on bail so as to leave him free until he could get actual proof.

Meanwhile, with himself out in Docktown again, knowing what he knew now, the thievery operations would be dead.

He dragged every fighting thing within himself together. "I want you to get me out of here!" he announced.

The eyes of the visitor were beginning to hold ominous lights, his face and neck seemed to swell somehow. "Is that all?"

"No. I want you to arrange things so that I can be free and unmolested as I was before."

There was a moment in which fury mounted hotly in John Huntley.

"You miserable young sneaking wretch!" he exclaimed. "They've got you dead on this thing, so far as I can find out, and, by Heaven, I hope the judge will jail you till the rest of your life isn't worth the living!"

Something halted John Huntley even then. The other raised steel-cold eyes to his and said:

"As things are with me now, a one-day sentence would accomplish that." Then, with gripping intentness: "Let's not waste time with all that. Just listen to me a minute."

The eyes of the shipping agent narrowed. But the young man standing against the wall went on unswervingly:

"In the first place, this whole thing is a frame-up. You don't believe it, but it happens to be true. I'm the victim. I'll probably get five or ten years. As things are I don't mind that, either. But, here's where you come in: while I'm in jail you shippers will be getting looted to an autopsy."

"Do you expect me to believe anything *you* could say?"

"Yes, because it's truth." Then: "I've simply got to have my liberty. I'm the only man in Docktown that can clean these things up."

"Just how?"—scathingly.

The burning eyes staring into his wavered perilously in a sudden perplexity. "I—I don't know *how;* I—I only know that——"

John Huntley made a sound that expressed the lowest depth of disgust. He wheeled to the barred door.

"Wait!" The prisoner caught his army. "What I tell you is true because there isn't another man in Docktown, perhaps in this whole city, that holds the *incentive* to do it that I hold!'

The man Huntley was staring at him curiously as if appraising his sanity. And the prisoner's overtaxed grip on things broke.

"No, I'm not crazy," he cried out, divining the other's thought. "I'm simply a man who's been outside life wanting to get back in, for the greatest reason a man can have. You've *got* to believe that. And you're taking no chances. If I'm not on the level the law can get me any minute you say. Only first I want to clean this thing up my own way, because that way will clean me along with it!"

The prisoner was speeding on swiftly, his argument piercing into the other's inert wonderment like a javelin:

"The real gang knows about me now. They worked out this thing. They set the stage, knowing I'd fall for it. In trying to frame them, they framed me. The stuff in my room must have been planted there last night. Get your attorney to set over the case. I can't leave Docktown. I'm going to put myself over if I die here." A soft little silence, then: "I'm fighting the fight of my life for *time*.. God, man, take a chance!"

The other's face was like the face of a man who had looked on strange things, profound things, moving things. "Open the door!" he called to the jailer.

Toward evening the Mole was released.

CHAPTER XIII.

BALL AND CHAIN.

THE Mole passed swiftly up the stairs. They seemed endless. He stood in his doorway. His attic room was quite wrecked. The Mole looked it all over appraisingly. The wreckage in his room seemed to reflect the wreckage in his plans. Apparently he was beginning all over again—and now with the handicap of his past dragging at him like a ball and chain.

It was the thought of the ball and chain that did what all his mental labor of the last few hours had failed to do—it settled things to one definite issue: tangible evidence. He was seeing now that he had to down the Gorya gang or the Gorya gang would down

him. If they should stumble on the matter of his past, he was done. All his future, possibly even life itself, depended on his getting definite evidence. And he had to get it quick.

He stripped up his sleeves and started in picking up.

A moment in the empty stillness, and the Mole walked across the floor for a broom. Something among the débris about the threshold halted him—a square envelope as of a letter. He stooped and picked it up. It held his underworld name of years before. For a moment he stood very still reading it. It was as though some one he had left far back down the road he had traveled was calling him, to halt him commandingly:

> The world is a small place after all. I seen you one night at the picture show. You cost me three years of my life in prison. When things are right, you're going to pay them back. Don't forget it. SINWITZ.

Sinwitz! The name brought a cold, icy drop in things. The Mole's mind was back in the jail at Bluffs City, with this man whom he had failed and who would never forget. He could see the man clearly. He seemed regarding the Mole with the same old look of frenzied hatred.

And in his hand he was holding a ball and chain.

Nightfall.

The attic room of the Mole held a strange tenant, strangely engaged. Seated at a table near the light the Mole was assembling a small assortment of implements, tools. They were peculiar devices, peculiarly designed—the working tools of his underworld craft of years ago. In his rapt intentness the man might have become again the Mole of old. In a sense he had. Calmly, deliberately was he planning to become the cleverest entrance crasher of all his life; calmly, deliberately was he planning to pull the most difficult break, and the most dangerous—Max Gorya's.

Suddenly he raised his head. He had become conscious of silence, odd silence. Atlantic Court, which at this time of day was generally buzzing with activity, might have been buried in sudden sleep. The Mole rose, passed out to the window at the end of the hall. The window was open. He looked down. Atlantic Court seemed weirdly deserted, weirdly silent. It was not the silence of casual inactivity. There was something sinister about it—a stealthy, furtive, watchful silence. He might have been looking down into a courtyard of the dead, or a courtyard—ambushed.

He turned and slipped silently down the stairs. He stood a moment in the recess of the street door, staring out. Just below him a child's doll lay on the stone steps, flagrantly deserted. A little way along, a garbage can had been overturned by the curb and a slinking stray dog, the only living thing in the court, was nosing undisturbed among its contents.

A slight motion in an upper window drew the Mole's eyes. It was a window in the rooms occupied by the Potoskys. Almost simultaneously with the motion a sudden vicious shot came from a window across the court. It smashed the silence vindictively—and a little flurry of chips flew from the bricks of Potosky's window. The shot was answered instantly from Potosky's. It shattered a flowerpot on the window sill across, and the red blossom of a geranium swooped out into the evening and poured down into the courtyard like a single glowing spurt of blood.

Realization struck the Mole like a blow. For some reason or other the factions in Atlantic Court had come to war and Potosky and Lacrosse had evidently determined to shoot it out. Now, in the silence, some one was coming into the areaway from the direction of Dock Street. Crowding back into the

obscurity of his doorway the Mole glanced in the direction of the footsteps clearly audible in the silence. It was Max Gorya. He moved swiftly, crossed the courtyard fearlessly and passed up the Potosky steps.

Some swift inspiration flooded the Mole to the complete exclusion of all about him. Here was Gorya in Atlantic Court. He was evidently bent on restoring peace in his organization. He would be here some time. Meanwhile, his own place would be deserted. Here, right at hand, seemed the chance for which the Mole had prayed with every impulse in him, but for which he hardly dared hope.

He turned and slipped up the stairway like a shadow, on up to his own room. With swift sureness he gathered together the instruments of his old craft which he had been assembling for just this chance. He threw these into a small bag and passed out.

Down at the street entrance all was silent in the court. He had a vague impression of confused noises coming from behind the many windows, as of the angry buzzing of bees in a closed hive. He slipped swiftly around an alleyway corner and emerged into Dock Street.

The Hungarian's door was in a deep old recess. In the growing dusk Dock Street in this section was almost deserted. Without hesitation the Mole walked matter-of-factly into the recessed doorway as though on a legitimate errand, produced a key from his pocket, fumbled with the lock a moment —and the door opened. He could never have hoped for anything so simple.

He remembered Max's living quarters somewhere back in this building. He crossed the shop to a rear door, made along a passageway, opened a door at the far end and was in this room. It was much as it had appeared that night before the frame-up, littered, careless, untidy, but more than ever impressive in its grim old appointments. The Mole noted an ancient safe in one corner beside an old-fashioned table desk littered with papers. The safe was locked. The Mole knelt, covered the old-fashioned combination with a handkerchief and began testing out the lock. Something in him leaped encouragingly. The lock was going to be simplicity itself if he could only have the time. He swept back the heavily perspiring hair under his cap and set to work.

Something stopped him dead.

In the distance he could hear what seemed like the street door opening. He could hear voices and the moving about of several feet. There came a lull as though the arrivals had stopped in surprise. Then heavy footsteps coming swiftly along the passage.

The Mole sprang for a rear door the other side of the fireplace, closing it softly behind him. He seemed to be in a smaller apartment almost completely dark. An ancient, dusty transom shed enough light to mark an opposite doorway. Making for it he stumbled over a chair, and simultaneously with the noise came a pistol shot from the room he had left and a bullet hissed by his head into the wall. The Mole leaped through the opposite doorway.

Here was darkness and the feeling of big space. He flicked on his flash for one desperate moment to get his bearings. He was in a huge loft filled with ancient casks, with dead old junk like the rubbish of a nightmare. He slipped in among the wastage and penetrated swiftly away like a rat. Already were the men in the loft behind him. He could hear them asking for lights. At the far end he was conscious of the dim, outside world through a window half obscured with cobwebs. It opened; he slipped over the sill, hung one instant and dropped.

Ten feet below he seemed to be in a narrow areaway surrounded by dilapidated sheds. He sped around the first

corner he came to—and hope of escape was smashed. There was a dull impact with another body and some one had seized him. In a flash the Mole was fighting with every desperate impulse of body and soul. In the darkness his opponent loomed huge and hopeless, but he fought with the fury of a starved tiger.

Suddenly his opponent managed to clear himself, to grip the Mole a single instant while he spoke pantingly into his face: "Wait! Wait! I am your friend." It was Big Nick Potosky, and while the Mole was staring dazedly, Nick went on: "Get around that corner, queeck! Before morning I will see you at your room."

Half stupefied, the Mole lurched around the corner and was gone. He could not tell which dazed him most, Potosky's beating or his parting words. In a baffled whirl of amazement, he slipped back to Atlantic Court and made his room.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GOLDEN STREAK.

IT was nearing dawn when the Mole, tensely wide awake in his attic room, heard a soft tapping on the door and opened it to admit the big Russian. The man was evidently laboring under intense stress of feeling. Behind the bovine face burned fires, evidently of deadly animosity, that blazed sullenly in his eyes. He crossed the room heavily and settled into a chair.

"I have come to hook up with you," he blurted forth.

Some big jolt of surprise leaped within the Mole. He could scarce believe his ears. "With *me!*" he cried out incredulously.

"Yes. I'm going to get Lacrosse. After to-night I'm going to get Gorya."

"What's happened? How did you come to be out back of Gorya's?"

"To-night Gorya takes Lacrosse and me to his place to talk things over. From my window I had seen you leave the court with the little bag. When we got into Gorya's place the little bag was on the floor. And I knew that you were there. When Gorya and the others start to find who was in the place, I said that I would go round outside and head any one off. That's how I found you. I went back and told them you had got away. Up to now they do not know who it was, but you had better move away from Atlantic Court."

"All right. Now what's the rest of it?"

"First, you save my little boy, and I do not forget." Here, the Mole felt that a tinge of softness tempered the fierce things in the man's face. "Then Gorya has used me dirty. I am through. Gorya took my new truck and turned it over to Lacrosse because Lacrosse say I loaf on the job."

The Mole's mind was flaring. Again was he down in the courtyard silent as death, with the single exchange of shots shattering the stillness. "But the gang will kill you!" he cried out.

Big Nick shook his head. "No, they will not. The gang will never know. Leave it to Nick."

From the garbled tale that followed, the Mole noted many points that were founded on common human animosities. Lacrosse's wife figured in prominently. Nick's own wife was mentioned. The tale embodied petty family jealousies coupled with the deadly striving of the men themselves for a certain status of leadership among the lower Docktown element. As things were Big Nick had lost caste. He figured that he had been set down several steps in the estimate of his associates, and after the prominence he had been enjoying, it galled him to his soul.

And other elements entered in. "Last week," he went on, "Gorya held out my money when he settled with Lacrosse and the others. He thinks to bind me by this. He is wrong. I am going to

get him." Here the man spread his upturned palms in a clumsy gesture of helplessness. "But alone I am nothing. I do not know how to act. You have brains. I know that you want to get all these men the same as me. I will help by telling you all I see. At the same time I keep on playing the game with them."

The Mole was on his feet, pacing the big room tensely. Big Nick had told him little that he had not already known—he could see that Gorya kept each man in ignorance of all save the man's own part in things. As things were, he couldn't use Nick yet. In court it would be simplicity itself for a clever lawyer to bring out the fact that Nick's story was but built on petty jealousies. And if, in addition, Sinwitz came into things and the Mole himself was shown up, both he and Nick would appear but an allied pair of crooks and all would be lost. Nick was at least on the inside, though, and until the Mole should have something ready to spring he was invaluable.

The Mole stopped in front of the slouched man in the chair, a figure of new-lifed determination.

"Say, old man," he began, "you have given me more encouragement than I can say. The whole thing now depends on absolute tangible evidence—you know, documents, papers, or something that would be sure proof. I went to Gorya's place, hoping to find it. It's there, I know. Is that not so?"

The sullen eyes came up to his. Nick's mind was working laboriously with this. "Yes. Gorya keeps all in a little brown book in his safe. When he pays us money he makes us sign receipts. He thinks by this to bind us to him forever."

"I noticed the safe to-night. But how can I get back there again, especially after this attempt?"

"I don't know now, but I will find out. Gorya leaves Docktown every now and then—always the times something special is being pulled. When he is going again I will let you know. It may be some time. Until then I will watch what I can from the inside." Nick stood up.

Impulsively the Mole put out his hand. "I don't know what to say to you," he began, "except I have the feeling that now things are beginning to come my way."

A moment, and the big, hulking figure slipped out the door into the blackness of the hallway.

The Mole turned an inspired face to the window facing east. Far out in the gulf of darkness he could see the dawn running across the void in a growing golden streak.

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOSTESS.

THE Mole had now an ally. Together they were but a pair of men handicapped by dubious pasts, but the alliance encouraged the Mole tremendously.

For the moment he turned his mind to other pressing matters. First, since his faked arrest and subsequent release, organized thievery was dead in Docktown, and consequently Atlantic Court hated him with a deadly hatred. At least for the present, he felt it wise to move to another room. So early in the day after the meeting with Nick, he put together a few belongings and slipped away from Atlantic Court to a room he had found at the farther end of Docktown.

Next came the matter of a new playing job. This the Mole managed the second day. A new night club, the Mixing Bowl, had been opened up just beyond Docktown in the borderland district between the underworld and the city proper. It was designed with no small cleverness to appeal to patrons from both quarters. From the start it

became a rendezvous for the prominent characters of the underground section, and soon began drawing also many adventuresome social lights, sometimes of the first magnitude, from the city proper.

The Mole found his way to the Mixing Bowl just at a time when they were changing the show. His arrival might almost have been timed in his favor. The show up to then had not been characterized by any particular brilliancy either of conception or execution. The management had counted on the location of the resort itself, on its food and drink and its highly mixed crowd, to draw. The show had been good enough for the local patronage, but the place had been unexpectedly successful and now it became necessary to offer a much higher grade entertainment to appeal to its city clientele.

The Mole sat back among the empty chairs and watched a morning rehearsal with a good deal of interest. The little orchestra was not particularly distinguished. The management had picked up an old-time leader, long since drifted across the borderline of sobriety, and long since lacking everything like the enthusiasm and appreciation of youth. On the floor six or eight girls were going through a dance number with but half-hearted enthusiasm, and with very little inspiration from the music. In the drab morning light the whole thing seemed lifeless and depressing.

To the Mole, however, one character of the place stood forth with rather a magnetic prominence. This was a woman, quite well beyond youth, who seemed to be covering both the dance turn and the music, and trying to inject into each something like a fairly decent snap and spontaniety. At this she was working hard.

From his seat in the background the Mole studied her curiously. She was a slightly tall woman of still elastic figure, but with the somewhat garish handsomeness of a tulip just before it begins to succumb to the sun. In the cold morning light her hair, touched to an almost purplish copper, seemed rather carelessly arranged, her face indifferently done. Her large, dark eyes, though, were rather fine, her dress was the tulip idea but almost uncannily at one with her coloring, and she moved with still youthful vigor and grace. Her enthusiasm was real; with both girls and music she was striving vigorously.

The music, however, seemed off, and after a particularly unsuccessful attempt of the leader to do something, to find something that might prove stimulating, the woman threw up her hands, dropped back to the rear of the floor, sat down on the corner of a table and lighted a cigarette almost angrily. One hand on her hip, she sat in silence, puffing her cigarette in ill-curbed restraint, her dark eyes flashing.

A moment, and the Mole saw the manager come out from obscurity and enter into conversation with her. Somehow he could feel that the manager was speaking to the woman about him, for suddenly she glanced over in his direction and scrutinized him closely a minute, her face meanwhile losing some of its impatience.

She slipped off the table, and came over to him with the directness of a man. "Can you play a violin?" she asked.

"Yes."

"Well?"

"Fair."

"What's your line, catch-as-catch-can, or solo—glad stuff, or the ancients?"

The Mole laughed. "Something of all."

She was not impressed. "I never saw one yet," she demurred, "but come on over here and try out this stuff." She wheeled away.

The Mole followed her along to the little team. She stood back smoking si-

lently, watching while he made his preparations. Her brows puckered into a puzzled frown as he delved into his violin case and slipped a string holding two copper coins over his left wrist.

Two minutes later something fine seemed happening in that drab place of morning rehearsal. The musicians seemed to forget that it was a dreary, gray morning after a hard night's work; they seemed to live their music with enthusiasm. Out on the floor the girls were being swept through the movements of their dance as if borne on a spirited wind that lifted them bodily. As for the woman, she stood at one side, her face lit, her big, dark eyes burning eagerly.

For almost an hour did the rehearsal continue, the spirit of real success growing surely with every moment. At last the girls trooped away, buzzing animatedly, the musicians disappeared in various directions of exit, and the Mole was alone, putting up his violin.

The directing woman came over and sat down on the piano bench. "Gee, kid," she began almost fervently, "you sure can play! When it comes to a violin there's players and players, but not one in a thousand pulls a tone with real juice in it!" She was staring at him with awakened interest. "Where have you been playing?"

"At Gorya's down in Docktown."

"Hungarian Max's?" she exclaimed. "Well, whaddya know?"

"Do you know him?"

"Know him! I can tell you more about Max than he can himself! I played the piano down there once, a long time ago. Max's place and Max nearly floored me. You had to eat out of Max's hand or eat the hand. I lost my appetite. What did the manager say your name was?"

He told her. "And yours?"

"More seasons ago than it pays me to remember I was billed as Iris St. Clair." Staring half wistfully into his face, she was holding out a friendly cigarette. "You've probably figured out that as a professional I've got along to the mourner's bench. I have. When show girls became extinct, I served a sentence with the movies, and now nothing seems to be left but the rôle of slave girl. Here, I'm hostess nighttimes; daytimes I'm musical director, stage manager, and about everything else they want to dig up outside of scrubbing the floors and trimming the steaks. You look to me to be about the first thing that's occurred round here that promises to lighten my burden." She stood up and exhaled contentedly aloft. "I like you. I'm glad you struck. I'll tend to it that you stick, too. Better pull round early."

Arriving to play that first night, the Mole encountered Iris St. Clair with a gasp. Gone was the hardened, life-tired woman of the theatrical profession. In her place was a gorgeously constructed creature of no small fascination, with years, weariness, earnestness, wisdom even, buried deep beneath a spontaneous, youthful good-fellowship and welcome.

From the first the Mole's work at the Mixing Bowl was a success. The girls liked him. Some of them were ready to make it stronger than that. Together with the woman, Iris St. Clair, he could get them to perform marvels. With her, also, he began to work out innovations in music, in costume, even in dancing.

Meanwhile, every day the Mole lurked out down in Docktown. Old Bart Cobbett had little to report. Not once did the Mole encounter Nick Potosky. At the end of the week the Mole wrote a note to John Huntley telling where he was and what he was doing, and trying to express a hopeful attitude. The strain and uncertainty began to tell on him. More than all he missed Lorne Huntley.

One night late the hostess of the Mixing Bowl dropped down into a chair near by and began to regard his tired, worried-looking face curiously.

"What's the matter?" she said. "You look about as cheerful as a nautch dancer in a plaster cast."

"I am," he laughed, "just about. I'm suffering to dance, to dance crazily, happily, all over. And I can't move a muscle because of the cast."

"Sounds like you're in love."

"Perhaps," he said. And then, wistfully, craving to talk things out of his system: "What do you know about love?"

She gave a soft little hoot of derision. "Me? I know all there is. There's a dozen different varieties but there's only one kind that's worth while."

"I know that kind," he said, and without revealing her name he told of Lorne Huntley. He spoke of her fineness, her exceptional honesty, her sure wisdom. And in a voice like a man reflecting over a dream he told how, for certain reasons, he was on the outside of all such until he had overcome the impossible.

"What's the impossible?" the woman asked with characteristic directness.

The Mole came out of his mood with a sudden smile.

"You'll think it funny, but it's Max Gorya."

The woman regarded her cigarette reflectively.

"Well, of course I don't know what it's all about, but perhaps I can help you there," she observed. "I'd give a good deal to help—*you*." And then, at his swift glance of inquiry: "No, son, don't be alarmed. I'm not going to make love to you; I like you too much. But some time when you feel you can tell me real facts about all this, from your girl friend to Gorya, perhaps I can help. Your love stuff sounds like the real thing, and"—she flicked her ash—"God knows I'd like to see *some one* make a go of it."

CHAPTER XVI.

THE MAN FROM CHICAGO.

ONE night in the week following, five men sat in the rear of Max Gorya's shop, behind a wooden screen. Besides Max himself, and Kenyon, the Huntley Company receiving clerk, there was Lynch, the special officer who did duty at the Huntley docks, there was Officer Blaney, who had just come in, and there was an exceedingly furtive individual, one Sinwitz. The outer street door was locked.

Blaney seated himself and glanced around. He addressed himself to Sinwitz. "Well, what have you got to tell us?" he asked.

"Plenty," Sinwitz responded. "This fiddler chap is a bird of some importance. He's Larry the Mole. He's got a record in St. Louis, and in Kansas City. He's known also in a dozen of the larger towns; he's considered one of the brainiest underground crooks in the business. But nabbing him hasn't always meant convicting him, and he's always been on the go."

"Do you know anything definite against him?" asked Blaney.

Sinwitz laughed. "Nothing that you can hang on him for fair. He was one of the suspects in the Van Decker jewels case out in St. Louis, but from what I could learn the thing has never been proved against him. The indictment, though, is still hanging over him. Anyhow, he served a couple of years in one of the State cribs out there just before he wandered East. That's where I run across him."

Max Gorya had been sitting quiet, his eyes half closed, his mental processes evidently busy. "What do you think?" he finally asked Blaney. "What brought this young man East? Do you think he is out to clear the deck and start an organization of his own?"

"It's hard to account for him," replied Blaney. "So far as I know, he's

been playing absolutely clean since he struck Docktown. It may be, however, that he's simply laying low until he learns his way about the East."

Sinwitz's face had gone sullenly dark.

"The last I knew of him," he volunteered, "he claimed he was going straight." He glanced maliciously into the faces about him. "Straight or not, for a certain reason I told him I was going to follow him to hell. He said it was a long way, but it hasn't been so long as I expected."

Kenyon, the receiving clerk, brought his tilted chair to the floor with an emphatic little thump.

"I believe I've got it," he said. "I wouldn't be surprised if this Mole, as you call him, is getting nuts on the Huntley kid. I've seen them driving together more than once. If that should be true, it would seem like he *is* going straight, or trying to. That would account for his sticking round Docktown trying to knock a living out of a fiddle till he hooked onto something substantial—a thousand-dollar reward, for instance."

In the background Max Gorya was nodding his head with slow conviction. "I believe you're right. The girl, too, may be his reason for coming into this thing, hoping to raise himself in the eyes of her father. In any case I decided long since that he is too dangerous a man to have in Docktown. He probably knows too much now, and he knows too many of us."

Max halted and studied the group reflectively.

"To get this young man as things are is not going to be easy. He knows our men and it may be that he knows our system. It is going to take a new man to do the trick. And now I tell you why I have brought you together. I have secured this new man, a man of ability, a man from the brotherhood at the Chicago end, a man strange to this Mole and strange to Docktown. He arrived to-day." Gorya rose. "I will fetch him."

He passed out a rear door and in a moment returned with a stranger.

"This gentleman," Gorya said, "is our good friend, Fitz Farolt. He is a very smart man. He is sent around to many places to settle just such little matters as this. I have talked to him. I know he can help us."

The men sitting about the room were staring fixedly. The man's exceptional presence had startled them out of themselves. In fact Lynch, the special officer, had risen awkwardly as if in instinctive deference to some one far his superior.

Fitz Farolt was a man well over forty. He was tall, notably handsome in a somewhat battered sort of way, and he had kept his figure. But there was some noticeable gray in his hair and the years were beginning to swathe a mantle of flesh about his otherwise vigorous shoulders. His dress was the dress of a man who had always made well-cut clothes more or less a part of his personality. Standing before these men he might have been a rather distinguished member of real society, or at least a well-trained actor depicting one. He smiled and met the barrage of glances carelessly. In a few brief pertinent questions he brought his information on the matter up to their own.

"It seems too bad," he went on, "that when you boys have got a nice little piece of business so well organized as this, it should have been smashed to pieces by this young buttinsky, when all the time it appears that he's had a record of his own. The thing seemed simple enough to me. The cleanest way to dispose of him is to get him back into court again so this record of his can be shown up and so discredit him all the way through. After that——" He smiled, and made a significant gesture that might have wiped the young man out of existence. Then, to Ken-

yon: "How do you account for the situation between him and your chief?"

Kenyon responded readily. He seemed to feel that he was talking to a personage of standing and to wish to impress the other with his own intelligence.

"I have tried to get a line on all this through the office," he said. "This Mole chap evidently put over some sort of influence on the chief that got him locoed, and J. H. is a clam when it comes to letting go of anything. Lately, however, the men in the office seem to feel that Huntley is getting restless, that he has been waiting for something to happen that's getting long overdue."

Blaney looked at the Hungarian. "I guess it's a good time to let something get out about this chap being a crook." He turned to the stranger. "What do you think?"

Farolt nodded. "Possibly." He spoke to Kenyon, the clerk. "Why don't you get next to your chief, Huntley, and just let drop a word or two about this Mole kid and what they are saying? Meanwhile"—to the others—"with what stuff Sinwitz can give you to go on, try to figure just what can be built up out of the man's record in the past. As to getting him back into court—leave that to me. I shall probably involve him in a little innocent crime on the side—a trick that's been done before."

A moment later from the haze of talk Farolt spoke directly to Gorya the Hungarian:

"Where is this chap now? What does he look like? What does he do? Where does he live? To accomplish anything I have got to get next to him, get next to him close"—Farolt grinned—"in fraternal love."

"He is playing the violin at the Mixing Bowl night club. Any evening you can find him there and you can then size him up."

"All right," returned Farolt carelessly. "Already I seem to have an idea that offers possibilities. If I can get close enough to him—and I have never yet met a man who failed to come when I went after him—I'll have him cold."

Every man in the room was staring at him intently—Sinwitz with full appreciation of artistry of a high order, Gorya with slit-eyed calculation, the others with open admiration. Standing suavely there before them Fitz Farolt was emanating actual power, was a convincing manifestation of the keen intelligence that had put him over through long, devious, crooked years. The man's self-confidence had never yet been nicked.

"Some night soon," he said, "I will slip into character and call round at the Mixing Bowl."

CHAPTER XVII.

FAROLT IN CHARACTER.

THE Mole's success at the Mixing Bowl came to him only as a light of more or less brilliance shining through a confused haze. The confused haze represented the constant worry growing in his mind over matters in Docktown.

Only once had he heard from Big Nick, and that once was hardly reassuring. Nick had come to warn him. Certain members of the gang Nick felt sure were out to get him. He could not tell just what their plans would be, but he seemed to know beyond doubt that some definite move was afoot in Docktown that might mean the Mole's annihilation. Meanwhile he was watching Gorya and Gorya's place.

All one forenoon the Mole wandered through a remote section of the city, trying with all that was in him to find some way out. For the thousandth time he went over the whole situation. There had been times when he had been about ready to go to John Huntley and tell all he knew, trusting to fight it all out

to success. And then the same old, cold chill of realization. With Sinwitz about he dared not move. The very thought of the Huntleys knowing about him, at least before he had proved himself, killed every impulse in him.

Along about midnight he made ready for one of the show's special features, a number done by a dancing team. Tonight they were to put on a Russian dance. Together with Iris St. Clair he had helped build up their number until it was a dancing act of no mean appeal.

And now the lights were out. The shining floor in the center of the place was laved in dazzling brilliance under a blazing spot. Suddenly the music exploded splendidly in the silence and into the white spot dashed two figures in Russian costumes of sheerest white, with white boots, bands of white fur, and on the girl's headdress a myriad glinting sparks of diamond-crystal jewels. Swept along on the outburst of music they burst into action of mad abandon.

In the dusky background, the Mole's mood seemed to flow in with the spirit of the number. He seemed actually to visualize a material world chastely white and clean, seemed to feel himself becoming part of that dazzling white brilliance. He seemed to feel the clean, cool wind of the steppes blowing across wide stretches of white snow. He could see powdered frost particles living, changing, shifting in the rays of white sunlight. And in all the cool, white realm was no conceivable blemish; here nothing lived that was not of great cleanness, of purity.

The music mounted madly to a climax. A frenzied, dinning exultation swept out upon the dancers like an electric torrent. It lifted them, shot them wantonly about, two glinting, white spirits in glittering, white brilliance. It seemed to inspire them with fantastic, violent motion of ecstasy. They were facing each other. They were dancing madly with arms, with legs, with shoulders, hips and backs. Frenzy gripped them. Squatting low, they jigged madly around each other in the white glare, kicking straight out with jerking steps from the knees. Erect again! Hands clapping sharply! Then whirling swiftly, arms aloft, spinning, flexing, reeling——

Crash! The music was done.

The place roared with applause. In his chair the Mole stared about as if coming back to the present world from a distance, from some place that was eternally clean and decent. He shut his eyes, tried to see it all again.

But now the evening's gorgeous hostess was at his shoulder.

"There's a guy over there in the corner who wants to talk to you," she said.

"To me?" The Mole looked up in surprise.

"Yes. He seems all lit up about the show. Claims he wants to tell you about it. He says he's a stockbroker from the West. He's got up to look like it all right, but there's something wrong with his make-up inside. Better go talk to him, but watch him."

The Mole looked over at the corner. Then as though something had snipped off a sustaining wire in his spine, he fell back limply a moment on his chair. And all the clean, white light in his mind went out.

The man waiting for him was Fitz Farolt.

And Fitz Farolt was his own father.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE ACTOR.

A FEW minutes later, shaking hands with Fitz Farolt at the table in the secluded corner, Lawrence Farolt, the Mole, knew an odd feeling as of standing before a dim little stage that was to dramatize the strangest epoch of his life.

Meanwhile, his ears were not hearing

the cordial effusiveness of the man before him, because his eyes were too busy with the man's face, his heart, too, sped up with its burden of strange emotions. His eyes were taking in the handsome face with its compellingly attractive power. He noticed the tiny nick from the margin of one ear, the relic of one of his father's night encounters that had intrigued the Mole as a child. For a day or so it had bled annoyingly.

And now he was appraising the man himself. The man himself repelled him strangely, and attracted him. He was too suave, too confident of his very real power. He was a man who put things over, all sorts of things, and knew it, and the Mole felt himself pulling oddly taut in apprehension, wariness.

At the same time, underneath all, the Mole was knowing an odd little groping out toward this man. A foolish little feeling like the gamboling of an overwrought puppy seeking to lick his master's feet—for after all the man was his father.

Farolt was sweeping aside glasses and silver and china, and holding out a cigarette case invitingly. The Mole accepted a cigarette and sat down.

"I'm from the West," the older man was saying. "I have been all lit up over your show. I'll confess that there's a big kick in the way such things are done in the East that we don't always find elsewhere. In any case your part in it has surprised me for a place of this sort." He glanced around at the place so frankly unpretentious, with its motley clientele suggestive of the underworld, notwithstanding its generous sprinkling of patrons from a much higher level. "At the same time I know enough about these things to realize that you yourself must have put a lot into it."

The Mole brought himself to speak for the first time, a flat observation from a wholly blank mind:

"I'm glad it pleases you."

Farolt de-ashed his cigarette and leaned forward upon the table, his chin resting on his thumbs, his eyes studying the younger man with a keen, businesslike appraisal wholly apart from the carelessness of his conversation. "I suppose your part in it got me all the more," he went on, "because I myself have always been interested in music."

Here, something drew tight within the Mole. The statement must have been purely untrue. His father, as he remembered him, had had music left completely out of his soul. He waited.

"For me the last number held a good deal of actual reminiscence. I have seen the Russian people dance in their own shacks. I made the Volga trip once. We hung up at a number of the little towns and villages." Farolt was puffing his cigarette as though thoughtfully, reflectively, but his eyes still held a look of acute, probing appraisal rather than any film of pleasant recollection. "I'll confess that the dancers I have seen over there were not dolled up in any snow-white uniforms and sparkling, crystal dust. Neither was the music the blood-jammer that you pumped into this last turn, but the spirit of the thing was identical over there and over here." He sat back with a little apologetic gesture. "I'll confess that to-night the whole thing got me for fair, and on impulse I asked Friend Hostess to bring you over. I hope you don't think me a freak or a nut."

The Mole replied as flatly as before: "That's all right with me." He could say no more. Things within him were numbing the sources of his speech, of his mental activity.

The man was running on. He was talking music, talking it very cleverly but, to the Mole, talking it with the obvious superficiality of one who has assumed a mere patter to cover up a vast ignorance.

And now the Mole was knowing a big, sinking feeling all through him.

The man opposite was wholly false in his every move. He was working earnestly, definitely. He was trying hard to put over the fascination held by a man of the world, still vigorously youthful, upon a young man who has yet the same way of adventure to go. But to the young man before him he might have been a babbling court jester shaking a sinister rattle of dry bones. And the sinking feeling grew. For he was realizing now that so long as this man lived he, the Mole, could never know the state of clean, fearless decency of life that had so uplifted him throughout the early part of this night.

And now the man was assuming a little change of manner. "Am I talking too much?" he smiled. "Am I keeping you?"

The Mole came to himself for a moment. He could not leave this man just yet. He felt some strange thing holding between them both that he could not yet define.

"No," he returned quietly. "The next number is a dance number and they can get along without me." He straightened back, noted the eyes of his little team regarding him expectantly, and gave them a signal to go on without him.

Farolt sat back. "That's good. Frankly, I am glad to talk to you." He drew a hip flask from his pocket, poured a generous drink, and pushed it over to the younger man. "Won't you drink with me?"

The Mole shook his head, his eyes very gravely regarding the eyes across. "I'd rather not, if you don't mind. I make it a rule never to drink when playing." He smiled for the first time. "I can't *feel* clearly."

"All right," with great cordiality. "It's up to you. But you don't mind if——"

The Mole shook his head. "No. Go to it."

The man swallowed the drink, lit himself a cigarette and looked back at the other. A silence so potent as to be like a little feeling of death amid all the reveling surroundings, came between the two. Within, the Mole was seeing his mother and this man sitting opposite each other at a bare little table, in a hard little room, with a child at one side, and there was the same silence hanging over the scene as now

Farolt shattered this. "Do you mind if I say that there is something about you that attracts me oddly?"

It was the first thing he had said in all the evening that held an absolute ring of truth, and, listening to him, something contracted sharply in the Mole's breast.

Farolt, however, hastened to dispel anything approaching sentiment. He laughed, carelessly. "Don't let that tangle you up, kid. I'm not getting lit, and I'm rarely sentimental, although sentiment is not difficult in a man old enough to be your father. I'm sorry. Forget it. It's—out."

The impulsive little warmth died swiftly out of Farolt's regard, and in all the days that followed the Mole was never to see again that tinge of honest softness in this man's face.

His mood was now something thoroughly businesslike. "How old are you?" he asked.

"I am twenty-five."

"You going to stick to this sort of thing?"—indicating the surroundings.

"No."

"What are your plans?" Then, in swift apology: "Don't mind me. I suppose any man my age is interested in any youngster of yours."

"My plans have not worked out yet, if I have any."

The next question was surprising: "Do you like money?"

A little silence. The Mole stared across evenly. "I suppose I do, but I don't want it so much that I'm unhappy without it."

Farolt evidently left that line of attack. From whatever investigation he had had in mind, he veered suddenly away. "How about your family?"

The Mole shook his head.

"I have none."

"Do you live in the city?"

"Yes."

Each was probing deeply into the eyes of the other. On sudden impulse the Mole said oddly: "I don't mix much."

The older man laughed. "You're clever anyhow." And then he proceeded to show how much more clever he was himself. "I'm not seeking to mix," he said with what was a good imitation of honesty. He closed his eyes to shut out things that might have been too revealing. "I don't suppose a youngster ever lived, though, who could just get the hungry, repining feeling a man still apparently full of life but jammed aside by years holds for youth." He sat a quiet moment with his eyes closed to inspection, the one touch of appeal necessary to the perfect actor.

In spite of himself the Mole felt a little pang of regret. "I do understand. But I doubt if there is any way that I could help."

The other man finished a perfect performance. "Who knows?" he said a little wistfully, laying down his napkin with a faint touch of resignation. He stood up. "I have enjoyed talking to you these few minutes," he said. "If you're not afraid of me"—with a slow smile that was the acme of honest intent —"if you're not afraid of me, I would like to talk to you again. Sometimes—a man my age gets—lonesome." He rose to his feet.

The Mole rose, too. He made his first impulsive remark: "When you come round again I'll be glad to talk to you." And it was something from his heart rather than from his head that impelled him to put out his hand.

CHAPTER XIX.

FAROLT WORKS OUT.

FROM the warm grasp of the young violinist's hand, Fitz Farolt went directly down into Docktown to the gaunt old building of Max Gorya that reared grim and ominous and forbidding in the darkness.

In his big room Gorya sat waiting, together with Blaney and the officer Lynch, and, before Farolt came out again the future of the young musical director at the Mixing Bowl seemed hopelessly hung with crape.

At first Farolt was strange, even to himself. For some reason he did not find himself the carelessly confident plotter of a few nights ago. The night's interview had affected him. Somehow it had made him realize his age, started him thinking disturbingly of the precarious uncertainty of the years ahead.

Gazing at the questioning faces about him, however, the man had a sudden feeling that all this might be visible on the outside, and he pulled himself together with a jolt. He lit a cigarette with cool, deliberate hands, blew out his match and drove direct to the heart of the subject.

"I've seen the kid. I've had a talk with him."

"He is an excellent musician"—from Max Gorya.

"Without knowing anything about it, I should say so," conceded Farolt. "When he stood up to play he had that whole damn place about him just keenly alive. If the stuff happened to be glad stuff, every one there was ready to keep right straight on to hell. At the same time, early in the evening he worked a little street kid through a sentimental mammy song that just about had 'em sobbing into their liquor."

"But outside of all that, he's clever, don't you think?" asked Kenyon.

"He *is* clever. He's got the keen

cleverness of the crook mixed up in him with his music side. The kid's damned good looking and he's got that quality about him that would pull women, for instance, clean out of the celestial realms or out of the jungle, either. I could see it all about me to-night. The hostess there—a dame harder than steel plates—loves him like hell, but he's too dumb ever to see it. That side of him is somewhat of a mystery to me. It hasn't been played up much."

"It's being played up now," grinned Blaney.

"What do you mean?"

"The Huntley kid. The scout that's been watching him reports that he's gone to the Huntley house two or three times lately to see her."

Farolt stood up suddenly. He paced to the other end of the room and came back to a dead stop. "That's the one point I needed to make a perfect frame-up!"

"How do you mean?"

"I decided at the first that there was only one way to get this kid for fair so as to leave things where they were with the Huntley Company, and that was to stack him up dirty against John Huntley himself."

There was silence.

"There's no other way to do this," Farolt resumed, "except to possibly pull some stunt in connection with Huntley's own residence. I see now that, with the combination of Huntley himself and the girl sweetie, together with the Mole's knowing the house and grounds, it frames up a situation that's unbeatable." A moment, then: "This is it: I'm going to set myself to get the Mole into the Huntley residence some night with both the Huntleys planted on the inside, and with the police planted on the outside. Then, when the thing is sprung, and we produce all the rest of the stuff we'll have ready as evidence, our little friend the Mole will be headed for such a nice long term in jail that he wouldn't be wise to his own centennial."

About Farolt the men had relaxed. They were looking into each other's faces with slow inquiry, finding in each face plain, skeptical doubt. In the case of Blaney this was reflected in a smile almost derisive. "That sounds lovely," he said. "But then so do all the other miracles."

Farolt ignored him. As he went on doubt faded from the faces of his companions. Something like intense admiration crept in.

"In the first place, where is this residence located?" he asked.

"Out back, in the lawn and shrubbery suburbs."

"Fine! When the thing is pulled off John Huntley will find the kid where he's got no license being, and can never explain. On the outside will be the good old faithful officers of the law, one named Blaney having been specially deputized, and a couple of others whom Blaney is going to arrange for."

The man went on with details that for the first time revealed to the others the truly scientific efficiency developed by a man who had devoted himself through long years to intensive crookery. All the points were as well considered and as neatly joined together as would be the detailed plans of a construction engineer.

"There is just one hopeless hole in your whole scheme," said Blaney. "How do you expect to get this kid to fall for anything so raw as that?"

Farolt was lighting another cigarette. "Leave that to me," he muttered into his cupped hands.

The next morning John Huntley answered a summons from the telephone on his desk. A voice came over the wire, calm, cool, undeniably compelling:

"Mr. John Huntley?"

"Yes."

"If you don't mind, Mr. Huntley, I'm calling down to see you. Frankly, I am coming down to open up to you certain facts you will want to know in regard to the young man apprehended recently in connection with the warehouse thievery. When you hear me through you will realize its importance. My errand is no whim, and I promise not to waste your time."

Ten minutes later John Huntley stood behind his desk, staring calculatingly into the face of Fitz Farolt. From the settling of certain lines about his face it seemed he was pulling taut within him. He knew himself about to encounter a mind of cleverness, shrewdness and strength equal, if not superior, to his own.

Farolt seated himself quietly at the other's invitation. He did not relax into the chair. He wasted no words on preliminaries. He gave the impression of thorough, businesslike understanding. He had gotten himself up in quiet, well-cut clothes that yet gave him a certain distinction. He made an impression, whether good or bad was uncertain, but in any case—pronounced. Farolt began on the only things doubtful in his own mind—the relations between Huntley and the Mole.

"Do you mind telling me," he said with a calm interest, "just what the situation is between you and this young man?"

"Why do you wish to know?" parried Huntley.

"Only for the reason that it will help. Don't tell me, though, if you have any misgivings about it."

Huntley answered: "This young man convinced me that his story was true, that he himself had no connection with the warehouse thievery, that he himself had been framed."

"Has he been able to prove this to you?"

"No. I have not seen him since."

Farolt held himself tense. "Which means that you are beginning to distrust him." He wanted the answer very badly.

"I don't think I am called on to tell you that," Huntley answered grimly.

A little satisfaction swam through Farolt. He was answered. He knew now beyond doubt that Huntley was already distrusting the Mole.

"All right," he went on. "Do you know this: that this young man had an actual criminal record in the West before he came East?"

"No, I did not."

"Well, that's true."

"Your telling me this does not make it so." In spite of all, John Huntley was seeing yet the clear, pleading eyes of the Mole as they were that day in jail, was hearing again his impassioned plea that held such a tremendous ring of moving truth.

"All right," said Farolt. "I don't expect you to believe it. I merely wish a chance to prove it to you and that is why I am here. I have learned from sources not necessary to mention that this young man plans a raid on your own house."

In his chair Huntley stiffened perceptibly. He said nothing.

"I understand, too, that he has come to know your residence thoroughly under a pretext of calling on your daughter. Did you know that?"

John Huntley grunted and relaxed. "No. I should say that was a damn lie."

"Very well. You can verify that from your daughter herself. If she tells you the truth you will be satisfied to consider the rest."

Huntley made no comment. Lorne would tell him the truth at his first question.

"The rest is this: I am going to call you again over the telephone. If you find what I have said to be true I am going to ask your permission to let me arrange the rest. I shall watch for the

definite time this young man plans this raid and with your permission I shall arrange also for a plant of officers to apprehend him. Are you satisfied enough that I am telling you the truth to let me go that far?"

"Yes."

Both men rose simultaneously. John Huntley felt again stirrings of deep wrath that had roused him before. At the same time he felt a peculiar hatred, almost, toward this man who was opening all this up to him. There was no move on the part of either to shake hands.

"You will be willing then to proceed against him?" suggested Farolt.

Huntley's reply carried conviction. "I told him once that if he were double-crossing me I would never let up on him this side of hell. And I keep my word."

CHAPTER XX.

THE PROPHECY OF SINWITZ.

IT was a strange little interview that evening between John Huntley and his daughter at dinner. The matter discussed was something that had imposed itself relentlessly between them, but with each, throughout, there were comradeship, confidence and love.

With the advent of the soup Huntley had suddenly laid down his napkin and sat back in his chair. "Lorne," he said, "let's talk."

The girl across looked up at him swiftly. She had noticed when he came home that he was more than usually abstracted. She knew him well enough to know that he was carrying something of especial importance on his mind. "All right, dad," she returned quietly. "What about?"

"About you."

It was then that the girl knew. It seemed almost unbelievable but in a swift flash of intuition she knew that her father was going to speak of young Lawrence. She herself sat back now, regarding the man across with complete frankness. "All right. I am ready to listen, dear."

Huntley came back with characteristic directness:

"Do you know a young fiddler who lives down in Docktown and goes by the name of Lawrence?"

"Yes, dad."

"How long have you known him?"

"Several weeks."

"How did you come to know him? Tell me about it."

The girl's face was very still, almost grave in its soft young lines, but she met her father's look fearlessly. "It seems simple enough to me, but I'll confess, dad, when I try and get it over to you it may not look simple. It *is*, though. Before I say any more I want you to realize that."

She began with the accident, speaking calmly, levelly, and leading on to the curious impression the young stranger made. "Lying there on the wharf unconscious," she went on, "he struck me as being somebody real. It was almost like seeing somebody dead who holds a dignity and bigness that they never had while they were alive. I'll admit that he was young and tremendously good looking, but I want you to remember the other."

John Huntley nodded.

The girl spoke on—told of the day she had driven this young man to the place he was converting into a home, of later having him to dinner and to play.

"What did you decide about him then?" her father asked.

"I decided that he was clean and decent, a million times more worth while than the boys of our gang, and that any young man of his go-after-it type, who was the remarkable musician that he was besides, couldn't but have big possibilities. I have always felt his music was but one side of him. It has not made him a freak, or careless, or an outsider."

Huntley was turning his fork slowly. "I was going to ask if you were really interested in him, but I can see that is not necessary, Lorne. But why did you not mention him to me?"

"That, too, is simple enough, dad, really. I wanted to decide whether or not he was worth while first, and if not he was simply going to pass on out. You know that." She gave a little reassuring laugh, and went on. "You can still trust me, dear. No girl could live a lifetime with J. P. Huntley and not be so hard boiled as to men that foolishness would fall away from her even when she was trying to grasp it. I do like this boy very much, chiefly because he's so different."

"Then you don't love him?"

"I think I could, dad." The girl's eyes in her father's were deeply earnest. "But I am not going to let myself do that until I know him more."

"I am sorry to know that you like him so well."

"Why?"

"Because he's no good"—bluntly.

The girl sat very still a moment. Then: "No, that is not true, dad. But tell me what you know."

"I have always been uncertain about his connection with the warehouse thievery. I have never felt satisfied in having interfered with his prosecution. I have always felt that he influenced me against my better judgment. I am afraid now that that is the same phase of his personality that he has put over on you."

"All right. Go on!"

"I learned now that he has had a crooked record in the past, and that he has not left it entirely behind him."

The girl was shaking her head. "No, dad. I can't believe that."

"I am afraid you must. I am told this young man plans a break on this very house; that he has used your acquaintance to pick up a knowledge of it."

The girl's response was odd. She laughed a low laugh. "Dad, don't be absurd. You know yourself that, down underneath, you regard this young man just as I do. You could not help it."

"I'll say that I have been disposed to. But this is too serious a thing to disregard. If the matter works out to that stage, I will have to give it a chance." John Huntley picked up his spoon. "It is, of course, unnecessary to ask that if all this should prove true, your interest in the young man would be dead."

"Yes, dad, it is quite unnecessary."

It was the riot hour at the Mixing Bowl. Everybody danced, or tried to. The music was an orgiac uproar. Life there was squandering itself noisily, clumsily, garishly.

At a table in a far corner only were things still, and things there were dead still. Fitz Farolt sat at one side. Across from him sat the Mole. The eyes of each were strange—cold, steely, deadly intent on one part; a hunted, glittering fear on the other.

Farolt was saying: "Your record convicts you. I have looked it up, thoroughly. A word from me and you're in jail. You can't refuse. You've got nothing to say. For that reason I've been taking no chances in telling you something of who I am. I might add that my line has never been piker stuff. I might add, too, that after a lifetime of it I've got this thing of loot down to absolute cold science. I never work a game without an eye to all the features of it. I never work up a break without I cover every point. Now, you know this Huntley place and consequently you represent all the side issues I spoke of. The job itself I'll do, but I want your assistance. Now, what do you say?"

The nervous quivering throughout the body of the Mole had sped up to such agonized tenseness as to be almost killing him. This man was his father, and

the one dominant thought in the whole horrible situation was that he himself must risk everything in the world to prevent it being known again that he was the son of Fitz Farolt. But this wild scheme!

"I can't do it! I won't do it!" he cried out passionately. "I don't know who put you wise to me, but I'm telling you this: they put you wise to what I was, not to what I am. All that crooked stuff is behind me so far it could never catch up. It never was a part of me really, if I'd ever had an even break. Now I've got that break."

Farolt laughed shortly. "The game isn't so bad. I've made it pay, damn well. As a painstaking crook, I've got a hell of a lot more out of life than ordinary routine would have brought me, and so can you. Now this is it: you're going to help me pull this Huntley break or you're going to jail forever after. In addition to all the other stuff against you, I happened to stumble across a certain case out in the West listed 'Van Decker Jewels'!"

"I never touched that!" the Mole burst forth desperately.

"All right," Farolt went on nonchalantly, and apparently unconvinced. "Then there's a former pal of yours called Sinwitz who's bursting all his buttons to get at you on a number of counts."

The Mole groaned in grim misery, and thrust his head forward into passionately gripping hands.

"Added to that," went on Farolt, "is a really beautiful organization of warehouse gyppery here in this very town in which you were recently apprehended as the prime mover. With all these hanging over you, it's dollars to doughnuts that a minister, even, would never get a look-in at your remains."

The Mole's face came up drawn and white. It was no longer the face of a youth. "Just the same I'll see you in hell first!" The words were half cried. Sinwitz's prophecy was bursting in the ears of the Mole. This moment he was in hell.

Farolt rose. He laid a hand on the young man's shoulder which to the Mole seemed a small weight of sinister torture, being the hand of his father and the hand of his greatest enemy at the same time.

"No, kid, you're first going to see me to-morrow noon at this address," smiled Farolt. "Night brings repose." And he slipped away.

CHAPTER XXI.

WALLS CLOSED IN.

IRIS ST. CLAIR tramped drearily in across the floor of the Mixing Bowl in the drab forenoon daylight. She extracted a cigarette from her hand bag, laid the bag on a convenient table, lit the cigarette and, blowing a cloud of smoke into the heavy, dead air, stood looking around.

On such a morning the place to Iris St. Clair was a dim, gray tomb wherein much frivolous gayety had been flung to rest. This morning it seemed also to hold the last remnants of youth and beauty and power in things, and realizing that, it seemed to make her conscious of increasing weariness, increasing discouragement, hopelessness. In the flat, dead light, with but a sketchy attempt at make-up, Iris St. Clair looked youthless and gray and tired.

Gazing about the place with hard, ironic appraisal her eyes suddenly widened. Every remnant of bitter reflection vanished from her mind. It was as though a brilliant lamp of interest, hope, courage had been suddenly lit within her. In an obscure corner a lone man sat hunched before a table, his head and shoulders buried in crossed arms on its top. But the sight of the dark, wavy hair and the outline of the youthful figure had lit the lamp of beauty in the woman's spirit.

She jammed out her cigarette and hurried across the floor, wending an intricate way through disordered chairs and tables. At the table in the corner she stood still a moment, her heart beating heavily. She stretched forth a quivering hand to the dark hair and said huskily:

"Kid, come out of it."

There came a long, half-sobbing sigh from the figure on the table and the man sat up.

The woman recoiled in sudden fright. The man was Lawrence Farolt, the Mole, and one side of his face bore a ghastly smear of half-dried blood and the rest was intolerably white and grim. His opened eyes swept her face a moment and his head fell back against the back of the chair and the lids closed wearily.

"Boy, you're hurt! What is it?"

"I don't think it amounts to much," dismally. "A lead streak opened up my scalp early this morning."

"But you *are* hurt. Don't try to talk; wait till I fix you up." The woman hurried away, and came back with a bowl of water and a napkin. For two blissful moments, the Mole's head back in the hollow of her arm, she bathed his face and loved doing it with all her soul.

He looked up at her finally from under his moist hair and said simply: "Thanks. You're good to me."

"That's all right. But what's it all about? Tell me."

He sat up then, apparently trying to grip himself into something like normal. He had been up all night. It had been a night of horror right straight through, horror of body and of soul. From the time he had left Fitz Farolt it seemed as if his feelings had been gnawing like wolves within him.

The Mole's head turned suddenly to the woman waiting across the table. His first remark was curious, bizarre: "Are you a friend of mine?" His big, dark eyes in the haggard, grotesque face probed hers with a seriousness that was stirring and deeply touching.

The woman's eyes never wavered in their luminous regard. "I am. You know it. You know, too, that I am a thousand times more than that, but in my telling you of it I'm putting a padlock on it for all time. Now, go on."

The young man's hand, shaking a bit, had gone up before his eyes. After a lifetime empty of kindness, friendship, love, the woman's frank speech well nigh unmanned him.

"I'm glad," he finally managed, "and I'm sorry." And then, on a running cry of loneliness: "But I've got to talk to some one! For the first time in my life some one has got to listen to me or I'll blow up!"

The woman's face across the table relaxed in its fixed regard. It became warm and soft and human and for the moment very beautiful in its tenderness.

"I'm the one, kid. You know that, too. You know that there's nothing you could ever tell me but what I'd understand perfectly."

His face went forward in his hands on the table. His voice sounded shaken and hollow as he told her. After a few terse remarks summing up his past, remarks in which he set forth cold and bare and unmitigated the raw facts of his wrongdoings, he came to Docktown and the way it had tangled up his life. "And now, when there's some one——" He stopped.

Here the woman's face if possible grew even more tender. "Don't mind me, boy, if it's your girl friend you want to talk about. No one could look and act and work like you have without some great big self-starter, and it's sure wonderful you've got one in this girl."

"But I've been a crook!" he cried out hollowly.

The woman sat back smiling gently. "You've never been crooked inside. The

part of your make-up that holds your music places you a million miles above that sort of thing really. Now go on!"

And now he had come to Farolt, of whom he must not speak. "I won't tell you what it was," he said grimly, "but last night things overtook me like leaping on me in the dark. For an hour or so after I got through here, it seemed I was done for fair. Then I made ready to take one desperate chance of righting things if I could put it over. I have always felt that if I could get inside Gorya's place I could find actual evidence of the warehouse proposition that would clear me of that thing clean and clear.

"Big Nick Potosky told me once of a little brown book that Gorya kept the gang accounts in, and receipts he made them sign. With some such evidence for a starter, knowing absolutely I was exonerated of that, I would have courage enough to fight through the rest, no matter how thick and fast it came. So I got up, pulled myself together, and made down into Docktown."

He stopped here, his eyes were shut, and the woman regarded him silently.

"Down there I ran across Big Nick, who has been watching things for me. I told him what I had come for. He advised me to wait. According to Nick, some deal was evidently afoot, for he had learned that Gorya was going to be away to-day and to-morrow. Nick was already planning to tip me off that to-night a break into Gorya's would be plain sailing. Gorya always lies low when anything special is being pulled—God knows what's booked for to-night. Anyhow, I had to be satisfied. As I was coming away some of the peeved Atlantic Court gang almost got me with a bullet."

There was silence, and then the Mole's voice came again filled with the same mournful, hollow emotion of his first remark.

"I got away, but I wish the bullet had struck an inch lower. To-night is my one chance at Gorya's and already I'm beginning to feel that I won't be allowed to make it. Meanwhile——" He stopped abruptly. He had almost said: "Meanwhile, Fitz Farolt is waiting for me." Some odd little whimsical thing of his youth evidently invaded the Mole. He looked up into the woman's face and smiled crookedly. "That's all there is."

There was a little moment of silence, then. "Yes," said the woman, "there's a lot more. You've done the one thing that, to a woman like me who is so hungry for friendship, means nothing short of heaven: you've trusted me. You've been really close to me for one half hour and I shan't forget it. If I could help somehow—and I'm going to try—I'd feel satisfied that I hadn't been left lying loose round the earth for nothing."

They gazed at each other in silence. In the cold, dim room of expired revels, with the heavy air of dead gayety hanging about them like a pall, something had yet come to live around that table that was bright and clear and beautiful. The boy felt it. The woman had known it all through. But neither mentioned it.

The boy broke in first. "You don't happen to have a smoke about you, do you?" he asked.

"I sure have," said the woman.

On the stroke of noon the Mole found himself at the address Farolt had given him—an apartment house in a quiet quarter. He found Farolt in his own apartment—well-furnished quarters, a trifle pretentious, like their occupant.

He stood a moment regarding the half-amused satisfaction in the other's face. "Thanks, I won't sit down," he said in response to the other's invitation. "I have come to say that I have decided to go in with you."

"Fine," commented Farolt without

enthusiasm. "I had already set the thing for to-night."

The Mole fell back, his face a mask. "No—not to-night!"

Farolt smiled. "I said to-night."

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO FAREWELLS.

THE Mole was driving. The little dark coupé slipped along through the midnight blackness with a speed that seemed almost malicious in its eagerness. All day had the Mole searched his very soul for some definite scheme that would frustrate Farolt without incriminating himself, but in his desperate need not a single feasible idea presented itself.

Nighttime came and found him a man numb from a whole day's mental battlefield. The only thing he could hope for was either to remain hidden in the Huntley residence so long that Farolt would be led to leave, or else—a scheme offering fewer chances still—to arouse the household intentionally and trust to making his escape in the confusion. If he were successful in either case, it would only mean setting ahead the day of disaster so far as Farolt was concerned. Which brought him back to where he had begun.

In the section of the Huntley place he turned swiftly down a side lane leading to remote outbuildings and turned off the lights.

There was a low, sharp remonstrance from Farolt at his side. "I wanted you to pull in on the other driveway up front."

"It's better down here," said the Mole. "This leads to the rear of the estate."

The little car plunged along the dimlit road and was parked abruptly among low-hanging, deep evergreens at one side.

The maneuvers that followed puzzled the Mole even then. More than once Farolt seemed to be leading him daringly across open spaces, when a secluded trail was equally as practical. Then, to his complete surprise, the entire Huntley mansion seemed shrouded in blackness. There was not even a night light visible about the place. In his ignorance it struck the Mole as uncannily lucky for a possible break, almost as though it might have been set intentionally.

A trellis gave access to a veranda roof, and the veranda roof to a window opening into an upper hallway. Strangely enough, the Mole found the window conveniently unfastened. He slipped in noiselessly and stood in the dark in the Huntley house.

No stranger moment had ever fallen upon his life. Somewhere near him slept the girl Lorne Huntley, from whom, of all people in the world, he would have given life itself to keep his presence unknown. Somewhere else near by reposed John Huntley himself, and in this instance, too, discovery meant the sacrifice of decency, future, freedom.

The Mole tried to force himself to think calmly. If, after all, he remained here overlong, long enough to excite Farolt's suspicions, it might bring Farolt in to look for him. His only recourse seemed to be to awaken the household in some way and try to make his get-away in the general confusion. If he got away it would at least gain him time.

Suddenly he started. A light had flashed somewhere in the grounds down below. He wheeled about. He knew he did not imagine it. He was positive of it. A moment, and something seemed to threaten from a new direction—from the house itself. The Mole's old-time coolness was no longer a part of him. His heart was nigh to bursting with suppressed excitement. Again his ears warned him. He was certain that he heard footsteps in the regions below.

They were ascending the stairs. In a moment they would reach the upper hall.

The Mole vanished. Gliding along the hallway, he turned a doorknob and slipped in.

As he did so he knew himself to be lost. The light in the apartment was snapped on, and with a cold feeling as of actual death pouring down about his heart, the Mole stood staring across the room into the eyes of Lorne Huntley.

It was probably absolute instinct that gripped his fingers about the key in the lock behind him and shot the bolt. In that instant he was too near the plane of another existence to know fear or any other human emotion. He said in a voice of dead coolness:

"I am not here for any crooked purpose. I suppose it's crazy to ask you to believe that."

"I am afraid so." The voice was equally as level as his own.

Some remonstrance mounted within him that threatened to swamp him completely, to swamp every instinct, impulse and emotion that he had. "You've got to believe me!" he said desperately.

"Why are you here, then?"

"I can't tell you that. I can only ask you to trust me."

Some one twisted the doorknob behind his hand, tapped on the door, called out.

The impulse that followed was the clean impulse of the burglar. The Mole leaped across the room, snapped off the light and flung up the window giving out upon the veranda roof. Then he might have been a man desperately bidding good-by to all life. His arms went round the girl in the dark, he crushed her to him and kissed her. He muttered swiftly: "This is honest, though—honest love, if I'm killed to-night!"

He felt the girl relax one big moment in his arms, heard her whisper: "And mine has been equally honest, but this is—good-by."

His ears awoke to the pounding on the door. He was out through the window like a flash. He made the veranda edge with the agility of a cat, squatted low on the coping and dropped off into the darkness.

He had an astonishing impression that behind him the Huntley place had leaped to full illumination. As he darted along he seemed to feel also that the grounds stretching away before him held lurking men. Suddenly, from the blackness at one side, he heard a shot. The Mole faltered. In that moment a thing deeper than every other consideration stopped him dead. A bullet may have gotten his accomplice, and Fitz Farolt, the accomplice, was his father.

Something, now, was slipping through the blackness ahead of him. He felt it without seeing, and he heard a soft swish of a body falling among the shrubbery. He leaped forward. The man had half raised, was trying to forge ahead. There was a dim luminousness now, scarcely more than starlight. The man on the ground recognized him and to the ears of the Mole came the strangest plea in the world: "Say, old man, help me, will you?" And, in a throaty tone wherein manhood battled with agony: "If you leave me here I'm sure bleeding to death unless they find me." Stunned, the Mole heard the rest before it was spoken: "I've got a feeling that I'm liable to die in jail, and God, kid, a man *can't* die in jail!"

There came a single moment in which, with this man dead, the Mole saw himself free—free and foot-loose in the world again, free to fight his way again, free of the life menace that had been his father, free to prove himself, free to live, to love——

The Mole burst into action—raw, elemental action that might have been the instinctive succor of one human animal to another. The man was his father. He wanted to help him more than he wanted anything else in life. Farolt

could walk. With an arm around his shoulder the Mole supported him through the hedge which separated the Huntley grounds from the back road, swung him along and entered the car. Presently the car shot forward along the road, picked up a crossroad far along, made back into the highway and sped onward through the darkness in the direction of the city.

A half hour later the Mole had his father lying on his own bed. There was a torn wound under Farolt's arm. To stanch its flow the Mole had bandaged it despairingly with half the linen the place possessed.

Farolt was dying. There was not the slightest doubt about it. Each man felt it holding clear in the mind of the other, and both men now were living in a realm far apart from the problems of the present. On his part Farolt was calm enough. It was characteristic of the man. Blaney, or one of the other Gorya men had evidently secretly intended to get the Mole with a bullet and had got him instead. In any case it was all right. He had simply played the game out and this was the end. Firm in him, however, was a deep, calm satisfaction that he was never to die in prison.

The Mole on the other hand was whirling through mental life as vivid and dazzling as a display of colored lights. He himself was back again in his childhood, seeing this man with his mother, seeing crime and cleanness, neglect and sadness, seeing countless scenes of silent conflict, and always a small boy between.

Crouching by the bed, the Mole emerged from his recollections to stare at that inexorable stain that was slowly devouring the whiteness of the linen all about. Suddenly he sprang to his feet. It was intolerable that this man, his father, should die—here—alone—without help.

"I'm going for a doctor," he said.

Already the man was struggling upright.

"No—no, for God's sake! Let me die here—where I'm sure of it."

He fell back, his face a drained, ghastly gray. And, watching, a sick thrill crept all through the boy's body like the stealing forth of every sorrowful emotion it held.

Then in the silence: "A little longer, kid, and I won't be afraid of ever dying in jail. Just give me that break."

The Mole sat down on the foot of the bed, gently, carefully. Impulsively his hand stole out to rest on the sheeted ankle almost caressingly. "Are you—are you suffering?" he asked.

"No," with a wheezy laugh. "Not so much as you'd think. I feel like I'd been hit with a load of hay that somehow has left one side all numb. And—little by little—the hay is settling all over me.

"It's good in you, kid," he said a moment later. "Somehow, I took to you—if it hadn't been business." And again: "I—I had a boy once. I've always felt—he was straight. I'd never want him—want him to know his father died a crook."

Sitting rigid on the bed the Mole felt his heart become like a tensely swelling balloon that would not burst. His head strained back, and silence gripped him by the throat.

"He could play the fiddle, too," the man was saying. "His mother was—some little musician." Farolt had slipped far back now, was evidently adrift among things that themselves were driftage of the years. "She used to play something—about a green hill far away——"

The Mole knew so much about that that it was paining him through and through. He was on his feet and across to his violin case. "Was it this?" he asked huskily. And he played the old hymn.

It was some time before the man on the bed replied. He seemed to be living far away, contemplating those very hills. Then: "Yes. Thanks." And in a moment: "There was another—funny proposition—she said it was a 'song without words'——"

Already the Mole was playing it, Mendelssohn's "Consolation." And he walked the room. And he jammed his eyelids tightly on his eyeballs.

Farolt spoke again: "I never—could see how a song—could have no words. But that time I got it. The words to that are—*peace*. Funny that you should know—about that song——"

The Mole was down by the side of the bed. The man was drifting far now. And he could never reach him. And he was knowing an inner fight that was like hounds harrying his manhood. This man would be dead in a few minutes and he *must* hang onto himself. He must not wreck this man's last thoughts by revealing himself.

A long sigh came from the man on the bed. The Mole stretched out a hand and gripped the other's. And again he was the respectful little boy, abashed in his father's presence, and now filled with awe. "Sir, are you still—there?"

A little silence as of listening intently. "Yes, kid. But the—the hay—is crowding all over me."

A little, and again the Mole asked in a voice that was but a husky whisper: "Sir, are you there?"

A long stillness, and then to the Mole as though the voice was coming from a long, long way, from even the very, very far green hills themselves. "Yes, but—I'm starting—on my—way."

The Mole gripped the bedclothes. A little, and again came his voice steadier, freer now:

"Dad—dad, old man, are you there?"

No answer came back in the crashing silence. Fitz Farolt was already far along down the road to the hills.

And the Mole sat back on his aching heels, and somehow he could no longer see the face on the bed in its new-found dignity and distinction. And he felt very alone.

And now it was dawn. The room had gone thinly gray around the light bulb that was a wan yellow tear in the midst.

And then the door crashed open. And Blaney with two officers crashed in.

And the Mole was hustled out.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IRIS.

THE trial was to be rushed. The hearing on the Huntley episode had been summarily disposed of to make room for the warehouse thievery case. The prosecution was oddly impatient.

At first it was all one to the Mole. He did not care. He was past all that. For the moment he was hopelessly sunk in the utter black discouragement of youth. Sinwitz was right that day long ago—trying to go straight was hell. And the Mole had made it at last. He closed his eyes tight.

He opened them to see the woman Iris St. Clair outside his cell—he never knew how she managed it. She put her hand through the bars calmly enough, but strange emotions seemed at work in her face.

"Hullo, kid," she said gravely. "How you feeling?"

The Mole moved across and took her hands.

"I'm all right," he said, and tried to smile.

Her fine, knowing eyes were taking in his face that had been lined with its wretchedness. "No, buddy," she reproved compassionately. "Don't lie to me; don't try to. You see, boy, I want to help. It seems to me that I've simply got to. Let's get right down to hard pan. As I recall it you had everything set to try and raid Gorya's place

last night for definite evidence. Just what happened?"

He gripped the bars and drew himself up, his drawn ivory face masklike in its earnestness.

"The last thing that could have happened had come out of the past to lick me. It was this: Fitz Farolt was my own father. He had planned a break on the Huntley place for last night. I had to forget Gorya's to go to the Huntley place and try to head Farolt off if I could. And now—everything else aside—I—I can't have him dragged into anything as my father. He's dead! I helped him die in peace. Let him be."

The woman was staring at him oddly, her face engrossed, thoughtful, above its undemonstrative sorrow. "All right," quietly. "What then?"

"You see, it has all got back to the warehouse stuff. It is on that that I am to be tried. Nothing happened at the Huntleys'—not a nickel's worth was lifted, but it will help queer me on the other. Without some definite evidence to back me up, I'm a total loss."

The girl's next question was odd. "What does this Big Nick you told me about look like?" she asked suddenly.

"Like a big Russian bear"—absently. "Still goes round as the old country sent him; wears a little gold ring in one ear. Why?"

The girl was nodding her head. "I saw him wandering around outside."

"Probably he wouldn't know how to go to work to get in." Some flare of inspiration lighted in the Mole's face. "I—I hate to ask you," he began, "but do you suppose you could get Nick in here? Also there's an old junkman, Bart Cobbett, along Dock Street. Do you think——"

"Yes, I can do something," she returned with conviction. "Now you start in and give me absolutely the whole dope. And then, sit tight—and wait."

A little later, outside the jail on the walk leading from the exit, the girl made across to a bench that held the slouched figure of Big Nick Potosky. She smiled quietly down into the dumb, engrossed face. "You been trying to see young Lawrence?"

"Yah." In his abstraction Nick's speech slipped.

"Well, he's told me all about it—about you and him and Max Gorya. You're not very keen for Gorya, are you?"

"I could kill him with these two hands!" he grunted surlily.

She was appraising him shrewdly. "I've seen the time when I could myself," she volunteered. "It strikes me we ought to be able to do something for young Lawrence, you and I. I've got head enough, and God knows you've got hulk enough." She sat down on the bench with a light touch on his arm. "Come on, let's talk."

CHAPTER XXIV.

ON TRIAL.

THE morning's papers were sensational. Enterprising reporter work had made a big and interesting story of the strange young man who, professing to be a musician, had come to dig in down in Docktown and conduct one of the cleverest thieving organizations the city had ever known. The morning of the trial, it had become the first news interest of an entire city.

The case was called along toward noon. The Mole came up from his cell calmly enough. But, inside, the constant strain of his waiting had pulled him taut till he was numb. With his last ounce of effort had he wrestled with the various chances as he saw them —together with Iris St. Clair and Bart Cobbett and Big Nick.

If the Gorya gang, as he felt sure, had stumbled on his past record, his own case was next to hopeless; if in addition they had picked up Sinwitz, it was useless for Big Nick to reveal him-

self or Bart Cobbett either—they would not accomplish anything and Gorya would only get both sooner or later. Almost helpless in jail, the Mole had put up the biggest fight within his power. Using himself as directing mind only, he had gone the limit. Now he waited.

To the spectators packed in every space of the courtroom, the young man being seated in the prisoner's box looked rather dangerous, if the truth be told. He was white and strung looking. The big, dark eyes seemed to be burning with a steady flare that might have been deathless resentment. They were rather disturbing features in an otherwise interesting face.

The prosecuting attorney began yammering loudly and aggressively even at the start, as if he sought by noise and violent epithet to spur up his own jaded conviction in the matter to a respectable malevolence. And from the start he was referring scathingly to the prisoner's record.

At his initial words the first wave of a threatening hopelessness fled cold through the prisoner. Record! His eyes were fast to a grained panel of the judge's bench. He did not see the panel; he was looking back behind the years. He was seeing clearly a little front room in a hard little house, bare and empty of all encouragement to softness. But the room held a woman who was anything but hard—and there was a small piano and a little boy with a violin.

The attorney went on with his yammering accusations. He was building up bit by bit an imposing structure of magnificent crime.

But the prisoner heeded not. He was seeing a young man, scarcely more than a boy, hiding away for months to overcome the effect of those early years, stumbling on and on trying to find himself, striving to develop the music in him which was the only part of himself that he knew and understood, and which his mother had always known to be his best side.

A little later the attorney was drawing out of a craven-souled witness a miserable little mess of faltering testimony. To wit: the prisoner was a ssupicious character when he appeared in Docktown, yessir. No one trusted him, nossir. He drove a truck nighttimes after dark; witness had seen him do it, yessir. Witness had helped move stolen goods out of the prisoner's rooms, yessir.

The crowded courtroom fastened its eyes on the prisoner, and stirred restlessly.

It was when one Sinwitz was called that some vague thing of association drew the spirit of the prisoner back to his surroundings. Sinwitz was saying: "I knew him, yes; knew him for years."

"Tell the court what you knew of the prisoner prior to his arriving in Docktown over a year ago."

The beady little ratlike eyes of Sinwitz rested a moment in the almost wondering stare of the prisoner. Then he was off—vividly, colorfully:

"Him? He was one of the slickest crooks in the West. He was known as 'The Mole,' because he worked underground most of the time, where the law had hard work to reach him." Followed a vigorous retailing of crime, ending with: "And in St. Louis he was suspected of stealin' the gold altar vessels out of one of the churches."

The packed courtroom sat still as death—the thick, awed stillness of suppressed horror.

The prisoner was lost again. When a man lied so horribly as this witness is only deepened the hopelessness that threatened to engulf him. The panel in the judge's bench came to hold him anew.

And now behind that panel he was seeing a young girl of unusual sureness and restraint yet lying limp and unre-

sisting in his arms for the one great moment of all his life; and even in the dark as it had been, he could feel the thrall of wonderful gray-green eyes on his own. And then the gray-green eyes that held his own as with actual bonds, began passing off into the distance, began fading steadily, vanishing surely, and taking something of body and soul with them——

A recess was announced until afternoon.

Iris St. Clair left the courtroom. A feeling of outrage was well-nigh choking her. She found Nick Potosky.

"There's no place for decency in this mix-up, big boy. Our testifying plans would never get over here. Now, listen. Let's take a long chance—hit the really spectacular. You go get that receiving clerk! Get him now before he gets wise; maim him if necessary! Then you make for Hungarian Max's place. I'm going to tackle that little point myself. I'll probably be glad to see you arrive, and you want to come prepared to cut loose. When you do, get it all out of your system, don't spare the rough stuff—go the limit! I'll go now and"—she made a fateful little gesture—"God be with all mariners at sea this day!" She watched the big chap move off eagerly, like a bear licking his chops.

The girl was recalling Max the Hungarian. It was in Max's theater that she had first adapted her musical ability to motion pictures. Max had loved her, or tried to. Max loved all women.

It was the noon hour. She telephoned Max. She was coming to see him. Max was glad. The girl could almost sense his interest flooding toward her over the wire. She had been to his place more than once, always with others. In picturing the interior of Max's apartment, a fairly plausible reason for her call occurred to her.

Once inside the great, cavernous place, Iris was frightened, and frightened badly—the place was so hidden away. And already the man was emanating dangerous things, vague, unplaceable, but powerful.

She snatched at a pretext swiftly, assuming an air briskly businesslike:

"I think I've got a chance to go back on the regular time again, Max. I'm thinking of getting up a musical turn, in costume. I've come to see if I can't make some sort of deal with you for the harpsichord. For what I have in mind it would make the act a knockout."

She had passed over to the ancient instrument and was removing the litter from its top. The Hungarian was at her shoulder, big, vital, pantherlike, dangerous. She forced all the sickening apprehension out from her heart and shut a door upon it.

He opened the case of the harpsichord. "Play!" he commanded, with a gesture. He passed across the room to the closet by the mantel and took out the flagons of wine.

The girl flashed a searching look about the apartment. The ancient safe was open. There was an old secretary with Max's books and papers on it. If only she could get a chance to go through them, could locate that little brown book——

She sat down and passed her hands over the odd keyboard, testing the instrument's tune in rapid chromatic chords.

The man behind her straightened up in swift interest, listening intently. Then he came to her with a glass of the strange wine. She sipped it tentatively and an inspiration seized her. "Got any biscuits, Max, or the makin's of a sandwich? This stuff makes me realize I'm famished."

He turned and caught up his cap. "I will get some. You will wait?"

"Sure will," she responded lightly, and turned back to her keyboard with

a wonderful flurry of the sugary, twanging music.

She heard the outer door close and darted to his desk. There was a long-untidy accumulation. The litter of papers and figures confused her. She had struck a strata of shipping papers. She snatched them out to the light. On top was an old bill of lading for twenty-five bales of wool shipped to some individual in New York. Underneath was another for ten cases of silk to the same name, both dated some weeks ago. They seemed valuable. She thrust them into her bosom. She heard the outer door open and darted back to the harpsichord.

The Hungarian entered with some paper parcels, and in a moment brought her refreshments on a plate.

Her hands were trembling so she did not dare lift them from the keys, but managed to nod smilingly to her host to set the plate down. Playing to him with every art she could summon, she felt that the man's arm was creeping slowly toward her from its place on her chair back.

Max's eyes lit upon the tumbled confusion of the secretary, glanced sharply at the papers which had fallen to the floor. And his ever-wary brain clicked, his eyes narrowed, his crawling arm halted.

He rose. He sauntered across the room and quietly turned the key in the lock. Then he faced the girl. "Why have you come here?" he asked. There was no levity in the directness of his stare.

The girl tried to smile, but her face seemed frozen. "Why—what—I don't know what you mean, Max."

He passed to the desk and touched its tumbled contents. He stooped and picked up the papers lying on the floor. "What were you doing with these? Do not lie!"

She tried to brave it out. "Why, I don't know what you're driving at." She rose and picked up her little bag. "If you're going to stage any melodrama, Max, I'm on my way." She moved toward the door.

The man simply reached for her, gripping her arm savagely. Some equally hot blood in her own body rose fiercely in resentment. She shook him off, and stood flaming before him. "Keep your paws off me!" she cried. "And open that door, or I'll turn Docktown loose and have you plucked apart!"

She struggled furiously to hold him off. Some one was trying the door, and she called out: "Nick! Smash it in! It's locked!"

The door splintered open. Big Nick stood one moment like a great bear reared upward for trouble. The girl tore herself free, staggered over by the mantel and gripped her hands over her face. Behind her, the two big bodies were thrashing and pounding about the apartment in a combat of deadly intensity, sawed into sharply by furious, gasping intakes of breath. Iris was trembling so that she could scarce stand, but she tore herself away from the mantel and made for that open safe. There came the crashing of furniture behind her, and the shrill jingling tinkle of glass. A swift silence.

The courtroom was sweating in its suffocation. To the prisoner the minutes might have marked a death watch, with himself a prisoner waiting execution. With hope at its last ebb he had waited for something to happen, he knew not what. He was numb from holding on, but now a man's voice in testimony made him forget all else.

He was listening to John Huntley, a man vindictive under many wrongs. John Huntley was telling of the debt he owed to one Fitz Farolt who, according to Huntley, had been the only man of decency and honesty in a whole bad situation. And under Huntley's blunt but

honest testimony the man who had been shot became rehabilitated, came to glow with a halo of uprightness and loyalty. And, listening, the mind of the Mole became blank to all but the one thing: his own father had betrayed him. Even from beyond death was Fitz Farolt helping to condemn him. Hope died within the prisoner. There were no longer human little pictures before the eyes of his mind.

And it was then it happened, the great commotion at the entrance to the courtroom. Big Nick Potosky and a strange officer, the nucleus of a crowd of jostling followers, trampled in from what had been a loaded truck out in the street.

The officer was escorting the big, glittering-eyed Hungarian; Nick Potosky was hustling along the receiving clerk—a very frightened man with dead-looking lips and a face like chalk; behind were jammed Lacrosse the stevedore, and a composed, set-faced girl with strangely blazing eyes, who was hugging an armful of papers. And last of all, fighting his way in around the door jamb, was old Bart Cobbett, the junkman.

And, stunned by his great relief, the prisoner was trying to recover himself, trying to choke down the things threatening in his throat like a man suddenly rescued from being drowned.

CHAPTER XXV.

HARBOR LIGHTS.

A CURIOUS atmosphere prevailed in the Huntley living room, an atmosphere of tenseness, of veiled questioning. Lorne Huntley, wearing a white, sleepless-looking face, was regarding her caller, Iris St. Clair, with grave courtesy, at the same time noting curiously the costume a bit garish, the sketchy, hurried make-up, marking the somewhat dreary casualness in the fine, dark eyes.

The caller's regard, on the other hand, was openly direct, appraising.

"Are you Lorne Huntley?" she asked, the frank honesty of it covering its apparent abruptness.

"Yes."

"I am glad. Looking you over I can see that at least you *are* some one. You've got sense and courage. I was afraid if you turned out to be the kid-sweetie type my job was going to be a hard one."

Lorne Huntley's eyes this morning were holding a burden in their depths that seemed to shut out all the world, and even her caller's strange remark did not serve to dispell it.

"In return may I ask who you are?" she returned quietly.

"My name is Iris St. Clair, and I am a friend of young Lawrence."

Then only did something shoot in among the weariness in the other's eyes to lighten it with a flash of interest. Iris noted the sudden look and hastened to qualify:

"Please get this at the start. I'm only a friend. Nothing more than that. But I'd like to say that sometimes the liking of a friend will go further, will stand more, trust more, fight more and die more, than the liking that may be all gummed up with love." And then in the dead silence: "That's why I'm here."

Lorne Huntley had averted her face a trifle. Now she moved toward a chair. "Will you sit down?"

"Thanks." Iris seated herself and produced a cigarette case from her bag. "Do you mind if I take a little drag? It's been a hard night, and I feel I'm going to need it."

She produced a lighter and lighted her cigarette deftly. Settling back, she asked: "First, do you think you could loosen up enough to tell me how you feel just now about this young man? "Don't be afraid; I'm wiser than I hope you'll ever be in a million years, and,

in passing, I'm honest. I'm letting that statement stand for what it's worth, but inside I feel you believe it. If your belief that I'm honest happens to be strong enough for you to trust me, it will help a great deal all round."

The other was staring at her oddly. Lorne Huntley was still locked tight to all approach, but tremendous things were stirring in her, seeking for expression.

"I do believe you," she managed at length. "But, in any case, you must see why I cannot discuss this young man with you."

"No, I don't," came back at her carelessly. "Because of my little friendship for the kid I am here on an errand that really has a lot of nice little honest-to-goodness ethics in it—all for you and him—with me, Iris St. Clair, left out. I must have your help. And then I, myself, simply pass out of the picture." She turned away to flick the ash from her cigarette into a tray.

No remark came from the other. Iris St. Clair broke the silence: "All right. Then I'll begin. First, how do you place his having been here in your house the other night?"

"He came to rob it. Didn't you know that?"

"No," carelessly, "I did not."

"But he did. His accomplice went to my father and opened up the whole thing before it happened."

Here, Iris St. Clair's face was showing a depth of feeling almost sinister. "Yes, that came out at the trial. But let me begin at the beginning, and please try and get it straight." She began speaking in startling clearness, every sentence illuminating things like flashes of lightning: "In the first place, the kid has had to be dumb about that break out here for the reason that Fitz Farolt, the accomplice as you put it, was the boy's own father, and the kid was forced to come here with him to try and prevent the break. He came to protect you, if possible. He came to protect John Huntley, your father, if possible. At the same time he came trying to protect his father, and he got his father away to his own quarters simply because he *was* his father and it had been a lifetime horror of Farolt's, the prospect of dying in jail."

She paused a moment and went on:

"As for the rest, he never told his father who he was. It was his father that started him crooked in the first place and he had got away from all that. Also, because of the kid's connection with you and your father and the thievery mess, if the relation to Fitz Farolt were known Lawrence would be condemned on sight. I'm beginning to believe that Gorya's gang probably used Farolt to help trap the kid—with no one, of course, knowing of the relationship."

Lorne Huntley had risen. She was walking away to the far end of the room, but her hands were up to her mouth as if to hold down all the things within her surging for release. From her seat the other followed her with earnest eyes.

"You see, here's the real works: For the last three years this boy has been absolutely on the level. Since he has known you nothing in the world could make him anything different. That holds, even now. I have just left him this morning. He's going on the best he can. He's packing up to start in all over again somewhere else in the world. But to him this morning, life is wearing a broken back, and he is the kind—the strange mixture of hardness and temperament—that receive hurts into their life deeply and don't let them out easily."

She watched the girl still moving uncertainly about the room and went on.

"His stunt in trying to protect his father makes of him the biggest kid I have ever known. He has got the makings of a big man in him. I'm not tell-

ing you news in telling you that. If you let him go without making some effort to help patch him up, you will be committing an actual crime." Here Iris St. Clair's voice fell to a softness, a tenseness, terribly moving: "I know what I'm talking about. And there's so much of the other thing in the world it's a shame to pass the fine things up."

She was quite unprepared for the Lorne Huntley that wheeled from the other end of the room and came toward her with eyes unlocked to their depths. "I do know now that you are right. I can't tell you how wonderful it has been, your coming here. I do trust you and I know you will help me. First, there is my father——"

"Tell him the whole truth; spare nothing. If you want me to talk to him, I'll do it. Beyond that, any further progress is up to us alone. This kid himself has been badly hurt in his soul, as the sob artists would call it. More than that, he wants time to get his feet under him. Even now, he'll never come whining round either you or your father until he feels he's justified. I know him well enough for that."

She stood staring into the other's face with its frankly revealed turmoil of every emotion, its youth, its beauty, its flaming hopefulness. Then slowly, she took Lorne Huntley's face in her hands and kissed it. "Good-by, kid," she said. "I guess I was right in coming. And now I'm on my way."

At dusk a limousine rolled through Docktown and deposited John Huntley and his daughter at Lawrence Farolt's door, the door of his old lodgings in Atlantic Court. Up in his apartment, a couple of moments later, they stood facing him in an awkward silence that seemed to bind all three.

John Huntley broke it. "First, young man," he began, "let me say I'm sorry—and I'm glad. I'm sorry that I have added so much to all your troubles, and I'm glad, damned glad, that you've won out." He held out a frankly honest hand, and added with almost touching simplicity. "I respect you a lot, sir."

Farolt's face met his, inexpressibly lit.

"And now," Huntley went on, "I'm not going to offer help that may not be welcome, but I *would* like to know something of your plans. First"—pausing to take from his pocket a folded slip—"first, here's a check for a thousand dollars' reward—you've eared it."

Farolt was smiling dazedly with suddenly restored interest in things.

"I've been—been working it all out," he said, "although now everything is different. I planned to make South America for a while as soon as I could. I wanted to get sort of readjusted in a new country. With this"—indicating the check—"I can start right away."

"What are you planning to do?"

"I have learned to like the shipping business, somehow. Its bigness and variety and its place in things sort of get me."

"All right. It's a hard game, and it takes *men,* but you'll make it. In Rio I know people who are looking for young U. S.-ers like you. Why not go there? I'll write them, but not unless you say so."

Farolt's face showed his appreciation. "Thanks, for your understanding. I'd be glad."

John Huntley put out his hand again. "I recall that first time you called on me I told you if you won out I'd see you got your own idea of a reward, and you came back and clinched it. I suppose I can guess what you had in mind even then. I'm going down to wait in the car. Whatever you two plan I'll agree to. Good luck, sir."

The door closed behind him. Lawrence Farolt and Lorne Huntley stood gazing at each other in a moment's uncertain silence. Then, from the girl:

"You are coming back?"

"Yes. I'm coming back," he returned simply.

Staring hesitatingly into each other's eyes, something swept them suddenly together into an embrace, fervent, revealing, as though they never would let go. There was a long, silent moment.

Then, slowly, the girl detached herself.

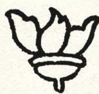
"It—it is going to be terribly hard, but I am letting you go with every confidence." She was trying to smile. "But you will see me before you go? I'll—I'll take you—take you aboard and ride you on the trail of our future in the car." A moment later at the door she turned her face. Her eyes were wet.

Alone, Lawrence Farolt stood gazing far out across the dusky, broken roof-tops to the harbor. The harbor was tranquil, serene, and, even as he gazed, lights came forth to mark things encouragingly here and there.

Watching, he smiled peacefully in the dusk. Sinwitz may have been right. Going straight might put a man through hell, all right, but it was putting him through *on the way back* to decency, simply driving him back over the same route he had traveled. And to get back—ah, it squared everything! It had all been worth while.

The lights in the harbor were numberless now—guiding lights, gleaming steadfastly.

The dusk closed down about the man—and his smile.



"DINGER" DAUGHERTY

NOT long ago it was reported that R. M. ("Dinger") Daugherty, legless and one-armed aviator of Martinsville, West Virginia, was planning a solo flight from New York to Rome. To date, there has been no report of his taking off for the long trip, but it matters little whether he ever does or not. The big thing in this story is the way Dinger Daugherty inspires every man who has to put up a hard fight against heavy odds. His resoluteness is such that, though pitifully handicapped, he achieves what tens of thousands, whole and strong, fear to attempt.

Splendid Dinger Daugherty! And wise! Maimed as he is, he leaves the earth and travels on the heights and has traffic with the stars. Wounds forgot, he soars triumphantly to the company of heroes. With the winds of danger in his hair, he spurns the threat of death and knows the thrill that comes only to those sons of men who make themselves brothers to the gods.

To fly from New York to Rome; single-handed and alone, to annihilate distance; to do what mortal man has never done; to shatter precedent and so compel the adulation of the crowd—that is nobler stuff than to surrender to the lacerating blows of accident and sit supine upon the ground, allowing ancient hurts to fetter him to slow and grinding years of mediocrity.

Dinger Daugherty, cruelly stricken and all but broken by Dame Fortune, has turned upon her and, by the majesty of his incomparable valor, made her his willing and worshiping servant. Fame is already his because of his so triumphantly reminding the race that an unconquerable spirit can burst asunder the bonds of physical weakness.

Oh, What a Dawg Was Sallie!

By Raymond Leslie Goldman

The Lowensteins Got a Watchdog and Then Proceeded To Be Robbed Four Times Within Two Weeks. *Ai! Ai!*

"LISTEN, Max," said Ben Lowenstein to his star salesman, "how is it you never call at the Bon Ton Store on Fourteenth Street? There's a store which I don't need to told you it is absolutely A No. 1, and I understand how they are doing a grand retail business in skirts and blouses—in especially, blouses. One order from a store like that, Max, would be better than ten such orders like you bring in from little stores which they are lucky if they could turn over ten dozen blouses a season."

Max Feinberg removed the point of a quill toothpick from between two rear molars, and after giving several loud sucks with contorted lips he succeeded in removing the annoying bit of liverwurst skin which he puffed toward the wastebasket. Then he gave his full attention to his employer.

"Such a question!" he replied with a shrug. "Why don't you ask me why I don't get orders from Marshal Fields or Montgomery-Wards or Sears-Roebucks? They are bigger even than the Bon Ton Store, I assure you, and so is their turnover in skirts and blouses."

"Is that so? I am glad you told me how big they are," Ben said sarcastically, "because otherwise I would maybe think they was N. G. and turn them down might they give me their business. No, Max, what I am asking you is about the Bon Ton Store. Instead

of sending you on the road I give you the metripolitan area, ain't it? And the Bon Ton is in your area!"

For a moment Max Feinberg was silent as he contorted his lips again and his probing tongue found another morsel between his teeth. He reached into his vest pocket for the quill.

"Max!" Ben shouted. "What is it here, anyhoe? Are you here to talk business or not? When you eat your lunch why don't you eat it and get done with it? Such picking and sucking I couldn't stand at all!"

Max put his toothpick away.

"All right, Mr. Lowenstein. Don't get so excited. Why are you bringing up this talk about the Bon Ton? You know very well that I tried to land them last year. I hung around that store so much that the salesgirls thought I was a floorwalker. But what good did it do? I couldn't get into Aaron Rebman's office; and all the buyers would say is, 'Nothing to-day.' And that's how it went."

"But that was *last* year," said Ben, "and this is *this* year. I see by your reports how you never even once called there this year."

"It's because it would only be wasting time," Max persisted. "The Eagle Company has got that there account and you couldn't take it away from them. Harry Grabiner, the president of the Eagle Company, is a personal friend of Aaron Rebman, ain't he? So what could you expect?"

"I tell you what I could expect," Ben replied. "I could expect a salesman which he claims he is a crackajack, y'understand, he could at least get to show his line to somebody, even if he couldn't land a order. Believe me, Max, when I was working as a salesman, I wouldn't take 'No' for a answer. And I didn't get paid what you are getting paid, neither."

The barb of this remark found a tender spot, and Feinberg winced.

"Well, Mr. Lowenstein," he said, "I am sorry I am all of a sudden such a bum salesman. Still, if you would look over the orders I turned in the past month——"

"Shush!" interrupted Ben. "I didn't said you was a bum salesman, Max. Right away you don't got to fly off the handle. All I said was——"

"Sure," Max cut in. "But if you think Aaron Rebman is so easy to land, why don't you maybe land him yourself? He lives in the De Luxe apartments, and you live in the De Luxe; so at least you could get friendly with him, couldn't you? As for me, I couldn't get near him, much less show him the line."

This was a direct challenge, and Ben was forced to accept it.

"All right, Max," he declared. "If you want I should show you how to land hard customers, I would show you. I don't ask my salesmen to do nothing which I couldn't do myself. Now, listen, Max. What I really called you in here for was something else again. You know how I hired up that feller, Jacoby, and I give him Illinois, Missouri and Kansas to work in. Well, Max, I think he is a good man, but he's a little green yet. So I want you should meet up with him in St. Louis right away and work with him until you show him the ropes. You got your own territory cleaned up pretty good—with the exception of the Bon Ton and a few places—so for the next month you would be more valu'ble getting Jacoby started. I want you should leave day after to-morrow at the latest."

Max sighed. "The Middle West in June!" he remarked distastefully. But the implied compliment was obvious, and he added: "All right, Mr. Lowenstein. I'll go there and show that feller how a real salesman works a territory. I could leave to-morrow night."

Ben nodded. "That's fine, Max. And please for a favor don't make your

expense account more as twicet as big as the orders you get!"

"Don't worry about that, Mr. Lowenstein," said Max, preparing to leave the office. "And don't forget, you are going to show me how a *good* salesman lands a hard customer. When I come back next month, I'll want to see the grand order you got from Aaron Rebman for the Bon Ton Store!"

Max took his leave, and Ben said to himself:

"By golly, I got to get a good order from Rebman, or I couldn't never take the swell head off of that feller, Feinberg! And first thing you know he would stick me for a bigger drawing account!"

He found that the problem was more perplexing when it involved himself than when it confronted his salesman. He must first gain the good will and friendliness, if not friendship, of Aaron Rebman; and although he resided in the same apartment building as the owner of the Bon Ton Store, Ben was not even on bowing terms with him. Rebman was not a member of the United Kishnev Brotherhood, of which Ben was president; indeed, Rebman was Exalted Grand Mogul of what might be called a rival lodge, the Order of Sholom Malechim. And Harry Grabiner, of the Eagle Skirt and Blouse Company, was a member of Rebman's lodge.

"I couldn't expect to beat out Grabiner entirely," he mused, that evening as he went into his living room after dinner. "But if I could meet up with Rebman and use a little salesmanship on him, then maybe I could get a *part* of his business. My line is positively better as Grabiner's; my prices are just as low and I got much better sellers. Rebman is a business man and he would see it for hisself. But I got to get him to look at my line first."

He was mentally seeking means to accomplish this end when his wife entered the room and seated herself in the chair on the other side of the floor lamp.

"To-day, Ben," she declared, "I spent the afternoon by Ida Klein's house."

Ben was not greatly interested. "Yes?"

She nodded. "She has got positively the smartest dawg I ever seen in my life."

"I bet you," Ben replied absently. "But then again, everybody thinks their children is smart."

"Ben!" she cried impatiently. "Why don't you listen when I talk? I could see by your face you wasn't listening at all. Did I said anything about children? What I said was how she got such a wonderful smart dawg! A dawg, Ben, not children!"

"Oh," he returned. "A dawg! What does she do with a dawg, Clara?"

"What does she do with him? What does anybody do with a dawg, Ben? She just has *got* it, that's all. And she was telling me what grand comp'ny that there dawg is for her."

Ben shrugged. "Then some people ain't hard to satisfy, Clara."

She ignored this. "Ida was telling me how, now both her children is married, and her husband is downtown all day, she used to get terrible lonely in her apartment all by herself. So her husband bought for her this here dawg, y'understand, and right away she feels better. Her husband is always looking out for his wife's pleasure. He's what they call a Pickinese."

"Who is?" Ben asked. "Her husband?"

"The dawg!" she cried. "Are you trying to act funny, Ben, when I am talking serious to you? I'm trying to tell you how her dawg is a Pickinese dawg; and the way he understand everything she says to him, it's wonderful! If she says lay down, it lays down; if she says get up, it gets up. And tricks! You should see her, Ben!

On the back legs it stands up and barks."

Again Ben shrugged. "Why don't she stick it in a circus, Clara? A circus is the place for such dawgs."

"Is that so?" Clara retorted warmly. "If dawgs is only in circuses, why has not only Ida Klein got a dawg, but also Gussie Sklower and Jennie Wahl and two other ladies from my sewing circle? It's because dawgs is grand comp'ny; that's why! And how do you know how lonesome I get here sometimes, all by myself, with you downtown all day and not a soul to talk to?"

"Ha!" Ben exclaimed. "What are you driving at, Clara? Are you asking me to buy for you a dawg? Is a dawg a soul which you could talk to?"

"Maybe it ain't a soul," she replied, "but you could at least talk to it."

"You could talk to a chair also," he declared. "And so far as getting a dawg around here, Clara, talking to a chair would do as much good as talking to me. Because you could talk my ear off, y'understand, and still I would say I wouldn't got a dawg around this house. And that's the end!"

"But just the same——" Clara began; and Ben silenced her by rising angrily to his feet.

"Stop!" he shouted. "What I said I mean it! Whatever you want, I always give it to you. If it's rugs or dishes or furniture even, you get it. But dawgs is something else again. All my life I got along without dawgs and I could get along a little longer also! And that's all I got to say!"

Alarmed by her husband's empurpled condition, Clara said soothingly:

"All right, Ben. You don't got to bust a blood vessel on account from it. If that's how you feel about a harmless little Pickinese dawg, we could better forget about it."

Ben followed this advice and returned promptly to a contemplation of Aaron Rebman. He decided to try the easiest and most obvious method first; and the next day he journeyed to Fourteenth Street and entered that busy emporium, the Bon Ton Store. And when, an hour and a half later, he returned to his own office, he realized more fully just what Max Feinberg had been up against.

"It would be easier to see the President of the United States," Ben muttered. "Everybody you ask tells you to ask somebody else! And then they say Mr. Rebman is terrible busy to-day; come back again next week." Owing to the obese condition of Ben's jowls, he had no jaw to thrust forward; but a glint of determination came into his blue eyes. "But just the same," he added firmly, "I am going to meet up with him anyhoe!"

That evening he left the office early and returned to the De Luxe; but instead of going up to his fourth-floor apartment at once, he waited downstairs in the gilt-and-marble foyer. Forty minutes later Aaron Rebman pompously entered and walked to the elevator; and Ben, with disarming casualness, stood beside him at the cage, waiting for the car to descend. Rebman pressed the bell button and the arrow-indicator above the cage showed that the car was hovering at the ninth floor. Ben thought that he saw his opportunity.

"By golly," he declared, "the elywator service here is terrible, ain't it?"

At just that moment, the car shot down with unusual speed, and the operator opened the gate for them to enter. It was undoubtedly the quickest service ever rendered by any elevator.

The two men rode upward together, but Ben maintained an embarrassed silence until he got out at the fourth floor.

"Phooee!" he said to himself as he reached for his latchkey. "Sometimes that there elywator sticks up there till you nilly drop over waiting for it! But for once it has got to come down like

a bullet! Rebman didn't got time to answer me even. And such a look he gives me! I wisht I said something about the weather."

If Clara Lowenstein entertained any idea of broaching again the subject of dogs, one look at her spouse's dark countenance immediately dissuaded her. With the experience of some twenty connubial years, she diagnosed Ben's disturbance as commercial rather than digestive. She left him to his thoughts, therefore; and the evening was one of domestic peace.

Despite the most intense cogitation, Ben made no progress with his plans; and he was sadly discouraged when, the following morning, he left his apartment. But his hopes revived when he entered the elevator. The colored operator said excitedly:

"Do you-all know what happen' las' night, Mistah Lowenstein? They was a big robb'ry in the apahtment above yours on the fif' floor!"

"A robb'ry!" Ben exclaimed. "Who got robbed?"

"Rebman's apahtment," said the operator. "Robbahs come in durin' the night an' lak to clean 'em out up theah! Woke up this mawnin' an' foun' everythin' inside out! P'leece a-comin' now! Oh, boy!"

Ben made an instant and very shrewd decision.

"Take me up to the fift'," he ordered.

When he got out at the fifth floor he stepped into the heart of great excitement. The door to the Rebman apartment stood open; and in the corridor stood Aaron Rebman, Mrs. Rebman and as many of the De Luxe residents as had already heard the news. Mrs. Rebman was wringing her hands hysterically, and Aaron was relating to any one who would listen just what had occurred.

Ben had more than curiosity to make him a willing hearer. He took his place at Rebman's side and assumed a look of sympathetic interest which Rebman could not fail to notice.

"It's terrible!" said Ben, shaking his head from side to side. "How did them thiefs get in, Mr. Rebman?"

"Through the deliveries entrance," Rebman replied. "That fool servant girl we got comes home after we was in bed, y'understand, and she goes to work and leaves the door unlocked!"

"Tch! Tch! Tch!" condoled Ben's tongue. "That's the way it goes with them servants."

"Ain't it?" Rebman agreed. "And so them thiefs comes in during the night, and what they didn't take, it was only because they couldn't lift it up!"

"It's terrible!"

"You bet it's terrible!" Rebman fairly groaned. "My wife's joolry! The silver! The di'mond ring I got from the lodge! I tell you, I am out anyhoe I don't know how many thousands!"

"Ai!" said Ben as miserably as if himself were the loser. "And ain't you got insurance even?"

"Life insurance, yes," Rebman replied with another groan. "Fire insurance also. But burglars insurance—no! How could I expect burglars in a fine apartment like this? My wife she blames me for it! She says I should have took out insurance a long time ago! She says everybody takes out burglars insurance! Ain't I lost enough without I should get blamed for it in the bargain also?"

Ben was still shaking his head. "How does she know everybody is got burglars insurance? I——"

"That's what I told her. But when she asks all these fools around here, they all say, yes, they got it!"

"Well, I ain't got it!" cried Ben. "I'm a man which he believes in insurance, y'understand, and you could ask Moe Grabiner who writes me up my insurance, how much life, fire, and so forth which I carry! But I ain't got a cent of burglars insurance!"

"Ha!" shouted Rebman. "I just wish you would told my wife that! The way she talks you would think I was the only man in the world which he don't carry it! Do you live by this here building? Your face is familiar, Mr.—Mr.——"

"Lowenstein," said Ben, holding out his hand. "Ben Lowenstein is my name, Mr. Rebman. I live on the fourth floor right under you here. I'm in skirts and blouses on Thirty-eight Street."

Rebman grasped Ben's hand. "I'm glad to meet up with you, Mr. Lowenstein. I want you should meet my wife."

He took Ben's arm and led him across the corridor to where Mrs. Rebman stood.

"My own husband is a fool!" she was announcing to the world in general. "Everything cleaned out and not a nickel insurance! All my expensive jools! My grand necklace which it is a hairloom from my grandmamma, *selig! Ach, Gott!* And not a nickel insurance does that man carry even!"

"Milly!" cried Aaron Rebman. "Ain't you ashamed you should work yourself up this way in the hall? Why don't you stop it a minute and meet Mr. Lowenstein which he lives downstairs under us? He is a big business man, Milly, which he has got one of the biggest skirt-and-blouse companies in the United States. He is a big executive, Milly. He believes in insurance; and Moe Grabiner hisself writes him up such life and fire insurance and so forth which very few men in this country could afford to carry it even! He has got liability insurance and employees' protective. He has even got tornado insurance! Ain't it, Mr. Lowenstein?"

Ben did not have tornado insurance, but he nodded anyway. He felt like the speaker of the evening being introduced by an exuberant toastmaster. His heart beat high with hope.

"You see?" Rebman went on exultingly. "Such a big man he is, Milly! But just the same, Milly, *he ain't got even a nickel's worth of burglars insurance"*

The effect of his harangue was to chasten Mrs. Rebman considerably. Rebman, thus vindicated, led her gently back into her apartment; and a few minutes later he returned to the corridor.

"The worst part of trouble," he told Ben, "is getting blamed for it by your wife. I was lucky you showed up here when you did."

"I come up," Ben replied, "to see if there was something I could do. A neighbor is a neighbor, ain't it, Mr. Rebman. I'm terrible sorry how this has happened to you. But maybe the police would ketch them crooks and get your stuff back for you."

"Yo!" Rebman answered. "If you would wait for the police you would got whiskers down to the floor already! Over a hour ago I called up the police station and I holler out how they should rush here like anything because my house is been robbed. And that feller at the station he says, 'Is the robber still there, or is he gone away?' And that was over a hour ago!"

Ben did not leave his new-found friend until nearly eleven o'clock; and when he did, it was with a light-heartedness which endured through the day. He and Rebman had found plenty of time for conversation, both before the arrival and after the departure of the policeman; and although Ben was too wise to talk business at such a time, he knew that the morning was not a wasted one. He and Clara had been invited to visit the Rebmans some evening.

Ben was not the only one to take advantage of the robbery. At the dinner table, Mrs. Lowenstein noted her husband's excellent mood and decided that the time was propitious for a revival of the shelved subject of dogs.

"The way people's apartments is

robbed these days," she declared nervously, "you couldn't go to bed at night and feel safe even. I understand how the Rebmans didn't even carry burglars insurance."

"And for me it was lucky they didn't," Ben grinned.

"What do you mean by that?" she inquired.

"Never mind what I mean," he returned. "But believe me, Clara, they learned me a good lesson. To-day I called up Moe Grabiner and I took out a thousand dollars burglars insurance."

She nodded approval of this act.

"But insurance ain't enough, Ben. Insurance don't keep you from getting killed in your sleep, does it? Them robbers could come in and stick a knife in you while you sleep, even if you have got insurance!"

Ben waved his hand lightly. "Yo! Right away them thiefs don't stick a knife in you, Clara. What they want is jools and money and so forth. And anyhoe, from now on it wouldn't be so easy for a robber like that to rob any apartments here. I understand how the management would keep a man downstairs in the lobby all night to watch so nobody could get in without he didn't belong here. But I took out the insurance anyways to be on the safe side."

"Just the same," she declared, "it would be a good thing to get a dawg here, Ben. Ida Klein was telling me how her Pickinese barks like anything just as soon as any stranger comes near her apartment. And believe me, Ben, she feels a lot safer alone in that apartment all day with her dawg to guard her!"

Ben shrugged. "Have you still got dawgs on the brain, Clara?" he asked without anger. "What good is a dawg if you get burglars? They bark and wake you up! I tell you, Clara, God forbid we should ever get burglars, I would rather keep on sleeping until after they got out!"

Clara knew that it was now or never. She allowed tears to come into her eyes and made no attempt to conceal them from Ben.

"All right, Ben," she said sadly. "If that's the way you feel about it, I would shut up and that's the end. If I got my heart set on such a little thing like a dawg and you wouldn't let me get it even, then what could I do? You should worry if your own wife would feel safer might she had a nice dawg here!"

"Shush!" said Ben. "Are you crying about a dawg, Clara? Do you want one so bad you cry about it? Why didn't you told me how bad you wanted it? Could I make guesses at it, Clara?"

She sighed and wiped her eyes.

"I thought I'd just keep it in, Ben," she replied in the tone of a martyr. "I thought I wouldn't even mention it at all!"

"Well, you was very foolish," he declared. "If my wife wants a dawg because she is lonesome without one and feels safer, then I would get you a dawg, dolling! To-morrow positively I would see what I could do."

He remembered his promise the next day as he and his friend, Sidney Soloman, were leaving the L. & K. Restaurant after luncheon.

"Well, Sidney," said Ben, "I got some shopping to do yet before I go back to my office. So if you ain't too busy, you could come along and help me buy it."

"What is it?" Sidney inquired.

"A dawg," Ben replied. "My wife is got her heart set on a dawg, Sidney, and she even cries about it, so what could I do? I got to buy for her a dawg, Sidney, and that's all there is to it."

"A dawg!" cried Sidney. "For why does she want a dawg?"

Ben shrugged. "It's because some of the ladies in her sewing circle has got dawgs, Sidney, and whatever they

got, she wants, even if it's measles! It's comp'ny for her, she says. It watches the house so if maybe a robber comes in, y'understand, the dawg could woke me up in time to get shot. It's somebody to talk to all day! Could you imagine, Sidney, talking all day to a dawg?"

"If you was a woman," Sidney declared philosophically, "you would be glad to talk to even a dawg, Ben, instead of keeping your mouth shut."

"Ain't it?" Ben agreed.

"Just the same, Ben," Sidney went on, "I wouldn't got a dawg in my house, not even if my wife couldn't stop crying from it. I got my experience with them, lemme tell you. Three years ago we got us a dawg which it was a peddlegreed Pommeranium."

"My wife wants a Pickinese," put in Ben.

"It don't make no diff'rence what they are, they're all terrible, Ben. So we got this here Pommeranium which a customer give him to me free for nothing for a present. So we named him Toscha after my wife's brother. Anyhoe, the first thing we got to do with this here dawg is house-bust him."

"House-bust him!"

"Sure!" Sidney leaned down from his altitude of six feet and whispered into Ben's ear. Ben nodded; and Sidney continued: "So finally we got him house-busted, y'understand, but not until all the rugs was practic'ly rooned, Ben. The cleaning bill for rugs alone was nilly thirty dollars!"

"Ai!" Ben groaned. "And my wife wants one yet!"

"Wait till I finish," said Sidney. "So then that dawg gets like crazy and we got to watch him like a hawk because everything he sees he wants to chew up. Slippers, shoes, dresses—everything he chews up!"

"Ai!" moaned Ben. "And I promised!"

"So one day, Ben, I was taking the dawg out for a walk; because after a dawg is house-busted, y'understand, you got to keep on taking them for a walk. And that time I didn't got him on a leash, and he run away!"

"You was lucky," opined Ben.

"Don't you believe it! Because my wife had went crazy over that dawg and she makes advertising in the papers might somebody found him and would bring him back. Over six dollars went for such advertising! But in a few weeks that dawg comes back hisself. And from head to foot, Ben, it was full of fleas!"

Ben shuddered. "Fleas! It's terrible!"

"Was it terrible! And fleas wasn't all, neither."

"What do you mean—fleas wasn't all?"

"Well," Sidney explained, "it gets also six or seven puppies, Ben, which because they wasn't not only Pommeranium but also fox terrors and bull dawgs and so forth, I couldn't sell them for even a dollar apiece."

"But I thought that dawg was named Toscha after your wife's brother!" Ben exclaimed.

Sidney nodded. "We made a mistake, Ben. So we changed her name to Minnie, after my wife's brother's wife, and sent the whole kaboodle down to the board of health. And that's what happened."

During this recital they had been walking westward; and now they stopped in front of a store which claimed to be Ye Pette Shoppe. In the display window a dozen woolly pups disported themselves after the manner of woolly pups, and Ben watched them gloomily.

"Anyhoe, Sidney," he sighed at length, "I guess I got to buy a Pickinese dawg, no matter what. Because my wife expecks it, and what she expecks if she don't got it, you never hear the end of it at all."

"Well, don't say I didn't warn you,"

said Sidney. "And anyway, if you want a watch dawg, for why do you pick a Pickinese? Instead you could at least get a big dawg."

"I would," said Ben. "I'll get a big Pickinese."

"You couldn't do that, Ben, because there ain't such a thing as a big Pickinese. There is little Pickineses, and still littler Pickineses, but no big ones. Come on in and I'll show you one."

They entered the store; and when the salesman displayed a Pekingese, Ben was overcome with astonishment.

"Is that thing a dawg?" he exclaimed. "It positively looks like some kind of a bug!"

The salesman looked insulted. "I want you to know that this is a blooded animal. He has a remarkable pedigree."

"How much is it?" Ben asked.

"One hundred and fifty dollars."

"What?" Ben shouted. "A hundred and fifty dollars! Take it away, mister! Do I look crazy I should pay out a small fortune for a dawg, much less a dawg which has got a pushed-in face like a prize fighter? Show me at least a cheap one."

The man retired and Ben asked Sidney:

"What did he mean—that dawg has got a peddlegree, Sidney?"

Sidney scratched his head, trying to find words to frame an explanation.

"It's like this, Ben: When you know who was the dawg's papa and mamma, and who was also the grandmamma and grandpapa, and also *their* mamma and papa and so on, then you write it all down on a piece of paper—and that's a peddlegree."

"Ha!" said Ben with a gleam of understanding. "It's like tracing back your *mishbocha* back to the old country!"

"That's it!" Sidney nodded. "And how they know who was a dawg's mamma, I could understand, but not a dawg's papa. I think the whole thing is a fake."

"Sure it is," Ben agreed. "Such a crazy business to ask a hundred and fifty dollars for a dawg! What I would spend out is ten to fifteen dollars at the most."

Upon hearing this, Sidney took Ben's arm, gave him a wink, jerked his head toward the rear of the store where the salesman had disappeared, and led him quickly to the street. By the time the salesman returned to the showroom with a selected dog, Ben and Sidney were well on their way back to their loft building on Thirty-eighth Street.

"So the very cheapest dawg you could get in a store like that is anyhoe fifty dollars," Sidney was explaining. "If you want a dawg for only ten or fifteen dollars you should look in the classified advertising in the papers. After people buy a dawg and got him a little while, they are happy to get rid of him at any price. Maybe you wouldn't get a peddlegree, but you could anyhoe get a dawg."

Back again in his office, Ben perused the classified sections of the morning papers, and his eye soon lighted upon this advertisement:

FOR SALE: Fine pedigreed Belgian police dog. Three years old. Thoroughly trained. Gentle and loves children. Bargain. Owner leaving city. $15 for good home. Address Box 658, *Star* Uptown.

In response to the letter which Ben wrote, he received a telephone call at his office the following day; and it was arranged that the dog was to be brought to the Lowenstein apartment that evening for inspection.

Accordingly, at eight o'clock, Ben and Clara were shrinking back in fright from a large gray animal which walked around and sniffed the unfamiliar living room, while a good-looking young man made every effort to reassure them.

"He won't bite you, sir! He's as gentle as a lamb, madam!"

"A lamb!" muttered Ben doubtfully. "He looks more like a wolf!"

"Sallie!" directed the owner. "Lay down!"

The dog quickly obeyed.

"You see?" said the young man. "She minds everything you tell her."

"Sallie!" said Ben with a grimace. "It's a her! First thing you know we would got fleas and puppies! I don't want that kind of a dawg, mister!"

"You needn't worry about that." The owner drew Ben aside, and Ben learned about dogs from him.

For the next half hour, Sallie was made to show off. Docilely she performed parlor tricks which made Ben gasp with amazement and Clara with delight. Moreover, Sallie seemed to take a great fancy to her prospective master and mistress and manifested such a doggish devotion and affection that Ben was, at length, not only willing to purchase her, but was actually eager to do so.

"I tell you, Sidney," he said to his friend several days later, "that dawg we got is nilly like a human being instead of only a dawg. Everything you say to her, she understands it. Such a bargain for only fifteen dollars! She's a peddlegreed Belching police dawg. She's three years old, so she's completely house-busted, so she ain't any trouble at all. She's gentle like a lamb, Sidney, but might anybody ring our doorbell, she barks like anything. Such a watchdawg!"

Sidney shrugged skeptically. "If burglars come, Ben, would they maybe ring a bell first?"

"Well, Sallie barks even if anybody comes near to the door even," said Ben. "And if a robber come in, she would tear them to pieces. It's wonderful!"

Sidney shrugged again and changed the subject.

"How are you making out with Aaron Rebman, Ben? I seen you eating lunch with him yesterday."

Ben smiled and rubbed his hands together.

"Sidney, I am lucky there also. Ever since we met up with each other, we are getting to be better friends all the time. A coupla nights ago me and Clara went upstairs by them a visit. Soon they would come down to see us. So far I got with him already, y'understand, that he practic'ly promised he would come by my office some day and look over my line."

"You are lucky, Ben," said Sidney. "The Bon Ton does a grand business. I wisht I could get his cloak and suit orders, believe me. Maybe you could interdooce me some time."

"Sure," Ben replied. "When I land him myself, then I'll see what I could do for you, Sidney."

TWO weeks had passed since the robbery of the Rebman apartment, and even the more timid of the De Luxe residents were beginning to sleep soundly at night. The frightening memory of it was becoming vague in the minds of all except the Rebmans themselves, who still mourned the loss of jewelry, money and silverware.

"The worst is the necklace them thiefs took," sighed Mrs. Rebman one evening when she and her husband were returning the Lowenstein visit. "It was such a hairloom I am all busted up over it."

While the two ladies indulged in a post-mortem over the lost necklace and other valuables, Aaron Rebman said to Ben:

"I hear how you took out some burglars insurance, Lowenstein. Harry Grabiner told me how his brother, Moe, wrote it for you."

Ben nodded. "I thought I would be on the safe side, anyhoe," he replied almost apologetically. "I took out only a thousand dollars and it cost me twenty-five dollars. It's just like throwing that much away in the gutter, because how

could robbers come in here the way they got things now? Downstairs all night the door and the steps and the elywator is watched so nobody could get up here even. And even if they could, my dawg, Sallie, would tear them to pieces."

"Believe me!" Rebman agreed, eying Sallie, who was dozing on the rug. "How that dawg barked when we rung the bell here! We was afraid to come in."

"So would burglars," said Ben, smiling confidently.

Thereupon he changed the subject; and until the visitors took their leave at eleven thirty, the two men spoke of business matters. The trend of this discussion was so satisfying to Ben that he fell asleep with a smile on his lips; and the smile was still there when he awoke early the next morning. But when he rolled out of bed and reached for his clothing which, according to his custom, he had thrown on a near-by chair, the smile faded and a look of deep puzzlement came into his eyes.

"Clara!" he cried, turning to his wife, who had just opened her eyes to the new day. "Clara, what did you do with my clothes?"

Clara sat up in bed, suddenly wide awake.

"What do you mean, Ben—what did I do with your clothes? What have I got to do with your clothes?"

"They ain't there!" answered Ben, pointing to the chair which now held only a union suit and a pair of socks. "The suit ain't there, is it?"

Clara looked. The suit, coat, vest and trousers, certainly were not there.

"Where did you put it?" she asked.

"Where did I put it, she says! Where do I always put it, Clara? I put it there on the chair! And now it's gone!"

Clara shrugged. "It couldn't walk away, Ben. If you put it there it would still be there. I guess you hung it up for once in the closet."

It was not, however, in the closet: nor did a most painstaking search of the apartment reveal the whereabouts of the missing apparel.

"Ai!" Ben shivered. "We was robbed, Clara! Somebody got in here and robbed us! Everything which was in the pockets is gone! Sixty dollars in the pocketbook! My watch! My chain and U. K. B. charm! Clara, look for your joolry, quick!"

From under her pillow Clara took a small key which unlocked a drawer of her vanity. There, in a locked casket, were her jewels.

"These, them crooks couldn't get," she said grimly. "At least these is saved anyhoe!"

"But my money!" Ben cried frantically. "Sixty dollars cash! And my watch and——"

"Shush!" Clara interrupted. "You are insured for it, ain't it? The terrible part is how them crooks could got in here! Where is Sallie?"

Sallie, it appeared, was a late sleeper. She was dozing, her long, pointed nose between her paws, in the hallway outside the open bedroom door.

"Is she a watchdawg!" sneered Ben unhappily. "If friends come for a visit, she is like a lion. But when burglars come in, she sleeps through it! Phooee, such a dawg!"

Ben telephoned to the police, and, along toward noon, an officer arrived. He seemed to be bored by so insignificant a robbery. He listened to Ben's description of the stolen articles and filled out a printed form.

"Have you got insurance?" was the one of the questions asked; and when Ben replied in the affirmative, the officer nodded, placed the folded form in his hat, and went his way.

The insurance company was quite as disinterested. Moe Grabiner paid Ben's claims in full without question; Ben drew more pocket money from the bank and bought himself a new and bet-

ter watch, chain and charm, and replaced the stolen suit of clothes.

"It's lucky I took out insurance," Ben said to Clara a few days later. "At least we don't lose nothing by getting robbed. That watch I got for nilly fifteen years already and the suit was from last summer."

Protected though he was, financially, he and Clara were not at all easy in their minds. At his own expense, Ben had heavy sliding bolts attached to both the front and delivery doors, the only possible means of entrance with the exception of the windows. But they were on the fourth floor, and there was no exterior fire escape on the building. Ben looked out of the bedroom window, down a smooth side of brick to the paved court below. Only an insect could have climbed the wall.

The police officer agreed with that when, several days later, Ben frantically summoned him to the apartment to report a second robbery. Ben's suit of clothes, containing a wallet, which, Ben claimed, held thirty-eight dollars, his new watch, chain and charm, had disappeared.

"And also," Ben trembled, "about three dollars and thirty cents in change in the pants pocket!"

The policeman filled out the form, and asked, "Have you got insurance?" Ben's reply seemed to clear the matter in the mind of the officer. He did not say, "Then that accounts for it!" but he looked it. He prepared to leave and Ben took his arm, whispering:

"We got a servant girl, mister, which while we think she is honest, y'understand, still you couldn't always tell about them. On such hot nights like this we got to leave the bedroom door open besides the window; so why couldn't that girl, might she was a thief, come in here and steal from us?"

"But why should she wait until night?" the officer queried.

"How do I know that?" Ben returned. "Before you go, you could talk to her anyhoe."

"Do you want to prefer a charge against her?"

Ben threw up his hands. "And get sued for it if I couldn't prove it? I should say not! But if you could maybe talk to her without a charge, then it would be all right. When a person gets robbed, somebody is robbing them, ain't it? Either somebody opens the door, which it has got big bolts on it, and lets somebody else in here, or else somebody in here is doing the stealing."

The officer gave Ben another look.

"No doubt about that," he agreed. "Well, I'll talk to the girl."

As a result of this, Nellie wept copiously, gave notice to her employers, packed up her belongings and removed herself from all further suspicion and the Lowenstein apartment.

If this righteous indignation did not establish her innocence, she was cleared by the events of the following week. For twice more, in the next seven days, the Lowensteins were robbed in similar fashion; and in addition, at the latest burglary, several of Clara's dresses were taken from the closet, adding to the total amount of Ben's claim which he presented to Moe Grabiner.

"Listen, Lowenstein," said the insurance agent, "this here is the fourth claim you put in since you took out the insurance two weeks ago or so. Now y'understand, Lowenstein, it ain't nothing out from my pocket, no matter how many claims you put in. But after the second claim for the same thing, practic'ly, the home office begins to get surprised, y'understand; and after the third claim, they begin to get suckspicious even. Their adjuster was talking even to the police about it; and what the police says, I don't know; but I got orders which if another claim comes in I should pay it, but the policy would got to be canceled."

Ben listened, his face as white as chalk, his round body trembling so that his flesh quivered like gelatin.

"Grabiner!" he gasped. "Do you mean——"

"I don't mean nothing, Lowenstein," Grabiner replied carefully. "For a long time now you are giving me your diff-'rent kinds insurance and up until now you ain't even got a fire, Lowenstein. Like I told you, I don't care for myself might you got a burglary every day in the week and two on Sundays. But what the home office says, I got to do. So am sorry but I got to cancel the policy."

"My God!" Ben groaned, burying his face in his hands. "It ain't enough I get robbed until we are so nervous we are all to pieces! It ain't enough something so terrible should happen to us! But now they think I am a thief and a crook! Oh, my God!"

Suddenly he raised his face, which was marked by tears.

"Arrest me!" he shouted, rising from his chair; for it was in Ben's office that the interview was taking place. "Make me right away arrested, Grabiner! Take my life! Take my blood, if you think I am such a low-life!"

"Shush, Lowenstein," said Grabiner soothingly. "You don't got to be afraid from getting arrested. In this country you are innocent till you are proved guilty, y'understand; and how could even the home office prove you are guilty? That's how it is with insurance, Lowenstein. We know some fellers which they have got positively rich on fires. But all we could do is refuse to insure them. It's hard to prove, Lowenstein, in especially with burglaries."

"Ai!" Ben moaned. "This is worser as all! Get out from here, Grabiner! You are killing me, Grabiner! Leave me alone so I could drop dead!"

Grabiner rose and prepared to leave. "I am terrible sorry, Lowenstein. I got nothing to do with it, I assure you. I think where you made your mistake was in getting so many burglaries so close together. Every six months, say, would have been better. Anybody could tell you was new at it, Lowenstein."

"Get out!" said Ben weakly. "Get out!"

When Sidney Soloman entered the office twenty minutes later, he found Ben in a most distressing condition. He was not surprised, however, for he had met Moe Grabiner on Thirty-eighth Street. He had come up to Ben's office to offer sympathy to his friend—and advice.

"It's too bad, Ben," he said uncomfortably. "But carrying on this way won't help you none. The trouble is, you overdone it!"

Ben looked up in agony.

"You also, Sidney!" he choked, as Cæsar must have said practically the same words to Brutus. "Even my own friends! Sidney, do for me please a favor and get out from here. Oh, my God, help me here! Let me drop dead! Why can't I drop dead?"

Despite passive coöperation, however, Ben did not seem to be able to accomplish this end.

"If I go to work and kill myself," he mused miserably, "then they would say how I was guilty with it. Furthermore, they would call it another trick on the life insurance company!"

He lived, therefore, to suffer further ignominy. That evening he met Aaron Rebman in the lobby of the De Luxe, and the proprietor of the Bon Ton Store snubbed him openly. He had very little to say to Ben; but every word he uttered was as a knife thrust in Ben's heart.

"I thought you was coming by my office to-day, Aaron, to look over my line?" said Ben, after Rebman had barely nodded to him.

"I changed my mind, Lowenstein," Rebman answered coldly. "I got certain reasons which I don't got to told

you about. But things get around, Lowenstein. Moe Grabiner told things to Harry Grabiner, his brother, and Harry told things to me already. So I'll say good-by, Lowenstein, because I got to go upstairs. My wife is waiting for me."

Ben left the elevator at the fourth floor. Even the operator was regarding him askance. As he inserted his key in the lock with palsied fingers, he heard the loud barking of Sallie within.

"Now she barks!" he fairly sobbed. "But she wouldn't bark even one little bark to save my life!"

He could not open the door with his key because Mrs. Lowenstein had the door securely barricaded against such entry. He rang the bell; and only after he had announced himself several times, did Clara throw back the bolt and open the door to him.

"I am always scared to death," she said. "Thank God, I at least got Sallie here to watch me! Ben! What is the matter with you? You look sick!"

"Sick!" Ben replied. "I am the same as dying! Listen, Clara, what a terrible thing is happening to us."

There was no dinner for the Lowensteins that evening; that is, none that could pass through their restricted throats. A sorrier couple could not have been found the length and breadth of the land. Far into the night they talked; and among other things, they discussed double suicide, and a removal to Afghanistan, the south pole, or some region equally remote. But they came to no definite decision except that they were ruined socially and commercially and that they must forever bear an undeserved stigma.

At last they were ready for exhausted slumber, and Clara asked:

"Ben, did you lock and bolt both the doors? Are you sure?"

"I don't know," Ben replied wearily. "And I don't care, neither, Clara. If more burglars come in, I only wisht they would kill me. I would be better off dead."

"Maybe so," said Clara, "but I want them doors locked anyhoe."

Ben accordingly examined the front door, found it securely locked and bolted, and made his way to the kitchen. The service door was likewise barred; and he was about to leave the kitchen when, in passing the table on which stood a number of glasses of watermelon-rind preserve, made that afternoon by Clara, his clumsy hands knocked over one of the glasses, spilling its contents on the floor.

"I am positively Jonahed!" he groaned, watching Sallie as she set about cleaning up the mess in a most pleasurable manner. "Eat it all up, Sallie," he told the dog. "Maybe it would make a watchdawg out of you."

Despite his troubles, Ben slept that night as soundly as a babe; and when he awoke next morning, he saw at once that a fifth robbery had been perpetrated. This time only his suit was gone; for he had taken the precaution of locking his wallet, watch and other valuables in the bureau drawer, and all the closets were tightly sealed as well.

He did not waken his wife at once. He sat staring in horror at the chair from which his suit had disappeared.

"I wouldn't believe in ghosts!" he muttered. "I positively wouldn't believe in them or I would go crazy with this! But the suit is gone again. That much I could see with my own eyes. And nobody could get into this here place with such bolts on the doors! And nobody is in here but me and Clara! . . . Ha! . . . But if we do it in the sleep, like I heard about already, where do we put everything?"

He was desperately trying to solve the mystery as he reached for his union suit. As his fingers came into contact with the chair, he felt something sticky; and during the ensuing ten minutes, if Clara had not remained fast asleep, she

would have watched an astonishing procedure. She would have seen Ben on hands and knees in his nightgown, crawling around the floor of the bedroom, out into the hall, into the kitchen, back to the bedroom. She would have seen him examine the chairs and the rug and the window sill, the while he uttered softly such exclamations as *"Ali!"* "Now I see it!" "So!" and "Who could guess it even?"

When Clara did awaken, she found her husband fully dressed; and she did not notice that he was not wearing his new suit.

"Well, Clara," he said cheerfully, "you got a fine sleep last night. So did I. Now I am feeling better."

She looked at the clock.

"It's nilly ten o'clock! How late you would be, Ben, by your office!"

He shrugged. "For a few days, Clara, I ain't going downtown at all. Right now other things is more important as business, which nobody would do with me anyhoe. I need a rest, Clara. I am going to stay home and every afternoon sleep."

"It's a good idea," she declared. "You are all to pieces."

It was an excellent idea, for it permitted Ben to sleep in the afternoons and to remain wide awake at night. Three wakeful nights passed uneventfully; but on the fourth, as Ben lay expectant and alert on his pillow, there came through the open window from the court below a soft, peculiar whistle. And in a trice, Sallie, who was lying in the hall outside the open door, padded quietly into the bedroom, placed her forepaws on the window sill, and looked down into the court. Then she went to the chair at Ben's bedside and, carrying the suit, one garment at a time, to the window, dropped it over the ledge.

Ben pretended to sleep during this enlightening performance; the suit was an old one. But as the last piece went over the sill, he jumped from the bed and ran to the window, in time to see a shadowy figure moving across the court toward the unbarred tradesmen's entrance that led to the street.

Ben set his lips grimly and looked at Sallie, who, instead of cringing like a criminal caught redhanded, seemed to be a mighty proud dog. Her tail wagging rapidly, she looked up at Ben with her jaws open, her tongue hanging out and her upper teeth gleaming white in the darkness. And when Ben was silent, failing to offer the expected words of commendation, she reared herself on her haunches and "sat up like a good dog."

"Phooee!" Ben whispered; for he did not want to waken Clara. "You could do tricks all right! Get out from here and lay down, you low-life crook of a dawg you! To-morrow you would get a chance to show off how smart you are!"

Good news often travels as swiftly as bad news; and the next evening there was a steady stream of callers at the Lowenstein apartment. So many people "just dropped in" that both the living and dining rooms were crowded.

"By golly!" Ben remarked to Sidney Soloman as he cast a gleaming eye over this informal reception. "I could see how maybe you would come here to apologize, and also Moe Grabiner; but if all these other people insulted me, it must been behind my back! They all got what you call a guilty conscious. Well," he sighed, "I could let bygones be bygones."

Sidney nodded in a shamefaced manner.

"Ben," he said, "even you got to admit it looked funny. Who could even suckspect a dawg was doing it? I don't see how you found it out."

"It was the watermelon preserves, Sidney," Ben replied. "I spill it on the floor, y'understand, and that dawg eats

it up and gets it on her feet. So when I seen it so sticky on the chair and also on the rug and the window sill, I right away get an idea, Sidney. And that's how I caught Sallie doing it."

"But you caught that robber also, Ben," said Sidney. "How did you get his address, even if you knew it was the same feller which sold you the dawg?"

"I didn't get his address," smiled Ben. "Sallie got it. I stick her on a leash, y'understand, and I get some policemen, and I say, 'Go home, Sallie.' And right away she leads us to the room where we catch that low-life thief. And in his room they find such joolry and silver and clothes, you wouldn't believe it! Even Rebman's stuff was there, because it was the same feller which he robbed their apartment."

"Well, all I got to say," Sidney declared, "is you deserve credit for it, Ben."

Ben shrugged. "I got enough credit because I could prove how I ain't such a crook, Sidney, which I cheat insurance companies. Just the same," he added, "Aaron Rebman could at least come to see me like all these other people. Not only did he insult me, but I helped him get his stuff back, didn't I? Even his hairlooms, Sidney."

At that moment the doorbell rang, and Ben, looking down the hall, witnessed the pompous entrance of the Rebmans. Even at that distance he could see the gold-and-sapphire necklace which encircled the stout throat of Mrs. Rebman.

"Here they are, Sidney," Ben said joyfully. "You got to excuse me now. This is one apology, anyhoe, which is like money in the pocket!"

On Monday morning, Max Feinberg, star salesman for the Lowenstein Skirt and Blouse Company, returned from his trip through the Middle West. His report to Ben at the latter's office was the encouraging one uusally rendered by a star salesman.

"So it's lucky you sent me, Mr. Lowenstein," he concluded, "because now I got everything fixed up in first-class shape for that feller Jacoby. He ain't bad, but he's green yet, and I showed him how to go about things."

"Believe me you did!" said Ben. "From your expense accounts which you been sending in here, Max, you must showed him how to go about every high-priced restaurant in the Middle West. Well, now you are back, and I hope you would anyhoe land a few big customers in your own area from now on."

"If not, I guess you could show me how?" Feinberg replied with a sarcasm permissible only to a star salesman. "I guess you landed the Bon Ton Store already like you said you would!"

With a mysterious smile, Ben reached for an order book on his desk, flicked back the cover, and handed the open book to Feinberg. Feinberg stared; then he looked up at his employer.

"Why—what is this, anyway?" he exclaimed.

"Can't you read even?" Ben replied loftily. "Don't you know a big order when you see one? That there order is from the Bon Ton Store, Max. It's a big one, but it ain't as big as the next one would be. It's a off season, Max, and you couldn't expect such a big one like, say, next September."

"Jumping juniper!" gasped the star salesman. "How did you do this, Mr. Lowenstein?"

Ben waved his hand largely.

"Never mind that, Max. But if you are such a crackajack salesman, maybe you could find somebody who wants to buy a peddlegreed Belching police dawg?"

Watch for another story by Raymond Leslie Goldman in an early issue.

How the Heavy Chains of Blackmail Were Broken by a Superbly Clever Trick.

CLOCKED

By ROBERT H. ROHDE

THE haggard young man stopped outside room No. 1133 and stared at the singular legend lettered in gold on the door:

ALGERNON MONTAGUE.

Counselor-*ex*-Law.

Adjustments.

"Last hope!" he whispered, and turned the knob. In a plainly furnished reception room he presented a sealed envelope to a sleepy youth who rose to greet him. "For Mr. Montague," he said.

A moment later a door through which the guardian of the outer office had shuffled was wide open. A cheerful voice came through it:

"Toddle in, sir! I'm quite at leisure."

'A sandy-haired, dapper, smiling little man sat behind a huge desk in the room beyond the open door and was waving toward a deep chair beside him. The haggard visitor dropped weakly into it. His words came with a rush:

"Don't know what you can do for me—nothing, most likely. But I'm told you're probably the only man in New York who could help me. My cards are on the table: if you can't, I'm finished—ruined. There'll be nothing left for

me to do but put a bullet through my head!"

For a moment small Mr. Montague studied him in silence, his finger tips steepled together under his chin. Then his gray eyes returned to the note he had just read:

FRIEND MONTAGUE: I guess maybe you haven't forgot the days when London Monty and Boston Harry Graham played the Main Stem together. Well, I'm sending Mr. Walter Hubbard through to you. He belongs to the club where I been working since I turned square, and he's sure acted white with me.

His picture has been in the papers a lot, and maybe you'll recognize him. He's amachure golf champ, see. I don't know exactly what his trouble is, but—cure it if you can.

As ever, your pal, HARRY G.

Montague looked up frankly from the letter.

"I fancy," said he, "that our mutual friend didn't tell you a great deal about me. But I like the cards on the table idea, Hubbard. I've been—not to mince it—a crook. Dare say I may wind up in quod yet, at that." He smiled. "No; a man's purse is safe with me nowadays. But I'll confess that, though I'm operating as a sort of detective, there's many a law I still don't respect."

"No law will help me," groaned Hubbard. "There's nothing doing there. This man Shayde——"

The name brought Montague up straight in his chair, bristling. He compressed a question into a single word, and gave it the quality of flat assertion:

"Blackmail?"

Hubbard blinked.

"You've guessed it. I've been bled white."

"Possibly," observed Montague. "I'm not guessing. Blackmail is Dudley Shayde's business. He's had a fortune out of it, but he keeps on. D'you see, it's his pleasure, too. He's merciless. Long ago I found that out. I'll not go into the details—but, Jove! I draw a line."

"You've had his attention, too?" gasped the harried golfer.

Mr. Montague coughed deprecatingly.

"Not exactly, perhaps," said he, "in the same way that you have. But I've had enough contact with him to discover his methods. I mean to say, he's cunning. To a certain extent he commands admiration." He smiled bleakly. "Look here, Mr. Hubbard: You tell *me* that you've been blackmailed by Shayde—but how much of a case could you establish against him with the district attorney, say?"

Hubbard spread his capable brown hands in a gesture of helplessness.

"None at all," he confessed. For a space he was silent, pulling himself together for a plunge. "It's going to be harder than I thought," he said then. "to lay down the cards. But how can I look for help—even for advice—otherwise? May I tell you the story?"

"As much of it," assented Mr. Montague promptly, "as you please. Or," he added after a pause, "as little."

Hubbard flashed him a glance of gratitude, and then his eyes lowered.

"There's a—a woman," he said.

"Always is," agreed Mr. Montague.

"Must I mention her name? If you don't mind, I——"

Mr. Montague twisted a point of the crimson mustache.

"My dear fellow," he gently reminded the golf champion, "this is a conversation between gentlemen—what?"

"She—she's married!" groaned Hubbard.

Full sympathy was in Montague's quick nod.

"So many are," he said, and sighed. He turned and for a moment stared out the window, over the sign-latticed sky line of Times Square. "Yes; I sometimes think of one whom a subaltern loved. Most unhappily for all concerned, she was married to a colonel."

Hubbard had lighted a cigarette. He took a half dozen nervous puffs at it and crushed out its fire.

"This is about the same sort of case, thrown over into civil life," he said. "Of course, I'm an amateur at golf—or do you know that I play at all? I make my living, and golf connections have naturally done their share in making it rather a good one, by selling bonds. To put it briefly, the lady is the wife of one of the men I used to sell them for."

"Too bad," murmured "London Monty." "But the Little Fellow's arrows are dev'lish hard things to dodge."

Catching censure behind the extenuation, Hubbard defensively submitted:

"I want you to understand. I didn't meet her in the chief's home for the first time, as his wife. We'd been kids together, she and I. We'd even been engaged—on the quiet, you know. But there were pressing family considerations that I won't go into. The chief was a widower, and she became his second. I went to their home just once. Couldn't stand it again—wouldn't have gone again in any circumstances. But once had been enough for the chief, as well. He has a well-developed sixth sense, like many another man in the Street; and he got it out of her how things had been between us. It made an unpleasant situation in the office until I chucked the job and moved on somewhere else."

"Then?" Mr. Montague's gaze was following a ribbon of smoke as it raveled off from his cigarette toward the ceiling. "I mean, that wasn't all?"

"No. It was just as unpleasant around the chief's estate up in Westchester. Still is, for that matter. And I've had letters. I give you my word that there's never been one meeting since. The letters in themselves are innocent enough. But they're incautious. It wouldn't be hard to put a false construction upon them. And if they were to get into the wrong hands, as matters stand now——"

Mr. Montague's chin went up sharply.

"What, what?" he exclaimed. "And Dudley Shayde has 'em? My dear man, whose *would* you call the wrong hands?"

Hubbard shook his head.

"Shayde hasn't them. But he knows where they are—and that's the same thing."

London Monty's eyes widened.

"It would seem to be. Well, where are they?"

"I don't know. I've talked a half dozen times to the man who stole them, but where he *is*—that's the question. If I could find out, I assure you that I shouldn't now be burdening you. I wouldn't hesitate to kill him to recover and destroy them!"

"Bad business that would be," remarked Montague. He flecked an ash from his cigarette. "But this is all a bit thick, Hubbard. You talk to a man, and yet don't know where? Don't tell me that Shayde has led you to him blindfolded!"

The golfer smiled wanly.

"Something like that. They've played the game—Shayde and Simmons, between them—with diabolical cleverness. They've never given me a chance."

Mr. Montague frowned over the new name.

"Simmons?" he repeated.

"Until a few weeks ago," said Hubbard, "I employed him to look after my bachelor apartment. He took care of my clothing, made breakfast for me, and got dinners occasionally. He had been with me less than a year, but I took it for granted he was reasonably trustworthy."

"Damned rare that they are—in the States here," observed Montague. "You should at least have kept the letters under lock and key. Burning 'em would have been a better job."

Hubbard sunk his tanned face in his hands.

"I know it now," he groaned. "But the first of them, I thought, would be all I'd have to remember her by. I couldn't bear the thought of destroying them. I did keep them locked up—until that one fatal night. She had written me that morning that she couldn't stand it any longer and finally had decided to sue for divorce. I got all the letters out, and reread them. There were phrases in them that I was suddenly mad to see again—reassurances of her love for me. With a divorce in prospect, they spelled my happiness."

He broke off, slowly shaking his head.

"I hope," he said, "you can see how it happened. When I turned in, I left the letters lying out on my reading table—every one of them. And when I got up in the morning, they were gone. And Simmons with them. He'd let me oversleep, and disappeared."

"Of course," nodded London Monty. "Servants are an inquisitive breed, Hubbard. There's never one lived who wouldn't cast an eye over his master's correspondence, given the chance. Your chap's eye, to be sure, was uncannily commercial. He saw certain possibilities in that imminent suit for divorce, I fancy."

"That was it," Hubbard corroborated. "I found it out within a week. Simmons didn't communicate with me directly, but I heard from Shayde. An utter stranger then, he phoned me at home one evening, and asked me to call at his office in the morning. He was insistent—and mysterious. The letters weren't mentioned, and yet I had a hunch there was a connection. So I did go to see him.

"I found him alone in a dusty little room in one of those gloomy old buildings in Nassau Street, back of Park Row. It seemed to be a law office. Anyhow, Shayde had a considerable law library. The walls were lined with shelves, shoulder high."

"As I well recollect," said London Monty. "Shayde, as a matter of fact, began as a lawyer. He was disbarred years ago, and that taught him a lesson. No one's been able to lay a finger on him since. He knows how to cover himself."

"I promise you he does!" interjected Hubbard bitterly. "He said absolutely nothing that would commit him.

"'If you are Walter Hubbard,' he told me, 'I will put you in touch with a certain party who is anxious to communicate with you.'

"Then he called a number on his telephone, and after the connection had been made he pushed the phone across to me. It was Simmons on the wire. I knew his voice at once, although he wouldn't answer to his name.

"'My name,' he said, 'doesn't matter. But yours does, and so does some one else's. For instance, the name of the lady who wrote this pretty little paragraph.'

"He began reading—words that I knew by heart. When I got back my breath, I called a halt. Simmons laughed.

"'How would that sound,' he asked, 'in a newspaper? Don't you suppose somebody'd pay a nice price for just the one letter just now, seeing who it's signed by?'

"I couldn't deny it, even to myself. The divorce action had been begun only a couple of days before. The papers were full of it. I asked Simmons what he wanted.

"'I can get a thousand dollars for this letter,' he said, 'and I need money. What's your bid?'

"What could I do, Mr. Montague? I told Simmons he could look to me for his thousand dollars. I said nothing about the other letters. The thousand, I thought, would satisfy him for a time—and I needed time to think.

"I asked Simmons where I could meet him, and he laughed again.

" 'You're not going to meet me!' he said. 'Not yet. I'm not as simple as that. I want the money left on the desk you're talking from. If you haven't got it with you now, get it before afternoon. Seal it in a plain envelope—and don't write anything on the envelope. Don't say anything about it to Mr. Shayde, either. He doesn't know anything about this, and isn't going to. But if the money goes on his desk, I'll get it. If it doesn't—I'll get it somewhere else!'

"It happened I had a thousand-dollar note with me. As I took out my wallet, Shayde turned away. I saw a blank envelope on the desk, and I sealed the thousand dollars in it.

" 'There it is,' I said to Shayde.

"He wheeled on me, scowling.

" 'If you're leaving something for the person you just talked with over my phone,' he snapped, 'that's strictly your affair and his. If I'm to act for you, that must be understood. Otherwise, I'll have to ask you to take that envelope along with you!' "

As Hubbard came to a pause, little Mr. Montague's expression was a study in conflict. There was both ire and admiration in his eyes, and the smile that came presently might have consisted of one part each of sirup and acid.

"Prodigious!" he ejaculated. "By gad! The world lost a poet when Dudley Shayde turned from the law to blackmail!" He lighted a fresh cigarette, and hazarded: "That thousand, I dare say, wasn't the whole of the tariff?"

"Not by a lot!" Hubbard confirmed. "They've nipped me for every dollar I had. For every dollar I could readily borrow. It's thirty thousand in all. Shayde called me again a few days after that initial touch. The same scene was repeated in his office. The only difference was that the price had gone up. And it's kept going up. It was two thousand, and then five thousand. It's been five thousand five times—and two of the five thousands were borrowed money."

"You've been a mark, Hubbard!" Montague exclaimed. "Do you mean to say you've given up all that money without getting back the letters?"

The golfer's eyes smoldered.

"It was understood they'd be surrendered when the thirty thousand had been paid. They should have been mailed to me days ago. But Shayde says he doesn't know anything concerning that. When I ventured to speak of the letters he testily informed me he didn't know what I was talking about—and didn't want to. Now I'm out of my fog, at least. I can see plainly that they intend to keep bleeding me forever. I'm at the end of my rope."

London Monty regarded him pityingly.

"My dear chap," said he, "blackmailers seldom loosen their grip on a man. Dudley Shayde never does. But you *have* been in a fog, certainly. If you hadn't been, it should have been easy enough for you to get a line on the whereabouts of this fellow Simmons."

"By watching Shayde's office?" queried Hubbard. "No; you're mistaken on that. I've haunted the place for the last couple of weeks, day and night. And Simmons has never turned up in the neighborhood. I've even followed Shayde at night. He lives in a quiet family hotel uptown. Simply goes there, and stays there once he's in. I've bribed employees of the place, described Simmons to them. They tell me he's not stopping at the hotel, and never has visited there."

As he listened, Montague had manifested impatience. He had barely heard Hubbard out when he cried:

"What a waste of time! Naturally, Shayde and Simmons wouldn't be meet-

ing. Shayde would expect to be followed. Where you missed was on the telephone. It was Shayde's habit to ring up Simmons after you'd come to his office, you say? Then what could have been simpler than making a note of the number—and asking the telephone company to supply you with the address?"

Hubbard shook his head.

"I never heard Shayde call a number."

"Yet the phone was in the same room?"

"Yes; he has only the one room. But —his phone is one of the automatics. He just dials the number. I could have caught it only by looking over his shoulder, and he's been careful to see I never got the opportunity."

A long and baffled "O-o-oh!" escaped London Monty.

"A dial phone, what?" he murmured. "Now, that does make a difference, Hubbard. I owe you an apology. I have one of the awful things myself in the next office. Blighted bores, they are. I've coined a name for those dev'lish disks that one has to twirl about to operate them. I mean to say, I once referred to the dial as 'the vicious circle!' Rather neat, what? And with Dudley Shayde using a dial telephone, neater still!"

The golfer's smile was perfunctory.

"It's hard for me to appreciate the joke," he said. "That dial on Shayde's phone has really been a vicious circle to me. A man can't get behind it. My talks with Simmons—my inability to put my hands on him—has been the most maddening part of the whole business."

Montague crossed his legs and clasped slender hands around a tweed-clad knee.

"It's been masterly strategy of Shayde's, throwing you into contact with Simmons," he said thoughtfully. "Had Simmons rung you at your home more than once, you might reasonably have found a way of tracing back the call. But when it was through Shayde's office that the connection was made, you absolutely couldn't play tricks. However, I'm thinking that the thing could be got around somehow. Suppose now, Hubbard, that when you go to see Dudley Shayde again you invite me along? What say?"

Hubbard straightened.

"You mean it?"

"Positively do. I won't guarantee that Shayde will be pleased—but do we need to fret about that?"

Already Hubbard was on his feet.

"I'm in your hands, Mr. Montague," he said. "What you can do with Shayde, I have no idea. But Graham's few words gave me confidence in you, and it's grown since I've talked with you. As a matter of fact, I stopped here on my way to Shayde's office. If we leave at once, I'll just make the appointment on the dot."

Without haste, London Monty arose.

"I detest being exactly on time anywhere," said he. "We'll allow Dudley Shayde a few minutes to cool, what? You'll make yourself comfortable in here alone for a bit, won't you? I've a little matter to look into before I leave."

He carefully closed the door behind him as he stepped out, but Hubbard heard his voice through the thin partition a moment later.

"Where's that contraption you had from the race track Johnny?" he was asking some one in the outer room. "Ah, thank you! I'll take it. And now will you be good enough to make a phone call for me?"

Next Hubbard heard the whir and click of a dial phone. It evoked unhappy memories, brought him up with a start. Now, it seemed to him, the dialing went on interminably. London Monty, must have had more than the "one little matter" on his mind, he was

sure; for he was making not a single telephone call but many.

Hubbard wondered if he might be the subject of any of them—or Shayde. What did this dapper little man, of whom Graham had spoken so promisingly and yet so mysteriously, think he could do against that impregnable pair of blackmailers? Montague looked and talked like a gentleman—but he confessedly had been and still was in a queer sort of business.

There had been murder in his eyes when Shayde's name was spoken; there was something deadly, even, about his smile. What manner of reprisal was he planning against the blackmailer? One possibility that suggested itself to Hubbard started a shudder. Would it turn out that this meeting between him and the extraordinary Mr. Montague had been the prelude to—a killing?

Returning, with a light gray fedora set jauntily on his head and a malacca walking stick crooked over his arm, London Monty seemed to divine something of what had been passing in his caller's mind.

"One day," said he, "Dudley Shayde will come to his full desserts. It's bound to happen. But it won't be this day, Hubbard—or directly through me. Finesse and not force is our watchword." He smiled and drew the door open. "And now if you're quite ready, old tock——"

The Times Square station of the subway was only a block or two away; and not more than fifteen minutes later, whirled downtown on an express train, Montague and Hubbard were crossing City Hall Park together.

"Old Shayde," the little man chuckled, as they turned into Nassau Street below the old Tribune Building, "is going to be jolly well surprised. I'd give a handful of sovereigns for a permanent record of his expression when he sees me."

And it was, Hubbard felt, an expression worth preserving. He had known Dudley Shayde to scowl before, and had reckoned the scowl ominous. But when he looked up to see Montague in his door his face went black as a thunderhead. His heavy jaw tightened, his full lips flattened back against his teeth; and his eyes, after glazing for an instant in an astonished stare, flamed with hatred.

As London Monty a while ago had come forward in his chair at the voicing of Shayde's name, so Shayde now edged his thick body for a spring. A hand crept slowly toward his coat pocket, until a quick word from the red-haired man stayed its progress.

"Easy!" Montague sang out. "You've no call to defend yourself, Shayde—and there's a witness to the fact. Don't forget that!"

A corner of Shayde's mouth opened, and speech spat through it like a burst from a machine gun.

"What the devil brings *you* here?"

London Monty nodded toward Hubbard.

"We came together," he said. "I do hope you've no objection to renewing an old acquaintance."

Shayde turned an inimical stare upon the golf amateur.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

That was to Hubbard, but it was Montague who answered.

"I've heard this gentleman's story," he said calmly. "When he told me he was on his way here, I elected to come along. If I must give a reason—well, let's say I came as a student, on a mission of research. Where could I better discover the modern trend in blackmail?"

Shayde's eyes narrowed.

"An ugly word!" he said.

"Not so ugly as the trade it describes, what?"

A bulky shoulder lifted, and Shayde grinned derisively.

"I'd be the last one to defend black-

-mail," said he. "I know the law, and I never cross the line. You should be sure of it. What weird tale has Hubbard been telling you?" He bared his teeth and swung his chair again to face the golfer. "How about it, Hubbard? Tell me to my face!"

"Mr. Montague knows of the letters," Hubbard told him. "He knows everything."

Over folded arms Dudley Shayde surveyed him with a mocking sparkle in his eyes.

"Letters? Then he knows more than I know. *I've* never been advised in regard to any letters. I've no more than permitted you the use of my telephone. If you think of accusing me of anything, take a lawyer's advice. Be ready to prove it!"

London Monty, his eyes gone icy, intruded himself once more.

"It's useless, Hubbard," he said, "to try to get down to business with all three of us present. Would you mind stepping into the hall for a moment? Oh, perhaps for a few moments. I say, you'll stay out until we call you, what?"

Hubbard looked to Shayde for dissent. Perceiving no sign of objection, he nodded and withdrew. London Monty snapped the spring lock when he had closed the door on him.

"Now to cases, Shayde," he said crisply. "We can talk in the open; for as you are very well aware, *I'll* not be jobbing with the district attorney or the police."

The disbarred lawyer puckered his eyes and laughed unpleasantly—very unpleasantly indeed.

"Agreed that you won't," said he. "No; I'm not afraid of *you*, Montague. Not in that way, or any other. I can take care of myself." He leaned back and hooked his thumbs in the armholes of his vest. "That's that. Now I'm going to repeat the question I asked you when you walked in on me. Maybe you'll answer it another way. What are you here for?"

"A show-down," said London Monty.

"Meaning?"

"That Hubbard has retained counsel —outside the law. You've bilked him unmercifully. My chore is to see that he pays out no more money without getting what he pays for."

Shayde smiled as his eyes sought the ceiling.

"They're wonderful letters, Algy! Full of purple passages. They'd be worth plenty to certain newspapers."

"Rot."

"To—the lady's husband, then!"

Mr. Montague blinked.

"Ah! That's more to the point. But, Dudley, have you thought of the lady herself as a customer?"

"She's in Reno."

"Quite so. However, consider this possibility: Might she not have a responsible representative here?"

That was a new and an interesting thought to Shayde. His eyes betrayed it.

"I begin to see light," he said softly. "And you're—it? Now we're getting somewhere. What's the offer?"

London Monty waved his hand.

"Would you believe," he asked, "that it had been left entirely to my discretion?"

Dudley Shayde could believe it. He rubbed his palms together.

"There might," he said, "be a cutback. It's business."

Frostily, Montague stared him down.

"Not my kind of business," he stated. "We're on opposite sides of the fence all the way through this deal, Shayde; and I give it to you straight that I'm out to get the letters at the low dollar."

Shayde shrugged.

"It'll have to be a high low. I'm not giving anything away. If you're bound to haggle, all right. Start trading."

"First," said London Monty, "I'll have to know what I'm trading for. I

know what's compromising as well as you do, Dudley. Never forget that. Before I say a word, I want to see the letters—see what's to 'em."

Shayde stared and smirked.

"Beautiful chance!" he jeered. "I'll have to have the money before you get your hands on them. That's absolute." Again he consulted the ceiling. "But I get the point. How'd it do, Algy, if I had them read to you? Read over the phone, and guaranteed to be read right, word for word?"

"What, what?" said London Monty. "The same sort of game you played on Hubbard!"

Dudley Shayde's eyes mocked him.

"Something brand-new in the racket, Algy! It's law-proof. And the moral effect of the voice on the telephone can't be beaten. Ask Hubbard!"

Shayde drew a pencil from his pocket and held it poised over the dial of his desk telephone.

"I'll call Simmons," he offered. "But —no-you don't! You stay where you are while I'm getting the number. No peeping, mind!"

Little Mr. Montague had taken an eager step forward. He halted at Shayde's warning, and the falling of his face acknowledged defeat.

"You're a sharp beggar, Dudley," he said. "Go ahead. Hold your advantage. Ring your man."

He moved back toward the door—even turned his back as a further guarantee of noninterference with the call.

"Very nice of you, Algy!" gibed Shayde. "You're showing sense."

He lifted the receiver from its hook, and poked the pencil into the dial. Hubbard, in the hall, saw Montague's slender shadow on the frosted glass of the office door as the pur of the disk came to him. His shoulders slumped. The "vicious circle" had both of them penned. His champion couldn't break through it, either.

Shayde came and opened the door a moment later, and Hubbard saw London Monty at the telephone.

"Your friend," Shayde said, "is on the line. Montague wanted to talk with him."

But London Monty wasn't talking. He was listening. Just once he spoke, and then merely to say: "Yes; I hear perfectly. Keep on."

To cover his demoralization, Hubbard lighted a cigarette. It had burned close to his trembling fingers before Montague hung up. Montague turned to Shayde.

"Thanks," he said briefly. "I'll want a couple of hours to come to a decision. In the meantime Hubbard and I will get off by ourselves."

Shayde's face was a blank.

"This is still all a mystery to me, Hubbard," he protested. "Remember that. I've permitted you to make a convenience of me long enough, and I'm through with you. You've brought Montague in, and that lets *you* out. If he comes here again on your business, I want him to come alone."

"Right-o," acquiesced London Monty. "Let's just toddle on, Hubbard—what say, eh?"

They were in Nassau Street before Hubbard found his voice.

"I'm finished!" he whispered hoarsely. "*Nothing* can be done. You don't need to tell me!"

Mr. Montague smiled thinly.

"It's a bit early in the bout, old chap," said he, "to be throwing up the sponge. Come, now! At least I know Simmons' voice."

He turned into a cigar shop and walked into a telephone booth. Through the glass of the closed door the golfer saw him make two calls.

Emerging, Monty caught Hubbard's arm, propelled him into the street, and hailed a taxi.

"Know where Richland Avenue is?" he asked the driver. "In the Bronx, you say? Well, I can appreciate a bit

of air after that hot box I've been in. Richland Avenue it is. No. 147."

It was a drive of nearly an hour. Sunk in misery, Hubbard asked no explanation, and Montague offered none. Before the cab reached Union Square he had closed his eyes and was calmly dozing.

Richland Avenue, where the taxi entered it, was a populous thoroughfare, but the houses were wider-spaced as the cab rolled along it. No. 147 stood quite alone, surrounded by vacant and marshy-looking lots. London Monty, opening his eyes as the machine stopped, discovered it to be a two-family dwelling.

Children who obviously belonged to the family occupying the lower floor were playing beside it, and unhesitatingly Montague marched to the door giving entrance to the upstairs apartment and jabbed the bell.

There was a brief wait. Then some one was coming down the stairs. The door opened grudgingly, and Hubbard glimpsed a tousle of sandy hair and a thin white face beneath.

"Simmons!" he cried.

He threw himself toward the door, but with a quick shove London Monty already had flung it wide open. He was standing in the entry, and a small automatic pistol that had magically appeared in his hand was burrowing into the pale man's ribs.

"One peep out of you," he said, "and you'll be responsible for an explosion. Upstairs, now—snappily!"

The look that Hubbard had earlier diagnosed as murderous was once more in Montague's eyes, and Simmons evidently read it the same way. His hands shot aloft.

"You've got me!" he gulped. "Don't let 'im harm me, Mr. Hubbard!" And up the stairs he went.

A deep scowl came upon Mr. Shayde's brow when Walter Hubbard and Montague walked back into his office, for two stipulations had been violated: Instead of a couple of hours, they had taken three; and London Monty, although plainly instructed to return alone, had brought the golfer with him.

Shayde's extreme displeasure was in his bark:

"What's the company for? Didn't I tell you to stay out of here, Hubbard?" Hubbard didn't reply. He was looking at little Mr. Montague.

"Considering everything," said Monty, "I could see no harm in the three of us being on the set at the curtain." He plucked a cigarette from his case, and tapped it on a thumb-nail. "I say, Dudley," he asked, "do you happen to have a match?"

Shayde stared from London Monty to Hubbard and back again, his hand automatically going out to the match stand on his desk.

"Tut!" murmured Montague. "Right before me, weren't they? But—a favor, Shayde! Would you mind striking one?"

Shayde laughed harshly.

"What's this, Algy?" he demanded. "Going to make a valet out of me? Well, any service you get you'll pay for, I guarantee! Here you are—and the charge goes on the bill!"

As he extended the flickering match across the desk, London Monty leaned toward it. But the paper that met the flame wasn't the paper of his cigarette. He had slipped a packet of envelopes from his pocket, and it was the protruding edge of one of them that suddenly flared up.

With a sheltering hand, Montague nursed the tiny blaze. In a second all the envelopes were burning.

Dudley Shayde started up, his face purple.

"What the devil is this?" he shouted.

London Monty, with one hand holding his paper torch and the other grip-

ping the pistol in his pocket, smiled amiably.

"It might be called," said he, "fighting fire with fire. These are the letters that Hubbard had paid you thirty thousand dollars for. I thought it the proper thing that you should burn them yourself. It lets you out of the deal, d'you see, in better form."

Shayde's expression went from bewildered rage to incredulity.

"You're a fool, Montague!" he grated. "What you hope to gain, I can't guess—but your bluff don't go!"

Montague's smile broadened.

"I've told you what letters these are."

"Bunk! Try and get the real ones!"

"I got them," said London Monty coolly, "without half trying. I mean to say, Dudley, that automatic phone trick isn't half as clever as you believed it. Simmons' telephone number, of course, is Richland 9986—although I thought it *might* have been 9985!"

Shayde's jaw dropped, and his popping eyes seemed to Hubbard about to roll out upon his cheeks.

"Cæsar's ghost!" he wheezed. "Where'd you get it?"

"From you, old thing," said London Monty. "I'd heard about your dial phone, and before I looked in on you I made a few experiments with my own. And, on my visit to you I found that if it takes the disk of my automatic phone two and four-fifths seconds, say, to click home from a certain figure, or a certain letter in the name of the exchange, that's precisely the time it takes the disk of yours. A split-second timing, to be sure—but when one has a stop watch available, the thing's absolutely simple. And when I had my back to you, Dudley, I had a stop watch in my hand!"

Shayde was stricken dumb.

"I checked up," continued Monty, "by calling the number in question, and when I heard Simmons on the line, I sweetly told him, 'Wrong number!' and rang off. Very readily the information operator obliged with the address at which I'd find Richland 9986. And there you are! By the way, Dudley, you'd better give us a check for your share of the booty, if you care to keep out of trouble. Simmons made a full confession, and handed over his part of the money—he'd not spent much of it."

In the hall, Hubbard grasped his arms.

"Name," he said, "your price. Any price you care to. Somehow I'll find it!"

Montague's chin went up. His eyes had hardened.

"When there's to be a price on any service of mine," he said, with steel in his voice, "I'm accustomed to naming it—and having it—in advance. Please check whatever you think you owe me in favor of the man who sent you to me—'Boston Harry' Graham."

Then, with Hubbard crestfallen, he swiftly relented.

"Don't be offended, old fellow," he begged. "Yes; you may pay me. I know a very decent little place not three blocks away. You may stand me a brandy and soda there. We'll drink, if you please, to two letter-writing ladies—yours, and my ancient colonel's!"

DID IT EVER OCCUR TO YOU THAT——

THE sunset does not actually fade away, but remains a continuous spectacle. There are sunsets and sunrises at various parts of the earth at this very minute. It was Lord Dunsany, we believe, who said in effect: "Your sunset is some one else's sunrise, and *vice versa.*"

BAD BLOOD

By CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK

In Five Parts—Part II—*The Story So Far:*

Carroll Gibney, a producer, who plans to make a movie of the Kentucky mountaineers with the natives as actors, rides into the region and stops at the shack of Joe Castle, a recluse. Sheriff Talbott comes looking for some one who wounded Little Jase McCaleb, a mountaineer. Cawdon Bratchell, adopted son of the local judge, is found hiding in the barn, himself wounded. He confesses he shot Jase, but says Jase shot first. Jase's father arrives, bitterly criticising the sheriff for not arresting Cawdon. Talbott retorts that he is going to arrest Little Jase. Old McCaleb then caustically refers to Cawdon's dead father, Dawes Fleetwell, as a liar and scoundrel. Cawdon learns for the first time that his father and stepfather were enemies. Later, at the town, where the wounds of both boys are treated, it becomes clear that both are in love with Lakeery, a mountain girl. She scorns Little Jase, and the latter threatens further harm to Cawdon.

CHAPTER IV.—*(Continued.)*

A SLENDER GIRL OF SIXTEEN.

THE courtroom was vacant the next day when Castle passed through it to the door at the side of the rude old bench, which gave into the judge's chamber. He paused a moment to let his eyes travel about its quadrangle between stained walls and dusty windows and to think of what audiences to unpremeditated dramas had occupied those seats in the century and more since the structure had been reared.

The chamber of justice, unadorned by any trappings of judicial majesty, impressed him as what it had been, and to some extent still was—an outpost

standing for the challenged and sometimes a precarious authority of law in a territory where each man sought to be a perverse and willful law unto himself.

Entering the judge's chamber, the visitor found himself in a small, square room furnished with an almost ascetic severity. A plain table was littered with briefs and papers, and time-worn volumes of law books lined the shelves about the walls. This was the background of statute, code and precedent against which the man who now rose gravely from his chair held his grip on a problematical circuit.

The man himself was tall and well knit. His temples were beginning to gray; but Gibney, who had visioned something of a patriarch, found himself looking into well-chiseled features of early middle age.

"Good mornin', Mr. Gibney," the judge offered greeting. "The sheriff told me you were coming to call on me. I'm right glad to see you."

"The sheriff told *me,*" responded the stranger with a smile, "that I was coming to call on you. It sounded rather like a command of royalty—but it is none the less a pleasure."

Muir Bratchell's shrewd eyes lighted humorously.

"Royalty's a word that falls right wide of the mark," he said. "But we've got such a teetering balance between law and lawlessness hereabouts that we like to meet strangers that come among us —and to welcome them when we can."

"I understand," answered the motion-picture man. "It's just that the law greets the stranger in the same spirit as men along the road—though more tactfully: 'What mout yore name be, stranger, an'—not meanin' no harm—what mout yore business be in these parts?' "

The judge leaned back and clasped his hands behind his head.

"Yes, backwood folks are given to formulas," he said. "Sometimes it's important to know such things as they ask about."

"Then I'll come to the point. I've made several productions of Kentucky mountain pictures—most of them on the West coast with eucalyptus trees masquerading as pines and with Hollywood actors posing as natives."

"I've seen some of those portraits of ourselves," the judge told him, and the visitor smiled.

"I suppose so. Well, somehow a notion has taken hold of me that I'm keen to try out. I wanted to come into this country without any cast of imported actors and make a picture of my own—in which every player should be native."

Judge Bratchell's face became more sober in its thoughtfulness.

"Do you reckon, Mr. Gibney," he asked doubtfully, "that you can make actors out of these inexperienced folks?"

"That's the experiment I mean to make. Of course, it may prove a washout. On the other hand, perhaps they can play themselves better than the gentlemen and ladies of Hollywood. If they can, I will get something of an epic; at least I won't have to start in teaching them to forget what they think they know." He paused, then added: "I've seen a boy and a girl in the last two days who are types suited to my needs. They would screen and they might take direction."

"Who were they?" inquired the judge.

"One of them was your son, judge, and the other was a girl at the settlement school. Her first name is Lakeery. I don't know her last name yet."

Bratchell was sitting in an attitude of meditation, and at length he said briefly:

"Lakeery's last name is Paston."

For a time the two talked generalities, and when Gibney rose Bratchell was also on his feet with an extended hand.

"You're undertakin' a right interestin' experiment, Mr. Gibney," he said. "I don't quite know whether I'm glad or sorry to see you try it—but I don't see that I could stop you anyhow. I don't make out that it breaks any law or threatens the peace an' dignity of the Commonwealth of Kentucky."

The lowlander looked about the shelves of musty tomes in their uniformity of drab bindings, and his eye fell on a thick volume which stood out contrastingly in bright red.

"I wonder," he said, "if there's another circuit judge in these hills who has that book in his library. Unless I'm mistaken, it's 'Who's Who in America.'"

Bratchell smiled as he answered:

"Yes. Sometimes, livin' off here back of beyond, I want to look up somebody that's in that book. You see, there isn't anybody to ask."

Young Cawdon Bratchell and Joe Castle started from the cabin together the next morning traveling "ride and tie." The boy had come on foot, and now the method of their journeying was that common to the hills when two fellow wayfarers have only one mount between them.

It was a method of alternating in the saddle and on foot, the horseman halting when he had gone a given distance ahead to "tie his ridin'-critter to a flying limb" and proceed on foot. But Castle ingeniously contrived in these relays that his mounted periods should be shorter than those of the wounded boy, and when they came to the school in the afternoon, he insisted on Cawdon's having his wounds dressed, and on spending the night there to break the journey. He himself went forward on foot, leaving his horse for Cawdon's use the next day.

Down at the edge of the school tract, a footbridge, fashioned from a single broad-girthed log, spanned a brook where minnows darted in rocky pools. At each end of this bridge were great boulders where against massed rhododendron, wild columbine lifted cruet-shaped blossoms and ferns grew in lacy lushness.

Looking across the ruggedness of Big Blue one lost all detail in the cloaking verdure of steep-tilted forest, so that the brook was a boundary between lawless tangle and ordered smoothness.

On the bridge the morning after Castle's departure stood a boy and girl.

"Ye'll have need to watch him close, Cawdy," the girl was saying earnestly. "He's like a rattlesnake, Jase is. He don't never lay by a grudge—an' I reckon I only made things worse—spittin' fire at him like I did."

"You?" he protested indignantly. "What else could you do? You can't tell him you—you like him just because he wants you to, can you?"

She shook her head.

"I could have kept a civil tongue in my head," she declared contritely. "I needn't have said I wouldn't wipe my feet on him—but I wouldn't. I saw his eyes glisten like live coals when I said it—an' I knowed right well—I mean, I knew right well he'd store it up against both of us."

"Let him!" exclaimed Cawdon contemptuously. "I'm not askin' odds of Jase McCaleb—an' yet——" He broke off there with so serious a darkening of his eyes that the girl leaned anxiously forward.

"Yet what, Cawdon?"

"I've given Tolliver Talbott my hand to keep the peace," he said, "and I know it would just about kill my pappy if I got mixed up in any feudin'."

Suddenly his expression changed and the handsome face frowned under a new thought as he put a point-blank question.

"Lakeery, did you ever hear any stories about my pappy—I mean my own pappy, not the judge?"

The girl was standing with golden flecks of sunlight falling upon her through the yellow lacery of young pig-nut branches and the clear freshness of her cheeks was like that of laurel petals in the strong light. Now her color deepened a little and her dark eyes became embarrassed.

"Your own pappy, Cawdy?" she questioned, as if sparring for time. "Do you mean Dawes Fleetwell?"

Young Bratchell caught her hesitance of manner, and he nodded with a grimmer set to his engaging features.

"Yes, Dawes Fleetwell," he responded. "I've heard some right spiteful things told about him here of late, and if folks speak ill of him, I've got a bound to know."

"Nobody speaks ill of the judge," she reminded him. "He's your pappy, Cawdy."

But Cawdon dismissed that statement with an obdurate jerk of his head. Something in him had seemed to change, and his tone had hardened.

"He's only my stepfather," he announced. "I haven't a drop of his blood in my veins. It's a man's own blood that makes him good or bad."

The girl knew nothing very definite of Dawes Fleetwell, but she had always heard him alluded to as a "smart rascal." Now she said gently, if evasively:

"There's always some folks that speak ill of everybody, Cawdy."

"I don't mean that," he told her. "I don't remember my own pappy very well. I was right little when we came back from New York, my mother an' me, after my pappy was killed. It's all like some dream when I try to think back to it. But my mother always told me he went there to the big city and made a great repute."

"You did things yourself, Cawdy," she declared admiringly. "Little as you were, I've heard tell time an' again that you acted on the stage."

He shrugged one shoulder.

"It was just like a puppy that has learned a few tricks," he assured her. "It's funny that I don't remember more about that. It was all so long ago—an' so almighty far away."

Suddenly he went on as if unwilling or unable to be diverted from the new thought that had taken unhappy possession of him.

"If I've had the wrong notions all along, I've got to find out," he said desperately. "If I've got bad blood in me, maybe folks will end up by callin' me a smart rascal, too. Folks say you can't get away from what's bred in the bone."

The girl drew a step nearer, her eyes brimming with sympathy.

"Every family's got some good an' some bad in it," she made stout assertion. Then, with abrupt vehemence, she added: "Anyhow, ye're good enough for me, Cawdy."

As though that assertion had swept his mind clear of every disturbing obsession, like a lightning bolt through freighted air, the boy's face cleared and then went red.

"I'm not good enough for you, Lakeery," he said impetuously, "unless I'm good enough for anybody in the world." He hesitated and gulped, because he had never made actual love to her before, then he rushed on: "Because there's not any other girl like you—and—and I—I just love the ground you walk on, Lakeery!"

Her own cheeks were flushed, too, but she did not move away. Her eyes widened and deepened. In stature he was a man. In years he was almost a man, yet until now, the vast shyness of boyhood had bound him to muteness on the most absorbing topic of existence. Except in the games at "play-parties" he had never kissed a girl, and in her eyes he read her responsiveness as if she had thrown up the blinds of her soul and opened it to his gaze.

Then he had taken her in his arms,

and the soft and yielding contact of her slenderness sent his blood into a leaping flame. His lips on her cheek brought a thrilling discovery of both a coolness and a warmth, and the mountains seemed unsteady before his eyes. He had forgotten his wounded arm and a fierce hurt shot through it, but that suffering was fiercely relished.

Then somehow he was no longer kissing her cheek. Their lips had met, and young Cawdon Bratchell was drunk with his first full taste of love-making.

After a little he held her back and looked at her, and his eyes were deep and earnest.

"From now on, Lakeery," he declared, "so long as we live, we belong to one another, an' I reckon nothin' else counts."

"Yes, from now on," said the girl. "But I must go back now."

Yet she did not go back at once. She stood on the footbridge watching him as he went into the woods and untied the reins of Joe Castle's horse from a "flying limb." She watched him mount, waved back to him as he waved his hat, and then a turn in the steep trail took him from her sight.

Still she stood there for what seemed a long time, though it was moments only—until suddenly a stifled shriek broke from her throat and she began running wildly into the tangle of timber.

She knew that spiteful crack of gunfire had not come from a hunter "squirrelin'" in the woods. It sounded from too close a point and her intuition told her that it had come from ambush.

After a few stumbling steps she saw Cawdon's horse standing still, and saw him slumped beside it at the edge of a trail hardly wider than a deer run. His right hand had instinctively reached for his pistol and drawn it, but it had not been fired.

The girl rushed over to him, and long generations of feud-bred men and women reacted in her. Even before she knelt by him and lifted his head, she reached down and caught up the revolver. She rushed into the woods, and when she thought she heard a rustle in the underbrush she fired two wild and random shots.

After that Lakeery Paston went back and knelt down, supporting the head of the boy on her lap, sobbing over him, and murmuring incoherently.

It was so that those who came running from the school grounds, at the crack of the rifle, found her.

Doctor Brand was among the first to arrive, and after a little the woman physician stood up.

"It's a more serious matter this time," she said, "but perhaps we can save him."

CHAPTER V.

"DISOBEY AN' YE DIES!"

IT was in his bare office back of the courtroom that Judge Bratchell greeted Joe Castle on his arrival the day following Gibney's visit and, as chance would have it, at the same hour that the boy and girl stood together on the log footbridge beyond the ridge of Big Blue.

"I reckon first thing, jedge," said Castle, "you want to hear about your boy. He started out along with me yesterday mornin', but he took the night at the school. They dressed his wounds there an' the doctor reckoned it would be just as well for him to break his journey. I got to town myself last night."

The judge inclined his head.

"The sheriff told me you were coming along with Cawdon," he said. "I'm beholden to you for takin' care of my boy. The McCalebs have already given bond for young Jase and started back. Of course, that matter came before the county judge."

There was no word of anxiety for the dubious situation which had arisen

out of the shooting or for the complications which might follow upon it, and after a moment the visitor said bluntly:

"You sent for me."

"I'd been hopin'," Judge Bratchell answered, "that I wouldn't have to send for you. I'd been hopin' you'd come to see me of your own accord."

"Why?"

"Because I knew you were a man from a different world than ours—and I thought you might see fit to honor me with your confidence."

"My confidence?"

"Yes. Even if you chose to wear a disguise to other folks. We haven't many celebrated novelists here, among us, Mr. Castle."

The visitor leaned back in his chair and laughed quietly.

"I suppose," he said, "I might as well drop the pose of being a mountain man—so far as you're concerned." After a pause, he went on: "I'd like to know how you happened to learn I was a scribbler of fiction. Of course the 'celebrated novelist' is pure flattery."

Bratchell rose from his chair and took down the red volume which had attracted the eye of yesterday's visitor. He opened it at a place marked with a scrap of paper and laid the volume on the table.

"I thought you might be this man," he explained, "and I looked it up here—Joseph Meredith Castle—and there it gives the novels you have written. I've read some of them, Mr. Castle. If you really wanted to hide out, you should have used another name."

The man in the rough garb of the mountaineer leaned forward with his elbows on the table. His face was thoughtful.

"I didn't suppose there were many readers of fiction here," he said. Then, with a faint smile: "Your sheriff seemed to regard me as a suspicious character. I gathered that you wanted to see me for another reason—to have me in for a sort of grilling as to my standing in society."

Bratchell shook his head, but his manner was still grave as he responded:

"No, I know something of your standing in society, and yet——"

"Yet what, judge?"

"Yet I was puzzled, Mr. Castle, and a little worried. A man may choose to leave a world he's made a mark in and live off by himself in a remote place like this, but it's right hard for such a man to go on playin' out the part of a backwoodsman among real backwoodsmen. And a man who seems mysterious and won't talk about himself stirs up guesswork. That ain't always a safe thing to do—at least in these hills."

"Beyond dropping more or less into the picturesque manner of speech around me, I never made any special pretense," explained Castle. Then he smiled somewhat sardonically as he added: "Of course, when Gibney descended on me and jumped at conclusions, I did play up to him. That amused me. Frankly, I didn't want him. He stood for all the things that I was seeking to get away from. Do you blame me?"

"No," Bratchell spoke seriously. "You had the license to choose your associations. The only reason I sent for you was that I got uneasy. I heard some talk about the hermit over there beyond Parr. There were vague rumors that you were a revenue spy—absurd gossip, but it might hold danger for you. I thought I'd better have a talk with you."

Joe Castle rose from his chair and went to the window. He stood for a time looking meditatively off across the county seat to the mountain walls around it; then he came back with a face somewhat stonily set.

"You are right, Judge Bratchell," he said. "I suppose every man owes society some explanation of his motives and movements. The theoretical right

of privacy appears to be a fallacy. I came here seeking to escape certain memories and failures."

"I wasn't seekin' to cross-question you, Mr. Castle, an' that book there isn't supposed to be a compendium of failures."

Castle shrugged.

"Failure and success are relative terms—and vague. As a matter of fact, I stand self-convicted as a literary hack, and nothing more. I have sickened of certain tawdry phases of city life. I'm seeking a more congenial state of mind in solitude. In short, I wish a complete change of orbit."

"So you came here."

"Yes. Here it seemed more possible to be independent—to write what was in me or not at all. Privacy of life invited me and I didn't seek companionships."

Judge Bratchell sat drumming with his fingers on the top of his table.

"Mr. Castle," he said gravely, "I didn't aim to pry into your private affairs—but you're among a people given to suspicions, some of 'em with secrets they don't want inquired into. Maybe it's just as well for you to have somebody like me in the neighborhood who can speak for you if the need should arise."

The visitor's eyes lighted to the quiet amusement which had more than once challenged Gibney's interest.

"Judge," he said, "I appreciate your proffer of kindly offices, and it's barely possible I may be able to reciprocate them in some trivial measure."

Bratchell regarded him gravely as though waiting without question for further explanation.

Castle went on with a somewhat acrid humor:

"You gained the impression that I was a literary celebrity. Actually I'm a man who sacrificed certain original literary gifts for monetary success, but my wasted years have given me a certain familiarity with the surface life of cities. If such information can ever help you, call on me."

"I'm obliged." The response of the mountain judge was sober, and as his visitor took up his hat, the door opened and Sheriff Talbott stood on the threshold. The little officer's usually tranquil face was flintily set and his eyes were contracted into slits, yet he spoke in a composed voice and came to his point with uncomplicated terseness.

"Jedge," he said, "I bear right dire tidin's. Cawdon started away from Big Blue School a little while ago an' he was shot down from the la'rel. Miss Moreland just telephoned me."

Muir Bratchell was standing behind his plain desk. As he took the first shock of the news he winced and his face stiffened, yet when his words came they were as quietly modulated as if they were being shaped in a formal ruling from the bench.

"Is it fatal, Tolliver?"

"He's got a chanct," answered the small man, "but it's graver than the other time. The bullet grazed his scalp—but he took a worse hurt when he fell off his hoss an' cracked his head against a rock boulder."

"Does—does Lissy know it yet?"

"I reckon not, jedge. Miss Moreland asked me to break the tidin's to you, as easylike es I could. She'd 'low you could tell his mother better then anybody else."

"I'll go to her," said Bratchell simply.

Castle stepped forward.

"I should have waited for your son, sir," he declared self-accusingly, "but I thought young McCaleb was safe in jail."

"He made bail straightway," answered the judge dully, "but of course you didn't know that." After a moment's pause, he added: "I don't suppose we have any sort of proof that the McCalebs shot him, have we, Tolliver?"

The sheriff laughed bitterly.

"What proof do we need, jedge, beyond common sense? It's ornery, dull-witted fellers like them thet just go on in blind rage without thinkin' two steps ahead. They don't see aught save what their hate shows 'em." He broke off and his narrow eyes gleamed dangerously, as he added: "But don't fret yourself about the McCalebs just now. Go comfort the boy's mother an' leave the balance of the matter to me."

Bratchell had reached mechanically for his hat. Now he paused anxiously and turned:

"What do you mean, sheriff? Leave what to you?"

The little man met the stern inquiry of the other eyes with a steady straightforwardness, and he spoke with deep conviction:

"I reckon we both know those fellers would love to 'stroy you, jedge. Leetle Jase's daddy an' the whole kit an' kaboodle will back him up. They'll sw'ar fer him an' alibi him—an' we ain't got a witness on the face of the earth to gainsay 'em in their lies. If we take airy step to prosecute, they'll holler an' squall thet whatever judge sets in yore stid ter try their boy, he's still speakin' with your voice. They'll give out to each an' every, thet it comes to the amount of avengin' your own grievances in your own co't. So I jest aim ter handle this matter"—he paused before adding the one word—"otherwise."

The judge shook his head in sober protest.

"Tolliver," he said severely, "you an' I have been pardners in this job here through some searching ordeals, but more than once I've known you to be hot-headed. If you go outside the law now, all that we've compassed goes down to wreckage, like a burned house. It would throw away the results of some years of right earnest work—your work and mine."

The smooth, pink face of the small man softened out of its stony grimness, and he laughed. His loyalty and devotion to this friend were such that, in his service, he stood ready to lay down his own life, but his inhibiting reticence permitted his tongue to shape no declaration of his feelings, so he laughed and said gruffly:

"Jedge, I don't aim to 'stroy you or your work, or my work, either. I only 'low to see to it thet these McCalebs act nice an' quiet fer a spell. I aim to do it without any public give-out that will set gossip tongues a-waggin'."

Muir Bratchell gazed in perplexed absorption at his partner in law enforcement as he observed dubiously:

"Tolliver, they aren't easy children to nurse—these McCalebs."

"I don't 'low to nurse 'em easy," announced the other tersely, "an' I don't aim ter tell you aught more—just yet. All you need know is this, jedge: I ain't settin' out to do any violence thet will discredit my office an' yours."

Abruptly the pink face broke into an engaging grin.

"Me an' them, we'll jest talk things over—maybe pray together—an' like es not, they'll have a change of heart."

When the judge had left them to bear to his wife the news which made his heart heavy, the sheriff turned to Castle and spoke amiably:

"If you aim to fare back to your house now, I reckon we might as well journey along together. You left your horse over at the school, but I've got mine, an' I'm willin' we should ride an' tie."

"But I know you want to make good haste," objected Castle. "Ridin' and tyin' will hold you back."

"Not crossin' over Big Blue," the officer reminded him. "Up the nigh slope an' down the yon', a man can fare as fast on foot as hossback."

But when they had left the school behind and each had a "ridin'-critter" under him, the small man set so hot a

pace that, save for the stamina of Castle's thoroughbred, he would have been put to it to keep up.

At the small hospital they had been told that young Cawdon's recovery seemed a possibility, though by no means a certainty.

If Joe Castle rode silently now, it was not because he was playing out his rôle of hermit, but because he could not escape a heavy and burdensome foreboding for the man at his side. This man was going to the house of sinister enemies where several men, stung by a sense of guilt and desperation and, most dangerous of all, by the incitement of fear, would be intrenched behind stout walls. Yet Talbott himself seemed more concerned in the horse which Castle rode, than in any prospect of danger that might lie ahead.

"I reckon you didn't get that critter hereabouts," he hazarded, as his eyes glowed with appreciation of fine lines and rhythmic movement. "He looks to have right smart thoroughbred strain in him."

"All thoroughbred," answered Castel. "He's by Polestar out of Bonny Blue, and he would be racing now except that his legs went dicky as a two-year-old. Stout enough for the road, though."

"Polestar! You don't say!" exclaimed the sheriff. "It ain't amazin' he looks good. That's a stud horse that's sent some sev'ral winners to the races."

Castle said nothing, but he knew that to most of these highland Kentuckians the affairs of pure blood and studbook lines in horseflesh were as remote as the intricacies of breeding racing camels across the ocean. So far apart are the lives of stony Appalachia from those of the opulent Bluegrass.

Perhaps Talbott noticed that interest, for he made a ready confession:

"I'm a plumb fool about hoss racin'. I always go down to see the Derby if so be I can get away. I aim to go down next week."

When they were a mile or so from the house of the McCalebs, and had for the last two hours met no other wayfarers, Tolliver Talbott drew rein.

"I'll bid ye farewell here," he announced. "I aim to hitch outen sight an' brogue on afoot through the woods. I've got it in head to give Old Jase a happy surprise."

"Come over to my house when you get through," invited Castle, and the sheriff nodded. But in the heart of the novelist as they parted, there lurked the fear that his guest would not come.

When the sheriff had disappeared into the "laurel hell" of the mountainside and hitched his horse in the concealment of a heavily wooded ravine, he did not avail himself of what was left of the daylight to hasten on and call out his name at Jase McCaleb's stile.

Instead he approached the place from above and reconnoitered it by bird's-eye view from the tangle of the steep slope at its back. There he crouched patiently in the laurel and awaited the coming of darkness.

The McCalebs would probably be prepared to stand siege. The same half-witted violence which had guided one of them straight from the jail and the giving of bond, to a fresh ambuscade, would be keyed to resist a second arrest.

These matters were known to Tolliver Talbott, post-graduate student of the feudal mind, and his conduct took them into full account.

At length he approached the house under indrawing curtain of nightfall, slinking noiselessly through the shadows of which he was one.

This cloak of invisibility and soundlessness he successfully maintained until he had reached the front of the cabin and stood flattened against its wall between door and window. The door was tight closed now and the window heavily shuttered, though the spring night was unseasonably warm, and it was only through the unintended cracks of

warped casings that the stealthy visitor could see any light from within.

Having so placed himself that no muzzle could be trained on him from either opening without the gun bearer thrusting out his head and shoulders, Talbott lifted his voice:

"Hello, Jase McCaleb!" he accosted in a clear and ringing tone which as yet held no note of challenge or animosity. "This is Tolliver Talbott. I crave speech with ye."

A dead silence followed, and since he had expected that, the officer smiled in the darkness as again he shouted over his shoulder:

"I knows ye're in thar, Jase. I can see the light. Quit playin' possum with me an' open up."

Still no response was vouchsafed, and this time the outer voice cast off its affability and boomed into the night with a commanding severity:

"Jase, do ye aim ter fo'ce me to bust down your door?"

So direct and unequivocal a challenge brought a defiant roar from the interior.

"Bust hit down at yore peril. What does ye want of me anyhow?"

"To have speech with ye. I told ye that."

"Why didn't ye hail me from ther highway like an honest man thet comes in peace?"

"Because I knew full well you wouldn't answer."

"Thar ain't no welcome fer ye hyar," announced McCaleb shortly. "I reckon ye kin talk from outside."

"That don't suit me. I like to look a man in the eye when I talks to him."

"All right. Ef hit don't suit ye, ye kin begone."

There was another silence and though it stretched itself lengthily, Talbott refrained from breaking it. He was psychologist enough to know that such a silence was more damaging to the morale of the man, or men inside than to himself. To them it was a period of conjecture heavy with anxiety. They were guessing what the resourceful and dangerous Talbott might be doing or planning just beyond the wall that hid him from their view.

So the sheriff stood immovable against the chinked logs, except that his head turned with birdlike quickness from side to side and his eyes, endowed with the cat's ability for night sight, darted their glances watchfully toward each corner of the house. Some one might have slipped out of the back door to attempt a surprise attack around a corner of the cabin.

Finally the voice of the elder McCaleb sounded again from inside, this time pitched to a note of ill-concealed curiosity:

"Who hev ye got with ye? How many deppities did ye fotch along?"

"There ain't nobody with me, Jase. I come alone. I ain't actin' as high sheriff to-night."

Perhaps they did not believe him. Certainly that last statement was one which gave food for perplexing thought, and it left the elder McCaleb of two minds. He preferred to parley through the thickness of solid walls, yet he feared the consequences of antagonizing Talbott beyond need.

"Thet don't sound reas'nble," he countered cautiously. "Ye don't never come hyar save to jail somebody thet's plumb innocent."

"I don't come to make any arrest at this time, Jase."

Again there was silence at the end of which McCaleb said noncommittally:

"Wait a minute, then. I wants ter study a spell afore I lets ye in."

Talbott smiled, but he redoubled his watch on the corners of the house.

He thought he heard the light creak of a hinge toward the rear, and with no seeming of haste he drew his heavy automatic from his holster and bent with his inordinately keen ears delicately attuned. If there was sound, it

was such as few men could have detected above the pink-wink whistling of the little frogs in the pond across the road. Yet Talbott had learned what he needed to know, and he slipped without the ghost of sound to the west corner of the house and stood there waiting.

Suddenly he stepped a pace aside from the cover of the wall and thrust his pistol muzzle against a yielding bulk of shadowy humanity just emerging from the end of the cabin. His voice was too guardedly low to penetrate a wall, but it could and did reach the ears of the astonished young man, bent on scouting duty, who already had the persuasion of cold steel pressing emphatically into his belly.

"Don't make no sound, son," came the still-voiced direction. "Turn round-about and bid yore pappy let ye in the back door. Disobey me an' ye dies."

Young Jase wheeled miserably, holding his rifle wide and quaking with the terror of chagrined surprise. He went around to the back of the cabin; and once more the sheriff spoke very low and very earnestly:

"Scratch on the door cautiouslike. Act like ye didn't want me ter hear ye out front."

The boy's forehead was sweat-beaded as under the goad of compulsion he obeyed. He scratched cautiously and his words came in an imploring whisper:

"Pappy, hit's me, hit's Jase. For God's sake, let me in!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE ASSISTANT CAMERA MAN.

THERE was a creaking inside and a hurry of tiptoed footfalls. Palpably some one in there was hastening from a watchful position at the front of the house. Then the door swung outward, and with the pistol muzzle this time pressing the small of his back, the son and heir of the house entered. At his heels like a material shadow followed Tolliver Talbott.

The interior of the place was squalid. On a four-poster bed in a corner, still unmade after nightfall, sat the slatternly figure of McCaleb's woman with the two "leastest" of her children, close at her sides. They had been placed there out of range of the front door and the woman's eyes were smoldering belligerently though she held a grim silence.

Against the smoked mantel leaned Ferguson with a cocked rifle in his hands, while the elder McCaleb himself stood, similarly armed, and poised on the balls of his feet where he had stepped back after unbarring the door.

Yet at first all the eyes, except those of the elder Jase, were intently held upon the front of the house, where they believed the danger still lurked.

The elder McCaleb's jaw dropped at sight of the second figure which had entered the place with a spectral silence through a door opened to admit another.

"Jase," began Talbott quietly, and the firelight fell on the automatic in his hand, "I fotched Leetle Jase back ter ye. He come slippin' up on me with his gun out. I reckon I had a license ter shoot him if I'd been so minded."

Ferguson had wheeled and the woman had uttered a stifled scream. Now every one in the room remained stock-still as if petrified by some sudden and noxious wave of poison gas.

The boy's sizable bulk partly masked the sheriff, and because he was keenly aware of the muzzle against his kidneys he made no effort to better his position by drawing away.

"'Pears like," declared Talbott thoughtfully, "there don't none of ye act like men thet kin afford ter talk straightforward."

It was Old Jase who first recovered the power of speech, and he glowered with anger intensified by the chagrin of having been so effectively outwitted.

"A man thet comes slippin' up in ther nighttime," he said, as yet curbing his wrath into some semblance of injured dignity, "don't 'pear ter merit no rightful welcome."

Talbott nodded his head composedly. "I told ye I aimed to come in—an' I came."

"Well, now ye're inside. What next?" The owner of the house had steadied into a quietness of manner which Talbott recognized as far more dangerous than his bluster. Old Jase McCaleb was, in the ordinary aspects of life, no coward.

In his heart had been rankling and festering the memory of that recent evening, when before the eyes of Red Ferguson and others he had taken a blow across the face from the little sheriff's hat and had shrunk back whining from the deadliness of the little sheriff's challenge. Ferguson had shrunk, too, and tactfully enough he had refrained from later allusions to that mortifying episode, but such affronts are not to be forgotten or lightly borne. They brand a man indelibly with shame.

McCaleb had sought to fortify his self-respect with the avowal that he had been biding his time. Now, perhaps, the time had come.

Now again both McCaleb and Ferguson found themselves standing in awe of Tolliver Talbott who was fabled to be invincible and immune from death, yet in their dull minds the sense of intolerable outrage struggled fiercely against this fear, struggled against it and almost overcame it.

To-night Talbott had invaded the house without official credentials, and a man's house is his castle. A man's courage reaches its apogee in defending his own threshold—and Jase McCaleb's threshold had been violated.

This might be the opportune moment to embrace and settle the conflict once for all, this moment when, in the eyes of the law, Talbott stood as a trespasser, when the odds of numbers were three to one against him.

Under certain circumstances, fear may make men courageous to the point of recklessness, and Jase McCaleb no longer stood a picture of excited fury, as he had done on the other occasion. He had become grimly quiet and collected, and his companion caught the infection of that stiffened spirit.

The first thing to do, of course, was to get Little Jase out of his parlous position as a human shield for the invader —then to start hell a-poppin' and depend on three competent riflemen to avail over the pluperfect pistol hand of the sheriff.

Perhaps experience had developed in the sheriff an uncanny art of reading the spirit back of masklike features, and now as if in contemptuous acceptance, he followed his rule of doing the unexpected. Seizing young Jase by the shoulder, he sent him wheeling across the floor—and out of the way.

As he did so the elder McCaleb fired, but in the sudden need of acting a half second before he was ready, he pressed the trigger with his rifle still at the hip level, and his bullet did no more than nick the officer's hat brim.

In the same instant the officer was on him.

Talbott did not fire his automatic. Men called him the "pistol whipper," and it was as the pistol whipper now that he went swiftly into action. With the heavy weapon reversed and palmed, he sent a crashing blow to the jaw of the elder McCaleb, and McCaleb went down like a felled ox. The rifle slid from his relaxed fingers onto the floor and lay there smelling of saltpeter in the close room.

Then, while both Ferguson and the boy hung for a hesitant half second in indecision, the sheriff's reversed pistol had flipped back into shooting position and had spat out one sharp report. The rising rifle went spinning out of Fergu-

son's grip and fell with a splintered stock.

Then Talbott turned his attention to Young Jase, but that he did with the deliberation of a disdainful quesion.

"Are *you* cravin' any argument, son?" he inquired; and the loutish youth, now single-handedly face to face with a legendary champion, gulped and quavered for an agonized moment. He burned brick red as he heard his witch-like mother shrilling fierce exhortation:

"Shoot him, Jase! Don't ye aim ter shoot?"

But young Jase dropped his gun to his side and abjectly shook his head.

Talbott was standing over the still prostrate body of the boy's father as the man, slowly groping his way back to sensibility, began raising himself on his elbow.

"I'll tarry now twell he's able to parley with me," announced the sheriff briefly, "an' then I reckon we can come to some understandin'."

Five minutes later the elder Jase was sitting hulked dejectedly in a chair beside the hearth, his eyes glowering, but his head hanging in the sore admission of defeat, while from the bed in the corner two children howled and one woman sat gazing out of eyes brimming with futile rage. To this overflow audience Talbott paid no attention. With a gesture of disdain he had put his pistol away in its holster.

The eruption of action had come and passed quickly, but all hope of successful defiance had drained out of the hearts of the McCaleb combatants. They were—until next time—defeated men awaiting such terms as their conqueror might see fit to impose.

"Now," said the small man shortly, "fergit all about my bein' high sheriff—an' just recollect I'm Tolliver Talbott. As sheriff, I've no *evidence* against none of you. In my own mind, I'm plumb dead sartin Leetle Jase there laywayed Cawdon Bratchell—both times."

Young Jase said nothing, and his father spoke only after an interval. His swollen jaw was marked by an ugly gash and he managed his speech with difficulty.

"We kin prove that when thet shoot was shot," he said, without convincing force, "we was all tergether at Lem Vickar's house a measured mile away from thar."

"Ye kin prove that alibi by lyin' witnesses," broke in the officer. "But ther ain't no need ter perjure yoreselves. I'm tutorin' this matter other fashion than that."

Old Jase looked up in dull perplexity, and Talbott went on in a level and unmistakable voice:

"Mark what I tell ye—because I ain't sayin' it but just once. Chain up your mad dog pup an' keep him chained. Ye're seekin' to 'stroy Jedge Bratchell an' I don't aim ter tolerate it."

After a brief pause came the ultimatum:

"Next time I see the earmarks of a McCaleb job in airy laywayin' hereabouts——" The little man broke off and his voice dropped to a leveler and deadlier pitch: "Next time I sees that, then I aim to destroy this fam'ly, root an' branch, to the last growed-up male brute. I aim ter stomp 'em out like a den of rattlesnakes—so holp me God in heaven."

From the bed came a torrent of shrewish denunciations, but Talbott did not divert his sternly threatening eyes from the older men.

"That's all I came over here to say," he informed them in valedictory. "If you misdoubts I mean it, try me."

Young Jase, whom the officer had scorned to disarm, stood still, holding his rifle swinging at his side. Old Jase's gun lay where he had dropped it on the floor.

Tolliver Talbott strolled toward the rear door, presenting to them a view of his back, and he did not deign to look

backward over his shoulder. On the threshold he paused with a preoccupied deliberation and stood, apparently interested in the starry sky. His back was still presented to his enemies and his hands hanging at his sides.

Inside they watched him as though fascinated. With a gleam of reborn hope stealing into his dull eyes, Little Jase tentatively half lifted his rifle. His finger itched on its trigger and his father gasped apprehensively but spoke no word. Then the boy's impulse of daring expired, quenched in the futility of fear. He let the muzzle drop again and Talbott gave no sign of having suspected the gesture, yet every man in the room had the feeling that he was dallying there, waiting, inviting, a hostile move, and ready, if any one made it, to wheel with catlike quickness and carry out his threat.

At length Tolliver Talbott went deliberately out and crossed the stile to the road.

"Lakeery Paston," said the young man who sat at one end of the log footbridge which crossed the brook at the edge of the school tract. He was nursing his knees with slender, interlocked fingers and he spoke reflectively as he gazed at the girl who sat across from him on the adz-flattened log.

"Lakeery Paston," he repeated, "I never knew a girl named Lakeery before—but then, if it comes to that, I never knew a girl like you before—and I've known 'em from Cape Cod to Capetown."

This lad had engaging brown eyes that held a teasing light which was at puzzling variance with the sober quietness of his voice. Lakeery, who was accustomed to a humorless people, jesting when at all with broad obviousness, was perplexed and a little fascinated by the more whimsical humor of the lowlander whose bearing and features she thought aristocratic, and yet who had confided in her that he had hoboed his way around the world.

The mountain girl ignored his hints of world-wide experience, which savored just a bit of boastfulness, and gave him a grave reply.

"I took my name from my great-grandmammy," she said, "an' I've heard tell she took it from the War of '12."

"The War of '12?" he repeated in perplexity; and his companion nodded her affirmation.

"In the War of '12 a passel of our folks fared up to Lake Erie an' fought on battleships with Admiral Perry. I had a foreparent killed up there—an' his daughter was my great-grandmammy. They named her Lake Erie. Finally it just got shortened up to Lakeery, I reckon." She paused and then added thoughtfully: "'Pears like it takes a war to cause our folks to fare far away from home—save them that get penitensheried."

The boy's lips twisted in a quiet and teasing smile.

"Don't the girls, like you, ever get exported by adoring strangers who find you blooming here among the laurel?"

Lakeery shook her head and on it the sun brought out a glint like that of dark mahogany.

"There isn't a lavish of strangers on the yon side of Big Blue," she told him. "An' moreover, we generally have a rather to wed with mountain blood."

"Have you got such a rather?" he demanded, and her reply came with the complete candor which traffics not at all with coy concealments.

"I'm Cawdon Bratchell's gal—I mean girl."

"Who says so? Cawdon Bratchell?"

"Him and me both."

The young man grinned impudently.

"Both of you have neglected to consult me, but it may not be too late even now."

"I reckon," announced Lakeery lightly, "you're just pokin' fun at me—

but anyhow it doesn't make no differ—any difference."

"No," he confessed candidly as his face grew grave again, "I guess not. I could fall for you like a rock slide, Lakeery, my dear. But I don't mean to. After all, I'm a tramp. Except for what Mr. Gibney is paying me as a sort of yes-man, I couldn't rub a dime against a nickel."

"How came you to meet up with Mr. Gibney?"

"I dropped in his lap, like manna from heaven—or like a sour apple off a tree," he informed her easily. "I was bumming round the lot out on the coast looking for a job as an extra."

"Do you love to act?"

"I love to eat," he answered promptly. "I'm willing to sit up and beg, or lie down and roll over in front of a camera for a juicy bite of chow, but I'm not acting now. I'm an assistant camera man."

"You don't act like a tramp," she told him, eying him with a direct gaze. "You don't talk like one either."

"Some are born tramps," he gave her assurance, "and some have tramping thrust upon them. But let my record speak for itself. I've bummed it to Bombay—and back."

"You have folks—good folks—somewhere, haven't you, Maynard?"

The youth's face grew momentarily serious, and a more sapient judge would have caught its sensitiveness and recognized how boyishly young it was, but he answered with an assumption of brittle carelessness:

"Yes—somewhere. They are too good, perhaps, to understand their black sheep—so I went over the hill."

"You mean you ran away from home?"

"Well, I walked out on them."

"But aren't you going back? Aren't they grieving about you?"

He shrugged his shoulder, but also he winced a little.

"Maybe some day I'll drift back to the fleshpots of Egypt," he told her defiantly. "But the hour has not yet struck."

"How long have you been away from home?"

"Over two years. Sometimes it seems like more."

"I reckon it seems like more to them—to your mother."

The boy's sensitive face shadowed, but to cover that he laughed a bit harshly and unlocked his fingers to stretch his arms in lazy indifference.

"Don't you ever write—to her?" persisted the mountain girl; and he shook his head.

"Can't afford to," he declared. "Last time I did, my old man sent a lawyer out to Montana to bring me home as a delinquent. I'm not of age yet."

He made that last admission with a touch of shamefacedness.

"I had to beat it out of that town riding the rods. Since then I've closed the correspondence."

"And I reckon you've been hungry sometimes?"

"Hungry? Say, girl, I've had the front of my stomach sticking to my backbone, but I've seen the world, and that's something."

"When this job is over with, Maynard," she demanded, "what do you aim to do then?"

Once more he shrugged his shoulders.

"'Take thought neither what ye shall eat nor what ye shall wear,'" he quoted irreverently. "But we aren't washed up on this job yet, my dear."

"You mustn't call me 'my dear,'" she reproved him. "I've told you——"

The boy laughed.

"You're a leading woman now in motion pictures, young Lakeery," he reminded her. "You must accept the conventions and vernacular of your art."

"I don't know," she declared dubiously. "I don't reckon Mr. Gibney'll

bother with me long, once he finds out how ignorant and stupid I am."

"Ignorant and stupid?" he repeated with his teasing grin. "What's that got to do with acting? It's what many actors ain't nothing but."

"I reckon we'll find out about that right soon now," she answered. "Doctor Brand says Cawdy's about out of the woods. He can start in play actin' in a few days now."

"And then," announced Maynard Sample, "we'll begin shooting."

The girl started and her eyes took on a look of terror, as she echoed: "Shooting!"

"Calm yourself, my wild mountain rose. I mean shooting the picture," he reassured her. "You positively must learn the lingo of the lot, my child."

"I reckon Mr. Gibney's in right tormentin' haste to get a soon start."

The lad nodded and spoke with professional assurance.

"Right. He wants to begin shooting before the springtide has run out, so he can get the timber-rafting shots—the splash dams and all, and then he wants to do the wind-ups with the rhododendron in full bloom."

A shadow fell across them, and they looked up to see Cawdon Bratchell standing at the approach to the footbridge. His eyes were somewhat dark with what might have been jealousy, and when she saw him, the girl rose quickly to her feet.

"Cawdy!" she exclaimed. "I thought you were still layin' down at the hospital. Do you feel strong enough to be walkin' round?"

He nodded.

"I'm strong enough for more than that," he made enigmatical reply, with his eyes on the lowland youth.

Young Sample's lips curved in a smile which was both disarming and unembarrassed, as he announced nonchalantly:

"We were just talking about you, wondering when you'd be well enough to start in on the job."

The mountain boy's manner became more courteous in response to the evident friendliness of the other's tone.

"I reckon it won't be long," he answered. "If it wasn't for Doctor Brand's bein' overcautious, I could have begun before this."

"Gibney has his continuity ready," went on Maynard, "and it looks rather good to me. It's a pity, though, he can't use young Jase McCaleb for the juvenile heavy. He's a good type."

Cawdon stiffened a little in spite of his determination to be mannerly to this potential rival.

"If you mean a good type of mountain man, I reckon you haven't come to know us very well yet."

The other lad laughed, with indulgent unconcern.

"Good Lord!" he exclaimed. "Get me right, Bratchell. This McCaleb lad strikes me as about as nasty a piece of work as I ever ran afoul of—but he's ready-made for the villain in the piece, unless he's too dumb to take direction."

Judge Bratchell's stepson stood looking off into the sloping woods; then his eyes came back to dwell on the girl, as the young camera man continued:

"Anyhow, he won't be in our all-star cast. Gibney says the judge put his foot down on that proposition for once and all."

Cawdon flushed, and he turned his questioning gaze full on the other.

"Why?" he inquired brusquely.

"Perhaps," the youth from down below suggested tranquilly, "he didn't think that the situation of this particular heavy sparkin', Lakeery with you cast as her favored boy friend, would be so hot. Things might get realistic. It might not make for the peace and dignity of the Commonwealth of Kentucky."

"The jedge," said Cawdon quietly, "didn't overly delight in my gettin' into

this business anyhow. The only reason I was set on it was that Lakeery's in it——"

"I get you," agreed Maynard amiably, and Cawdon's lips parted to speak, then closed again without words.

When Lakeery and Cawdon had gone away together, the other boy sat alone on the footbridge deftly rolling a cigarette with one hand, and whistling softly to himself.

CHAPTER VII.

AT THE TRACK.

THE race track at Churchill Downs wore its gala dress. Already the city of Louisville was taxed to its capacity to house the strangers within its gates, for to-morrow was the day for the running of the Kentucky Derby. That acid test of thoroughbred class and fitness which has come to mean America's nearest approach in importance and sentiment to the English Derby at Epsom Downs, had been the lodestone of a mighty pilgrimage.

To-morrow the huge grand stands, clubhouse inclosure and lawns would be dense with seventy thousand men and women drawn from far and near: fashionables and inveterate gamblers, sportsmen and sports. Horsemen from the celebrated breeding establishments of the Bluegrass and the East, would represent the blue bloods of turfdom, and the sordid hangers-on of handbooks and greedy piking, would furnish the human sediment in the retort of the game.

That would be to-morrow. This Friday afternoon was an off day so far as the importance of the card went—a sort of breathing spell before the big day, and for that reason an hour and a half before the bugle sounded its "boots and saddles" for the first race, the press stand presented an atmosphere of easy relaxation.

To-morrow the credentials of every man who got by the policeman at the foot of the stairs which climbed narrowly to this eyrie of the sporting writers, would be severely scanned and challenged. Then highly paid turf writers from coast to coast would be crowded in that room where the twenty-five telegraph instruments clattered and portable typewriters broke into their sputtering chorus of rapid composition. Outside on the roof of the stand broadcasters would be busy at their mikes and the moving-picture cameras would be ranged in busy batteries.

But this augmented influx of journalistic notables is for one day only, and to-day the large room was tenanted only by local scribes and the vanguard of the foreigners. So to-day a while before first bugle call they took their ease in Zion.

It was one of these veteran news writers, known to the fraternity as "the Squire," who came into the room now, ushering a guest who was a layman at the racing game, but whose eyes wore the gleam of the enthusiast.

"Well, now, s-a-a-y, boys, s-a-a-y," the Squire drawled with primitive humor to a trio of his colleagues, "I guess you-all know this bird, Tolliver Talbott, the man-eating pistol whipper of the Cumberlands?"

The men so generally addressed did not seem to place the celebrity at once, and the celebrity himself flushed red to his collar line. There was no declaration of a bad man from the hills in his short stature, his chubby plumpness or the bland amiability of his eyes. If his clothes were not pronouncedly urban, neither were they conspicuously rustic. He was immaculate in his dark store clothes and his soft, white shirt, but the broad-brimmed felt hat was one feature of country dress which he had not brought himself to renounce.

"Well, s-a-a-y, where have you been all these days?" went on the Squire heartily. "This is the lad that Governor Meadows threw out of office on polit-

ical charges a few years back. He forgot he had no job and defended the jail up there against a mob when the new sheriff was asleep at the post. He got his job back and he's held it ever since."

Talbott flushed more deeply than ever, and he said self-deprecatingly:

"I reckon I was right lucky that time not to get jailed for impersonating an officer."

He went out and stood on the balcony overlooking the fresh and trim beauty of the infield, gay with its new flower beds and its myriad tossing scraps of flag bunting. He listened with silent attentiveness as the gossip of the group fell back to shop talk of the turf. The gossip ran discursively but intimately on old times, and Tolliver Talbott of the Cumberland backwoods, indulging in his annual surrender to dissipation, found it all profoundly interesting.

Then another scribe appeared towing another guest, and this time a half dozen voices were raised in recognition and greeting.

"Well, so help me," boomed a voice. "Now the horn can blow and the game begin. 'Old Nova Scotia' is with us. Where have you been all this time, you old bum?"

The man so facetiously addressed betrayed no resentment, but wagged his head with an affable grin.

He was dressed as shabbily as any tramp, and on his bent shoulders rested the weight of many years. His hair and beard were white and unkempt, and his knotty hands were tattooed with faded designs that hinted of the human frescoing of his entire body.

"Old Nova Scotia probably has a name," the Squire confided to the high sheriff from the hills, "but he's only known around the tracks by that moniker. They say he's gambled—and gone broke—on every well-known race course in the world—and he looks it."

"He does look kinderly hard up," commented Talbot in a voice considerately lowered; and the Squire laughed.

"He eats now and then," came the calm response, "and the rest of the time he lives on memories of how close he came to cashing. I reckon he sleeps mostly in flop joints, but somehow he gets to the race tracks however far the journey. If you went to the English Derby next month, you'd probably see him there."

The narrator paused, then added:

"He's an old deep-water sailor—went to sea as a boy, whaling out of New Bedford—then fishing off the Banks—then just following the races."

The old man was given a chair, and soon Talbott found himself the member of a small group gathered about him, a group that talked only enough to cue his yarns. And as he listened to the narrative of this ancient mariner, whose coat pocket bulged with well-thumbed form sheets, the little mountain man bent forward with parted lips and an engrossed interest.

"Yes, boys," Old Nova Scotia was telling them in a thin voice, "I dunno but I'm the worst Jonah in this game that's got quite a few in it. Did I ever tell you how I won almost a million one time—and never got to cash?"

"Come now, pipe down, old sea dog," razzed one of the younger listeners. "A million is heavy money even these days. Make it a few grand and we might believe you."

But the old man shook his head solemnly.

"I said almost a million," he affirmed, "and I meant it, on a ticket that cost me less than five bucks."

"Such a long shot as that never went across on any race in the world, since Lord Godolphin's Arabian started the blood line," declared the Squire stoutly, then added after an instant's pause, "that is, except one gamble."

The old man nodded and his watery eyes lighted.

"You get my rate and course, mate. That's the one I'm talking about—the Calcutta Sweep."

Tolliver Talbott looked up. He wanted to understand, and in a mild voice he inquired:

"The Calcutta Sweep? What's that? I reckon I never heard tell of it."

"Never heard of the Calcutta Sweep?" echoed Nova Scotia, gazing at him blankly. "And you follow this sport of kings?"

"Tell him, Nova Scotia," prompted the Squire. "For all their wise talk, I guess there's more than one cub here that hasn't any very clear idea of the big lottery."

"Give me a chaw," requested old Nova Scotia as he disposed himself more comfortably in his hard chair. Then he began:

"It's the biggest lottery in the world, mates, this Calcutta Sweep. It's been running for close to a century and this year it will take in—aye and pay out to a few lucky stiffs—something around six million dollars."

Talbott gulped and his eyes almost bulged in their sockets, but he held his peace. and the old fellow went on:

"There are two glass barrels in the Royal Turf Club at Calcutta sealed up by the stewards when the last ticket is sold—and opened again on drawing day. One of those barrels holds hundreds of thousands of numbered marbles. The other holds slips of paper with the names of fifty thousand horses on them, horses eligible to start in the English Derby."

"Fifty thousand!" The mountain man could not restrain the instinctive interruption. "Fifty thousand horses in one race?"

The ancient mariner smiled and wiped his watery eyes.

"Aye. By the theory of it every thoroughbred colt and filly in the world foaled three years before the race is run has a right to start—every foal registered in the stud book that's due to be a three-year-old on that Derby day. By the time the race itself draws near, the most of 'em are dead or hauling trucks or the like; but every name goes into the barrel at the start—and a few of them will go to the post."

"And how many of them numbered marbles are there, did you say?" the sheriff asked.

"As many as there are chances sold between the time the sale starts and the day the barrels are sealed. The treasurer of the club can't sell to any one except members, but the members can sell to outsiders—as many chances as they want."

"And it runs into millions?"

The little sheriff was sitting excitedly tense in his chair.

"Aye, into millions. Of course, all any man has is a number—till the drawing comes off. That's the week-end before the race and by that time the flood tide of many thousand horses has ebbed down to twenty or twenty-five. All the rest are out. All the other names that come out of the glass barrel mated to a numbered marble out of the other barrel, are as dead as salted mackerel."

"So," Talbott again interrupted somewhat diffidently, yet set on understanding this story of gambling on so princely a scale, "the one ticket on the winner takes the whole damn jackpot—the whole six million—is that right, stranger?"

"It is not right, mate," announced the battered derelict. "There'll be three or four tickets on the winner this year. Nowadays they divide up the capital prize. There'll be as many likewise on the second and third horses—place and show—and every jack tar that has a ticket on an actual starter, gets a good prize out of the big grab bag to boot. But the lads that have the Derby winner out of that lottery will never have to work again."

Talbott sat forward in his chair and

his eyes were gleaming with the passion of his one major dissipation.

"Where can a man buy one of them things, stranger?" he asked.

"At the Royal Turf Club in Calcutta, or from some member of it," he was enlightened, "and nowhere else on God's green earth or blue sea, unless he can contrive to buy part of another man's ticket."

"Why not buy all of it?" inquired the sheriff tersely, and the old story-teller smiled commiseratingly on his ignorance.

"You'd have to do that a long time ahead—when all anybody had was a number. This close to the running at Epsom, almost every man jack that has a chance on a likely starter has cast an anchor to windward by selling a piece of his ticket. A half share on the favorite's number is like to fetch fifty thousand bucks—I shouldn't be surprised."

"I'd love right well to have one of them tickets," declared the mountaineer.

The sailor wagged his white head.

"Nowadays when you take a chance you get only a number and your name is registered at the Turf Club along with that number. When you sell a share you give memorandum of sale."

"How far ahead do they begin sellin', stranger?" Talbott's inquiry was almost wistful.

"Oh, months ahead, to be sure. But mind you, mate, it's only a number you get then—a number among hundreds of thousands. It's not till the drawing comes about that you know whether your marble will come out of the barrel along with the name of a live horse or a dead horse or just a blank."

The sheriff shook his head perplexedly, and the story-teller began afresh, his aged eyes closing reminiscently:

"There's two big times in that lottery. One of 'em comes at the week-end before the race—the other one comes when the race is run. If you haven't seen the drawing day at the Calcutta Turf Club, you haven't been anywhere yet. Even if you ain't a swell or a toff that can get inside the clubhouse, you can feel the fever of it on the street. It's the big white whale of all the world's lotteries, mates—and one time I had the winner in the sweep."

He broke off, and his voice ended in a note that was like the wail of a lost soul.

As he looked on the seamed old face, the mountain sheriff felt himself in the presence of human tragedy wearing a new guise and habit.

"Why didn't you cash, Nova Scotia?" inquired the Squire gently, and the old man came to himself with a start and went on with his story.

"I got into a mah cheuk game with a bunch of chinks in Shanghai," he said simply. "It was long before the drawing, you understand, and it was only a number I had. I lost my chance to a slant-eyed yellow boy, stakin' it against twenty dollars Mex.—and I gave him a memo of sale—all regular."

Tolliver Talbott wiped the moisture of excitement from his pink face, and he heard the sailor wailing:

"An' I had a right to cash, too. It's the likes of me that should win the sweep. In close to a hundred years since it started, it's never been won yet by a member of the club or by a toff or a swell. It's always a clerk or a street sweeper, or a down-and-outer—and Lord knows, I was one of *them*."

The Squire opened his lips to ask a question, but an assistant came hurrying over with a memorandum.

"The scratches are posted for the first race," he said, and the newspaper man rose and reached for his telephone. With him rose the other scribes, and old Nova Scotia dragged himself out of his chair.

"Guess I'll get down along and make me a bet," he announced. "I've got two bones between me and hell. If I pick an also-ran, God help me."

When six of the seven races on the card had been run, the sheriff from the hills stood looking about him on the grassed area before the jockey room. The litter of torn and losing tickets underfoot told of how much water had flowed over the dam since first bugle call. With Talbott, too, it had been an afternoon of such large excitement as comes to a man who once in a long while emerges from the back country to ride his hobby full tilt in a metropolitan crowd. He had fared well enough to share the contentment of the modest winner, but the interests of race after race had overlaid with new impressions his memory of the old derelict whose story had enthralled him a few hours ago. For the time being, he had forgotten Old Nova Scotia.

Now he saw him again, and the desolation of the withered face told the mountaineer that this had been, for him, another day of disaster.

Nova Scotia was sitting on a bench with his shoulders disconsolately slumped, and as usual he was reciting his woes to a companion. Talbott paused to look at the battered character who had tramped the world and seen so many things beyond the "ocean-sea," and for a moment his gaze dwelt with rekindled interest. The second occupant of the bench was, of course, only a negligible human atom among other thousands. About his somewhat heavy figure was nothing distinctive.

That was at first, for after a moment, the officer straightened and stood intently studying the side face of that second man. Save for his having drifted to that particular bench beside old Nova Scotia, Talbott would have passed him by a dozen times with no second thought, no challenge of interest. Now he drifted nearer and, seeming to study his form sheet, looked keenly over its edge at the man's profile from behind.

"He's shaved his face, an' put on meat, an' changed right smart in these years," observed Talbott to himself. "But I wasn't wrong. That's the scar over his eye where Luke Tubb's dirk knife cut him. Save for Old Nova Scotia, I wouldn't ever have looked twice, though."

The old sailor rose and hobbled dolefully away, and, stepping over, Talbott laid a light hand on the other man's shoulder. The man started.

"Easy, Lacey," admonished the officer, schooling his face to an expression of commonplace. "I 'lowed you were still out West."

"I *was* out West—some years." The answer was growled. "I'm goin' back again right soon."

Talbott shook his head in emphatic negation.

"No, Lacey," he contradicted, "you're goin' to the Louisville jail house till we starts back home together. That old charge of murderin' Luke Tubb ain't nuver been squashed—since you took leg bail."

"I don't aim to give up to ye, Tolliver," declared the man with a grim quietness. "I've done been free too long to sulter in no penitentiary now."

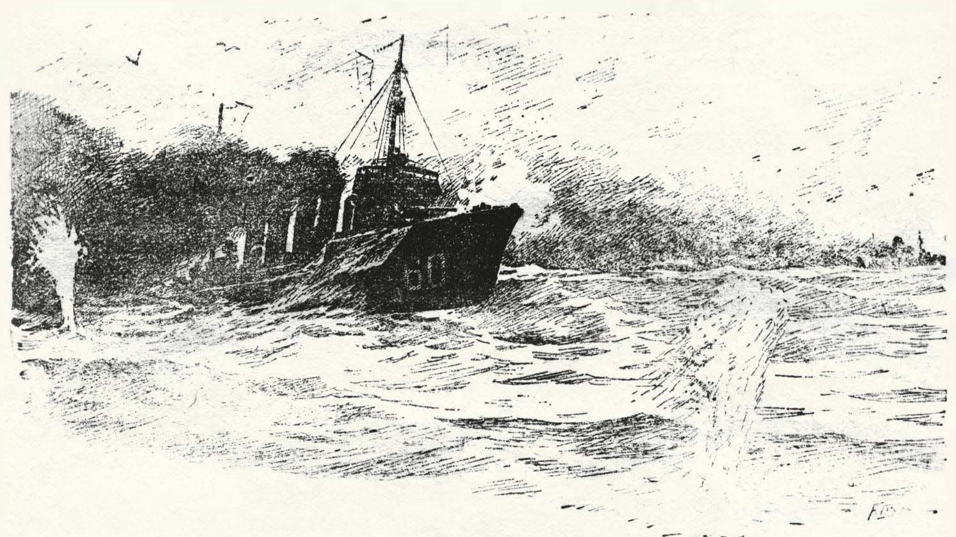
"It would be a kind of pity to start shootin' in this crowd," suggested Talbott persuasively, his right hand was inside his vest. "Moreover, unless you've bettered your nimbleness drawin' a pistol-gun, it would cost you your life. Come on, Lacey, we're goin' to town."

The man cast a glance of swift and desperate calculation about him. He saw a policeman sauntering near by, but, more convincing than that, he saw the narrowed slits of Talbott's eyes and the flinty light between their lids.

"I reckon," he said slowly, "ye've got the edge on me this time, Tolliver—but thar'll be another time to come."

To be continued in the next issue.

What Can a Baseball Bug Do in the Navy? Plenty.



"EATS"

By
CLARENCE L. CULLEN

ONE afternoon, while this battleship is at anchor in "an American port" that nobody ever heard about any more than they heard about London, and I'm standing watch as bos'n's mate at the gangway, a newspaper man that I know comes off to the ship in a sampan. This was in the days before my promotion. He's a baseball writer known everywhere as "Sid"—he himself has forgot that his last name is Mercer because nobody calls him that—and I'm acquainted with him personal because, before the war is dreamed of, he made a short coast cruise aboard of us to get the dope for a piece in his paper about the sports of the men for'ard on board a man-of-war.

"As I live, if here isn't 'Spud' McGlone!" says Sid, who's there with the oil, making me as soon as he comes over the side. "And how," says he, giving me the hand, "is my old cruisemate?"

His old cruisemate, I tell Sid, is able to take a little nourishment, if it's prepared dainty, from time to time.

"It's good-hearted of ye," says I, "to ride all the way uptown in the crowded subway, and then take a skiff off to the ship, for the single purpose of inquiring after me health. Of course," says I, "the state of an old shellback of a bos'n's mate's health is the one thing on your mind in visiting this ship today."

"Well," says this baseball writer with the gifted grin, "I did have some idea that I might find 'Eats' aboard here."

"The gentlemen aft, as ye well know," says I, "will always stake ye to a little snack in their mess room if they judge ye to be perishing for eats.

"The Eats I seek," says this smooth Sid, stroking me again with his smile, "is a man."

"I met some of the headliners—I

mean to say head-hunter—cannibals of the Solomon Islands a long time ago," says I, "but I never expected to pass the time of day with a cannibal, and a white one at that, on board a ship in the Hudson River."

"It's not my purpose," says Sid, "to dine on this Eats person if I find him. In the course of journalistic duty," he goes on, "it has been necessary for me to roast a great many ball players. But, after roasting them, I never ate any of them that I can remember. Let me give your memory a bit of a job. You're a baseball bug, as I recall from that cruise I made with you. Didn't you read, a couple of years ago, about the pitcher who ate himself out of the American League?"

So I identified Eats. Away off on the China station, two years before, I'd read in the sporting pages of the home papers about this bush-league hurler who, given his chance to pitch in fast company, had gnawed himself out of the big league without ever pitching a big-league game. The ruin he'd made of his young life by overplaying the big-time hotel eats had caused a country-wide laugh. But I couldn't remember this gormandizer's name.

"I happened," the baseball writer goes on, "to be traveling that season with the American League club that signed this hick heaver from the minors and carried him over the circuit a few trips to season him and to get him hep to the hitters before starting to work him. He knew how to pitch all right. He'd have delivered in due time if it hadn't been for his uncontrollable passion for Class-A grub. As it worked out, the swell fodder dished up by the hotels on the main circuit wrecked him. He'd start off the morning with a double planked steak the size of a bath mat, bedded down in onions, with a peck of hash-browned spuds on the side and a two-foot stack of hot cakes to come, and the remainder of his gastronomic day followed the same intensive lines. The poor gopher fell so hard for the fancy rations that he took on twenty-seven pounds of blubber on those few rides around the American League circuit. He larded up so fast in six weeks' time that he could barely waddle, much less pitch, at morning practice. So he was canned, and that ended his baseball career. He wouldn't pitch in the minors any more, even after getting the suet off, because of that Eats nickname the papers had given him, Well, I got the tip last night that this bird has joined the navy and that he is now a member of the crew of one of the battleships now in this harbor. So I'm looking for Eats. If he's aboard this ship I want to say howdy to him for shipping in the navy before being called in the draft. Eats is a good skate. His only vice is fancy food and a whole passel of it."

"If this Eats celebrity is aboard this frigate," says I, "nobody in the crew, including meself, knows it. He's keeping his tongue back of his teeth about his ball-playing record."

"He'd do that, naturally," says the baseball writer, "being the sensitive plant he is about that Eats nickname. He'll be under cover for his whole cruise if somebody doesn't spring him."

"I disremember," says I, "the real name of this food-ruined pitcher. What is it?"

"Sure enough," laughs me scribbling friend Sid, "he wouldn't be shipping in the navy under his exit-limping nickname of Eats. His real name, as you'll at once recall, is——"

"So here you are!" cuts in the officer of the deck, a friend of Sid's, coming up just then. "Come aft," says he, taking the baseball writer by the arm, "and tell me all your little troubles." And they head for the mess room. When Sid leaves the ship an hour later in his sampan I'm off watch and miss seeing him over the side. So I'm left dangling as to the real name of this Eats

matey. It's tantalizing to think of him being one of me own ship's company for'ard, if he really is, and immune from the taunts of his shipmates because of his shipping incognito, as ye might say, under his own name. But these are the things we have to bear up under, and I console meself with the reflection that if Eats really is aboard of us he'll be sure to begin bragging sooner or later of his ability as a ball player, thereby revealing his identity and exposing himself to the pleasant gizzard-piercing gibes of his mateys.

Two days later, when I'm again on watch at the gangway, there comes over the side from a training station a mob of deck-hand recruits. This raft of ordinary seamen that have never been to sea has one among them who takes to me at once. He's on board nearly four minutes before he edges over to where I'm standing and tells me confidentially that the main deck of a battleship would not do for a game of ball. He's a freckled, loose-jointed lad with tallowy hair and a pair of sunburned ears that stand out from his head like hard-drawing spinnakers.

"She's a big boat," says this ordinary seaman fresh from the beach, casting his eye over the superdreadnaught, "but she's not big enough for a game."

"Game of what?" I inquired, not getting him, those being his first words to me. "Checkers or tiddledywinks?"

"Game of ball, of course," says he, looking as if my lack of savvy pains him. "She's long enough, maybe, but she hasn't got the width for a diamond."

"That could be easily fixed," says I, "with temporary wooden extension paths built onto her beam for base running."

"But even then all this stuff would be in the way," says this deep-sea baseball enthusiast, waving a hand about.

He was referring, I saw, to the ship's bridge, lifeboats, rafts, turrets, guns, funnels, ventilators, and suchlike foolish gear that needlessly clutters up a battleship's main deck.

"Don't let that worry ye," says I. "If ye organized a couple of promising nines and wanted to play the game on the main deck, ye'd only have to ask the skipper and he'd order all this useless deck junk chucked over the side. Barring, perhaps, the guns. He might ask ye to leave the guns where they are for the present, in case they should come in handy later on, there being a war going on somewhere, according to the papers."

"What d'you mean—over the side?" he asks me. "Throw all this heavy stuff, that spoils the deck for a game, into the water?"

"Certainly," says I. "We heave all this in-the-way gear, such as smokestacks, lifeboats, ventilators and so on over the side, and get new, every time we have clear-ship-for-action drill. So why not jettison it for a good Saturday afternoon ball game between a couple of high-grade nines picked from the hands for'ard of the ships waiting here for sea orders?"

"There'll be a Class-A nine on this boat all right if I have the picking and coaching of it, and I guess they'll give me that job when they find out what I know about baseball," says this freckled lad who, I can see already, has no confidence whatever in himself. "But it would be kind of expensive, wouldn't it," he goes on, "throwing all these big, screwed-down things into the water every time we have a game?"

"There's allowance made for such matters in this man's navy," says I. "The main idea is to keep the men for'ard contented. The crew like to have entirely new deck equipment every little while, because the new gear saves them work at their cleaning stations. So expense, as ye call it, isn't considered."

"Does the bridge go overboard, too, every time you have that what's-its-name drill?" he asks me.

"Of course it does," says I. "But there are plenty of spare bridges kept below in sections."

"Doesn't this boat look kind of bare with everything peeled off of her that way?" is his next question.

"Maybe she does, but a peeled battleship is all right when ye get used to her," says I. "Of course," I adds to that, "she'd only have to be peeled for a regular game. When the hands for'ard want to toss the ball for practice and exercise, the first luff—the executive officer, that is—will always give them permission to use the quarter-deck. The quarter-deck, as a rule, belongs to the gentlemen aft, meaning the officers. But we've obliging gentlemen aft on this line of frigates, and they'll always go below and write letters or play dominoes so's not to be in the way when the lads for'ard want to use the quarter-deck for tossing the ball."

"That ain't so rotten of 'em, is it?" says he to that. Then, being almost ten minutes on board this battleship just then taking aboard a fresh crew for foreign service, he goes below to begin organizing a ball club from among the hands.

Can it be possible, I'm wondering as he goes below, that this spinnaker-eared lad is the famous Eats? He almits that he's a splendid ball player. He doesn't have to admit that he dislikes himself, like most ball players, that being as plain to see as his freckles. Maybe, thinks I, he's decided to face it out and live down his nickname in the navy.

But these speculations about him being the noted Eats are all blown away when I have me second chat with him later in the day. It's then that I ask him his name, hoping to identify him, for the sake of the ship's fun, as the pitcher who gnawed himself out of a big league. Me hopes were dashed when he told me his name was Nesbit. Nesbit, I knew, was not the real name of Eats.

"Well, Mr. Nesbit," says I anyhow, striving to hide me keen disappointment, "and how do ye like the seafaring life so far?"—the ship still being in dry dock.

Men for'ard, ye know of course, don't "mister" each other, the "mister" belonging on men-of-war only to gentlemen aft. But there was something about this baseball expert, even if he wasn't Eats. So I gave him "mister."

"This boat ain't so rotten," he answers my question. "But don't call me 'mister.' Call me 'Nudgy.'"

"Very well, Nudgy," says I. "But I'm fearing it sounds too familiar. It's as if I'd call the president of the American League 'Ban' the second time I'd met him."

"Huh!—that old has-been," says Nudgy, showing that I'd touched upon one of his prejudices. "I could mention people that have forgot more about baseball than Ban Johnson ever knew."

"Could ye now?" I ask him, being surprised to hear this. "I thought he had a great reputation for understanding the game."

"So he has, like a lot of others that don't know nothing about baseball," says Nudgy. "Yes," he goes on, switching the talk back to himself, much as he hated that subject, "the fans got to calling me Nudgy on account of my crafty way of stealing bases—sort o' nudging away from the bag, you know, and fooling 'em into letting me take a long lead. Everybody in Bolivia, where I pitched, calls me Nudgy when I'm home, to show they know what a fox I am at stealing bases."

This "Bolivia" had me tangled for a minute. Nudgy didn't look or talk like a South American. I hadn't heard, either, that the game of baseball had taken hold down that way. But Nudgy soon set me right.

"Have you ever been in Bolivia?" he asks me.

"Once," says I. "I went up on that

jolty Andes Railroad from Antofagasta to La Paz. But I didn't see a ball game while in La Paz. The sport hadn't reached South America when last I was there."

Nudgy stared at me, his face puckered worse than ever—and when Nudgy was going easy at half steam to save fuel his face puckered naturally like wet matting.

"Say, who're you kidding?" he asks me. "I ain't talking about anteaters and antiphlogistine and late pears. I'm talking about Bolivia, where I pitched."

"I thought I was too, Nudgy," says I, "but it's my mistake. Go ahead. When ye pitched in Bolivia, ye were saying——"

Then it comes out that Bolivia is a famous city of two thousand inhabitants and a trolley line and waterworks of its own in some Middle Western State, the name of which I forget for the moment. The Bolivia club, after Nudgy had joined it as pitcher, had finished a bang-up fourth in the Chickweek Crick League of four clubs. The Bolivia club would have finished first, Nudgy told me, if his pitching hadn't so dazzled and stunned his fellow players that they couldn't hit with him in the game.

Nudgy, I learned in this talk, was the inventor of a new kind of a pitched ball which he had first christened the Nesbit Fire Ball, but now, out of modesty and to give his home town a chance, had renamed the Bolivia Blazer. He was keeping secret the facts about this Bolivia Blazer, though he had written to Walter Johnson about it. He wrote about it to Walter—Nudgy called him "Walter"—because he felt that this formerly good pitcher, now on the down grade owing to the infirmities of age, needed a mystifying ball and one that yet wasn't too hard to hurl, like the Bolivia Blazer, to encourage him as well as to brace up his declining delivery. Nudgy happened to know that Walter was using the Bolivia Blazer in all the winning games he pitched. But he was not resentful because Walter had not replied to his letter.

"Big leaguers can't help getting stuck on theirselves," Nudgy said as to that, "and so I ain't holding it against Walter for not thanking me for telling him how to pitch the ball that keeps him from being sent back to the minors. Anyhow, I'll be pitching for the Washingtons myself, or some better club, when Walter's back on his old job herding geese."

Nudgy hated, I could see, to tell me about the flocks of big-league scouts who were always hanging around Bolivia to watch his pitching during the playing season. It seems the hotel accommodations of Bolivia had often been taxed to bed down these scouts when the rush to Bolivia to watch Nudgy's work was on.

"There's a brilliant career ahead of ye in the navy, Mr. Nesbit—I mean Nudgy," says I when he'd finished these savage attacks upon himself. "If ye'll promise not to pass the word among the ambitious but raw lads that came with ye to this ship, I'll tell ye something that only us old-timers know about and that'll interest ye."

"I don't have nothing to say to them country jakes," says Nudgy to that. "Not one of them can play decent ball. What is it?"

"It's this," says I. "Every year all the officers of the navy vote secretly to decide on the best ball player among the men for'ard in the entire service. So, ye see, by the end of this year ye're liable to be walking the quarter-deck with the gentlemen aft wearing your sword and cocked hat at muster, with an ensign's commission signed by the president in your pocket, and higher to come."

"That won't be so rotten, just for a little while," says Nudgy. "But I wouldn't promise to sign up permanent

as a quarter-deck walker. Plenty of big-league ball clubs will be begging me to pitch for them before the war is over."

"Of course they will," says I, "but a navy commission is worth having, too, as something to fall back upon. The present admiral of the European fleet thought so anyhow. He was a sail-maker's mate on board the old *Tallapoosa* when he got his commission as ensign by being voted the best player in the navy of one-o'-cat, or rounders, before we began to play the regular game of ball on board ship."

"Well, I'll think it over," says Nudgy. "But I wouldn't sign up permanent to be a ensign or a admiral or anything else on one of these navy boats. A big-league pitcher job is good enough for me."

Nudgy went below then to continue his task of looking over material for the ship's nine he had already begun to organize, with himself as captain to start with.

I was glad to get on this even keel with Nudgy at the start of his first cruise as a ball player. From twenty years of watching the new ones coming over ships' sides I've learned, I hope, to pick the winners. But I take no credit to meself for seeing that Nudgy would be the baseball power aboard this battleship. Anybody, after a few words with Nudgy, could have seen that he had something about him.

We already had aboard of us a number of veteran baseball experts, most of them, like Nudgy, around twenty-one years of age. Some of our scarred old-timers of many diamonds were even younger than that, being navy apprentices. But these other ones smeared their energies, as ye might say, by failing to give their entire minds to baseball. They would think at times of other matters, such as learning how to be men-of-war's men, the war, pay day, the folks back home in Oskaloosa, and suchlike trifles. Not so Nudgy. Nudgy, ye could see with half an eye, thought of nothing but baseball. A war was all right if there was time for it and a navy had its uses for those interested in navying. But baseball came first, and everything else hull down, with Nudgy. Such zeal, when it is linked up with modesty, can't be smothered. So Nudgy, I could see, would go far aboard this ship, and it was pleasant to have him take me, an old swab of a bos'n's mate, into his confidence, as I've shown ye he did.

But it looked, when he came to me at the gangway a few days later, as if something had been said to him to make him lose this confidence in me. There was suspicion in Nudgy's eyes this time.

"Say, who'd you think you were kidding?" he demands of me, his voice peevish.

"Kidding?" says I. "Me kid a young man-of-war's man just beginning his first cruise, and him a coming big-league ball player besides? Ye're misjudging me."

"Well," says Nudgy, "you told me they played ball games on board these boats, and everybody I've mentioned that to says they don't do no such a thing."

"I didn't say there'd been any games played on board ship lately, with a war going on somewhere," says I. "But that's not saying there hasn't been many a ball game played on board men-of-war. If ye mistrust me words, ask the captain. Have ye had a talk with the captain yet about playing a game on board this ship?"

"No, I haven't, and I ain't going to, neither," says Nudgy. "I've been told that there never was a ball game on one of these boats."

"Never was!" says I. "Ye must have been talking with somebody that shipped in the navy last Tuesday. Callahan, come over here a minute, will ye?" I sing out to Jim Callahan, the old leath-

erneck corporal on gangway post. Callahan, who's been in the marines since the days of the old *Ticon'*, strolls over to where I'm standing with this doubting Nudgy. "Here's a young ball player," says I to Corporal Jim, "that's been told by somebody that we've never played any games of ball on the decks of ships in this man's navy."

"There's woodchucks on the beach," says Jim, showing little surprise, "that'll say anything. Why, I recollect as if it was yesterday the last game of ball that I myself played in on board a man-of-war. You've heard of the old *Swatara*, of course?" he asks Nudgy.

Nudgy nodded. The *Swatara* went on the scrap heap some time during the first term of President Cleveland, and the oldest shellback on a guardo had forgot all about the cut of her ten years before Nudgy was born. But the lad hated to forfeit me high opinion of him as a ball player by admitting that he'd never heard of the *Swatara*. So he nodded, as I'm saying.

"Well," says Corporal Jim, "it was my luck to pitch the game for the *Swatara's* nine the time we beat the *Yoho's* crack club for the championship of the Asiatic fleet. That game was played on the spar deck of the *Swatara* in the harbor of Singapore. We smothered the *Yoho's* nine, the score being twenty-eight to nothing and all of the twenty-eight were home runs. Ye've heard of the *Yoho's* famous team, of course?" asks Jim, pinning Nudgy with his pair of green eyes that can bore through copper sheathing.

Nudgy nods again. There never was such a man-of-war as the *Yoho*, but this young baseball expert didn't want to fall in me estimation by acknowledging that he didn't know the entire history of the game afloat as well as ashore.

"That," goes on Corporal Callahan, "was the last game of ball I figured in on board a man-of-war. The game was won by the *Swatara's* nine at the cost of four human lives. The victims were saddle-colored men, or even darker, it is true. But for all that they were human beings like ourselves. So, after that, I could never bring myself to play another game of ball on board ship."

"I'd hate to play in a game where they slaughtered each other like that," says Nudgy. "Were these murdered ones regular players?"

"They weren't murdered—not by human hands, that is," says Corporal Jim. "They were players, but not regulars. They didn't belong in the game by rights. They were extras, or supernumeraries, as you'd say. They were doing great work as swimming fielders when they met their death. It was a sad finish for the poor leather-tinted lads, even if they were Hindus, Malays, lascars, and the like."

"Swimming fielders!" cuts in Nudgy, again looking suspicious. "What d'you mean—swimming fielders?"

"I mean what I say—swimming fielders," says the old leatherneck corporal, scowling at Nudgy's tone of doubt. "This championship game had to be played on board ship because there was Asiatic cholera in Singapore at the time and the ships' companies were not allowed beach liberty. The *Swatara* wasn't a third the size of this ship, but she was bigger than the *Yoho*, so the game was played aboard of her. But, the *Swatara* being narrow in the beam, we of course had to have extra men who were expert swimmers to field the balls batted over the side.

"So each ship's club was allowed to use four swimming fielders. These extra men were all Oriental huskies picked for the job from the Singapore fishing craft in the harbor. They were so quick to grasp the idea of the game that they'd swim for the ball batted over the side the instant it hit the water, or even at the crack of the bat. As soon as they'd get the ball they'd thrust themselves above their 'midships line out of the

water and whip it over the side to where we stood on deck waiting for it as if they'd done nothing else all their lives. The *Yoho's* pitcher was as good as I was that day, almost, and we shut each other out up to the *Swatara's* half of the ninth inning. It was then the big school of sharks showed up suddenly on the starboard side of the ship. So our team, in the very last inning, won the game hands down, twenty-eight to nothing."

"Sharks!" squeaks Nudgy, his eyes hanging on his cheeks. "What did the sharks have to do with it?"

"Nothing at all," says Corporal Jim, "except that they mopped up at a gulp those four dark-meat swimming fielders working for the *Yoho's* team. After that, of course, it was easy for us. The *Yoho's* club had no swimming fielders left to toss back to the ship the balls we walloped over the side. That, of course, sent the *Yoho's* pitcher up in the air, and we assassinated everything he pitched us. The overboard balls not being fielded, everything we rapped over the side went for a home run. That's how we rolled up the twenty-eight home runs in the final inning. Of course it was depressing to see those four decent dark men disappear out of life like that. But it might have been worse. We'd have lost our own four swimming fielders in the same way, seeing that none of them, on account of the cholera ashore, were allowed to come on board to escape the sharks, if it hadn't been for a precaution we took before the game began."

"What d'you mean—precaution?" asks Nudgy.

"Before the game began," says Callahan, "we paid a Chinaman to rub our own four swimming fielders all over their bodies with New Jersey cologne—oil of citronella that is. The catcher of our club, Pat O'Hara by name, the captain of the foretop, had found out somehow that sharks dislike the smell of citronella even worse than mosquitoes do. The smell of citronella, Pat told us, causes sharks to sneeze their seven rows of teeth loose, and asphyxiates them besides, and they can scent the stuff in salt water at a distance of fifty yards. So these big Singapore harbor sharks kept away from the *Swatara's* citronella-swabbed swimming fielders, thereby handing us that ball game. That," finishes the corporal, edging away from us when he sees an officer of marines approaching, "was the only game of ball I can call to mind just now that was won entirely owing to the timely aid of a school of man-eating sharks."

"Well, they don't get me in no ball games like that," says Nudgy to me. "We'll play our games on land, where ball games was meant to be played."

"Have ye organized your club yet?" I ask him.

"Two of 'em—one the regulars and the other the dubs we practice with," says Nudgy. "They're all rotten, but they've got me to coach them. We're going on land next week for the first practice game."

Nudgy goes below then to write a letter, saying he's open to reason, to a committee ashore that's getting up a fund to provide men-of-war's men with balls, bats, masks and the rest of the ball-playing gear. Nudgy, ye'd have remarked, was always doing something that gave himself the worst of it like whenever ye were beginning to believe that he was foolish in the head.

"Some sketch, that hick, what?" I hear somebody say in me ear when Nulgy goes below.

I'd noticed the sayer of this listening in, with a grin, on Corporal Jim's reminiscence of the *Swatara-Yoho* game. He's a good-natured big piano mover from Chicago by the name of Mulqueen, an ordinary seaman who'd come to the ship from the training station in the same batch with Nudgy. Mulqueen

just, over the mumps, hadn't shaved in three weeks, so that in the dusk ye'd have taken him for an Airedale.

"Nudgy Nesbit, ye mean?" says I. "Nudgy's a coming pitcher, I understand." I was willing to get the Mulqueen view as to that.

"I know he is," says Mulqueen. "He told me he was at the training station. So am I a coming watchmaker."

"But Nudgy can pitch, can't he?" I ask, anxious to hear more on this from Mulqueen the Airedale.

"If that birdie, as a pitcher, has got anything but a glove and a prayer," says Mulqueen, "I've got a deed for the Thousand Islands. If he can start from his hand a ball that's got anything on it but the seams, I can start an earthquake."

"But ye must be wrong about that," says I. "Ye can't have heard about the Bolivia Blazer, a new pitched ball that Nudgy's invented."

"No, I ain't heard anything about it—it's a secret," says Mulqueen. "The Bolivia Blazer's the ball that's keeping Walter Johnson from being turned back to his old job herding geese. I seen Nudgy toss the Bolivia Blazer one day at the training station. It's a section-hand chuck that your old-maid aunt could hit with a piccolo while lying on a sofa reading the society news."

I thought perhaps this might be professional jealousy on Mulqueen's part and that maybe he felt bruised up because he hadn't been asked to join one of Nudgy's teams, the regulars or the dubs. So I asked him if he himself was a ball player.

"Who, me?" says Mulqueen, grinning back of his ambush of whiskers. "Say, bo, I sifted into this outfit to mess up my share of the Heinies if I get a chance, not to play ball. But I kind of hate to see an old jackswab like you being kidded along by this Bolivia Blazerino that thinks he's a pitcher. That's why I'm easing it to you that if Nudgy can throw a rock at a rooster I can strike out Ty Cobb nineteen times in twenty."

I thank Mulqueen for seeing to it that Nudgy doesn't go right on making a foolish old flatfoot of me, and the Airedale is a matey of mine from then on.

On a Saturday afternoon the week following Nudgy takes his two teams off to the beach to give his regulars practice for a game he's arranged to play with the team of our rival superdreadnaught. On this shore trip a newspaper photographer takes the regular team's picture, with Nudgy sitting in the middle, trying, ye could see, to forget the word "Captain" in big letters on the breast of his ball-playing uniform. Nudgy hates this publicity so much that for a week after this picture appears in the paper he suffers from writer's cramp from addressing copies of the paper to the poor fishfaces back in Bolivia.

From his second practice game on the beach Nudgy comes aboard looking so worried that I foolishly suppose he's anxious over the rumors flying thick and fast that we're soon to up anchor to join another battleship fleet over the way that ye may have heard of though it isn't advertising much. But it's an injustice I'm doing Nudgy in so supposing. The navy, the war, or his ship's movements—these trivial matters ain't disturbing Nudgy at all, if he ever gives them a thought. What is bothering him though, as he tells me, is that he's heard ashore that the rival superdreadnaught's team will have in the game he's arranged to play with it a player who has held his own as an outfielder in fast company—in the American League, that is to say. This player can pitch, too, Nudgy tells me, looking gloomy, and no doubt he would pitch against Nudgy in the game between the two battleships' teams.

It's then, and not until then, that I tell Nudgy about Eats.

"Maybe," says I, "this new man on the other ship's team is the celebrated food specialist who nibbled himself out of the American League."

"No, he ain't," says Nudgy. "He's a regular American League outfielder that everybody knows about. I don't know how good he can pitch, but I ain't afraid of him if I can get my Bolivia Blazer to working right."

"There's no telling," says I, "that this Eats, whose real name escapes me, ain't right aboard this ship, keeping under cover for fear the crew will call him by that nickname he earned for himself."

"There ain't no nickname in the world," says Nudgy, "that'd keep a man who'd been with a big-league ball club, even if it was only for a few minutes, from sashaying around on one of these boats and showing off. And if there was a sailor on this boat that had once been signed to pitch for a big-league club, even if he never done any pitching for it, he wouldn't have stood aside and let me, that ain't yet been signed for fast company, be boss of this ship's ball club. He'd have grabbed the job for himself."

That wasn't any poor argument, ye'll remark. There certainly was something about Nudgy.

Nudgy first became aware of the war as a thing that interferes with the regular business of life when, on the day before he was to take his team ashore for the game with the rival battleship's club, we up-anchored on a wireless from Washington and headed straight for European waters to join a fleet that's been waiting a long time for the rats to come out and that has a lot more waiting of that kind yet to do, if ye're asking me. The rival battleship made the same trip abreast of us and anchored alongside of us on one of the wings of the Grand Fleet. But it's a full month after we quit the home waters before Nudgy gets leave to board our sister superdreadnaught to arrange to play on a Scotch meadow the game that had been postponed when we got the sudden orders for foreign service.

Maybe ye read about that game in the cable dispatches. An English newspaper man who happened to be visiting the Grand Fleet saw the game and he cables his impressions of it to some American papers. He describes the game, if ye remember, as tophole. He says, too, that the game is attacked with great energy and address by the bluejackets, and he considers it a pity that they couldn't be taught to devote the same amount of energy and address to a real game, this real game being cricket. The batsmen, says he, displayed wonderful ability as bowlers, but it's unfortunate, he thinks, that the American game, which he grants has its points, doesn't provide a knock-off period or recess in the middle of the play in order that the players might renew and refresh themselves with a cup of tea or so.

It's a big shore-resting party from both fleets that sees the game on this wind-swept Scotch meadow, and there's some hundreds of Scotch fishermen and farmers and suchlike looking on at the game without ever opening their faces. I wonder, watching these last, if they loosened up enough to let out so much as a whisper while they were fighting the Battle of Bannockburn.

I walked out from the village-on-a-cliff where we're resting with Mulqueen the Airedale to see the game. Mulqueen, for some reason or other, isn't keen to watch this diamond performance between men-of-war's men. But we've become great mateys since he's put me on me guard against reposing too great faith in Nudgy as a coming big-league pitcher, and so he permits me to drag him to this game between Nudgy's regulars and the team of the rival battleship.

It's wonderful to see what a hero this outfielder from the American League, who's now captain of the other ship's

team, and who's to pitch against Nudgy, has become with his ship's shipmates. They buzz around him as if they could be cured of the hiccups or the king's evil by touching the hem of his pants, and ye see with half an eye that all this atta-boy stuff of his mateys is mother's milk to him. He's a husky, trim-built gossoon, but a little loud out of the face to be a real one, ye'd have judged. This game that he's going to pitch against Nudgy, it seems, to listen to him, is going to be the softest afternoon's entertainment of his life. It's going to be, in fact, like robbing an old ladies' home of a crock of cookies.

Mulqueen, standing beside me back of first base, gives a grunt over the gloaty comedy of the American Leaguer.

"You get that bird's number from the sounds that dribble from his chops," Mulqueen rumbles in me ear. "He's one of them ball players that wears a yellow installment-plan rock on the hand that he picks his teeth with, and that floats around the hotel lobby with his lilac socks and lilac silk handkerchief, trying to make the jane at the telephone switchboard. I hope Nudgy's got something to-day besides his Bolivia Blazer. I'd give a month's pay to see him smother that stiff."

"Batter up!" sings out the umpire, dusting off the plate, and the game is on, with the rival team first at bat, and Nudgy, ready to drop with stage fright, on the mound.

Nudgy, what with his scaredness of the big leaguer on the other team and his efforts to make his Bolivia Blazer behave, walks the first two, amid the wild parrokeetings of the rival ship's crew and the depressed silence of the Scotchmen present, who look upon the game as ye'd listen to a Chinese orchestra. Then Nudgy, whose spinnaker ears have become the color of a flamingo from the comical quips of the captain-pitcher of the other team, who's coaching at third, strikes out the next two by working the corners with a fast ball that has enough gravy on it to cause Mulqueen to stare wonderingly.

"Say, pipe the whiskers on that hick's fast one, will you!" Mulqueen mutters in me ear. "If the poor zob would lay away from that lumberjack loop that he calls his Bolivia Blazer and keep on shooting up that fast one, he'd have this ball game iced. D'you notice how the kid tightens up," Mulqueen goes on, his eyes shining over Nudgy's gameness, "under the small-time kidding of that You-know-me-Al plug that's to pitch against him? I didn't know Nudgy had that line of goods. He's got the makings of a pitcher, and if he——"

Quock! goes the crack of a bat just then, followed instantly by something that sounds like somebody taking a hard slap on the jowls. What has happened is that the big-league captain-pitcher of the other team, at bat, has leaned healthy on the outshoot Nudgy sends up to him, and walloped it on a dead line at Nudgy on the mound. Nudgy throws up his pitching hand to knock it down, which makes the slap. He knocks it down all right, and fields it clever besides, chucking out the man who races for third. But the middle finger of his pitching hand, bent inward when he knocks down the hard-batted ball, is hanging loose, and Nudgy, when next we look at him, is squatting cross-legged on his mound, feeling of the broken finger. There's no understudy pitcher on Nudgy's nine that anybody knows of, and it looks as if the game is off before the finish of the first inning.

It's then that I miss Mulqueen from beside me. But, looking around for him, I find he's in plain sight. He's trudging, with his uniform cap tipped over his left ear, over to where Nudgy sits on his mound, trying to straighten out the bent finger. Mulqueen takes a look at the digit.

"It's broke, kid," I hear him say to

Nudgy, "and you're done for to-day. Go get the surgeon to fix the mitt—he's in the crowd. I'll pitch out the game."

Nudgy looks at Mulqueen, surprised-like, and is about to say something, when the American Leaguer, who's lodged on first, shades his eyes with a forearm, takes a swift slant at Mulqueen in his bluejacket uniform, and then bawls through the funnel he makes of his hands:

"Dash my blink lights, if there ain't Eats!"

The gang don't make it at first, and a kind of puzzled hush falls on all hands. Mulqueen pulls Nudgy to his feet, takes off Nudgy's left-hand glove and puts it on his own left and spits comfortable into the palm of it, and then, looking his former teammate of the American League smack dab in the eye, grins in his chops.

"Eats it is, you big hawbuck," says Mulqueen the Eats to the other big leaguer. "I'll see now if you've got enough of a ball club to furnish me a lunch."

The captain-pitcher of the other club laughs kind of hollow.

"Hey, bunch," he sings out to his team on the bench, "this guy that's going to pitch is the Eats that nose-bagged himself out of the American League a coupla years ago."

They all got it then.

"Oh you Eats!" was the yell that you could have heard over half of Scotland. But it wasn't a mean yell. If ye'd a good ear for such things ye'd have found something kind of pleased and affectionate in it.

Mulqueen's ordeal of exposure was over. It left him as steady as a rock, and he settled himself to pitch a ball game. There was no suet on Mulqueen now. He was as hard as wire. His work as a man-of-war's man had done that for him.

Mulqueen the Eats pitched the game through, as the cable dispatches stated, and he had everything a big-league pitcher needs and then some. He frivoled with the other American Leaguer's team of men-of-war's men, letting them down with two infield hits, only one man making second.

That night, at the little Scotch inn where we were resting, as it's called, Nudgy, with his broken finger bandaged up, came out to the bench in front where Mulqueen and meself were sitting.

"This'll fit you, I guess, and it's yours by rights now," says Nudgy, trying to hand Mulqueen the shirt of his baseball uniform with the word "Captain" spread all over the breast of it. "You'll be boss of our boat's ball club now and I'll be a extra pitcher for you when my finger's all right again."

The downright boyishness of Nudgy's act and words catches Mulqueen, who's no softy either, somewhere in the neighborhood of the neckband. The hoarseness of his voice when he replies tells ye that.

"No, you don't, matey!" says Mulqueen the Eats, pushing the captain's shirt away from him. "I eased into this outfit to smear up my share of the squareheads, not to play ball. Keep the shirt and do the job yourself, pal. I'm no slaminski. You organized the ship's ball club, and it'll stay your ball club for all of me. I'll pitch a game for you whenever you want me to."

The big bruiser, every bit the good skate that Sid, the scribbler, told me he was, stands up from the bench and drops an arm around the shoulder of the pleased Nudgy lad.

"If I don't stop one when we get into a jam," says he, quietlike, "I'll be back up there in fast company when the war is done. And, if we both get ashore at home again, I'm liable to pitch many a game against you. For you'll be up there yourself, buddy, if you stick to your fast one and try to forget that there ever was such a ball as the Bolivia Blazer!"

A Wild Horse Whose Spirit Was Mightier Than Enslaving Lariats and Corrals.

KING of the CRAGS

By MARY SHANNON

IT is wild and glorious in the rim-rock border of the Rockies—a perilous land of bristling rock edges, overhanging valleys, damp canyons, and swift, white streams.

And here, from season to season, in freedom absolute roamed Tumbleweed, the fiery gray stallion, and beside him ran Red Wind, the fleet-limbed, blood-red mare.

From grazing table-land to sheltered valley Tumbleweed guided, watched over her.

Always, when danger threatened, he whistled through scenting nostrils, and in their dash to cover Red Wind's silver mane flew beside him like a banner triumphant.

More than once had he fought for her. Once—but that was long ago, before they had come over the Divide, spent and beaten with a long, hard chase, to drop into the shelter of the rim-rock land.

Peace they had found, snatches of bunch grass, clear, singing creeks. Then, one day, alarm had sent them in a headlong dash to safety. A dark face had appeared over the ledge above. After that came other faces, intruding upon their solitude—Indians who went away and spread the story of the two horses in the rim-rock land.

"Red Wind" they called the mare, because she was red like the robin's breast and went like the wind. Tumble-

weed they called the "Gray Stallion," because in color and speed he was own brother to the fierce, the glorious Tumbleweed who was the terror and the wonder of all the rodeos and stampedes in the land.

So was born the story of Red Wind and Tumbleweed, the story that wafted to the rim-rock land a sense of unease, a presage of trouble.

A rugged land it was, barren in all its beauty, with scarce vegetation to support the lives of the pair. Only in the brief summer it bloomed into lavish luxuriance.

Through the long hours of sunshine Red Wind and Tumbleweed grew sleek and strong. The leanness of the rigorous winter was lost in muscles of springing resiliency; the power of the gray horse challenged the crags and hills, the speed of the red mare became swift as the dart of a bird.

One morning, with the first frost of autumn spangling leaves and grass, Tumleweed lifted his head and sniffed the air. A dream glow lay upon hill and valley. Nothing stirred, but there was borne to him a hint, a warning intangible, of danger, of some menacing power near.

Instantly he whistled, wheeled. Red Wind leaped to her place beside him, and side by side they were gone into the shadows. But far as they could run that sense of unease went with them. It haunted the valleys, it seemed to peer from overhanging ledges.

The breath of an alien sound floated on the breeze, the scent of an old enmity flattened Tumbleweed's vengeful ears. In and out the folds of the rim rock they flitted, but close behind them trailed that menace unseen. Not for a single instant did Tumbleweed relax that marvelous vigilance.

Even when they paused to graze stealthily in sheltered spots, or to drink of clear-running streams, every sense put out its sentinels of watchfulness. He kept Red Wind close beside him. At the least sound they were off like a shot.

It was not for several days that their foe came out of the shadows, and it came then in the shape of a flying lariat that whizzed by Tumbleweed's head and missed by the barest breadth. It was like the bright glance of a sword. In that transitory second Tumbleweed knew. He whistled to Red Wind, wheeled, and again their startled hoofs smote the stony trails in ringing retreat.

No shadowy unease hung over them now, but an ugly danger that threatened every moment, that drove them up and down, harried and fugitive in this land that had been their own. And always Tumbleweed sensed the relentlessness of that enemy, the certainty of pursuit closing in around them.

He did not know that the invincible Tumbleweed, idol of all the rodeos and stampedes in the land, lay dead at Mendleton with a broken neck, the breaking of which had thrilled ten thousand spectators. He did not know that the insatiable public was already clamoring for another idol. He knew only that his old enemies were after them again, and all the strategy for which he had been famous in the past came back to him. His wild-beating heart flung a fire of defense around Red Wind.

At first the pair ran in wild bursts of speed, the long sweep of the rim-rock land holding out its promise of shelter to them. Glen and coulee, canyon and hidden ledge, opened their thousand retreats.

Sometimes for hours they lost their pursuers. In those periods they rested and drank and grazed, watchful, wary, alert. But behind them, inexorable as fate, followed their enemies, the threat of the flying lariat, the strange apparition of a horseman rising as from the earth to cut short their race to cover.

Like the gathering of a storm the chase quickened. Tumbleweed sniffed

it on the wind. He tossed his mane and stamped his hoofs. It was war, war, and he was out to win! Magnificently he ran, the spring of vitality flaring into bursts of speed. Under sunlight and moonlight and starlight he led Red Wind.

But now familiar shelters bristled with danger. Their pauses for food and drink grew less frequent. They began to know periods of suffering. Yet, turn where they would, there followed that terrible patience which permitted them neither rest nor peace.

A sort of wild desperation seized Tumbleweed. There grew upon him the certain sense of a dread net closing in about them, narrowing, tightening. He grew less strategic, less confident. A swift spurt would end abruptly at sight of a man on horseback who swung a long, coiling rope. So often this happened that the runs of the fleeing horses shortened confusedly. Then, suddenly, the gray horse realized that he was trapped, trapped in a cup of the hills that lay around the mouth of a long, deep canyon.

It was a canyon in which the sparse vegetation dwindled to patches of green on sun-kissed spots. For a long time after coming to the rim-rock land Tumbleweed had avoided that canyon. But the rigorous winter had finally driven him into its shelter. Even yet there lurked in its depths some sense of old association, some nether instinct that turned his footsteps away from it when danger threatened. And now he knew that his enemies were bent on driving him into that canyon.

He flung up his head with a valiant gesture of defiance. Well he knew that danger had closed in upon them. But the invincible spirit flaming in him would know no defeat. He dashed this way and that, at any avenue that promised hope of escape.

Each time he was driven back to the cup from which escape lay only through that unguarded pass to the shunned canyon. A desperate game that went on and on. His chest burned, his tongue protruded blackened and dry. Beside him he heard the whistling of Red Wind's breath. And still he fought, doggedly, gamely.

Suddenly the tension tightened to a crisis. Something whizzed through the air, and for a dizzy instant there swooped above Tumbleweed a whirling rope. His panting neck burned at the touch. A thrust of his sharp hoof, a side leap, and he wheeled, swinging Red Wind with him. With every sense sharpened, his starting eyes sought a way of escape. Each hope of his died in baffling defeat. Only the gap to the canyon stood unguarded.

With his back to it and his mate beside him Tumbleweed faced the circle of his foes. A lariat sailed through the air. While it was still a dizzy circle above him he reared in a whirling pivot, and the rope flitted away uselessly.

Before he had recovered his footing another spun from a ledge above. A side leap, a quick turn, saved him. Another whistled by his head, narrowly missing him. Another and another.

He grew frantic, desperate. In a moment of white-hot rage he saw a rope dragging at Red Wind's foot! With a wild scream he trampled it into the ground. In a paroxysm of fear the mare sprang from the reaching coils of another lariat, and into the gap of the canyon. With the instinct of protection uppermost Tumbleweed was behind her. Too late he realized their mistake. But there was no turning back. Mad with fear, Red Wind was tearing straight down the narrow canyon, and the gray horse sprang to his place beside her.

The way was rough and broken. Once Red Wind stumbled, came to her knees. Blood marked each flying step of hers after that. Behind them came the ring of voices, closer, clearer, in a

wild medley of sound. Yet even in that desperate dash some instinct of old association rose to warn Tumbleweed against something that lay at the far end of the canyon. And with each step every nerve and muscle swerved and groped from that vaguely threatening danger.

Then, as if in answer to his need, a bend in the canyon wall held out a desperate hope. He swung Red Wind toward it. Here a cave lengthened into a sort of tunnel through the rock. Shelter they had found here from snowstorms in the long winter. They plunged into it, driven by mad fear. The ring of their hoofs dulled against the cavern walls. Behind them whoops and yells rushed in waves of sound, swept them on. Before them swung a blaze of light. The tunnel had ended in a jagged aperture opening upon a steep slope.

They were at the end. Hope had snapped. The triumph of exultant voices was in their ears. Not an instant did Tumbleweed hesitate. He leaped through the broken rock, and with grappling hoofs fought his way up the perilous slope to a boulder hanging flat and smooth above a great, yawning chasm. And close beside him went Red Wind.

Panting, driven, with bloodshot eyes and heaving sides, they stood still and faced their pursuers. And there the amazed and discomfited cowboys saw them, poised above that terrible drop more as creatures of spirit than of flesh. Akin to the circling eagles they seemed, to the black arc of wild geese flying south.

The men stood in awed silence, then quietly withdrew. On the hill above they held a colloquy. They spoke in hushed tones, as if even a sound might send the horses crashing to death. There was wonder in their faces, hardened though they were to the life of the far frontier.

"Wouldn't that beat hell now?" ejaculated one.

"I tell you he ain't no horse! He's a devil that's popped outa one o' these here ruts that ain't got no bottom to 'em," declared another.

"No ord'nary hoss'd ever thought o' perchin' on a rock like that," added a voice. "Though, once, down in Arizony——"

"Come down to earth, boys," adjured one. "Well, 'Rusty,' what you calculate to do now?"

The attention of the group turned to a slim, wiry giant with rusty hair and bright-blue eyes—the man who had led them on this wild chase. Adventurers of the hills they were, tagging along the edges of civilization, gambling, horse breaking, cattle rustling, jumping some other men's claims.

Down at the rodeo in Mendleton they had witnessed the magnificent death of the great Tumbleweed, and when Rusty had laid before them his scheme of capturing for the rodeo this gray horse of the rim rock they had turned from their tinhorn games with relish, and followed him over wide ranges to this border land of the Rockies. And now, dust caked, exhausted, defeated, they awaited their leader's answer.

"Do? What is there to do?" demanded Rusty as he gazed down with kindling eyes at the two horses. "Can't rope him where he is. Can't do nothin' —long's he stays there!"

"And he'll stay there long's we stay here," put in another. "Guess he's beaten us to it."

"Three thousand dollars to land him in Mendleton safe and sound," muttered Rusty, gazing down at Tumbleweed. "God! I hate to give in!"

"I'd make a pretty safe bet that you'll never get him. He'll go over the edge first," declared one.

A swarthy man was furtively uncoiling a rope.

"Yah, he's beat us to it. Let's have a

little fun anyhow. See him do the death dance on that rock," he suggested, sliding forward and preparing to swing the rope.

With a spring Rusty was upon him, had hurled him to the ground.

"No, you don't!" he retorted hotly. "What kind of a low-down would that be? Hasn't got an inch of a show where he is! 'Twould be a crime to see him go down into that river bed—after the fight he's put up!"

There was a burst of approval from the men standing around. Unperturbed, the swarthy man picked himself from the ground and leered at Rusty.

"Might as well let him go down into that river bed. *You'll* never get him!"

"Sure o' that?" retorted Rusty.

He turned from the group and stood staring thoughtfully down upon the two horses on the ledge. There seemed something implacable about the still postures of them. Presently he strode back to the men.

"Listen here, boys," he began, and heads drew together in anxious conference.

The sun dipped in the sky. Sunset filmed the two horses on the rock with a golden haze. It touched the silvery mane of Red Wind, the defiant forelock of Tumbleweed. The vast and solemn congregation of stars looked down upon them, silent and steadfast upon the rock.

Day found them waiting, waiting with the patience of carved figures. For hours now no sound had broken the stillness, the stillness that filled Tumbleweed's ears with reassurance. Hunger and thirst were tearing at him. The sight of green patches on the barren walls roused him to a ravenous urge. A white glisten of falling water across the ravine tortured his burning veins. And beside him Red Wind whinnied longingly, and licked at his coat with parched tongue.

The sun beat down upon them, a wind lifted waves of parched sand that stung their faces. Some time, with the sun at its hottest, the limit of endurance snapped. Slowly, with infinite care, Tumbleweed guided the mare back through the jagged gap and the intricate pass till they stood within the canyon walls again. Warily they waited, listened. An eagle screamed raucously overhead, and again all was still. Scarce even a breath of wind stirred in the rim-rock land. Cautiously the pair moved out. Then the ripple of a tiny stream drew them like a hand. They waded into it, they drank and drank, and rested and drank again. Mad with hunger, they snatched at the bunch grass, munching, crushing the green blades starvedly.

Night found them still in the canyon, full fed, resting in the shadow of an overhanging wall. That sense of unease had not yet lifted from Tumbleweed. An aspect of strangeness lay on the familiar trails, fresh-torn earth, the deep imprint of flying hoofs. Sometimes in the night the gray horse started, lifted his head with flashing quickness. Slowly his startled muscles would ease to rest again by the side of Red Wind.

It was the time of Indian summer. A golden, hazy contentment filled the crevices and hollows of the rim-rock country. In the canyon the vegetation had been eaten to the roots. Famished for the green grass of the upper tablelands, Tumbleweed and Red Wind ventured up the canyon. Not an alien note breathed through the matchless air. Overhead a raven sailed on the long tides of the wind. The ring of Tumbleweed's hoofs became assured.

His nose caressed Red Wind's shoulder; the silky sheen of her mane swept his face like a silver flame. The rim rock was his again! Red Wind was his! Again he had fought for her, and again he had won! His hoofs struck the rocks proudly. Green rose like a wave beyond the canyon gap. Red

Wind's dainty hoofbeats quickened. With a whinny of hunger she broke into an eager trot.

But just within the canyon pass Tumbleweed halted, head lifted, muscles alert for flight. From some nether instinct he felt the certain presence of a foe. Hunger had driven Red Wind a pace ahead. But there was no danger that could make him forget her. For an uncertain moment he waited. And in that moment he was lost!

The noose had him, that cruel band of fire that tightened, tightened, that stilled his struggles in a black and shuddering palsy. But before his eyes filmed he saw the vanishing flame of Red Wind's coat far up the waves of tableland. She was safe!

Light came back to his eyes in glimmering rays. There were ropes about him, every muscle incased, imprisoned, and Rusty's voice in his ears:

"Roped you are, my boy! Say, isn't he a peach?"

Other men were there, admiring, envious.

"As like Tumbleweed as two peas!"

"Good shot, Rusty. He'll make you some money, all right."

"If he don't get his neck broke, too."

"He's apt to break a neck or two himself first."

"Get on your horses, you-all," ordered Rusty, "an' hold tight to them ropes. We'll let him up, an' you kin bet there'll be some circus."

Then Tumbleweed was up and fighting for lost freedom. He fought as he had never fought before. He charged the men sitting their horses about him, but each charge ended futilely with him jerked back upon his haunches in frothing, snorting rage. He stood still at last, glaring with bloodshot eyes upon his ring of captors. Blood streamed from open places on his coat, oozed from his panting nostrils.

Then the man with rusty hair put a twitch on Tumbleweed's jaw and led the way through the canyon gap and out of the rim-rock land across a wide, long range. On wings of freedom the wild crane flew south; on the faint, far breeze came the echo of Red Wind's voice.

Long afterward, it seemed, Tumbleweed looked out through the raw logs of a stout, high inclosure. A stream of clear water ran through it from which he drank gratefully. A closed shed, through the door of which he saw drifts of wild hay, stood half in and half out of his corral. Every step was an agony, for he had fought to the very last. On one flank was the burning imprint of the branding iron. And now he was a prisoner, a prisoner in the log corral with the range stretching away on all sides. Presently he yielded to hunger and fatigue and reached into the shed for the fragrant hay.

In a few days he was up, showing fight. He charged the log walls every time a man appeared outside. They laughed and threw sticks to incite him to still greater fury. Sometimes he stood still with lifted head, gazing toward the far-off rim rock that lay against the northern horizon. Then all the longing of his wild heart went out in ringing cries, and he would stamp and race the confines of his inclosure in fierce rebellion. Abruptly out of the North came the whirling snow, and winter clicked down over the land.

Through the long, cold months Tumbleweed was left much alone. In the raging of a blizzard he learned to seek the shelter of the shed. And soon he learned to seek it for other reasons. For there he found hay in plenty, warmth and water with the chill taken off. Never had the lean years fed him so prodigally. Forgotten were the starved days when he had picked at frozen grass and licked at melting snow.

Perhaps, as he looked out across the huge winter whiteness, came fugitive

memories of Red Wind, of the days when they huddled together in bare canyons, of times of famine when he had pawed snow for her. Through the long winter nights he listened to those other wayfarers of the mountain summit—tempest, the streaming wind, the snow coming with muffled rush out of the North, wild rains and whirling sleet.

Men would look in upon him with pleased faces. Only the man with rusty hair would stand watching him, thoughtful, silent. For Tumbleweed's leanness was hardening with power, virility. The glinting splendor came back to his gray coat, his long, flying mane. When a restlessness came upon him he tore in wild bursts of speed up and down the inclosure. Then the men would gather outside and watch and nod their heads.

Sometimes they teased him. One day somebody threw a hat over the wall. Tumbleweed's hoofs tore it to shreds in a moment. A hand thrust a red handkerchief through the logs. Tumbleweed charged. The log fence creaked with his mighty impact, men scattered precipitately. Admiring comments broke from them:

"He's a damned sight worse'n the other Tumbleweed ever was!"

"I wouldn't miss that rodeo at Mendleton this spring for a thousand dollars!"

"How much'll you bet that 'Strawberry Red' will ride him?"

"I ain't bettin'!"

The rigorous winter unbent at last. Bare patches showed on the snowy range. One morning, coming out of the shed, Tumbleweed stood still and lifted his ears. The smell of earth stung his nostrils. The air was vibrant with the whir of many wings, with the rush of rivers breaking free.

He stepped out into the inclosure and whinnied a challenge to the distant hills. It was answered by the clang of wild geese, by the scream of soaring eagles. Spring was awake in the land—spring with its thousand forces rising to that divine renewal of life. Everywhere was a quickening, a stir. Within Tumbleweed the fires of power rose like a tide to meet it.

Spring! The royal promise of it was in his step. Round and round the length of his corral he stamped and pranced, his flashing eyes turned to the dim outlines of the rim-rock land. The man with the rusty hair came and stood outside the fence. Other men came, and at sight of them Tumbleweed whistled and stamped with a savage power. A sting of hatred sent a cloud of earth before his terrible hoofs.

He reared in sinewy fury and struck at the stout walls imprisoning him. With screams of rage he dashed for the watching men. A stick tossed over the fence he trampled to slivers in a moment. And outside the fence the men laughed and swore exultantly.

"Gosh, won't there be a clean-up at Mendleton this spring!"

"I'd like to see Red ride *him!*"

"Say, the crowd'll go wild!"

"He's ten times the horse I thought he'd be!"

"There's class to him now, I tell you!"

"Got to get him outa here, Rusty, or you won't have him. Some night he'll jest naturally climb that there fence an' be gone!"

"It's gonna be a job," warned one.

"Three thousand dollars to get him there safe and sound," broke in another.

"Oh, I ain't afraid o' the job o' gettin' him there," retorted Rusty. "But to get him there sound and whole! If I was to blow into the Siding with him lookin' like the wreck he was when I got him in here, they'd gimme the laugh. But if we can get him there lookin' like he looks now——" He thrust his hands into his pockets and watched Tumbleweed standing with head lifted toward the rim-rock land.

"Poor devil," he murmured. "It's a

damned shame to get him down there an' mebbe break his neck first time they take him into the ring."

"Aw, come on, Rusty. Hanged if I don't believe you're gettin' chicken hearted," taunted one.

"No, I ain't gettin' chicken hearted," retorted Rusty, "an' if anybody thinks so I'm right here to prove I'm not! But there's just this about it: We got to get this horse down there sound and whole. There ain't gonna be no twitch on him this time. We'll rope him, with slack enough to give him his head, only jerkin' him up to keep him in the right direction. It's gonna be a tough job, the toughest any of you ever tackled. But if we can get him there lookin' like he looks now——"

That night Rusty woke from a troubled sleep, to the call of Tumbleweed's voice. He stirred on his hard bed. The cloud of sleep lifted briefly. Sadness held him like a weight.

"They'll break his neck down there. They'll break his neck," he murmured wistfully.

Outside, the range lay filmed in moonlight. Tumbleweed stood motionless within his prison walls, ears lifted in an attitude of waiting, of listening. His nostrils quivered, his senses quickened, sharpened. The soft breeze came down from the rim-rock land breathing of sage, of starting bunch grass. The voice of it rose and died, and through the long hours Tumbleweed waited, waited for something his instincts told him would come.

And just as the first timid tremblings of dawn came over the hills he heard it, faint and far, yet clear as the message of a bell—the call of his wild mate, the call of Red Wind. He flung up his head and sent back a ringing cry, and in that cry was all the homesick longing of his lonely heart. But now the air was filled with the whir of migrant wings, the cries of hungry birds flying to feeding grounds on the range.

Again and again the voice of the gray horse challenged the dawn. Like a maddened thing he flung his power against the imprisoning walls; in bursts of furious speed he raced the circle of his corral. And, as he tore past the open door of the shed, a noose swooped over his head, closed about his throat.

The next moment he was on the ground, gasping, struggling, as the rope drew and tightened till his eyes filmed and he ceased to fight. And when the film had cleared again, and the strangling breath eased with a rush, he was up in a frothing, murderous rage. The wall of his prison had been broken, and through this door he charged blindly. For one brief moment he felt the glorious thrill of liberty. He dashed into the great world that lay open before him. But he was jerked back with a terrible, a cruel and taunting power! There were ropes on his body. They burned like so many searing bands of fire.

But there burned within him a hotter fire, a fire of rebellion and defiance and hate. Before his fierce charges men scattered and swore. And always, when he was almost upon them, he was jerked back upon his haunches with a force that seemed to jeer and laugh. So close were teeth and hoofs upon those hated foes!

Sometimes, in a fury of desperation, driven by the blind impulse of escape, he ran madly, not realizing that hated hands were guiding him to another prison that awaited him in a box car at the end of a lone railway siding. And from one of those blind bursts of speed he paused to see, across a roll of low hills, the rim-rock country!

He dashed for it, wild memories afire with him, felt the snap and strain of ropes upon him that held him pawing, fighting the clear, crystal air. In baffled rage he swung and charged for the nearest horseman. Those bands of fire bit into his flesh, tightened like red-hot

irons, threw him prone backward upon the earth. But, unconquered, he rose and struck at those imprisoning ropes, struck and tore in a whirling paroxysm of rage. And still he felt himself driven on by that inexorable power he sensed but could not define. But he contested, he fought, every inch of the way.

It was in those blind bursts of speed that progress toward the Siding was made. Warily the men watched and waited for the spirit of Tumbleweed to flare into defiance, to race away to freedom where he would. A tough job, but if they stuck they might yet win. Somehow, if luck were with them, they might manage to get the horse uninjured into that waiting box car.

The tense, watchful hours went by. Slowly they were moving parallel to the rim-rock country. At times Tumbleweed seemed to have forgotten the men utterly. He would stand moveless and gaze with lifted head toward the rim rock, watching, listening. And patiently the men would wait for that impulse to spring into a wild dash for liberty, that dash which they might maneuver and guide in the direction of the Siding. A dangerous game, perhaps a game to the death. A slip of the rope, a stumble of a horse, and they might lie trampled to death beneath those vicious hoofs.

The business of the moment was to watch those ropes, to give just enough slack, to know when to tighten them and check that terrible speed without injury to that matchless body. A desperate task, and their own horses showed signs of breaking under the strain. And in the midst of those wary men and nimble horses Tumbleweed tore and fought, and sprang with murderous intent upon those enemies who held him there a captive.

And then, in a lull of the race and conflict, there vibrated through his spent and beaten senses a call that was all of spring and life and freedom and love. He was up, quivering and wild with joy. He stood still, feet planted immovable, and sent back a ringing call. A captive no longer was he! Free, free as the winds he skimmed the crags and peaks of his beloved land! And beside him, fleet and beautiful, ran Red Wind, blood red in the sun! Again the peal of her voice entreated him, and he saw her, poise like a thing of flight, high on a ledge above him. She was calling to him, calling him back to the rim rock.

Every instinct within him started toward her, toward the old familiar haunts and hiding places. And he went with a sweep of power that took all with him. In vain the cruel ropes tugged and jerked and tightened. In vain men swore and maneuvered and contrived. His was the strength of ten horses, the strength of a demon roused to the last reserve of nerve and muscle. Back to that rim-rock land, to the red mate calling him from the heights, he would go. Yes, even though he walked on hind legs, even though again and again the burning ropes flung him backward on the ground and dragged him in the dust.

Each time he was up and battling to the death. He did not know when the first rope snapped. But he knew that a horse and rider went reeling to the ground, and he sprang toward them with death-dealing hoofs and gleaming teeth. But just at that moment there thrilled through him that call from the hills, and again was every thought forgotten as his quivering lungs sent back an answering peal.

The fallen rider was up, a rope was circling above Tumbleweed's head. Again came that wild accession of strength. Another rope, another bond to hold him from his heart's desire. He struck wildly with his sharp hoofs, and the rope snapped in two.

Victory surged through him in a stream that welled into power. He sensed the confusion among the cow-

boys, and with it came a certainty of success. He dashed toward a man who was swinging a rope, and just before he reached him, swerved fiercely upon another. As both raced away he slashed at the trailing ropes. Another rope jerked him back till he lay upon his haunches. A moment and he was up and charging a man on horseback. Then, like the bugle call of an army, he heard that summons from the hills. Red Wind! Red Wind calling to her wild mate, while down among men Tumbleweed fought his grim fight alone.

But in that call was the voice of spring, and freedom, and the glorious thrill of the wild. He became a tornado of slashing hoofs, of gleaming teeth, of flaming eyes. He came out of those tangling ropes with a spring like the snapping of wires and was gone for the hills, a wild cry of triumph and of joy ringing behind him.

Dumfounded, the exhausted men watched him go, on and on, over hill and curve. Panting curses broke from them. A revolver flashed in the hands of the swarthy man. Rusty's eyes blazed at him:

"Put that gun down, damn you!"

"Come on! Let's get fresh horses," urged one.

"No!" retorted Rusty violently.

Round-eyed faces peered at him. "You—you don't mean you're gonna let him get away!"

Rusty's eyes glinted like steel as he said:

"Just remember this: My brand's on him, and when I want him—I'll go after him! But——"

He closed his lips abruptly, lest their trembling betray him. He turned, his face hidden from the others, lost to everything but that fleeing horse growing smaller, smaller, in the great gulf of space. Fainter, fainter, came back that wild, triumphant neigh. And in the roll of its echo rang another cry, appealing, alluring, compelling. Coming to meet her lost mate, with answering peals and the speed of wings, raced Red Wind. In the ecstasy of their meeting was no thought but of each other. A moment the pass held them, symbols of love and freedom, then side by side they vanished into the depths of the rim-rock land.

There will be another story by Mary Shannon in a future issue.

MR. REED PASSES JUDGMENT

SHORTLY before Jim Reed of Missouri retired from the United States Senate to such joys and thrills as the lifelong actor in public affairs can get from private life, he was invited by one of the national capital's most exclusive hostesses to a dinner that was followed by a musicale.

In addition to the artists who were paid to entertain the great and the near-great then present, was a young society woman who assailed the ambient atmosphere and the assembled eardrums with her idea of how several airs from grand opera should be sung.

"You know," one of her friends beamingly informed the senator in an enthusiastic aside, "she's doing this only to please our hostess. She usually sings only for her own amusement."

"Evidently," Reed commented suavely, "it takes as little to please the hostess as it does to amuse the singer."

To the Luckiest Man in the West Came a Moment When He Needed Luck Supreme.

LUCKY HARKNESS

By W. P. LAWSON

IT was a little after midnight in the month of July. There had come no thunderstorm that day to cool the air, burning still from the fierce caresses of the incandescent Arizona sun.

Inside the Spur Saloon, the chief recreation center of Gleeson, the heat was stifling. A moving fog of tobacco smoke, drifting, curling slowly, partly obscured and half revealed the bald sordidness of the surroundings.

Through this pallid medium the walls, plastered with cheap prints, showed unreal and dim; mistily unreal also loomed the long battered bar. The drink-stained card table in the center of the room seemed a phantom board, and the five players about it, in the wan light from the swinging lamp above, were like ghostly figures in a dream.

As one drew closer the forms cleared. Hard, lined faces gleamed in the circle of light; brown and eager and glistening with sweat. The men were silent, for the most part, smoking constantly and intent on their game. Now and again breaking the silence came a rough jest, a short curse, an occasional call for drinks, the click of chips, the rustle of cards.

Two of the players were cowmen. Their attire and the unmistakable dialect of the puncher betrayed the type. A miner, in process of dissipating the "road stake" so arduously acquired, seemed to take his ill luck in bad part. Johnny Morris, the gambler by trade, and a soft-spoken, quiet man, played quickly and skillfully. The size of his stack varied from time to time. His expression, his gentle, conciliatory manner, changed not at all.

The fifth player was Harkness. No one present knew more about Harkness than he had told them, and that was nothing. He had appeared in Gleeson the week before and stayed on from day to day, silent alike as to his business there and the purposed length of his sojourn. Local etiquette prohibited inquiry in such matters; the courtesy was perhaps rendered inevitable from the

fact that the town lies within a day's ride of the Mexican border. Harkness was received in the Spur and elsewhere for what he should choose to show himself, and for that alone.

And yet, although comment was absent, curiosity in regard to the taciturn stranger had been by no means wanting. The importance of a newcomer's advent to such a town is large in inverse ratio to the size of the community. Added to this there was in the case of Harkness his strange, inscrutable manner.

Mystery was sensed in his presence. The strength of his personality, too, was apparent in a time and region of strong men. The long, well-molded jaw, straight, firm mouth and heavy, aquiline nose testified to the mature power Experience, our foster mother, lends to those who have learned deeply and well at her hands.

In Harkness' features repression was evident. Utter absence of expression was the end, it seemed, to which they had been schooled. In his eyes alone was to be seen a soul.

They were level, steady eyes; dark, deep set, seldom winking. Their look was simple and direct. They were not calculating eyes, nor reflective; not the eager, roving eyes of the trickster, the shallow brain, nor yet the set, rapt eyes of the dreamer. They revealed the mind of facts and action; they were the eyes of a fighter, an unyielding combatant with whatever difficulty or danger might arise.

Withal—and this was their mystery—they held a haunting look, not of fear, but of pain—not of despair, but of suffering. They were the eyes of a brave man who endured much.

Harkness had played nightly at the Spur since he came to town, and each morning left the game a winner. From the monument of chips just now before him it was plain that his luck still held. Every hand served to emphasize his control of the game.

A jack pot was in process of solution. Morris, the gambler, dealt.

"Happy is the dealer in a big jack pot!" he hummed softly. "All ready. Up to you, Harkness!"

"Opened for five!" said Harkness.

Almost with his words a stranger entered the room and stood behind his chair, glancing over the speaker's shoulder. For the moment his entrance, scarcely observed, aroused no show of interest.

One of the cow-punchers threw down five blue chips.

"I'll take a chance and sleep in the street!" he announced cheerfully.

The miner hesitated, then stayed.

Each man drew three cards.

"No advantage in the draw!" chanted the cow-puncher.

"Jump to it, old scout!" said his companion.

Harkness examined his amended hand with a faint scowl.

The stranger behind him whistled a tune through his teeth and nodded appreciatively. He was a careless-looking, straight young man with a rounded chin and a short, well-cut nose. His eyes were blue, bold and smiling. His thin lips curled continually in a one-sided, ironical smile.

The neatness of his range attire, the jaunty angle of his broad-brimmed hat with its leather band, the care with which the bright silk handkerchief was knotted about his throat, showed pretensions to an elegance which sat rather well upon him. He wore an air at once attractive and compelling. He seemed perfectly self-satisfied, perfectly at home.

Harkness had opened the jack pot; it was his "say-so."

"Ten dollars bet!" he announced.

The cow-puncher threw down his cards with a loud but ludicrously plaintive oath.

The miner considered his hand earnestly.

"Raised twenty!" he flung out; and counted the chips.

Harkness, watching catlike, saw his hand shake, ever so slightly. He coolly searched his opponent's face, glanced at his pile appraisingly and pushed in forty blues.

"And twenty!" he said.

"You're called!" snapped the miner, and staked his last dollar.

There was a moment's silence.

"Queens full on deuces," said Harkness quietly, spreading out his cards.

"That beats hell out of three kings," replied the miner. He leaned back and relit his dead cigar. He even forced a smile, but his face was unwholesome.

A chorus of voices burst out. Even the undemonstrative Morris was moved to querulous utterance.

"By Satan, Harkness," he cried, "I never see nothin' like it, the way you're luckin' it!"

"It's shore funny," admitted the winner, stacking the clutter of chips with both hands. "But my luck always runs that a way." He spoke slowly, one might have said reminiscently, not at all elated by his success. "When I'm out o' luck," he went on, "Job was a fav'ryte of fortune 'longside of me. Then again, when the luck's with me, nothin' can't seem to break it nohow. To-night, now, I'd win at anythin', spite of hell an' high water——"

"You lie!"

The cold flat answer was a challenge. Harkness, shuffling the deck, looked up quickly. That first start was the one unusual movement he made. The stranger had moved from behind his chair and was standing opposite, across the table. His easy unconcern was gone. Hatred gleamed from his narrowed eyes, his thin lips were twisted now in a grimace of triumphant derision. From his right hand, resting lightly on his hip, a Colt .45 gleamed menacingly.

"You lie!" he repeated. "You pore ornery—— This game I'm goin' to introjuce now is the last game you're goin' to set in—and you're a-goin' to lose *hit.* That there luck of yours you've been braggin' on, that there's jest plumb played out!"

A soft shuffle of chair legs on the uneven floor hinted that the poker party was adjourning, sine die.

"Set still!" commanded the stranger, throwing a swift glance around the circle. "My business with this here lucky ——"—he nodded shortly at Harkness—"won't take long. Afterward—ef you want—you kin go on with your game!"

Harkness remained motionless, his hands on the table before him, his face devoid of expression save for a faint, careless smile hovering about his lips. Beneath this mask, though, his brain was racing. He felt that his hour had come; but the effect of this feeling surprised him. It was not that he felt no fear, that his iron nerves were under perfect control. He had faced death in too many forms, on too many occasions, to be unnerved now. It was because he felt an unwonted exhilaration. And with this exhilaration came a curious mental clarity.

His enemy was before him, had challenged him to play, but held the winning hand.

He was helpless. He knew it to be unfair; and was astonished that he was content. He was even—yes, he was glad, glad with a great, overwhelming wave of relief and joy.

What could it mean, he wondered, this—happiness? He groped for a solution, curiously. Dimly it came to him that he was satisfied, after all. He was satisfied with his life and the manner of its ending. He had fought, fought from infancy. He had conquered circumstances, one by one; and now that fate, through no fault of his own, had conquered him, he did not quail nor flinch.

He stood forth strong, revealed in a high light. He tasted his manhood. His

courage was tried and was gold. He smiled proudly and looked into his enemy's eyes.

The youth stood motionless as if to prolong his triumph, striving to read into Harkness' face something of fear or of despair. But these he could not find. His eyes gleamed bloodshot, though his face was grave and cold.

A tense expectancy lay on the faces of the men about; their eyes roved fascinated from the small shining circle of the gun's mouth to the smiling eyes before it.

Then they witnessed a very curious thing.

A strained expression flashed into Harkness' face. A flush suffused his features, leaving them the next moment colorless and ghastly. He seemed, in the pale haze, curling, drifting slowly, already a corpse. In the same instant he plucked a revolver from his shirt and, as the hammer of Garrett's weapon clicked harmlessly, shot him accurately through the heart.

For a breath there was the dead hush of complete astonishment. Then Harkness, calm, unsmiling, utterly himself again, replaced his gun, stepped to the fallen man's side, and examined his revolver.

"Had her cocked on an empty chamber," he said. "The damn fool! Forgot to turn th' cylinder."

Johnny Morris, the gambler, spoke in his soft, conciliatory voice, which trembled slightly.

"That there was worth seein', Harkness. But how in hell did you dast take a chanct on him? Was you jest trustin' your luck?"

Harkness was frowning absently at the dead man. He seemed not to hear at first.

When he stuck his gun under the lamp," he said, "I seen th' light shinin' through the barrel!"

He turned with the words and left the room. He mounted his roan and shook him into a lope, his head turned south toward the border.

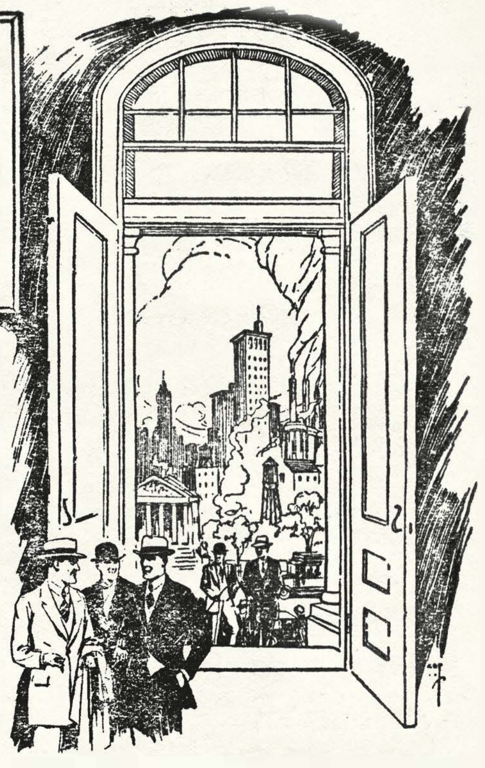
JOHNSTON AND HIS SAXOPHONE

THE average adult citizen has been accosted at least once in his liftime by a tousle-headed, big-eyed, highly excited lad who, grasping a saxophone and dreaming of theatrical fame, announced that he was a born musician. His confidence in his own genius was invariably explained by the fact that in a fateful moment he had picked up the saxophone and discovered that he could play a scale on it. Thrilled to his marrow by the experience, he devoted himself to hours of the most lugubrious and nerve-racking tooting that ever blighted an otherwise happy neighborhood.

Merle Johnston, of Washington, District of Columbia, who is in fact a genius with the saxophone, argues that the unpopularity of the instrument must be blamed, not on the sax, but on those young tooters whose ambition is by no means warranted by musical talent. They so torture and harass adult ears with their hopeless attempts at harmony, he says, that many people are prejudiced against an instrument which, in the hands of a real performer, is a great contribution to music.

Moreover, he proves his argument by coaxing strains from his sax which delight the civilized ear and could, if occasion offered, charm the savage beast. So good is he that he is on the air regularly in fourteen weekly broadcasts, makes phonograph records that sell, and is director of the Ceco Couriers, a well-known radio feature.

The POPULAR CLUB



Every reader of THE POPULAR MAGAZINE, man or woman, qualifies as a lover of good stories and as a good fellow, and is therefore automatically and entirely without obligation elected a member of THE POPULAR CLUB.

ONCE, on a camping trip, the camp mate of Mr. A. I. Cook, of Delta, Colorado, made a certain suggestion as to how to start a fire. The effect of this suggestion on Mr. Cook was such that he came within an ace of committing assault and battery on his friend. But he didn't; he controlled himself and sat down and had a heart-to-heart talk with the offender, who is to-day a better and finer man. But read Mr. Cook's letter:

I have been a reader of THE POPULAR since it started. In fact, up to a few years ago, had an almost complete file—only three copies missing. However, while I was away from my ranch some years ago, somebody thought so much of those old POPULARS that they took all but the last ten years of my file of them! About all that I can say about that deal is that I admire somebody's taste in magazines.

I came very near quitting THE POPULAR when it was a weekly, as during that time it did not seem to me to be up to its usual standard. But I am glad now I didn't, as THE POPULAR is now as good as, or better than, ever. So many of the stories are so good that I buy them in book form—when they are so published—and add them to my collection. I hope the Mr. Palmer stories—"The Genial Mr. Palmer" was a dandy—will come out in book form. I bought all the copies of THE POPULAR containing that story that I could find in three towns, and mailed them to friends who I thought would appreciate such a good story. The copy I mailed to a friend up at Cook Inlet, Alaska, certainly made me "popular," and, I think, added to your subscribers!

Please put me down for a membership in THE POPULAR CLUB. The editor of THE POPULAR seems to take it for granted that all his readers read the last of THE POPULAR *last*. I found another subscriber the other day who does as I do, *i. e.,* reads "A Chat With You" *first*. Also, he, like myself, never reads a continued story until he has all of it. I often wonder if there are other readers who read THE POPULAR this way. I regret the discontinuance of the "Caught in the Net" feature, but thoroughly enjoy the new "A Minute With." When starting on a fishing or hunting trip I always make sure that the latest POPULAR is in my war bag. I might accidentally leave out my pipe or the matches, but I invariably make *sure* of THE POPULAR. I nearly "ruined" one friend who proposed starting a fire with a copy we had with us when the snow was deep and everything else more or less wet. He knows better now—reads it himself since that trip.

WILL BEALE.

The Author of "The Fiddiing Crook," Complete Novel in This Issue, Writes of Himself.

I DON'T believe any writer finds himself very interesting. He probably knows better. In looking myself over for anything at all exceptional, one thing comes to me about myself that has always seemed unusual to other men. It is this: I am well content with what I have got out of life. I don't think this means that I have been satisfied with a little; it seems to me I have demanded a great deal from life and somehow or other got it. It does not mean that life with me has been any bed of roses; I have been thwarted, disappointed, have known hard luck, been good and hungry, and gone broke; but I could always laugh, and, so doing, could find life one fine, big experience.

To begin at the beginning, I was born on a rocky, sea-girt island in the north Atlantic. My mother was of rugged, seafaring pioneers. My father, bearing a French strain, came from the backlands of Maine. Temperamentally, I suppose I fuse both.

As to my breadwinning experience, barring three brief years of my life, I have never worked for any one but Will Beale, and I began paying my way early. With my brothers rushing off early to sea, at twelve I played the violin for a living, and kept it up until I was twenty—teaching, concerts, and show business. Press clippings during this time said I was good, but it all seems funny to me now. At twenty, to the apparent regret of many, I quit music cold as a career and went into business.

Then followed the three years I mentioned as working for somebody, from which I graduated to go on my own. I began to write, had what I know now to have been real encouragement, but halted to plunge head over heels—temperament, career, prospect, and bank account—into a food-packing business. I perfected the goods, and introduced them—as far as the coast. There were times in those years, tough hard-hitters, when life seemed a far cry from either Roget's "Thesaurus" or the Grieg sonata, but perhaps I didn't have sense enough to quit. Later I sold out, subsided to routine, and took up writing again.

If I represent another variation from the ordinary, it is in the fact that from sixteen on I insisted, in spite of everything, on seeing something of the world. Always, when things crowded me so I found it a bit hard to laugh, I'd quit, drop everything, and go look over the world to restore my sense of humor. In doing this I have come to know the United States pretty well, considerable of Europe, something of Africa, Canada, West Indies, Mexico, and way stations. I have always done this with a pretty keen interest, and everywhere I have found people ready to be wonderful at the drop of a hat, without regard to type or geography—in Paris, where the speedometer goes nervous, or in Newfoundland, where they haven't even roads.

Perhaps I have lived life from a good many angles, and for that reason I may have written all over the map. I would rather write *well* than anything I know.

A Chat With You

WISE men get themselves hobbies. A hobby is the surest way to keep from ever being bored. Your hobby may be, as Robert Louis Stevenson once recommended, a taste for collecting shells. It may be tinkering with your radio set. Or baseball on Saturday afternoons. Whatever it is, hang onto it. And get more hobbies, too. It's the best way to lay up riches for the future—not riches that will help pay your heavy bills, but a different kind that will make your bills and the other burdens of life seem less heavy.

* * * *

WE know of a man who threw his whole life into his business. Day and night he lived his work. He was an expert in his line, and in time he rose high in his firm. Then, in middle life, he suffered an accident which, while it did not cripple him, nevertheless made it impossible for him to carry on his office work. He had to retire.

It was pitiful to watch the swift disintegration of this fine man. He had never followed a hobby. And there he was suddenly left with nothing to do—his hands empty. In no pastime could he find the same absorbing interest that his work had held for him. He went to pieces quickly.

* * * *

NOW, if he had had some extra interest, like collecting antiques, or trout fishing, or amateur chemistry, or music—anything—he'd have continued to be a happy man.

If he had been interested in constructing crossword puzzles, or in finding distant stations on his radio, or in carving toy sailboats with his knife, or even in raising dogs for duck hunting, he wouldn't have gone to pieces.

The best hobby of all is reading—good reading. It is something that stays with you all your life. You can read whether you are sick or well, young or old—and a good story is a good story whether you read it in China or in an office when the boss isn't looking—although this latter practice is not quite to be recommended.

Reading has this virtue, too, as a hobby: it appeals to everybody. Duck hunting may not appeal to you especially, or crossword puzzles, but the odds are ten to one that if you get interested in a corking story you'll finish it and turn over to see if the next story is as fine.

* * * *

THE number of THE POPULAR which you now hold in your hand is an excellent one with which to start your reading hobby—if you are a newcomer to this friendly circle. Any of our old-time readers, and there are many of them, could tell you much more enthusiastically than we dare to, how quickly you will get the POPULAR habit.

The next issue, which will be the Holiday Number, will go a long way toward cementing your friendship with this magazine. The novel by Metcalf Johnson will be a mystery tale, called "The *Zingara* Murders." It is a remarkable story in that all the murders take place on a yacht anchored out in Long Island Sound, right off the Connecticut shore. Can you imagine a more intriguing setting for a swift-moving, perplexing mystery yarn?

THE holiday spirit will be expressed by H. de Vere Stacpoole, Henry Herbert Knibbs and others, in short stories and other features that will make you wish Christmas could come not once, but several times a year. We ask you not to miss the yuletide number, for that is the time when we all truly get together in spirit, and it would be a real shame if any of you were to be absent.

Our gatherings back in this part of the magazine, where we meet in the Club and the old Chat, are very precious to us, for that is the time when, more than ever, we feel that we know each of you personally. Since you cannot be here in person, write in! A letter is like a handshake. And every letter you write comes directly to the hands of the editors. Don't forget now!

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Holiday Number—Out December 20th

The "Zingara" Murders — METCALF JOHNSON
An Intriguing Mystery Novel

The Man With A Grouch — H. DE VERE STACPOOLE
A Christmas Short Story

Dolling, We Are Growing Thinner — RAYMOND LESLIE GOLDMAN

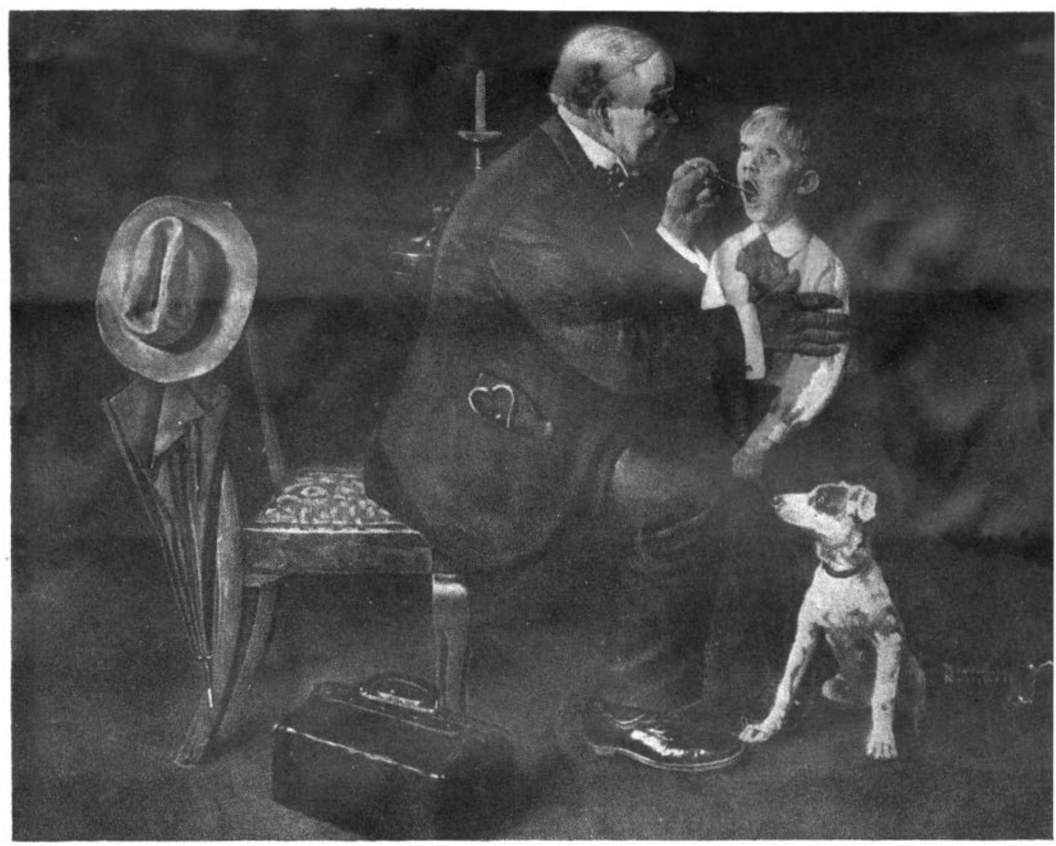
Bad Blood — CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK
A Five-part Story—Part III

The Snow Angel — HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS
A Christmas Short Story

The Popular Club

A Chat With You — THE EDITORS

And other attractive stories and features



"*The same advice I gave your Dad . . .* **Listerine,** *often*"

Do you remember—

When the good old family doctor came into the house, how your heart began to thump? You didn't know but what you had cholera morbus or something equally dreadful. You saw yourself dying in no time.

Then his firm gentle hands poked you here and there. His bright kind eyes looked down your gullet. And, oh, what a load left your mind when you learned that your trouble was only a badly inflamed throat and that Listerine would take care of it?

The basic things of life seldom change: Listerine, today, is the same tireless enemy of sore throat and colds that it was half a century ago.

It is regularly prescribed by the bright, busy young physicians of this day, just as it was by those old timers—bless their souls—who mixed friendship and wisdom with their medicines.

Used full strength, Listerine kills in 15 seconds even the virulent Staphylococcus Aureus (pus) and Bacillus Typhosus (typhoid) germs in counts ranging to 200,000,000. We could not make this statement unless we were prepared to prove it to the entire satisfaction of the medical profession and the U. S. Government. Three well-known bacteriological laboratories have demonstrated this amazing germ-killing power of Listerine. Yet it is so safe it may be used full strength in any body cavity.

Make a habit of gargling systematically with full strength Listerine during nasty weather. It aids in preventing the outbreak of colds and sore throat. And often remedies them when they have developed. Lambert Pharmacal Company, St. Louis, Mo., U. S. A.

It checks

SORE THROAT

KILLS 200,000,000 GERMS IN 15 SECONDS

Judges of Quality

"One thing you can say for the men—they know a good smoke."

Their judgment has made Camels the most popular cigarette in the United States.

Camel

CIGARETTES

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