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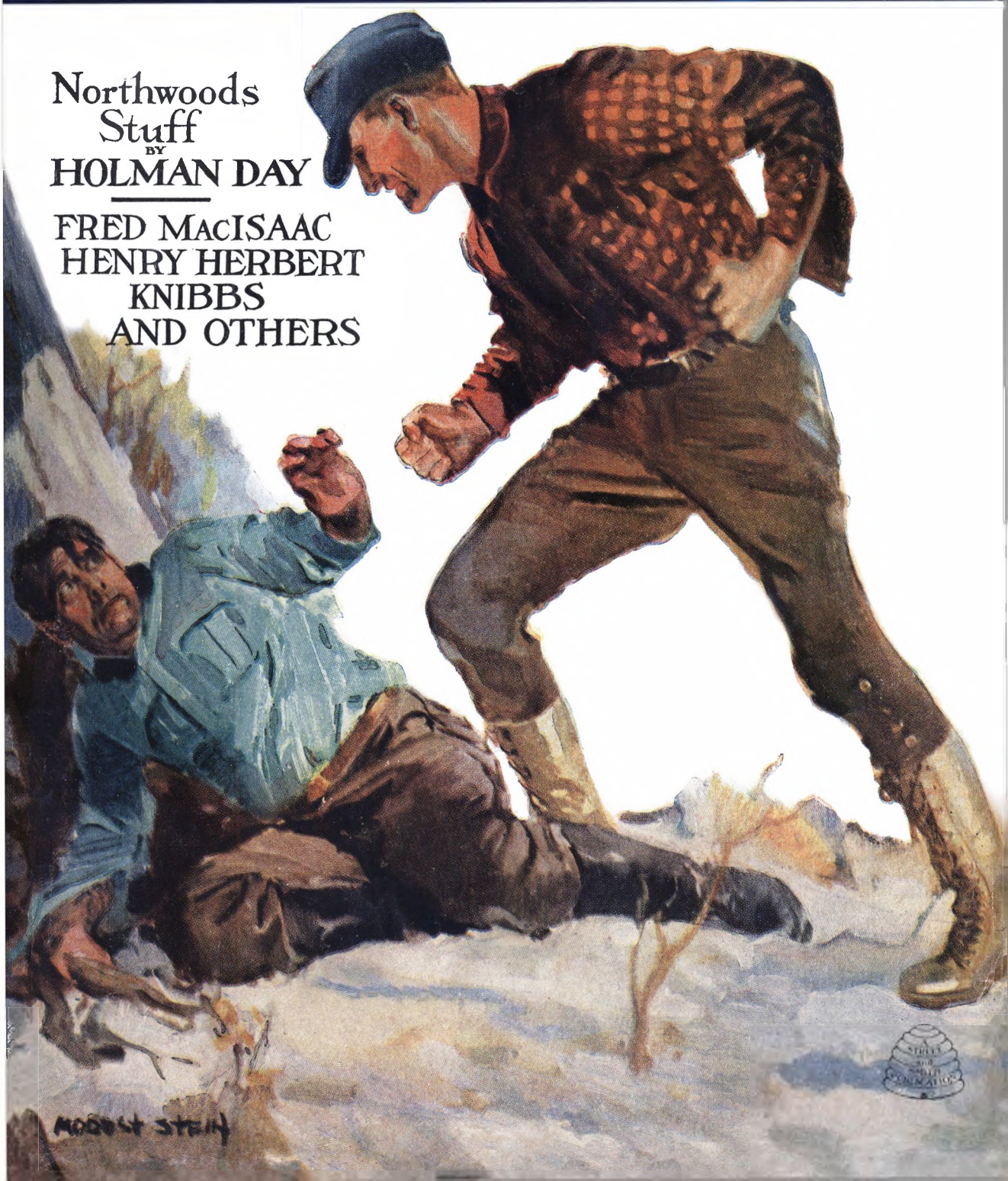

Northwoods Stuff
BY
HOLMAN DAY

FRED MACISAAC
HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS
AND OTHERS

A most unusual and interesting novel will be the feature of next week's THE POPULAR. "The Triumph of the Trees," by Clay Perry, is the story of a highly successful prize fighter who was different from the run of the mill. The giants of the forest and a wisp of a girl combined to exert a wonderful influence on his life. You must not miss this story. Next week, January 21st.

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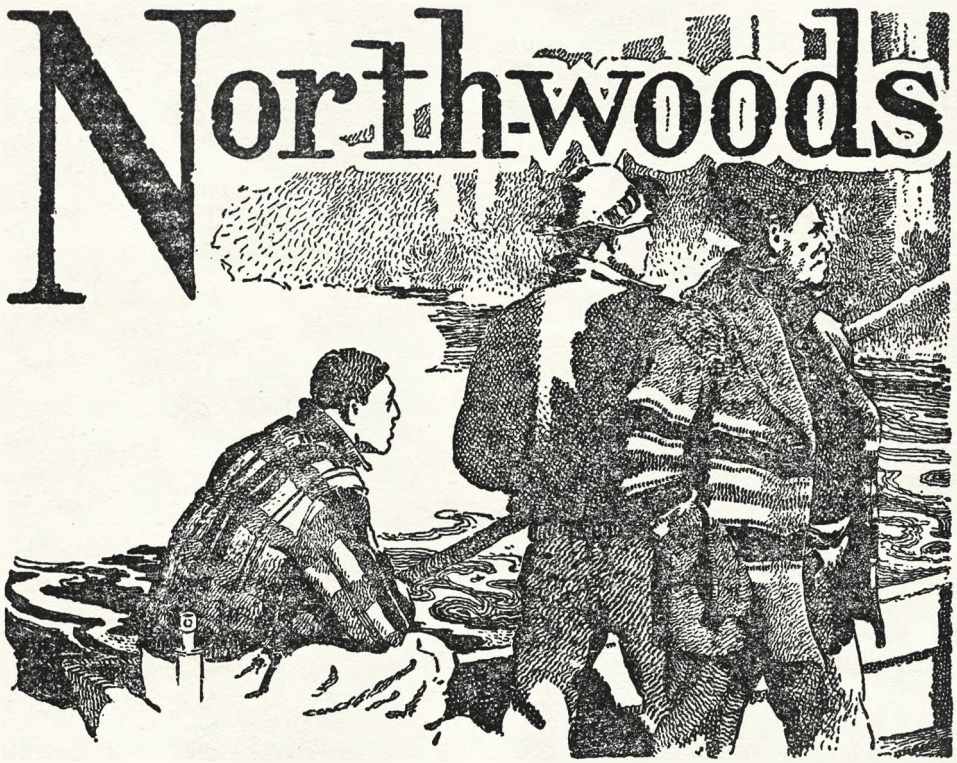


Author of "South o' the Wolves,"

During the time that ex-Boss Breck Morner was in prison, things changed up in with green eyeshades; radio displaced the old fiddlers; and efficiency became the old spirit of understanding that had bound the woodsmen and the bosses together;

CHAPTER I.

TWO CONVICTS FREED.

AWAKE long before dawn, "No. 3140" was waiting anxiously for the daylight so aggravatingly slow in coming; it seemed as if it were sulking in the east beyond the lofty, spike-tipped walls; it dawdled sullenly in the prison yard.

The convict, watching and waiting, did not lay blame against the light because it so plainly hated to come inside a State prison. He knew what a dreadful thing it was to be in there. And he had come from the unpenned stretches of the forest of the North country. Light had not been more free than he had been.

Three years of the cage! Now his heart leaped and his soul expanded. This was the glory-morning to which he had looked forward, checking off days, subtracting the time allowed for good behavior; he had been mighty thrifty in piling up the golden hours of that allowance. He pulled down his tally card and slowly stripped it into fragments, glad because it no longer was of account.

A guard came, noiselessly treading with felt-soled shoes, and handed into the cell the new suit of going-out clothes donated by the prison to the convict who had done his turn.

A little later as a free man, no longer No. 3140, but Breck Morner, he was allowed to eat his breakfast at a small

"*In the Tall Timber*," *Etc.*

the woods. Machines came in; city men moved about in the old camp buildings, men watchword. But it seemed to Morner that one thing was lacking—and that was the without that, he was positive that the grit needed in a real crisis would be lacking.

table in the prison kitchen. On the other side of the room a man in new garments was eating, too. To protect the mental equilibrium of the other convicts, men outgoing or about to be hanged were kept apart on the eve of the especial event.

Morner did not know the other man. Must have worked in a shop! Morner had been put to heavy toil in the construction of a new cell wing.

After the two had eaten they were convoyed by a guard to various doorways closed by iron grilles or solid sheet metal. The men in process of being freed grinned furtively at each other whenever a door clicked or clanged open to let them pass. The smile served aplenty for communication of sentiments; they had been trained inside those walls to do without speech. And they had not forgotten their training.

They were conducted to the office of the prison warden. He was a fat man and was solidly packed between the arms of a swivel chair. He was inclined to be unconventional and rather jolly when he was sending prisoners out into the world. He had freshly posted himself from the big record book on offenses charged in these latest cases and on their manner of conduct during confinement. Paternally he preached them a bit of a sermon, gave each a manila envelope containing the cash taken off the prisoner when he was admitted, added a ten-dollar bank note, the regular prison dole, and shook hands with them with-

out going to the bother of pulling himself from the clutch of the chair arms.

"Both of you have worked in the woods, so I note from the record of previous occupation. Going back there?"

"Yes, sir. That is to say, *I* am," promised Breck Morner. He peered through the window into the sparkle of autumn sunlight. "Seems like I'm a-holding my breath, sir, till I can climb up onto a hard-wood ridge and get a hearty meal for my eyes off'm the Jack Frost painting."

"The frosts have done a fine job on the foliage this year," stated the warden enthusiastically. "I'm just back from a trip after partridges. Good luck to you, Morner. Anything to say about your plans, Goss?"

"I wasn't thinking exactly about going back to the woods, sir."

"You're used to the life and you'll be getting on your feet quicker," advised the official. "Better talk things over with Morner. He seems to be level headed. Try the North country with him."

A guard pulled the bolts and dropped the chains from the last big door between the men and the sunlight.

"Give the house a good name, boys," he suggested jovially. "But don't get yourselves and any of your friends into the habit of coming here."

Again they allowed grins to express sentiments; after long inhibition, their minds and tongues were clumsy.

They walked side by side along the street for some time, without speaking. Then:

"Goss, so the warden said your name is," suggested Morner.

"Yes, with Wagner for front doorknob. 'Waggy,' I'm called. What's your own full?"

"Breck Morner."

"What was your jolt?"

"Three."

"Mine five. Woods, hey?"

"Yes, chopper and river jack."

"Same here."

They walked on, block after block, saying no more. Speech, free, easy and open, was still an uncomfortable matter to manage.

In company they entered a shop and bought pipes and tins of tobacco. When they trudged on again, smoking, they were a bit more wonted to the old man-fashion style.

"I'm going to the depot and take a train for upcountry," stated Morner. "Any remarks to make on what 'Mister Bolt-and-bar' advised?"

"All my timber work was south—hard pine. Maybe I wouldn't know the tricks in the North country."

"Maybe I don't—not now! All my jobs was on long timber. Guess to-day, with so much newfangled machinery turning out the four-foot stuff for the pulp mills, it's more or less like a sausage factory. But I'm going to the North woods. Don't know nothing 'cept the woods. I'm hungry for the big sticks."

After prolonged thought Goss said:

"Reckon I'll go, too."

Later, sitting side by side on a bench in the smoking room at the railroad station, they were silent until Goss broke out with:

"Seems queer, don't it, sitting here, knowing we can jump up and run along with the rest of those folks who are galloping back and forth?"

"Oh, Lord! If I should ever do anything again to make me be sent back to what I've come from!" Morner gasped.

The companion, with a side glance, studied the other, noting his grizzled hair, grooved countenance—not hard lines but a scroll of steadiness and amiability. The old-timer looked honest.

Morner caught the stare and returned it. Goss was young, with smooth features, his complexion refined by his in-

door life for so many years. He flushed slightly when Morner scrutinized, and the color was becoming.

"Youngster, you don't look tough. How come they penned you?"

The flush deepened into angry red.

"I ain't so sure I don't belong in a foolish house on a life sentence. I wasn't much more'n sixteen when I was guiding parties along the northeast border. Everybody had rum along and I got fooling with it."

"Rum done it for me, too! But go ahead."

"And once when I was half crazy for want of it after a bat, I broke into a sporting camp where I knew some dudes had a stock. I was reckless and half googled—so they caught me at the job. Got a six-month jail sentence."

"But that wasn't State prison!"

"But it so happened 'twas hitting the trail toward it, all right. That jail was so easy to break out of, it was a shame not to grab the chance. So I scooted—and I went South. I was cured of all cussedness, believe *me!* Went to work. Worked hard in the woods. Got in with a mighty fine girl, too. Just loved that girl so much I went all blooey! You know how it is, and if you don't know you ought to be wise at your age! When a fellow is dead in love he just naturally dumps the duffel of his whole life for that girl to paw over. He wants sympathy. So I dumped. And she was a nice girl, and she was awful sorry.

"But she said she wanted to live happy ever after with me. And it couldn't be all happy with that cloud hanging over us—me an escaped jailbird! So she said for me to go back North and clean up the record—tell 'em what had happened to me—and she was betting as how the jailer would be so glad because I was in love and going straight he'd pat my shoulder, and tell me to go and be happy. Then there'd be nothing else to do but telegraph her to come and be married. Well, mister, I'm afraid that girl had been reading about all this forgive-and-forget bunk.

"I showed myself North, the grand jury was in session, the district attorney told 'em I'd broken and entered in the nighttime, then had broken jail and was a desperate criminal to be made an example of. So I was jounced for five years in the big jug! And the girl wrote me she couldn't marry a State prison convict, and she had met a real nice elderly man who owned a hen farm and a dairy. So I suppose she's been patting butter and counting eggs while I've been butting stone walls and counting days. And that's the hell o' life!"

Morner relighted his pipe and mused.

The narrator emitted a sound that was halfway between a snarl and a cackle of grim mirth.

"I won't be mad, mister, if you laugh at the fool mess I went and stuck myself into."

"Well, it ain't wholly to be cried about, seeing it's past and gone. You're all washed up where the law's concerned. And a girl who quit like that one did might have quit for some other reason after you were married and when she could hurt you still more. And *you* haven't had all the trouble there is in the world. I've had mine—and rum started it, too!

"When I was master of the Oxbow drive I went in and under and saved 'em from a season's hang-up—single-handed, and with dynamite and devilishness for tools. They made me a hero. I took their hooraws and their rum—and made a fool of myself. Started hell-hooting for a wind-up in the city. Tramped through a Pullman car with my spike boots on, howling and kicking up splinters. Nigh killed two of the gang that made a bee and throwed me off at a flag station. Pulled over the stove in the depot, made a bonfire of the place, and danced around it till the

sheriff came with a posse and jammed me into a sapling crate.

"Judging from what was said in court against me—arson and attempt to murder and suchlike—I wouldn't have been a mite surprised to have 'em jug me for life. In the old days they used to stand for a lot o' rampage after the drive was down. They passed it by as rivermen's fun. They don't giggle no more! Even my own company let me go to State prison—said their crews would be better off after an example was set. Hope I've done some good by being that example—and hope the milliminum, or whatever they call it, has come to the North woods by a little of my help. If it's looked at in that light, they may give me another show."

"Suppose they will?"

"Well, I'm going into the woods, anyway. Can't stay away. Considering where I've been, the trees seem better now than they ever did. I want a lot of open—big space—around me, son." He stood up and stretched out his arms and drew deep breaths. "Oh, Lord, won't it be good! No walls and roofs but the mountains and the sky overhead. And I won't be shaming the good old woods again, no, sir!"

"I'm glad to be going along with you." It was said earnestly. "Both of us have made terrible breaks, but we ain't all to the bad."

"Only two poor cusses who are meaning to tussle it out better style from now on."

The two shook hands—then they started for the North.

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST TUSSLE.

FROM the jumping-off place, the end of a stage line, Morner and Goss footed it along a tote road, heading into the wilderness of the border county.

They had outfitted thriftily at a village store and were at woodsmen's ease in mackinaws, leggings, shoe pacs—the rough-and-ready garb of toilers; with care they had folded the new garments donated by the State and carried this gear in their lank duffel bags.

Here and there they came to camps and clearings where workers made shift with the oods-and-ends occupations of the big woods—poplar peelers, choppers of ties, hackmatack and cedar, hewers of ship knees, cutters of birch for dowels, toothpicks and spool wood, gleaners of the harder woods—ash, maple, beech for carvers of shoe lasts, canoe builders, furniture makers. As the sea is an inexhaustible reservoir from which all sorts of products are drawn, so is the big forest ready to yield its infinite variety to industry.

The two who were plodding north were welcomed to board and bed in these camps. They ate, slept and went on with gratitude for the uncalculating hospitality.

Jobs were offered but were turned down. Morner and Goss had had all their dealings with the big timber, the black growth. Morner had been a gear in the giant machine that had ground fodder for the ravenous presses; Goss had helped in handling massive timbers of southern pine. To ask them to fiddle-faddle with railroad ties and dowel stock was the same as inviting whalers to jiggle hand lines for fish.

"We'll keep on toward the north," said Morner each morning when the two took to the trail. "Prob'ly the bosses ain't climbing any high nubble to watch for me and holler, 'Hurrah!' and wave! But I'm guessing one of the last of the old true-blue Busters won't be shut away from a job on account of what's past and well ought to be forgotten." Some of his modest pride had been coming back to him in the woods. "At any rate, I was always forgetting all risks for their sakes."

It truly did seem, at last, that much had been forgotten in the North woods —even such a character as Breck Morner had been in his days of exploits. At intervals, on trail and tote road, men met him, passed on and gave no special sign of recognition except for the accustomed hail between all strangers meeting and passing in the woods.

Repeatedly Morner informed Goss:

"That's a man I know. But seems he doesn't know *me* any more. Same with them others we've run acrost. Of course, it's just as pleasant not to have 'em running up to me and hollering: 'Well, well! So you've been let out o' State prison!' But, dammit, this is worse than dying and coming back to life and walking round and not having anybody even bat an eye,. thinking mebbe they're seeing a ghost. Guess I wasn't much of anything up this way, after all, or else, mebbe,. I'm still in State prison and having another one o' my dreams of being out and all free."

"Cheer up!" Goss counseled. "Why not figure it that nothing very serious was laid up against you in men's minds? So it was quick sluiced. It's easy to forget a man's face. Grudges ain't so easy to forget. And grudges remind as to faces. Nobody, so far, seems wanting to tie a tin can to you. I should size it that way if I was you." This was optimism from one who was under no cloud of doubt in his own case; he was in a region new to him and was not called on to hazard guesses as to his standing among men in those parts.

Eventually Morner stoutly, desperately put his own dubious standing to the test. One day he flung out his arm and stopped a middle-aged man who was footing it down from the Northland, heading for the outside, so his heavy pack suggested.

"Hullo, Dave Spencer!"

"Why, hullo yourself, Breck Morner!" This reply to the hail was matter-of-fact, casual, as if the parties had been meeting daily in the avenues of the forest. It was Yankee reserve with the extra coating of woodsmen's repression.

"On your way out, Dave?"

"Must be, seeing as how I've met you on your way in."

"How's tricks in the big concern?"

"Nothing but!"

"What ye mean?"

"All tricks! Steam haulers, garsoline yappers for twitch roads, power grindstones and saw filers, adding machines, typewriters—and at night you-all set in a social-service hall and look into the garp of a big horn and listen to yowling and blarting from city folks way off somewhere. Too much dinky-doodle stuff for an old woodsman. They ain't a fiddle or an a-cord-een left in the woods. Nobody jigs no more. No shanty singing. That's the woods nowadays!" He yawned. "Helluva hole for healthy men!"

"Huh! So, hidebound, you're leaving on account o' that?"

"Waal," admitted Spencer, wriggling his shoulders to settle his pack, "they was one other small reason for my leaving. Got fired!" He marched on.

Morner chased after, calling: "But, look here, Dave! I've been boss over you and am knowing to what an all-round good timber handler you are. If they're firing men like you, I'm wondering what show I stand to be hired."

Spencer halted and faced about.

"Darn little," he said.

"But I'm a topnotcher in timber, even if I *have* been in State prison."

"Prob'ly a lot o' the rest o' them critters up there have been jugged in past times, but it hasn't been so well advertied about 'em as about 'Boss' Morner. Now, get it right, Breck! I've had to listen to 'ficiency speeches in that social hall. I'm running over with 'ficiency ideas!" He spread his palms and adopted the tone of the orator. "Men, we're parts of one big machine, and

each part must fit all puffick! They can't be no rattling, no jarring, no gritting, no grinding. One little hot bearing and the big machine must stop. Mo-*rarl!* Mo-*rarl!*" He bellowed the word and puckered his forehead, aping a frown of severity. "Without perfect mo-*rarl* we don't get no results! Mo-*rarl* is the slick oil to grease the big machine! What would be said of an engineer who should *see* grit, *know* it for grit—and then put it into his oil?" Spencer dropped his tone to normal. "Breck, your kind o' grit used to be the real stuff in the woods—the stuff that got results. But to-day you'd only start squeaks."

"Grit is needed more than ever in the woods, Dave." But Morner was blinking, troubled, doubting when he made this declaration; he had heard that strange shifts had been taking place in the timber country while he had been away.

"Not our kind, Breck, not any more, so the 'ficiency fellers have got it figgered out—and they're smart lads with figgers. All I done was do too much talking about the old days—and I got sized up as grit in the mo-*rarl*. I'm too polite to hint what'll be said to you when you go in front of one o' them new fellers and ask to be put into the machine. You know where your temper got you once. Better not put it to another bad strain."

"A whole lot has been done to that temper in the last three years," stated Morner bitterly. "It has been in a blasted hot fire and all the cracks are closed and pounded tight."

"That's nice! All meek, hey? And soopled! Then you'll only be rounding over to take your kick. You're plumb sure to get it. And instead of having temper for a man's kind of a comeback at 'em, you'll only be saying, 'Much obliged!' for help in a start on your way out o' the woods. Helluva thing for you to keep remembering—that kick! Still having my temper, I licked two walking bosses and backed out cussing at the super. So it's all easy off'm my mind about fretting and fussing and worrying whether I'd better go back and ask to be put into the big machine. Tell me. Did you like State prison? If you can give it a good word I'll go kill the timber corporation president, plead manslaughter for a good cause and have a soft snap for the rest of my life." Without waiting for a reply, he trudged on his way.

Morner sloughed to the side of the tote road and sat on a fallen log. He propped his elbows akimbo on his knees and gazed at the ground, taking stock in his case.

After a time he slowly raised his eyes and caught the stare of Goss, sitting at a little distance on a tussock.

"Young feller, you'd better mosey along by your lonesome if you want to get a job up here. You've been hearing about how much of a handicap I'm likely to be to any side kick trotting along with me."

"How about yourself? Quitting or going on?"

"I'm going on!" Morner's cheek muscles tautened and bulged when he set his jaws. "I ain't letting Dave Spencer's tongue wallop me. If I'm in for a down-and-out slam I'll take it at headquarters, man style."

"Good stuff!" indorsed the mate. "I hate a quitter. I'm giving you no chance to hate me for being one. This is where I stick along with you."

Morner winked a suspicion of moisture from his eyes.

"Looks like I'd be running the chance o' being lonesome in the woods if it wasn't for you, buddy. Reckon I know how you feel, all right. Take us two, just out o' State prison, and meaning to go to it straight, from now on, whatever we tackle, as we've talked and settled on! If we duck the first test o' grit, our whole system is knocked gal-

ley-west. We're then off'm our feet and in the chute, and there's no telling where the end of the drop will be. But when we walk away from headquarters after the grit test—well, 't any rate, we can say: 'It was sure some wallop, old kid, but facing the way he did we got booted uphill instead of down, and the good old nerve is still with us, though the job isn't.' And now let's light our pipes and hike on!"

In that spirit they made their sortie on the field headquarters of the corporation.

Forcibly it was borne in upon Breck Morner that much in the way of change can happen in three years of this era of quick revolutions in business management, when scattered companies are consolidated into a merciless whole, officered, high-power style, geared with accuracy to produce at top efficiency.

There was a new office building in the center of the far-flung web of operations and camps. A frame structure of two stories! No longer the log-walled wangan, homely, reassuring; the boss smoking his pipe, thumbs stuck inside the belt of his mackinaw, cursing the faults committed by a subaltern, then forgiving with a grin and telling the culprit to get back onto his job!

No more of that in the big office where the two prison-smirched job hunters waited meekly outside a rail and listened to the clicking of typewriters! Morner recognized none of the clerkish men who bustled about, their faces partly masked by eyeshades.

After a time he and Goss were escorted to a room above the door of which was the legend: "Superintendent."

The man at the big flat desk in the middle of the room was a person whom Morner had never seen before. But the applicant, embarrassed by the stranger's severe demeanor, began to thank Providence when a side glance brought into view a man at a small desk in the corner; this was Sam Turner who had been a scaler and timekeeper during Morner's sway as boss. He greeted Turner cordially. The latter looked frightened and replied in a tone that corresponded with his manner.

"Sam will speak for me, mister, as being an able boss when I had the job," Morner hastened to say, making the most of the presence of one who had viewed such efficiency.

"What can you say for him, Turner?" demanded the superior.

The clerk stammered when he replied that Breck Morner had spoken the truth about his ability.

"What's that?" shouted the overlord in falsetto of protest and amazement. "Breck Morner? Why, look here, Morner! This is the height of impudence. I've heard all about you and your actions. You must be straight from State prison."

"Yes, sir. Was made straight *there* —coming straight *here!*"

"You certainly have your nerve with you!"

"Yes, sir. My nerve has helped me a good many times." He spoke humbly, wistfully. "It helped me when I went alone into the snarl of the Oxbow hang-up, with a sack of dynamite and——"

The officer flung up both hands.

"This is impudence, I tell you! Get out of here!"

Backing toward the door, shocked by this violence, Morner offered for himself:

"They al'ays said I could get more out o' men than most any boss."

"Mighty little control you'd have over men and their morale—with the record that's hitched to you. Get out!"

Breck halted, mildly persisting.

"You see, sir, I was feeling as how I wouldn't ever be making any other mistakes and would be worth more nowadays."

"You're making the biggest mistake of your life right now—thinking we'd

hire such a man as you. Get out! The two of you get out!"

Goss had ventured a few anxious words. The big man whirled on him.

"You're teaming with a jailbird. That speaks for itself about you. Go along!"

The two tiptoed out of the building. In the yard Morner dusted his hands.

"Well, that's that." He tried to smile, but the expression was twisted into a wry grimace.

"He hadn't any right or call to be so rough—you trying honestly for your comeback," protested the young man. "Gorry! I hope you ain't feeling too bad about it, Breck."

"It's tother way, son! Really and truly is! I'm feeling better about myself after that test. I braced up to him, knowing well enough what he'd hand me. And after 'twas handed I held my temper. No; didn't have to *hold* it. No tussle with it, whatever! I'd been reckoning as how in the past three years it had been well trained, but wasn't sure till I'd tested. Now I'm sure. Oh, yes! I'm feeling good."

But the other's indignation was operating in Breck's behalf.

"It ain't the right way for a man to make good—letting himself be a doormat. He fair wiped his feet on you!"

"I don't feel like a doormat. And I'm blamed sure I ain't aiming to be a knocker, either. Guess I'll try to be something like the knob on a door. Handy for folks to use in opening a way for themselves."

Goss scowled and shook his head. "I don't get you—not for a cent!"

"Don't blame you. It's all kind o' gummy in my own mind. I ain't 'specially spry with my tongue. But the idea is, if you stay where you're put, mind your business, be helpful according to what you're set to do, if it's only as a doorknob according to what I've said about being handy for folks, you're getting the grip of a mitt, at any rate, and you'll be keeping shined up and—well, some day you may be spotted as a human being instead of just serving as a doorknob. And it'll be a case of many good turns deserving others—and all that. That's as near as I can say it out. But it's all clear in my own mind—and I'm going to stick to my plan." Breck marched away, Goss tramping beside him.

At the edge of the clearing the two halted in front of the long, open shed where the motor equipment was lodged—trucks, haulers, tractors.

"Pretty much all machine these days, son," observed Breck.

"We've just had a good sample of it, I'll say," grumbled Goss, his thoughts dwelling testily on the affair in the office. "Cogs, cranks, sheet iron; *bang! bang!* here the big hystrampus comes; get out of the way or be run over! There ought to be something more'n that in handling men to get the most out of 'em."

"Seems so to me—but can you put a word to it?"

"No," admitted Goss. "I only know it's so."

"There was something close to it in the days past, working for the 'Old Sirs,'" said Breck. "You know it was there. Never heard it called by a name. But it was al'ays on tap when the drive would start—when we manned the river and never saw no clock and never give a hoot 'n hell about time passing, 'cept we'd notice when 'twas too dark to see ledges; then we'd eat what the cookee brought, eat till our faces dropped into the plates for a nap till the boss kicked us onto our feet again. And we'd grin at him and turn to it once more.

"Yes, lad, whatever that thing was, it was there in us all the time. Nothing was run specially reg'lar. Mostly hell dash! Fellers like me running it. And you've just heard how I've been sized up by Mister Machine. It's all machine." He aimed his finger at the

radiator of a truck, at the glossy, blank eyes of its headlights. "It's a damned able thing, that critter, no doubt. But when bosses of woodsmen try to cut pattern by that style, there'll be something lacking in a big pinch! And it's in the woods that a big pinch comes when nobody is looking for it."

At this juncture Breck was not looking for that which came from behind —the harsh voice of the official who had shooed the two out of his presence. "Look here, men! What for are you hanging about these machines?"

"Only to find out how fast the world is jumping," explained Breck. "They don't give convicts much of a chance to catch up on news," he added bluntly.

"It won't get you a thing, Morner, reminding people you've been in State prison."

"I've saved you the bother of reminding *me,* sir! You looked like you was going to say it, sizing me as a tough."

The man of authority narrowed his eyes, looking for what might be hidden under Morner's demure exterior. "You're trying on more of your impudence."

"No, sir."

"But you walked out of my office carrying a grudge."

"You're all wrong, mister."

"I'm wise to grudges, I tell you! Have been dealing with too many of them. On your way, now, both of you! Your sizing up these machines means you intend to monkey with them."

"We'll be moving, sir. We hadn't the least idea you'd take our stopping for a peek as you seem to be taking it." He started along, pushing Goss who was grumbling. "Shut up! Prob'ly the super has been against plenty o' grudges."

"I'll bet he has," growled Waggy. "And all by jumping on men!"

"I've had to jump on 'em," declared the official. "It's the only way to handle the gangs I'm dealing with."

Breck halted. "Excuse me, sir! I won't bother you too much. When I was a boss I had my own way of dealing with me. Tough men, the most of 'em. I'm wondering how much the woods ways are changed. Because I never did get the right juice out o' men by jamming and jumping. Would you mind telling me if your plan works best these days?"

"Dammit! I still believe there's impudence back of all you say to me."

" 'Fore Heaven, there isn't, sir! I'm trying awful hard to get posted a little. Prob'ly I'll never get another job as boss, anyway. But if one is ever offered me I guess I won't be taking it if I'm expected to be up with the times by jumping and jamming."

"Blast you! You're giving a sly dig to my style of management."

"I'm sorry you're taking it that way, sir. I might say for myself as how you had a perfectly good reason for turning me down when I asked for a job." Then Morner straightened back his shoulders. His chin came up. He displayed no antagonism, only the pride of a boss who had once held sway over men with the spirit of fairness and honesty. "But you didn't have no call to jump with both feet on me, sir. I'm carrying off no grudge, I tell you again. But on your own word other men have done so—and it's perfectly plain why they have. I'll bid you good day, sir."

"Just a minute, Morner! Turn around here."

Breck obeyed.

"You're doing considerable bragging about that system of yours."

"I didn't mean to have it sound that way."

"Sounds so to me! I'm not twitting you on the mess you made of managing yourself. But if you've got a special recipe for handling other men in the woods, I'll slip you a good price for same." A sneer went along with the offer.

"I'm guessing it would be pretty hard to write out that receet, sir, or even talk it out so's you would understand. It's woods stuff I'm talking about, not how things are done in the city style by big concerns. You're from the city, of course."

"Yes—where brains have the call over beef."

Out of his training, his past environment, out of the feelings that the forest was the real metropolis for men of his ilk, Morner returned: "Too bad you've al'ays lived off so far."

"Still impudent, eh?"

"Sorry, sir, you ain't got a better name for what I've tried to make decent and good sense, as I look at it. You've got all the say here about men, have you?"

"I hire—I fire!"

"It's a pretty sharp tool, that power, mister. It's terrible easy to gouge with it if you're careless. Just a minute! I was going on about my own business, but you stopped me. Now't I'm stopped by your bidding, I'm going to say something before I pass on. This style o' management, that new office building, these machines—everything is new. But if you tell me you've got new human nature in the woods, or can make over the natures of men such as take jobs in timber, then you're awful mistaken or else you're lying—and you can't put over anything on me, either way. Hold on, I tell you! I'm out and free and not called on to answer to nobody, seeing I ain't got no job. Perhaps being free does make me a speck imperdent, if you want to put that name on what I say.

"But I'm a-telling you, you can't make this thing of yours *all* machine. Not in the woods. Somehow, some day, you're going into a pinch. It'll be a case of human nature bucking the machine. And if you don't know how to handle human nature any better'n the sample o' style you've been giving me, there's going to be hell to pay! And all of a sudden, when you ain't looking for it. That's from me—and I've been through a lot as a boss of woodsmen. Now, good day to you, sir." Morner marched away with Goss at his heels. The woods boss was looking uncertain.

"Better leave your address," called the super. "I may need an expert like you claim to be."

Unruffled by the irony, Breck kept going. "Shouldn't wonder a mite, mister! But you won't have to go far to find me. This is my old stamping ground and I'll be hanging around in it for a spell."

"Aha! I can guess now where you'll be found. Flocking with birds of a feather. Across from Skulltree, hey?"

"That's the place, sir! You're as good a guesser as you are gouger! Across from Skulltree!"

CHAPTER III.

A TWO-FISTED CRUSADER.

WHEN Morner and Goss were some distance on their way, along a tote road, the young man spoke out, after waiting in vain for the other to proffer explanation: "Breck, seems like there's a good deal of a hint o' something hitched onto this Skulltree, whatever the place is."

"You got his twit for a dirty dig, didn't you?"

"Sounded as if it might be one."

"It is one. It's only sort o' passing the time o' day to tell a fellow to go to the devil; there's more or less doubt about there being any such place. But there *is* consid'able hell across from Skulltree. And when you hand the twit of it to any man who knows this part o' the country, you're running the chance of a crack on the jaw. But I'm going there. Seems to be about the right place for me—labeled like I am these days. Don't ask me about the place just now," he snapped curtly, breaking

in on questions. "No need of wasting breath on what you'll see for yourself."

After a trudge in silence they went down a long slope to the rim of a broad bog of sphagnum moss, a pot of mud jelly that quaked under their feet.

"Follow close behind me," said Morner. "I know the cut-off—it saves us two miles of hoofing it on the hard ground."

Beyond the bog was a screen of cedars; the trail took them to the edge of a deadwater. Here ended another trail, the circuitous route over the higher land.

Across the deadwater was an island, circled desolately with bleached skeletons of fallen trees that had been undermined by waters.

"Above that island used to be the big eddy at the foot of the falls," stated Morner. "Only a narrow channel then 'tween this shore and what was a big island them days. They raised the dam and flooded out what used to be. Into the big eddy the stuff was sluiced down the falls, then circled around and around for a long time. If a jack got drowned in the swift water upstream, they come here to fish him out o' the ring-around-rosy. There's part o' one they didn't get while he was whole."

Goss' gaze followed the direction of Morner's pointing finger, and he saw a blackened skull pinched firmly in the crotch of a weather-whitened tree stub. The object was almost directly above their heads.

"So this place is called Skulltree—and that over there is across from Skulltree," stated the man of the region. " 'Tain't much for looks nor for living on. But, seeing what we are, it'll have to do us for a spell, I guess."

He hollowed his palms at his mouth and hallooed.

" 'Less they've changed like everything else has up in these parts, somebody'll come and set us over in a punt."

Goss dragged down his stare from the grisly thing in the tree crotch. He looked at the island, surveying it from end to end, saw many scattered huts and shacks, and beheld a man sauntering down to the shore. "What's the answer, Breck?"

"This! There are a lot of men over there. Used to be, at any rate. All of 'em tagged or branded. Have been in prison or have done things why they ought to be put there. Law hasn't promised that last kind anything special. But the law has let 'em alone, forgetting 'em, as long as they stay across from Skulltree. If you want to pass on your way, Waggy, now's your time to hike. But I'm going to hang round in these parts—and this seems to be the only sociable place for me."

"Guess my case is the same. I'll hang, too."

A man, standing in a flat-bottomed boat, was poling across the drought-shallowed expanse of the deadwater to where they stood waiting.

"All bad ones, hey?" quizzed Goss.

"So ticketed by them who pinch their noses and turn their backs. I d'know how many real tough-roughs are over there these days. There was a few o' that kind when I was knowing to things. But let me tell you, Waggy, the most of 'em was poor devils who had made only the one bad break like I done. Awful sorry. Trying to get another show. Hanging on here, hoping. Men o' the woods, knowing they wouldn't stand no show outside, tackling new-fangled jobs. All the honest grit shook out of 'em after they'd been jounced. I was able to sneak some of 'em into my crews. And, good gad! how they did tussle to it, grateful for another chance!"

He edged his palm at his forehead and scrutinized the boatman now near. "By good chance, here comes one o' the last named." But, instead of showing pleasure in this approach of a friend,

Morner scowled and grunted an oath. He folded his arms and waited.

When the end of the punt had been pushed upon the shore, the welcoming grin of the arrival faded out of his visage under the stern, condemning regard of the man he had come to ferry across from Skulltree.

"Back here, are you, Casson?"

"Yes, Boss Morner!" The reply was quavered in self-reproach.

"How come? You had a new chance. You were going strong."

"And by your help! But when you was jumped on I felt so bad I got drunk and licked a boss who laid his tongue to you. And I ain't had no heart ever since—thinking such a thing could happen to you, the best on the river."

"Casson, I've been punished aplenty without a kick-back o' that kind from you!"

"But it's true—and it happened the same with a lot more, Boss Morner."

"There's no handle on my name these days, Casson. I'm down and out along with you, as it stands right now. But it ain't going to stay that way." Then he added savagely, turning on Goss to remind the companion: "A doorknob I've been aiming to be—so I said—meaning to help poor cusses through to something better! And I proved to be a bar o' soap on the doorstep—and here's Casson tripped by me and sluiced on his back. And others, he tells me. By hell, men, I've got business waiting for me across from Skulltree!"

He ordered Waggy to step into the punt; then he pushed it off.

"Coming here with a bunch and a half," Morner muttered. When the boat was on its way he asked: "Anyways nigh about the same gang on the island?"

"Not much diff'runt from what it was. The boys have to stick here. No show for a job with the new company. We've been warned not to ask for work."

"Well, you needn't starve any more'n you have in past times." Morner turned to Goss who was squatting midship. "You saw how all those lads down the line were making a go of it, getting out birch and hard-wood stock? The boys across from Skulltree have made a living same way—buying stumpage on the ridges in these parts. S'pose you're all still at it, Casson?"

The poler avoided the sharp scrutiny of the man in the bow, made a pretense of looking for snags and faltered nervously, evasively: "Oh, yes. 'Bout the same."

"Say, look here, man. Don't try to put anything over on me!" Morner barked, in the old manner of authority.

"I ain't meaning to, Boss Morner." He choked. "Excuse me. I was forgetting you don't want the handle."

"I'm thinking now there's a good reason for putting the handle back on, and letting it stay there," retorted Morner dryly. "Taking you for a sample, Casson, I'm guessing there's something all-fired loose over here, and a boss is needed. When it comes to sizing men, I'm there—and you know it."

"Nobody ever trained with you, Boss Morner, without knowing it. All right. I'll come acrost. Reckon it's safe enough to come out open to you. You can't be having no fancy notions about the law, after what was done to you. We've been scrooged down and jumped on, we fellers acrost from Skulltree. It's time to turn and get something for ourselves, any way we can. So we've hitched up with a feller and are helping him smuggle hooch."

The grooves in Morner's visage deepened, but the countenance was a mask. "Good money in it, Casson?"

"Pay is prime!" The man winked and grinned fatuously.

"Easy work?"

"Well, 'tain't edzackly like setting down and knitting, Boss Morner. Each one of us tramps by his lonesome acrost

the border, loads up with all he can sack on his back, brings it over here through the woods, and it's hid on the island. Makes a dandy place. You're knowing to it as how the law has al'ays let us alone, over acrost from Skulltree."

Morner nodded, his face without expression. "Who is this chap you're helping?"

"No names called because he ain't give us his name. 'Mister X' he says to call him." Casson cackled. "The yallerbacks he gives us are all marked with a big 'X.'"

"It's a cagy way of getting the stuff over the border by trails away from the roads," indorsed Morner. "How about getting it on from here?"

"He has his other gang. And more'n that," Casson chuckled, "he's using the big-timber company's tote trucks, giving the boys a private load for the outhaul, else they'd be going empty. Lands the stuff handy for the highway south. It all seems to be working slick-checker!"

Morner and Goss swapped glances.

"All machine!" said Morner. "Nice machine! Timber company men working with it and for it. Honest lads in the woods used to work for something else."

"As one o' the men who worked for you, Boss Morner, I'm saying you'd have knowed if we was up to any tricks like I'm speaking of—but I'm guessing we wouldn't 'a' been monkeying," declared Casson.

"Thank you," returned Morner. His tone was meek, but his eyes glittered. He stood erect in the bow of the punt when it neared the shore. Goss was now looking at a man transfigured; this was no longer the cowed convict; this was not the man partly apologetic in his own behalf, timid in testing his stand among men. Breck Morner had snapped into the poise and self-reliance of a woods boss.

Moreover, there was in the man, at last, something too deep for anybody's vision—the flaming spirit of a crusader called to his duty. Casson had started the fires alight by the revelation of how he and the other men had lost faith and courage when Breck Morner had gone down the chute, setting a miserable example. In State prison he had vowed as to his own future course. But at this juncture he knew he could not win back to honest self-respect without taking along with him the men who had lost faith in decency through him.

He had never heard the word "altruism;" he was not ruled by soft sentiment; these men had lost something by his default, he owed a debt—and, by the gods, they were going to get it back! That was his notion of how matters stood. He couldn't stand square with himself until he had performed and paid. He was a woodsman—and that was the way of the honest woods.

He stepped out of the boat and faced those who came straggling down to the shore to meet him.

"Hello, my lads! I'm out of State prison and back here—across from Skulltree where we're honest enough to own up to the truth about ourselves. We're going to move. Oh, no! Not off'm this island just yet a while. But move it'll be—a climb. I'm starting from the scratch along with you."

They blinked at him, not understanding very well. They mumbled to each other. But this was the old Breck Morner, master of men, and their beaming admiration came bursting through the fog of their muddled ideas.

It was plain enough that in him a new element had come among them—across from Skulltree! Possibly a disturbing element. This latter idea seemed to be in the mind of a man who stood at a little distance and surveyed Morner with hostility.

Breck caught the significance of the stare and made an estimate of this

stranger distinguished from the herd by corduroy rig and shiny puttees. He was a young man with a heavy beard, and on that account Breck found him a rather odd figure; the beard suggested an attempt at disguise.

Between the two, instantly, there was silent challenge—instinctive. Each in his own way and for his own purposes was seeking dominance over these nondescripts, and both men recognized the situation.

Morner grabbed that situation with vigor. He cracked out: "Mister X, eh? I've been told about you."

"We stand even-Steven on that, Morner."

Goss had been taking his time about leaving the punt. Now he leaped forward, yelling stridently. On his way toward the bearded man, Goss picked up a cudgel. "Damn you, Sime Keller! You can't fool me any longer with whiskers!"

Keller pulled a gun off his hip. "Stand back, young fool! I'll bore you!"

Morner made a grab at his mate but missed.

Goss went floundering, stumbling up the steep slope, shrieking oaths and threats. In his fury he paid no heed to the aimed weapon.

Morner chased after, shouting commands to the men.

Both disregarded the mediator—Keller to the extent of shooting; he calculatingly picked on Goss' right arm and sent a bullet into the flesh.

The young man shrilled, whirled, fell and rolled down the slope past Morner.

Breck leaped to him where he lay and called to men to help in holding the victim and stripping off jacket and shirt.

Goss continued to vociferate, paying no more attention to listeners than he had to the gun. "It's Sime Keller! He was a renegade with his rum tricks on the northeast border. Same as he's doing here."

"Hold still! Shut up! I'll be handling this rum thing," declared Morner. "I don't need your help."

"And I don't need no help from you in getting at him for the way he treated my sister. I'll kill him! I'll kill him!"

"I reckon you'll be let to do it, then," stated Breck grimly.

Folding a bandage—a clean towel brought in a hurry by Casson—Morner swung a questioning, provocative, significant glance along the row of encircling faces; the men were bending forward to discover how badly Goss was wounded. They grimaced and looked from Morner to each other when Goss reiterated his laments.

Morner did know the men of the woods. He understood just how clean sentiment lay in each one of those banished poor devils.

Fortune was unlucky for Goss, but the same turn gave Morner his opportunity—and he used it for full effect. He drawled sardonically:

"Boys, you and I have been hell-raisers in our time. But we've never 'sociated with rats, no matter what else. S'prised to find you've been training with one."

"But we didn't know we was!" bleated Casson, spokesman.

"You know it now! This poor chap is giving his blood to prove his words."

As soon as Morner had finished his services, he left Goss in the circle of men and walked up toward Keller. The latter warned: "I'm out to make my bigness. Mind your eye!"

"I'm running resks with both eyes, looking at you, you low-down mutt! Put up your gun. Our run-in isn't due right now."

"Going to set a date?"

"Date depends, Keller. Before the real tussle comes I've got a big job ahead of me, and all in hearing are going to know it. I'm talking out so all can hear. Puffickly honest, you see!" He turned his back on the foe and

grinned at the herding men. No mealy-mouthed reform argument for that gang, he well knew. He went at them, bluffly rough and ready. Whatever they were now, they had been of the woods and the river. They expected a boss to talk so-and-so, and now their relish was not marred by any astonishment; this boss was not stepping out of character.

"You blasted pirates, you! It has been easy money, hey? Pack hosses for rum! You all know how rum has handled *you,* and now you're helping feed it to other poor cusses. Taking cash and your orders from what you've heard *he* is!" He jerked a thumb over his shoulder to indicate Keller.

Casson, still spokesman, started to say something.

"Shut up!" bellowed Morner. This ain't going to be no joint debate. No, nor stump speech from me, either. I'm simply saying to you that you can't be expected to turn over from being this hellion's goats and be angels, all in a minute! I see some of you sifting away from the others. That's good so fur's it goes. But I'm going to take my time with you lads and make it go so much further that I'll have enough o' you behind me to turn this island into a dangerous headquarters for rum. Also, for that rumster standing there!"

Keller shouted rabidly: "You've come butting into my business, you devilish jailbird, and for two more words o' that kind o' talk to me I'll bore you!"

"So do," advised Morner placidly. "The thing will be quick settled. *My* way is bound to use up a lot o' breath and time. *Your* way will put you mighty sudden into a new line o' business—peddling ice water in hell." He set back his shoulders and roared, the old Breck Morner back with his own: "These lads may not agree with me right now on the rum-smuggling business, but, by the blue gods o' the big sticks, woodsmen one and all here gathered, they'll frazzle any gun-toting coward who puts lead into an old woods boss who's got only loose air in his grip." He flung up his empty hands.

There was no questioning the unanimity on that point. The men leaped in air and yelled indorsement.

"So, that's that!" stated Breck, when there was silence. "Mister X, you're hooting on the side of the devil from now on. I'm for help. Help to get these boys out of the scrape they're in. The tussle is on. Let's go to it!"

Keller tucked his weapon away. He loftily disregarded the presence of Morner, brushing past him when he went down the hill, swinging outside the circle of men surrounding Goss. Halting at a little distance he secured their attention by a harsh call.

"Looks like your parson is ready to start his first revival meeting. All whiners and quitters stick along with him. I don't want 'em. But all you real he-men get onto the job along with me."

"Going to the border for more goods?" inquired one of the herd.

"Sure thing!" Then Keller dug Morner with a nasty look. "And the goods will be brought to this island, as usual. Outsiders take notice."

There was a stirring in the huddle of men. Several moved along toward Keller, urging others to follow, muting their voices.

"Go along, boys, all those who still hanker for his game," Breck advised cheerily. "The split-off will help us get down to cases quicker. It's got to be a joined drive with no jams, if you hitch with me."

His mild manner fooled certain men, who mumbled with heads together.

One of them turned on Morner when he genially asked for man's talk, all out and open.

"All right," agreed the spokesman. "You'll get it. We don't want no pussy-footer meddling with a snug lit-

tle business that's turning us in easy money. Some man *you* be, telling us how to go right!"

"C'rect you are, son!" admitted Breck, smiling. "That is one way o' looking at it. But on tother hand, a lot of you boys have let yourselves get turrible rusty in knowing what's best in the long run. You do need a special teacher. I'm just out of a fine college. Have put in three years getting to know what's the best line to be follered to keep on the safe and sensible side. I'm here to make up a class and I'll teach it all free. Can't ask nothing fairer'n that, eh?"

"Yes, there's one thing fairer." The spokesman was surly.

"Name it, lad." Breck's demeanor was still radiating benevolence.

"You go ahead and beat it. We're asking *that!*"

"My sakes! And only a few minutes ago you hollered as loud as the rest against dirt being put over on me."

"Only showing I stand for a fair and even break." He clapped a hand on his chest. "That's me! I ask the same for myself."

Breck's eyes narrowed slightly.

"Ask to be let alone to push poor fools into the trouble that's sure to come flooding along this way? Ask to be let to dive in all over, yourself? Why, man, you never was in a crew o' mine; but some of these others will tell you how I never saw any jack go overboard into the white water without jumping in and fetching him out. Haven't changed a mite since I was a drive boss."

The other's weak nature flared into fury as a recourse. He was egged on by asides from his mates; he caught a compelling glance from Keller who patted his breast pocket significantly. The challenger was brawny—he had fought his battles—he had confidences in himself. He rolled up his sleeves and advanced. "The best man takes the biscuit."

Morner demanded: "Meaning if you lick me I'm to skedaddle and leave the crowd to be all rummies?"

"That's the idee!"

"I dunno where you grabbed off the notion that you have the full right to handle these lads, all of 'em, like you'd shake dice. For me, I don't slur 'em with any such size-up o' their standing in this thing."

"Guess what you mean is, you're sca'rt to fight me."

"Maybe a lot in that, too! But if I should happen to lick you I'd never turn round on these free lads and say: 'Now come and do what I tell you. You're mine!' "

Men in the crowd from which Keller's adherents had sifted out, muttered approval. Breck Morner, master of men, did know how to deal with the natures he had found in forest and on drive.

Now, with that same shrewd understanding, he realized that battle had become a necessary adjunct of strategy. His "hair-oil" talk had served its full purpose; now only fists could clinch his prestige. "Le's see, feller, I don't seem to know your name."

"Brad Warson, if it's going to help you any."

"Well, Brad, you're in a class by yourself up this way. You've just told Breck Morner he's afraid to fight. That keeps it all personal, only between you and me. These boys, it's all settled, will do what they feel to do afterward. You're mad and ugly. I ain't a mite that way. So, you're starting with a handicap against you—and I'm sorry for you."

Men chuckled freely; this was what they relished in combat—jaunty deliberateness, not mere savagery; combat for combat's sake.

"Handicap, hey? For me?" raged Warson. "How about yourself, gone all softer'n putty in State prison?"

"Oh," mourned Casson votto voce, "I

hadn't thought o' that! I was only thinking of the old Breck Morner."

Goss was up on his feet by this time.

"Say, don't you worry, old top! Where do you think he was for three years—sitting in a cell? They built a new wing while he was there, and he tugger-lugged on steel work. If Morner has any science to go with his muscle——"

Casson flung a side glance of deep pity for ignorance.

"Science—in woods fighting? All that counts here is to lick the other feller—and everything goes, even to jumping up and kicking his head off."

"Come along, Brad," Morner invited genially. He inspected with critical eye while the adversary marched forward. "Hope you won't mind my remarks while we're at it. You look soggy, like you'd been swigging too much rum. Rum is awful stuff for muscles and nerves. That's one good thing about State prison," he rattled on. "No rum with the rations. Go ahead! Hit out!"

With a yell inspired by the rage he had been accumulating, Warson leaped and struck. Morner slanted the blow upward over the forearm that he flung forward to shield his face. He danced back.

"I say again, Brad, don't mind my remarks while we're at it!" It was ironical, calculated taunting, an assumption of poise and sureness that had a crumbling effect on the mere rancor that inspired the antagonist.

But Warson had weight and might. He rushed in, battering viciously.

In backing away from the assault Morner received a blow on the face and at the same time his heel caught against a root. He went down and Warson, regardless of any rules that square men might respect in a fight, leaped in air to dump all his crushing weight upon the fallen foe.

Even as he fell, Morner squirmed with a click in his movements, snapped to face the human projectile, dove between the straddled legs, caught one of Warson's feet, twisted, and the man fell heavily on his back, landing across stones and roots.

Some moments elapsed before he recovered his breath and propped himself in sitting posture, facing Morner who was copying the position.

Warson looked into the eyes as hard as marbles between the narrowed lids. He was still dazed from his fall.

"I see," said Morner, grating out his words, "you know the rules of woods fighting—lick your man, any style. Doing me up won't get you much of anything. But licking you is a blasted important part of the business I'm on up here." The eyes narrowed to a slit, leaving only a sinister glint for the intimidation of the foe. "And now I'm going to lick you, Warson! Fists, feet, teeth, anything! Look out for yourself!"

Even as Morner said that, for the daunting of the enemy, he was making a mental reservation, knowing that his peculiar cause needed more than remorseless victory. He was in the field to set men to the right-about; in the flush of the moment they might applaud any kind of conquest and such would serve in ordinary cases. But in discussion afterward—*there* would lie the danger if tactics were dirty! Breck Morner must come through clean.

There was mud on Warson's back when he scrambled up. But worse than that, there was mire on his methods; men were grumbling profane opinions of his attempt to smash Morner while the latter lay flat. They yelled wrathful protests after Warson kicked at his adversary at the moment when Morner drove through the windmill guard and landed a telling blow on the jaw.

That kick, cowardly, vicious in its attempt, swung Warson half around when Morner dodged. That kick deserved all the comeback it received when Morner

took full advantage of the situation. Warson exposed the target at which the boss had always aimed in the old days when the urgency of time and occasion demanded that a man be licked quickly and completely. He pivoted, bringing the weight of his body with the blow, and struck Warson twice under the hook of the jaw—once when the man was erect, the second time while his knees were doubling under him.

"Breck Morner never did leave 'em half licked!" squealed Casson.

The victor twisted his fist into the slack of Warson's collar and dragged the man to the edge of the deadwater, rolling him in.

Morner strode back to where Keller stood with his adherents.

"First timber in the drink! The drive has started. You get me, don't you?" He pointed at batteaus hauled on the shore.

There was momentary hesitation. Then they twisted their gaze away from his ominous stare and trudged to the bateaus.

Keller closed the line of march. "We were going, anyway," he snarled over his shoulder. "And we're coming back, remember that!"

Morner made no reply. He was smiling broadly, his eyes on Warson crawling on hands and knees from the water.

Casson shrilled: "Don't forget to take along your water spaniel, Mister X! He's sure a willing dog, even if he didn't fetch back the chip for you. Real obliging, he is!"

On that, a great chorus of hilarity boomed over the water after the seceders.

"Al'ays leave 'em larfing when you say good-by!" commented Casson, winking at Morner.

"Fine notion," commended the boss. "And now't we are all feeling pleasant and sociable, suppose we set down in the sun and talk things over."

CHAPTER IV.

HOORAY! HOORAW!

AT that time, and for some days afterward, there was much talking across from Skulltree. Finally, Goss talked privately with Morner. A young man's impatience spoke out.

"Breck, you ain't getting anywhere with 'em. All they do is hem and haw and fiddle fingers under their noses—and I'm betting most of 'em wish they was off with Keller and the bunch, making another clean-up."

"Yes, I do ketch that feeling in 'em, myself," Morner drawled. The boss exhibited a bland indifference that exasperated Goss; as a loyal admirer the mate resented intensely the failure of anybody else to appreciate Breck Morner at full value as an unselfish champion.

"What for are you wasting any more time here?"

"Right now, son, time ain't o' much more account to me than it is to a chiny nest egg. And that's of some use, too. It coaxes a hen to lay a real egg. I'm running of a notion the hen is soon li'ble to lay."

He disregarded the keen curiosity in Goss' eyes.

"Y'see, lad, I'm beginning to have hopes. Not so much about that pertic'lar egg I've spoke of, but along another line. Casson is cinched for me and keeps me posted on what these chaps are talking about on the side. I deal with human nature, y'know—not as it's figgered to be by them sweet hopers who think nature is real nice, down deep, just as the Lord made it and turned it over to be used. But I handled human nature as something that has been all r'iled up with what the devil has tossed in, hoping al'ays I can strain off a little good stuff away from the bad. And Casson says the boys here, taking all things by and large, what you showed that Keller up to be and his

cussed business and the chances he's running—'specially the chances—and the boys, Casson says, they're cal'lating as how rum toting ain't all it's cracked up to be. They ain't edzackly sorry they didn't go on this last trip to the border."

"And after all the honest talking you've done, this is as much as they're reformed, hey?"

"I think it's a whole lot—a great big lot," insisted Morner. "Dammit, this ain't no story-book stuff we're living. It's real life. I ain't dealing with angels. Just poor cusses who've been rolled in the dirt so much it takes a lot o' soft soap and dousing to make 'em even as white as snow mixed into a March mud puddle. Now they're scared. That's the first start away from anything where they'll be hurt. And they know blasted well that somebody's going to be hurt in that business Keller's carrying on. The officers are onto him. They ain't everlasting fools along the border. Last trip there was chasing and shooting, the boys say. I'm figgering—and Casson says the boys are—that this trip the wallop will sure wil-*loop!* So the boys here are getting to be real well reformed."

"You're sure easy to suit."

"Yes, considering the kind of human nature I'm dealing with, I'm puffickly satisfied," admitted Morner seriously, though his eyes twinkled. "And I keep looking out acrost his deadwater, hoping I'll soon see the rest o' the reforming heaving into sight."

For their talk the two were seated on an overturned punt.

"There's a bateau way up there, splashing along this way," stated Goss, with a bit of sarcasm. "Maybe that's it."

"I saw it before you spoke," returned Morner serenely. "That's why I spoke just now about hoping!"

Without swapping any more comment they waited until the bateau came heavily plunging, grating up the shore in a roll of water. The craft had served as ferry for all the men who could pack onto it. One man squalled, reporting:

"They got afoul of us, this trip! Ketched Mister X! Killed Warson! The cussed fool stopped running and took time to sass 'em. Ketched some others that wa'n't so good runners as we are."

Lamed, stiffened, done up by panic and flight, they floundered out of the bateau. Several of them lugged sacks. The contents clinked when the bags were set on the ground.

"This is your good chance to rub it in, Boss Morner," invited one of the men. "Go to it. We deserve it."

"Do you think I could tell you boys anything you ain't told yourselves?" queried Breck. "I ain't said a thing—only saying I'm sorry—sorry because you had to go to the limit to find out for yourselves. By the way, having been well bit by the snake, what did you bring him along here for?" He pointed to the sacks.

"Guess we was too sca'rt to remember to throw it away," was the lame explanation, along with a grin. "But now't it's here——"

"Yes! 'Now't it's here.'" Morner drawled the words. He pulled a big jackknife from his pocket and slit one of the sacks. "I'm keeping my tongue off'm you, boys! None o' this I-told-you-so stuff. Ain't going to say a thing. But I'm going to make known full and clear my notions of the cussedness o' rum—and not yipping a single word in doing it."

He chose for a target the projecting surface of a boulder out in the deadwater. Grabbing bottle after bottle by the neck, he heaved, and the shattered glass slithered down the stone slope of the ledge.

"Gee-ro! It's kind o' tough to see that done," groaned one of the party.

"'Twill be tougher if it gets inside

you fellers or is found outside by the law that's prob'ly headed this way."

A convert to the new order, a man controlled by the fear that Morner had calculated on for conversion, quavered: "There's quite a slag o' the stuff hid on the island by Mister X."

"Better run and rout it out, boys," advised their mentor. "The law will hand it to all of us savage if the stuff is found here. That won't be right for the rest of us who're trying to be decent." He went on with his target practice, after slitting another sack.

The men who hurried away on the errand, came running back precipitately. "It's been dug up and took!"

By this time every man on the island was at the scene.

Morner paused, a bottle in the grip of each fist. "By Heaven, I'm running this thing from now on!"

They knew it; their demeanor acknowledged the fact. Boss Morner had proved on a recent memorable occasion his mastery by action.

"Show-down! Show-down, I tell you—all of you!"

They convinced him as to their innocence; men could not be guilty or in collusion who clamored disclaimer with the fervor these men showed.

"Them timber-corporation toters know all about what's been doing across from Skulltree, Boss Morner," stated one man. "Somebody has come snitching in the night."

Morner finished the bombardment of the boulder and struck his hands together with the satisfaction of one who had satisfied his soul by the turning of a trick well done.

"If rum has got into the ribs o' that timber crew to work on the grudge already there, the boss o' the machine will find the bearings mighty hot. Boys, it's on account of you that the rum's there, if that's where it's gone. But I know *you*. You don't give a hoot if they're tipping that new office building upside down. Dunno as I do, either. You see, we can be puffickly honest with each other, with none o' this high morality tinkaloorum. But here's the big point, lads. They're all thinking we're only cheap muckers across from Skulltree. Le's do something to show 'em different.

"But that ain't the biggest point. Things have been sort o' blue and tiresome for us. We need to be shook up. Have some fun. I've got the glimmer of a notion. Big sport. They ain't real woodsmen, them city-employment bush-whackers over yender. Le's all go over and show 'em something of the old style. That's where that rum has gone, and we'll find things ready to give us our opening. What say?"

They said it with tempestuous hilarity. They howled and leaped.

Shrewdly he had kept away from preaching. He had not counseled duty. He had invited them to a woodsmen's frolic.

"Being ferrying," he commanded. He remained on the shore, overseeing the embarkation. And, walking up and down the shore, he sang:

"The Busters are coming, hooray, hooraw!
The corkingest cusses that ever you saw.
We're ready for fight and we're ready for fun,
And we don't give a damn how quick it's begun."

On the third repetition the others caught the words that fitted a familiar tune. They roared in a mighty chorus and the echoes beat back from forest and hills.

Goss caught step with the patrolling boss. "Billy-be-gad, Breck, you do know men!"

"It's been my business to know 'em!"

"But how do you manage to grab right?"

"I aim to do my thinking about two jumps ahead, and holler for 'em to come on—tell 'em to try to keep up with me."

"But what's the big notion you've thought up for over yonder?"

"I dunno——"

"But you said——"

"Sure I said. If I really can't think ahead, I make 'em think I'm thinking ahead. And don't be worrying, son, that we won't be finding plenty ahead of us when we get there. And mebbe a tip on the way."

CHAPTER V.

"OPEN THAT DOOR!"

THE tip was given by one Watkins, a corporation walking boss. Morner's hustling crowd met Watkins doing his walking, but at a trot—ducking away from his bossing.

"Too much for me," he informed Breck after greeting the latter as a friend of the old days. "They're mean enough, anyway, this new kind. Now they've got a holt o' rum and the devil's to pay. Have cooped the super and his clerks in the big office and are howling they'll tip it over."

"Huh!" grunted Morner. "Was supposing they'd already done it."

"Well, I'll say you're taking this awful mess cool enough."

"Why not? It's no skin off'm me, either way."

"There's a ringleader who has been organizing 'em. He's a labor nut. Woodsmen can't be in a union."

"Next you'll be telling me as how that white-birch tree is trying to dance a jig. Excuse me, Watkins, I'm in a hurry."

"But lemme tell you! The boys ain't all to blame, the way Craig has been running things. Cussed if I'll take resks in fighting for him. I'll run over for you the list of complaints and why the men are organizing to protect themselves."

"Watkins, you're a good runner, as I saw when I met you. But you can't run over that other matter fast enough to suit me right now. Come on, boys! It's waiting for us, just as I told you."

He marshaled his men up into a birch tract and set them at work doing things.

Watkins sat on a log and watched the doings without in the least comprehending what the work had to do with the situation at the corporation headquarters, though Morner's remark to his men indicated that there was a connection.

The walking boss, urged by curiosity, was obliged to run when he followed Morner and the men a little later.

Still on the run, they all trooped into the clearing, yelling like fiends.

The dusk of late afternoon had settled; faces and identities were not easily determined.

A man on a tree stump checked his clamorous ranting.

Morner hustled through the press of listeners, going directly to the trouble maker, adherents at heel.

"We're making our bigness in this thing, pard! We're with you, whole hog!" Morner was hearty in this assurance.

"But who the blazes are you?"

"New boss of one of the branch camps. Heard about the ruckus. We're here with the good old grudge! Here with the goods to fetch results. Look at the sample." He flung up his hand and exhibited a brown cylinder, shaking it to and fro, waggling the flexible wisp of something projecting from the end. "Canned thunder—with fuse and cap! It's full of business and means business! Up hands, boys, all of you! We're here all primed."

His followers waved their cylinders above their heads and yelled.

Rushing the matter, carrying the situation off its feet and along pell-mell, Morner shouted: "What's the main troub', pard?"

"We've got a list of complaints a yard long and we——"

"Don't give a hoot about 'em! Not

now! Prob'ly they're like ours. But what do you want most right at this minute?"

"To have a talk with the super. He won't come out. He won't let me in."

"Come with me, buddy! You're going in if he doesn't come out."

The whole crowd cheered that declaration.

Morner pulled the ringleader down from the stump and escorted him along, arm in arm. The men from the island flanked the pair.

Morner vociferously hailed the office building's closed door.

"One minute allowed for you to come out, Mister Super! You're no boss if you can't face your men. A sneak who won't give his men a hearing ain't fit to be a boss. This is the woods—and you've got to handle your crew according to the way o' the woods. Come out! If you don't come out we'll blow that damn door off'm the hinges and come in."

He waited a few seconds.

Then he shouted: "If you'll open that door, only two men will come in—my pard and me—come in all quiet for a talk. That's on oath—with all listening. Get your matches ready and lit, boys, if that door don't swing open in thutty seconds——"

The door swung open.

Morner went in with his man and kicked the door shut behind the couple.

Sam Turner had opened the door.

"The super ordered me not to, Breck. But he don't know you like I do. I've saved the company a nice new building."

Morner flourished the brown cylinder.

"You bet you saved it, Sam. They ought to send you a medal from New York. Where's the mogul?"

Turner pointed toward the office.

This time Breck Morner entered the super's presence as master of the situation, god of the machine.

The officials' clerks were herded with him.

Morner shot words rapidly.

"I ain't telling you how to run your machine, mister! You remember back, that's all. Jog your mind about what I said to you and ditto it for this day and date. One more thing, though." He clapped his palm on the shoulder of the disturber he had brought in. "Lock this chap into a good solid room. Sneak him out and down country in the night. Hear he's trying to organize a machine of his own to club the company machine with. He don't belong in the woods. Good night!"

The super's jaw dropped. Morner's summary ending of a triumph was too amazing.

"But what's going to happen, Boss Morner, if I hold this man in here?"

"Nothing! I'll take my crowd and herd the mob back into the bunk houses. They'll sleep off their rum and you can meet 'em halfway in the morning and settle trouble, man style. If you can't be that decent, then New York better send at least one human being up here to manage your machine." He started for the door. The agitator made an effort to follow, but the clerks overpowered the man.

"But I've got a lot to say to you, Boss Morner," the super bleated, overtaking Breck at the door.

"You said it the last time I was here. You can't add a blasted word that'll interest me."

He flung the door open, but spun around and faced the flabbergasted official.

"Oh, still one more thing, mister! I don't want you to think I was really depending on dynamite to handle men in a pinch."

He displayed the brown cylinder, slowly unrolled the wrapping and showed that it was birch bark with the brown side out. He dropped at the super's feet the bit of sapling on which it

had been rolled together with the twisted yarns raveled from a woodsman's long stocking. Morner allowed himself a grin in which there was profound comfort. "Easy when you know how, mister!" He banged the door in the super's face.

Outside he gave sharp commands. His men rushed the mob, brandishing the bodeful cylinders.

"Get into your bunks!" Morner shouted. "Your feller is having a nice talk with the super. Super'll meet you in the morning and give you your rights." He added sotto voce to Goss: "I don't give a tinker's damn whuther he does or not. Somebody, anyway, will be hooting up here from the big city to straighten things after this whoopereenus!"

A half hour later Morner stopped his triumphant gang in a glade lighted by the moon.

"Boys, now't your work has proved you're true blue and worth quite a lot, when the right boss has you in hand, I'm going to tell you something I've been keeping to myself. It's candy for nice boys! Old Cale Shaw has made up his mind at last to cut a couple o' million feet o' saw logs off'm that township he's been saving up. Remember, don't you, some of you, about a man hailing me one day to come across to Skulltree? That was old Cale. He was glad to hear I was back up here and said he guessed I was worth double to him or anybody else for having been through State prison and much worse trouble. Knows men, you see. Like I do. I told him I'd fetch along a real crew. Shut up! I don't want no hooraying. If you've got a lot o' loose air in your lungs, join in with me while you march, heads up, and look aloft to see how splendiferous the moon seems to-night."

He sang with them, while they stamped along in time with the beat:

"The Busters are coming, hooray, hooraw!
The corkingest cusses that ever you saw.
We're ready for fight, and we're ready for fun,
And we don't give a damn how quick it's begun."

The feature in next week's issue of THE POPULAR *will be an exciting novel about one of the most thrilling branches of navy life. Don't miss "The Submarine" by J. H. Greene, in next week's* POPULAR.

IT'S A LAND OF SNOW—AND RAIN

THE general impression of Alaska is that it's locked in winter by ice and snow. That's true of the Far North—the territory includes more than 500,000 square miles—but in southeastern Alaska it isn't.

Ketchikan, the first port of entry, just over the boundary that separates British Columbia and Alaska, gets over a hundred and fifty inches of rain each year. Of all weather bureaus or coöperative stations reporting to Washington, D. C., Ketchikan is said to report the most rain.

The fall, however, comes mostly in the winter months. There is very little snow in Ketchikan proper, although it falls to a depth of twenty and thirty feet on the mountains in the district. The average temperature is about 45 degrees. The hottest day last summer was 86 degrees.

Bandy

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "Partners," "Morningstar and the Navajo," Etc.

A story of three hobos, riding the brake beams of a railroad.

CERTAIN of the fraternity, traveling light, rode the lurching deck of a pullman, chin to chest, and a death grip on a ventilator. Others rode the rods, or the beams. A very few rode the blind baggage of a mail train doing its regular fifty between stops. But these latter were not true representatives of the order. They traveled too fast.

"Bandy" and "The Jigger" belonged to the old school of fare dodgers. A freight was fast enough. Box, gon, flat—loaded or empty—it was all the same in the day's cinders. Bandy and The Jigger did not grumble at tie trotting, when fortune forbade them their ease in a rumbling empty, or a gon, loaded with machinery, iron pipe, or other heavy merchandise. But they shunned gondolas of lumber. They considered a brake beam safer.

Bandy and The Jigger had left Chi together and had made K. C. without mishap. Chi, K. C., and Los were the high spots of their itinerary. At K. C. they fell in with "Slush"—or rather, he fell in with them. Bandy and The Jigger had chucked their bed rolls into a westbound empty, just as the freight pulled out of the yards, about ten of a crisp October night. As the freight rumbled out of the block, The Jigger started to close the side door when its edge was grasped by a hand. Another hand followed, clawing at the floor of the car. Some one was running along, trying to get a foot on the side rod and hop into the empty. Trainmen didn't do that sort of thing. The Jigger seized the clawing hand and tugged. The man outside lost his footing. The Jigger, though slender and shaky, braced his foot against the door and

hung on to the lurching burden, which threatened to jerk him out into space.

"Gimme a hand!" he cried.

Bandy was also a slim, short brother, though not shaky. He reached down and caught the struggling man's coat collar. He heaved. The three went to the floor in a heap. And that was how Slush fell in with them.

When their visitor got his breath, he cursed them both for not getting a move on. He might have been cut into sausage meat. Bandy admitted that he might have been, but that the hoofs and bristles would have been a total loss. They couldn't see their uninvited guest. The empty was as dark as the inside of a cow. But he bulked big in the darkness, and his tone was intolerant. Bandy was little; but big voices and beef didn't worry him. The Jigger was apologetic. He was shaky. His nerve was gone.

The Jigger tried to explain. The burly hobo blustered. Finally Bandy's ruff began to rise.

"I could 'a' kicked you in the face," he said in a mild, matter-of-fact tone. "The Jigger and me chartered this sleeper. If you don't like the lay, there's the door. She's open yet."

"Oh, hell!" rumbled the husky. "Forget it!"

The tone sounded hearty. The Jigger was deceived, but not Bandy. However, he knew how to play the game.

"All right, Slush," he said.

"Where do you get that 'Slush' stuff, anyhow?"

"I play by ear—and you sound like it. Me, I'm Ferdinand, and the skirt who held your hand is Isabella."

"Well, I'm for a flop," declared the burly one. "You guys hittin' the plank, or you got a roll?"

"Twin beds," replied Bandy. "And they ain't no bugs in mine. Mebbe The Jigger ain't so particular."

"You're the real muriatic, ain't you?"

"Just stick your finger in me, and see. What do you know about acid, anyhow? Run a little bomb factory, mebbe?"

The burly hobo mumbled to himself in the darkness. He hated the guy that the other guy called "Bandy." Hated him for calling him "Slush," and because he was the kind of a guy you couldn't back down. He was used to backing 'em down. The other, The Jigger, didn't count. Acted like a hophead. Probably all shot to pieces without his snow. But the guy that had done the talking, he was too bloody sharp to live long. Some day some guy would get friendly with him, and then give him the boot when he was hanging on to a side bar trying to swing up. The wheels would do the rest.

About daybreak the freight whistled for a siding. Bandy nudged The Jigger. They corded their rolls, opened the side door and tossed them out. Then they jumped. Bandy landed clean. The Jigger, as usual, landed on his hands and knees. He was shaky.

As Bandy helped him up, Slush stuck his head out of the car doorway and glanced up and down the track. Although the train was moving slowly he got a hard fall when he jumped. Not that Bandy cared. But he noticed it. The husky was not a regular. He was green. He made it on sheer strength and bluff. Bandy and The Jigger walked back to their rolls and made for the flop, which was an old flop, known to all the members of the order. Real members would talk glibly and possessively about "the first regular flop west of K. C.," as though they were stockholders in the railroad and not mere blisters on the thundering vans of commerce.

The Jigger gathered willow twigs and branches for a fire. Bandy produced the can and the Java. Slush watched and waited. Bandy took a loaf of bread from his roll, a dried onion and three potatoes. He sliced the potatoes

and strung them on a willow switch. Covertly he sized up Slush. The big walloper had short, stiff black hair, the neck and shoulders of a bruiser, but his eyes didn't measure up to his size. They were little and black and shifty, with a sort of veiled, fanatical gleam such as Bandy had seen in the eyes of foreign mill hands in the East.

As mere beef, Slush didn't worry Bandy any. But he was treacherous, and too tight for a regular. You could tell a regular by the way he walked, or swung on or off a rattler. The Jigger picked at his finger nails, scratched himself, shrugged one shoulder and then the other. He took an old newspaper from his pocket, opened it, glanced at it and put it back again. Slush sat cross-legged, close to the fire, warming his hands.

"Looks familiar, don't it?" said Bandy, indicating the camp.

"Same old flop," declared Slush.

"Which bein' the case, you better rustle up another can—if you're waitin' for breakfast."

"I'll get it," offered The Jigger.

"You set still. Slush knows where it is," said Bandy.

Slush started poking about among the willows.

"That walrus ain't never been here before," whispered Bandy. "He ain't no bo. He's some kind of a crook. We shake him the first chance, see? Now don't go to apologizin' to him because you're alive. Throw the hooks into him, same as I do. He'll ride you if you don't."

Slush returned to the fire. "Can't find it," he said, and sat down.

Bandy gestured toward the track.

"It's up over the second beam of the culvert, where the gang always leave it. And there's plenty water in the ditch. Help yourself."

Bandy watched his own coffee can, and turned the switch strung with slices of potato. Slush came from the culvert, a smoke-blackened and dented tomato can in his hand. The can was half filled with second, or possibly third edition coffee grounds. "This stuff wouldn't make decent swill for a hog!" he declared.

Bandy cocked his eye at the battered can. "Well, try it, anyway. I don't claim to be a judge of hog food myself."

Slush dropped the can and started for Bandy.

"You can have half of mine!" cried The Jigger.

"And the whole of this!" said Bandy, as his clasp knife flashed up and he held the point against the stomach of the big walloper.

"Aw, forget it!" said Slush, backing away.

Slush picked up the can and walked over to the ditch. He came back and set the can on the fire. He took two bread-and-meat sandwiches from his coat pocket, and tossed their newspaper wrapper into the fire. He wolfed the sandwiches down as he waited for the coffee to boil. Bandy and The Jigger made a meal of half-cooked sliced potatoes, a bit of onion, bread and coffee. The Jigger didn't eat much. His stomach wasn't right. He sat squirming and picking at his finger nails. He was afraid of Slush and wanted to make friends with him.

When Slush emptied the can he became loquacious. He talked of wealth and poverty—the usual hobo patter—and larded his talk with profanity so pointless that even Bandy was disgusted. The Jigger sat with his emaciated hands clasped round his knee, staring at Slush, and nodding timid approval whenever Slush made a point against the government, or the church, or any public or private institution that stood for decency and order. Slush ranted and raved, shaking his fists at the inoffensive Jigger, the unheeding sky, and the scrawny October willows.

"Got his number," murmured Bandy. "Soap box, and Saturday night. He's goin' to Los on business—mebbe." Bandy chewed a twig.

Slush thundered at invisible plutocrats, then lowered his voice to the tremolo: "Brothers——"

Bandy rose. "Not me. And you're seein' double if you think The Jigger is twins." Bandy stalked off toward the culvert. He took the gang's battered can along with him and replaced it in the old nook. "Brothers me foot! He'd 'a' left the can for cows to tromp on."

Bandy explored the culvert as one might glance at the pages of a hotel register, mildly curious as to the names of the latest arrivals. The beams of the culvert registered names, initials and pencilings, but nothing new.

Slush was ranting again. Bandy's mouth hardened to a thin line of disgust. The big walloper was putting a spell on The Jigger. The Jigger always fell for bluster and noise. Not that some of the gang weren't noisy, upon occasion—"Red," and "Toledo" Blake, and "The Gyp," and "Swaunee," and "The Topeka Kid." But they were different. Though they fought and wrangled and pilfered and got drunk, and frequently condemned the existing order of things, they didn't preach riot and rebellion in the flare of a gasoline torch, on street corners.

The worst of it was, The Jigger didn't have a mind of his own. He'd listen to anybody and swallow almost any kind of salve. And first thing, The Jigger would be falling in with the big walloper's ideas, and, maybe, traveling with him. And the big walloper would sure make a goat out of The Jigger.

The big walloper had attacked and demolished about everything worth while. The Jigger had listened with open mouth and bemused eyes.

Bandy sneered to himself. "We'll now take up the collection," he said to the mud-streaked culvert.

But the big walloper hadn't finished. He began to attack the flag of our land. What he called it, and what he said he would do to it, should have earned him hard labor for life. But there was no officer present, and no penitentiary. Bandy's scalp tingled. His mouth twitched and his nostrils drew thin. He glanced about looking for a good-sized chunk of rock. He spied a brake stick half buried in the sand of the culvert—a stout hickory club about three feet long. He wiped the moist sand off the brake stick and thrust it up his sleeve.

The big walloper was putting a spell on The Jigger. He had him going. Next thing, the big walloper would be traveling with them, right along, and there would be trouble, because Bandy couldn't stand for his line of guff. If there was going to be trouble, it might just as well be right now. Bandy sauntered toward the fire. Slush was swinging his arms and ranting. Bandy stepped up behind him, swung the brake stick and cracked it down on the orator's head. He didn't put his weight into the blow. He didn't have to. Slush let go of his clutch on the air and went down in a slack heap.

"You killed him!" screamed The Jigger.

"Not that you'd notice. But he'll be a good dog for a couple of minutes. Sling your bundle and we'll drift. Quit shakin', you damn fool! Punch the clock! He's poison! Snap into it!"

The Jigger got up. His knees wabbled as he slung his roll across his thin back. "We'll get pinched, sure!" he moaned as he lurched up the embankment, following Bandy.

"For crackin' that guy? I ought to get pinched for not croakin' him! Shove your dogs if you're comin' with me."

For two hours The Jigger shoved his dogs down the hard highway of the bo, following Bandy's quick, easy stride. A

sulphur-colored sun glimmered between rifts in the clouds. The bleak fields of Kansas spread on either side of the railroad, monotonously forlorn. The Jigger began to lag. Finally he stopped and sat down. Bandy swung round. Slowly he walked back to where The Jigger sat staring at the empty fields.

"Want me to carry you?" he said as he gazed down at The Jigger.

"I'm all in," declared The Jigger, oblivious to the sarcasm. "I'm out for the count. I wish I was dead!"

"That's easy. Keep settin' right where you are. The Flyer will be along pretty quick."

"It would be quick," said The Jigger. "I saw a guy once——"

Bandy took hold of his arm and yanked him to his feet.

"Swing out of your roll and follow my smoke. It's only a mile to the next flop. You ought to know that. This ain't no place to quit."

Bandy shouldered The Jigger's roll and started down the track. The Jigger followed, biting his bent forefinger.

Presently they turned from the track, crawled under a sagging fence and entered a narrow ravine. Some ancient torrent had hollowed a cave in the west bank. An overhanging shelf of limestone jutted out like a porch roof without pillars. The floor of the cave was covered with a carpet of ashes. The walls were smoke-blackened and damp. Bandy uncorded The Jigger's roll and spread the grimy cotton quilt.

"Flop!" he said. "I'll rustle grub." And he disappeared.

The Jigger slept. His arms and legs twitched. The interior of the cave grew dark as the sky clouded over. The Jigger moaned in his sleep. The tense wires on the high poles along the right of way hummed musically in the wind. The floor of the cave trembled as a fast freight thundered eastward. The Jigger slept on through eons of wandering.

Bandy came down the ravine with a bundle of broken branches under his arm. He dropped the firewood at the mouth of the cave and called to The Jigger. The Jigger crept out, shivering He broke branches across his knee and made a fire. Bandy drew a chicken from his shirt, plucked it and buried the unnecessary details. He spitted the chicken on a stick and turned it while The Jigger made the coffee. They ate hurriedly. When they had corded their blankets Bandy scattered the fire and trampled it out. Slush didn't know of the cave, and Bandy didn't intend to advertise it.

The cave was about a mile and a half east of town. If a local freight took the siding within the next few hours, they would hop it and make another jump. The Jigger felt better. He always felt better at night.

"Where did you lift the cackle?" he asked as they left the ravine.

"Off a cigar case in the lobby of the Parker House. Shove your dogs."

The wind had died down. The clouds were heaving apart lazily. Patches of velvet showed between the cloud rifts; irregular, spreading patches shot with the cold, sharp glitter of stars. When Bandy and The Jigger arrived at the siding switch, they left the track and climbing a fence, sat down behind a billboard. Bandy made a cigarette and smoked. The Jigger chewed nervously at his finger nails. Waiting always made him nervous.

"That was one grand feed," he declared finally. And that was as near as he dared come to thanking Bandy, who always rustled grub when they were short, and always cursed if a guy thanked him.

Bandy gestured toward the chill October sky.

"It's different in California. Sometimes it rains in winter, but not for long. It's more like summer all the year round. Funny, you been hittin' the grit

right along and you never made it west of Albuquerque."

"The guys said if you got kicked off crossing the desert, you was done."

"Done, nothin'! She's a hard old map, and a long shuffle between flops, but she ain't so tough in winter. Just can that idea of gettin' kicked off. We're goin' through. Listen, bo! You might just as well be dead as the way you are. So figure you're dead, and if you make it to California, you're that much to the good. And if you're ever goin' to get right again, it'll be out there. We're goin' through."

"Bandy, you're a prince!"

"Prince, me eye! I'm nothin'—the same as you. Only I ain't all shot with dope. Listen!"

They heard the gritty shuffle of feet on the tie trail above them. A dim figure drifted past, going toward town. The scuffing footsteps died away in the distance. The Jigger shivered.

Within the hour a mixed train of merchandise took the siding, a westbound string of box cars, flats loaded with machinery and two gondolas of lumber. It was a short train, and it pulled up close to the main line switch, west of the station. In order not to be seen by the trainmen in the caboose, Bandy and the Jigger trotted down the field paralleling the track. They were about opposite the middle of the local freight when an eastbound passenger hurtled down the line and droned away in the dark. The local whistled, got the block and began to pull out onto the westbound tracks.

Bandy went over the barbed-wire fence like a slack-rope performer. The Jigger tried to crawl through. His roll caught in the wire. Finally he managed to break loose. He ran up the embankment. The train was in motion, and Bandy was calling to him to hop on. The gons and flats had gone past. There were four or five box cars between them and the caboose.

Bandy swung onto the rear end of a box car as The Jigger caught the front end of the next car. They swung in between the cars and stood on the bumpers until the train passed the station. The couplers grated and whined as the freight clicked from the siding to the main line. When the wheels had begun to hum, and the few faint lights of the town had drifted away into the night, Bandy and The Jigger began to climb their respective ladders to the deck.

Bandy was about to pull himself up onto the deck of his car when he saw a crouching figure clinging to the brake wheel of the car The Jigger was climbing. It wasn't a trainman. A trainman would have been on his feet and carrying a lamp. The Jigger's head and shoulders loomed above the edge of the car roof. He heard Bandy shout something, but he didn't understand what he said. The Jigger leaned forward over the edge of the roof so that his roll wouldn't overbalance him when he drew his legs up.

Bandy saw the crouching man kick The Jigger square in the face. The Jigger clawed at the car roof as he rolled sideways. He dropped between the ends of the cars. Bandy heard a muffled scream, then the steady click, clack of the humming wheels. The Jigger was done for. Bandy saw him go—saw him land across the rail. He backed down the ladder. He thought of swinging off, but the local was making fast time. And what could he do if he did swing off? There wouldn't be enough left of The Jigger to bury.

Besides, it was bad business for a bo to be seen anywhere in the vicinity of a dead man. It always meant trouble, and sometimes the pen. Well, The Jigger had gone out quick. Bandy seemed to hear that muffled scream. He clung to the cold iron rod, drew himself close to the side of the car, his foot on the lowest step. The guy that had kicked

The Jigger off the freight wouldn't try that on him. He couldn't reach him from the deck. Or if he did let his leg down, Bandy knew just what he would do.

Bandy felt his hands growing numb and stiff. He hooked his arm in the hand rod and hung on. He told himself he would ride that freight into hell before he would let the guy up on deck get away from him. And presently the local whistled and began to slow down. As it stopped Bandy climbed up until his eyes were on a level with the car roof. There was no one on the deck of the other car—no one in sight, up or down the train. Bandy backed down the ladder. Perhaps the other man had dropped off on the opposite side when the freight stopped, or had gone along on deck, and climbed down into one of the gondolas.

Hearing the crunch of footsteps on the other side of the train, Bandy squatted down. He could see a pair of legs moving toward the gondola of lumber. He saw one leg, then the other, go up out of sight. He heard a boot clump against the side of the gondola as some one clambered in.

Bandy stole along until he came to the forward end of the gondola of lumber. He saw the outline of a man's head and shoulders above the edge of the car. Instantly Bandy was convinced that the man was Slush. No real hobo would risk riding between stacked lumber and the end of a car. If the engineer set the air suddenly, or the train hit anything, stacked lumber would shift just a little quicker than any other cargo. And the fool had climbed into the forward end.

Though Bandy believed that the man was Slush, he was not certain. The man's back was toward him, and he seemed to be peering up the track. When Bandy heard the distant murmur of an eastbound passenger he almost laughed. No bo would stand in a gon and watch a passenger go by at night. A bo would keep out of sight.

A spray of yellow light shot down the track, grew brighter. Against the light Bandy saw the head and shoulders of Slush. There was no mistaking him. The yellow spray flashed to blinding white. A ribbon of dimly lighted car windows flicked past.

As Bandy went forward along the train he swung out of his bed roll and threw it in the ditch. He didn't expect ever to need a bed roll again. Even if he did come through all right, he didn't want to be encumbered with baggage. He was going to square up for what had been done to his pal.

And Bandy, though not old, was wise in his craft. He knew by the way the cars toward the rear of the freight had backed and filled when the local began to slow down, that several of the cars forward were equipped with air. It was a short train. The engineer had not whistled for brakes. He was controlling the train with the air. And Bandy knew what would happen if the air hose uncoupled when the train was moving along at a good clip. The train would stop as though it had hit the wall of a stone quarry.

When the freight fulled out, Bandy was riding the bumper back of the tender. He had located the sagging air hose. The freight was doing about twenty-five or thirty miles an hour when Bandy let himself down between the tender and the first car. Resting his feet on the brake beam, and hanging on to the step with one hand, he leaned down and tried to uncouple the hose.

But he could do nothing with one hand so he braced himself between the tender and the car, hooked his toes into a step of the ladder, and hung, head down, and both hands resting on the hose coupling. He twisted and strained. The coupling came apart. The brakes clamped. The engine shot ahead, pulling the draw bar out of the car. Ban-

dy's feet were jerked from the ladder. He didn't know what had happened until he found himself huddled against a barbed-wire fence at the bottom of the ditch along the right of way.

The engine had stopped. And the disconnected train had stopped. Between the two was a space of night sky and stars. The barbed wire had ripped his cheek open. His arm and shoulder began to sting and throb. He rolled under the lower wire and, getting to his feet, staggered across a field. He heard the shouting of trainmen, saw their lanterns dance and sway as they ran back and forth along the train. Up the track the engine was blowing off steam. Down the track, three lanterns glowed near the gondola of lumber.

"Break in two?" some one called.

"Nope," replied one of the crew. "Don't know what happened. The line broke somewhere, I guess. This lumber has gone clean through the forward end of the gon, but I guess she'll ride till we get to the junction."

The lanterns moved about the damaged gondola. Bandy tried to raise his left arm and found that it was broken. He stood staring at the moving lanterns. Presently he heard a voice:

"Come 'ere, Jim!"

Then a murmuring of voices.

A question, an answer, distinct in the keen night air. "Damn hobo. Got caught when the lumber shifted. Well, he had it coming to him, an' he got it good an' plenty."

Another voice: "Tell Jake to back down slow, and hook on and try the air. No! Let him lay where he is."

Bandy wandered on across the field. He came to a barnyard. No dog challenged him as he crossed the yard and entered the unlocked barn. There were no animals in the stalls. The place seemed abandoned. He crawled into a stall and sat with his back against the partition. His injured arm was growing numb, did not pain him much. Shock and exhaustion drugged him into troubled sleep. The Jigger and he had made it through to California and were camped along the beach. A heavy sea was running, and the wind was biting cold—so cold that it made his arm ache. But The Jigger didn't seem to mind the weather at all.

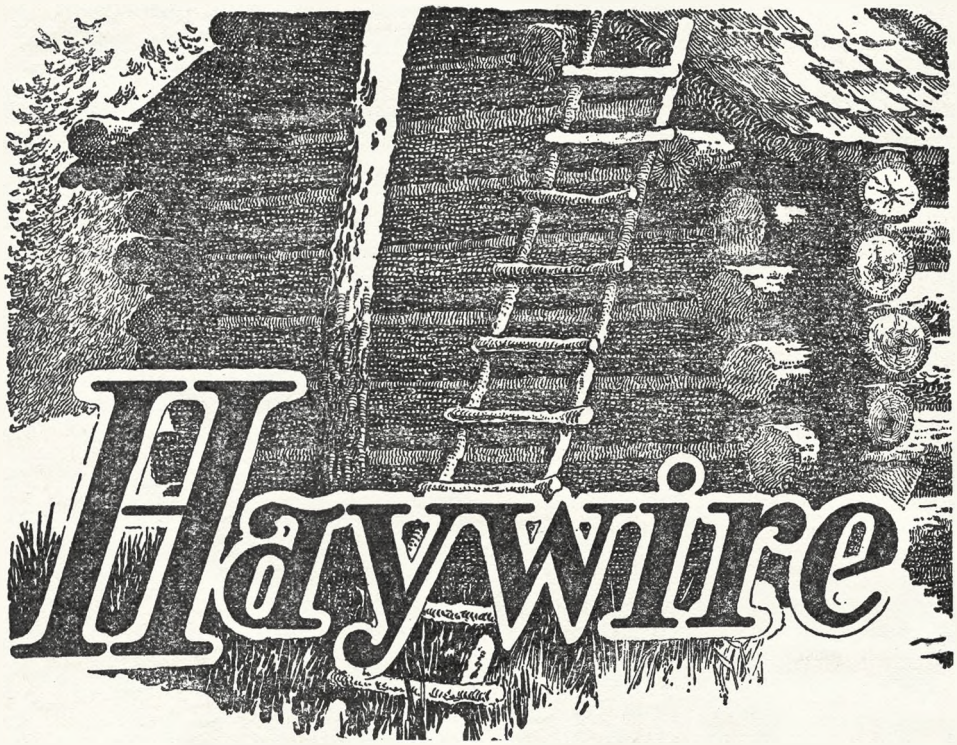
AN HONOR BESTOWED

WHEN the late Albert J. Beveridge first landed in Washington as a senator from Indiana, he had neither made a record as a legislator nor achieved the fame which was later to come to him as the author of his brilliant "Life of John Marshall," but the fact that he was comparatively unknown and a thorough greenhorn in law-making did not prevent him from putting over the idea with great clearness that he thought pretty well of his own importance and talents. He went about with something of a strut, and sometimes he talked to the old-timers in a patronizing way that distinctly irritated them.

One of the men on whom he pulled some of this sort of stuff was Thomas Nelson Page, author and diplomat. A few evenings later, seated opposite Page at a formal dinner, he leaned across the table during a lull in the conversation and addressed him.

"You know, Mr. Page," he said, as if his remark were extremely important, "I passed your house on Connecticut Avenue this morning."

"Thank you," said Page quietly. "Thank you very much."



Author of "You Get What You

Since old Joel Hayward had become an invalid, the cattle had been stolen and the money to take them out of the rut. Lynn would have pulled out, if it hadn't been for

CHAPTER I.

LYNN REBELS.

LYNN HAYWARD spun a silver dollar on the counter and wished it were as many as it looked while revolving swiftly on its edge. The new school-teacher, turning from the ribbon counter at the moment, glanced at his moody profile and wished she had his eyelashes and that intriguing curve of upper lip. Both wishes slid away into the eternal ethers where such thoughts drift in endless journeyings; for the dollar suddenly wabbled and fell clinking on its side, and lay, just one, dingy, silver dollar and no more; and the fascinating profile turned full-face to the new school-teacher, as Lynn eyed her curiously, with the quickened interest of a normal young man of twenty-two who sees a young and pretty face that is strange to him.

The school-teacher's eyes immediately froze to that wordless barrier with which nice young women wall themselves invisibly away from the questing male of their species. She walked with dignity past him and out into the hazy sunshine of a late summer day in Wyoming. Lynn's eyes followed her, the desirable curve of his upper lip now straightened a bit in a half smile of complete understanding. He liked her the better for the snub, and he decided that he would ride in to the next dance, even if he had to borrow a dollar for the ticket. He hoped she wasn't too dog-gone puritanical; she couldn't be, with that wavy shine in her hair, where it showed under her straight-brimmed white sailor hat. She sure looked hu-

By B. M. Bower

In Five Parts
Part I

Give," "Points West," Etc.

ranch had just generally gone "haywire." Nor would he let his eldest son, Lynn, raise his sister, Rose; but he stayed—to witness an altogether unlooked-for development.

man, anyway. He certainly would ride in to the dance and take a chance on her not being too religious to enjoy herself.

Then the storekeeper, one Jackson by name, set a yellow-wrapped bottle of Hubble's Blood Purifier on the counter, and picked up the dollar with greedy fingers. Lynn pulled his eyes and his thoughts away from the new schoolteacher.

"How *is* the old man?" asked Jackson, in his commercial tone of eager interest in his customers. "This stuff seem to help him any? He's been taking it regular for over a year now. Do him any good, you think?"

"No, it don't. But he thinks it does."

Lynn slid the bottle into his right-hand pocket and jerked his hat brim a little lower over his eyes with the unconscious motion of a man who expects to ride against the wind. His errand in town was ended, since he had no other dollar to spin or to spend.

"Well, 's long as he *thinks* it does ——" Jackson gave a mirthless chuckle. "Too bad—a fine, strapping man like your dad. Must be nigh going onto eight years he's laid on his back, helpless."

"He doesn't lie on his back except to sleep, same as any other man," Lynn corrected, with the frown which the thought of his father usually brought to his face.

"Oh. I didn't know he was able to be up and around. How long——"

"He's up, but he isn't around. He sits in a morris chair most of the time and plays solitaire—and bosses the ranch." The frown deepened with the

vague resentment conjured by the words and the thought behind them.

"Well, that's something. But I guess there ain't much to boss, these days, eh? Don't even run a wagon any more, do you, Lynn? I hear the Quarter-Circle-Bar brand is wiped out."

"Say, do you want to buy us out?"

"Who, me? Me buy out the Hayward holdings?" Jackson's laugh had the hint of a sneer. "I ain't buying up ghost ranches—not to-day, I ain't. Why? Your dad want to sell?"

"No. But you're so keen on getting all the details I kinda thought you wanted to buy us out."

Lynn turned and walked stiff-necked to the door, glanced up and down the street, and went on to where his horse, a springy-muscled roan with a coat like satin, had trod a dusty path around the end of the hitch rack. The Haywards did have fine horses, even if they had no cattle. Lynn's gloomy eyes lightened a shade when they rested upon the impatient Loney, but there remained a resentfulness that showed in the vicious yanks he gave to the tie rope. The roan swung as Lynn thrust a toe in the stirrup, and they went off down the street in the easy gallop that was a part of the Hayward horses' training.

With a quarter still in his pocket Lynn had decided to extend his shopping a bit, and buy a sack or two of Durham down at the new little store beyond the Elkhorn Bar—a rather squalid place of refreshment much frequented by men of a certain type. As he approached the place Hank Miller came out and walked uncertainly down toward the hitch rail, where his horse waited, dispiritedly tired from hard riding.

Hank had a pint of whisky in his pocket and three or four drinks under his belt; he was feeling frisky. Two hilarious cow-punchers followed him, and as Hank turned with a remark over his shoulder, the three burst into laughter. Lynn, just riding abreast of them, read a jeer in their mirth and in the glances they cast his way. He pulled the roan to a restive stand before them.

"Say, you fellows see anything funny about me?" he challenged sharply.

"Well, if it ain't Lynn 'Haywire!'" chortled Hank, sweeping his hat to the ground in a derisive bow. "Just in from his vast domain, the Haywire Ranch! How's the cattle business, Lynn? Goin' to ship a trainload or two of beef this fall?"

Lynn went white around the mouth at the gibe. He reined closer to Hank, giving back the taunt with an old and unforgivable insult that stung Hank to quick, drunken fury.

"Say! Damn you, no man living can call me that and get away with it!" bawled Hank, reaching for his gun with awkward haste, too drunk to draw quickly and no expert at any time.

Lynn's hand likewise dropped to his pocket for the only weapon he possessed. He leaned and struck with savage force.

"Purify your dirty soul—you need it!" he shouted above the pop of breaking glass.

As Hubble's Blood Purifier and a pungent aroma of brandy mixed with strong herbs filled the air, Lynn added a sentence which may not be repeated. The roan, rearing at the crash of glass, wheeled on its hind feet and bolted for the open prairie; and Lynn, turning for a parting gibe at the group, with Hank weaving blindly about in their midst, felt that he had acquitted himself with honor.

But that backward look nearly cost him dear. The galloping horse averted disaster by swerving sharply to one side as he went up the street and Lynn, abruptly facing to the front, saw that he had all but run down the new schoolteacher. He had a swift vision of wide, indignant eyes, as he thundered past. But that did not deter him from an-

other backward look. He wanted to see if she were going into the house of the preacher who lived across the street. If she did, she would not attend the dances. But it was the milliner's shop she entered, and Lynn faced forward and permitted his thoughts to dwell again upon Hank Miller's insult.

"They stole us out of cattle, and now they got nothing but sneers!"

He gritted his teeth in futile rage, and let the roan out in a run.

"Haywire! We're a haywire outfit!"

The words bit deeper and deeper into his pride. For in the rangeland, of course, there is a certain contemptuous reproach in the term. Springing from the habit of using the wire from broken bales of hay to patch harness and machinery in a makeshift kind of mending, haywire grew to mean a poverty born of shiftlessness. "To go haywire" meant to go to the dogs generally—to be broke, or its equivalent, and through laziness and mismanagement.

One cannot wonder, then, if Lynn's blood boiled with futile rage, as he rode homeward.

CHAPTER II.

"HE CALLED ME HAYWIRE!"

IN the rangeland, homes love to snuggle deep within the arms of some little valley facing the south or the east; never west or north, if they can help it, because of the bitter sweep of the winds in winter. Groves are a godsend for the shelter they give in cold weather and for the shade they offer from the fierce heat of midsummer. The Hayward homestead sat well back in a high-walled coulee facing Elk Basin to the southward, with a wooded creek running down to the lower prairies and tall cottonwoods throwing long, leafy branches over the scattered buildings. The big corrals lay farther out in the open, beyond the fence that guarded the grove from loose cattle and horses.

The ranch did not look haywire from a distance, Lynn thought, as he rode over the hill and pulled the roan to a walk down the steep road that led to the creek crossing. But his eyes were bitter as he gazed up the creek and saw the deceptive prosperity of those long, low stables, those great, wide-winged corrals, at the big bunk house beyond, and the sprawling, homy house just visible within the depths of the grove. Lynn knew only too well what a closer view would reveal: stables, corrals, sheds, bunk house—all empty and decaying with disuse; chuck wagons—three of them—standing in a forlorn group, tires rusty and with long grass growing between the wheel spokes; mowers, rakes, farm wagons, harness, fragments of chains broken and left lying where they were dropped. A ghost ranch, Jackson had dubbed it. Well, it looked the part. All it lacked was the ghost—and that, he thought with a sardonic twist of humor, might be furnished later, when his father finally fled his hulking, helpless body.

Sometimes he almost hated the place for its run-down look—for the atmosphere of failure that seemed almost a visible miasma of discouragement and gloom, when one stopped to gaze with seeing eyes upon its slatternly disorder. And yet he loved it, somehow, with a yearning love not to be put into words. Perhaps he loved what it could be—what it once was and would still have been if disaster had not struck down the man who had built the ranch log by log, acre by acre, and refused to see how it had slipped into ruin. The hatred was dominant in Lynn's thoughts now; hatred and a great disgust with life as he had found it.

He unsaddled Loney and turned him into the horse corral, where another black pony nickered greeting, and went on up to the house. His sister, Rose, a slim young thing with fine hazel eyes and such lashes and mouth as the new school-teacher had envied Lynn, was

sitting on the kitchen doorstep stringing green beans—she called it that—for supper. As Lynn approached, she looked up studyingly, snapping a bean pod in two with her thumb and dropping the pieces negligently into a large yellow bowl.

"What's the matter?" she demanded bluntly, as he came up. "You're black as a thundercloud, Lynn. And pa's on the rampage because you're late——"

"If he wants me to fly, he'll have to furnish the wings," Lynn sullenly retorted, coming to a halt because Rose, with her basin of beans and her yellow bowl, was using the full width of the step. "Move over, can't you?"

"What are you so cranky about? My goodness, this is a sweet family!" But she gathered up her bowl and let him up the steps. "Any mail?"

"Not a thing," Lynn said in a gentler tone. "I run my horse half the way home—I don't see why dad thinks I'm late," he said by way of explanation.

"I know—but he hasn't had his Purifier to-day. He ought to buy it by the barrel, so he wouldn't run out so often. It always makes him unlivable to be out of that stuff. Don't keep him waiting, Lynn."

Until that moment he had not thought much of the smashed bottle or the effect its loss would have at home, but her words sent him into the house with his underlip between his teeth. No dodging the interview—postponement would only make matters worse. His mother —"Hat" Hayward, the neighbors had called her for more years than Lynn was old—came into the kitchen when she heard his step, but his glance slid away from her expectant look.

"Your father's waiting for his medicine," she said briskly. "I wish you'd hurried a little more; he's been real bad all day."

"I did hurry."

"Well, I guess maybe you did. Where is it?"

"I haven't got it."

"Lynn!"

"What's that you say?" came booming through the living-room doorway. "You ain't *got* it?"

"No."

"Spent the money for whisky, I'll bet! And your father sufferin' the tortures of the damned at home——"

Lynn walked to the door and looked in, impelled by the injustice of the charge. What he saw was a big man sitting in a heavy chair before a little table, mechanically shuffling a deck of cards while his hard, bulging eyes glared at him in angry accusation.

"I didn't do anything of the kind. I broke the bottle on the way out of town."

"Broke it! Pity you didn't break your damn fool neck!"

"Lynn!" cried his mother behind him. "That horse didn't buck you off, did he? Was you hurt?"

"Hurt!" put in the old man. "You couldn't hurt him with an ax! Didn't you know any better'n to come home without my Blood Purifier? Why didn't you go back and get another one? Want me to die, aye?" He flung down the cards like a pettish child. "I'd be a damn sight better off dead and outa the way. That's what yuh want, all of yuh."

"Why didn't you get another bottle, Lynn?" his mother hurried to divert the stream of invective.

"Dad knows darn well why I didn't; because I didn't have another dollar, that's why. He's too darn stingy to give me a dime more'n he has to."

"Now, Lynn! Don't you speak of your father that way. How did it happen? Did your horse fall with you?"

Lynn suddenly flung off the restraint that had irked him from the moment he looked at the dour face of his father. He trembled a little, and with that white line around his mouth which meant that his temper was raging.

"I'll tell you how it happened—maybe it will take dad's mind off that patent dope for a minute. I smashed the bottle over Hank Miller's head, because he called me Haywire! I'd do it again, too. But he's right—we *are* a haywire outfit. Look at us! Ten thousand acres of deeded land, and not a hoof of cattle on it that belongs to us! Pasturing other men's stock for a living, and our own wagons rusting in the weeds.

"Look at us! Here I am with my hands tied—can't do a damn thing to put the ranch on its feet again—can't even get out and work for wages—got to wear run-over boots and hand-me-downs for want of the price to buy clothes fit to wear. There's Rose ought to be in school; and the boys growing up as worthless as two Injun kids. And I—here I am, able to take charge and make something of the outfit, tied hand and foot just because dad won't trust me with a dollar——"

"*Can't* trust yuh with a dollar, that's why! Can't even trust yuh to ride in and buy me a bottle of medicine!" snarled the old man. "And that ain't all. I ain't *goin'* to trust yuh; neither I don't trust nobody. You want me to plaster the ranch with a mortgage so's you can buy cattle. I know your argument: cattle's up now, and so forth. They can go up—and you along with 'em! I ain't going to buy no more cattle for these rustlers to steal. I've got the ranch, and they can't walk off with that! I've got the deeds on record, and there ain't an acre that ain't paid for or that I ain't holding according to law. And there ain't goin' to be—not while I'm alive."

"Other men borrow money to buy cattle," Lynn retorted. "They get rich at it. Or sheep. I could get a bunch of sheep and not put out a cent——"

"Not by a damn sight!" Joel Hayward almost lifted himself out of his chair, so that he could thump the table harder. "There ain't ever been a sheep on Hayward land, and there ain't going to be! Not while I'm alive, there ain't. Mebby," he added with heavy irony, "you better kill me off, so's you can run things to suit yourself. Put a bullet through me—anything, so's you can get things into your own hands. That's all yuh want, anyway."

"Now, Joel, that's not so and you know it!" his wife remonstrated sharply, sending a quick, somewhat apprehensive glance at her eldest son. "You say that just to be talking, and it ain't right or just. Lynn's going to do the best he can, and as you think best, Joel. He don't really mean to bring sheep onto the ranch; he hates 'em just as bad as you do. He just said it same as you say things you don't mean when you're mad."

She drew a breath of relief when he grunted and picked up the cards again, tapping their edges on the table to even the deck for shuffling. Lynn had walked out of the room into the kitchen, and by these signs Mrs. Hayward knew that the worst of the storm was over.

"Why don't you give the boy a chance to do something for himself and us?" she pleaded, laying a hand on old Joel's shoulder. "He's a man grown, and a good steady one with a level head like his father. All he needs is a little money to get a start, and he'll pull us all outa the hole in a few years."

"Money! What's went with all that pasture money?"

"You know well enough where it went, Joel!—to pay taxes on all the land you've got, and to feed us. There ain't anything left to run the ranch like it should be run. Lynn couldn't even buy enough seed to put in more'n ten acres of oats. We rake and scrape to keep clothes on our backs and food in our mouths. Lynn can't even put up any hay, except what him and the boys can do with that toggled-up mower. If you'd let him buy a couple of new mowers and a stacker, we could have

hay to sell and winter stock. But no; you won't give him an inch of leeway!

"There's the Dollar outfit, been after you to sell the upper ranch. They don't want to pay as much as it's worth, of course. Trust the Dollar outfit to scheme and connive to get something for nothing! But it'd put us on our feet once more, and you could go where you'd get help——"

"Help! Mighty little help I'd get anywhere! Only thing that ever did help me, I can't have because that damned idiot of a half-witted, pet son of yours had to bust the bottle."

"What's one bottle of medicine when you've got it in your power to be cured, maybe? You could run the ranch to suit yourself, then. You won't sell the horses, even after Lynn worked like a dog breaking a bunch you'd promised to let go. That boy rode himself ragged gentling the lot, so they'd bring more money; and then you balked on signing the bill of sale! Seems like you want to see your family go hungry and naked, Joel—and keep yourself helpless the rest of your life. We could have things if you'd just sell the upper ranch——"

"Sell! Sell! That's all I can hear, day or night. You'd sell the roof over my head, if I'd let you. If it ain't horses, it's land you harp on. All you want is money for that lazy hound to blow in. Always something you're whining to *sell!* There ain't goin' to be a hoof or a foot of land sold while I live, and you can put that in your pipe and smoke it. Sell! You and——"

The screen door slammed as Lynn left the kitchen.

CHAPTER III.

THE FAMILY DIPLOMAT.

"LYNN!"

Lynn, walking fast down the path to the corral where he kept his saddle horses, neither answered nor looked back.

"Where you going, Lynn?"

Rose set the string beans inside the screen door, out of the way of an investigative old hen with a brood of half-feathered chicks, and went running down the trail after him.

"Lynn, you aren't going anywhere before supper, are you?"

"The sooner I get off the ranch the sooner there'll be peace in the family," Lynn said between shut teeth, as he yanked his saddle off the fence and whistled for the black horse.

"But Lynn, you surely aren't going to blow up and leave, just because dad's on the rampage? My land, that's about all the fun he has! It isn't the first time——"

"No, but it's liable to be the last. I've heard that subject mauled in that room ever since I was a kid. Now he's taken a notion to make *me* a cussing post for everything that goes wrong. If I clear out, maybe the rest of you——"

"Oh, that's just because he wants his Purifier," laughed Rose, blinking back her tears. "I've got a dollar, and I'll donate that to the cause. If you feel you must ride or bust, chase yourself in after another bottle of soothing sirup, Lynn, and forget——"

"Forget! Yeah, that's dead easy for some."

Lynn had bridled the black horse and now settled the saddle on its back, pulling the blanket straight underneath with practiced fingers that received no thought whatever from his seething brain.

"It's all right for you, Rose," he said between yanks. "You aren't expected to keep things running smooth with both hands tied behind your back. What's the use of my trying to hold the ranch together? I can't make a turn but what he goes straight in the air and calls me everything he can lay his tongue to. I've got about as much authority here as old Heinie up the creek; not as much, because he does listen to Heinie, and I

can't open my mouth about anything, but what he cusses me to a fare-ye-well. And yet I'm the one that has the work and the worry and the scheming to make ends meet."

He dropped the stirrup from the saddle horn and turned upon her with a despairing look of utter defeat.

"Rose, it's enough to drive a man crazy! All this land, and no stock! Dad doesn't realize what it takes to pinch along and pay taxes out of the pasturage. Look at all that hay land—if I only had the machinery and could hire a crew to put up hay! Look at those corrals! Rotting, full of weeds. And we could have a bunch of cattle and be shipping beef every fall and have money to do things with, if he'd only let me go ahead. It takes money to make money—any fool knows that much. He roars at me because the ranch is going to the dogs, but don't he know I can't hold it up with my bare hands? Haywire! They're calling me Lynn Haywire now, Rose! They——"

"It's a pity," flashed Rose, "that you didn't have two bottles of Purifier to smash over that idiot's head! I'll bet he was drunk or he couldn't have had such a bright thought. You don't care what they say, do you, Lynn? Hayward or Haywire—what's the difference?"

"A lot of difference! You aren't a man; you don't know how a man feels about making good in the world. And I *could* make good—if I just had something to start on! That's what grinds me, Rose. Dad could give me a start, if he wanted to. We don't need all this land; we can't eat it, and we can't wear it. And that bunch of horses—what good are they to us? We can't sell them; he won't stick to any deal he lets me make. We might eat them," he added darkly. "We might have to, or starve—the way things are going."

Rose stood close beside him, one hand on his shoulder, while with the other she stroked the satiny neck of the black horse. She would never dare put her sympathy and love into words, but she must have known it was some comfort for Lynn to open his heart to her. He never did to any one else.

"Don't you suppose you could——" Lynn's laugh stopped her.

"No. You can't suppose a thing that I haven't thought of a thousand times. But I'm hog-tied, I tell you. I can't make a move that dad wouldn't balk me in it. He acts as if he sits there just studying out ways to keep me from making a living for the bunch of us.

"No, Rose, there's no use talking—I've got to get out. I—I couldn't stand much more and keep my hands off him, even if he is a cripple and my own father! He's trying to edge me up to the point where he'll have an excuse for ordering me off the ranch, so I'll just beat him to it. I wouldn't give him that satisfaction to save his life. I'm no use here, anyway, the way things stand."

"Well," said Rose, with artful alacrity, "I don't blame you one bit for leaving, if that's the way you feel. But I'd wait till after supper; there's an errand Mom wanted you to do. She baked to-day and she promised Heinie she'd send him up a loaf of bread, when you got home. He's back from Cheyenne.

"Now, there," she said with a laugh that sounded almost natural, "is a shining example of how to be happy though poor! There's old Heinie with his eight-dollar-a-month pension and the dollar he gets every day he washes gold—though he did say he made a little more the last three months—and he's happy as a king. He says he had a 'hell of a time' in Cheyenne this trip. He says he ate peanuts and drank lemonade till he was sick as a dog. You ought to hear him tell how riotously he squandered his gold dust! He says he'll have to go without sugar in his coffee for the next three months, but he saw the sights

and lived like a king—on peanuts!—and he's satisfied."

A side glance at Lynn's face told her that the small diversion was doing what she had hoped. His eyes had lost a little of their black rage. So she gave his shoulder a final pat of complete understanding and stood back, so that he could mount, if he chose.

"I know just exactly how you feel, Lynn; and I'd go, too, if it wasn't for leaving Mom in the lurch. I expect to marry the first man that asks me—and there *are* a few that are liable to!—just to get away from Pop's eternal yowl about money and the roof over his head. But it would seem kind of low-down to sneak out on Mom, so——"

Another sly glance from under her thick curtain of brown lashes seemed to give her intense, though secret, satisfaction. Lynn was squirming mentally, just as she intended.

"You let me catch you marrying any of these boneheads around here! I'll shoot him! There ain't a man in the country fit for you to wipe your shoes on, Rose, and you know it. You needn't——"

"Well, I haven't been asked, yet. You won't let any of them get close enough to see the whites of my eyes."

"That's only half of it," snorted Lynn, pulling Blackie's foretop straight—to kill time, Rose knew well enough.

"Well, good-by and good luck, and I hope—— Oh, would you mind waiting long enough to chop us some wood? Mom used the last stick to finish her baking, and I've scraped the chip pile down to the bone. Would you do that for the onliest sister you've got, please? If it was only the kind of wood I could chop——"

"You've no business chopping wood. Where's Sid and Joe? I thought that was their job."

"It is, and that's why they beat it the minute any one mentions the woodpile. Boys are awful when they get too big to spank. I asked them to water the garden—my flowers, anyway. My four-o'clocks are just perishing for a drink, and it gives me a pain in the side to pump."

"I've told you a thousand times to leave that old pump alone! Sid and Joe ought to do that much, anyway."

"Yes; but they've found a cave up under the cliffs somewhere, and they're too busy playing Injun. They dug up five hills of those best potatoes so they can camp out. Mom was mad enough to kill them both." Rose sighed, keeping an eye on Lynn's revealing face. "The things they're supposed to do around the place would fill a book; but what they really do could be written on a postage stamp, and you wouldn't need a magnifying glass to read it, either!"

Lynn had tied Blackie to the fence, yielding that much to the girl's artful undermining of his determination to leave.

"All right, Lynn," Rose said, "I'll hurry supper along, just as soon as there's wood to start a fire. You needn't cut much; just enough for supper and breakfast—maybe we can corral those darned kids by that time and get them to work. And you needn't bother about the garden, Lynn. If the boys are too lazy to pump, let the flowers die. You have enough on your shoulders, without breaking your back over that pump."

Lynn stooped and picked up a dead twig from the cottonwood near by.

"Get into the house!" he ordered sternly. "You've done your Delilah—now git!"

But before she went, the girl flung her arms around his neck and gave him a shy, sisterly kiss on one tanned cheek. Then, without a word, she fled up the path, leaving Lynn to make his way to the bare woodpile, where a jag of dead cottonwood limbs and a crooked, knotty log lay scattered beside the sawbuck. Uncomfortably the thought smote him

that it didn't take money to haul in decent wood from the hills and keep a pile cut for the women so they would not be put to the sorry shift of counting sticks before they started to cook a meal. A little time, a little effort—but what was the use? All they could do was live from hand to mouth, anyway, and the woodpile but matched the rest of the ranch. It was all haywire.

That thought extended to the primitive method of watering Rose's flower garden and the few vegetables that had been planted convenient to the house. To bring water down from the spring would take more pipe than lay loose around the place, and there was no money to buy new pipe. More than that, it would take several days of hard digging, and none took kindly to labor; not even Lynn, who was a rider to the bone and felt lost and unhappy if he must get down on his own feet and do hard work. The two boys, Sid and Joe—but you know how much of pick-and-shovel work could be had from those two.

So the old well out beyond the corner of the house had to serve. The pump was an old wooden one with the green paint long weathered away, scale by scale. It gasped and sighed over the task of lifting water up from its cold, mossy depths, but the stream came gushing spout full and crystal clear. It came spout full when a husky pair of shoulders bent over the handle; the women were content with a trickle into the bucket.

Lynn had dug ditches down the rows of the garden and had made a long, slim trough that could be shifted from ditch to ditch, and the rest depended upon a strong back and a willing heart. The two leggy, irresponsible boys were sometimes caught napping and made to stand reluctant shifts at the pump, but they were growing wary of the house, now that the hot, drying winds had come and the ground drank thirstily the water they sent trickling along the ditches. Rose had told the plain truth; the garden really was suffering, and Lynn could not dismiss its need with a shrug, knowing Rose had resorted to it as a subterfuge for keeping him at work until his anger cooled. Instead, he pumped and irrigated the whole patch, and sat down at last to supper, conscious only of stiff shoulders and a prodigious appetite.

Within the house the storm had blown over, as such storms always had. Mrs. Hayward ate as usual, in momentary expectation of a call from old Joel, who could bellow "Hat!" in a tone to make the whole family jump. Lynn and Rose ate in almost complete silence, chiefly because sharp ears in the living room could catch stray phrases and a sharp tongue twist the meaning with a venom scarcely to be borne. One kept one's thoughts hidden from old Joel's malicious, prying mind. The boys, withstanding a terrific though imaginary siege from Indians at their cave, had not come home, and probably would not, until their horses had to be fed. And in his heart Lynn could not blame them much.

It was nearing dusk when Lynn rode off on Blackie, the two loaves of bread and a dozen cookies carefully wrapped in a clean flour sack and tied to the horn of the saddle. Six miles up the creek old Heinie had staked out a placer claim and built a rock cabin, when Lynn was still wearing pink dresses. Lynn could no more recall his first acquaintance with old Heinie than he could remember when he first became aware that the huge, dark, swearing man with the loud voice was his father.

Riding up to Heinie's with bread and cakes and mended clothes was the first errand he had ever been sent upon on a horse all by himself. His toes could not reach the stirrups then, and he had to be boosted to the saddle by his mother, and was warned of this and of

that venturesome thing that he must not do. High adventure had lain along the trail in those days, and to be caught out after dark set him to gazing often over his shoulder in fearful expectation of bears and Indians—and as a matter of fact, the Indians *were* something of a risk, and Lynn was used to seeing the look of relief in his mother's face when he rode back into the yard.

But there was no thrill in making the ride to-night. Instead of Indians and bears that might be just behind him, lurking among the rocks and trees, black gloom rode with him; and a blacker future stretched before him in the dusky bends of the trail. He knew he must stay—he had known it all along—and watch the old ranch sink deeper and deeper into ruin. He had no hope that the two boys would ever lend a hand, or that the three of them working day and night could accomplish anything save a makeshift existence, where should have been a stabilized prosperity steadily growing toward wealth. With his father's warped mentality that would not consent to anything that even hinted at a business venture, what could he look forward to but the irksome futility of choring around among those empty buildings and corrals, or harvesting tiny crops of hay and grain? His father would not even let the hay be cut on shares by the neighbors. He would not tolerate the presence of any stranger on the ranch, now that he was chained to the house by his paralysis and could not watch what went on. If a neighbor rode up to make a call, Joel said he came to see how soon the old man might be expected to die and get out of the way. If strangers came, they were thieves and cutthroats who would steal everything they could carry off. The grazing land he would rent, and it was the money from this that fed his family and clothed them after a fashion—after the taxes had taken their lion's share. But no man nor woman might come to the house; Joel would order them off with curses ringing in their ears.

These things rode with Lynn, and the bitter acknowledgment that his brief revolt had been only a gesture, and that his sullen acceptance of conditions must continue so long as his father lived. Even the wind that had risen with the setting of the sun seemed to know his mood and to tune its soughing through the treetops to a dismal refrain for his gloomy thoughts. "No hope for Lynn," it seemed to sigh. All that land, all those buildings, all those horses—and yet no hope from a starvation poverty. Always the noxious atmosphere of bickerings, complainings, nagging in the house, always the desolation without its walls. So long as old Joel was alive there——

Lynn caught himself up sharply, afraid the thought would beget an ugly wish that his father might die. It had been growing, edging closer and closer to his foreconsciousness. He pulled himself away from the subject and turned his thoughts to old Heinie, who had just spent every dollar he owned and yet was proud and happy over his capacity for enjoyment. Heinie wouldn't whine and grumble and make every one miserable, if he were crippled and helpless; Heinie would have a joke for every ache and pain. Heinie was one of the world's rare optimists, with his lean little gold diggings and his lean little pension and his bare little cabin under the cliff. Lynn's mouth relaxed so that he was smiling to himself when he tied Blackie to a swaying sapling up on the bank and went down the steep trail to the cabin.

The old man was sitting beside the table under the window. Lynn could see the bald spot on his head glistening in the lamplight as it oscillated up and down with Heinie's chuckling laugh. Something tickled the old man hugely to-night; thoughts of his peanut-and-lemonade spree in Cheyenne, perhaps.

He had not heard Lynn coming—the wind would account for that, of course. Lynn drew closer to the window. He would see what Heinie was up to, and then he would holler at him and give him a scare—the old coot, laughing at nothing!

Lynn looked in—his eyes focused upon the table in an incredulous stare.

Heinie's spread arms inclosed, almost with an embracing closeness, a neat square of small packages that held Lynn's breath sucked into his lungs while he gazed. Rubber-banded packages of bank notes—a stack of them as large almost as the old man could encircle! Heinie was chuckling over them, gloating over them with shining slits of eyes, nodding his bald head and laughing as a mother laughs and looks upon her baby in its bath.

CHAPTER IV.

LYNN LOOKS UPON WEALTH.

HEINIE reached out with the leisurely, silky-steel motion of a cat reaching to stir up a half-dead mouse. He picked up one of the packages, licked his thumb, and riffled the ends of the bills, counting just above a whisper.

"One thousand, two thousand, three thousand, four thousand—ten thousand dollars. I golly, you shore's good fer sore eyes!" He lifted other packages and set them beside the first, his fingers lingering over the feel of the money. "Eight bundles—'s eighty thousand dollars. I golly, that'd buy a carload of peanuts, I betcha! He-he-he!—peanuts b' the carload, if I wanted 'em. But I don't want 'em. Buy me a place in the old country some day, you will. Soon as I got a hundred thousand, poor ole Heinie'll go back to the old country and buy himself a home. Here's some more to go with yuh—kinda keep yuh from gittin' lonesome!"

While Lynn watched unbelievingly, the old man opened his coat, reached into and through the bottom of a pocket, squirmed and contorted his features for a minute, and drew out four other bank notes of the same thousand-dollar denomination. Lynn had never in his life seen such a display. He had hardly known there were such things as thousand-dollar bills. Pulling the safety pin out of them, Heinie held it between his white-bearded lips while he straightened the bank notes, placed the rubber band to his liking, and laid them gently down upon the pile.

"Purty good clean-up—but I'll have to hunt me another town next time. Lar'mee, mebby—only that's a nosey burg, too. Ask any of them banks in there for thousand-dollar bills and the hull town'd know it. Have t' make it Denver. Yep—buy m' peanuts in Denver next time. Cheyenne's gittin' too blame nosey, last time 'er two. Got t' cut it out.

"Now, you go t' bed. He-he-he! Pore ole Heinie, scratchin' around to make a livin'——"

His speech trailed off into a meaningless muttering, as he rolled the packs into a flour sack, made that into a compact bundle, and went to his bunk. Leaning across it, he laid the bundle on the bed, took a certain rock in the wall between his two hands and gave it a sharp twist to the left and pulled it out. A sizable hole, seemingly lined with tin, was revealed; and into this Heinie crowded the bundle, and replaced the rock at a certain angle, giving it another sharp twist, this time to the right.

Lynn's lip came sharply between his teeth, as he turned away and went blindly back up the steep bank to his horse, mounted, and rode off up the creek through a thicket of willows that whipped his shoulders unheeded as he passed.

Eighty-four thousand dollars back there in old Heinie's cabin? Lynn could not seem to grasp the stupendous fact

even yet. He would have been very much astonished to discover that Heinie had eighty-four dollars in his possession. He would have felt slightly resentful, because Heinie was always making it plain that he was broke most of the time; that he spent his pension and his quarterly clean-up of a little gold dust when he went in to Cheyenne to see the sights, and that, knowing he would come home without a dime in his pocket, he always bought his three-month supply of food before he bought his ticket, and he was wise enough to buy a round-trip ticket to insure his getting home. This was Heinie's stock joke, which he would tell over and over, with much chuckling and wagging of his bald head. Always broke between trips, but always happy as a king—that was Heinie, and he was proud of it.

In all his life Lynn had never once doubted the truth of anything Heinie told him. Good old fellow—give you the shirt off his back if he thought you needed it; always ready to cheer you up, always saying money isn't everything. Preaching the gospel of cheerfulness in the face of his poverty.

Lynn drew his fingers across his eyes, half tempted to believe he had been imagining things. Old Heinie with eighty-four thousand dollars, all in one-thousand-dollar bills! All wrapped up in a flour sack and stuffed into a hole in the wall over his bunk! Four thousand dollars he had had pinned in his coat with a safety pin, when he stopped at the house and hinted, maybe, for a loaf of bread! Lynn's fist came down on the horn of his saddle so suddenly that Blackie jumped.

"The damned old miser!" he grunted disgustedly, as the full import of the amazing discovery thrust home at last. "Putting up a poor mouth all these years, and him rolling in money! Let Rose and Mom drop everything to mend up his rags for him—let me pack stuff up for him to eat!

"Awful sorry we're playing such hard luck—to hear him tell it! Telling Dad, every time he sees him, what a darn shame it is he can't go East to some hospital where they can cure him! The dirty, lyin' hypocrite! He could of sent Dad—lent him the money to go when Dad was first taken down! He could stake me to a bunch of cattle on shares, and make more money for himself while he was helping me get a start. With eighty-four thousand dollars he could —— Why, if I had that much money to work with I'd be a millionaire in ten years—yes, in five!"

The mystery of the money began to nibble at his attention. How had Heinie got it? Found some rich pay dirt, of course; and yet that was as surprising as the money itself. Snow Creek had never shown gold in any quantity; a lean placer was all any one would expect to find along its bed. Heinie must have fooled them there. They had taken it for granted he could not wash out decent wages, and he had encouraged the idea. A dollar a day, when he worked—that was what he averaged, according to his talk and the appearance of the claim. And yet, all these years he must have been taking out quantities of gold. His quarterly pension check had given him the excuse for going to town often enough to cash in his gold. Simple—so simple that no one would ever suspect the truth.

"I suppose that's the first time the old skunk ever forgot to hang a dish towel or something over the window while he goggled over that money," Lynn mused exasperatedly as he rode. "Lucky thing for him it wasn't some others I could name, that happened along just then. A thousand dollars in each bill, and a stack of 'em higher than that bald-headed old pelican could see over! I didn't suppose there was that much money in the whole State of Wyoming!"

Memory of how the money had

looked, all neatly stacked on the table, returned to enthrall his imagination. The things a man could do with that much money! Just for instance——

Lynn began to dream a bit. He'd buy a nice little bunch of good-grade heifers and a couple of pure-bred Hereford bulls, to begin with. Not too many, because Dad would have to go East, and that cost like the devil. And he'd send Rose to college, and put Sid and Joe into some good military school where they'd have to buckle down and study or get the stuffin' lammed out of them. And he'd buy Mom a silk dress and a sealskin coat and let her go back to Indiana and see her folks. He'd hire a good cook—chinks are all right, some of them—but maybe it would be better to get some broken-down old round-up cook that would be glad of a steady place. If he could get hold of old Tanglefoot, he'd be a dandy. And for himself——

"Betcha that little schoolma'am wouldn't look at me with that can't-see-yuh expression," he speculated further, and curled his lip in wistful mockery of the thought. "Betcha if I was to drive up to her boarding place some Sunday afternoon with the bay colts hitched to a shiny, new buggy and ask her if she'd like to go riding with me—I betcha the ice would thaw out of her eyes in about two minutes! I'd take her up along Echo Gorge and show her the view from the cliff, and we'd walk over to Lover's Leap and I'd tell her about the Indian girl that jumped off there. Then I'd take her up the trail through those big trees, and we could eat our lunch up on Lookout while we waited for the moon to come up over the peaks."

Lynn forgot old Heinie, forgot the money, even, while he dreamed of what he would say to the little schoolma'am on that Sunday afternoon, and what the little schoolma'am would say to him. If she liked to ride horseback, he'd break that little gelding and give him to her, maybe, and they could take long rides every Sunday——

Blackie heard a rustling in the bushes and jumped sidewise, slamming Lynn's right stirrup against a rock. The jolt brought Lynn back to reality with a jar. He was not riding the high, sunlit slopes with the little schoolma'am, whose name he did not know; he was jogging along up the creek, headed for no place in particular. It was dark down here among the rocks and willows, but overhead were the clear stars, and the tilt of the Big Dipper told him that the evening was edging into night, and would slide over the hill to midnight before so very long. He must have killed a lot of time watching old Heinie.

The lying old whelp, no wonder he could make a joke of his pretended poverty! No wonder he laughed when he showed the holes in his coat and said he guessed he'd have to cut armholes in a gunny sack pretty soon and wear that. With a fortune cached away in the wall of his cabin, he could afford to laugh. Who couldn't? Instead of laughing because he was game over his loneliness and his hard lot in life, he had been laughing all these years at the joke he was playing on the Haywards and the rest of the world.

Lynn thought of the many, many times when Mom had told Heinie to take off his coat and she would sew up the rip in his sleeve. Heinie always laughed and pulled off the torn garment and went in to sit in his shirt sleeves and play cribbage with old Joel, while Mom strained her eyes by the window of the kitchen, threading her needle and sewing by the fading light. Heinie always came late in the day, Lynn now remembered; perhaps he chose late afternoon and wore his raggedest coat with deliberate cunning, because Mom usually had a little time to herself then and would offer to mend for him and would ask him to stay for supper.

Lynn's teeth came together with a click. Mom never would sew another patch on that stingy, lying old devil's clothes if he could help it. Nor would Heinie have the laugh on Lynn for carrying good bread and cookies up to his place. He could buy his own cookies.

Right there Lynn stopped and untied the flour sack, set it open-mouthed in the saddle in front of him and ate cookies as he rode. Not that he was hungry; he was getting even with that bald-headed old reprobate down the creek. With spiteful gusto he forced down the last crumb and tied the sack, regretting that he could not swallow the two loaves of bread as well.

"Sponged off us ever since I can remember," he said, harking back to the great imposition. "And he knows perfectly well we can't feed ourselves, hardly, since dad's crippled and half crazy. He knows we haven't got eighty-four dollars, even—let alone thousands. No, nor eight dollars and forty cents! Not unless dad's a lying old miser, too, and has got a bunch of money hid out on us."

For another half mile that possibility was considered with gloomy suspiciousness and finally discarded. Dad might be capable of such perfidy, but Mom would know of anything like that. Mom was the kind of woman who always did know where every cent came from and where it went, just as she always managed to know everything else that concerned the family in any way. No, Lynn was absolutely certain that the Hayward family was just as hard up as they seemed to be. The thought carried a certain oblique sense of pride; at least they weren't hypocrites. They might be dirt poor, but they didn't lie and they didn't whine for favors.

"The way he's let us fetch and carry for him—— Why, his darn placer claim is on our land, by rights! And he's riding a horse we gave him, when he knows we're just about on the rocks! And him with money enough to buy every hoof we own, and the land thrown in!" Lynn drew a deep breath and let it out in a snort of contempt. "He's worse than those pawnbrokers Mom reads about in the Bible."

CHAPTER V.

"HEINIE'S DEAD!"

"YOU must have stayed up pretty late with Heinie," Mom broke the moody silence of breakfast time. "How'd he like the cookies? I tried out a new recipe—did he say anything about them, Lynn?"

"No," said Lynn shortly, "he didn't."

"Didn't he eat any? Heinie's the greatest hand for fresh cookies I ever saw in my life. Didn't he so much as taste 'em?"

"No, he didn't."

Lynn reached with his fork for another hot-cake.

"Well, my land! He must be sick or something, then. Wasn't he feeling well, Lynn? I thought he looked kinda petered out when he was by here. How'd he look, Lynn? Was he complaining any?"

"No," said Lynn, giving her a strange look from under his straight dark brows, "he wasn't complaining, so far as I heard."

"Lynn Hayward," his mother said sharply, pausing with the pancake turner thrust aslant from the hand on her hip, "you didn't go and make Heinie mad, did you? He'll stand joshing, but if he thinks you don't believe him, it hurts his feelings. Poor old fellow, he's got a hard enough row to hoe. You didn't say anything mean, just because you rode off mad, did you, Lynn?"

"Poor old fellow, the devil!"

"What's got into you, Lynn? You surely didn't go and pick a fight with old Heinie?"

Lynn's lips pressed together in the stubborn line. But immediately he

pulled them apart and laughed up at his mother, though a cloud still shadowed his eyes.

"No. I didn't take the stuff to him at all. I went on to the Upper Ranch and stayed there all night, and rode home at daylight to do the milking and feed the horses. I ate the cookies myself. They—you sure are an artist when it comes to cooking, Mom."

Rose looked up from her breakfast, her eyes keenly studying Lynn's face. But she didn't say anything. Her mother was speaking, querulously upbraiding Lynn for not doing as he was told.

"And what did you do with them two loaves of bread, for conscience sake? You didn't eat 'em both during the night, I hope?"

"They're at the Upper Ranch, in the bread box. I'll go get them, if you want them so bad."

"You could take them to Heinie, I should think. I don't see what's got into you lately."

"Needs his back warmed with a quirt, that's what!" shouted old Joel from the next room. "Gittin' too damn smart, that's what? You let that lazy hound run over you rough-shod. If I could git around I'd mighty quick take the kinks out of him! He wouldn't talk back to *me,* the way you let him. I'd take the hide off 'im with a blacksnake whip."

The scrape of Lynn's chair as he pushed back from the table, halted the senseless tirade, while old Joel listened for the step that would tell him what was taking place in the kitchen.

"If you want to feed Heinie, one of the boys can pack stuff to him, Mom," Lynn said as quietly as he could, while a futile rage against his father surged within him. "I've got other things to do. Anyway, I shouldn't think it would hurt him to come after what he wants. He's got a horse, and he isn't——" He was going to say "paralyzed," but the thought of that inert figure in the next room checked the word.

"Hat! You goin' to let that worthless whelp give you lip like that?"

"Ah, give us a rest!" Lynn muttered under his breath as he walked out. With a warning shake of the head toward her mother, Rose got up silently and followed him, while Mrs. Hayward clattered the stove lids to cover the sound of her going.

"Sid and Joe, you go saddle your horses and take some bread up to Heinie, like I promised," their mother directed, when Joel's anathema against Lynn had somewhat subsided, and she had carried him his third cup of strong, black coffee, well-sweetened and scalding hot. "Then you ride on to the Upper Ranch and get that bread and bring it home. It'll mold, and there ain't any sense in wasting good bread."

"Can't we have it for our camp, Maw?" Sid teased. "It's all the same, ain't it, whether we eat it all cut up on the table, or whether we gnaw it up there and pertend it's pommican. Come on, Maw—let us have it to camp out with! Gee, we can have a reg'lar old Injun battle, if we don't have to come home to get something to eat!"

"Just save washin' dishes for us," little Joe argued, with a whimsical grin.

"Well-l, you boys chop some wood before you go, and I don't know but what you can have it," she yielded. "Only, I want you to promise you'll go right straight up to Heinie's first, and take him the stuff I promised he should have. Do you think you can do that, for once in your lives, and not go larruping off after a coyote or whatever comes along?"

"Sure! You bet, Maw. Gee, two loaves of bread! Can we have butter, too, Mom? Gee, we'll give them Injuns fits!"

"You git out there at that woodpile!" came the off-stage growl that ran like a discordant undercurrent through every

bit of dialogue that took place in the house. "Your mother'll give *you* fits, if you don't do as you're told!"

"Can we, Maw?"

"I'll see how much wood you chop before you go."

With that half promise to add a little zest to the task, the boys went off to make a showing at the woodpile. Experience had made them cunning in the art of piling a half dozen sticks so that they would seem twice as many. They set off in a high lope and higher spirits, having wheedled their mother into adding a jar of currant jam to the butter she indulgently wrapped in a wet cloth for them. Heinie's bundle flopped behind Sid's saddle and a banner of dust settled over the garden as they passed by the fence.

But in an amazingly short time they came tearing back down the trail, their faces pasty white and their mouths loose-lipped and trembling. They stopped with a jerk of their bodies, as the horses slid stiffened forefeet in the dust before the kitchen step, and they almost fell off their mounts in their hurry to get inside.

"For the land's sake!" cried Rose, wiping dishes at the sink. "Those imaginary Indians go on the warpath for sure?"

"Heinie's dead!" blurted Sid, who always took the lead by virtue of his two extra years.

"His head's all mashed in the back of it!" stuttered little Joe, big-eyed with horror.

"And—and everything's all upset and throwed around every which way!"

"You boys behave yourselves!" Rose admonished them, frowningly. "Don't bring your blood-and-thunder stuff in here—shame on you!"

"What's that about Heinie?" Mrs. Hayward came hurrying from Joe's room, a pillow in one hand, its slip in the other.

"He's dead! He is, too, Rose! You shut up. If you don't believe it, you can go and see. Somebody killed him, Mom. They had a fight, I guess. The table's upset, and everything."

Mrs. Hayward sat down on the nearest chair, looking white. She stared vaguely around the room, as the pillow slid to the floor beside her.

"Why, I—I don't see—— Are you sure?"

"Course I'm sure!" Sid's wits and his courage took heart from the familiar surroundings. He could add gruesome details. He could even feel a pleasurable glow of importance in his knowledge of the tragedy. He was made to go in and repeat the story to old Joel, who listened with the king of diamonds in his fingers, just as he had suspended his fifth spread of solitaire that morning.

"Looks like robbery," he said grimly. "Where's Lynn?"

"He—he just started for town after another bottle of your Purifier, dad," Rose told him hesitantly. "I had a dollar and I gave it to him to buy——"

"Nobody but a fool would give a plugged nickel to that pinhead. Never here when he's wanted."

"Sid, you ride just as fast as you can go, and see if you can't catch him," Mrs. Hayward cut in breathlessly. "Tell him what's happened. Tell him he must get the sheriff—some one must telegraph to Lander. Lynn will know what to do, soon as you tell him what happened."

"Just 's if he didn't know!" sneered old Joel. "He was up there las' night, wasn't he? Looks mighty damn funny to me——"

His wife whirled on him in a fury.

"Joel Hayward, you let me hear another whisper like that and you can starve and rot before I'll ever do a hand's turn for you again! For shame on you! Your own flesh and blood!"

"I never said anything," Joel mumbled in an abashed tone. "I only said that——"

"Never mind what you said. You shut your mouth and keep it shut. Sidney, you go overtake Lynn——"

"He can't, Mom. Lynn rode Loney, and he was going to hurry back and hoe potatoes." Rose stood with her back to the wall, looking from one to the other. "Let me go, Mommie. This is nothing for a kid to handle."

A long look passed between the two. Mrs. Hayward's eyes wavered to the window. Little Joe was crying with a snuffling whimper. Sid looked plain scared. Old Joel laid down the king of diamonds on the ace, and licked his thumb absent-mindedly, one eyebrow canted upward as he stole a glance at his wife.

"Yes, go! And hurry, Rose. Be careful, won't you? Poor Heinie! Whoever in the world would want to do a thing like that? A poor man like him —it couldn't have been robbery. Heinie didn't have anything." She stopped with a gasp of pitiless suspicion, Joel's words recalled like a blow in the face. Lynn's unaccountable attitude that morning toward Heinie—oh, no, it was unthinkable! With a muttered sentence about Rose, and something she must tell her, Mrs. Hayward left the room, the two boys clattering at her heels. No one ever remained in Joel's room by choice—the boys least of all.

"You boys go to work at that woodpile!" Their mother commanded them sharply. "And you cord the wood, too, so I can see just how much you've done. Don't you let me catch you loafing—Lynn will have enough on his hands without getting in and doing your chores for you."

"Oh, Maw-w!" whined little Joe. "Can't we go and see the sheriff when he comes? We're the ones that——"

His mother gave him a distracted slap and a push toward the woodpile, and there was that in her face which stifled Joe's perfunctory howl and sent the two boys to do her bidding.

Rose had already saddled her own little gray horse, which the strain of Arabian that gave wings to his feet and an almost-human intelligence to his brain. "Mercury," she had named him in a spasm of romantic fervor, when Lynn had first led him to the door on her twentieth birthday not so long ago. But that mood had passed, as such moods do; so now the horse was plain "Merk." He was keen and sure-footed, with a gait like velvet, and even his devilment was a joy to Rose.

She led the horse out of the corral and up the path to meet her mother.

"You *will* be careful, Rose? You know what your father said—what he thinks—and the way the boy acted this morning. I don't know—Lynn's got an awful temper when he's roused, and he was all wrought up over that Haywire slur. If Heinie heard it in town and started to josh him about it—— I don't know—I'm most afraid to think!"

"I wouldn't think, if I were you, Mommie. I'll get hold of Lynn and tell him first. Don't you worry, Mom. Lynn's got a lot to him besides his temper. He—he *couldn't* do a thing like that. Or even if he had, don't you suppose he's got brains enough not to say what he did at breakfast? Anyway, I'll find out the truth. And—and Mommie, no matter what comes up, *we stand pat for Lynn!*"

She gathered the reins up short, spoke admonishingly to the tensed and waiting Mercury, and swung to the saddle as easily as Lynn would have done.

"Keep everybody away from Dad," she leaned to warn her mother fiercely. "Don't let any one in the house, if you can help it. Or if you must, keep him quiet—if you have to gag him!" Something of Lynn's dumb rage gleamed in her eyes, which were usually so clear and so softly whimsical. "He hates Lynn, mother. I honestly believe he's insane on the subject. He'd accuse him to any one he dared say it to. He looks

at Lynn sometimes as if he'd like to kill him, and would if he could get his hands on him. I never said it before. But after this, we can't let Dad see *anybody.*

"It's a good thing," she added under her breath, "he can't walk!"

"Rose! That's a terrible thing to say!"

"It's a terrible thing to have to *think* of one's own father—but he's made us all think it, more or less. You, too. That room reeks of venom, and it's mostly for Lynn. Keep your word, Mom. If he so much as yeeps, shut down on the grub. He just sits there and stuffs himself, anyway. It'd do him good to skip a meal or two!"

"You and Lynn—you're so *hard,* sometimes!"

"Lynn and I need to be. Keep the boys away from there, too. Let them camp out if they want to. And watch Dad. It isn't Heinie we have to think of now, Mom; it's Lynn."

"Oh! To think that my boy——"

"Cut that right out, Mom! Even your thoughts. Lynn didn't. I know he didn't. Good-by, Mommie dear. Don't you worry a minute."

She faced forward, leaned a little, and slackened the reins a fraction of an inch. Mercury leaped like a panther and was off down the trail at a run. Rose's mother watched the gray pony whip around the bends in the creek-bottom and go streaking up the hill beyond. Most horses would have slowed to a walk on that steep climb, but Mercury had the lungs of a mountain goat.

"My, how that girl does ride!" Mrs. Hayward heaved a deep sigh as she turned back to the house. "She and Lynn are no more like the rest of us than light is like dark. I wonder if Lynn meant to come back? Rose seemed to think——"

It was an ugly thought to plague that harassed woman, and it was not made easier to bear because she must hide it deep within her soul and give no sign.

To be continued next week.

CHEAP TALK

WHEN the mistress of the White House was the governor's lady, in Boston, she was more or less bored by the visits and attentions of a politician's wife who was so watchful of her money that she put into the word "frugality" an added and arresting horror. She was, in brief, stingy, parsimonious, and grasping far beyond the ordinary.

Moving into a new home, this skilled squeezer of the cash decided that she would furnish it ornately and sumptuously and that, furthermore, she would do it entirely with second-hand stuff. She was out for splendor—cheap. Consequently, she began to talk to Mrs. Coolidge and others about the wonders and beauties that could be secured at auction sales. While carrying on this campaign of education, she was stocking up with her purchases of second-hand material; and at last the great day came when she invited her friends to inspect the new home.

Coming away from the function with a woman who, being also a politician's wife, was discreet of speech, Mrs. Coolidge asked her:

"What did you think of it? What was the general impression made upon you by the house?"

"I don't think I can describe it," replied the discreet one; "but I will say that auctions speak louder than words."

By Howard Fitzalan

LEGUERRE of The Lost Division

Two Birds

Author of "A Diplomatic Exchange," "The Heart of the Eagle," Etc.

Leguerre goes to Europe on a special mission, and accomplishes the impossible.

"WAR," said Judge Gunther, with an eye on the bending ash of his cheroot, "is whatever you choose to call it. Banditry, on the other hand, is definitely a business."

Nugent Leguerre, looking out on the green of his chief's brick-walled garden in Beauregard Lane, experienced a disquieting premonition.

"Oh, I say!" he ejaculated reproachfully. "You're surely not consigning me to the Mosquito Coast again?"

For the moment Gunther ignored the question.

"A business," he repeated, "and subject to those conditions by which all business is controlled. Profit and loss are always to be considered—cost and return, the main chance. Call himself what he will, a bandit can no more go too deep into the red and keep on at his trade than can a broker."

Leguerre's gaze clung wistfully to the cool green. The heat had been close enough to insufferable when a Heaven-sent banana boat had lifted him off that evil Central American beach a month ago, his job supposedly completed. Now——

"Never thought of it that way," he said, "but doubtless it's all very true. What ho! for the quinine country. When do I start—and why do I go, *this* time?"

Smiling, Judge Gunther shook his head.

"Don't distress yourself with any thought of the Mosquito Coast, Nu-

gent," he said amiably. "I didn't have your friend, Costarro, in mind, it happens. Won't you accept my remarks as general?"

He deftly flipped the long ash into a tray, at the instant of its parting. The smile vanished as he resumed.

"No, you seem to have done very nicely in the matter of the esteemed Liberator, Leguerre. My latest reports have him still in retirement. But that was, comparatively, a small business. The thing I'm leading up to—assigning you to—has a thousandfold uglier potentialities. There's the possibility of another World War in it."

"Ah!" murmured Leguerre. "The inevitable Balkans!"

"Again," nodded the judge. "And the muddle is worse than any since Sarajevo. The Morovnian minister has had his goods packed for a week now—been ready to leave Zollwitz on a half hour's notice. Only the promise of the Zollwitz government to throw extra troops along the Morovnian frontier and keep the marauding Comitadji bands at home has held him on."

Leguerre rubbed his lean chin.

"It could be done, naturally enough," he said. "But how sincere is Zollwitz?"

"On the state department's best advices, quite sincere—at the moment. I shan't ask you to concern yourself about that phase of the situation."

"What's the chore, then?"

"I revert, Nugent, to my opening remarks. Although there's little enough love lost between them and their neighbors across the frontier, these Comitadji irregulars are out-and-out bandits—more frankly bandits than Costarro would ever dream of confessing himself to be. And banditry, permit me to repeat, is a business. In one way or another, it must *pay!*"

"I'm afraid," admitted Leguerre, "I miss the point. Doesn't it pay—and, if not, why not?"

"In the very nature of things, it can't. The raiders, of course, pick up whatever they can lay their hands on. But that isn't much. If there's a God-forsaken, poverty-stricken strip of populated territory in the world it's that along the Zollwitz-Morovnian frontier. Two or three outlaw bands might, conceivably, find loot enough over the border to repay them for their effort and their risk—if they kept industriously on the job. But during this last year the bands have been multiplying until there's been no keeping track of them."

Leguerre turned from the window.

"I begin to get the idea," said he. "It's got so a good union bandit can't draw his scale, and still the raids go on. But that upsets your theory, chief. It proves that banditry isn't a business, but an art. They must be enamored of their work."

"No," contradicted Gunther softly, "I still hold to the theory. There's an element of invested capital to consider, as well as that of overhead. Where the devil do these people get their arms? How do they get fresh supplies of ammunition, if what they steal doesn't pay for the cartridges they spend in their guerrilla mountain battles with the Morovnians?"

"I dare say," remarked Leguerre, "that the chancellery in Zollwitz would have the information."

Judge Gunther shrugged.

"Don't think so, myself," said he, "and that doesn't mean I've swallowed the government's protestations, either. Economic conditions argue against it. Zollwitz to-day is a bankrupt nation; the last quotations I saw had the *girda* at three hundred to the dollar, and there's been a crop failure since, to make things worse."

"That doesn't sound," Leguerre confessed, "as if they'd be hunting trouble at this writing."

"Certainly not. Whatever her hereditary sentiment against Morovnia, Zoll-

witz knows she'd be in for a quick and thorough trouncing, if war should be declared. Next year, some time in the future, she probably hopes to have a whack at the folks next door; she's another nation looking forward to *'der Tag.'* But for now, I'm convinced, she'll do all she can to keep the peace. I honestly don't believe that Kosta, the Morovnian minister, will leave Zollwitz—not in the near future. I think he's been convinced by repeated apologies and assurances, that Zollwitz intends to do her best to put down the Comitadji bands. But——"

Gunther paused to relight the cheroot, and his eyes were grave when he lifted them again to Leguerre's.

"But," he continued, "there's a hazardous margin beween promise and performance. The standing army of Zollwitz is in about the same shape"—he smiled ruefully—"as our poor old division. It's been whittled down to the bone. I doubt if there are enough troops under arms to suppress the border outlaws. You know, Leguerre, what it is to smoke men out of mountains, when they know every foot of them. The biggest army Zollwitz ever had would find its work cut out, and I doubt the present skeleton organization will get far."

"And if the raids continue?"

"War's bound to come. Ever since the new alignment was effected, Morovnia has had a bit of a chip on her shoulder. The bigger powers of her group can be depended on to keep tugging at the leash; but, given sufficient excuse, she'll have her head, sooner or late. And if ever she pushes an expedition into Zollwitz, with the tension what it is on the *other* side of the fence—the Lord knows what will come to pass!"

It was precisely the answer that Leguerre had expected; his question had been put perfunctorily to fill an interval. Now he injected a reminder:

"But, banditry being a business——"

"The division," concluded Judge Gunther, "will attempt to reduce its problem to business principles. We have been directed by a certain highly placed personage, whose name or whose office I will not need to mention, to take a hand. If there's a possibility of extinguishing the spark before it reaches the powder, it's our job to see that it's done.

"We'll work, as usual, alone. The state department is pursuing its investigation in the regular way, and I shan't presume to say that it is not a most efficient way. Likely enough your report will eventually be passed on to the secretary of state and will become the subject of diplomatic representations—somewhere. What use is made of any information we may be able to supply will be, of course, a matter out of our control.

"My thought of a solution was summed up in my first words to you, Nugent. The Comitadji bands, we'll assume, are not carrying back enough spoils into Zollwitz to make the game worth while. The fact that the raids keep on makes it self-evident—to me, at least—that they must be receiving encouragement in some other form; that some underwriter sees an advantage to be gained by fomenting a break between Zollwitz and Morovnia, with all such a break implies, and is, to some extent, financing the guerrillas.

"I'm putting it up to you, Leguerre, to find out whether I'm right—and, if I am, to learn where the financial support is coming from. First knowing that, the United States will be in a position, perhaps, to call a halt. And if, when the money stops, the raids don't stop, then I'll give it to you that banditry's an art!"

Leguerre tapped a fresh cigarette on his thumb nail.

"Will you suggest a method of procedure?" he asked diffidently.

"I could suggest a dozen," replied Gunther, "and so I'll suggest none. Any method of yours would probably be as practicable as any of mine. I know you'll fritter no time, of course; and yet, before you start across, I'd like to point out that I won't be looking for anything definite from you the day after you land on the Continent. It's a long fuse that leads to the magazine, my boy, and if you're a month or two on the assignment——"

So Nugent Leguerre, undocumented agent of that politics-cramped governmental-intelligence arm which certain wiseacres of Washington have jocosely rechristened the "Lost Division," went forthwith packing off, burning incense to the gods that his ship was not taking him south again, but east—on what he idly reckoned out to be his thirty-fourth errand abroad for Judge Gunther and his deceptively somnolent I. C. D.

He tarried over a week-end in Paris; met there—to sum it all up in a sentence pardonably as breathless as these scantily sketched subsequent activities of Leguerre—met there, among divers others, a disconsolate young man who had been a shipmate of some undeterminable prior voyage; with absolutely no thought that the incident would have a sequel, permitted the youth to claim an ear for his woes and a shoulder for his tears; pushed on thence by way of Belgrade and Sofia to Zollwitz; in the guise of drummer for an eminent bootlegger of munitions disposed of sundry scores of cases of rifles and cartridges not yet, alas, delivered; and presently, having returned to the French capital, composed between *aperatifs* a coded cablegram which both elated and mightily mystified Judge Gamaliel Gunther on its eventual arrival in Washington.

Judge Gunther was at breakfast on a glassed porch overlooking the garden in Beauregard Lane when the cablegram was delivered to him. It effectually, when he had decoded it, upset the program of his day.

Ordinarily he would not have started toward the dusty and clerkless little rear office, to which the division has been relegated in these inglorious post-war times, before ten thirty o'clock. But he was observed before ten on this particular morning, tight buttoned in the rusty-black frock coat that clung to his sparse, straight figure like insulation to a wire, stalking stiffly and swiftly through a wide anteroom in which at least one early bird senator and a whole hatful of honorables sat benched and patiently awaiting their calls.

Perched on the edge of a high-backed chair in the chamber beyond, his coat tails carefully lifted and parted, he pithily paraphrased a request transmitted to him in the cablegram.

The impeccably groomed gentleman to whom he addressed himself—ex-officio he was the leader of a party—gave evidence, as he listened, of relapsing from that dry austerity which had builded immeasurably greater popularity for him in Wall Street than in Main.

"When you want anything, Gunther," said he, favoring the judge with a whimsically quizzical regard, "it's always refreshingly out of the routine. It's never, thank the Lord, a post office or a pardon or an appointment that you're after. Well, what would you do with a battleship? None of your people in trouble, I hope?"

It was not physically that Judge Gunther straightened, for that would scarcely have been possible. The effect of a straightening, rather, was in his voice.

"I do not believe, sir," he remarked, with one eyebrow a little lifted above its fellow and his tone even a shade milder than it had been before; "I do

not believe I recall any occasion when the Intelligence Control has called on another service for support. Moreover"—this hastily, to forestall an imminent contrite interjection—"it is not a battleship I'm asking for. Merely a cruiser. A light cruiser. Specifically, the *Tuckahoe.* My information is that she is somewhere in the vicinity of Stockholm and due to turn homeward."

"And you say you want her to put in at——"

"Not," corrected Gunther, "to put in anywhere. Simply to lie, until I have received further advices, off Bornholm. Leguerre gave no longitude nor latitude when he cabled. He detests the mechanics of the code, and he's seldom at pains to be clear. However, I gather it will suit him if the *Tuckahoe* cruises between the southern shore of Bornholm and the mainland until—well, until she's done the job he wants her for."

The leader of his party appeared to have recognized the name that Gunther had spoken.

"Leguerre?" he repeated. "It was on the little matter at Prayd-Amah, wasn't it, that he saw me? Isn't he that extremely elegant young man of yours who looks as if he'd just stepped from a tub but could do with a little more sleep? Do you know, Gunther, I've got into the habit of thinking of him as an Englishman."

The judge smiled.

"Distinctively a cultivated mannerism," said he. "The yawning, too. But you won't catch him napping often. If you want the measure of my faith in him, sir, I'll inform you that I've passed on the Zollwitz-Morovnian affair to him for investigation—his present assignment."

"And this place, Bornholm?" The question came quickly. "The name doesn't sound like that end of the Continent."

"A Danish island in the lower Baltic," said Gunther. "It lies, roughly, midway on a line between Malmo and the Gulf of Danzig."

The impeccably groomed gentleman looked a bit startled.

"What possible relation," he demanded, "can there be between Leguerre's business and his request? How can an American warship, loitering in the Baltic, affect the growth of a war cloud in the Balkans?"

Judge Gunther sighed.

"I must admit," said he, making a try at whimsicality himself, "that Leguerre hasn't taken me into his confidence. He'll put just so much into a code message, and then fatigue seems to fasten onto him. At paper work of any sort he's absolutely impossible. But I will say, sir, that I trust him implicitly. And, if you will pardon me, I'll suggest that the cost of any extra coal burned by the *Tuckahoe* on her homeward voyage would probably represent quite as practical an investment of naval funds as the average."

There was a moment of silence.

"We-ell." The word came slowly, in a voice of concession. "Bornheim, was it? Ah, Born*holm!*"

A fountain pen traced a note on a memorandum block. With the cap as carefully replaced as if its work for the day were done, it was put aside.

"I'll cherish the hope," said the distinguished note maker dryly, "that Mr. Leguerre won't use the *Tuckahoe* in storming any more military works in friendly ports!"

The youth who had figuratively stained Leguerre's sleeve with salty tears during that early hesitation in Paris bore the trippingly alliterative name of Walter Willicomb. He was from Louisville, U. S. A., and in love.

It was love—need it be said?—that had brought on his despondency—love and a rival.

On shipboard, Leguerre recollected,

he had found the boy amusing. Young Willicomb had just been released from the army, then; and it was his current tragedy that, having enlisted as a regular only three days before the armistice, he had been required to serve out his time to the detriment of his ambitions toward art.

Stumbling on him again, and inveigled into joining him at a liqueur under a passionately striped awning, Leguerre had discovered him as more than a wee bit of a bore. All the gayety of that forgathering had been in the rich colorings above. Willicomb had not actually wept; but he had been at times, as he poured out his lamentations and aired his grandiose projects of reprisal, precariously close to sobbing.

Leguerre, before the name that intrigued him was mentioned, had sought refuge in a willful detachment. In truth, he had more important things to concern himself about than the heart interests of this lachrymose companion of a half-forgotten voyage, and he heard Willicomb as a remote voice coming to him upon a Balkan mountaintop. When, eventually, he realized it was no commonplace saga of love gone astray that was being served up to him, time and circumstance conspired to prevent him from catching up the lost thread.

In Paris Leguerre had many other friends, any one of whom he might conceivably have found more entertaining; nevertheless, it was Willicomb whom he went hunting on his return. It was a determined search, too, for after a day of failure he arose to resume it.

Late in the afternoon, tracing out a clew extracted from a romping art student, Leguerre came upon his quarry under another and not-so-radiant awning on the Left Bank. Willicomb was sipping an absinth; and that, as a barometer of romance, Leguerre read for low.

He seated himself opposite the Kentuckian at the little sidewalk table, gave an order, and spoke a word of advice.

"No; better stand on what you have before you, Willicomb. You've had an early start on me—and I want to talk to you more or less seriously."

A corner of Willicomb's mouth drew down in a slanting, sardonic, and not-quite-sober smile. He snapped his fingers.

"Seriously?" he protested. "But don't you know it's only a tr-trivial old world? Show me a reason, be serious. Get it in the neck, when you are —an' that's that."

"Listen, Walter," said Leguerre quietly. "A couple of weeks ago you did me the honor of—of opening your heart to me. It's that I want to talk about."

Willicomb, with his palms flat on the table, pushed himself erect.

"Oh—that! Well, if you think you can help me, you can't. Not by advice, Leguerre, anyway. I've had too much of that already. I'm not going to forget Sally; and damned if I'm going to abandon her, either.

"What I'm going to do, Leguerre, I'm going to have that rotten pup, Rommel, out of Saxonia and over in Fort Leavenworth clink, where he belongs, or die trying. Somebody should 'a' done it long ago. I reckon if the right man shoves a gun into his belly and tells him to come along quiet—I guess he'll come, all right. He's a dog —yellow!"

Leguerre shook his head slowly.

"No; Karl Rommel's not yellow," he said. "I've heard enough about him at secondhand to know he's not. But there's no question, certainly, that he's a thoroughgoing rotter."

"Yellow!" persisted Willicomb, his voice rising stridently. "Showed that in the thumping he gave me—half his size!"

"No," contradicted Leguerre again.

"That was the rotter in him—the bully. There's no more mistaken theory in the world, Willicomb, than the one that holds a bully to be always a coward. It's the brute in the man that comes out in the bullying, and the brute instinct is the fighting instinct. Rommel is a rough customer."

"Yah!" jeered Willicomb. "Was it yellow, or wasn't it, to dodge the draft? I don't set up as any hero; but when I was sixteen I was eatin' bananas by the dozen and drinkin' water by the pail to try to bring up my weight, scraping a razor over my face three and four times a day tryin' to bring out a beard—just so's I could qualify to the eye and the scales and climb into the war. And Rommel, he——"

"Rommel," interposed Leguerre, "acted like a blighter—and an ass. The whole thing was that he wouldn't knuckle down. He thought he didn't have to; thought that the eighteen or twenty million dollars that his very decent naturalized-American governor had boiled out of his soap vats and left unrestrictedly to him gave him as much privilege before the law as he'd choose to claim. I wouldn't say, Willicomb, that Rommel exactly evaded the draft. Rather, he defied it.

"In all his life, I fancy, he had never been forced to do anything that it didn't please him to do. He was constitutionally against taking orders. If they'd sent him a polite invitation to join the colors, or he'd been waited on by a committee headed by a genial general or a convivial colonel who'd proposed an army career for him over a round of cocktails, I dare say he might have behaved differently. Mind, I don't say that he *would* have behaved differently. That's just my secondhand impression of his character. Bit piggy in the head, what?"

"Damn piggy!" grunted Willicomb. "Piggy every way; though I will say he manages to cut a dashing kind of figure, swaggering around the Saxonian countryside. He's got a romantic pose these days, and I reckon that's what has caught up Sally Benson, as much as anything else.

"Back home in Louisville she got to running with a crowd of advanced thinkers who spend their evenings telling each other that money ought to be spread out more evenly, so that the poor won't have to drive their own cars, and isn't war a perfectly ghastly mistake? Hell! Who says there's any sense in it? But if it's got to be, and it's a case of fight or let a gent with hobnailed boots walk over your face, what real thinker—advanced or otherwise—is going to say he'll take his service layin' down?"

Willicomb lifted his glass and sipped from it; but his taste for the green liquor seemed suddenly to have departed, and after the one sip he spilled the rest of it onto the walk.

"Radical?" he questioned, replacing the glass, bottom up, before him. "Well, down at the bottom Sally Benson's really about as radical as *I* am. Rommel's got her hypnotized—dazzled. He's rushed her good and plenty ever since her dad came over to run the Berlin branch for the Hercules Trust.

"He hands her the same line that he's been handing out to every American, he or she, that he can get to listen to him—highfalutin stuff about his conscience and all that kind of bunk.

"But scratch under the surface, and see what you find! His real guide ain't his conscience; it's what he wants."

Leguerre twirled the thin stem of his glass between his fingers.

"I think you told me," he said, making a stab into the mist that clouded his memory of their earlier talk, "that Rommel and Miss Benson are engaged."

Willicomb stared at him.

"Hell, no!" he exclaimed. "You

haven't got that part of it straight. What I told you was that I was afraid it was coming. I guess they would have been, all right, if I hadn't showed up in Saxonia in the nick of time. I got a promise from Sally then that she wouldn't do anything rash for a couple of months, anyhow.

"The way it all came about, the Hercules people figured first on sending Sally's dad to take charge of the Paris branch. I've been crazy about Sally ever since I can remember; and after her folks moved up to New York from Louisville—about the time that I joined the army and had the war go cold on my hands—she and I kept letters whizzing back and forth.

"It was great news, you bet, when she wrote about coming to Paris to live, and it wasn't so bad, either, when the Hercules Trust changed its mind and nominated an ex-enemy capital for Mr. Clay Benson. Getting to Saxonia from Paris is a lot easier than getting from Paris to New York.

"The Bensons came here first and spent a week or so, and then I went on to Saxonia with them, and had a week with Sally there. Well, I won't say I had the whole week with her, because this Rommel person had dawned before I came away.

"He seemed to swing considerable cat with the Hercules Trust, and he met Mr. Benson in that way. Next, he got himself introduced to Sally, and the rush was on—right under my nose.

"I didn't like Rommel, at the start. Smile at that; go ahead! But I wouldn't have had any great love for him, even with Sally out of it. His record was enough to set me against him, or even his talk, alone.

"I've run into up-stage Englishmen and they are bad enough—— Oh, pardon me, Leguerre! You're English, aren't you?"

At the gentle denial, Willicomb stared again.

"Guess it must be Boston, then. But no offense. I was going to say, when I mentioned up-stage Englishmen, that I'd never seen pride of race pushed so far as Rommel pushes it. You'd think he'd never seen America—had no use for it.

"How I had my muss with him was that I begged to disagree.

"Honor bright, Leguerre, that was the whole shot of it. It wasn't until after the row that I heard about the perchant he has for getting into woman scrapes. Course, I can't out with that to Sally. But, by the Almighty, *I* know it, and I know it for truth, and soon's I can get a couple of fellows of the right kind to come along and attend to any little details that may crop up on the side, I'm going to have Rommel back by the scruff of his unsanitary neck! So help me!"

Leguerre was fitting a fresh cigarette into his holder.

"I believe," he said casually, "the thing's been tried. And, if I'm not mistaken, a couple of ardent young Americans who made an attempt at abduction out of exuberance of spirits, or for the public weal, or what not, are still putting up in a foreign jail."

"I told you," said Willicomb, "that advice was what I didn't want. If you'd care to help—in the other way—welcome. You've got a dependable look, Leguerre, with all your——" He broke off, colored, and covered his confusion with a throaty rumbling intended to counterfeit a cough. "But it's nothing I'd press a man to have a hand in," he resumed less hectically. "I know it's been tried before, and I know what the odds are.

"I know that I'm more likely to wind up in quod at the end of the venture than Rommel is. But he'll never have Sally Benson, to break her spirit and her heart, Leguerre—and that's something I swear to you before my Maker!"

Leguerre clucked deprecatingly.

"I do wish you wouldn't go on that way, Willicomb," he deplored. "You sound too devilishly somber. Assuming you could bluff him to the border, and he squawked when your train was filled with Saxonian officers——"

"I could blow him inside out," said Willicomb piously. "And, believe me, I *would!*"

"Pretty mess it'd leave you in—now, wouldn't it?"

"I should care! If I can't protect Sally Benson one way, I'll do it another. Rommel has it coming to him, anyway—from me. I've spoke about the ruckus we had? Sure; must have a half dozen times. That was a month ago. I'd been over there and seen Sally, and rowed with *her,* and went off to swab a few drinks with Rommel.

"He got more than a little teed, and began to ride the U. S. A. with spurs. It got too thick for me, and I called a halt. That was all I did—just called it. I guess maybe I hit Rommel first, but there wasn't any call for him to wade into me like he did. I was as good as out after his first couple of smacks—blind. But he followed 'em up and pasted me the whole length of the garden we were in. He must have used one of his hands to hold me up, so I could take it all.

"They say that it's the regular thing for him to beat up fellow citizens who insist on Uncle Sam getting some kind of respect in his conversation. He won't come out of Saxonia, but he'll hop onto Americans whenever he comes across them. Fastens himself onto 'em. He's the gay host, as long as they'll let him have his run of tongue, but rough and tumble if they go to shut him up.

"If he's ever got the worst of that kind of argument, I haven't heard about it. Maybe he's careful to pick 'em small; I don't know. All I can say is that he got one underweight one and sent him to the cleaners. So if I talk about taking a gun to him, I reckon I——"

"Forget the gun, Willicomb!" cut in Leguerre sharply. "That's all nonsense. You're bound to come off at the small end if you tangle with Rommel, so long as he stays where he is. But I agree most heartily that your friend, Miss Benson, should be steered away from him. Now let's try out a sensible plan. I'm off for Saxonia tomorrow. If you'll give me a note to Miss Benson, introducing me as your friend, I may be able to do you some good. Certainly, I can't do your cause any harm. What do you say?"

Unimpressed, Willicomb regarded him with lackluster eyes.

"I can tell you now," he said, "that it won't work. She won't be steered off Rommel; *he's* got to be steered away from her. I know she's falling, and falling hard. Got to lift him clear—stick him away where he ought to be. Get him back to America, where they'll take care of him until her mind's her own again.

"What'd they give him, if I could drag him home? There was desertion, in the first place; then that jail break of his, and the bribery that came afterward. He'd be good to stay in Leavenworth for three or four years, wouldn't he?"

Leguerre raised an artistically tailored shoulder.

"All of that," he said. "But what about that letter of introduction, Walter? Do you demur on some vague ethical ground? Don't you believe that in love and war——"

"This is both!" cried Willicomb, at decision. "And fair it is, if I upset my own cart with her by sending you." Palms flat on the table again, he shoved himself to his feet and stood wavering. "My diggings are across the square, old fellow. Come on with me—and, if my fingers'll hold a pen, we'll do it now!"

When he had met Sally Benson, Leguerre felt sorrier still for poor young Walter Willicomb; but it was the girl who claimed his greater sympathy when he had seen her, as presently he did, with the exiled and embittered Rommel.

Embittered Rommel was, and Leguerre had not to meet him a second time to see through the screen of his sang-froid.

The gilded one, deliberately or not, had made his choice, and now he smoldered in revolt against the consequences of it. He had developed, as Willicomb had said, a rabid hatred of the United States, and his talk was rancid with invidious comparison between things that were American and things that were not.

Leguerre, with never a murmur of dissent, sat back and took it all in. He wore a mask of unconcern, but continually he studied Karl Rommel as a biologist might study some unique microscopic organism under a glass. And in course, summing up the results of his observation, he knew that the man's venom sprang from nostalgia.

Rommel hated his own land—hated it because he was hungry for it, homesick for it, and it would not have him back, unless he came in humility to yield himself up to the penalties he had earned.

There were two sides to Rommel. and this of bitterness was but one. It was the other that he presented when Sally Benson was with him, as all too frequently she was. Then, and adeptly, he dramatized himself as one who patiently bore a cross—who for his soul's sake had taken a well-considered stand and now gave back a high contempt for the contumely of "the mob."

Leguerre had dined with them twice before he had made his decision in regard to Sally Benson. Hers was a worse case than he had thought, for it was not her mind that Rommel had captured, but her heart. He was good looking, after a dark and somewhat heavy fashion; but that, Leguerre was soon convinced, had only a part in the girl's infatuation. That infatuation was a plant stalwartly rooted in the toughest heart subsoil of all—pity.

As will perhaps have been deduced, Nugent Leguerre was one of those touring Americans whom Rommel "fastened onto."

So sure was the exile of his domination over Sally Benson that he seemed to welcome the threesome idea. He had the air of showing her off—submitting her, it might be, as a crowning and conclusive answer to all criticism of his wartime conduct.

In the week following his arrival in Grossnow, Saxonia's capital—better to place it, it was the week of Lieutenant Commander Elwood Peterkin's successful flight from Roosevelt Field to Grosnow in the great Borofski *CY-16*—Leguerre dined with Rommel and Miss Benson no less than three times. Also, he spent several of his afternoons in the company of Rommel and his particular crony, a ramrod-straight dandy, Herr Oberst von Klugg.

Von Klugg occupied himself chiefly in twiddling a wide-sashed monocle whenever he was not engaged in painfully squinting through it; but he was, he lost little time in insinuating, a quite formidable person. He had been the ace of his student dueling corps at a famous old Saxonian university, and Leguerre was led to gather that he had been graduated *cum laude* after majoring in the saber. He had been actively involved in the Great War before settling down to the quietude of the cafés and an occasional carving match, but he discussed it much less than Rommel.

"Very unvortunate—in effery way," was the comment with which he customarily retired from the subject whenever, among the three of them, it was raised.

Even that was more than came from Leguerre. He merely listened; and, when his eyes were not hidden in his beer mug, they were politely blank. He hadn't had a part in the war himself, he once admitted; and his subsequent mild demeanor suggested that he was without emphatic views on it. If, on occasion, he noticed that Herr Oberst von Klugg smiled at him peculiarly under his buckhorn mustache, he gave no sign of resentment.

Singularly enough, it was on a point quite remote from the military that Leguerre eventually took issue with Karl Rommel. The talk had been of aviation, of the possibility of transoceanic flying becoming commercially feasible in heavier-than-air craft. Rommel had adopted the negative.

"There'll never be a time," said he, "when the majority of planes won't flop into the sea and drown all hands. Talk about mooring landing rafts and supply stations every few hundred miles of the way across is poppycock. As well think of building a bridge. No, ocean passenger carrying is a job for dirigibles; and when there's money enough in sight to make the trade worth while, the Zepps'll have it sewed up.

"This American business of shooting over plane after plane, with better than half of 'em crashing out at sea, is stupid. Take Peterson, or whatever his name is—what's he accomplished, now that he's here? The first plane that managed to make it from America to Grossnow proved all there was to prove; which, in my opinion, wasn't much of anything. What's the use of sending off a second and third and fourth, and now a fifth, plane? The hip-hip-hurray business was finished after the second flight. According to the papers, there weren't a thousand people at Janny Field when Peterson landed.

"So if Peterson was looking for glory, he got fooled. Back in the States a stray editorial or two may have proclaimed what a hero he is—but what the devil! As for courage, if the man really had any he'd have shown it on the other side. He'd have been more of a hero in *my* eyes than any solo flight will ever make him, if he'd put up his back and refused to start. Show me Peterson, and I'll tell him to his face that he's a moral coward—that is, if he isn't a plain fool!"

It was then that a little of Leguerre's lethargy left him, although he didn't raise his voice.

"Now, I say, Rommel," he protested gently, fishing with a matchstick for a flake of ash that had settled in the foam on his new mug, "I can't quite stick that, you know. It's all very well to generalize, but I happen to be acquainted with Commander Peterkin. Very decent sort he is, too. Not a fool, and not any kind of coward. Oh, positively not!"

Rommel glanced at Von Klugg, and with a broad grin returned the latter's faint, mocking smile.

"Come off, Leguerre!" he said. "God, I'd begun to think you were a sort of citizen of the world, and here you go piping up with 'Yankee Doodle!' It's just that kind of thing that's made America a joke everywhere west of the Golden Gate and east of the jolly old Goddess of Blah!"

Leguerre looked up from his beer.

"Do you know, Rommel," he said, with an air of discovery, "I fancy I've been mistaken in 'mistering' you. Your case seems rather to demand 'herring.'" Leguerre repeated the word, rolling it upon his tongue as if he had found an unsuspected flavor in it, and his eyes brightened. "'Herring!' By Jove! that's excellent. Don't mind a bit of a pun, do you, Rommel—about the 'herring,' that is? Calling you 'Herr Rommel,' don't you see, instead of 'Mr. Rommel'—that might

be termed '*herr*ing' you! Now you follow me? Herring, what? Because, upon my word, Rommel, considering that you were born in America and that every cent of your money was made there, you *are* a rum sort of fish!"

The blood was draining from Rommel's cheeks as he leaned across the table. "I want to hear that again!" he cried in a voice that rang through the crowded *bier stube*.

Leguerre patted his cheek dubiously —and drew back his feet under his chair, transferring some of his weight to them.

"Oh, it's too intricate, old fellow," he demurred. "I've really a remarkable facility at that sort of thing—comes of practice at charades, I suppose—and it takes an agile mind to follow me. Besides, I can't always go back over the pattern of my puns myself. If you don't fancy the herring idea, and simply won't be called a fish, then I know a really grand word that's splendidly descriptive of you—*renegade!*"

A hundred pairs of eyes were focused on the table, and waiters with flying aprons were rushing toward it as Rommel shot up from his chair and it went crashing to the tiled floor behind him.

"You'll swallow that, Leguerre—or else a few teeth!" he cried.

Leguerre was on his feet, too. He said nothing, but his fist shot out as Rommel came for him. There was red on his knuckles and on Rommel's lip, as the waiters came between them.

Herr Oberst von Klugg took calm command of the situation, after the waiters had forced Rommel back into his seat.

"When a blow is struck, chentlemen," he observed cheerfully, "honor can yet be sadisfied; but in a bublic blace ve must condugt ourself witt decorum, nodt? Shouldt you be acquaindted witt the saber, my services——"

"Hell with the saber!" grunted Rommel. "He hit me before I had a chance to put my arms up; and I'm going to beat his head off!"

Leguerre ran his eyes appraisingly over Rommel's bulk.

"You're something of a man, Herr Rommel," he remarked. "But still I wonder if you could. I suppose I should inform you that I used to box a bit."

Rommel's swelling lip twisted in a grin.

"Would you stand up?" he queried. "That's what I wonder. You look like a one-punch artist to me, Leguerre."

"I've several more, I imagine. As for standing up, it's really a question of the proper place. With Von Klugg, I'm all for decorum—outward order and decency, as a famous mayor of New York once stipulated as the price of license. Roughing it about would never do here. I don't believe I'd be stigmatizing myself if I declined to participate without a shift of terrain. If you know a spot where we can continue without making a spectacle of ourselves, and without inviting arrest, why——"

Von Klugg suggested a gymnasium. Leguerre slowly shook his head.

"Too public, I'm afraid. I'm never at my best before a gallery. Since I'll be giving Rommel at least twenty pounds of weight, it does seem to me that I should select the battleground."

"It could be brivate in this——" began Von Klugg.

"Excuse me, no," interrupted Leguerre firmly. "The gymnasium doesn't appeal. I love the outdoors. If I'm going to lose my head, I'd relish a look at the sky, don't you know? Now, isn't there some nice, quiet suburban nook where we could have it out without a lot of people staring and police whistles blowing?"

Von Klugg looked questioningly a Rommel.

"Dere's Donnerplatz," he submitted. "I could show you dere in a daxi."

"Please!" said Leguerre. "Another objection. I'd rather keep this just to the two of us. How about this Donnerplatz, Rommel? Do you know it? Well, that's fine. Suppose we call the public out, Rommel—and go there by ourselves?"

His eyes narrowed, Rommel cast a quick glance toward Herr Oberst von Klugg.

"All right," he acquiesced, as crisply as the swollen lip would permit. "Donnerplatz it is—and we'll go alone!"

But Leguerre, before their taxi had carried them many squares from the *bier-stube,* was certain that at least one other taxi was following them. Later, glancing back again, he thought that a third cab had tailed onto the procession. However, he betrayed no sign of uneasiness when presently he proposed to his companion:

"What say if the victor rides back in the taxi? Or is there a nice hospital and a decent hotel near by in Donnerplatz?"

Rommel jerked a thumb toward the cab window.

"Judge for yourself," he said. "This is Donnerplatz."

They were passing through a little cluster of villas, which ran, not to the gables and exposed beams of the typical Saxonian town, but rather to a hybrid architectural style which Leguerre mentally classified as early Englewood.

Beyond were woods, and when the taxi had pushed perhaps a half mile along the road that wound into them, Rommel called to the driver to stop.

"Anything wrong with *this,* Leguerre?" he sneered. "We haven't a hell of a lot of light left—and I want to watch your face while you take your medicine."

"Perfectly ripping place," said Leguerre. "Ideal." He grinned at the chauffeur and addressed him in a very passable approximation of his native tongue. "Wait here, please. I'm dropping my friend, but I'll be back in a few minutes."

A few hundred yards farther into the woods, in a glade by a little brook, Leguerre came to a halt and peeled off his coat.

"This is cozy," he pointed out. "It's open overhead, and the water's here. So, Rommel, permit me to repeat the invitation of the immortal Abdullah: 'Take your last look at the sun, sky, and brook!' "

And Rommel replied to the pleasantry with a fist. It stung Leguerre's ear as it shot over his shoulder, for he had been a fraction of a second late in getting from in front of it; but it was with a soul-satisfying right to the jaw that he repaid.

The blow rocked Rommel, stopped his bull rush, put him for a moment on the defensive. Leguerre sifted a jabby left through his guard and cut him above the eye; then, instantly, he was all but smothered as Rommel flung himself forward again, his arms madly flailing.

All doubt of the issue lay in the duration of the assault. With the brawn of Rommel's overdeveloped shoulders and his superior weight behind it, any one of his wild swings must have felled his retreating adversary. But when the fury of the attack was spent, Leguerre was still on his feet and unmarked, and victory already perched upon his standard.

He plowed in methodically, then, at intervals panting:

"Well, Rommel—had enough? I'd like to spare my knuckles the shock of the *coup de grâce,* you know."

But always Rommel's answer was a roar of defiance and a new onslaught.

They fought two rounds in one, if the berserk battle could be measured by Queensbury timing, and the second round was the last. The good big man,

as often before has been proved in rings and out, was not in the end so good as a man who was not so big—but quite a lot better. Leguerre's snakily gliding right fist found an open right of way and shot through with all his strength behind it. Rommel went down.

The incident, though, was not quite closed. Even as Rommel toppled, a new figure projected itself into the battle. From a clump of underbrush leaped Herr Oberst von Klugg. Flourishing a heavy, gnarled cane, he charged toward Leguerre.

"Blitzen!" he shouted. "Now you veel *dis!"*

Von Klugg had a hundred feet to come, but when he had covered only half the distance he came abruptly to a halt and stood staring.

What he stared at was a pistol—and that had come suddenly out of the bushes, too. The man who held it had level eyes and a resolute cast generally, and, moreover, there were two others of the same mold behind him.

Leguerre apparently had some acquaintance with these timely newcomers; even some prior intimation of their near presence.

"Very neatly blocked, Charlie!" he sang out, evidently intending to congratulate the man with the pistol. "You'll take Herr von Klugg under your wing from now on, won't you? I shan't want to be bothered with him."

The battle in the woods had obviously not been fought over by Nugent Leguerre in his dreams, for when he turned up at the great flying field north of Grassnow on the following morning, he gave every indication of having enjoyed an undisturbed rest.

Commander Peterkin, fifth American aviator to make the New York-Grassnow flight without mishap, was tuning up his big Russian-designed, American-built biplane preparatory to hopping off for Hamburg; but, as Rommel had said, the hip-hip-hurray days were over.

Perhaps the hour was too early for a crowd to be expected. At any rate, except for a little knot of Saxonian officials gathered around the *CY-16,* the field was unpopulated.

Leguerre had no sooner joined this group than the Yankee flyer recognized and hailed him.

"Hullo, Leguerre!" he cried. "What you doing so far from home? Great Scott, this *is* a surprise!"

"Oh, I get about," smiled Leguerre. "I always try to get over for the bock season, you know. Sorry I haven't had a chance to look you up before. But, at that, I thought, with the ovation and all that sort of thing——"

"Thank the Lord, it's' getting so a man can spend more time flying his ship than taking bows!" said Peterkin. "It's hell to have to light in crowds and take off out of 'em." He waved an arm over the empty field. "This sort of thing is great."

Leguerre scratched his ear.

"You're not starting off so soon? I've the devil of a time trying to spell out the local papers, and I hadn't——"

"To-day's the day. I'll be going as soon as I get some compensating weight aboard."

"By Jove, you take it smoothly!" ejaculated Leguerre. "You know, if I were starting to fly over the ocean——"

The flyer laughed.

"I'm through with the ocean, for this trip," he said. "I don't leave Saxonia. As far as I go is Kobitz. The ship will be dismantled there and stowed aboard a liner. I go home as a passenger. You see, that's the reason for the compensating weight. The fuel tanks won't be a quarter full, and the ship's likely to be cranky if she flies too light."

A brilliant thought came to Leguerre.

"I say," he suggested, "how about my weight? I mean to say, I'd like

awfully to make the hop to Kobitz with you. Might even stay there and buy dinner for you—what?"

Peterkin grinned at the listening and marveling officials.

"That could be done, couldn't it?" he queried. "I don't know but what I'll take him up. Are you in earnest, Leguerre?"

"Never more so in my life. I didn't come out expecting such a gorgeous invitation, but I'm positively on."

And so, there being no official objection—as, indeed, there scarcely could have been on a flight beginning and ending within the Saxonian borders—Leguerre sailed off from Janny Field as a passenger on the *CY-16*.

An hour had passed before the take-off, for the tuning had not yet been completed. In the interval Leguerre developed a set of nerves which in the eyes of Saxonian officialdom argued him to be rather more an amateur of the air than he actually was. But it might have been noted that he recovered his composure to a remarkable degree after Peterkin had beckoned him to his place in the inclosed fuselage.

Not more than a hundred voices joined in the feeble cheer that lifted as the big biplane left the ground. Ten minutes later, plunged into a low-hanging cloud bank, the ship was lost to the eyes that strained after her. Still she climbed, and it was at an altitude far above the lower clouds that she finally straightened out. Before he put her on an even keel, the pilot had glanced at his altimeter.

"From below," he told Leguerre, "they can't tell whether we're going or coming now. So away we shoot!"

An hour later a wide, shimmering band came into prospect directly ahead and dizzily far beneath them. It was a great body of water, plainly; so beyond question the plane had wandered off the straight line between Grassnow and Kobitz.

"Pomeranian Bay," said Peterkin "Better start doing your stuff."

"Right-o!" said Leguerre, and began to crawl into a parachute harness. "I say," he added as he buckled on the belt, "I've never tried anything like this before, Pete. I've got your instructions down pat, but I do feel just a tiny bit squeamish. You're sure the blessed things always open, are you?"

Not waiting for an answer, he crawled back toward the tail of the monster biplane and cast an eye over the weight boxes he had helped to lift aboard. Selecting one, he wrenched at the lid boards—and sighed as a red row of bricks met his eye. But when he had opened another of the rough chests, his expression changed to one of pleasure. It was, although just now in a sad state of disrepair, a human face that he had uncovered. One eye in this weirdly disclosed countenance was shut tight. The other burned upon him with an unwinking blaze of detestation.

"How's it now, Herr Rommel?" queried Leguerre, with the faintest shade of anxiety touching his tone. "Haven't been too uncomfortable, I trust? Oh, pardon me! I forgot that you've got a yard of cloth in your mouth. Permit me to restore your freedom of speech!"

His fingers worked swiftly at a series of knots, and in a moment Karl Rommel stood before him, with rage in his one useful eye.

"How does it feel," Leguerre amiably asked him, "to be back home? Oh, but you are, you know! An American deck is American soil, and this—— But I wonder if they call the floor of a fuselage a deck? We'll have to ask Peterkin presently. If it's so, as I suspect, we're standing on probably the highest point in America. Quite twelve thousand feet in the air, I fancy."

Forward of them, the pilot turned from his controls.

"Sighted her!" he called. "She's

bound to be the *Tuckahoe*—she looks like a light cruiser, and she flies our flag. I'll circle down right over her, and you can cast off at three thousand or so."

Leguerre had dug up a second parachute kit. He offered the contrivance to Rommel.

"Don't you enjoy skiing, Karl?" he asked hopefully. "Well, I'm sure you'll find 'chuting no end more thrilling. Not a bit of danger in it. We'll take a life belt apiece with us, and knives to cut away the parachutes—and, of course, I've arranged to have a boat to pick us up below when we're through with our ride. Nothing to it—absolutely nothing. One simply steps off and pulls the rip cord. After that, all one has to do is to let the feet hang!"

In the room beside the garden in Beauregard Lane, Judge Gunther regarded Nugent Leguerre with eyes not altogether approving.

"After all, Leguerre," said he, and his voice was not altogether approving, either, "it was the war department's job to fetch home Rommel, if they wanted him. I don't want to detract from your achievement, or anything of the sort, but it seems to me you've spent rather precious time on a job that might have been let slide until your assignment had been covered."

"But the girl, chief!" Leguerre protested. "If you could have seen her, you'd certainly have wanted to rescue her from that rotter. And it seemed to me the best way."

Judge Gunther lifted a silencing hand.

"Don't want to hear any more," he snapped. "The *Mauretania* sails tomorrow. You hurry back and finish your job."

Leguerre stared at him wide eyed.

"I say," he exclaimed, "I don't know of another thing I can do, chief! As I cabled, you know——" And then he broke off, the victim of a frightful suspicion.

"Oh, maybe I didn't!" he murmured contritely. "Why, this Rommel, you know, is the angel who was putting up for the Comitadjis! He was the man financing the new war in the Balkans. It won't come off now."

Another Leguerre story will appear in an early issue.

ANYWAY, HE KNEW WHAT THEY MEANT

WHEN Herbert Hoover, Secretary of Commerce, was busy last summer with relief work for the Mississippi flood sufferers, he issued statements exhorting the nation to send money and material to the Red Cross to put the stricken people on their feet again. As invariably happens at such times, there were those who, reading his appeals carelessly, assumed that the donations were to be sent to him instead of the Red Cross.

One of the checks he received in this way was from a dozen North Carolina children who had by their own efforts raised fourteen dollars and seven cents for the cause. Accompanying the check was a letter signed in a childish hand and saying:

DEAR MR. HOOVER: We had a fair and made up this money. We send it to you, but will you please give it to the flood sufferers? Yours truly,

_____.

P. S. We hope the suffering is not all over yet.

The Jonah Leg

By Ernest Douglas

Author of "The Whitehead," "Surprise Water," Etc.

This time Joe Bonner's wooden leg gets the best of Wong Foo, a Chinese gentleman who had quite a drag down in Sonora, Mexico—and didn't care who knew it.

THE Chinese boy certainly wasn't looking for *us;* we did not know a soul in Hermosillo. Besides, he sang out, "Mister Bonney," quite plainly half a dozen times, as he surveyed the passengers alighting from the Pullman. When it seemed that he wasn't going to find his party, Joe Bonner turned as though he had just heard him and pointed toward our grips. Politely, the Oriental gathered them up.

"You idiot!" I hissed. "He wasn't paging you."

"What of it? We'll ride uptown in style, anyway."

By this time the boy, loaded down with baggage, was standing before us. He bowed again and murmured:

"This way, gentlemen."

We followed him through a throng of Mexican cabmen, beggars, and tamale peddlers. Then I saw what it was that had inspired my partner to misunderstand the lad. At the corner of the station building was the most resplendent carriage I had ever seen outside a circus parade. It was an old-fashioned barouche with the body painted gold and white, wheels of purple, and a velvet top with gay silken fringes. The gray horses were fat and sleek and their harness glittered with silver.

Inside the carriage sat a corpulent Chinaman with a face as round and smooth as a dinner plate. An American business suit bulged about his rotund form. He fought away the flies and heat with a brocaded fan.

"Meestaire Bon-nay?" he questioned with an oily smile, as he stepped out and offered us a pudgy hand. "I am Wong Foo."

"We guessed as much," lied Joe, booming one of his infectious laughs, which were equally effective at getting us into or out of trouble.

"You have heard of me?" Wong Foo was obviously flattered. "But I hope you speak the Spanish. The English, it is very hard for me."

"Poco, poco, todos los dos," Joe admitted.

"I am glad of that." Wong dropped easily into fluent Castilian. "But I did not catch your companion's name."

"My name is Peter Wayland," I replied, with a defiant glance at Joe. Regardless of what he might do, I was not going to sail under false colors.

"My close friend and business associate," Joe hastened to add.

"Ah, yes. Will you gentlemen do me the honor to ride in my poor carriage? And I also hope that you will make my house your home as long as you may be in Hermosillo. It shall give me much joy to make it as pleasant as possible for you, and there we may discuss at our leisure a little matter of business."

"We-ell," returned Joe, with expertly simulated hesitation.

"No, I shall not try to sell you a mine," Wong denied, with another sly grin.

Bonney must be an American mining man, I reasoned, as we sank into deep cushions facing our host.

The boy had taken the driver's seat. He started the grays at a smart clip down a long street. As we bowled along, sometimes over cobblestones, and sometimes over unpaved stretches with the barouche pitching like a ship in a storm, Wong Foo pointed out the Hill of the Bells, the cathedral spire, and other sights of Hermosillo.

Suddenly he broke off with a sharp cry, and shouted something in Chinese. His greasy brown features were now a sickly yellow hue; he shrank fearfully into his seat.

The driver yanked the horses to their haunches, turned them about abruptly, and headed into an alley.

Joe and I leaned out to look down the street we were leaving. We could not see a thing to get excited about. A few ragged children were playing with a pet deer on the sidewalk, and a little farther on a crippled old peon with a homemade peg leg was hobbling into a cantina.

Wong Foo was silent and his eyes refused to meet ours. Not until we emerged into another street did he resume the interrupted conversation. He did not mention the cause of his alarm.

Our route seemed to skirt the business district. Finally the carriage turned in at a gate in a high stone wall and we found ourselves in a beautifully kept private park crowded with palms, banana plants laden with green fruit, and a thousand flowering shrubs and vines. In the middle was a large, flat-roofed, one-story house of pink-stuccoed adobe.

"Ah, your garden is a paradise on earth," raved Joe, sniffing the fragrance of *lirio* blossoms. "And what a splendid residence. We have nothing to compare with this loveliness in the States."

"It is my joy that it gives you pleasure," beamed Wong.

Two more Chinamen, in wadded black jackets and straw sandals, took possession of our luggage at the door. Wong excused himself, a trifle nervously, on the ground that there was "a little matter" requiring his immediate attention. His servants would show us to our rooms, and he hoped earnestly that we would not find the "miserable quarters" too uncomfortable. Dinner would be served in an hour, if that suited our convenience.

Outwardly the house was much like any Mexican mansion; within it was a

mandarin's palace. We brushed against fantastically carved teakwood furniture as we followed our obsequious guides. There was more of the same in our rooms, which were spacious chambers with an ornate bath between. Draperies and bedspreads were of yellow silk with gold-embroidered designs of dragons and serpents. The air was heavy with a pungent, vaguely irritating scent. I judged this to be stale incense; but Joe, when we discussed it later, pronounced it merely "chink smell."

After being assured that we wanted for nothing, the Celestials withdrew. I went to one of the French windows, pulled aside the curtain and looked out into a shady patio with a gently plashing stone fountain for a center piece.

"Well!" I turned to Joe. "Where do we go from here?"

"Why go anywhere?" he yawned. "This suits me all right."

"When Wong Foo finds out that you aren't Bonney, we'll be thrown out on all ears at once."

"Well, it won't be the first time such a thing has happened to us. Just sit tight, Pete. We came to Sonora hunting for excitement, and it looks like we've hit the right trail right at the jump-off.

"Say, I'll bet that matter Wong Foo wants to talk over with us hasn't got anything to do with foreign missions. And there's another thing. What was it that scared a year's fat off him while we were driving here from the depot?"

I couldn't tell him, of course. While we were still debating the odd occurrence, and growing more mystified, the rattle of silverware recalled my attention to the patio. Dishes were being arranged upon a huge table. True to the custom of the country, Wong Foo was going to feed us out of doors.

One of the several flunkies working around the table was the young coachman. Joe managed to catch his eye, and waved him over. He came at a dog-trot, blaming the house boys for not attending to our wants.

"No, there isn't a thing we want except a word with you," Joe told him, at the same time deftly slipping a ten-peso note into his willing hand. "What is your name?"

"Gee Loy."

"Well, Gee, we like it fine here. Your master is just as friendly and hospitable as he can be. But one thing has happened that makes us a little uneasy. What was it that frightened him half to death and made you take to that alley in such a hurry? If there's somebody running around loose that might break in here and try to murder us all, we want to know it and be on our guard."

A smile wrinkled Gee's face.

"Do not be alarmed," he said. "You are in no danger. We fled from that peon before the cantina."

"From him? Why? Was he about to start shooting?"

"No, but he had a wooden leg."

"A wooden leg? What has that got to do with it?"

"Whenever ill fortune overtakes the master it is brought by a man with a wooden leg. A coolie with a wooden leg murdered his father in Canton. When he emigrated to Mexico he sailed in a ship whose captain had a wooden leg. The ship was wrecked near an island and while the master was swimming to shore the captain seized him around the neck and almost drowned him.

"Soon after he landed at Guaymas he was captured by a wooden-legged bandit and held as a slave for six months in the mountains. After he escaped he was nearly killed in a train wreck, and then he learned that the engineer had a wooden leg. When he bought this house one of the heirs could not be located. Finally the missing heir appeared and demanded that Wong pay him fifty thousand pesos, or move out. He had a wooden leg.

"Only last year the master lost an enormous sum to a German at baccarat. He would have lost his entire fortune had he not accidentally kicked one of the German's shins and heard it sound like a hollow log.

"So the master has learned that all wooden-legged men are devils, and he shuns them as he would a plague. At this very minute he is in his joss room, praying to his ancestors that they ward off the evil that always comes when he sees a one-legged man."

"We-ell!" Joe's features were oddly distorted. "So that's it. Needn't tell him I asked, Gee. Here's another ten pesos for you."

I drew the curtains before I dared look again at Joe. He was sitting down, gazing with a grin of pure delight at his right leg, which was stretched out in front of him.

Covered by a khaki trouser leg, there was not a thing out of the ordinary in the appearance of that limb. But I knew that from the knee down it was rubber, metal—and wood! Joe's original right pin had been shot away at St. Mihiel, and he believed implicitly that all the success which had come to us in our Mexican-border adventures, all our miraculous escapes, were due to the quasi-magic powers of this substitute. He called it his lucky leg.

Joe was whistling softly as we washed and made ready for dinner with Wong Foo. The summons came shortly, and the three of us dined pleasantly under a monstrous orange tree with birds twittering gayly among its branches. There was Chinese and Mexican food enough for a regiment, with sufficient champagne and gin for at least a company. Joe and I, not sure what was going to happen next, indulged only lightly.

At length, when we were gorged to the limit and had our cigars going full-blast, Wong Foo launched into a dissertation upon the mining industry of Sonora. It was a subject upon which we had little information; so we refrained from exposing our ignorance, and just kept still, waiting for Wong to work around to what he had on his chest.

As a sort of peroration he recited a list of the mines in the immediate vicinity of Hermosillo.

"And that is all," he concluded, "except the Amor de Dios."

He seemed to think that this called for some comment from us. A long silence ensued.

"Yes," Joe echoed finally. "There is the Amor de Dios."

"Do you think it is a good mine, Señor Bonney?"

"My mind isn't made up."

"Of course not. You have not seen it. But why should your company desire it? There are many other mines."

"That's true. There are many other mines."

"Señor Bonney." Wong leaned over and pawed Joe's arm. "It would give me much joy if your company would not buy the Amor de Dios."

"Why shouldn't my company buy it, if it's a good mine?"

Wong looked uneasily at me.

"Go ahead," urged Joe. "Wayland is in on all my deals."

"It would give me much joy if you would advise against its purchase."

"O-oh! How much joy?"

"I will give you five thousand pesos, if your report is unfavorable."

Joe puffed furiously. Waiting tensely, I bit my cigar in two.

"Wong Foo, it's a bargain. I shall turn the Amor de Dios down cold."

The Chinaman shook hands delightedly, and insisted that we help kill another bottle of champagne.

"You shall have your five thousand pesos the day after the option expires," he promised. "You have the word of Wong Foo, which any one in Hermosillo will tell you is sacred."

"Let's see." Joe cocked a speculative

eye upward. "How long does that option run? I have lost count."

"Until the first of next month. This is the thirteenth."

"Well, we'll go out and look at the mine to-morrow."

"Ah, why go to that trouble? It would give me much joy to entertain you here in the city. There are many doors that swing open to Wong Foo and his friends. What is your favorite amusement? Gambling——"

"Business first—that's my motto," Joe declined. "I'll have to have a few geological facts to embody in my report, to make it convincing."

So it was arranged that in the morning we should hire horses and a guide at a near-by corral and ride out to the Amor de Dios, which lay about ten miles southwest of town in a canyon called "Paso de Chivos." It was agreed without the subject being mentioned that it would be just as well for us not to be seen around the mine with Wong or any of his retainers.

We excused ourselves early, claiming to be tired after our long train ride. Joe sat for a long time, partially undressed, squinting at his wooden leg.

"Wong thinks that a wooden leg is poison," he soliloquized. "The mere sight of one throws him into a conniption fit. Wouldn't he faint away if he knew about this old lucky peg right here under his own roof?"

"Yeah, and it would give him much joy to murder a couple of fool Yankees that got into his house under false pretenses," I sighed. "Better keep that phony leg out of sight around here—and don't you dare to limp."

"Good advice. I'll slip it between the mattresses, while we get our beauty sleep.

"Say, what do you think of that heathen's gall, anyway? Do I look like the kind of a crook that would double-cross his employers for five thousand pesos?"

"Evidently you do. He certainly was cool and confident enough in putting his proposition."

"Humph! He's dead right about one thing, anyway. Wooden legs are Jonah legs to him, especially when he's manipulating to steal somebody's mine."

We ate breakfast by ourselves the next morning; Gee Loy said that we were too early for his master. The sun was barely up when we set out through the cool, spicy dawn to find the corral of which Wong had spoken.

It seemed that we were also too early for the *corralero*. He was nowhere about, and an hour dragged by before he put in an appearance. Then it took him another hour to saddle horses for us and to locate his son, Anselmo, a sallow youth who, his father averred, knew "every badger hole in this whole section."

Anselmo may have known the badger holes, but he did not know the prospect holes. He led us across the wide, sandy bed of the Sonora River and then straight west over a dozen miles of cactus, sand and rocks to the shack of two discouraged Americans who were digging on a stringer of copper. Their property was not the Amor de Dios.

The miners were able, however, to give us directions that caused us to retrace our steps halfway to the city. Then we swung southward a league or so and climbed a thousand feet almost straight up. Eventually we entered a tree-choked gorge between high red cliffs. This was the "Pass of the Goats," and the Amor de Dios was supposed to lie somewhere along its tortuous course.

Noon was well past when we finally reached our destination, and my mild interest in the machinations of Wong Foo became burning curiosity. On Joe's part it was more than mere curiosity. There turned out to be a pretty woman involved, and so, as usual, my impul-

sive, romantic, red-haired partner more or less lost his head.

We came upon the Amor de Dios after fighting our way through a thicket. Right under the canyon wall were several roofless adobe and rock houses. The dark mouth of a tunnel pierced the cliff, with an old mine dump just to one side.

It was a typical abandoned mining camp; but it was not unoccupied at that moment. There were several saddled horses and a pair of *mozos* under a tree in the background. On a broken wheelbarrow, in the shadow of a ruined wall, sat an amazingly attractive Mexican girl. Standing before her was a rough-looking, putteed American, obviously flustered.

The girl was crying, or nearly so; tears glistened on long lashes over brightly black eyes. Raven hair was parted in the middle and arranged in coils over the ears. If one wished to be captiously critical he might say that the nose and mouth were a trifle too tiny for her face, but otherwise she was the acme of feminine loveliness. And that with no adornment whatever. Her black-and-white dress was of cheap materials, and the brown, shapely hands were without rings.

The Yankee turned to us a countenance coarsened and reddened by tropic suns. He surprised me by appearing glad to see us.

"Do you talk Mex?" he asked, without preliminary. "If you do, tell her for Jake's sake that the Santa Catalina Silver Company wouldn't have her claim for a gift. There's nothing here."

"We'll break the sad news," Joe replied, his eyes fastened on the girl. "But how can you be so dead sure there's nothing here?"

"I don't claim to be able to see any farther into the ground than the next man, but I can tell at a glance that this was just a pocket and has been completely worked out. There may be another pocket farther in, but the chances are all against it, and it would cost too much to find out. My people took an option on the property thinking that there might be a big body of low-grade ore worth developing.

"I've been explaining all this to Miss Veragua, here, because she insisted on knowing what sort of a report I was going to make; but between her English and my Mex, we're all tangled up."

"What does the Señor Bonney say?" the distressed beauty inquired in liquid Spanish. "Is he not going to look again? There is much ore, I am sure. On his deathbed my grandfather swore that this mine would make the family rich."

"I could wear out seven picks and both eyes and it wouldn't change my opinion a particle," Bonney said, when Joe had translated. "The Amor de Dios is worthless. If I waste any more time around here I won't catch the night train north."

"Well, if you're absolutely sure that you don't want it, what will you take for your option?" asked Joe.

Bonney sized us up suspiciously. "Are you in the mining business? What do you know about this bat cave?"

"Not a thing; and I'm not in the mining business. I've just got a hunch that you're overlooking something good."

I could tell from Bonney's grin, as he glanced from Joe to Señorita Veragua, what he was thinking.

"How much will you give?"

"A thousand pesos. That's five hundred dollars, enough to pay you for your trouble in coming down here."

"The option isn't mine to sell, but I'll wire your offer to the directors as soon as I get into town, and I know they'll take you up. They'll telegraph instructions to Hernandez & Co., the banking firm, and you can pay the money to them."

"Suits me."

"Deal's closed, subject to confirmation. By the way, what's the name?"

"Joseph Bonner."

"Eh? I'm Josiah Bonney. What an odd similarity! Bet there'd be some mix-ups over our identity, if we lived in the same town."

"There probably would," Joe agreed, with a reminiscent twinkle in his eye.

Bonney gravely hoped that Joe's hunch would "turn out satisfactorily," bowed awkwardly to Miss Veragua, whistled to his *mozo,* and rode off down the canyon.

We still sat there on our horses. I looked at Joe and chuckled.

"Now! You've got a perfectly good option on a perfectly no-good mine. Out a thousand pesos. How do you expect to get your money back?"

"Easy. I'll make four hundred per cent profit, if I don't do anything but take Wong Foo's Christmas present."

"Wong Foo!" On hearing the name Señorita Veragua started to her feet, eyes blazing and hands clenched.

"I thought you were going to help me, but it is all a trick. You come from my enemy, Wong Foo."

"Not at all! Not at all!" A flush mantled Joe's ruddy cheeks. "That fat rascal is no friend of ours. We're just out to block his game, whatever it is."

She subsided upon her wheelbarrow, eying us doubtfully. Joe dismounted, reached for the canteen that Anselmo carried, and took a long drink.

"Now, let's get this all straight," he proposed, as he chose a seat by the wall. "Just what is that old grease pot up to, anyway? Tell us what you know about him."

Of course she wouldn't talk; I couldn't blame her for feeling suspicious. But blue-eyed Joe, with his broad-gauged grin, won her confidence in short order. He told her of how he had pretended to misunderstand Wong's coachman, just for the sake of a ride in that gorgeous carriage, of how we had continued with the deception because it was so easy and promised interesting developments, and then of Wong Foo's proffered bribe. He said nothing about wooden legs, however.

"Now what does it all mean?" Joe concluded. "Perhaps you can explain it."

Armanda Veragua could tell us part of what we wanted to know, but by no means all. She and a married brother were the sole survivors of a once-numerous family that had lost most of its estates through revolutions and consequent economic disturbances. Their father had died two years before, leaving them only a few acres upon the Rio Sonora, and the Amor de Dios, which had yielded a small fortune to some Veragua a century back and was supposed to require only development to become again a rich producer. It was heavily mortgaged.

The mortgage had been bought in for a song by Wong Foo, formerly a truck gardener but grown mysteriously wealthy in the last few years. He had started foreclosure proceedings. The Veraguas, eking out a living on their miserable farm, were unable to employ lawyers. No more were they able to pay interest, nor float a new loan to save their heritage. Unless thirty thousand pesos were paid over by the first day of the following month to the mortgagee, the mine would become Wong Foo's.

Cosme Veragua was for giving up the struggle, but his sister was made of sterner stuff. She spoke vaguely of certain plans for her future that required capital, and the Amor de Dios was her only hope. Somehow she had raised the money for a journey to Tucson, up in Arizona, where she persuaded the officers of the Santa Catalina Silver Company to send an engineer to examine the claim. If Bonney reported favorably, they were to make a first payment of thirty thousand pesos and

pay seventy thousand more in installments, the payments to be strung out over several years.

"And now that man says there is no metal in our mine," she finished pathetically. "Do you think he is right, señor?"

"I know blamed well he's wrong," Joe declared. "What can that imbecile tell about a mine in a fifteen-minute examination? There must be something immensely valuable here, or Wong Foo wouldn't be tearing his shirt to get it. If he's willing to pay five thousand pesos, it must be worth at least a hundred times that much.

"We'll just have it looked over by a real mineralogist, first of all. There must be somebody in Hermosillo who knows a mine when he sees it."

"Oh, yes, there are several. Juan Castro is a man of honor and reputation. I have long desired to employ him, but——"

"Expense is no object now. I bet we'll have that Santa Catalina crowd trying to buy back my option for a cold million before the week's out. My old lucky—— Well, luck is sure running our way."

Armanda rode out of the canyon with us and galloped northwestward on a trail leading to her home, laughing gayly at Joe's fulsome compliments and promising to meet us at the mine the following day. We reached Hermosillo in time to hunt up Juan Castro, a diminutive, stringy little man, affable and apparently intelligent.

Yes, Señor Castro had heard of the Amor de Dios. No, he had never enjoyed the pleasure of examining it. He had understood that it was a promising prospect that might yield great wealth when conditions became stabilized and capital available; but of its geology he had no personal knowledge.

When Joe threw down a nice little retaining fee he admitted that it would be possible for him to undertake an inspection on the morrow. In fact, he would be delighted.

"So that's that," I remarked as we left the engineer's dingy office. "Now, how are we going to get our traps out of Wong Foo's castle without a fight, or at least a nasty argument? It's my guess that when he finds out how he has been hornswoggled, we'll find ourselves on the receiving end of a tong war."

"We'll worry about that when he does find out," Joe returned airily. "What's the use of moving till we have to? I like his grub, and his champagne, too. Maybe he'll spill some more gossip over the teacups."

Wong Foo was not at home. Called to some near-by village on important business, Gee Loy said. Gee was under instructions to convey Wong's apologies, also an invitation to join him in "a little party with some very charming ladies," upon his return late in the evening.

"Now that's my idea of a piece of luck," I told Joe when we were alone. "We'll just get out of here while the coast is clear and our carcasses bear no hatchet wounds."

For once, reckless Joe Bonner heeded the counsel of his cautious pal. We informed Gee that our plans had changed and we would spend the night elsewhere. He seemed surprised that any one should voluntarily forego the lavish hospitality of Wong Foo, but made no protest. Our suit cases were surrendered readily to the porter whom we sent over from the Hotel Moderno.

It was a gay party that gathered in the Pass of the Goats the next morning. Armanda Veragua was there, more radiantly lovely than ever, and also her melancholy brother, Cosme. Joe rallied them about the fortune soon to be theirs, and even coaxed a faint smile of hope from the gloomy Cosme.

Castro, with a geologist's pick in one hand and an electric torch in the other, plunged into the tunnel. We all tried to

follow him for a while, Joe gallantly assisting the señorita, but at her suggestion we soon turned back. It was a dark, dusty, evil-smelling place, swarming with bats that were continually flying into our faces.

It was a good two hours before Castro returned, his pockets bulging with samples of rock. He sat down, hammered at them with his pick, peered at the fragments through a magnifying glass, and tossed them all away. Finally he folded his arms and looked off into space, obviously puzzled.

"Well, what's the verdict?" Joe queried. "Does it look like anything worth further investigation?"

"No." The Mexican shook his head positively. "I am much disappointed. There is absolutely nothing here. Once there must have been a rich pocket, but it was worked out and there is no evidence that another exists."

With mouths agape we heard him repeat almost word for word the conclusions of Josiah Bonney.

"You're crazy!" roared Joe. "Or else blind. Isn't there anybody that knows beans about one of the richest mines in Mexico? There's silver here, or something else! We know it."

Castro shrugged his shoulders. "I can look again, of course. I can also have the rock assayed for metals that are not apparent to the eye. But this is certainly no silver mine. And even the bat guano has been recently removed."

"Guano? I saw where it looked like somebody had been digging around; but those birds weren't looking for guano. Not on your life! They found something, and if you can't locate it, I will.

"Miss Veragua, don't you pay any attention to what this person says. I don't believe he'd recognize silver unless he heard it chinking in his pockets."

She shook her head despondently.

"He does know," she maintained. "And Señor Castro is not a man who would try to deceive us."

Castro reëntered the tunnel and Joe stuck right with him through the day, while the rest of us remained outside and desultorily threshed over the mystery. The geologist showed Joe just where the vein pinched out. They minutely explored every stope and crosscut, and the only sign of ore they found was a pebble picked off the dump.

"The little rat knows his stuff, all right," Joe acknowledged to me privately. "But maybe the assays will give us our clew. I made him bring a sackful of samples."

Joe cheerily reassured the Veraguas, when our ways parted. But as soon as they were out of sight, he lapsed into a frowning study that continued into the evening. He spoke only to curse the whole tribe of mineralogists and to wonder audibly if Castro could be in the pay of Wong Foo. When word came to us in our room that two gentlemen were downstairs to see us, his temper was nothing less than vicious.

One of the callers waiting in the dimly lighted patio was Wong Foo. The other was a tall, cadaverous Mexican in a green uniform with many brass buttons, whom Wong presented with significant emphasis as, "Major Torres, chief of police of Hermosillo, and a very close friend of mine."

"I was much pained at your sudden departure from my roof," the Chinese went on.

"We decided that we'd rather be here," Joe replied shortly.

"No doubt. You will pardon me, but I think your conduct is rather rude."

"You will pardon me, but I think your rascality is rather crude."

"What do you say?" Wong's voice was high and shrill and his plump body shook like jelly. "You accuse *me* of dishonesty? You who have most evidently gone back on your pledge to advise your employers not to buy the Amor de Dios."

"The only pledge I gave was that any

report I might make would be unfavorable. It will be. But I did not promise not to buy the mine myself."

"Buy it yourself? Aha! You think to cheat both the Santa Catalina Company and Wong Foo. I shall telegraph them immediately."

"Burn up the wires and see how much good it does you. I'm going to buy the Amor de Dios. Yes; and work it, too."

Wong was well-nigh speechless with rage and astonishment at this bold defiance. He sputtered impotently.

"Señor Gringo, I think you are very unwise," interposed the acid voice of Torres. "Wong Foo is an honored citizen of Mexico, a man of influence with many powerful friends in high places."

"I don't care how much influence he has. And that girl he is trying to rob has at least two friends that will turn out to be as powerful as dynamite if anybody tries to interfere with them. Now, good night and good-by!"

Torres smiled wickedly, showing long, tobacco-stained buck teeth. He took Wong's arm and pushed him out of the patio.

At the doorway Wong turned, his bloated face distorted with venomous hate.

"It will give me great joy to see that you never operate the Amor de Dios."

"Say, don't you think that if you had really tried you could have done a more complete job of getting us in wrong with everybody in Sonora?" I snorted when they were gone. "And, Lord! what a bluff!"

"What bluff?"

"About buying that bat roost."

"No bluff about it. If there's no other way to beat that tub of lard, I'll make a first payment on the Amor de Dios, even if I have to write home to grandmother to pawn her false teeth."

He meant it, too. I knew from long experience that it would be useless to argue with Joe Bonner in that mood.

The next morning came another jolt. The assayer reported completely negative results. He had tested Castro's samples for every metal that they might conceivably contain, but, aside from worthless traces of silver and lead, they were barren.

Joe took it more calmly than I expected.

"I don't believe those fellows are playing with Wong," he said. "The stuff doesn't look like ore, that's a fact. It's my theory that Wong found a blind ledge while digging around in those old workings, then covered it up. It ought to be fairly easy to find. We'll just get a crew together and go after it systematically."

There were plenty of Mexican miners to be had in Hermosillo. We hired seven or eight who looked fairly husky, and another who claimed to be a cook. Then we bought some secondhand tools, a case of dynamite, and a small supply of provisions. I made arrangements to have them packed out to the mine.

While I was attending to this, Joe called on Hernandez & Co. and closed the deal for his option. He also sent a messenger to Armanda Veragua with a note setting forth the newest developments.

The following day we established a camp in Paso de Chivas, and made a start toward clearing out the tunnel. Joe gave orders that everything in the way of loose stone and debris was to be carried outside. Walls were to be wiped free of their accumulated dust, closely scrutinized and sounded for hidden chambers.

An interesting discovery was made. In removing a pile of waste rock well back from the portal, our shovelers came upon a small cavity in what had appeared to be solid diorite.

"Ye-e-e-ow!" whooped Joe, bringing a swarm of bats about his head. "What'll you bet that this doesn't lead to another ore-body bigger than the first? We've hit the trail already."

We had to get down on our hands and

knees to crawl through the opening. Almost immediately, however, we were able to stand erect. The thin beams of our flash lights showed roughly hewn steps leading up and up, out of sight.

Our hearts hammered with expectation as, accompanied by a couple of the Mexicans, we started to climb. The steps were slippery and the primitive staircase twisted like a corkscrew, so it was rough going for a wooden-legged man. Joe puffed right along with the rest of us, though.

After we had ascended a hundred feet or so we came out upon a wide shelf in the canyon wall. We had seen no indications of ore or of stoping.

"What's it for?" puzzled Joe. "This is something I don't savvy."

One of the workmen, a fellow named Polonio, laughed.

"Only a way of retreat from Indians and robbers," he said. "You see, the mine is safe from attack from above. And if enemies should come by way of the canyon, the defenders could scamper up to this place and fire upon them from here. It is a common trick that Mexicans have learned from animals that burrow in the ground."

Polonio's explanation was so obviously correct that even Joe, grievously disappointed though he was, did not dispute it. We descended to the tunnel level and announced that the first shift was over.

Before following the miners into the open air, we prowled around for a few minutes, looking over what had been accomplished. When we did go outside, the camp was in the wildest confusion. Mexicans were hurriedly rolling their blankets and throwing their other belongings together. They crowded around us, yelling for their pay.

"Hey! Hey! What's all this about?" Joe shouted above the din. "We're not through yet. This job is going to last several days, maybe a long time."

"Dinero! el dinero!"

"Here, you tell us," bellowed Joe, shaking Polonio by the arm.

"We are afraid. This is a bad place."

"Who says so? What have you seen?"

Polonio squirmed but did not answer. His hesitation was quite evident.

"Wong Foo is at the bottom of this. Has he been here?"

"No! No!"

"Then one of his flunkies has. I knew it. What did he say?"

"We will all die if we stay. Wong Foo does not want us here. No man dares defy Wong Foo!"

"Well, if you are convent girls who faint at the hissing of a snake we will bring some gunmen here to protect you."

"Ten thousand noes!" Polonio fairly quivered with earnestness. "We will go. And you must go also, señores. He will most certainly have you slain, if you remain."

"Yes? What will we be doing all that time?"

In vain did Joe plead, cajole and argue. Wong Foo's representative, whoever he may have been, had scared them silly. Even double wages did not interest them. They were going; not the next morning, nor that evening, nor even after supper—they were leaving right now.

To avoid collision with the law, we had to pay off on demand. Clutching their coins and warning us to follow them without delay, our miners scurried off into the gathering darkness. We were left alone in a wild, lonesome spot leagues from any human habitation that we knew of and—worse than that—two hundred miles from the American border. I didn't feel so good.

Still fuming about the cowardice of the deserters, Joe picked up a pan of scorching meat that the cook had left on a big camp fire.

Crack!

The pan went spinning out of his hand. Its contents spilled upon the coals, hissing furiously, and producing a momentary flare.

Frozen with surprise, we stared into the dusk. From where, in the tangle of trees and underbrush that filled the canyon, had come that rifle shot? We had our revolvers, of course, but knew not which way to shoot.

A fusillade of bullets screamed about us. I thought then that I was feeling their wind as they zipped past my head; now I am not so sure that it wasn't just the breeze that I created myself as I raced for the nearest cover, the old tunnel of the Amor de Dios.

Joe was right with me, and never has denied that he started first. Right at the entrance, he staggered. I caught him and half dragged him around the nearest bend, into pitch blackness.

"Did they hit you, old man?" I panted.

"Only my leg. The wooden one. Chipped, that's all. Lucky leg!"

The attackers had not ceased their firing. Every second or so a slug plunked into the tunnel, but we were safe, as long as we stayed behind that curve.

"Let 'em waste their ammunition," scoffed Joe. "If any of 'em get brave enough to come in here, it'll be just too bad."

With no water and no food we were in no shape to withstand a prolonged siege. I pointed this out, but Joe poohpoohed my pessimism. He felt that the two of us, backed by a pair of six-shooters, a fair supply of ammunition, and his lucky leg, were capable of standing off the Chinese Nationalist army.

That is, he felt so until our nostrils began to tingle and our eyes to smart. All at once we realized that the mine was filling with smoke.

While we had lain there comfortably arguing, some one in the attacking party had crept up and kindled a big bonfire just inside the tunnel. We were to be smoked out like trapped foxes.

"Come on," coughed Joe.

"Come on where?"

"Up. Where else?"

Then I remembered that exit so thoughtfully provided by the first owner of the Amor de Dios. We dived through the acrid fog, until Joe's light showed us the opening in the diorite wall. A moment later we were scrambling up the stone stairway. The smoke had not risen above the tunnel, so we had pure air to breathe.

The stars were shining brightly in an inky, velvet sky, when we pulled out upon the shelving ledge. Warily we approached the lip of the precipice and looked down.

Nobody was in sight except one Chinaman dragging fuel for the fire. We knew, however, that there must be many more out in the brush, waiting to plug us if we appeared.

It would be poor strategy, we decided, to disclose our location by picking off that lone fire tender. Joe thought that with the coming of daylight we might be able to pot several of our foes and drive the rest out of the canyon. I reminded him, however, that we had only revolvers. Furthermore, as soon as the sun began to beat down upon us, that unshaded area would be a sizzling furnace.

"I'm going," I declared stubbornly. "You don't catch me sticking around here to fry like a pancake on a griddle. Besides, a draft may bring the smoke up here at any moment and give us dead away. Come on."

Of course, I didn't know there was any way off our perch except down the stairway; I merely hoped there might be. And there was.

It took us some time to find it, though. We had to be careful about making noise and did not dare to use our torches. To make escape even more difficult, a stiff wind began to fan us and it brought thick clouds racing across

the sky from the southwest. In a few minutes we had not even the glow of stars to light us.

By feeling around we discovered several breaks in the flinty porphyry, any of which might afford a route to the bottom of the gorge. After making three or four false starts, and crawling painfully back, we struck the right one.

Finally we stood in a clump of cactus, badly winded and scratched, but at least with an excellent chance to get clear away. Joe jubilantly proposed a flank attack; but I promptly vetoed that scheme. Outnumbered and inadequately armed, unable to see our hands before us, we could hope to accomplish nothing.

Since the enemy was to the north, the only safe way for us to move was up the canyon to the south, on the chance that when morning came we could find an exit from the pass and circle back to Hermosillo.

Progress in that dense gloom was distressingly slow. Again and again we crashed into patches of cactus or of thorny shrubs. Then the going became easier. We seemed to be in a sort of path.

Joe's bulky form was barely visible in the murk ahead of me. All at once it went out of sight. There was a heavy splash.

I could hear him ten or twelve feet below, spluttering and swearing. Cautiously I switched on my torch. Joe was floundering around in what was unmistakably a small irrigation ditch with a low bank on the far side.

"Shut up!" I implored. "They'll hear you back at the mine."

I slid down the near bank, hopped over to the other side and gave him a hand. We drank deeply and continued on our way. That ditch augured a farm, human beings—possibly help.

Straining our eyes for a farmhouse light, we walked out into a field where knee-high vegetation rustled about our legs. It had a queer, sickening smell and almost at once my head began to ache.

"Wait a minute." I caught Joe by a dripping arm. "What plant is this?"

"Alfalfa, I guess."

"In a cat's eye!"

I dropped upon the ground and groped about until I plucked a flower. This I pressed to my nose for one unpleasant instant; then I trained my light upon a vivid red blossom.

"Just as I suspected. Opium poppies."

"Wha-at?"

"We've blundered upon an opium plantation. Blame well hidden, too. And opium means Chinamen, of course. Wong Foo! Now do you know why he didn't want any mining camp in Paso de Chivas? That would bring people into the neighborhood, which would mean certain discovery of his secret."

"Hey? Not so fast, Pete. If that's so, who is it that has been digging around in the Amor de Dios?"

"His farmers, probably. They really wanted guano, for fertilizer. He didn't know anything about mines, but supposed like everybody else that the Amor was a treasure vault. So he didn't want Bonney nor anybody else to buy it. Don't you see?"

"Humph! Maybe you've got it figured out straight, Pete. Too bad for the little girl if you have. But on the other hand it puts that slippery Chinee right where we want him."

"Maybe. Let's get out of this dope garden. It smells worse than Wong's house and my head's splitting."

We retreated toward the ditch. As I led the way, I was actually reeling, for I have always been extraordinarily susceptible to narcotics.

I tripped over a squirming object. A dog let out a yelp and took hold of my ankle. Joe kicked it viciously and it ran off howling.

Not unconscious, but very faint from the poppy fumes and the pain of the

dog's bite, I sank down. Joe seized my collar and was hauling me out of the poppies when——

"Hands up!"

Although the command was given in Spanish, it was with a decided Oriental accent. We could hear some unguessable number of men scampering around. No doubt about it, we were surrounded.

"Well, what do you want?" called Joe. "Why this interference with peaceful travelers?"

There was silence for a long minute. I had struggled to my feet. We stood side by side with arms raised, half expecting every second to be our last.

The clouds parted briefly, disclosing a circle of dim shapes.

The Chinese jabbered excitedly and delightedly among themselves. We had been recognized.

A catlike little chap advanced and relieved us of our revolvers. He patted our pockets, but took nothing else.

"Well, what do you think you're going to do with us?" Joe demanded. "We are American citizens and——"

This brought squeaky laughs.

"That is for Wong Foo to say," we were told.

He gave an order in his own tongue, and two of our captors trotted off down the canyon. We were prodded gently from the rear and guided toward a lantern that came bobbing through the night. Ahead was a cluster of low buildings.

Before one of these we were halted. The door opened, we stepped through obediently, and a padlock clicked behind us.

Our torches revealed that we were in a vile, dirty hole, alive with cockroaches and half filled with empty packing cases. Upon two of these we sat to lament the misfortune that had come at the very moment Fate had dealt us a trump card, and also to rack our brains for some plan to regain our liberty.

"There are just two things in our favor," said Joe. "One is that when somebody starts a fight, a Chinaman will always hunt his hole. They get rattled easily."

"Yes. I suppose that's correct, to a certain extent. What's the other thing?"

"My wooden leg."

"Oh, don't go driveling about that lucky leg again. You might as well put your faith in a four-leaf clover."

"You've got a license to say that, after all the scrapes this peg has pulled you out of. Tell me; what is it that Wong Foo fears more than anything else?"

"Why—wooden legs. I guess."

"Yep! And he's going to throw a spasm, when he sees this one. The time to break the news to that old yellow peril is just about here."

To my ears came the sound of ripping cloth.

"Point your flash light this way, Pete."

Joe was posing before me, arms folded. His right foot was thrust forward. The trouser leg had been cut away at the knee and the sock was rolled down over the shoe top.

The wooden leg was bare.

"Now take my light, too. Lay them both over here on this box, where they'll shine directly on my leg. That's fine. Now turn 'em dark. But be ready to switch 'em on again, the instant that Wong Foo pokes his head inside that door. Give him a good eyeful, then we'll duck. Are you with me, Pete?"

"I suppose so. It's the nuttiest idea that—— Well, that hop patch must have affected you worse than it did me. But we've got only a minute or two to live after Wong comes, anyway. We might as well die trying to make our get-away as standing by an adobe wall."

"That's the old spirit, Pete. Listen!"

Footsteps were approaching our prison. Some one was carrying on a singsong monologue. It sounded like Wong Foo's voice.

The key rattled in the lock. To me it seemed that an age passed while the door swung open.

Wong Foo stood in the doorway, and with him a coolie who carried a lantern. Behind them was a group of five or six others.

"Ha! Señor Redhead. You see now what happens to foolish gringos who will not listen to Wong Foo. Step out here and tell us how much ore you are going to dig from the Amor de Dios."

My trembling hands fumbled for a moment. Then my thumbs found the flash-light buttons, pulled them back.

Wong's eyes stood out like twin moons. He was rigid with horror.

Joe reached down and caressed his mechanical knee.

A wild shriek of dread rent the air. Wong Foo threw up his hands and fled as though pursued by the devil himself. As he bounded away he knocked down two or three of his retainers, who promptly picked themselves up and followed him. So did the others, not knowing what had terrified their leader, but no doubt supposing themselves to be in the most appalling danger.

The only one who did not turn tail was the fellow with the lantern, and my fist caught him smack on the jaw. Before he hit the ground, I was outside, fogging along in the wake of Joe. He was headed straight east—I think for no other reason than that the hut faced that way and at that time he was wasting no time in swerving to right or left.

I tripped and went headlong into a bed of poppy plants. Almost instantaneously I was up again, boring into the darkness. Again I fell, my feet entangled in the lush foliage. Joe was having the same trouble.

Recalling a trick of my boyhood, I took to jumping high and coming down solidly with both feet. What gait Joe adopted, with his wooden leg, I never asked; but he managed to keep up.

Simultaneously, we were hurled back with bleeding hands and torn clothing by a barbed-wire fence. That detained us for only a moment, however. We crept through to a steep mountainside dotted with clumps of organ-pipe cactus.

There we had to slow down for the grade, but we kept right on putting distance between ourselves and Wong Foo's ranch. Providentially, the clouds did not lift until we were over the first ridge and into another canyon or valley.

Onward and usually upward, in a generally northeasterly direction, we tramped and climbed without pause. My bitten ankle was swelling and throbbing; but I remembered Joe's more serious handicap, gritted my teeth and pushed along without complaint.

We swung just a little too far to the east. When dawn came the vast military prison at the southeast corner of Hermosillo was looming on our left. That meant a mile of extra walking, and it was the longest mile I ever covered.

Undeniably we looked like desperate characters. Our bespattered, woebegone appearance and Joe's unclad wooden leg would have brought us under suspicion, anywhere. So we were not surprised when two shabby policemen with Mauser rifles hailed us with the information that we were under arrest.

"Arrested?" Joe sighed wearily. "What is the charge? We have broken no law, and if you will take us to the Hotel Moderno, we'll prove that we are not beggars."

"We have not said that you are beggars, for we know that you are far worse than that. Our chief, Major Torres, will tell you about it at the *juzgado*."

This was a body blow. We had not been taken into custody as mere vagrants, but as criminals, and the Lord only knew what trumped-up accusation would be filed against us.

"We were fools to come here," I

mourned. "It was a cinch that Wong would have his side kick, Torres, throw out the dragnet for us. Your leg won't get us out of this snarl. Wonder if there's an American consul in this town."

"They won't let us get to him, if there is."

Two other policemen came loping in from a side street and congratulated our new set of captors upon earning the hundred pesos that apparently had been posted for our apprehension. The newcomers added themselves to our escort and helped shoo us along the Avenida Oaxaca.

"Bah!" spat one disgustedly. "Here come those accursed bandits. Let the cowards see how brave policemen snare gringo outlaws."

Joe raised his head eagerly. I knew exactly what was running through his mind, for I was thinking the same thoughts. There was bad blood between the local authorities and the roving dragoons that are supposed to keep the peace in the remote districts of northern Mexico. And what was it that Polonio had said? No one except these Federal officers dared to run counter to Wong Foo, or words to that effect.

A handsome young captain, with a cavalry saber and about the neatest uniform that I had seen below the border, led a dozen heavily armed, alert-looking troopers along the avenue. He looked at us curiously, and his moustachios curled in a smile, as he spied my pal's right leg.

Joe slapped me smartly on the back.

"I understand now why we are arrested," he bawled. "It's because we know all about their opium business."

"Que dice?" rapped out the captain, reining in his horse. "Did you say something about opium?"

"Close that mouth, gringo," snarled a policeman, jamming his rifle into the small of Joe's back. "Another word and I shoot."

"And I shoot, too." The Federal officer drew his revolver. "What is the charge against the Americans?"

The Federals were ranged behind their leader, grinning at the prospect of a row.

"Out with it. Why are the Americans detained?"

"I don't know. We——"

"Because we accidentally strayed into Wong Foo's poppy field," thundered Joe. "And because we're ready to show the Federal authorities where it is."

"He lies! He lies!"

"I'll take charge of the prisoners, Gomez. Felipe, Alvaro, give the Americans your horses."

While the policemen protested volubly and profanely against this interference, we climbed aboard two of the cavalry ponies. Our rescuer leaned over and extended his hand.

"I am Captain Ramón Cabral," he stated. "Now what is this about a field of opium and my wily old enemy, Wong Foo? I have been sure for a long time that he was smuggling opium, but have never been able to prove it."

"We don't know that he smuggles it, but we know for a certainty that he raises it—in a little valley at the far end of Paso de Chivas. Do you know where that is?"

"Why, yes."

"Then you'd better go there in a hurry. Maybe you'll catch the whole gang. But send some of your men out into the mountains on both sides to cut off their escape."

"Ah! We go! Forward, soldiers of Mexico!"

Cabral seemed to forget that we were prisoners. He took it for granted that we would follow him to Paso de Chivas, and we did the best we could. But we were tired to the point of exhaustion, our stirrups were much too short, and those soldiers set a pace that was simply too much for us. Before we entered the canyon, they were out of sight.

About the time we reached the Amor de Dios, where a pile of embers still smoldered in the mouth of the tunnel, a volley of shots crackled among the hills. Then all was still.

Sure that we had missed the big show, and too worn out to care much, we ambled along to the ditch where Joe had taken his midnight ducking. There we met the main body of soldiers, driving four barefooted coolies before them.

"You were right, my friends," Cabral cried triumphantly. "This is a glorious day. We found the poppy rancho, a big one, and also a factory for preparing the opium. The trade in Sonora is now broken up."

"Not unless you caught Wong Foo. Did he get away?"

Cabral winked.

"He tried to, but—well, we had to shoot him. He is dead. Very unfortunate."

"You bet it is! I wanted to walk up to that old reprobate's south end and kick him with this wooden leg and tell him how much joy it gave me. It was his Jonah leg, all right."

This must have sounded like nonsense to Cabral; but he did not ask for explanations just then, having other matters on his mind. The Federal government had offered a reward of ten thousand pesos for putting an end to the opium traffic that had been going on for two or three years in that part of Mexico, and he was pledging his aid in collecting it.

"But we're not entitled to it all," declared Joe. "We only gave you the tip. At least half the money belongs to you soldiers."

"Thank you, gentlemen. You are more than generous." Cabral shook hands with us again. "It is indeed a glorious day for us. With my share, added to my present savings, I will have almost enough to get married.

"You must pardon me if I speak of personal matters; but I am overjoyed, and I owe all my good fortune to you. I am betrothed to the most beautiful girl in all Mexico, the Señorita Armanda Veragua, one of the heirs to the Amor de Dios Mine. But the pay of a captain——"

"Oh-h-h! That's why she was so anxious to sell the mine and get hold of a piece of money—to get married. And the old burrow isn't worth two puffs of Wong's dream smoke."

Joe cocked an inquiring eye at me. I nodded.

"Well, Cabral, if it hadn't been for your sweetheart, we might never have stuck around Paso de Chivas long enough to get wise to Wong Foo's little secret. So, because we think a lot of her, and you, too, you can just regard our half of the reward as your wedding present from us.

"Hey, there! Don't you go trying to kiss us. Let her do that, if she wants to. It will give us much joy. Won't it, Pete?"

And I agreed that it would.

PRECOCITY TALKATIVE

KENNETH X. MARTINE, a realtor of Duluth and Miami, has a daughter, Maysie, aged eight years. One evening he and his wife were having a vast amount of fun and doing a lot of laughing over a new "word" game after Maysie had gone to bed. At breakfast the next morning the young lady looked preternaturally sad, solemn and lugubrious. Several times she sighed loudly. Finally she could contain herself no longer.

"What a delightful time you two had last night!" she exclaimed enviously. "Oh, I feel the need of a husband, mamma; I *do* feel it!"

By Fred MacIsaac

THE LAST Atlantide

In Six Parts ~ Part V

Author of "The Progress of Peter Pratt," "Scum of the Sea," Etc.

This is said to be the journal of Pagneomon, a prince of lost Atlantis. His father was murdered by Negor, a noble, and Pagneomon was brought up by Thoro, a scientist and priest of the evil god, Magor. When Negor usurped the throne, planning to wed forcibly Arsinhœa, a princess, Pagneomon went to the rescue. En route he saved a girl, Murnova, from robbers, then ambushed an ambassador and impersonated him. He was welcomed by the king, and met Arsinhœa, with whom he fell in love. She plotted with him. Murnova was to pose as Arsinhœa, while the latter escaped. The girl agreed because she loved Pagneomon, but made him swear never to marry any one but her. He had already sworn to Arsinhœa never to hope for her love, and so he did not care. Tathe's brother arrived, and Pagneomon killed him in combat to avoid an exposé. Then he and his men, with Arsinhœa disguised, left the city. Pursued, they took to ships. They learned that Negor had wedded Arsinhœa after all—yet she was on Pagneomon's ship! The king was deceiving the populace. At last the fugitives landed on the shore of a great mountain and went on to the caves of the wise Thoro.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE NEWS FROM LUTH.

AS we plodded upward from the shore on foot, I was contemplating my future operations, for I was determined to take the field. Already I had fifty men and the caves would furnish hundreds more. However, we were all on foot and no force of footmen could withstand the charge of mounted, heavily armed soldiers.

While it would be possible for me to procure a limited number of buthoms, I felt that my army would have to consist of infantry, and I needed to devise a method of combating with them large forces of riders. Fireballs would be

of great aid, though I doubted if enough of these fearsome objects could be manufactured in time to use along a whole battle front.

I had constructed two rough litters of boughs of trees, and upon one of these the princess reclined, while the other was occupied by the wife of Tundor and the smaller boy.

There was no road and I was not sure of my way, but I hoped to encounter a scout from the caves or stumble upon some landmark which would tell me the route.

Daylight found us still climbing, footsore, our clothes torn by thorned bushes, our sandals in tatters from the rough ground—and at last I knew where I was. We were about a thousand paces to the right and below the secret entrance to the main cave of Thoro. Far below us to the west I saw a large body of mounted troops encamped, evidently set to watch the caves and cut off my band.

I decided that we must spend the day lying flat on the ground, huddled behind rocks, for, while we could easily reach the entrance before they came upon us, I did not wish to betray to them its location.

I arranged the litters so that the women might be sheltered beneath them, but the rest of us must lay in the open under the burning sun, hoping that no enemy would stumble upon us.

The afternoon was half gone when I discovered a man peering at us from beneath a rock a score of paces distant, a fellow with a shock of sand-colored hair and greenish eyes. Tundor saw him at the same moment and whispered to me—he had been laying beside me —that he would try to crawl over and cut him down before he could give an alarm.

"Wait," I replied. "I know him. In fact, I recognized him for a slave who had served me during my sojourn in the caves.

I made a certain sign, whereupon the fellow crawled toward me on his hands and knees, then flattened on the ground in front of me.

"Greeting, Pagneomon," he said. "I was set by my Lord Thoro to watch for your coming. The enemy is in great force at the foot of the mountain."

He pointed in their direction.

"Have they tried to attack the caves?" I asked anxiously.

"Not yet. Thoro has sent messages to Negor that all the power of Magor will be used against him if he disturbs the tranquillity of the priesthood."

"Good! We shall wait until dark and then move to the entrance."

"That was to be my message to you if I found you."

Two hours more we waited, and then it was dark enough to proceed unobserved. I passed again into the caves with great joy, for a moon had waxed and waned since I had departed, and I was returning with my mission accomplished.

My fishermen, greatly alarmed, passed through the stone portal and were immediately conducted by the slave to the lower caves. I turned my own followers over to attendants; then, leading Arsinhœa, who was also pale with apprehension, I moved toward the well-remembered room of the head of the brotherhood.

Thoro sat in his familiar position behind his great table, poring over a huge book; but when we stood before him, he rose and prostrated himself before the princess.

"Welcome, queen of Atlantis," he said, his white beard spreading curiously upon the stone floor.

"A poor queen, and a fugitive, reverend man," replied the girl in a trembling voice. "Rise, sir, and bless me."

"The priests of Magor do not bless, but neither do they curse," he replied. "But all our power and knowledge is at your disposal." Then he rose and em-

braced me, to my pride and satisfaction.

"Pagneomon, you have justified my confidence in you," he declared. "I know all you have accomplished and I rejoice at your success."

"A poor success," I commented bitterly. "Have you late news from Luth, master?"

"Be seated, Queen Arsinhœa," he pleaded, drawing forward his own chair of heavy timber. "Yes, I have late news by the means you know about. Negor has concealed the escape of the queen and has set up a false Arsinhœa in her place."

"And who is this woman who dares to take my name?" cried the girl, throwing back her head with a regal gesture.

"It is a woman named Murnova," he said.

The answer stabbed me like a knife and for a moment paralyzed all motion in my limbs.

Murnova!—the girl who had risked all for me, whom I had mourned as dead, and to whom I had sworn two solemn oaths which seemed to have ended my personal life.

"Murnova," repeated Arsinhœa casting at me a strange look. "How can that be?"

The old man bowed to her before answering:

"King Negor went at an early hour, the morning after your escape, to your chamber to greet you in person on your bridal day. He found Murnova on your bed, asleep.

"As he gazed at her the cruel savage king for the first time in his life was stricken with love of woman. He waked her gently and demanded of her where was Arsinhœa and how she had come there. Murnova answered not a word, and Negor, who should have been wild with anger, admired her courage. He spent the entire morning talking with her, and he called in attendants who identified her as the woman whom you had brought into the palace. Then he set pursuit upon you, but he instructed his officers to call the woman with you, Pagneomon, Murnova—for his plan was forming in his mind.

"In the end he decided to wed with Murnova instead of Arsinhœa, and, as her coloring is much like yours, princess, he determined to make Luth believe that she is Arsinhœa. He led her veiled to the temple, then rode with her in the light of torches through the great square, but did not permit the nobles to view her closely. Until now none save her serving women have seen her face; and his love for her grows every day."

"So Murnova, instead of going to her death, went to gain a crown," I murmured.

"The traitress!" cried Arsinhœa, lifting both hands to heaven in her anger.

"Blame her not," chided Thoro gently. "By her audacity you were enabled to escape, Queen Arsinhœa. And who may refuse to wed a tyrant when in his power?"

"If she loved you, Pagneomon," Arsinhœa declared to me, "she would have slain herself ere she wed the beast Negor. I should have done so. This is her revenge upon you for sacrificing her to save me."

"I am glad she escaped," I said slowly. "I do not think she wished to marry Negor, but she had none to substitute for her, while the king would have found another woman to wed had Murnova slain herself. Since there must be a false Arsinhœa, I am content that it be Murnova."

The princess regarded me frowning, then said: "For my own reasons, I also am satisfied that it is she who is the queen of the murderer. Thoro, I hunger and thirst and I am very weary."

"Your quarters are prepared," he said eagerly. "While they are not like your rooms in the palace, I hope you will find them comfortable, and there

is food in plenty. Permit an old man to escort you."

With a curt nod to me she departed, leaving me to my reflections. Here was a curious situation. By two oaths I was bound to Murnova—to wed her if she lived and to remain single if she died. Yet she was wife to King Negor. If it was of her own volition that she married him, I was free from my obligations. But that I could not believe, yet she lived and I was bound to wed her. But I could not, for she now had a husband. If I killed Negor, must I wed her? It was a complication beyond solution.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE STANDARD OF REVOLT.

IN my heart I had agreed with Arsinhœa that the shrewdness of Negor had prevented our raising the royal standard and assembling an army with any success—but I had not counted upon the sagacity and ingenuity of Thoro.

Throughout the land there were nearly twenty thousand persons in the secret brotherhood of Magor, who obeyed without question the commands of the good old high priest.

A few days after our arrival in the caves, simultaneously in Luth and Mummor and other towns and villages throughout the nation, morning light revealed writing upon the walls of many buildings, and the writing was as follows:

A FALSE QUEEN REIGNS IN ATLANTIS.

The true Arsinhœa has escaped the clutches of the tyrant Negor, scorning to wed the murderer of her royal father, and is safe among her friends.

At the proper time she will appear at the head of her army to drive the usurper from the throne. All true Atlantides be prepared to rally to her standard!

The wrath of Negor at this insolence took the form of unprecedent slaughter of the innocent. Hundreds of nobles were killed, some of the houses whose white walls bore the writing were leveled to the ground and all within put to the sword. He held a public audience and brought Murnova before the nobles—but the audience was held by lamplight and she showed herself for a second only. If any doubted she was Arsinhœa they dared not speak aloud, yet the rumor spread like wildfire.

Meanwhile, huge bodies of soldiery scoured the country, destroyed homes and ravaged private lands, seeking vainly for the princess and myself.

One night Fedrath arrived at the caves, accompanied by my own mother and sister whom she had drawn from a hiding place near the mountain where they had been forced to take refuge when the pursuit of my band made further progress toward the caves dangerous. Fedrath informed us that my Uncle Gathor and my Cousin Baruth had been slain by the frantic Negor upon information from Zuthor that I was the person who had impersonated Tathe and carried off Arsinhœa, while everybody even distantly kin to my family had been put to the sword. The passage under the city walls had been discovered and gallant old Teckor had been murdered. Terror reigned everywhere.

My joy at meeting my mother and sister was great, and we talked far into the night, while Fedrath was closeted with Thoro, giving him further information.

Three days later five thousand mounted men, half the available force of buthom riders in the kingdom, were discerned moving toward the mountain, for Negor had decided to exterminate the priesthood of Magor. Safe in our fastnesses, securely concealed, we rested while they scoured the great hill. They even entered the smoking crater where scores perished by the poisons in the air.

We lay hid another week when cer-

tain indications caused us to don the face coverings provided for such an emergency. And then the crater belched fire and smoke, semiliquid stones, red hot, fell at a great distance, and such was the shaking and rumbling that we thought the end of all had come. In a few days the mountain was again tranquil, but it had driven our enemies far away in a state of demoralization and they did not return.

Meanwhile our brothers in the city were secretly assembling bands of those who wished to overthrow the tyrant, and the reports which came by the homing birds informed us that their numbers were increasing every hour, ready to ride forth and join us when we took the field.

And I, after long consideration, had evolved a plan to meet and overthrow mounted men with footmen. I laid it before Thoro who considered it gravely and finally gave his approval and set his mechanics to work to manufacture great numbers of the spears of various lengths which I required.

"Choose your ground wisely, convince your soldiers that you can conquer, and I believe your strategy will succeed," he said.

For days I rode over the now deserted countryside to select the spot where I should pitch my camp and defend it. And at last I came upon a place that I believed ideal.

Freemen and slaves in the caves were then put under my orders, and all save the old white-bearded savants emerged and exercised daily in the new tactics, while I preached to them my assurance of victory. And now came recruits, straggling in, having slipped through patrols in darkness, for word had been sent forth that the time had come. Many of these came mounted, and in a week I commanded a hundred buthoms, while my little army was a thousand strong.

Arsinhœa accompanied by my aunt, mother and sister often, and watched us as we moved over the ground.

Spies, no doubt, sent word to Negor of what was afoot in the rough country.

My spears of varying length were now issued and I arranged them in this manner. The shortest spears were six feet long and these were in the hands of the front rank, while the second rank held longer spears, the third, fourth and fifth ranks still longer, and finally there were spears so long and stout of shaft that no soldier could carry them. When I lined up my men they stood a foot apart, the spears of the rear ranks resting on the shoulders of those in front, and a hedge of sharp points protruded as thick as needles upon the back of a queer little animal of the country which thus protects himself.

The fugitives came fast, now—hundreds per day. Mancor and Tundor and a dozen other lieutenants taught them the business of soldiering as I had invented it.

News arrived that from Mummor was advancing an army commanded by Zuthor, with instructions to drive the rebels into the crater of the burning mountain, while Negor was making warlike preparations and would follow soon in great strength.

With two thousand men, including two hundred mounted, I advanced down the mountainside toward my chosen ground and, marching beyond it, I camped.

It was a valley two hundred paces wide, protected upon each side by towering hills, sloping upward at its mountain end.

Arsinhœa, mounted upon a milk-white buthom, wearing the costume of a soldier with helmet armor and sword, accompanied us, to the joy of her followers, and retired to the caves only at night.

I had set most of my men digging pits across the valley, at the bottom of which were thrust into the ground many

short spears, points up. Then the pits were covered over with branches, a frail roof upon which we placed earth and small stones so that it seemed solid ground. We left certain paths over the line of pits, marked by white stones so that our men might cross in safety, and I dug the pits behind our camp. The very heavy spears had been carried, several men to each one, and laid upon the ground at the head of the valley where I would make my stand.

By the time these preparations were completed my spies came back to report that the enemy was in sight, and my mounted men rode forth to meet them, commanded by Mancor, with instructions to avoid fighting and fall back before them.

I set up many tents across the valley in front of the pits and placed there five hundred spearmen under Tundor, whose orders were to offer some slight resistance but to fall back at once before the charge of the buthoms. Seeing my tents, Zuthor would suppose that he had defeated me or I would not have abandoned them; he would lose caution and speed in pursuit of the flying footmen.

Now I drew up the main body of my men some twelve hundred strong in a straight line across the valley, in the close order of which I have spoken, and then they discovered the purpose of the very long and heavy spears. I had them driven in the ground very solidly, their points extending over the soldiers above the hedge of spears so that, if all went wrong and my untried warriors fled, this row of sharp points might impede pursuit until I could rally my ranks.

Nine ranks deep my force extended across the level ground, and a little way up the hill. The lighter-armed men who fled across the pits were instructed to form at right and left upon the hillside, while the buthom men would draw up behind these to defeat an attempt to ride around and take us at either side. I had one hundred archers, and these were placed on the hillsides in front of my main body so that they might shoot down the enemy before he reached the line and so throw him into confusion. And, best of all, behind the line I had a score of slaves trained in the hurling of fireballs, and they had more than two hundred of these alarming weapons. They might turn the tide of victory.

I made all lie flat upon the ground and cover their gleaming spear points with earth, that they might not be visible too soon to the enemy, and then I rode to where Thoro sat his mount beside the princess, and waited for his approval.

"It is well conceived," said the old man. "Have you posted guards upon the hilltops to watch the country, lest Zuthor send a strong force by a wide detour to take you in the rear?"

I reddened with shame for, so confident had I been that Zuthor would fall into my trap, I had not considered that he, also, might have generalship. "I shall do it at once, sir," I muttered.

Then Arsinhœa called to me and I bowed before her. She was girt with armor of gold, fashioned for her in the caves, and from the top of her glittering helmet floated the red feather of the kings of Atlantis—a warrior queen. Her red hair streamed behind her, no longer restrained by the helmet as during our journey, and her little white hand gripped an unsheathed sword.

"Do you like me, Pagneomon, in my armor?" she asked, with a smile.

"I adore you, Queen Arsinhœa."

"Fight well for me, Pagneomon. Let me not be prize of war."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE BATTLE IN THE VALLEY.

NOW a spy reported that my buthoms were flying before the enemy who were as numberless as the grains of sand on the mountain. Then Thoro drew the reluctant Arsinhœa to a place

of safety behind my lines, and I sent men posthaste to the hilltops to report what they might discover. Then I rode carefully across the pit path to my false camp and from there was able to see, upon the plain below, my mounted force retreating rapidly before an overwhelming throng of enemy buthom men. My plan was being carried out.

I estimated that Zuthor mustered four thousand buthoms. He also seemed to have several hundred oxcarts filled with archers, and a cloud of footmen who numbered at least twenty thousand, but these were still far off. When my mounted gained the camp and halted, the enemy, seeing the spears of the footmen, sounded a trumpet, and the pursuit halted to wait for the main army which moved slowly forward. Zuthor evidently thought the battle would be here and wished to take no chances but overwhelm me by force of numbers.

As I have mentioned before, the riders of buthoms were nobles and freemen; the footmen were slaves or low-cast townsfolk or laborers from the sea bottoms. Battles were decided by the charge of the mounted men, while the footmen were useful in pursuing, killing the wounded or hunting down the opposing footmen who usually fled at the first onslaught of the great birds. Zuthor had twice as many buthoms as I had birds and footmen, yet he wasted an hour until he could draw up his force at a distance of three or four hundred paces from our position.

Then a trumpeter rode forth and sounded a parley; an officer came from the group surrounding Zuthor, and I sent Mancor to meet him as a matter of courtesy.

I marked Zuther himself by his gold armor and the red-and-white feather—colors of the governor of Mummor. He sat a huge, black bird and carried the royal colors fluttering from his tall spear. He would lead the charge of buthom men, slay with his own hand as many as possible and fall in the front rank before giving back a step; such were the generals of this day. But I would avoid encounter so that I might direct my whole line, and only when all was lost would I smite a foe with my gray sword.

The parley ended, both officers rejoined their armies, and Mancor said: "A summons to yield to the king's mercy without condition."

We both laughed.

The trumpet of Zuthor sounded and his birds began to move forward rapidly. We discharged a few arrows at them, then fled the camp, ran rapidly across the pits and joined the main body.

I saw the great mass of mounted swoop upon the camp, saw tents go down and heard cries of triumph—though they did not find a single foe. Then, without pause and in some disorder, they drove headlong in pursuit and in an instant became entangled in the row of pits. The whole front rank went down and the second line followed them. Their confusion was increased by my archers who rained arrows upon them from the hillside.

But the press behind was tremendous, for they had been forced to narrow their front to enter the valley. Zuthor, by bad luck, had driven across in safety by one of the paths and now stopped his mount to urge his men on. Some succeeded in avoiding the spear points because the pits were already full of squirming men and birds, and rode over their bodies.

After some minutes, in diminished ranks, I would have sworn they lost a third of their number.

They charged again. But now my heavy troops were in position, and the enemy drove their birds against an impenetrable hedge of spears which killed many but threw the rest into confusion so that they became unmanageable. Their ranks were broken up, and my

archers poured arrows upon them and emptied many a seat.

I stood behind my lines on a rise of ground, observing the slaughter and restraining myself with the uttermost difficulty from plunging in, sword in hand. I saw Zuthor back up his bird, then force it to leap, and it rose high in the air, only to light upon the point of one of the very heavy spears which met the buthom squarely and impaled it. Zuthor rolled off upon the spears of men in the rear ranks.

My soldiers, inexperienced as they were, had seen how the pits had slain so many of their enemies and how the hedge of spears, for the first time in history, had stopped a charge of mounted men, and they shouted with exultation and gave back not an inch. Though the lumbering oxcarts with archers had been stopped by the pits, the footmen had found their way across and were coming in masses, but these were thrown into confusion by runaway birds who were carrying their riders out of the battle.

One of the enemy officers rallied a few score riders and attempted to climb the hill to work around my line of spearmen, but the buthoms in reserve there charged and drove them back.

There must have been two thousand birds with riders still plunging in the space between the pits, the hills and the hedge of spears, and at any moment there might come a break in my line. I therefore gave the word to the slaves, who commenced to hurl the fireballs, and this ended the battle.

I have described the effect of the operation of a single fireball; multiply this by a hundred and you will have some idea of the terror caused by the simultaneous explosion of a great many. The shrieking of the buthoms, the yells of terrified men, the roar of the astonished army of footmen who supposed that Magor had come to the aid of his friends, and then the multitude taking to flight, birds and footmen mingled in wild confusion, the birds biting viciously their own infantry to clear a path for themselves—it was a chaotic scene.

With the greatest difficulty I prevented my troops from breaking ranks and pursuing, which would have been fatal, for the enemy still outnumbered us ten to one. I had to slay one or two fellows before I convinced the others that they must hold their ground; but I sent the mounted and light-armed men to capture riderless and uninjured buthoms which were plunging about madly and which were much more valuable to us than human prisoners.

For a long distance the ground was strewn with the weapons of the enemy footmen, thrown away in the flight, and when it was safe we rounded up bands of these footmen, totaling a couple of thousand, and gave them the choice of death or joining our forces. If Zuthor knew not how to make use of infantry, I had learned the way, and I knew that I would have to be very much stronger to defeat King Negor who would soon be upon us.

In this strange battle I had lost only twenty men, with fourscore wounded, while three thousand of the enemy riders lay dead or too sorely wounded to escape, and the bodies of a thousand footmen were upon the valley floor.

We captured on the ground or drew uninjured out of the pits some four hundred buthoms, and found alive above five hundred riders who chose to fight in the future for the queen rather than King Negor.

I had no fear in enlisting such men, for the conqueror is always a desirable leader, and none in Atlantis had real love or loyalty for Negor. Indeed, when our recruits set eyes upon the lovely Arsinhœa, they became the most devoted of her adherents and fought as bravely in the future as any of my men.

I now would have a respectable force

of buthoms for the next encounter, but I had learned a great lesson in this fight which the enemy had yet to understand —that mounted men should be used as an auxiliary force, while battles should be decided by well-trained and properly armed infantry.

The footmen of Luthor had been poorly clad wretches—barefoot, many clad only in a breechclout and armed with a short spear. Certain companies carried shields, but most had no protection against arrows or javelins. My front rank had been shielded by very large, padded leather bucklers, and all wore helmets.

To arm properly my new army I had only to pick up swords, spears, helmets, breastplates and bronze bucklers from the ground and from the bodies of the fallen, and I knew that, when next I went forth to battle, my troops would be equipped as no infantry since the world began.

But Arsinhœa and Thoro had come down when they saw the battle was won, and the warrior queen rode along our lines extending her hands in gratitude to her soldiers. Their cheering was like the thunder.

And then she came to me, drew rein and gazed at me with eyes that filled with tears. The color in her cheeks was high.

"Pagneomon, my general," she said softly, "you have defeated a multitude of my enemies with a few brave men and your great courage and intelligence. Ask me what you will, it is granted."

"Queen, I lay the spoils of victory at your feet. I ask only your approval."

"H'm," she said. "There is the matter of a certain oath. Would you not seek release from it?"

I sighed. "For what good? I have sworn other oaths. I am not a free man, but your slave."

Arsinhœa's eyes snapped, and with her white teeth she drew in her under lip.

"As you will, general!" she retorted, then rode off to rejoin Thoro who had already been met by Fedrath.

In truth, I feared to be released from my oath to Arsinhœa, lest I tell of my love, and until I knew that Murnova was wife of Negor of her own free will, my conscience forced me to regard myself bound to her.

We worked all that day collecting the spoils and creating order among the ranks of our prisoner recruits. It was the custom after a battle to dispatch all wounded of both armies as naught could be done for them; but, knowing the craft of Thoro's physicians I bade my men spare all except those already dying. As a result of this policy some three hundred wounded were made sound and later added to my forces.

My hope now was that Negor, in person, would come against us. Had I been in his place, I would not have stirred but would have waited for the enemy to besiege me in my impregnable city. Yet even Negor could not resist the fear that his people would deem him a coward if he did not take the field; therefore, he would probably venture forth.

And now I turned my army into workmen to make a multitude of weapons of the varying lengths required by my heavy infantry. The caves clanged all day and night as the slaves constructed many more of the giant spears which had been so useful. For spearheads we had plenty from the spoils, but as timber was scarce we spliced several of Zuthor's spear shafts together to make the desired lengths. My ambition, when I met Negor, was to oppose him, not with two thousand, but twenty thousand heavy infantry; and it looked as though I should have my wish, for dissatisfied men from all quarters were coming in by hundreds every day.

The news from Luth was that Negor would march with two hundred thousand men, while all the buthoms in the

country were being taken to increase his forces of mounted. I counted on several weeks before the king took the field —and I needed every day.

And then there came astonishing reports from Mummor, for, upon news of the terrific defeat of the governor who was hated even more than King Negor, the city had risen and declared for Arsinhœa.

No longer need we lurk in the caves; we could raise the royal standard over the citadel of Mummor, draw upon its citizens and quadruple our forces at once. I decided to advance to Mummor since there was no enemy between us and its walls, and since the dwellers there were now our followers.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE FALL OF MUMMOR.

AS Mummor was nearly halfway to Luth, should Negor move swiftly he could appear before the city ere I could reach it, in which case the citizens might lose heart and open the gates to him. Therefore, speed was necessary, and so I spoke to Thoro. Arsinhœa was present—she was always present at our conferences, and often she made suggestions that were worthy of a wise man. Now she was exultant with the thought of occupying the second city of the kingdom.

However, Thoro shook his head.

"Do not shut yourself up within the walls of a city and await the enemy," he warned. "In the books of the past it always has been the weakest who submitted to being besieged. In the besieger's hand is the choice of when to strike, and I have noted that when a city is invested it falls more often than survives. At present our fortunes are in the ascendancy and Negor trembles in his palace; but if you show yourself content to rest behind walls of a smaller city than Luth, you deliver the remainder of the country into the enemy's hands. When you are in the open, Luth may rise behind him if Negor marches out to meet you; but if he besieges you in Mummor, Luth will know that an insurrection within cannot be aided by you."

"Yet we must occupy Mummor," I protested, "for the sake of those who hold it. We must succor them."

"True. Enter Mummor, crown Arsinhœa in the palace, and arm all citizens not already under arms. But get your army out before Negor sits down before it."

"We need grain and meat," I continued, "and there is great store of it in Mummor and the country round. This barren country cannot long support our army, so we must go forward. But your advice is good, Thoro; I shall not be caught behind the walls of Mummor."

"Nor shall I rest there if you keep the field," declared Arsinhœa. "The queen's place is with her soldiers."

In two days we were ready to march, and we set forth, a brave array, leaving behind us Thoro and his savants. Ahead rode six hundred mounted men, as well armed as ever went out under the king's banner from Luth.

Behind came myself and Arsinhœa accompanied by my Aunt Fedrath—the women on buthoms, though litters were carried should they tire; and there followed nearly five thousand footmen, the finest infantry that ever set foot upon the soil of Atlantis, all armed with sword and spear, protected by bucklers. Fully half of them, my original force, wore heavy breastplates, impenetrable to arrow or spear, which irked them much by their weight on the march, but which would serve them well in battle.

When we left the barren country and entered the more inhabited lands we were greeted as saviors by the populace,

and many nobles with mounted men joined us until, when we arrived at the outskirts of the forests of Mummor where I had sought the blue-green fire, my mounted force had swelled to one thousand.

The fatuous king had not yet taken his army out of Luth, so we had plenty of time; but I omitted no precautions and advanced in battle array through the forests lest some sort of ambuscade might have been set for us.

When we approached Mummor the gates were opened wide, the walls were lined with women and children, and the army marched forth to meet us and drew up in a long line in our honor. All spears were decorated with flowers, and the new governor of Mummor, Abnemon by name, rode out unarmed, with both hands lifted high above his head in salute.

I responded in kind, met him halfway and escorted him to the presence of Arsinhœa who sat her bird with great dignity and looked like a war goddess in her shining armor.

Abnemon rode on one side of Arsinhœa, and I on the other as we passed through the gates and entered the main avenue of Mummor. As I had never before visited this city I observed it curiously and saw that it was a small copy of Luth—the same passages for bird and vehicle only, the same terraces upon which the people walked and from whence they now showered the queen with beautiful blue, white and red blossoms. Whether the people of this city believed her to be the true Princess Arsinhœa or not, they affected to believe it, for they had suffered much from Negor and Zuthor and welcomed a change of rulership.

The palace resembled somewhat that of Luth, but was very much smaller. However, its luxury was a delight to us after the poverty of the caves.

I made a tour of the defenses of the city, which I found disappointing. There were few and inadequate war engines, and the walls were neither high enough to be defended by a small number nor stout enough to resist the ponderous engines operated by vapor which I knew to be in the possession of Negor.

I found about one thousand mounted men in Mummor, most of them survivors of the battle of the mountain, and some ten thousand footmen. Immediately I set to work to turn these fellows into the same sort of infantrymen as those who marched with me, and also I put all armorers of Mummor to fashioning spears of proper lengths. There were five hundred archers, and I was glad to receive them, for there was my weakness. Abnemon assured me that fugitives from Luth were arriving every day to fill our ranks.

We spent a week of hard work in Mummor making every preparation for a siege, and all the time, from all sea bottoms in the vicinity, men were continually coming with loads of grain and provisions.

The queen also was busy, holding court every day, administering justice, righting wrongs; and so fair were her decisions and so beautiful and gracious was she that the people of Mummor loved her and were willing to die for her.

At last Negor moved against us. Our spies reported that he had pitched camp close to the walls of Luth and had assembled fifteen thousand mounted men and a hundred and fifty thousand footmen. The false Queen Arsinhœa was with him in his tent. She mingled freely now, with the courtiers and was popular with them. Negor consulted her in every move. If that were so I flattered myself I understood why he had delayed so long in marching, for Murnova would do all in her power to help me.

About a thousand paces from the north wall of Mummor ran the River Kawnoth, which was broad and deep,

and which supplied the city, through pipes laid underground, with water. With all my reënforcements, including the garrison of Mummor, I had not more than twenty thousand footmen, less than three thousand buthoms and a thousand archers.

Thus it was necessary to force Negor to narrow his front that he should not be able to envelope me with his horde, and I decided to draw up my army between the wall of the city and the river, although there was a risk that he might send part of his forces around the city, which was not of such great extent, and attack me from the rear.

If he did not do this I could defeat him by the same tactics which had crushed Zuthor; but if he did I had the choice of withdrawing into the city or retreating into the forest, and I determined to do the latter in accordance with the wise advice of old Thoro.

Abnemon and his councilors protested violently against my plan and demanded that I remain within the walls to defend the city; but I persuaded them that, if defeated, we might withdraw into the city, while the king could not take it before he had disposed of my army. It was the support of Arsinhœa which decided them to agree.

The horde advanced slowly, for they were transporting with them vast stores of provisions and scores of ponderous engines of siege. The king wasted his time in sending to us successive heralds with demands for surrender. The first three or four I sent back with polite refusals, but after that I just had the heads cut off from the bodies of the messengers and thrown into his camp by swift mounted men; so, finally, he desisted.

I followed my mountain tactics, with less hope of success, by covering the plain before my position with deep pits, exercising my infantry continually in the operation of the spear hedge, and keeping a swarm of spies about the usurper's army to learn his intentions. I promised myself that Negor should die in the encounter even if I were defeated, and proposed to keep by my side a picked body of mounted men to cut the way to the side of the monarch as he fought, that it might be my arm which would lay him low and thus avenge my father Teforn.

But fate and a woman snatched that joy from me in the manner which I shall now relate. Negor was in camp, two days' marches from me, and while he feasted with his generals, Murnova entered, followed by a dozen armed men who fell upon the murderer and slew him. The generals made no move to aid him.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE TERRIBLE MURNOVA.

ON the contrary, when the deed was done, as one man they prostrated themselves before Murnova and hailed her as Arsinhœa, the queen of Atlantis, daughter of a line of mighty monarchs, ruler in her own right and sovereign over hearts and heads and hands.

The news was hailed by the army with delight, for the cravens among them, knowing that the revolt was against the usurper Negor, assumed that it would now consider its purpose achieved and submit to the queen of the old line.

While there were many among the high nobles who must have been aware that Murnova was an impostor, they kept silent; but the rank and file of the soldiery, who had prepared most unwillingly to fight for Negor, were filled with delight at the accession of her whom they supposed to be the true Arsinhœa.

When this news was brought to me my anger was tremendous, for Murnova had cheated me of my revenge; but, after a time, I considered that she had struck a great blow for our cause, since without Negor the enemy had no

strong leader, and the girl I had rescued from the robbers would not and could not attempt to continue the war against her rightful queen.

How little I had understood Murnova. I had once treated her like a child and made no effort to discover what was in her mind, yet her fortitude and heroism in agreeing to sacrifice herself that Arsinhœa might escape should have proved to me her shrewdness.

Next morning in the royal palanquin she was borne at the head of her vast army, which advanced joyously against us.

I had far underestimated the resourcefulness and lack of scruples of Murnova, and I realized now that she could not have slain the king in the presence of his generals and escaped unharmed and triumphant had there not been a conspiracy. I was to discover the details of that conspiracy very soon, for there came into our lines a woman who told my captains that she had a private message for my ear which, when I heard it, I would reward them hugely.

I was sitting in my tent studying a plan of the battle ground which I had constructed upon a table, when a young officer told me of the woman, and curiosity caused me to order that she be ad-admitted. The woman was young and comely and came into my presence without fear. They had searched her lest her intention was to slay me and found no weapon upon her, and I did not stay her when she came very close and spoke in a low tone.

"I bear a message to you from Queen Arsinhœa, widow of King Negor," she said softly, with an arch smile.

"You may speak," I said coldly.

"Know, then, that Arsinhœa, whom you knew as Murnova, approaches to destroy you with an army of irresistible strength."

"If that is so, we shall soon discover."

"Now this is her message. I repeat it as she gave it to me: 'Pagneomen, my love, I remind you of your vow. I have survived, I am free. You are my affianced husband. I will make you my consort and set you on the throne and I shall be your slave. Negor wed me against my will, but I charmed him to save my life and he was wax in my hands. He had sworn to have your life and would have destroyed your little army with his mighty force; but I conspired with the general, Muldorath, to slay him, showing him that, with Negor gone, the rebellion would melt away, and his reward would be my hand in marriage. You shall come to me and slay Mulrodath, join your army to mine, dispose of the false Arsinhœa, let her be the sacrifice now as once was I, and we shall reign in peace and happiness over all Atlantis.' "

She finished and I sat silent, for I was so appalled by the wickedness and treachery and cunning of Murnova, whom I had supposed a kitten but who had proved that she was like the huge cat with long tusks that roamed through the forest of Mummor, that I could not speak. Her love for me, which had seemed beautiful when she passed into the chamber of Arsinhœa, had become a horrible thing, and her vile suggestion that I slay Arsinhœa, my queen and my love, to reign with an impostor, sickened me.

No matter how a man may love, if he is an upright man he sets his honor and his duty above his affections. Even had I not loved Arsinhœa and been captivated by Murnova instead, I should have refused to do this thing. How much more, under the circumstances, did I revolt at the thought!

Yet, by the most solemn oaths I was bound to this wicked woman whose affection was unbridled, who considered no crime too horrible if it brought her the man upon whom she had set her savage heart. I had sworn that I would marry her if she survived, and she had

survived. She had summoned me, and if I did not obey I was forsworn. Yet I would not obey.

I had sworn by my dead father whom I respected above gods and all men; my father would absolve me from that oath were he living; and honor, too, freed me, for the oath of fealty to a sovereign takes precedence above all other oaths when they come into conflict.

"Return to Murnova," I said. "Tell her I pity her. If she will disband her army and surrender, I promise to spare her life, though she deliberately persists in setting herself up as the real queen who, as she knows better than any, reigns now in Mummor. I am loyal to the true queen of Atlantis despite any oaths I may have made to Murnova, but I shall keep my word and make her my wife if she obeys my order. Otherwise, I shall destroy her and her army. Now go."

"My queen is very fair, lord," insinuated the messenger.

"Go!" I shouted.

She trembled and fled from the tent.

And so it had now resolved itself into a war between queens, the true and the false Arsinhœas, the woman I loved and the woman who loved me, the maid to whom I was bound by my oath of allegiance and the creature who had my promise of marriage.

Murnova had the force of numbers and the prestige of the city of Luth, while we were weak in soldiers. But we were strong in the right and we would conquer.

I could not reconcile the sweet, grateful, loving little creature who had prattled to me during my journey toward Mummor, who had served me so assiduously during my residence in the palace, with this bold, haughty, unscrupulous usurper who dared advance against her sovereign, who had coldly killed her husband, wretch though he had been, who had cajoled Negor's general into conspiring against his master by a promise of marriage—all this wickedness to reach my side. She did not seem to comprehend that her conduct must make me abhor her. Yet it took less courage to commit these crimes than to march unattended into the chamber of the princess, there to await death by torture. Yes, she was brave, as brave as the doughtiest warrior.

And I was to learn that she was more sagacious than any of her generals.

Meanwhile, behind my back, men were whispering together, and the people of Mummor who had already turned their coats were considering turning them back again. The arguments which were being used by the timorous were hard to controvert though they were false as the false Arsinhœa herself, and this was their purport:

Was it not more likely that the daughter of the old king had been forced to marry Negor than that she had managed a miraculous escape through the aid of a beardless boy who by luck had won a victory over the stupid Zuthor? How did they know that the girl who reigned in Mummor was Arsinhœa? Much more likely that she was coming at the head of the army of Luth. If it was really the true queen who now came at the head of a great army to overthrow the impostor in Mummor, who should they take up arms against her, since their quarrel was with Negor who was dead?

Many were eager to swallow these sophistries because they believed it to their interest to do so; they were terrified time servers, and the multitude of warriors in the train of Murnova convinced them of the justice of her cause. Her two hundred thousand soldiers were two hundred thousand good reasons for believing in it.

The chief of these traitors was Abnemon, the governor who had my confidence, and Neforn, the general of the Mummor army. Had Thoro been with me to advise me, his profound knowl-

edge of human nature would have caused him to suspect disaffection and guard against it; but, alas, he was in the caves, and I was but a youth of twenty, more a soldier than a councilor and busy with my plans for the coming battle against enormous odds.

Only to Arsinhœa did I reveal the dreadful proposition made to me by Murnova, although I would have declared it from the housetops had I a letter from her to prove my words. The girl had been too shrewd for that, and had sent her message by word of mouth; and I, instead of disdaining a reply and seizing the woman who bore the message to force her by torture to confess it publicly, had foolishly sent her back in safety.

The wrath of the queen when I informed her was extraordinary, but most of all she reproached me for telling Murnova that I would still keep my oath and marry her if she surrendered herself and her army.

"I will seize her from you and tear her limb from limb!" she declared. "And if you attempt to stop me I shall serve you the same way."

I had never seen my sweet love in fury before and, though her rage appalled me, her loveliness, in anger, was so enhanced that I worshiped her the more, though I knew that such cruelty was impossible to her.

"You may be sure that Murnova will not surrender after the message I sent to her," I declared. "She will attempt to destroy your army, capture you and me and then try to work her will on both of us. I had some fear of Negor who, after all, was a man of great courage and shrewdness, but I do not fear an army commanded by this country girl."

"Women can think of things that men forget," she replied. "You must fight harder to conquer this traitress than you ever would have fought against Negor."

Next morning the vanguard of the army of Luth appeared on the plain, extending for many thousand paces, one flank on the river, the center at the king's highway and the other flank stretching far into the country beyond. From the topmost tower of Mummor I watched them come. Beside me were the queen and Abnemon, the traitor.

It was an array to daunt the bravest heart. As usual the mounted men led the way, and the sun flashed its rays upon shining armor and gleaming spears, while red pennants and streamers on the lances made the terrible panorama almost beautiful.

While still a long way from the walls of the city they halted and prepared to erect their camp, and I noted where the pavilion of Murnova was set up, well in the rear upon some slightly rising ground behind the center of the long line.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

MY army was already in position between the city wall and the river, with Mancor on the field in command and Abnemon with three thousand of the footmen of Mummor manning the walls of the city. Behind my lines was the north gate through which I could withdraw my troops or send reënforcements into the city. For safety's sake, I insisted that Arsinhœa, remain behind the walls during the battle, and after some demurring she consented to accept my suggestion.

In my mind was forming a daring plan. I had marked the position of Murnova's tent by the line of the king's highway, which made it easy to locate in the darkness of night. I considered taking some hundreds of my mounted, two thirds of my entire strength in birds, and hurling them upon the enemy at this point in the middle of the night, hoping that I might cut my way to the tent of the false queen, seize her and make my way back to my own lines

before they could recover from the surprise and muster enough of their forces at that place to prevent my escape. Fortunately I did not confide my scheme to any one.

I had doubted that Murnova would actually give me battle, and even now I supposed that it was because she dare not order a retreat that she had come so far. But I did not dream the extent of her ascendancy over the generals.

One hour before midnight. I appeared in my camp in full armor, summoned Tundor and informed him of my project. For the first time he protested an order.

"Pagneomon," he pleaded, "this is a brave plan but much too indiscreet."

"It is indiscreet to fight an enemy outnumbering us ten to one?" I replied coldly.

"But you take the flower of our mounted. In the darkness you may lose your way, or be cut off by a multitude of the enemy. If you are slain, what will become of us?"

"If I am slain in the big battle, the result is as serious."

"If you insist upon this expedition, let me command it. My loss is unimportant; your generalship will survive the loss of the force of buthoms——"

"I wish to capture this woman myself."

"It is not like you, Pagneomon. Never before did I think you too young to command an army."

"Enough," I commanded. "Did you ever hear of a battle in the middle of the night in Atlantis? Well, they do not expect us; the surprise will be complete. Their line is far extended and we shall strike with overwhelming force at a certain point. We cannot fail."

"At least consult Mancor."

"I shall. On him falls the command should I be slain or captured. Go and prepare your men. Tell them I lead in person."

Mancor approved my plan, but he also begged to be allowed to command instead of myself, and him also I overruled. Alone in my tent I wrote a line to Arsinhœa, to be delivered to her if I did not return. I had not spoken of the plan to her, because I knew she would forbid it. This is what I wrote:

To Arsinhœa, queen of Atlantis and of my heart:

I am about to set out upon an enterprise which may end the war or cause my death. At midnight I charge the enemy with intent to capture Murnova, counting upon darkness and the audacity of the attack for its success. I have placed Mancor in command should I fail to return, and I wish now to tell you of my great love for you as a woman, not a queen. For you I gladly lay down my life; you are my breath and my star. I mind my oath. Never while I lived would I dare to speak such words to your majesty; but if you ever receive these lines it will be because I have ceased to live, repeating your name as I give up my spirit. If I fall, go to Fedrath and with her fly to Thoro, for I doubt that Mancor can defeat the enemy.

Folding this and sealing it and placing it in wrappings, I put it in the hands of my chief slave with instructions to deliver it to Arsinhœa if I died.

All being ready I summoned the slave of Thoro in charge of those with fireballs, and ordered him to mount a dozen men well armed with these missiles. These would ride close to me waiting until I gave the word.

Then I mounted and rode to the buthom camp where I found that Tundor had drawn up his men ready to mount and follow. I passed along the line, telling them that we were going to capture the false queen and end the war, and that they need have no fear. They were to follow me in absolute quiet until the order came to charge.

We rode along the walls of Mummor at a safe distance, so that the watchmen would not raise an alarm, until we struck the highroad which led straight to the enemy.

We rode in night so black I could not see a dozen paces from me. There was no rattle of sword nor clink of chain nor sound of spear haft striking against buckler or armor.

When I had covered what I estimated to be two thirds of the distance to the outposts of Murnova, I formed my men so that twenty rode abreast upon the highroad and twenty in the fields on either side; thus we were in fifteen ranks, deep enough to overwhelm any force which might oppose us upon a narrow front. On the return we would all keep to the highroad which would form us some fifty ranks deep, irresistible even though they rallied in great numbers.

There was no evidence of an enemy ahead of us, not a light of a camp fire along the whole line. Evidently all save sentinels were deep in slumber, dreaming of everything except such an onslaught.

We moved on noiselessly until I discerned ahead of us a dozen mounted men in the road. Their challenge came at the same instant, and then I gave the call to charge. We rode down the patrol before they knew what had happened, but the shouts and clashing of swords and spears gave the alarm and now I heard men shouting in the distance. Suddenly a trumpet sounded—but by this time we were scores of paces into them and moving like the gale of wind.

Now lights were appearing on all sides, multitudes of dark forms outlined against them. On every hand rose the brazen notes of horns, cries of terror and bellows of defiance. Directly ahead a company of mounted set itself in our path, but I sent them flying with a single fireball which lit up the country for a second and showed us tents to right and left, and swarms of footmen in great disorder.

These poor creatures, too frightened to level a spear, were trampled upon by our mad birds and, intent only upon avoiding danger, hampered us not at all. We were through their lines in a minute and for a few hundred paces encountered no opposition, though I knew they were closing in behind us. Then we came crashing into the queen's guards who had time to draw up their mounts and bar our path. But they were five hundred strong and had extended, not knowing from whence the danger came, and so were only two files deep. Behind them I could discern the high top of the queen's pavilion.

Down upon them we thundered, shouting and screaming, our birds uttering their own shrill outcries. Before me appeared a warrior whom I transfixed with my lance. I avoided the thrust of the second-rank man and ran him neatly through with my sure sword. Some of my men had fallen, but the files behind drove on and we had broken their line and were upon the guarded tent. I arrived at its rear and, not waiting to ride around to the entrance, cut my way through the hides with my sword, riding into the tent amid the shrieking of Murnova's women attendants. The lamps had been lighted and I saw the whole place in a glance. A dozen girls cowered upon the ground, but Murnova was not there. Pointing my sword at one of the attendants, I demanded the queen.

"She is not here."

"Where has she fled?"

"She did not fly, lord. An hour since she rode forth with her generals to make a tour of the camp."

Thus, bold and successful as had been my expedition, the prize had evaded me.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE MERCY OF MURNOVA.

THERE was no time to curse or bewail. Outside I heard the cries of triumph of my men. The madmen had forgotten that the enemy would be upon them, one hundred to one, in a few min-

utes; but I remembered and I sounded the signal for assembling at once.

Some of my fools had set fire to the camp, and bright tongues of flame were leaping skyward and betraying our scanty forces. Valuable minutes were lost in persuading the fellows to reform. The passion for loot had seized some of them, and, glancing along my line, clearly visible in the light of the burning tents, I realized that fully a quarter of them had not obeyed the signal. Meanwhile, I knew that our path was now closed, and to cut our way back would be accomplished with fearful loss —if we achieved it at all.

"Forward!" I cried, and started onward in the direction away from Mummor.

"Stay!" exclaimed Tundor. "You forget the road."

"Not I!" I laughed. "We return by a different road."

At full speed we dashed on in the direction of Luth, and in a minute we were again in darkness. I knew that the enemy would move slowly, expecting us to return to the attack, and that, for a few moments, there would be no pursuit. So, when we were a thouasnd paces beyond the camp, which was now visible along its whole line, a conflagration in the center and torches appearing as far as the eye could see on either hand, I turned to the right and moved rapidly in the direction of the river. This was done because I considered that they would have sent most of their mounted from all parts to the rescue of the royal camp and we would have only footmen to oppose us at the extreme end of their array.

Furthermore, should we be fighting desperately opposite our own army, meeting unexpectedly strong forces, I was confident that Mancor would move to our rescue.

For a quarter of an hour we rode fast until I saw, not far ahead, the river, blacker than the black night. Then we turned and waited five minutes to rest our birds so that they might be fresh for the last dash.

Although it was a calamity to have won the royal camp and lost Murnova, it was fortunate for us that she was absent with her generals because, minus their leaders, the mounted of the enemy did not venture to follow us, but waited for our return or a word from the highest officer to advance. Never had I heard of generals of Atlantis giving up their slumber to ride around their lines in the middle of the night; thus such a contingency had not entered my calculations, and it grew upon me that Murnova must be responsible for such vigilance.

There were many lights in the enemy lines ahead of us but if they expected attack I knew they were awaiting it with their backs to us, therefore I formed my men, twenty in a line and some forty-five rows deep and charged. We came upon scattered bands of footmen, then upon an array drawn up but facing the wrong way, and we rode them down, before they could turn. We crossed rough, dark ground, which disturbed our formation, and then, to my astonishment, encountered a strong force of mounted who met our charge with one equally ferocious.

Again there was the clash of arms, the crash of bird striking bird, the clang of bronze on armor. We were just cutting them through because of our dense formation when from the left there came out of the darkness a strong force of mounted who struck us upon our unguarded left side with terrific force, scattering our compact body, topping over many of our birds and throwing us into confusion. An enemy drove the breast of his mount against the side of my buthom and I was hurled from my seat. I fell heavily upon the ground where I lay, unable to rise, expecting to be trampled upon by the heavy mounts, yet escaping miraculously.

At the moment of my fall the slaves began to hurl fireballs of their own volition, and, as usual, the enemy gave way. Thus my men, ignorant of the loss of their leader, rode free—those who had not perished—and without further opposition made their way to my lines, knowing the danger of the pits and avoiding them. Of all the men who rode out with me, only about half, I learned later, came back, and my rash venture had been without profit and had cost nearly a third of my total force of mounted.

Now the ground began to be lighted up and I saw a band of footmen approaching with spears to slay the wounded. My fall had stunned me but I was recovering my senses, and I realized that I had not been pierced by sword or spear. I had begun to move on hands and knees away from the murderers when there appeared a troop of mounted, directly in front. I leaped to my feet and turned to the right, but I was seen and they rode directly at me.

Sword in hand, I turned and faced them, though I knew my doom was at hand, and the light from a torch fell full upon my face. A spear was being leveled at me by a rider when a woman's voice screamed shrilly: "Capture! Do not slay!"

In a second I was surrounded and suddenly found myself in the presence of Murnova and her generals.

She sat her mount in woman's dress —no armor, no helmet, her hair piled upon her head in a knot—beautiful and startling in the flickering light of the torches. Beside her rode a huge man whose helmet bore a tall, red feather and whose costume was that of a general. I did not doubt he was Muldorath who murdered Negor for love of her.

In the right hand of Murnova was a light sword. Muldorath bore heavy lance and buckler, and beside him hung a great two-handed sword like that my father had been wont to wield.

"Capture none!" he shouted. "Slay me this dog."

As he spoke, an expression of ferocity crossed the face of the false queen. Like lightning she turned, thrust suddenly with her slender weapon and drove it through the bare, bull-like throat of the great general, who fell from his bird with a groan.

Murnova had withdrawn the sword and held it on high.

"I want no generals who permit an enemy to burn my camp!" she cried. "Nor any who disobey the order of the queen. Oramo, you are now in the place of Muldorath."

A moment of shocked silence; then Oramo, suddenly promoted, shouted:

"Long life to our Queen Arsinhœa!"

"Convey this man to a tent, where I will speak privately with him," she said, when she had acknowledged with a stately nod the homage of her new general—which the others had been quick to copy. "From him I may learn what force assailed my camp and how it succeeded in driving my cowardly soldiers before it."

I followed several soldiers who rode ahead and on either side, while Murnova turned her haughty back and preceded us, her generals around her. Desperate as was my situation, I devoted more thought to the astonishing woman and understood, now, how my misfortune had occurred. Murnova, after all, was the real general who had chosen the midnight hour to ride forth with her guard and make sure that her army was alert, and, by the most dire chance, I had chosen to cut my way back in the one spot where there happened to be a great force of mounted upon the alert. To her, I had no doubt, had come the idea of attacking my formation upon the side, for there we were very vulnerable although we were irresistible to a foe which confronted us.

And now I was in her hands to be used as she chose.

I marveled at her quickness of wit which had saved my life for the moment, for she had recognized me as her men were riding me down. And I marveled at her audacity in slaying her chief general, the man whom she had promised to marry, when he ventured to disregard her command. Furthermore, her instant promotion of Oramo was all which had saved her when she had performed that deed, for otherwise they might have fallen upon her and slain her in their anger; instead, she had preserved her ascendancy, and Oramo, no doubt, would be her slave instead of her general. A few weeks had transformed a meek, timorous young girl into a bold, brutal warrior queen; that she would slay me if I defied her I did not doubt.

For our interview Murnova had taken possession of the tent of some commander at this portion of the line—a plain soldier's covering, small and ill furnished. She was already within when my captors led me through the entrance.

"Remove his arms and leave him with me," she said from her couch of skins, and, when they demurred at risking their queen alone with an enemy, she flashed a glance of fire upon them before which they quailed and departed.

"Now, Pagneomon," she said sweetly, "prostrate yourself before your queen."

I remained standing and returned her glance until she dropped her eyes. "My queen is not here, Murnova."

"Breathe not that name," she commanded in a low tone. "Pagneomon, why are you so cruel to one who loves you?"

"I serve the queen; you are her enemy; you have assumed her name and station and wage war against her—that is why."

Murnova smiled at me.

"And who persuaded me to impersonate that stupid girl, to wear her clothes and occupy her place, by oath of marriage which he has violated? Can I be blamed for wishing to live when my husband and my love awaited me with impatience? Pagneomon, it takes a strong woman to be queen of Atlantis; in my place your Arsinhœa would not have survived an hour. Did you note how I force my soldiers to worship and obey me?"

"I saw you do an unwomanly thing—murder a man who was unguarded. Your hands are covered with blood, Murnova."

"I can wash them," she said indifferently. "Why made you this attack—so foolish, so insane? You are a poor general, Pagneomon; I have shown that I am a better one."

I winced at this because it was true enough, and she laughed when she saw that I had felt her thrust.

"I hoped to find you in your tent, capture you and thus put an end to this civil war."

She nodded. "Bold, as I would expect you to be; but you did not know that Murnova also is bold and thoughtful as well. I am no bull-headed Zuthor, to rush in without looking to right and left. You cannot defeat my army as you slew and scattered his, my husband-to-be; nor will I permit you to tell me where I shall offer battle. Your Arsinhœa is doomed! Were you back in your lines you could not save her. Now you are a helpless prisoner at my feet; at least you ought to be at my feet—but you are so bold, Pagneomon." She sighed, but her smile mocked. "Much has happened since you deceived me with your caresses and sent me to what you were sure was my death. I have been a queen and I have sat upon a throne, and I like it. I shall not yield. I have learned to beguile men and to command them. You shall marry me and be king, Pagneomon, or you shall die."

"You could not make me king, Murnova. Your army would not brook it."

"My army will obey the queen's command," she said haughtily.

I folded my arms and threw back my head.

"Call in your executioner. Or perhaps you prefer to slay me yourself as you slew your general."

To my astonishment the haughty Murnova burst into tears, fell upon her couch, buried her head in her arms and shook with sobs.

Because I was moved to pity and feared my weakness, I spoke harshly:

"There is the true Murnova—the weak, weeping, wretched woman whom I rescued from the robbers and the picta's bites."

She raised a tear-stained face to me and piteously said:

"Won't you marry me, Pagneomon?"

Although I loved Arsinhœa with a surpassing love, I was sorry now for this poor creature.

"Murnova, descend from this throne, give it to Arsinhœa, admit your imposture; she will forgive you at my entreaty and I shall keep my word and make you my wife."

Then the old Murnova changed into the imperious if false queen of Atlantis, for she sprang to her feet and regarded me with fury.

"You love this woman, you have always loved her, and because of that, not because she was the princess, you sent me to die for her! I shall make you my husband, and I shall slay Arsinhœa with my own hand. I have spoken."

My pity was over, my anger high.

"Then slay me now, for I shall never marry you, Murnova. I hate and despise you."

For a moment I thought she would grasp her sword and drive it into my heart; but her mood softened and her lower lip quivered. She managed to smile, a queer, twisted smile, and clapped her hands—which brought two captains running into her tent.

"You need greater humiliation than death at present," she said coldly. "Convey this man through our lines, for he has given me valuable information and I have promised him his freedom." Turning to me, she added: "When my standard flies triumphantly over the palace of Mummor I will give you audience again. Now go."

Unable to credit that the woman was deliberately giving up her prey, I stumbled after the officers, but at the tent door I turned.

"This is noble of you," I said. "I thank you, and I shall remember your clemency."

"Go before I change my mind!" was her sharp retort.

"A boon!" I cried. "Give me back my sword."

"Give it him," she commanded indifferently. Thus I received again my good gray weapon and, exultant at my astonishing good fortune, I passed through the lines to the outposts, where my guides abandoned me. I walked cautiously forward, aided by the lights of my own camp which were twinkling in the distance; for the return of the expedition, leaderless, had awakened all and spread consternation through the army.

In an hour I was at my outposts, to whom I gave the word of the night, and who welcomed me joyously. The news of my return preceded me, and Tundor and Mancor and a multitude came forth to greet me with shouts of delight. From them I learned that my absence had spoiled the triumph, for the news that we had penetrated to the royal pavilion, burned it and taken much spoil, had given the men the confidence they had been losing. After all, I thought, it was worth the loss of eight hundred buthoms to have spread terror in the ranks of the enemy, and I considered that the proud Murnova might find in the morning that the effect of the raid upon her army was extremely deleterious to their assurance.

Early in the morning the forces of Murnova struck camp and advanced some distance toward us. I prepared for the assault.

When five hundred paces distant they halted and began to pitch their tents. The left of their line touched the river as did my right, and it extended past my front and the wall of the city, which was one thousand paces in extent upon that side.

Despite the long line, so great were the numbers of the enemy that their depth was enormous, and in the rear came multitudes of carts drawn by oxen, containing provisions, and an array of oxen drawing siege engines.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE BATTLE OF MUMMOR.

TWO messengers had summoned me that morning to the queen in the palace, but I dared not leave my troops lest attack be immediate. Now, seeing that they proposed to delay, I hastened into her presence and prostrated myself before her.

"I am very angry with you, Pagneomon," she said when I had risen, though her eyes belied her words. "Without consulting me you took a fearful risk which might have cost your life and the ruin of us all. Why did you do this?"

"I ask your pardon, queen," I replied meekly. "I thought to strike a blow which would save us. Counting upon surprise, I hoped to capture Murnova and bring her bound before you."

"Yet you gained the camp. Did you permit her to escape?" she asked.

"She was absent, Arsinhœa. We fired the camp, as you know, then cut a way through their line at another point." Fearing to worry her, I refrained from telling of my capture; but she had already heard I had been taken and escaped to my lines an hour later.

"How did you escape?" she demanded.

I flushed. "I was brought before Murnova, who released me."

Arsinhœa's eyes flamed.

"Released you? What compact did you make with her? I would not have released you in such circumstances, nor would she."

"It was that or slay me for I refused again to carry out my oath to become her husband. She said she would humiliate me further and make her demand again."

"Humiliate?"

"She counts upon defeating me in this battle," I admitted. "She is very confident."

Arsinhœa left her seat and walked to a window opening from which she could look down upon the enemy array, and for a moment she gazed upon her rival's strength in silence.

"A woman is hard to understand, even by another woman," she said. "Perhaps Murnova's confidence is based upon something of which we are not aware, for surely she knows your prowess. There was a secret way out of Luth, remember. Perchance she knows of a secret way into Mummor."

This startled me indeed. But the secret ways of Luth were made by the brothers of Magor, and those of Mummor were also our men; had there been such I would have been informed of it, and so I assured her.

"I shall summon Fedrath," said my queen, "and she and I will force people to tell if indeed there is such a passage. Go now, Pagneomon, and be my general, not my captain of mounted. Let Tundor again be that."

I grew red under the rebuke, but I knelt and kissed the hem of her garment, whereupon she stooped and with both hands helped me to rise. For a second I gazed into her great eyes, so close. My lips yearned for hers, but I remembered in time and took my leave.

Until the battle joined I stationed myself upon the tower at the corner of

the wall where I could look down upon my army and the troops of Murnova, and keep in sight also the defenders upon the ramparts of the city. Now I saw a great herd of cattle being driven through the ranks of the enemy opposite my position. Presently they were in front of the battle line, and still the mounted men behind drove them on toward us. For a moment I could not comprehend this curious action, but understanding came quickly. Murnova was making use of the cattle to locate the pits I had dug for her buthom riders. The clumsy beasts lumbered on until the front rank broke through the false ground and fell into the pits with a great lowing and bellowing and squealing, and soon every one of my traps were broken through and yawning holes betrayed to the enemy their whereabouts. A thousand head of cattle lay impaled upon spear points, dying in noisy agony. But Murnova's mounted men were warned. That was what she meant when she had said that she was not like the bull-headed Zuthor.

And now there was activity among them as the buthoms gathered from all points of the line and concentrated opposite me. I saw thousands of footmen carrying long scaling ladders at points opposite the city wall, which meant that Murnova proposed to attack the city with her footmen and engage my army simultaneously.

It was unfortunate that our pits had been uncovered; yet I had not really hoped to make them as effective in this battle as before. There remained my wall of spears—fifteen thousand strong—my archers, my buthoms, my slaves with fireballs, while on the city walls were nearly five thousand citizens who should hold them in safety until the battle on the plain was decided.

All day under the burning sun my men held their positions, yet night came without further movement from the enemy. When darkness fell, I sent Tundor with one thousand buthoms through the city and out the south gate to fall upon any force which Murnova might send to work around Mummor under cover of night. I respected her ingenuity now.

Shortly after daylight Tundor rejoined us with his detachment to report that he had detected no movement to the south from the army of Murnova. Ascending to my tower, I saw no evidence that she had made any change in her position. What was she waiting for?

Having broken our pits, why did she not give battle, since she outnumbered us so tremendously? Her inactivity worried me, and I knew it did my troops no good; for the longer they contemplated the horde which opposed us, the more formidable it would look to them. Did she expect me to begin the battle? Such a move upon my part would be folly, for I occupied a carefully chosen position and must not move out of it.

I tried to remember all I had read of the ancient generals, but could recall no situation like this. I knew well that Murnova was entirely unacquainted with military matters, and so, whatever her reasons for inactivity, they could not be strategic. Nevertheless, I would have preferred to battle Negor or Muldorath, both of whom she had slain—downright fighting men who would have rushed upon the enemy without any of this hesitation as soon as they sighted them and knew them inferior in numbers. For such tactics I was prepared. But, with a woman general, who could guess what she might decide to do?

Late in the afternoon, however, trumpets sounded in the opposite camp, a great shouting arose and the whole front began to move toward us, pausing again just out of arrowshot. Sensing that these tactics were unnerving my men, I rode along the lines, cheering them.

Now their mighty array of buthom riders moved forward slowly and began

to pick their way across the pits, after which they reformed their ranks and faced us just out of arrowshot.

My men shouted taunts and gibes but still they sat silent, awaiting the word. Meanwhile, the vast army of footmen had moved up to the walls, and news was brought me that a force of several thousand buthoms had appeared at the extreme right of Murnova's line. I could not understand the purpose of this since there were naught but solid walls to oppose them. I dispatched a hundred men to ride around the city at our rear, to keep careful watch of the forests beyond and guard against a surprise; but the enemy was closing in and already the men with scaling ladders were beginning to fall under the rain of arrows from the wall.

And now the trumpets of Murnova sounded along the whole line, and I saw a general ride forward and lift his spear. The mounted forces drove their birds full tilt against us. Evidently the enemy had credited the defeat of Zuthor entirely to the line of pits into which his front ranks had fallen. Now, having avoided this danger, they were as confident as ever that footmen could not hold their ground against a charge of mounted. Behind my heavily armed spearmen, my buthom men were ranged with orders to slay any who tried to retreat. My archers, from an elevation, darkened the air with their arrows.

On they came, shouting, the birds shrilling wildly, the riders couching their spears or hurling them directly at the line of infantry, while I called encouragement and prepared to drive my birds into any breach which might be made in the hedge of spears. Because they had charged from a short distance, they struck our line less forcibly than had the men of Zuthor; nevertheless, it trembled 'neath the shock. But I rejoiced to see that it held. The first ranks of mounted recoiled from the long spears, but were driven against them by the momentum of the multitude behind. Fully ten thousand of the flower of Luth were in that multitude, fighting under the eyes of their queen, determined to conquer or die, while part of my line was composed of slaves and half-trained citizens who had no stomach for battle and who were struck with terror at the sight of the great birds bearing down upon them and the grim riders in full armor. My old line, veterans of the mountain, held like a rock, but the recruits were unsteady and only the presence of our own riders behind them kept them in their places.

So terrible was the struggle, I could not devote attention to what was going on elsewhere, but I rode up and down behind the lines, bringing up archers, marshaling fireball men and calling for mounted where a break seemed inevitable.

Hundreds of birds and men were down, but others filled their places, hacking at the hedge of spears, breaking them off, then striving to drive the birds through. A single or double rank of men would have been crushed at once —or soldiers armed with shorter spears —but my rear rank men thrust at the mounted when the front rank men went down, while the long spears driven in the ground, which could not be forced backward, were of tremendous service.

A roar of voices at my left showed me where a breach had been made and a half dozen of the mounted enemy had hewn their way through, but as I looked a rush of buthoms led by Tundor destroyed the daring group and forced our men and birds into the breach.

Several thousand footmen of the enemy had waded into the river and were on the point of turning our right by this means, but again my reserves of mounted met them and drove them back in terror.

For hours, it seemed, the battle continued, and the slaughter of the enemy by spears and arrows and fireballs was

tremendous. But our own lines also were being steadily thinned, and I saw that in many places but two or three ranks of spearmen remained. The fireballs at first had caused dismay and flight, but the enemy always returned to the fray. Our supply of the wonderful devices was limited and was soon exhausted.

When it seemed as though we could not last much longer, I summoned Tundor, ordered him to assemble all his forces of buthoms, of which we had less than one thousand left, and with these I led a sally in front of the spearmen, which decided the battle in that quarter. The enemy mounted were piled up in great confusion against our spears, thrusting and hacking, but no longer leaping madly upon the spear points. They were in no condition to resist a charge, so we tore through them from one end of the line to the other, then turned and cut our way back again, slaying and maiming and driving hundreds in flight. A trumpet put an end to it, and I was overjoyed to see the remnants of the enemy drawing off at last. We pursued them to the pits, but no farther, and I estimated that not more than three or four thousand survived out of ten thousand who had engaged us.

I saw that the battle beneath the city wall continued and that the defenders appeared to be holding their own as they hurled over the scaling ladders as soon as they were set against the ramparts. But my heart bled for my own followers, who had been reduced to half their number. Most of the survivors seemed to be suffering from wounds of one sort or another. Although we had emerged victors in this battle, we could not survive another; but I hoped it would not be necessary. Murnova could no longer muster such a force of mounted to hurl against us.

Much as I hated to disregard the advice of the good father Thoro, I was considering that I must retire into the city and stand a siege, for Murnova still mustered a gigantic army, while I was in no condition to hold the field. Then a commotion at the north gate of Mummor, which was behind our lines, attracted my attention. I saw a band of buthoms issue from the gate; I heard the clash of swords, shouts—and then I recognized Arsinhœa, mounted upon her white bird, riding directly toward me, followed by a dozen attendants, just as the gate of the city dropped into place with a brazen clang.

Supposing she had come to congratulate me upon my hard-won victory, I rode toward her. But the gestures she was making were of alarm.

"We are betrayed!" she cried, when she was near enough for me to hear her. "Pagneomon, the enemy is in the city!"

I glanced wildly around and saw that some of my followers were within earshot, so I rode to her and warned her to be less loud.

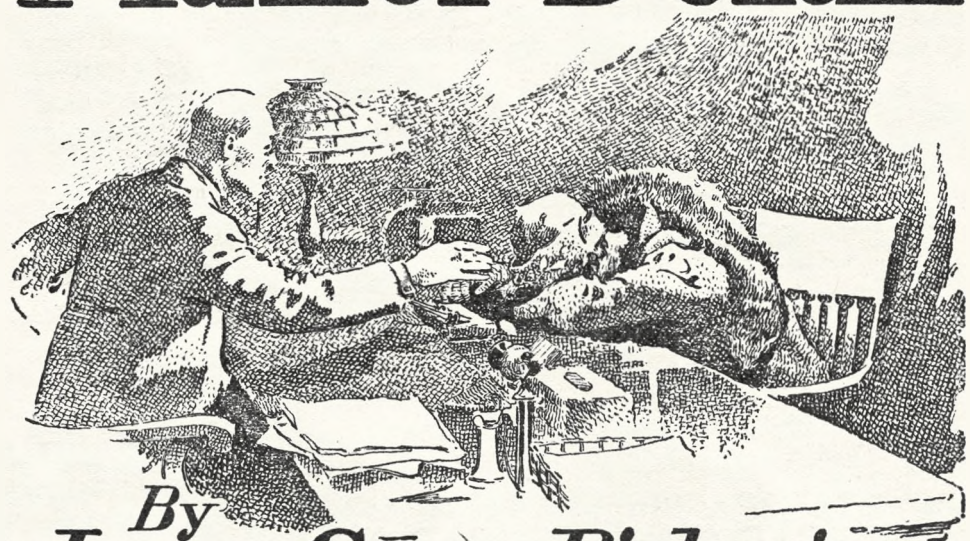
"What has happened, Arsinhœa? Quick!" I demanded. "We have just defeated the enemy with great slaughter."

"But while you fought," she said, panting for breath, "the traitor Abnemon opened the south gate to the enemy by arrangement. Fedrath got the news and brought it to me in time for me to summon a few faithful followers and ride to tell you. The enemy were just behind us at the gate and we had to fight our way out."

Thus Mummor had fallen. That was why Murnova waited. When she had finished her negotiations with the cowardly governor, she had sent her buthom forces against me to keep me occupied while she gained the prize for which we fought without a blow.

To be concluded next week.

A Matter of Detail



By James Sayre Pickering

Author of "The Fowler String," "The Princess and the Pearls," Etc.

Here's another story of Silas Tipping, Fifth Avenue jeweler, and his experiences.

H. EDWARD ALLSOPP, late of Park Avenue, but now of the East Sixties—and not far enough east, by the way, to be in the newest ultra-fashionable neighborhood, but too far to be in the old—entered the jewelry store presided over by the genius of Silas Tipping, and asked the floor clerk if Mr. Tipping could be seen.

Silas' floor clerk, a smiling and pleasant youth named George, was impressed by Mr. Allsopp's brilliance. Mr. Allsopp's sleek hair, his tiny, trained wisp of a mustache, his black stick and his shoes, gleamed with a dazzling and artificial polish, while the rest of Mr. Allsopp's habiliments—suit, chamois gloves, snap-brim hat, and spats—bespoke him, to George, the possessor of unlimited credit, one highly to be honored. And the clerk sped into Silas Tipping's office with the word that H. Edward Allsopp, in all his glory, waited the pleasure of Mr. Tipping.

Silas was sitting in his comfortable swivel chair, talking with his stenographer and telephone operator, Miss Noyes. That young lady had been, to judge from the pencil and notebook at her elbow, taking dictation, but she was now talking to Silas with an animation and a glow in her pretty face that could not possibly have been aroused by business, even so romantic and enthralling a business as was Silas'.

Silas cocked his mild blue eye up at

George from under his bushy brows, and took his announcement with a strange calm.

"Henry Allsopp, eh? Pretty neat, isn't he, George?"

"Very well gotten up, Mr. Tipping!"

Silas nodded, turning to Miss Noyes.

"Same old 'Nipper!' Tell him I'll see him in a minute."

George, mystified at this indifference, left Silas and Miss Noyes to resume their interrupted and unbusinesslike conversation, and carried the message to Mr. Allsopp, who seated himself carefully in one of the chairs provided at Tipping's for such contingencies, and waited.

It had been many months since Nipper Allsopp had last been in Tipping's. The Allsopp fortune, which had made their custom something to be seriously reckoned with by Silas, had disappeared almost overnight in one of those strange slumps which descend like a pall over Wall Street; and the loss had killed old H. Edward, Nipper's father. His mother, a fluttering, ineffectual, Mrs. Nickelby sort of person, had immediately taken refuge with relatives in the South, and was living in blessed seclusion upon the memories of better days.

Nipper had elected to remain and tempt fortune in the city. The many trinkets and some really valuable pieces of jewelry which his father had left and which his mother had given him he had sold, bit by bit, to Silas. Upon the proceeds of these and upon some money obtained in various ways—personal loans from those who knew him when, and so on—Nipper was conducting his precarious but brilliant existence. He was absolutely incapable of earning his living by any of the accepted methods. Brought up by a busy father and a doting mother, he had been spoiled and neglected into a good-looking parasite, and, if the truth were known, Silas had become rather weary of his visits before they had ceased, some months before, with the sale of the last of old H. Edward's scarfpins.

Nipper looked about him. Nothing had changed since his last visit. There were the same staid and quiet walls of walnut lined with the few small cases in which Silas was pleased to show the marvels which he had to sell. One diamond, a brilliant of fiery and heart-exciting blue, lay, a drop of pure light, on a cushion of velvet. Beside it, an emerald, negligible as to flaws, glowed and smoldered in a green that defied the palette of the finest colorist. One ruby and one sapphire shared another case; the sapphire of a blue that never was on land or sea and of a depth beyond the power of the eye to plumb. The ruby was a drop of blood—scarlet, arterial blood, with a flame at its heart. The third case was given over to a necklace of pearls, a graduated ribbon of sunlight hung in a graceful loop, gently, softly gleaming with a divine, rosy glow, filling the case as much by its own perfect radiance as did the lights flooding upon it.

Nipper had seen such things at Tipping's before. The only wonder of it was how the old man managed to get such marvelous things, and where he found the people to buy them. Nipper knew that other cases, ranged along the walls and looking as innocent as lowboys, contained all the stock necessary to a well-balanced jewelry business. He also knew, although he could not, perhaps, have said so in as many words, that when one was in search of the finest, one went to Tipping's for it—immediately, if one was of the initiate; and after every other source had failed, if one was not. Nipper gazed about him, and sighed a small sigh of regret for parted glories.

As he sighed, Miss Noyes slipped out of Silas' office and came quickly down the showroom toward him. She paused before his chair long enough to tell him

that Mr. Tipping would be glad to see him now, and then sped on to her desk. Nipper rose and went into the little office, where he found Silas Tipping standing by the table to greet him.

"Good morning, Mr. Allsopp!"

"How do you do, Mr. Tipping?"

Nipper swung out a chair for himself, jauntily, and Silas resumed his own swivel chair, sinking down in it until the starched bosom of his shirt rose in a beautiful curve under his chin.

"Pretty well, thank you, for a man of my age!" he said, smiling. "I'm having difficulties with my office force, though. Miss Noyes, the girl who just left here, and who controls my correspondence and my switchboard, has announced that she is leaving me!"

"Got a better job?"

"That, I can't say! She's going to be married!" Silas laughed. "I haven't any objection to that, except that it forces me to look around for some one to take her place. It won't be easy to do, I'll tell you!"

Silas smiled, ruefully, and Nipper, impatient, plunged into the business about which he had come.

"Mr. Tipping, it's been some time since I've seen you. You know the reason, I guess, as well as anybody. You've been kind enough to sell most of my stuff for me and so on. I'm not here to dispose of any more; there isn't any more. But I have had an idea in my mind for some time, and I want you to tell me whether or not you will help me out with it. Do you ever pay commissions to people who bring business into your place?"

Silas looked at the dapper young man for a moment. He had a grateful remembrance of more than thirty years of profitable Allsopp custom; and, to tell the truth, he rather admired in Nipper what was evidently an effort to capitalize his wide and wealthy acquaintance. Hence, he broke a rule of long standing, and nodded.

"Sometimes I do! I'm against the idea, I'll tell you frankly; but it's considered legitimate, and is pretty widely done. If you are thinking of sending people in here, I'll be glad to pay you a ten-per-cent commission on whatever they may buy."

"That's fine! The reason I asked was that I know some one who is thinking of buying a fairly expensive piece of jewelry, and I don't believe she has ever been here. I'm pretty hard up, too, and I could use a piece of change very nicely."

"All right! It's a bargain! Who is the woman?"

"Mrs. Hartley Downes. Do you know her?"

"I know of her. She's never been in here, and I'd like very much to have her for a customer. If you can get her to come in, I'll pay you a commission on the necklace, if she buys it, and on anything that she may buy in the future, too."

"Fine! She's an old friend of mine, and Hartley has been making a barrel of money lately. He's promised her a necklace, after her pestering him for one for a year. It ought to be a good one, too. I'll talk to her—I'm going to see her to-night—and I'll see if I can't get her to come in here. Of course, I won't be with her, and I don't want to figure on the deal, personally, in any way."

Silas nodded. "Naturally! Discretion is everything in matters of that sort!"

Nipper rose. "Well, I guess that's about all, Mr. Tipping. I'll get Mrs. Downes in here, and you do the rest. Her husband is a wealthy man, so her credit's good, I imagine?"

"First class! We'll do all we can, Mr. Allsopp! I'm much obliged to you, and all that, but I must insist that no word of this transaction ever reaches the ears of Mrs. Downes. It would do a great deal of harm. Not that it's ille-

gal, but people always seem to regard it as an imposition! Remember that!"

"Oh, absolutely! You can count on me! Good-by, Mr. Tipping, and many thanks!"

Silas shook hands with Nipper and escorted him to the door. Back in his office again, he thought the situation over. As he had told Nipper, this commission business was not one which he liked. Where it was regularly done, the amount of the commission was added to the price of the article, so that the commission was paid by the customer and not by the dealer. Silas, on the few occasions when he had given commissions, had been content to deduct the amount from his profits. Where the sale was large, it was not noticed.

In the case of a necklace for Mrs. Hartley Downes, it was likely to be large. Mrs. Downes was slated, by all accounts, to be the ruler of the young married set in which she moved. It was a rare Sunday that her photograph did not appear in the rotogravure sections, and the columns devoted to society chat featured her doings more often than not. Silas felt that any commission he might pay to obtain Mrs. Downes as one of his customers would be money well spent.

On leaving Silas' office, Nipper walked west about a block and a half, and entered one of the nondescript hotels which line the cross streets of that district. With a nod to the clerk, he went directly to a room which, according to the register, was occupied by a Miss Florence Martin. He knocked, and entered, as he was bade by a voice from within. A young woman was sitting on the edge of the bed, reading a magazine, and had any one of a thousand people entered with Nipper, he would have sworn that the woman sitting there was Mrs. Hartley Downes!

Some strange whim of Nature had given to Florence Martin the same wavy, chestnut hair, which held red lights on its gleaming surface; the same clear, blue eyes; the same delicately modeled, aristocratic nose; the same proud, full lips; the same height and manner; and more—Nature had completed the job by bestowing upon Florence Martin that indefinable, intangible something which was possessed, out of all the people on earth beside her, by Mrs. Hartely Downes alone. It was one of those strange, inexplicable resemblances occurring between two people utterly unrelated, save as each one of us is related to every other one of us. There may have been differences, but they were so subtle as completely to escape the casual eye. With Silas, who had seen nothing more of the real Mrs. Downes than her picture, the deception would be ridiculously easy. There was not the slightest doubt in Nipper's mind but that the old gentleman would be completely taken in. He, himself, had known Mrs. Downes from girlhood; and even now, he had to struggle to convince himself that this serious-faced girl with the troubled blue eyes was not the wealthy young matron.

Nipper's plans were complete now. His visit to Silas was the final step. It formed the excuse for a call from Mrs. Hartely Downes, just as Nipper's asking for a commission form the excuse for his own visit to Tipping's. He had that complete feeling of satisfaction that comes from work well done, as he sat in the one chair of the room and told Florence Martin of his call.

"Everything is jake! He fell for it like a little man! I even got a promise of a ten-per-cent commission out of him, if he made a sale!"

Florence looked at him, her eyes filled with a strange combination of relief and sadness.

"Nipper, do we have to do this?"

Nipper made a gesture of disgust with his cigarette.

"Listen! Do I have to go all over

this again? Of course we have to do this! Where are you going to pick up such easy money anywhere else? Don't be foolish! Why, you were just made for the job! Do you suppose I'd spend all my time coaching you and all my money buying you clothes, if I didn't mean to go through with it? Don't be absurd!"

Florence shrugged, discouraged. "I could do something—get another job and pay you back."

"Yes?" Nipper was coldly ironic. "And what would I be doing in the meantime?"

"You could try to get the real Mrs. Downes to go into Tipping's."

"What a chance! I owe Hartley Downes about five hundred, now! I hope I never see him again! Come on! Forget your high ideas and get down to business!"

Florence sighed. She felt guilty however she acted. There was no doubt, whatever his motive had been, that Nipper had saved her from misery and distress; but this ambitious plan of his, even if successful, seemed likely to rob her of the one thing which she had not lost—her self-respect. She cast her doubts from her, for the present, and sat up.

"Did he know her?"

"Never saw her! Said he'd like very much to have her for a customer. Just do your stuff, now, and it'll go over big!"

Nipper snuffed out his cigarette, and rubbed his hands together.

"Now, let's go over it again! You know who you are?"

"Mrs. Hartley Downes, of No. 898 Park Avenue. Twenty-eight years old; educated abroad; maiden name Claire Madden; married Hartley Downes in 1923. Beautiful, charming, good golfer; summer place in Westbury; and so on!"

"All right! Now, what are your little habits?"

"Nod several times whenever I say 'Yes' or 'No.' Be very enthusiastic in my likes and dislikes. Interrupt often, but never rudely. Make quick and eager gestures. Put on the high hat, but never overdo it."

"That's good! But remember, although Silas Tipping has never seen Claire Downes, you have to be right on your toes! He's a pretty shrewd old bird, and he certainly knows his onions! You look enough like her to fool Hartley himself, but I wouldn't take a chance on Tipping. Now, here's the dope. You go in there at four o'clock to-morrow. There isn't apt to be any one else there at that time. Ask for Tipping. If he's busy, don't stay—say you'll come back some other time. If not, go into his private office and start working. Tell your story any way you please, but get over the idea that you are about to have the pearl necklace that you've always wanted, and that it must be a good one. Tell him that Mr. Allsopp suggested that you come in."

Florence gestured impatiently.

"Oh, I know we've gone over this a thousand times," said Nipper, "but I don't want to have any slip-up! The chances are that he won't have anything there that is expensive enough. Jewelers don't often carry necklaces for fifty thousand in stock—not many! He'll offer to get some for you, and you make a date to see them on Saturday. Saturday noon. There won't be anybody in there then, either. Make him get a good one! And go slow! Remember, people don't buy necklaces for fifty thousand all in one breath. Don't overdo it! Blue blood, you know. Remember, Claire Downes is the real article."

Florence nodded. "I understand! You're sure these clothes are all right?"

"Absolutely! Don't worry about that part of it! Your make-up is perfect! You put the act over, and we'll be on Easy Street!"

Florence sat for an instant, her hands folded in her lap, pensive.

"Nipper, I don't like it! Why do we have to do it? Why do we have to steal so much?"

"Listen! Did you ever hock anything?"

Florence laughed a little, bitter laugh. "Don't be foolish!"

"Well, what did you get for it? I mean, what part of what you paid for it?"

"Little enough!"

"It's the same way here, only more so. I have to sell this thing in a place that I know of on Sixth Avenue, and if I get ten thousand for it, I'm lucky! That's why! It's a sure thing. You get the necklace Monday—and, by the way, make sure he doesn't try to deliver it; that *would* spill the beans!—and we can sell it and be out of here Tuesday night. You get one thousand! Tipping won't send a bill for it until the first of the month, and by that time we'll be gone so long, New York will have forgotten all about us! I'd like to see Claire Downes' face when she gets a bill for fifty thousand. Boy!"

Nipper lay back in his chair and laughed.

"Yes," admitted Florence, still striving to find gaps in Nipper's apparently invulnerable armor, "but how about this Tipping man? Who is he, and why are we—er—cheating him?"

"Don't *you* fret about Silas Tipping. We're going after him because he's known me and my family for years! Why, my father's business just about kept Tipping, for a while! Besides, he's the only big jeweler I know in New York, and he's the only one that would take me for granted. He'll think you are Mrs. Downes and never tumble. Anyway, his is about the only big place she's never been in. See?"

Florence nodded. "I suppose so; but I don't like it, Nipper—just the same."

"Listen! You give me the willies! If you go in there looking like a pallbearer, you're going to give the whole show away. Cheer up, will you? You're about to realize your life's ambition. Come on! Take a brace!"

"But suppose we *do* get caught."

"How can we get caught? Here you are, the living image of Claire Downes; you buy a necklace, which you can well afford, and walk out with it. People do it all the time. It's perfect, I tell you. You're made to order for it. It's the only stunt I know of that can't fail. Figure it out for yourself. What could happen, if you keep your head and don't give us away? Nothing. And there you are."

In the face of Nipper's remorseless logic, and in order to keep from showing what would be, to her, ingratitude for what he had done for her, Florence was silent. Nipper rose.

"Cheer up, Flo! It'll go all right. I'm going to run along now, but I'll be back and we'll go eat. Take it easy and don't worry. This time next week, we'll be practically independent."

He grinned at her, and slipped out of the room.

Florence Martin sat on the bed and rested her brow against the cool iron bars of its headboard. So many things had happened to her in the past few weeks that she had not had time to catch up with herself. Three months ago, she had been a quiet and efficient stenographer in a large but shaky advertising agency. The agency had shaken a little too much, and had gone down with a crash. A combination of hard times and a superfluity of efficient stenographers had kept her out of work for a period which stretched into weeks and months, while her pitifully small store of savings had dwindled.

Carefully husbanded, they had ceased at last to become sufficient for those two elemental needs, food and sleep. She had passed from a feeling of faint goneness through one of ravenous famish-

ment, when she could cheerfully have torn at raw beef with her teeth and nails, to a strange and terrifying lassitude, when her pangs were numbing rather than driving. The horror of hunger was so close upon her that she felt she never could forget it.

The pretty room which she had kept for so long had gone first, and she had sought for cheaper and yet cheaper lodgings, until her final dwelling place had been a corner in an unspeakable tenement. After weeks of this, when her usual springy step had changed to an inelastic trudge, she had spent the day downtown, in the financial district, in a vain search for work.

Evening found her with exactly one nickel in her purse and with a weakness which caused her to stagger as she walked. Unable to bear the thought of the long trip uptown to her room on foot, and knowing no other place to go, she had decided to spend her nickel madly on car fare, and had wearily climbed the steps of the elevated, holding to the rail every so often in order to rest that she might reach the top. Her eyes were dimmed, seeing only half of the rushing, unsympathetic world around her, and that half but vaguely. She reached the top of the stairs, walked to the turnstile and fumbled in her purse for the nickel.

As she was about to thrust it into the slot, it fell from her fingers, and she stood, sick, watching it roll back across the platform and drop through the ornamental iron railing to the street below. She made several vain steps in pursuit, but had been far too late, and, weak and dizzy; the despair of her situation engulfing her like a wave, had burst into hopeless, streaming tears, there at the top of the stairs.

Here Nipper had found her, pausing on his way to a train. He had looked at her first from natural curiosity, had given a slow whistle of amazement, and had marched her, unresisting, to the nearest restaurant, to regale her upon soup, from an unbreakable white plate, and crackers—restraining her, wisely from plunging into an orgy of eating which might have killed her. He had told her that he might have a job for her, had taken her to the hotel, and had fed her back to strength.

When Nipper explained to her what his plan was, she had felt very keenly the irony of her situation. She had fought, all through those dreadful weeks, to keep herself from anything like dishonor, and now, the person to whom she owed her physical rehabilitation—perhaps her very life—was urging upon her, as payment for what he had done, something crooked. She could not refuse outright, though she did do all that lay within her rather weakened powers to dissuade Nipper from his course. Nipper's unfailing courtesy and evident respect for her; his insistence that she was the one person who could help him, and her uncanny resemblance to Mrs. Downes, had all been strong factors against her better feelings. Nipper's plan had sprung full-armed, as it were, into his mind that first night as he watched her eating, her tearing hunger struggling with her table manners, and he had finally persuaded her to go through with this one adventure with him.

Nipper had bought her an outfit which she was to wear during her impersonation—a surface outfit. She smiled a little as she thought of it. She hoped that she would not be hurt in some accident while she was dressed as Mrs. Downes. Outside, she was perfect. The rest—well, they were clean enough, now that she had a room with a bath, but rags was the word that best described them. Nipper was going to give her the clothes and a thousand dollars if they were successful. With that, she could keep herself for a long time —surely until she got work again. The idea of continuing the sort of existence

into which circumstances had forced her and never entered her head. It was merely a desperate measure—a stop gap until honest work could be found. Nipper was different. He had other plans for other fields, when this job was done. He had never been anything but kind and respectful to her. His only motive was money and a quick get-away.

Florence had decided to stay on in the city. No fear of her ever seeing Silas Tipping again. She laughed, a bit grimly, and fell to rehearsing her part before the mirror. And it was thus that Nipper found her when he returned to take her to supper.

The next afternoon at four o'clock, George Hibben carried in to Silas Tipping, the word that Mrs. Hartley Downes was waiting to see him. Silas himself went out to meet her, and ushered her into his office with all the courtesy at his command. She sat daintily before his table while he remained standing, waiting for her to speak. She hesitated for an instant, looking around her; then, with a languid smile on her lips, plunged in.

"You have a lovely place here, Mr. Tipping. Mr. Allsopp has told me all about it and about you! About how kind you were to him when his poor father died. Wasn't it terrible? He and I have been friends for years, you know. He told me that I must come here before I bought my necklace. You know, I'm to have a pearl necklace! I've always wanted one, and at last I'm going to get it. I'm so thrilled."

She looked up at Silas, her eyes beaming, and a flush of excitement on her cheeks. Her hands trembled, probably with eagerness. Silas smiled down at her, a kindly, fatherly smile, and he nodded in sympathy.

"It's a wonderful ambition, Mrs. Downes," he said, "and a great responsibility! I have some necklaces that may be of interest to you, but there are a number of things that every woman must know, who is to own a necklace, and which very few do. I'll have the strings brought in, and we'll talk them over."

He pressed a button set in his desk, and the face of George appeared in the doorway. Silas stepped over to him and gave an order. George vanished, to reappear in a moment carrying a roll of black satin which he handed to Silas. Silas laid this on the table and unrolled it, while Mrs. Downes leaned forward to watch.

There were six necklaces in the roll, lying on its white lining. Their color ranged from a pinkish white to a deep, creamy rose. They glistened and gleamed as Silas straightened them out by combing through them with his fingers; the lights seemed to slip and slide over their surfaces. Mrs. Downes, moved out of her character by the beauty of them, gasped and bent over them. She caught herself and exclaimed in delight:

"Oh! Lovely, Mr. Tipping! They are exquisite!"

Silas picked one up, fondling it with affection.

"Mrs. Downes," he said, "pearls are the only gems that are not minerals. They are animal matter, and are the most fragile of all jewels. They are as delicate as your skin, and almost as lovely. You must give them better care, even, than you do yourself. Powder, cold cream and perfumes hurt pearls. Most 'sick' pearls are nothing more than dirty pearls. Now here are strings," he turned back to the necklaces, "of many colors. We must try to find the shade which best suits your complexion. A dark person, an extreme brunette, can wear pearls of a very deep and rich color. A blonde will do better to wear a delicate pink string.

"For you," he cast an expert and appraising eye at the soft bloom of Florence's cheek, and the chestnut light in

the bit of her hair that he could see beneath her hat, "for you, a pink with a touch of cream would go best, I think." He picked up one of the strings, and held it in his palm, sliding his hand over it. "Let us try this one." He rose and, stepping behind her, clasped it quickly around her neck. Then, with the merest gesture, he indicated the cheval glass surrounded by a group of soft lights, that stood in a corner of his office.

Florence, captivated, rose and stood before the glass. The necklace lay in lovely light over her bosom, gleaming softly against the dark cloth of her smart jacket. Silas stepped around her, looking it over. He straightened it with a touch, cocked his head to one side, and waited for her approval.

"Oh! It is lovely, Mr. Tipping! It's too wonderful for words!"

She came to herself suddenly, having lost for an instant the realization that she was playing a rôle. She nodded quickly, several times, a well-known characteristic of Mrs. Downes, and looked down at the necklace again somewhat more seriously.

"I'm sure such a necklace is far too expensive for me!"

"That string is sixty-eight thousand dollars, Mrs. Downes."

Florence gasped. She had imagined herself working gradually up from about ten thousand dollars, using all her finesse; and this sudden arrival at her goal upset her. It was as though she had suddenly been precipitated into the third act of a play, after having rehearsed only the first. She missed all the intermediate cues and business. She played for time, toying with the necklace as it lay upon her coat, tilting her head from side to side, approaching the glass from various sudden angles. It was a finished performance, but, after all, it was not entirely assumed. The pseudo Mrs. Downes was very much a woman; and any woman, no matter who, finding herself with such glory upon her person, would have behaved in very similar fashion.

Silas broke the spell.

"Mrs. Downes," he said. "It is very seldom that you would wear a necklace over your coat. There is no setting for pearls like the skin. Why don't you open your collar to get the effect of the string upon your throat? I'm sure that will help you to make up your mind."

Florence, still groping for her cue, did as Silas suggested, almost involuntarily. She unclasped the neck of her jacket and flung it far back on her shoulders. The light linen vestee beneath it she also opened, leaving bare a throat worthy indeed of Mrs. Hartley Downes. Silas stepped around her as she arranged the necklace against her skin, to catch the soft glow of the pearls, which are, as he said, set off by the delicate tints of a beautiful complexion as by no other background. He looked at them as they lay there—and looking, pursed up his lips in the expression which he always used when he saw something which he did not entirely understand. He cast a quick glance up at the face of his lovely customer. Florence was standing entranced, her eyes far away upon the image of herself in evening dress with such a necklace about her throat. Silas spoke, and she started, as one starts from a dream.

"Do you like them, Mrs. Downes?"

"They are beautiful! I wish I might take them with me now, but it's so hard to make up my mind." She had found her cue, now. "Sixty-eight thousand dollars was really more than I expected to spend, and I must think it over." Her smile was deprecating her inability to settle a matter of that magnitude out of hand. "Would it be asking too much if I put off any decision until Saturday?"

"Not at all!" Silas was all kindly courtesy. "You are bound by nothing!"

Florence looked at him an instant.

The whole business was going off so easily. Mr. Tipping was such a gentleman, such a fine, kind, paternal sort of man. She felt mean—as though she were cheating her own father.

"Most unfortunately, Mrs. Downes, I shan't be able to see you on Saturday; but Mr. Harris, my assistant, will be here and will be glad to talk to you about the necklace." Silas leaned over and pushed the button again.

Florence nodded, absently, turning again to the mirror, and her conflicting thoughts. She would have given much not to be where she was, robbing a man like Silas Tipping. How wonderful pearls were! What lights they held! What glorious, delicate color! She postured and posed before the mirror, all unconscious that George had come to the door and gone again, and that Tom Harris, Silas' right-hand man, was standing there now, a look of polite inquiry on his face. She half turned from the cheval glass in answer to Silas' words.

"This is Mr. Harris, of whom I spoke, Miss—er——"

She answered carelessly:

"Florence—ah—Mrs. Downes!"

Conscious of her error, she had whirled around, facing Silas. A quiet smile tightened his lips, and, in the sudden agony that filled her mind, she noticed, strangely, that he did not seem to be surprised.

"That's right," he said coolly, "your own name!"

She shrank back against the wall, one hand behind her for support, the other at her throat, which had suddenly grown to sight that she could not breathe. Of all the questions in the world, the last she had expected to be asked was for her name. She must act quickly. She straightened and, seizing her courage in both hands, stepped forward, her voice full of fine indignation.

"My own name!"

"Exactly!" Silas' smile faded, and his voice lost its genial tone. "Your own name! The one you were surprised into saying just now!"

"That was my first name!"

"Good! But it was not Mrs. Hartley Downes' first name. Hers is Claire. Come on, tell me all about it. I know you are not Mrs. Downes."

He stood before her, waiting. She glanced at the door. Tom Harris, mystified, but knowing that something was wrong, filled it completely, and had one hand behind him, ready to signal to George in case of need. Florence stood a long minute, a picture of beautiful terror. Her collar was open wide at her neck, and Silas watched the color drain out of her face and disappear from that lovely throat, leaving the pearls gleaming darkly on a skin grown marble white. He saw stark fear come into those soft eyes, saw the mouth lose its desperate, gritted line. He stepped forward just in time to catch poor Florence Martin in his arms as she stumbled forward—blind with tears of awful despair.

He led her gently to a chair, unclasped the necklace from around her throat, handed it, with the five others that still lay on the table to Tom Harris, and motioned that puzzled gentleman away from the room. He closed the door softly behind Harris, and went back to his seat. The girl was sobbing with horrible, dry, racking sobs. Silas was torn with two emotions. He could not altogether understand the impersonation; but he could understand, to the very core of him, the absolute, unfeigned collapse which had just taken place. When the paroxysm seemed to subside a bit, he touched her gently on the shoulder.

"There! There, my dear! Is it as bad as all that?"

She looked up at him, his kind, troubled face distorted by her film of tears. Something in him seemed to draw her out, to force her to throw herself upon

this man who, her every instinct told her, could be nothing but good. Words burst from her:

"If you only knew."

She told the whole distressing story —the loss of her position; her search for another, at first confident and eager and finally desperate as her small store of money ebbed away; the struggle to keep her clothes in order, to conserve her energy on the smallest possible outlay for food; and at last the fight merely to keep body and soul together; then failure and utter discouragement; and finally, Nipper, looking like a personification of ready money, with his infallible plan based on her resemblance to Mrs. Downes. She had come so far, over such a dreadful road—had had the necklace actually upon her neck—and this was the end. She spoke rapidly, in a low tone, twisting her wet handkerchief into a sodden string between her nervous fingers, her eyes cast steadily on the table.

"And now, I suppose I'm a thief, and you will put me in jail. I don't know how it all happened. I can't imagine why I did it, except that I'd been so hungry, and I never wanted to be hungry again. Have you ever been hungry?" She looked full at Silas, into those blue eyes now filled with pity, and her voice became steadier. "I'd been so hungry; but all the time I'd never done a thing wrong. Not a thing! And then I'm pulled out of the gutter and fed and clothed and sent to steal, to pay for it all. I'm glad you caught me! At least they'll feed me in jail."

She raised a hand to her throat, as though it were dry, and discovered that her dress was still open. She fastened it with shaking fingres.

"Child! Child! Don't talk like that!" Silas leaned toward her, his hand touching her arm. "You aren't a thief. Thank the Lord I *did* catch you before you'd actually stolen the thing! Dry your eyes and pull yourself together. Nipper Allsopp ought to be hung—the rascal!" He sat a moment, his hand upon his lip, thinking. "It won't do to have this thing become known. Do you know where Nipper is?"

She nodded. He pushed the telephone across the table to her.

"Call him up and tell him the game is up. Tell him to get out of town, and never to come back. Tell him he'll be arrested if he's still here in twenty-four hours."

Wondering, Florence did as she was bid. She called the number of the hotel and got her room. Silas sat back and watched her conducting her side of the conversation.

"Hello! Nipper? . . . It's all off! I was caught! . . . I don't know! . . . In Mr. Tipping's office. Yes, he's right here. . . . Get away! Out of town! If——"

She looked up, smiled very faintly, but she listened intently as she hung up the receiver.

"He cut off," she said. "I guess he's gone."

Silas nodded. "I rather think so!"

"Mr. Tipping," she said, her voice quite evidently made to sound firm by an effort of her will, "what are you going to do with me?"

Silas sat gazing at her from over the gleaming bulge of his starched shirt bosom. For the first time she noticed that the necklaces were gone, and that the door was closed. Through it, she could hear the bustle made by Silas' staff as they stored the precious merchandise in the safes for the night. She turned back again, her unanswered question heavy on her mind. Silas' hands, which had been pressed against his lips, fingers joined, came down to rest upon the table. He shifted in his chair, and leaned over toward her, but did not speak. He seemed to be making up his mind. She asked him once more, a dry terror gripping her.

"Please, Mr. Tipping! What are you going to do with me?"

Silas looked directly at her. His eyes, so cold and hard when he had discovered her imposture, were kind and smiling now. He had let Nipper go; surely he would not punish her! She sighed as she thought of how clearly she deserved punishment.

"What I shall do with you," said Silas, "depends on the answers you give to my questions!"

She sat waiting, determined to give him true answers, even to the baring of her inmost soul. Withal, she shuddered and felt heartsick at the thought of going out again into the life she had led before Nipper found her.

She looked at Silas, her face set.

He drew a deep breath and blurted forth his first question.

"Are you a stenographer?"

She gazed at him in amazement, with the expression of one who has been bracing every nerve and holding his ears for fear of a tremendous explosion and is greeted by the *pop!* of a firecracker.

"Am I what?"

"Are you a stenographer?"

"Why, yes, Mr. Tipping. And I think I can say I'm a good one, too."

"Can run a telephone switchboard, too?" Silas asked.

"Yes, I can. I ran one for months. Listen, Mr. Tipping! Please don't joke with me. I've had too much happen to me; I couldn't stand it!"

Silas looked at her, pity in his eyes.

"I'm not joking you, child! Next Monday I'm going to need a girl who can fill those jobs. There, there. For Heaven's sake, don't start again!"

Florence raised streaming eyes to him. "B-but I can't work for you. I'm not honest."

"I'll take a chance on that. I wouldn't trust any one's honesty, if he were hungry enough. You'll get so sick and tired of all this"—he waved a hand which included all his magnificent stock in trade—"that you won't even want to wear a watch. You wouldn't do a thing like this of your own accord, would you?"

Florence shook an emphatic head, "No! Nor for any one else's, either!"

"Pretty ticklish feeling, wasn't it? Well, we'll keep you away from the Nipper Allsopp's of this world, hereafter!" He reached into his pocket, and drawing out a wad of bills, he pushed several of them across the table to her. "Here's an advance on your pay. Get yourself a place to stay, and take a good rest until Monday. We work hard here."

Florence folded the money into her pocketbook.

"I can work pretty hard, myself, for real money every Saturday night, Mr. Tipping," she said.

"We pay on Fridays!" said Silas, with a laugh.

Florence looked up at him suddenly, her face serious.

"Just one more thing, Mr. Tipping, before I start forgetting my troubles! Tell me, how did you find out that I wasn't Mrs. Downes?"

Silas grinned.

"That was luck," he said. "Pure and simple."

She looked at him sharply.

"Nipper could have sent any woman in here to impersonate Mrs. Downes. I've never seen her, and I believed absolutely that you were she, until I found out differently. He banked so much on that resemblance that he neglected the details. Open your dress!"

"What?"

"Open your dress again, just as you did when you were trying on the necklace!"

Wondering, Florence unfastened the collar of her jacket and the little linen vestee, and threw them back. Silas smiled as he watched her, and she looked down at her throat, puzzled.

"I always suggest that pearls be tried

on next to the skin. That part of it was done in the ordinary course of events. What made me suspect was this!"

He reached forward and delicately indicated the top of her slip, which showed just a bit of its edge. His action was courtesy itself.

"You mustn't feel hurt at what I'm going to say. You've been through a lot, and this only serves to bear it out. That what-do-you-call-it of yours is—well, it's almost ragged!"

It was true! The slip, clean and snowy, was palbably turned and darned and patched!

Florence drew the neck of her coat together and dropped her eyes.

"I didn't know Mrs. Hartley Downes," said Silas, "but I've done business with enough women to know that any one who could afford to consider a necklace for sixty-eight thousand dollars would have one of those things in better shape than yours. That made me think, and I decided to try you with the old name stunt. You were a thousand miles away, looking at yourself with that necklace on, and I got Tom Harris in here for an excuse to use your name. When I hesitated, your unconscious mind blurted out your real name—matter of habit—before you could recall the name you were supposed to go by. That's all. Now you can start in forgetting. Tom Harris won't remember a thing, and neither will I; and Nipper has gone where the woodbine twineth! Your troubles are over."

Silas rose, and walked with Florence down the length of the deserted showroom. She held her head high again. A strange, peaceful happiness was in her heart! She looked up at this man—this very much of a man—who walked so straight beside her for all his white hair and his evident years—and she breathed a quick little penitent's prayer. They stood by the door, and Silas opened it for her. She reached out a hand, and he grasped it, smiling a comforting smile.

"Good night, child!"

She turned to go, and his voice recalled her.

"Wait!"

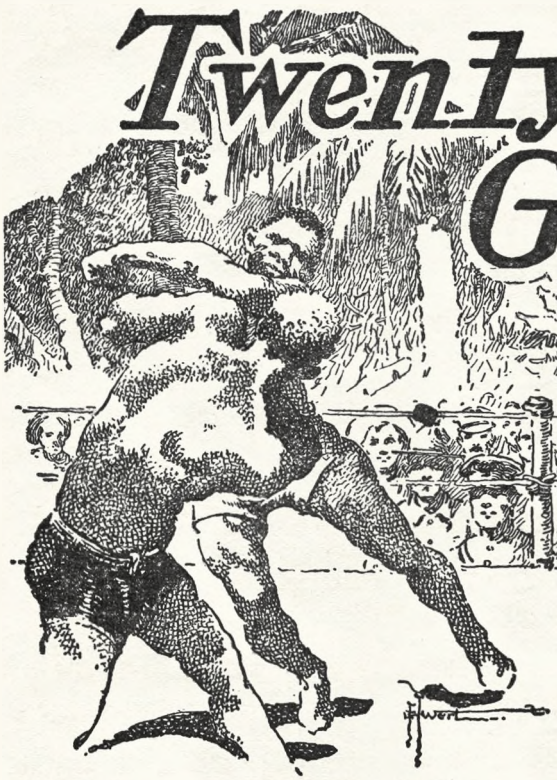
He was beckoning to her through the half-opened door. She turned, a feeling on her that it was all a dream, and that she was being recalled to fear and doubt again. Silas leaned out at her.

"By the way," he said, laughing, "what *is* your name?"

HOLDER OF A NAVY RECORD

JOHN DEAN MILLIGAN, who died in Washington last October, held the navy record for length of service on one ship. He spent fourteen consecutive years and three months on the *Fish Hawk*, having been loaned by the navy to the United States Fish Commission for scientific work immediately after the Spanish-American War. He collected birds in Porto Rico and fish up and down the Atlantic coast. Incidentally, this great traveled served in both the Spanish-American War and the World War, and was one of the first men to explore the interior of Japan, following Perry's opening of that country to the outside world.

Twenty-Four Grand!



By

Philip Kerby

Author of "The Nine of Spades," "Destiny's Side Kick," Etc.

American soldiers in a Philippine post hock everything they own and a lot they don't own in order to help out a young Filipino prize fighter who is desperately working against all kinds of tough odds in order to help out his destitute native father.

THE slim, brown arm of the white-clad referee swung in a final scimitar over the prostrate brown human form—"eight—nine—and out!" Bedlam broke loose. Tagalog, Ilocano, and Visayan praises and curses, cheers and tears, mingled with a few blunt Saxon oaths of the American army, were carried by the hot night air of the tropics across Manila Bay, as a new insular flyweight champion was hailed by an excited populace.

"And 'boloney' is only 'boloney,' no matter how thin you slice it!" murmured Sergeant Michael Aloysius Donovan, as he ruefully lit his stubby claymore.

"Apropos of what?" I queried.

"Apropos of me darlin' ten pesos that I bet with Clancy on the present shindig. Fighters is it they call themselves? That skinny little licorice stick, bowing and scraping and preparing to make a speech, would last about three seconds with real class. Is he fast? Is he clever? Does he know his stuff? Sure, maybe. But a real champion's got to have something more."

"What?"

"Nerve. And plenty of it, too. A champion that stays a champion for any time at all has got to have it. You never can tell whether you've got it or not—that is, not until you're in a tight pinch and have got to fight on and on and on, with the world getting

blacker every single minute, and a roaring in your ears, and you trying to hit a white jumping-jack in front of you, that one minute looks as big as a balloon, and the next has shriveled to the size of a pygmy. That's fighting, mister."

"You tell 'em, Micky. Write a book about it. Let's dig." Corporal Tommy Phelan mopped his forehead and reluctantly buttoned up his freshly starched tunic.

"I might write a book, at that. All about 'Kid' la Cruz. He was real class. None of this lucky punch stuff in his."

"Sure, no banana oil there! And he could take just as well as deliver. The Kid was one grand little guy—I'll say he was."

Corporal Tom took my arm as we edged our way through the laughing, cheering, singing Filipino crowd. The news that a new champion had been born surged through the multitude of staring, camisa-clad sport fans huddled outside the arena. In the distance I heard the hollow report made by bamboo canon exploded in honor of the victory.

The fight had seemed to me to be full of interest, and I was at a loss to understand the apathy of my army friends. The preliminaries had all been much above the average and the main bout replete with thrills. I had known the Filipinos, hitherto, as a jolly, pleasure-loving people, always willing to put off until to-morrow a task that might easily have been completed to-day. But when I watched the businesslike manner in which they went about polishing each other off in the squared circle, beneath an orthodox battery of motion-picture cameras, calcium flares, and other *passementerie* of the cauliflower industry, I saw a new facet of their national existence. Also I never knew before that they had a ring history. Kid la Cruz was a name to conjure with.

"Who is this paragon of virtue you mentioned a moment ago?"

"Come again, mister. I don't get you. Speak American, please."

"Kid la Cruz, I believe you called him."

"And you fresh from home and never heard of the Kid? Did you stop any time in San Francisco? If you'd had, you'd 'a' heard plenty of him. Pushing a pen in a lawyer's office days so he can pass his bar exams—but nights he owns everything on the Presidio. And how! The army worships him. When he fights, the whole post hocks their shirts."

The crowd sauntered along, stopping to purchase American ice-cream cones, Spanish dulces of many colors, sticky native sweets. The humid heat of the tropics made one listless. I wondered how the fighters ever managed to go ten fast rounds in such a lazy atmosphere. It seemed to me that a great portion of the credit for their performance should go to their handlers, who during the brief minute intervals between rounds had it in their power either to make or break a fighter. I voiced this thought to Sergeant Donovan.

"Sure, the bottle-and-sponge bozos help some, I guess. But they never get no credit. Whoever heard of a towel waver getting his map on the front page?" The sergeant knocked the dottle from his half-portion pipe without looking in my direction.

"Gosh! ain't we modest to-night!" interjected Tommy. "The sarge here had his map along with the Kid's in every paper in Manila; yup, s'help me, including the Chinese. What's more; he was interviewed, and the news sharks cabled it all the way to America—cabled it, mind ye, and him not the top kicker either. Say, maybe there wasn't some soreheads when the sportin' finals come back six weeks later. Shucks, you couldn't touch the sarge with a ten-foot pole."

"Well, I didn't notice you wearing much crape either!" boomed the sergeant. "Half a grand is not bad pay for half an hour's work. It would take you sixteen months in this man's army and then some to pull down as much. Stop squawkin'! Let's get a drink. My throat feels like a last year's snakeskin."

"I'll buy," I volunteered, "in return for the story of Kid la Cruz, how Tommy made five hundred dollars in half an hour, and what you said in your cabled interview."

"Let's go," they chorused.

We woke up a drowsing *cochero,* boarded his high-wheeled *carromata* and set off at a fast clip toward Passay. The Escolta was deserted save for a lone khaki-clad traffic officer who with a wave of white-gloved hand indicated that the marble Jones Bridge across the Pasig River was clear. On we sped, skirting the old moss-covered walls of the ancient citadel of Manila, whose moat has been turned into a golf course, and whose flogging pits have been transformed to putting greens for duffers.

Once free of the city, the air was perfumed with the exotic fragrance of *Dame de Noche,* sweeter than any honeysuckle, mingled with the salty tang of the incoming tide. Low along the horizon the five-starred Southern Cross followed its misty nightly orbit, while overhead Orion's Belt and the Great Dipper gleamed so brightly that one instinctively feared a strong draft would blow them out.

The Luneta was dripping with moonlight. On the opposite side of this great sea park, Rizal's monument loomed like some silvery beacon. Nearer, the Army and Navy Club, with its ivy-colored walls, resembled the palatial adobe of one of the early *conquistadores.* Beyond, Manila Bay, reflecting the blue, star-dusted heavens, stretched restlessly to distant Corrigedor, guardian outpost of Uncle Sam's colonial possessions, and mighty Marivales, whose summit exchanged secrets with the clouds.

On the Fort McKinley road, just before it enters the amusing little suburb of Passay, there is a byroad which leads off toward the bay. At the end of this little road is Aunt Hannah's Place. Aunt Hannah caters almost exclusively to the wants of the American army. Admittedly darker than the Queen of Clubs, this dusky Phœbe claims Jackson, Mississippi, as her birthplace, and the universe as her home.

As taps had sounded more than an hour before, the place was deserted save for a few stragglers like ourselves lucky enough to have obtained all-night passes from the military reservation. Aunt Hannah's *muchacho* sleepily brought us brimming mugs of excellent cold beer. We lolled back in our wicker chairs and listened to the gentle lapping of the incoming tide.

"Come on, sarge. Shoot the yarn to pay for our drinks. What you forget, I'll remember."

Donovan lit a Lucky from the oil flare, drained his schooner of beer at a gulp, wiped his moist lips with the back of his hand and began.

"I met the Kid one hot day in November just after the big rains. Our buck Looie, Terry McGee, who was post athletic officer, called me over and introduced me. Said the Kid wanted a chance in the prelim next Friday night. I looked him over. In his dapper ducks no one would ever have picked him for a patsy, or a ham-and-egger either. Just the way he stood you knew he had class, but as a box fighter I was afraid he'd be a terrible flop. Our boys in headquarters company get real tough sometimes. 'Spider' Kelly or Jimmy, 'the Goof,' might knock him for a row of Pangasinan pie plates!

"He don't say nothin'; just stands there looking first at me, then at the Looie, quizzicallike, like a setter pup

that's lost his master. He swallows once or twice rather hard and I see his big brown eyes get watery. 'Hoots, toots and cuttlefish! A cry-baby fighter,' thinks I. 'To put him in the same ring with Kelly would be murder.' But the Looie figures different and says to me that we ought to give Mr. la Cruz a chance to prove his mettle. Mr. la Cruz says he'll do his best if I'll only give him an opportunity. I says I suppose so, but he'll have to sign a quit claim releasing me from all damage forever and ever.

"'I've signed so many papers recently that a few more will not make any difference to me,' says he in bosky English.

"'What's your rep? What's your scrappin' moniker? Weight? Height? Blood pressure? Grandmother's maiden name?'

"'I'm afraid I do not understand. Will you repeat a little more slowly please that I may get the inflection?'

"'Details, kid, details. Who the hell are you? In addition to being matchmaker, I'm also official announcer. When I crawl on the resin next Friday night I can't say: "The next boxing exhibition for the bantamweight honors will be between Spider Kelly, the hairy horror of Jolo, and Mr. Francisco de la Cruz, a newcomer to Manila." I've got to know your fighting name, your rep, and a lot of other things.'

"'But I have no fighting name,' says he. 'I am learning to box in the college gymnasium and I have not boxed elsewhere. But to get a reputation I must start somewhere, and the lieutenant has been kind enough to offer his assistance.'

"'You're the hungriest kid ever I see for punishment,' I tells him. 'If you want to take a grand whalin' before a bunch of rough customers, drop around next Friday evening with your sneakers and gym pants. I'll give you a job.'

"And damned if he didn't. I first thought he was trained down too fine, and I wanted to put him in the flyweight division; but he said he'd always boxed in the bantam class. The boys had been giving Jimmy, the Goof, a razzing after the way Young Ole, the 'Swedish Terror,' waded into him, so I figured to let Jimmy get aboard the gravy train and give him the Kid in the semifinals.

"When it comes time for the Kid to step in the ring, I asked him who was his sponge wringer, and he said he didn't have one. Tommy, here, volunteered to wave a towel."

"Sure, I picked him all by meself," Tommy interrupted the story. "I took one look at him in the dressing tent and I knew he was a hot-tamale hombre! I watched the muscles in his back ripple, saw what a long reach he had, how thin his wrists and ankles were—you know, thoroughbred stuff—and went out and plunked down five pesos on him, just on a hunch."

"Tommy lost his five pesos," Sergeant Donovan continued, lighting a fresh cigarette, "but he made a buddy."

"What the hell! Five pesos is only five pesos, but a friend's a friend."

"Sure, that's what I'm saying. You and the Kid are friends."

"Just like that," said Tommy, shaking hands with himself. "I wish he was here now. He'd tell you the story of his fights without wandering all over the lot; how he happened to take up fighting and why."

"I'm coming to that part now. Don't crowd me at the barrier or I'll make you do all the telling."

"Would another glass help refresh your memory?" I asked.

"It would that," he replied.

When the glasses were filled, Donovan again took up the thread of his narrative:

"What the Kid don't know about fighting would fill a book; but mister, he sure could box. He had no room to

let above his ears, not him. All space occupied. He was fast, too. His skinny, long legs took him from corner to corner quicker than you could shift a chaw of tobacco. Jimmy, the Goof, certainly earned his moniker by the third round. Instead of fighting he was giving a good exhibition of shadow boxing. When he'd try to connect, the Kid was marked absent. In the fourth, though, he landed a one-two on the Kid's ribs which weren't funny. The Kid tried to break clean, but Jimmy let him have a sock on the jaw. Down he went in a heap. He was on his feet at the count of four and Jimmy tapped him again on the break."

"I kept yelling my head off at him to stay down and get his breath," Tommy interjected, "but the silly fool either couldn't or wouldn't hear me."

"Up he come again, a little wilted, but game as hell," said Donovan.

"I give him a bawlin' out and tried to slap some sense into him along with the arnica between bells," Tommy confided, "but nothin' doin'. He whispers that a good sport never takes advantage of the count. Advantage nothin', I tells him, only strategy. He smiles and shakes his head."

"The next three frames were ding-dong," the sergeant resumed. "Our Kid was down more than he was up. Jimmy, the Goof, hit him early and often, but he couldn't knock him out. The gang were yelling for a K. O., but Jimmy couldn't deliver. The judges had to give Jimmy the decision on points. In the dressing tent later Lieutenant McGee comes over to Tommy and slips him an extra twenty pesos, which the gang had donated to the Kid."

"And I had one grand time making him take it," said Tommy. "He thought it was charity and told me to send it back to the men with his thanks. I told him he was both a hick and a boob. Any time any eight-minute eggs contribute, I told him, it's next to a miracle. He didn't make me at all—but just grinned and said: 'For my father, I take it—not for myself.'

"Feature that on your mike!" Donovan paused to allow the full import to sink in. "The Kid takes a swell beatin' in order to give some jack to his old man. We didn't get the story out of him that night; no, nor until many nights later. He'd always smile and shake his head and ask if he could fight again on next Friday. I'd say: 'Sure. I'm game if you are.' That'd be all. But during that winter the Kid developed a lot of savvy, and I don't mean perhaps. He put on a little weight, too, across the shoulders and trained down above the ears. Tommy, the lieutenant and me—we all took him in hand. The Looie gives him everything he'd picked up at the Point; I chimes in on differences between box fightin' and prize fightin', and Tommy rubs the crease out of his muscles. We all hunched the Kid was a comer, but we never let him know how good we thought he was.

"During this grooming the Kid graduated from the kindergarten and, while he still took frequent beatings, he was all hunky dory the next morning. After the bouts one Friday night I asks the Looie how about tryin' to get a few meal tickets for the Kid down to the stadium, but he thinks we ought to keep the Kid under cover. I tell him that he's got to go out and get a rep before he can ever get into the big-money class and now's the time. The argument is settled by the Kid himself who comes into the post exchange office, looking like his best amigo had just kicked the bucket. He was sniffing and wiping his eyes, almost the same as the first time I see him.

"The Looie bawls him out. 'Dry up,' says he, 'The big rains ain't started yet. You're beating the weather man's schedule.'

"'I know,' pipes up the Kid. 'Only too well do I know. Here I have a telegram from my father saying that the great drought has ruined the entire crop of tobacco, that unless we can pay what we owe, we are ruined—and worse than ruined, for we shall be peons always for my education.'

"How's that for a sweet sock in the eye?" The sergeant waxed belligerent. "Old Man Job's lot was a chunk of the Pearly compared to the Kid's troubles. Seems he was the only son in a family of girls, and his mother before her death had made his old man promise that Francisco would be a lawyer, with a grand white-collar job in Manila. So far plenty good. But, to be an avocado requires much education, and education costs money, and so the old man hocked his plantation to one José Perez, a spick high-hat, long on money and interest rates. Never having money to spend before, the Kid promptly goes through his roll in the first six months, placing most of it on a little red rooster that comes out second best in the Santa Mesa cockfights.

"Dad plasters a second mortgage so that his darlin' son can go on studying to be an avocado. This time it's the Madrid Easter lottery that the Kid hopes to recoup on, and he invests heavily. It seems that Perez, being a gambler, sport and promoter, had cornered the available supply of lottery tickets, and the Kid had to buy from him. Despite the señor's grand promises, not a single one of the Kid's numbers showed in Madrid. The only assets left the Kid's father were the growing crop and the live stock. Finally, after much bickering back and forth, Perez had been persuaded to lend more money on the growing crop.

"And now Old Man Sol takes it for the count. The Kid tells us he started fighting because he'd read about Jack and Gene getting more *dinero,* win or lose, than the governor general himself. And that was why he was willing to take so many beatings—to help pay the interest on his old man's mortgages. Now, he figures, he's had all the split lips, shiners, and skinned knuckles in vain—and kidlike, he's crying mad.

"What have we to suggest? Ain't there no justice? He'd made mistakes, sure. He'd lost money gambling and the like, but was his luck never going to change? We must help him and quickly. If double interest were paid, perhaps Perez would wait a little.

"Lieutenant McGee tells him to go chase himself and come back in the morning, and in the meantime he'll try to dig up something promising. When he'd beat it, after shaking hands all round twice, the Looie looks at me and I look at him, and we both look at Tommy polishing a rifle bolt in the corner. Nobody had an idea that the Kid had fought only for the mazuma. Tommy says: 'Well, why don't we form a syndincate, "La Cruz, preferred," and offer the stock for sale?' The Looie admitted it was a good idea, but canned it because army regulations forbid. So that one was out. I thought of passing the hat, but they both jumped down my throat and told me the Kid wasn't no blind beggar. McGee fidgets, smokes three butts without a wisecrack, then says the only way for us to help the Kid is for the three of us to work together to put him over on the big time. He agrees to look after the financial end of it, I'm to manage and Tommy is to rub like the devil.

"And we did. The Kid turned every cent of his winnings over to the Looie, who made some sort of a dicker with Perez to hold up proceedings until the Kid could make a killing. I had more details than a monkey has fleas, and was making matches for him in Iloilo, Cebu and Zamboanga, as well as the stadium here. Tommy had a terrible time keeping up with the Kid, but finally got himself attached to headquarters as

courier, and was sent on special missions, which always somehow coincided with the Kid's visits. The Looie was a bear thinking up missions!

"The Kid walloped his way along toward stardom with seldom a draw, or a decision on points. He was never pleased unless he got a clean K. O. The sports writers were tipped off by the Looie who used to take them all over to the Army and Navy Club, line 'em up at the bar, and, while they were drinking their fourth glasses, shoot a long line about the Kid. They thought first it was a bunch of taffy, but after a while began plugging for him. Before long he was getting more write-ups than a lapu-lapu has scales.

"All of which made my job easier. The Kid was a definite asset, and instead of me trying to get him on a good card, managers now asked for him. By the time he had to go back to college there were only two or three between him and Pete Garcia, the bantam champ of the Islands.

"Garcia—you probably have heard of him—was a savvy hombre. He used to hang out at the Poodle Dog, where he held a regular court, or sometimes late at night he'd go out to Santa Ana, get a table near the dancing floor and park himself for an hour or two. He'd only fight three or four times a season and never with his title at stake. I used to lie awake nights, wondering, first, how the devil I could get a match for the Kid with Garcia, and then how I could stop getting one."

Donovan sighed ruefully and twirled his empty glass. I clapped my hands and Aunt Hannah's *muchacho* brought more beer. He smiled across at me and nodded toward Tommy who was snoring gently.

"If it ain't one thing—it's two," Donovan soliloquized. "With us it was about seven, or maybe eight. First off there was a great rumpus at college when it was found out that Francisco Alfredo Dominique de la Cruz had engaged in the prize ring for money. More or less ruptured his amateur athletic standing, and if the Looie hadn't been a grand explainer, the Kid's career would have ended right there. McGee talked to the president for three hours one hot afternoon in October and convinced him that the Kid was only earning his way through same as half a million other kids back in the States and that he was keeping the home fires burning as well. The president allowed as how that was something and agreed to take no official action so long as the Kid fought incog., and the Looie played guardian angel.

"Along about this time the sports writers began their annual hullabaloo to bring the bantam championship of the world over to the Islands, and to send Garcia over to get it. Ever since Garcia had been champ, there had been howls issued by his camp followers for the big fight, but no sucker had been found to put up the money. This year, however, the yawps met with better success, and one Thursday morning the Manila *Bulletin* came out with a yarn that a backer had been found to send Garcia to the States for the big mill. The backer preferred to remain anonymous.

"Think that one over! And me with a comer on my hands who, when he was right, could knock the everlasting daylights out of all the Garcias on Luzon. The Looie tells me to keep my shirt on, that he will get the low down from the *Bulletin* lad who wrote the story. He did, that night, and when he told me, I damn near lost my lunch. Don José Miguel Alvarez Perez! Land shark, lottery crimp, and bad egg generally. The Kid's bad joss. For a while I thought he had sure enough put the Indian sign on my bouncing bimbo.

"But the Looie didn't let Perez, Garcia & Co. get away with a thing. Not

him. The next day there was a long story in every sheet in Manila about the Kid challenging the champ, winner to go to the States. It was then that the Looie's free drinks paid dividends. All the sporting editors began razzing the champ, and Garcia, to save his face, had to issue a defi. I went over that afternoon and had a long talk with Manny, the slippery head of the stadium and unofficial matchmaker.

"He told me that Garcia was bad medicine and to lay off, that he'd fix up a deal with Perez and a Spanish syndicate to tour the world, agreeing to go fifty-fifty on his takings. I told Manny I'd think it over and let him know. I did. Two days later the Looie fixed it so's the Kid signed articles with Garcia for a fifteen-round go on New Year's Eve for the championship of the Islands. I heard afterwards that the pen pushers kidded Garcia into it, telling him a big fight just before sailing for the States would be good publicity.

"The Kid didn't go into really hard training until just before Christmas holidays. Then every mule skinner that ever put on five ouncers went down to his quarters to give him a work-out. And advice. Nothing else but. The day before Christmas the Kid beat it home to be with his folks who lived some sixty miles up the line.

"I had a telephone call from him Christmas Night, worried as a porcupine who's lost his quills. Seems Christmas afternoon Perez made a formal call, bringing all his mortgage papers. Said he was bringing a little Christmas present for the Kid and his father. Put 'em all out on the parlor table and said he'd leave 'em on condition that the Kid did not interfere with his plans for Garcia. The Kid lost his temper, called him everything he could lay his tongue to and just about threw him out of the house. After that there was the devil to pay.

"The old man wanted to know why his boy was fighting if not to pay off his indebtedness. Here was a wonderful chance, and why hadn't he taken it? And the Kid couldn't answer him, except to say that if he had, he'd have hated himself for the rest of his life. Then he asked me why he did it.

"I yelled at him to lay off the think stuff and come on back to training camp, pronto. Temperamental. High strung. More nervous than the youngest schoolma'am at her first teacher's meeting. For the next two days the Kid was shot to pieces. Couldn't eat or sleep. Just kept harping that either way he stood to lose. If he put Garcia to sleep, he and his father lost their hacienda; if he threw the fight now, Perez would do nothing for him anyway after the way he insulted him.

"The fourth night the Looie called a meeting of the board of strategy.

" 'Men,' says he 'our investment has gone sour on us, and we've got just about one chance in ten thousand to snap him out of it. Both of you have got to go out and pass the old campaign hat for contributions—free-will offerings to meet a serious athletic emergency. Tell 'em, I'll personally guarantee it'll be put to good use.'

"Tommy tried to argue again about the Kid not acceptin' charity.

" 'Who said anything about charity!' bawls the Looie. 'You do as I tell you and don't throw so many monkey wrenches in the machinery.'

Before taps that night Tommy came over to my bunk and tells me that he's overheard the Looie calling up all the sporting writers and talking worried. He thinks maybe the Looie is going to let us hold the bag. I tell him he's more goofy than Jimmy, that the Looie has got a plan, and that whatever it is we'll find out when he's ready, and not before.

"Next day, right after pay call, Tommy and me make the rounds. We

didn't take no excuses. Everybody had to kick in. And plenty. Tommy brought in more than eight hundred pesos, and I had over a thousand. While we were waiting in the post exchange office for the Looie, Tommy tells me that all the afternoon papers have stories about the Kid going stale and that the odds outside the Mont de Piètié rose to 7 to 1 on the champ.

"The Looie came in with his arm over the Kid's shoulder. He pointed to the two hatfuls of jack and says to the Kid: 'How good do you think you are?'

"The Kid mumbled something about not knowin'.

"'Well,' says McGee, 'here's how good the boys think you are. There are almost two thousand pesos in those hats. Two thousand pesos invested at 7 to 1 makes fourteen thousand, plus ten thousand to the winner equals twenty-four thousand. High finance? Sure. But you told me your dad owes twenty thousand. The two thousand that the boys are contributing won't do you any good unless you plaster it all on yourself. It's whole hog or none. Do you get me?'

"If Tommy and me were worrying, the Kid was going through worse. He went whiter than his handkerchief; looks out across the parade ground where the companies were forming for retreat, listens to Kelly blowing first call, shivers, wipes his forehead and reaches for the money.

"The Looie pounds him on the back. 'That a boy,' says he. 'You can't lose now. That gang'll root for you till icicles drip in Hades. Beat it. I made the best odds I could for you.'

"When he'd left, the Looie blows his nose hard and turns to us. 'If any of the gang wants to make a piece of change for themselves, tell 'em the Kid looks real hot to me.'

"'Fine time to tell us,' says Tommy, 'when there ain't a loose peseta in the whole post!'

"I tells him to shut up, that there always the Mont de Piètié. The Looie grins and unbuckles his silver spurs and hands them over, telling us to soak 'em for the limit.

"Did I tell the gang? I did. That was the one time we all hocked our B. V. Ds, army regulations and court-martials notwithstanding. The Mont de Piètié and the whole Plaza Goiti looked like an American arsenal. Boots, binoculars, blankets, bedding rolls, everything that you could raise a peso on. Before five o'clock the next afternoon the odds dropped to even money, and when the Kid entered the ring that night he was the odds-on favorite.

"The Looie, Tommy and me were the only ones in the Kid's dressing room. Tommy was rubbing in soothing advice with the alcohol. The gang outside started singing. Even in that hot room you could feel the excitement of the stadium. Everybody was on edge. But if the Kid had the post solid behind him, the spicks to a man were rooting for Garcia. Seems Perez had cabled a group of sports in Madrid that he'd fixed things pretty for Garcia, and so every bet was covered easily.

"We were just stalling along to fill in time during the prelims when there was a rumpus outside, and the door was burst in by a little gray-haired Filipino who began shooting a line of Tagalog that sounded like a string of damp firecrackers. When he saw the Kid on the slab he rushed over and kissed him on the cheek. The Looie and me were on his neck in a second and pulling him away, kicking and shouting. Then the Kid jumps off the rubbing board and introduces his old man. He asks us to leave them alone for a minute. We went out into the corridor and closed the door.

"'I smell a polecat,' says the Looie. 'This round belongs to Perez. He's cleverer than I thought he was.'

"The Looie's right, for when we go

back the Kid's blubbering like a two-year-old. Tommy gives him a stinging slap across the shoulders and the Looie opens up a battery of sarcasm that would blister the hide of a rhino. The dope is that Perez decided to foreclose and so sent a sheriff and a couple of deputies out to the plantation to take it over at midnight. Perez himself brought the old man in his machine and told him he was still willing to forget past insults, provided only the Kid would agree to throw the fight.

"In the midst of all this Clancy pounds on the door and says the semi-finals are over and that the crowd is bellowing for the Kid. The Kid straightens up, knots the strings of his pongee bath robe around his middle and looks square at the Looie. Lieutenant McGee puts his arms around the Kid's shoulder and says: 'Amigo! Remember the gang out there are your buddies. It's up to you to decide whether to double cross them or not!'

" 'I'll play the game,' says the Kid, and smiles through his tears.

" 'Then get out there and fight!' the Looie bawls. 'This baby Garcia is good—he'll be better to-night than ever on account of what he's looking forward to. And Perez has probably tipped the crowd that you've thrown the army over.' "

Donovan got up from his chair, walked over to the edge of the veranda and looked across Manila Bay. I followed him. In the east a faint light was breaking above the heights of Santa Mesa, the outrider of a tropical dawn. The upper branches of the flame tree glowed red. Sentinel palms guarding the white-coral road swayed majestically to and fro in the light air of early morning, as a lone gull, mounting skyward in great, long spirals, at last headed for the open sea.

"And what a fight it was, too," Donovan went on with his narrative, loungeing against the veranda rail. "When the Kid entered the ring, the gang stood up and cheered for five minutes. And well they might. His dark face was flushed with excitement and his eyes shot sparks. As he peeled off his bath robe he made me think a lot of 'Long Bob' Fitzsimmons, only of course much lighter. But he had the same long reach and springy step, the same panther movements of his body. No denying he was a handsome youngster, not a scar on his face or body, nor a cauliflower ear either.

"The champ kept us waiting nearly a quarter of an hour—an old trick—trying to get our goats. But the Looie was wise and, while I was taping the Kid's hands, he shot a volley of wise cracks to the reporters, that had them and the Kid laughing; so when Garcia finally did enter the ring scowling, we stole all his thunder. The spicks, though, gave him a good hand and he waved back at them, all steamed up. The referee called them into the center to give them final instructions and to look at their tapings, and I saw Garcia accidentally on purpose step on the Kid's foot and wink at him. Our boy just stares like the hick dumb-bell he is.

"During the first two rounds nothing much happened. Both boys danced around each other like a couple of real bantams in a cock pit, scratching for an opening. In the middle of round three, the Kid sees what he's been looking for, leads with his right and follows with a left chop to Garcia's jaw. The crowd yelps and Garcia clinches to save himself from falling. In the hug-me-tight he whispers: 'Is it okay for the seventh round?'

"The Kid says: 'Is what okay?'

"Garcia answers: 'The works.'

"Our bimbo replies with a tattoo on the other's ribs. The referee breaks them, and Garcia looks like some one had put poison in his mocha.

"Rounds four and five go to Garcia. It was as pretty boxing as ever I see. Between bells of the fifth and sixth frames, the Kid whispers that Garcia is hitting low.

"The next round is pretty even. The Kid lands twice over Garcia's left eye, almost closing it; but Garcia comes back with a couple of rabbit blows that has the Kid on his knees. Tommy howls at the foul, but the referee don't pay no attention.

"For thirty seconds nothing happens in round eight. The crowd starts yelling: 'Fake! Fake!' Garcia tries a right cross for the Kid's kidneys, but our boy ducks and comes back with a straight left, catching Garcia over the right ear. He wabbles on his pins and the Kid brings another up to his jaw which Garcia partly blocks with his open glove. In the clinch he's facing me and I hear him say something about the Kid's father.

"It's a damn lie!" howls the Kid, and pushes him away. And then the fun began! The Kid forgot all his lessons and waded in. Garcia never knew what a battery he opened up by talking about the Kid's family in the prize ring.

"Tommy and me couldn't get a word out of the Kid during the next two intermissions. At the beginning of the eleventh the Looie stands on a chair below his corner, and all he says is: 'Remember, Kid, the gang is rooting for you. It's a knock-out for Garcia in the next four rounds or court-martial for us all, because we've hocked everything we own and much we don't. Boy, we sure are praying for you.'

"Did he come through? I'll tell the world he did, though not until most of us had bitten our tonsils. I thought the eleventh was the beginning of the end, because after the Looie's little speech, the Kid opened up and gave Garcia all he had. But in the twelfth Garcia staged a comeback and, with two left jabs and a smart uppercut, had the Kid reeling off the ropes. He sagged to his knees and flopped and I thought sure the jig was up. At the count of eight the bell saved him. Tommy and me dragged him to his corner. The judges came over and asked if I was going to throw in the sponge, and I told 'em not by a damn sight. That my Kid was all right. Only needed a little rest. As the bell clanged I yelled at him. He nodded, and, as Garcia jumped at him to finish him off quick, the Kid feinted, and side-stepped.

"The spicks began shouting to Garcia to finish him off quick. He sure tried but had no luck. The Kid was using everything he had ever been taught, and was fighting with his brain much more than his fists. Garcia was mad that he couldn't break through the Kid's guard, and in his excitement he left an opening. The Kid sprang. A right chop followed by a straight left over the heart. But Garcia was game and was up at the count of seven. Again the Kid hit, this time over Garcia's bad left eye, completely closing it, and then a one-two-three to his ribs did the trick.

"Was there a celebration? Ask Aunt Hannah. We had to chip in to buy her a complete new bar after that night. But the funny part of it was that it took nearly fifteen minutes to convince the Kid that he'd copped the big money. Said the only two things he remembered was the Looie's speech and me howling at him. When the gang came busting in his dressing room they brought in seven campaign hats filled with Spanish gold pieces, peso notes, American dollars and a collection of miscellaneous diamond stickpins and gold cuff links.

" 'Our respects to the new champeen,' they says, 'And here's only a part of the jack that's coming to him.' And I opines that 7 to 1 is pretty fair odds, even in these hard times. What do you say, mister?"

By Ledyard Bailey

Beak Leary Hires A Cook

Author of "A Red-headed Raven," "The Hole in the Frying Pan," Etc.

When Leary started away from the ranch to locate a new cook, he hadn't the least idea that this harmless search would lead him into a drama of life, love and death —a situation involving human emotions from the most beautiful to the most ugly.

SING LOW trotting from the woodpile toward his kitchen with a flopping, headless hen in each hand, tripped over a stick and did a forward somersault, then sat up and sat still. He appeared to have lost all interest in the prospect of chicken fricassee.

"Long Dan" had not, and he walked across from the bunk house to investigate.

"List bloke!" remarked Sing Low casually, and lifted his right arm, the hand hanging limp and twisted.

"Yeah!" said Long Dan. "Now ain't that like a Chinee? With six other perfectly good days in the week, you have to go and pick on Sunday!" With that he cradled the Chinaman in his arms, carried him into the house and put him to bed; while "Pinky" Parker hooked up the buckboard and went for the doctor.

All of which accounts for the fact that "Beak" Leary, on his way to town to rustle a new cook, threw down his blankets close to the road that night, and was rolling his after-breakfast cigarette at sunup next morning. The Fool Hen stood behind him and nudged his shoulder, begging for another cold biscuit.

"Horse," said Beak, "you feelin' agile this mornin'? Because if so, we'll take the short cut over that ridge."

At the word something shot into sight

on the sky line of the ridge, black for an instant against the flush of sunrise, and plunged down the slope—a running man. In all that wide sweep of rolling sagebrush country, he was the only moving object, and he ran as if making the most of his monopoly.

"That sure is one single-minded traveler," muttered Beak. "When he goes, he aims to arrive."

A moment later, startled out of his drawl, he growled, "Now what in——" For the running man, without faltering in his headlong stride, was shedding his clothes in mid-air. His hat sailed out into the void, his coat flapped away, dropping among the sagebrush like a shot chicken; his shirt, caught by one sleeve, whipped out behind like a torn wagon top and was left hopelessly outdistanced. By the time he reached the wagon road he was down to a ragged white singlet, faded overalls and shoes. The level sun gleamed on the wet bronze of his chest and arms, and on the white of his eyes and teeth as he panted, open mouthed.

"Do you reckon," inquired Beak, "he's maybe one of these 'back-to-nature' locos?"

Locoed or not, he was a man of one idea, this runner. Arriving at the road, he became aware of his shoes. He took a dozen steps in the dust of the wagon track, crossed it, ran out into the sagebrush, stooped and straightened—a shoe in each hand. He wound up like a ball player and threw them, straight and far, out into the dry gulch below. Then he came back, treading gingerly in bare feet, stepped lightly to the high center of the wagon road, where a little dry grass persisted, and resumed his journeying at a steady jog trot. Distance was what he craved, and plenty of it.

When he was within ten yards Beak stepped from behind the boulders that had screened him. "Hi—yah!" he called, his arms held wide in the stop signal.

The darky doubled at the hips, dropped down with a thud and sat still, big bare feet stretched out, hands in the air, eyes rolling.

"Ah know'd it!" he said. "Ah know'd ah'd nevah make it. An' boss, befo' heav'n Ah nevah had nothin' to do wif it."

"With what?"

The fugitive stared; he had expected this white man to know all about it. "W'y-w'y," he stammered, "wid dat killin'—back yondah!"

It was a good many years since Beak Leary had seen much of darkies—not, in fact, since he had run away from home at fourteen; but he had not forgotten the rules.

"Get up out of that road, you triflin' renegade," he snapped, "and come into camp! Had any breakfast?"

The fugitive scrambled to his feet, grinning. Having met up with a white man who spoke his language, he forthwith shifted all responsibility and shed his fears even as he had his clothes.

"Boss," he gurgled, "would you jes' say that las' word once mo'? It sounded like somethin' Ah ain't seen no sign of fo' two days."

Beak led him to his night camp, laid beside a trickle of spring among the rocks, and made him free of coffeepot and frying pan, and what cold biscuits were left.

"Coffee and bacon in the grub sack," he directed.

"Watch me—boss," chuckled his guest. "Ah's the brekfus-gettinest colored boy west of the rivah!"

Beak sat cross-legged, his back to a boulder, and watched. The man was a cook; he showed the speed and deftness of the professional, and Beak admitted, privately, that Jimmy Mulligan himself had never made better coffee. He set down his cup, rolled a cigarette and said:

"Come across now. Let's see if you can talk as fast as you can run."

The darky filled the coffeepot with clean water and set it on the fire to heat for the dishes; he had the artist's capacity for detail. Then he stood before his judge and talked. His Georgia dialect had gone the way of his panic; he talked almost straight United States until he came to his climax.

"This is how come, boss. Ah quit my job at the Lazy K 'bout a week ago —after the rush work was ovah—an' drifted west along the railroad, lookin' for a country that ain't so ovahcrowded as Nee-braska. Ah started with good clothes, boss, an' money—enough to divide up with a conductah when it was necessary. But night befo' last, back in that Al—my town, Ah meets up with a set of dice that was plumb deef; they couldn' heah my voice a-tall; an' by the time Ah quit tryin' Ah'm picked almos' clean."

"You had plenty of clothes when I saw you first," said Beak.

"Yes, suh. But they was—borrowed —them clo'es was, boss. This morning. That's how come Ah got stampeded that a way. Ah'm driftin' along the road, ovah the other side of that ridge yondah, an' Ah sees a cabin, set back in a draw. It looked right peaceful—an' sort of deserted. Ah figured Ah might could rustle me a little grub anyhow, an' maybe an old hat. So Ah headed up for it."

Here he paused and shook his head mournfully, his eyes searching Beak's impassive face.

"Boss, they ain't nothin' certain in this world—except you're bound to git it in the neck somehow! The door was wide open, an' nobody answered when Ah knocked and hollered, so Ah made myself free. Everything looked peaceful, like Ah tell you. There was a stove and shelves full of grub. Ah started me a fire an' while it was gettin' hot Ah scouted round. Hangin' on a nail was an ole hat an' coat that looked like they wouldn' be missed. But there was another door, part way open, an' Ah saw mo' clo'es. So Ah went an' put on an ole pair o' shoes an' a shirt. Ah craved me a handkerchief fo' my neck, too; but they wasn't none in sight, an' Ah come back to the big room, put on the coat an' hat an' was stoopin' down to get a stick of wood for the fire when Ah saw tracks on the flo' behind me. Fresh-made tracks—an' boss—they was red! Red footprints, made with them same shoes Ah had on! Ah made 'em, myself—comin' f'um that room! Ah takes one look, an' Ah saw it—blood. Undeh a closet do'. Ah walked right spang in it! Boss, Ah don' know did Ah pass out th'u the do' or the roof. Ah des' made one jump f'um the flo' wheah Ah was at—an' when Ah hit the ground Ah was ha'fway up the hill. An' heah Ah is. An' that's all."

His teeth gleamed in a wide and confident smile. His troubles were over; the rest was up to the white man.

Beak considered him. A marvelous actor? Or as simple-minded and honest as he seemed? Hard to believe, either way you took him. Only one thing was clear, he was too good a cook to be hanged. And he was due for just that, sure as taxes, as soon as anybody picked up his trail from that cabin.

That is, provided there really had been a killing.

"How come you to be so sure it was blood you saw? More likely you knocked a can of fruit off the closet shelf, slammin' round the way you did."

"Boss," said the darky solemnly, "Ah'd give the rest of my clo'es to believe that! But Ah saw it fo' sho'." He shivered at the recollection.

"Pick up camp!" ordered Beak. "We'll ride over and take a look."

"Who—me? Not me, boss! Ah's taken my las' look at that cabin."

Beak fixed him with a stare that made him wriggle like a beetle on a pin. "Want I should turn you loose, do you?"

"Ah sho' does, boss. Ah didn' have nothin' more to do wif it than what Ah tole you."

"I reckon I'd ought to do it. You're too chicken-witted to live. Only for one thing I would, too."

"An' what's that, boss?"

"Never mind, now. Haven't you sense enough to see what will happen to you—set afoot this way, stranger in the country, knowin' nobody, and leavin' a trail behind you like a stampeded steer, in stolen shoes?"

The fugitive's glossy bronze skin faded to a dull green and his teeth clicked. The noose dangled before his eyes.

"Don't you do that—please suh. Ah's comin' a-runnin'." And he whirled in to clean up camp with such energy that he was standing with the bed roll on his shoulder by the time Beak had the Fool Hen saddled. They zigzagged up the hill, the darky trotting alongside with one hand hooked in the latigo—not so much to help himself as to keep close to his white man as he neared the place of panic.

At that he was spared the final shock, for Beak swung wide, rode into the trail below the cabin and pulled up fifty yards away. "Wait here," he ordered as he dropped off, "and mind the horse." He put the reins in the black man's hand—not because it was necessary to hold the Fool Hen, who could be trusted to stand, but to make sure that his cook did not stampede again. He walked slowly toward the cabin, his eyes scanning the dry earth of the trail for any sign of what had happened.

The tracks of a saddle horse coming and going, all of them a day or more old; now and then the print of the black's bare foot made that morning—nothing of any significance until he came to the porch along the front of the cabin. Here was a telltale tangle of hoofprints, stamped plain in the bare dirt. One horse had come in on the jump from a side trail, and had been reined to its haunches alongside the porch, its shoes plowing the earth as it slid to a stop. It had stood, shifting its feet now and then as it waited, had whirled, swung right round and plunged away again along the same trail. The tracks were fresh and sharp, showing darker than the sun-bleached earth around them.

Beak stood on the porch and studied this sign, working out the picture in his mind. Some one had ridden in that morning, riding hard, and on a side trail. Must have known where he was going and what for. Must have been in a hurry, too, both coming and going.

He turned and stood in the open doorway, looking the room over. Everything was peaceful, everything but those sinister red footprints leading from the side room. The fire in the stove had died down, but the teakettle still sang with a faint hiss—the only sound in the world. Beak walked quietly across and paused in the door of that room, his hand on the jamb. Here was more evidence. This door had been driven in; the jamb was splintered where the bolt had torn loose. On the door itself the print of a boot heel showed plain, close to the knob.

"When a man hauls off and kicks a door in, that way," muttered Beak, "he's lookin' for trouble on the other side of it. Only question is—what kind of trouble? And why?"

His eyes ranged over the room, inch by inch. A bed, a bureau and looking glass; a Navajo blanket on the floor in front; a man's comb and brush; a bunch of neckties in an embroidered sling; several photographs, women's photographs; a washstand and pitcher in the corner. Beak squatted on his heels and looked under the bed—three pairs of shoes, men's—one patent leather. Also, considerable dust under the bed.

"Bachelor," said Beak. "Fond of

good clothes; liked to doll up now and then; had a lady friend or two."

Squatting thus, his eyes near the floor, he saw something else against the light from the window—a little thing, but right interesting. A wire hairpin standing straight up on that rug in front of the bureau.

"Must have dropped there this morning," he thought. "Nobody's been near it since."

His eyes came round at last to that closet door. There was the splotch of red, glazed and darkened now. There were holes in that door, bullet holes, six of them, accurately spaced in a zigzag pattern from left to right and back again.

"A shootin' man!" said Beak. "And right thorough. He aimed to make a clean-up on whatever's behind that door."

Having secured all the information his eyes could gather, he stepped to the closet door, placing his feet warily to avoid the red patch and turned the knob. The door sprang open, pressed against his hand by a heavy weight inside; he steadied it, easing the thing behind it to the floor at his feet. The body of a man, his knees doubled under him, sagged down against the door. The effect was weird, horrible.

Beak straightened him out as best he could and looked him over. He was young, well made, and had black hair and mustache. Handsome after a fashion, his face was distorted with frozen terror. He was now thoroughly dead. Four of those six shots through the door had reached him. His hands were empty, but on the floor of the closet lay an ivory-and-silver-mounted pocket pistol. Beak reached in and lifted it: it was a .38 caliber, double action, five shot—a deadly gun for close fighting, a gambler's gun. Hadn't been fired; all five chambers were loaded. Either he hadn't had time, or he had been too scared to try. On the handle was engraved the owner's name—"Jack Menefee."

Beak had heard of him, in town—sure-thing gambler, ladies' man, all-round bad actor.

Nothing else in the closet but clothes, men's clothes, good quality and neatly hung; a couple of town-going hats on the shelf.

Leaving the body where it lay, Beak walked out on the porch, sat on the railing and rolled a cigarette. The outside air and the fragrant smoke tasted uncommonly good. He had the picture pretty clear in his mind. Just one detail was missing. He finished his cigarette, vaulted the rail to avoid the horse tracks, and walked along the edge of that side trail for a few yards. So he found the missing link, the prints of a woman's shoe coming down the trail toward the cabin; no sign of any returning.

"Looks like the cards are all faced," said Beak. "And come to study them over, I can't see where I've bought any chips in this game, myself. That handsome corpse in there got just about what was comin' to him, the way I figure it."

Having reached this conclusion, he turned his back on battle, murder and sudden death, and headed for his horse. As he came round the turn in the trail the horse and its holder caught sight of him at the same instant; the horse whickered and the black man jumped to his feet, his teeth flashing a wide welcome. "Lordy, boss, you was gone fo' evahmore!" he called.

Beak stopped in his tracks, pushed up his sombrero and drew thumb and finger along his high nose.

"Daw-*gone!*" he muttered. "I like to forgot the main business on hand. What about that fool darky?"

He thought fast. All very well to leave trouble where it lay and go about his own business. But his business was to cut out a cook; and here was a cook, a good one, come stampeding right into

his loop. Where was the sense in letting him get himself hanged? And so long as that murder in the cabin wasn't cleared up——

"M-m!" he sighed. "Ain't it funny the way trouble sticks to my fingers? Boy," he called, "shake a foot with that horse!"

The other grinned delightfully and led the Fool Hen forward, one hand rubbing the sleek neck back of the ears. He was on good terms with the horse already.

"What's your name?" demanded Beak, as he took the reins.

"Mahcus Aurelius Pickens, suh."

"Uh-huh. It would be. We'll let that go as it lays. What's your real name?"

"'Congo!'" chuckled the late emperor of Rome.

"That'll do me. You're hired—cook at the Split X; forty-five a month if you make good—and the Lord have mercy on your soul if you don't."

"Suits me to the ground, boss," said Congo; but his eyes rolled toward the cabin. "How—how 'bout that killin' in theah?" he quavered.

"Killing?" said Beak. "You don't know anything about any killing. Do you?" he added sharply.

"N-no—no, suh!" stammered Congo. Then he caught the idea. "Not me, boss! Nevah heahed the wo'd befo'" he declared with deep conviction.

Nevertheless his eyes showed white and he held his breath as they passed that open door. Beak rode close to the porch and headed into the side trail beyond, pulled up after a few yards and, ordering Congo to stay there, rode back to the door yard and reined the puzzled Fool Hen to and fro through the telltale tracks until they were thoroughly blinded. So far, so good. But how about the body? If he was going to cover the trail he would have to make a clean job of it.

He stepped from the saddle to the porch and stood in the doorway, rolling a cigarette; then walked across to the stove for matches and filled his pocket from the box, struck one and held it in his fingers, his mind so intent on his problem that he forgot his cigarette. The match scorched his finger, and he dropped it, still flaming. It fell straight into the litter of paper and chips in the wood box.

Beak stared down at it, watching the tiny flame creep and grow.

"That's the answer," he said. "Cleans up everything—body and blood and bullet holes—and photographs."

He turned away, mounted his horse and rode on that side trail, his new cook trotting alongside without a care in the world. There was still one piece of unfinished business on Beak's mind, however, and he proceeded to get it over with.

"Can't be far," he said to himself. "The woman came afoot, and before sunup. Must be near neighbors."

It was a good guess. The trail led through a patch of quaking asp, over a low ridge and down to a round, green valley and a well-kept ranch house. There was a fenced garden, green vegetables and flowers; two milk cows in the pasture; a rocking chair on the long porch.

"Good family man," said Beak. "Handled the woman too easy, I wouldn't wonder. That's liable to make 'em lose interest."

He rode down to the house and swung off, leaving the horse anchored by trailing reins; then walked toward the door, keeping Congo beside him. As he came to the porch, the door opened and a man strode out, closed it behind him and stood fast, meeting Beak's eyes with a look as steady as his own. "Good man!" thought Beak. And he was: tall, powerfully made, wide shoulders, red-blond hair thrown back from a white forehead, light-blue eyes set deep and far apart, long, tawny mustache. Stand-

ing so, his head high, eyes narrowed, hands at his sides, poised lightly on his feet, he put Beak in mind of an old colored print of a Norse pirate in the prow of his war canoe.

"Good morning," said Beak. "May I trouble you for some—information?"

"About what?" said the ranchman, without shifting his eyes or moving a muscle.

"This colored boy here," said Beak. "Have you ever seen him before? Know anything about him? He's landed himself in big trouble this morning."

"About what?" said the ranchman again.

Congo's eyes began to roll; he had been deluding himself that his troubles were over, but the next words made his teeth chatter.

"Your neighbor, Jack Menefee, was shot this morning—murdered. This boy was seen running from the house. He swears he had nothing to do with it, doesn't know anything about it except that he saw the signs on the floor. But he's a gone darky, unless——"

"Unless what?" said the ranchman.

"You're plenty economical with your language," drawled Beak. "Unless the real murderer is found."

For the first time the ranchman's eyes flickered; he turned his head, listening for some sound from the house behind him; he hesitated, torn by the sudden temptation, the unlooked-for way of escape. Beak caught a glimpse of a shadow at the window—of a shifted curtain. "Now for it!" he thought. "I'm backing him to come through."

The man threw up his head. "He's found," he said, "I killed Menefee myself."

"Congo!" barked Beak. "What you doin' here? Get back there and mind that horse like I told you." He was barely in time; the door was flung wide and a woman sprang out to stand close beside the man.

"He did not!" she cried. "Don't believe him. *I* killed him! *I* killed him! And he deserved it."

Beak swept off his sombrero. She was a young woman—girl to look at her; slim and dark; would have been right easy on the eyes if she hadn't been crying so hard. Her big black eyes were flashing now, though; and there was a grim, grown-up set to her mouth. She meant what she was saying.

Here was a new twist to the game, evidently just as surprising to the ranchman as to Beak. The former bent his high head and stared into the girl's face; then he threw one arm about her and turned to Beak again. For some reason he seemed cheered up a whole lot, and his tongue was loosened.

"You will pay no attention to what my wife says. She is much—much overwrought this morning. I am the man you want."

Beak smiled at them; he had a right disarming smile when he felt like it.

"I hate to contradict you, sir—me being on your own ground—but you are not the man I want. I'm no peace officer, understand—just an innocent bystander, hunting for a cook for the Split X outfit. Leary's my name. I've done hired that colored boy this morning, and—good cooks being mighty hard to come by, as you know yourself, ma'am—I didn't like the idea of his getting himself hung."

He set one spurred boot on the porch and leaned an elbow on his knee—just rambling along, giving them time to get themselves in hand. He felt certain now that things were coming out right. The tragedy of that morning had cleared the air for both of them.

It was the woman, as usual, who recovered her wits first. She laughed—kind of a hysterical-sounding laugh, but well meant.

"Why Eric," she said, "he's telling the truth. Come in; come in, sir, and we will tell you all about it."

"Thank you kindly, ma'am," said Beak, without moving, "but you'll have to excuse me. I know all I need to about it now."

The man took his arm away and stepped in front of his wife. His wits were slower and he was not quite ready to believe that the danger was over. He looked searchingly at Beak.

"What *do* you know?" he demanded.

"This much," said Beak, "since you ask me. Some one, a woman, ran down that trail to Menefee's cabin this morning, before sunup. Somebody else—a man—rode hell-bent after her, located her—heard her scream, I wouldn't wonder. Anyway, he kicked the door in and, not liking the looks of things, he saw red and pulled his gun. This Menefee, bein' a natural-born rat, tried to hide in the closet, and the man shot him through the door, and made a mighty thorough job of it. Then he picked the woman up, jumped on his horse and carried her"—Beak paused, looking steadily at the woman—"brought her home," he finished, "where she belongs. And where she's going to stay, I judge."

The ranchman stared, fascinated; then turned and spoke to his wife in a queer, hushed voice: "The man's a wizard!"

She nodded, and taking his hand drew his arm about her again. "You are right," she said, smiling at Beak. "Here is where she's going to stay."

The touch of her hand, the sound of her voice, seemed to clear her husband's head; and he smiled also, for the first time.

"One thing you missed," he said. "I did give Menefee a chance to get his gun. He claimed it was in the closet, ran in, slammed the door behind him and called out something—something I won't repeat. Then I killed him."

"He told the truth about the gun," said Beak. "I found it on the floor in the closet—and not a shot fired. That's what made me certain he was yellow."

"And now," said the ranchman, his jaw setting again, "since you know so much, what are you going to do about it?"

Beak glanced over his shoulder.

"The way I see it," he drawled, "there's nothing more needs to be done, by anybody." He turned from the porch and pointed to the column of smoke, shot with sparks, that swirled up beyond that ridge where the trail ran to Menefee's cabin. The ranchman and his wife came and stood beside him, watching in silence, their faces pale, their hands locked together.

After a minute the woman turned her black eyes, questioning and intent, to Beak's face. There was no more expression on it than a saddle flap. He moved away toward his horse and his cook, and his hand was on the saddle horn before the others came out of their trance and ran to stop him.

"Hold on!" cried the man. 'We can't let you go like this. Good Lord! Look what you've done for us."

Beak shook his head without speaking; and the woman came close and laid a hand on his arm.

"I know you won't listen to thanks," she said breathlessly. "But you must believe this. He rode by here yesterday—on his way to town—and stopped—to ask Eric about hay. I noticed a beautiful quirt he carried, and spoke of it. And Eric was angry with me, and I resented it. Such a trifle! But this morning, when I opened the door, there was the quirt hanging beside it. I was frightened, I knew if Eric saw it there would be trouble. So I snatched it and ran over there, not expecting to see him, never dreaming what a beast he was. I was a fool, but I meant no harm."

"I am proud to believe it, ma'am," said Beak Leary gravely. Then he vaulted from the ground to his saddle, Congo caught his stirrup leather, and they were gone.

A Chat With You

IN Shakespeare's play, *Hamlet* says to his friend: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."

Quite true! New things turn up every day. Did you ever consider how the numbers 7 and 11 came to have such a mystical significance? Have you ever seen people roll dice? Then you have heard the appeal for these numbers to turn up on the bones. But why should they be the important numbers? The rules of the game, do you say? The game, in all probability, is older than the Pyramids, and the rule is not an arbitrary one but founded on some ancient mystery and secret.

* * * *

FOR many years we have heard that 7 was a number with mystical associations. We have heard that at the end of seven years the human body was quite replaced by new atoms. Seven years was the cycle. So that the lad of seven was quite a different fellow from the boy of fourteen. As for the young man of twenty-one, not a bit of him remained of the boy of fourteen. When we get to twenty-eight, Mr. Twenty-one has disappeared—and so on.

This is all theory. It cannot be proved. But, like any other theory, it remains interesting and worthy of attention until it is disproved. Does anything in your own life or fate answer to this theory? It may be just a fancy or there may be something in it. Judge for yourself.

* * * *

WITH the number 11 we drift out of the maze of guesswork and opinion and come into the domain of science. Here we may bring observation to bear. Mr. Julian Huxley, gifted teacher of zoölogy at King's College, London, and formerly senior demonstrator in zoölogy at Oxford, has something important to say about the number 11.

Something happens about every eleven years to the various creatures who inhabit this green earth of ours. Year before last there was a pest of field mice in California. If you who are reading this happen to live there you probably know more about it than we could tell you. They had a plague of mice in Europe in 1923. They had another in Nevada in 1907. A little rodent called the lemming multiplies out of all bounds in Scandinavia at regular intervals. The Asiatic grouse at regular intervals multiplies so rapidly that great hordes of them fly eastward into China and westward into Europe. These intervals are set about eleven years apart. The annals of the Hudson's Bay Company show the number of skins turned in by trappers for the last hundred years or so. Both lynx and rabbit have a cycle of eleven years from high point to high point. The lynx lives on rabbit, so the big year for the lynx is a year or so after the big year for the rabbits. But the cycle is eleven years.

* * * *

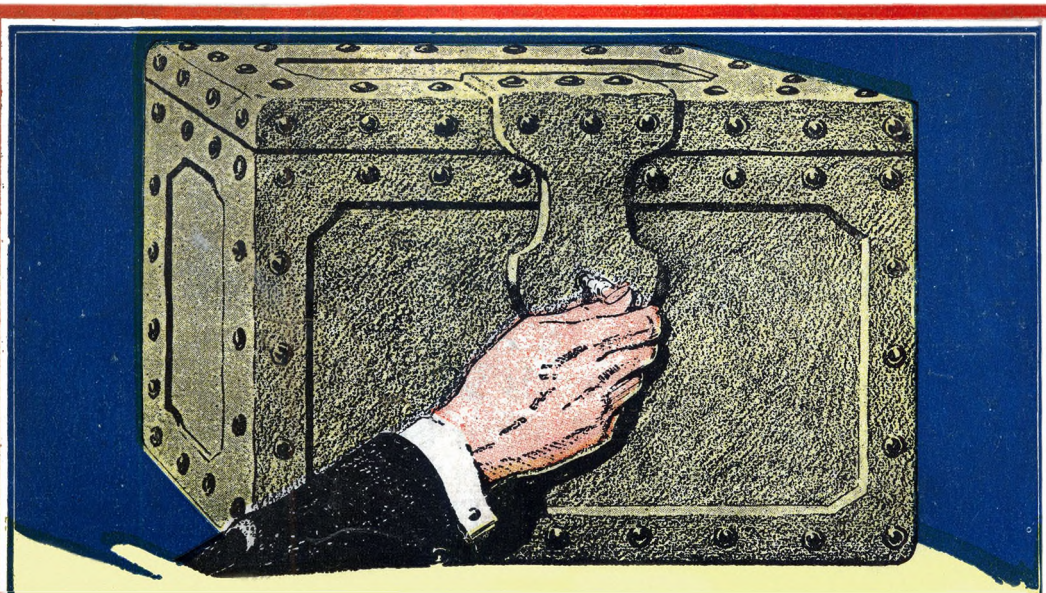
MR. HUXLEY looks, like the true scientist he is, for a reason for all this. If there is an effect there must be a cause. He thinks it may perhaps be found in the sun spots. They affect the climate on this earth. A little more rain here, a little less there, a little more heat here, a little less there, have a prodigious effect on insects and vegetation, on the animals who live on the vegetation and on the bigger animals who live on the smaller ones. What

causes the spots to appear and disappear on the lambent face of the sun and so affect our climate? No one may say for certain, but it has been shown that they have their eleven-year cycle. And if they affect the smaller animals, they affect men. A pestilence among men generally follows a multiplicity of rodents. By the way, it is interesting to note that the great redwoods of California, with their record of three thousand years set in the concentric rings of their trunks, bear the same testimony to the eleven-year period. It has been held that the fluctuation of sun spots is probably connected with the distance of the great planet Jupiter from the sun's incandescent surface.

However that may be, eleven years ago Roy Norton, B. M. Bower and W. B. M. Ferguson were all writing for THE POPULAR. If you liked it then, or twenty-two years ago for that matter, you will like it now. And if you are starting it now, you may perhaps wish you had started eleven years ago.

THE POPULAR

In the Next Issue, January 21, 1928



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