TWICE-A-MONTH

20 CTS.

REG. U.S. PAT. OFF.

The Popular Magazine

JAN. 20 1922

PAINTED BY
ANTON OTTO FISCHER

A COMPLETE NOVEL OF THE NORTH
BY GEORGE MARSH

Free Proof You Can Eat A Pound a Day Off Your Weight

Famous Scientist Discovers Remarkable Secret That Shows Results in 48 Hours! No Medicines, Starving, Exercises or Bitter Self-Denials of Any Kind!

AT last the secret of reducing easily, quickly and safely has been discovered. No more painful self-denials or discomfort. Just follow a simple natural law, and a pound or more of your weight will disappear each day—the very first week! Most people begin to see actual results in 48 hours!

This new way to reduce is different from anything you have ever tried before. Men and women who have been struggling for years against constantly increasing flesh, who have tried everything, from painful diet to strenuous exercising, have found this new method completely successful! Thousands of women who have had to wear special corsets and inconspicuous clothes have been amazed at the rapid change in figure that enables them to wear the gayest colors and the most fluffy styles. Thousands of men whose stoutness made them listless and inactive, who puffed when they walked quickly, who were deprived of outdoor pleasures, are astonished at what this new discovery had done for them. Not only has it quickly reduced their weight, but it has given them renewed strength and vigor.

Nearly everyone finds that a reduction of a pound a day from the very start is not too much to expect. You'll be down to your normal weight almost before you realize it—and with practically no effort. Many users say that they enjoy their meals as never before and feel refreshed, invigorated, strengthened.

Here's the Secret

Food causes fat—everyone admits that. But Eugene Christian, the famous Food Specialist, has discovered that certain foods when eaten together, are converted only into blood, tissues and bone. And in the meantime your excess flesh is consumed at the rate of a pound or more a day.

In explaining this discovery, Christian has said:

"Fat in the human body is like mercury in a thermometer—it can be raised or lowered, that is, diminished or increased, by combining your foods at meals according to certain simple, natural laws. There is nothing complicated, nothing hard or difficult to understand. It is simply a matter of following directions and learning how to combine foods so that fat is consumed instead of deposited in the body."

How You Can Have Free Proof

Realizing the importance of his discovery, Eugene Christian has incorporated all his valuable information into 12 simple lessons, called "Weight Control—the Basis of Health," which will be sent free to anyone who writes for them. These lessons show you how to control your weight and bring it down to normal by this wonderful new method. They show you how to eat off a pound or more of weight a day.

Prove it! Test this wonderful new way of reducing at our expense! See results in 48 hours. Fat people are not attractive; they suffer many discomforts; doctors say they die young. Why continue to carry this harmful weight, when you can lose it so quickly, so easily, so naturally?

Let us send you Eugene Christian's Course in weight-control on free trial. It's the only sure way to lose weight quickly and safely. We want you to see your own unnecessary flesh disappear. Dieting, medicines, bathing and exercising touch only the surface; this new discovery gets right down to the real reason for your stoutness and removes it naturally.

What Users Say

Reduces 45 Pounds

"I am only 30 years of age, height only 5 feet 2 inches, yet when I started your method I weighed 188 Pounds. Was forever complaining of headaches and indigestion. Various reducing pills had proved unsuccessful but I decided to try your method because it sounded so reasonable. I reduced to 143 pounds and never felt better in my life. No more headaches or indigestion and most of all I enjoy my meals. My complexion has improved and general health benefited, The menus are satisfying and delicious."

Mrs. A. Clare, Cleveland, O.

Reduces 40 Pounds—Banished Acute Indigestion

"Had consulted doctors to get rid of my superfluous fat but without result. I weighed 200 pounds. I wrote for and applied your methods and had no trouble in quickly reducing to 160 pounds—expect to reduce to 150 pounds and then stop. My complexion has improved wonderfully restless nights and acute indigestion have vanished. The method is so easy, no discomfort, no risk, and no starvation."

Melissa Givings, New York City.

Loses 16 Pounds in 2 Weeks

"I am writing to let you know how pleased I am with results so far. When I began I was 198 pounds—in two weeks I came down to 182 pounds. I am convinced I could reduce even more rapidly but don't care to reduce so fast. Will let you know in a short time how much more I have lost."

Mrs. Laura Tucker, New York City.

Above are just a few of the hundreds of letters on file in our office.

No Money in Advance

This is a special Free Proof Offer. You need not send any money in advance. The complete 12-lesson course containing all of the valuable information regarding Christian's food combination discoveries, will be sent to your door. Just mail the coupon and the course will be sent to you at once.

As soon as it arrives weigh yourself. Then throw aside all your medicines and salts and dieting and exercises. Just follow the simple little rule outlined in the course, and watch results! In a few days weigh yourself again and notice how much you have lost. Notice also how much lighter your step is, how much clearer your eyes are, and how much better you feel. You be the sole judge of the benefits of this new discovery to yourself.

Don't delay. Get your coupon off at once,—now. No money just the coupon. When the course is in your hands, give the postman $1.97 (plus postage) in full payment. It will be refunded immediately upon request if you do not see a most encouraging improvement within 5 days. If more convenient, you may remit with coupon, but this is not necessary.

Here's the coupon. Clip it and get it into the mail box at once. Remember many people lose a pound or more a day—from the very start. Mail the coupon NOW.

(The course will be mailed in a plain container)

Corrective Eating Society, Inc.
Dept. W-3712, 43 West 16th St. New York City

CORRECTIVE EATING SOCIETY, Inc.
Dept. W-3712, 43 West 16th St. New York City

You may send me in plain container, Eugene Christian's Course, "Weight Control—the Basis of Health," complete in twelve lessons. I will pay the postman only $1.97 (plus postage) in full payment on arrival. If I am not satisfied with the course I have the privilege of returning the course to you within 5 days after its receipt. It is of course understood that you are to refund my money if I return the course within this time.

Name .....
Please write plainly

Address .....

City .....

State .....

Price outside United States $2.15 cash with order

"THE SHAMAN," a complete novel by Roy Norton, will appear in the next issue. Among the other good writers represented will be Witwer, McMorrow, Day, Paine, Stacpoole and Rice.

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

Vol. LXIII. No. 1 — January 20, 1922

CONTENTS

Twice-a-month publication issued by Street & Smith Corporation, 79-89 Seventh Avenue, New York. ORMOND G. SMITH, President; GEORGE C. SMITH, Treasurer; GEORGE C. SMITH, JR., Secretary. Copyright, 1922, by Street & Smith Corporation, New York. Copyright, 1922, by Street & Smith Corporation, Great Britain. *All Rights Reserved.* Publishers everywhere are cautioned against using any of the contents of this Magazine either wholly or in part. Entered as Second-class Matter, September 20, 1909, at the Post Office at New York, N. Y., under Act of Congress of March 3, 1879. Canadian Subscription, $4.72. Foreign, $5.44.

WARNING—Do not subscribe through agents unknown to you. Complaints are daily made by persons who have been thus victimized.

IMPORTANT—Authors, agents, and publishers are requested to note that this firm does not hold itself responsible for loss of unsolicited manuscripts while at this office or in transit; and that it cannot undertake to hold uncalled-for manuscripts for a longer period than six months. If the return of manuscript is expected, postage should be inclosed.

YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION $4.00 — SINGLE COPIES 20 Cents

The next POPULAR will be on the news stands February 7th

How I increased my salary more than 300%

by Joseph Anderson

I AM just the average man—twenty-eight years old, with a wife and a three-year-old youngster. I left school when I was fourteen. My parents didn't want me to do it, but I thought I knew more than they did.

I can see my father now, standing before me, pleading, threatening, coaxing me to keep on with my schooling. With tears in his eyes he told me how he had been a failure all his life because of lack of education—that the untrained man is always forced to work for a small salary—that he had hoped, yes, and prayed, that I would be a more successful man than he was.

But no! My mind was made up. I had been offered a job at nine dollars a week and I was going to take it.

That nine dollars looked awfully big to me. I didn't realize then, nor for years afterward, that I was being paid only for the work of my hands. My brain didn't count.

THEN one day, glancing through a magazine, I came across the story of a man just like myself. He, too, had left school when he was fourteen years of age, and had worked for years at a small salary. But he was ambitious. He decided that he would get out of the rut by training himself to become expert in some line of work.

So he got in touch with the International Correspondence Schools at Scranton and started to study in his spare time at home. It was the turn in the road for him—the beginning of his success.

Most stories like that tell of the presidents of great institutions who are earning $25,000 and $50,000 a year. Those stories frighten me. I don't think I could ever earn that much. But this story told of a man who, through spare time study, lifted himself from $25 to $75 a week. It made an impression on me because it talked in terms I could understand. It seemed reasonable to suppose that I could do as well.

I tell you it didn't take me long that time to mark and send in that familiar coupon. Information regarding the Course I had marked came back by return mail. I found it wasn't too late to make up the education I had denied myself as a boy.

I was surprised to find out how fascinating a home-study course could be. The I. C. S. worked with me every hour I had to spare. I felt myself growing. I knew there was a bigger job waiting for me somewhere.

Four months after I enrolled my employer came to me and told me that he always gave preference to men who studied their jobs—and that my next salary envelope would show how much he thought of the improvement in my work.

Today, my salary is more than 300% greater than it was when I began my studies. That increase has meant a better home and all the luxuries that make life worth while.

What I have done, you can do. For I am just an average man. I had no more education to begin with than you have—perhaps not as much. The only difference is a matter of training.

TO every man who is earning less than $75 a week, I say simply this:—*Find out what the I. C. S. can do for you!*

It will take only a minute of your time to mark and mail the coupon. But that one simple act may change your whole life.

If I hadn't taken that first step four years ago I wouldn't be writing this message to you today! No, and I wouldn't be earning anywhere near $75 a week, either!

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
BOX 3386 SCRANTON, PA.

Without cost or obligation please explain how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

- ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Electric Lighting & Railways
- ☐ Electric Wiring
- ☐ Telegraph Engineer
- ☐ Telephone Work
- ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Toolmaker
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ MINE FOREMAN or ENG'R
- ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER
- ☐ Marine Engineer
- ☐ ARCHITECT
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ PLUMBING & HEATING
- ☐ Sheet Metal Worker
- ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt.
- ☐ CHEMIST
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ BUSINESS MANAGEM'T
- ☐ SALESMANSHIP
- ☐ ADVERTISING
- ☐ Show Card & Sign Ptg.
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ ILLUSTRATING
- ☐ Cartooning
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Correspondent
- ☐ BOOKKEEPER
- ☐ Stenographer & Typist
- ☐ Certified Public Accountant
- ☐ TRAFFIC MANAGER
- ☐ Railway Accountant
- ☐ Commercial Law
- ☐ GOOD ENGLISH
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ CIVIL SERVICE
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ AUTOMOBILES
- ☐ Mathematics
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ AGRICULTURE
- ☐ Poultry Raising ☐ Spanish
- ☐ BANKING ☐ Teacher

Name.....

Street and No.....

City..... State.....

Occupation.....

THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXIII. JANUARY 20, 1922. No. 1

Breed of the Wolf

By George Marsh

This story of a dog among dogs in the grim North where the Hudson's Bay Company has made history is equally for dog lovers and all who prize for its own sake a fine tale told by one who knows the land of which he writes and the drama of the struggle for mere existence there. Even old runners of the winter trails, when they heard of it, doubted the tale of how Marcel and his dog team won the fight for the life of Julie Breton. One needed to know the heart of Marcel and of Fleur, greatest of "lead dogs," to understand how that was possible.

(*A Complete Novel*)

CHAPTER I.

THE solitudes of the east coast had shaken off the grip of the long snows. A thousand streams and rivers choked with snow water from bleak Ungava hills plunged and foamed and raced into the west, seeking the salt Hudson Bay, the "Big Water" of the Crees. In the lakes the honeycombed ice was daily fading under the strengthening sun. Already, here and there the buds of the willows reddened the river shores, while the southern slopes of sun-warmed ridges were softening with the pale green of the young leaves of birch and poplar. Long since the armies of the snowy geese had passed, bound for far arctic islands; while marshes and muskegs were vocal with the raucous clamor of the nesting gray goose.

And one day, with the spring, there returned Jean Marcel from his camp on the Ghost River, the northernmost tributary of the Great Whale—returned to the bald ridge where in March he had seen the sun glitter on a broad expanse of level snow unbroken by trees in the hills to the north. His eyes had not deceived him. The lake was there.

From his commanding position on the bare brow of the isolated mountain, he looked out on a wilderness of timbered valleys and high barrens which rolled away endlessly into the north. Among these lay a large body of water partly free of ice. Into the northeast he could trace the divide—even make out where a small feeder of the Ghost headed on the height of land. And he now knew that he looked upon the dread valleys of the forbidden country of the Crees—the demon-haunted solitudes of the land of the "Windigo," whose dim, blue hills guarded a region of mystery and terror—a wilderness, peopled in the tales of the medicine man with giant eaters of human flesh and spirits of evil. For generations it had been taboo to the hunters of Whale River.

There was no doubt of it. The large lake he saw was a headwater of the Big Salmon River, the southern sources of which tradition placed in the Bad Lands north of the Ghost. Once his canoe floated in this lake, he could work into the main river and find the Eskimos on the coast.

"So!" muttered the Frenchman, "I go!"

Two days later, back in camp on the Ghost, Marcel announced to his partners, Antoine Beaulieu and Joe Piquet, his intention of returning to the bay by the Big Salmon.

"W'at you say, Jean? You go home tru de Windigo countree?" cried Piquet, his swart face blanched by the fear which the very mention of the forbidden land aroused, while Antoine, speechless, stared wide-eyed at Marcel.

"Oui, nord of de divide, I see beeg lak'.

It ees Salmon water for sure. I portage cano' to dat lak' an' reach de coast by de riviere. You go wid me an' get some dog?" Marcel smiled coolly into the sober faces of his friends.

"Are you crazee, Jean Marcel?" protested Antoine. "De spirit have run de game an' feesh away. De Windigo eat you before you fin' de Salmon Riviere, an' eef he not get you first, you starve."

"Ver' well, you go back by de Whale; I go by Salmon an' meet de Husky. I nevaire hunt anoder long snow widout dogs."

"Ah-hah! Dat ees good joke! You weel nevaire see de Husky," broke in Piquet. "W'en *Matchi-Manitou* ees tru wid you, de raven an' wolf peek your bones, w'ile Antoine an' Joe dance at de spreeng trade wid de Cree girl."

Ignoring the dire prediction, Marcel continued: "Good dog are all gone from de maladie, at Whale Riviere Post. De Husky have plenty dog. I meet dem on de coast before dey reach Whale Riviere an' dey want too much fur for dem. Maybe I starve; maybe I drown in de strong water; maybe de Windigo get me; but I go."

And he did.

With a shrug of contempt for the tales of the medicine men, Marcel started the following day.

"Bo'-jo', Antoine!" he said, as he gripped his friend's hand. "I meet you at Whale Riviere."

The face of Beaulieu only too patently reflected his thoughts as he shook his head.

"Bo'-jo', Jean, I nevaire see you again."

"You are dead man, Jean," added Piquet. "We tell Julie Breton dat your bones lie up dere." And the half-breed pointed north to the dim, blue hills of dread.

So with fur pack and outfit, and as much smoked caribou as he dared carry, Marcel poled his canoe up the Ghost, later to portage across the divide into the trailless land where, in the memory of living man, the feet of no hunter of the Hudson's Bay Company had strayed.

It was a reckless venture—this attempt to reach the bay through an unknown country. The demons of the Cree conjurers he did not fear, for his father and his mother's father, who had journeyed, starved, and feasted in trailless lands, from Labrador to the great Barren Grounds, had never seen one or heard the wailing of the Windigo in the night. What he did fear was the possibility of weeks of wandering in his search for the main stream, lost in a labyrinth of headwater lakes where game might be scarce and fish difficult to net. His smoked meat would take him but a short way. Then his rifle and net would have to see him through.

But the risk was worth taking. If he could reach the Eskimos on their spring journey south to the post, before they learned of the scarcity of dogs at Whale River, he could obtain huskies at a fair trade in fur. And a dog team was his heart's desire.

Portaging over the divide to the large lake, Marcel followed its winding outlet into the northwest. There were days when, baffled by a maze of water routes in a network of lakes, he despaired of finding the main stream. There were nights when he lay supperless by his fire thinking of Julie Breton, the black-eyed sister of the Oblat missionary at Whale River—nights when the forebodings of his partners returned to mock him as a maniacal mewing broke the silence of the forest, or there drifted across the valleys low wailing sobs like the grieving of a Cree mother for her dead child.

But in the veins of Jean Marcel coursed the blood of old "runners of the woods." His parents, victims of the influenza which had swept the coast the year previous, had left him the heritage of a dauntless spirit. Lost and starving though he was, he smiled grimly as the mating wolverene and the lynx turned the night into what would have been a thing of horror to the superstitious breeds.

When, gaunt from toil and the lack of food, Marcel finally found the main stream and shot a bear, he knew he would reach the Eskimos. Two hundred miles of racing river he rapidly put behind him and one June day rounded the bend above a long white water. He ran the rapids, rode the "boilers" at the foot of the last pitch, and shot into deep water again. But as he swung inshore to rid the craft of the slop picked up in the churning "strong water" behind him, Marcel's eyes widened in surprise. He was nearer the sea than he had guessed. His last rapids had been run. He had reached his goal. On the shore stood the squat skin lodges of an Eskimo camp, and moving about on the beach, he saw the shaggy objects of his quest.

The lean face of the youth who had bearded the dreaded Windigo in their lair took on a smile. He, too, would dance at

the spring trade at Whale River—and lashed to stakes by his tent in the post clearing, a pair of priceless Ungavas would add their howls to the general chorus when the dogs pointed their noses at the new moon.

CHAPTER II.

In his joy at his good luck, Marcel had momentarily forgotten the ancient feud between the Eskimo and the Cree. Then he realized his position. These rapids of the Salmon were an age-old fishing ground of the Husky. No birch bark had ever run the broken waters behind him—no Indian hunted so far north. If among these people there were any who traded at Whale River where Cree and Eskimo met in amity, they would recognize the son of the old Hudson's Bay Company head man, André Marcel, and welcome him. But should they chance to be wild Huskies who did not come south to the post, they would mistake him for a Cree and, resenting his entering their territory, attack him.

Drawing his loaded rifle from its skin case, he placed it at his feet and poled his canoe slowly toward the shore where a bedlam of howls from the dogs signaled his approach. The clamor quickly emptied the lodges scattered along the beach. A group of Huskies now watched the progress of the strange craft, every man armed with rifle or seal spear. The canoe was so close that only by a miracle could Marcel hope to escape downstream if they started shooting.

The Frenchman snubbed his boat, leaning on his pole while his anxious eyes searched for a familiar figure in the skin-clad throng which talked and gesticulated excitedly. But among them he found no friendly face.

"*Kekway!*" he called. "I am white man from Whale Riviere!"

His muscles tensely set, he watched for a hostile movement from the Huskies silenced by his shout. No answer was returned from the shore. His hopes died. They were wild Eskimos and would show no mercy to the supposed Cree invader of their hereditary fishing ground.

Yet the hostility which the Frenchman awaited was delayed. Not a gun in the whispering throng on the beach was raised; not a word in Eskimo addressed the stranger. Mystified, Marcel called again, this time in post Husky:

"I am a white man, from the fort at Whale River. Is there one among you who trades there?"

The tension of the sullen group seemed to relax. Pointing to a thickset figure striding up the beach, a Husky shouted:

"There is one who goes to Whale River!"

Marcel expelled the air from his lungs with relief. One wrong move, and a hail of lead would have emptied his canoe. Then to his joy he recognized the man who approached.

"Kovik!" he shouted. "It ees Jean Marcel from Whale Riviere!"

The Husky waved his hand to Marcel, then turned to his comrades. For a space there was much talk and shaking of heads; then he called to Jean to come ashore.

Grounding his canoe, Marcel gripped the hand of the grinning Kovik while the other Huskies fell back, eying them with mingled curiosity and fear.

"Husky say you bad spirit. Kovik say you are son of little chief at Whale River. W'ere you come?"

It was clear, now, why the Eskimos had not wiped him out. They had thought him a demon, for Eskimo tradition, as well as Cree, made the upper Salmon the abode of evil spirits.

"I look for huntin' ground, on de head of riviere," said Jean.

"Good dat Kovik come," returned the Eskimo. "Some say shoot you; some say you eat de bullet an' de Husky."

Jean laughed: "No, I camp wid no Windigo up riviere; but I starve."

At this gentle hint, Marcel was invited to join in the supper of boiled seal and goose which was waiting at the tepee. When Kovik had prevailed upon some of the older Eskimos to forget their fears and shake hands with the man who had appeared from the land of spirits, Jean stowed his outfit on the cache of the Husky, freed his canoe of water and, placing it beside his packs, joined the family party. Shaking hands in turn with Kovik's grinning wife and children, who remembered him at Whale River, Marcel hungrily attacked the kettle, into which each dipped fingers and cup indiscriminately. Finishing, he passed a plug of company niggerhead to his hosts and lit his own pipe.

"W'ere you' woman?" abruptly inquired the thickset mother of many.

"No woman," replied Marcel, thinking of

three spruce crosses in the mission cemetery at Whale River.

"No woman, you? No huskee?" pressed the curious wife of Kovik.

"No famile." And Jean told of the deaths of parents and younger brother, from the plague of the summer before. But he failed to mention the fact that most of the dogs at the post had been wiped out at the same time.

"He good man—Marcel! He fr'en' of me!" lamented Kovik. Sucking his pipe, he gravely nodded again and again. Surely, he intimated, the Hudson's Bay Company had displeased the spirits of evil, to have been so punished. Then he asked: "W'ere you dog?"

"On Whale Riviere," returned Jean grimly —referring to their bones.

His eyes were on the great dogs sprawled about the beach. He had seen no such sled dogs as these at the post, not even with the Eskimos. But his grave face betrayed no sign of what was in his mind.

Massive of bone and frame, with coats unusually heavy, even for the far-famed Ungava breed, Jean noted the strength and size of these magnificent beasts as a horseman marks the points of a blooded colt. Somewhat apart from the other dogs of Kovik, tumbling and roughing each other, frolicked four clumsy puppies, while the mother, a great slate-gray and white animal, lay near, watching her progeny through eyes whose lower lids, edged with red, marked the wolf strain. While those slant eyes kept restless guard, to molest one of her leggy, yelping imps of Satan would have been the bearding of a hundred furies.

One puppy, in particular, Marcel noticed as they romped and roughed each other on the shore, or with a brave show of valor, noisily charged their recumbent mother, only to be sent about their business with the mild reprimand of a nip from her long fangs. Larger, and of sturdier build than her brothers, this puppy, in marking, was the counterpart of the mother, having the same slate-gray patches on head and back and wearing white socks. As he watched her bully her brothers, Jean resolved to buy that four-months-old puppy.

As the Northern twilight filled the river valley, the Huskies returned to the lodge, where Jean squeezed in between the younger members of the family whose characteristic aroma held sleep from him long enough for him to decide on a plan of action. Before he started to trade for huskies he must learn if the Eskimos knew that dogs were scarce at the fur posts. If rumor of this, relayed up the coast, had reached them, he would be lucky to get even a puppy. They would send their spare dogs to the posts.

The following morning, at the suggestion of Kovik, Marcel set his gill net for whitefish on the opposite shore of the wide river, as the younger Eskimos showed unmistakably by their actions that his presence at the salmon fishing, soon to begin, was resented. But Jean needed food for his journey down the coast and for the dogs he hoped to buy, so ignored the dark looks cast at him. But not until evening did he casually suggest to Kovik that he, Kovik, had more dogs than he could feed through the summer. The broad face of Kovik widened in a mysterious smile.

"You geeve black fox for dog?" he asked.

Marcel's hopes fell at the words. It was an unheard-of price for a dog. The Husky knew of the scarcity. But masking his chagrin, the Frenchman laughed in ridicule:

"I geeve otter for dog."

Kovik shook his head, his narrowed eyes wrinkling in amusement: "No dogs at Whale Riv'—or Fort Geor'. Me trade dogs at Whale Riv'."

It was useless to bargain further. The Husky knew the value of his dogs at the posts, and Jean could not afford to rob his fur pack to get one. There was much that he needed at Whale River. And then there was Julie. It was necessary to increase his credit with the company to pay for the home he would some day build for Julie and himself. So, when Kovik promptly refused a valuable cross-fox pelt for a dog, the disheartened boy gave it up.

But he still coveted the slate-gray and white puppy. Never had he seen a husky of her age with such bone—such promise as a sled dog. And her spirit—at four months she would bare her puppy fangs at an infringment of her rights by an old dog, as though she already wore the scars of many a brawl. Handsomer than her brothers, leader of the litter through a build more rugged, a stronger will.

The next morning, by way of strategic approach, Jean Marcel again offered a high price for a grown dog. But the smiling Kovik would not relent. Then Marcel suddenly pointing at the female puppy, offered

the pelt of a marten for her. To Jean's surprise, the owner refused to part with any of the litter. They would be better than the adult dogs, these children of the slate-gray husky, he said. It was a bitter moment for the lad who had swung his canoe inshore at the Husky camp with such high hopes. And he realized that it would be useless to turn north from the mouth of the Salmon in search of dogs. Now that they had learned of conditions at the fur posts, no Eskimos bound south for the spring trade would sell a dog at a reasonable price.

As Marcel watched with envious eyes the puppies which he realized were beyond his means to obtain, the cries of the eldest son of his host aroused the camp. Above them, in the chutes at the foot of the white water, flashes of silver marked the leaping vanguards of the salmon run, on their way to spring-fed streams at the river's head. Seizing their salmon spears the Eskimos hurried upstream to take their stands on rocks which the fish might pass.

Having no spear Jean watched the thick-set son of Kovik wade through the strong current out to a rock within spearing reach of a deep chute of black water. Presently the crouching lad drove his spear into the flume at his feet and was struggling on the rock with a large salmon. Killing the fish with his knife, he threw it, with a cry of triumph, to the beach. Again he waited, muscles tense, his right arm drawn back for the lunge. Again, as a silvery shape darted up the chute, the boy struck with his spear. But so anxious was he to drive the lance home, that, missing the fish, his lunge carried him headfirst into the swift water.

With a shout of warning to those above, Jean Marcel ran down the beach. His canoe was out of reach on the cache with the Husky's kayak and the clumsy skin *umiak* of the family was useless for quick work. In his sealskin boots and clothes the lad would be carried to the foot of the rapids and drowned. Jean reached the "boilers" below the white water before the body of the helpless Eskimo appeared. Plunging into the ice-cold river, he swam out into the current below the tail of the chute, and when the half-drowned lad floundered to the surface, seized him by his heavy hair. As they were swept downstream, an eddy threw their bodies together, and in spite of Marcel's desperate efforts, the arms of the Husky closed on him. Strong as he was, the Frenchman could not break the grip, and they sank.

Marcel rose to the surface fighting to free himself from the clinging Eskimo; his sinewy fingers found the throat of the half-conscious boy and taking a long breath, he again went down with his burden. When the two came up Marcel was free. With a grip on the long hair of the now senseless lad he made the shore, dragging the Husky from the water.

Shaking with cold he was lying panting beside the still body of the boy when the terrified Eskimos reached them.

The welcome heat of a large fire soon thawed the chill from the bones of Marcel, but the anxious parents of the young Husky desperately rolled and pounded him, starting his blood and ridding his stomach of water, before he finally regained his voice, begging them to cease. With the boy out of danger they turned to his rescuer, and only by vigorous objection did Marcel escape the treatment administered the Husky.

"You lak' seal in de water," cried the relieved father with admiration, when he had lavished his thanks upon Jean; for the Eskimos, although passing their lives on or near the water, because of its low temperature, never learn to swim.

"My fader taught me to swim in shallow lak' by Fort George," explained the Frenchman.

"He die—eef you no sweem lak' seal," added the grateful mother, her round face oily with sweat from the vigorous rubbing of her son, now snoring peacefully by the fire.

Then the Huskies returned to their fishing, for precious time was being wasted. The boy's spear was found washed up on the beach and loaned to Jean, who labored the remainder of the day spearing salmon for his journey down the coast.

That evening, after supper, he sat on a stone in front of the tepee watching the active puppies. Inside the skin lodge the Eskimo and his wife conversed in low tones. Shortly they appeared and Kovik, grinning from long side lock to side lock, said:

"You good man! You trade dat dog?" He pointed at the large slate-gray puppy sprawled near them.

The dark features of Jean Marcel lighted with eagerness.

"I geeve two marten for de dog," he said, rising quickly.

The Husky turned to the woman, shaking

his head. Then, seemingly changing his mind, Kovik seized the puppy by the loose skin of her neck and dragged her, protesting vigorously, to Jean, while the mother dog came trotting up, ears erect, curious as to what he was doing with her progeny.

"Dees you' dog!" said the Eskimo.

Marcel patted the back of the puppy, still in the grasp of her owner, while she muttered her wrath at the touch of the stranger. Although evidently these Huskies wished to make him pay dearly for the dog, he was glad to get her, even at such a price. He went to the cache, loosened the lashings of his fur pack, and returned with two prime marten pelts, offering them to the Eskimo. Again Kovik's broad face was divided by a grin.

"You lak' seal in riv'—ketch de boy. Take dog—no want skin!" The Husky pushed the pelts away.

Marcel's eyes widened in surprise as he stammered: "You—you geeve to me—dat puppy?"

Kovik nodded, grinning with delight at the success of his little ruse. But the young Frenchman's eyes were suspiciously moist as he wrung the Eskimo's hand. Now, after all, he was not to return empty-handed to Whale River, the laughingstock of his partners. It had been worth his while—this plunge into the Bad Lands. Now, in two years he should have the dog team of his dreams. Some day this four months' old puppy should make the fortune of Jean Marcel.

He could not know how much more vital a part than that in his life—and in the life of Julie Breton—this wild puppy with the white socks was to play.

CHAPTER III.

When Marcel put his canoe into the water the following morning, to cross to his net, three young Eskimos who had been loitering near Kovik's lodge followed him to the beach and, as he left the shore, hurled at his back a torrent of Husky abuse.

It would have been better to listen to Kovik's warning against delaying his departure and attempting to fish at the rapids after the salmon arrived. The use of the boy's spear, the day previous, had brought the feeling among the younger men to a head. They meant to drive him downriver.

Removing the whitefish and small salmon, Jean lifted his net and, stretching it to dry on the shore, recrossed the river. On the beach awaiting his return were the Huskies. Clearly, they had decided that he was possessed of no supernatural powers and could now be bullied with impunity. As he did not wish to embroil his friend Kovik in his defense, he had decided that when he had smoked his last catch he would leave. Nevertheless, the blood of the fighting Marcels was slowly coming to a boil. If these raw fish eaters thought that they could frighten the grandson of the famous Etienne Lacasse, or the son of André Marcel, he could, if necessary, show them their mistake.

Ignoring the Huskies, Marcel landed, cleaned some fish for Kovik's kettle, and carried them up to the tepee where the family were still asleep. When he returned, the hot blood rose to his bronzed face at what he saw. The three Eskimos were coolly feeding his fish to the dogs.

In the blind rage which choked him, Marcel reached the pilferers of his canoe before they realized that he was on them. Seizing one by his long hair, he wrenched the surprised Husky backward into the water and sent a second reeling to the stony beach with a blow in the face. The third, retreating from the fury of the attack of the maddened white man, drew his skinning knife; but seizing his paddle, Marcel sent the knife spinning with a vicious slash which doubled the screaming Husky over a broken wrist. Turning, he saw his first victims making down the beach toward the tepees, while the uproar of the dogs was swiftly arousing the camp.

As his blood cooled, the youth, who had suffered and dared much that he might have dogs for the next long snows, realized his folly. They had baited him into furnishing them with an excuse for attacking him.

He would never see Whale River and Julie Breton again. Now, even the faithful Kovik would be helpless against them. Already the Huskies were emerging from their tepees to hear the tale of his late antagonists. He had no time to lose before they would be rushing him.

Bounding up the beach to Kovik's tepee for his rifle, he rapidly explained the situation to the Eskimo. Jean did not hope to escape alive, but of one thing he was sure—he would die like a Marcel with a gun in his hands.

Urging Jean to get his fur pack and

smoked fish to his canoe at once, Kovik hurried down the shore to the knot of wildly excited Eskimos. Meanwhile, with the aid of Kovik's grateful wife and son, Marcel's canoe was swiftly loaded and his treasured puppy lashed in the bow.

The rush up the beach of an infuriated throng bent on his death was delayed. Not a hundred yards distant, the doughty Kovik, the center of an arguing mob, was fighting with all the wits he possessed for the man who had saved his son. For Marcel to attempt to escape by water would only have drawn the fire of the Huskies and nullified Kovik's efforts. Besides, their kayaks, faster than any canoe, were below him. A break for the "bush," even if successful, meant starvation in the end. So with extra cartridges between his teeth and in his hands, Jean Marcel grimly fingered the trigger guard of his rifle, as he waited beside a bowlder for the turn of the dice.

Kovik still held his men, and Marcel clearly noted a change in the manner of the Huskies. The shouting had ceased. Shortly, Kovik left the group and walked rapidly toward Marcel, followed at a distance by his people.

"Dey keel you, but Kovik say you fr'en' wid spirit who would come downriv' an' eat Husky," explained the worried defender of Jean. "Kovik say you shoot wid spirit gun all de Husky. Now you go—queek!" Kovik gripped the hand of the relieved Marcel and pushed off his canoe.

With the emotions of a man suddenly reprieved from a sentence of death, Marcel poled his canoe out into the current. The Eskimos had joined Kovik on the shore behind him, when, warned by a shout from his friend, Marcel instinctively ducked, as a seal spear whistled over his head. Some doubter was testing the magic of the white man.

Seizing his paddle, Jean rapidly crossed the river and secured his precious net; but he was not yet rid of his enemies. If the young men, conquering their fear of his friendship with demons, at once launched their kayaks they could overhaul his loaded canoe. Once clear of the last tepees on the shore, though, and with his pursuers behind him, he was confident that he could pick them off with his rifle as they came up in their rocking craft.

With all his power Jean drove his canoe with the swift current. Kovik had the Huskies in hand and they did not follow, and shortly he had passed the last lodge on the shore and the camp was far behind him. It seemed like a dream—his peril of the last half hour. But now, with his puppy in the bow, he was safe on his way to the coast.

Suddenly Marcel was wrenched from his dream by stark reality as two rifle shots cracked on the near shore. Dropping his paddle, he lurched forward in the canoe. Again the rifles spat from the bowlders on the beach. Two bullets whined over the birch bark. But except for the yelping puppy in the bow, there was no movement in the canoe as it slid along the cat's-paw of the current.

Waving their arms in triumph at the collapse of the feared white man whose magic had been impotent before their bullets, the Huskies hurried alongshore after the canoe. Carried by breeze and current, with its whimpering puppy and silent human freight, the craft grounded a half mile below the ambush. The chattering pair of assassins hurrying toward it were already quarreling over the division of the outfit of the dead man. The dog, although lashed to the bow thwart, had managed to crawl out of the boat and was struggling with the thongs which held her, when the Huskies came running up. Looking into the birch bark, they turned on each other gray faces on which was written ghastly fear.

The canoe was empty!

The white man they had thought to find a bloodied heap was after all a maker of magic—a friend of demons. Kovik had told the truth. They were lost! Struck motionless by terror, their feet frozen to the beach, the young ruffians awaited the swift vengeance of their enemy. And it came.

A rifle crashed in the bowlders hard by. With a scream, a Husky reeled backward with a shattered hand, as his gun, torn from his grasp by the impact of the bullet, rattled on the stones. A second shot, splintering the butt of his rifle, hurled the other to his knees. Then with a demoniacal yell, Marcel sprang from his ambush.

Running like a caribou jumped by barren-ground wolves, the panic-stricken Huskies fled from the place of horror, pursued by the ricocheting bullets of the white demon, until they disappeared up the shore.

"Till we meet, m'sieurs!" cried Marcel. "De nex' tam you ambush cano', don' let it drif' behin' de point." Shaking with

laughter, he turned to his yelping puppy. "De Husky t'ink dey keep us from goin' to Whale Riviere, eh?" he said, soothing the worrying dog with the stroking of her trembling shoulders. "But Jean and hees leetle dog, dey go to see Julie Breton!"

When the shots from the ambush had whined past his face, Marcel had flattened in the canoe both for cover and to deceive the Huskies. The second shots convinced him that he had but two men to deal with. Slitting the bark near the gunwale that he might watch the shore without betraying the fact that he was conscious and thereby draw their fire while they were protected from his by the bowlders, he saw that his craft was working toward the beach.

Driven by the current, the canoe had already left the Eskimos in the rear. When it finally grounded on the beach it was at a point hidden from the pursuing Huskies. Marcel was out of the craft in a bound and concealed himself among the rocks. Then, great as had been the temptation to leave the men who had ambushed him dead upon the beach, a warning to their fellows, the thought of Kovik's position at the camp had led him to content himself with disarming them and sending them shrieking up the river shore with his bullets hard at their heels.

During the rest of the day, as Jean Marcel put mile after mile of the Salmon between himself and the camp at the rapids, the puppy often cocked curious ears as the new master ceased paddling to roar with laughter at the memory of two flying Eskimos.

CHAPTER IV.

That night Marcel camped at the river's mouth and watched the gray waters of the great bay drown the sinking sun.

Somewhere, far down the bold east coast the Great Whale River emptied into the salt "Big Water" of the Crees. It would take about four days of hard paddling to make it, if the sea was flat and the wind light. But if he were wind-bound, as was likely heading south in the spring, it might take weeks. He had a hundred pounds of cured fish and could wait out the wind, but the thought of Julie, who by this time must have learned from his partners of his mad journey, made Jean anxious to reach the post. He preferred to be welcomed living than mourned as dead.

If only she cared for him as he loved her! Well, she should love him in time, when he had become a *voyageur* of the company, with a house at the post!

The second day out he was driven ashore under gray cliffs by a southwester and, wind-bound, spent the succeeding three days in overcoming the shyness of the hulking puppy, who, in the gentleness of the new master found swift solace for the loss of her shaggy kinsmen of the Husky camp. Already she had learned that the human hand could caress as well as wield a stick, and for the first time in her short existence was initiated into the mystery and delight of having her ears rubbed and back scratched by this master who did not kick her out of the way when she sprawled in his path. And because of her beauty, and in memory of Fleur Marcel, the mother he had loved, he named her Fleur.

When the sea flattened out after the blow, Marcel launched his canoe, and, with his dog in the bow continued south, and at last turned in behind a long island paralleling the coast. For two days he traveled down the strait in the lee of this island and knew, when he passed out into open water and saw in the distance the familiar coast of the Whale River mouth, that he had traveled through the mystic Manitounuk—the Eskimos' "Strait of the Spirit." The following afternoon off Sable Point he entered the clear water of the Great Whale and once again, after ten months' absence, saw on the bold shore in the distance, the roofs of Whale River.

There was a lump in his throat as he gazed at the distant fur post. That little settlement, with its log trade house and church of the Oblat Fathers, the last outpost of the great company on the bleak east coast, which for two centuries had defied the grim North, stood for all he held most dear —was home. In the church burial ground inclosed by a slab fence, three spruce crosses marked the graves of his father, mother, and brother. In the mission house, built by Cree converts, lived Julie Breton.

As the young flood swept him upstream he wondered if already he had been counted as lost by his friends at the post—for it was July; and he wondered whether the thoughts of Julie Breton still wandered north to the lad who had disappeared into the Ungava hills on a mad quest.

Nearing the post, he could now see the

tepees of the Whale River Crees, dotting the high shores, and below, along the beach, the squat skin lodges of the Huskies, with their fish scaffolds and *umiaks*. The spring trade was on. Beaching his canoe at the company landing where he was welcomed as one returned from the dead by two post Crees, Marcel, leading his dog by a rawhide thong, sought the mission house.

At his knock the door was opened by a girl with dusky eyes and masses of black hair, who stared in amazement at him.

"Julie!" he cried.

The girl found her voice, while the blood flushed her olive skin.

"Jean Marcel! You have come back!" she exclaimed in French. "But Jean—we had great fear you might not return!" He was holding both her hands but, embarrassed, she did not meet his eager eyes seeking to read her thoughts. "Come in, *M'sieu le Voyageur!*" and she led him gayly into the mission. "Henri, Père Henri!" she called. "Jean Marcel has returned from the dead!"

"Jean, my son!" replied a deep voice and Père Breton in short order was vigorously embracing him.

"Father, your greeting is somewhat warmer than that of Julie," laughed the happy youth, as the bearded priest surveyed him at arm's length.

"Ah, she has spoken much of you, Jean, this spring. You will be the talk of Whale River; the Crees said you could not get through. And you got your dogs? We have only curs here, except those of the Huskies, and they are very dear."

"The Huskies would not sell their dogs, father. They were bringing them to Whale River."

Then Marcel, speaking in French as had Julie, sketched briefly to his wondering friends the history of his wanderings. As he finished the story of his escape from the camp with his puppy, Julie Breton's dark eyes were wet with tears.

"Jean Marcel, why did you take such risks? You might have starved—they might have killed you!"

"I had to have the dogs, Julie. I must save my credit with the company. It was the only way."

"Let me see your puppy! Where is she?" demanded the girl.

Jean led his friends outside the mission to where he had fastened his dog. The wild puppy shrank from the strangers, the h ir bristling on her neck, as Julie impulsively thrust a hand toward the dog's handsome head.

"Oh, but she is cross!" she exclaimed. "What is her name?"

"Fleur."

"Too nice a name for such an impolite dog!"

Jean stroked Fleur's head as she crouched against his legs muttering her dislike of strangers. At his caress, her warm tongue sought his hand.

"There," he said proudly, his white teeth flashing in a grin at Julie, "you see here is one who loves Jean Marcel."

CHAPTER V.

As the grim fastnesses reaching away to the north and east and south in limitless, ice-locked solitude, had wakened to the magic touch of spring, so had the little post at Whale River quickened with life at the advent of June with the spring trade. For weeks, before the return of Marcel, the canoes of the Crees had been coming in daily from winter trapping grounds in far valleys. Around the tepees which dotted the post clearing like mushrooms groups of dark-skinned women, heads wrapped in gaudy shawls, laughed and gossiped, while the shrill voices of romping children filled the air, for the lean moons of the long snows had passed and the soft days returned.

Swart hunters from Lake d'Iberville, half-breed Crees from the Whispering Hills and the Little Whale watershed, belted with colored company sashes, wearing beaded leggings and moccasins, smoked and talked of the trade with wild *voyageurs* from Lake Bienville, the Lakes of the Winds, and the Starving River headwaters in the caribou barrens. From a hundred unmapped v l-leys they had journeyed to the bay to trade their fox and lynx, their mink and fisher and marten, for the goods of the company.

Below, along the beach, Huskies from Richmond Gulf and the north coast, from the White Bear and the Sleeping Islands, who had brought ivory of the walrus, pelts of the white fox, seal, and polar bear, and sealskin boots, which only their women possess the art of making waterproof, were camped in low skin tepees, their priceless dogs tied up and under constant guard. But while the camp of the Eskimos w s a bedlam

of noisy Huskies, the quarters of the Crees in the post clearing, formerly overrun by brawling sled dogs, was now a place of peace. The plague of the previous summer had left the Indians but a scattering of curs.

Carrying his fur pack and outfit to the mission, Marcel sought the trade house. Passing the tepees of the Crees, he was forced to stop and receive the congratulations of the admiring hunters on his safe return from his *longue traverse* through the land of demons, which had been the gossip of the post since the arrival of Joe and Antoine.

When his partners appeared, to stare in amazement at the man they had announced as dead, Jean made them wince as he gripped their hands.

"Bo'-jo', Joe! Bo'-jo', Antoine!" he laughed. "You see de Windigo foun' Jean Marcel too tough to eat! He ees good fr'en' to me now."

"I nevaire t'ink to see you alive at Whale Riviere, Jean Marcel!" cried the delighted Antoine.

"Did you get de dog?" asked the practical Piquet.

"Onlee one leetle pup; de Husky would not trade."

As he entered the door of the long trade house he was seized by a giant company man.

"By gar! Jean Marcel!" cried Jules Duroc, his swart face lighting with joy as he crushed the wanderer in a bear hug. "We t'ink you sure starve out in de bush! You fin' de Beeg Salmon headwater? You see de Windigo?"

"*Oui*, I fin' de riviere for sure, Jules; but de Windigo he scared of me. I tell heem Jean Marcel ees fr'en' of Jules Duroc."

The laughter in the doorway drew the attention of two men descending the ladder from the fur loft.

"Well, as I live, Jean Marcel!" It was Colin Gillies the factor, and he wrung the hand of the son of his old head man until Marcel grimaced with pain.

"We were about giving you up, Jean," added Angus McCain, the clerk, seizing Jean's free hand.

"Bonjour, M'sieu Gillies! Bonjour, Angus! Dey say I leeve my bones on de Beeg Salmon; de Husky shoot at me; but—I am here!"

Seated with his three friends, Marcel told of his struggle to reach the Salmon, his meeting with the Eskimos and escape with his dog.

"I'm glad you didn't kill that pair of Eskimos, Jean, much as they deserved it. It would have made trouble later."

"Good old Kovik! We won't forget him," added McCain.

"No, that we will not," agreed Gillies. "He thought a lot of your father, Jean."

"Well," said Jean proudly, "I weel have good dog team in two year. Dat pup, she ees wort' all de work an' trouble to get her."

"You're lucky," said Gillies. "It's mighty hard on our hunters not to have good dogs."

The days at the mission with Père Breton and Julie raced by—hours of unalloyed happiness for Jean after ten months in the bush. Not a day passed that did not find him romping with the great puppy who had learned to gaze at her tall master through slant eyes eloquent with love. Each morning when he visited the mission fish nets and his own, the puppy rode in the bow of the canoe. Each afternoon, often accompanied by Julie Breton, they went for a run up the river shore.

When he heard that Kovik had arrived, Jean brought Fleur down to the shore, only to find the family absent from their lodge. To Marcel's amazement, his puppy at first failed to recognize her brothers, who, yelping madly, rushed her in a mass.

With flattened ears and mane stiffened on neck and back their doughty sister met them halfway. Bowling one over, she shouldered another to the ground, where she threatened him with a fierce display of teeth. And not until their worried mother, made fast to a stake, had recognized her lost daughter and lured her within reach of her tongue, did the nose of Jean's puppy reveal to her the identity of her kin. Then there was a mad frolic in which she bullied and roughed her brothers as in the forgotten days.

When Kovik appeared in his *umiak* with his squat wife and family, there was a general handshaking.

"How you leeve my fr'en' on de Salmon, Kovik?"

The Husky shook his head soberly.

"Kovik have troub' wid young men you shoot. Dey say Kovik bad spirit, too. You not hurt?"

"Dey miss me, an' I drif' down riviere an' ambush dem. I could keel dem easy, but it mak' it bad for you. Here ees tabac

for you, an' tea an' sugar for de woman. I tell M'sieu Gillies what you do for Jean Marcel."

When Jean had distributed his gifts, Fleur came trotting up, but, to his delight, refused to allow Kovik to touch her.

"Huh! Dat you' dog?" chuckled the Husky.

"*Oui,* she ees my dog, now," laughed Jean.

CHAPTER VI.

The spring trade at Whale River was nearing its end. One by one the tepees in the post clearing disappeared as each day canoes of Cree hunters started upriver for lakes of the interior. Already the *umiaks* of the Eskimos had followed the ebb tide down to the great bay, bound for their autumn hunting camps along the north coast.

When Jean Marcel had traded his fur and purchased what flour, ammunition, and other supplies he needed to carry him through the long snows of the coming winter, he found that a substantial balance remained to his credit on the books of the company; a nest egg, he hoped, for the day when, perchance, as a *voyageur* of the company with a house at the post, he might stand with Julie at his side and receive the blessing of the good Père Breton. But Jean realized that that day was far away. Before he might hope to be honored by the company with the position and trust his father had so long enjoyed, he knew he must prove his mettle. For the company crews and dog runners, entrusted with the mails, the fur brigades and company business in general, are men chosen for their intelligence, stamina, and skill as canoemen and dog drivers.

When he had packed his last load of winter supplies from the trade house to the mission, he said with a laugh to Julie:

"Julie, we have made a good start, you and I. We have credit of three hundred dollars with the company."

The olive skin of Julie Breton flushed to the dusky crown of hair, but she retorted with spirit:

"You are counting your geese before they are shot, M'sieu Jean! Thanks! But I am very happy with Père Henri."

Père Breton's laugh interrupted Jean's reply. "Yes, my son. Julie is right. You are too young, you two, to think of wedding yet."

"Some day, Julie, I will be a company man and then you will listen to Jean Marcel!" And the lad who had cherished the memory of the girl's oval face through the long winter and taken it with him into the dim, blue Ungava hills, left the mission with head erect and swinging stride.

"Jean, when are you going back to the bush?" inquired Gillies, as Marcel entered the trade house.

"My partners an' I go nex' week, maybe."

"Well, I want you to take a canoe to Duck Island for me. We're short-handed here and you have just come down that coast. I promised some Huskies to leave a cache of stuff there this summer."

Marcel's dark features reddened with pride. He had been put in charge of a canoe bound on company business. His crossing to the Big Salmon had marked him at Whale River as a canoeman of daring—a chip of the old block, worthy of the name Marcel.

"Bien, M'sieu Gillies! When we start?"

"To-day, after dinner!"

Returning to the mission elated, Marcel ate his dinner, made up his pack while they wished him, "Bon voyage!" then went out to the stockade. At the gate he was met, simultaneously, by the impact of a shaggy body and the swift licks of an eager tongue. Then Fleur circled him at full speed, yelping her delight, while she worked off the excitement of seeing her playmate again, until, at length, she trotted up and nosed his hand, keen for the daily rubbing of her ears which drew from her deep throat grateful mutterings of content.

"I leave my leetle dog a few days," he whispered into a hairy ear. "She weel be good dog and obey Mamselle Julie, who weel feed her?"

The puppy broke away and ran to the gate, turning to him with pricked ears as she whined for the daily stroll into the scrub after snowshoe rabbits.

"No, my leetle one! We walk not to-day!" He stroked the slate-gray back which trembled with her desire for a run with the master; then circling her shaggy neck with his arms, his face against hers, while she fretted as though she knew Jean was leaving her, he said: "Till we meet, Fleur!" and closed the gate.

She stood grieving, her black nose thrust between the slab pickets, the narrow eyes following Marcel's back until he disappeared. Then she raised her head and, in the man-

ner of her kind, voiced her disappointment in a long howl. And the wail of his puppy struck with strange insistence upon the ears of Jean Marcel—somehow like a premonition of some misfortune which the future held for him.

As the canoe of the company journeyed through the Strait of the Spirit, flocks of gray geese, which were now leading their broods out to the coast islands from the muskegs of the interior, rose ahead, to sail away in their geometric formations, while clouds of pin tail and black duck patrolled the low beaches.

Jean made Duck Island in good time and left his cargo for the Huskies in a stone cache there. But running into a southwester, while homeward bound, he did not reach Whale River for a fortnight. As he approached the post, he made out at the log landing the company steamer *Inenew,* loaded with trade goods from the depot at Charlton Island. Through the clearing, now almost bare of tepees, for the spring trade was over, he walked to the mission.

The door was opened by Julie Breton.

"Good day, Mamselle Breton!" and he seized the unresponsive hand of the girl.

'I am glad to see you home safely, Jean."

Something in the face and voice of the girl checked him.

"What is the matter, Julie?" he asked. "Père Henri—he is not ill?"

"No. Père Henri is well, but——"

"You do not seem glad to see me again, Julie!"

"I am glad. You know that."

"Well," he flung out, hurt at the girl's constrained manner, "I'll go and see some one who will welcome Jean Marcel with no sober face!"

"Jean!" she said, as he turned away.

"What is it, Mamselle Breton?" He smiled into her troubled eyes. "Fleur has missed me, I know. She will give Jean Marcel a true welcome home."

"Jean—she is not there—they stole her!"

The face of Jean Marcel twisted with pain.

"Mon Dieu! Stole my Fleur—my puppy!"

"Yes, they took her from the stockade, two nights ago—two men who came up the coast after dogs."

He turned away to hide the sudden misting of his eyes. The girl rested a sympathetic hand on his shoulder.

"Poor Jean!"

"I worked so hard to get her, Julie! I loved that puppy—she was my child!"

"I know, Jean. After what you have been through—to have lost her——"

"But I have not lost her!" the youth suddenly drew a deep breath and swung around to the girl with features set like stone. "I have not lost her! Julie Breton, I will follow them and bring back my dog if I have to trail those men to Rupert House!"

The tears had gone and in the eyes of Jean Marcel was a glint Julie had never known—a glitter of hate for the men who had taken his dog, of swift hate so intense, so bitter, that she thrilled as she gazed at his transformed face. Instinctively, she realized that the lad who faced her now was no longer the playmate of old to be treated as a boy, but the possessor of a high courage and unbreakable will that men in the future would reckon with.

Jean entered the trade house to find Gillies in conversation with a tall stranger. Jules Duroc, who was there, whispered to Jean that he was Mr. Wallace, the new inspector of the east-coast posts, who had come with the steamer.

When Gillies turned to greet Jean, he knew from the look in his face what was in his mind.

"A few days after you left, Jean," Gillies explained, after their brief greetings, "two half-breeds dropped in here with the story that they had traveled up the coast from Rupert House to buy dogs from the Huskies. There were no dogs for sale here and they seemed pretty sore at missing the York boat bound south with the dogs bought by the company for East Main and Fort George. Why, we didn't know, for they couldn't get any of those dogs, anyway. They were a weasel-faced, mean-looking pair, and when Jules here found them feeding two of our huskies one day, there was trouble."

"What dey do to you, Jules?" asked Jean, smiling faintly at the big company bowman.

"What did Jules do to them; you mean," broke in Angus McCain.

"Well," continued Gillies, "we got outside in time to see Jules break his paddle over the head of one and pile into the other who had a knife out and looked mean. Then I kicked them out of the post. They left that night with your dog, for the next day at Little Bear Island they passed a canoe of goose hunters bound for Whale River,

and the Indians noticed the puppy, who seemed to be muzzled and tied."

Marcel was walking the floor of the trade house, hot with rage.

"French half-breeds, M'sieu Gillies, or Scotch?" he asked.

"Scotch, Jean, medium-sized; one had lost half an ear and the other had a scar on his chin and the first finger gone on his right hand. But you're not going after them, lad? They've two days' start on you and it's August."

"M'sieu Gillies, I took de *longue traverse* for dat dog. She was de best pup in dees place. I love dat husky, m'sieu! I start to-night!"

"Man alive! You won't make your trapping grounds before the freeze up, if you head down the coast now. You're crazy! Besides, they are two days ahead of you, and with two paddles will keep gaining."

"M'sieu Gillies"—the boy ignored the factor's protest—"weel you geeve me letter of credit for de company posts?"

"Why, yes, Jean—you've got three hundred dollars' credit here. But man, stop and think! You can't overhaul those breeds, alone, and if they belong in the East Main or Rupert River country they'll be back in the bush by the time you reach the posts—even if you can trail them that far. It's three hundred and fifty miles to Rupert House; you might be a month on the way."

Jean Marcel shook his head doggedly, determination written in the set muscles of his dark face. Then he suddenly demanded of the factor:

"What would my father, André Marcel, do eef he leeved? Because of de freeze-up would he geeve hees pup to dose dog stealer? I ask you dat, m'sieu?"

Gillies' honest eyes frankly met the questioner's. "André Marcel was the best canoeman on this coast, and no man ever did him a wrong who didn't pay."

"Well, then, m'sieu?" demanded Jean.

"André Marcel," Gillies admitted, "would have followed the men who stole his dog down this coast and west to the Barren Grounds."

Jules Duroc nodded gravely as he added: "By gar! André Marcel, he would trail dose men into de muskegs of hell."

"Well," said Jean, smiling proudly at the encomiums of his father's prowess, "Jean Marcel, hees son, weel start to-night."

Argument was futile to dissuade him from his mad venture. His partners of the previous winter, Antoine and Joe, who had waited impatiently for his return, refused to delay longer their start for Ghost River and left at once.

Then Jules took Marcel aside and quietly talked to him as would a brother.

"Jean, you stay here wid Mamselle Julie till de steamer go. Dat M'sieu Wallace, he sweet on you' girl w'en you were up de coast. You stay till he leeve."

For this Jean had an outward shrug of contempt, but the rumored attentions of Wallace to Julie Breton, during his absence, sickened his heart with fear. Was he to lose her, too, as well as Fleur?

Before supper, at the mission, Père Breton urged him to return to his trapping grounds and spare himself the toil of a hopeless quest down the coast in the face of the coming winter. Julie was adding her objections to her brother's, when a knock on the door checked her. Her face colored slightly as Jean glanced up when she turned to the door.

"Good evening, monsieur!" she greeted the newcomer, a note of embarrassment in her voice.

"Good evening, mademoiselle." And Inspector Wallace entered the room. "I hope I'm not late?"

The inspector, a tall, well-built man of thirty-five, was dressed in the garb of civilization and wore shoes, a rarity at Whale River. Chief of the east-coast posts of the great company, he had been sent the year previous from western Ontario and put in command of men older in years and experience who had passed their lives in the Far North. Naturally much resentment had manifested itself among the traders. But that the new chief officer looked and acted like a man of ability the disgruntled factors had been forced to admit.

As Wallace sat talking with Père Breton, who was evidently much pleased by his attentions to Julie, he seemed to Jean Marcel to embody all that the young Frenchman lacked. How, indeed, could he now aspire to the love of Julie Breton, when so great a man chose to smile upon her?

Wallace seemed surprised at the presence of a humble company hunter as a member of the priest's family, but Père Breton privately informed him that Jean was as a son and brother at the mission.

While the black eyes of Julie flashed in

response to the admiring glances of Wallace, Jean Marcel ate in silence his last meal at Whale River for many a long week, torn by his longing for the dog carried down the coast in the canoe of the thieves and by the hopelessness of his love for this girl who was manifestly thrilling to the compliments of a man who knew the world of men and cities, who had seen many women yet found this rose of the North fair. As he ate in silence, the young Frenchman made a vow that should this man, who was taking her from him, treat her innocence lightly, inspector though he was, he should feel the cold steel of the knife of Jean Marcel.

After supper, as Jean prepared to leave, Père Breton renewed his protests against the trip, but in vain. If he had luck, Marcel insisted, he could beat the freeze-up home; if not, he would travel up the coast later, on the ice, or—well, did it matter much what became of Jean Marcel?

So, with the letter of the factor, on which he could draw supplies at the southern posts, Jean Marcel shook the hands of his friends and, sliding his canoe into the ebb tide, started south as the dying sun gilded the flat bay to the west. He waved his hand in farewell to the group of company men on the shore. He saw above them the figures of Julie Breton and the priest. As Julie held aloft something white, she and her brother were joined by a man. It was Inspector Wallace.

Jean swung his paddle to and fro, in response to Julie's Godspeed, then, dropping to his knees, drove the craft swiftly downstream on the long pursuit which might take him four hundred miles down the coast to the white waters of the great Rupert and beyond. And with him he carried the thought that Julie, his Julie, would daily, for a week, see this great man of the company. It was a heavy heart that Marcel, that night, took down to the sea.

With the vision of Fleur strangely sensing the impending separation from her master, as her wail of despair rose from the stockade the night he left her to go north, constantly before his eyes, Jean Marcel reached the coast and turned south. The thought of his puppy muzzled and bound in the canoe two days ahead of him lent power to every lunge of his paddle. Also, the knowledge that, back at Whale River, instead of walking the river shore in the long twilight with Jean Marcel, as he had dreamed, Julie would have Wallace at her side, added to the viciousness of his stroke.

The sea was flat; and when at daylight he saw looming ahead the cliffs of Big Island, he knew he had won a deserved rest. He went ashore, cooked some food and slept.

CHAPTER VII.

A day's hard paddle past Big Island the dreaded Cape of the Four Winds thrust its bold buttresses far out into the sea. Marcel knew that wind here meant days of delay, for no canoe could round this grim headland feared by all *voyageurs,* except in fair weather. So, after a few hours' sleep, he toiled all day down the coast and at midnight had put the gray cape behind him.

Two days later when Marcel went ashore on the Isle of Graves, of the Eskimos, to boil his kettle, he found to his delight a Fort George goose boat on the same errand. The Crees who had just left the post to shoot the winter's supply of gray and snowy geese, or "wavies," as they are called from their resemblance in flight to a white banner waving in the sun, had met, two nights before, off the mouth of Big River, the canoe he was following. The dog thieves, who were strangers, did not stop at the post, but had continued south.

With two paddles they were not holding their lead, he laughed to himself, but were coming back. If he hurried he would overhaul them before they reached Rupert. As he did not know the Rupert River and realized that if once they started inland he would be caught by the freeze-up in a strange country, he continued his voyaging late on into the night.

Then followed day after day of endless toil at the paddle, for he knew he must travel while the weather held. He could not hope to make Rupert or even East Main before the wind changed—which might mean idling for days on a beach pounded by seas in which no canoe could live. At times, with a stern breeze, he rigged a piece of canvas to a spruce pole and sailed.

Only through necessity did he stop to shoot geese. He was hunting bigger game and his heart hungered for his puppy, beaten and half starved, in all likelihood, traveling somewhere ahead down that bleak coast in the canoe of two men who did not know that close on their heels followed an enemy as dogged, as relentless, as a wolf on the

trail of an old caribou abandoned by the herd.

After days of ceaseless dip and swing, dip and swing, which at night left his back and arms stiff and his fingers numb, Jean Marcel turned into the mouth of the East Main River and paddled up to the post. There he learned that the canoe of the half-breeds had not been seen, and that no hunters of their description traded there. So he turned again to the bay and headed south for Rupert House. Off the Wild Geese Islands, he met what he had for days been dreading, the first September northwester, and was driven ashore.

For the following three days he rested and hunted geese. When the storm whipped itself out he went on and at last crossing Boatswain's Bay, rounded Mount Sherrick and paddled up Rupert Bay to the famous old post, which, since the days of the Merry Monarch and his favorite, Prince Rupert, the first governor of the "Company of Merchants-Adventurers trading into Hudson Bay," has guarded the river mouth—an uninterrupted history of two centuries and a half of fair dealing with the red fur hunters of Rupert Land.

"So you're the son of André Marcel? Well, well! Time does fly! Why, André and I made many a camp together in the old days. There was a man, my lad!"

Jean straightened his wide shoulders in pride at this praise of his father by Alec Cameron, factor at Rupert. When he had explained the object of his long journey south in the fall, the latter raised his bushy eyebrows in amazement.

"You mean to tell me that you paddled from Whale River in fifteen days after a dog?"

"Yes, M'sieu Cameron."

"Well, you didn't waste the daylight or the moon, either. You're sure a chip of the old block. It must be a record for a single paddle; and all for a pup, eh?"

"Yes—all for a pup!"

"You deserve to get that dog. These half-breeds you describe, by the way, dropped in here back in June behind the Mistassini brigade and traded their fur."

"Dey were onlee a day ahead of me up de coast."

"Queer I haven't seen 'em here, yet. Pierre!" Cameron called to a company man passing the trade house. "Have those two Mistassini strangers, who went north in June, got back yet?"

"No, but Albert meet dem in Gull Bay two day back. Dey have one pup dey get from Huskee!"

"There you are, Marcel! Your men crossed over to Hannah Bay to hunt geese. They'll be here in a week or two on their way upriver. You wait here and we'll get your dog when they show up."

"T'anks, M'sieu Cameron!" The dark eyes of Jean Marcel snapped. At last he was closing in on his quarry. "I weel go to Hannah Bay now and get my dog."

"Two to one, lad? They may get the best of you! And I've no men to spare. Better wait here."

"M'sieu, André Marcel would go alone and tak' his dog. I, hees son, also weel tak' mine."

"Good Lord! André Marcel would have skinned them alive—those two. Well, good luck, Jean! But I don't like your tackling those breeds alone."

Jean shook hands with the factor.

"Bonjour, M'sieu Cameron, and t'anks!"

"If you don't drop in here on your way back, give my regards to Gillies and his family—and be careful," said the factor as Marcel left him.

Two days later, after rounding Point Comfort, Marcel was crossing the mud flats of Gull Bay. At last the stalk was on, for somewhere in the vast marshes of the Hannah Bay coast camped the men he had followed four hundred miles to meet face to face and fight for his dog. Somewhere ahead, through the gray mist, back in the juniper and alder scrub beyond the wide reaches of tide flats and goose grass, was Fleur, a prisoner.

That night in camp at East Point, while he cleaned the action and bore of his rifle, the clatter of the geese in the muskeg behind the far lines of spruce edging the marshes filled him with wonder. Never on the bold east coast had he heard such a din of geese gathering for the long flight. At dawn, for it was windy, lines of gray Canadas, bound out to the shoals, waked him with their clamor.

The tide was low, and he carried his canoe across the mud flats. As he poled his canoe south through the shoals, he saw idling everywhere along the bars and sand spits the gray Canadas, always with an erect,

keen-eyed sentinel on guard. Farther out, white islands of snowy geese flashed in the sun, as here and there a wavy raised on the water to flap his black-tipped wings. Just in from their arctic breeding grounds, they were lingering for a month's feast on toothsome south-coast goose grass before seeking their winter home on the great Gulf two thousand miles away.

Slowly throughout the morning Marcel traveled along the mud flats bared for miles by the retreating tide. At times the breeze carried to his ears the faint sound of firing; but there were goose boats from Moose and Rupert House on the coast and it meant little. That night as the tide covered the marshes he ran up a channel of the Harricanaw delta, seeking a camp ground on its higher shores. Having landed, he was looking for driftwood for his fire when, suddenly, he stopped.

"Ah! You have been here, my fr'en's!"

In the soft mud of the shore ran the clearly marked tracks of a man and dog. The footprints of the dog seemed large for Fleur, but Marcel had not seen her in six weeks, and the puppy was growing fast.

"Fleur!" he said aloud. "Weel you remember Jean Marcel after all these weeks wid dem?"

He had seen no smoke of a fire and the tracks were at least two days old. His men were doubtless on the west shore of the bay where the rank grass grew to the height of a man's head; but he would find them. The guns of the hunters would betray their whereabouts.

At last he had reached the end of the trail. To the thief, the law of the North is ruthless, and ruthlessly Jean Marcel was prepared to exact, if need be, the last drop of the blood of these men in payment for this act. It was now his nerve and wit against theirs, with Fleur as the stake.

Before dawn Jean was taking advantage of the high tide and, when the first light streaked the east, was well on his way. As the sun lifted over the muskeg behind the bay he saw, hanging in the still air, the smoke of a fire.

He ran his canoe up a waterway and into the long grass. There he waited until the tide went out, listening to the faint reports of the guns of the hunters. At noon, having eaten some cold goose and bannock, he took his rifle and started back over the marsh. Slowly he worked his way, keeping to the cover of the grass and alders, circling around the wide, open spaces, pock-marked with water holes and small ponds.

Knowing that the breeds would not take the dog with them to their blinds but would tie her up, he planned to stalk the camp up wind, in order not to alarm Fleur who might betray his presence to his enemies, if by accident they were in camp in the afternoon when the geese were moving. At last he lay within sight of the tent, which was pitched on a tongue of high ground running out into the rush-covered mud flats. The camp was deserted. His eyes strained wistfully for the sight of the shaggy shape of his puppy, and pain stabbed at his heart. She was not there. Distant shots from the marsh to the west marked the absence of at least one of the breeds. But where was Fleur?

Marcel was too "bush-wise" to take any chances. Still keeping to cover, he made his approach up wind until he lay within a stone's throw of the tent. Then a shift in the breeze warned a certain pair of keen nostrils that some living thing skulked not far off, and the heart of Jean Marcel leaped as the howl of Fleur betrayed his presence. Grasping his rifle, he waited. The uproar of the dog brought no response. Evidently the breeds were both away, so, rising, he ran to the excited puppy lashed to a stake back of the tent.

"Fleur! Ma leetle dog!" Dropping his rifle, he approached her with outstretched arms. With flattened ears, the puppy crouched, growling at the stranger, her mane bristling. "Fleur! Don't you know me, pup?"

The puppy's ears went forward. She sniffed long at the outstretched hand that had once caressed her. Slowly, the growl died in her throat.

"Fleur! Fleur! My poor puppy! Don't you remember Jean Marcel?"

Again the puzzled dog drew deep whiffs through her black nostrils. Back in her brain memory was at work. The voice of Marcel stirred the ghosts of other days, vague hints, blurred by the cruelty of weeks, of a time when the hand of a master caressed her and did not strike, when a voice called to her as this voice. Then another sniff, and she knew! She whimpered and her warm tongue licked his hand, and Jean Marcel had his puppy in his arms. Mad with joy, the yelping husky strained at her rawhide bonds as her anxious master examined a

great lump on her head and felt her ribs, ridged with welts from kick and blow.

"So dey tie her up and beat her, my Fleur! Weel, she not leave Jean Marcel again. W'ere I go, Fleur go!"

"W'at you do wid dat dog?"

He had scarcely had time to hear the hissed words when a fierce blow on the back of his head hurled him flat on his face.

For a space he lay stunned, his numbed senses blurred beyond thought or action. Then, as his dazed brain cleared, the realization that life hung on his presence of mind, for he would receive no mercy from the thieves, held him limp on the ground, as though unconscious.

Snarling curses at the crumpled body of his victim, the half-breed was busy with the joining of some rawhide thongs. Jean cautiously raised an eyelid. The breed was bending over him with a looped thong. Not a muscle moved as the Frenchman waited, Nearer leaned the thief. He reached to slip the looped rawhide over one of Marcel's outstretched hands, when, with a lunge from the ground, the arms of the latter clamped on the breed's legs like a sprung trap, and the surprised thief was thrown heavily.

Then began a battle in which quarter was neither asked nor given. Heavier, but slower than the younger man, the thief vainly sought to reach Marcel's throat, for the Frenchman's arms, having the under grip, blocked the half-breed from Jean's knife and his own. Over and over they rolled, locked together, so evenly matched in strength that neither could free a hand. Near them, yelped Fleur frantic with excitement, plunging at her stake.

Then the close report of a gun sounded in Marcel's ears and a great fear swept him. The absent thief was working back to camp. It was a matter of minutes. Was it for this that he had toiled down the coast in search of his dog—for a grave in the Harricanaw mud?

Desperate with the knowledge that he must win quickly, if at all, he strained until the fingers of his left hand just reached the haft of the breed's knife; then the teeth of the man under him bit through Jean's shirt into his shoulder and he lost his grip. Maddened by the pain, he wrenched his right arm free and had his hand on the haft of his own knife before the grip of the thief closed on his wrist—holding the blade in the sheath. Then began a duel of sheer strength. For a time the straining arms lifted and pushed at a deadlock. With veins swelling on neck and forehead Marcel fought to unsheath his knife, but the half-breed's arm was iron, and did not give. Again a gun was fired—still nearer the camp.

With help at hand, the thief, safe so long as he held his grip, snarled in triumph in the ear of his trapped enemy. But increasing peril only increased the Frenchman's strength. With a fierce heave of the shoulders his hand gripping the knife moved upward. The arm of the thief gave way, only to straighten. Then, with a wrench that would not be denied, Jean tore the blade from its sheath.

Frantic and white with sudden fear, the breed fought the sinewy wrist advancing inexorably on its grim mission. In short jerks, Marcel hunched the knife toward its goal. The knotted features of the one who felt death creeping to him, inch by inch, went gray. The hand gripping Marcel's dripped with sweat. Panting hoarsely, like a beast at bay, the thief twisted and writhed from the pitiless steel. Then in his ears rang the voice of the approaching hunter. With a cry of despair, the doomed half-breed called to the man who had come too late. Already the knuckles of Marcel were high on his ribs. With a final wrench the blade was lunged home.

The man's last cry was smothered in a cough. He gasped, quivered convulsively; then lay still.

Bathed in sweat, shaking from the strain and exertion of the long battle, Marcel got stiffly to his feet and seized his rifle. Again the camp was hailed from the marsh. It was evident that the goose hunter had not sensed the cry of his partner or he would not have betrayed his position. Doubtless he was poling up a reed-masked waterway with a load of geese.

Jean smiled grimly, for the thief would have only his shotgun loaded with fine shot, for large shot is not used for geese in the North. Hurriedly searching the tent, he found a rifle which he threw into the rushes; then he loosed Fleur. The approaching half-breed was in his power. But Jean wanted no prisoner. To stay and beat this man as Fleur had been beaten, would have been sweet, but of blood he had had enough. For an instant his eyes rested on the ghastly evidence of his visit, awaiting the return of the hunter, then he took Fleur and started

across the marsh to his canoe. As for the man who was coming, when he found his dead partner, fear of an ambush would prevent him from following their trail.

Reaching his canoe, Jean divided a goose with Fleur and, when it became dark, started for East Point. That the half-breed's partner would attempt to follow him and seek revenge he had no doubt. With the shotgun alone, though—Jean had thrown away the only rifle at their camp—the thief's sole chance would be to stalk Marcel while he slept. But as the sea was flat and the tide ebbing, Jean was confident that daylight would find him well up the coast toward Point Comfort.

CHAPTER VIII.

It was the first week in September. This meant a race with the freeze-up back to Whale River, for with the autumn head winds, the journey would take him a month, travel as he might. Though he sorely needed geese for food on his way north, there was no time to waste at Hannah Bay so Marcel paddled steadily all night. At dawn, in the mist off Gull Bay, Fleur became so restless with the scent of the shoals of geese which the canoe was raising that Jean was forced to put a gag of hide in her mouth while he drifted near to the wavies with the tide and shot a week's supply of food.

At daylight he went ashore, concealed his canoe behind some bowlders and, trusting to Fleur's nose and ears to guard him from surprise, slept the sleep of exhaustion. Later while his breakfast was cooking, Jean reveled in his reunion with his dog. In the weeks since he had last seen her she had fairly leaped in height and weight. Food had been plenty with the half-breeds and Fleur was not starved, but Jean's blood boiled at the evidence she bore of the breeds' brutality.

Though Fleur was but six months old, the heavy legs and already massive lines of her head gave promise of a maturity unusual even in the Ungava breed. Some day Jean would have a dog team equal to the famous huskies of his grandfather, Pierre Marcel—who once took the Christmas mail from Albany to Fort Hope, four hundred and fifty miles over a drifted trail, in twelve days!

"Yes, some day Fleur will give Jean Marcel a team," said Jean aloud, and rubbed the gray ears while Fleur's hairy throat rumbled in delight as though she were struggling to answer: "Some day, Fleur—for you will not forget how I came from the north and brought you home." And then the muscles of his lean face twisted with pain. "But who will there be to work for, with Julie gone?"

That day, holding the nose of his canoe on Mount Sherrick, Jean crossed the mouth of Rupert Bay and headed up the coast. In three days he was at East Main where he bought dried white fish for Fleur and salt to cure geese. He started the same night for Fort George. Two days out he was driven ashore by the first northwester and held prisoner, while he added to his supply of geese.

After the storm he toiled on day after day, praying that the stinging northers bringing the freeze-up would hold off until he sighted Whale River. At night, seated beneath the somber cliffs by his driftwood fire, with Fleur at his side, he often watched the wonder of the northern lights, marveling at their mystery, as they pulsed and waned and flared again over the sullen bay, then streamed up across the heavens, and in their diffusion veiled the stars which twinkled through with a mystic blue light. The "Spirits of the Dead at Play," the Eskimos called those dancing phantoms of the skies. He thought of his own dead and wondered if their spirits were at peace.

Later, as he lay a blanketed shape beside his sleeping puppy, came dreams to mock him—dreams of Julie Breton, always gay, always happy, and beside her, smiling into her face, the handsome inspector of the east-coast posts.

Night after night he dreamed of the girl who was slipping away from him, who had forgotten Jean Marcel in his mad race south for his dog.

On and on he fought his way north through head seas and cross winds, often landing to empty his canoe, and so on to the lee of the next island. While his boat would live he traveled, for September was drawing to a close and over him hung the menace of the first stinging northers which for days would anchor his frail craft to the land. And on their heels would follow the nipping nights of the freeze-up which would shackle the waterways and lock the land in a grip of ice.

Past the beetling shoulders of the Black Whale, past the Earthquake Islands and

Fort George, leaving Caribou Point astern, the dreaded Cape of the Four Winds at last loomed through the mist which blanketed the flat sea. It was to this gray headland that he had raced the northers which would have held him wind-bound. And he had won. He rounded the cape, and five days later a drawn-faced, tattered figure with Fleur at his side, he stood at the door of the mission house. It was Julie who greeted him.

"Jean Marcel! Thank God!" she cried, and impulsively kissed the cheeks of the blushing lad. A whine of protest, followed by a smothered rumble at such familiarity with the master, drew her glance to the great puppy. "Fleur! You brought Fleur with you, Jean, as you said you would! Oh, we have had much worry about you, Jean Marcel—and how thin you are!" She led man and dog into the building. "Henri! Come quick and see whom we have with us!"

"Jean, my son!" cried the priest, embracing the returned *voyageur*. "And you brought back your dog! It will be a brave tale we shall hear to-night!"

And later, at the trade house, Jean and Fleur were greeted with:

"*Nom de Dieu!* Jean Marcel! And de dog! He return wid hees dog, by gar!" And Jules Duroc sprang to meet him.

"Welcome back, my lad!" cried Colin Gillies, snatching a hand of Jean from the emotional company man, while Angus McCain, joining in the chorus of congratulations, clapped the helpless Marcel on the shoulder. The perplexed puppy, worried by this uproar of strangers about her master, leaped and tore the back out of McCain's coat, and was forthwith relegated by Jean to the stockade outside.

"How far did they take you, Jean?" asked the factor. "Did you have a fuss getting your dog?"

"I was one day behind dem at Rupert Bay an'——"

"What, you've been to Rupert?" interrupted the amazed Gillies.

"I go to Rupert and see M'sieu Cameron. Dey cross to Hannah Bay to hunt goose."

"And with one paddle you gained a day on them? Lad, you've surely got all your father's staying power. Where did you come up with them?"

Jean related the details of his capture of Fleur to an open-mouthed audience.

"So there's one less dog stealer on the bay," dryly commented Gillies, when Marcel had finished his grim tale.

"Why you not put a bullet in dat oder t'ief, Jean?" demanded the bloodthirsty Jules.

"It ees not easy to keel a man—onless he try to keel you and steal your dog. I had de dog. One of dem was enough," gravely answered Jean.

"That's right; you had your dog," approved Gillies. "But you've surely got your father's fighting blood!"

Basking for three days in the hospitality of the mission, resting from the strain and wear of six weeks' constant toil at the paddle, Marcel reveled in Julie's good cooking.

To watch her trim figure moving about the house, to talk to her while her dusky head bent over her sewing, would have been all the heaven he asked, after the loneliness of his long journey, had it not been that over it all hung the knowledge that Julie Breton was lost to him. Kind she was as a sister is kind, but her heart he knew was far down the coast, at East Main, in the keeping of Inspector Wallace.

On his return he had learned the story from big Jules. All Whale River had watched the courting of Julie. All Whale River had seen Wallace and the girl walking nightly in the long twilight, and had shaken their heads sadly, in sympathy with Jean Marcel. Yes, he had lost her. It was over, and he manfully fought the bitterness and despair that was his; tried to forget the throbbing pain at his heart as he made the most of those three short days with the girl he loved—and might never see again. For Marcel was not returning from the Ghost at Christmas.

Ambition for the future had been stripped from him as the withering winds strip a tree of leaves. The home he had pictured at Whale River when, in the spring, he fought through to the Salmon for a dog team which should make his fortune, was now a phantom. There was nothing left him but the love of his puppy. She would never desert Jean Marcel.

But Jean Marcel was a trapper, and the precious days before the ice would close the upper Whale and the Ghost to canoe travel were slipping past. His partners of the previous winter had agreed to take with them the supplies which he had drawn from the post, but he was certain that they would not net fish for his dog. They would not

plan for the dog they had been confident he would not recover. So, with as much cured whitefish as he could carry without being held up on the portages by extra trips, Marcel started with Fleur on the long upriver trail to his trapping grounds. When he left, he said to Julie in French:

"I have not spoken to you of what I have heard since my return."

The girl's face flushed but her eyes met his.

"They tell me that you are to marry M'sieu Wallace," he hazarded.

"They do not know, who tell you that!" she exclaimed with spirit. "M'sieu Wallace has not asked me to marry him, and besides, he is still a Protestant."

Ignoring the evasion he went on slowly: "But you love him, Julie; and he is a great man——"

"Ah, Jean," she broke in, "you are hurt. But you will always be my friend, won't you?"

"Yes, I shall always be that." And he was gone.

Although the stinging winds with swirls of fine snow were already driving down the valleys and the ice nightly filmed the eddies and backwaters, yet the swift river remained open to the speeding canoe until, one frosty morning, Marcel waked in camp at the Conjuror's Falls to find that the ice had overnight closed in on the quiet reaches of the Ghost just above, shackling the river for seven months against canoe travel.

Caching his boat and supplies on spruce saplings, he circled each peeled trunk with a necklace of large inverted fishhooks, to foil the raids of that archthief and defiler of caches, the wolverene. That night he reached the camp of his partners.

Antoine Beaulieu and Joe Piquet, like Marcel, had lost their immediate families in the plague and, the year before, had been only too glad to join the Frenchman in a trapping partnership of mutual advantage. For while Marcel, son of the former company head man, with a schooling at the mission and a skill and daring as canoeman and hunter beyond their own, was looked upon as leader by the half-breeds, Antoine was a good hunter, while Joe Piquet's manual dexterity in fashioning snowshoes, making moccasins, and building bark canoes rendered him particularly useful.

Marcel's feat of the previous spring in finding the headwaters of the Salmon and his appearance at Whale River with a pure-bred Ungava husky, to the amazement of the Crees, had increased his influence with his partners; but his determination to go south after his dog when it was already high time for the three men to start for their trapping grounds had left them in a sullen mood. Because they could use them, if he did not return from the south, they had packed his supplies over the portages of the Whale and up the Ghost to their camp, but, as he had expected, had netted no extra whitefish for the dog.

That night they sat long over the fire in the shack they had built the autumn previous, listening to Marcel's tale of the rescue of Fleur and of the great goose grounds of the south coast. In the morning Jean waked with the problem of a supply of fish for Fleur and himself troubling him, for one of the precepts of André Marcel had been, "Save your fish for the tail of the winter, for no one knows where the caribou will be." Down at Conjuror's Falls he had cached less than two months' rations for his dog, and they were facing seven months of the long snows. To be sure, she could live on meat, if meat was to be had, but a husky thrives on fish, and Marcel determined that she should have it.

Confident of finding game plentiful, his partners, with the usual lack of foresight of the Crees, had netted less than three months' supplies of whitefish and lake trout. This emergency store Marcel knew would be consumed by February, however plentiful the caribou proved to be, for the Crees seldom possess the thrift to save against the possible spring famine. So he determined to set his net at once.

Borrowing Joe's canoe, he packed it through the bush to a good fish lake where he set the net under the young ice, and baited lines; then taking Fleur, he started cruising out locations for his trap lines in new country, far toward the blue hills of the Salmon watershed, where game signs had been thick the previous spring.

CHAPTER IX.

Toward the last of October when the snow began to make, Fleur's education as a sled dog began. Already the fast-growing puppy was creeping up toward one hundred pounds in weight, and soon, under the kind but firm tutelage of her master, was as keen

to be harnessed for a run as a veteran husky of the winter trails.

When he had set and baited his traps over a wide circle of new country to the north Jean returned to his net and lines, and at the end of ten days had a supply of trout and whitefish for Fleur, which he cached at the lake.

It looked like a good winter for game. Snowshoe rabbits were plentiful, and wherever their runways led in and out of the scrub spruce and fir covers, those furred assassins of the forest, the fox and the lynx, the fisher and the marten, were sure to make their hunting grounds. During November and December, when pelts are at their best, the men made a harvest at their traps. The caribou were still on the barrens, feeding on the white moss from which they scraped the snow with their large, round-toed hoofs, and the rabbit snares furnished stew whenever the trappers craved a change from caribou steaks, though no Indian will eat rabbit as a regular diet while he can get red meat.

During these weeks, learning the ways of the winter forest after a puppyhood on the coast, as Fleur grew in bulk and strength, so her affection deepened for Jean Marcel. Now nearly a year old, she easily drew the sled loaded with the meat of a caribou on a beaten trail. At night, in the tent Marcel had pitched and banked with snow as a halfway camp on the round of his trap lines, she would sit with hairy ears pointed, watching his every movement, looking unutterable adoration as he scraped his pelts, stretched them on frames to dry, or mended his clothes and moccasins. Then, before he turned in to his plaited, rabbit-skin blankets, warmer by far than any fur robes known in the North, Fleur invariably demanded her evening romp. Taking a hand in her jaws which never closed, she would lift her lips, baring her white fangs in a snarl of mimic anger, as she swung her head from side to side, until, seizing her, Jean rolled her on her back, while rumbles and growls from her shaggy throat voiced her delight.

Back at the main camp, Fleur, true to her breed, merely tolerated the presence of Antoine and Joe, indifferent to all offers of friendship. Moving away at their approach, she suffered neither of them to place hand upon her. At night she slept outside in the snow, where the thick mat of fine fur under the long hair rendered her immune to cold.

And all these weeks Jean Marcel was fighting out his battle with self. Always the struggle went ceaselessly on—the struggle with his heart to give up Julie Breton. Reason though he would, that he had nothing to give her, while this great man of the company had everything, his love for the girl kept alive the embers of hope. He carried the memory of her sweetness over the white trails by day and at night again wandered with her in the twilight as in the days before the figure of Wallace darkened his life.

As Christmas approached, Jean wondered whether Wallace would spend it in Whale River, and was glad that they had not intended, because of the great distance, to go back for the festivities at the post.

Wallace surely would change his religion. Surely no man would balk at that, to get Julie. And the spring would see them married. Well, he should go on loving her—and Fleur; there was no one else.

One afternoon toward the end of the year, when the early dusk had turned Marcel back toward camp from his most northerly line of marten traps, he suddenly stopped in his tracks on the ridge from which he had seen the lake on the Salmon headwaters the spring previous. Pushing back the hood of his caribou capote to free his ears, he listened, motionless. Beside, with black nostrils quivering, Fleur sniffed the stinging air.

Again the faint, far, wailing chorus which had checked him reached Marcel's ears. The dog stiffened, her mane rising as she bared her white fangs.

"You heard it, too, Fleur?" Resting a rabbit-skin mitten on the broad head of the nervous husky, Marcel gazed long at the floor of snow to the north.

"Ah-hah!" he exclaimed, "dey turn dees way."

Clearer now the stiff breeze carried the call of hunting wolves. Fleur burst into a frenzy of yelping. Seizing her, Marcel calmed her into silence. Then, after an interval, the cry of the pack slowly faded, and shortly the man's straining ears caught no sound save the fretting of the wind through the spruce.

Wolves he had often heard, singly and in groups of four or five, but the hunting howl which had been brought to him through the hills by the wind was not the clamor of a handful of timber wolves, but the blood chorus of a pack. None but the white wolves which far to the north hung on the

flanks of the caribou herds could raise such a hunting cry. And there was but one reason for their drifting south from the great Ungava barrens.

It was a sober face that Jean Marcel wore back to his camp. Large numbers of arctic wolves in the country meant the departure of the trapper's chief source of meat—the caribou. With the caribou gone, they had their limited supply of fish, and the rabbits, eked out by the flour which would not carry them far, for the half-breeds, in spite of his warnings, had already consumed half of it. To be sure, the rabbits would keep them from actual starvation—would pull them through to the break-up of the long snows in April. But he cursed his partners for failing to make themselves independent of meat by netting more fish in September.

"To-morrow," said Marcel, on his return next day to the main camp, "we start for de barren and hunt de deer hard while dey stay in dees countree."

"W'at you say, Jean? I got trap line to travel to-morrow," objected Antoine Beaulieu.

"I say dis," returned Marcel, commanding the attention of the two men by the gravity of his face. "De deer will not be in dis countree in t'ree-four days."

"Ha! Ha! Dat ees good joke, Jean Marcel!" exclaimed Piquet.

"Yes, dat ees good joke!" returned Marcel, rising and shaking a finger in the grinning faces of his partners. "But I say dis to you, Antoine Beaulieu an' Joe Piquet. We go to de barren and hunt deer to-morrow or I tak' my share of flour and mak' my own camp."

Marcel's threat sobered the half-breeds. They had no desire to break with the Frenchman whose initiative and daring they respected.

"De deer are plentee, I count seexteen to-day," argued Antoine.

"Yes; to-day de deer are here. But, whiff!"—Jean waved his hand—"an' dey are gone; for las' night I hear de white wolves. To-morrow we go!"

Piquet and Beaulieu admitted that the white wolves, if they appeared in numbers, would drive the caribou—called deer, in the North—out of the country, but they insisted that what Jean had heard was the echoing of the call and answer of three or four timber wolves gathering for a hunt. Never in his life had Joe Piquet, who was thirty, heard of arctic wolves appearing on the Great Whale headwaters. Thus they argued, but Jean was obdurate. On the following day the three men started back into the barrens with Fleur and the sled.

CHAPTER X.

The first day, by hard hunting, they shot three caribou, but to the surprise and chagrin of Antoine and Joe, on the second day, in a country where they had never failed to get meat earlier in the winter, the hunters got but one. After that not a caribou was seen on the wide barrens, while many trails were crossed, all heading south. Following the signs of the fleeing caribou were the tracks of wolves, not singly or in couples, but in packs.

When the hunters had satisfied themselves that the caribou had left the country, they relayed their meat into camp with the help of Fleur and the sled. That night the trappers took council. The caribou meat, flour and remaining fish, counting Jean's cache at Conjuror's Falls, would take them into February. After that, it would be rabbits through March and April until the fish began to move. In the meantime, a few lake trout and pike could be caught with lines through holes in the ice. Also, setting the net under three feet of ice could be accomplished with infinite labor. But the results in midwinter were always a matter of doubt.

"You had all September to net fish, but what did you do? You grew fat on deer meat," flung out Jean bitterly, thinking of his hungry puppy who required nourishing food in these months of rapid growth.

"How much feesh you got in dat cache?" demanded Piquet, ignoring the remark.

"About one hundred fifty pound," replied Marcel.

"Not on Conjur' Fall. I mean at de lak'."

The fish Jean had netted and cached at the lake, on arriving in October, were designed for his dog and already had been partly used.

"Only little left at de lak'," he replied.

"Dat feesh belong to us all. De dog can leeve on rabbit."

Piquet's remark brought the blood to Jean's face.

"De dog gets her share of feesh, do you hear dat, Joe?" rasped Marcel, his eyes blaz-

ing. "You an' Antoine got no right to dat feesh; you refuse to help me an' you laugh when I net dat feesh. De dog gets her share, Joe Piquet!" Marcel rose, facing the others with a glitter in his eyes that had its effect on Piquet.

"We have bad tam, dees spreeng, for sure," moaned Antoine. "I weesh we net more feesh."

"Well, I tell you what to do," said Jean. "Eef de feesh do not bite tru de ice or come to de net, we travel ovair to de Salmon. Plentee beaver dere."

At the suggestion of moving into the unknown country to the north, with its dread valleys peopled with spirits, the superstitious half-breeds shook their heads. Rather starve on the Whale, they said, than in the haunted valleys where the voices of the Windigo filled the nights with fear.

With a disgusted shrug of his wide shoulders, Marcel dismissed the subject. "All right, starve on de Ghost. De Windigo get you on de Salmon!"

With the disappearance of the caribou the partners began setting rabbit snares to save their meat and flour. Jean brought up the last of his fish from Conjuror's Falls but refused to touch his cache at the lake. With strict economy and a liberal diet of rabbit, they decided that their food could carry them into March.

During the last week in January while following his trap lines, Jean made a discovery the gravity of which drove him in haste back to the camp on the Ghost.

"How many long snows since de rabbit plague, Joe?" he asked. His comrades turned startled eyes on the speaker. Piquet slowly counted on his fingers the winters since the last plague all but exterminated the snowshoe rabbits. Then, leaping to his feet, he cried: "By gar! It ees not dees year. No, no! De ole men at de trade said de nex' long snow after dees will be de plague."

"Well, de old men were wrong," Marcel calmly insisted. "It ees dees year w'en you net leetle feesh, dat de rabbits die. On de last trip to my traps I find four rabbit dead from de plague; an' since de last snow I cross few fresh tracks."

"I fin' none in two days myself," echoed Antoine thoughtfully.

The stark truth of Marcel's contention drove itself home. They gazed with blanched faces into each others' eyes, from which looked fear—fear of the dread weeks of the March moon and the slow death which starvation might bring. The grim specter which ever hovers over the winter camps in the white silences menaced the shack on the Ghost. The plague, which periodically sweeps the North, would bring starvation to many a tepee of the improvident children of the snows as well.

As the weeks went by, the food cache at the camp on the Ghost steadily shrank. The nets under the ice and the set lines were now bringing no fish. More and more Jean slept in his halfway camp ten miles north, for, although the short rations he fed Fleur had been obtained solely by his own efforts, Joe and Antoine objected to the well-nourished look of the puppy while they grew thin and slowly weakened. For generations, the huskies have been accustomed to starvation, and if not slaving with the sleds, will for weeks show but slight effect from short rations.

To increase the difficulty of hunting for food, January had brought blizzard after blizzard, piling deep with drifts the trails to their trap lines, which they still visited regularly, for the starved lynxes were coming to the bait of the flesh of their kin in greater and greater numbers. Twice, seeking the return of the caribou, the desperate men traveled far into the barrens, beaten by the withering January winds, returning with wind-burned, frost-blackened faces.

Finally, in desperation, when the flour was gone, and the food cache held barely enough meat and fish for two weeks, Joe and Antoine insisted that, while they had food to carry them through, they should make for the post.

"You can crawl into de post lak' a starving Cree because you were too lazy to net feesh. I will stay in de bush with my dog," was Jean's scornful reply.

But the situation was critical. With two months remaining before the big thaw in April, when they could rely on plenty of fish, there seemed but one alternative—unless the caribou returned or the fish began to move. A few trout and an occasional rabbit and ptarmigan would not keep them alive until the break-up, when the bear would leave their "washes" and the caribou start north. Already with revolting stomachs they had begun to eat starved lynx. If only they could get beaver; but there

were no beaver on the Ghost. They must find game shortly or retreat to Whale River.

One night Jean reached his fish cache on his return from a three days' hunt toward the Salmon waters. At last he had found beaver, and caching three at his tent, with his heart high with hope, he was bringing the carcasses of three more to his partners. As he approached the cache in the gathering dusk, to his surprise he found the fresh tracks of snowshoes.

"Ah-hah!" he muttered, his mouth twisted in a grim smile, "so dey rob de cache of Jean Marcel while he travel sixty mile to get dem beaver!"

The last of Fleur's pitiful little store of fish was gone. The cache was stripped. Jean shook his head sadly. So he could no longer trust these men whose hunger had made them thieves! He would break with them at once. Bitter with the discovery, Marcel drove Fleur over the trail to the camp. Opening the slab door, he surprised the half-breeds gorging themselves from a steaming kettle of trout. But hunger had driven them past all sense of shame. Looking up sullenly, they waited for him to speak.

"Good evening, my friends! I see you have had luck at de lines," he surprised them with. "I have three nice fat beaver for you."

The hollow eyes of Joe and Antoine met in a questioning look. Then Piquet brazened it out.

"Beaver, eh? Dat soun' good—fat beaver!" and he smacked his thin lips greedily.

"W'ere you get beaver, Jean?" asked Antoine, now that the tension due to Jean's appearance had relaxed.

"W'ere I tell you I would fin' dem—nord, in de valley of de spirits!"

Marcel heaped a tin dish from the kettle and, slipping outside, fed Fleur.

"Here, Fleur!" he called, "ees some of de feesh dat Joe has boiled for you. W'at? You lak' it bettair raw? Well, Joe he lak' it boiled."

Returning, Jean ate heartily of the lake trout. When he had finished and lighted his pipe, he said: "You weel fin' de beaver on de cache. I leeve in de mornin' for Salmon Riviere country."

"W'at! You goin' leeve us, Jean?" cried Antoine, visibly disturbed.

"Yes, I don't trap wid t'ief!" The cold eyes of Marcel bored into those of Beaulieu, which wavered and fell. But Piquet accepted the challenge.

"W'at you t'ink, Jean Marcel! You geeve dose feesh to de dog w'en we starve?" he sullenly demanded. "We eat de dog, also, before we starve."

"You eat de dog, eh, Joe Piquet? Dat ees good joke. You 'av' to keel de dog and Jean Marcel first, my fr'en'," sneered Marcel. "I net feesh for my dog and you not help me, but laugh; now you tak' dem from my dog. So! I am tru wid you both! I geeve you de beaver and bid you good day, to-morrow!"

Antoine was worried. He knew what the loss of Marcel would mean to them in the days to come. The sullen Piquet in whom toil and starvation were bringing to the surface traits common to the half-breed, treated Marcel's going with seeming indifference.

Deep in the night, Marcel waked cold. Lifting his head from the blankets, his face met an icy draft driving through the open door of the shack which framed a patch of sky swarming with frozen stars. Wondering why the door was open, he rose to close it, when the starlight fell on Piquet's empty bunk.

"Ah-hah! Joe he steal some more, maybe!" he muttered, hastily drawing on his moccasins. Stepping into the thongs of his snowshoes which stood in the snow beside the door, he hurried to the cache. Beneath the food scaffold crouched a dark form.

"So you steal my share of de meat and hide it, before I go, eh? You t'ief!"

Caught in the act, Piquet rose from the provision bags, as Marcel reached him, to take full in the face a blow backed by all the concentrated fury of the Frenchman. Reeling back against a spruce support to the cache, the dazed half-breed sank to his snowshoes, then, slowly struggling to his knees, lunged wildly with his knife at the man sneering down at him and missed. His thrust carried him headfirst into the snow, his arms buried to the shoulders. In a flash, Marcel fell on the prostrate breed with his full weight, driving both knees hard into Piquet's back. With a smothered grunt the half-breed lay limp in the snow.

A few moments later Jean was back at the shack.

"Get up, Antoine!" he called. "You fin' a cache robber, widout fur on heem, out dere. I tak' my grub an' go."

"W'ere ees Joe?" asked the confused Beaulieu, rubbing his eyes.

"Joe, he got w'at t'ieves deserve. Go an' see."

Antoine reappeared shortly, followed by the mumbling Piquet.

"Ah, bo'-jo'! M'sieu Carcajou! You have wake up?" Jean sneered.

One of Piquet's beady eyes was swollen shut, but the other snapped evilly as he limped to his bunk.

Taking his share of the food, Marcel loaded his sled, hitched Fleur, and looked into the shack where he found the two men arguing excitedly.

"Till we meet, Antoine! Better hide your grub or M'sieu Wolverene weel steal w'ile you sleep."

With an oath, Piquet was on his feet with his knife, but Beaulieu hurled him back on his bunk and held him as he cursed the man who stood coolly in the doorway.

"A' 'voir, Antoine!" Jean repeated, as the troubled face of Beaulieu turned to the old partner he respected. "Don' let de *carcajou* keel you for de grub."

And ignoring the proffered hand of the hunter who followed him out to the sled, he took the trail north.

As dawn broke blue over the bald ridges to the east, Marcel raised his set lines and net at the lake and pushed on toward the silent hills of the Salmon headwaters.

CHAPTER XI.

It had been with the feeling of a heavy load loosed from his shoulders that the Frenchman left the Ghost. Disgusted with the laziness and lack of foresight of his partners, he had gradually lost all confidence in their capacity to fight through until spring brought back the fishing. The robbery of his cache and the affair with Piquet had made him a free man.

For Antoine, the friend of his youth, ever easily led, but at heart honest enough, he held only feelings of disgust; but with the crooked-souled Piquet it should henceforth be war to the knife.

Knowing that there were more beaver in the white valleys of the Salmon country, Marcel faced with hope the March crust and the long weeks of the April thaws, when rotting ice would bar the waterways and soggy snow would close the trails to all travel. Somehow, he and Fleur would pull through and see Whale River again. But it meant the need of a dogged will and, day after day, many a white mile of drudgery for himself and the dog he loved.

The February dusk hung in the spruce surrounding the halfway camp of Marcel. It was beside a pond in the hills that divided the watershed of the Ghost from the Salmon. For three days Jean had been picking up his traps preparatory to making the break north to the beaver country. With a light load, for Fleur could not haul much over her weight on a freshly broken trail in the soft snow, the toboggan sled stood before the tent ready for an early start under the stars. From the smoke hole of the small tepee the sign of cooking rose straight into the biting air, for there was no wind. But the half ration of trout and beaver which was simmering in the kettle would leave the clamoring stomach of the man unsatisfied. Fleur had already bolted her fish, more supper than her master allowed himself, for Fleur was still growing fast and her need was greater. With the three beaver he had brought from the north and the fish and caribou from the Ghost, Marcel still had food for himself and dog for a fortnight.

As the dusk slowly blanketed the forest, stars here and there pricked out of the dark canopy of sky to light the white hills rolling to the dread valleys of the forbidden land of the Crees to the north. As the night deepened, the Milky Way drew its trail across the swarming stars. In the pinch of the strengthening cold, spruce and jack pine snapped in the encircling forest, while the ice of lake and river, contracting, boomed intermittently, like the shot of distant artillery.

On the northern horizon, the northern lights flickered and glowed, fitfully; at length, loosing their bonds, snakelike ribbons of light writhed and twisted from the sky line to the high heavens, in grotesque traceries.

For a space Jean stood outside the tepee watching this never-ceasing wonder of the aurora; then sending Fleur to her bed, sought his blankets. Fleur slept outside under the low branches of a fir, and when it snowed, waked warm beneath a white blanket of her own. Inured to the cold, the husky knows no winter shelter and needs none, sleeping curled up through the bitter nights, nose in bushy tail, in a hole dug in the snow.

The northern lights had dimmed and faded. Sentinel stars alone were guarding the white solitudes when, from the gloom of the spruce out into the lighted snow moved a dark shape. The muffled snowshoes of the skulker advanced noiselessly. As the figure crept nearer the tent, it suddenly stopped, frozen into rigidity, head forward, as though listening. After a space, it stirred again. Something held in the hands glinted in the starlight. It was the action of a rifle, made bright by wear.

When the creeping shape reached the banking of the tepee, again it stopped, stiff as a spruce. The seconds lengthened into minutes. Then a hand reached out to the canvas. In the hand was a knife. Slowly the keen edge sawed at the frozen fabric. At last the tent was slit.

Leaning forward the hunter of sleeping men enlarged the opening and pressed his face to the rent and gazed into the darkened tepee. Then withdrawing his hooded head, he shook it slowly as if in doubt. Finally, as though decided on his course, he thrust the barrel of his rifle through the opening and dropped his head as if to aim, when, from the rear a gray shape catapulted into his back, flattening him on the snow. As the weight of the dog struck the crouching assassin, his rifle exploded inside the tent, followed by the prowler's scream of terror.

Again and again the long fangs of the husky slashed at the throat of the writhing thing beneath her. Again and again the massive jaws snapped and tore, first the capote, then the exposed neck, to ribbons. Then with cocked rifle the dazed Marcel, waked by the gun fired in his ears, reached them. Dragging his dog from the crumpled shape, Marcel looked, and from the bloodied face grimacing horribly in death above the mangled throat, stared the glazed eyes of Joe Piquet.

"By gar! You travel far for de grub and de revange, Joe Piquet," he exclaimed. Turning to the dog, snarling with hate of the prowling thing she had destroyed, Jean led her away.

"Fleur, ma petite!" he cried. "She take good care of Jean Marcel while he sleep! Piquet, he thought he keel us both in de tent." The great dog, trembling with the heat of battle, her mane stiff, yelped excitedly. "She love Jean Marcel, my Fleur! And what a strength she has!" Rearing, Fleur placed her massive forepaws on Marcel's chest, whining up into his face, then seizing a hand in her jaws, proudly drew him back to the dead man in the snow. There, raising her head, as if in warning to all enemies of her master, she sent out over the white hills the challenging howl of the husky.

When Jean Marcel had buried the frozen body of Joe Piquet in a drift over the ridge, where the April thaws would betray him to the mercy of his kind—the forest creatures of tooth and beak and claw—he started back to the Ghost with Fleur, taking Piquet's rifle to be returned to his people with his fur and outfit. Confident that Antoine had had no part in the attempt to kill him and get his provisions, he wished Beaulieu to know Piquet's fate, as Antoine would now in all probability make for Whale River and could carry a message.

As Fleur drew him swiftly over the trail, ice-hard from much traveling, Jean decided that, if Antoine wished to fight out the winter in the Salmon country, for the sake of their old friendship he would overlook the half-breed's weakness under Piquet's influence and offer to take him. Dawn was wavering in the gray east when Marcel reached the silent camp. He called loudly to wake the sleeping man inside. There was no response.

Marcel's heavy eyebrows contracted in a puzzled look.

"'Allo, Antoine!" Still no answer. Was he to find here more of the work of Joe Piquet? He swung back the slab door of the shack and peered into the dim interior.

The half-breed lay in his bunk.

"Wake up, Antoine!"

Marcel approached the bunk. The faint light coming through the open door fell on the gray face of Antoine Beaulieu stiff in death.

"*Tiens!*" muttered Marcel. "Stabbed tru de heart w'en he sleep! Joe Piquet, he t'ink to get our feesh and beaver an' fur, den he tell dem at Whale Riviere we starve out. Poor Antoine!"

Jean sat down beside the dead man, his head in his hands. He regretted bitterly now that he had refused the hand of his old friend in parting; that he had not taken him with him when he left the Ghost. It was clear that before starting to stalk Marcel's camp, Piquet had deemed it safer to seal the lips of Beaulieu forever as to the fate of the man he planned to kill.

"Poor Antoine!" Marcel repeated.

In the cold sunrise he lashed the body of his boyhood friend, which he had sewed in some canvas, up on the food cache, so that it might rest in peace undefiled by the forest creatures, until on his return in May he might give it decent burial. Beside it he placed the fur packs, rifles and outfits of the two men.

"Adieu, Antoine!" he called, waving his hand at the shrouded shape on the cache, and turned north.

CHAPTER XII.

March, the Crees' "Moon of the Crust on the Snow," was ten days old. Camped on a chain of lakes in the Salmon country Marcel had been following the few traps for which he had bait and at the same time had hunted widely for food. Soon, the sun, mounting higher and higher each day at noon, would begin to soften the surface of the snow which the freezing nights would harden into crust. Then he could travel far and fast.

The Frenchman's drawn face and loose capote evidenced the weeks of undernourishment; but, though Fleur's great bones and her ropes of muscle, banding her back and shoulders, thrust through her shaggy coat with undue prominence, still she had as yet suffered little from the famine. So long as Jean Marcel had had fish or meat, his growing puppy had received the greater share, for she had already attained in that winter on the Ghost a height and bulk of bone equal to that of her slate-gray mother now far on the north coast.

For days Jean had been praying for the coming of the crust. With it he planned to make a wide circle back into the high barrens in search of returning caribou. Once the crust had set hard, traveling with the sled into new country would be easy. Food he must accumulate to take them through the April thaws, or perish miserably, with no one to carry the news of their fate to Whale River.

Since the heartbreaking days when the white wolves drove the caribou south and the rabbits disappeared, he had, in moments of depression, sat by the fire at night, wondering, when June again came to Whale River and one by one the canoes of the Crees appeared, if by chance a pair of dark eyes would ever turn to the broad surface of the river for the missing craft of Jean Marcel—whether in the joy of her love for another the heart of a girl would sometimes sadden for one whose bones whitened in far Ungava hills.

At last the crust came. With eyes shielded by snow goggles made by cutting slits in flat pieces of spruce, for the glare of the sun on the barrens was intense, Jean started with his dog. All the food he had was on his sled. He had burned his bridges, for if he failed in his hunt they would starve.

They were passing through the thick spruce of a sheltered valley, traveling upwind, when Fleur, sniffing hard, grew excited. There was something ahead, probably fur, so he did not tie his dog. Shortly Fleur started to bolt with the sled and Jean turned her loose. Following his yelping husky, who broke through the new crust at every leap, Marcel entered a patch of dense cedar scrub. There Fleur distanced him.

Shortly, a scream, followed by a din of snarls and squalls filled the forest. Close ahead a bitter struggle of creatures milling to the death was on. Jean, fearing for the eyes of his raw puppy battling for the first time with the great cat of the North, broke through the scrub to see the lynx spring backward from the rush of the dog and leap for the limbs of a low cedar. But the cat was too slow, for at the same instant Fleur's jaws snapped on his loins, and with a wrench of her powerful neck the husky threw the animal to the snow with a broken back. In a flash she changed her grip, the long fangs crunching through the neck of the helpless beast, and with a quiver the lynx was dead. Hot with the lust of battle, Fleur worried the body of her enemy. Reaching her, Jean proudly patted her back.

"Good Fleur! She make de *loup-cervier* run!" he cried, delighted with the courage and power of his puppy. Then he anxiously examined the slashes of rapier claws on Fleur's muzzle and shoulders. "Good!" he said, relieved. "De lynx he very weak or he cut you deeper dan dese scratch."

As Jean hastily skinned the dead cat he marveled at its emaciation.

"Ah! He also miss de rabbit. Lucky he starve or you get de beeg scratch, Fleur."

For answer the hot tongue of the dog sought his hands as she raised her brown eyes to his. With arms around her shaggy shoulders her proud master muttered into the ears of the delighted husky love words

that would have been strange indeed to any but Fleur, who found them sweet beyond measure.

"My Fleur, she grow to be de dog, de most *sauvage!*" he cried. "Some day she keel de wolf, eh?"

Continuing east, four days later Marcel camped in a valley on the flank of a great barren. In the morning, tying Fleur with a rawhide thong which she could have chewed through with ease but had been taught to respect, he followed the scrub along the edge of the barren searching for caribou signs. Often he stopped to gaze out across the white waste reaching away east to the horizon, seeking for blue-gray objects whose movements in scraping away the snow to the moss beneath would alone mark them as caribou.

All day he skirted the barren but at last turned back to his camp sick at heart and spent with the long day on the crust following his meager breakfast. Deep in the shelter of the thick timber of the valley, he had dug away the snow for his fire and sleeping place, lashing above his bed of spruce boughs a strip of canvas which acted both as windbreak and heat reflector. When they had eaten their slim supper, he freshened the fire with birch logs and sat down with Fleur's head between his knees. The "Starving Moon" of the Montagnais hung overhead.

"Fleur, you know we got onlee two day meat left? W'en dat go, Jean Marcel go, too—in few day, a week maybe; an' Fleur, w'at she do?"

The husky's slant eyes shone with her dog love into the set face of her master. She whined, wrinkling her black nose, then her jaw dropped, which was her manner of laughing, while her hot breath steamed in the freezing air. She waited in vain for the smile that had never failed to light Marcel's face in the old days at such advances. Dropping his mittens Jean held the massive head between his naked hands.

"Jean Marcel feel ver' bad to leave Fleur alone. Wid no game she starve too w'en he go."

Fleur's deep throat rumbled in ecstasy as the hands of the master rubbed her ears.

"Back on de Ghost, Fleur, ees some feesh and meat Joe and Antoine left; not much, but it tak' us to Whale Riviere, maybe."

The lips of Fleur lifted from her white teeth at the names of Jean's partners.

"You remember Joe Piquet, Fleur? Joe Piquet!"

The husky growled. She knew only too well the name, Joe Piquet.

"It ees four-five sleep to de Ghost, Fleur. Shall we go? W'at you t'ink?" The strained face in the fur-lined hood approached the dog's, whose eyes shifted uneasily from the fixed look of her master.

"We go back to de Ghost, Fleur? Or mak' one beeg hunt for de deer?"

The perplexed husky unable to meet Marcel's piercing eyes sprang to her feet with a yelp.

"Good!" he cried. "We mak' de beeg hunt!" He had had his answer and on the yelp of his dog had staked their fate. Tomorrow he would push on into the barrens and find the caribou drifting north again, or flicker out with his dog as men for centuries had perished, beaten by the long snows.

In the morning he divided his remaining food into four parts; a breakfast and a supper for himself and Fleur, for two days. After that—strips of caribou hide and moss, boiled in snow water, to ease the throbbing ache of their stomachs.

Eating his thin stew, he shortened his belt still another hole over his lean waist, and harnessing Fleur, turned resolutely east into country no white man had ever seen, bent on a bold gamble for food—or an endless sleep in the blue Ungava hills.

In his weakened state, black spots and pin points of light danced before his eyes. Distant objects were often magnified out of all proportion. So intense was the glare of the high March sun on the crust that his wooden goggles alone saved him from snow blindness. He traveled a few miles until dizziness forced him to rest. Later he continued on, to rest again, while the black nose of Fleur, who was still comparatively strong, sought his face, as she wondered at the reason for the master's strange actions.

By noon he had crossed no trail except that of a wolverene, seeking food like himself, and finally went down into the timbered valley of a brook where he left Fleur and the sled. Then he started again on his hopeless search. As the streams flowed northeast, he was certain that he had crossed the Height of Land to the Ungava Bay watershed, and was now in the headwater country of the fabled River of Leaves, into which no hunter from Whale River had ever penetrated.

Marcel was snowshoeing through the scrub at the edge of the plateau when far out on the barren he saw two spots. Shortly he was convinced that the objects moved.

"By gar, deer! At last they travel nord!" he gasped, gazing with bounding pulses at the distant spots almost indistinguishable against the snow. Meat out there on the barren awaited him—food and life, if only he could get within range!

Cutting back into the scrub, that he might begin his stalk of the caribou from the nearest cover with the wind in his face, he slowly moved behind a rise in the ground out into the barren. With a caution he had never before exercised, lest the precious food now almost within reach should escape him; the starving man advanced. At last he crawled up behind a low knoll and stretched out on the snow. Cocking and thrusting his rifle before him, he wormed his way to the top of the rise and looked.

There a hundred yards off, playing on the crust, were two arctic foxes. Distorting their size, the barren-ground mirage had, from a distance, cruelly deceived him.

With a groan the spent hunter dropped his head on his arms. "All dees for fox!" he murmured. Then, because foxes were meat, he took careful aim and shot one, wounding the other, which he killed with the second bullet. Hanging the carcasses in a spruce, Marcel continued to skirt the barren toward the east.

As dusk fell he returned to Fleur and made camp.

Cutting up and boiling one of the foxes, he and the dog ate ravenously of the rank flesh, but hope was low in the breast of Jean Marcel. A day or two more of half rations and he was done. And when the deer did come, it would be too late. Jean Marcel would be past aid. And Fleur—what would become of her? True, she could live on the flanks of the caribou herds like the wolves—till the wolves found and destroyed her.

Tortured by such thoughts, he sat by his fire, the husky's great head on his knee, her eyes searching his, mutely demanding the reason for his strange silence.

Another day of fruitless wandering in which he had pushed as far east as his fading strength would take him, and Jean shared the last of the food with his dog. He had fought hard to find the deer, had already traveled one hundred miles into the barrens, but he felt that it was no use; he was beaten. The spirit of the *coureurs* whose blood coursed his veins would drive him on and on, but without food the days of his hunting would be few. Henceforth it would be caribou hide boiled with moss from the barrens to ease the pinch of his hunger, but his strength would swiftly go. Then, when hope died, rather than leave his dog to the wolves, he would shoot Fleur and, lying down beside her in his blanket, place the muzzle of his rifle against his own head.

Two days followed in which Marcel and Fleur drank the liquor from stewed caribou hide and moss while he continued to hunt. As he staggered into camp at the end of the second day the man was so weak that he scarcely found strength to gather wood for his fire. Fleur now showed signs of slow starvation in her protruding ribs and shoulders. Her heavy coat no longer shone with gloss but lay flat and lusterless. Vainly she whimpered for the food her heartsick master could not give her.

With the dog beside him, Marcel lay by his fire numbed into indifference to his fate. The torment of hunger had vanished, leaving only great weakness and a dazed brain. He thought of the three wooden crosses at Whale River; how restful it would be to lie beside them behind the mission, instead of sleeping far in the barrens where the great winds beat ceaselessly by over the treeless snows. At the mission Julie Breton might have planted forest flowers on the mound that marked the grave of Jean Marcel.

Julie! What hopes he had had of a little house of their own at Whale River, when he would have entered the service of the company and drove the mail packet down the coast with the team that Fleur should give him! How often he had pictured that home where Julie and the children would wait his return from summer voyage and winter trail; Julie Breton, whom he had loved from boyhood and who he had prided himself should love him, some day when he had proved his manhood among the swart men of the east coast.

All a dream! Julie was happy. She would soon marry the great man at East Main, while in a few days Jean Marcel was going to snuff out—smolder a while, as a fire from lack of wood, dying by inches—by inches; and then two shots. Poor Fleur! It had all come to pass because he had dared to follow and bring her home and had

had no time to cache fish and game in the fall. She would have been better off with the half-breeds on the Rupert, where the caribou had gone. They would have kicked her, but fed her, too.

Now he must take her with him when the time came. No more starvation for her, and a death in the barrens when she met the white wolves. Yes, he would take her with him.

CHAPTER XIII.

Before dawn, a cold nose nuzzling his face, waked Marcel.

"Fleur hungry? It ees better to sleep w'en dere ees no breakfast," he protested.

The warm tongue sought the face of the drowsy man, and the dog, not to be put off, thrust her nose roughly into his robe, whimpering as she pulled at his capote.

"Poor Fleur!" he muttered. "No more meat for de pup! Lie down! Jean ees ver' tired."

But the dog, bent on arousing the master, grew only the more insistent, seizing his arm in her jaws. As he sat upright, wide awake, Fleur sniffed long at the frosty air, then dashed yelping into the dusk up the trail toward the barren. Turning, she ran back to camp, whining excitedly.

"Eh! W'at you smell, Fleur?" cried Marcel, tearing his rifle with shaking hands from its skin case and cramming cartridges into a pocket. Could it be the deer at last? Only a starving wolf or lynx, prowling near the camp, likely. Still he would go! The love of life was yet strong in Jean Marcel now that a gleam of hope warmed his heart.

Slipping his toes into the thongs of his snowshoes, he made Fleur fast to a tree, and started. He was so weak from lack of food that often he was forced to stop in the climb, shaken by his hammering heart. At last, exhausted, he dragged himself to the shoulder of the barren and moved on unsteady legs along the edge of the scrub, his eyes straining to pierce the wall of dusk which shut the plateau from his sight. But the shadows still blanketed the barren; so testing the light wind, that he might move directly out toward the game when the light grew stronger, he sat down to save his strength for the stalk. Only too clearly his weakness warned him that it was his last hunt. By another day, even though he managed the climb, his trembling hands would prevent the lining of his sights on game.

As opal and rose faintly streaked the east, the teeth of the hunter, as he waited to read the fate daylight would disclose, chattered in the stinging air. He would soon know now whether he were to creep back to his blankets and wait for stark despair to steady the hand which would bring swift release for Fleur and himself, or whether meat, food, life were scraping with round-toed hoofs the snow from the caribou moss out there in the dim dawn.

Daylight filtered over the floor of snow, and as the light at length opened up the treeless miles, a sob shook the lean frame of the hunter. Tears welled in the deep-set eyes to course down and freeze upon his face, for there, on the snow before him, were the blue-gray shapes of caribou at last.

Three deer were feeding almost within range while farther out moving patches marked other bands. At last the spring migration had reached him. He would see Whale River again when June came north. And Fleur, fretting back there in camp at his absence, would revel and grow gigantic on deer meat.

Marcel painfully crawled within easy range of the nearest deer. As he attempted to line his sights in order to hit two with the first shot, as he had often done, the waving of his gun barrel in his trembling hands swept him cold with fear. The exertion of crawling to his position had cruelly shaken his nerves. He rested. Then he carefully took aim. As he fired, his heart skipped a beat, for he thought he had missed. But to his joy a caribou bounded from the snow, ran a few feet and fell, while another, stopping to scent the air before circling upwind, gave him a second shot. The deer was badly hit and the next shot brought it down.

The tension of the crisis passed, the shattered nerves relaxed, and for a space the starving hunter lay limp in the snow. But warned by his rapidly numbing fingers, he forced himself to his feet and went to the deer. Out on the barren, beyond the sound of his rifle, scattered bands of caribou were feeding. Meat to take them through the big break-up of April was at hand. The lean face of Jean Marcel twisted into a grim smile.

He had beaten the long snows.

Stopping only to take the tongues and a piece of haunch, Marcel returned to his hungry dog. Frantic with the faint scent of caribou brought by the breeze, the fam-

ished Fleur chafed and fretted for his return.

"Fleur! See what Jean Marcel got for you!"

The husky, maddened by the scent of the bleeding meat, plunged at her leash, her jaws dripping. Throwing her a chunk of haunch which she bolted greedily, Marcel filled his kettle with snow and, putting in a tongue and strips of steak to boil, lay down by his fire.

CHAPTER XIV.

At intervals during the day Jean drank the strengthening broth, too "bush wise" to sicken himself by gorging. By late afternoon he was able to drive the rejuvenated Fleur to the barren and bring back the meat on the sled.

The days following were busy ones. At first his weakness forced him to husband his strength while the stew and roasted red meat were thickening his blood, but as the food began to tell, he was able to hunt farther and farther into the barrens where the main migration of the caribou was passing. When he was strong enough, he took Fleur with a load of meat back to his old winter camp, returning with traps. These he set at the carcasses he had shot, for foxes, lynxes, and wolverenes were drawn from the four winds to his kill. So, while he hunted meat to carry him through April —and home, at the same time he added materially to his fur pack.

Toward the end of March, before the first thaws softened his back trail and made sled travel heartbreaking for Fleur, Jean began relaying west the meat he had shot. He had now, cached in the barrens, ample food to supply Fleur and himself until the opening of the waterways when fish would be a most welcome change. His sledding over, he returned to his camp in the barrens to get his traps and take one last hunt, for the lean weeks of the winter had made him overcautious and he wished to make the trip back with a loaded sled.

By the coming of April, Fleur, in whom an abundance of red caribou meat had swiftly worked a transformation, had increased in bone and weight. As Jean watched her throw her heavy shoulders into her collar and trot lightly off over the hard trail with a three-hundred-pound load, his heart leaped with love of the beautiful beast who worshiped him with every red drop in her shaggy body.

Lately he had noticed a new trait in his dog. Several times, deep in the night when he waked to renew the fire, he had found that Fleur was not sleeping near him but had wandered off into the bush. As she needed no food, he thought these night hunts of the husky peculiar. But at dawn, he always found Fleur back in camp sleeping beside him.

It was Marcel's last night in the barren-ground camp. Leaving Fleur, he had, as usual, hunted all day, returning with a sled load of meat which he drew himself. As he approached the camp he crossed the trail of a huge timber wolf and hurried to learn if his dog had been attacked, for tied as she was, she would fight with a cruel handicap. But Fleur greeted him as usual with yelps of delight. In the vicinity of the camp there were no tracks to show that the wolf had approached the husky. However, Marcel decided that he would not leave her again bound in camp unable to chew through the rawhide thongs in time to protect herself from sudden attacks of the wolves which roamed the country.

After supper man and dog sat by the fire, but manifestly Fleur was restless. Time and again she left his side to take long sniffs of the air. Not even the rubbing of her ears which usually brought grunts of pleasure had the magic to hold her long.

The early moon hung on the bald brow of a distant ridge and Jean, finishing his pipe, was about to renew his fire and roll into his blankets when a long, wailing howl floated across the valley.

Fleur bounded to her feet, her quivering nostrils sucking in the keen air. Again the call of the timber wolf drifted out on the silent night. Fleur, alive with excitement, trotted into the bush. In a moment she returned to the fire, whimpering. Then sitting down, she pointed her nose at the stars and her deep throat swelled with the long-drawn howl of the husky. Shortly, when the timber wolf replied, the lips of Fleur did not lift from her white fangs in a snarl nor did her thick mane rise as her ears pricked eagerly forward.

As long as he lay awake Jean wondered at this behavior. But presently his wondering was drowned in sleep.

At dawn Jean waked with a sense of loneliness. Pushing together the embers of his

fire, he put on fresh wood, and not seeing Fleur, called to her; but she did not appear. She had a habit of prowling around the neighboring bush at dawn, inspecting fresh tracks of mice, searching for ptarmigan or for the snowshoe rabbits that were not there.

But when Marcel's breakfast was cooked Fleur was still absent. Thinking that a fresh game trail had led her some distance, he ate, then started to break camp. Finally he put his index and middle fingers between his teeth and blew the piercing whistle which had never failed to bring her leaping home. Intently he listened for her answer somewhere in the valley of the stream or on the edge of the barren. But the yelp of his dog did not come to his ears.

Curious as to the cause of her absence Jean smoked his pipe and waited. He was anxious to start back with his traps and meat; but where was Fleur? By the middle of the morning, becoming alarmed, he made a wide circle of the camp, hoping to pick up her trail. Two days previous there had been a flurry of snow sufficient to enable him to follow her tracks on the stiff crust. In the vicinity of the camp were traces of Fleur's recent footprints; but finally, at a distance, Marcel ran into a fresh trail leading down into the brook bottom. There he lost it, and after hours of search returned to camp to wait for her return.

The day wore away and still the husky did not appear. Night came and visions of his dog lying somewhere stiff in the snow, slashed and torn by wolves, tortured his thoughts.

As he sat brooding by his fire, he came to realize, now that he had lost her, what a part of him the dog had become. His thoughts drifted back over their life together, months of grueling toil and delight. Tears traced their way down his wind-burned cheeks as he recalled her early puppy ways and antics and how she had loved to nibble with her sharp milk teeth at his moccasins and sit in the bow of the canoe, on their way down the coast, scolding at the seals and ducks.

And with what mad delight she had welcomed his visits to the stockade at Whale River, circling him at full speed, until breathless and panting she leaped upon him, her hot tongue seeking his hands and face! On the long trail home from the south coast marshes, how closely she would snuggle to his back as they lay on the beaches, as if fearing to lose him while she slept. And the winter on the Ghost, with its ghastly end —what a rock his dog had been when his partners failed him! In the moment of his peril, how savagely she had battled for Jean Marcel!

Through the lean weeks of starvation when hope had died, to the dawn when she had waked him at the coming of the caribou, his thoughts led him. And now, when spring and Whale River were near, it was all over. Their life together with its promise of the future had been snapped short off. He should never again look into the slant, brown eyes of Fleur. He had lost everything; first Julie, and now Fleur.

At daybreak, without hope, he took up the search along the stream. Where the wind had driven, the crust, now stiff with alternate freezing and thawing and swept clean of snow, would show little sign of the passing of the dog. But in the sheltered areas where the crust was softer and the young snow lay he hoped to cross Fleur's tracks.

At length, miles up the valley, he picked up the trail of the dog in some light drift. Following the tracks across the brook bottom and up into the scrub of the opposite slope, he suddenly stopped, wide-eyed with amazement at the evidence written plainly in the light covering of the crust. Fleur's tracks had been joined by, and ran side by side with the trail of a wolf.

"By gar!" gasped the surprised Frenchman. "She do not fight wid de wolf!"

As he traveled, he still found no marks of battle in the snow, simply the parallel trail of the two, dog and wolf, now trotting, now lengthening out into the long wolf lope.

"Fleur leave Jean Marcel for de wolf!"

The trapper rubbed his eyes as though suspicious of a trick of vision. His Fleur, whom he loved as his life and who adored Jean Marcel, to desert him this way in the night—and for a timber wolf!

It was strange indeed. Yet he had heard of such things. It was this way that the Eskimos kept up the marvelous strain to which Fleur belonged. He recalled the peculiar actions of the dog during the previous days—the wolf tracks near the camp—her excitement of the night before when the call had sounded over the valley. This wolf had been dogging their trail for a week and Fleur had known it.

"Ah!" he murmured, nodding his head. "It ees de spreeng!"

Yes, the spring was slowly creeping north and the creatures of the forest were already answering its call. It was April, the season of mating, and Fleur, too, had succumbed to an urge stronger for the moment than the love of the master. April, the Crees' "Moon of the Breaking of the Snowshoes," when at last the wind would begin to shift to the south and the nights lose their edge. Then the snow would melt at noon, softening the trails, and later on, rain and sleet would drive in from the great bay, turning the white floor of the forest to slush, flooding the ice of the rivers which later would break up and move out, overrunning the ice shell of pond and lake which late in May would honeycomb and disappear.

Marcel followed the trails of wolf and dog until he lost them on the wind-packed snow of the barren. There was nothing to do but wait. He knew his dog had not forgotten him—would come home. But when? It was high time for his return to the camp in the Salmon country, to his precious cache of meat, which would attract lynxes and wolverenes for miles around. The bears would soon leave their "washes" and the uprights of his cache were not proof against bear. But he would not go without Fleur, and she was away, somewhere in the hills.

Three days he waited, continuing to hunt that he might take a full sled load back to his cache. But the weather was softening, and any day now might mean the start of the big break-up. It was deep in the third night that a great gray shape burst out of the forest and pounced upon the muffled figure under the shed tent by the fire. As the dog pawed at the blanketed shape, Marcel, drugged with sleep and bewildered by the attack, was groping for his knife when a familiar whine and the licks of a warm tongue proclaimed the return of Fleur. The man threw his arms around his dog.

"Fleur come back to Jean?" Breaking from him, as he rose to his feet, the dog in sheer delight repeatedly circled the fire, then rearing on her hind legs put her forepaws on his chest.

"Fleur bad dog to run away wid de wolf!"

Marcel seized her by the jowls and shook the massive head, peering into the slant eyes in the dim starlight. And Fleur, as though ashamed of her desertion of the master, pushed her nose under his arm, the rumbling in her throat voicing her joy to be with him again. Then Marcel gave her meat from the cache which she bolted greedily.

It had not entered his mind, once he had found her tracks, that Fleur would not return to him; but during her long absence the condition of the snow had been a source of worry. Each day's delay meant the chance of the bottom suddenly falling out of the trail before he could freight his load of meat and traps back to his old camp far to the west. Once the big thaw was on, all sledding would be over. So, hurriedly eating his breakfast, he started under the stars, for at noon he would be held up by the softening trail. Toward mid-afternoon, when it turned colder, he would travel again.

Back at his old camp, Marcel found that the fishhook necklace with which he had circled each of the peeled spruce uprights of his cache had properly baffled the wolverenes and lynxes. Resetting short trap lines, he waited for the break-up with tranquil mind. For his cache groaned with meat.

CHAPTER XV.

The snows were fading fast before the rain and sleet of the big thaw. Often, at night, the softening winds shifted, to drive in raw from the north, again tightening the land with frost. But each day, as May neared, the sun swung higher and higher, slowly scattering the snows to flood the ice of myriad lakes and rivers. Already, already Marcel had thrilled to the trumpets of the gray vanguards of the Canadas. On fair days the sun flashed from white fleets of wavies, bound through seas of April skies to far arctic ports.

With May the buds of birch and poplar began to swell, later to lighten with the soft green of their young leaves the somber reaches of upland jack pine and spruce. At dawn now, from dripping spires, whitethroat and hermit thrush, fleeter than the spring, startled the drowsing forest with a reveille of song.

One afternoon in May on his return from picking up a line of traps to be cached for use the following winter, Marcel went to the neighboring pond to lift his net. For safety on the rapidly sponging ice he wore his snowshoes and carried a twelve-foot spruce pole. He had reset the net and was lashing an anchor line to a stake when sud-

denly the honeycombed shell crumbled beneath his feet.

As he sank, he lunged for the pole he had dropped to set the net, but the surface settled under his leap, carrying him into the water. Fighting in the mush ice for the pole almost within reach, to his horror he found his right foot trapped. He could not move farther in that direction. The snowshoe was caught in the net.

Marcel turned back floundering to the edge of firm ice, where he held himself afloat. Fast numbing with cold as he clung, caught like a beaver in a trap, he knew that it was but a matter of minutes. Fleur, if only Fleur were there! But Fleur was hunting in the bush.

With a great effort he braced himself on his elbows, got his frozen fingers between his teeth, and blew the signal. Once heard, his dog had never failed to answer it.

To the joy of the man slowly chilling to the bone, a yelp sounded in the forest. Rallying his ebbing strength, again Marcel whistled. Shortly Fleur appeared on the shore, sighted the master and bounded through the surface slop out to the fishing hole. Reaching Marcel, the husky seized a skin sleeve of his capote and, arching her great back, fought the slippery footing in a mad effort to drag him from the water. But the net held him fast.

"De stick, Fleur! De stick dere!" Marcel pointed toward the pole.

Sensing his gesture, the dog brought the pole to the ice edge. Then with the pole bridging the hole, its ends on firm ice, Marcel worked his way to the submerged net, but the sinkers had hopelessly tangled the meshes with his snowshoe. Under his soggy capote was his knife. His stiff fingers fumbled desperately with the knot of his sash but failed to loose it. Again Fleur seized his sleeve and pulled until she rolled backward with a patch of the tough hide in her teeth.

The situation of the trapped man seemed hopeless. The chill of the water was fast numbing his senses. Already his heart slowed with the torpor of slow freezing. With difficulty he kept the excited Fleur from plunging beside him into the mush ice.

Then with a final effort he got his free leg, with its snowshoe, over the pole, and seizing the husky's tail with both hands, cried:

"*Marche*, Fleur! *Marche!*"

Settling low between widespread forelegs, the dog dug her nails into the soft ice and hurled her weight into a fierce lunge. As her feet slipped, the legs of the husky worked like piston rods, showering Marcel's face with water, her nails gouging the ice, while she fought the drag of the net.

At last something gave way, Marcel felt himself move, and the great dog slowly drew her master over the pole and up on the ice with the net still anchored to his right foot.

Still gripping Fleur's tail in his left hand, with the other he finally reached his knife and, groping in the icy water, slashed the heel thong of the caught shoe. Free, Marcel limped to his camp, Fleur now leaping beside him, now marching proudly with his sleeve in her teeth.

The heat of the fire and the hot broth soon started the blood of the half-frozen Frenchman, who lay muffled in a blanket. Near him sprawled the husky, who had sensed only too acutely on the ice the danger menacing her master and would not now leave his sight, but with head on paws watched the blanketed figure through eyes which spoke the thoughts she could not express: "Jean may need Fleur again. She will stay with him by the fire."

Once too often Marcel had gambled with the rotten spring ice and had barely missed paying for his rashness. To drown in a hole like a muskrat, after pulling out of starvation with a cache heavy with meat and fish, was unthinkable!

CHAPTER XVI.

When late in May the snow had left the open places reached by the sun and the ice had cleared the rivers Marcel was ready to make his first trip to the camp on the Ghost. Before the weather softened Jean had smoked the remainder of his meat, and now he faced a ten-mile portage with his outfit. Before the trails went bad he could have freighted on the sled sufficient food for his journey home but had preferred to face the break-up in his own camp near a fish lake and relay his meat over on his back in May. The memories of the winter aroused by the camp on the Ghost were too grim to attract him to the comfortable shack.

One morning at sunrise, after lashing a pack on Fleur's broad back, he threw his tumpline over a bag of smoked meat and swinging it to his shoulders, started over the

trail. In the middle of the forenoon he walked into the clearing on the Ghost and, pushing off the head strap of his line, dropped his load.

Glancing at the cache where he had left the body of Antoine Beaulieu lashed in canvas with the fur packs and rifles of the dead men, Marcel exclaimed in surprise:

"By gar! Dat ees strange t'ing!"

The scaffold was empty; the body of Antoine had been removed and not a vestige remained of the fur packs and outfits of Jean's partners. Neither wolverenes, lynxes, nor bears, had they been able to overcome the fishhook barriers guarding the uprights, would have stripped the platform in such fashion. Searching the soft earth, he found the faint tracks of moccasins which the recent rain had not obliterated. But down on the river shore the mud really told the story. A canoe had landed there within a week, for in spite of the rain the deep impress of the feet of men carrying heavy loads still marked the beach. Since the ice went out some one who knew that the three men were wintering there, had traveled up the Ghost from the Whale. But why? They could not have been starving, for fish could then be had on the Whale for the setting of a net. Evidently they had buried Antoine and taken the fur packs, rifles and outfits of the two men to Whale River.

Marcel searched for a message, in the phonetic writing employed throughout the North—burned into a blazed tree or on a scrap of birch bark left in the shack—but found nothing. The cabin was as he had last seen it. They had thought him, also, dead somewhere in the bush and had left no word, or——

Then the situation opened to him from the angle of view of the Cree visitors.

To them it would all simply amount to this: a camp on the verge of starvation, witnessed by the depleted cache; a dead man stabbed to the heart, with his rifle and outfit beside him; also, the rifle and personal belongings, easily identified by his relatives, of a second man, who, if he were still alive, would have had them in his possession; of the third man, who was to winter with them, no trace at the camp; in short, two men dead and the third possibly alive, if he had not starved out. And that third man was Jean Marcel. This was the grim tale which would be traveling down the river ahead of him to the spring trade.

Who killed Antoine Beaulieu and where is Piquet? These were the questions he would have to answer. This the factor and the kinsmen of his partners would demand of the third man—if he survived to reach the post. Yes, Whale River would anxiously await the return of Jean Marcel that spring. But would Whale River believe his story?

Of the people of the post he had no doubt. Julie, Père Breton, the factor, Angus, Jules, he could count on. They knew him—were his friends. But the Crees and half-breeds—would they believe that Joe Piquet had been the evil genius of the tragedy on the Ghost?—Joe Piquet, now dead and helpless to speak in his own defense. Would they believe in the innocence of the man who alone of the three partners had fought free of the long famine? Marcel's knowledge of the Indian's mental make-up told him that since the visit of the Crees to the camp his case was hopeless. They would readily believe that he had killed his partners for the remaining food and, not anticipating the coming of a canoe in the spring to the camp, had gone after caribou, planning to secrete the body of Antoine with its evidence of violence on his return.

Of those who had peopled the canoes starting for the upriver summer camps in July many a face would be absent when the Crees returned for this year's trade. Famine surely had come to more than one camp of the red hunters that winter, and doubtless swift death in the night, also, among some of them who when caught by the rabbit plague and the absence of wintering caribou, like Piquet went mad with hunger. Disease, too, as a hawk strikes a ptarmigan, would have struck down many a helpless child and woman marooned in snow-drifted tepees in the silent places. Old age would have claimed its toll in the bitter January winds.

To the red hunters, starvation and tragic death wore familiar faces. In the wide North they were common enough. So, when in the spring, men loosed from the maw of the pitiless snows returned without comrade, wife, or child, seeking succor at the fur posts, with tales of death by starvation or disease, the absence of witnesses or evidence compelled the acceptance of their stories however suspicious the circumstances. Because there was no proof of guilt, and because, moreover, their tales were often true, there could be no punishment, except the covert condemnation of their fellows or the

secret vengeance of kinsman or friend in the guise of a shot from the bush or knife thrust in the dark. He recalled the cases he knew or which he had heard discussed over many a camp fire, of men on the east coast, sole survivors of starvation camps, who would go to their graves privately branded as murderers by their fellows.

Grim tales told by his father returned to him; of the half-breed from Nichicun who, it was commonly believed, had eaten his partner; of Crees who had appeared in the spring at the posts without parents or wives and children, to tell conflicting stories of death through disease or starvation; of the Frenchman at Mistassini—still a valued servant of the company—who was known from Fort Albany to Whale River and from Rupert to the Peribonka, as the squaw man who saved himself on the Fading Waters by deserting his Montagnais girl wife. These and many more, through lack of any proof of guilt, had escaped the long arm of the government which, through the fur posts, reached to the uttermost valleys of the North.

And so it must have been with Jean Marcel, however suspicious his story, had he buried Antoine somewhere in the snow, as he had Piquet, instead of lashing the body on the cache with its telltale death wound. As it was he already saw himself, though innocent, condemned in the court of Cree opinion as the slayer of his friend.

Well, he swore to himself, they should believe his story at the post! For it was the truth. And if any man, white or red, openly doubted his innocence, he would have to answer to Jean Marcel. To be branded on the east coast as the assassin of his partners was a bitter draft for the palate of the proud Frenchman. For generations the Marcels had borne an honored name in the company's service and for the last of them to be suspected of foul murder was disgrace unthinkable.

Of one thing he felt sure, as he hurried back over the trail to his camp. The situation brought about by the visit of the Crees demanded his presence at the post as soon after their arrival as his paddle could drive his canoe. From the appearance of the tracks on the beach they already had a good start and it would take two days for him to pack to the Ghost what meat and outfit he needed for the trip, besides his furs.

CHAPTER XVII.

Three days later he had run the strong water of the Ghost to Conjuror's Falls, where he exchanged Beaulieu's canoe for his own, cached the previous fall, and continued on to the Whale until the moon set, when he camped. Next morning, long before the rising sun, reaching the smoking surface in his path, rolled the river mists back to fade on the ridges, Marcel with Fleur in the bow was well started on his three-hundred-mile journey.

Each day—after the news had once reached the post—the story passed from mouth to mouth among the Crees would gather size and distortion with Marcel not present to refute it. So there was great need for speed, and he drove his canoe to the limit of his strength, running all rapids which skill and daring could outwit.

Different, far, from the home-coming he had pictured through the last weeks, would be his return to Whale River. True there would have been no long June days with Julie Breton, as in previous summers, no walks up the river shore when the low sun turned the bay to burnished copper and, later, the twilight held deep into the night. If she were not already married her days would be too full to spare much time to her old friend Jean Marcel. But still there would have been rest and ease, after the months of toil and famine—long talks with Jules and Angus, with worry behind him in the hills. Instead he was now returning to his friends branded as a criminal by the evidence of the cache on the Ghost.

At times, when the magic of the young spring swept his troubled brain clean of dark memory for a while, he dreamed that the water thrushes in the river willows called to him: "Sweet, sweet, sweet, Julie Breton!" He would feel, for a space, that yellow warblers and friendly chickadees, from the spruces of the shore, hailed him as one of the elect, for was he not also a lover? As he paddled, he deeply inhaled the scent of the flowering forest world of Northern springtime while his birch bark rode the choked current. And then, the stark realization that he had lost Julie, and the shadow of his new trouble, would bring him rough awakening.

Meeting no canoes of Cree hunters bound for the trade, for it was yet early, Marcel at the end of nine days turned into the post.

He smiled bitterly as he saw in the clearing a handful of tepees. Around the evening fires they had doubtless already convicted Jean Marcel, alive or dead. Familiar with the half-breed weakness for exaggeration, he wondered in what form the story of the cache on the Ghost had been retailed at the trade house.

The howling of the post dogs announced his arrival, stirring Fleur after her long absence from the sight of her kind to a strenuous reply. Leaving his canoe on the beach Marcel went at once to the mission, where the door was opened by the priest.

"Jean Marcel!"

The bearded face of the Oblat lighted with pleasure as he opened his arms to the wanderer.

"You are back, well and strong?" he asked in French. "The terrible famine did not reach you?"

Jean's deep-set eyes searched the priest's face for evidence of a change toward him, but found the same frank, kindly look he had always known.

"Yes, father," replied Jean, also in French. "I beat the famine; but I have bad news. Antoine is dead. He was——"

"Yes, I know," Père Breton hastily broke in. "They brought the word. It is terrible! And Piquet—is he dead, also?"

"Yes, father," Marcel said quietly. "Joe Piquet was killed by Fleur, here, after he stabbed Antoine!"

"Just Heaven! Killed by Fleur!" He looked at the husky. "What a dog she has grown to be!"

"I wish to tell you all first, father, before I go to the trade house. And Julie?" Jean's voice was vibrant with fear of what the answer might be.

"Put the dog in the stockade and I will call Julie. We have been very sad here, wondering whether you had starved; the tale Piquet's uncle, Gaspard Lelac, and his sons brought in day before yesterday made us think you also might have——"

"Did they say Antoine had been stabbed?" interrupted Marcel.

"They said they found his body."

"Where?" demanded Marcel.

"Buried on the river shore!"

"They lie!"

He fully realized that he faced a battle with men who would not scruple to lie when the stark facts already looked bad enough.

"They never were truthful people, my son. We have hoped and prayed for your coming to clear up the mystery."

Jean put Fleur in the stockade and returned to the house. Julie Breton stood in the doorway.

"Welcome home, Jean!" she cried, giving him both hands, but did not kiss him on the cheek. "Why—you are not thin!" She looked wonderingly at his face. "We thought —you also—had starved." Her eyes filled with tears as she gazed at the man already numbered with the dead by his friends at Whale River.

Were these sisterly tears of joy at his safe return or did she weep for the Jean Marcel she once knew, but who was now dishonored?

"There, there! *Ma petite!*" consoled Père Henri, patting the girl's dark head. "We have Jean here again, safe. All will be well in time. Julie had you starved out in the bush, Jean, when we heard the Crees' story."

But the puzzled youth wondered why Père Henri did not mention the charges that the half-breeds must have made on reaching Whale River.

Recovering her self-control Julie excused herself to prepare supper. Then, before asking what the Lelacs had told the factor, Marcel related to the priest the grim details of the winter on the Ghost—ending with his discovery, on his return to the old camp, of the visit of the Lelacs' canoe.

"Father, it looks bad for me. They found Antoine stabbed and Piquet's fur and outfit. I brought his rifle back to the camp and cached it with his stuff and Antoine's to bring it all downriver in the spring to their people."

At this the heavy brows of the priest lifted in surprise. Marcel continued:

"The cache was empty. It was a starvation camp. Antoine was dead, and obviously Piquet also, for his outfit was there. Seeing these things, what could any one think? That the third man, Jean Marcel, did this and then went into the barrens for caribou. There he starved out, they would conclude—or else found meat and will return —when he can clear himself if he is able! Father, it was my wish to tell you my story before I heard the tale the Lelacs brought to the post. Then you could judge between us."

The priest leaned forward in his chair and rested his hands on Marcel's shoulders. His

eyes sought those of the younger man which met his gaze unwaveringly.

"Jean Marcel," he said, "I have known you since your father brought you to Whale River as a child. You have never lied to me. You have told me the truth. We did not believe that you had killed your comrades. You would have starved first! Nor did Gillies or McCain or Jules believe in the truth of the charge of the Lelacs. They are waiting to hear your story. Also, since hearing your side, I see why the Lelacs are anxious to have it believed at the trade house that you were responsible for the deaths of these men. They are grinding an ax of their own. It is not alone because they are kin of Piquet that they wish to discredit and injure you."

"How do you mean, father?"

"I will tell you later, my son. You should report at the trade house now."

Cheered with the knowledge that his old friends were still stanch, Marcel hurried to the trade house. Meeting no one as he passed the scattered tepees, he flung open the slab door of the log building and entered with head high.

"Jean Marcel! By gar, we hear you arrive!" roared the big Jules, rushing upon the youth. "You not starve out, eh?"

Gillies and McCain, wringing his hand, added their welcome.

"Jean, you had a hard winter with the rabbits gone," suggested Gillies. "You must have found the caribou this spring?"

"Yes, I find de caribou, m'sieu. But I travel far for dem. It was hard time in March."

"And the dog—you didn't have to eat your dog, Jean?" asked McCain.

Marcel's face hardened.

"De dog and Jean, dey feast and dey starve togeder. I am no Cree dog eater. Dat dog she save my life—one, two tam, dees winter, m'sieu."

Marcel realized that they were waiting to hear his story before alluding to the charges of the half-breed kinsmen of Piquet.

"M'sieu Gillies," Jean began. "I weesh to tell you what happen on de Ghost. De Lelacs bring a tale to Whale Riviere dat ees not true."

"We've paid no attention to them, Jean, trusting you would show up and could explain it all. I was sorry to hear about Antoine and Piquet but I don't think you had any part in it, lad—be sure of that!"

"T'anks, m'sieu." Slowly and in great detail Marcel related to the three men, sitting with set faces, the gruesome history of the past winter. When he came to the night that Fleur had destroyed the crazed Piquet, the Hudson Bay men turned to each other with exclamations of wonder and admiration.

"That's a dog for you! She got his wind just in time!" muttered Gillies.

"You ask eef I eat her, m'sieu." Marcel turned on McCain grimly. "Could you eat de dog dat save your life?"

"No, by God! I'd starve first!" thundered the Scotchman.

"I love dat dog," said Jean quietly.

Then, breathless, his audience heard the rest of his tale. At the end Marcel enumerated in detail the articles belonging to Antoine and Piquet which he had placed on the stage of the cache beside Beaulieu's body when he left for the Salmon country and which on his return to the Ghost he had found to have been taken by the Lelacs to Whale River.

"I lashed Antoine in hees shed tent and put heem on de cache, for the wolverene and lynx would get heem in de snow." As Marcel talked McCain and Gillies exchanged significant looks.

"Um!" muttered the factor, when Jean had finished. "Something queer here!"

"What, m'sieu?" Marcel demanded.

"Why, Lelac says he found the body of Antoine buried under stones on the shore and that there was nothing on the cache except the empty grub bags."

"Dey say de fur and rifle was not dere?"

"Yes, nothing on the cache!"

"Den I must have de rifle and de fur; ees dat it?"

"That's what they insinuate."

"Ah-hah!" Marcel scowled. "Dey say dey fin' noding, so do not turn over to you de rifle and fur pack?"

"Yes—they claim you must have hidden them as you hid the body."

"Den how do dey know Piquet ees dead, too?" Marcel's dark features relaxed in a dry smile. It was not, then, solely the desire for vengeance on the murderer of their kin that had prompted the half-breeds to distort the facts.

"They say his extra clothes and his out-

fit were in the cabin, only his rifle and fur missing. Now, Jean," continued Gillies, "I am perfectly satisfied with your story. I believe every word of it. The Marcels are not liars. But the Lelacs are going to make trouble over the evidence they found at your camp. Suspicion always points to the survivor in a starvation camp and you know the circumstances are against you, my lad."

"M'sieu," Marcel protested, "eef I keel Antoine, I would tak' heem into de bush and hide heem, I would not worry ovair de fox and wolverene."

"Of course you would have hidden the body somewhere. We appreciate that. But as they are trying to put this thing on you they ignore that side of it. What you admit they found—Antoine's body with a stab wound, and Piquet's outfit, makes it look bad to people who don't know you as we do. They won't believe that the famine got Piquet in the head. They'll say that's a tale you made up to get yourself off."

Marcel went hot with anger. His impulse was to seek the Lelacs and have it out, then and there. But he possessed the cool judgment of a long line of ancestors whose lives had often depended on their heads, so he choked back his rage.

"Now I don't want it carried down the coast that you killed your partners, Jean," went on Gillies. "Young as you are, you'll never live it down. And, besides, there's no knowing what the government might do. I'll have to make a report, you know. So we've got to do some tall thinking between us before the hunters get in."

While the factor talked, the swift brain of Marcel had struck upon a plan to trap and discredit the Lelacs; but he wished to think it over, alone, before proposing it at the trade house, so held his tongue. When he was ready he would ask the factor to hold a hearing.

One question he did ask before packing his fur and outfit from the beach up to the mission.

"Have de Lelacs traded dere fur, m'sieu?"

"No, we haven't started the trade yet."

"W'en dey trade dere fur weel you hold it from de oder fur—separate?"

"Why, yes. But you can't hope to identify skins, Jean."

A corner of Marcel's mouth curled in a quizzical smile. "Wait, M'sieu Gillies; I tell you later," and with a *"Bonsoir!"* he went out.

CHAPTER XVIII.

Although it would have been pure suicide for any one to attempt to take Fleur from the stockade against her will, Marcel feared that some dark night those who wished his disgrace might loose their venom in an injury to his dog. So, refusing a room in the mission house, he pitched his tent on the grass inside the spruce pickets where Fleur might lie beside him.

Here his stanch friend Jules sought Jean out. It seemed that Inspector Wallace had been up the coast at Christmas, had stayed a week, and, although no one knew exactly what had happened, or whether he had as yet become a Catholic, there was no doubt in the minds of the curious that the Scotchman would shortly remove this sole obstacle to his marriage to Julie Breton.

The loyal Jules' crude attempt to console the broken-hearted hunter went unheard. Fate had made him its cat's-paw. Not only had he lost his heart's desire, but his name was now a byword at Whale River. There was nothing left to lose. He was indeed bankrupt.

During supper, Jean was plied with questions by Julie, who in his absence had had his story from her brother. To the half-breeds she never once alluded, seemingly interested solely in the long hunt for caribou on the barrens and in Fleur's rescue of her master from the lake. Clearly, from the first, she had believed in the honor of Jean Marcel. And with what was evidently a forced gayety, the girl sought to banish from his mind thoughts of the cloud blackening the future.

"Come, Jean Marcel!" she said with a laugh, speaking as always in French. "Are you not glad to see us that you wear a face so dismal? You have not told me how you like this new muslin gown." She pirouetted on her shapely moccasined feet, challenging his approval. "Henri says I'm growing thin. Is it not becoming? No? Then I shall eat and grow as fat as big Marie, the Montagnais cook at the Gillies'."

The sober face of Jean Marcel lighted at her pleasantry. His brooding eyes softened as they followed the trim figure in the simple muslin gown. It was a rare picture indeed for a man who had but just finished seven months in the bush, half the time with the specter of starvation haunting his heels—this girl, the memory of whose face

he had carried with him into the nameless barrens. But she belonged to another and he, Jean Marcel, was branded as a murderer at Whale River, even if he escaped the law.

Presently, when Père Breton was called from the room to minister to a Cree convert, Julie became serious.

"Jean Marcel, I have much to say to you; but it is hard—to begin."

"I should think you would have little to say to Jean Marcel."

"Why? Because some half-breeds have brought a story to Whale River which was not true?"

"Well, enough of it is true, Julie, to make the Indians believe, when they hear it, that Jean Marcel killed his partners to save himself from starvation."

"Not if Père Breton and Monsieur Gillies have any influence with the Crees!"

Marcel smiled indulgently at the girl's ignorance of Cree psychology.

"The harm is already done," he said. "No matter what M'sieu Gillies and Père Henri tell them they will believe the man of those three who got out alive is guilty."

"They will not believe these Lelacs, when they are shown to be liars," she insisted, stamping her foot impatiently.

"They have lied about the rifle and fur only, Julie. They are telling the truth when they say they found Antoine and some of Piquet's outfit. The rest does not matter except to make me a thief as well as murderer."

"But it is all so unjust, so terrible—to be accused like this when, because of your good heart, you wished to bury Antoine decently in the spring instead of leaving him in the snow where they would never have found him. It is too——" Through tears Julie's dark eyes flashed in angry protest.

The girl's tears roused his heart to a wild beating. Unable to speak, he faced her, his dark features illumined with the gratitude and love he could not voice. For a space he sat fighting for the mastery of his emotions.

"Julie Breton, you give me great happiness —when you say you believe me—are still my friend," he said huskily.

"Oh, là, là! Nonsense!" she cried, dabbing with a handkerchief at her wet eyes as she recovered her poise. "You are a boy, so foolish, Jean. Do you think that we, your friends who know you, will permit this thing? It is impossible!"

And she changed the subject, nor did she allow him to return to it.

CHAPTER XIX.

Day by day the ebb tide brought in the canoes of returning Crees. Gradually tepees filled the post clearing. And with the coming of the hunters from the three winds was heard many a tale of famine in far valleys, of families blotted out.

Tragedy there had been, as in every winter of famine; but however sinister were the secrets which many a mute valley held locked in its green forests, no rumors of such except the tale of the murders on the Ghost had reached Whale River. Pitiless desertion of the aged and the helpless, death by violence, doubtless the starving moon had shone upon; but none had lived to tell the tale except those who had profited with their lives, and their lips were forever sealed. And so, as Marcel had foreseen, to the gathering families of Crees who themselves had but lately escaped the maw of the winter, the tale of the Lelacs, expanding as it traveled, found ready acceptance.

As yet Jean, chafing under the odium of his position at the post, had not faced his accusers. The plan of his defense which had been decided on after a conference with Gillies and Père Breton, depended for its success on the trading of their fur by the Lelacs, and the uncle and cousins of Joe Piquet for some reason had traded no fur.

Many of those who, the spring previous, had lauded Jean's daring in entering the land of the Windigo and voyaging to the coast by the Big Salmon, now exchanged significant glances at his appearance, avoiding the steady eyes of the man they had condemned without a hearing. Shawled women and girls, who formerly, at the trade, had cast approving glances at the wide-shouldered youth with the clean-cut features, whispered pointedly as he passed and children often shrank from him in terror, as from one defiled. But Marcel had been prepared for the effect of the tale of the Lelacs upon the mercurial red men.

Since his return he had not once met the Lelacs face to face. Always they had hastily avoided him when he appeared on the way to his canoe or the trade house. Jean had been strictly ordered by Gillies under no circumstances to seek trouble with his accusers or their friends, so he ignored them.

Their disinclination to encounter the son of the famous André Marcel, however, had not gone unmarked by the keen eyes of more than one old hunter. Many a red man and half-breed, friends of the father who respected the son, had frankly expressed to him their disbelief in the charges of the Lelacs, accepting his story which Gillies had published to the Crees, that Beaulieu had been stabbed by Joe Piquet while Marcel was absent and that Piquet was killed later by the dog. Strongly they had urged him to make the Lelacs eat their lies, promising their support; but Jean had explained that it was necessary to wait.

Occasionally when Marcel crossed the post clearing, pulsing with the varied life of the spring trade, to descend the cliff trail to his canoe, there marched by his side one whose name also was anathema with many of the Crees. That comrade was Fleur. The story of Piquet's death as told by Jean at the trade house, though scouted by the Lelacs, had nevertheless left a deep impression; and the great dog, now called the "man killer," who towered above the scrub huskies of the Indians as a mastiff over a poodle, was given a wide berth. But to avoid trouble with the Cree dogs, Jean kept Fleur for the most part in the mission stockade. There Gillies and McCain and Jules had come to admire the bulk and bone of the husky they had last seen as a lumbering puppy. There Crees, still friendly to Jean, lingered to gossip of the winter's hardships and stare in admiration at the dog. There, too, Julie romped with Fleur, though Fleur had grown somewhat dignified with the gravity of her approaching responsibilities. For to the delight of Jean, Fleur was soon to present him with the dog team of his dreams.

When the *umiaks* of the Eskimos began to arrive from the coast, packed with tousle-headed children and the priceless sled dogs, Jean, taking Fleur, sought out his old friend Kovik of the Big Salmon. As he approached the skin lodge on the beach, beside which the kin of Fleur were made fast to prevent promiscuous fighting with strange dogs, she answered their surly greeting with so stiff a mane, so fierce a show of fangs, that Jean pulled her away by her rawhide leash, lest her reputation suffer further by adding fratricide to her crimes.

Playmates of her puppyhood, the mother who suckled her, she had forgotten utterly; vanished was all memory of her kin. She held but one allegiance, one love; the love approaching idolatry, which she bore the young master who had taken her in that far country from the strange men who beat her with clubs; who had brought her north again through wintry seas; who had companioned her through the long snows, and in the dread days of the famine had shared with her his last meat. The center and sum of her existence was Jean Marcel. All other living things were as nothing.

"*Kekway!*" cried the squat pair of Eskimos, delighted at the appearance of the man who had given them back their first born. "*Kekway!*" chuckled a half dozen round-faced children, shaking Jean's hand in turn.

"Huh!" grunted the father, his eyes wide with wonder at the sight of Fleur, ears flat, muttering dire threats at her yelping brethren straining at their stakes. "Dat good dog!"

"Yes, she good dog," agreed Jean. "Soon I have dog team lak' Husky!"

Shifting a critical eye from Fleur to his own dogs, Kovik nodded.

"Ha! Ha! You ketch boy in water. You get bes' dog."

The Eskimo had not erred in his judgment of puppies. He had indeed given the man who had cheated the Big Salmon of his son, the best of the litter. At sixteen months, Fleur stood inches higher at the shoulder and weighed twenty pounds more than her brothers. Truly, with the speed and stamina of their sire, the timber wolf, coupled with Fleur's courage and power, these puppies whose advent Jean awaited should make a dog team unrivaled on the east coast.

"Cree up dere," continued Kovik, pointing toward the post clearing, "say de dog keel man."

Marcel nodded gravely. "Man try keel me, she keel heem."

"Huh! De ol' dog keel bad Husky, on Kogaluk one tam."

Fleur indeed had come from a fighting strain—dogs that would battle to the death or toil in the traces until they crumpled on the snow for those they loved or to whom they owed allegiance.

Marcel, not long after this, was walking on the high river shore above the post with Julie Breton and Fleur. Like a floor below them the surface of the Great Whale moved without ripple in the still June afternoon. Out over the bay the sun hung in a veil of

haze. Back at the post even the huskies were quiet, lured into sleep by the softness of the air. It was such a day as Jean Marcel had dreamed of, more than a year before, back in the barrens in January. He was again with Julie on the cliffs, but there was no joy in his heart.

"The Lelacs have traded their fur," he said, breaking a long silence. "The hearing will take place soon, now."

"Yes, I know, you were with Monsieur Gillies and Henri very late last night," she replied.

"We had some work to do. The Lelacs will not like what we have to tell them. We shall prove them liars and thieves; but, Julie, the stain on the name of Jean Marcel will remain. The Crees will not believe my story."

"Nonsense, Jean," she burst out. "You must make them believe you!"

"Julie," he said, ignoring her words, "since my return I have wanted to tell you—that I wish you all happiness——" He swallowed hard at the lump in his throat. "I have heard that you leave Whale River soon."

At the words the girl flushed, but turned a level gaze on the man who looked at the dim, blue shapes of the White Bear Hills far on the southern horizon.

"You have not heard the truth," she said. "Monsieur Wallace has done me the honor to ask me to marry him, but Monsieur Wallace is still a Protestant."

The words from Julie's own lips stung Marcel like the lash of a whip, but his face masked his emotion.

Then she went on:

"I wanted to talk to you last summer, for you are my dear friend, but you were here for so short a while and we had but a word when you left." Then the girl burst out impulsively: "Ah, Jean; don't look that way! Won't you ever forgive me? I am —so sorry, Jean. But—you are a boy. It could never be that way."

Marcel's eyes still rested on the silhouetted hills to the south. He made no answer.

"Won't you forget, Jean, and remain—a friend?"

He turned his deep-set eyes to the girl.

"Yes, I shall always be your friend, Julie," he said. "But I shall always love you—I can't help that. And there is nothing to forgive. I hoped—once—that you might—love Jean Marcel. But now it is over. God bless you, Julie!"

As he finished Julie Breton's eyes were wet. Again Marcel gazed long into the south, but with unseeing eyes.

The girl was the first to break the silence.

"Jean," she said, returning to the charges of the Lelacs, "you must not brood over what the Crees are saying. If the truth were known, some of them have eaten their own flesh and blood in starvation camps! You are a brave man, Jean Marcel. Show your courage at Whale River as you have shown it elsewhere!"

Marcel shook his head. "They will speak of me now, from Fort George to Mistassini, as the man who killed his partners."

They had turned and were approaching the post when the practiced eye of Marcel caught the far flash of paddles toward the river mouth. He watched the rhythmic gleams of light from dripping blades leaving the water in unison, which alone marked the approaching canoe on the flat river. Then he said:

"There are four or six paddles. It must be a big company boat from Fort George. I wonder what they come for during the trade?"

As Jean and Julie Breton entered the post clearing the great red flag of the company, carrying the white letters H. B. C., was broken out at the flagpole in honor of the approaching visitors. The canoe, now but a short way below the post, was receiving the undivided attention of Eskimos, Crees, and howling huskies crowding the shore. The boat was not a freighter, for she rode high. No one but an officer of the company traveled light with six paddles. It was an event at Whale River, and Indians and white men awaited the arrival of the big Peterborough canoe with unconcealed interest.

"It must be Inspector Wallace," said Jean.

With a face radiant with joy in the unexpected arrival of Wallace, Julie Breton hastened to the high shore. Marcel turned slowly back to the mission stockade where his dog awaited him at the gate.

As the canoe neared the beach the swart *voyageurs* conscious of their Cree and Eskimo audience, put on a brave burst of speed. At each lunge of the narrow Cree blades, swung in unison with a straight arm, the craft buried its nose, pushing out a wide ripple. On they came, spurred by the shouts from the shore, then at the order of the man

in the bow the crew raised their paddles and bow and stern men deftly swung the boat in to the Whale River landing amid the cheers of the Indians.

"How are you, Gillies?" said Wallace, stepping from the canoe. And looking past the factor to a woman's figure on the high shore, he waved his cap.

"Well, well, Mr. Wallace; we hardly expected to see you at Whale River so early," answered Gillies dryly, smiling at the eagerness of Wallace. "Anything happened to the steamer?"

"Oh, no! The steamer is all right. She'll be here on time. I thought I'd run up the coast during the trade this year."

Gillies winked surreptitiously at McCain. It was most unusual for the inspector of the east coast to arrive before the accounts of the spring trade were made up.

"How has the famine affected the fur with you, Gillies?" asked Wallace, as they proceeded up the cliff trail to the post clearing. "The Fort George and East Main people were hit pretty hard—a number of families wiped out."

"I expected as much," said Gillies. "A few of our people were starved out or died of disease. It was a tough winter with both the rabbits and the caribou gone. We have done only fairly well with the trade, considering."

"What's this I hear about a murder by one of your Frenchmen?" Wallace suddenly demanded. "We met a canoe at the mouth of the river and heard that you have the man here now?"

"That's pure Indian talk, Mr. Wallace," Gillies protested. "I'll give you the details later. A half-breed killed one of his partners and attempted to kill the other, Jean Marcel, the son of André Marcel; André, who was our old head man. And you saw Jean here last summer. He is one of our best men. In fact, I'm going to take him on here at the post, although he's only a boy. He's too valuable to keep in the bush."

"Oh, yes! I remember him; friend of Father Breton. But we've got to put a stop to this promiscuous murder, Gillies. There's too much of this thing on the bay—this killing and desertion in famine years, and no one punished for lack of evidence."

"But this was no murder, Mr. Wallace," Gillies answered hotly. "You'll hear the story to-night from Marcel's lips, if you like. We have some pretty strong evidence against his accusers, also. This is a tale started by the relatives of one of the men to cover their own thieving."

"Well, Gillies, your man may be innocent, but I want to catch one of these hunters who came in to the posts with a tale of starvation as excuse for the disappearance of their partners or family. When the grub goes they desert, or do away with, their people, and get off on their own story. I'd like to get some evidence against one of them. The government has sent pretty stiff orders to Moose for us to investigate these cases, and where we have proof, to send the accused 'outside' for trial."

"When you've talked to him, Mr. Wallace, I think you'll agree that he tells a straight story and that these Lelacs are lying."

"I hope so," answered Wallace, and started for the mission where Julie Breton awaited the great man of the east coast.

CHAPTER XX.

That night when Inspector Wallace had heard the story of the murders on the Ghost, he sent for Jean Marcel, to whom it was quite evident on reporting at the trade house, that the relations between Wallace and Gillies had recently become somewhat strained. The face of the inspector was noticeably red and Gillies' heavy brows contracted over eyes blazing with wrath.

"Sit down!" said the inspector as Marcel reported.

Jean did so quietly.

"Now, Marcel," Wallace began severely, "this case looks pretty bad for you. You go into the bush in the fall with two partners, and the body of one is found with a knife wound, together with the effects of the other, in the spring."

"Yes, m'sieu!" assented Jean.

"You say Piquet killed Beaulieu and was killed by your dog when he attacked you. All right! But suppose when you began to starve you had killed Beaulieu and Piquet to get the remaining grub, how would that, if it had happened, have changed the evidence at the camp?"

"De body of Antoine on de cache," replied Jean coolly, "proves to any smart man dat I did not keel heem. Eef I keel heem I would geeve de bodee to de lynx and wolverenes out in de snow. Den I would say he died of de famine."

Marcel's narrowed eyes bored into those

of the inspector. He tried to forget that before him sat the man who had taken from him all he held dear, this man who now had it in his power to dishonor him as well—to send him south for trial among strangers.

"Well, the Lelacs say you did hide the body. But suppose you left it on the cache. You were safe. Why should any one come to your camp and see it? You were two days' travel up the Ghost from Whale River. They surprised you while you were away hunting."

With a look of disgust but retaining his self-control, Jean answered: "It was a ver' hard winter. De Cree were starve' and knew de camp up de Ghost. Dey might come tru de bush for grub any tam. So, eef I keel heem would I wait till spring to hide him under stones, as Lelac say?"

"Um!" The face of Inspector Wallace assumed a judicial expression. "The circumstantial evidence is against you. Of course, you have something in your favor, but if I were on a jury I'd have to convict you," Wallace said with an air of finality.

"One moment, Mr. Wallace!" growled Gillies. "How about the previous reputation of Marcel and the character of the whole Lelac tribe? Hasn't that got any weight with you? I believe this boy because I've always found him honest and straight, as his father was. I don't believe the Lelacs because they always were liars. But you've missed the real point of the whole matter."

"What do you mean?" The inspector colored, frowning on the stiff-necked factor.

"Why, putting the previous reputation of Marcel aside, if he had killed Beaulieu, would he have told us that Beaulieu was stabbed? Clearly not! He would have said that Antoine died of starvation and was not stabbed, for as soon as he heard they had not turned in the fur, he knew he had the Lelacs in his power and could prove them thieves and liars, and we all would have believed him. The story of the Lelacs as to the man having been murdered would not have held water a minute after the hearing proved them thieves.

"Furthermore he knew they could not prove their tale by the body of Beaulieu, either, left to rot on the shore there in the spring freshets. There would be no evidence for a canoe from the post to find." The Scotchman rose and pounded the slab table as he drove home his final point. "Why, Jean Marcel had it in his power, if he had been guilty, to have walked out of this trouble by simply giving the Lelacs the lie. But what did he do? He told his tale to Père Breton before he learned what the Lelacs had said. He freely admitted that Beaulieu had been stabbed when he might have denied it and got off scot-free. Does that look like a guilty man? Answer me that!" thundered Gillies to his superior officer.

The force of Gillies' argument was not lost on the unreceptive Wallace. The stone-hard features of Marcel, however, reflected no emotion. But in his heart smoldered a deep hatred of this inspector of the company who, not satisfied with taking Julie Breton from him, now tried to flout his honor as a Marcel and a man.

"Well?" demanded Gillies impatiently, his frank glance holding the eyes of Wallace.

"What you say, Gillies, has its weight, no doubt. If he had wanted to avoid this thing, he might have done it, when he learned that the Lelacs had held the fur. Still, I'll think it over. It may be best to send him 'outside' to be tried, as a warning to these people. I can't seem to swallow that tale of the dog killing Piquet. Sounds fishy to me!"

"Have you seen the dog?" demanded Gillies.

"No!"

"Well, when you see her, you won't doubt it. She's the most powerful husky I've ever seen—weighs a hundred and forty pounds. She's got a litter due soon."

"I'd like to take a pup or two back with me!"

"You'll have to see Marcel about that," chuckled Gillies. "Her pups are worth a black fox skin. We'll have this hearing tomorrow then, if it's agreeable to you, Mr. Wallace. When you see the Lelacs you may understand why we believe so strongly in Marcel."

As Wallace went out, Gillies drew Jean aside.

"I have little faith in this Inspector Wallace, Jean. He would send you south for trial if he could find sufficient reason for it."

"M'sieu Gillies, Jean Marcel will never go south to be tried by strange men for the thing he did not do."

"What do you mean? You would not make yourself an outlaw?"

"I shall not go, m'sieu."

Colin Gillies believed in his heart that Marcel spoke the truth.

CHAPTER XXI.

The following morning Jean Marcel forgot the cloud hanging over him in his joy at the event which had taken place since dawn. Rousing Julie and her brother, he led them to the stockade. There in all the pride of motherhood lay the great Fleur with five blind, roly-poly puppies whimpering at her side.

"Oh, the little dears!" cried Julie. "How pretty they are!"

First speaking to Fleur and patting her head, Jean picked up a squirming ball of fur and, as the mother whined anxiously, put it in Julie's arms.

"Oh, *mon cher!*" cried the girl, nestling the warm little body to her cheek. "What a morsel of softness!" But when Père Breton reached to touch the puppy a rumble from Fleur's deep throat warned him that Julie alone was privileged to take such liberties with her offspring.

Jean quieted the anxious mother whose nose sought his hand. "See, father, what a dog team she has given me."

One after another he proudly exhibited the puppies. "Mark the bone of their legs. They will make a famous team with Fleur as leader. Is it not so?"

"They are a possession to be proud of, Jean," agreed the priest, standing discreetly out of reach, for Fleur's slant eyes never left him.

"Which of them do you wish, Julie?" Jean asked. "One, you know, is for you."

"Oh, Jean, you are too good!" cried the girl. "I should love this one, marked like Fleur." And she stooped to take the whimpering puppy in her arms, while Jean's hand rested on Fleur's massive head, lest the fear of the mother dog for the safety of her offspring overpower her friendship for Julie. As the girl fearlessly reached and lifted the puppy, Fleur suddenly thrust forward her long muzzle and licked her hand.

"Good!" cried Jean, delighted. "Fleur would allow no one on earth to do that except you. The puppy's name must be Julie."

In his joy at the coming of Fleur's family Marcel had forgotten, for the time being, the hearing. But later in the morning at the trade house, Gillies, whose obstinacy had been deeply aroused by the attitude of Inspector Wallace, planned with the accused man how they should handle the Lelacs.

For the factor had no intention of permitting Jean's exoneration to hang in the balance of the prejudiced mind of Wallace. The canny Scot realized that if the Lelacs were thoroughly discredited at the hearing at which the leaders of the Crees would be present, and were shown to have an ulterior motive in their attempt to fix the crime upon Marcel, there would be a strong reaction in favor of Jean. His story would then be generally accepted. To this end he carefully laid his plans. Wallace, busy prying into the books of the post, he did not take into his confidence, wishing to surprise him as well as the Crees by the bombshell the defense had in store for the Lelacs.

At noon Wallace overheard Jules and McCain talking of Fleur's puppies which they had just seen.

"By the way, McCain, where are these remarkable Ungava pups which you say were sired by a timber wolf?"

"Over in the mission stockade, sir."

"I want to see them and the old dog, too. I'm rather curious to put my eyes on the husky that could kill a man with a loaded gun in his hands. That part of Marcel's story needs a bit of salt."

"You won't doubt it when you see her. She's a whale of a husky," said McCain.

"Well, I never saw the dog that could kill me, with a rifle handy. I'll stroll over and take a look at her."

"I'll show you the way."

Arrived at the tent in the stockade, McCain and Wallace were greeted by a fierce rumble, like the muttering of an August southwester making on the bay.

"We'd better not go near the tent, Mr. Wallace. I'll see if Jean's in the house. The dog won't allow any one but Marcel near her."

Ignoring the warning, Wallace approached the tent opening to look inside, but so fierce a snarl warned him off that he stepped back with considerably more speed than his dignity admitted. Red in the face, he glanced around to learn if his precipitous flight had had an audience.

Shortly, McCain returned with Marcel, and Wallace, now that the dog's owner was near, again approached and peered into the tent.

There was a deep growl from within, and with a cry of surprise the inspector was

hurled backward to the ground by the rush of a great, gray body. At the same instant Jean Marcel, calling to Fleur, leaped headlong at his dog, seizing her before she could strike at the neck of the prostrate Wallace. Calming the husky, he held her while the discomfited inspector got to his feet.

"You should not go so near, m'sieu. She ees not use to stranger," said Jean brusquely.

"I—I didn't think she was so damned cross," sputtered the ruffled inspector. "Lord, but she's a wolf of a dog!"

"Now, sir," demanded the secretly delighted McCain, "do you believe she could kill a man?"

Surveying Fleur's gigantic frame critically as Jean stroked her glossy neck, soothing her with low words crooned into a hairy ear, the enlightened inspector of the east-coast posts gave ground on the point.

"Well, I don't know but what she could," he admitted. "I never saw such a beast for size and strength. Let's have a look at the pups."

Jean brought from the tent the blind, squirming balls of fur.

"They are beauties, Marcel! I'll buy a couple of them. They can go down by the steamer if they're weaned by that time. What do you want for them?"

Marcel smiled inscrutably at Inspector Wallace.

"M'sieu, dese pups are not to sell."

"I know, but you don't want all of them. That would give you six dogs. All you need for a team is four."

But Jean Marcel only shook his head, repeating:

"Dey are not to sell!"

CHAPTER XXII.

The trading room at Whale River was crowded with the treaty chiefs and older men among the Cree hunters chosen by the factor to be present at the hearing. Behind a huge table made from hewn spruce slabs sat Inspector Wallace, Colin Gillies, and McCain. In front and to one side were the swart half-breeds, Gaspard Lelac and his two sons. Facing them on the opposite side of the table was Jean Marcel, and behind him Père Breton, with Julie; for she had insisted on being present, and the smitten Wallace had readily agreed. The remainder of the room was occupied by the Crees, expectant, consumed with curiosity, for it had leaked out that certain matters connected with the tragedy on the Ghost and heretofore undivulged would that afternoon be given light.

Among the assembled half-breeds and Crees there were two distinct factions; those who had readily accepted the story of the Lelacs with its sinister indictment of Marcel—among whom were the kinsmen of Antoine Beaulieu; and those who, knowing Jean Marcel as well as his unsavory accusers, had refused to accept the half-breeds' tale, and were waiting with eagerness to hear Marcel's defense. Outside the trade house chattering groups of young men and Cree women were gathered awaiting the outcome of the proceedings.

Rising, Colin Gillies called for silence and addressed the Crees in their picturesque tongue.

"The long snows have come and gone. Famine and suffering have again visited the hunters of Whale River. With the return of the rabbit plague and the lack of deer, many of those who were here last year at the spring trade have gone to join their fathers. The company is sad that its hunters and their families have suffered. Last autumn, three hunters went from this post to winter on the Ghost River. This spring but one returned. He is here now, for the reason that he traveled far into the great barrens to streams which join the Big Water many, many sleeps to the northeast, where at last he found the returning deer.

"This spring, when the Ghost was free of ice, Gaspard Lelac and his sons, wishing to visit their kinsman, Joe Piquet, traveled to the camp of the three hunters. What they found there they will now tell as they told it to me when they came to Whale River. After you have learned their story, Jean Marcel, the man who returned, will relate what happened on the Ghost under the moons of the long snows.

"The company has sent to visit Whale River its chief of the east coast, Inspector Wallace. He will hear the stories of these men and decide which of them speaks with a double tongue. It is for you, also, when they have spoken, to say whether Gaspard Lelac and his sons bring the truth to Whale River, or Jean Marcel. You know these men. Hear their talk and judge in your hearts between them. Gaspard Lelac has put the blood of Antoine Beaulieu and Joe Piquet on the head of Jean Marcel. The

fathers at Ottawa and the chiefs of the company at Winnipeg will not suffer one of their children to go unpunished who takes the life of another.

"Listen to the speech of these men. Look with your eyes into their faces and upon what will be shown here, and judge who speaks evil and who from an honest heart. Gaspard Lelac will now tell what he saw and did."

As Gillies finished, a murmur of approval filled the room, followed by a tense silence.

Lelac, a grizzled French half-breed with small, closely set eyes which shifted here and there as he spoke, then rose and told in the Cree tongue the story he had retailed daily for the previous month.

Wishing to visit his nephew Piquet, he said, and learn how he had weathered the hard winter, Lelac and his sons in May had poled up the Ghost to the camp. There they found an empty cache and part of the outfits of Beaulieu and Piquet, the latter of which they at once recognized. Alarmed, they searched the vicinity of the camp and by chance discovered the body of Beaulieu buried under stones on the shore. There was a knife wound in his chest. They continued the search in hope of finding Piquet, as his blankets and outfit, evidently unused for months and eaten by mice, were strong proof of his death, also; but failed to find the body. Of the fur packs and rifles of the two men, there was no trace, but a knife, identified later as belonging to Antoine, they brought back. There were no signs of the third man's outfit about the camp. If the third man was alive, what were they to believe? Antoine was dead, and Piquet, also, for his blankets were there. Some one had killed Antoine and Piquet. There was but one other—Marcel. So they traveled to Whale River with the news.

The sons of Lelac glibly corroborated the story of their father. When they had finished, the trade room buzzed with whispered comment. At a nod from Wallace, Gillies questioned the elder Lelac in Cree for the benefit of the Indians.

"You say that these blankets here, this knife and a cooking kit, and the clothes and bags, were all that you found at the camp —that there were no fur and rifles on the cache?"

"These were all we found, nothing else," replied Lelac, his small eyes wavering before the gaze of the factor.

"You swear that you found nothing but these things," repeated Gillies, pointing to the articles on the floor in front of the table.

"Nothing."

The set face of Jean Marcel, which had remained expressionless during the Lelacs' statement, relaxed in a wide smile which did not escape many a shrewd pair of Cree eyes.

"Jean Marcel will now relate what passed on the Ghost through the moons of the long snows."

With the announcement there was much stirring and shuffling of moccasins, accompanied by suppressed exclamations and muttering, among the expectant Crees. But when Marcel rose, squared his wide shoulders, and with head high ran his eyes over the assembled Crees, friendly and hostile, to rest at length on the Lelacs, his lips curled with an expression of contempt, while the Indians and breeds relapsed into silence.

Slowly and in detail, Jean told in the Cree language how his partners had gone upriver when he started south on the trail of the dog thieves who had stolen Fleur; how he recaptured Fleur and later reached the Ghost at the freeze-up. The tale of his eight-hundred-mile journey to the south coast drew many an "Ah-hah!" of mingled surprise and admiration from those who remembered Marcel's voyage of the previous spring through the spirit-haunted valleys of the Salmon headwaters. With his familiarity with the Cree mental make-up and his French instinct for dramatic values, he held them breathless by the narration of this odyssey of the North.

Then Marcel described the long weeks when the three men fought starvation, with the deer and rabbits gone; how he traveled far into the land of the Windigo in search of beaver; and finally, he came to the break with his partners. The hard feeling which developed at the camp on the Ghost, Jean made no attempt to gloss over, but boldly told how the others had not played fair with the food, and he had left them to fight out the winter alone. Of the death of Piquet he spoke as one speaks of the extermination of vermin. An assassin in the night, Piquet had come to the tent of a sleeping man and the dog alone had saved his life.

They called his dog the "man-killer." Would they have asked less of their own huskies? But if any of them doubted, and he understood that the Lelacs were among these, that his dog could have killed Piquet,

let them come to the tent in the mission stockade by night—and learn for themselves.

"*Nama!* No!" some Indian audibly protested, and for a space the room was a riot of laughter. The Crees had seen Fleur, the man-killer.

But when the narrative of Marcel reached the discovery of the dead Antoine, stabbed to the heart in the shack on the Ghost, his voice broke with emotion. When he had found Antoine, killed in his sleep by Piquet, Marcel said that he had bitterly regretted that he had not taken Beaulieu with him, leaving Piquet to work out his own fate.

Then Jean described how he had lashed the body of Antoine, sewed in a tent, upon the platform cache, and placed the fur packs and rifles beside it when he left to go into the barrens for deer. Turning, the Frenchman pointed his finger at the scowling Lelacs.

"When you came to the camp this spring," he cried, "you did not find the body of Antoine Beaulieu buried on the shore; you found it on the cache sewed in a tent. If I had killed him would I not have hidden him somewhere in the snow where the starving lynx and wolverenes would have done the rest? No, you found Antoine on the cache, and beside him were his rifle and fur pack with those of Joe Piquet. What did you do with them?"

His evil face distorted with rage, the elder Lelac snarled: "You lie! You got de fur and rifle hid!"

Suppressing the half-breeds, Wallace ordered Marcel to continue.

Jean finished his story with the account of his long journey into the barrens beyond the Height-of-Land where the streams flowed northeast instead of west, and told of his meeting with the returning deer when weak with starvation, and of his return to the Ghost to find that a canoe had preceded him there.

As he resumed his seat, the eyes of Julie Breton were suspiciously bright. The priest leaned over and grasped Jean's hand, whispering: "Well done, Jean Marcel!"

It had been a dramatic narration, and the audience, including Inspector Wallace to whom it was interpreted by Gillies, had been impressed by the frank and fearless manner of its telling. Angus McCain and big Jules smiled widely as they caught Marcel's eyes.

Again Gillies rose.

"Jules!" he called, and Duroc brought from an adjoining room a bundle of pelts, placing them on the long table.

Again the room hummed with the whispering of the curious audience. The surprised Lelacs, now in a panic, talked excitedly, heads together.

"Marcel, examine these pelts, and if you notice anything about them, make a statement," said Gillies, conducting the examination for the benefit of the Crees in their native tongue and translating to Wallace.

With great care, as his Cree audience craned their necks to watch what the Frenchman was doing, Jean, first examining each pelt, slowly divided the bundle of skins into three separate heaps.

"Have you anything to say?"

"Yes, m'sieu. This large pile here, I know nothing about; but this heap here are all pelts trapped last winter by Antoine Beaulieu."

A murmur passed through the crowded room. Here surely was something of interest. Lelac rose and started to look at the pelts. Big Jules pushed him roughly back on the bench.

"You stay where you are, Lelac, or I'll put a guard over you!" rasped Gillies.

"This pile here," continued Jean, "belonged to Joe Piquet."

"How do you recognize them?" demanded Gillies.

"All these have Antoine's mark, one little slit behind the right foreleg. These with two slits behind the left foreleg, were the pelts of Piquet. My mark was three slits in front of the left hind leg. When we started trapping from the same camp, we agreed on these marks."

The air of the trade room was heavy with suspense.

"You swear to these marks?"

"Yes, m'sieu."

"François Maskigan!" The treaty chief of the South Branch Crees, a man of middle age, with great authority among the Indians, stepped forward.

"François, you have heard what Marcel says of the marks on these skins?"

The chief nodded. "*Enh.* Yes."

"Look at them and see if he speaks rightly."

It took the Indian but a few minutes to check the distinguishing marks on the pelts and examine the large pile which Marcel had said possessed none.

"Are the marks on these pelts as Marcel says?"

"Yes, they are there, these marks as he says."

The cowed Lelacs, their dark faces now twisted with fear, awaited the next words of Gillies. Then the irate factor turned on them.

"Gaspard Lelac!" he roared. The face of Lelac paled to a sickly white as his furtive eyes met the factor's. "All this fur, here, you and your sons traded in last week; your own fur, and the pelts of Beaulieu and Joe Piquet, dead men. I have held them separate from the rest. You are thieves and liars!"

The bomb had exploded. At the words of the factor the trade room became a bedlam of chattering and excited Indians. In the North, to steal the fur of another is one of the cardinal sins. The supporters of Marcel loudly exulted in the turn the hearing had taken, while the deluded adherents of the Lelacs, maddened by the villainy of men who had stolen from the dead and accused another, loudly cursed the half-breeds.

Nonplused, paralyzed by the trick of the factor, instigated by the adroit Marcel, the Lelacs sent murderous looks at Jean who smiled contemptuously in their faces.

Gillies' deep bass quieted the uproar.

"Jules!" he called the second time. All were on tiptoe to learn what further surprise the stalward Jules had in store for them when he entered the room with two rifles which he laid on the table, while the Lelacs stared in wide-eyed amazement.

"Where did you get these rifles?" asked Gillies.

"In the tepee of Lelac, just now, hidden under blankets."

"Whose rifles were they, Marcel?"

Marcel examined the gun.

"This .30-.30 gun belonged to Piquet. This is the rifle of Antoine."

With a cry, a tall half-breed roughly shouldered his way to the front of the excited Crees.

"You thieves!" he cried, straining to reach the Lelacs with the knife which he held in his hand. But sinewy arms seized him and the frenzied uncle of Antoine Beaulieu was pushed, struggling, from the room.

It was the final straw. The mercurial Crees had turned as quickly from the Lelacs to Marcel as, in the first instance, they had credited the tale of the half-breeds. Now, with the Lelacs proven liars and thieves, Jean's explanation of the deaths of his partners, as Gillies foresaw, had, without corroboration and on his word as a man only, been at once accepted. Calling for silence Gillies again spoke to the hunters.

"You have heard the words of these men. You have judged who has spoken with a double tongue and who, with the guns of dead men hidden in a tepee, have traded their fur and put their blood upon the head of another. Do you believe Jean Marcel when he says that Piquet killed Antoine Beaulieu and went out to kill him also, or do you believe the men who stole the guns and fur of a dead man, which belong to his kinsmen?"

"Enh! Enh! Jean Marcel speaks truth!" cried the Crees, and the chattering mob poured out into the post clearing to carry the news to the curious young men and the women who waited.

Meanwhile Père Breton embraced the happy Marcel while the unchecked tears welled in Julie's eyes. Then Gillies and McCain wrung the Frenchman's hand until he grimaced. But the big Jules, patiently waiting his turn, pounced upon Jean with one of his bearish hugs and, in spite of his protests, carrying him from the trade house like a child in his great arms, showed the man they had maligned to the Crees, who now loudly cheered him.

Turning to Gillies, the inspector said gravely: "These Lelacs go south for trial. I'll make an example of their thieving."

But Colin Gillies had no intention of having the half-breeds sent "outside" for trial, if he could prevent it. It would mean that Jean and he, himself, with Jules, would have to go as witnesses. He could take care of the Lelacs in his own way. He had punished men before.

"That would leave us very short-handed here. The famine has reduced the trade this year a third. If we want to make a showing next season, we can't spend six months traveling down below for a trial."

"True. That would mean your going and we can't afford to injure the trade; but I ought to make a report on this murder business in famine years."

"If you get the government into this, it will hurt us, Mr. Wallace. Why can't we handle this matter as we have handled it for two centuries?" protested Gillies. "A report will only place the company in a bad

light—make them think we can't control the Crees."

"Perhaps you're right," admitted Wallace. "I'm out to make a showing on the east coast, and I don't want to handicap you."

So Gillies had his way.

CHAPTER XXIII.

To Jean Marcel it had been a happy moment—that of his exoneration by the hunters of Whale River. For weeks, with rage in his heart, he had silently borne the black looks of the Crees whom he could not avoid in going to his net and in crossing the post clearing to the trade house. For weeks his name had been a byword at the spring trade—Marcel, the man who had murdered his partners. But now the stain of infamy had been washed clean from an honored name. In his humble grave in the mission cemetery, André Marcel could now sleep in peace, for in the eyes of the small world of the east coast, his son had come scatheless through the long snows. No tale would now travel down the coast in the inspector's canoe that another white man had turned murderer for the scanty food of his friends.

With his acquittal by the company and the Crees, his love for Julie Breton, more poignant from its very hopelessness, gave him no rest. As he struggled with renunciation, he brought himself to realize that, after all, it had been but presumption on his part to hope that this girl with her education of years in a Quebec convent, her acquaintance with the ways of the great world "outside," should look upon a humble company hunter as a possible husband.

He had all along mistaken her kindness, her friendship, for something more which she had never felt! In comparison with Wallace, who Jean had heard Gillies say, might some day go to Winnipeg as assistant commissioner of the company, he was as nothing. Doomed by his inheritance and his training to a life beyond the pale of civilization, he could offer Julie Breton little but a love that knew no bounds, no frontiers; that would find no trail which led to her too long; no water too vast; no height too sheer to separate them, did she but call him.

So, in the hour of his triumph, the soul-sick Marcel went to one who never had failed him; who loved him with a singleness of heart but rarely paralleled by humankind; who, however humble his lot, would give him the worship accorded to no king—his dog.

Seated beside Fleur with her squealing children crawling over him, he circled her great neck with his arms and told his troubles to a hairy ear. She sought his hand with her tongue, her throat rumbling with content, for had she not there on the grass in the soft June sun, all her world—her puppies, and her God, Jean Marcel?

There, Julie Breton found them, man and dog, having in vain announced supper from the mission door, and led Marcel away, protesting. Never to Jean had she seemed so vibrant with life, never had the color bathed her dark face so exquisitely, nor the tumbled masses of her hair so allured him. But as he entered the mission he saw Inspector Wallace seated in conversation with the priest, and his heart went cold.

During the meal, served by a Cree woman, the admiring eyes of Wallace seldom left Julie's face. He seemed annoyed at the presence of Marcel at the table. However, as the Frenchman rarely joined in the conversation and early excused himself, leaving Wallace a free field, the inspector's temper at what might have seemed presumption in a company hunter, was unmarred.

June drifted into July and, to the surprise of Gillies and Whale River, the big company canoe still remained under its tarpaulin on the post landing. That the priest looked kindly on the possibility of such a brother-in-law was evident from his hospitality to Wallace. But what piqued the curiosity of Colin Gillies and McCain was whether Wallace, a Scotch Protestant, had as yet accepted the Catholic faith, for the Oblat, Père Breton, could not marry his sister to a man of another religious belief. However, deep in the spell of the charming Julie, Inspector Wallace stayed on after the trade was over, giving as his reason his desire to go south with the company steamer which shortly would be due.

Although to Jean she was the same merry Julie, each morning visiting the stockade to play with Fleur's puppies, who now had their eyes well open and were beginning to find an uncertain balance, he avoided her, rarely seeing her except at meal time. Of the change in their relations he never spoke, but manlike he was hurt that she failed to take him to task for his moodiness. In the evening, now, she walked on the river shore with Wallace, and talked through the twi-

light when the sun lingered below the rim of the world in the west. Jean Marcel had gone out of her life. He ceased to mention the inspector's name, and absented himself from meals when the Scotchman was expected.

Julie had said: "Jean, you are one of us, always welcome. Why do you stay away when M'sieu Wallace comes?" And he had answered: "You know why I stay away, Julie Breton."

That was all.

One night when Jean returned late from his nets after a long paddle, having sought the exhaustion that would bring sleep and temporary respite from his grief, a canoe manned by three men drifted alongshore toward his beached canoe. Occupied with his thoughts, Marcel took no notice of the craft. Removing from the boat the fish he had caught, he was about to lift and place it bottom up on the beach when the bow of the approaching birch bark suddenly swung sharply and jammed into the stern of his own.

With an exclamation of irritation at the clumsiness of the people in the offending canoe, Jean looked up to stare into the faces of the three Lelacs.

"You are good canoemen," he sneered, roughly pushing with his paddle the half-breeds' canoe from his own. That the act was intentional, he knew, but he was surprised that the Lelacs, convicted of theft, and on parole at the post awaiting the company's decision as to their punishment, would dare to start trouble.

As Jean shoved off the Lelacs' canoe, the half-breeds, as if at a preconcerted signal, shouted loudly:

"W'at you do to us, Jean Marcel? Ough! Why you beat me wid de paddle? He try to keel us!"

The near beach was deserted, but the shouts in the still night were audible on the post clearing above. The uproar waked the sleeping huskies at the few remaining Eskimo tepees on the shore, whose howling quickly aroused the post dogs.

It was evident to Jean that his enemies had chosen their time and place. Obeying scrupulously the orders of Gillies since the trial, Marcel had avoided the Lelacs, holding in check the just wrath which had prompted him to take personal vengeance upon his traducers. Now, instead, they had sought him, and from their actions intended to make him seem the aggressor.

"Good!" he muttered between his teeth. Life had little value to him now, he would give these thieves what they were after. "You 'fraid to come on shore? You squeal lak' rabbit; you t'ief!" he taunted.

Continuing to shout that Marcel was attacking them, the Lelacs landed their canoe and the elder son, evidently drunk, lurched toward the man who waited.

"Rabbit, am I?" roared the frenzied half-breed, and struck savagely at Jean with his paddle. Dodging the blow, before the breed could recover his balance the Frenchman lunged with his one hundred and seventy pounds behind his fist into Lelac's jaw, hurling him reeling into the water ten feet away. Then the two Lelacs reached him.

Gasping for breath, the younger brother fell backward helpless from a kick in the pit of his stomach as the maddened Marcel grappled with the father. Over and over they rolled on the beach, Lelac, frenzied by drink, snarling with hate of the man he had tried to destroy, fighting like a trapped wolverene, and the no less infuriated Marcel resolved now to rid Whale River forever of this vermin.

It was not long before the bands of steel cable which swathed the arms, shoulders and back of Jean Marcel overcame the delirious strength of the crazed half-breed, and Lelac was forced down and held on his back. Then like the jaws of a wolf trap, the fingers of Marcel's right hand shut on the throat of the under man. The bloodshot eyes of Lelac bulged from their sockets. Blood filled the distorted face. The mouth gaped for air barred by the vise on the throat. In a last feeble effort to free himself, a helpless hand clawed limply at Marcel's wrist—then he relaxed, unconscious, on the beach.

Getting to his feet, Jean looked for the others, to see the younger brother still nursing his stomach, when an oath sounded in his ears and, struck from the rear, a sharp twinge bit through his shoulder.

Leaping away from a second lunge, and drawing his knife with his left hand, Marcel slashed wildly at the half-breed whom the water had revived, driving him before him. Then, as he fought to reach him, the shape of his retreating enemy slowly faded from his vision; his strength ebbed; the knife slipped from his fingers as darkness

shut down upon him, and he reeled senseless to the stones.

With a snarl of triumph, the elder of the brothers, crouched on the defensive, sprang to the crumpled figure, a hand raised to drive home the knife thrust, when something sang shrilly through the air. The lifted arm fell. With a groan, the half-breed pitched on his face, the slender shaft of a seal spear quivering in his back.

Close by, a kayak silently slid to the shore and a squat Husky, his broad face knotted with fear, ran to the unconscious Marcel. Swiftly cutting the shirt from the Frenchman's back, he was stanching the flow of blood from the knife wound, when people from the post clearing headed by Jules Duroc reached the beach.

"By gar! Jean Marcel!" gasped Jules, recognizing his friend. "He ees cut bad?"

The Husky shook his head. "He not kill!"

Staring at the dead man transfixed by the spear and his unconscious father, Jules roared: "De t'ief, dey try revange on Jean Marcel!"

Stripping off his own shirt, Jules bandaged Marcel's shoulder. As he worked, one thing he told himself. Had they killed Marcel, the Lelacs would not have gone south for trial. Father and son would never have left the beach at Whale River alive.

Then he said to the gathering Crees, "Tak' dem!" pointing to the younger Lelac now shedding maudlin tears over his dead brother, and to the half-choked father, resuscitated by a rough immersion in the river from unfriendly hands. Seizing the pair, rapidly sobering and now fearful for their fate, the Crees kicked them up the cliff trail.

"Tiens!" exclaimed Jules to the Husky, finishing the bandaging. "Dey try keel Marcel, but he lay out two w'en he get de cut?"

The Husky nodded, "Ah-hah! I hear holler an' dey run on heem. He put all down. One in water, he get up an' cut heem wid knife. He fall and, whish! I spear dat one."

"By gar! You good man wid de seal spear, John Kovik." And Jules wrung the Eskimo's hand.

"I cum fast in kayak to fight for heem; I too slow," and the Husky shook his head sadly.

"Ah, you come jus' in tam. You save hees life."

The Husky placed a hand on the thick hair of the senseless man, as he said, "He ketch boy, Salmon Rive'. He fr'en' of me!"

Again, Jean Marcel's bread upon the waters had returned to him.

With the unconscious Marcel in his arms, Jules Duroc climbed the cliff, the grateful Kovik at his heels, to meet the inhabitants of Whale River on the clearing. The news of the fight on the beach had spread swiftly through the post and many and fierce were the threats made against the Lelacs as they were shut in a small shack and placed under guard.

In front of the trade house, Gillies, followed by McCain and Wallace, met Jules with his burden.

"How did this happen, Jules? Is he badly hurt?" demanded the factor. Jules explained briefly.

"Stabbed in the back? Too bad! Too bad! Take him to the mission hospital."

"Well, Gillies, this settles it! The Lelacs go south for trial, now, and they won't need you as a witness either," announced Wallace.

"Yes, we'll have to get rid of them," admitted the factor. "They were crazy to do this after what has happened. I should have shut them up. Too bad Jean didn't use his knife instead of his hands on them!"

"Or his feet!" added McCain. "The Husky says he put one Lelac out of business with a kick and choked the old man unconscious, when the one who was knocked into the river stabbed him. He fought them with his bare hands. I take off my hat to Jean Marcel."

"Who started this affair, anyway?" asked Wallace. "The Lelacs, under a cloud here, couldn't have dared to."

Gillies turned on his chief.

"What do we care who started it? Haven't they tried to ruin Marcel? I ordered him to keep away from them, but didn't he have sufficient cause to start—anything?"

"The Crees say the Lelacs got drunk on sugar beer and were waiting for Jean to get back from downriver," broke in McCain, fearing a row between Gillies and the inspector. "John Kovik, the Husky, saw them rush him, and John got there in time to throw his seal spear at young Lelac, after he had stabbed Marcel from behind."

"Oh, that explains it; Marcel was defending himself," said the ruffled inspector.

"Yes, and you will notice, Mr. Wallace," rasped Gillies, "that Marcel fought them with his hands, until he was cut, one man against three. If he had used his knife on the old man, he wouldn't have been hurt. Does that prove what we've told you about him?"

It was at this point that Julie Breton and her brother, late in hearing the news, reached Jules carrying his burden, whose bandages were now reddening with blood.

"Oh, Jules, is he badly hurt?" cried the girl, peering in the dusk at the ashen face of Marcel. Then she noticed the bandages and, putting her hands to her face, moaned: "Jean Marcel, what have they done to you; what have they done to you?"

"It bleed hard, mamselle," Jules said softly, "but it ees onlee in de shouldair. Don' cry, Mamselle Julie!"

Supporting the sobbing girl, Père Breton ordered: "Carry him to the mission, Jules."

"Yes, father!"

And Jean Marcel returned again to a room in the mission.

Tenderly rough hands bathed and dressed the knife wound. Through the night Père Breton sat by his patient, who moaned and tossed in delirium which the fever brought.

CHAPTER XXIV.

Deep in the night a long, mournful howl, repeated again and again, roused the sleeping post. Straightway the dogs of the factor and the Crees, followed by the Eskimos' huskies on the beach, were pointing their noses at the moon in dismal chorus. With muttered curse and protest from tepee, shack and factor's quarters, the wakened people of the post covered their ears and sought sleep, for no hour is sacred to the moon-baying husky and no one may suppress him. One wakes, and lifting his nose, pours out his canine soul in sleep-shattering lament, when, promptly, every husky within hearing takes up the wail.

The post dogs, having, alternately, and in chorus, to their hearts' content and according to the custom of their fathers, transformed the calm July night into a horror of sound, again sought sleep with noses buried in bushy tails. Once more the mellow light of the moon bathed the sleeping fur post, when from the stockade behind the mission rose a long-drawn note of grief.

The dark brows of Père Breton, watching beside the delirious Marcel, contracted.

"Could it be?" he queried aloud. Curious, the priest glanced at his patient, then went outside to the stockade. There, with gray nose thrust between the pickets stood Fleur. As he approached, the dog growled, then sniffing, recognized a friend of the master who sometimes fed her, and whined.

"What is the matter, Fleur? Do you miss Jean Marcel?"

At the mention of the loved name, the dog lifted her massive head and the deep throat again vibrated with the utterance of her grief for one who had not returned.

"She has waked to find the blanket of Jean Marcel empty, and mourns for him!"

Père Breton returned to his vigil beside the wounded man.

When the early dawn flushed the east, the grieving Fleur was still at her post at the stockade gate awaiting the return of Jean Marcel. And not until the sun lifted above the blue hills of the valley of the Whale did she cease her lament to seek her complaining puppies.

At daylight McCain and Jules, coming to relieve the weary priest, found Julie sitting with him. The wound was a long slashing one, but the lungs of Marcel seemed to have escaped. The fever would run its course. There was little to do but wait, and hope against infection.

Greeting Julie, whose dark eyes betrayed a lack of sleep and whose face reflected an agony of anxiety, the men called Père Breton outside the mission.

"The Lelacs will not go south for trial, father," said McCain dryly.

"What do you mean? Why not?" demanded the astonished priest.

"Well, because there's no need of it now," went on McCain mysteriously.

"No need of it! I don't understand. They have done enough harm here. If they don't go, the Crees will do something——"

"The Crees *have* done something," interrupted McCain.

"You don't mean——" queried the priest, light slowly dawning upon him.

"Yes, just that. They overpowered and bound the guard, last night, and—well, they made a good job of it!"

"Killed the prisoners?" The priest slowly shook his head.

McCain nodded. "We found them both

knifed in the heart. On the old man was a piece of birch bark, with the words: 'This work done by friends of Jean Marcel.' "

The priest raised his hands. "It would have been better to send them south. Still, they were evil men, and deserved their fate. Tell nothing of it to Julie. She has taken this thing very hard."

When Wallace and Gillies had surveyed the bodies of the dead half-breeds, the factor turned grimly to his chief.

"Well, Wallace, I don't see how we can send the Lelacs south for trial now. They wouldn't keep that long."

"Gillies," said the inspector with a frown, ignoring the ghastly witticism, "I want you to run down the men who did this. Whether they deserved it or not, I won't have men murdered in this district without trial. The lawlessness of the east coast has got to stop."

Gillies turned away, suppressing with difficulty his anger. Shortly in control of his voice, he answered:

"Mr. Wallace, I have put in many years, boy and man, on this coast, and I think I understand the Crees. To punish the men who did this, provided we knew who they were, would be the worst thing the company could do. When the Lelacs stole Beaulieu's fur and rifle, they put themselves outside the Cree law, and as sure as the sun will set in Hudson Bay to-night, the Lelacs would never have got out of the bush alive this winter."

"I know," objected Wallace, "but to overpower our guards and kill them under our noses——"

"What of it? The Lelacs had robbed a dead man and would have killed Jean Marcel—if he hadn't been a son of André Marcel, who was a wolf in a fight. The Lelacs were three quarters Cree and the Indians here have a way of meting out justice to their own people in a case like this that even Canadian officials might envy. You may be sure that the Lelacs were formally tried and condemned in some tepee last night before this thing happened."

"These two guards must have been asleep," complained Wallace.

"Well, we'll never know, Mr. Wallace. They say that they were thrown from behind and didn't recognize the men who did it. Even if they did, they wouldn't tell who they were, and it's useless to try to make them. The Crees have taken the Lelacs off our hands—and have saved us time and money by ridding us of these vermin."

Inspector Wallace slowly cooled off and in the afternoon went to the mission to make his daily call on Julie Breton only to be informed, to his surprise, that she was too tired to see him.

Meanwhile the condition of the wounded man was unchanged. But Père Breton faced a problem which he deemed necessary to discuss with his friends Jules Duroc and McCain.

Throughout the day, Fleur had fretted in the stockade, running back and forth followed by her complaining puppies, thrusting her nose between the pickets to whine and howl by turns, mourning the strange absence of Marcel.

"Fleur will not grant sleep to Whale River to-night, unless something is done," said the priest to the two men who were acting in turn as assistant nurses.

"Why can't we bring her in; let her see him and sniff his hand; it might quiet her?" suggested McCain. "It will only make her worse to shut her up somewhere else."

"By gar! Who weel tak' dat dog out again?" objected Jules. "Once she here, she nevaire leeve de room."

"Yes, she will, Jules. She'll go back to her pups after a while. We'll bring them outside under the window and let 'em squeal. She'll go back to 'em then."

"I am strong man," said Jules, "but I not love to hold dat dog. She weel eat Jean Marcel, she so glad to see heem, an' we mus' keep her off de bed."

At that moment Julie entered the room. "I will take Fleur to see him; she will behave for me," volunteered the girl.

So, not without serious misgivings, it was arranged that the grieving Fleur should be shown her master. That night when Julie had fed Fleur, she opened the stockade gate and, stroking the great head of the dog, said slowly:

"Fleur would see Jean—Jean Marcel?"

At the sound of the master's name, Fleur's ears went forward, her slant eyes turning here and there for a sight of the familiar figure. Then with a whine she looked at Julie as if for explanation.

"Fleur will see Jean, soon. Will Fleur behave for Julie?"

With a yelp the husky leaped through the

gate and ran to and fro outside, sniffing the air; then as if she knew the master were not there, returned, shaggy body trembling, every nerve tense with anticipation, slant eyes eagerly questioning as she whimpered her impatience.

Taking the dog by her plaited collar of caribou hide, to it Julie knotted a rope and led her into the mission where McCain, Jules, and Père Breton waited.

"Fleur will be good and not hurt Jean. She must not leap on his bed. He is very sick."

Seeming to sense that something was about to happen having to do with Marcel, Fleur met the girl's hand with a swift lick of her tongue. With the rope trailing behind, the end of which Jules and McCain seized, to control the dog in case she became unmanageable, Julie Breton opened the door of Marcel's room, where with fever-flushed face the unconscious man lay on a low cot, one arm hanging limply to the floor. When the husky saw the motionless figure, she pricked her ears, thrusting her muzzle forward, and sniffed; and as her nose revealed the glad news that here at last lay the lost Jean Marcel, she raised her head and yelped wildly. Then swiftly nuzzling Marcel's inert body, she started to spring upon the cot to wake him, when Julie Breton's arms circled her neck and, aided by the drag on the rope, checked her.

"Down, Fleur! No! no! You must not hurt Jean."

Seeming to sense that the mute Marcel was not to be roughly played with, the intelligent dog, whimpering like one of her puppies, caressed the free hand of the sick man, then, ignoring the weight on the rope dragging her back, she strained forward to reach his neck with her tongue, for his head was turned from her. But Jean Marcel did not return her caress.

Puzzled by his indifference, then sensing that harm had come to the unconscious Marcel, the dog raised her head over the cot and rocked the room with a wail of sorrow. The wounded man sighed and, turning, moaned:

"They took Fleur and now they take Julie. There is nothing left—nothing left!"

At the words, the nose of the overjoyed dog reached the hot face of Marcel, but his eyes did not see her.

Again Julie's strong arms circled Fleur's neck, restraining her. The slant eyes of the husky looked long into the pale face which showed no recognition; then she quietly sat down, resting her nose on his arm. And for hours, with Julie seated beside her, Fleur kept vigil beside the bed, until the priest and McCain insisted on the dog's removal.

When Jules brought a crying puppy outside the window of the sick room, for a time Fleur listened to the call of her offspring without removing her eyes from Marcel's face. But at length maternal instinct temporarily conquered the desire to watch by the stricken man. Her unweaned puppies depended on her for life, and for the moment mother love prevailed. With a final caress of the limp hand of Marcel, reluctantly, with head down and tail dragging, she followed Julie to the stockade.

For days Marcel's youth and strength battled with the fever aggravated by infection in the deep wound. All that Gillies and Père Breton could do for the stricken man was done, but barring the simple remedies which stock the medicine chest at a post in the Far North and the most limited knowledge of surgery possessed by the factors, the recovery of a patient depends wholly upon his vitality and constitution. With medical aid beyond reach, men die or fight back to health through the toughness of their fiber alone.

There was a time when Jean Marcel journeyed far toward the dim hills of a land from which there is no trail home for the feet of the *voyageur*. There were nights when Julie Breton sat with her brother and Jules or McCain, stark fear in their hearts that the sun would never again lift above the Whale River hills for Jean Marcel, and that never again his daring paddle would flash in sunlit white water or his snowshoes etch their webbed trail on the white floor of the silent places.

And during these days the impatient Wallace chafed with longing for the society of Julie whose pity for the sick man had made of her an indefatigable nurse. A few words in the morning and an hour or two at night was all the time she allotted the man to whom she had given her heart. To the demand of the inspector in the presence of Père Breton that Julie should substitute a Cree woman as nurse, she had replied:

"He has no one but us. His people are dead. He has been like a brother to me. I can do no less than care for him, poor boy!"

"Yes," added Père Breton, "he is as my

son. Julie is right," and added, with a smile, "you two will have much time in the future to see each other."

So Wallace had been forced to make the best of it.

By the time that the steamer, *Inenew*, from Charlton Island, appeared with the English mail and the supplies and trade goods for the coming year, Jean Marcel had fought his way back from the frontiers of death. So relieved seemed the girl, who had given lavishly of her young strength, that she allowed Mrs. Gillies to take her place in the sick room while she spent with Wallace the last days of his stay at Whale River.

Once more the post people saw the lovers constantly together and more than one head shook sadly at the thought of the one who had lost, lying hurt in heart and body on a cot at the mission while another took his place beside Julie Breton.

At last the steamer sailed for Fort George and no one in the group gathered at the landing doubted that the heart of Julie Breton went with it when they saw the light in her dark eyes as she bade the handsome Wallace good-by.

It was an open secret now, communicated by Wallace to the factor, that he was to become a Catholic that autumn, and in June take Julie Breton as a bride away to East Main.

CHAPTER XXV.

During the tense days when the fever heightened and the life of Jean Marcel hung on the turn of a leaf, there had been no repetition of the visit of Fleur to the sick room. But so loudly did she wail her complaint at her enforced absence from the man battling for his life so near in the mission house, that it was necessary to confine her with her puppies at a distance.

Once again conscious of his surroundings and rapidly gaining strength, Marcel insisted on seeing his dog. So, daily, under watchful guard, Fleur was taken into the room, often with a clumsy puppy, round and fluffy, who alternately nibbled with needle-pointed milk teeth at Jean's extended hand, making a great to-do of snarling in mock anger, or rolled squealing on its back on the floor, while Fleur sprawled contentedly by his cot, tail beating the floor and love in her slant eyes for the master who now had found his voice, whose face once more shone with the old smile which was her life.

August came. The post clearing and the beach at Whale River were again bare of tepee and lodge of the hunters of fur who had repaired to their summer camps where fish were plentiful, to wait for the great flights of snowy geese that the August frosts would drive south from arctic islands. Daily the vitality and youth of Marcel were giving him back his strength, and no remonstrance of the Bretons availed to keep him quiet once his legs had mastered the distance to the trade house.

By the middle of August, except for a slight pallor in the lean face and the loss of weight due to confinement, to his friends he was once more the Jean Marcel they had known. But for weeks, a sudden twisting of his firm mouth marking a twinge in the back, recalled only too vividly to them all the knife thrust of Lelac. When first rid of the fever and again conscious and strong enough to talk, Jean had repeatedly voiced his gratitude to Julie for her loyalty as nurse, but she had invariably covered his mouth with her hand, refusing to hear him. Grown stronger and sitting up, he had often repeated his thanks, raising his face to hers with a twinkle in his dark eyes, in the hope that her manner of suppressing him might be continued; but she had tantalizingly refused to humor the convalescent.

"I shall close your mouth no longer, monsieur," she had said with a grimace. "You will soon be the big, strong Jean Marcel we have always known and must not expect to be a helpless baby forever. And now that you can use your right arm I shall no longer cut up your fish."

"But it is with great pain that I move my arm, Julie," he had protested in a feeble effort to enlist her sympathy and so prolong the personal ministrations he craved.

"Bah! When before has the great Jean Marcel feared pain? It is only a ruse, monsieur. I am too busy, now that you can help yourself, to treat you as a child."

And so, reluctantly, Marcel had resigned himself to doing without the aid of the nimble fingers of Julie Breton. The fierce bitterness in his heart which before the fight on the beach with the Lelacs had made an endless torment of his days gave place on his recovery to a state of mind more sane. Deep and lasting as was his wound, the realization of the girl's devoted care of him had,

during his convalescence, numbed the old rawness. Gratitude and his innate manhood shamed Marcel into a suppression of his grief and the showing of a brave face to Julie Breton and the little world of Whale River. In his extremity she had stood stanchly by his side. She had been his friend, indeed. He deserved no more. And now in his prayers, for he was a devout believer in the teachings of Père Breton, he asked for her happiness.

One August evening found three friends, Julie, Jean Marcel, and Fleur, again walking on the shore of the Great Whale in the mellow sunset. Romping with puppy awkwardness, Fleur's progeny roved near them. The hush of an August night was upon the land. Below, the young ebb ran silently without ripple. Not a leaf stirred in the scrub edging the trail. The dead sun, master artist, had limned the heavens with all the varied magic of his palette, and the gray bay, often sullenly restless under low-banked clouds or blanketed with mist, now reached out, a shimmering floor, to the rim of the world.

In silence the two watched the heightening splendor of the western skies. Disdaining the alluring scents of the neighboring scrub, which her puppies were exploring, Fleur kept to Marcel's side where her nose might find his hand, for she had not forgotten the days of their recent separation.

Marcel broke the silence, his eyes on the White Bear Hills, sapphire blue on the southern horizon.

"What you did for me, Julie, I can never repay."

The girl turned impatiently.

"Monsieur Jean Marcel, what I have done I would do for any friend. I am weary of hearing you speak of it. Have you no eyes for the sunset the good God has given us? Let us speak of that?"

He smiled as one smiles at a child.

"Very well! We shall speak no more of it then, Mamselle Breton. But this you shall hear. I am sorry that I have acted like a boy about M'sieu Wallace. You will forgive me?"

"There is nothing to forgive," she answered. "I know you were hurt. It was natural for you to feel the way you did."

"But I showed little of the man, Julie. I was hurt here"—and he placed his hand on his heart—"and I was a child."

She smiled wistfully, slowly shaking her head. "I fear you were very like a man, Jean. But you are going away, and I may not be here in the spring—may not see you for a long time—so I want to tell you now how proud I have been of you this summer."

He looked up quizzically.

"Yes, you have made a great name on the east coast this summer, Jean Marcel. When you were ill the Crees talked of little else—of your traveling where no Indian had dared to go until you found the caribou, your winning against those terrible Lelacs, and proving your innocence; your fighting them with bare hands, because you know no fear."

The face of Marcel reddened as the girl continued:

"You are brave and you have a great heart and wise head, Jean Marcel; some day you will be a factor of the company. Wherever I may be, I shall think of you and always be proud that you are my friend."

Inarticulate, numb with the torture of hopeless love, Marcel listened to Julie Breton's farewell.

CHAPTER XXVI.

When the first flight of snowy geese, southward bound, flashed in an undulating white cloud over Whale River, the canoe of Jean Marcel was loaded with supplies for a winter in the land of the Windigo. And in memory of Antoine Beaulieu, he was taking with him as comrade and partner the eighteen-year-old cousin of the dead man whose kinsmen had humbly made their amends for their stand against Marcel before the hearing. Young Michel Beaulieu, of stouter fiber than Antoine, had at length overcome his scruples against entering the land of dread, through his admiration for Marcel's daring and his confidence in the man whose reputation since the hearing and the fight with the Lelacs had been now firmly established with the Whale River Crees. When Marcel had repeatedly assured the boy that he had neither seen the trail of *Machi-Manito,* the devil, nor once heard the wailing of a giant Windigo through all the long snows of the past winter in the Salmon country, Michel's pride at the offer had finally conquered his fears.

So leaving the puppy he had given Julie as the nucleus for a mission dog team, and presenting Gillies with another, Marcel

packed into the canoe already deep with supplies the three remaining children of Fleur, whom he had named in honor of his three stanch friends, Colin, Jules, and Angus, and gripping the hands of those who had assembled on the beach, eased the craft into the flood tide.

"Good-by and good luck, Jean!" called Gillies.

"De rabbit weel be few; net de beeg cache of feesh before de freeze-up!" urged the practical Jules.

"No fear, Jules. We ketch all de feesh in de lac," laughed Jean, then his eyes sought Julie Breton's sober face as he said in French:

"I will not come back for Christmas, Julie. The pups will not be old enough for the trail."

And with the conviction that he was saying good-by to Julie Breton forever—that on his return in June she would be far in the south at East Main with Wallace, he pushed off. He heard Julie call after him.

"Bon voyage, Jean! God bless you!"

As the paddles of Jean and Michel drove the boat into the stream, the whining Fleur, beholding her world moving away from her, plunged into the river after them.

"Go back, Fleur!" ordered Jean sternly. "You travel de shore; de cano' ees too full wid de pup."

So the protesting Fleur turned back to follow the shore. The puppies, too young and clumsy yet to keep abreast of the tide-driven canoe on the broken beach of the river, had to be freighted.

When the boat was well out in the flood, Marcel waved his cap with a last, *"A'voir!"*

Far upstream, a half hour later, rhythmic flashes growing swiftly fainter and fainter until they faded from sight, marked for many a long moon the last of Jean Marcel.

September came and waned and on the heels of September followed a week of mellow October days lulling the North into temporary forgetfulness of the menace of the bitter months to come.

Then the unleashed winds from the Arctic freighted with the first of the long snows beat down the coast and river valleys, locking the land with ice. But far in the Windigo-haunted hills of the forbidden land of the Crees a man and a boy, snug in snow-banked tepee, laughed as the winds whined through November nights and the snow made deep in the timber, for their cache was heaped high with frozen trout, whitefish, and caribou.

With the coming of the snow, the puppies, young as they were, soon learned that the life of a husky was not all mad pursuit of rabbit or wood mouse and stalking of ptarmigan; not all rioting through the bush, on the trail of some mysterious four-footed forest denizen; not alone the gulping of a supper of toothsome whitefish or trout followed by a long nap curled in a cozy hole in the snow, black noses thrust into bushy tails. Although their wolf blood made them at first less amenable than the average husky puppy to the discipline of collar and traces, their great mother through the force of her example as lead dog and the swift punishment she meted out to any culprit, contributed as much as Jean's own efforts to the breaking of the puppies to harness.

Jules, the largest, marked like his mother, like the other puppy Julie had chosen, with slate-gray patches on head and back, was all dog; but the rogues, Colin and Angus, mottled with the lighter gray of their sire and with his rangier build, inherited much of his wolf nature. Many a whipping from the long lash of plaited caribou hide, many a sharp nip from Fleur's white teeth, were required to teach the young wolves the manners of camp and trail and to bend their wild wills to the habit of instant obedience to the voice of Jean Marcel. But Fleur was a conscientious mother and under her stern tutelage and the firm but kind treatment of Jean—who loved to rough and wrestle the puppies in the dry snow—the shaggy ruffians grew in the wisdom of trace and trail and in their wild natures ripened love for the master who fed and romped with them and meted out punishment only to him who had sinned.

In search of black and silver foxes, whose pelts—worth in the world of cities their weight in gold—are the chief inspiration of the red hunter's dreams, Jean had run his new trap lines far in the valleys of the Salmon watershed. To the increasing satisfaction of the still worried Michel the sole noises of the night which had yet met his fearful ears had been the scream of lynx, the occasional caterwauling of wolverene and the hunting chorus of timber wolves. But darkness still held potential terror for the lad in whom, at his mother's knee, had been instilled dread of the demon-infested bad lands

north of the Ghost, and he never camped alone.

January came with its withering winds, burning and cracking the faces of the hunters following their trap lines. The fine, swirling snow struck like shot and stung like the lash of whips. Often when facing the drive of a blizzard even the hardy Fleur, wrinkling her nose with pain, would stop and turn her back on the needle-pointed barrage. At times when the fierce cold, freezing all moisture from the atmosphere, filled the air with powdery crystals of ice, the true sun, flanked by sun dogs in a ringed halo, lifted above the shimmering barrens, dazzlingly bright.

One night when Jean and Michel, camped in the timber at the end of the farthest line of fox traps, had turned into their robes before a hot fire, in front of which in a snow hole they had stretched a shed tent both as windbreak and heat reflector, a low wail, more sob than cry of night prowler, drifted up the valley.

"You hear dat?" whispered Michel.

The hairy throat of Fleur, burrowed in the snow close to the tent, rumbled like distant thunder. Marcel already fast drifting into sleep, muttered crossly:

"It ees de Windigo come to eat you, Michel."

Again upon the hushed valley under star-incrusted heavens where the borealis flickered and pulsed and streamed in fantastic traceries of fire, broke a wailing sob.

Michel sat up with a cry, turning a face gray with fear to the man beside him. Again Fleur growled, her lifted nose sniffing the freezing air, and started her awakened puppies into a chorus of snarls and yelps.

Raised on an elbow, Marcel sleepily asked: "What de trouble, Michel? You and Fleur hear de Windigo?"

"Listen!" insisted the boy. "I nevair hear dat soun' before."

Silencing the dog, Jean pushed back his hood to free his ears, smiling into the blanched face of the wild-eyed boy beside him. Shortly the noiseless night was marred by a sobbing moan, as if some stricken creature writhed under the torture of mangled flesh.

Marcel knew that neither wolf, lynx, nor wolverene—the "Injun devil" of the superstitious—was responsible for the sound. What could it be? No furred prowler of the night—for he knew the varied voices of them all—had such a muffled cry. Puzzled and curious he left his rabbit-skin robes and stood with the terrified Michel beside the fire. In an uproar the dogs ran into the bush with manes bristling and bared fangs, to hurl their husky challenge down the valley at the invisible menace.

"It ees de Windigo! Dey tell me at Whale Riviere not to come in dees country! De Windigo an' *Matchi-Manito* are loose here," whispered Michel through chattering teeth.

Jean Marcel did not know what it was that made night horrible with its moaning, but he intended to learn at once. The lungs behind that noise could be pierced by rifle bullet and the cold steel of his knife. There was not a creature in the North which Fleur would not readily battle. He would soon learn if the hide of a Windigo was tough enough to turn the knifelike fangs of Fleur and the bullets of his .30-.30. Seizing Michel by the shoulders he shook the boy roughly.

"I tell you, Michel, de devil dat mak' dat soun' travel on four feet. You tie up de pup an' wait here. Fleur an' I go an' breeng back hees skin."

But the panic-stricken Michel would not be left alone and, when he had fastened the excited puppies, he drew his rifle from its skin case with shaking hands and joined Marcel.

Holding the aroused Fleur with difficulty on her rawhide leash, Marcel snowshoed through the timber in the direction from which the sound had come. After traveling some time they stopped to listen. From somewhere ahead, seemingly but a few hundred yards down the valley, floated the eerie sobbing. Michel's gun slipped to the snow from his palsied hands. Turning, Jean gripped the boy's arm.

"Why you come? You no good to shoot. De Windigo eat you w'ile you hunt for your gun."

Picking up the rifle, the boy threw off the mittens fastened to his sleeves by thongs, and, gritting his teeth, followed Marcel and Fleur.

Shortly they stopped again to listen. Straight ahead through the spruce the moaning rose and fell. Fleur, frantic to reach the mysterious enemy, plunged forward dragging Marcel, followed by the quaking boy who held his cocked rifle in readiness for the rush of beast or devil. Passing through

scrub, a small clearing opened up before them. Checking Fleur, Marcel peered through the dim light of the forest into the opening lit by the stars, when the clearing echoed with the uncanny sound. Marcel's keen eyes strained across the starlit snow into the murk beyond.

"By gar! I see noding dere! It ees de Windigo for sure!" gasped Michel.

But the Frenchman was staring fixedly at a clump of spruce on the opposite edge of the opening. As the unearthly sobbing rose again into the night, he loosed the maddened dog and followed.

They were close to the spruce when a great gray shape suddenly rose from the snow directly in their path. For an instant a pair of pale wings flapped wildly in their faces. Then a squawk of terror was smothered as the fangs of Fleur struck at the feathered shape of a huge snowy owl. A wrench of the dog's powerful neck, and the ghostly hunter of the northern nights had made his last patrol, victim of his own curiosity.

With a loud laugh Jean turned to the dazed Michel:

"Tak' good look at de Windigo, Michel. My fox trap hold heem fas' w'ile he seeng to de stars."

The amazed Michel stared at the white demon in the fox trap with open mouth. "I t'ink dat owl de Windigo for sure," he muttered.

"I nevair hear de owl cry dat way myself, Michel, but I know dat Fleur and my gun mak' any Windigo in dees countree look whiter dan dat bird. W'en we come near dees place I expect somet'ing in dat fox trap."

And strangely, through the remaining moons of the long snows the sleep of the lad was not again disturbed by the wailing of Windigos seeking to devour a young half-breed Cree by the name of Michel Beaulieu.

CHAPTER XXVII.

June once more found Marcel paddling into Whale River. The sight of the high-roofed mission where he had known so much of joy and pain quickened his stroke. He wondered whether Julie had gone away with Wallace at Christmas or whether there would be a wedding when the trade was over and the steamer would take them to East Main. Avoiding the mission, until he had learned from Jules what he longed to know, Marcel went up to the trade house, where he found Gillies and McCain.

Too proud to speak of what was nearest his heart, he told his friends of his winter in the Salmon country. It had paid him well. When he tossed on the counter three glossy black-fox pelts and six skins of soft, silver-gray, alone worth well over a thousand dollars even at the low prices of the Far North, the eyes of Gillies and Angus McCain bulged in amazement. Cross fox, shading from the black of back and shoulder of rich mahogany, followed, and dark-sheened marten—the Hudson Bay sable of commerce—and thick gray pelts of the fisher. Otter, lynx and mink made up the balance of his fur pack.

"My Lord, the Salmon headwaters must be alive with fur!" exclaimed Gillies examining the skins; "and most of them are prime."

"Dere ees much fur in dat countree," laughed Jean, "eef de Windigo don' ketch you. Ah, Michel?"

Michel, proud of his part in so successful a winter and in having bearded the demons of the Salmon in their dens and lived to tell the tale, blushed at the memory of the snowy owl.

"This is the largest catch of fur traded in my time, at Whale River, Jean," said Gillies. "What are you going to do with all your credit? You can't use it on yourself, you'll have to get married and build a shack here."

Blood darkened his bronzed face, but Marcel made no reply.

He had indeed wrung a handsome toll from the haunted hills, which, tabooed by Cree trappers for generations, were tracked by the padded feet of countless fur bearers. After allowing Michel a generous interest in the fur, Marcel found that he had increased his credit at the post by over two thousand dollars, giving him in all a trade credit of twenty-six hundred dollars with the company. He could in truth afford to marry and build a shack if he were made a company servant. But the girl——

Then he heard Gillies' voice.

"Jean, I want you and Angus to go up to the Komaluk Islands with a York boat. The whalers are getting the Husky trade which we ought to have. They will ruin them with whisky."

"Ver' well, m'sieu!"

Marcel drew a breath of relief. If Julie were not already married, he would be only too glad to go north—to be spared seeing her made the wife of Wallace.

Then Jules appeared. After the customary hug, Jean drew the big head man outside, demanding in French:

"Is she here still? They were not married at Christmas? When do they marry?"

Jules shook his head. "A letter came by the Christmas mail. By the company he was ordered at once to Winnipeg. He is there now and will not come this summer."

"And Julie, is she well?"

"Yes."

"When, then, will they marry?"

Jules shrugged his great shoulders. "Christmas maybe. Perhaps next June. No one knows."

Marcel was strangely elated at the news. Julie was not yet out of his life. She would be at Whale River on his return from the Komaluk Islands—even though he was held all summer.

The welcome of Julie and Père Breton at the mission temporarily drove from Marcel's thoughts the coming separation. Far into the night the three friends talked while Julie's skillful fingers were busy with her trousseau. She spoke of the postponement of her wedding, due to the presence of Inspector Wallace at the headquarters of the company at Winnipeg. Julie's olive skin flushed with her pride as she said that he had been mentioned already as the next chief inspector. Wallace had already become a Catholic, but the uncertainty of the time of his return to the east coast might cause the delay of the ceremony until the following June.

Marcel's hungry eyes did not leave the girl's face as she talked of her future—the future he had dreamed of sharing. The wound was still raw, and he was glad to escape the acute suffering which her nearness caused by leaving Fleur and her puppies in Julie's care and starting with McCain the following morning in a York boat loaded with trade goods for the north coast.

In August the York boat returned from the Komaluk Islands and Jean drew his supplies for another winter on Big Salmon waters. To Gillies who urged him to accept a regular berth and put his team of half-breed wolves on the mail route to Rupert—for the winter previous the scarcity of good dogs along the coast had been the cause of the Christmas mail not reaching Whale River until the second of January—Marcel turned a deaf ear. In another year, he said, he would carry the mail up the coast, but his puppies were still too young to be pushed hard through a blizzard. Another year and he would show the posts down the coast what a real dog team could do.

Glancing at McCain, Gillies shook his head resignedly, for he knew well why Jean Marcel wished to avoid Whale River.

On the morning of his departure, as Jean stood with Michel on the beach by the canoe, surrounded by his four impatient dogs, Julie stooped and kissed the white marking between Fleur's ears, whispering a good-by. Turning her head in response, the dog's moist nose and rough tongue reached the girl's hand.

"Lucky Fleur!" Jean said to his friends.

"It's sure worth while being a dog, sometimes," drawled Angus McCain with a grimace. But Julie Breton ignored the remarks, wishing Marcel Godspeed.

Through the day as they traveled Marcel looked on the high shores of the Salmon with unseeing eyes, for in them was the vision of a girl.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Christmas was but a week distant. For the first time in years Jean Marcel possessed a dog team, and through the long December nights he had come to a decision to talk to Julie Breton once more, as in the old days, before she left Whale River forever.

Led by Fleur, Colin and Angus and Jules, now grown to huge huskies already abreast of their mother in height and bulk of bone and showing the wolf strain in their rangy gait and in red lower lids of their amber eyes, were jingling down the river trail to the festivities at the post. For, from Fort Chimo westward across the wide north to Rampart House, Christmas and New Year's are kept. From far and wide come dog teams of the red hunters down the frozen river trails for the feasting and merrymaking at the fur posts. Two weeks, "fourteen sleeps" on the trail, going and coming, is not held by many a hardy hunter and his family too high a price to pay for a few short days of trading and gossip and dancing. There are many who trap too far from the posts and in country too inaccessible to make the journey possible, but throughout the white desolation of the fur lands the spirit of Christmas is strong and yearly the frozen

valleys echo to the tinkling of the bells of dog teams and the laughter of the children of the snows.

Over the beaten river trail, ice-hardened by the passage of many sleds preceding them, romped Fleur and her sons, toying with the weight of the two men and the food bags on the sled. At times, Jean and Michel ran behind the team to stretch their legs and start their chilled blood, for it was forty below zero. But to the dogs, traveling without wind at forty below on a beaten trail was sheer delight. Often, on the high barrens of the Salmon, they had slept soundly in their snow holes at minus sixty.

As Jean watched his great lead dog, her thick coat of slate-gray and white glossy with superb vitality, set a pace for her rangy sons which sent the white miles sliding swiftly past, his heart beat with pride and love.

Good all day for a thousand pounds they were, on a broken trail, and since November he had in vain sought the limit of their staying power. Not yet the equals of their mother in pulling strength, at eighteen months their wolf blood had already given the puppies her stamina. What a team to bring the Christmas mails up the coast from East Main he thought, idly whirling the whip of plaited caribou hide which had never flecked the ears of Fleur, but which he sometimes needed when the excitable Colin or Angus scented game and, puppylike, started to bolt. No dogs on the coast could take the trail from these sons of Fleur. No dog team he had ever seen could break out and trot away with a thousand pounds. That winter they had done it with a load of caribou meat on the barrens. Yes, next year he would accept Gillies' offer and put Fleur and her sons on the winter mail—Fleur and the team she had given him—his Fleur, whom he had followed and fought for and who had in turn battled for his life.

"*Marche,* Fleur!" he called, his eyes bright with his thoughts.

The lead dog leaped from a swinging trot into a long lope, straightening the traces, followed by the team keen for a run. Away they raced in the good going of the hard trail. Then in early afternoon when the sun hung low in the dim west, the men turned into the thick timber of the shores, where, sheltered from the wind, they shoveled out a camp ground with their snowshoes and built a roaring fire while the puppies, ravenous for their supper, yelped and fretted until Jean threw them the frozen fish which they caught in the air and bolted.

Before Jean and Michel had boiled their tea and caribou stew, four shaggy shapes with noses in tails were asleep in the snow, indifferent to the sting of the strengthening cold which made the spruces around them snap, and split the river ice with the boom of cannon. Soon, also, the two men were asleep in their blankets.

Hours later, waking with a groan, Marcel sat upright in his blankets. Near him the tired Michel snored peacefully. Throwing a circle of light on the surrounding spruce, huge embers of the fire still burned. The moon was dead, a veil of haze masking the dim stars. It was bitter cold. Half out of his covering, the startled *voyageur* shivered, but it was not from the bite of the air. It was the stark poignancy of the dream from which he had escaped that left him cold.

He had stood by the big chute of the Conjuror's Falls on the Ghost, known as the "Chute of Death," and as he gazed into the boiling maelstrom of white water, the blanched face of Julie Breton had looked up at him, her lips moving in hopeless appeal, as she was swept from sight. He had plunged headlong into the roaring flume, frenziedly seeking her as he fought down through the gorge, buffeted and mauled by the churning water, but though he hunted the length of the river below, he had not found her.

Then, in his dream, he was traveling with Fleur and the team in a blizzard, when out of the smother of snow before him beckoned the wraith of Julie Breton—always just ahead, always beckoning to him. Pushing his dogs to their utmost, he never drew nearer, never reached the wistful face he loved.

Marcel freshened the fire and lighted his pipe. It was long before he threw off the grip of his dreams and slept again.

CHAPTER XXIX.

Two days before Christmas the team of Jean Marcel, its harness brave with colored worsted, jingled gayly past sleep house and tepees, and drew up before the log trade house at Whale River.

"Welcome, Jean. It ees well dees Chreesmas you come." The grave face of Jules

Duroc checked the jest on Marcel's lips as he shook his friend's hand.

"You are sad, my friend; what has happened to the merry Jules?" Jean asked.

"Ah, Jean Marcel! Dere ees bad news for you at Whale River."

Across Marcel's brain flashed the memory of his dreams. Julie! His speeding heart shook him as an engine a boat. His lips twitched, but from them came no words as his questioning eyes held those of Jules.

"Yes, it ees as you t'ink, Jean Marcel. She ees ver' seek."

Marcel's hands closed on Jules' arms.

"Mon Dieu! W'at ees it, Jules?" he demanded. "Tell me, w'at ees it?"

"She has de bad arm. Cut de han' wid a knife."

Blood poisoning, because of his medical ignorance, held less terror for Marcel than some strange fever, insidious and mysterious. He had feared that Julie Breton had a dread disease against which the crude skill of the North is helpless. As he hastened to the mission where he found Mrs. Gillies installed as nurse, his hopes rose, for surely a wound in the hand could not be fatal!

From the anxious-eyed Père Breton, who met him at the door, Jean learned the story.

Ten days before Julie had cut her hand with a knife while preparing frozen fish for cooking. For days she had ignored the wound, when the hand, suddenly reddening, began to swell, causing much pain. Gillies and her brother had opened the inflamed wound, cleansing it with bichloride, but in spite of their efforts, the swelling had increased, advancing to the elbow.

She was now running a high fever, suffering great pain and frequently delirious. They realized that the proper treatment was an opening of the lymphatic glands of the forearm and elbow to reach the poison slowly working upward, but did not dare attempt it. The priest told Marcel that in such cases if the poison was not absorbed into the circulation or reached by operation, it would extend to the armpit, then to the neck, with fatal termination.

Jean Marcel listened with head in hands to the despairing brother. Then:

"Is there at Fort George or East Main no one who could help her?"

"At Fort George, Monsieur Hunter, who has been lately ordered there to the Protestant church, is a medical missionary. We learned this to-day when the Christmas mail arrived. But they were five days coming from Fort George with their poor dogs. It will take you eight days to make the round trip, and even in a week it may be too late —too late——" He finished with a groan.

"Father, I will go and bring this missionary. I shall return before a week."

"God speed you, my son! The mail team is worn out and we were sending a team of the Crees, but they have no dogs like yours."

Mrs. Gillies led Marcel into Julie Breton's room and left them. On her white bed, with wayward masses of dusky hair tumbled on her pillow, lay Julie Breton, moaning low in the delirium of high fever. On a pillow at her side lay her bandaged left arm. As Marcel looked long at the flushed face with its parted lips murmuring incoherently, the muscles of his jaw flexed through the frost-blackened skin as he clenched his teeth at his helplessness to aid her—this stricken girl for whom he would have given his life.

Then he knelt and, lifting the limp hand on the coverlet, pressed it long to his lips, rose, and went out.

First feeding and loosing his dogs in the stockade, Marcel hurried to the trade house. There he obtained from Jules five days' rations of whitefish for the dogs, and some pemmican, hard bread, and tea.

"You t'ink you can mak' For' George in t'ree day?" Jules shook his head doubtfully. "It nevaire been made in t'ree day, Jean."

"No one evair before on de east coast travel as I travel, Jules," was the low reply.

Gillies, Père Breton, and McCain entered the room, talking earnestly, and overheard Marcel's words.

"Welcome back, Jean; you are going to Fort George instead of Baptiste?" asked Gillies, shaking Marcel's hand.

"Yes, m'sieu, my team ees stronger team dan Baptiste's."

"When do you start?"

"In leetle tam; I jus' feed my dogs."

"Are they in good shape? They must be tired from the river trail."

"Dey will fly, m'sieu."

"Thank God for that."

"M'sieu," said Marcel quietly, "my dogs will mak' Fort George in t'ree days."

"It's never been done, Jean, but I hope you will."

When Marcel brought his refreshed dogs

to the trade house an hour later for his rations, a silent group of men awaited him. As Fleur trotted up, ears pricked, mystified at being routed out and harnessed in the dark, after she had eaten and curled up for the night, they were inspected by the factor.

"Why, the pups have grown inches since you left here in August, Jean. They're almost as big as Fleur, now," said Gillies, throwing the light from his lantern on the team.

"Dat two rear dog look lak' timber wolves," cried Jules, as Colin and Angus turned their red-lidded, amber eyes lazily toward him, opening cavernous mouths in wide yawns, for they were still sleepy. Fleur, alive to the subdued tones of Jean Marcel and sensing something unusual, nuzzled her master's hand for answer.

"What a team! What a team!" exclaimed McCain. "They ought to walk away with a thousand pounds. Are they fast, Jean?"

"W'en you see me again, m'sieu, you will know how fast dey are! *A'voir!*" Marcel gripped the hands of the others, then turned to Père Breton.

"Father," he said, "if she should wake and can understand, tell her—tell her to wait—a little longer till Jean and Fleur return. If—if she—cannot wait for us—tell her that Fleur and Jean Marcel will follow her—out to the sunset."

With the crack of his whip, as he turned away, came his curt *"Marche,* Fleur!" and he disappeared with his dogs into the night.

CHAPTER XXX.

One hundred and fifty miles down the wind-harassed east coast, was a man who could save Julie Breton, and the mind of Marcel held that one thought only as his dogs loped down the river trail to the bay.

Dark though it was, for the stars were veiled, Fleur never faltered, keeping the trail by instinct and the feel of her feet.

Reaching the bay the trail swung south, skirting the beach, often cutting inland to avoid circling long points and shoulders of shore. Marcel was too dogwise to push his huskies as they swung south on the sea ice, for no sled dogs work well after eating.

As the late moon slowly lifted, he shook his head, for it was a moon of snow. If only the weather held until he could bring his man from Fort George! That he could average fifty miles a day going and coming, with the light sled, he was confident. He knew what hearts beat in those shaggy breasts in front and what stamina never yet put to the supreme test lay in their massive frames. He knew that Fleur would set her sons a pace, at the call of Jean Marcel, that would eat the frozen miles to Fort George, as they had never before slid past a dog runner. But once a December norther struck down upon them on their return, burying the trail in drift, with its shotlike drive in the teeth of man and dogs, it would kill their speed, as a cliff stops wind. And then, what would become of Julie Breton—waiting helpless through the long days for his return?

He had intended to camp for a few hours later in the night, to rest his dogs, but the warning of the ringed moon flicked him with fear, as a whiplash stings a lagging husky. It meant, in December, snow and wind. He must race that wind to the lee of Big Island, so he pushed on through the night over the frozen shell of the bay, stopping only once to boil tea and rest his ever-willing dogs.

As day broke blue and bitter in the ashen east, a team of spent huskies with ice-hung lips and chops swung in from the trail skirting the lee shore of Big Island, and their driver in belted caribou capote, a rim of hoar frost from his frozen breath circling his lean face, made a fire from cedar kindlings brought on the sled, boiled tea and pemmican and, feeding his dogs, lay down in his robes. In twelve hours of constant toil the dogs of Marcel had put Whale River sixty white miles behind.

At noon he shook off the sleep which weighted his limbs, forced himself from his blankets, ate and pushed on. Although the air smelled of snow, and in the north brooding, low-banked clouds hugged the bay, snow and wind still held off. In early afternoon, as the sun buried itself in the ice fields, muffled rays lit the bald shoulders of the distant Cape of the Four Winds, seventy miles from his goal.

"Haw, Fleur!" he called, and the lead dog swung inland to the left, on the short cut across the cape.

As yet the tough Ungavas had shown no signs of lagging. With their superb vitality and staying power, they had traveled steadily through the night. Led by their tireless mother, each hour they had put five miles of snowy trail behind them. With the weather steady, Marcel had no doubt of when he would get back to Whale River, for

the weight of an extra man on the sled would be little felt on a hard trail, and he would run much himself. But with the menace of snow and wind hanging over him, he traveled with a heavy heart.

On Christmas Eve, again a ringed moon rose as the dogs raced down an icy trail into the valley of the Little Salmon. The conviction that a December blizzard, long overdue, was making in the north to strike down upon him, paralyzing his speed, drove him on through the night. Reckless of himself, he was equally reckless of his dogs, led by the iron Fleur. It was well that her still-growing sons had the blood of timber wolves in their veins, for Fleur, sensing the frenzy of Marcel to push on and on, responded with all her matchless endurance.

At last they camped at the Point of the Caribou and ate. To-morrow, he thought, would be Christmas. A Merry Christmas, indeed, for Jean Marcel. Then he slept.

The afternoon of Christmas Day, as they passed Wastikun, the Isle of Graves, the wind shifted to the northeast and the snow closed in on the dog team nearing its goal. The blizzard had come, and Jean Marcel, knowing what miles of drifts, what toil in breaking the trail to give footing to his team in the soft snow, and what days of battling the drive of the wind, awaited their return, groaned aloud. For it meant, battle as he would, he might now reach Whale River too late; he might find that Julie Breton had not waited, but overweary, had gone out into the sunset.

In the early evening, forty-eight hours from Whale River, one hundred and fifty miles up the coast, four white wraiths of huskies with a ghostlike driver, turned in to the trade house at Fort George. The spent dogs lay down, dropping their frosted masks in the snow, the froth from their mouths rimming their lips with ice.

Sheeted in white from hood to moccasins, the *voyageur* entered the trade house in a swirl of snow and called for the factor. A bearded man engaged in conversation with another white man, behind the trade counter, rose at Jean's entrance.

"I am from Whale Riviere, m'sieu. My name ees Jean Marcel. Here ees a lettair from M'sieu Gillies." Marcel handed an oilskin envelope to McKenzie, the factor, who surveyed with curiosity the ice-crusted stranger with haggard eyes who came to Fort George on Christmas night.

At the mention of Whale River, the man who had been in conversation with McKenzie behind the counter also rose to his feet. And Marcel, who had not seen his face, now recognized him. It was Inspector Wallace.

"Too bad! Too bad!" muttered the factor, reading the note, "and we're in for a December blizzard."

"What is it, McKenzie?" demanded Wallace, coming from behind the counter and reaching for Gillies' note.

The narrowed eyes of Marcel watched the face of Wallace contract with pain as he read of the peril of the woman he loved.

"Tell me what you know, Marcel!" Wallace demanded brokenly.

Jean briefly explained Julie's desperate condition.

"When did you leave Whale River?"

"Two day ago."

"What," cried McKenzie, "you came through in two days from Whale River? Lord, man! I never heard of such traveling. Your dogs must be marvels!"

"I came in two day, m'sieu," repeated Marcel, "because she weel not leeve many day onless she have help."

"Why, man, I can't believe it. It's never been done. When did you sleep?" The factor called to a company Indian who entered the room, "Albert, take care of his dogs and feed them."

"Dey are wild, m'sieu. I weel go wid heem."

Marcel started to go out with the Indian, for his huskies sorely needed attention, then stopped to stare in wonder at Wallace, who had slumped into a chair, head in hands. For a moment the hunter looked at the inert inspector; then his lip curled, his frost-blackened face reflecting his scorn.

"W'ere ees dees missionary, m'sieu?" he said. "We mus' start in a few hour, w'en my dogs have rest."

"What! Start in the teeth of this? Listen to it!"

The pounding of wind and shotlike snow on the trade-house windows steadily increased in fury.

The muscles of Marcel's face stiffened into stone as he grimly insisted:

"We mus' start to-night!"

"You are crazy, man; you need sleep," protested McKenzie. "I know it's a life-and-death matter. But you wouldn't help that girl at Whale River, by losing the trail

to-night and freezing. I'll see Hunter at once, but I can't allow him to go to his death. If the blow eases by morning; he can start."

Marcel turned, waiting for Wallace, who was nervously pacing the floor, to speak. Then, with a shrug, he said:

"M'sieu Wallace weel wish to start to-night? I have de bes' lead dog on dees coast. She weel not lose de trail."

"What do you mean—Monsieur Wallace?" blurted the factor. Wallace raised a face on which agony and indecision were plainly written. But it was Jean Marcel who answered, with all the scorn of his tortured heart.

"She ees de fiancée—of M'sieu Wallace."

"Oh, I—I didn't—understand!" stumbled the embarrassed McKenzie, reddening to his eyes. "But—I can't advise you to start to-night, Mr. Wallace."

The factor went to the door. As he lifted the heavy latch the power of the wind, in spite of his bulk, hurled him backward. The door crashed against the log wall, while the room was filled with driving snow.

"You see what it's like, Wallace! No dog team would have a chance on this coast to-night—not a chance."

"Yes," agreed Wallace, avoiding Marcel's eyes. Then he went on, "You understand, McKenzie, I'm knocked clean off my feet by this news. But—we'll want to start by morning at least—sooner, if the dogs are rested—that is, of course, if it's possible."

Deliberately ignoring the man who had thus bared his soul, Marcel drew the factor to one side.

"*Mon Dieu,* m'sieu!" he pleaded in low tones. "She weel not leeve. Onless we start at once, we shall be too late. Tak' me to de doctor."

The agonized face of the hunter softened McKenzie.

"Well, all right, if Hunter will go and Mr. Wallace insists. But it's madness. I'll go over to the mission now and talk to the doctor."

When Jean had seen to the feeding of his tired dogs whom he left asleep in a shack, he hurried through the driving snow with the company Indian to the Protestant mission house where he found McKenzie alone with the missionary. As he entered the lighted room, the Reverend Hunter, a tall, athletic-looking man of thirty, welcomed him, bidding him remove his capote and moccasins and thaw out at the hot box stove.

"Mr. McKenzie has shown me Gillies' message, Marcel. Now tell me all you know about the case," said the missionary.

Briefly Marcel described the condition of Julie Breton—Gillies' crude attempt at surgery; the advance toward the shoulder of the swelling and inflammation, with the increasing fever.

"M'sieu," he cried in desperation when he had finished, "I have at Whale River credit for t'ree t'ousand dollar. It ees all——"

Hunter's lifted hand checked him.

"Marcel, first I am a preacher of the Gospel; also, I am a doctor of medicine. I came into the North to minister to the bodies as well as to the souls of its people. Don't speak of money. This case demands that we start at once. Have you good dogs?"

Troubled and mystified by the attitude of Wallace, McKenzie broke in, "He's surely got the best dogs on this coast—made a record trip down. But, Mr. Hunter, I'll not agree to your starting in this hell outside. You must wait until daylight. The inspector has decided that it would be impossible to keep the trail."

"I came here to aid those *in extremis,*" replied the missionary. "I'll take the risk. It's a matter of days and we may be too late as it is."

"T'anks, m'sieu! Her brother, Père Breton, weel not forget your kindness; and I—I weel nevair forget." The eyes of Marcel glowed with gratitude.

"Then it's understood that you start at daylight, if the wind won't blow you off the ice. I'll see you then." And McKenzie, looking hard at Marcel and Hunter, went out.

When the factor had closed the door Jean turned to Doctor Hunter.

"Thees man who marries her in June ees afraid to go. Weel Mr. Hunter start wid me—at midnight?"

The big missionary gripped Marcel's hand as he said with a smile, "I didn't promise McKenzie I would not go. At midnight, then."

CHAPTER XXXI.

In the unwritten law of the North no one in peril shall ask for succor in vain. So universal is this creed, so general its acceptance and observance throughout the vast

land of silence, that when word is brought in to settlement, fur post, or lonely cabin, that help is needed, it is a matter of course that a relief party takes the trail, however long and hazardous. And so it was with John Hunter, clergyman, physician, and man. New to the North, he had come from England at the call for volunteers to shepherd the souls and bodies of the people of the solitudes and, without hesitation, he agreed to undertake a journey which the elder heads at Fort George knew might well culminate in the discovery later, by a searching party, of two stiffened bodies buried beside a starved dog team, somewhere in the drifts behind the Cape of the Four Winds.

Marcel and the dogs were in sore need of a few hours' rest for the grilling duel with snow and wind before them, so, when he had eaten, Jean turned into a bed in the mission.

At midnight Jean hitched his dogs and waked Hunter. Leaving Fort George asleep in the smother of snow, the dog team plunged down to the river trail, into the white drive of the norther.

Giving the trailwise Fleur her head in the black night, Jean, with Hunter, followed the sled carrying their food and robes. Turning from the swept river ice into the bay, dogs and men met the full beat of the blasts with heads lowered to ease the hammering of the pin-pointed scourge whipping their faces like shot. With the neighboring shore smothered in murk, still trusting to Fleur's instinct to keep the trail over the blurred white floor which only increased the blackness above, Marcel followed the sled he could barely see. Speed against the wind was impossible, and at all hazards he must keep the trail, for if they swung to the west on the sea ice they were doomed to wander until they froze.

He would push on and camp until daylight, in the lee of the Isle of Graves. With the light they would begin to travel. Then on the open ice, where there was little drift, he would give Fleur and her pups the chance to prove their mettle, for there would be little rest. And beyond, at the Cape of the Four Winds—a midwinter vortex of unleashed arctic blasts—they would have ten miles inland through the drifts. The unproven sons of Fleur would indeed need the stamina of wolves to take them through the days to come.

At last the trail which the lead dog had held solely by keeping her nose to the ice, ran in under the bold shore of Wastikun. There, after feeding the dogs, they burrowed into the snow in the lee of the cliffs, wrapped in their fur robes. With the wind, the temperature had risen and men and dogs slept hard until dawn. Then, hot tea, bread, and pemmican spurred the fighting heart of Marcel with hope. The wind had eased, but powdery snow still drove down, blanketing the near shore.

Daylight found them on their way. Due to the wind there was as yet little snow on the trail over the bay ice and the freshened dogs, with lowered heads, swung up the coast at a trot. All day, with but short respite, men and dogs battled on against the norther. The mouth of the Little Salmon was the goal Marcel had set for himself—the river valley from which they would cut overland behind the gray cape, to the north coast. Forty miles away it lay—forty cruel miles of the torturing beat of shotlike snow in the faces of men and dogs, forty miles of endless pull and drag for the iron thews of Fleur and the whelps of the wolf. This was the mark which the now ruthless Frenchman, with but one thought, one vision, set for the shaggy beasts he loved.

Hunter, game though he was, at last was forced to ride on the sled, so fierce was their pace into the wind. The great beasts steadily ate up the miles. At noon, floundering through drifts like the billows of a broken sea, with Marcel ahead breaking trail, they crossed Caribou Point, with Hunter, refusing to burden the dogs, wallowing behind the sled. There they boiled tea, then pushed on to the mouth of the Roggan.

At Ominuk night fell like a tent, and again a white wraith of a lead dog, blinded by the fury she faced, kept the trail by instinct, backed loyally by her brood of ice-sheathed wolves.

The coast swung sharply. They were in the lee of the cape. But a few miles farther and a long rest in the sheltered river valley awaited them. Marcel stopped his dogs and went to Fleur lying on the trail, her hot breath freezing as it left her panting mouth. Kneeling on the snow beside her with his back to the drive, he examined each hairy paw for pad cracks or balled snow between the toes, but the feet of the Ungava were iron; then he took in his hands her great head with its battered nose, blood caked

from the snow barrage she had faced all day. Rubbing the ice from her masked eyes, Jean placed his hooded face against his dog's. She turned her nose and her rough tongue touched his frost-blackened cheek.

"Fleur," he said, "we are doin' it for Julie —you an' Jean Marcel. We mus' mak' de Salmon to-night. Some day we weel hav' de beeg sleep—you and Jean."

Again he stroked her massive head with his red, unmittened hand, then for an instant resting his face against the scarred nose, sprang to his feet. With a glance at the paws, and a word for each of the whining puppies whose white tails switched in answer, Jean cracked his whip and they plunged forward.

Late that night a huge fire burned in the timber of the sheltered mouth of the little Salmon. Two men and a dog team ate ravenously, then slept like the dead, while over them roared the norther, rocking the spruce and jack pine in the river bottom, heaping the drifts high on the Whale River trail.

In three days of grueling toil Marcel had got within ninety miles of his goal—had got back within a day and a half of Whale River, had the trail been ice hard. But now it would be days longer—how many he dared not guess.

Had the weather held for him, four days from the night of his starting would have brought him home, for on an iced trail his great dogs would have run at his call like wolves at the rallying cry of the pack. As he drew his stiffened legs from the rabbit skins to freshen the fire at dawn, he bit his cracked lips until they bled at the thought of what the blizzard had meant to Julie Breton, waiting, waiting, for the dog team creeping up the east coast, baffled by head wind and drift.

The dogs had won a long rest and Marcel did not start breaking trail inland until after daylight. With the sunrise the wind had increased and the heartsick Marcel groaned at the strength-sapping floundering in breast-high drifts which faced his devoted dogs, when he needed them fresh for the race up the sea ice of the coast beyond. Before he slept he had weighed the toil of ten miles of drift-barred short cut across the cape against the alternative of doubling the headland on the ice. He had decided that no men or dogs could face the maelstrom of wind and snow which churned around the cape's bald buttresses, no strength force its way, no endurance prevail against it.

With Marcel in the lead as trail breaker, and the missionary, who took the punishment without murmur, following the sled, Fleur led her sons up to their Calvary in the hills.

As they left the valley and reached the open tundra above, they met the full force of the gale. For an instant men and dogs stopped dead in their tracks, then with heads down they hurled themselves into the white fury which had buried the trail beyond all tracing.

But the desperate Frenchman pushed on in the direction of the north coast followed by Fleur with her whitened nose at the tails of his snowshoes. At times, when the force of the snow swirls sucked their very breath, men and dogs threw themselves panting on the snow, until, with wind regained, they could go on again. Often plunging to their collars in the new snow, the huskies traveled solely by leaps, until, stalled nose-deep, tangled in traces and held by the drag of the overturned sled, Marcel and the exhausted Hunter came to their rescue. Heartbreaking mile after mile of the country over which Marcel had sped two days before they painfully put behind them.

At noon the man who lived his creed, his strength sapped, crumpled in the snow. Wrapping him in robes, Marcel lashed him on the sled and pressed forward.

Through a break in the snow, before the light waned, Marcel made out in the north the dim silhouette of Big Island. He was over the divide and well on his way to the coast. With the night the wind eased, though the snow held, and although he was off the trail, the new snow on the exposed north slope of the cape was either wind-packed or swept from the frozen tundra and again the exhausted dogs found good footing.

For some time the team had been working easily downhill, Marcel often forced to brake the toboggan with his feet. He knew he had worked to the west of the trail and was swinging in a circle to regain it. Worried by the sting of the cold which was growing increasingly bitter as the wind fell off, he stopped to rub the muffled, frost-cracked face, and hands of his spent passenger, cheering him with the promise of a roaring fire. When he started the team, Colin, stiffened by the rest, limped badly,

and Jules, who had bucked the deep snow all day like a veteran of the mail teams, gamely following his herculean mother, hobbled along head and tail down, with a wrenched shoulder. It was high time they found a camping place. With the falling wind they would freeze in the open. So he pushed on through the murk, seeking the beach where there was wood and a lee.

They were swiftly dropping down to the sea ice, but snow and darkness drew around them an impenetrable curtain. Seizing the gee pole, Marcel had thrown his weight back on the sled to keep it off the dogs on a descent when suddenly Fleur, whose white back he could barely see moving in front, with a whine stopped dead in her tracks and flattened on the snow. Her tired sons at once lay down behind her. The sled slid into Angus and stopped.

Mystified, Marcel called: *"Marche,* Fleur! *Marche!"* fearing to find, when she rose, that his rock and anchor had suddenly broken on the trail. But the great dog, ignoring the command, raised her nose in a low growl as Marcel reached her.

"What troubles you, Fleur?" he asked, on his knees beside her, brushing the crusted snow from her ears and slant eyes. Again Fleur whined mysteriously.

"Where ees de pain, Fleur? Get up!" he ordered sharply, thinking to learn where her iron body had received its hurt. But the dog lay rigid, her throat still rumbling.

"By gar, dis ees queer t'ing!" muttered Marcel, his mittened hand on the massive head.

Then some strange impulse led him to advance into the blackness ahead, when, with fierce protest, Fleur, jerking Jules to his feet, leaped forward, straining to reach her master.

The Frenchman, checked by the dog's action, stared out into the darkness until, at length, he saw that the white tundra at his feet fell away before his snowshoes and he looked out into gray space. As he crouched peering ahead, his senses slowly warned him that he stood on a shoulder of cliff falling sheer to the invisible beach below.

He had driven his dogs to the lip of a ghastly death! And Julie——

Turning back, he flung himself beside the trembling Fleur, and with his arm circling the great neck, kissed the battered nose. Fleur, with the uncanny instinct of the born lead dog, had scented the open space, divined the danger, and had lain down, saving them all.

Swinging his team off the brow of the cliff, he worked back and finally down to the beach, and his muffled passenger, drowsy, with swiftly numbing limbs, never knew that he had ridden calmly, that night, out to the doors of doom.

In the lee of an island Marcel made camp and boiled life-giving tea—the panacea of the North—and pemmican, which soon revived the frozen Hunter.

To his joy, he realized that the back of the blizzard was broken, for as the wind and snow eased, the temperature rapidly fell to an arctic cold. With Whale River eighty miles away, his dogs, broken by lack of rest and stiff from the wrenching and exhaustion of the battle with the deep snow, his own legs twinging with *mal racquette,* Marcel thanked God—for the dawn would see the wind dead and if his dogs did not fail him, in two days he would reach the post.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Whale River was astir. Before the trade house groups of Crees critically inspected the dogs of Baptiste Laval, who fretted and yelped, eagerly waiting the *"Marche!"* which would send them off on the river trail. Inside, the grave-faced Gillies gave big Jules his parting instructions.

"He never started home in that blizzard, Jules; McKenzie wouldn't allow the missionary to take such a chance. But Jean surely left yesterday morning and with fresh dogs he'll come through in four days, even with a heavy trail. You ought to meet him this side the cape."

"Yes, m'sieu. But I t'ink he travel more fas' dan dat. I see heem to-morrow, maybe."

"No, he never started that last day of the blow. It would have been suicide. Poor lad! He must have been half crazy, with her on his mind."

"How ees she dis noon, m'sieu?"

"The fever holds about the same—no worse; but she must be operated on very soon. The poison is extending. If you meet them at the cape you ought to get the doctor here a day ahead of Jean, with his tired dogs."

Surrounded by the Crees who were wishing them luck on their trip to meet and relay Marcel home, Baptiste had cracked

his dog whip for the start when an Indian with arms raised to attract attention was seen running from the shore across the clearing.

"Whoa!" shouted Jules, and Baptiste checked his dogs.

"What does he say?" called Angus McCain. "A dog team downriver? Do you hear that, Gillies?"

"Husky," replied the factor dryly. "Couldn't possibly be Marcel!"

"No, he couldn't have come through that norther," agreed McCain.

"What's that he says, Jules?" demanded Gillies.

Jules Duroc, hands and shoulders in motion, was talking excitedly to the Cree who had joined the group by the sled. Turning suddenly, he ran back to the factor.

"Felix say dat a team crawl up de riviere trail lak' dey ver' tired. He watch dem long tam."

"That's queer. But it's some Husky—can't be Marcel. Why, good Lord, man! He hasn't been away six days."

Angus disappeared, to return with an old brass-bound telescope and hurried to the river shore with Jules, followed by the scoffing Gillies. To the naked eye, a black spot was discernible on the river ice.

"There are two men following a team," announced Angus, the glass at his eye. "They're barely moving. Now they've stopped; the dogs must be played out. The driver's trying to get them up! Now he's got them going!"

Gillies took the telescope and looked for a long space. Suddenly to those who watched him, waiting for his report, his hand visibly shook. Turning to Jules, he bellowed:

"Jules, you travel like all hell for that dog team! God only knows how they got here alive, but there's only one lead dog on this coast that reaches to a man's middle. That team crawling in out there is Jean Marcel's —God bless him!—*and he's got his man!*"

With a roar Jules leaped on the sled and lashed the team headlong down the cliff trail to the ice and they madly raced downriver under the spur of the rawhide goad.

"Run to the mission, some one, and tell Père Breton that Jean Marcel is back!" continued Gillies. At the words, willing feet started with the message.

The eyes of Colin Gillies were blurred as he watched through the glass the slow approach of those who had but lately fought free from the maw of the pitiless snows. Now he could recognize the massive lead dog, limping at a slow walk, her great head down. Behind her swayed the crippled whelps of the wolf, tails brushing the ice, tongues lolling as they swung their lowered heads from side to side, battling through the last mile on stiffened legs, giving their last ounce at the call of their gaunt master who reeled behind them. Far in the rear a tall figure barely moved along the trail.

At the yelp of Jules' approaching team the dogs of Marcel pricked drooping ears. Stopping them, Jean waited for Hunter.

"Dey sen' team. It ees ovair, m'sieu! We mak' Whale Riviere from Fort George in t'ree day and half, but she—she may not be dere."

Too tired to speak, Hunter slumped on the sled. With a yell, Jules reached Marcel and gathered him into his arms.

"By gar, Jean! You crazee fool; you stop for noding! *Tiens!* I damn glad to see you, Jean Marcel!"

The fearful Marcel gasped out the question. "Julie! Ees she dere? Does she leeve?"

"Yes, my fr'en', she ees alive. You save her life."

Staggering to his lead dog the overjoyed man threw himself beside her on the trail where she sprawled panting.

"We 'ave save her," he cried. "Julie—has waited for Jean and Fleur."

Taking the missionary on his sled, Jules tried to force Marcel to ride as well, but the *voyageur* threw him off.

"No, no!" he cried. "We weel feenish on our feet—Fleur, de wolf, and Jean Marcel."

So back to the post Jules raced with Hunter. A cheering mob of Indians met dogs and master on the river ice and carried Marcel, protesting, up the cliff trail, where Gillies and Angus were waiting.

"I reach Fort George de night of second day, but de drif' and wind at de cape——" He was checked by a hug from the blubbering McCain as Colin Gillies, with eyes suspiciously moist, welcomed him home.

"You've saved her, Jean," said the factor; "now you must sleep." With hands raised in wonder he turned to the group. "Shades of André Marcel! Two days to Fort George! It will never be done again." Then they took the swaying Marcel—asleep on his

feet—and his dogs, away to a long, warm rest.

But the Crees sat late that night smoking much company plug as they shook their heads over the feat of the son of André Marcel, who feared neither Windigo nor blizzard. And later the tale traveled down to the southern posts and out to Fort Churchill on the west coast, and from there on to the Great Slave and the Peace, of how the mad Marcel had driven his flying wolves one hundred and fifty miles in two sleeps, and returned without rest in three, in the teeth of a Hudson Bay norther.

And hearing it, old runners of the trails shook their heads in disbelief, saying it was not in dogs or men to do such a thing. They did not know the love and despair in the heart of Jean Marcel which spurred him to his goal, and they did not fathom the blind devotion of his great lead dog, who, with her matchless endurance and that of her sons, had made it possible.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

Fresh from a London hospital though he was, John Hunter found that the condition of Julie Breton demanded the exercise of all his skill as a surgeon. But the operation, aided by the girl's young strength and vitality, was successful, and she slowly overcame the grip of the infection.

Four days after Marcel reeled into Whale River with his battered dogs, bringing the man who was winning back life for Julie Breton, an exhausted dog team limped in from the south. Rushing into the trade house the white-faced Wallace grasped Gillies' hand, hoarsely demanding:

"Does she live, Gillies?"

"She's all right, Mr. Wallace; doing well, the doctor says," answered Gillies. "She's going to pull through, thanks to Jean Marcel and Doctor Hunter. I take my hat off to those two men."

Wallace's eyes shifted to the floor as he ventured:

"When did they get in?"

"They came through against that blow in three days and a half. The greatest feat of a man and dogs in my time. When did you leave East Main?"

Wallace stared incredulously at Colin Gillies' wooden face.

"East Main? Why, didn't Marcel tell you?"

"No," replied Gillies, but he did not say that his wife had been told by Hunter of the presence of Wallace at Fort George the night Marcel brought the news. However, the factor did not further embarrass his chief by questions. And Wallace did not see fit to inform him that not until the wind died, two days after the relief party started, had he left Fort George.

"I suppose she's too sick to see me?" the nervous inspector hazarded.

"Yes, no one sees her except Mrs. Gillies and Hunter."

"Well, I'll look up Father Breton," and Wallace went out followed by an expression in Colin Gillies' face which the inspector would not have cared to see.

For a week Wallace remained at Whale River and then, assured by Doctor Hunter of Julie's safety, left, to return later. When he met Marcel in the trade house and attempted to thank him, the cold glitter in the eyes of the Frenchman as he listened with impassive face to the halting words of the great man of the coast filled Colin Gillies with inward delight.

As Gillies bade good-by to his chief, he said casually, "Well, I suppose we'll have a wedding here in June, Mr. Wallace."

"Yes, Gillies. Father Breton and I are only waiting for Julie to set the date. Good-by—I'll be up the coast next month."

But what piqued Gillies' curiosity, was whether Doctor Hunter had told Père Breton just what happened at Fort George when the tragic call for help came in on Christmas night. Jean Marcel's mouth had been shut like a sprung trap. Even Jules and Angus did not know; of that Gillies was sure. But why had the doctor not told Père Breton, as well as Mrs. Gillies? He was Julie's brother and ought to know. If Hunter had enlightened the priest, then Colin Gillies was no judge of men, for he had always admired the Oblat.

The first week in February Julie Breton was sitting up, and Mr. Hunter bade good-by to the stanch friends he had made at Whale River. Not always are the relations between Oblat or Jesuit and Protestant missionaries unduly cordial in the land of their labors, but when the Reverend Hunter left the mission house at Whale River there remained in the hearts of Père Breton, his sister, and Jean Marcel, a love for the doctor, clergyman, and man, which the years did not dim.

One day, later on, Marcel and Fleur were making their afternoon call on Julie, who was propped in bed, her hair hanging in two thick braids.

"We leave in a few days," Jean said in French. "Michel is anxious to get back to his traps."

"But—don't go so soon, Jean. I haven't had an opportunity to talk to you as I wished."

"If you mean to thank me, I am glad of that," he said, his lips curling in a faint smile.

"Why should I not thank you, Jean Marcel, who risked your life like a madman to help me? I do now thank you with all my heart. But for you I would not be here. Doctor Hunter told me I could not have lived had he arrived one day later."

With a gesture of impatience Marcel turned in his chair and gazed through the window on the world of snow.

The dark eyes in the pale face of the girl were strangely soft as they rested on the sinewy strength of the man's figure; then lifted to the strong profile, with its bony jaw and bold, aquiline nose.

"You do not care for my thanks, Jean?" she asked.

"Please!" he begged. "It is all over, that! You are well again! I am happy; and will go back to my trap lines."

"But it is not all over with Julie Breton," she insisted.

He turned with brows raised questioningly.

"It has left her—changed. She will never be the same."

"What do you mean? Doctor Hunter said you would be as strong as ever by spring."

"Ah, but I do not speak of my body, Jean Marcel."

He gazed in perplexity at her wistful face, then his eyes again sought the window.

For a long space Julie was silent. Then a suppressed sob roused him from his bitter thoughts, and he heard the strained voice of the girl.

"I know all," she said.

"What do you mean?"

"Mrs. Gillies and Doctor Hunter—when I asked him—told me—long ago. We have kept it from Père Henri. It seems years—for I have been thinking much since then—lying awake—thinking."

"Julie, what has been worrying you? Don't let what I did cause you pain," he pleaded, not catching the significance of her words. "It's all right, Julie. You owe me nothing—I understand."

"Ah, but you do not understand," she said, smiling at the man's averted face.

"Julie, I have suffered, but I want you to be happy. Don't think of Jean Marcel."

"But it is of Jean Marcel of the great heart that I must think—have been thinking, for days and days." She was sitting erect, tense; her pale face drawn with emotion.

"I tell you I know it all," she cried, "how they—*he*—feared to start in the storm—and waited—ordered you to wait. But no wind or snow could hold Jean Marcel, and in spite of them he brought Doctor Hunter to Whale River—and saved Julie Breton."

Dumb with surprise at her knowledge of what he thought he and Hunter alone knew—at the scorn in her voice, Marcel listened with pounding heart.

"Yes, they told me," she went on, "how Jean Marcel heard the news when he reached Whale River and without sleep that night hurried south for help, swifter than men had ever traveled, because I was in peril. Doctor Hunter has told me how you and Fleur fought wind and snow to bring him to Whale River—and to me. And now you ask her not to thank you—you who gave her back her life!"

Only the low sobbing of the girl broke the silence. In a moment the paroxysm passed and she looked through tears at the man who sat with bowed head in hands as she faltered:

"Ah, will you not see—not understand? Must I tell you—that I love—Jean Marcel?"

Dazed, Jean rose. With a hoarse cry of, "Julie!" he groped to the bed and took her in his arms.

After the years she had come home to Jean Marcel.

Later, Mrs. Gillies looked in to see a dusky head on the shoulder of the man who knelt by the bed, and on the coverlet beside them the great head of Fleur, who gazed up into two illumined faces through narrow eyes which seemed to comprehend as her bushy tail slowly swept to and fro.

In June there was a wedding at Whale River, with an honored guest who journeyed

up the coast from Fort George for the ceremony, John Hunter.

The mission church overflowed with post people and the visiting Crees, few of whom but had known some kindness from Julie Breton. In the robes of his order, Père Breton faced the bride and groom. Beside the former gravely stood the matron of honor, her gown of slate-gray and snowy white, carefully groomed for the occasion by the faithful Jules, glossy with superb vitality; her great neck circled by a white ribbon knotted in a bow—which it had required days to accustom her to wear—in strange contrast to the massive dignity of the head. From priest to bride and groom, her slant eyes shifted, in wonder at the proceeding.

The ceremony over, the bride impulsively kissed the great head of the dog while a hum of approval swept the church. Then, before repairing with their friends to the mission house where the groaning table awaited them, Julie and Jean Marcel, accompanied by Fleur, went to the stockade. Three gray noses thrust through the pickets and whined a welcome. Three gigantic, wolfish huskies met them at the gate with wild yelps and the mad swishing of tails. Then the happy Jean and Julie gave the whelps of the wolf their share of the wedding feast.

GOLD TEETH AND GOLD SHORTAGE

MANY things have been assigned as the main causes or contributory causes of the shortage of gold in the United States during the war, but it remained for the South, according to a very recent report from New Orleans, to furnish an unusual and unlooked-for contributory cause. Many a one in the North as well as in the South has noticed the number of negroes who have one or two gold or gold-filled teeth. It appears that for a number of years gold crowns or gold-filled teeth have been in great vogue among the colored people of the South. According to the report the quantity of gold used in this way caused more or less of a worry to government treasury officials during the war. This news came very lately from a New York diamond merchant, who during the war was United States silver and gold administrator. He is quoted as saying that the office of silver and gold administrator was unknown to most people and its activities had to be kept quiet, "as misunderstanding persons, learning of them, might have started a money panic."

According to the latest statement from this official, reported very recently from New Orleans, when gold was needed most by the government during the war, the administration discovered that there was a leak somewhere. The leak was traced South and then into the dentists' offices. Dentists it was found were using four times as much gold as they normally did.

The question, the report quoted says, was: "What were they doing with this gold?" It was found that there was an unprecedented demand for gold teeth. People would for many weeks save most of the high wages they made during the war and when they saved enough would invest in gold crowns for their teeth. It did not matter that their own white, natural teeth were strong and sound. Gold teeth were the style and as a result many perfect teeth suffered.

The report quoted said that while we had a gold reserve of $2,000,000,000, the government needed it all to pay war debts. "The object of the administration," it said, "was to gradually shut off the use of gold so that it would not be felt and that the government could build up a reserve ample enough to take care of any possible needs."

The latest reports from Washington since the war are that gold is now a drug in the market and that now the treasury holds over 40 per cent of the world's supply.

Classics in Slang

Jazzed by H. C. Witwer

Author of "Phil Grimm's Progress," "Confidence," Etc.

Taking on "Homicide Mike" O'Leary and Dan Cupid on the same evening leaves McTague nothing but the solace of more Shakespeare

V.—ROMEO AND JULIET

To the Sporting's Editor of the *Daily Shriek*.
FRIEND EDITOR: Well, editor, most undoubtlessly you have been givin' over quite some little time to wonderin' how come I have not wrote to you hence, as us well-read babies says. The fact of the matter is that between box fightin' and toyin' with love's young sweet dream, editor, I have been busier than a four-headed cat in a fish store and when my heart ain't bein' broke, my nose *is!*

As you prob'ly know, I am not yet heavyweight champeen of the world, editor, and the chances is I never will be whilst the present rules prevail. It seems that in the order to cop the world's title you have got to smack Jack Dempsey for a row of silos and you can see at the glance, editor, how silly it wouldst be to expect *me* to do that. To be frankly with you, I don't think Dempsey wants any of my game. The cold-blooded murderer of George Carpenter has been kind of gun-shy with the regards to minglin' with me, since I like to broke his hand with my jaw when he accidentally knocked me stiff in, I think it was New Orleans, or one of the many slabs I have been flattened in. It begins to look like that the only ways I will ever get into a ring with the champ is to disguise myself as the sponge of whoever he's fightin'.

Editor, I have wrote Dempsey a raft of challenges in the care of Georges oo la la Carpenter, his old pal and golfin' companion, but thus far I have received no reply. I hope the boys is not mad at each other, hey, editor? They have been so polite in the past what with boostin' each other in the newspapers and the like that I bet when they shook hands at the beginnin' of their fight, they each bowed and says to the other, "Pardon my glove!"

But to drop Dempsey, as somebody will sooner or later, let us get down to *my* affairs, hey, editor? Well, since last I went to the trouble of writin' you a letter I have leaped overnight into the class of such world beaters as John L. Sullivan, Jim Corbett, Bob Fitzsimmons, James J. Jeffries, and Jess Willard. In other words, *I* have been knocked stiff, too!

How the so ever, editor, *that* part of it is nothin' alongside of the wallop I have been handed by the little Goddess of Love, Dan Cupid. My romantical affair de heart, as they say in Tokyo, with the Venus of the bookstore is all shot to pieces and it seems I got the same chance of gettin' wed right now as Grant's Tomb has. Editor, I have come to the conclusions that a guy which can understand women can also understand a conversation between a couple of gnats!

Well, to begin with the athaletic part of my letter, editor, I will tell you how come "Homicide Mike" O'Leary took a close decision over me at Madison's Square Garden by smackin' me for a goal in the second frame the other night. Pay no attention what the so ever to what the newspapers says with the regards to O'Leary knowin' too much for me, editor, as I am goin' to present you herewith the inside story of that brawl. What does the reporters know about the fight game? And the answer is, *nothin'!* You bein' a reporter yourself, editor, why they's nobody know's that's a fact better than you do. Am I right or verse visa?

Homicide Mike O'Leary win by resortin' to foul tactics, as I will show you. I lose because I was too honest and too dazed to be anything but fair.

On the account it has always been a hobby of mine not to keep no copies of my letters, editor, I don't know whether I told you or

not that I have now got a manager. But anyways, I am bein' shoved through the ropes at the various abattoirs these nights by no less than "Beansy" Mahanoy, which besides me, has got a promisin' needleweight and two oversize middleweights which is always good for a laugh if nothin' else. Well, editor, the other day Beansy calls me up and says he has matched me with Homicide Mike O'Leary for ten rounds at the Garden and to prepare myself accordin'ly. You'd think I was en route to the chair, hey, editor? I have never heard of Homicide Mike O'Leary, so I asks Beansy for some memorandum about him.

"Oh, he's a set-up!" says Beansy. "He's old enough to of been a sparrin' partner for Robinson Crusoe and he ain't had a fight in three years. You ought to take him without workin' up a presspiration! O'Leary's one of them poor old tramps which works out somewheres every day, but never gets a bout."

"Well," I says, "if this guy's been trainin' steady for three years he ought to be *good* about now! What does he weigh?"

"A scant two hundred and forty," says Beansy. "You'll have to give him about twenty pounds, but that don't mean nothin' to *me*—we'll cop!"

Why shouldst it mean anything to *him,* when *I* am the baby which has got to go in there and try, hey, editor? And can you picture me givin' away twenty pounds to anybody by the name of Homicide Mike O'Leary? I'd be insane to give that bozo a gram the best of it!

I told the above to Beansy and he laughs.

"You ought to know by this time that *names* don't mean nothin'," he says. "Remember old Denny Cash, which never had a nickel in his life? Anyways, this tramp's real moniker is Abe Salzman—Homicide Mike O'Leary is only his fightin' name."

"Well," I says, "it's a good one! Likewise, Beansy, 'Leathernecks' is only the marines' fightin' name, but that ain't made 'em *lose* no quarrels, so far. You better come up and talk this over with me, before you lay down a deposit for my appearance with this Jewish Sinn Feiner—and that's that!"

"I'll see you in the mornin'," says Beansy. "Start right in workin' out over to Billy Milligan's gym."

"When is this holocaust comin' off?" I asks, with pardonable curiosity.

"To-morrow night!" says Beansy, and hangs up.

Editor, as twenty-four hours' notice is much more than I usually get for a mill, I cheered up considerably.

Well, that night, as they say in the movies, I knocked off trainin' for Homicide Mike O'Leary and breezed over to the bookstore which was left unto me by my lately Uncle Angus McTague of New York and Heaven. Of course, editor, bequeathin' *me* a bookstore was about as sensible a move as bequeathin' a pair of dancin' pumps to a snake, but then again when a man is gettin' ready to leave this world flat on its back, editor, why naturally enough he is liable to be a bit goofy, hey?

How the so ever, you undoubtlessly recall me tellin' you that the store is bein' ran by my ex-uncle's clerkess, Miss Ethel Kingsley, until the new comer, viz, *me,* shows up. Well, as luck wouldst have it, Ethel turned out to be a eye tonic which wouldst of caused Nero to postpone burnin' up Rome for another day at the least, and likewise, editor, she is as educated as Alma Mater herself.

Havin' fell wildly in love with her at a glance, I figured that should I tell her I am "One Punch" McTague, Uncle Anguses nephew, her new boss and a roughneck box fighter, she will throw up her job and take the air. So with devilishly cunnin', editor, I claim I am merely a friend to the missin' heir of the bookstore, entitled Archibald Gustavus Windsor-Blenheim, which you can't tell me ain't a name! I then says that when the nephew shows up I will buy the joint off him and thusly I keep Ethel in the bookstore, as she is crazy with curiosity to see what does Uncle Anguses nephew look like—not knowin' she is seein' him every day. Ain't that romantical, hey, editor?

You remember that things has got to the sensational point where I have gave her a eight-hundred-buck diamond ring with the sugar I got for knockin' "Manslaughter" McGowan for a row of Chinese ash cans and whilst we have not yet signed matrimonial articles, I am allowed the boons of callin' her by her first name whilst waitin' 'til I can call her by my last name. In the mean's while, she is givin' me a college education by the via of me readin' all the classicals and then writin' my idea of them for her.

And now that we got that all settled, editor, I will tell you how this here affair which

had all the various earmarks of a promisin' romance has came to a sudden halt, mainly on the account of this big, double-crossin' stiff, Mons. Homicide Mike O'Leary, nee Abe Salzman.

Well, this time I breeze into my bookstore, editor, just in time to witness one of the few miracles I ever seen in my life. They is a customer in it!

After this little stiff has copied off the addresses of all the Smiths or the like from the city directory and blowed without sayin' as much as go to Hades to my charmin' clerkess, editor, I walks up to the counter and with a bewitchin'ly smile claims that it's a pretty day. Well, they was no violence or bloodshed over that remark, editor, and bein' rewarded with a look which gives me the same kick I used to get over a bar before the plague, I laid down a neatly wrapped package I had under my arm.

"For me?" says Ethel, with some eye work which wouldst make the current movie vamps take arsenic.

"If I was as good a guesser as you," I says, "I wouldst do nothin' but play stud poker day and night!"

She calms down my pulse by lowerin' her eyes and then she reads off the card on the outside.

"From Archibald Gustavus Windsor-Blenheim—with love."

Then, editor, she rips off the string and out tumbles a six-pound shoulder of lamb all dolled up with them nifty little paper what nots, which is the butcher's favorite way of kiddin' his rich customers. Editor, you have not got the slightest idea how tasty that thing looked and then they was quite a lot of expense represented there, too. Ethel's face gets as red as a four-alarm fire, with pleasure, I figured on a hasty guess. But little did I know——

"Mr. Windsor-Blenheim," she says, with seven dollars' worth of ice on each word, "is this meant to be rude?"

"No," I says, with a goofy grin. "It's meant to be stewed!"

A cherry lip quivers a second, editor, and then comes down again in a thin red line, as the sayin' is.

"Kindly explain just what you mean by this," she says coldly, with a sarcastical nod at the innocent lamb.

"With pleasure," I says. "I have been figurin' out how hard it is for you and your mother to get by on your wages these days, with food and drink higher than the Woolworth Buildin'. Well, Ethel, on the ways up here I was just goin' to stop in and get you some candy and flowers like as of yore, when it struck me how simple I was to give you such idiotical stuff as that which will not put no weight on you or the etc., where for the same amount of jack I couldst present you with somethin' which besides showin' my sentiments has also got a practical value. With that, I turned on my rubber heels, Ethel, and beat it for the nearest butcher shop. That there lamb shouldst make a elegant stew for now, Sunday dinner, let us take for the example and they is no meat growed which *I* like any better, so——"

But, editor, she has bust out laughin', which as Charlie Chaplin says, is always a good sign.

"Well," she says, fin'ly, wipin' her nerve-rackin' eyes with a quarter of a inch of lace, "you are original, at least! Where is your last lesson?"

Editor, I give her "Macbeth" which is the latest one of them cuckoo novels I have wrote up.

"Now," she says, with a faintly blush, editor, as she hands me another book, "this time I am going to give you 'Romeo and Juliet,' one of the world's greatest love stories—also by William Shakespeare."

"Say!" I remarks, shovin' it in my pocket, "I have read three or four serials by this guy Shakespeare already and I can't understand how that baby was able to hold a steady job anywheres if he kept wastin' his time like that. What did he do for a livin', anyways?"

"Oh—that's a—a sacrilege!" she gasps, editor. "Surely you must know that Shakespeare was perhaps the greatest playwright of all time?"

"Show me!" I says. "I think Georgie Cohan wouldst make your friend take carbolic. And that reminds me, what d'ye say if we take in a show some night this week?"

"I will be busy most of the evenings this week, except to-morrow night," she says. "That's really the only evening I can give up and as mother is crazy to see John Drew, perhaps——"

"All right!" I butts in, "suppose you let your old—eh—suppose you let your mother and Jack Drew go somewheres together and we'll——"

"John Drew is an actor," she laughs, "and

he's in the play we want to see, silly! Would you like to go to-morrow night, too?"

Editor, to-morrow night in this case is the identical night I have got to fight Homicide Mike O'Leary.

"Ethel," I says, "I can't go to-morrow night, but I'll get the tickets and meet you and your mother after the show and we'll all go somewheres for a bite to eat and the like, hey?"

"Ah—why *can't* you go to-morrow night, if I am not too inquisitive?" she says, gettin' cool again.

Naturally enough, editor, I can't tell her I am goin' to engage in vulgar fistycuffs with Homicide Mike O'Leary, so I do a piece of the quick thinkin' for which I am very gradually becomin' famous.

"I am goin' to a funeral, Ethel," I says, without twitchin' a eyelid.

"A funeral—at night?" she sniffs.

"Sure!" I says, gettin' in deeper like all liars the further I went, editor. "They are havin' this funeral at night so's to avoid all the mad rush and hullabaloo of the average graveyard in the daytime."

She give vent to somethin' on the order of a snort, editor.

"Who is the unfortunate person—a relative?" she asks.

"Nope," I says, "a friend of mine named Mike O'Leary!" and with that I shifted the subject hithers and yon, editor, 'til it was time to close up the bookstore for the night. Then I walked home with Ethel and what we talked about on the ways home and the like, I will not tell no man!

Well, editor, it is all arranged that I am to leave the tickets for Ethel and her mother at Jack Drew's box office the next night and then call for them in the lobbie of the theater at half past ten. I have figured out, editor, that as me and Homicide Mike O'Leary is scheduled to enter the ring in the neighborhood of ten-twenty, why *one* of us will have been knocked kickin' by ten-thirty and whilst I wouldst naturally enough like to be the one which is still standin' erect, that part of it is merely a incident—the important thing bein' that I am at the lobbie of Jack Drew's theater at half past ten, hey, editor?

As the matter of fact, editor, I was fifteen minutes late gettin' to that lobbie and I wish now I hadn't showed up at all!

It was exactly nineteen minutes after ten on the fatal night when me and Homicide Mike O'Leary, the big false alarm, touched gloves and settled down to the business of makin' each other like it. This baby turned out to be one of them fast-steppin' tappers, editor, and they is nothin' which gets me more disgusted than one of them gymnasium wonders which pecks at your lamps 'til he closes 'em, splits your beak with a irritatin' straight left and drops you now and then with a right cross. What I like in front of me is a tough tramp which don't know nothin', but can take it.

Well, anyways, I find out all I wanted to know about this bozo in the first minute and a half and after takin' all he had I smacked him flat with one of the prettiest right hooks I ever seen in my life. Editor, he was as cold as a pawnbroker's eye and the crowd is beginnin' to file out thinkin' what a set-up Dempsey wouldst be for me, when just as the referee reaches the count of "nine," *the bell rings and gyps me out of the fight!*

Well, the crowd starts back, editor, and I have got to get my gloves hurriedly laced on again as my handlers had took 'em off and out come Homicide Mike O'Leary as tame as a house cat for the second round. He begins tincannin' all over the ring and me chasin' him and fin'ly I pin him on the ropes in his own corner. I am measurin' him with my left before swishin' over my world-famous right for the purposes of knockin' him stiff, editor, when what do you think he done? He falls over into a clinch with me and whispers in my ear:

"I'm through, McTague—you win!"

Well, editor, I am late for my date with Ethel as it is, so I turned to walk to my corner and, quick as the flash, this guy hooks his left to my tender heart and his right to my jaw and the next thing I know Beansy Mahanoy is sayin' I can't be *dead* because he just seen my right eyelash flicker.

The minute I am able to walk without assistance, I get into my citizens' clothes and grab a taxi for Jack Drew's theater. Editor, I am shakin' like the leaf and as I seen from a mirror in the taxi, my face looks like I have just came out on the wrong end of a spirited argument with a infuriated buzz saw. One of my most important eyes is closed and as far as that goes, editor, the other one ain't as open as it might be. On the top of this, my lips is inclined to be a bit puffy and they is a cut on my right ear such as is bound to be picked up by men in my line of work. All in all, editor, I was not in shape to have my photo took, let

us say, or to call on my sweetheart or anybody else's for that matter. But a guy in love don't stop to think, so as advertised I continued on to the lobbie of Jack Drew's theater where I am to meet Ethel and the candidate for my mother-in-law.

They have been waitin' for me fifteen minutes, editor, and some clever pickpocket has evidently stole Ethel's temper.

"Where have you—why what on earth is the matter with your face?" she busts out. Her mother is likewise lookin' at me curiously, editor.

"Aheh!" I says, brushin' back my wavy hair. "Eh—to be frankly with you, I was ran over by a auto!"

Ethel's eyes begin to sparkle coldly.

"I don't believe *one* automobile could have possibly done all that damage," says Ethel. "You must have acted as the track for the Vanderbilt Cup race! Did you bury your friend all right?" she adds with a sarcastical giggle.

"No," I says without thinkin', editor. "He buried *me!*"

"I think you have been drinking and I do not wish to see you again," says Ethel. "Come, mother!"

And, editor, before I can say woof they have stepped into a taxi and rolled away, leavin' me standin' there broken-hearted and like that on the curb.

Alas, ah me, and alack a day—a tough break all around, hey, editor?

Well, anyways, here's this "Romeo and Juliet" thing and kindly shoot it back to me the minute you read it, editor, after you have put in a comma and the etc., here and there so's it'll make sense. I will take it over to Ethel as soon as I get it back and if she don't make up with me, why the North River will welcome another corpse to its cold bosom!

ROMEO and JULIET

By

W. Shakespeare and One Punch McTague.

The Capulets and the Montagues, which between 'em had about all the jack in a slab called Verona, liked each other the same way a Englishman likes to be woke up in the mornin' with the sweet strains of "The Wearin' of the Green." For years they had been hirin' gunmen to cook each other and this warm friendship was passed along from father to son in both families. Well, New Year's Eve, old man Capulet staged a blow-out which wouldst of made Nero's wild Saturday night parties look like New England prayer meetin's. Not even a union plumber couldst of turned up his nose at the chow, the best jazz band in the country blowed wicked saxophones for the boys and girls, wine flowed like Niagara and what with one thing and another, the affair was a wow from many standpoints. Everybody in Verona got a invite but the Montagues—they was barred.

Now Ignatius X. Montague had a son entitled Romeo which was as good lookin' as $7 50 a week, a speed boy with the ladies and afraid of nothin'. When this kid found out that the Capulet racket was a mask affair, him and a couple of pals named Benvolio and Mercutio, rents costumes and eases into the house without nobody tumblin' to who they was.

Romeo is out on the floor shakin' a nasty hoof with one of the janes which danced like her last name was Castle and whilst he had seen manys the pulse quickener in his day, this baby knocked his heart for a goal at the first look. Well, the boy immediately begins to play cards, and he is givin' her the old oil about what a riot she *is,* when a guy named Tybalt, one of old Capulet's nephews, dances past Romeo and recognizes his voice. This bird breaks away from the dance floor and rushes to his uncle with the news, sayin' he'll lure Romeo outside where a waitin' gunman will rub him off and that'll be that. But the old man won't stand for no rough stuff at his party and says Romeo is safe whilst he acts like a gent, but when he starts home after the racket it'll be different.

All this time, Romeo ain't got the slightest idea who this knock-out is which he has went cuckoo over, but a couple of hours later he finds out she is no less than Juliet, the daughter of his father's worst enemy, old Capulet himself. This annoyed the kid a bit, but after another look at her brain-staggerin' eyes he decided to take a chance and go ahead tryin' to make her. After a while some jealous dame tips off Juliet as to who her boy friend is, but Juliet is overboard also and she made up her mind to stick with Romeo regardless of the jam she's bound to get in.

Well, along about twelve, old man Capulet called it a night and the party busted up. Romeo and his pals ducks out the back

way and they are just jumpin' over the fence when Romeo happens to look around and there's Juliet at a upstairs window tryin' out a smile on him. Romeo, a bit dizzy, tells his pals to keep on goin' and he'll meet 'em next spring and with that he hauls off and shins up a drain pipe 'til he's right outside Juliet's window, takin' a chance on one of old man Capulet's gunmen seein' him and knockin' him off. What will not a guy do for love, hey? Ah me! By the time Romeo slid down the pipe again the milkman was makin' his merry rounds and Juliet had promised to be his fair young bride, so *that* was all settled.

The next day Juliet sneaked away with Romeo and they get secretly wed by a old friar, which was a friend of Romeo's and a regular guy. The friar figured this here weddin' wouldst be just the thing to wind up the tong war between the Capulets and the Montagues, but the old boy gummed everything up.

That same noon, Benvolio and Mercutio, Romeo's right-hand men, was walkin' down the street when along comes old man Capulet's nephew Tybalt with a bunch of his friends, all pretty well lit up. The minute Tybalt seen Mercutio he starts bawlin' him out for linin' up with Romeo. Well, one word led to the other and pretty soon they both got their irons out and is blazin' away. Just as Mercutio croaks, along comes no less than Romeo himself and when he sees his old pal layin' stiff in the gutter, what does he do but grab his own gat and cook Tybalt. Romeo gets pinched, dragged up before a judge which happened to be a relative of Tybalt and the results is that Romeo gets twenty-four hours to leave the town for good and all.

About a week after Romeo had been drummed out of the burg, Juliet's old man frames for his daughter to marry a guy with the silly name of Paris. Now Juliet had figured on joinin' Romeo at Brooklyn as soon as she couldst get away and this latest tough break nearly drives the poor kid cuckoo. What to do? What to do? She fin'ly goes to Romeo's friend, the old friar which had wed them, and this baby was as full of tricks as Houdini. He slips her a bottle of hooch which he tells her to drink on the day she is scheduled to be dragged to the altar by this goof Paris. The stuff will knock her stiff for a couple of days, says the friar, and they will think she has kissed off and bury her. That night he'll tip off Romeo which will come and take her away from the grave and all will be jake.

Well, everything went off like the old friar said, with the slight exception that before he couldst wise up Romeo that the funeral was a fake, the kid sees in the paper that Juliet has croaked. Stoppin' in the nearest drug store for a quart of carbolic, Romeo jumps in his flivver and burns up the roads to Juliet's grave, gettin' there in the middle of the night. There he finds this Paris person moanin' his head off so Romeo pulls his gun and cooks him, just to be nasty. Then he quaffs down the carbolic and leaves this world behind, after makin' a few remarks which sounds so goofy to me that I will not even copy 'em off.

A few minutes later, the dope the old friar gave her was wore off Juliet and she opens her eyes, expectin' to find Romeo there to whisk her away in his car. Instead of that, there he is at her feet as cold as the middle of January, in Alaska. With a heart-renderin' shriek, Juliet rams a hatpin in her heart and falls down beside him and I still claim that Georgie Cohan has got this Shakespeare lashed to the mast.

And, as Adam remarked to Eve on the ways out of the Garden of Eden, that's that!

In the next issue our friend takes up the study of "The Merchant of Venice."

GOOD NEWS FOR DOG LOVERS

FRENCH veterinarians are experimenting on a large scale in the vaccination of dogs against rabies. In isolated cases dogs have been rendered immune for periods of two or three years by the injection of a serum recently developed. It is hoped that this period of safety from the most feared of all canine diseases will be lengthened by knowledge gained from the experiments now in progress.

The Spark in the Tinder

By Holman Day

Author of "The Psychomancers," "On the Long Leash," Etc.

To old "Double T"—Serenus Skidmore Trask, lord of the Brassua lumber country—and to John Lang young "Skiddy" Trask was only a puppet to be moved at will. They moved him off the board of life, at that. But that didn't mean that they were quit of him. And "Generous John" Lang came to realize that it indeed had not been an act of mercy when young Skiddy had let him live.

(A Five-Part Story—Part I.)

CHAPTER I.

IN CASE OF DOUBT—THE PRUDENT WAY.

FOR the third time two men had come upon another man who was waiting on the same spot. They who came were lost. The waiting man was dead.

The two did not merely happen upon the man the first time they saw him. They had plunged headlong through the forest, struggling over rocks and in meshes of the undergrowth, following in the direction of the sound of a shot. They had been signaling distress with their own rifles, firing three shots in quick succession—the woods code salvo which told that a lost man was asking succor. When they heard what they accepted as a reply, though it was a single shot, one of the men impetuously signaled back; he persisted in pumping his rifle though his companion swore at him, and he gave over his panicky fusillade only after the weapon had been violently torn from his grasp. While his companion railed at a fool who fired, hit-or-miss, into the woods, rifle at hip, there was immediately another shot from the direction of the first replying signal.

The man who had wrested the rifle from the other tossed it back and strode off. He looked like a safe man to follow, once he had an objective in view. He possessed the jutting chin that suggests self-reliance and strong convictions. That chin was determinedly outthrust when he drove straight into the tangle of the woods.

The man who followed as closely as possible in the path and behind the sturdy bulk of the pacemaker was younger and slighter; he crooked his arm in front of his face as if he feared that the bushes would scratch his fair skin, and he dodged the obstacles over which the other marched straight toward a goal that had at last become definite, lining the signal sound with the true aim of a bee.

At last, in the clearer stretch of a hardwood slope, the leader stopped beside the prostrate figure of a man. The legs were limply flexed, one of the arms was doubled under the body, and there was much blood on the face. A few of the October leaves had dropped scatteringly on the body, indicating that the man had been dead only a short time, because the frost-stricken trees were showering their sear foliage in prodigal fashion.

The younger man, breathless from his hurry, interrogated the other man when the latter rose from a close inspection of the body.

"Yes, he's dead!" There was no especial emotion in the speaker's voice. "And nothing on him, as far as I can find, to tell who he is."

Like the two who stood over him the man who lay prone was in the garb of the woods. But his high boots, his corduroy breeches and jacket lacked the smartness and newness of the attire which announced the others as transitory guests of the forest—sportsmen from town. In a holster he had

packed a revolver—a weapon of little use to big-game hunters.

"He's a guide—a woodsman—isn't he?" huskily queried the younger man.

The dead man was young and good looking. The investigator of conditions proceeded with a surety of action that revealed considerable of his character and experience. But in all his handling he was careful to restore conditions exactly as he found them, as if showing professional respect for evidence. With a side glance he detected his companion about to pick up a rifle that lay a few feet from the body.

"Skiddy, keep your hands off that!" he commanded sharply.

"Sure!" agreed the rebuked. "I ought to know better than to butt in on John Lang, the best criminal lawyer in the State!" He ventured to inquire what the lawyer made of it.

"This man was killed by a shot in the back of his head. The face wound was caused by another bullet, fired at close range—look at the powder marks. My first say-so is that an enemy coward killed the man, shooting from behind."

Lang did not pick up the rifle, subject of the hands-off command. He surveyed it critically, squinting from it to the body. He shook his head and muttered, but he did not confide his mental arguments to the other man.

"Skiddy, we've got to make another stab to get out of these woods. We're in a devil of a fix."

"And, as you have said, I got the both of us into it," complained the friend.

"I said that to you when my temper was flaring, Skiddy. Let it drop. For the sake of the quip I'll merely say here and now that I allowed you to stampede me in the chase for an imaginary deer, and that you're never a safe companion when you're chasing the dears. Come along! All the good we can do that chap, there, is to report the thing when we get outside."

"Gad! An enemy has got to hate good and proper to shoot a man again after the man is dead!" Lang's friend had turned to look with questioning dread at the body, after a few steps.

"Well, a woman can grow to hate as much as that," vouchsafed the lawyer. "That's one truth I've run against in some of my cases. Look out for yourself, Skiddy! You're all the time taking chances."

"A woman—do that—in these woods? You figure that this is a woman job?"

"Come along." Lang tripped his sleeve and glanced at his wrist watch as he strode down the slope. "We've less than two hours of daylight, Skiddy. And look at that sky to figure east or west or north or south from!"

Late October had dipped her brush deeply in somber monochrome and had smeared the heavens with dismal drab. It was a brooding pall of overshrouding vapor with wisps of fog trailing among the treetops, and the leaves scaled and fluttered in dead air. Lang knew that eastward lay the waters of the region. The sporting camp where he and Trask had lodged was on those waters. He halted on the slope and listened to catch the sound of some rivulet whose course he could follow. He saw only dry gullies and heard nothing except the tick-tick of leaves scaling down the trunks of the near-by trees.

"If you weren't such a ripping criminal lawyer, with your reputation for wonderful deductions, I wouldn't take stock in this woman theory of yours."

"Confound you, I have no woman theory in this case," snapped Lang; "nor have I said so. There are no women in these God-forsaken woods to-day—only two fools and a dead man."

"But somebody killed that man and——"

"I'm beginning to evolve a theory about that man, and it's no especial comfort to think about it."

"You're the last man who should slur women," persisted Trask. He avoided the searching stare of Lang's gray eyes. Trask had the embarrassed air of one who wanted to go ahead with a subject and did not quite dare to presume.

"Are you getting back to that matter you have been pawing at the edges of for the past few days?"

"I'm only saying that for a man"—Trask gulped and still kept his eyes averted—"a man who is engaged to a girl like Reba Donworth, you don't show the reverence I like to see shown women."

Lang took three long steps, grasped Trask's chin in the V of thumb and forefinger and jerked the younger man's face to meet his own.

"Skiddy, ever since we have been in the woods on this trip you've been trying to get onto the subject of Reba with me. Now let me say to you——" But he halted in

his outburst and released his grasp. "Don't worry any more about having to break the ice on that topic. I'll attend to it for you at the right time. Naturally, I have some personal interest in it. The thing for us to attend to now is putting one foot before the other in lively style."

He marched away at a gait which hastened Trask into a half trot. There was a mingling of relief and confusion in the latter's expression. He had shown the trepidation of a man who had vowed and who feared to perform, and was glad of a respite.

A half hour later Lang stopped on the slope of a hardwood ridge and when Trask came up the lawyer pointed his finger. They had come for the second time upon the man who was dead. The leaves had now nearly masked the blood-dabbled face.

"It's what a man does when he is lost in the night—he walks around in a circle," growled Lang.

He turned his back on the body and looked up at the sky. The murk was blank. When Lang started again he did not take the easy way down the slope; he went on upward. However, in spite of his efforts to go straight, when the dusk was deepening into gloom under the trees, Lang halted once more beside the body which had become the grim goal of the wanderings of two lost men.

Trask swore roundly.

"Go on! Curse yourself, Skiddy!" counseled Lang.

"Oh, I know I'm to blame about that deer——"

"Not the deer! That's an old story. Sit down there! We need rest." Lang pointed to a log and sat on it beside Trask and proceeded to fill his pipe. "Skiddy, I've been thinking what you may have done to that man over there under the leaves—*may* have done, understand! It's my custom to look matters in the eye, when I'm balancing evidence."

"What could I have done to him?" demanded Trask while the lawyer was lighting his pipe.

"Shot him in the back of the head while you were sweeping the woods with that crazy barrage. I say again, there's a possibility of it."

"But there was another shot from this direction right after I stopped."

"Right after I stopped you—yes! But suppose that fellow had his gun cocked to reply when he was dropped—and his gun fell when he fell and the bullet from it smashed through his face—just as the lay of the rifle over there suggests?"

Trask had taken one pull at a cigarette. He dropped it between his feet and his jaw sagged like a scolded hound's. "I couldn't have done it! The whole woods—all the trees—so far away——"

"We won't go into the matter of a bullet's trajectory, Skiddy, because we'd only be guessing. I fired three shots just before you let loose. Now, listen! We'll assume for our own peace of mind that in this case the random shot didn't find a mark. Anyway, we're back in the presence of the victim where we'd better settle on a line of action. I ought to obey the law, as a lawyer. But, as a lawyer, I know what the law can do to a consciously innocent man. We're not sure where we were when we were shooting at your hide-and-seek deer. We've been going in circles. We're not sure where the signal bullets landed. When we report this dead man, we'll be suspected of killing him in mistake for a deer. Even though we admit only the signal shots we'll be in bad. This State just now is going hard after careless hunters. We'd be in for manslaughter charges. The fact is, however, it's undoubtedly deliberate murder. My professional line is defense of accused men—I don't hunt them down!"

He turned a grim side glance in Trask's direction.

"The more a man goes to sea, the more afraid of the sea he is. It's the same way in going to law. But I propose to take some liberties with the law in this case, ethics or no ethics. I have decided that we'd better not report what we have found in these woods. Can I depend on you to keep the secret?"

"You bet you can!"

"Very well! And now we're going to turn our backs on this proposition over there"—he pointed to the body in the gloom—"for good and all."

Each man had a flash light, a precaution that only reckless hunters in modern days neglect.

"The idea is to go straight this time," counseled Lang. "By going straight, instead of around and around in this hard growth, we'll cross some kind of a brook in time. And any brook will take us to the Brassua waters."

He posted Trask at a tree, with rifle barrel held against it to insure steady aim. He ordered Trask to sight and make sure that the glare of the flash light carried by Lang kept straight in line as the pathfinder went forward, directed by the shouted words of right and left. When Lang had advanced well into the woods, he waited and allowed Trask to come up.

After an hour or so of this hitch-and-go-on through the growing dusk, they heard the soft murmur of falling waters and found a brook and followed along down its course. The woods were still dense and solemn about them, but the brook was so companionable in its chattering and was so surely a friendly guide that Trask let out a whoop of thanksgiving.

"Oh, but it must be lonesome back in there where we've been chumming with a dead man!" he said.

"Forget the dead man," Lang advised. "We have made up our minds not to be troubled by anything that relates to him. I've always tried to show due deference to the law, and I guess the Old Lady will make a little allowance for a nephew who wants to keep out of a mean mess."

"Yes, we're well out of a mean mess," agreed Trask.

CHAPTER II.

ANOTHER MAN IN THE WOODS.

In the black night the flash lights, now steady on the trail, now waving in search of a path to avoid an obstacle, dispersed far and fantastic beams. Trask became nervously aware that the lights were attracting some of the wild life of the woods. There were grunts and whinings near at hand, and tramplings and snortings at more cautious distances. When, above all other sounds, rose a peculiar, quavering cry, Lang stopped short. Trask, gasping, assured Lang that a wild cat was near.

"I have heard plenty of wild cats, Skiddy, and not in dreams, as you have. Shut your clapper and let me listen!"

The cry continued, a raspy, choked, wailing sound.

"Let's keep out of trouble," pleaded Trask.

"I have turned my back on a dead man to-day because we couldn't do him any good and he might do us harm. But I'll never turn my back on a living man when he's in trouble."

"It's not a man—no man would make a noise like that."

"He might if he had cracked his throat crying for help."

Again the outthrust chin announced the resolution of a man who went straight at problems which he had decided to tackle. Trask hesitated, then he chased along after his friend. After a few moments Lang hailed and the voice that replied was the unmistakable voice of a man, imploring brokenly, with words.

He was readily located for he steadily babbled his appeals for help. However, not much else than his hands were showing—hands that waggled and shuttled in short arcs in the flash light's rays. He was covered with a thick blanket of leaves. It was evident that he had lain there for many hours. Two young sapling trees were doubled over him by a larger tree that presumably had been felled by the man himself; his ax lay only a few feet from his hands. He was pleading in French patois and in broken English.

Lang exhibited the sturdy quality of his muscles by setting his clutch upon the top end of the felled tree and swinging the trunk to one side; the saplings on which the trunk rested afforded a sort of skid and helped him.

"You hold the light for me, son!" he told Trask.

The captive had been pinned for so long under the saplings that his stiffened muscles refused to serve him at first. Lang set hands into the man's armpits and lifted him to a seat on the log that had been such an unrelenting jailer. He was short, thick, sturdy, following the true type of the French-Canadian woodsman, with grizzled beard and little black eyes that blinked at the flash light that Trask held close.

"*Nom d' Dieu!*" he moaned. "*Merci! Merci, m'sieu!*"

Lang patted him on the shoulder. "Tough luck, old scout!" he said in his most consoling tone.

The man slowly put out a toil-calloused hand and touched Lang's arm with the air of one making sure that he was dealing with real flesh and blood. Then, with the ready emotional fervor of his race, he began to weep and to gabble in patois.

"He evidently has been seeing things to-day—or thinks he has," the lawyer vouchsafed to the attentive Trask who was listening without understanding. "He isn't sure,

exactly, that we are really men, as we seem to be. I'll try to convince him in his own language and get his wits straightened out."

The man recovered much of his composure as soon as Lang began a rapid-fire conversation in French, but unless the lawyer kept checking the outbursts they developed into something akin to hysteria. After a time Lang put up his hand and commanded silence and pondered, gazing keenly at the trembling chap who began to twist and knead his muscles.

"Couldn't slip me just a bit of a bulletin as to the gist of the debate, could you, John?" inquired Trask wistfully.

"Bughouse—temporarily—I reckon that sums it up," was Lang's sententious comment. He put out his hands to the man. "Slip me your good grip, brother, and we'll get a start toward that home of yours you tell me about, before your wife and kiddies do too much worrying."

That call to service brought the man upstanding; he did not avail himself of the help of Lang's hands. But he set his own hands against the lawyer's breast and demanded earnestly, "You t'ink I don't see it, what I say I see?"

"No, no! You didn't see anything like that. There are no such things in the world."

"You're wise an' good man! I can see! So 'twas my head, she go round, hey?"

"Just it!" returned Lang indulgently. "The best of us have spells like that!"

The woodsman turned from them and went hobbling from tree to tree, searching for something.

"Don't tell me what you and your new friend have been talking about, if you don't feel like it!" Trask's tartness was that of a man who had been under great nervous strain.

"*Miracle de beaute! Comme une fee! La belle au bois!*" Lang play-acted with gesticulating hands and then clasped them in simulated rapture over his heart, grinning into the face of the man whom he was mocking. "So beautiful—so like a fairy that when she called to him he turned and stood stock-still and let the tree fall and pin him to the ground. Skiddy, do you know I just simply *had* to refer him to your own condition of mind as I have seen it in the past, by way of straightening him out. So many times have you told me that She This or She That so completely put the spell on you that you saw only what she wanted you to see till calamity bounced something off your bean!"

"I don't relish your making fun of me before a clodhopper Canuck!" The flash light showed that Trask's eyes glittered with fires a bit too intense to be evoked by mere pleasantry. "The subject happens to be a sensitive point with me lately."

"I was merely dry-nursing a much jarred intellect, Skiddy. I didn't want the poor fellow to think he was the only one who had seen bewitching woman when bewitching woman wasn't there at all."

"By gad, there never has been any optical illusion in my case."

"I have only taken your word for it, Skiddy," returned Lang satirically placid before the other's boyish passion. "You have assured me after every affair that it was all nothingness—worse than nothingness." He hastened away, directing his flash light on the man who was searching among the trees and calling to him to ask what the trouble was. But Trask, hurrying behind Lang, was more importunate with questions of his own.

"What's all this you have been telling my friend?" he asked the French woodsman. "What about seeing handsome women in these woods? Talk English! It's about time to tell me—I'm in on this!"

Trask was showing the heat of a person who was not sure of his self-control in stress. He shoved the eye of his flash light close to the man's face. But the countenance became blank. The man shook his head.

"I see no woman!" he replied.

"He was telling me about seeing a fairy, Skiddy," explained Lang, drawling his words. "But, of course, I was obliged to tell him there are no fairies these days. So, I reckon, he and I agree that there was nothing to see."

The man turned his gaze on this spokesman and ducked his head in grateful acknowledgment of the help he was getting from the good and wise man.

"Nottins! *Oui!* It's my head—she go round!"

With the manner of having dismissed a subject that had been settled—as far as he was concerned, he went on, circling trees and pawing at the trunks.

"Turn to and help with your light," was Lang's command to Trask. "M'sieu Onésime Ouellette, so he tells me his name is,

left his rifle standing against one of these trees, and he can't seem to locate it."

Then Ouellette began to jabber, beating his palm against a birch whose trunk was marked by an old and peculiar cicatrix.

"He says he left his rifle at that tree," Lang translated for Trask.

The woodsman got down on his hands and knees and began to crawl around the tree in widening circles. Suddenly Lang extended his hand, palm upward, and turned his face to the sky. "Snow!" he ejaculated. In the fan of radiance from his flash light the flakes were dancing. He went to Ouellette and smacked the absorbed searcher smartly on the shoulder. "Come along, man! I want to get under that roof of yours. Here! I'll make you a present of this rifle—I never want to see it again." He yanked Ouellette up and shoved the rifle into his hands. "Make a cane of it—and lead off!"

The woodsman was instantly obedient. His subservience since Lang had freed him had something doglike about it. Ouellette hobbled along over ground that was familiar and the two sportsmen plodded behind. Trask's silence suggested sullenness; Lang, his eyes on the back of the guide, was pondering.

After a time two dull, yellow squares appeared, set into the whiteness of the swirling storm. They were the windows of a shack in a clearing. Ouellette hailed shrilly and a larger patch of radiance appeared suddenly between the squares; it was the opened door of the shack and in the door was silhouetted a woman who screamed hysterical greeting while she held back clamorous children. But Ouellette would not enter until he had given precedence to his guests. All the time he was vehemently explaining, tears on his cheeks. He smiled wistfully through his tears and was silent when Lang commanded him with a show of brusqueness. The woman hushed her plaintive wail of gratitude, also. There was something about this stranger that compelled obedience.

Lang swung off his hunting bag.

"Madame," he asked, "what have you in the pot on the stove?"

Explaining that it was the supper that she had been saving for her husband the wife hastened to dip from a simmering stew of venison, filling pannikins which she set on a bare table.

There was only one room in the shack. A part of the room was a workshop.

"I'm poor man, m'sieu," explained Ouellette, noting the direction of Lang's gaze. "I make canoe paddle, ox bow, snowshoe, anyt'ing, and *ma femme* she weave basket." He tossed up his hands and shrugged his shoulders. "Only poor man—but if I don't come home——" he put caressing palms on the frowzled topknots of two snuggling youngsters and expressed his emotions by a shake of his head.

That night Lang and Trask slept in the one bed in the place—after an argument with their host. In all other matters docile, Onésime Ouellette was a sturdy rebel in the matter of the bed. When Lang continued to refuse to sleep in the bed, the Ouellettes, *père, mère,* and the children, ranged themselves on the bench, bolt upright, with the plain intent of rebuking the obdurate guest with that reproachful vigil, unless he gave in.

After the morning meal, Onésime was obdurate on another point; he declared that he would not allow Lang and Trask to be lost again in the woods and insisted on guiding them to the main tote road of the Brassua region. It was plain to Lang that the woodsman, his muscles aching from the bitter torture of the day before, was hardly able to drag one foot after the other but Ouellette did a bit of a jig to show that he was fit, hiding his grimaces of agony as best he could under a twisted smile.

That morning there was on the ground a delivery of what the sagging clouds of the day before had promised. All night the damp snow had fallen and the footing was soft and soggy.

"I'm glad she come like that!" declared Ouellette. "Now I have some excuse to give you somet'ing for remember a poor man you make to live some more so his babies don't starve."

With a rapture that had something childlike in it, he fitted Lang and Trask out with snowshoes that he selected with great care from his little stock. When Trask fumbled at his pocket Lang scowled at him in demoniac fashion.

"But he can't afford it," whispered Trask, taking advantage of Ouellette's preoccupation with the thongs of the shoes.

"If you should stand up and kick that man just now it would be a kinder act than offering him money to his face," growled Lang.

Trask was silent for a few moments, sit-

ting on the bench, looking down at the floor of shaved saplings. Then Lang caught a furtive side glance that the younger man gave him. "I guess you're fully entitled to the nickname 'Generous John,'" said Trask. "I'll confess that I don't know the science of generosity. It isn't done with money! I realize it. When I test you out——"

He seemed to be unable to go on and Lang impatiently prodded him. "Test me out on what?"

"On the science of generosity, as you practice it. Now what! Let me watch you operate. It gives me courage."

However, Trask missed one operation of Lang's generosity. All the folks of the little household went outside to watch the departure of the guests. Inside, the baby set up its wail of loneliness.

"I'm to blame for that," stated Lang with conviction. "She has taken a great liking to me, and I didn't kiss her good-by." He marched back into the shack. "Everybody stay out," he commanded over his shoulder. "It's a private matter between myself and my sweetheart."

The baby was in a crib that had been fashioned from a halved barrel. His back to the door, Lang pulled his wallet from his pocket as he walked across the floor and dipped from it all the bills it contained. He tucked the wad of money under the baby's pillow. He dredged his breeches pocket for all the small change it held and filled the little, clutching hands with the coins. The baby hushed its cries.

"I thought so," muttered Lang grimly. "It usually works, no matter how young they are!"

"I left her something to cut her teeth on," he informed Madame Ouellette when he passed her.

"But——" protested Onésime, who had heard the chink of the coins.

"Don't you dare to butt in, Ouellette. It's a matter between my sweetheart and myself —remember that!"

The way to the trunk tote road of the Brassua region was long and tortuous by the trail, and they found the main tote road unmarked by foot or sledge runner.

Lang put out his hand. "We're all right from here on, M'sieu Ouellette. Two miles farther, you say our camp is?"

"Oui, m'sieu!"

The woodsman pulled off his cap and stammered, seeking more words of gratitude. Lang snatched the cap out of the trembling hand and stuck it on the man's head. "Hustle along home! It's all right."

"M'sieu, we all say our little prayers at my poor house. And your name—so we may speak it——"

Lang found a card in the wallet that was empty of money. The man stared hard at the printed words and then he gave Lang a beseeching look and shook his head.

"You can't read—is that it?"

"Oui, m'sieu!"

"My friend," broke in Trask, "this is a great man when it comes to helping folks out of their troubles—all kinds of troubles—especially law troubles." Lang scowled but his companion went on. "This is the lawyer who has saved more poor devils from the noose than any other lawyer in the State—and all free of charge, most of the times! This is John Lang!"

That promulgation produced such astonishing results that Lang found himself incapable of protesting against Ouellette's actions. The woodsman pulled off his cap and dashed it into the snow. He knelt in front of the lawyer and when he failed in his frantic clutching for Lang's hands he embraced Lang's knees. He was incoherent. But it was evident that the flood of his speech signified gratitude and reverence.

"And he can't read!" murmured Trask. "John, I thought your fame was made by the newspapers. But it seems not."

"My brodder—my poor brodder Ovide—you save him!" Ouellette bleated.

Lang understood. He grasped the woodsman and pulled him upright. "Is he your brother—Ovide Ouellette?"

"It's my brodder. He meet wicked mans when he go to live in dat city. But he didn't rob and kill. No, no! You save him. Oh, *m'sieu,* he tell me and we have prayed to saints for——"

"Man, it was only one of my cases—in the line of my work. Hush!" commanded Lang impatiently. "It was nothing. He was innocent."

"Don't overdo generosity, John, in giving away the credit that belongs to you," Trask protested, showing considerable temper. "Even this man who can't read knows what the newspaper readers know—that you smashed down the most damnable structure of circumstantial evidence ever built in a court of law, and pulled a poor devil free."

"I don't want to try the case over again

here. Listen, Ouellette! You bother me by making so much fuss about a matter that's dead and gone. You're a good man. Keep away from the cities. Take good care of your little home. And I reckon you'll never be in trouble with the law. But if you do get into trouble—ever—I'll promise you something for the sake of the little sweetheart I went back to kiss." He smiled trying to relieve the embarrassing situation by jocularity. "Hunt me up—have somebody tell you what it says on that card, and I'll put you right with the world again."

The woodsman had kept the card safely in his broad palm. He set the other palm over it, as if he were carefully caging some precious thing that he feared would take flight. He tried to speak but the words choked in his throat. He turned and trudged away, until the sagging, snow-laden boughs hid him from sight.

"Well, Skiddy, suppose we get along!" suggested Lang.

But Trask hesitated. There was a suggestion in his manner that he had come plump up against a proposition that he had been side-stepping and was not prepared to meet even then. "This snow will quiet the woods," he said; "cover the dry leaves and give us a chance to get our deer."

"I've had enough vacation. I'm out and away to the railroad before to-night!" Lang turned awkwardly on the snowshoes, and the slowness of the maneuver gave Trask further opportunity.

"I'm tuckered. Let's rest before we tackle the next stretch." But when Lang still urged that they keep on slowly Trask gulped and came out desperately and more frankly. "John, I want to say something to you. I promised to say it in the woods."

Lang stared at the young man and took long thought, without revealing any mystification. "I believe I did assure you that you need not worry about having to break the ice on a topic that you have been testing out. Well, shoot!"

"Up there!" urged Trask. "I want to sit down." He did look pale and weak right then. He pointed to a craggy ledge that jutted above the hollow where the road lay. When the men climbed to the ledge they were high above the surrounding country, and their eyes commanded the far horizon where the purple hills shaded the white of the snow into the azure of the skies. The snowfall had ceased.

Lang filled his pipe and lighted it, and displayed the patience of one who had resolved to give ear on a subject to which he had devoted some rumination of his own.

CHAPTER III.

THE TEST OF GENEROSITY.

It was Lang who spoke first despite the air he had assumed of intending to be a polite and patient listener.

"Whenever I begin to feel satisfied with myself, Skiddy, I get up high and look at the horizon. Then I have a hankering to get over that purple rim. Not merely the terrestrial rim, understand! But I'm urged out of the self-satisfied state by a hankering for knowledge of what I haven't tested —the Beyond Thing, you know!"

"Yes, I know," returned Trask with dispirited conviction.

"But, of course, when you think of going on and on, there's the feeling that you want understanding company on the journey. And that's why I always find myself murmuring these words from Tennyson when I'm trying to look over the border:

> 'And o'er the hills and far away,
> Beyond their utmost purple rim,
> Beyond the night, across the day,
> Thro' all the world she followed him."

"It all depends on just what kind of a she is following you," declared the younger man with the same amount of conviction he had shown previously.

"True, Skiddy! I suppose you now refer to those who followed you until your uncle, Serenus Skidmore Trask, paid them to stop following," said Lang sweetly. "I venture to mention the thing because I have acted as attorney for the Trask interests in satisfying the ladies. Up here, above the petty things of the world, why wouldn't it be a good time for you to resolve against all the follies of that sort in the future?"

"I resolved on that before I got up here."

Lang put out his hand but Trask directed one swift glance at those sardonic gray eyes and pulled back the hand that he had begun to extend.

"I beg your pardon, Skiddy! But I wasn't really intending to ask you to shake hands. I want to borry some money. I left all mine in the baby's cradle back there."

"You keep jumping a fellow till he doesn't know where he's at," complained

Trask. "But I reckon you're giving me an opening right now, with that money subject. You've been generous enough to give your roll to a baby. You've been generous enough in promising that Canuck what you'd do to help him if ever he gets into trouble. I wonder just how much you're entitled to that nickname you've acquired." Trask had whipped up his courage, and it took the bit and galloped. "Why do you think I came up here on this trip with you?"

"Because I urged you to come."

"But you know I hate the woods, and don't like hunting. I'm going to give you a chance to say something because you'll open up the subject, probably, better than I can. Why did you ask me to come up here? Do you dare to tell me just why?"

"Certainly!" Lang rapped the ashes out of his pipe. "Sitting here, man to man, above the world, gives the impulse of frankness an excellent chance to operate, eh, Skiddy?"

"It would be hard to get down to cases, man to man, as you put it, in your office or in the Talisman Club."

"It seems to have been equally hard up here, seeing that you have stalled till now."

"I was giving the spirit of the open plenty of time to get into your blood."

"Good! I'll answer your question of a few moments ago. I'm not surprised to find you itching with curiosity. You know well enough that you're no sort of a chum for me. I don't like you at all. When I invited you to come along I was trying you out. I expected that you'd hang back in order to take advantage of my absence from town. I've been watching you and Reba. I was trying her, too. I knew I couldn't drag you away if she gave you the word to stay."

"She told me to come along."

"She did, eh?" Lang's poise was jarred for a moment.

"Yes. Her idea was that the best place for talking over the matter with a man like you was in the open—under God's high sky—when you're away from the things that make you so infernally wrapped up and selfish."

"She said that—of *me?*"

"Well, she didn't use the word 'infernally.' The rest of it is about right."

Lang set his elbows on his knees and with the thumbs and forefingers of his hands twisted into spills the hair at his temples; his brown hair was touched with gray there.

"I have noticed," he said, "that you and Reba have been paying more attention to your talk than to your steps when you have been dancing. I suppose, according to the cheap and vulgar way of looking at the thing—according to your view, if you were in my place—I'm jealous. But calling a certain emotion by the name of jealousy doesn't fix its character. I have noticed; I have thought on the matter; that's my prerogative because Reba and I are going to be married."

Trask stood up.

"Now that we're up here, man to man," he replied, "I'm going to speak for Reba and myself. She says——"

"Speak for yourself, son! I'm a lawyer. A third party's say-so is not admitted as evidence."

"I'm in love with Reba. It's real love."

"I'll admit that you ought to know the real after handling so much of the counterfeit. If I thought your feeling for Reba Donworth was like the other attacks you have had I'd test the toughness of your head against this ledge. Where do you expect to get with that love?"

"Reba wanted me to come here into the woods with you, and talk to you about it. Do you deserve to be called 'Generous John' when the real turn is called?"

"What do you think?" queried Lang placidly.

"I think you're too high-minded to try to make a girl go through with a thing after she has changed her mind about it."

"I asked you what you think about me. But I didn't call for fluff talk. I've already told you that I don't like you. No real man can like you. You're a renegade with women. You fawn, flatter, and flop. You have made it your game because your uncle has been willing to stake you. I suppose it's a part of his woman-hating nature to use you in carrying out his grudge. It's a pity he hasn't a better tool. I'm frank, you see. Now come across with what you think about me."

"I think you're a bluff on this generosity thing!" Trask's face was flushed. "You take on tough cases because you like the game of helping men cheat the law. You don't care about fees from poor devils because the newspapers advertise you so much that rich men flock to you when they need

help. It's all vanity, in your case. You live on praise. What show would a handsome woman have if you were married to her? You wouldn't put yourself out for her sake. You don't dance. You wouldn't give her a chance to live and laugh. Go ahead with your fists, now, if you feel that way. But —I'm going to have Reba!"

Lang took his time about replying.

"Rather inadequate, this what you call your test of my generosity, son! I'm about as much affected by your taunts as if I were accused of selfishness because I refused to allow Chief Sootmug, of Uganda, to add Reba to his harem. You're having a brain storm where Reba is concerned. Do you think for one minute that she would leave me and take up with you?"

"I tell you she asked me to explain to you! And she'll tell you as much."

"When she does I'll see to it that she receives treatment for a very serious attack of—er—insanity. Are you going along with me?" Lang rose from the ledge and made sure that his snowshoe thongs were secure.

"You're not taking this thing seriously," Trask raged. "It's life or death, with me! You're like the rest—always judging a man by his past. I tell you that love——"

"Leave off talk of love," commanded Lang sharply. "You have said that I don't understand the subject, anyway! But there's one thing I do understand, my boy, because I'm the attorney for the Trask family. You're dependent on your Uncle Serenus for the bread you eat."

"He ought to keep me in bread—with plenty of butter, considering the name I'm carrying around because he stuck it onto me," retorted Trask.

"He is a notional old man—even if he has made his will. And I'll tell you what he has made you, young man, by one of his notions that his namesake should be a gentleman—whatever Uncle Trask's idea of a gentleman is. He has made you a loafer and a rake. And if he happens to take another notion, because he isn't pleased with his job where you're concerned, I'm sure I don't know what you'd do to earn even cigarette money."

"I'm not worrying about what Uncle Serenus will do for me if I'll get married and settle down," insisted the other.

"I don't care how sure you are of your future. It's a gamble. If Reba had any money of her own, you'd be gambling with that. She has something more precious than money—that's herself and her happiness. You shall not gamble with any such stakes."

Lang's forbearance, in spite of his sharp words, had emboldened Trask. It seemed that the lawyer proposed to use his tongue instead of his fists.

"Who are you, Lang, to talk about the nephew and heir of Serenus Trask as a gamble for any girl? Look around you!" He swung his arm to command the outspread scene that stretched to the purple rim of the hills. "I'm just the same as owner of all this. It's my uncle's. At least, I'm told that he owns all the timberland up this way. I'm Trask, of the Double T—and it's a log mark that stands for millions."

The forensics were plainly wasted on Lang. He had scooped his hand at his ear and was listening to something else. It was the jangle of bells, growing louder. Below, around a curve of the cliff, came two strapping big horses, hitched tandem, and drawing a sleigh that was heaped high with robes. Two persons, well furred, were in the sleigh. They passed directly under the crag where the two men were perched.

Trask was silent. He peered under his palm. "It's my uncle!" he gasped.

"Good eye!" commented Lang dryly. The sleigh had passed on. "Did you also recognize the woman who was with him?"

'It's a man—a boy! My uncle hates women too much to be riding with 'em."

Lang started down the steep slope.

"I'll venture to say that's the first time you ever failed to detect a woman—even at that range."

"I tell you it couldn't be a woman," insisted Trask, scrambling along behind. "My uncle would no more be seen——"

"Talk between us stops here and now, son! And you'll travel fast if you keep up with me—for I'm getting off your lands before nightfall, Baron of the Double T."

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEST OF LOVE.

Among the other maxims that Lang, lawyer, had hammered out on the anvil of court experience was this: "Let the mouth tell the story—let the eyes tell the truth."

When he was back in the city he resolved to get the whole truth from a certain pair of eyes. As a first step, he determined to sur-

prise the owner of those eyes. He wanted to study them without any forewarning that would put them on their guard. He clung to the belief that the susceptible professional in love affairs had mistaken Reba Donworth's attitude.

He and Trask, both taciturn, had arrived in the city after a night in a sleeping car. They separated at the station.

Lang knew how much dawdling attention Trask's unkemptness would require before the latter ventured forth from his quarters in the Talisman Club. In his bachelor apartment the lawyer made himself fit for business with the celerity of a man to whom professional punctuality was sacred. But he did not go straight to his office after his breakfast. Walking briskly, he made a detour that took him across the park to the county buildings.

He relished the nip of the frost in the air and would have been glad if the snows of the North Woods had swept far enough south to hide the sere raggedness of the park. He relished, too, the salutes and the salutations that men gave him; he knew that men turned to look after him. He was conscious that women looked at him, too. He caught gratifying glimpses of himself in shop windows. What he saw reassured him in the way of feeling confidence in his personality; he *was* something in the world, and he had made himself what he was.

He had told Reba that he had intended to take at least two weeks' rest in the woods after that triumph of his in the Devore case; he was back a week ahead of time. In the past he had been punctilious in his methods of meeting Reba, apprising her by telephone of his intention to call at her home of an evening or to serve as escort. He felt sure of her favor, but his reserved delicacy in the matter of "springing surprises" squeezed all the spontaneity out of his love affair with the girl.

When he walked up the courthouse steps he felt, for the first time in his association with her, a subtle sense of shame, as if he were coming sneaking and prying. He walked past the door of the office of the clerk of the courts, conscious of a reluctance to meet her in this fashion, without warning her. He knew that he would find her in her office, for she was conscientiously punctual as the chief assistant of the clerk of the courts.

The clerk himself was not as punctual; he came leisurely along the corridor from the street, puffing his after-breakfast cigar, and hailed the hesitant Lang with great cordiality. He swung open the office door and waved Lang in ahead of him.

Reba rose from her desk and came to the rail barrier, her hand outstretched. Lang studied her eyes. They were serene.

"I have been thinking that you would find two weeks too long a vacation," she said. "You haven't surprised me a bit. I was really expecting you."

Lang was accusing her in his thoughts of having just had a telephone talk with Trask; her face was the face of deceit, he told himself; and if not the face of deceit, her lack of joyful emotion, no matter if her prescience had predicted his arrival, did not promise him the sort of love he was craving. All at once, in his new temper, he found himself demanding in the way of love something that his previous equanimity had been perfectly willing to dispense with. He did not expect that she would fall in his arms there in a public office. But her eyes were altogether too serene! It was the eyes that told the truth! Skiddy Trask, as an expert, had had something to say about love—the true kind, he called it. Lang began to wonder what he, himself, had been missing.

"May I call this evening?" he asked, dropping her hand.

"It would be strange if you did not," she answered. For the first time he found himself weighing a reply from her. Seeking evidence! He found her gazing at him with a certain strange and inquiring intentness as if she were making an estimate of his thoughts.

Lang had never seen her look so desirable. The woods develop in a man hunger for love of woman. In his case that yearning for her was edged by a growing fear that he was losing her. He wanted to grasp that round, firm neck and beat his palm against her dimpled cheek and command her to come out with the truth. He compromised by reaching out his hand and giving her cheek a love pat. She revealed no delight. She looked around with a show of sudden fear lest the act should have been observed in that public office. Her color deepened and she backed away from the rail. In his new temper he felt the same rancor that would have been developed if he had detected her in an act which definitely showed aversion for his personality.

"Very well! Expect me!" He turned and strode out.

Late that afternoon his resentful mood had not been modified; it had settled into a sullen determination to find out. He threw his scruples to the wind—and the consciousness that he had done so for the sake of a woman and what was called love put him into a particularly ugly state of mind. He decided to place Trask and Reba under espionage—to do the same kind of sneaking work, himself, that certain paid agents, whom he privately despised, had done for him in his criminal cases.

At half past four Lang called on the telephone, asking for Trask at the Talisman Club; in case he found Trask he had an excuse for an appointment—to return the money borrowed in the woods. He was told that Mr. Trask had left the club only a few minutes before.

"This is John Lang speaking." And John Lang felt a flush creeping into his face; he was getting ready to lie—and that was what this new kind of love was doing to his man's punctiliousness, he sourly told himself. "I instructed my stenographer to telephone and ask him to wait for me."

The man at the club was promptly inveigled into imparting information contrary to the Talisman's rules. "A lady just called for Mr. Trask on the phone, and he answered. He must have misunderstood, if it was your stenographer, sir."

So Trask and Reba had arranged an appointment to precede her engagement of the evening with him. Lang was so sure of it that he experienced the sudden rage of a deceived lover, as if he had been made aware that one whom he had trusted was plotting against him. He gave over weighing the thing in the scales of honorable dealing. He hastened to post himself in the park where he could observe Reba's usual route from her office. He concealed himself behind a boxed-in fountain.

The girl's preoccupation helped his precautions when she appeared and after he had started to trail her. And the shadows were deep except where the park's lights shone. A quickset hedge shielded the path he chose—a path which paralleled the avenue along which she was walking. When he saw Trask waiting for her, Lang made a quick detour and posted himself behind the other man. There was a spruce bough shelter for tender shrubbery and it served Lang excellently. Trask was waiting in the radiance cast by a pole light.

The lawyer was able to look directly into Reba's eyes when she came close to Trask and he recognized instantly what he saw in those eyes. For himself, what he had found previously in Reba's gaze had been a certain sort of candor which pleased him. But he had never seen this mating softness with which she was regarding young Trask. It was confession, compliance, surrender. He knew what it meant in the case of a woman. He was not pausing to diagnose his emotions—to determine what was impulse of love and what was rage at being robbed of a prize that catered to his personal pride and fed his passion of possession. He did not pause to look longer or to give any further consideration as to how he should display that generosity with which he had been complimented.

"Just a minute!" He called harshly and he followed his words, striding close to them. He carried a cane. He jabbed it past Trask's face in mute command for that person to be off.

"Seeing that you're here, we may as well settle it," blustered the young man, desperately courageous in the presence of the female.

Lang, too, felt his own emotion in the presence of the female—the brutal urge of ownership. He was clinging to that ownership. "Do I need to remind you that this young lady and I are engaged to be married? Off with you!"

"I won't go!"

The girl put one hand against the cane when it came back as if Lang were poising it for a blow. With the other hand she waved dismissal to Trask, and he turned and went away obediently.

Just then a woman passed with a fuzzy dog trotting obediently at the end of a leash. Lang pointed his cane in the direction of the retreating woman, dog, and Trask.

"Oh, it's what women want in these days—ballots instead of babies—lap dogs in lieu of real, he-men!" He turned on Reba. "Why are you handling a sacred matter between us in this foolish way?"

"I suppose it does seem a foolish way to you, John. But I'm afraid that most of the ways of women seem foolish to you. You have said so, at any rate. I have grown to be afraid of something else—of *you!*"

"So you set that cur to do the first bark-

ing for you, eh?" Again the thrusting cane designated Trask, retreating across the patches of light.

"I am trying to encourage his self-respect," she declared. "He felt that he wanted to talk to you first."

"Why didn't *you* talk to me?"

"I had grown to know your true nature so well that I was afraid, I repeat. I'm going to be bold with you, John, now that affairs have come to this pass. I know you better than those who call you 'Generous John' Lang."

"If you're afraid of me because I'm a real man, you needn't be so any longer. I have become a spy, a sneak and a liar on account of you. Give me a few more days and I'll be in Skiddy Trask's class—and then I'll suit you!"

He was glaring at her, but in his heart was still the knowledge that he wanted her. He was hunting in her eyes for that love-light that had died out when the other man went away. He looked at her lips and felt an ugly bristling at the back of his head when he pondered on the love light inviting a rival's kisses.

"Don't you want to leave it just as it is?" she pleaded. "I'm going to find it hard to explain to you. You're the kind who won't understand very easily."

"I wouldn't say a word if you had gone over to a real man. I demand information."

"Perhaps you should seek and find the right woman to mate with the real man which you like to call yourself."

He caught her up on the note of bitterness that he detected. "Well, am I *not* a real man?"

"I suppose so, seeing that you are so positive on that matter as well as on others where you claim to know it all."

"Reba, what has come over you?"

"Call it rebellion against the real man, if you like," she replied listlessly. "I don't know. Perhaps the times are making women into something they ought not to be, as part of the general punishment that the human race is getting. Perhaps the ideal life for women is to drudge for the household boss, with a dole of pocket money that he counts down with a sigh or scowl."

"You know I'm not that sort, Reba. Tell me——"

"John, I don't want to tell you what you are. You wouldn't believe it. And why should I tell you if it's over between us? I have worked all my life. Now I want to play. Skiddy Trask knows how to play."

"Do you think I'd make you work?"

"But you don't know how to play!" She almost wailed that complaint. "One can't learn how—one must just feel that way. It spoils it all to be obliged to argue about every hop, skip, or giggle of life to prove that it isn't silly business. And—Skiddy Trask has nothing to do except play."

Lang gritted his teeth. "I saw the look you gave him a few minutes ago."

"I wasn't conscious that there was anything especial in my look."

He opened his mouth—but he promptly shut it. Her unconsciousness of having made her revelation stopped all argument on the matter.

"I don't understand the kind of looks *you* are giving *me*," she said. "But I suppose it's all because of my weak folly. You're calling it that—and I'll agree. So, that much for that! You don't want a fool for a wife." She was pleading wistfully. "Skiddy will be a fool along with me—hop, skip, and dance and giggle."

"Don't try to make a fool of *me* any longer," he commanded irefully. "You're secretly a domineering sort. You want a man who will kotow. You've probably been reading this sentiment slop on how to be lovers though married, and have picked a mushy, love-cracked fool who'll attend to it as his regular business instead of going to an office every day and making something of himself."

"Perhaps it's that way," she said resignedly. "But I do value your good opinion of me, John, as you have expressed it in the past. I don't want you to think the fault is all mine. I don't want anything to happen to you through me to spoil your good opinion of yourself."

"What about this thing that's happening?"

"My confession of my frivolous longings must have cured you in regard to me."

"I'll say that it ought to, even if your opinion of me, as relayed by Trask in the woods, did not. I realize now that when he arraigned me for selfish and secret pride and vanity, he was really quoting you. It is plain that your lightest word is treasured by him. But"—he narrowed his eyes and surveyed her, from the brown hair under her toque down over her shapeliness to the very

toes of her shoes—"I am not cured. And I propose to compliment your backhanded opinion of my generosity."

When she dubiously questioned him with her gaze he made the matter clearer. "I'm not going to give you up."

"I have something to say for myself on that point, John!"

"Well, let's narrow my declaration for the present. I'll not give you up to Skiddy Trask. If it were a case in which I would not be insulted by your choice——"

"There speaks your selfish vanity!"

"I won't allow you to arraign my honest consideration for you, Reba," he retorted with heat. "I won't permit you to be soiled and debased by what that poisoned renegade calls love."

"I'll confess openly that I want a gay life and travel and clothes and not much of anything except mere fun to think about," she cried with a sort of desperate urgency. "You ought to despise me for admitting it. Please do! I want Skiddy Trask for a husband."

"There's something the matter with you. I'll cure it," he declared grimly.

"I am breaking our engagement at this moment."

"Your contract with me is not so easily disposed of, Reba. I don't propose to suffer hell's torments thinking of you in Trask's possession. If you persist, it's going to be bad—*bad!* Now, may I walk along with you?"

"I prefer to go alone."

"Very well, Reba. I have a matter to attend to, anyway." He lifted his hat. "This has been an unpleasant topic. I'll not refer to it this evening."

"Are you going to call this evening?" she demanded somewhat incredulously.

"Certainly. I've been missing you terribly. Expect me!" And yet he spoke mildly and smiled. After he had started away he turned and smiled again, but the girl did not seem to be reassured by that smile.

CHAPTER V.

IN THE MATTER OF THE TRASKS.

John Lang walked into the Talisman Club, going straight there from his talk with Reba Donworth. He passed Skiddy Trask who was at the tobacco stand, restocking his silver case with cigarettes; Trask bent low over his occupation and did not turn his head.

The manner of the men in the lounge, when they scrambled to their feet to shake hands with the lawyer, advertised the popularity of Lang in unmistakable fashion. His cordiality of response was not that of a political seeker, making capital of urbanity. He showed a touch of pride as if he were receiving what was his due and he gave the impression that he would have missed the incense of compliment were it lacking.

When he turned his back on the club members who were gathered around him, and after he had retreated to a corner of the big room, it was plain that he controlled respect as well as liking: nobody presumed to intrude on the privacy he made for himself in the depths of a club rocker. There was pride in the Talisman Club because the State's most eminent criminal lawyer had found that corner a haven for his cogitations.

When Trask, a few moments after Lang had hidden himself in the deep rocker, walked over to the corner, they who were observing wondered at Trask's temerity, but excused the boldness on the ground that the two must have become particularly close friends during that trip to the woods. Yet Trask did not have the air of a sociable chum as he walked toward the man on whom he was intruding; his face was pale, his eyes blinked nervously, and he threw away his cigarette after he had taken a couple of long drags at it.

But when he reached Lang the curious spectators beheld only the most ordinary greeting. Lang, without rising, pulled money from his pocket and passed it to Trask. Everybody in the room heard what Lang said when he paid the money. "And thanks into the bargain for being my banker in the woods, Skiddy." However, nobody heard Lang's next words, in an undertone. "I'm preparing the case. Go over there and sit down. I'll beckon to you when I'm ready for you."

For a moment Trask showed a hesitancy that was based on his determination to have the thing over with while his courage was up. But Lang's eyes dominated, and the younger man obeyed orders.

Then the Talisman Club settled back into the placidity of its accepted routine. It was quite the usual thing to leave John Lang alone in his corner, and Trask had done so, and there was no more interest in the matter. Nobody noticed when Trask, after

a time, obeyed an uplifted finger and joined Lang, pulling a chair close beside the rocker.

"I'm going to do the talking," said the lawyer. "If you insist on talking, you'll make matters worse."

He waited as if he were determined to have the matter of obedience settled at the start. Trask remained silent.

"We're not going into any discussion of selfishness or generosity or love or sacrifice," pursued Lang. "I'm not going to argue with you. When I argue cases in court my strong point is in first of all challenging prejudiced jurors. I'm going to tell you something, Trask, and I ask you to look straight into my eyes while I say it—and see whether you think I mean what I say. So long as I draw a breath of life, you never shall have Reba Donworth as your wife. You have plenty of others to choose from—as you have been choosing in the past."

Lang, speaking in low tones, was exhibiting all the tenseness of a challenger who expected an onslaught and was prepared to meet it. The younger man's unexpected suppliant attitude astonished Lang and was, therefore, disarming.

"I wonder if you won't let me say just a word," he appealed, wistfully, almost bashfully. "It may give you what you lawyers call new evidence."

"Go ahead!"

"You know what I have been. It's hard for you to believe in me, I know. Perhaps I can't cash in on my word of honor with you."

There was no softening indication in Lang's eyes that the word of honor had value.

"I expected you'd feel that way. But I'm going to swear by the memory of two good folks who are dead—my mother and my father! I have never been serious enough before this in my life to take that oath to bind anything."

Lang's countenance remained noncommittal.

"I love Reba in the right way. I swear to it. And I swear that by having her as my wife I can go straight. I haven't been arguing with myself about that—I know it in here!" He pounded his fist on his breast. "It comes to a man after a time. She feels it just as I do. And that's why she is being noble in this thing—to make a man of me."

"She told me," Lang drawled, "that she's out for a good time from now on, and thinks you're able to give her one."

"She said that because she thinks you'd make fun of her for marrying me to reform me."

"You show an intimate knowledge of her thoughts on the subject," said Lang, his eyes glittering.

"Perhaps she and I are only poor fools for feeling the way we do. But we do feel it, and it can't be explained to cold-blooded folks. It's love—and outsiders always make fun of real love. If you prevent me from marrying her you're taking away my life chance to be a good man. I can't be a smart man, like you and the others. Uncle Serenus has spoiled me for that! But I can be a good man with Reba, from now on!"

"Lower your voice," snapped the lawyer. But in spite of the harshness of his tone his expression revealed that Trask's declaration was attacking his jealous and bitter resolution. "And stop right there and let me think. Don't look at me! With that hound-dog face of yours, I don't know whether to kick you or to be sorry for you!"

To make sure that he would not be troubled by the woebegone countenance, he swung in his chair and turned his back on Trask.

In the silence that followed, Lang was taking counsel with himself, so he assured his soul. If Reba Donworth wanted to marry young Trask to reform him, it was only that usual, threadbare, commonplace folly that Lang's cynicism rejected. If she really wanted idle pleasure with an abject slave for a husband, she was heading toward ruin. That sort of woman would not be able to reform any weak man. He wondered how much of falsehood there was in her declaration on that point, in her feminine desire to hide from Lang the trail of a real love, in order to save the feelings of a rejected lover. And at that point in his ponderings he found himself torn by that strange, ugly, animal determination to have her for himself. His imagination painted her in the arms of another, with that upward look——

A club attendant was obliged to tap him on the shoulder in order to bring him back to the realities. "You are wanted on the telephone, sir! The gentleman says the call is important."

Without apology to the young man, Lang hurried to the telephone.

"This is Serenus Skidmore Trask speak-

ing," he was informed by a voice, sonorously important, that rolled the name with a suggestion of admiration for it. "Lang, please come out to my house this evening. I want to consult you, as my attorney."

"Can the matter be postponed, Mr. Trask?"

"I do not want to postpone it. Why can't you come?"

"I have an engagement at eight."

"For how long?"

Lang hesitated. Then:

"Keep your appointment, whatever it may be," came over the wire to him, "and come as soon as possible after it. No, you'll not be keeping me up, Lang! I shall not be able to sleep, anyway, until the matter has been attended to." The speaker clicked back the receiver without waiting for Lang to assent.

The lawyer shoved his hands into his trousers pockets and returned slowly to the lounge. He faced the dumbly appealing young man, and stood with legs apart, hands still in his pockets. "You'll have to be contented with what you have—idleness, money you haven't earned, and the sort of girls on your level. You can't add Reba Donworth to your gallery. Keep away from her, or I'll make you sorry."

There was no compromise in the countenance into which young Trask stared. He came slowly to his feet and once more Lang braced himself. But there was no belligerency in the other. "You're the one who'll be sorry," was his regretful answer.

"I really *would* be sorry if I let fool sentiment ruin a girl like Reba," growled Lang. "Don't make any threats to me. You can't carry them out!"

"You don't know yet what I can do."

"There's one thing you can do, if you don't mind your eye! You can get me into a state of mind where I'll put you onto the rocks financially, as far as your allowance is concerned. Your uncle takes a lot of stock in what I tell him!"

The lawyer turned and walked away. When he was aware that Trask was following he turned and grasped the flaccid arm of the idler. "Not only do I order you to keep away from her—you keep away from me, as well. However, if there comes a time when you really have something important to say to me, come and say it, like a man."

Trask showed fire.

"There's coming a time, damn you, and I'll say it!"

CHAPTER VI.

TRASK OF THE DOUBLE T.

That morning Lang had found a mental and physical fillip in the fresh raiment he put on for city wear, after putting off the rough garb he had worn down from the woods; he was conscious, for a time, of a subtle sense of new confidence.

In his mood of this evening he was seeking further confidence, and without stopping to analyze the matter of the male preening its plumage before the female of the species, he dressed carefully in evening garb for his call on Reba Donworth.

The girl lived in a matter-of-fact flat with her widowed mother. While he walked toward it he wondered if that conventional flat with its player piano and its fan-tailed goldfish and the davenport where he was allowed to lounge and smoke his pipe had not had something to do with making his courtship conventional and commonplace, too. Apparently the girl's deeper sensibilities had not been wakened in those surroundings and by their easy-going association with "comfort." Her confession, if she were telling him the truth, indicated that she was not looking forward with rapture to an unending succession of evenings of the kind, after marriage, no matter how adequate his placid taste found such evenings. He was willing to admit that even a steady-going young woman, such as she had seemed to be in the past, probably had, at times, her truly feminine notions about trying her wings.

But to throw over a man like John Lang for a—well, for Skiddy Trask! A mere thought flash of the character of Trask sufficed Lang better than a bookful of arguments as proof that the girl should be saved from her temporary folly. He would not admit that he was indulging in personal vanity, in estimating his own character, any more than he would confess to himself that he was selfish in keeping her away from Trask.

When the vestibule door latch was clicked after his ring, he walked slowly up the stairs instead of using the elevator. As he shrewdly suspected, this ruse brought her out into the hall to investigate her caller's delay in appearing. He took advantage of a situation that enabled him to meet her alone, away from observation by her mother. He gathered her to him in a rather violent embrace and kissed her repeatedly—almost

with ferocity—for when he had her in his arms he fell to thinking that she wished to give those lips to another man.

She set her palms against his breast and strove to break his embrace, and her amazement was tinged with a bit of terror.

"It's going to be different from now on," he muttered, his lips close to hers. "I know what you have missed in me. But I love you. I'm going to make you love me!"

After he followed her into the little hall of the flat, he took her in his arms again. He seemed to feel that a second demonstration was needed to prove the authentic nature of the first one. When he crushed her to him, her head against his shoulder, he caught a glimpse of her face by means of a double reflection in the hall mirrors. There was absolutely no emotion in her face, now that her first surprise was over. Her face was cold, calm, resigned.

He started to remove his overcoat but shrugged it back on again, jerking his broad shoulders wrathfully.

"I really only called to offer my apologies for being unable to spend the evening. I have been summoned into conference by an important client. If I'm allowed, I'll keep on my coat while I pay my respects to your mother."

He marched in, his hat in his hand, made his duty speech and marched back into the little hall where Reba awaited him.

"I'm afraid you're making business a pretense just now," she said. "I wish you would stay. We should talk our affairs over without anger."

"That would be impossible."

"But I have done nothing to make you angry, John. You must pardon me for being startled for a moment."

"It's the other thing—afterward—that made me angry. Listen! I'm going to give you a chance—if it's as bad between us as it seems to be. Choose a *man*, Reba. He can have you if he's somebody who doesn't insult my pride and self-respect. That must be the bargain between us. You look at me as if I were crazy. Perhaps I am, seeing what this devilish thing has developed into. I'm just crazy enough to tell you that this nasty little animal, Trask, can't have you. But perhaps all this is only an unpleasant dream we're having, anyway. I think we're going to be sensible and wake up. Good night!"

He did not offer any more caresses. He was calm again and she copied that calmness, walking with him to the elevator.

"You're looking extremely well to-night, John. Is the important client a lady?"

"Jealous?"

"No, John."

"I'm sorry! I had a moment's flash of hope."

The elevator came and he left her.

He found a cab at the street corner and was taken to the home of Serenus Trask in the suburbs of the city.

When he reached Serenus Trask's home he found, as usual, that the great gates of the extensive grounds were closed, but, after he had sent away the cab, he used his knowledge of the place by entering between granite posts that flanked a narrow walk. The home of Trask was a stone mansion well back from the street. The other houses of the neighborhood were shielded by deciduous trees, and at that season the leaves were stripped off and the houses could be seen. But the stone mansion was concealed embowered in evergreens brought down from the North country—"black growth" from the timberlands of the Double T. In the north the nickname for Trask was "Old Double T" on account of his registered log mark that was cut into the end of every stick of the millions of his spring drive.

The grounds of the stone house were not well cared for. Trask was in the woods more than he was in the city, and he liked a rough outdoors and hated the slickness of smooth lawns. The stones of the mansion's walls were rough, too.

Lang, as he pushed the button of the doorbell, had his mouth open to greet the doorman familiarly; for years Trask had employed an old man whose rheumatism had unfitted him for his ancient job as a timber cruiser. But a strange, smart young chap in buttons pulled open the door and he did not step back when Lang started to enter.

"Beg pardon, sir! But Mr. Trask will see no one this evening except a gentleman who is to call late."

"Don't you know who I am?"

"No, sir! It's my first day in the house, sir."

"I'm Mr. Lang. Your master is expecting me."

"But not so early, Lang. Not so early!" It was the rasping voice of Trask within. "Come in. I'm glad you're here. And I'll

be cursed glad to get the business through with."

Lang walked in, saying as he stepped forward to greet Trask, "But I didn't hint at any late hour, sir!"

"Oh, I guessed at it since hearing the pretty stories about the lass, son!"

Then Lang stopped short and stared almost aghast at Trask because, when the old man had said what he said, in a jocose tone full of sly significance, he winked and tittered. Lang found that hilarity as amazing as if the stuffed *loup-cervier* that decorated the newel post of a staircase near them had begun to sing a dulcet song out of its snarling mouth. Serenus Trask, blatantly a confirmed bachelor, ready at all times to express his contempt for women, had just mentioned one of the sex and had tittered and grinned.

Lang decided that the grin was more discomposing than the habitual scowl that Trask carried around. That smirk did not belong with the countenance it was adorning. The lawyer had never been particularly at ease when Trask was looking at him, nor was any other man comfortable under the gaze of Old Double T. One of his eyes "toed out" instead of having a twist inward after the usual manner of strabismus. The affliction kept one nervously trying to guess which eye was the right one to catch in a conversation.

There were other circumstances that were putting Lang into a flabbergasted state. The lawyer had seen Serenus Trask in all sorts of attire, through the gamut of tweeds, slouchy frocks, belted jackets and larrigans, but he had never seen him garbed in what Old Double T was wearing then.

He was swathed in a flowered silk dressing robe, with a silk sash knotted about his waist. Out of the folds projected a wattled neck that was stained to dull red hues by weather exposure, and set on the neck was that seamed face—with the grin. He stuck back into his mouth an obtrusively new ivory holder in which was tilted a big cigar, and then he shuffled along and poked a gnarled thumb into Lang's abdomen. "All alike, eh, Lang? Men are all alike!"

He did not bother to await a reply but turned and started back to the room from which he had come and Lang promptly followed, for it was the room where he always conferred with Trask. It opened off the main hall and was spacious. It was wainscoted high with massive logs that had been varnished. Above the wainscoting were walls made of peeled saplings set perpendicular to the logs below. Those walls were decorated with crosscut saws, looped bind chains, and with axes that were arranged to form huge rosettes. Other adornments were maps that showed great stretches of country with splashes of blue lakes and striations of streams and rivers.

"Send me an invitation to the wedding, Lang," pursued the host, kicking around a chair for the accommodation of the caller and showing red morocco slippers under the robe. "You have always handed me a good brand of law in return for my money, and I want to do something handsome for you when you join drives with the lass."

Lang had laid off his overcoat before sitting down.

"Stand up and turn around slowly," commanded the master of men. "Who's your tailor? I haven't got your set-up and figure," he went on after Lang had given the information, "but a good tailor can probably hide faults as well as a Soubungo farmer can deacon a barrel of apples for market. I'll drop in on your man to-morrow."

Such frank amazement as Lang was showing could no longer be disregarded by a man with the acumen that Trask possessed. "You don't find me harmonizing with the style of my den, I take it. Find me a little different, eh?"

"I'll admit it."

The client was immensely tickled by thoughts which he did not impart. However, he did say, "Perhaps I'll harmonize better after I've had these logs ripped out of this room and some genteel plastering done."

Lang gazed around him. "That seems to be quite a change for you to make, sir."

"We change, son! We change!" confessed Trask amiably. "What we like early, we don't like later—some of us. You see, I have been sticking to the woods much too close! So I've been away—South. Nice time. Picked up new ideas."

Lang tried hard to get Trask's eyes into some sort of a line so that he could study them; Trask was apparently looking squarely and frankly at his lawyer but the eyes did not focus so that they revealed anything.

"I got back from the woods only this morning—I have been hunting on some of

your timberlands," stated Lang, and he paused a moment, trying to make up his mind to inform Trask that, according to the best evidence of a lawyer's eyes and knowledge of identities, he had seen that autocrat of the region, speeding down the Brassua tote road in a cloud of snow. While he hesitated Trask inquired casually:

"Any amount of snow up there yet?"

"Not much! A foot or two, but I think it's too soft to stay." His tone was as indifferent as Trask's had been.

"I'll get the bosses' reports, of course, but I'm glad to have a tip from you that there's no chance to start hauling logs yet. How long were you upcountry, Lang?"

"About a week. Mostly in the Brassua region—hunted near the main tote road."

Then Lang got the range of Trask's eyes and swapped real stares with Old Double T.

The host relighted his cigar, and took his time about it. While his face was wreathed with smoke he said: "I'm glad to hear that, too. I may get another tip from you. Did you happen to hear about, or lay eyes on that stranger up there who looks so much like me that they're taking him for me?"

"If you mean a double, Mr. Trask, I'll say no—I heard nothing about one."

"There is such a fellow, so one of my walking bosses writes me. But I haven't found that he's trying to cash checks with my name or to borrow money—so I guess I won't need your legal advice on that thing—not now, at any rate. I didn't call you up here for that. By the way, you're quite a society bird, I suppose."

"No, I'm not, sir."

"Well, you must have made it your way to go into a lot of good houses and you probably understand the genteel styles of furnishings."

"The only thing about a chair that interests me is whether the legs are strong enough to hold me up."

"Well, no matter if you don't know. I can hire men who make it their business. Seen my nephew Serenus Skidmore Trask, Second, lately?"

"He was with me on my hunting trip." Lang looked hard at Trask and if ever a look proclaimed, "And you probably know it!" that stare said it. But Old Double T was unperturbed. He looked at his cigar and again snapped off the ash.

"Well, I'll be damned! How did that happen?"

"It's rather a private matter, sir."

This time Lang got a look in return. "Say nothing about it, then! I never pry into any man's private matters. Well, I'll amend that just a mite, seeing that my nephew's matters aren't private where I'm concerned—I'm running him and his matters. Tell me—did he say anything about being ready to hitch up—I mean a marriage—with a real woman?"

"I think he's willing to get married."

"And settle down?"

"That's the way he talked."

The lawyer was dreading the next question; Trask was going to ask bluntly who the woman was. But Trask pulled the stub of the cigar from the holder, blew violently through the stem, and tossed the holder on the table.

"There's some comfort, Lang, in making an investment and controlling the investment—being able to have the absolute say about it. I control all my investments. I've bought and paid for Serenus Skidmore Trask, Second. Have been wondering just what I'd do with him when the time came to use him. Have thought sometimes I had wasted my money. But no! I have an instinct about investments. I follow my hunch—and make good. Now that I'm ready to use him, he's just the tool I want. I'm going to use him in buying something where cash can't be used." He pulled out a drawer of the desk table, and fumbled there. "I'm going to marry him off."

"Without consulting him about the woman?"

Trask leveled his wall eye at Lang from under a knotted brow.

"What the hell has he got to say about a wife, any more than about anything else when I'm giving him his orders? Look at her!"

He scaled a photograph across the table and Lang caught it. It portrayed a woman's face, broad, pudgy, with little eyes, deep-set, and a simpering mouth.

"Awful for looks, eh? Yes, I know it. I'm a better judge of women than I used to be." Again that peculiar titter. "But that's Maravista Blake, son. Does the name, Blake, tell you anything?"

"You mean Jonas Blake who——"

"I mean Jonas Blake, and I hope there's a night-and-day shift sticking red-hot stove covers under him in Tophet. That's his daughter. Heiress of the Tulandic town-

ships. That's where she has lived under old Jonas' thumb, and now she wants to see the world and shine in society. See the point now, don't you, Lang?"

"Yes! But does she forget the old feud and take your nephew——"

"She hasn't brains enough to know there was a feud. I guess that she thinks that her father and I were blowing up each other's dams all those years in fun, like boys roll marbles. I'm going to run the Tulandic for her from now on—while she's running my nephew. She and I have a perfect understanding. She wants to marry a real gent—and I want to save a hundred thousand dollars a year by joining drives; that saving for me will come from merely joining her hand to my nephew's. Good investment when I made him a gent, eh? Had a hunch I could use a gent when old Jonas could be got out of the way!"

"It's lucky for you that somebody hasn't grabbed her up before this," said Lang dryly.

"Wait till you see her! She has been perfectly safe, even in Tulandic. But the marriage matter isn't what I called you up here for. Fixing it with the girl was the main thing—the marriage is self-operating from now on."

He pulled out another drawer and began to fumble.

Lang, during the pause, had an opportunity to clear his puzzled thoughts. Just why Trask, as a client, should be concealing the fact that he had brought the Tulandic heiress down the Brassua tote road was not plain to the lawyer, but that detail was unimportant, now that Lang was assured in his mind of the identity of the passenger. And the plans for remodeling the stone mansion—in his matchmaking Old Double T was showing that he knew with what bait to trap the woodland damsel!

Trask brought out a thick packet of papers and shook it. "Here are the schedules of my properties and the old will you drew for me, Lang. I've called you up here to draft a new will—an air-tight one—not a legal hole in it. Then, as I told you, I'll sleep better to-night. No man knows what may happen to him after he's past seventy. But wait a moment!"

He laid the packet on the table and made a long survey of the lawyer, wrinkling his forehead, clawing at his shaggy eyebrows, pondering.

"I didn't intend to do it—but I'm going to. I didn't intend to take any chances—not yet a while." He rose slowly, and then he plumped back into his chair. His face had worn a sly, satisfied, proud smirk. Now it hardened while he looked Lang up and down. "No, damn you, I won't—not while you're wearing those clothes. Danger in starting new ideas."

Lang's convictions were settled: the simple, Tulandic heiress was in the house and Trask was apprehensive lest the nephew's monopoly might be endangered. The lawyer smiled grimly, reached out and turned the photograph face down while Trask stared.

"Your eyes are easily hurt, eh, where women are concerned?" demanded the old man.

"Something like that."

Once more Trask rose. He banged his fist on the table. "I may as well make the break now as any time. I reckon you'll come back here and put more power into that will. Better have you understand. Come along!" He strode away, his head shoved forward, his silk robe swishing making a strange figure of a man in that interior of rugged plainness. Lang followed into the hall, up the stairs past the vicious stuffed *loup-cervier,* and was ordered to wait a few paces from a closed door. Trask opened the door and went in.

The lawyer, waiting, smiled at his thoughts. He was to be called upon to be polite to the woman who had come down from the woods so opportunely, the dea ex machina in the general solution of the difficulties that ranged all the way from the elder Trask's long warfare in the North to the troubled love affairs of himself and Trask the younger and Reba. It would be easy to be polite to such a woman.

"Come in!" called the old man, appearing in the doorway.

The room that Lang entered was only dimly lighted. He stumbled over the end of a roll of rugs.

"New ones," said Trask. "Thousand-dollar ones. Haven't had time to spread 'em."

There was no one except the two men in the room. Trask went to a portière, a heavy velours affair that closed in a large alcove; there was plenty of light beyond the curtain; radiance streamed under the edge.

Without preface or pause, the old man pulled the drapery aside.

It was not merely the light-flood that

made Lang close his eyes for a moment. Reclining on a broad divan was a young woman in elaborate negligee, if a heavily embroidered mandarin jacket could be called such. The massed pillows, the extravagance of colors that were almost garish, the pomp of too many jewels that sparkled and glittered on fingers and breast and even in her hair, furnished a setting that Lang found Oriental, pagan, almost unreal.

But the face at which the visitor stared with widening eyes was not the pudgy face of the photograph. He found even more unreality in the face he saw, than in the bewildering sumptuousness of its setting.

The girl was young and wonderfully beautiful, with the beauty that is so alluring when it is free from sophistication. She gazed back at Lang with the absolute composure which a baby or a kitten displays in the presence of strangers. She did not have the air of consciously vaunting her charms. A slow smile drew her lips a bit away from her white teeth—an ingenuous smile. She quite frankly showed her interest and approval when she looked at the tall chap in evening dress. As if her expression did not suit his ideas, Trask stepped between her and Lang and bent and kissed her fervently.

He turned from her and dropped the portière and came and stood before the lawyer with the air of proud, jealous, triumphant possession.

"Now you can see why I want a new will that all hell can't break. She's going to have everything that my money can bring her, Lang."

"Yes, but who is she?"

"You infernal fool, what do you think? She's my wife."

CHAPTER VII.

AN INTRACTABLE INVESTMENT.

At midnight Trask and his lawyer were finishing a job whose details and side issues had required patient attention. It was not merely framing the new will, the rough draft of which was tucked into Lang's pocket to be put into formal manuscript on the morrow; there was a plan of procedure to be devised in regard to the marriage of Trask the younger. In arranging the methods of control of the Tulandic properties, they considered also the control of the nephew in case he should show rebelliousness.

Old Double T ridiculed the idea when Lang suggested that the nephew might not obey. "Damn it, I own him," he said.

"Even so! And you have owned a good many colts, head, hide, and hoofs. But you have to break a colt before you can use him."

"You're a good lawyer to have in the family, Lang!"

Lang was wondering just how honest a lawyer he was at that moment. He knew that rancor was in him. That afternoon the rancor had driven him to brandish over young Trask the threat of antagonizing the uncle. The lawyer had not realized how soon the opportunity would present itself. He was in a mood to grasp that opportunity—and he put the thought of legal ethics away from him and went at the matter on the plane of man to man, in a very human conflict for the possession of a woman. The attitude of the elder Trask was making the opportunity more tempting.

"If this particular colt is going to need a twist bit, Lang, I'm depending on you to rig one for him. By the way, all prices are up, these days. Is that retaining fee, ten thousand a year, enough for the time being?"

It was merely Trask's usual bluntness in his talk of money matters and Lang knew that there was no suggestion of a bribe. Nevertheless, conscious of his secret and his ulterior motives, he was also conscious of a twinge in his professional sense of pride.

"I don't want to feel that my retainer has anything to do with this case of your nephew," he snapped surlily. "I'm not doing it for pay. It's wholly out of my interest in the family which I have served as counsel."

"That's it! I like that. And I'm going to let you go ahead with him, according to your own notions of what's best. Call on me for authority and I'll back you up. But be sure that the twist bit is a good one."

"I'll attend to that, sir," promised Lang, setting his jaws.

Working out the details of the pressure to be brought on young Trask, in case the nephew showed contumacy, Lang was occupied for some time. The only light in the big room was the circle of glow on the table under the shade of the lamp. The walls and the corners were banked with gloom. There was no sound in the great mansion of stone.

In spite of his concentration on his task, Lang's thoughts kept drifting to that radi-

ant girl abovestairs. The old man had not mentioned her or his marriage since his declaration of her identity in front of the portière after he had dropped it to eclipse her beauty.

Was this the passenger in the big sleigh in the aura of flying snow flung up by the hoofs of the hurrying horses? Lang was finding it hard to credit his suspicions. Such exotic beauty was certainly not of the woods.

It was easier to credit Trask's calm assurance in regard to the trip South; the air of the girl suggested such past environment. Lang was even inclined to place some stock in Trask's fantastic statement about that double of his in the North country; the story was far-fetched, but it was more credible than the supposition that this girl had come out of the snows.

Sometimes, in the course of his writing, the lawyer paused and pondered. He was thinking of the girl upstairs. Her smile lingered with him. There was something elusive about the attraction she exerted. Lang, whose business it was to delve into human hearts and emotions, had studied sex attraction on its higher plane—the psychic quality of certain rare female types, a mystic dominance of men by influences above and beyond the bonds that mere physical senses weld on a captive. He perceived something of this in the conquest of the aged and confirmed hater of woman.

In his efforts to recall verses which he had read in that connection, he used the blank side of a sheet of paper on which he had jotted some of his legal notes, and sought to aid his memory by writing out the words. Old Double T was staring at him through smoke clouds, but saw only a prosaic lawyer working for a client.

> For love has saved that perfect mold
> In which Fair Helen's form was cast;
> With passion's heat he melts the gold
> Of beauty of the storied past,
> And once again, with art, he pours,
> And then, with glory of the morn,
> In other climes—on other shores—
> Transcendent Helen is reborn.

Lang had been reading aloud, as he progressed, the various clauses of the agreement that young Trask was to be forced to follow.

"That one seems to be a corker, judging from the attention you're giving to it," suggested Trask. "How does she read?"

"It's too strong—altogether too strong," said Lang, and he shuffled the sheet among his papers, folded them and put them into his pocket. His comment agreed with the sudden secret disgust with which he was viewing the strange obsession he had just been allowing to take control of his thoughts.

"Sir, I think the other stipulations will do the work, if your nephew accepts them."

"I'm leaving it to you, Lang, to see that he does accept them—agrees to do exactly what you tell him to do, and in all respects."

"Don't you think," paltered the lawyer, "that you'd better tell him, yourself?"

"I have always let you act for me in fixing up those girl affairs of his," stated Trask with decision. "You'll have to do the talking to him in this matter. He and I can't get to anything sensible when we talk—never could. I don't do anything except cuss him—and I swear too much, anyway. Sounds like hell, now there's a lady in the house." Making this his first reference to the girl upstairs following their meeting with her, the old man's eyes lighted up. "I'm not asking you what you think of her. Didn't introduce you, eh? Didn't intend to." He pulled his lips away from his teeth and edged out the words. "Don't propose to have any young fools ducking and dancing around her. She's mine. I showed her to you to make you envy me. But I'll tell you, Lang! Seeing that you have seen her and know what I've got up there, I want you to do something to please me—just us two together."

He pulled a bunch of keys from a drawer and rose. But when Lang got up also, the old man told the lawyer to sit down and wait. He shuffled away into the dim hall and opened a door and banged the door behind him. A few moments later there was the muffled bang of another more distant door.

Lang, assorting a stack of loose sheets on the table, his eyes on the circle of radiance, heard no sound, but he became aware of some sort of sheen near his elbow. He looked around. He saw the embroidery of the mandarin coat, gorgeously shimmering. He lifted his eyes and beheld the girl's face in the shadow. She was smiling.

"Blind like bats, you men!"

She spoke softly. There was a suspicion of accent in her voice, a mere hint that she might be either foreign or else so thoroughly provincial that she was not rid of the dialect of her district.

Lang rose with all haste and bowed low.

She put out a hand, the jewels on which dazzled his eyes, and she shyly touched the white expanse framed in his evening waistcoat. She did it with the naïve manner of a child. "Those I have read about—in the stories of rich folks and dukes—they are like you."

She pointed to a dark corner of the room. "Blind, like bats, you are, both of you—and very deaf. I followed you down and you didn't hear me. It has been funny listening—from over there. There was no fun, waiting upstairs alone."

Lang was taken aback by this frank confession of eavesdropping.

"You have told him many things that are good for him to do," she went on. "He said yes to all. You must tell him to be very good to me, and he will do what you tell him. I like men who are big and can tell others what to do."

"I do not tell Mr. Trask what to do," he protested. "I'm his lawyer. I advise him."

"It is the same. You have power. Tell him to be very good to me."

"But he is good to you, Mrs. Trask!"

Her eyes opened wider. "Why do you call me that?"

"Because—why, you are——"

He was stammering. It did seem incongruously difficult to look at this glorious being and call her Trask's wife.

"Oh, now I know! It's because I'm married to him. It's so new—and no one has said it to me before. It seemed queer because you did not call me Anita—as others do."

"Why, I—I—you know I couldn't——"

For the first time in his life the self-contained John Lang found himself floundering helplessly in the presence of a woman.

"You are sure to be my friend," she told him. "I like to look at you. Do not hurry away. I shall go back to the dark corner and listen some more. But you must tell him not to keep me in a dark corner. He has promised that I shall see everything."

Then there was heard the muffled bang of the distant door.

"I suggest—it's wise—you'd better run upstairs," urged Lang, awkwardly apprehensive in spite of his knowledge that he was an innocent party in this tête-à-tête in the shadows.

"I feel like having you tell me what to do—just as you tell him what to do. But"—she gurgled laughter—"you mustn't tell me what to do if it isn't fun." She stood on tiptoe and put a finger against his lips and then she placed the same finger against her mouth, making a moue that signaled "Hush!"

She hastened without sound into the shadows.

The nearer door banged and then Trask came into sight. He had a dusty bottle in one hand and brought two glasses. "It's worth a dollar a drop, Lang, in these times. But it isn't too good for the occasion." There was a corkscrew among the keys of the bunch and he opened the bottle carefully. After the glasses were lifted Trask gave the toast. "Here's to the lady above us! And she is making it enough of a heaven up there to suit me for the time being!"

Lang looked toward the dark corner when he drank. He put his hand protestingly over the glass when he set it down; Trask had offered to fill it again. The old man pushed the hand away and poured the glass brimming full. "You've got to drink to that new will, Lang! You've got to drink to my marrying the Blake girl and her Tulandic townships into my family. And you've got to drink to pledge me that when you have finished training my nephew he'll agree to be harnessed in any kind of a hitch and will trot to any gait under my whip. Up glasses!"

The wine was manifestly having its effect on the host when Trask escorted the lawyer to the front door.

"It's too bad, Lang, that I can't go into the market and buy years off some young fool like I'd buy stumpage off timberlands. I could make it worth while for somebody with more time than money. I've just begun to live, son, really just begun to live!"

His back was toward the door of the den. He was absorbed in his fervent declaration. With the manner of playing a game of hide and seek, the girl tiptoed out of the den, ascended the stairs a few steps, turned and called to him.

Trask did not respond to her roguish smile. "I told you not to come down here."

"But he is a great, wise man who tells you what to do," she retorted, waving a very cordial greeting to Lang. "And he will tell you that to keep me penned up is not being good to me, as you promised to be."

"He will, will he?"

She ran down the stairs, stood on the

lower step and propped herself with both hands on her husband's shoulders. She was enabled to project her head far enough past Trask's so that the old man could not see her face. She did not disguise her admiration for the tall young man, but that commendation was artless, to all appearances. Her expression teased him.

"You must advise him, Sir Knight! I call you that because my old sweetheart husband has not introduced you to me. So, good night, Sir Knight! Remember we have a secret!"

Lang wanted to be chivalrous even in his embarrassment; but the malignant stare of Old Double T suggested that a ten-thousand-dollar annual retaining fee was imperiled, then and there.

"I should hardly call it a secret, Mrs. Trask," he said coldly, "merely because I obeyed your signal and did not warn your husband that you were stealing down the stairs just now to surprise him."

He could see that Trask was not wholly satisfied or placated. The lawyer realized that the old man's jealousy was partaking of the nature of a mania. Lang decided to lecture her, even though she was the wife of another man.

"Joking remarks, even on the most innocent lines, are dangerous when they are not understood by men. Be careful about dropping such remarks."

Mrs. Trask frankly made up a face at him. "Oh, shush for men! They don't understand much of anything, anyway."

"Anita!" rebuked the old man; but he drew her to him fondly in the hook of his arm.

Lang strode out and went away with that tableau in his mind's eye. His mutterings indicated that he was not in a pleasant frame of mind.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TWIST BIT.

Lang went to bed with the knowledge that there was an ominous creak in the machinery of his settled philosophy of life. He was not relishing his state of mind and he was not able to define what seemed to be an alarm signal in his conscientiousness.

He rose in the morning with the unhappy conviction that the machinery was still squeaking. The principal trouble seemed to be in the region of the sense of self-approbation. He went forth to the tasks of the day and scowled when he saw his reflection in the shop windows. He felt that by that expressed disfavor he was answering, somehow, those gibes as to his vanity. A certain pair of critics had given the questionable title of vanity to what he considered was manly and proper pride.

And they had called him selfish!

On an eminence in the city park which he was crossing on his way to his office, the workers for a national charity had erected a great clock face, its hands marking the growth of the quota that was solicited.

When he arrived at his desk he drew a check, wrote a note, and summoned a messenger. The check was for the charity—and the sum he gave was ten thousand dollars. He considered that he was answering their taunts as to his selfishness. Furthermore, that amount was the sum of his annual retainer from Serenus Trask. With that check Lang was answering, too, his own conscience in some measure—telling the quizzing conscience that by giving away the money he was now free to deal with young Trask without incurring the imputation that he had handled a presumptuous ingrate for the wage involved. Having eliminated the money feature, according to his way of looking at the thing, Lang set his jaws and went ahead.

He called the Talisman Club, got in touch with young Trask, and ordered that half-reluctant gentleman to make haste in getting to the Lang law office. After he had arranged his papers in the case, Lang laid them on the table in the center of his office, planted his hands, palms down, on either side of the little stack of sheets and sat in his chair and waited, as stiff and grim as a wooden idol. There had been urge and menace in Lang's tone when he commanded Trask to hurry, and the lawyer was not kept waiting long. A chair had been placed for the caller at the table, opposite Lang. Trask sat in it at the lawyer's curt request, and endeavored to copy the stiffly upright attitude of the other; but under Lang's ominous stare, the younger man began to slump, propping his elbows on the arms of the chair.

"Our business to-day has nothing to do with what we have been talking over lately. We have wasted altogether too much time on that nonsense. It is not a matter to be mentioned between us again."

He paused. He had just paid well for the privilege of being free to handle Skiddy

Trask as inclination prompted. His mood had no mercy in it. He decided to strike with the bludgeon of facts—to stun his man and tie him at leisure.

"Your Uncle Serenus is married!"

Serenus, the Second, blinked dizzily; but it was immediately evident that his skepticism was too hard a shell to be cracked by any such blow as that. He shook his head and started to say something, but Lang hit him again, with the information cudgel, while Trask was still groggy.

"And you're going to be married—at once—to a woman he has picked out for you!"

"It's all something that you have rigged up!"

"I knew nothing about either matter till your uncle informed me."

"You lie!"

Lang promptly satisfied an itching that had been in his palm for several days—for weeks, in fact, ever since he had seen Skiddy Trask talking so earnestly to Reba in the dances. He half rose, leaned across the table, and slapped Trask across the face with a vigor that nearly stunned the assaulted man. The lawyer had his hand poised again when Trask had straightened himself in the chair.

"Do you care to follow the discussion any farther along the lines you just chose, Mr. Trask?"

"I can't believe——"

"You *can* believe. *I'm* telling you!" Lang slapped his breast with the admonitory palm. "I'm telling you because I'm directed to tell you, acting as your uncle's attorney, I repeat that your uncle is married."

"I didn't mean what I said to you—but you jumped me," quavered the nephew. "May I ask who she is—where she came from?"

"I know nothing about that. But I have seen her. She's his wife. As to your chosen wife—the woman you're going to marry—she is the daughter of the late Jonas Blake, so many years your uncle's rival in the North country. The marriage settles the feud and unites great interests. So, you see how impossible it will be for you to squirm out of it."

"I'm not talking now to you, Lang—keep your hands off me! But I'm saying that I'll never marry that woman, whoever she is!"

Lang shuffled the papers on the table.

"I had a long conference with your uncle last evening. The matter of possible stubbornness on your part was considered. I just spoke the whole truth when I said that the marriages—both of them—are your uncle's arrangements, and he did not consult me. But as to certain other procedure in regard to you, he did consult me, and I advised him, as his lawyer, how you could be constrained to obey, and that part of the thing is my doing." There was satisfied malevolence in Lang's manner. He added coldly, "You ought to have known better than to trespass, Mr. Trask!"

"And that's how you're using your power in the law, is it?"

"That's how I'm using it in this case. Your uncle has invested money to make you what you are, and now, so he says, he intends to use the investment. Are you sufficiently grateful to obey him?"

"I won't marry the woman."

"Very well! We'll assume that you continue to persist in that ingratitude. In the new testament which I have drafted and which will be executed to-day, you are formally mentioned, to cover the law and to guard against attempts to break the will. You receive one dollar. You'll recollect, possibly, that your uncle exacted notes each time he settled those affairs which your allowance did not suffice for. The notes are scheduled in the will and the cancellation of them will constitute your inheritance, on the ground that you have received your share of the estate. Legally sound, and proof against shyster lawyers! Therefore, as you will stand before the world to-night, you have one dollar coming to you—when your uncle dies. He's looking extremely healthy. Unless, by to-morrow, your engagement to Miss Maravista"—he dwelt on the name and Skiddy winced—"Maravista Blake is announced, your allowance stops. It seems she has agreed to let your uncle make the announcement.

"When your engagement is settled upon, one quarter of the allowance starts. After the day of the wedding you'll get one half the allowance, being on probation to see whether you're making her happy. The rest of the money for your support will be given you by your wife from her estate, your uncle managing the estate for her, and handing her the money. But you must ask your wife for the money, doing so in writing, and she must turn the letters over to your uncle in

order that he may judge of your devotion by their style.

"The idea is, that when the Double T and the Tulandic are joined by your marriage there must be great harmony, and no possibility of a divorce. If your wife is still happy at the time of your uncle's death, a codicil lets you in for a share of his estate. If she isn't happy, you will be in a bad way, Mr. Trask. For you'll have nothing from your uncle, and an unhappy wife will not be generous with you. Understand, do you?"

"And you say you planned it?"

"I planned it—and all legal safeguards will be attended to. The whole thing affords an opportunity to show your uncle that you value the easy life he has given you—will continue to give you if you come halfway with him." The lawyer's suave and patronizing tone did not agree with the triumphant and challenging glitter in the gray eyes. "Your uncle directs me to tell you that if you attempt to come storming to him he'll break all relations, switch off the Blake marriage, and leave you flat."

Trask grasped the edge of the table and slowly pulled himself up out of the chair.

"Yesterday in the club you told me to wait till I had something to say before talking to you."

"That was my proposition."

Trask stumbled to the door and turned there, his hand on the knob.

"I'll not take up your time right now. Perhaps what I have to say isn't of any importance, anyway. And I don't seem to have the words handy. But I can say a little!" He had been twisting his fedora hat in his hands while he sat at the table. He held it tightly rolled in his clutch. He shook it at Lang. "When I do talk to you, Lang, it will be at the right place and time, and then you'll wish to God that you had torn my tongue out here to-day instead of only slapping my face. You're going to be sorry!"

After Trask had gone away, the lawyer allowed himself a moment to take account of stock. He did admit to himself his human animus in the affair of Reba; he was sure that as the elder Trask's attorney he had a right to make the younger Trask amenable to the wishes of a benefactor. He could not bring himself to believe that the tongue of Skiddy Trask could harm John Lang, professionally or socially, or that anything Trask could say would harass the conscience of a man who was so certain of his own rectitude.

He pushed a buzzer, summoned his stenographer and proceeded to put the will of Serenus Trask into legal shape.

In the late afternoon that important client walked into Lang's office.

"Let's see! It was sort of agreed, wasn't it, that you would bring the will and the papers out to the house this evening?" Trask, asking the question, gave the lawyer a searching stare.

"Yes, sir!"

"Perfectly willing to come?"

"Entirely willing." There may have been a touch of too much fervor in the lawyer's consent. At any rate, Old Double T did not look very hospitable just then.

"I'm not going to bother you to that extent, Lang. I'm willing to do a part of the running—and besides, I've had to come downtown to order a flock of suits from that tailor. I'll execute the will and get my copies of the other documents."

Lang understood; more than ever was the old man's jealousy assuming the nature of mania. They went through with the routine of the business in hand; even when they were checking up the stipulations in regard to young Trask the old man continued to be reticent on the question of his nephew; he had put no questions in regard to the outcome of the lawyer's session with "the investment." Lang finally approached the topic by asking whether young Trask had ventured to break over the strict orders and intrude on the honeymoon privacy of the mansion.

"Oh, yes! He ran out to see me after his chat with you," stated Trask with much serenity. "As I was telling you last night, you're a great lawyer. You earn your money."

"I'm wondering why you didn't mention till now that he had been to see you."

"Nothing special to mention! Boy seemed to be all right. Said he was much surprised, but hoped I had a good wife. Didn't let him see her, though. He's too foolish where girls are concerned. Young fellows are inclined that way these days." He gave Lang another sharp glance. "Even fellows who are well balanced other ways!"

"Look here, Mr. Trask, do you mean to tell me that he came out to your house and was sensible?"

"He must have had all his tantrum out here with you. Glad I left it to you. Had a drink and nice chat, and I gave him a thousand so that he can make a regular pleasure trip of it."

"A trip to where?" demanded Lang with considerable violence.

"North country. Tulandic, I suppose, seeing that I took a lot of pains in telling him how to get there. Got to court a girl before you can marry her right, you know! Seemed to be anxious to get away. Took the noon train. Oh, he knows a good thing. Didn't show him her picture, though. No need of dulling the pleasure he'll take while making the trip upcountry. Marriage is in the air these days, eh?"

The old man reached out his stubby thumb and prodded Lang and reminded the lawyer that gossip gave him a lass of his own. But Lang did not smile back at his jovial client. The sudden supineness of young Mr. Trask was not reassuring.

"You say he's going to Tulandic?"

"I told him to go there—and stay right there till he has fixed things," snapped Old Double T, coming out frankly, at last. "I ordered him not to go roaming anywhere else in the North country."

The lawyer wondered how many fragile matters might be lying around in that North country, and what the blundering methods of a fool might compass in the way of smashing things.

Lang did not devote a moment's thought to the pleasing idea that his rival had dashed north on an amatory errand, even though the nephew had allowed his uncle to finance the trip. Lang knew Skiddy Trask and Skiddy's state of mind in that juncture with surer knowledge than Old Double T possessed.

TO BE CONTINUED.

STEPPING SOME

THE fastest animal on earth seems to be the Asiatic antelope, which scientists have timed running at a rate of sixty-two miles an hour. In a mile race one of these animals could give the fastest horse in the world a handicap of a third of a mile, and the fastest human runner a handicap of three quarters of a mile, and lead them under the wire. Even the driver of a racing automobile starting even with the four-footed speeder would have to step on the gas to come home a winner.

ANOTHER LITTLE JOKE

HENRY FORD was riding along one of the mountain roads near Asheville, North Carolina, when he saw a crude board sign hung on a "worm" rail fence reading "For Sail." A few yards away on top of the fence sat a half-grown youth in ragged shirt, "one-gallus" trousers, worn-out shoes, and no socks, a familiar type of the mountaineers who are invariably reticent and monosyllabic, when approached by strangers.

Mr. Ford, however, was in genial mood.

"When does the farm sail?" he inquired, grinning.

The youth put both hands on the rail on which he sat, eased himself into a more comfortable position, emitted a long stream of tobacco juice, shifted the cud, looked at his questioner with dull, unresponsive eyes and replied: "Jest erbout the time some sucker comes along who kin raise the wind."

Gold That Glitters

By Perceval Gibbon

Author of "The Saint," "The Second-class Passenger," Etc.

Truer gold was the heart of this little barmaid than woman ever wore or coin was made of

THE tramp who plodded at the road's edge was aware of the car only in time to leap aside as it swished past him, almost brushing his elbow. It was being driven at an insane speed, going like some great canary-colored projectile, and he had time only to note that its occupants were a monocled youth at the wheel and a gaudy sort of girl at his side before it took the bend ahead almost on two wheels and vanished.

He stared after it with an amaze that soured into resentment.

"The murderin' fools!" he said aloud. "Pity they don't break their bloomin' necks!"

He gathered up the curious contents of the bundle he had let fall in his jump for safety. He had found this Kentish main road in general a kindly one; he had obtained lifts on homeward-bound market wagons and food of a sort had been plentiful. The canary-colored car was an outrage; his anger was that of a man whose clear rights have been infringed.

He went forward upon his way, still breathing desultory maledictions.

"Murderin' fools," he repeated, as his unhurrying feet brought him to the bend around which the car had disappeared. "Pair of bloomin'——"

He ceased abruptly; there was no need of further ill wishing. A hundred yards ahead of him the car had left the road and charged the ditch that ran beneath the high hedge beside it and now lay with its near-side wheels crumpled under it, its screen a bristle of shining splinters of glass and the whole of it a wreck and an ensign of disaster. Upon the grassy bank of the hedge the pinks and yellows of the girl's attire lay in a tragic and crumpled heap. As the tramp stared there arose to sight from the other side of the car the overcoated figure of the fool who had driven it, capless now, holding a handkerchief to his face and steadying himself upon his feet with the other hand upon a mud guard. He seemed to be calling out feebly and inarticulately.

The tramp broke into a run. For all his shuffle when he walked—the labor-saving, mile-eating slouch of the road dweller—he could move handily enough when he liked and he arrived swiftly. He flung down his bundle and stood looking at the unconscious figure of the girl.

She lay on her back, with her head drooping downward toward the ditch, cushioned upon the gay-colored ruin that had been her hat. Upon the pallor of her face the unchanging pink of the cheeks and the hard, fixed bow of the mouth stood out like bloodstains, giving to her stillness a very horrid quality of death, and her ungloved hand, outstretched upon the grasses, was splayed as though fixed in a last effort of defense. And with it all there was, for the tramp at any rate, a special atrocity in the delicate and pretty fashion of all her accouterment, her luxurious and costly looking femininity that should have made her immune from these violences. He looked across at the youth with a savage face.

"Killed 'er, 'ave you?" he said. "Well, you'll be 'ung for it!"

The youth, still pressing the handkerchief to one side of his face, moaned weakly.

"'S my eye," he said tremulously. "Smashed my glass; 'fraid it's done for! Here!" He detached the hand by which he held on to the car, fumbled at a pocket, and managed to bring forth some loose money. "Go 'n' fetch doctor!" he said.

"Go to blazes!" snarled the tramp and bent to the girl.

She showed no obvious wound, but as he raised her so as to lay her with her head uppermost she weighed as lifeless as a shape of stone upon his hands. There were puddles of water in the ditch bottom; he soaked

his neckcloth in one of these and squeezed it upon her face. Trickles of mud ran here and there and gave to her half-obliterated rouge and powder a new and affrighted ghastliness.

"Miss!" he called to her. "'Ere, miss! Open yer eyes just a minute! Can't you 'ear me, miss?"

But miss heard nothing. The tramp looked up with a face in which a kind of austerity had replaced all his savage anger of a couple of minutes before.

"You've done it," he said. "The way you was drivin' that car—murder's the only name for it. What was she—your wife?"

The wretched youth had been dabbing at his damaged eye all the while, half whimpering with the pain of it. He showed as a bony-faced, beaky, weak-chinned creature, with a little, foppish smudge of mustache upon his upper lip and hair plastered flat like a crust upon his skull. Shaken, bruised, and wounded as he was, he met the tramp's question with a gape of utter astonishment.

"Wife!" he said. "Wife! Her!"

And actually from under the red and oozing handkerchief there sounded the thin cackle of a laugh.

The tramp stared at him; he was genuinely and deeply shocked. He was no judge of the quality of a woman, but he knew something about men and it seemed to him that while the girl to whom he had been ministering was pitiful and appealing, the youth who laughed was merely vile and despicable.

Words gathered themselves within him tumultuously.

But he was saved from the mighty oratory that hovered on his lips. Those broad and easy roads serve many travelers, and from around the bend there came the hum of an approaching car. In a few seconds more it had pulled up beside them, and the two men it contained had sprung out.

"Hullo!" exclaimed one of them. "Bad smash, eh? The lady's injured, I'm afraid."

"The lady's dead!" retorted the tramp vehemently. "An' 'e"—with a rigid finger pointing in fierce denunciation—"*'e* did it! Drivin' like a madman, 'e was! Nearly run over me, quarter mile back there."

The man who had spoken looked at him in surprise, with a faintly supercilious cock to his well-shaped brows. But he answered nothing and suddenly it was borne upon the tramp that these two decent-appearing new arrivals would discount any charges he brought against the youth by his tatters, his uncouth speech and all his character of one who had no place in their ordered world.

The youth, with his handkerchief still to his face, was dribbling disjointed explanations.

"Tire burst, I s'pose," he was saying. "Broke my eyeglass in the smash; 'fraid I've lost my eye."

"Let's have a look!" suggested the second of the two newcomers, advancing upon him, while the other knelt down beside the girl. The latter had taken a flask from his pocket and went to work to force some of the contents between the girl's slack lips. All of them pointedly disregarded the tramp. He stood by the ditch, watching them as they went to work and marking with envy the unhesitating manner with which the man with the flask felt at the girl's heart and tested for a pulse in her slim wrist. He was out of it all.

The man who worked over the girl looked up at last.

"I say, Jack!" he called. "I think we'd better get 'em into your car and rush 'em into Maidstone. The lady here—I'm awfully afraid——" A shrug expressed the nature of his fears.

The other agreed. "Yes, an' this eye wants attending to pretty badly," he said. "You hold the lady in the back seat and we two'll go in front."

It was only when they were all but ready to start that the last speaker took indirect notice of the presence of the tramp. His cool eye dwelt on him appraisingly for a couple of moments; then:

"Better take the rugs an' things with us," he said. "No use leavin' them to be stolen!"

And when he had piled the movables from the wreck into his own car, he drove off. He went slowly, so as not to shake up their unconscious burden, and in the very deliberation of the car's progress there was for the tramp a suggestion of arrogant indifference to his existence.

"Well, I'm blowed!" he said, as he stood alone beside the débris of the canary-colored car. "Murder—in broad daylight! But who's goin' to believe me?"

He was assured that no one would. He had not even actually seen the accident take place; and the girl was almost certainly dead and, therefore, past bearing out his testimony. He shrugged resignedly and

stopped to gather up his bundle again. With his hand upon it he paused and remained stooping, staring at something that had fallen among the weeds at the foot of the bank.

" 'Ere!" he said. "What's this?"

He reached for it, picked it up and rose to examine it. It was a brooch, a pretty thing made in the form of a lyre, such as a woman might use to fasten a scarf across her bosom. It twinkled up to his startled eyes from the hollow of his grimed palm which set off and enhanced its look of useless and lavish costliness.

"Diamonds!" he gasped. "Gold an' diamonds! Must 'ave ripped it off 'er when she fell! Why, 'ere's 'undreds of pounds' worth!"

He turned it back and forth in his big blunt-ended fingers; and suddenly, with quick furtive movements of the head, he glanced about him lest any one should be watching. It was at that moment that the thing became his, a means toward plenty and pleasure. He thrust it deep into his pocket and took his bundle in hand.

His conscience troubled him not at all. James Webb, from time to time deck hand on Thames barges, dock laborer, Jack of all trades upon many watersides and now, since the spring was fine and the summer promised well, a tramp of the southern counties of England, was so little a thief in the grain that he was genuinely unaware that he was stealing at all. The girl was dead, so she didn't own it; she wasn't the young fool's wife, so *he* didn't own it; and anyhow, a thing picked up in the grass like that—it was a gift tossed to him by sheer circumstance. Only—it was a thing to keep quiet about, lest it should be taken away from him.

He arrived in Maidstone soon after noon. At the bottom of the hill which sloped between villas to the town, a large policeman looked searchingly and disapprovingly at him as he slouched past, crossed the bridge and headed up the busy and cheery High Street. He saw the glance and stiffened defensively as though the official eye could see through the stuff of his worn corduroys to the treasure in his pocket. He knew what he wanted and presently he found it—the plate-glass front of the town's chief jeweler, with its exhibit of clocks and silverware and, in a corner next the door, its display of jewelry. He stopped here, an incongruous figure of shabby poverty with his untidy bundle dangling from one hand, and took stock of the gems exposed in the window.

Most of the articles were ticketed with their prices, but a few of the larger pieces set forth on pads of white velvet were unmarked. It was one of the latter that gained his attention, a heart-shaped pendant crusted with brilliants. Mentally he compared it with the brooch in his pocket.

"Not 'arf as many diamonds, nor yet not such big ones. Wonder why they don't stick the price on it?"

For that was his purpose, to find some index to the value of his find, ready for the time when he should turn it into cash. He frowned thoughtfully at the bright window and was suddenly aware of a dapper assistant within watching him suspiciously through the glass of the door. Upon a sudden impulse he pointed with a finger to the diamond heart and beckoned the assistant forth with his head.

The assistant stared a moment, then jerked open the door and stood upon the threshold, eying him from head to foot.

"What d'you want?" he demanded.

Webb again pointed to the little heart behind the glass. "Mister," he inquired; "what's the worth o' that heart thing you got there? You ain't put no price on it."

"That! You thinking of buying it?" queried the other.

"Not without knowin' the price, any'ow," retorted Webb.

The jeweler's shopman sniffed. "Better treat yourself to something cheaper, my man," he said loftily. "That heart is worth" —he hesitated and decided to be crushing while he was about it, and a big lie costs no more than a little one—"it's worth a cool thousand pounds, that is! Are you sure you won't take a couple of 'em?"

"Thousand——"

To the jeer itself Webb replied nothing at all. He backed away from the little shopman as though in fear. He backed till he had reached the farther edge of the sidewalk; then, with a last scared look at the triumphant jester, he turned and blundered on up the street. For he had believed utterly. The capricious and unaccountable fortune that will enrich a man one day and undo him the next had singled him out for this stupendous gift, and it frightened him.

He found a quiet spot in a big street and with much precaution against possible spies he drew his wealth forth. It was as he had

thought; it had many more and much larger stones than the thousand-pound heart; altogether there was twice as much of mere mass to it. It might even be worth two thousand. He swore reverently as he reflected upon it.

"But it'll take some gettin' rid of," he warned himself. "Can't go into a pawnshop like this an' ask 'em for thousands o' pounds. I—I got to get some different clo'es."

He surveyed himself and frowned in thought. It was impossible plausibly to connect the figure which he cut in his own eyes with the El Dorado which beckoned to him. Pawnshops, as he knew them, were the very homes and headquarters of suspicion and distrust; and he had no idea of how to find the discreet dealers in stolen goods who give a value for value and ask no questions. "I *got* to get some different clo'es," he repeated to himself, and had a vision of himself nobly clad, armored against the doubts of usurers, laying down his treasure confidently upon a counter whence presently he picked up its price in handful after handful of spendable money.

"An' that means gettin' a job," was his conclusion. "Couple o' months—or p'r'aps three—ought to do it. Can't go an' miss a chance like this 'ere!"

The blind brick walls about him alone were witnesses to the stiffening of resolution that ran through him and made of the drooping tramp a man with a direction and a purpose.

It was late evening ere he completed the journey on foot over the hill road that links Maidstone with Chatham; his instinct led him unerringly toward the waterside now that work was in question. And the same instinct, like that of a homing bird, led him to a suitably mean street and to a correspondingly unpretentious public house. In a stuffy little compartment not much bigger than a telephone booth he laid his bundle down and demanded beer and bread and cheese.

"Come far?" asked the girl who pushed the tankard toward him, with perfunctory civility.

He nodded. "Walked over from Maidstone," he answered. Now that he was in search of work there was no need to tell her more. She was a large and buxom girl with a mild and pleasant face and something of directness and simplicity in her regard. She picked up the shilling which he laid down and moved toward the cash register at the back of the bar. A harsh voice arrested her.

"Here! Let's 'ave a look at that!"

Webb, lowering his tankard at the sound of it, was aware of a shirt-sleeved man behind the bar who held out his hand for the shilling which he had just paid over—a short and pot-bellied man, with a jowl that crushed into creases over his collar and angry little eyes like a proud pig. He took the coin from the girl's hand, examined it, and rang it twice on the bar.

"All right!" he said then, restored it to her, gave Webb a glance that seemed to challenge him to make any comment on the matter and moved away.

"What was all that?" Webb asked the girl when she returned with his change.

She gave a wry little smile. "There's a lot o' bad money about lately," she said. "I took a bad half crown this morning—at least, he says it was me."

"Was it you?" asked Webb.

"I don't know. But I know I got to pay for it," she answered. "Either that or pass it off on some one else. An' of course I can't do that."

"But some one passed it on you," said Webb.

She nodded resignedly. "That's what *he* says," she answered. "But I couldn't do that."

She spoke with such a tranquil conviction that Webb had no reply. He did not altogether understand, but he was impressed, none the less. In her place he would have seen no evil in passing on his loss to another; but he liked the steadfastness of honesty that went so well with her quiet and patient eyes.

He had the good fortune to find employment the following morning. A wharf extension was building, and before noon he was one of a gang of men at work unloading stone from a flotilla of lighters for the construction. It was not easy nor agreeable work; the stuff had to be piled by hand into barrows and taken ashore over plank gangways—a day-long monotony of lifting and hauling that tired his slackened muscles to the utmost. The dinner hour found him already stiff and aching, with a powerful inclination to leave the job and depart again to the freedom and ease of the roads, the variety and interest of tramping. But upon

rising that morning in the common lodging house where he had slept, he had pinned the brooch within the waistband of his trousers, where a hand thrust through the belt could feel its presence. He felt for it now, while he sat upon a stone heap and ate the food he had brought with him and the touch of it was sufficient to restore his resolution.

And the end of the day also brought its reward in a sense of satisfaction in a task accomplished and also in the knowledge that some sixth of a week's wages was earned toward the achievement of his purpose. He sat that evening in the general kitchen of the lodging house, his elbow upon the table, his head in his hand and reviewed once more the prospect that opened before him. Tramps, laborers, and the like were busy about him with talk, cooking and such things; but he saw nothing of them. He was gazing beyond them to where there moved, against an indeterminate background, an impressively clad figure to which all the world was a buyable chattel. It rode in cabs, it refreshed itself frequently, it labored not at all. It was comely and clever: it was himself as he would be.

Some one passing behind him jostled him roughly where he sat so that his dream dropped from him. He turned to curse the man who had knocked against him, but ere he spoke he saw the scene about him and realized its quality. A drunken man was trying to take his boots off and a group was watching him with laughter. About the fire stood a gang, keeping jealous eyes on their pots and pans and a miserable woman was trying to feed a rag-wrapped baby. Utter squalor, naked poverty and inhuman degradation were the note of it all. He slipped a hand through his belt and felt between his fingers the small hard shape of the brooch. And suddenly he laughed.

He saw no more of the girl who had first greeted him on his arrival in Chatham till his wages had been paid him on the following Saturday. His program of thrift allowed him little to spend upon mere indulgences, but his days of work and his evenings in the foul and noisy kitchen had left him a little lonely and he had a pressing need for a while of companionship. The shabby little bar seemed to him cozy and hospitable and the sight of the girl, large and serious and kindly, gave him an odd sense of respite from the rigor of his purpose. Moreover, the fact that she recognized him warmed him with a feeling of welcome.

"Found work?" she inquired.

"Yes, I got a job," he answered. "I'll likely be 'ere two or three months, now."

She smiled. She had a slow and kindly smile that he found pleasant to see. "You'll be in here sometimes, then?" she suggested.

He nodded. "Sure to be," he agreed. "Ain't got nowhere else to go. An' you? Been takin' any more bad money lately?"

Her smile faded at that. "I don't know how it 'appens," she said dolefully. "I'm sure I'm as careful as I can be. But it keeps comin' in. Another half crown an' a two-shillin' piece—an' I've got to make it good!"

"It's a shame," said Webb warmly. "Must be some feller that's got you marked down. Why don't you go to the police an' 'ave them put a detective on."

She sighed. "The landlord's done that a'ready," she answered. "But it *is* a shame. It isn't only that I got to lose by it; but to think there's a man like that goin' about! It makes you sick—feedin' himself an' buyin' his drinks with money that don't belong to him! Wouldn't you rather starve?"

"I'd like to catch 'im," said Webb. "That's what I'd like to do. He wouldn't pass no more bad money for a bit, I'll bet! But why should *you* 'ave to pay?"

She made a helpless gesture with her hands. "It's that or get the sack," she said. "I got five of 'em now that I've 'ad to pay for."

"Let's 'ave a look," he suggested.

She felt in her pocket and produced an envelope and emptied its contents on the bar. There were three half crowns and two florins. Webb picked up one of the former and examined it curiously.

" 'E's a clever workman, whoever 'e is," he commented. "You could pass one o' these on me any time an' I'd never know. 'Ardly anybody'd know. A man 'u'd take it an' go off an' spend it and not be any the worse." He was watching her as he spoke; she only nodded regretfully. "What you goin' to do with 'em?" he asked.

She shook her head. "I don't know," she said. "Try an' put 'em where nobody'll ever find 'em, I suppose."

"Throw 'em in the river, perhaps," he suggested, half facetiously. "I'm workin' down there; 'ow'd you like me to take 'em an' heave 'em in for you?"

To his astonishment she smiled almost eagerly.

"Will you?" she said. "Do! Then I'll know they can't do no more harm."

He stared at her. "You mean it?" he demanded.

She seemed not to understand. "Course I mean it," she protested.

"Right!" said Webb. "I'll do it." And he swept up those plausible tokens of value and dropped them into his jacket pocket.

It was policy as well as a sense of humor that prompted him in his manner of disposing of them, for he was anxious that she should have independent testimony that he had really thrown them into the river. The dinner hour on Monday was reaching its end and the men were sitting about among the stone heaps, smoking and awaiting the summons to renew work. Webb, sitting among them, dropped a hand to his trousers pocket and brought out the coins and inspected them as they lay in his hand.

"Hullo, Jim!" called one of the others. "Been robbin' a till or what?"

The rest of them turned to look. Webb smiled at them.

"Can any o' you fellers swim an' dive?" he asked. "'Cos, if so, I'll make it worth your while."

"How?" came the chorused query.

"Like this," he answered, rising to his feet. He took one of the half crowns between finger and thumb and held it forth for them to see. Then, while they watched him breathlessly, he flung the broad coin forth over the water. It sparkled in a long arc and hit the surface fifty yards away.

"What yer doin', yer fool?" yelled somebody. Webb grinned at him and a second coin followed the first. "'E's mad!" cried another, and rose as though to prevent him, but the third and fourth coins went the way of the others. He backed away from the man who would restrain him.

"Only this left," he cried. "Pity to keep it all by itself, ain't it?" And the last of the coins spun forth and plopped into the river.

The men stared at him as he went back to his seat upon the stones and resumed his pipe. For every one of them, the sum he had thrown away was considerable.

"Well!" commented one, expelling a deep breath. "Jim's mad, an' that's all about it! Or else 'e's come into a fortune."

Webb had his hands tucked into his belt; beneath the fingers of one lay the little jeweled lyre. He smiled again.

If he wanted publicity for his disposal of the coins he assuredly got it in the amplest measure. By evening he was notorious along the waterside; and when, next morning, he offered the explanation of his action, he was scarcely less famous. But when next he visited the public house the girl greeted him with a smile of merry appreciation.

It came to be almost his only recreation, the glass of beer and the hour of chat with her across the bar in the intervals of her service. Week followed week and his visits had the quality of ritual. The tale of his savings grew; he reached the point at which he was able to calculate the date when he would be able to leave the dull toil of his employment and go to London to realize upon his wealth. His resolution in this respect had never faltered; it was always in London that he had glimpsed his gilded future. Not even his genuine liking for the girl could shake his determination to be done with Chatham as soon as his plans should be ripe. Twice again he threw away base coins for her, and the fact of her fixed and unalterable honesty, a quality as constant in the make-up of her mind as the shape of her features in the contours of her face, became less marvelous to him.

The climax of their acquaintance came one evening when he entered the little bar to find no other customer there. "Evenin', miss," he greeted as usual and ordered his very modest drink.

She smiled at him, the slowly widening and friendly smile for which he had come to look, filled his pewter tankard and set it down before him. He thrust a ten-shilling note across in payment and she turned to get change from the cash register behind her. At the same moment the shirt-sleeved and pot-bellied landlord bustled to the machine and began to work upon it.

"'Ow much?" he demanded, taking the note from the girl. "Right!" He struck the appropriate key and handed her a little pile of silver and coppers in return. She passed it to Webb who pocketed it and leaned against the counter, chatting till it was time to push his tankard over to be replenished. He paid for it this time with a half crown that he fished at random from his pocket. And as on the evening of his first visit, the landlord intercepted the girl and took the coin from her.

"'Ere!" he demanded suddenly of Webb. "What's this you tryin' on?"

He bounced the coin upon the bar; it rang as flat as lead. His little eyes were savage as he glared at Webb.

"What yer talkin' about?" retorted Webb. "If it ain't good, that's your lookout. You give it me in my change for me last drink. I 'adn't no other 'arf crown on me!"

The landlord pushed the coin over to him. "You look out I don't call a p'liceman," he threatened. "I 'anded out yer last change meself and there warn't no 'arf crowns among it. You pick up yer 'ome-made money an' pay for yer beer, will yer?"

"I tell you I got it from you!" insisted Webb.

"Miss!" The pot-bellied man turned to where the girl stood behind him, looking on and listening. Webb could no longer see his face when he turned nor the warning and commanding wink with which he prompted her. But over the bulging shoulder he could see her face and its trouble.

"Miss! You 'anded 'im the change I give yer," barked the fat man. "Speak up; you're witness there wasn't no 'arf crown in it, was there?"

She did not answer at first but stood nervously tangling her fingers before her.

"Speak up!" ordered the landlord. "Got a tongue in yer 'ead, 'aven't yer? Tell 'im there wasn't none!"

There was another pause; then she sighed.

"Yes, there was," she answered in her mild and steady voice.

The landlord swore and she shrank back from him. Webb laughed, but he was thrilled, too. He knew he might safely have counted upon it, but it was none the less stimulating and heart warming to watch her unswerving truth at work.

"Now's the time to send for a policeman," he jeered. "Unless, p'r'aps, you'd like me to fetch one."

The landlord gave him a ferocious look and banged down a sound coin in place of the imposture which yet lay on the bar.

"You'll clear out to-morrow, *you* will," he rasped at the girl. "'Ad enough o' *your* tricks, I 'ave."

And he stamped his indignant way toward his den of an office and left them together. They stood, one to each side of the pewter-topped counter, and looked at each other. The girl's eyes were wet with distress.

"Oh!" she broke out. "What does he want me to do things like that for? It's like—it's like—stealin'; I can't bear them. An' now I've got to go an' I don't know what I'm goin' to do."

"Hush!" said Webb. "It's my turn to stand by you now. I never saw nobody like you. I don't believe you could do a dirty thing if you tried. Supposin', now—supposin' you an' me was to fix up together! I bin savin' money all the weeks I bin 'ere an' soon I'll 'ave more—'eaps an' 'eaps more. We'd go to London; p'r'aps we c'd even 'ave a pub of our own. What say?"

She looked at him steadily. "You mean—get married?"

He nodded. Then, misreading her silence, he leaned across the bar, and, in tones little louder than a whisper, he told her the story of the accident on the Maidstone road, of his find, of his plan and his prospects. And to clinch his tale he fumbled within his waistband, pricked his finger on the pin of the brooch and managed to extract it. He showed it to her, lying gleaming in the cup of his hand.

"A thousand pounds—any'ow," he said. "Think—a thousand pounds!"

He heard her gasp and looked quickly up at her face. What he saw there made his jaw drop.

"*You!*" she breathed, in a sort of incredulity of horror. "You—like all the others! And I did think you were decent an' honest! I was just goin' to——"

She broke off abruptly.

"But what's the matter?" he demanded. "'Tisn't as if I'd stole it. There it was, lyin' in the grass for anybody to pick up. An' the woman was dead."

She shook her head. "But it ain't yours," she said. "You ought to have taken it to the police station. But to keep it like that an' to ask me to come an' live on it—oh, it's wrong, it's all wrong!"

There was always that confident assurance, that trenchant discrimination between clear right and clear wrong, in her manner and voice. He was unutterably abashed.

"Then—then you won't——"

She shook her head again. "I couldn't," she said decidedly, "I'd rather starve, an' I *did* think you would, too."

She turned away and he, leaving his drink untasted, turned in silence to the door.

It was twenty minutes later that a sturdy young man in worn working clothes and with a face whose hard seriousness imper-

fectly masked a certain trepidation, made his way to the desk of the sergeant on duty at the police station.

"Well?" inquired that officer briefly.

For answer the young man slapped down upon the desk a trinket that winked in the electric light.

" 'Ad any inquiries 'bout this bein' lost?" he asked.

The stout sergeant examined it with interest. "Where d'you get it?" he said.

James Webb told him the story.

"Ah!" said the sergeant. "An' you've been holdin' on to it in case a reward was offered, eh? You might 'ave got into trouble over that, you know. 'Owever—Billings!"

A young constable rose from his seat by the fire and came forward. The sergeant handed him the brooch.

"Take that across the road to the jewelers' an' ask 'em what they think of it!"

James Webb was given the seat by the fire vacated by Billings, and sat staring moodily at the coals till the policeman returned and dropped the brooch on the sergeant's desk.

"Well?"

Billings grinned with a sidelong glance at the listening Webb.

"Says he'll sell you them by the dozen at ten shillings apiece."

Webb breathed deeply. Without a word he took the brooch which the smiling sergeant handed to him and went forth. He passed slowly along the street in the direction of the little inn.

"I'll get her to teach me that honesty trick of 'ers," he said. "I cert'n'y ain't no good at the other thing!"

NO NEED FOR THE EGGS

THE national capital is the happy hunting ground of the "nouveau riche," the social climber and the rank outsider. It is, consequently, full of stories of the absurd things the "pushers" do and say in the fond hope of creating the illusion that they feel at home among the mighty. Their pretensions are legion.

One evening at a dinner Representative Longworth, of Cincinnati, encountered a "new" dowager who wound up a catalogue of the wonders of her "country place" with a description of her poultry yard. The hens were all "prize fowls," she explained, elaborating on their pedigrees.

"I suppose they lay every day," commented Longworth politely.

"Oh, of course, they could," she said loftily, "but in our circumstances, you understand, it's not at all necessary for them to do so."

THE BEST BOTTLED STUFF

JOHN B. ANDERSON, one of the leading attorneys of Asheville, North Carolina, made a forty-mile trip into the mountains of western North Carolina, one day last spring, to have a consultation with an ill client. On the way he stopped at a mountaineer's cabin to get a drink of water. However, since he was in a territory whose inhabitants regarded the manufacture of liquor as a God-given privilege with which the government had no right to interfere, the conversation soon veered to that absorbing topic. From there it was a short stage to a discussion of the best kinds of whisky obtainable.

"From all I've ever heard," said Anderson, "the very best whisky is the kind that's bottled in bond."

"Naw," objected the mountaineer with that ghost of a smile that, in his type, indicates an outburst of humor. "The very bes' is the kind whut's bottled in barns."

Bright Roads of Adventure

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "First Down, Kentucky!" "Eyes in the Boat, Number Six!" Etc.

"Bright men stir up most of the trouble in this world," lamented McCready—and seemingly with justification

V.—MAROONED ON NO NAME KEY

The day after the naval action of the Rio San Juan passed very quietly. The *Three Friends* headed west for Cape San Antonio and did better than fourteen knots with a strong wind behind her and a following sea. At night we kept an anxious lookout for hostile cruisers as we are sure that both ends of the island will swarm with them. If they catch us, we are gone ducks. Two lights were sighted during the evening but they didn't see us as we are running dark. Boiler tubes leaking and coal getting shy. *Am stuck on the life.*

THIS I find scribbled on a page of the smudged, sea-stained diary. That last remark was intended to be confidential, the words of a young man talking to himself. It makes odd reading for the Ralph Paine of to-day, a sedate, bald-headed citizen of such conventional propriety that his fellow townsmen elected him to the New Hampshire legislature to help make laws instead of smashing them, and his excellency, the governor, appointed him as a member of the dignified State board of education. Seldom has a pirate of the Caribbean been so thoroughly reformed, outwardly if not at heart.

The gods of wind and weather favored the attempt of the *Three Friends* to elude the interference of the irritated Spanish naval forces. The brilliant moon was covered with watery clouds and the sea took on an aspect gray and misty and melancholy. The signs foretold a rough blow and a wet ship. Another day and she was wallowing in rain and spray while the strident gale twanged her funnel stays and the combers leaped over Mike Walsh's twelve-pounder which was lashed at its station in the bow. Our cook, Jim Bell, was flooded out of his galley and he properly refused to try to kindle another fire, loudly explaining that he wa'n't hired to drownd hisself in no swimmin' races, no, suh. And so we rummaged in the hold for hard-tack and sardines and canned beef and huddled on deck wherever a lee could be found.

Nobody cursed the weather, although it wickedly racked and pounded the *Three Friends.* It was not beyond conjecture that her abused engines might quit or her seams open and let her founder like a blooming basket, but in this whirling smother of clouds and rain and foam, with an ocean wildly confused, the ship was at least effectually concealed against discovery. Slowly, with infinite labor, she crept far over to the coast of Yucatan and then changed her course to continue the detour well into the Gulf of Mexico. It was the part of discretion to avoid those cramped waters between Cuba and Florida.

As soon as this heavy weather subsided, there arose much excitable discussion concerning the scheme of leaving the party of patriots and the cargo on some God-forsaken key or other while the vessel went off to find more coal and supplies. It was not a popular idea. There was much grumbling and some talk of mutiny ran to and fro, but it simmered down when Captain O'Brien offered a few brief remarks. These were to the effect that he was running the show and they had better stow all that fool nonsense. He would give them the surplus grub that belonged to the crew and come back to take 'em off somehow.

It may be remarked in passing that this wiry, gray-haired terrier of a man was drawing near to sixty years of age. He had led a battering life on many seas and suffered innumerable anxieties and hardships but he was still vigorous, not to say forceful, as I have tried to indicate. This may interest the landsman who, in sheltered comfort, feels that he must begin to ease up

when on the wrong side of fifty. The example of this indomitable sea rover should stimulate the "tired business man" who wears himself out in a few hours a day at a desk and plays golf to fit him for the ordeal.

Somewhere off Key West, early in the night, the *Three Friends* dropped a boat and manned it with four Cubans who rowed into port with secret messages for their friends and confederates. They carried also, for transmission to New York by cable, the stories written by McCready and Paine of that unexpected engagement with the Spanish gunboat. These narratives had been submitted to Colonel Perez Calvo and Captain Johnny O'Brien for censorship, but they could not bear to mutilate them. Pride forbade, and the devil take the consequences! With his customary intelligence, McCready appraised the situation as follows:

"These newspaper stories will not be accepted as legal evidence of piracy. They can't find us to make us swear to the truth of them, for we shall be lost in Cuba. And if they did, we wouldn't have to incriminate ourselves. The crew of the ship won't squeal on each other, you can gamble on that. And the Spanish navy can't depose, under oath, that the vessel which shot 'em up was the *Three Friends*. The story will raise a fuss and be played up on the front page, but in the eyes of the law all newspaper men are liars until proved to the contrary."

This sounded so logical that worry was dismissed. The sea-worn *Three Friends* moved northward in the Florida Strait and skirted the far-flung tangle of shoals and keys among which she had sought a hiding place from the two American cruisers during the voyage outward bound. Finding deep water in the Hawk Channel, inside the barrier reef, she ran forty miles and then slowed down to turn in among the maze of keys which were then so remote and solitary. In the light of the moon they disclosed themselves as dark dots or mere threads scattered over an immense, shallow area of quiet water. Once more we were wearily hoisting all that heavy cargo out of the hold by main strength, passing up the innumerable cases of rifle cartridges with the rope handles, grunting over the boxes of weapons, shoving at that uneasy consignment of nitroglycerin. Again it all had to be heaped on deck to dump into the surf boats strung alongside.

The ship dropped anchor at midnight, and we looked in vain for the landing place. It was four miles away, explained Captain O'Brien, and the water was so shoal that he could move no closer. To this invisible destination it was necessary to transfer the cargo, the patriots, the supplies, in the boats and to tug eight miles at the oars for every round trip to the beach. Fond memory refuses to weave any romance into that back-breaking performance. It was disgusting. After ten days at sea in the *Three Friends* the company was not in the pink of condition for such a task. You might have called it a bit overtrained.

However, one could not reasonably expect to enjoy such sport as shooting up Spanish gunboats all the time. In a boat loaded to the gunwales I plied an oar and reflected that the Yale-Harvard race was never like this. The Cubans who manned the other thwarts may have been excellent cigar-makers, but they were infernal duffers in a boat. The unwieldy, flat-bottomed craft progressed in a drunken manner, occasionally sidewise or wrong-end to, amid a prodigious splashing and banging and cursing. One of the Cuban military officers pretended to steer. It was engaging to hear him invoke an endless category of saints whose intercession seemed highly advisable if we were ever to fetch up anywhere.

Among the unhappy toilers of the sea was one who professed acquaintance with these waters. He it was who found the objective, called No Name Key, after two hours of spasmodic toil. By night the place looked unpleasant, a tiny strip of sand and a dense growth of mangrove bushes barely lifted above the tide. It was worse to discover that reefs of coral and limestone surrounded the key and the boats could be hauled no nearer the beach than several hundred yards. This meant that every bit of cargo had to be lugged that distance by tired men who floundered and stumbled or fell down under their burdens and found it rough going indeed.

Our boat set some stuff ashore with which to make a camp and discovered that the centipedes and other ill-natured bugs were holding a district convention or something of the sort on No Name Key. It was a swampy islet with an evil smell of rotten vegetation and tidal mud. As a hiding place for our band of outlaws it had been chosen, no doubt, because nobody would think of trying

to find us there. Fragments of driftwood were lodged in the mangrove branches, several feet higher than the level of the beach. This served to show that the key had been swept by more than one hurricane sea. It was evident that the weather signs would be watched with a singular interest.

Having rigged a rude tent and stowed the personal dunnage in it, my boatload of heroes embarked for the return trip to the *Three Friends*. A strong breeze came up with the dawn and the tide raced wickedly through the channels and lagoons. That four-mile pull was very like a nightmare, for the current set us far astern of the anchored vessel and then we seemed to be gaining no distance at all. The boat was light, however, and we clawed ahead an inch or so at a stroke.

In a worse plight was the valiant Mike Walsh who had just then set out with a load of munitions and patriots. Tide and wind drove him seaward. In the rough water his Cubans were a tangle of sprawling oars, of feet waving against the sky. This was different from landing an expedition, close to the shore, in some sheltered bay of the Cuban coast. Mike knocked a man off a seat and took an oar. He rowed as strongly as he swore. His voice would have drowned the whistle of the *Three Friends*. Remorselessly his boat drifted out across the wide reach toward the Hawk Channel and an empty horizon and it seemed unlikely that he could steer to make one of the intervening keys.

As the distance increased his expostulations could no longer be heard. He and his crew resembled some fantastic mechanical toy in furious but futile motion. Captain O'Brien was intent on getting the cargo out of the ship before any meddlesome revenue cuttters or cruisers from Key West might happen along. This was no time to dally with a rescue party and, therefore, all that Mike Walsh got was sympathy. He passed from view behind a fragment of an outer key, still driving for the great beyond. It was consoling to feel an implicit faith in his ability to master almost any emergency and one could fancy him as organizing an impromptu filibustering expedition of his own, with his derelict boatload of patriots and rifles and ammunition.

It was eight o'clock in the morning when McCready and I shoved off for another trip to No Name Key. The sailormen of the *Three Friends* were helping to navigate the surfboats, having perceived that the job was in a bad way without them. By noon all of the stuff had been put ashore and the marooned company dropped in its tracks on the beach and among the muddy mangrove bushes to rest its aching bones and sleep profoundly, while the *Three Friends* took her departure.

Our very souls were fatigued because all this exertion had yielded such pitiful results. After the long voyage into the Caribbean, ten days of it, the enterprise was in a situation much less hopeful than when it had sailed. It seemed foredoomed to disappointment and misfortune.

Toward nightfall the party began to bestir itself. The Cubans used their machetes to cut boughs and rig shelters with bits of canvas, rubber coats, and so on, slinging their hammocks to the stouter bushes. McCready and Jack Gorman and I made our own camp and saved a place for Mike Walsh, even though he was missing with all hands. Cuban sentries were posted on both sides of the key and there was a semblance of military routine with shrill challenges of *"Quién Va"* and a whistle blown to command silence after dark. My diary has this comment:

> Jack Gorman is a bully forager and we got our share of grub and water and decided to take turns guarding it. In the twilight I waded out and took a bath and put on a clean shirt. The moral effect was excellent. Felt better than at any time since the voyage began. Laid around a fire in the evening and wondered what was going to happen to us. Some of the Cubans very peevish and hollering for more to eat. The colonel expects a schooner from Key West with more stores. This is a funny way to spend Christmas.

The wind veered into the northward next morning, blowing strong, with a clouded sky. The sea beat against the key and two of the surfboats had been so carelessly secured that they went adrift and were lost. Two others were left, but in such boisterous weather it was hopeless to set out exploring in search of a refuge more habitable, nor for the present was there any way of obtaining more food and water.

It was a cheerful Christmas, nevertheless, with a gift welcome beyond compare, for at a yell from the beach the Cubans scampered out of their shelters. A speck of a boat was lunging in from seaward before the wind, a low, inert lump of a craft which wallowed over the crested seas like a cow jumping

hurdles. After a while it was seen that a rag of blue fluttered from an oar raised in the bow, and in the stern the figure of what appeared to be the solitary occupant gleamed white from the waist up.

"It's nobody else but Mike," shouted Jack Gorman, "but where's his bunch of waterlogged patriots?"

The astonishing surfboat grounded far out among the reefs. Her commander was seen to flourish an oar in the manner of a harpoon, or as if he were stirring a kettle of soup in the bottom of the boat. Feeble wails arose.

"Mike is rousin' up his crew," said Gorman. "He didn't lose 'em after all."

The Cuban castaways bobbed up one by one and went overboard in close contact with a busy oar handle, followed by a roar from Mike Walsh:

"The beach ahoy! Send some hands off to help me get the stuff out and report me to the comandante as arrivin' with me cargo in good order."

We stumbled through the surf and fell upon the neck of this competent chief gunner's mate. Stripped to the waist, his hairy chest was elaborately tattooed with a spread-eagle and the American ensign. No fear of his striking his colors! His greeting was affectionate, but he hastened to protest:

"God bless ye, boys, an' there's no place like home. But first let me get rid of the cargo. Then I'll spin the yarn. I've been clear to the coast of Africa and back, with a bum crew. And my only shirt that I set for a sail is blown out of the bolt ropes, for I couldn't stop to reef after I once got her hoisted."

Mike carried more ammunition from his boat to the beach than any other three men, reported to the Cuban comandante in person, apologized for his delayed arrival, and was joyously hauled into our camp where he ate enough for three men, rebuilt the makeshift tent in handy sailor fashion, and insisted on washing the tin plates before he sat himself down to rest.

"I was kind of cir-circuitous," explained Michael Walsh, with his boyish grin and humorous twinkle. "When I went driftin' off to hell-an'-gone, I addressed me brave but helpless Cubanos until my tongue hung out, but it was no use. When they come to they'll say I made 'em work their passage. The boat shipped a lot of water, being loaded deep, but I would not permit them to jettison cargo, the same havin' great value to old Gomez across yonder. So I made 'em bale the ship till they fell off their perches and washed about in the bilges. And then I prodded 'em again.

"When day broke the good ship was in the Florida Strait, and I began to worry. If I bumped the coast of Cuba there might be difficulty in explainin' this infant expedition of arms and rebels, an' me the same Mike Walsh that tossed shrapnel into the Spanish navy. But the wind shifted, please God, an' I came drivin' back. What with balin' and rowin', the enlisted men is wore to a frazzle."

For several days longer the stormy weather held the party as prisoners on No Name Key. The rations were running short, and there was no sign of the promised schooner from Key West. The cleaning rods of the rifles were lashed to bits of stick and served to spear the giant crawfish out on the reef. These had the size and flavor of lobster and were boiled in a kettle of salt water. When the gale subsided, Mike Walsh and a boat's crew explored other small islands two or three miles distant and found a little brackish water for drinking and a few bunches of green bananas.

Quarrels over food touched off several lively scrimmages and the Cuban doctor patched and plastered the wounded. The fresh water was doled out on short allowance, and it was prudent to keep an eye on your own share if you preferred to save part of it against a greater thirst. The suffering was not acutely serious, but it was most uncomfortable. The morale of the expedition was beginning to break. The privations endured were not enough to account for this. It was the sense of failure, the feeling that rescue had been somehow thwarted and that the party was abandoned to its fate.

As was bound to happen in such dismal circumstances, some men displayed unbreakable courage and fortitude while others whimpered and would have stolen the boats and fled by night if the sentries had not been on the alert. The Cuban leader, Colonel Perez Calvo, had preferred to stay in the *Three Friends* and seek terra firma in Key West. The scourge of seasickness had made him of little account, and there was no mourning when he vanished from the picture. The command was assumed by the one-eyed Major Morales, a brave soldier but not the

man to coax and cheer and drive these forlorn and emotional castaways. He threatened, cursed, beat them with the flat of his machete, and they sulked the more.

What held them together and saved the situation was the personality of a blithe soldier of fortune, Pagaluchi by name, an Italian by birth, a Cuban by adoption, and recently an engineer in the Argentine navy. He was a linguist, a gentleman, a rover at home in the ports of every sea, and he had the gift of shining in adversity. While frying himself a mess of green bananas and bacon in a tin plate you might have heard him caroling an Italian love song, breaking off to tell in Spanish some broad anecdote which made the Cubans yell with laughter, or strolling over to chat in French with a disconsolate lad from Haiti. As a diplomat he displayed his talent in such episodes as this, which my diary briefly mentions:

> Another gun play this afternoon. Major Morales ordered the peppery little chap nicknamed Porto Ric' to go in a boat and hunt for water. Porto Ric' properly refused, having worked like a dog while the loafers took siestas in the shade. Morales pulled his artillery and Porto Ric' was there with a machete which he had been sharpening with a file. Before they could mix it up Pagaluchi waltzed in and shoved them apart. Then he delivered orations and smoothed it out in a jiffy. Lively disappointment among the Cubanos who were hoping that Morales was about to get a military funeral on No Name Key.

After a week of this unpleasant but vivacious existence among the mangrove bushes, a small schooner appeared in the offing and brought provisions, also news from the swarthy conspirators in Key West who operated a *Junta* of their own. The *Three Friends* would not be able to return and embark the expedition for another voyage to Cuba. For one thing, her engines and boilers were in no condition to risk another adventure without a thorough overhauling in port. Even John Dunn, that fat and garrulous chief, had been compelled to admit that she couldn't stand being chased by no more Spanish gunboats, dern her old soul, and it was a miracle she hadn't laid down and quit on him, anyhow. There had been nothing to do but patch her hastily in Key West and limp home to the shipyard in Jacksonville.

Report and rumor indicated that she would be tied up hard and fast by official decree, with deputy United States marshals on board to prevent her from playing truant. That armed fuss off the Rio San Juan had involved her in difficulties which her plausible deep-sea liars could not brush aside. Already, in Key West, they had found it awkward explaining that ragged gap in the bulwark where Mike Walsh's acrobatic twelve-pounder had tried to kick itself over the side while in action.

Vainly had Captain Johnny O'Brien and Skipper Bill Lewis argued the matter with candid, clear-eyed sincerity. They had been looking for a wreck reported adrift. The quest had kept them in the Caribbean until the coal bunkers were empty. There was nothing suspicious aboard, no frenzied patriots or explosive cargo. As for that hole stove in the bow—a collision on a thick night with an unknown steamer ought to satisfy the most skeptical officials. Those newspaper stories? Reporters' guff! Fakes hatched in Key West! What would the poor old *Three Friends* be doing but trying to earn an honest living as a towboat? Shooting at a Spanish man-of-war? What did she have to shoot with?

This was entertaining gossip, but it lacked the essential fact. What ship could come to our rescue and when? Nobody knew. every effort had been made, but quién sabe? McCready and I resolved to go to Key West in the little schooner which had arrived in the nick of time to avert starvation. We hoped to pick up information more definite than these disquieting rumors.

To Mike Walsh I intrusted the custody of the sword of Gomez, that splendid weapon which had been carried over many a league of salt water and was still far from its destination. Mike was proud and gratified to take charge of the sword, and it went without saying that the surest way to court sudden death would be to try to steal it from him. He had mounted his twelve-pound field piece to sweep the beach and from a pole beside it flew the lone-star flag of *Cuba Libre*. It was his habit to organize himself as efficiently as possible, and even No Name Key could not daunt him.

Dirty, ragged, unshaven, the two correspondents drowsed on the schooner's deck while she ran for Key West with a fair wind, reaching there late at night. Down among the wharfs a Cuban was luckily encountered and he served as a pilot to a restaurant kept by one Palacho who was deep in the plots of the *Junta*. In those days it was a Key West without a railroad, a sleepy

tropical town, much more Cuban than American, a little, exotic island set far out in a sun-bathed ocean. For us refugees it was easy enough to find cover in the Cuban quarter and remain there safe against discovery.

Ah, it was superb to comprehend that we were heroes, brave men from the *Tres Amigos* who had defied the powerful navy of Spain, who were impatiently awaiting the chance to go and do it again. That midnight supper in the restaurant of the excitable Pulacho! The idea of payment insulted him—it was little enough to do for the veterans of the battle of the Rio San Juan, a sirloin steak, broiled pompano, turtle stew, guava jelly, cheese, coffee, big cigars, and red wine. Then we rolled into bed at Sweeney's lodging house and were disturbed only by a crowd of drunken sailors who seemed to make a pastime of falling downstairs. McCready's last waking thought was:

"Without exaggeration, that was a square meal. We'll pack up all the fancy grub we can lay our hands on to-morrow and take it back to Mike Walsh and Jack Gorman—also a demijohn—and a couple of boxes of those bully cigars. It's coming to them. Goo' night."

Next morning we learned that, although warrants had not been issued for the arrest of the pirates of the *Three Friends,* such proceedings might occur at any moment and it was advisable to remain inconspicuous, even shy. However, we ventured as far as a Cuban barber shop and there chanced to meet Richard Harding Davis and Frederic Remington, who had been in Havana and other ports and towns held by the Spanish forces. Both men have died since then, while in their prime—Dick Davis, the facile journalist and gifted story-teller who won distinguished success in the flush of his youth, and burly, big-hearted Fred Remington, whose genius with brush and pencil preserved for future generations the vanishing life of the Western frontier.

They seemed to find amusement in the pair of vagabonds from No Name Key, and Davis declared that we were too good to be true—the delightful flavor of piracy—the haunt on the lonely tropic key—and our thoroughly disreputable make-up.

"First-class stories you chaps wrote, both of them," said he, and the compliment pleased us tremendously. "The *Herald* and the *Journal* played them as big stuff."

"I thought you were a brace of tough blacks who had just broke out of jail," chuckled Remington.

"It's the coal dust," explained McCready. "You sleep in it for ten days and it rubs into your skin. Washing in salt water doesn't start it. We scrubbed a few layers off this morning. As for our clothes, take it from me that an honest heart beats beneath these ragged garments."

"Better dine with us to-night, at Palacho's," urged Davis. "We'll post trusty scouts and see that you aren't pinched. I want to hear all about it. A pair of pirates is a rare treat."

"Thanks, but we must be heading back to our desert island," said I. "Our pals will worry if we don't turn up. Mike Walsh is liable to capture a sponging schooner and bombard Key West if he thinks anything has happened to us."

From the barber shop we drifted unobtrusively into the office of a prominent Cuban official through whose hands passed the confidential information of importance. Key West was a whispering gallery of revolutionary plots and counterplots, the base of secret communications with Cuba. First we looked over a pile of newspapers and found them hugely interesting. This item in the *Times-Union,* of Jacksonville, made McCreedy chortle:

A report received from Key West states that *La Lucha,* a Havana newspaper, in the issue of Saturday, printed a story to the effect that a Spanish patrol boat had entered the harbor of Havana with part of its pilot house gone, the captain reporting that it was carried away by a shot from the *Three Friends* while the patrol boat was chasing the filibusterer near the San Juan River. If this report has been received in Havana, the American government officials say there is little doubt that the matter will be reported to Washington and may lead to serious complications between Spain and the United States.

Other newspapers regarded the affair as worthy of solemn editorial discussion. The *Nashville American,* for instance, held this gloomy view of it:

It is reported that the steamer *Three Friends,* engaged in the filibustering business, while on a recent trip to Cuba had a regular battle royal with Spanish warships and gunboats and by means of a Hotchkiss gun ably handled drove off the Spanish vessels. If this story is correct, it details a thrilling encounter and will inspire the Cubans to attempt to operate a naval force. It true, does it not make the *Three Friends* a pirate? If she hoisted the Cuban flag she will

have to be seized by the United States authorities, for our government has not recognized the Cubans as belligerents, and if the *Three Friends* fought the Spanish men-of-war, claiming to be a Cuban vessel, she cannot be other than a pirate and will have to be treated as such.

Mr. William Randolph Hearst followed my account of the voyage by emblazoning a dispatch from a correspondent in Jacksonville with these startling headlines:

"PIRACY" STRIKES TERROR

THREE FRIENDS FILIBUSTERS IN FEAR OF THEIR LIVES

IF CONVICTED OF THE CRIME THEY WILL BE SENTENCED TO DEATH

THE HOTCHKISS GUN PLAYS AN IMPORTANT PART IN THE CHARGES

ADMINISTRATION WILL PROSECUTE

The Spanish legation in Washington affected to pooh-pooh the incident. If there had been the slightest shred of truth in the sensational yarn, the Spanish Minister would have been promptly informed of the facts by Acting Captain General Ahumada, in Havana, and it would have been an imperative duty to have demanded the surrender of the boat and its crew to the Spanish government, to be dealt with according to the universally recognized law of nations. Absolutely no report of any such alleged and absurdly improbable occurrence had been received.

This was obviously for publication. The United States was rapidly drifting toward war with Spain at that time and the American people were in no temper to listen to a demand that the crew of the *Three Friends* should be surrendered and shot against a wall, as had happened to the sailors of the *Virginius*.

After a pleasant hour spent in reading these and other extracts from the news of the day, McCready looked up to observe, with an air of virtuous pride:

"We may never be famous, like Richard Harding Davis, but for a couple of common or garden reporters, we have come pretty near making ourselves notorious."

One more entertaining report had filtered through a Cuban source. In the formidable legal document which was said to be in preparation, Ralph Paine was to be named as among "the certain people then engaged in armed resistance to the government of the King of Spain, in the island of Cuba, to cruise or commit hostilities against the subjects, citizens, and property of the King of Spain, with whom the United States is at peace."

This distinction was presumably accorded because I happened to be known in Jacksonville where the years of my youth had been lived and where my father was highly respected as a clergyman.

"You have put one over on me," remarked McCready, without envy. "Nobody mentions me as included in the indictment along with Johnny O'Brien, et al. The Jacksonville papers print your photograph, I notice, and seem proud of you as a native product. The well-known young pirate—son of the former pastor of the Ocean Street Presbyterian church. It listens well."

At noon our Cuban friend and adviser received a cable message in code which startled us into impetuous action. The steamer *Dauntless* had been able to get to sea from Jacksonville and was southward bound to attempt to rescue the exiles and the cargo from No Name Key and convey them to Cuba. She was already well on her way and might be expected to arrive within the next twelve hours. Here was a slant of good fortune when hope had been almost given up. Somehow the *Dauntless* had bluffed the officials and the American naval patrol. In the latter case it was suspected that the officers of the cruisers and revenue cutters had winked the other eye. Their sympathy was with the bold seafarers who played the filibustering game and they must have applauded the scrimmage of the *Three Friends* off the Rio San Juan. It was for McCready and Paine to make hasty departure from Key West and rejoin their long-suffering comrades in arms. Perish the thought that they should reach No Name Key too late and be disgraced as deserters! And there was the effulgent sword of Gomez to be delivered in *Cuba Libre!* After buying some supplies, wet and dry, we trundled to a wharf in an ancient hack with the curtains buttoned on, desirous of making a secluded exit, and managed to hire a decrepit sloop. Her skipper was a sun-dried, elderly negro who seemed dubious about getting to No Name Key at all, with the wind dead ahead.

He hoisted a patched mainsail and a frayed jib and stood out through the fairway to the inside channel which wandered among the scattered islets to the northward.

The tide was also against him, and the sloop had to make short tacks to clear the reefs and muddy shoals. The afternoon wore on and by dead reckoning it was conjectured that a rheumatic terrapin could have given the sloop a ten-mile start to No Name Key and have won in a walk. Twilight came and the laggard craft was stirring the soft mud with her keel while the mariner grumbled:

"She's a-grubbin'. Ain't no water in this channel a-tall. How you reckon a vessel gwine sail if she has to keep on a-grubbin'?"

McCready and I rustled a supper on the rusty stove in the box of a cabin and then stretched out for a nap on the pig-iron ballast which served as a floor. Two hours later she had quit grubbin' and was stuck hard and fast. The lights of Key West twinkled no more than five miles astern. It was an utterly impossible voyage. The situation impressed our youthful emotions as immensely critical. A question of honor was involved. If the *Dauntless* should take off the expedition and leave us behind, the stain would be ineffable. Sink or swim, we were bound to see the thing through.

To one of us there came a flash of inspiration, a possible solution of the problem. In Key West harbor was the steam yacht *Vamoose,* one of the fastest vessels afloat, which had been built to break records. She had been chartered by Mr. Hearst to expedite his news service between Key West and Havana and to circumvent the Spanish military censorship. The trick for us was to shove the wretched sloop out of the mud, run back to Key West with a fair wind, and beseech the *Vamoose* to whisk us to No Name Key. It went against the grain to confess the defeat of our own private project but we were in the devil of a fix.

Plunging overboard we tugged and hauled and pushed, while the ancient skipper manned a pole, and after a bitter struggle the sloop floated off. No longer compelled to tack, she found the channel without grubbing and so ran clear of the keys and back into the harbor. In charge of Mr. Hearst's Havana news service was Charlie Michelson, a first-class journalist whom we had known in New York, and as soon as we could scramble to a wharf there was a wild search to find him. This was no time for stealth or the fear of the law. Key West was ransacked by two incredibly anxious young men, and you would have thought it an issue of life and death.

Michelson was sauntering out of a billiard room on his way to bed when we fell upon his neck, both jabbering at once. We were hard cases, he said with a grin, and deserved no sympathy whatever nor did he wish to be seen with us, even in a dark street, but the *Vamoose* was ours for the asking, of course, and he was glad to oblige. He would send off word to the skipper at once, telling him to get up steam, and he'd have us bowling up the Hawk Channel before midnight. Back to the sloop we legged it to pack up our stuff and persuade the black mariner to paddle us off to the yacht in his dinghy.

If this narrative has conveyed a true impression of the life aboard the *Three Friends* and on No Name Key, it will be realized that to be escorted into the staterooms of a luxuriously appointed yacht by a respectful steward in a white jacket was in the nature of a shock. The steward was even more shocked, no doubt, but he had been well trained and dissembled his feelings. McCready splashed and snorted in his bathroom without waiting for a cocktail. This brief experience was a respite and an interlude which seemed positively unreal. We rolled into clean, soft beds instead of being dented upon pig-iron ballast.

Ah, but it was a grand night! As in a trance we heard the anchor lifted and felt the *Vamoose* vibrate to the thrust of her twin screws as she passed out into the wide seaward channel. This forty-mile run was a mere two-hour jog at twenty knots. Because it was ticklish business finding No Name Key in the night, the yacht went as near as she dared and then dropped her hook in the bight of Loggerhead Key to wait for daylight.

At five o'clock she was again under way, moving with caution to keep in deep water, while her disreputable guests enjoyed an early breakfast. Enjoyed it? They almost wept into the finger bowls. The touch of elegance, of the refinements of civilization, was too much. Soon after this the *Vamoose* rounded a long, wooded islet and sighted No Name Key. There it was, five miles distant, a swampy patch of mangrove almost submerged in a sea of shifting greens and blues. But it was no longer lonely and unfrequented. An amazing activity was manifest.

Four miles out from the key lay a black-hulled steel towboat with red deck houses. It was the *Dauntless.* Alongside her were

two or three native sloops and schooners while other small sailing vessels were moving to and from No Name Key. Almost a dozen of them were engaged in bringing off the cargo. It was a fleet whose white sails dotted the bright water which was swept by a lively breeze. Spongers and fishermen of the Florida coast and Nassau, they were making brisk work of it and the scene was uncommonly picturesque.

"By Jove, we didn't have much time to spare, Mac!" said I. "The *Dauntless* will be loaded and on her way before long. And we'll be there, the sword of Gomez and all."

"Wait a minute. No presentation speeches, please," cried McCready, who had borrowed a pair of glasses. "You are one of those chronic dam-fool optimists. The expedition has gone bughouse again, as sure as you live."

This was the lamentable truth. Instead of the orderly procession of sailing craft between the *Dauntless* and the key, dementia had suddenly, mysteriously afflicted them. They were scattering hither and yon, scudding before the wind or beating frantically to seek the passages between the more distant keys. Those alongside the steamer were casting off and making sail in the most violent kind of a hurry. Never was a well-contrived filibustering expedition so curiously disrupted, and in this helter-skelter flight the delirious little sloops and schooners were carrying away the hundreds of cases of Mauser rifles, the millions of rounds of cartridges, the boxes of machetes, and all the rest of it.

"It beats me. In fact, it beats hell," said the master of the *Vamoose* as the yacht slowly steamed toward the *Dauntless*. "Old Gomez has a fine chance of getting that stuff, I don't think. She is a busted party, if ever there was one. No use of my trying to round 'em up, for they're all in shoal water and still going it. And the *Dauntless* draws twelve or thirteen feet. She can't chase 'em, either."

Two or three of the sloops were vanishing beyond the keys to the westward. McCready muttered something about this filibustering game giving him the yips, likewise the fantods. It was as bad as that. When the yacht stopped her engines within hailing distance of the *Dauntless*, there was Captain Dynamite Johnny O'Brien standing upon the roof of the wheelhouse, and for once his demeanor indicated a disturbed condition of mind. He rumpled that mop of gray hair with both hands and desisted to adorn his remarks with gestures. How he had managed to dodge out of the *Three Friends* into this steamer was an extraordinary puzzle in itself but just now it seemed commonplace. There were other things much more baffling to engage the attention.

The remarks of Captain O'Brien were unheard. The wind blew them away. He was a mere pantomimist, as far as we were concerned. The real orator of the day, who passionately held the center of the stage, was a dark, active gentleman who showed the whites of his eyes while he spouted language like molten lava. Where two or three of his best phrases rebounded from the side of the *Vamoose* the white paint curled up in blisters. He was using Spanish and English, well mixed. I recognized him as a man of distinction, General Emilio Nunez, among the foremost Cuban leaders. Evidently he had taken it upon himself to see that this expedition was handled without more mishaps.

"Do you get that?" exclaimed McCready who had ducked and thrown up an arm as though to ward off a double-shotted expletive. "He says we have spilled the beans, or words to that effect. If we go aboard the *Dauntless,* he will take great pleasure in shooting us deader than Judas Iscariot."

"He means it, Mac, but maybe he will cool off. All these crazy sloops and schooners mistook the *Vamoose* for a revenue cutter from Key West as soon as she showed herself around the point. That's what ails them. They were taken with acute panic and beat it while the going was good. And they are still going."

This was the answer, perfectly simple as soon as it could be sifted from the denunciations of General Emilio Nunez, who fairly bounded from one deck of the *Dauntless* to another. Our yacht was long and low and painted white, like the naval vessels of that era. She was no merchant vessel, this could be discerned at a glance, and her lines happened to be unfamiliar to these fugitive spongers and fishermen. Meanwhile, they were putting as much water astern of them as possible, and in all directions. The *Dauntless* blew her whistle to recall them but they took it as a warning and flitted no less earnestly toward the horizon. Here was a ship's cargo spread over the face of the waters in a manner heart-rending to behold.

And our sense of responsibility for it was acute.

It seemed so unhealthy to present ourselves on board of the *Dauntless* that McCready and I jumped into one of the yacht's boats and two sailors rowed us in pursuit of the nearest munition-laden sloop which appeared to be "grubbin'." If one of them could be overtaken and reassured, probably the others would turn back at seeing her make for the *Dauntless* or for No Name Key. Alas, the crew of the sloop made such frantic exertions that they avoided stranding and resumed the flight. Wearily we turned to try to head off another one, but it was no use. To me life was a complete ruin. *Vamoose!* Never was a yacht better named to fit an occasion. The expedition had vamosed and it looked as though McCready and Paine must do likewise to save their skins.

Hovering at a safe distance from the *Dauntless* we babbled at each other. The yacht blew a signal to recall her boat. She was in a hurry to return to Key West. It appeared that we should have to go with her, two sad-eyed young pirates ignominiously vanquished by circumstances over which they had no control. We were cowards when it came to boarding the *Dauntless* and engaging General Emilio Nunez at close quarters.

At this doleful moment there came chugging into view a small steam launch which proved to be laden with Cuban partisans from Key West who had come to bid the forty-odd warriors adios and to lend a hand in towing the boats out from No Name Key. We rowed like mad to intercept the launch and, in feverish accents, explained what had happened. The day was saved! Tragedy was changed into a comedy of errors. Instantly the launch shot away to round up these daffy little sailing vessels, and they could no longer find refuge in shallow water. The skipper of one schooner, imagining that capture was now imminent, lost his wits entirely and let her drive for the beach of a key. There he hopped overboard, followed by his four men, and they vanished in the mangrove bushes, all hands moving rapidly when last seen.

The launch had better luck with the next attempt. A sloop was fairly trapped in a pocket between two islands and it was possible to soothe her fears, after much shouting and scolding. Presently this sloop was bowling in the direction of the *Dauntless* and another of the fleet took the cue. The stampede was checked. Soon the white-winged vessels were homing back like a flock of birds. The orderly business of transferring cargo was resumed. The episode had been an interruption, not a catastrophe. It was conceivable that General Emilio Nunez might waive the death sentence, but Paine still quaked at the thought of meeting him face to face, while McCready was nervous and easily startled.

Taking our lives in our hands we scrambled aboard the *Dauntless* in a furtive manner suggesting two burglars engaged in a second-story operation. With care we were able to escape the notice of General Nunez, who was absorbed in more urgent matters. Some of the patriots had been brought off from No Name Key, but Mike Walsh and Jack Gorman were missing. To a question our young friend, Lieutenant Edgar Carbonne, replied:

"Mike is waiting for you on the key, Señor Ralph Paine. And Sergeant Gorman wished to keep him company, I think. Unless you go ashore and report yourself, Mike will stay right there, you bet. It is an obligation, he told me, to guard the sword of Gomez and your camp stuff until you come back."

Yes, that was it—the simple, unquestioning fidelity of a man who would never go back on a pal. A rough man by your standards, gentle reader, was Mike Walsh, but in the sight of God I venture to say he was rated a gentleman, and his heart was pure gold. Failure to join the *Dauntless* would have been a mighty serious business to him, the end of his high ambition to hold a commission in the Cuban artillery, the risk of arrest and imprisonment as a deserter from the American navy, but he was ready to stand the gaff sooner than break his word.

And Jack Gorman, hardened old regular trooper, had preferred to stay with Mike because they were bunkies during this adventure—Gorman with that obsolete old Springfield rifle of his and the two hundred rounds which were to bank out a fortune for him in popping off Spanish officers at a thousand dollars per head. Chivalry was not dead. The world may laugh at Don Quixote but his soul goes marching on to rebuke ignoble motives and to illumine the Golden Rule.

I went ashore in the Cubans' launch and

found these two musketeers in a camp almost deserted. My personal luggage had been neatly bundled and Mike Walsh stood waiting, the sword of Gomez under his arm. Gorman was counting his cartridges to pass the time.

"Sure, I knew you'd turn up," said Mike as we shook hands. "I had words with Morales, the major, who acted some tumultuous at me for refusin' to budge, but Jack waved the old blunderbuss at him."

"Come on, you bully old fools," I shouted, "and jump in that launch!"

"The elegant sword is intact, diamonds an' all," said Mike as he turned it over to me. "I slept with it."

Compliments and gratitude seemed strangely out of place. They were not expected. I tried to express something of the sort but Mike interrupted.

"Stow it. For the love o' God, what else would ye expect me to do? Now, let us shove off for another promenade in the Caribbean Sea an' may it get us somewheres."

By four in the afternoon the *Dauntless* had the cargo under hatches and the party strewn about her decks. She ran clear of the sheltering keys and plunged into a lively sea. Again the course was set to steal around Cape San Antonio, at the western end of Cuba. It was the old story—decks awash with spray and rain, seasick Cubans, the open sky for a roof, and a diverting gamble with destiny. McCready and Paine were hard to find during the late afternoon of this first day of the voyage. They were hiding behind a lifeboat where General Emilio Nunez was unlikely to discover them. It was their earnest hope that he might regain his normal temperature overnight.

"He displayed the symptoms of a bad hombre," murmured McCready in the twilight. "If we can stall him off until tomorrow, there is a fighting chance that he may not throw us overboard. If ever a man had provocation, he was it."

"The *Vamoose* seemed a happy idea, Mac. I thought we were bright."

"We were, buddy, but bright men stir up most of the trouble in this world. Whew, I've aged ten years since morning."

Upon the small bridge surmounting the wheelhouse Captain Johnny O'Brien loitered with a dead cigar between his teeth and a tattered straw hat pulled over his eyes. He was placidly sweeping the horizon with a strong pair of glasses. A distant smudge of smoke was visible and he called down to the helmsman to let her go wide of it.

In the next issue Mr. Paine will tell what became of the sword of Gomez.

AS FAR AS HE WENT

JOHN SHARP WILLIAMS, of Mississippi, if he wished, could spend the remainder of his life in the United States Senate. But he has had enough of it. He is already out with the announcement that at the expiration of his present term he will not be a candidate to succeed himself.

The mood in which he reached this decision probably corresponded to the way he felt one day soon after he had left the House of Representatives to take his seat in the Senate. One of his intimate friends was protestin Williams' making fun of the "Upper House."

"You ought not to talk that way about the Senate," argued the friend. "And another thing: you ought to dress in a more dignified way, John, wear a high hat maybe, anyway have your clothes pressed oftener, get a crease in your trousers legs. You don't look like a senator."

"Great gosh!" exploded Williams. "I don't want to look like one! It 's tough enough to have to be one!"

Ladies Present

By Thomas McMorrow

Author of "Summerhold," "Whiter Than Painted," Etc.

As long as a man isn't able to fool himself there is some hope for him

THERE was a new girl at the stationery counter in Gerringer's 5, 10 and 25 Cent Store.

You or I might have shopped for years at Gerringer's and might have been unable to find our exact tint of note paper anywhere else without being on this occasion thrilled by the sales clerk's newness; she was nice looking, but we could probably have gazed at her from eight in the morning until the following ten minutes to six without becoming convinced that here at last was the Only Girl. But Warren McKeever couldn't.

He pulled at an end of his trifling blond mustache with a manicured thumb and forefinger and gazed languishingly at the clock.

"I think I will take in a picture to-night," he said, in a loud voice to nobody in particular.

Nobody in particular heeded the remark —certainly the new girl at the stationery counter did not. She continued sorting into monochromatic piles the red and blue and purple note paper which Gerringer's customers had thrown into a polychrome heap; she seemed unaware that the young man behind the gents' notions counter across the aisle was delicately tendering her an invitation to pass an evening at the theater.

A shabby old woman was picking over the merchandise on the gents' notions counter. From the several receptacles for shoe laces she took samples, carefully compared them, and then carefully replaced them, each in the wrong box. She did Warren the same service with the gold collar buttons and cuff studs, and then reached for the rack of men's neckties.

"If you'll tell me what you want, madam," said Warren sourly, "I'll save you the trouble of pulling the shop apart!"

"I'm not looking for nothing," said the old woman with equal asperity. "I'm just looking about a bit!"

Warren's commerce with the public was usually conducted on this plane—one of mutual distrust and dislike.

She fingered the score of cravats which she had strewn upon the counter.

"Real silk, I suppose?" she sniffed.

'What do you want for a dime?" demanded Warren.

"I want none of your cheek, young man, that's what I want," she said. "I guess I'll buy one of these ties, if I choose, without asking you!"

"Help yourself," said Warren, trying to catch the new girl's eyes to wink.

The old woman pawed the cravats over, pulling at the shoddy material until it gathered and gaped. She made as if to speak to the clerk several times, but compressed her lips firmly instead. A cravat took her fancy.

"I think," she said, and hesitated meditatively. "I do really think, young man——"

The hands of the big clock hanging from the mezzanine gallery swung into a right line. On the first stroke of the hour Warren reached out, snatched the merchandise from the old woman, and swept the cravats into a drawer.

"Think it over to-night, and come back to-morrow morning," he said. "Store's closed!"

He picked his straw hat from under the counter, perched it on his head, and stepped out into the aisle.

"McKeever!" called the floorwalker. "McKeever, I say!"

"Go soak your head," growled Warren, swaggering to the street doors.

He sauntered out into One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.

He idled along the street with the air of a man of the world. He dawdled before show windows, gazing with the critical eye of an intending purchaser at topcoats marked in plain figures one hundred dollars,

at silk shirts which were a mere eighteen, and at shoes which were irresistible bargains at twenty-four dollars and seventy-five cents. Warren had good taste. As usual he paused to offer his daily tribute of homage to the clothing dummy in the window of Levy's Elite Shop.

The dummy gazed out over Warren's head with glassy arrogance and the complacent smile of one who knows he is correct from top to toe. The dummy, too, had a slight blond mustache, and it was Warren's cherished belief that the dummy's cast of features were not unlike Warren's and that Warren in like sartorial setting would have made as commanding a figure.

He sighed and walked on. One must swallow an ambition to be absolutely correct when one's salary is only fourteen dollars per week. He must, in these times of high prices, if he wants to swallow anything else. The dummy had Warren at an unfair advantage there.

He stopped before the cigar store at the corner of Eighth Avenue. Again he surveyed the displayed merchandise, staring openly at banded Partagas and at the smooth and costly browns of Henry Clays and Coronas, thirty cents apiece. He did not waste a second glance at the pasteboard box of wrinkled and venomous Manilas, in red and blue on white, "3 for 10 to-day!"

He entered the store. The clerk watched him hopefully as he hovered over the plate glass beneath which the products of Havana were laid out in state.

"I like them," said Warren with gentle melancholy, "but I'll have to give them up. Doctor's orders! They don't like me. I think I will try a mild Manila cigar for a change, if you have one."

He pulled his only dollar bill from his pocket, with an effect of disengaging it from a thick roll, and threw it upon the plate glass as one casts away the skin of an onion who retains the juicy fruit. He selected three weeds from the pasteboard box, lit one at the flame, and tucked the others into his upper coat pocket, whence they peeped impressively forth. He lounged into the street and took his accustomed place in a silent rank of pale-faced men.

This particular corner attracts loafers; there was a tough saloon there in the old days. The saloon is gone, but its fragrance hangs round the corner still. Each loafer smoked a long black cigar and watched the passing throng with cold and unwinking eyes. Each was carefully attired, white-handed, smart from his seal-brown Oxfords to his near Panama. They were gentlemen all, and Warren—since the stroke of six at Gerringer's—was a gentleman, too. By their vividness of dress, drooping grace, and apparent aloofness from the sweat and the burden they impressed hurrying Harlemites with the idea that here against the cigar store were banked the lilies of the street that toiled not nor spun.

Warren was only twenty.

But at twenty one is a man—isn't it so? And men of spirit work only as a desperate resort. They choose the better part. After all, what does a man promise himself for his sweat and tears if not a measure of elegant leisure?

There is honor, but each man has his own. Warren had been born and bred in a New York slum.

He coughed, tapped his mouth hollowly, and looked accusingly at the Manila.

The blotches on his pale face became more pronounced. His stomach was playing him false. One may be a man at twenty and have an intellectual liking for strong cigars, and have an unworthy stomach. Warren was trying to break that stomach of its puerile hankering for ice-cream sodas and chocolates, but the stomach had something to say. At present it was venting its disapproval of Manilas. Again Warren tapped his mouth, and took a resolute pull at the cigar. He bent over sharply and let the weed fall.

Warren was a quitter. He dropped his Manila. Thereupon his stomach promptly forgave him, because he was only twenty, and sent up a call for supper.

He ran his eyes over the fronts of the eating places which line the stately Harlem thoroughfare.

If you want food, and are willing to take it on the hop without finicky niceness about heat or flies or noise or elbowing crowds —in a word, if you are twenty—eat in Harlem. Harlem eateries are also recommended to gourmets who have an object in spending only thirty cents for supper. Madison Avenue has its Ritz Carlton, University Place its Lafayette, Tenth Street its incredibly intricate table d'hote—but will they give you pie for a nickel, soup for a dime, and a roast with vegetable substances for fifteen cents? Certainly not!

Warren entered the Hampshire Lunch.

He joined the patrons who stood before the counter, rubbing their chins reflectively, and calculating the stopping powers of Italian spaghetti with cheese, German pot roast, French roast with onions, English mutton chops, Irish stew, Spanish omelet. The dishes of all the nations are laid out stark and cold on the marble slab of the Hampshire Lunch for the patrons to figure on.

"Hello, Warren, old-timer!" cried Tom Whitehead from behind the counter. "What'll it be to-night?"

Tom runs the Hampshire Lunch. He knows everybody, and calls him by his first name on second sight. He has the gift of the glad eye. What gratulatory warmth in his countenance as a patron settles an old score of a dollar seventy-five, and states that he's landed a job at last! Bless Tom's honest heart, you'd think he'd landed the prize himself. And what fine concern shades his mobile features and how slowly he withdraws his thumb from the succulent depths of the brimming bowl of beef stew he is sliding across the counter when the patron tells him loudly how the patron told his boss point-blank that very morning where he got off!

Warren has chosen. He is bearing away his prize, a towering bulk of sliced green peppers, cold slaw, chopped onions, and mangled lettuce leaves. It is certainly grand value for ten cents, and there is nothing like a bite of crisp salad to tone up the system in hot weather. Warren has given considerable attention to dietetics, which is the science of eating with good judgment, and you would never catch him in the act of sitting down to a stuffed goose or a larded capon in the summer time.

He trudged to an armchair.

Upon the splayed arm he placed his salad, and his platter of rice pudding. Against a glass of iced tea he propped his evening paper. Expertly he forked his green provender into his mouth while his eyes remained on the news sheet. Warren liked to keep abreast of the times, and he liked to make an event of his meal. He read a thrilling story of one Sperduti, an Italian bandit who had been shot to death under picturesque circumstances in Mulberry Street. He read an interview with a prominent gambling man who indignantly denied that he had been caught fixing the 1919 World's Series. He skipped the editorial page, and carefully conned a column headed "What the Smart Dresser Will Wear."

The Hampshire Lunch was crowded, and prospective patrons were turning away from the doors for lack of armchairs, but jolly Tom Whitehead found time to speak to Warren every little while from behind the counter. He asked him how business was at Gerringer's and if he had seen the show at the Critique that week. He asked him why he didn't try a bus ride down Fifth Avenue some night after supper, informed him that "Pagliacci" was being shown free that very evening at the City College Stadium, and highly recommended the new picture at Little's Open Air for an evening's entertainment.

"Running along?" cried Tom from behind the banked counter. "What's your hurry? So long, Warren!"

Warren strolled along One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.

The shades of day had been raised from the chop-suey joints, pool rooms, and all-night restaurants. Harlem was setting about its amusements. The thousands of young chauffeurs, mechanics, clerks, waitresses, stenographers, and idlers who give its color and volume to Harlem night life were crowding the street. Their faces were bright, their voices gay, their souls at ease. Toil and worry are deadening; pleasure is man's chiefest end, saith Herbert Spencer. The cares that infested the street by day had struck their black tents.

Warren stopped in front of Little's Open Air and discontentedly watched the ingress of couples arm in arm.

He had never been very successful with the ladies. He was shallow-chested, anæmic, and febrile. He admired intensely the virile youths who could take ladies by storm and reduce them to utter subjection by exhibitions of manly strength and grace. He had made efforts to redeem his social defects. He had bought and read with heroism a three-foot shelf of books warranted to make one enchantingly glib; but then he had never been short of something to say. To build up an attractive physique he had taken Bull-Blood Tonic by the quart, and to render himself hardy and enduring he had drunk much hard liquor and smoked strong cigars. But in vain. He remained timid, shallow-chested, bloodless.

He had taken refuge finally in being a gentleman.

A nice-looking young lady was standing in the foyer of Little's Open Air. You or I —patrons at Gerringer's—might have bowed to her slightly and doubtfully, as to an acquaintance we could not place; we would not have given her a second glance. There were prettier young ladies awaiting their escorts, if we had eyes for unprotected females.

But Warren could not dismiss her so cavalierly. For she was the Only Girl. Color came into his face. He coughed, pulled at his coat lapels, and advanced with straw hat in hand.

"Pardon me," he said with elegance. "But aren't you the new manager of the stationery department at Gerringer's? Seems to me I seen you somewheres before. I got gents' notions, just across. I was just about to go in and see the pictures," he explained. "And I seen you standing here, and I thought that maybe you would permit me to escort you in."

His assurance delighted him. He felt that he was improving; he was not at all afraid of this young and beautiful girl.

Her brown eyes searched his eager face. To each nice girl nature gives a power of divination.

"I'd love to," she said. There was a pleasing shadow of huskiness in her rich voice. She was not as tall as Warren, but was fuller of figure. "But then there's Billy. I'm waiting for him now."

'Who's Billy?" asked Warren sharply.

"Billy is my escort, of course," she said, not at all offended.

"It is half past eight," said Warren masterfully. "The feature is begun already. Billy is out of luck. Come ahead!"

"I'm sure that I shouldn't," she demurred, walking beside him toward the ticket chopper.

"What's your name?" asked the young man when they had found places in the dark interior of Little's Open Air. "Mine's Warren."

"That's a pretty name, Mr. McKeever," said the young lady. "I am Miss Harkens."

"Oho! So you did know my name!"

"I couldn't help hearing it. That floorwalker shouted it so."

"He's a vulgar swine," grumbled Warren. "He hasn't got any cultivation, that floorwalker hasn't."

"But why didn't you put away the stock?"

"Catch me! Old Gerringer's paying me from half past eight until six, and not a blessed minute more. I believe in being independent. Why, say, if old Gerringer was to walk in here right now, and come up to me and say just one word—just one word—I'd get right up and say, 'Look here, Gerringer——' "

"Oh, there he is now!" exclaimed the lady agitatedly.

"There's who?" asked Warren, blenching. "Not Mr. Gerringer?"

"No, Billy! Back there on the end bench!"

Warren turned his head stealthily. Against the dimly lighted entrance to Little's Open Air was silhouetted the figure of a crippled soldier in uniform. The silhouette was clutching the back of the bench before it, and letting itself slowly and painfully down into darkness. One hand held crutches aloft.

Warren straightened up.

"Don't worry about Billy," he said confidently. "If he gets fresh I'll take care of him. He can just lump it!"

"You're very brave," she breathed, her eyes shining. "Most men are afraid of Billy. He's frightfully jealous and awful particular who I go with."

'You're not engaged to him, are you?"

She laughed teasingly.

"Somebody else is jealous! Billy and I are very, very good friends, Mr. McKeever."

" 'Warren,' " he pleaded.

"Indeed not! Why, I do not half know you. If you care to call some evening, and meet my mother, so that we can be properly introduced, then that is another matter."

"But you do like me a little?"

"You may call, Mr. McKeever."

There is no love but love at first sight. When two hearts meet which will some day beat as one at the footfall of the landlord they know each other at first blush. Oh, this is true!

"Aren't the stars big to-night!" said Warren, gazing up at the eternal vault which roofed Little's Open Air.

The feature of the evening's entertainment ran to its appointed close. The hero put forth his strong arms, and the heroine glided into them. Their lips met in a long kiss. Slowly their figures faded, but to the enchanted gaze of the audience that kiss lingered on the darkened screen like the disembodied grin of a certain Cheshire cat. It was very beautiful.

"Ah!" sighed the audience repletedly.

"Let me go out alone," urged the young lady. "Maybe Billy's outside."

"A gentleman never lets a lady go home alone," said Warren.

They passed the soldier on the end seat, who was struggling with his crutches. Warren smiled, but did not speak to the young lady. He did not care to hurt the poor veteran's sensibilities. They emerged into the street.

"There's Billy!" whispered the young lady.

Against a pillar of the playhouse leaned a tall and broad-shouldered young man, with large and hairy hands clasping his elbows. His jaw was square, his eyebrows bushy, and his eyes deep-set and black. He was not the crippled soldier. Warren had never seen this youth before and he decided at once that he did not care for the acquaintance. His temperamental eyebrows were knitted, and he was staring very hard and very unkindly at Warren.

"I guess I will bid you good evening, Miss Harkens," said Warren, raising his straw hat with a sweet but trembling smile.

He turned to depart from the scene with a hasty but dignified step.

"Just a minute, young fellow!" said a bass voice.

Warren turned, holding his smile by main force, and saw Billy towering over him. Billy glared at him rudely.

"Billy!" cried Miss Harkens, catching his arm.

"Young fellow," said Billy, "I don't like you. I don't like your looks. I don't like anything about you! I want you to leave this girl alone, understand?"

"What do you mean?" blustered Warren, looking up at the big man perkily. "Suppose you mind your own confounded business, sir!"

"I mean," said Billy, contemptuously placing the flat of his free hand against Warren's face, "I want you to leave this girl alone!"

With the last word he straightened his arm suddenly, and Warren staggered back against the wall of the foyer. Billy watched him equably; he had probably manhandled similar men before.

Warren was furious. But Warren was a quitter. The slum which had bred him had not given him the guts to fight back against superior force. Hanging out on the corner with a low gang had not taught him the worth of courage. Strong cigars had not made him strong, nor had drafts of hard liquor toughened his fibers. Nine tenths of courage is physical fitness.

He righted himself and replaced his hat.

"You're a rowdy," he said to Billy. "As a gentleman, I wouldn't soil my hands with you!"

He walked quickly away. He had carried the incident off rather neatly. Dodging an issue disposes of it, doesn't it?

He sat at the window of his top-floor rear and smoked a retrospective cigarette. He was not quite at ease. Each man has his self-respect; he cannot live without it. If he lose one standard of values he must find another. If Warren had been thirty-five, say, and had lived as he lived until twenty, he would have had definitely abandoned his juvenile regard for physical hardihood and would have made his base retreat before Billy without any abating of his self-esteem. The necessary compromises and surrenders of his past would have forced upon him a new set of values. But Warren was twenty and the callous and worthless loafer of thirty-five was only in process of making.

He slept late, caught a hasty cup of coffee, and hurried to Gerringer's. Miss Harkens was at her counter. Warren swaggered into the store and walked behind gents' notions.

"Good morning, Miss Harkens," he called politely.

She did not look up.

The business of the day had not yet begun. He crossed the aisle to her counter.

"You are not angry at me, are you, Miss Harkens?" he said. "You know—for what happened last night. I had a very good mind to give that ruffian a sound thrashing, but in the presence of a *lady*——"

"Shut up!" hissed Miss Harkens. "You—*coward!*"

Warren was not thin-skinned.

"Oh, come, Miss Harkens," he continued with an insinuating smile. "You didn't really think that I would be capable, as a gentleman——"

She had turned her back. Now she spun about. In her pale face her brown eyes burned with scorn.

"Gentleman!" she repeated, turning the word over in her mouth to savor it, and ejecting it disgustedly. "Gentleman be——"

It was a good old English word, a Biblical word, but a word which is tabooed as an ex-

pletive by polite society. Warren was driven back by it as he had been by the extended arm of Billy. He sought refuge behind gents' notions; he found himself attending strictly to the business of his counter and smiling courteously at a lowering old woman who had come in to purchase a ten-cent cravat.

He decided to speak to Miss Harkens on her way home.

He remained for a few minutes after six o'clock for the first time since assuming charge of gents' notions. Miss Harkens placed her flapping sailor on her head as delicately as if she were placing a flatiron on an egg, stabbed it recklessly through and through with a long steel, and walked toward the entrance.

Warren assumed a ghastly smile and cleared his throat. It was now or never.

"Hm-m—hm-m!" coughed Warren. "Ah —excuse me——"

At this moment he saw Billy advancing from the street. Billy looked larger and more daunting by daylight.

"Ar-rh! Ar-rh!" coughed Warren, bending over and beating his breast. That was not at all what he had intended to say, but it was the best he could think of at the time. Meanwhile, he was walking quickly up One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street.

He stood behind the plate glass of the drug store on the other side of the avenue, and watched Billy and Miss Harkens pass by. They were arm and arm, and were laughing. Billy was doing most of the laughing, but Miss Harkens was looking up at him unoffendedly.

Warren felt very sick.

It was perfectly evident that matters had to be molded nearer to his heart's desire between Miss Harkens and himself and Billy. But Warren had no stomach for the job. He was wretchedly disappointed by the way in which one Warren McKeever had reacted to Billy. He had always thought that this Warren McKeever was a high-spirited devil of a fellow beneath his bland exterior, and that he would rise to a devastating rage which counted no odds in the face of insult. In place of which this Warren McKeever had swallowed a slap in the face, and seemed ready to go a dozen more.

Warren McKeever had to be taken vigorously in hand if he was to be saved alive; for his Kingdom of Heaven was not to be won except by violence!

On the table in the center of the drug store was a heap of paper-colored volumes in bright jackets. The frontispiece of one caught Warren's eye.

It was entitled the "Complete Art of Jujutsu." The picture showed a young lady of refinement and delicate nurture in the act of throwing an ugly customer over her head. The ugly customer was much larger than the young lady and much better nourished, but he was flying lightly above her extended arms. It failed to convince Warren, although the text explained that the power which had raised the ugly customer to his bad eminence was not the young lady's, but the ugly customer's own energy of attack neatly deflected upward by a deft twist of the wrist.

The system impressed Warren as requiring too hearty coöperation on the part of Billy. He opened "The Complete Art of Wrestling." He dropped this hastily when the first illustration disclosed that he would have to permit Billy to grasp him securely by the back of the neck and wind an arm about his waist before Warren could duly proceed to practice the art upon him.

He found "The Manly Art of Self-Defense with Illustrations" more plausible. He took this manual and approached the patent-medicine counter.

"Let me have a bottle of Bull-Blood Tonic," he requested. "Large size."

"Eighty-nine cents," said the clerk.

Upon the square pasteboard case was a testimonial from one Jess Willard, stating that he was a user of Bull-Blood and that he ascribed his giant strength to that potent liquor. There was also a picture of this gladiator, flexing proudly the huge biceps which had been grafted on his upper arm by the tonic. Warren's faith in this picture had always been implicit, but, several days before, the metropolitan press had received astonishing advices from a ringside in Toledo.

"Jess Willard!" protested Warren. "Why, he got licked!"

"That's the old packing," said the clerk, after an inspection. "Here's the new box, with a testimonial from Jack Dempsey! There's *his* picture on it, see?"

"But," argued Warren confusedly. "How could——"

"I guess Jack must have drunk more of it," said the clerk. "It's great stuff!"

"Let me have two bottles," said Warren.

Tom Whitehead did not have to suggest

amusements to Warren that evening to dislodge him from his armchair in the Hampshire Lunch. Warren hurried through his supper and then around the corner to his room on Manhattan Avenue. He undressed, turned up the gas high, and lay down to read.

"Why, it just takes practice!" he murmured hours later. And he fell asleep with a grim and foreboding smile on his thin face.

He showed his find next day to his friend, Royal Haviland, who sold household hardware.

"I'm thinking of taking up boxing," he said. "A fellow needs some exercise out of business hours. A fellow ought to be able to defend himself from footpads and ugly customers. Any night a fellow is liable to be stuck up, and if he don't know how to defend himself, why, there he is!"

Royal inhaled a draft of cigarette smoke and blew it out against the glowing tip.

"Not such a punk idea," he agreed. "I was thinking the same thing only yesterday when I was walking with a dame on Lenox Avenue, and a tough guy passed a remark. If he'd said much more I'd have gone right over and crashed him, if I had the training. I got the weight, but I ain't got the speed. You got to have speed if you're going to crash a tough guy and get away with it."

"I know a fellow's got a bicycle repair shop under the viaduct over on Riverside," said Warren. "There's an empty loft upstairs that used to be the Idle Hour A. C., and there's a shower up there, and apparatus. What do you say to going there?"

They looked it over and liked it. They would have it to themselves; there would be no smart Alecks to stand around and pass remarks. What little athletic apparatus there was was new, never having been used by the Idle Hourites. The police had left it behind them, after they had descended on the club and removed the gambling paraphernalia for whose use the loft had been taken.

That evening found them in their clubhouse.

Warren propped the "Manly Art" on top of a chest-weight machine and squared off at Royal. The book was open at an illustration of Blocking Lead to Head and Countering to Kidneys; Warren had mastered the theory of this gesture the previous evening.

"Hit me," he offered. "Come on—don't be afraid!"

Royal struck him smartly in the pit of the stomach, which interfered with the retort to the kidneys. Warren sat down on the floor.

"That wasn't the right blow," he gasped. "You don't get the idea. You better read that part and then you won't make such a bull. Why, I could have side-stepped that blow if I knew what you were up to, and caught you unawares at my mercy! We'll try that over."

The sun had gone down, and Warren had turned on a lone electric light. The corners of the loft were in shadow.

"Here's how to stand," explained Warren, book in hand, posing Royal. "Left hand closed and resting against right shoulder; left elbow protecting solar plexus. Don't bend over so far!"

"It don't quite cover," grunted Royal, looking down at his elbow scantily draped across his ample stomach.

There was a gulping noise in the corner of the loft, as of a large bottle with a small neck, drowning.

"Oo-lp! Oo-oolp!"

"What *is* that?" exclaimed Warren. He had heard it distinctly before when Royal had felled him.

"Somebody's there," said Royal.

They went to look. A hundred-pound bar bell stood upright against the wall behind a brown vaulting horse. The upper ball of a similar bell rested against the top of the horse.

"Nobody's here!"

"Oo-oolp!" said the upper ball of the bell which peeped over the horse's back. And it displayed a row of shining teeth and the china white of eyes.

It detached itself from the horse and moved into the open before their surprised eyes.

" 'Scuse me, gents," it said, resolving itself into a small coal-black negro. "Must of swallered something, I guess."

"Who are you?" they asked.

The little darky glided over onto the rubber mat which stood under the light. He then proceeded to execute a fantastic and sinister dance, blowing about on the mat with the light inconsequence of a puff of down, while his head jerked hither and yon and his black fists weaved in and out. He made them dizzy to watch him.

"Who am I?" he cried. "Give a look, white boy!"

"Stand still," requested Warren.

The little man struck a pose—legs wide apart, feet set, open hands lined up with his tilted head.

He was an incredible gnome, such a creature as a person of strong imagination might see in almost any twilight. His head was covered with wool, sparse and tightly kinked, his arms were as long as his bowed legs, and his hands and feet were cast in the mold of a man heads taller. But his ears held their fascinated gaze longest; they were many times normal bulk, were at least a half-inch thick through the cartilage, and drooped at the tops. Warren thought of sunflowers.

"Ever see me before?" he asked.

"I never even saw anybody that looked like you," said Warren sincerely.

"Guess not," said the little man proudly. "Ain't nobody like me. Never was, never will be! Featherweight, lightweight, welterweight, middleweight, heavyweight. Yep, two heavyweights. Fought 'em both. Six rounds at a stag; stood on 'em both. The Ha'lem Choc'late Drop! That's me!"

"You're a prize fighter?" conjectured Royal.

"Um-m—maybe so, maybe not so," said the little negro, blowing about on the mat again. "Jes' a rummy, maybe—ain't for me to say, white boy."

"Have a smoke," invited Royal.

The little colored man sat down suddenly and picked a cigarette from Royal's silver-plated case. His motions were as quick and effortless as a spider's.

"You boys going to fight?" he asked when they sat before him. He was twice their age, or more.

"We're thinking of it," said Warren.

"Oo-oolp!" he chortled, and wiped his mouth apologetically. " 'Scuse me, gents. Can't 'magine what makes me do like that. Which one of youse does the thinking?"

"I," said Warren defiantly.

The colored man looked him over gravely.

"You got the ears for it," he said soberly. "You got dandy ears. See these yere? Ears like mine ain't no good. Get a good smack on 'em and they start to bus' open. Blood poison. Flowers and music. Them ears chased little Choc'late Drop out of the ring. My own fault, gents. I didn't have no right to let them two big men hit me on both sides at once. Man, it made the right side of mah head ache on the left! Yessuh! It was some smack."

"You don't look very big for a prize fighter," said Royal.

"It ain't what you weigh on the flats of you' feet that counts, white boy; it's what you weigh on the bones of you' hands. I'm a heavyweight, I am—from the wrist out!"

"Could you whip a big man?" asked Warren eagerly.

"If he's standing on the ground, I could," said the Chocolate Drop.

"Could—could I?"

"Why, sure. Jes' smack him! Smack him first! Then smack him second."

"But he's liable to hit me and knock me cold, isn't he?"

"Oh, don' min' that—don' min' a thing like that. How far can he knock you? Not so far. You come back, and start to smacking him again. Thassall. He can't hurt you if you smack him first. Don' guard, don't duck—let him hit you. But you hit him first and all the poison'll be drawed out of his!"

"Would you like to box with us, and keep your hand in?" asked Royal. "We won't hit you on the ears."

"What's the matter with me training you?" offered the Chocolate Drop handsomely. "I got to hang around here, anyway. I was hired by the Idle Hours to smack white gen'lemen who lost their roll and got fussy, and I'm getting my wages until they've lawed it out, and the Idle Hours open up again. I'll manage youse!"

"That will be fine!"

"Strip off, white boys, till I see what kin' o' plugs I got in my stable."

"Um-m," he grunted, pushing a finger like a twenty-penny nail into Royal's pudgy stomach. "What does you and all that 'ere lard weigh?"

"A hundred and fifty-two."

"Flyweight," said the Chocolate Drop. "You got to take off them fifty-two. There's 'most two of you there, an' only one is a fighter. What do you weigh, skinny boy?"

"A hundred and ten," said Warren, rubbing his ribs.

"How did you do it? Why, boy, you're built for a welter! Look at 'em bones! You're a dead ringer for the 'Chickasaw Kid,' when he come out from the hospital after pneumonia. Put you out to grass. You couldn't lose no weight if you tried. Fact is,

the harder you work the bigger you'll get—less'n you' sick.

"Put on them mitts, both of youse! Thass right. Now then, Fat, this skinny boy done whispered to me that you ain't nothin' but a pail o' grease, and he could sling you aroun' his head, only you'd spill you' supper! What d'you think of that?"

"Oh, I don't know," said Royal, swinging smilingly but viciously.

"You're a liar!" shouted Warren. He was addressing the Chocolate Drop, but the situation required him to keep his eyes on Royal.

"Who's a liar?" asked Royal, shoving his glove into Warren's face with all the force of his chubby right.

"You are," gritted Warren. "Who do you suppose?"

He missed a heavy swing for Royal's nose. They mixed it. They worked awkwardly and inefficiently, but their zeal was evident.

"Oo-oolp!" yelled the Chocolate Drop, choking his laugh as usual.

Warren's left glove collided fairly with Royal's white forehead. Royal sat down on the rug and dropped his arms. He was dazed.

"Time out!" called the Chocolate Drop.

"You got a mean smack in that left mitt," he said to Warren seriously. "Maybe I can do something with you after all, although you are an awful piece of cheese. But anybody what packs the ol' wallop has got the makings of a great man. A good wallop is a gift; you got it or you ain't. Skinny, ol' Choc'late Drop thinks maybe he can learn you to rise in the world!"

"Do you really think I could get to lick a big man?" asked Warren with eagerness.

They sat down on the mat and talked.

In the succeeding days the initial enthusiasm of the Chocolate Drop's two pupils waned, but their trainer held them to their work. His was no Greek delight in physical development, nor had he any understanding of the street fighter's yearning to maul the general public with impunity. Fighting was a business to the Chocolate Drop. He really believed that he could make a fighter out of Warren and thus blossom forth as a manager. He was building on that promising left.

As time went on Royal was relegated to the position of rubber, bottle holder and handy man, while Warren pursued the flitting Chocolate Drop around the rubber mat.

"He says we have to give up smoking," said Warren as the pair left the store one evening. "And take long runs along the Drive and around the park. He says he always done his running there, in an old pair of pants and a sweater."

"Aw, can't we smoke?"

"Not in training. No fighter ever smokes in training. That's why they're such perfect specimens. Out of training, of course, that's different."

"I'm out of training," said Royal, lighting his cigarette.

"No, thanks," said Warren.

He stopped as formerly before Levy's Elite Shop. He gazed up at the dummy, who had assumed a light and fawn-colored overcoat—the night being a trifle chilly—and looked more self-satisfied than ever. The dummy's small blond mustache was newly waxed.

"I'm going to shave off this Charlie Chaplin," said Warren, rubbing his upper lip.

"He's got a bum build," he confided to Royal. "He looks to me like a big fathead. Not enough neck and shoulders and his arms are too short for any use. I bet I could walk around him like a cooper around a barrel. A big stiff like that would be just my dish!"

They entered the Hampshire Lunch.

"We have to eat proteins," said Warren. "Lots of them. I read in a newspaper today that they're great to build up muscle."

"Can we get them here?"

"We'll ask Tom."

They walked to the counter.

"What's your pleasure, gents?" asked Tom Whitehead, with his everlasting smile. "How about some quail on toast, or some sucking pig with truffles? Hello, there, Roy, old scout! Seen you with a little queen on Seventh Avenue last night. Oh, never mind, now! How does he do it, how does he do it? Hey, Warren?"

"We're in training," said Warren. "We want lots of proteins to-night, to build up the muscles."

"To build up convulsions, you mean," said Tom, shaking his head disapprovingly. "Larger portions? Why, if you're in training you want smaller portions! You train along with me and I'll have you fine as barbed wire in a week. How about a nice hamburger and some French fries—and then some homemade apple pudding with milk? Am I right?"

"Not larger portions—proteins! I think it's some kind of breakfast food."

"They serve them down at the Vegetarian restaurant," said Tom. "But they're no good for you, unless you're training for the boneyard. You'll get more kick out of a nice juicy hamburger than out of a barrel of that cattle feed. Catch a tray!"

After supping with Tom they wandered along One Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street. They were fresher than the same hour had ever found them in the old days. Their eyes were brighter, their cheeks had color, and their shoulders an assertive swing, and there was a lift to their steps beyond the magic of the newest rubber heels.

Warren saw Billy.

His enemy was with a young lady, but she was not Miss Harkens.

"There he is now!" exclaimed Warren tensely.

"Who? Billy? Are you going up to him and crash him?"

"He's got a lady with him," said Warren, trembling not altogether with disappointment. "I'll have to bide my time!"

"He is a big fellow, ain't he?" commented Warren. "You better not rough it with him at first. Hold him off with stiff jabs until you make him mad, and then cop him with the left as he rushes. You want to use science!"

"He isn't so big," argued Warren. "I'm putting on beef myself. I weigh over a hundred and twenty right now. Feel that arm!"

"Oh-h!" breathed Royal respectfully. "Knotty!"

They followed Billy and the young lady. While they watched him they saw him frankly put his arm around the lady's waist. He walked along in that comforting attitude, maintaining it while stopping to gaze into show windows. He and his lady finally disappeared into Little's Open Air.

"That's his girl," said Royal.

"Do you think so?" snapped Warren.

He decided to tell Miss Harkens. In fact, he felt it was his duty to do so, as a gentleman. The following morning he crossed the aisle.

"Miss Harkens," he said. "I——"

Miss Harkens raised her brown eyes from the stationery, and stared him down.

"Well?"

"Oh, nothing," said Warren. He had suddenly perceived that he had been seeking to avoid the necessity of meeting Billy in battle.

He experienced indirect benefits from his exertions in pursuit of the Harlem Chocolate Drop. These by-products of the manly art fell to him without any effort of will on his part. His increased vitality made him good-tempered and enabled him to sympathize with his neighbors, with Gerringer, with the floorwalker, even with the buying public. He perceived that the public did not frequent Gerringer's for the pleasure of deviling the sales people. He came to see that his job was more than a mechanism from which could be painfully extracted fourteen dollars per week. He came to do his work thoroughly because he was unable to do it in the old slipshod fashion; he had to have an outlet for his growing energy.

Taking and giving violent buffets had not increased his intelligence nor awakened him to the moral obliquity of cheating Gerringer out of a day's work. But what came to Warren's hand to do he did with his might. Billy Sunday was a ball tosser first, Teddy Roosevelt a cowboy, Abe Lincoln a rail splitter—name me a great American and I'll name you a man of his hands!

When Gerringer's business required another floorwalker Warren got the job. He had assistance, however.

It wasn't much of a job, but it paid twenty-two dollars per week, and took him from behind the counter. It raised his nose from the grindstone of gents' notions. Warren was moving up.

Miss Harkens was obliged to speak to him now in the way of business. Warren found that the duties of a floorwalker necessitated frequent pauses before the stationery counter and consultations with its fair manager—strictly business, of course. Oh, indeed! Miss Harkens was polite, coldly polite.

She might have discouraged Warren, but he was not readily cast down now. At first he meditated a plunge into drink and dissipation. He pictured himself as being discharged for drunkenness and rapidly sinking into the depths. Then one day he would return to the store, unshaven and in utter rags and would stalk to the stationery counter and stare at her with tragic and accusing eyes.

That was a fine picture. However, he decided on second thought to become a glittering success, greater than Gerringer, and to completely forget her in the mounting

whirl of business. And then, one day, into his sumptuous office where typewriters rattled without surcease and clerks rushed madly in and out, would come Miss Harkens. She would be quite awed, and would timidly approach his solid mahogany desk, would lift those hateful brown eyes, and would murmur, "Don't you remember me, Mr. McKeever?"

Narrowing his eyes with an abstracted frown he would stare at her. Could it be that little girl who had attended the stationery counter so many years ago up in Gerringer's?

He would call her "my dear," in a fatherly way, and strive to put her at her ease amidst his magnificence, but would hold her relentlessly at her distance. Too late, Maud Muller!

Gerringer gave him a new angle.

"I think we should move that stationery counter up front," suggested Warren, meeting his employer in the aisle. "Ever so many customers ask for it."

"That's why it's in the back," said Gerringer. "They got to walk through the store to get to it. We're not making much on the stationery."

"Rather promising little girl, that Miss Harkens," said Warren.

Gerringer smiled.

"That's about what she said of you when I offered her your job. She said she thought you'd do very well at it and asked me to give you the chance."

When Gerringer had walked on Warren went direct to the stationery counter. He leaned over it, and spoke to Miss Harkens.

"I am going to call some evening, and meet your mother," he said. He turned his back brusquely and strode away.

He wondered if her mother could clear up the mystery of her relation to Billy. The fellow seemed to have some kind of a hold on her. She was not in love with the rascal. Oh, well, Warren knew that, of course! But he was always hanging around and appearing at inopportune moments and seemed to find a constant welcome. Warren had discovered that he lived in the same apartment house as did Miss Hawkens; this discovery Warren had made while passing a few hours gazing worshipfully at the building.

Warren got his views of social relations from the pictures at Little's Open Air and the Critique, but their suggestions did not fill the bill. If Billy had lent a large sum to her father then Billy was out of luck and that was the end of it, because her father was dead and, therefore, in no position to force her into an unhappy marriage. And if he held a mortgage on the Harkens homestead and was threatening to foreclose it if she wouldn't be his—why, the Harkenses should worry, as it wasn't their house, anyway! It was annoying that picture explanations fitted only picture people.

That evening he supped at the Hampshire Lunch as usual with Royal, and dropped into the cigar store. He treated Royal to a good cigar, and lit its shapely mate.

"We ought to break training once in a while," he explained. "We don't want to get too fine, and go stale."

They strolled up Eighth Avenue under the elevated railway and turned west on One Hundred and Twenty-eighth Street. Warren was silent. Warren was thinking, and whenever Warren was thinking hard his feet took advantage of his abstraction and walked off with him toward the home of Miss Harkens.

She lived in a twenty-family walk-up flat in the unfashionable section which abuts Colonial Park on the east. Rents are cheap around Colonial Park in spite of the natural advantages of the location, for the colored tide which has swamped half of Harlem is still rising, and the white area is narrowing to a fringe.

Two persons were seated on straw mats on the brownstone steps of the flat. The man's arm familiarly circled the lady's waist, and he was trying to press his face to hers. The lady had planted a hand at the base of his neck, and was holding him off with all her power. It was not a sight to stir a New Yorker to chivalrous indignation; young people must do their love-making somewhere.

The lady screamed slightly.

"It's Billy," exclaimed Royal. "And ain't that Miss Harkens?"

Warren uttered a snarl to lift the hair on a dog's neck and sprang forward. Perhaps he still lacked the courage to attack the hulking Billy in cold blood, but Billy trying to kiss Miss Harkens against her will was something else again. He seized the ruffian by the collar, jerked him away from the lady, and sent him rolling down the stoop. The bulky rascal sat upright for an instant on the pavement, and then leaped to his feet.

"Billy!" screamed Miss Harkens. "Don't hit him!"

"Keep your seat, madam!" yelled Royal, dancing joyfully about. "Lace it into him, Warren, old boy!"

Billy leaped to the attack. He swung his right for Warren's head—the inevitable blow of the untutored fighter. Warren stepped in to meet him, getting inside of the roundhouse swing and brought up his left fist with that short and terrific jerk which had earned him the loving regard of the Chocolate Drop. Warren had the gift; his bones from his toes to his knuckles were so adjusted in a system of levers and fulcrums as to enable him to deliver the whole thrust at the end of his fist. A larger man could not have delivered so heavy a blow, be his intentions the best in the world.

"Oh, mamma!" yelled Royal. "That was a doll baby! Jab him away, Warren! Jab him away! Use science!"

Billy had been stood back on his heels. He rushed flounderingly to get his hands clutched on Warren. But after flirting about with the Chocolate Drop Warren avoided Billy as he would have side-stepped a cross-town car. He skipped about before the enraged man, shooting in cutting rights and lefts.

"Billy!" implored Miss Harkens. "Don't hurt him!"

"You can have Billy when we're done with him," said Royal. "Bring over the left again, Warren!"

Billy backed Warren against the iron railing which inclosed the areaway. He rushed in with his hands over his face, and his elbows touching each other over his stomach. Warren waited for him to open up. Warren's knees were bent, his feet spread apart, and his body sagged down and to the left.

Billy opened his arms, and grabbed.

In a single beautiful and coördinated gesture Warren straightened his knees, twisted his body powerfully to the right, and sent his left fist whizzing up. It landed on Billy's jaw.

"Right on the button!" yelled Royal.

Billy was a rugged fellow. He sagged beneath the unmerciful stroke, but caught Warren about the waist and pulled him to the ground.

"Break, break!" cried the master of ceremonies, seizing Billy by the legs. Billy kicked and upset Royal. The three young men floundered on the pavement, still fighting.

"Call the police!" gasped Billy. "They have me down!"

Miss Harkens fell determinedly upon the scrimmage. She seized Royal by the arm and dragged him off. She then placed a hand upon Billy's chin and pushed.

The young men came to their senses. They arose, and sat down on the stoop, their mouths lolling open. But the lust of battle was unappeased in their eyes.

Billy had a bluish lump on his jaw, and his right eye was swollen and closing. Warren's nose was running gore. They were not a pretty spectacle, but then the survivors of any battle are not pretty spectacles, be their excuse for fighting ever so noble.

"How *could* you strike that poor boy, Billy?" asked Miss Harkens. "Oh, how could you? This is Mr. McKeever from the store, and this is Mr. Haviland!"

"Mr. McKeever from the store," growled Billy. "Forget it! He's a pug, that's what he is! I'm done fighting for you, sis. Taking a beating and then getting bawled out for it is a bit too much!"

"You'll keep away from her, will you?" demanded Warren. "You'll give her up the papers—or whatever it is that gives you power over her?"

"He's a nut," said Billy to Miss Harkens in a half whisper.

"I'm sorry if I caused you to misunderstand, Mr. McKeever," said Miss Harkens. "And I'd be heartbroken if I thought that my——" She paused. "Billy is my brother—so there!" she said.

"What's that?" cried Warren, jumping up. "Your brother? Put it there, Billy, old top—put it there!"

Warren was brought into the house and washed. A piece of beefsteak was bound over Billy's eye, and he went off to see what he could of a picture at Little's Open Air.

A sharp kick on the shins as the three remaining young people sat on the stoop reminded Royal that he had a pressing appointment. He departed.

"Let's take a walk," suggested Warren.

They crossed over to Riverside Drive, and walked under the viaduct on their way to the benches near Grant's Tomb.

"Come in here a minute," he said when they came to the bicycle repair shop. She followed him up the stairs to the loft.

The Chocolate Drop was sitting on the rubber mat, dreamily inhaling a very bad cigar.

"Hello, Wa'en," he said, efficiently making one syllable of the name. "Evenin', missus. How come you boys ain't here to-night? You ain't never going to make a fighter unless you sinks you' teeth in and holds on!"

"I guess I don't want to be a fighter any more," said Warren. "I'd like to keep up the boxing, but——"

"Ain't I knowed it?" said the Chocolate Drop. "I knowed it all the time, Wa'en—you ain't got the heart of a fighter. You got the guts and you can hit—but you don't like to hit! You don't like to feel that ol' mitt go—spang!"

"I'm afraid it's no business for a white man."

"For a black man nuther," said the Chocolate Drop reflectively. "Not less'n he's borned without ears. Me, I'm going to be a dentist! Yessuh, a dentist—that's me!"

"A dentist?"

"Begin at it to-morrow mornin'—yessuh, at eight sharp. Got a brother that's a dentist up in a Hundred and Thirty-fifth Street, and me and him is going to be partners. If he can't pull the teeth out, then I'll knock 'em out! Share and share alike, good money and bad. Stand down at the street door in a red coat and gol' buttons and a high red hat, and give out cards. Man needs tack and judgment to be a good dentist. Yessuh!"

"How is that?"

"Well, gen'l'man comes busting up with a big swollen face. Shall I smack him and run him up the block, or shall I bow low and open the door? Did he get that swollen face upstairs from my brother, or is this the very first time he come to patronize? Yessuh! A good dentist up in my neighborhood needs tack—and a wallop. That's me!"

Hours later they were still sitting on a bench enjoying the beauty of the summer night.

"Aren't the stars big and bright!" whispered Warren.

"I suppose it looked funny from the street, Mr. McKeever," said Miss Harkens. "I told Billy he ought to go in and shave, and he got fresh and tried to rub his face against mine. And did you really fight that terrible battle for me, Mr. McKeever?"

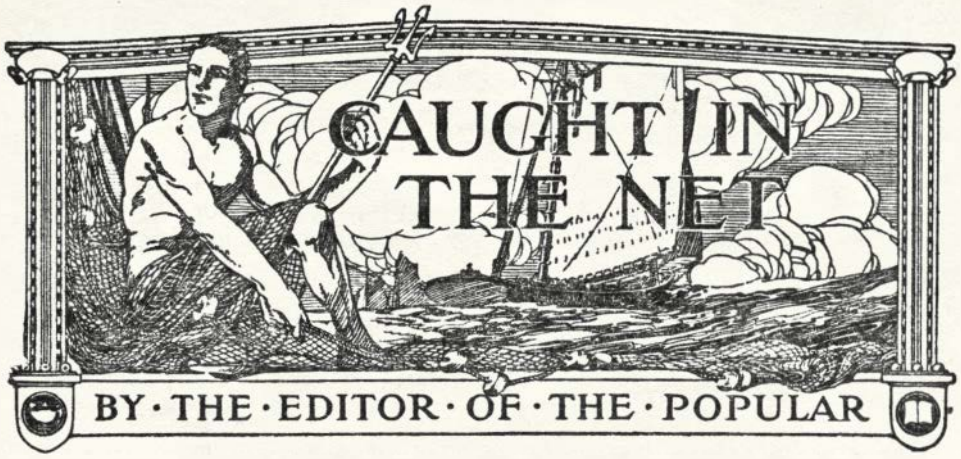
"Warren!" he corrected commandingly.

"Warren," she sighed, letting her head relax blissfully against his shoulder.

Another story by Mr. McMorrow in the following number.

A SOUVENIR GAVEL

PRESIDENT HARDING has on his desk in the executive offices of the White House the big mahogany gavel which he used as permanent chairman of the Republican national convention in Chicago, in 1916. At that time, when Hughes was nominated, nobody in the United States, not even Harding himself, had the remotest idea that he would ever be looked upon as presidential timber. It serves to recall the amazingly astute prediction, or the surprisingly big stroke of luck, of Harry Daugherty, now attorney general, when he said in New York, five months before the convention of 1920, that Harding would get the nomination late in a hot night when the delegates had been worn out by fruitless balloting for the candidates then big in the public eye. That is what actually happened.



WHEELS OF PROGRESS

WHEN enough people want a thing dreams come true. Not so long ago a good-roads enthusiast was looked on as a well-meaning breeder of needless expense. No one lived through and effectively combated more of this antagonistic feeling than the late Amos G. Batchelder, long the virtual leader of the American Automobile Association, but prior to that one of the founders of the League of American Wheelmen, through which the first general, systematic attack on good roads indifference was launched about 1880. It was a gallant beginning that these "ancient" bicyclers made. But it has become a truism that it was through the coming of that other machine of which wheels are so integral a part, in the period 1895-1900, that the first great impetus was given to the improved highways movement. A glance at car manufacture and registry figures from 1895 on is eloquent of the reason why, though the beginnings of the auto's influence, like many another great beginning, was impressively modest.

Only 300 cars were made in 1895. Even in 1900 no more than 5,000 were built and the total registry was then less than 14,000, in a population of 75,000,000. By the year 1, Anno Ford, or 1903, 11,000 cars were made, and the total registry was a little over 38,000, of which number only 708 were Fords. Indeed it is noteworthy, in passing, that the great democrat of gas-cars began to take its place as a preponderating factor in the national auto output only after some ten years' time. By the year before the war, however, the "flivver" production was over half as large as that of all other makes—168,220 compared to 316,780 of other makes. In that year the total registry of cars first rose to over a million and, since then, has been maintained at increasingly stupendous proportions to the total of population, until in 1921 there was a car for every dozen inhabitants, or approximately 10,000,000 autos, 1,000,000 of which were trucks. In 1920, 2,025,197 cars were made—1,027,677 of which were Fords. Small wonder that to-day's demand for better highways has made the demanders listened to with a respectful sympathy that would have been thought a fantastic dream when the League of American Wheelmen raised their voices!

Now there are 1702 organized agencies active in the cause of good roads, through whose efforts over 310,000 miles of surfaced highways have been completed. Let alone the vast sums already expended on this accomplishment, there is now available well over $1,000,000,000 for road work during the next two years. In May and June of this year alone nearly $350,000,000 were made available in highway bond issues by States, counties, municipalities, et cetera, and a further great fillip has been given such work by the recent Federal act appropriating $75,000,000 to be apportioned among States for road construction, providing the States supply a sum of money equal to what is apportioned to them. A considerable change from the days when State action by Kentucky, between 1821-37, resulted in the building of only 343 miles of State roads, such as they were.

The time is far distant, though, when any resting on laurels can be afforded. Three hundred and ten thousand miles of "surfaced" highways is impressive, taken by itself, but not so much so when considered as being only a part of the 2,500,000 miles of rural highway in the country. When you consider that each mile of this total is of use to some farmer, the importance to us all, whether car owners or not, of improving these roads becomes obvious. To complete this task it is estimated would involve a cost of about $15,000,000,000, and would take a good many years. Plenty of need of putting shoulders to the wheels yet. And in this connection, let it be remembered that it is the part of autoists to take a steady interest in motor-tax legislation and to coöperate thoroughly in whatever provisions are wisest. So will all our roads, in time, become well paved with something much more endurable than good intentions.

PROPAGANDA

WE were interested in reading lately a pamphlet issued by a well-known organization which set forth a praiseworthy desire for the promotion of true American patriotism through the writing and presentation of "the indisputable facts of history as applicable to our country without bias and without prejudice." By which was meant history without racial bias or sectional prejudice. With this principle one can surely find no fault. The stating of it in this instance, however, might have stirred even deeper response had not the writer in question evinced unmistakable prejudice against one certain race largely represented in our somewhat heterogeneous nationality. Palpably, considering its source, the pamphlet was indirect propaganda tending to benefit the race from which its author sprang by belittlement of the race against which his bias was so apparent—from both of which races a large part of our body politic is derived. With propaganda akin to this, for or against any certain racial strain in our national make-up, we are becoming increasingly familiar. The chance for a sort of genteel riot of it was afforded by a recent "Makers of America" exhibition held in New York City where various races represented in our midst had opportunity to laud their respective contributions to the upbuilding of our country to their hearts' content.

In such "racial" claims of achievement we confess we do not take the interest that we might. Nor are we aware of showing any particular "ingratitude" in this. Obviously each of our racial strains has had its part and will continue to have its share in determining what we are as a nation. But we cannot persuade ourselves that any of them played, or play, their part out of any special sense of altruism. Whatever the race, insofar as it has contributed as a whole, so has it reaped reward here according to its ability—and meant to do so in this our "land of opportunity." We would be better pleased to see the representatives of our various component races let it go at that and refrain from this attempting to prove that this country owes most to this or that given racial strain. It would seem more fitting for one and all to feel that whatever they have done they have done as American citizens and not as—well, let us say, Fiji Islanders or representatives of Timbuktu.

It would seem not only fitting but even necessary for the welfare of all concerned. Surely our peculiar problem of governing cosmopolite America and trying to amalgamate its many variegated racial strains into a coherent entity is great enough as it is without the gratuitous engendering of friction between them by efforts to emphasize the importance of any one of them to the body politic to the disparagement of any other. If not checked, where is "propaganda" tending to this end going to stop? Doubtless through their modesty we have yet to hear in this respect from some 100,000 Japanese, some 60,000 Chinese, and a quarter of a million Indians in our midst. Can we not have done with it all, now and forever and, trying to forget who has had the greater molding influence on the country, simply try to remember that this is not Fiji-America or any other Hyphen-America but just the United States—and incidentally, as long as we are here and a part of the game, endeavor to become resigned, one and all, to being just plain "Americans?"

THE BLUE AND THE GAY

TIME was when he who relished his toddy of an evening, or oftener, scoffed at the possibility of a national Sahara. As often enough has happened in other matters, however, organization among prohibitionists carried the day—and who shall say how largely because of unorganized overconfidence on the part of the thirsty ones? At moments of indigestion, as it were, we find ourselves sometimes wondering if by any chance overconfidence among the less strait of us might give Blue Law advocates the opportunity to attain their object. Having got so far as getting the bill introduced into Congress the chairman of the Crusade Committee handling the matter has claimed that 1,500,000 are backing him in his attempt to obtain a national Sunday law prohibiting the publication and circulation of Sunday papers, the operation of Sunday trains, and the carrying on of all professional and other labor and of all amusements that are conducted for profit on Sundays. A program with the blue sky fittingly as the limit, it would seem, approximating to the old Connecticut laws of the same tint. If there are a million and a half people back of it, we might do well to pause to tremble and ask if history is about to repeat itself.

We are not entirely without comfort, though. Already has appeared a Roland for the Oliver of the dark-blue Crusade Committee—to wit: the "Religious Liberty Association," which, through its bulletin recently circulated from Washington, expresses its sentiments in no uncertain tones. As to the enacting of any such national law as the crusaders wish, it takes the general stand that so far as the civil government is concerned it can deal by right only with civil affairs relative to man's proper relationship with his fellow man, and holds that to put into the laws any such commandment as one forbidding one to work on Sundays is to fail to recognize what civil government has a right and what it has not a right to do. A man's attitude toward his Sabbath, which is another way of saying toward his religion, adds "The Religious Liberty Association," "should never be regulated by a law enacted by the legislative body and enforced by a civil court." That the Puritans once had thirteen capital offenses of a purely religious character punishable by a civil magistrate does not seem to the "R. L. A." to make any such modern action any more admissible. "If a man does not wish to read his Sunday paper," claims the association, "that is his privilege, but why does he want Congress to make a law preventing all other men from doing so?" And, indeed, though we cannot say that we would want to have to read *all* of our Sunday paper, the reading of it at all would appear to be a matter to be determined by the individual conscience and not by the strong arm of civil force.

One logical flight of thought expressed by our doughty opponent of the Blue Crusaders gives us somewhat of a new shock. To the reformers' contention that murdering the Sabbath—according to their idea of what its murder is—is worse than murdering men, the "R. L. A." points out that to follow out this belief to the limit would mean instituting "the death penalty for all such as do not believe in their drastic Sunday laws." A truly blue thought. However, no matter how the battle eventually goes between the crusaders and the more unregenerate of us, there should be, for those of us still remaining incorrigible, some little consolation in the reflection that the most extreme and most quoted of the famous Connecticut Blue Laws of old were never in force, anyway. As for any incorrigibles whose fears none the less remain lively, we can only suggest to them to "organize"—while the organizing is good.

THE SURE, GRINDING MILLS

WE are kept fairly well acquainted with the country's total wheat and other "grain" crops, but are not so well posted on what we get from such crops in "finished flour and meal products." This is shown in a recent report of the present census of manufactures for the flour and grist-mills industry, which covers the year 1919. Wheat flour, as might be expected, represents a large part of the total value of our grain-mill products—in 1919 amounting to 70 per cent of the whole, the value of the 1919 wheat-flour product being $1,436,589,000. At the time of the last previous manufactures census, 1914, the value of this product, $543,840,000, was a little

over 61 per cent of the total value of that year's grain-mill products. The number of flour and grist mills then operating was 76 more than the number listed in the present census, which gives the total of mills as 10,712. The total value of all "grain" products turned out by these mills in 1919 was $2,052,850,000, as compared to $877,680,000 in 1914. It is to be remembered, of course, in this connection—taking as a basis of comparison average prices recorded to have been received by producers at the close of these two years—that prices for 1919, roughly speaking, were anywhere from 70 per cent to 140 per cent higher than those for 1914.

The present census shows that as regards quantity produced 1919 shows an increase over 1914 in respect to wheat flour, rye flour and rye graham, and barley meal, while there was a more or less marked decrease shown in quantity of buckwheat flour, corn meal, and corn flour, and especially of hominy and grits. That stanch old standby, oatmeal, maintained about the same figures in quantity produced for the two dates, as did other breakfast foods, hominy excepted.

It is interesting to note the amount of various "grain" crops grown in the year covered by the present census—1919, and the amount of them used in the mills and turned out as finished products in that year. The following table gives the figures at a glance.

RAW MATERIALS.

	Crops (bushels)	Used in mills (bushels)
Wheat	940,987,000	613,094,000
Rye	88,478,000	15,487,000
Corn	2,917,250,000	113,768,000
Barley	165,719,000	21,151,000
Oats	1,248,310,000	58,581,000

PRODUCTS.

	Quantity	Value
Wheat flour	132,478,000 barrels	$1,436,589,000
Rye flour and graham	2,527,000 barrels	21,236,000
Corn meal and flour	10,683,000 barrels	82,066,000
Barley meal	91,808,000 pounds	3,217,000
Oatmeal	28,120,000 pounds	1,101,000
Hominy and grits	288,525,000 pounds	9,247,000
Breakfast foods, etc.	96,501,000 pounds	4,350,000

The total value of such mill products, as noted before, is completed by such products as bran and middlings, feed, and buckwheat flour. Of the latter commodity, so dear to the American breakfast table, some 5,000,000 bushels came to the mills in 1919, which were turned into 90,000,000 pounds of buckwheat flour, valued at over $5,000,000. This is some 35,000,000 pounds less than was produced by the mills at the time of the last manufactures census in 1914. Let us hope that this is no omen that this delectable viand is to be increasingly lacking in the future! The national "stack of" is too nearly sacred for that!

POPULAR TOPICS

NEW YORK State led the country in production of manufactured goods last year. Its output, valued at almost nine billion dollars, was more than one eighth of the nation's total. Thirteen States manufactured products valued at a billion dollars or more. A value of almost $63,000,000,000 is placed on the manufactured goods produced in the country last year. There were more than a quarter of a million manufacturing plants in operation, employing an average of more than nine million wage earners. Our manufactures were three times as great as in 1910, and five and one half times as great as in 1900.

SHAKESPEARE has been dead for over three hundred years, but in London two buildings still are standing in which his plays were produced while he was alive—Middle Temple Hall and the hall of Gray's Inn.

THERE is a fire every minute, day and night, in the United States. There are five school fires each day of the year. Fires cost twenty thousand lives a year, and cause a property loss of $300,000,000. And the chief cause of fires is carelessness!

ABOUT a third of Canada's immigration of 148,000 for the year ended March 30th last came from the United States. It is estimated that Americans who settle in the Dominion take an average of $372 with them. Canada needs settlers badly, and while last year's immigration is small compared with the record year of 1913, it is an encouraging increase of 27 per cent over the fiscal year ending in March, 1920.

ON her first regular trip the steamship *American Legion* made a new record for the voyage between New York and Rio de Janeiro. The new liner's actual running time was 12 days and 20 hours.

CANADA'S fur production last year was more than three and one half million pelts, valued at over $21,000,000. About half the pelts were muskrat and beaver, and these furs were valued at about $12,000,000. Marten, mink, silver fox, and fisher pelts, in the order named, completed the total. A small proportion of these pelts came from fur farms, of which there were 424 in Canada at the end of 1919. On these farms were 8,000 foxes, most of them of the silver variety, valued at $3,000,000.

HAVANA is doing everything that it can to make Broadwayites feel at home. According to our consul general in the Cuban capital a subway system, modeled after New York's, is planned.

FOR the calendar year of 1920 our exports of grain, dairy, and meat products, and cotton, were valued at $2,759,573,000—as compared with a prewar average of $848,338,000—and in value constituted 78 per cent of our agricultural exports. On a tonnage basis our exports of these commodities were double the exports of any year before the war. Production of grain in the United States in 1920 was 19 per cent above the average prewar production, and grain exports double the average prewar exports. Exports of dairy products were eight times those of any year previous to 1915. Meat exports were 50 per cent above the prewar average. Cotton production in the United States decreased by 893,000 bales, and our cotton exports by 2,220,000 bales.

NEW JERSEY farmers now receive valuable information regarding selling prices of their products via wireless. The government radio station, in Washington, sends out this information, at five o'clock every afternoon, so slowly that farmers' sons with amateur wireless sets can "take" it.

FOR the first half of last year American railroads paid their employees $1,457,010,151, as compared with $1,707,770,698 for the corresponding period of 1920. Last year's wage bill was 54.44 per cent of the roads' total operating expenses, as against 62.29 per cent the year before. In June last there were 1,586,143 railroad employees in the country, as compared with 1,804,822 in January, 1921.

BEANS are becoming popular again, according to the restaurant men. Since war days they have been shunned by the millions of men who got enough of them to last for a while in the days when they were serving in the army or navy. But this dislike is passing away and "a thousand on a plate" is again becoming a favorite restaurant order.

Crossed Records

By Calvin Johnston

Author of "Temple Dust," "The Switchman's Ghost Story," Etc.

If Doone of the Foothills Division of the P. D. had had less courage he would have been thought a braver man

GHOSTS are the hypocrites," said the visiting stranger to the night yard crew, "or how could they climb out of the graves night after night and sit there along of the lying epitaphs, without blushing?"

"Is it a ghost you would have blush?" sourly enough inquired Denny, the old switchman, for the other who had crossed the tracks from the passenger station while biding his belated train was taking the story away from him this snowy night in the switch shanty.

" 'Tis little we know," said the stranger, "but a blush would become them as I am in a position to know, having been intimate at one time with a keeper of doomsday records, who confided to me in his cups that the truth about the past flatters nobody who has ever lived in it."

Only Jimmy Burke, the call boy, with one shrewd bright eye cocked under the brim of his storm cap, took issue with this:

"I'm not blushin' over any past," he said.

"And what d'you know of it who has hardly started one?" asked the stranger contemptuously. "But day by day as it piles up against you with the doomsday record showing you late for calls or reprimanded for impudence to your betters, or given demerits for hopping switch engines to save you the trouble of putting one lazy foot before another—then you will learn to blush with your cheek of brass when the keeper of the record looks at you."

"And who is he?"

"Who but the personal-record clerk in the superintendent's office—and it is such a man I was intimate with who told me what I am telling you.

"Twenty odd years ago there was an accident clerk on the P. D. by the name of Doone—Danver Doone; a queer, hollow-sounding name, is it not?—as if whispered by the wind around a wreck; and well it fitted the owner with his young, gray face and soft tread and smile of sympathy.

"In your time, my friends, you may have noticed that it is an uncomfortable business to be up on the superintendent's carpet, though a bold man may give him eye for eye. And when the superintendent calls for his record clerk and says: 'Bring me this man's file,' the strongest will quail. For even if your record, when it lies opened between you and the superintendent, shows never a black mark, never a reprimand or demerit during the years of service, still there's a chill of awe in looking on the past of you; and if you have the wisdom you will ask secretly: 'If I have done nothing with blame, how is it that I have done nothing with praise, either?' And that is the question Danver Doone should have asked himself on the carpet before Superintendent Rivets of the Foothills Division, a morning twenty odd years ago.

"But in those days the gray had not come into Danver's face, nor on his hair, nor the stoop into his shoulders, and he was switching in the yard at Foothills, after a five-year service as call boy and yard clerk with never a mark against him. Much puffed up he was with his record, because it was not worse than the average of all the thousand in the record room, and in the youthful ignorance of him he stood pat on it; as if a man could hope for the just rewards in life and death on the strength of faults or crimes omitted.

"Standing there—carpeted—before Superintendent Rivets though, Doone was due to acquire more wisdom.

" 'Yesterday in the very tracks where you stand now,' said Rivets to him, a gaunt little man embittered by the disappointment of waiting for trains on the P. D., with a hard blue eye which pulverized you on the spot,

'only yesterday,' he repeated, 'where you stand now, stood Jim Carney, engine foreman. Where is he to-day? Dead by reason of somebody's neglect! You were of his crew. What happened?'

" 'As you must know,' returned Danver, 'for you were on the spot after it was over, we were on the main—taking a cut of feeders to the stockyards, when a car wheel split a switch and derailed. And at that I ran back to flag anything else coming along.'

" 'And you are sure your lantern was burning?' The question made Danver blush with indignation. 'Answer me,' commanded Rivets.

" 'It was burning,' said Danver.

" 'According to your knowledge and belief,' said Rivets dryly. 'But we will go on. Now, there is a curve at that point and you ran back to flag. How far did you go?'

" 'Two hundred yards—and there met No. 11 and gave signal—and the engineer was not in control according to yard regulations——'

" 'Two hundred yards,' interrupted Rivets. 'according to your knowledge and belief.

" 'Why do you say that,' asked Danver, 'when I counted two hundred and twenty-five steps as I ran?'

" 'But a man can take two hundred and twenty-five steps and not go a hundred yards—if the steps are not in a direct line; and you had been drinking in a saloon before going to work last night.'

" 'It was two drinks—not much for a man to get full on,' said Danver coolly. 'And they were taken with poor Jim Carney himself.'

"Rivets looked down at Danver's personal file open on the desk before him. 'I do not notice any leaves of absence attached here,' he said. 'In all your five-year service you have never had a vacation?' The switchman shook his head. 'You must take one—at once,' said Rivets. 'And, by the way,' he added, 'do you know that I have worked twenty years without a vacation?'

" 'No, sir; I did not know it,' replied Danver steadily, being too proud to plead against the injustice he was getting.

" 'But you knew,' said Rivets in a nasty voice. 'that I was leaving last night on a vacation—to Niagara Falls and New York and Florida.'

" 'I had heard so.'

" 'And having heard it you figured the division would run wild till I got back—and so came on duty in drink. You did not wait till I was out of town; another ten minutes I would have been on No. 11 and gone, with my division polished like a ballroom. And then you stagger down the yard behind your derailed cars, and short-flag. And I must stay to pick up your wreck, and this morning a bridge is out west, and a time-card meeting called for Monday.' Rivets took the passes for his trip out of his wallet and chucked them into his desk. 'I will have them extended twenty years more,' he said, 'and maybe in that time I can clear away enough of the grief of this division to start again.'

" 'Sure, he will have his revenge on somebody for the lost vacation,' thought Danver, but standing pat on his clear record, said: 'You will not fire a man, Mr. Rivets, for the first offense in five years' service. I took just two drinks and was cold sober on duty.'

" 'I will fire you for short-flagging,' said Rivets, 'on the evidence of the engine crew of No. 11 and Muldoon the flagman and of my own senses, for I timed them after hearing the whistle on entering the yard. There is my vacation beginning, I thought, and still held the watch in my hand when the crash came below the station platform. A minute and fifty it was, and the distance proves the engineer of No. 11 in control. And the spot where you flagged was not a hundred yards from the wreck. You were there before I was, and spoke to me with whisky on your breath, and dead Jim Carney under the cars.'

"Now, even Danver, my friends, for all the assurance of him, must go out staggered by such proof of his short-flagging, and a while he stood in the doorway of the headquarters office wondering that the day had suddenly become so dark, and himself like an unsheltered man threatened by storm. And slowly, for he fought it off, came the remembrance of Katy Carney, the young widow with her arms stretched over the body of Jim as they brought it into the cottage and her face uplifted in question to them all and to the saints themselves. That question on the pretty face which had so often smiled him a welcome to the home of the Carneys was the threat which this day and all other days was to hold for Danver Doone.

" 'But I was not in drink and counted the two hundred steps I ran,' he denied to him-

self with a terror of the proof against him, when the engineer who was one of Carney's switching crew of the night before passed downstairs from Rivets' office, and said that the superintendent would see him.

"Upstairs the two men again faced each other over the record file, and Rivets said: 'I notice there that your record is crossed with that of Engineer Doone, who was killed five years ago in the Brush Creek collision. He was a good friend to me once, was Engineer Doone, and a faithful employee and rather than set his son adrift with a discharge I will keep my finding a family secret of the P. D., and put you on as car clerk in my office. But, never again, understand, will you throw a switch or set a brake on the P. D.' And with that he writes in the record with a scratching like that of the devil in the doomsday book which he keeps unbeknownst to the angel whose legal business it is. 'Car clerk it is,' says Danver, and thanks him, but like one in a trance, for not a minute now can he rest till he has paced over again the distance he backflagged the night before. And presently with trembling knees he walks, counting from the spot where the wrecking crew is still picking at the remains of the cut of cars, to the switch stand beyond the crossing where he had waited and swung his lantern. And it is one hundred yards. After a while he paced it again; and then he went on to the office and all the way he counted his steps up to one hundred and glanced back. And ever after it was the penance laid on him by the saints that he should count his steps, and at the one hundredth would pause and look back. So that in time he came to be known as one of the haunted men about railroad offices, where nobody in courtesy searches out the ghosts of another—except when the superintendent resurrects the files from the record room.

"Katy Carney, with herself to keep and the baby, spent the last of her savings at business college and came into the superintendent's office as stenographer, and here was the penance again. For all unaware of the question in her dark eyes she looked on Danver, the friend who she believed could never bear to throw switch in the yard again since the night Jim was killed, but had chosen to come into the office instead. But Danver read the question: 'Why should my Jim be taken from me and the others left?' and, taking his hundredth step, would look behind to see himself standing by with a lantern and letting No. 11 in on his foreman riding the last car of the cut.

"A gray twilight crept over Danver's face and his hair, as he came to understand that the question must some day be answered, that murder will out at last. A year went by and two and four and each one made the answer harder, for by now the grave between the two was a spot of sentiment, y' understand, covered over with dead flowers, where they had lingered till it was too late to part. And it was an awful thing for Danver to feel a stir in the grave at times, as if the dead man would rise to answer the question in Katy's face himself.

"Cheerful friends they were, for what with making a living and planning a great career for the baby, who was already in trousers, Katy could not give up to grieving, and was divil a forlorn widow at all. There would be a minute's chat at the office between them during the day and they often walked home together, and Danver admiring the baby would predict he would be superintendent.

" 'Sure Danny is the loyal friend to us that he was to Jim,' Katy would reflect; 'and yet never a man has changed so.' And she could but wonder what blight had fallen on the young man of four years agone that he should now be graying and stooping, and in spite of his joking tone and a ready, quiet laugh, pause so often with a look of fear.

" 'Perhaps 'tis the humor of Superintendent Rivets weighs on him,' she suspected, for on days of delays and accident ould Rivets would stand before Danver's desk and pulverize him with his hard blue eye.

" 'A choice day for a vacation, Mr. Doone,' he would say—and you must know that after a year in the office he had made Danver accident clerk, so that when he brought in a report Rivets would laugh a bitter laugh. 'Have you never been to Niagara and Florida, Mr. Doone? I will visit them some day in twenty years, when the P. D. has ceased running a wrecker as the second section of every train. 'Twill be a pleasure to write you what I discover there.'

"Katy, hearing this, for she was now personal stenographer to the superintendent, would remark the sadness of Danver over Rivets' good humor.

" 'Tis the very mention of wreck hurts and scares him,' she thought; 'he has never been the same since that night in the yard.'

"Now a woman cannot bear that a man she loves should turn pale at danger, and it was the first sign of Katy's heart interest in the man that she took him to task. 'What has become of the man you used to be?' she asked when they walked home together one evening. 'Why must you waste the years of you as clerk in an office—to shun the dangers of the yard where you might have been yardmaster by now?'

" 'The danger is everywhere,' answered Danver, paler than ever. 'And the greatest,' he thought to himself, 'is with me now.' For he wished to tell Katy he loved her and keep the secret of Jim's death at the same time.

" 'Is there danger in the office?' she asked scornfully. 'And you have me to escort you across the tracks every evening.'

" 'I cannot let her believe that,' thought Danver in the pride of him. And then, with a groan—for the show-down had come—he told the truth of Jim's death at last, and the superintendent's ruling that he should never again touch brake or switch on the P. D. 'And outside of the one mistake which cost so much,' he said bitterly, 'my record is clear.' But to this Katy said nothing. And when they came to her gate she gathered the little boy in her arms, lest he be friends with the man who had murdered his father.

"Next morning in the office she spoke to Danver, but with the sort of religious sympathy you show to some criminal you cannot touch without taint. Her cheeks were white and her eyes deeper and darker. 'The penance grows heavier than I can bear,' thought Danver Doone, and now with the burden which bowed his shoulders he had another which weighed down the heart. 'Still, I will stay it through,' he said; 'for though Katy would scorn to take friendship or aid from me, she is a widow and not strong, and a baby to keep. And if sickness and misfortune come, as they do to all, I will find a way to be of use to them.'

"So the job of him became like a soldier's post where you watch and fight yourself, which is harder than fighting the enemy. For a year Danver did not run away, and though the two who were in love with each other spoke once each day they could not meet again in the spot where the dead man had now risen to keep watch also. And yet there grew within Danver along of the hurt and burden of guilt a great peace also. And it was the end of his long year of watching, and a peace which passed understanding also settled over the Foothills Division of the P. D.

"At first Danver Doone, accident clerk, felt it was all one—that the division seemed at peace because he was at peace. Then he noticed that the accident-report blanks were dusty in his desk, and on the morrow Superintendent Rivets called him in his office.

" 'I will write you what I see in Niagara and Florida, Mr. Doone,' he said, and folded up a sheaf of wire transportation and put it in his wallet. 'After five years,' he said, 'it is the vacation.'

" 'A pleasant journey, sir,' said Danver, and as Rivets waved him away, having had his joke, he added, 'Myself I am not going yet.' Sure, it was not the gray, stooped clerk which spoke, but Danver Doone, yardman, of bold eye and swaggering shoulders! 'You have had your revenge,' he told Rivets; 'look at me and say whether I have paid. And in the five years I have not had a drink. You would not have joy of this vacation, Mr. Rivets, with me still paying for costing you the last one! Give me back my job with the engine.'

"Rivets' hand moved to the buzzer and the record clerk came in. 'Bring me this man's file,' said Rivets. Presently the two men studied each other across the desk with the file open between them, and Katy Carney listening at her typewriter.

" 'Write out an order transferring Danver Doone to yard service,' Rivets told her; 'attach it to the file—and pass it to him.' Rivets had risen and was putting on his overcoat. The incident was closed.

"But he was halted in his tracks by the cry of Katy.

" 'It was not Danny—but Jim's own fault,' she said faintly, and Danver, reading the memorandum scribbled by Rivets on the dark morning five years before, saw——

"Engineer Blake, Switch Engine 76, testified he was backing on Foreman Carney's signal when struck by No. 11.

"It appeared that a moment after Danver had run back with his lantern, Carney had rerailed the car and started on after his flagman; they had backed a hundred yards when they were struck.

"'It was the drink,' said Rivets. 'Carney forgot No. 11; the engineer supposed he was taking siding when he backed.'

"'And you let me suffer for five years in the belief I'd killed Jim Carney——'

"'Hold!' said Rivets, coming back to rap the desk with his knuckles. 'Who drank with him before going on his trick?'

"'That fault was between the two of them,' said Katy.

"'Ho! And does my secretary find against me?' asked Rivets, hard as nails. 'But think again, Mrs. Carney. Didn't I transfer this Danver Doone of yours instead of firing him, and save his record so that he could at any time resign if he had been man enough, and get a job on another road?'

"'You figured I would quit?' asked Danver. 'Well, I would not.'

"'Mr. Rivets is right, and I do not know what to make of you at all,' said Katy; 'on another road you would have been yardmaster by this time.'

"'I have nothing to blush for here,' answered Danver. 'Glory be, my record is clear—it is proven.' He tapped the file. 'From beginning to end!'

"'But you should blush,' said Katy. 'Is a record without demerits and discharge enough? What of the merits that should be there, and promotions on this or some other road?'

"'Words, woman, which you will have to kill,' said Rivets, astonished by the quarreling against the peace and dignity of a superintendent. 'Doone—you are not obliged to commit yourself—do you care for this woman? And how long since?'

"'Years, sir.'

"'And you asked her to marry you?'

"'No, sir; I told her of Jim's death, and the memory of him raised up between us.'

"At this Rivets walked around and looked up at Danver Doone standing in his tracks.

"'Write,' said Rivets, 'and attach to this man's file, "Promoted." Have you written?'

"'Promoted to what?' asked Katy.

"'To something better than a superintendent has to give,' answered Rivets, pulverizing her with his hard blue eye; 'promoted by his loyalty and efficiency as man and employee during an emergency of five years.'

"Katy blushed with anger at the reproach, and then her eyes roving to Danver in a long look, she touched her typewriter keys.

"'What are you writing now, Mrs. Carney?'

"'What you have said—to be attached to the file.'

"'It is not regular; but let it stand. Make haste; my train is in. Take a last dictate: "The file of Danver Doone to be crossed with that of Katy Carney and make one record."'

"And, with this the superintendent's vacation had begun at last."

Watch for more of Mr. Johnston's work in the near future.

A VERSATILE PRESIDENT

THOMAS JEFFERSON, third president of the United States and author of the Declaration of Independence, was as many-sided a man as Theodore Roosevelt. In addition to being a statesman of vision, he was a skilled farmer and horticulturist and imported the first reaping machine used in Virginia. South Carolina's importance as a rice-producing State may be traced to his experiments. He was a violinist of merit. He drew the plans for Monticello, his home, and for the buildings of the University of Virginia, still regarded as excellent examples of classic architecture. He foresaw the use of the submarine and torpedo and was an inventor of ability. He also was an enthusiastic archæologist and an expert at setting broken bones and sewing up wounds.

From Bitter Creek

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "Lost Wagons," "Maverick Basin," Etc.

(A Four-Part Story—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE STOAT.

SOME men have a genius for lightning calculation and others for lifting pig iron, and wherever they go they find calculations to perform or heavy things to be lifted about. Place a weasel in any field and he will find a hole to plunge into, and come up with his jaws red with blood. Wayne Crump had a genius for stratagems and spoils, and he had found room for it even on the desert. But to those who could read signs he had the mark of Cain on his brow; and for women, the Judas kiss. He made love, but with a purpose, and beneath his quiet smile there was the slyness of the serpent and the stoat. In his heart he loved nothing but money.

Cal looked back ruefully to the day of his arrest, when Crump had taken his roll and asked for more; and he saw that, even in his hates, the Texan was willing to forget for gold. He had demanded Cal's ten thousand, and promised to get it yet, or send him to the penitentiary for life; but Cal had other plans, and as he rode back to the Bitter Water he brooded over schemes for revenge. Short of shooting him dead there was nothing that Crump could do in the way of further reprisals; and, having read his heart's secret, Cal was fully satisfied that the Texan would not resort to murder. Or not at least until he had located the ten thousand dollars, which he still thought was in Cal's possession. But Armilda had half of it and Peggy McCann the rest, and Cal was stripped down to his guns.

There had been surprise, and some chagrin, when he had bobbed up again at Soledad and purchased a new carbine and pistol; but though Bill Beagle glowered and Whispering Johnson looked glum, they dared not refuse him the guns. Cal rode away quickly, returning black looks for black looks, and after dark that night he pulled in to his cabin, which had been looted and left open to the cows. This little attention he attributed to Bill Beagle, when he had gone back to get his horse; but, having confidence in a hereafter for men of Bill's stripe, Cal left him to the mercies of a just God. The man he was gunning was Wayne Crump, the archconspirator, and the cowboy who had butchered that calf; and the next morning early he rode off down the cañon to pick up his trail for the pursuit. For Polley could wait, and Wiggins would have to, until he had run down this renegade cow thief.

The trail led up over the ridge and down the next cañon above Bitter Creek, where the puncher had tied his horse; and at the first sight of his tracks Cal knew for a certainty what he had suspected from the start. The boy who had killed the calf had left those same horse tracks in Death Valley—he was the man Cal had trailed to the corral—and if nothing better offered Cal could take the trip again and pick him up in the sink. But, since that time, Watson had seen those tracks again—this was the cowboy he had seen riding with the Indian. He had worn the same slouch hat that Wiggins had described, for such things loom up big through a glass, and unless Cal was mistaken the kid was hiding out in the hills, or even gathering another cut of stock. But a promise is a promise and, before he could take the trail, Cal was scheduled for an interview with Mrs. Polley.

She was attired in a riding habit of such daring design that Cal hesitated to ride up to the corral; but she, for some reason, seemed rather glad to see him, though she was obviously setting out to meet Crump. Her horse was all saddled but she stood waiting for Cal's coming, and Buster rushed out to welcome him.

"Good morning," she hailed. "Mr. Pol-

ley hasn't got back yet. Did you come down to see him about the mine?"

"Why, yes," answered Watson bluffly, "but I guess it doesn't matter. Getting ready to go out for a ride?"

"I was," she confessed, "but it was just because I'm lonely. Won't you come in—and we'll have a cool drink!"

"Never refuse a lady!" observed Cal, smiling gallantly, and she returned his smile mischievously.

"That's just the way *he* talks," she said. "Do you ever see Mr. Crump?"

"Why, yes," he said, "we had a long ride together only a couple of days ago."

"Well, where *is* he?" She pouted as she led the way into the bungalow. "I haven't seen him for days and days."

"Down at the ranch," suggested Cal, easing himself into a big chair and accepting the glass of champagne. "How's every little thing around here?"

"Well, if you mean me," she sulked, "I'm just feeling rotten. Why don't you come down and see me, once in a while?"

"'Fraid Crump will take a shot at me," he answered boldly and she went off into a paroxysm of giggles.

"I just love you Western men," she said at last. "Do you know what he said to me one time? There was an awful wind that day, and oh, I just hate it, so I said:

"'Does the wind blow this way all the time?'

"'W'y, no,' he said, 'sometimes it blows the other way!' And I just simply thought I would *die!*"

"Oh, he's a funny cuss," returned Cal, smiling weakly at the joke. "How do you like it, out here on the desert?"

"I just hate it!" she answered, and the sulky pout came back while her eyes took on an instant angry glow. "He just keeps me out here out of spite!"

"Who, your husband?" inquired Cal innocently.

She stamped her tiny boot petulantly.

"He never takes me anywhere—and he won't let me have a machine! He's afraid some man will run away with me."

"I bet ye," nodded Cal and gazed at her so frankly that she blushed and wriggled in her chair. But though he knew of her meetings with Crump he did not continue the banter. Polley did well, with such a wife on his hands, to take her far from the haunts of men; because a woman of her beauty and sex allure was in danger, even there. Wherever she went she would have men at her feet, and she knew her powers well; but Cal knew a girl who had more sense in a minute than this woman would have in a lifetime. A common test in psychoanalysis—to discover some secret obsession—is to require the patient to write down rapidly the first words that come to mind. Such a test with Lura Polley would reveal the word "he" and immediately after it "Mr. Crump."

"I wonder," began Cal, "when Mr. Polley will be back. Did he say, when he started for town?"

"No!" she answered, swiftly changing her mood; "he never tells me anything. But I know very well what you're trying to do, and you'll have to see me first."

"Well, here's looking at you," jested Cal, lifting the glass in salute; but she thrust out her lip and smiled pityingly.

"You can't fool me," she stated. "I'm wiser than I look. Two years on Broadway, and if that don't wise a girl up I'd like to know what does! I used to be with the Follies."

"Well, you *are* wise then," agreed Cal, although he had his reservations. "What did you want me to see you about? I'll do most anything to accommodate a lady."

"I want you to come through," she spat out vindictively, "with fifty per cent of the proceeds. Otherwise you don't sell your mine."

"What gave you the idea that I wanted to sell my mine? And fifty per cent is some cut."

"Yes, and two hundred and fifty thousand is some price, I'm telling you, for that hole that you call a mine. But I'm tired of sitting by here and seeing other people trim him of hundreds of thousands of dollars—if you want to sell your mine, you split fifty-fifty or I'll fight the deal to a finish. He never gives me a cent that I can call my own, and now I'm just going to *get* it."

"Fine and dandy," smiled Cal, "but not from me. I might consider ten per cent, if you'd get behind the project and help to boost the sale; but fifty per cent is too big to be honest—I'm afraid we can't make a trade."

"Well, twenty-five," she offered, after biting her lips in silence. "I've never done anything like this before. But he said——"

"Who—Crump?" he interpolated, and before she knew it she had nodded her head in assent.

"I thought this was his work," he went on coolly, as she stamped her foot in rage at her break, "but you can tell him the limit is too high. Ten per cent I can stand, if you deliver the goods, but I'm not going to pay any blackmail."

"Deliver the goods?" she asked, now visibly subdued by his knowledge of her understanding with Crump. "What is it you want me to do?"

"Well, quit knocking the deal, for one thing; but that won't help much now, he's just about off the trade. Ten per cent of two hundred and fifty thousand is quite a little sum for just letting the deal go through; couldn't you jolly him along some and get him to feeling good-natured—we can't do business with a grouch."

"I just hate him!" she burst out, snatching Buster into her arms and then slapping him and putting him down. "He's so stuck on himself!" she wailed. "Oh, I just can't do it, I can't be pleasant to him—I hate him, that's all, I hate him!"

"Sure," nodded Cal. "I know how you feel. But what about the twenty-five thousand?"

"Well, I'll do it!" she decided. "You come back in a week. But I don't care—I just hate him, that's all."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE IRISH.

There was a man-size hate within the poured-in riding habit that incased the emotional Mrs. Polley. Evan Polley had bought her, and he thought he had paid for her, but Watson could see that he would pay again, and pay heavily, before the purchase price was in. The striped tent which Polley had set up when he first brought his wife to the desert was faintly suggestive of a sultan's harem; and this woman, beautiful as a flower but steeped in discontent, had made the picture complete.

But there are some women, and often beautiful ones, whose allure is never so compelling as on the first time they practice their wiles; after that it declines until, their box of tricks used up, men avoid them like Scylla and Charybdis. Cal had been carried off his feet, the first time he met her, by Lura Polley's exotic charm; but now he saw her as a spoiled woman, as shallow and spiteful as she was beautiful.

With a grim curse for Wayne Crump, who would also pay through the nose, he mounted and rode off up to Polley's mine.

The pay streak in the Thousand Wonders had pinched again, although the main vein still widened out; and this, among other things, had probably influenced the temperamental Polley in his decision not to buy the Golden Bear. Yet something that Wiggins had said had set Cal to thinking. He wondered if all was well underground—for Pat Duffy and his gang were high-graders from Grass Valley when it came to robbing the boss. Not a man had quit to go to Soledad on a drunk since they had hired out to work for Polley, and that in itself was ground enough for suspicion that they had found rich pickings somewhere. Wiggins had gone down the hole, but what he had found there was known to no one but Polley—and it might even be it was *not* known to Polley, for Wiggins gave nothing away. He had been hired to examine the Golden Bear, which he had done most conscientiously; but he had not been retained to report on the Thousand Wonders, hence his close-mouthed silence on its wonders.

An expensive hoist had been installed at the shaft head in place of the old-fashioned windlass; and Peggy McCann, who had once wound the windlass, was now a full-fledged foreman. He was standing at the collar, watching for Cal to leave the house, and when he saw him he came hobbling down the path.

"W'y, hello, Watsonville, me bye!" he cackled gleefully. 'Where the divil have you been, all the time? There was a man come through yesterday that said you'd been pinched, but I can see he didn't know what he was tarking about!"

"Yes, he did," replied Cal. "They arrested me, all right, but a friend got me out on bail. Have to tap you for that money, to hire me a lawyer. How much of it is there left?"

"How much!" repeated Peg, drawing his eyebrows down fiercely. "There's jist as much as you give me!"

"Good enough!" pronounced Cal. "I thought the rats might have got in there and——"

"I wear it to bed!" grinned Peggy.

He limped over to his cabin under the

edge of the hill and began to unstrap his leg, but as Cal told his story he frowned.

"That's bad, me bye, ba-ad! They'll convict ye, undoubtedly. Why don't you jump your bail and beat it? Old Mexico is a fine country—go down to the Cananeas and tell 'em you're a friend of Peg McCann."

"Nope," said Cal, "I haven't got through with them. In fact, I haven't got started. Just give me the roll, so I can hire a good lawyer, and I'll take a fall out of the 1 yet."

"You will not," returned Peggy. "Don't I know that Whispering Johnson? Look what he's done to Larry Kilgallon! There's the squarest man that ever handled a dollar and he can't hardly get his mail. And Larry's smart, mind ye, he wasn't born yisterday; but what can ye do against a gang?"

"Never mind," answered Cal, "Larry's still doing business. So shake out that rat's nest and let's see how much is missing—these pack rats are hell on the trade. Maybe that thousand-dollar bill has been packed down to Larry's Place and a hundred dollars left in its place."

"There it is!" nodded Peggy, laying the bill down impressively.

"Thanks," said Cal, stowing his bank roll away. And then: "But what's this here, Mr. McCann?"

He had picked up a chunk of ore which had fallen out of the hollow and regarded honest Peggy intently. The ore, and he knew it, was solid native silver—and Peggy was looking wild.

"What—that?" he shrilled, grabbing it away from Cal and turning it over dumbly. "Well, dommed if I know what it is!"

"I'll tell you, then," said Watson, "it's native silver—and I see it's in Thousand Wonders quartz."

"Ah, go 'way with ye, ye divil!" burst out Peggy in mock despair. "And was it you that was tarking about pack rats? Sure, it's nahthing but some ore from the old Silver King, the richest mine in the worrld in its day. Take your money now and go and don't be asking questions of a man that's done ye a favor. It's small thanks I git, after all I've done for ye——"

"Aw, forget it!" broke in Watson. "Who's doing any talking? Sure it's Silver King ore, and I never even saw it—do you think I'd throw down a friend? But on the level, Peggy, is this what you boys are high-grading? I know you're up to something!"

"Well, it is then," said Peggy, and sighed resignedly as he fixed his stern eyes on Watson.

"The reason I know," explained Cal, "is that Pat Duffy and his gang haven't been in on a drunk for a month. It stands to reason the pickings are good."

"They are that," declared McCann, "but I'm having the divil's own time trying to kape the scoundrels from blabbin'. Drrunk, ye say? They're drrunk without whisky, jist from comtimplating the money we've made. The news will break, sooner or later, but we're sneaking the stuff out as fast as the truckman can work. We pack it on our backs, away out on the desert, and he picks it up going to town. And five dollars a pound is the least that we get for it—that shows how good it is. But spaking of Eccleson, do you know what he done? He's the man that discovered this silver!"

Peggy paused to laugh and strap on his wooden leg, and Cal murmured the proper disbelief.

"Was I telling ye," went on McCann, "about this prophecy or something, and the supe being afraid to go underground? Well, believe it or not, he's a fool for luck, and he's never been down the hole. Wan day he come running up with some book he'd been reading and directs me to start a crosscut; so at it we went, right out through the country rock, and at forty feet we tapped the new vein! She runs alongside the main lead, as pretty as ye plaze, and the silver ore is there in big lenses. But silver! Out here? It's never been dreamed of—so we figured it was meant for ourselves. What! Muck out that ore and send it to the top for this millionaire to buy a new autymobile? 'Nahthin' doin',' sez I, and the byes was all with me. We've been shipping it out for a month."

"Did this mining expert, Wiggins, happen to see any of that ore?" asked Cal after a long, thoughtful pause, and the huge Irishman shook with laughter.

"Naht a sliver," he said, "Pat looked after that. Will you catch a weasel asleep?"

Cal picked up the rock and examined it closely while McCann sat back and leered.

"So you're a mining man, eh?" he inquired scathingly. "Ever see annything like that before?"

"I believe I have, but I don't know where."

"On your Gold Dollar claim, that ye sold to Whispering Johnson! You white-handed byes make me tired!"

"No!" exclaimed Cal, jumping up from his chair, "whereabout did you find the ore?"

"Right next to that big dyke, that goes clean to the peak—we found it in a hole that you'd shot!"

"And never mucked it out? I remember the very spot! I just did it for assessment work."

"Ah, now listen, me bye, t'row away all them books and learn to muck out clean, like a man. How manny times have I told ye that them theories are ruinin' ye? Go to work underground and learn mining!"

"I don't need to," said Cal. "I let you people do that—and then I muck out after you. Have you got any more of this ore?"

"Well, I may have," observed Peggy, "but it's not for a man that'll go arf without mucking out his hole. You're a good bye, Watsonville, but a dommed poor miner. You couldn't work for me a day."

"I might get you highbinders to come up and work for me," suggested Cal, after a meditative silence. "Maybe there's silver in the Golden Bear."

"Ah, nah!" crowed Peggy. "We're working for the Irish. The native sons can rustle!"

CHAPTER XXX.

ANOTHER MAN'S COW.

They say over in Ireland that God loves the Irish; and now and again, as far west as the Mojave, the evidence points that way. The native sons would have to rustle to keep up with the run of luck that was attendant upon Pat Duffy and his gang; but, though Cal was sorely tempted, he rode off east without following up Peggy McCann's tip. In fifty years of mining and prospecting through the district, from Klondike to the Bitter Creek and beyond, no man had ever reported a showing of silver, although float had now and then been found. But until very recently silver had not been worth the mining, any more than lead and zinc, and the impatient prospectors cast these specimens aside without giving them a second thought. They were in a gold country, so why trifle with silver—and Cal had been as bad as the rest.

He remembered with a pang that he had found evidences of silver in the hole on the Gold Dollar claim, but it had taken the Irish to follow along after him and muck out after his shot. What a yell would go up from Whispering Johnson when he found that his despised claim was rich, and how he would twit Cal over salting his best claim in order to sell it for ten thousand dollars! If the ore came in at depth, as it had in the Thousand Wonders, the Gold Dollar was worth a small fortune; and something must be done to cut Johnson off from his treasure and leave him braying like a wild ass of the desert.

What a revenge it would be if Cal could circumvent him and buy back his claim before the break! But now he must ride off, bearing his secret with him, and trail down Wayne Crump's pet cow thief. It was that or go to prison.

Cal felt vaguely resentful as he considered this last trick that an unkind fate had played him. All the skeins of his life seemed to be tangled up and mixed as if by a mischievous sprite. Things were happening too fast, one on top of the other, and one day he was in jail and the next day rushing home, and the third day starting off again. He was always a lap, or two laps, behind when it came to catching up with his destiny; and what might save his life or change the run of luck always came in a day or two late. Now he had in his hand a secret that was priceless if he could use it without delay. And fate compelled him to run down a cow thief in a thousand square miles of rock and sand! Yet any day, any hour, some of Duffy's crowd might get drunk and give the whole snap away!

Campomoche snapped his teeth at the constant jabbing of the spurs and rolled a vicious eye at the quirt, but Watson had found the trail of the Texan and he was following it on the lope. The boy cow thief was his, unless a sand storm came up and wiped out the clean line of tracks; and now that Campomoche knew what was in the wind he followed the trail by himself. More than once in his day he had galloped after wild cattle or trailed lost horses from range to range, and what a man can see a horse can see, too, if he has the wit to look. Campomoche was desertwise, if he did resent the pace; and, once on the trail, he was a sleuth.

They cut through the clay hills and came

out at Wiggletail Spring just as the sun was sinking low in the west; but the cowboy had fled, his camp fire was cold and his horse tracks led off to the east. That morning he had been there, resting up for the plunge, and now he was out on the desert. What trail he would follow to cross the rolling sand hills Cal Watson could not even guess, but he knew that where he went Campomoche and Lemon could follow, and he had water cans stored in his kyacks. This boy rode alone on a single big horse—the desert might swallow him up; but Cal could water his animals and follow his own trail back whenever he was hopelessly lost. He camped at the spring, and before daylight was on his way, for the wind had been blowing all night.

The rocks on the great desert are seldom if ever smooth, except in the bed of some wash; where the wind has full sweep they are cut sharp by the sand blasts that roll in on them day after day. And the sand hills, that pile up like rollers in a huge surf after a driving gale, move about so restlessly that no landmark can exist unless it rises above their tide. In winter they move south, as the prevailing north winds sweep down through the Death Valley draw; and in the spring they start back again as the hot southeast wind comes back for a month at a time. It was winter yet, and the sand was driving south when Cal came out into the open.

Each moving wave of sand had a delicate feather edge, a plume of scudding dust and biting flint, and the tracks of the Texan's horse were filling up at the bottom, though the line of holes were still there. They led on across the flat, weaving about to avoid the sand hills, but leading north, as the cattle had gone. Sighting ahead as he followed Cal could see the low gap toward which the boy was making his way; and when the tracks grew dim he pressed on toward the hills, hoping to pick them up in the pass. Hours and hours he toiled on, jostled and buffeted by the wind, bowing his head to avoid the lash of the sharp sand, and when he rode up the trail through the black lava buttes he found a track not two hours old. It came in from the west, around the brow of the hill, and he knew that the boy had been lost.

From the top of the divide Cal looked out over a waste of sand that extended to the far horizon, and across it in yellow waves the clouds of dust drifted ceaselessly, blotting out the dreary landscape as they passed. From the hills it was like a murky sea that seethed and boiled up toward the pass, but somewhere in that inferno there were a man and a horse, fighting their way against the storm. A day and a night they had been wandering through the sand before they had found their way to the pass; and the horse tracks still led on, barely dimmed by the blasts that rushed up through the notch in the hills.

Cal gazed long and anxiously before he rode down the trail and at last he made out his man. That column of thicker dust, rising high at every swirl, marked the place where his horse was walking; the strange thing was, he was coming toward them.

As Cal moved down out of the gap the violence of the wind abated, it no longer whipped tears into his eyes; and on the edge of the sand Cal stopped and gazed long at the object beneath the pillar of dust. The horse he could see, but the man was not riding—perhaps he was not even there. His eyes swept the waste beyond, gauging the size of each column of dust, and at last he located what he sought. It was a lesser cloud of sand, rising up in erratic puffs, dying down and rising up again crazily. The man was off and rambling, and his horse, more sober-minded, was starting on the long trail back. Cal rode down rapidly, picking the horse up in passing, and toiled on till he came to the Texan.

The slouch hat was missing, his hair was blowing wild and he was running from hill to hill.

"Where'd you ketch that horse?" he yelled, rushing toward it in a fury, and as he jerked at the cruel bit the horse flew back. The cowboy looked about for a rock to hurl, panting frantically as he tried to curse, and then he fell face down in the sand. Cal had stepped off his horse and struck him down from behind, at the same time taking away his gun; and now, turning him over, he poured water in his face and handed him the sloshing canteen.

"A-ah!" he sighed, after he had taken a big drink, and then he looked up into Cal's face. "What—you?" he yelled, and leaped up to start to run again, but Cal tripped him and brought him to earth. Then he dragged him into the lee of a winnowing sand hill and gave him another drink.

"You're running wild," he said. "Key

down and keep your shirt on. Sure it's me. Did you think I was dead?"

"I've been out of my head," murmured the Texan feebly. "How'd you come to ketch my horse?"

"I saw him rambling," answered Cal. "He's got more sense than you have. Where'd you think you were trying to go?"

"W'y, back to my camp," defended the man. "But the wind blew out the trail. I ain't been in these parts very long."

"Didn't I see you," questioned Cal, "down in Death Valley sink? You were driving some J Prod cows."

"You might 've," he admitted, "but I never seen you, up to that time you came down the crick. How come you're out here, when them fellers arrested you? Didn't Wayne take you in to jail?"

"He might 've," mimicked Cal, "but you don't know me, kid. I came out here on purpose to get you."

"Well, I surrender," sobbed the boy, suddenly bursting out crying, "I'm scairt of this hyer desert—it ain't natural! And if you hadn't come I'd 'a' died, sure as hell. My horse done pitched me off and run away!"

"Don't say a word against that horse," advised Watson grimly, and gave it a drink out of the crown of his hat. Then he opened a can of water and gave them a drink all around, winding up with a big drink himself.

"Well, we'll go," he said, heaving his man up into the saddle and turning his horse toward home.

Traveling with the wind, they drifted through the pass until at last they made Wiggletail Spring. With the storm howling past them and throwing sand in their teeth, there was no chance for any further remarks, and not until supper had been cooked and devoured did Cal revert to the subject of the calf.

"Now, listen, kid," he said, "I know all about you and just what you've been doing with these cows. I was over in Death Valley and left my mule tracks by your corral; and I saw you go through here with that Indian. But that was *your* business, as far as I was concerned—until you capped me in on that calf-killing game. Now it's *my* business, see, and I guess you understand I didn't come out here for pleasure. I can take you into town and turn you over to the sheriff, and that will let me out, right there; but if you cut out this sniveling and tell me what you know I may change my mind—understand?"

He sat gazing at the boy, who had broken down completely, and every line in his face was weak; and yet, with the weakness there was a tough look, too—the combination had made him a criminal. The slack, willful lips had a vicious, cruel pout, and his eyes were little and furtive; but the tears which welled out of them and his narrow, pinched face told of a weakness which was more than that of youth. He was the type of the boy accomplice in crime—a weak boy, easily led—and unless Cal was mistaken the hand which had led him astray was that of the masterful Wayne Crump.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

After glancing up sullenly the boy answered with a sniff: "Lester Wood."

"All right, Lester," went on Cal, "now just tell me all you know about this man that calls himself Crump. What was his name when you knew him, back in Texas?"

The slack lips of the boy cow thief drew in to a defiant line.

"I don't snitch on my pals," he said.

"Oh, he's your pal, eh?" jeered Watson. "Well, you sure picked a dandy—how much did he pay you for killing that calf?"

"I didn't kill it!" declared the boy, and leaped hastily to his feet as Cal reached over for his quirt. "Oh, don't whip me, mister!" he quavered abjectly; but Cal caught him as he broke for the brush.

"You limber-necked little walloper!" he hissed as he brought him back, "didn't I see you right there, butchering it?"

"Yes, but *he* killed it!" wailed the boy. "All I done was to take his jackknife and make-believe butcher it. And when I seen you, I run!"

"Well, don't run again," advised Watson, "or I'll burn you up with this quirt. Now, come through, kid—I've got no time for fooling. What was Crump's name when he was back in Texas?"

"It was Hackett," sniffled the kid, "Wayne Hackett. You won't tell him I told you, will you?"

"I won't tell him anything, if I get what I'm looking for. What was it he did back in Texas?"

"He—we stole some cows, down in Valverde County and drove 'em across the line into Mexico."

"And then what?" asked Cal, and as the

boy rambled on he sensed that he was covering something up.

"Yes, but before that!" interrupted Cal. "I want his whole record. Give me the whole thing, kid, and I'll turn you loose."

"Plumb loose?" questioned the boy. "Because he'll kill me if he knows it. He helped rob a train in Oklahoma."

"I thought so!" exulted Cal. "Now one thing more—has he ever been sent to the pen?"

"He served two years at Huntsville," admitted the boy reluctantly, "but he said it was all a mistake. Something about another man's cow."

"I knew it," nodded Cal. "He's a natural-born cow thief. That's all, kid—I'll get the rest from Texas."

CHAPTER XXXI.

PHANTASMAGORIA.

It was *always* a mistake, if you take the word of the man who is caught stealing another man's cow. When the pardoning governor of South Carolina made inquiries at the State prison he found only one man that was guilty—the rest were all there by mistake. Well, it was all a mistake as far as Cal Watson was concerned, but there would be no occasion for troubling the governor. A tactful request for the Bertillon record and a photograph of Wayne Hackett, the cow thief, and Wayne Crump the alleged detective would be No. 1323 while Cal Watson walked out of court, free. For Wayne Crump was the only witness against him, and his testimony would be thrown out of court. But Cal would let him testify before he sprang his surprise.

The trial would not take place for a month or more. The men who opposed him were desperate, and if Cal began by discrediting Whispering Johnson's star witness he might get another one, in a pinch. But the game had gone so far that its last few plays were slated, and Cal could see the fall of the cards as they went down one after the other, until he made his grand slam at the end. Let the district attorney rave and bring on all his witnesses, let him lay his hand down and smile; and then with this last card Cal could destroy his whole case and put his star witness in jail. There would be no comeback, as far as Crump was concerned, for he himself was a fugitive from the law. A mere word to Dave Johnson, a mention of the reward, and Crump would be started for Texas.

The sand storm was still sifting its grit down Cal's neck and his eyes were red from the wind, but as he rode back after starting the boy off for Nevada, he felt like the king of the world. It had taken half a day to put young Lester Wood on the trail, but Cal did not begrudge the time. The little cow thief had lost his nerve, and, besides, he might need him, so he had directed him to a rancher that he knew. A hundred dollars in money and some food and a canteen was not too much to pay for such a witness, and along with the rest Cal had given him some good advice about the effect of evil associates. Not that it would make much difference, for the boy was on his way, but the point was to avoid men like Hackett. For after all that he had done for him Lester Wood's sole reward had been a quirting from the hand of Crump.

Out on the Dry Lake below the wind was still blowing great guns, throwing the dirt a thousand feet high; but riding down Black Cañon Cal escaped its full fury, and he hummed a little song to himself:

"I'm a wild, woolly wolf from Bitter Creek
And this is my night to howl."

That was his war song, when he was winning, and right then he felt lucky, for he held all the cards in the deck. The shadow of State prison no longer hung over him; he had Wayne Crump on the hip. As soon as he got the time he could consider ways and means of making a big clean-up on silver. Peggy McCann's game was a good one, but it could not last; and no harm would come to him if Cal slipped in and euchered Johnson out of his Gold Dollar claim. And this strike in Polley's mine put a new face on the conspiracy to sell him the Golden Bear.

Not until he had investigated, and traced the vein that carried the silver, would Cal consent to the sale of his heritage; but, of course, Polley, if he chose, could insist upon his rights, and his option had two weeks to run. If Cal showed his hand too soon, by trying to get back the Gold Dollar, the canny millionaire might smell a rat and buy; and, on the other hand, if he waited for the option to expire the Irish might get drunk and spill everything. Then what a scramble there would be to get in on the new strike, the ground would be staked to the Peak; and the Bitter Creek silver district would be the talk of the mining world.

But the danger was slight of Polley wanting to buy, for he was carrying a morning-after grouch, and any efforts of Mrs. Polley would have slight hope of success, unless she learned to change her ways. The good ship *Matrimony* was headed for the rocks, as far as the Polleys were concerned; and any sudden change of front would only excite his suspicion if she continued to nurse her hate. Any sincere repentance, sufficient to break his low mood, would mean the putting aside of her dog; and half of her time, during Cal's last visit, she had been kissing and cuddling Buster.

Cal had told her the story of his horse, Campomoche, and how he had won his name; and then, half to tease her, he had warned her against lizards, the bane of desert cats. When a horse eats a *campomoche* along with his sacaton grass he goes into a decline and dies—unless, like Campomoche, he has a mule lover like Lemon to imbue him with the will to live. And if a diet of lizards will kill cats, what might it not do to a delicate dog like Buster! Cal had told it to her to give her something to worry about besides her own foolish self, for Buster was death on lizards; but if any man could gauge the processes of her humming-bird mind, Lura Polley would never succeed as a conspirator. For she thought more of Buster than she did of her husband, Wayne Crump and the ten per cent combined.

At the mouth of Black Cañon, Cal paused to squint at the sun and decide whether to turn north or south. To the north lay home, or what passed for a home with him, and perhaps a merry evening with Polley; but duty called him south, to array lawyers and detectives and put them on the blood trail of Crump. The time had come at last when he must fight the devil with fire, for Crump had shown himself ruthless; but the long ride after Crump's accomplice had pulled Cal's animals until now they were gaunt and fretful.

Above that inferno of dust the sun hung red and murky, swinging low toward the western hills; and with each mighty gust the dirt leaped from the sand hills and scudded across the lake floor like a wall. It was the third day of the wind and the morrow might be fair——

Suddenly Cal heard a clacking of rocks. He whirled in his saddle, for some one was smashing through the brush, coming down off the north hill after some cows; but when they hit the flat they were enveloped in such a cloud that Cal could hardly see them for dust. Some bold and hardy rider was chasing a bunch of wild cattle, turning and twisting to cut off their escape.

As the horse came to a stand and the dust was swept away, Cal saw that it was Armilda's Stranger. Then the cattle broke again and Stranger galloped to head them off; they turned back again and he was prancing before them; finally the mad procession went dashing up the draw again, leaving Cal to scratch his head.

What new devilment was this in that most ill-omened of desert places. Had Armilda loaned some cowboy her pet horse? Or, if not, and this slashing rider was herself on a rampage, whose cattle was she driving off?

Surely not her own, for she—and suddenly he was sure it was she—had turned these away from home; and if they were her father's, or Johnson's, what then? She came out of the draw again, whipping savagely after a red yearling, and as it turned she shook her rope out and charged. Cal drew down behind a knoll and watched her in amazement. She missed, and rode in again. Then with a sudden, graceful flip she snapped her loop over the calf's head and Stranger sat back on the rope. Down she dropped with her tie strings and, as the calf was jerked a somersault, she ran in and knelt on its neck. There was a struggle as she noosed its feet and drew them together, and Cal crouched out of sight and swore. Had Crump gone so far that he had corrupted even Armilda—and was she branding this yearling for him?

The muffled pop of a pistol dismissed that question forever—Armilda had killed the calf. Already Cal could see her casting loose the rope. She tied Stranger to a bush and went back; and then, down in the dirt, she began butchering the calf, and Watson ripped out an oath. Was this the Armilda that he had known at Bubbling Wells, the girl who loved music and poetry? Here she was out in a sand storm skinning the hide off of a calf, her delicate hands fouled with blood. But why? His brain reeled as he sat back and tried to think of any reason except the one he feared. She could not be doing this for Crump! But why, then, kill a calf? Why was she out in this sand storm, if not because it was a good time to work unseen? He crouched down grimly and waited.

For half an hour—an hour—she worked there in the sand wash, stooping over the carcass of the calf; and then he saw her digging, and covering something up, and at dusk she mounted Stranger and rode away. Cal had rushed in once to inspect the body of a calf and been caught with the bloody knife in his hand; now he waited until dark, and when he began to dig his pistol lay at his side. She had buried the hide deep, but he was there to learn the story that brand and earmarks would tell; though why he should wish to prove Armilda a cow thief was still somewhat obscure in his mind. It was all a part of the phantasmagoria of wind and dust and night, and if the girl he had loved had fallen so low he might as well know the truth. To kill and butcher a calf merely for the beef it would yield and bury the damning evidence in the sand! He shuddered as his hand encountered a protruding foot; but here was no hide, but the meat.

Once more Watson's brain whirled as he laid hold of a leg and yanked the fresh-skinned carcass from its resting place. Armilda had buried the meat and gone away with the hide! He sat back on his heels and considered. Here was a mystery within a mystery, the world was topsy-turvy. Hides were being carried away behind saddles and fresh meat left buried in holes.

He looked about him quickly, then pushed the body back and smoothed the dirt over the hole. This was something he could not fathom. It went against all reason; but so it had been when Crump had set his booby trap and lured him to the dead calf on Bitter Creek. Then as now his brain had spun, he had looked on astounded as the cowboy had begun skinning the calf. But when Crump had risen up and thrown down on him with a Winchester the reason had been all too plain.

Cal stepped up on his horse and rode off through the storm, and suddenly he was afraid of the night.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BUSTER'S LIZARD.

The sand storm had ceased and Dry Lake lay smiling, its phantom water dimpling peacefully in the sink; a week had passed and Cal had been to town and back, but still the storm roared in his ears. All was peaceful to the eye. But as he looked across the lake he saw Black Cañon and remembered Armilda. She was riding like the wind after a scampering red calf, her loop held high for the throw; and now she had roped him and was down tying his feet; there was a shot, and the calf lay dead. The sun was going down, blood-red in the west, and still she stooped over her kill; until at last she rode away, leaning against the wind which roared in his ears like the sea. And that was the last of Armilda.

Cal had seen her in Mojave City with Dave Johnson's daughters, daintily gowned and carrying herself laughingly; but his heart had failed him and he turned back before she saw him, for he feared to meet her now. She was buying pretty things with the five thousand dollars they had wrung from vulgar Whispering Johnson. But would she be so gay if she knew that Wayne Crump was a cow thief and an ex-convict to boot? Would she dress herself so daintily to please his fickle eye if she knew he had a rendezvous with Lura Polley? And she was visiting with Dave Johnson's daughters when she knew that their father would soon hale him into court a prisoner.

Yet though his heart was sore Cal could not turn against her, he could not destroy her last chance for happiness; they had promised to be friends no matter whom she married, and he could not inform on Crump. Sometimes love performs its miracle, even with a man like Crump, and though Cal wrote for Wayne Hackett's record he did it in such a way that no sheriff would come rushing in from Texas. There would be a reward for Wayne Hackett, and even the most guarded inquiry might set the Texas sleuths on his trail. But here was the curious thing—when Crump had come to Soledad, posing as a cattle detective from Texas, he had inquired for a cow thief named Hackett.

A man with a nerve like that could get by almost anywhere; but, though he had decided to protect him if possible, Cal wrote for his record all the same. Love and affection is one thing and friendship is another; but he did not intend, out of misguided devotion, to let Armilda's lover railroad *him*. Cal would get the information and hold it as a club and if Crump forced his hand he would strike. He was from Bitter Creek, if they crowded him too far.

The grand jury had convened and indicted Watson for grand larceny. Whisper-

ing Johnson and his gang were confident; but Wiggins had spoken well when he had said that a good lawyer could break down any case that was framed. Crump was telling a lie and he was acting a lie, and Cal had engaged McKinney to defend him; and when Abe McKinney unlimbered his long forefinger he would make the alleged detective look sick. There was the matter of the money that he had extorted from Cal as payment for protecting him from Beagle. And a few pointed inquiries about his past life in Texas would make him squirm like a worm on a hook. And if Mrs. Polley had been nice to her husband there might be money to hire outside legal talent. The last word from Wiggins was that Polley was ripe, and Cal rode out of Soledad hopefully.

It is the little things that count in putting over a big sale, and the day was beauteously calm. All nature seemed at peace, and Mr. Polley received Watson with open arms. Willis set up the drinks, Mrs. Polley looked in smiling, and Buster was for once out of the way; but as the talk worked around to the merits of the Golden Bear they heard an excited yapping up the gulch. Mrs. Polley rose up anxiously, then controlled herself by an effort and beamed a trifle fatuously upon her husband. She was thinking of her ten per cent.

"What's that devilish dog up to?" burst out Polley impatiently, and at a glance from Cal Mrs. Polley slipped out quietly and the Apostle of Success went on. He was talking at the moment about the Thousand Wonders Mine, which had developed a lean streak of ore, and as he fingered the rich quartz which Willis had brought in Cal saw that Wiggins had spoken truth. Mr. Polley was ready to buy.

"There is something about gold," he observed, smiling pensively, "that gives it a strange fascination—I mean the virgin gold. It has always been a fad or fancy with me never to handle a soiled or used bank note. I accept nothing but brand-new money. But how much more fascinating is the native gold you have dug from the earth yourself. A treasury note is merely a promise to pay, but gold is the foundation of finance. When I have mined a few more tons I am going to set up a mill—by Jove, I'll order it now! Here! Willis, Willis, bring me that memorandum that Mr. Eccleson submitted to me yesterday! Yes, and then, Mr. Watson, when I have milled all the ore I'm going to have the gold cast into a bar. Or a slug, such as they used in the days of Forty-nine—some of those beautiful fifty-dollar gold pieces!"

"That would be fine!" agreed Cal. "When the Golden Bear was going big the old man used to cash his gold in ingots; and every time——"

"What's that? What's that?" broke in Polley irritably. "Oh, damn that confounded dog! Mr. Watson, you can't imagine—why, that's Lura, screaming! Something terrible must have happened. I only hope he's killed!"

He rushed out the back door, closely followed by Watson, who was muttering under his breath.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" demanded Polley irascibly. "Why, Lura, I thought you were hurt!"

"No, it's Buster!" she wailed. "He et a lizard! Oh, my darling, do you think he'll die?"

"Die? Of course not! I never heard of such nonsense! Please—please try to control yourself, Lura!"

"Aw, he won't die!" spoke up Watson. "I've seen dogs eat lots of them. It's only cats that they hurt."

"But you said so!" accused Lura clutching the dog to her breast, "you said if he et one it would kill him!"

"No, I didn't," retorted Cal, "say anything of the kind! I said sometimes too many lizards killed *cats*."

"Oh, come, come, now!" protested Polley, laying his hand on her shoulder. "Please don't be unreasonable, Lura. Buster looks all right to me—just set him down a moment and see if he shows any signs!"

"You get away from me!" she cried, shrugging her husband's hand aside. "I know you—you *want* him to die!"

"I do not!" declared Polley, but she knew it for a lie.

"Well, then, get out the automobile!" she commanded, going wild. "I'm going to take him to the dog hospital in Los Angeles!"

"Oh, fiddlesticks!" exploded Polley, "I'll do nothing of the kind. Mrs. Polley, you're just a plain fool!"

"Well, I may be," she flared back, "but you're an *old* fool! I hate the very sight of you!"

"No! Never!" he went on, ignoring her retort, "I'll never dance attendance on a dog!"

"Then I will!" she came back, starting over toward the car. "You're just waiting and hoping that he'll die! And that worthless Emily—I told her to watch him—but he caught a big lizard, and et it!"

"Well, do as you wish!" returned Polley with asperity. "You may have the use of the car."

He looked on gloomily as she sent the servants flying, fitting up the big car for the trip; and when she had departed, with Buster in her lap, Polley swore.

"Damn a woman, anyway!" he ended up fervently. "Did you ever see one that wasn't a fool?"

"They can make a lot of trouble," observed Watson with a sigh and followed him into the house. But Polley's line of thought was hopelessly broken—all he could think of was his troubles with his wife—and after a couple of drinks he dropped down into a chair and sat gazing stonily into space.

"Im-possible!" he burst out after a minute of staring silence and rose up with sudden decision. Ignoring the startled Willis he strode into his study and returned, tearing a paper into fragments.

"What's this?" demanded Cal as Polley handed him the fragments—but he knew. It was the option on the Golden Bear.

"It's no use!" declared Polley. "I'm not going to buy your mine! I'm going to sell out and quit this cursed place. It's been nothing but trouble and worry and expense—and what has it brought me in? Not a dollar—not a dollar—and do you know how much it's cost me? Sixty thousand wouldn't begin to cover it!"

"Yes, but look what you've got," protested Watson encouragingly. "Look at all this rich ore that's coming in. You've got a good mine and if you keep on sinking——"

"Oh, bosh!" exploded Polley. "Every dollar that I spent here is lost. But I'm going to show the world that I'm still a good business man. How much will you give me for my mine? Yes, I mean it—the whole mine—the lock, stock, and barrel—the house, the hoist and the hole! Speak quick—how much will you give?"

"Well," began Cal, after an instant of rapid thinking, "I'm not in a position to buy. You know that as well as I do. But that doesn't prove that the Thousand Wonders isn't a mine——"

"Bah!" exclaimed Polley, striding angrily up and down. "You are trying to rob me of my money. Two hundred and fifty thousand for the Golden Bear! It's an insult, I say, to my intelligence! Oh, I see it all now, but you can't dupe me, my bucka; I have a test for such cases as this. How much will *you* give *me* for the Thousand Wonders Mine? I will sell it for one thousand dollars!"

"Well, you've sold it, then," said Cal, making a grab for his roll, and he laid a thousand dollars on the table.

"Why—why!" began Polley, his neck puffing with excitement, and then with savage decision he accepted the money and scribbled out a quitclaim deed.

"I beg your pardon," he said at last, "if I've seemed to reflect upon your integrity. Now, what are you going to do with your mine?"

"I'm going to work it," answered Cal, "and I'm going to make it pay. Have you ever been down that hole? Well, what do you know about the mine? I'm just the same as broke, but I wouldn't sell out right now for a hundred thousand dollars, cash."

"And why not, pray?" questioned Polley, his red eyes beginning to gleam. "Have you been down the shaft yourself?"

"No," said Cal, "but I'm going down right now. I always knew the Thousand Wonders was a mine."

"Well, well!" fumed Polley, beginning to pace the floor, "perhaps I have been too precipitate. You don't want to sell the mine back? No, no—quite so—of course not, of course not. Well, I wish you the best of luck, Mr. Watson."

He shook hands gravely, but his weasel eyes were watching, and as Cal left he beckoned him back.

"Tell me the truth," he wheedled. "You're welcome to your buy. What is it that you know and I don't?"

"I can't tell you," answered Cal, "but if you want to take a flyer—well, how about Johnson's claim?"

"Do you advise me to buy it?" burst out Polley eagerly. "Say the word—that's all I ask!"

"Advise, nothing," returned Cal. "You're a hard man to deal with—been spoiled by having your own way. What I say is—well, use your own judgment."

"One thing more," nodded Polley. "Is the Golden Bear for sale? It is not? Well, that is my answer."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

ONE DOLLAR—MEX.

A man must be agile to keep up with a millionaire who is subject to brain storms and repentance, but Cal Watson flattered himself that he had whipsawed Mr. Polley if he did claim to be a world beater. There had been some quick turns, and Cal had come there to sell, but the next thing to a good sell is a good buy. The machinery and improvements at the Thousand Wonders were worth twenty thousand, laid down, but Cal had had in mind that vein of native silver that Duffy's crowd had been so industriously high-grading. He might not be a miner, according to Peggy McCann's lights, but he was getting on in the realms of high finance.

He found Peggy McCann at the collar of the shaft, but at the guileless grin on the old miner's face Watson hesitated to come out with the truth. Peggy was indeed getting old, though his hair was just turning and his inch-long eyebrows were still black; it was just that the years had made their mark on his rugged countenance, for he had lived hard, asking odds of no man. Yet his black eyes still snapped with the unquenchable fire of youth and in his heart he was still a boy. But the time would soon come when old age would claim its toll, and Peggy had not saved a cent.

"Well, Peggy," began Cal, "how's the high grading coming along—have you got any more samples in your leg? That last was a good one, but I noticed you took it back. Come through now—haven't I always been your friend?"

"You have that," conceded Peggy, "but you're always gitting arristed—and when a man's arristed, he's *s'arched!*"

"You're a deep thinker," acknowledged Cal, "but tell me this, Peg. How does it come, if you're so smart, that you're always broke?"

"Heh! Broke, is it?" gloated Peggy, "you ought to see the rat's nest that I've got in me leg, right now? Would ye be wanting a hundred or so, for that trip across the line into Mexico? If that's all it is, stop b'ating about the bush, because I've niver had sich a fartune befoor."

"No, and you never will again," answered Watson soberly. "Hard luck, Peggy, but it was too good to last. The Thousand Wonders Mine has been sold."

"Sold, ye say!" cried Peggy, suddenly losing his benevolent smile, "and who was the gomerel that bought it?"

"A first-class mining man," boasted Cal, handing over his deed. "The native sons have rustled, Peggy."

"Hooh, and what's this?" scolded McCann, fumbling helplessly for his glasses. "Well, me glasses are garn, and I can't read a word. But d'ye mean to tell me, Cal, that you've bought this old mine back? Currse the day that I showed ye that rock!"

"Oh, I don't know," soothed Cal. "You may be luckier than you think—the news was liable to break any day. And I'll tell you what I'll do—you gave me the tip—you can keep all the ore you've got."

"Kape nothin'!" exploded Peggy. "It was the oppartunity of a lifetime, and I ruint it by dropping that rock. What'll the byes say to me now, after all I've been telling them? Ah, Watsonville, I niver thahrt you'd do it!"

He regarded him mournfully and Cal let him run on until his reproaches and lamentations had ceased. It would be difficult indeed to convince Peggy of his innocence, and especially while the blood was in his head; but after McCann had quieted down he explained to him carefully the circumstances that had led up to the sale.

"Ah, well," complained Peggy, "that's always the way—I niver can hold me luck. It's been this thing and that thing, ever since I was a child and got caught st'aling milk from Pat's cow. But what shall I tell the byes underground—will they roll up their blankets and go?"

"I'll tell you," proposed Cal. "I've got no love for those lads—they ganged me and did it dirty—but if they'll keep their mouths shut and do what I say, I'll let them keep their pickings—whatever it is, if it runs up into thousands. But the first man that blabs, I'll trim him. Now this is a case where we're out to clean Whispering Johnson, and that's as much as I'll say. What we need is a little time to frame up something deep, and, in the meantime, here's my proposition to you:

"I am needing, Mr. McCann, the services of an expert to prospect the Golden Bear for silver. A practical mining man preferred, and if he's got a wooden leg it makes no difference to me. He'll need a few assistants, and if they happen to be high graders there'll be no kick coming there,

either. The ore is what I'm after, and the men that find it will get one month free lease, to make a clean-up. Do you know where I'll find such a gang?"

"R-right here, and thank ye kindly!" answered Peggy with a grin. "Good-by, Cal, and kape out of jail."

That was the main thing, after all, to keep out of jail. And yet as Cal cut across the Dry Lake for Soledad his thoughts were not on his trial. He had made a wonderful buy, even if the Thousand Wonders was barren; but with that vein of native silver it was worth a hundred thousand and maybe up into the millions. But wonderful buys were not what he had come for—he had gone out to make a sale—and that thousand dollars down had been like part of his lifeblood, for he needed it to pay for his defense. Yet a man must play the game or crawl under the table, and he had called Polley's bluff like a sport. The next thing was to cash a few chips.

A feather of dust coming through the pass caught his attention as he rode somberly on; and then, leaving the road, a jackrabbit car came rushing toward him and he knew that Wiggins had heard. He came speeding across the lake bed like a tumbleweed before the wind and threw a wide circle to stop.

"What's the matter?" he demanded. "I met Mrs. Polley down the road, and she said she was going to the hospital!"

"The dog hospital!" corrected Cal. "The whole deal has gone to hell—it takes a woman to dish things."

He drew out the fragments of the torn-up option and Wiggins threw up both hands and swore. It was startling, coming from him.

"Never again!" he declared, "will I go into a deal where there's a woman even remotely involved. And so her dog ate a lizard—well, if that don't beat Hades. And he tore up the option, right there?"

"Right there," nodded Cal, "and told me I was a crook. Said he was wise to the whole dirty deal. But he said he had a test for a case like that—offered to sell me the Thousand Wonders Mine!"

"I get you," sighed Wiggins, "well, that dog eating the lizard has cost us a tidy sum."

"Sure," smiled Cal, "but I haven't quite finished. I bought him out, for a thousand dollars!"

"You did!" shrilled Wiggins, opening his eyes up wide. "My boy, you're wasted on mining. Did you ever think of trying my line? But what did the old four-flusher do then?"

"He tried to buy it back," grinned Cal. "And then he asked about the Golden Bear. Got a hunch we've found something good."

"Well, have you?" inquired Wiggins, but Cal evaded the question, though why he could hardly say. Surely, of all the people he had turned to in his difficulties, there was no one who had responded like Wiggins; but Cal's only answer was an enigmatic smile and a shrewd glance up the road.

"Here comes his truck back," he said. "The old boy is marooned. I wonder if he'll go in as freight or wait for the limousine?"

"It'll be a long wait," opined Wiggins, "if I know anything about women. But what is it, Cal—what's on your mind?"

"Oh, nothing," responded Cal. "Only Mr. Polley is thinking of buying Whispering Johnson's claim."

"No!" exclaimed Wiggins, and his canny smile came back. "Well, what's the next move? I suppose you figure on beating him to it?"

"You're wrong," answered Cal. "I'm through with these millionaires—they're too danged swift for me."

"What!" snapped Wiggins. "You don't mean to say you're going to let him buy it, straight out? And not make him pay you your cut? Well, I must say, Mr. Watson, after making such a start, your game seems to be falling off. Because the first rule in mining is to make the rich man pay—the poor man has nothing to pay with."

"True enough," admitted Cal. "Only I happen to be poor, too. I need all my money to hire lawyers."

"Why, my dear boy!" protested Wiggins, "haven't I always been your friend? Just tell me—how much do you want?"

"I need five thousand dollars," ventured Watson, at last, "but you've already put up ten thousand for bail."

"I'll tell you," suggested Wiggins, "I'll turn that over to you. It'll be released when you surrender for your trial. Just a moment and I'll write you out an order." He scribbled a hasty note and handed it to Cal. "Now," he said, "to return to Polley!"

"Wiggins!" began Cal, after a thoughtful silence, "I can't help likin' you, somehow;

and yet I hate to pull this stuff. Of course, Polley is crazy, and it's a crime to be rich, but—well, I don't like to trim him again. He's treated me right, according to his lights, and I've been there and drunk his champagne——"

"Yes, yes," prompted Wiggins as Cal came to a stop, "very creditable, I must say, to your heart; but you're young, Mr. Watson, you're young. However, have you anything to suggest?"

"I've got a scheme," grinned Cal, "to trim Whispering Johnson, but that's as far as I'll go. I'll fix him so he'll sell for one dollar, Mex. You buy it, and *keep* the mine."

"And the profits?" hinted Wiggins.

"You keep it," reiterated Cal; "there'll be profits. No, I'll tell you," he burst out, "you've been so good to me, Mr. Wiggins—Polley's miners have made a strike. All the time he's been fuming around they've been digging out native silver, and selling it for five dollars a pound."

"I happened to know that," smiled Wiggins. "Part of my business, you understand, but I thank you just the same. We're going to get along, Mr. Watson."

"I believe it," laughed Cal, reaching over to shake hands, "but let's play the game on the square. That Gold Dollar claim is good enough to keep—the thing is to grab it, quick. Now you ramble back to Soledad and get Johnson's best price, and about the time he thinks he's made a sale I'll blow into town with the news. Then the price will be one dollar—Mex!"

A gleam of understanding came into Wiggins' quiet eyes and he leaped out to crank up his car and, as Cal followed after him, he saw his streak of dust rushing up through the pass like a meteor. Cal jogged on more sedately, and when he rode into Soledad the jack rabbit was parked by the store. Wiggins was sitting on the board walk, whittling shavings and listening to Johnson, who was expatiating on the glories of his mine.

"Oh, Mr. Watson!" called Wiggins as Cal rode past, and Johnson glanced up wrathfully. "Just a moment," explained Wiggins, "a question of information—how long is the Gold Dollar claim?"

"I don't know," shrugged Cal; "fifteen hundred feet, I guess. Why don't you ask the owner of the claim?"

He glanced fleeringly at Whispering Johnson, who rose up waspishly and the battle of words was on.

"I done told him!" grumbled Johnson, "but if he values the word of a——"

"Well, say it!" challenged Cal, "you can't hurt my feelings. I always consider the source."

"You dog-gone cow thief," bellowed Johnson. "You been knocking my mine again—I say it's worth twenty thousand dollars. Ain't it on the same lead as the famous Thousand Wonders? Well, and look at the ore they've found!"

"Since when?" mocked Cal. "The Thousand Wonders is closed down. Didn't you see Mrs. Polley go by?"

"You shut up!" warned Johnson. "Now I've had enough of this, savvy? Don't you say another word aginst that mine!"

"A-all right!" bowed Cal. "This is your town, Mr. Johnson." And he rode up the street to the Bottle House.

"Well, well!" hailed Larry Killgallon, as he came in the door, "if here isn't Misther Watson! What's the good word from up above?"

"Oh, nothing much," said Cal and, after buying the drinks, he ordered a hearty meal. But news travels fast in a string town like Soledad, and soon a breathless idler came up from Johnson's store with the news that the Thousand Wonders was closed down. Cal ate on soberly while the discussion raged behind him, replying to chance questions with grunts, but when he stepped down from his tall stool at the lunch counter it was Larry himself who asked.

"What's this I hear?" he said, "about the Thousand Wonders closing down? Did you happen to come that way? Then Peggy and the byes will be coming in on the truck to——"

"They're working for me," returned Cal.

"For you, eh?" beamed Larry. "On the Golden Bear, ye say? A-ah, there was a wonderful mine! But what was the mahther wid old Polley all at once—they say that his wife has left him."

"Maybe so," answered Cal, "she didn't like it, out there. Anyway, he got tired and sold out."

"Sold out!" cried Larry as the crowd gathered about, and Cal laid down his quitclaim deed. "Howly Moses!" exclaimed Larry, "and did ye buy it yerself, now? A thousand dollars down and no more! Well, well, think of that—and the machinery and iverything. But I always said he was touched. He ain't right, byes, I tell ye—

drrinkin' that pisen Frrench champagne—did ye moind the look in his eye? Well, well, and closed down—this'll be a harrd blow for all of us—but I heard the byes had struck ore?"

"It pinched out," returned Cal. "Never had a real ore body. Left Polley sixty thousand in the hole. I just bought it for the tools and material. Well, I'll put my horse in the corral."

He went out into the sunlight and looked down the street to where Whispering Johnson was gesticulating. Mr. Wiggins sat bowed over, thoughtfully whittling long white shavings—the price would be one dollar, Mex.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

EXHIBIT A.

All the desert side was there when Cal Watson came to trial for stealing Sol Barksdale's calf—Whispering Johnson, Bill Beagle, Sol Barksdale and Armilda, Wayne Crump and Polley and his wife. Little Buster had survived the lizard he had eaten, but the Polleys had moved into town; the desert was too lonely, and besides, there were more lizards, so Lura had had her way. She was driving her new automobile, a peace offering from her husband, and attracted more attention than the trial.

Whispering Johnson wore his soiled shirt and his vote-getting overalls, still draped according to custom below his paunch; and in a voice like the rumbling of a mountain bull he announced that they had caught him in the act. Bill Beagle was subdued, chewing tobacco and spitting somberly. But Wayne Crump was in his glory. He wore a new velours hat, a fancy shirt with pink arm bands, and two pairs of short-waisted pants; and his curly black locks were oiled and patted down until they stuck to his bony brow. But though he swaggered about gayly in his polished, high-heeled boots, the scared look was still in his eyes.

There had been a chance meeting between Crump and California Watson just before the case was called, and since then Crump had been nervous.

"Well," he said, "have you got that ten thousand?"

"No," answered Cal, "I gave it to a lawyer. How's your forgettery?" he inquired as Crump stood watching him, and Crump had smiled at him slyly.

"All right," he hinted. "Make it five."

"You'd get life," stated Cal, "if I told what I know." And he went off and left him staring.

Now the trial had begun, not a dollar had been passed and Crump was a little wild. The jury had been drawn, after a searching examination from the beetle-browed Anson Jeffreys; and as he looked at this man who was destined to cross-examine him Wayne Crump put his forgettery to work. Anson Jeffreys, it was claimed, was a lineal descendant of Judge Jeffreys, who had conducted the Bloody Assizes, and in repose he looked like a ruffled lion in the presence of yapping curs. In action he was a human volcano of words, spouting demands, innuendoes, and accusations; a man who ran roughshod over witnesses and opponents in order to get his man. And if that man did not respond with the truth and the whole truth he shook the truth out of him by force. He had a voice like Whispering Johnson and an eye like a rapier's flash—and he had cost Cal ten thousand dollars.

Abe McKinney was there with his files of notes to supply the salient facts for the defense, and every time he looked at Crump he seemed to be waiting to stab him with his long forefinger. Between them sat Cal Watson, very quiet and self-possessed, never doubting the outcome of the case; but when he glanced at Armilda, sitting with her father and Crump, he prayed that his lawyers would win. If not, if the lie held and they could not controvert it, he would have to rise in his place and denounce Crump as an ex-convict, whose word was not good in any court. That would end the case, right there, as far as he was concerned—and it would end Armilda's romance, too.

Yet as he looked at her furtively he could not believe that she had ever been really in love with Crump. She looked too clean and wholesome to have been capable of it. Yet he had seen her with his own eyes, butchering a calf in a sand storm. Cal had never quite recovered from the shock of that strange scene and the sense of its unreality; he had almost thought at times that he had dreamed it in some way, after his exposure in riding through the storm. But it was Armilda, he knew it, and she had shot and skinned the calf exactly like Crump's other dupe. Lester Wood had not wanted to skin the calf below Cal's house, but he had bowed to a stronger will. Perhaps Armilda had done the same. And in the background

of his mind Cal never quite forgot Armilda's mother, who had run away and died in old Mexico.

It was afternoon when the jury was sworn and the district attorney opened the battle. He was a handsome young man with a wealth of black hair and a nose like a Roman senator, and in spite of the presence of the formidable Anson Jeffreys he began his case with assurance. The law and the evidence were all on his side, the defendant had been caught in the act; and besides that, he had the moral support of Whispering Johnson and his friends. They had crowded into the courtroom until the bailiffs had brought more chairs and the judge had finally ordered the doors closed, and in the tense silence that falls when a man's freedom is at stake the district attorney called his first witness.

Sol Barksdale took the stand and testified, among other things, that on account of losing cattle he had employed Wayne Crump as a detective. Having thus paved the way for his principal witness, the district attorney excused Barksdale. As Wayne Crump, slightly pale, took the witness chair every eye in the courtroom was upon him. He had failed in his attempt to extort money from Watson, and now there was nothing but his revenge. His eyes were a little wild, and he glanced often at the door, but he told a straight story and stuck to it. He had been employed to watch Watson, he had been hiding near his house, and upon hearing a shot he had hurried down the cañon and discovered the defendant skinning a calf. It was a solid-colored, red yearling and, after packing it back to the ranch, he had removed the skin and delivered it to the sheriff as evidence.

"Bring on that skin!" ordered the district attorney, throwing back his flowing hair and setting himself for a speech. "You have heard, gentlemen of the jury, the testimony of Mr. Barksdale, regarding his trouble with the defendant. You have heard the further testimony of Mr. Crump. He is an officer of the law, a cattle detective by profession, and he was accompanied by a deputy sheriff, Mr. Beagle. The witness has stated that he caught the defendant in the act of skinning this J Prod calf, and that the brand of the animal had already been mangled in an effort to conceal its identity. Such an act, if it can be proven, is prima-facie evidence of the intent to commit a crime—and we have this animal's skin to prove it. Bring on Exhibit A!"

Dave Johnson himself brought the exhibit into court, and at a sign laid it down on the table. The district attorney knew the value of suspense, and he did not unfold the hide.

"Your honor," he declaimed, "and gentlemen of the jury, I am aware that all men are fallible. We are all swayed by passions which are liable to warp our judgment, even to influence our testimony under oath. But a fact is a fact, a brand is a brand, and a knife cut speaks for itself. I am aware that the learned counsel for the defense is prepared to question the witness' testimony, to cross-examine him regarding the facts which he has stated; but I ask you, gentlemen of the jury, can he controvert *that?* Can he question this hide and this brand?"

He unrolled the stubborn hide and pressed it flat against the table, then held it out in one hand.

"I will ask the witness," he said, "if he can identify this hide. Is this the skin you refer to?"

"That's the skin," returned Crump, barely glancing at the exhibit, which had buckled back into its folds. "And I turned over to the sheriff as Exhibit B the knife that the defendant was using."

"Bring in that knife!" thundered the district attorney, turning the hide inside out in order to exhibit the brand; "and here, gentlemen of the jury, are the signs of his handiwork——"

He stopped and looked about, glanced down at the hide again, then gazed inquiringly at the sheriff.

"Mr. Sheriff," he began, as the crowd rose up to stare, "are you sure you have brought the right hide?"

"Yes, that's it," asserted Johnson. "Exhibit A. I've had it locked up in my vault."

"Let me look at that exhibit!" spoke up McKinney suddenly, and strode over and snatched the hide away.

"Your honor!" he barked. "This is not a J Prod brand; I object——"

"Order in the court!" shouted the bailiff, hammering lustily with his mallet. "Sit down there, or I'll throw you all out."

"Let me see that," directed the judge after the uproar had subsided, and then he, too, glanced at the sheriff.

"Mr. Sheriff," he said, "are you sure

this is the skin that was turned in as Exhibit A?"

"That's the skin!" declared Johnson. "I'd swear to it, anywhere. It's never been out of my vault!"

"The brand here," observed the judge, "seems to be in the form of a triangle. May I inquire if you know such a brand?"

"That's a Triangle Dot!" exclaimed Dave Johnson in disgust, and Wayne Crump leaped down from his chair. One glance was enough for the cowboy's trained eye.

"It's been changed!" he charged. "This isn't the same hide!"

"Let us have order!" commanded the judge, waving them all back to their seats, and Crump dropped back into his chair, dead white. The hide was the same but the brand was different—some one had switched in a Triangle Dot skin. As for Watson, one glance was enough for him also, but he shut down his jaws and smiled grimly. It was not the same skin, but what then? Was he, the defendant, called upon to give testimony that would strengthen the case against him? That was up to the district attorney. The learned Anson Jeffreys, out of his element for once, stared blankly at the scene before him, but Abe McKinney had been a cowman and knew how to read brands, and he waved the hide like a banner.

"Your honor," he shouted, "I move that the court instruct the jury to acquit the defendant, for the reason that the evidence introduced by the prosecution does not sustain the allegation of the indictment. On the contrary, it contradicts it, for the indictment alleges the theft of an animal branded J Prod whereas the hide introduced in evidence as Exhibit A shows the brand to be Triangle Dot!"

"I object!" protested the district attorney, but he knew he was beaten, and the judge promptly ruled against him.

"The court instructs the jury," he said, "that, without leaving their seats, one of their number should sign a verdict, as foreman of the jury, finding the defendant not guilty."

Cal rose up smiling, but the pack was at his throat and in the lead came Sol Barksdale, clamoring.

"Arrest that man!" he cried. "My daughter will swear out a warrant. The Triangle Dot brand is hers."

"Can't *you* do it?" urged the district attorney, biting his lips with excitement. "I shall go to the bottom of this matter. You're her legal guardian—swear out another warrant, and we'll see who tampered with that skin."

"I would," stated Barksdale, "but my daughter is of age and no longer under my guardianship."

"Well, where is she? Get her up here! This is a serious matter. Mr. Watson, I'm going to ask you to remain here."

"Anything to accommodate," answered Watson dryly, and glanced about the fast-clearing courtroom. He saw Wiggins in a corner, talking busily with Polley and Crump and Mrs. Polley just going out; but no one had rushed up to shake hands with him yet, and Whispering Johnson was furious. He stood just across from him, arguing savagely with his brother who was hotly denying any complicity; and when Armilda was brought to the front of the courtroom Johnson could hardly be silenced while Barksdale stated the case.

Armilda stood smiling in the odd way she had, even including the defendant in her glances, but when the district attorney brusquely demanded her compliance she turned grave and shook her head.

"No," she said, "I can't swear out the warrant."

"But why?" raved the district attorney. "It's your duty as a citizen, and you owe it as well to your father."

"I know my duty," she retorted, "without coming to you. But if you've got to have a reason, we've always been friends, and I told Cal he could kill my yearlings, any time he was out of meat, only he had to save the brand—so, of course, that explains about the hide."

"It explains nothing!" snapped her father. "Didn't you see him with that calfskin? And wasn't it a J Prod animal? Well, then, perhaps you will explain how it was changed on the way—there's something very curious about this!"

"I don't have to explain," returned Armilda sweetly, and went off and left them fuming.

"Well!" spoke up Cal, "what are you all going to do about it? You're a bunch of crooks, and you know it. I didn't steal that calf, or any other calf, so you want to be danged careful what you say. I've got a ten-thousand-dollar lawyer just r'aring to whirl into you. Do you want me, or do I go free?"

"You go free," grumbled the district attorney, and went off muttering angrily, while Cal made a break for the door.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE POST-MORTEM.

The age of miracles has passed and what would at one time have been a commonplace became now a matter of wrangling and recrimination. In the days of the saints the mere changing of the brand on a calfskin locked up in a vault would hardly have excited comment; but the stiff-necked generation that sojourned in Mojave City was mostly from Missouri. Even the beneficiary of the deed had his shrewd suspicions as to the agency which was behind this transmutation and, though he kept his face straight, there was a questing look in his eye as he stepped out of the courtroom—free. There was something decidedly fishy about the whole transaction, but if any one could explain it, it was Armilda. And one thing was sure, she had never so much as hinted that he was welcome to kill her beef.

She had made up that lie purposely in order to balk her father, and perhaps to save Cal's own hide; but he wanted to let her know that he needed no such protection and that, left to himself, he would have won. It was all very nice and friendly for her to come into court and reel off this glib, convincing lie; but coming as it did, this switching of the hides had spoiled his plans completely. Here was his ten-thousand-dollar lawyer, a cross-examiner without an equal, a man who could have torn Crump to pieces; and before he could come into action and vindicate Cal's good name the whole case had been thrown out of court. Cal had spent a small fortune to engage Anson Jeffreys in order to save Crump from his past, and now in a minute the whole case had blown up.

As he came out on the broad steps that led down from the courthouse Whispering Johnson and Dave struggled past him, and from the sheriff's office just below Cal could hear their loud-mouthed wrangling as they held a post-mortem on the skin.

"There's something rotten here!" declared Whispering Johnson. "Now, listen, Dave, don't you think you can double cross *me*. You've been friendly with Cal Watson, you never shut him up at all; and, by grab, you changed that skin."

"I did not!" came back Dave. "And you nor nobody can't say I did. I locked that in my vault, just the way it was handed to me, and no one has touched it since. I keep that key myself, never lend it to nobody, and I tell you that's the very same skin."

They were having it back and forth, and Cal was still listening when he saw a handsome limousine at the curb. The door was half open and a woman's face peered out, a face like a Neapolitan flower girl's. It was Mrs. Polley in her stunning new car, and as Cal watched her she was joined by Wayne Crump. He had been one of the throng that had gathered about the Johnsons as they were arguing the matter of the hides, but as he strode out to meet her Cal saw the look in her eyes—the rest was plain as print. Then the door closed behind Crump, the curtain was pulled down, Buster yapped, and they glided away.

"Good night!" exclaimed Watson and shook his head grimly. The recreant lovers had fled. Having seen the first act the finale was plain to him, but he did not feel called upon to interfere. Let them flee, and Godspeed, and if they never come back it would be soon enough for him.

He had started out to seek Armilda, but now his resolution failed him. How would she take this sudden flight? And how would she greet him if he came hurrying with the news that Crump and Mrs. Polley had fled? And for all he knew they were just riding around the block to give little Buster the air! So many things had gone awry that he felt himself at fault, like a hound that has overrun its trail. When he had come to Mojave City he had thought he had everything slated, but nothing had gone according to schedule. Crump had not sworn to any lies, Cal's lawyers had not flayed him, Armilda had suddenly befriended him; and now, after a lull, here came Peggy McCann riding up on the station bus.

"Lave me arf here!" he shouted, and as he saw Cal on the steps he let out a whoop of joy. "Come down!" he beckoned, "and I'll show ye something gargeous! Look at this, now!" And he held up an ore sack. "You're a hell of a miner!" he shrilled derisively. "Look what you had all the time, at the Bear!"

He grabbed out a handful of ore and Cal's heart jumped, and stopped—the Irish had struck silver again.

"Now that lease," went on Peggy in his

most caressing tones as men crowded in to see the ore, "ye didn't put it on paper, ye know. But it's good, eh, Cal, me bye; your word's as good as your bond, eh? The byes sent me down to make sure!"

"My word is good!" answered Watson shortly. "You've got a lease for thirty days."

"You're arl right then," laughed Peggy, patting him lovingly on the shoulder, "and a dom good man of your word. But ye'll never be a miner, Cal—ye couldn't work for me a day—it was rright before your eyes, arl the time!"

The post-mortem over the calfskin was brought to an abrupt close by the flash of Peggy McCann's ore. In half an hour the word was all over town that Cal Watson had made a big strike. Cal forgot about his trial and its baffling complications, forgot the men and women who had opposed him—the Golden Bear had made good, his father's faith had been vindicated, there was ore and it gleamed like jewels. Native silver of metallic white, and ruby and horn silver, too, all set in a matrix of crystal quartz—and the vein was as wide as Peggy's hand. He was the center of a shifting crowd, above which Peggy McCann loomed like a man among dwarfs; big and swollen with huge muscles, his broad face all aglow as he repeated the tale of the strike. But it was Peggy they were listening to; and as Cal stood dreaming he was plucked out of the crowd by Wiggins.

"Come over here," he said, "I've got a buyer for your mine. Make it steep—a half million, at least."

Cal followed him reluctantly—he did not want to sell his mine, he wanted to keep it and develop it and make good; and when he saw Polley, his eyes shining expectantly, he stopped and jerked away.

"No," he said, "I don't want to sell the Bear. My old man told me to keep it."

"Well, sell him the Thousand Wonders," hissed Wiggins in his ear. "He'll give you two hundred thousand."

"Mr. Watson," began Polley, rushing up to shake hands with him, "what is your price for the Golden Bear? Of course my option has expired, but if two hundred and fifty thousand——"

"Nothing doing," announced Cal. "Absolutely!"

"Ah, but everything has its price," Polley reminded him, smiling fatuously, "and I want to own the Golden Bear."

"You'll never do it," replied Cal. "And I want to correct you, right there—there are some things that are beyond price, Mr. Polley!"

"Ah, yes," beamed Polley. "What is that the Bible says about a virtuous woman? And by the way, have you happened to see Lura? She went out a while ago in her machine."

"I saw her," nodded Cal, and something in his tone caused the millionaire to forget the Golden Bear.

"I hope," he frowned, "she wasn't driving with that cowboy? I forbade it—absolutely! As long as she is my wife——"

"Well, she was," said Cal ruthlessly, "and if you'll take my advice——"

"Advice! Advice!" burst out Polley in a passion. "This affair has gone beyond that. I warned her only yesterday that he was a low, unprincipled hound who would bring her name, and mine, into disrepute, and that the next time I caught her—— But by the way, Mr. Watson, did you happen to notice the dog?"

"He was with 'em," answered Cal, and Polley's eyes flashed sudden fire.

"Let them go!" he burst out hoarsely. "Let them go!"

He began to pace up and down, talking excitedly to himself, and then suddenly he threw up his hands.

"Let them go!" he repeated. "She'll make his life a hell. And now what about the mine?"

"I'm sorry," reported Wiggins, "but Mr. Watson refuses to part with it. But I suppose you know, Mr. Polley, that the original strike of this silver was made at the Thousand Wonders? There's an eighteen-inch vein——"

"I knew it!" exploded Polley. "Didn't I pick it for a winner? Well, who says my system doesn't work? Mr. Watson, what is your price on that mine?"

"Two hundred thousand dollars," returned Watson evenly, and Polley snatched out his check book.

"It's sold," he said, "without another word. I've gone against my hunches long enough."

Cal glanced across at Wiggins who responded with his quiet smile, and they went in to draw up the papers. Watson pocketed the check with a strange sense of unreality;

his mind had become immune to surprise, and a flash of white passing into Johnson's office had led his thoughts astray. Armilda Barksdale had gone by with the Johnson girls—and he wanted to find out about those hides.

They were talking and laughing when he came in behind them, standing in a bevy around Dave Johnson's desk.

"You lost your witness, dad," teased Mary. "He eloped with Mrs. Polley—and what do you think Polley said? 'Did she take that dog?' he asked. 'Well, let 'em go!' he says. How's that for a gentleman, dad?"

"Pretty good," responded Dave, looking up to nod at Cal; "but here now, you girls run away. This is the sheriff's office. What can I do for you, Cal? Come to get your property back?"

"Why—yes," assented Cal, greeting the young ladies impartially. "There's somebody calling for you, Dave," he added.

The sheriff rose up, grumbling at a summons from the cell room, and the girls looked at Cal and smiled. The moment was strangely psychic and something in their eyes hinted to Cal of a friendly conspiracy.

"Shall we tell him, girls?" whispered Mary, and when Ellen nodded they turned and glanced knowingly at Armilda. "You do it," they said and slipped out of the door, looking back over their shoulders as they went.

"Anything serious?" inquired Cal; but Armilda only laughed.

"They're making an excuse to go."

"Yes, but what were you going to tell me?" he went on eagerly. "Say, was it you that switched those hides?"

"Oh—goodness!" she gasped, beckoning him frantically to stop. "They could send us to the State prison, if they knew. Oh, if Uncle Dave had heard you——"

"Well, come over here," he suggested, stepping back into the corner, "and whisper it in my ear."

"You aren't mad?" she asked as she followed him into the corner. "Well, we took an impression of his key—in a cake of soap—and sent it to Los Angeles to a man that makes duplicate keys. And then one day when uncle was called out of the office we put the other hide into his vault, and I nearly died laughing when that district attorney looked down and saw my brand. And Whispering Johnson—did you hear him?"

"Pretty rich," acknowledged Cal, smiling back a trifle grimly; "but where did you get that other hide?"

"That's my business," she answered. "I—I guess you know why I did it?"

"No, I don't," returned Cal, "but I can guess, Armilda. I thought—well, I was afraid you'd gone back on me."

"Well, did you care?" she asked, and her smiling eyes lit up suddenly with a glow of wrath. "Why didn't you come back and see me?" she demanded.

"'Fraid to do it," he confessed; "they were all out to get me. And there was another reason, Armilda—I didn't know, you see, and—I wanted you to be happy, if you could."

"What—with him!" she exclaimed, and pushed him away scornfully. "You're hopeless," she declared, smiling wistfully.

"Oh, I don't know," he said, drawing her gently to him. "Say, is that what you've been doing all the time—trying to get me going?"

"Why sure!" she laughed. "You wouldn't come near me. I thought it might make you jealous."

"It did," acknowledged Cal, "more jealous than you'd think. But I'm glad you still like me, Armilda."

"Who said I did?" she demanded, looking up and blushing shyly.

"I know it," he said, "so there's no use pretending. I happened to see you in a sand storm, when you killed that Triangle Dot calf."

"Oh, you know *everything!*" she sighed, brushing her hair against his cheek. "Will you come around and see me—soon?"

"Right now is soon enough for me," he said.

And Armilda smiled to herself.

THE END.

Pen Shots of Champions

By Grantland Rice

IV.—JAMES M. BARNES

Open Golf Champion, U. S. A.

"LONG JIM" BARNES of Pelham, open golf champion of the United States, is correctly titled.

He is long of body, long of legs, long of arms, and one of the longest hitters in the world with both wood and iron.

Barnes is six feet three and a half inches tall, weighing one hundred and seventy-two pounds, and a Christopher Columbus of human flesh couldn't locate a surplus ounce of the same upon his tall and willowy frame.

He is the tallest champion in the history of American golf, which forces him in the act of putting to spread over no small portion of the green, as he bends down to the ball.

Long Jim came to America from England when he was twenty-three years old, locating in the Far West. He is now thirty-five, so the last twelve years of his golf development have been spent under American skies and above American turf.

He was a good golfer when he landed, but not a great one, as his game has developed steadily and moved forward through hard study and close application.

Barnes has been after the olive wreath which goes with the open championship for nine years and even as far back as 1913 at Brookline he was well up with a good chance to win for the first three rounds.

One Bad Round

On more than one occasion before this he has threatened to lead the field, only to fall heir to one bad round year after year. For the greater part of the journey he would be neck and neck with the best in the field, but until 1921 he could never quite hook those four good rounds together. It was not that he would crack or break wide open.

There would merely be a 77 or a 78 or a 79 suddenly interpolated among the 72's and 73's, just enough to crowd him out of the clover.

In spite of these continued setbacks he refused to lose confidence in his game and each year he went after the title with greater determination than ever, until he finally got going and spread-eagled the field with one of the widest margins ever known.

Lover of Nature

Barnes has two hobbies. One is his profession—golf. The other is nature at large, including birds, trees, and the open in general. When there is spare time around he can frequently be found wandering through the woods, studying the ways and modes of bird and animal life.

He rarely goes to the theater or to motion pictures and is in no sense a bookworm. Life for him and the existence thereof is mainly an out-of-doors proposition, whether it be inland or along the coast. He is one of the few who revel in the high, twisting winds of the seaside links and who can play about as well there as he can amid calmer scenes.

Philosopher of Golf

Barnes is one of the rare philosophers of the game. His play through the last open championship at the Columbia Country Club, Washington, D. C., was entirely characteristic of his golfing ways. Due to an unfortunate attack upon many of the greens by the drouth and a certain rank growth of grass, conditions in this respect were not altogether ideal.

There was the expected or normal amount of complaining or murmuring on the part of the players.

Many of these let conditions affecting certain of the greens get upon their taut nerves. They saw putts glide gently to the right or left of the cup and so lost confidence in their touch.

Barnes made a careful survey of this mental agitation upon the part of many leading opponents and immediately made up his mind not to worry over any condition that could not be helped.

"These greens just suit me," he remarked in a casual way after his first practice round. And this was the philosophy he carried throughout the entire tournament where he stated later that he never permitted himself to get sore or to lose his temper at any stage of the contest.

It was this great poise which earned the fine praise of President Harding when he distributed the trophies on the final day. A putt might jump sidewise or his ball in the bunker might find a heel print made by an elephant, but in each case Barnes retained his serenity and went on playing golf.

Another Example

One lone example illustrates his careful, studious nature.

He saw that the long, harassing fifth hole might easily cost any man the championship.

Over five hundred yards in length, with a vast bunker to be carried on a second shot well down the course, there also was a fence along the entire left flank with its out-of-bounds penalty of two strokes.

Trouble to the left here meant almost a sure seven and a very possible eight or nine. Barnes saw at once the amount of grief and woe and misery that lurked in this direction, so he decided to study conditions upon the right side of the course. Here he saw that the rough was not unduly severe and that with only a mashie niblick shot left to the sloping green he would be about as well off as if he had split the middle of the course.

So each time Long Jim came to this hole he deliberately adjusted his aim to the right, played with great care and deliberation for the rough on his second, and so was practically the only man in the championship who got by this haunted spot without any bitter memories or any lasting scars.

This was all typical of his play in general, part of his careful, well thought-over methods of attack upon par.

Most Careful of All

Barnes is a great golfer in a physical way. He is a long, accurate hitter, a long, consistent iron player, and a fine putter.

He is about as long from the tee, when he decides to let one fly, as any man in the game.

But his main characteristic is his extreme carefulness. There is at no time anything haphazard in his play. He takes few chances, but when he decides that one is in order he goes for it boldly. Each shot is thought out before it is played, and once the decision is made there is no half-hearted effort to back it up. "The mashie hates a quitter," he once remarked. And then he added, "And so does every other club."

He is a great believer in working upon the right mental attitude, in thinking through as well as in swinging through.

Mind directs muscle. So how can a man swing through when his thought is broken upon the downward swing?

One Peculiarity

The Open Champion has at least one peculiarity. Before starting a round he insists upon locating a clover leaf, four leaf preferred, which he keeps dangling from the left hand corner of his mouth throughout each round.

There will be a fresh clover leaf for a new round, but always the clover leaf.

Barnes, with his unusual mop of hair crowning a thin, serious face, usually plays bareheaded. His head is unusually large and with the extensive mop of uncovered hair is quite striking.

It is only necessary to take one look at Barnes to see that he belongs to the studious, determined type.

This is further shown, this deliberation of manner, in the way he times a stroke.

There is never any hurried hitting on his part as he waits for the blow before finally whipping the club head through.

One of the main faults in golf, baseball, or tennis is hitting too soon through overeagerness or an uncontrolled keenness. It is a wonderful sight to see how Barnes holds the big impact for the right moment, in place of wasting it at the wrong spot.

"Think of the right thing at the right time," one of his leading slogans, might be taken as a key to his way of going about the job.

In place of the old tip, "Keep your eye on the ball," Barnes' suggestion is, "Keep your mind on the ball." Think as you swing and you'll swing as you think.

The Weakness of Lop-ear

A Sequel to "The Putting Away of Lop-ear"

By Hugh Kennedy

Author of "Starthroat: Graduate," "Number Fifteen and Jonah," Etc.

A fox's strategy of "so near and yet so far" may make too much of a near thing of it—sometimes

LOP-EAR, eager to know what would happen next, scouted along the moon-made shadows of the fence. When the boy, for four months his beloved master and playfellow, had finally disappeared in the direction of the farmhouse, the young fox turned away. In that act he crossed a threshold, faced—life.

At his age—five months—he should have been ready for independence, but was not. Reared in captivity, and but now set free, he still dragged a chain of ignorance, if no longer one of steel. He lacked that parental training which in a wild state would have been his birthright. He had never, after his sixth week, frisked with his brother cubs, learning in nature's school. No mother's growl had warned him of threatened danger; nor had a hunting sire taught him to sniff out for himself meat cunningly hidden in places more and more difficult to find. His lessons had been few in that eternal wariness which is the price his kind have always paid for the dear boon of life.

Yet inherited instincts set him going at once on right courses. He sniffed the night air and turned his face toward the source of the very light and unsteady breeze. Whatever messages, whatever advance notices, either of warning or of promise, such a wind might bear, would be his while he kept to that direction.

He followed, too without any very deliberate exercise of choice, the higher ground. He knew nothing of what this untried world—this world of fields and fences, of rustling grain and shadow-haunted meadows, this fearsome yet inviting world—might have in store for him. His first view of it must be gained from points of vantage. The natural ridges afforded him such ground. He followed them, keeping his questing nose pointed, in the main, up wind.

He did not travel fast, nor, on that first night of freedom, far. His curiosity was too insatiable, his dread of surprise too hampering for that. He stopped stock-still at the snapping of a twig, cowered from the dull stamping of a fly-plagued horse. He turned aside for every arresting smell, every promising squeak, searched every outstanding hummock. Even sounds long familiar—a house dog's bark, a whippoorwill's sad call—sometimes arrested him by a new quality of startling nearness.

He crossed or skirted many fields before the late August moon descended. The darkness did not trouble him, but seemed rather like a protecting mantle about him. Under its cover he came to the narrow crossroad along which the boy had often passed to school in the springtime. He studied its parallel fences suspiciously, crossed its wheel tracks cautiously, stopped to sniff at the very stump from which the boy had first seen him at the old den mouth, a tumbling, flop-footed puppy—the very spot, had he known it, where the boy had first desired him.

Withal he made progress. Dawn found him in a less cleared, more rugged and altogether wilder part—the very hills to which his ancestors had for centuries clung. This suited him, looked like home to him. He felt tired; his life of ease and confinement had not toughened his muscles. Also his feet, unaccustomed to any kind of rough going, had begun to give him trouble. He looked about for a place to sleep.

But, kennel-reared though he was, he felt no need either to seek or to make a place of shelter. He had all outdoors. That was enough. He was now adult; and to an adult fox a den is at best a makeshift forced on him every spring by the need to confine and safeguard his pups. He sleeps best in the open, wherever the need for it finds him.

Lop-ear curled up now on the dry grass of a knoll-top, his sharp nose and ears his only trust against surprise.

His prospects, on the whole, were bright. Handicapped though he was by the manner of his upbringing, his release had fallen on that time of year when such a handicap had least prejudice to his welfare. Harvest time in the plant world, it was also the time of fullness for all animal life. Mice flourished now as at no other time of year; and mice formed his natural, his most delectable, source of food. Humble bees and wasps were reaching the maximum of their hoard. Their nests were not hard to find, and they had no defense against the sniffing nose, the desecrating forefeet, the hungry jaws, of the fox.

But these formed only the titbits, the sweets, of his diet. Something more bulky than mice, more sustaining than honey, he must find. Otherwise he must be forever hunting. It was his nature to feed full on flesh, then sleep; laying up, whenever possible, a reserve store.

The first afternoon of his liberty brought him a satisfaction of this need. Hungry after his unwonted exercise, he had wakened after a few hours of sleep. Though still muscle-stiff and sore of foot, and though his normal time for hunting, which is nightfall, was many hours away, appetite drove him abroad. The day was warm, bright, still. Crows, robins, high-holders, catching his eye by their movements, or his ear by their calls, brought eager recollections of his first illicit chicken dinner. But to capture them was beyond his present powers. He nosed about in the grass and woody undergrowth. A garter-snake rustled away from him. He caught it, shook it to dislocation and death, then spurned it. Only dire hunger could force him to meat so bloodless and uninviting.

Then fortune favored him. Picking his dainty way along a sandy incline, he caught in the air a new meat smell. He lowered his body into the sparse grass and crept forward. A moving thing caught his eye, a squat-bodied, furry creature that went scuttling toward a hillock of bare sand. He sprang out in pursuit, but too late. The young woodchuck had disappeared into its burrow.

Hungrily Lop-ear nosed the new-made tracks. The urge of his appetite made him forget all his natural prankishness. This was business. He gave himself to it intently. This animal was his if he could take it. He tried to enter the burrow, found it too small for his longer-legged body, and desisted from the useless effort. He must use brain work here.

He sniffed along the fresher of the tracks radiating from the hillock and came on the feeding grounds of the animal. Caught while thus abroad, it could be intercepted, cut off from escape. If he approached over the brow of the hill, he could command the whole slope, have a downhill course for his rush. He would try that another time. Desire kept him hovering a while about the burrow. Yet it is not the nature of the fox, any more than it is of the dog, to watch a hole as a cat will watch. He, therefore, left presently.

But a country that, because of its friable soil, is favorable to foxes, favors no less the woodchuck, who is much more dependent on his burrow. Therefore, it was not long before Lop-ear, his senses now united in a definite purpose, repeated his discovery of a feeding woodchuck. With greedy caution he stalked him, his eyes snapping with all the eagerness, but none of the mischief, that had marked his first capture of a barnyard fowl. With every advance of a foot, every fresh parting of the grass, he measured the distance from himself to his prey, from his prey to the excavated sand that marked the burrow mouth. At last he made his rush —not straight at the ground hog, but at a spot midway between him and his hole. Cut off from that retreat, he would be lost. But with a loud whistling chuckle of alarm the woodchuck scuttled, not toward the burrow, but into the long grass. Sure of him, Lop-ear sprang forward in pursuit. The woodchuck disappeared, seemingly swallowed by the ground. Investigating, Lop-ear discovered a little-used, inconspicuous alternative opening to the den.

Foiled, he vainly haunted the vicinity of the burrow as before. Plainly he had underrated this quarry, but he was learning. Returning to the first burrow over the brow of the slope and stealthily approaching it, he discovered a woodchuck, not feeding but basking in the sun on the warm sand of the hillock. It differed in size from the one he had first seen, was gross and heavy. It seemed to sleep.

He stalked it, gained striking distance, sprang into his downhill dash, caught it be-

fore it had even gained its feet for escape. He caught the first hold that he could snatch, tried to shake the beast in his jaws. But he had no pullet to deal with here. The ground hog was full grown, quite his own equal in weight. It was powerful; his tugging failed to upset it. And it had weapons. Its two pairs of long, curved incisors met burningly in Lop-ear's shoulder, met and met again. The wounds, the unexpected resistance, roused all his native savagery.

Yet, however hot his blood, Lop-ear lost none of his native guile. He sprang away, for he was no bulldog; rather a snapping, agile fighter. He sprang away, but so as to cut off retreat by way of the hole. Then he feinted, trying for a fresh hold. No member of the dog tribes need be taught the deadliness of the nip which severs or numbs the spinal cord. Lop-ear's eventual aim was that.

But the marmot, head up, faced him with front teeth gleaming, clicking savagely. Feint as he would, he found no opening for a fresh hold without taking another cut from them. Suddenly the beast rushed him, making for its hole. Nimbly he leaped aside and caught its rump as it tried to pass. He held it, but its rush had carried it halfway into the burrow. Another foot meant escape. A tug for life ensued. The rodent had the downhill pull. His sturdy limbs, well spiked with claws, held to the firm soil of the beaten runway into his home. He had the advantage. A powerful dog might well have failed to move him. Lop-ear tried desperately for a fresh hold. He got nothing but the animal's tail. It came away at last in his teeth, so tense was the strain put upon it. With that he had for the time to content himself.

But Lop-ear's hunting blood was up. His single taste of ground-hog flesh had made him ravenous for more. He made his first kill that day, and as his prowess increased, made many more. His earlier kills he ate while still warm; but the first time he had a left-over portion he buried it in sand. Returning to it a couple of days later, he found it in a gamy condition vastly pleasing to his palate. More and more frequently he began to cache his larger kills.

For the month following his release he fared well. Except for wild honey, his diet was a full flesh one; but his immense activity—his restless hunting trips, his tussles with surprised and intercepted ground hogs —kept his digestion good, his muscles tough. His many attempts to stalk a tree grouse—a "partridge," the boy would have called it—or to run down a brown rabbit, gave him additional exercise if nothing more.

With all this blood lust, this killing or going hungry, his cubhood prankishness flickered out like a spent flame. He became utterly wild. Once he scented the schoolward trail of the boy along the crossroad. Moved by vague memories, by a dim longing for something lost, something friendly and kind, he followed it a little way. He soon desisted, swept into a torrent of more primitive desires by the squeaking of a field mouse. As the band of short hairs about his neck, chafed by the collar he had worn in captivity, grew out to normal length, the only sign of his domestic life to remain was his drooping ear, the result of his mauling by the neighbor's terrier.

On that terrier he had his present revenge. In the course of his nightly prowls the scent of roosting poultry often drew him close to a farm building. Once the terrier, discovering him, gave noisy chase. His brush straight out behind, the fox shot off at his highest speed. Never before had a dog pursued him. He took no risk of capture. But as the yapping of the terrier grew fainter with distance he quickly realized his own advantage. He slackened speed, let the dog come on. Again he left him behind. Thus alternately using his speed, or loafing as though to entice his fatuous pursuer on, he led him across many a vain and heated mile, rousing every cur within hearing to bellowing comments on the chase.

To conclude that he had led the terrier this chase in any spirit of frolic or of tantalization would be to misread him. The adult fox is no humorist in intention, whatever he may be in effect. His life is too strenuous, its hazards too imminent, for him to court danger in any spirit of foolhardiness. He keeps just out of reach of a pursuing enemy because that is his way of defeating that enemy. He is a scout; and a scout's business is to know what his enemy is doing—not to lose touch with him. Should that enemy prove too swift, too tireless, then he must resort to other means of evading him than by straightaway flight.

Dogs have a trait, a wolflike trait, which is not wholly lacking in the fox himself. Both will combine for a pursuit; but with this difference, that dogs, like wolves, will

unite in packs, foxes in pairs only. Furthermore, the fox pair is invariably a male and a female, united in that lifelong bond which constitutes a fox mating. In the dog or wolf hunting pack, family is not a factor.

Such a pack, as autumn waned toward the calm and haze of Indian summer, formed among three dogs from the nearest village. Mongrel hounds, their hunting instinct grew most imperious at that season of the year, and because their owners were either too busy or too indifferent to sport to be much afield with a gun they began to hunt on their own account. Singly, in pairs, or all three together, they roamed the countryside, growing bolder with each unpunished foray. Soon, in night raids, they began to terrorize the pastured sheep, running them to exhaustion, finally outlawing themselves by pulling down a victim, cutting its throat to consume its blood, but leaving its carcass unviolated otherwise. Undetected, or at least unidentified, they grew in boldness; and many a meal of mutton did their raids provide for Lop-ear, who was no more averse to carrion than is the average pampered house dog.

But to live cheaply on their killings was not to be Lop-ear's only experience with these marauders. Very naturally, as their prowlings extended, they one night crossed his trail and gave tongue in pursuit. A dog that will run sheep rarely barks when so engaged. As though aware of his outlawry, he preserves the stealthiness of guilt. But the same dog will grow clamorous on the trail of a fox or hare.

In these outlaws Lop-ear was to find trailers of a different caliber from the terrier. They had greater speed, better staying power. He still held the advantage. He could set the pace, could lead them handily; but he could not shake them off. In the first hour of his flight their persistence began to trouble him. To be rid of them he must use means more subtle than flight.

He first tried running along the top of a fallen tree trunk. The trick delayed but did not baffle his pursuers. The revival of their clamor soon told of the chase renewed. Lop-ear felt himself tiring. What next could he do? As he sped through the sparse woods of the hills a lodged tree offered a new possibility. He ran up the sloping trunk as far as the impetus of his speed would carry him, then leaped to one side as broadly as he could from the gained height. By the breadth of that leap his trail was broken.

Soon he paused to test the effect of his ruse. Again the trick had halted the dogs. But among three of them sniffing in widening circles about the point where they had lost the scent, one was not long in picking up the new trail. Soon Lop-ear again heard the malevolent yelps of their renewed coursing. Once more he took to his heels. What could he do now? He was fully aware that it was by his scent he was being trailed, and his scent was something of which he could not be rid. He had recourse to back-tracking. He turned about and retraced his own trail for a distance. Then he leaped to one side and made off at right angles to his former course.

The mongrel hounds came straight on to the point where Lop-ear had turned. There they found themselves at fault. This time no amount of circling, of threshing the underbrush, served to put them again on the trail. From a neighboring hillside the fox kept himself informed of all their futile searchings. This time he had them. Their night's raid had come to naught. With the first streak of dawn they gave up and loped off toward their village homes. Lop-ear made sure of their departure. Then he slept.

The Indian summer lingered. Cool nights brought heavy dews or white frost that made for good hunting. The dogs kept up their raids. On another night they again picked up Lop-ear's trail and gave chase. This time his back-tracking failed. One of the three, perhaps running wide at the time, caught the fresher scent of the true trail, gave tongue along it. Soon all three were hot on Lop-ear's heels.

Again he escaped; but whether it was chance or a clear exercise of reasoning that saved him it would be difficult to decide. Making for higher ground, he found himself on the edge of a gravelly bank with a slope so steep that grass, except in scattered clumps, had not been able to gain a lodging on it. Perhaps it was the fresh chance afforded here for a sidewise leap that decided Lop-ear's course. Perhaps, on the other hand, it was the reasoned conclusion that shifting sand would not hold his scent. Whatever his motive, he leaped from the top of the bank and alighted far down the slope. Clinging to this, he ran along its face. Sand and small stones, disturbed from their poise, dribbled confusingly across his wake.

At the point of his leap the dogs presently halted. In vain they circled, sniffed,

panted. They were hopelessly at fault. Lop-ear had at last found a perfect means of throwing them off his trail. He never forgot it.

Winter approached. The ground hardened. Trees—all but the hemlocks and cedars—lifted naked branches against the thickening scud that to the weatherwise foretold of snow. The migratory birds had long since held their farewell conventions and had departed south. Mice no longer sallied from their nests; ground hogs had holed up for the long sleep. The lean season—his first—had descended upon Lop-ear.

Almost overnight his problems became acute—by no means the problem of keeping warm. His fur had thickened and his brush enlarged to meet that need. Against the cold he had both quilt and comforter. Rather was it the problem of food that tried his wits; and often he knew days of hunger. His nightly trips grew more extended; often they continued throughout the day as well. Had it not been for such half-torpid mice or such wholly torpid bugs and snakes as he could uncover in humus or decaying wood, he might have starved. They were his reliance in extremity, these rodents, reptiles, and insects, the emergency rations of his leanest days.

But days—or rather nights—of full feasting he also enjoyed. Throughout a countryside well stocked with horses, cattle, sheep, and swine, deaths—natural or accidental—from time to time occurred. Dragged to a distance from the farm buildings and left to await burial in the spring, the carcasses so accounted for became his chief hope for full-fed winter days.

Yet at one of these feasts he ran grave risk. Beside the carcass of an aged horse the farmer who had suffered its loss set out a trap. Lop-ear had never before seen one. Never had his mother had opportunity to teach him by her exaggerated horror of one that it was, of all things, most to be shunned; and now, to increase his peril, a sprinkling of snow had obscured whatever warning the man-handled steel might have had for his senses.

But what early training had not done for him a timely example was now to accomplish. On his arrival at this feast on a bitter night in January he found a vixen of his own age before him. She snarled at his approach, and in avoiding her he also avoided the open trap near her. Perhaps because her native caution had been dulled by the ferocity of her appetite, perhaps because of the distraction due to Lop-ear's sharing of her feast—all the dog tribes are greedy in the presence of a rival feeder—she sprang the trap. The agonies of her attempts to release herself, the straining, the frantic attacks of her teeth on the unyielding steel, her final escape by biting off the toes of the imprisoned foot, enabling her to pull it free at a dear price in blood and anguish—all these had their lesson for Lop-ear. That lesson did not prevent him from returning to the spot on other nights; but he carefully avoided the reset trap.

Amid such vicissitudes of fortune his first winter sped for the young fox. Very often in the course of his excursions he came on the smelling posts or other traces of members of his own tribe; and sometimes, as at the feast of horseflesh, he even met one of them. He had no fights with them; for rarely are foxes of vicious temper. Neither did he fraternize with them; for his kind are never gregarious. They pair and maintain an exemplary family life; but they do not associate in packs. Until the mating time should come he went his own way, ignoring his fellows.

That mating time arrived late in February. A young vixen began to utter the shrill cry characteristic of the approach of the pairing fever and Lop-ear sent out his answering note. Bounding over the snowy hillsides, he sought her trail. To find it, to overtake her, proved easy; but to win her demanded much sterner efforts. A rival of his own age had already come up with her. At Lop-ear's approach he was engaged in the most winsome arts of courtship, displaying before the coy female his many perfections of body. He leaped from side to side before her, frisking, flirting his magnificent brush, indulging in eager, wanton antics of extraordinary grace and charm.

With Lop-ear's arrival his pranking abruptly ceased. Hackles erect, fangs bared, he snarled with the utmost ferocity his challenge to battle. Lop-ear as fiercely replied. They approached each other—not head to head, but with a sidewise progress. Each swelled himself, displayed his teeth, uttered the most savage cries. They bore their brushes, bristled to abnormal size, erect above their backs. They darted in, clashed. Each took a cut on neck or shoulder that merely doubled his ferocity.

In fighting, as in the hunt or in flight, the fox is by nature a trickster. So each feinted, leaped away, sought to draw the other into a disadvantage. To crush a forefoot, while saving his own, was the real objective of both. Each gave, each took, much other punishment while striving for that main chance of battle. Lop-ear had all his rival's weight, all his toughness, and something more than his power of muscle. When their bodies met full tilt, it was never his that gave ground. The earlier advantages were clearly his.

But he suffered one handicap that was fatal to his hopes of victory. He lacked that instinctive perfection of defense that comes only of the rough-and-tumble rivalry, the apparently aimless play of growing cubs. In all that play, nature's chief aim appears to be the teaching how best to snatch, how best to evade, that maiming grip of either front foot. Perfect automatism is the result. It can never be learned later in a single fight.

Of this handicap Lop-ear's antagonist took sudden advantage. Gaining the object of many maneuvers, he dashed his brush in Lop-ear's eyes. Surprised, blinded, Lop-ear lost a single pulse-beat in readjusting his vision. By that brief stroke of time the battle went against him. He felt a crushing grip close over his left forefoot. The hold was not kept—the fox is no bulldog—but the damage had been done. Unable to set the foot down, he could not longer dodge, feint, strike, as before. He stuck gamely to the struggle; but his defeat became certain, a matter of time.

Weakened, cut, bleeding, he gave up at last. His rival left him at once, trotting after the indifferent and departed vixen. Lop-ear did not follow them. They would now constitute a family, and each would be faithful to the other for life. An outsider, he limped away. He gained no mate that year, for the pairing season is short and his wounded foot kept him for days in enforced retreat.

The following February he mated with a vixen a year younger than himself. The mating was for life. Until the time came to dig their first burrow they ranged the countryside together. Whatever their fortunes, they never allowed themselves to become widely separated. Each managed to keep aware of the other's whereabouts.

As soon as the spring thaws had exposed the slopes and hilltops enough to provide dry soil for digging, the vixen began to look about for a site for their first den. She chose at last a sunny knoll that commanded a good view of all avenues of approach. The actual digging of the den called for much arduous labor on the part of both. The total length of the system of tunnels they excavated was more than thirty feet. From this they scraped out all the loose earth by way of the first opening. In all, the den had three vents—a main and a secondary entrance about twenty feet apart, and an air-shaft. The central feature of the system was of course the chamber in which the expected cubs were to be reared.

Yet even with all this tunneling complete, the home required an added feature. This was the larder, or storeroom. They hollowed it out near the bend of the main tunnel, about four feet from the chief entrance. In this was space for a pullet or two, a woodchuck, a suckling lamb, or such other reserves of meat as good hunting should provide; for during the first weeks of her motherhood the vixen would never leave her cubs to hunt. Lop-ear must provide for both.

Their first litter, born early in April, was a litter of only five. Larger families they were to rear in later and maturer years, but never one that gave them intenser pride, more consuming solicitude. All blind at birth, the cubs had more the appearance of pure Maltese kittens than of young red foxes. About the ninth day their eyes opened to the obscurity of the living chamber. Not until their fourth week were they allowed to venture forth into direct sunlight. By nature night hunters, they saw well whether in the semidarkness of the underground tunnels or the dazzling glare of the knollside, at once their playground and their school.

The years—full years, with danger and want often threatening—passed one by one for Lop-ear. Six times his various dens had housed a family of cubs. Six times he had proved himself a good father, a tireless provider, a shrewd guardian for his prankish families. Then on a day in the last week of the year he wakened suddenly from his morning nap. Somewhere along the sand hills a string of sleigh bells was faintly tinkling—not rhythmically, as when borne by a trotting horse, but jerkily, unevenly. Soon after came a gunshot. His vixen never re-

turned to him. He found her trail in the snow, but had not followed it long before it became obscured by the footprints of two men.

Something remotely familiar, something hauntingly genial about the smaller of these tracks led him in memory back to the days of his captivity. They were the tracks of the boy, once his beloved young master, now grown to be a young man, a young man returned from college for his Christmas holidays. But something inimical as well, something always associated for Lop-ear with terror and suffering, no less disturbed him with every testing of the companion trail. Its sideling footprints were surely those of his old enemy, Sol Hazen, the neighborhood character who, in the admiring phrase of the boy, "knew all about foxes and birds and fish and everything." He it was who had torn Lop-ear as a puppy from his first home; and he it was who later, after his mauling by the neighbor boy's terrier, had clipped and cauterized his mangled ear. What fresh evil were those hated feet now bearing into his life?

The two trails parted presently. That of the boy made a wide detour. The man's kept on along the vixen's trail. Nothing more could Lop-ear learn of her, nor of what bearing those sinister trails had had upon her end.

Another year passed, a year of lonely ease for the widowed fox. He had not mated again, but lived a solitary. The anniversary of his vixen's disappearance found him at sunup returning to his hills after a long night of hunting. Some snow had fallen an hour before, but the day broke clear and frosty. Arrived on familiar ground, he looked about for a place to sleep. As usual, he sought no overhanging shelter, either from the elements or from view. His quick choice fell on a drift of snow through which a dwarf cedar thrust up a diminished cone of tapering boughs. It broke the contour of the drift, made his own figure inconspicuous.

The making of his bed took little time, gave him but slight concern. He merely turned around once or twice on clustered feet and curled himself into a ball. His four feet and his nose he infolded with his ample brush. Except for his one pointed ear he looked like a smooth mound of reddish-yellow fur—an outcropping bowlder, a bunch of dry grass. Gradually by the mere weight and warmth of his body he sank into the snow. The sharp December frost troubled him not at all. For hours he slept soundly.

Suddenly wide awake, he sprang up and slipped around the cedar. The distant tinkling of a string of bells—jerkily, unevenly borne—had startled him. Slowly that sound of evil memory came nearer and nearer. He retreated farther, seeking cover from which to gather information about this mysterious intruder.

The bearer of the sleigh bells, when he came into view, proved to be a man tall and angular of figure. His gait, whenever he examined closely the ground before him, became the peculiar, high-stepping, sidewise progression of the man afflicted with a pronounced squint. He wore no overcoat, but was well muffled in cap, scarf, and mittens. He carried no weapon whatever. Slung bandolierwise over his right shoulder an ordinary string of sleigh bells depended.

Without a sign of haste or eagerness he came on until he reached the cuplike depression in the snow that had been Lop-ear's bed. Over this he stooped. With some care he examined it, testing its surface with a bared hand. Then he stood erect and began to shake the bells violently. Through the clear, frosty air came soon an answering halloo from a point which might have been a mile beyond Lop-ear's place of observation.

After that the man resumed his leisurely march, following the easily identified course of Lop-ear's fresh trail. From this approach the fox retreated, but at no panic speed. Here was danger, but not such as constrained him to immediate flight. As fast as the man came on he would retire; but no faster. With trailing brush he trotted on to another lookout station. There he sat down to observe his foe.

Steadily that foe came on. Except for an occasional squinting glance at the clearly visible trail, he gave no sign of being in pursuit of anything. The ground was rough and wooded, but easily traversed; for the larger and more merchantable trees had long before been cleared away, leaving many little communicating glades that made the going easy.

Always, as the man came on, the bells kept sounding drowsily; but from time to time he waked them into livelier voice by a sharp jerk of his mittened hand. Although an answering halloo had come to the first

of these bursts of clangor, not even an echo from the hills rewarded the later ones. Still at intervals the man repeated them, signaling by means of them to a previously posted confederate, keeping him informed of the progress and direction of the crawling chase.

The truth is that the hunters were playing with sure instinct on Lop-ear's one weakness. Sol Hazen, however flattered by the boy's admiring tribute that he knew all about foxes, at least was well aware of this weakness. He knew that no fox will flee outright from an enemy slower than himself, but, scouting as he retires, will adapt the speed of his retreat to that of the pursuit.

Further, and very curiously, they were but turning one of his own favorite ruses against himself, subjecting him to the identical style of hunting which he and his vixen had for years employed on their own behalf. How often had he chased a fleet rabbit, not with any hope of catching it himself, but with fair prospects of driving it into the waiting jaws of his crouching mate! With what a show of candor and preoccupation had he skirted a patch of wild strawberries in which a flock of partridges were feeding! How concerned with scratching himself he had managed to seem, or with rolling on his back—anything to avoid startling them into taking wing before he had inched them within leaping distance of his partner's ambush! Even the wily and sentinel-posting crow had fallen a victim to that strategy.

Never before had Lop-ear been thus pursued. Here was no haste, no shouting, no clamor of dogs. Yet pursuit he clearly realized it to be. Beneath the slow, unyielding pressure of it he began to grow uneasy. He tried some of his old tricks. He broke his trail by a side leap from a sloping tree. The pursuit did not even falter there. He tried back-tracking, setting each foot carefully down in a footprint already made. This scheme delayed, but did not baffle a pursuer who worked entirely by sight. The low and not unmusical chiming of the bells began to have a fascination of terror for him, like the voice of some foreordained fate not by any means to be avoided. It came on with a progress that was as sure as it was unhurried.

In this extremity he recalled the steep sand bank at which he had eluded the village curs. Any bare ground that would not retain his tracks might now serve his purpose. He turned his steps toward it, not in any panic, not at a faster pace, but only as the imminence of the lingering chase compelled him to go on.

At the point where he had changed his course the man stopped to agitate his bells more briskly. Then he came on as before, satisfied, it would seem, that his confederate would understand his signal and take up a new position accordingly.

At the edge of a small glade, carpeted only with snow, Lop-ear a while later paused to reconnoiter his line of retreat. Along the farther side of the glade lay a great rotting log. On its upper surface it had a large knot with a bare limb protruding from it. Not a sound nor a move in that direction gave the fox cause for suspicion. Behind him the hated tinkling of the bells grew closer. Picking his way with dainty feet, he advanced into the center of the clearing. There, with one graceful forefoot arrested in the act of advancing, he froze in an attitude of attention. Subtly he felt the warning of some new danger. With every sense alert he scanned the ground in front.

Suddenly the false limb moved. Flame spurted from the end of it. A deafening report sounded. Scuttling to one side into the woods, Lop-ear fled unscathed, as he had once fled from the shot with which the boy had set him free.

The large knot detached itself from the log, resolved itself into the head of a man—a very young man with college colors just visible in the band of his hat. He rose and stepped over the log. Then he sat down on it, the gun barrel leaning in the crook of his arm. He rested his elbows on his knees, sank his head into his hands.

In that attitude the man with the sleigh bells presently found him. He looked about for the body of the slain fox. Puzzled, he noted the place of the young man's ambush, measured its distance from the point at which the fox had stood still. An easy shot.

"Missed him!" he grunted disgustedly.

"Uh-huh," admitted the young man, half ashamed. "I couldn't do it, Sol. Guess who it was, can't you?"

The man merely grunted again.

"Lop-ear," murmured the boy to himself, "good little old Lop-ear!"

The Body of Blynn Anderson

By Hubbard Hutchinson,

Author of "Chanting Wheels," and other stories

As sweet oil may clog an exquisite piece of machinery, so did a woman destroy in Kensington that which might have revealed all the mysteries of the universe

A DRAB, remorseless kind of day, with the wind whipping the trees into shuddering phantoms against a leaden sky to the accompaniment of a subdued staccato of rain tinkling from the window and the damp reek of sodden leaves seeping into the room.

I had come to view an apartment that I contemplated renting. The rooms were good, the lighting excellent, but the dull light of the storm-filled sky, the bare walls, the dusty paneling, all combined to produce an impression of gloom that my common sense refused to dispel. One chair, abandoned by the former occupants, enhanced the forlornness of the place, a padded desk chair, patterned with scratches and old and worn, but human with use.

I strayed into one of the bedrooms and opened a closet door. In one corner lay a heap of old newspapers. I poked them with my stick.

Then I came upon something that was not newspapers, and dragged it into the light.

It appeared to be a fragment of an irregular diary; I turned over the pages and observed entries of varying length and appearance. Curiosity overcoming a latent protesting of honor I dragged the chair to the window, sat down and began to read. The manuscript began abruptly; the front pages had been torn away. The entries were separated, but not dated, and ran as follows.

"—— newest phase of the subject puzzles me greatly. That the mind and soul are inseparable has long been clear to me, but I had never realized that they, or rather it, could be released and persist as a coexistent entity, separate from the body. I must investigate further.

* * * * * * *

"Blynn and I had a long talk to-night and I tried to interest him in the recent discoveries that had so excited me. He came in with a gust of cool night air, and the long stride that I envy and admire and sometimes think I hate. He tossed off hat and coat and lit a cigarette and began one of those dreadful tuneless things on the piano that are merely rhythmic noise.

"I am at a loss to know, sometimes, why I stay with him. I explained what I had found—how the proving of it would be a stride in modern psychology to which previous advance would be like the aimless toddlings of a young kitten. He received it all in silence, made an exclamatory noise at the end, and after a polite question or two—prompted, I am sure, by nothing but affection for me—puffed on profoundly at his cigarette. Then he turned rather guiltily to the sporting section, the perusal of which I had interrupted.

"Perhaps it is as well that we are so utterly different. He brings me down to earth with refreshing regularity and is very kind; I have a feeling that my own precarious existence is dependent on him, that my faint vitality is but a flickering, pallid shadow of his splendid strength. The last time I tried to go out and fell and he helped me home, it seemed to me that all the small power I possessed lay in the tense arms that held me.

"Oh, that a body like that should not be *doing!* With half that elastic vitality I could move—yes, and *influence* the world. Think of a freed, intelligent mind, capable of almost instant projection into space—distance annihilated—the very universe opened—and all the blazing mysteries of the stars brought near.

"But always there is exhaustion, illness, long white nights of anguish; and fear that time will not be given me to complete my work.

* * * * * * *

"It is months since I have written; it seemed that I would never write again. I

had completed my experimenting and made sure of the thing that I was after; all that remained was the stupendous test of the perfected theory—the projection of the personality, or soul. But then came fever, a gray, misty time, with Blynn's face appearing out of red clouds of delirium. I am tactfully informed that another such attack will end things.

"If I could be only really well, for a whole week! I think I almost loathed Blynn yesterday. I had been working. He came in late, in one of his playful moods and stretched out on the couch, a big contented animal fairly radiating vitality. Presently he began to talk about the girl that he is interested in, whom he has mentioned occasionally. He is going to bring her here, to see me. She is very beautiful, he tells me. I mentioned again what I have been doing, this time with some effect.

" 'Do you really mean that you can turn the mind loose and let it go running 'round the world while you are asleep?' he demanded.

" 'Roughly, yes,' I replied.

" 'And it can go outside the world, into space?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Well, why don't you go?'

"I tried to explain that, while the act of freeing the personality was perfectly possible to me, to send it forth required a dynamic force of physical well-being that I lacked.

"Then he demanded that I should 'send' him. I could not tell him that it demanded a mind sensitive and delicate, unbound, as far as possible, by earthly ties, an intellect keen, tempered, awake—an instrument as perfect as his body. I merely said that it would not do.

" 'Well,' he remarked, 'it's too bad we can't combine things.'

"I did not think about it at the time, but later the full portent of what he said flooded quite suddenly into my mind; I sought to banish the idea, but an insidious small voice whispered, 'With his body and your mind; you could accomplish anything! You could free your own self. With that immense reserve of strength you could traverse space. The mystery of gravitation, the secret of the atoms, nothing would be closed to you. Among men you would be a mental king. Your achievement would be limitless with your three elements of perfection—your unsurpassed mind, no longer hampered by illness; the fine body to house it, and your own great secret—the release of the personality. Greatness; power; honor——'

"I have tried not to listen. It is absurd, all that.

* * * * * * *

"Blynn brought the girl to the apartment yesterday. I did not want to see her—I knew the sudden concealed light of pity that would flash into her eyes at sight of my deformity.

"But when she began to speak, I was speechless. A mind—brilliant, volatile; a quaint fancy of phrase—sparkling out in sunny humor. And then her chance remarks—a light familiar touch with literature and art, an exquisite appreciation of beauty! Blynn left us for an hour or two. Her tender look of pity never quite vanished; wonder, too, shone in her eyes. We talked of books and of music and of all the fine things that made life something besides one long pain to me. Her love of perfection revealed to me unconsciously the solution of a growing mystery—her attachment for Blynn. His sheer beauty drew her; the balanced strength of his poised shoulders, the fineness of his face.

"I wondered if she felt the lack of common ground. We were disagreeing over Blake.

" 'What does Blynn think about it?' I ventured.

"She smiled whimsically. 'Oh, Blynn—he'd stare like an old owl if I asked him, and mutter "rot" and want me to sing "The Rosary" for him.'

"For an instant I caught a grave, an almost fleeting shadow on her face; then the door opened and her eyes danced like flames as Blynn came toward her.

" 'I must fly,' she exclaimed. 'I'll be here again. And you'll tell me more about yourself, won't you, Mr. Kensington, and not let me gabble like a magpie on a pole?'

"She is very—different. I wonder——

* * * * * * *

"I will not do it; it is absurd, wild. Something within me says, 'It is your duty. You can lead humanity high and far. What is one individual to such an end? His mind, his entity is nothing. Take his strength, and go onward to the heights meant for you.'

"And, of course, if I did, the world would think that it was he who had changed,

suddenly, developed; and I, Henry Kensington, the obscure hunchback, would drop mercifully into oblivion.

"Neither of us have families——"

Here about a page of the manuscript had been blotted out. I looked around, to be sure that I was still awake. Here, in this very room, had dwelt a genius, perhaps a madman. Certainly the wild screed that I held was not the production of a totally sane mind.

With my nerves tingling with excitement, I hitched my chair closer to the window and read on. A portion of the censored entry was legible.

"——fear I know not what! Suppose I should not be able to get back, once I had released myself! Suppose both Blynn's personality and my own lodged in the same body, his or mine? Oh, I am driven, in all this, by something outside myself! I had a frightful dream last night. Blynn stood before me, torn and bloody and naked, and with one dripping finger he wrote on my forehead the word Murderer. The letters burned into the flesh! Then the same voice said, 'You are but fulfilling your destiny. What is one man to the future of the race?' But I fear——"

Here occurred a gap of two or three pages in the manuscript; pages filled with strange wavering lines and curves, as if a child had played with the pen.

Then the writing began again, but startlingly changed. The first hand had been fine, slender, small, with low letters and short loops—the second was powerful, original, eccentric, but seemed to bear a strange resemblance, in spite of this, to the first script. The first sentences were traced with evident care and slowness, but later on the writer had seemingly attained top speed with his pen, as he got fairly back into the inditing of his strange tale.

"I hardly know how to begin the writing of what I must set down—yes, must, because my spirit will not let me rest until all is plain before me, just as it happened. Perhaps I can face my future better if this thing is clear.

"As I write I look down and see Blynn's hand tracing the letters across the page—and I feel that it must be all a mad dream and that I will soon awake—again in the hospital. I will try to be plain and truthful.

"Once I was resolved, all was easy. I made the sleeping drug and those other preparations which I may not yet reveal. Blynn came in about six.

" 'Hallo!' he cried, unfolding the evening paper. 'It's a great afternoon—you ought to get out more, Harry; it would do you good.' This was bromidic advice which I would gladly enough have followed had it been possible.

" 'Where have you been?' I asked.

" 'Oh, for a ride in the park. I boxed all morning at the Athletic Club, and felt stuffy inside. The air's bully.'

"I regarded him in silence. Spring was in the air; one felt the afterglow of warmth and smelled thin, suspended perfumes that heralded the return of the sun to the north. The windows were open. Blynn pulled off coat and vest and settled comfortably to read the evening paper, one fumbling, bronzed hand groping for matches where his coat pocket should have been.

" 'When,' I said presently, with something of bitterness, 'are you going to do something?' He laughed. 'Why should I?' he replied. 'I don't have to.' He stood up, and stretched his arms wide.

"It was his words and pose, I think, that determined me. Glorious strength, physical perfection—and utter lack of will, initiative or purpose.

"He mentioned bringing Marian to the apartment again——

"Somehow, I got the powder into his coffee. He raised the cup, then stared across the table at me.

" 'You look so damned queer,' he said. 'What is it?' I muttered something about head. My heart was thumping so that I feared he would hear it. After dinner I chattered on for what seemed ages until, watching, I saw the first signs of the sleep potion. Presently Blynn blinked drowsily.

" 'I guess I'll turn in, Harry,' he said at last. 'Good night.'

"I waited for half an hour, then went to his bedroom and groped for the light. I knew he would not awaken now. His face was a little flushed and his chest heaving softly with big deep breaths. I went to work at once. Of course it was at first a matter of pure hypnosis; then—which was the greater thing—I must bring into play the

directive force. He yielded to hypnosis surprisingly easy.

"For a long moment I looked down at him, with mingled emotions of resentment, envy, fear—and with the ten-year-old tenderness of warm and intimate friendship tugging at me. 'Blynn,' I whispered, shaking his shoulder. 'Blynn——'

"Then, cursing my own weakness, I hurried on with my preparations. I seated myself in a chair and swallowed the sleep potion. I set going, mentally, certain things. Then I felt the customary numbness creep up, up, until I knew myself unable to move.

"And, too late, came remorse. I saw in one awful moment that I would not only steal Blynn's body, but that I might even annihilate his very soul. I struggled to rouse myself, vainly.

"When I fully perceived the futility of regret, there came a revulsion of feeling and, quite coldly, I settled my mind to direct. The familiar numbness grew; my last waking consciousness I fixed upon Blynn.

"I can scarcely describe my waking; it seemed that I floated in an immense void, soundless, sightless, and that gradually, slowly, I drew down, down until my state was the dim awareness that lies between sleep and waking.

"But first of all, before anything, came a feeling that I had never experienced—as if I were buoyed up by some tremendous force; I felt my very mind tingling with energy and power; my thoughts moved like lightning. Then slowly full consciousness returned and with it the growing sense, immense and unaccountable, of unlimited strength. A glowing, throbbing something coursed through me; I opened my eyes and my gaze encountered the ceiling. I found I was lying flat on my back in bed.

"'I went to sleep in the chair,' I murmured, and the movements of lips and throat seemed strange to me. 'How could I get in——'

"And then came realization of what had occurred. I turned and looked at the chair.

"Lying asleep, his head back and his hands folded, lay a man in whose broad forehead and sensitive features I recognized —myself, the Kensington that was. Long I gazed—so fixedly that the room grew black and only the sleeping face showed in a whirl of bright stars. The last mists of my deep sleep cleared away and I knew that I had succeeded.

"I rose from the bed, and looked down at myself, at the long, muscular limbs, at the strong hands that I had known as Blynn's. I moved the right arm, and with the left hand felt with a thrill of exultation the steely elastic muscles gliding under the satiny skin.

"Suddenly I arose and with long, swift strides moved into the hall and then flashed on the lights in the library. It seemed that I must do something; I couldn't merely rest, quiescent; I raised my hand to my head; a similar movement across the room struck me still. I crossed and stood before the big cheval glass.

"I looked at myself with all the naïve joy of a child with a new plaything; and then, conscious of a decided effort, I met my own eyes.

"An indescribable feeling of awe came over me; wonder and fear at what I had done and at what I saw. The eyes, dark, luminous, gray, were Blynn's, yet—I knew it was myself looking out of them.

"For some time I stared, fascinated, into the eyes in the mirror. A slight sound from Blynn's room aroused me. Hardly knowing why, I slipped into the adjoining room and closed the door—all but a slight crack, through which to listen.

"In the intense stillness I heard a faint sigh, then a slight stirring and a smothered kind of groan, followed by a sudden movement and the patter of steps down the hall and into the library.

"Then my heart skipped suddenly, for I heard my own voice, yet the intonation was Blynn's, and terror—terror of something fearful and unearthly—was in its tones.

"'Good God!' he murmured, over and over. 'What is it—what is it—what is it?'

"I heard him move across the room to the mirror. Then followed dead silence, finally broken by a low moan and the crash of a falling body.

"I rushed out and picked him up, then drew back before the terror, almost the insanity, stamped upon the unconscious face. I carried him into his own room, procured water, and bathed his forehead and temples. I was quite calm, and awaited with intense curiosity the awakening of this hybrid, pitiful creature. Presently his eyes opened, and as soon as their gaze encountered my face he screamed and covered his face with his hands. I gently drew them down.

"'It's all right, Blynn,' I said quietly,

and at the sound of Blynn's low voice from my own lips I started. 'It's all right.'

" 'What——' he muttered hoarsely. 'For God's sake, what——'

"I stopped him and quietly, simply, told him what had occurred. It is useless to recount the scene that followed. He cursed me in a high, dreadful voice; he struggled, but I held him as a child might hold a puppy. He threatened, quite absurdly, to call in the police, until I showed him that they would merely carry him to the nearest insane asylum. At last he lay silent, panting. I turned to go, and he seized my hand.

" 'Will it be—always?'

"The utter despair, the oldness of his tone cut me, and I bent toward him quickly. 'No,' I replied. I did not know if I spoke the truth but I hated the sight of suffering. 'Just until I can do this great thing that I am trying for. I shall try to release the personality to-night. Don't you see, Blynn, that you are helping, too; that the triumph will be for us both?'

"He was still silent. I watched him, with queer thoughts mingling in my mind—watched myself lying there in the half light of dawn. Infinite pity of him came to me, a strange feeling, partly sorrow for my friend with a fate more fathomless than death, partly sadness for myself as the rightful inhabitant of so poor a dwelling, with its pain and illness, its weakness and suffering.

"I turned and went out, closing the door and locking it after me. Hearing nothing, I threw myself down in one of Blynn's big chairs and quite unconsciously found myself lighting one of his cigarettes. This opened a whole new train of thought—as to what extent Blynn's personal habits had remained with his body. I lit the cigarette and enjoyed the novel sensation of smoking.

"The more I thought about what had happened the more amazed I became at my own apparent coldness. I had idolized Blynn from of old, and yet I could see him endure all the agonies of mind that he had suffered a few moments since with no stronger emotion than pity and something very like disgust. Could it be, I thought to myself, that I had cared for nothing but his superficial charm, his boyish cleanness and superb strength, and that the real entity, the real soul of the man, was so negligible that now, no longer incased in a vessel of bronze and alabaster, its feeble rays were quite obscure?

"Once more I stood before myself in the mirror, and there was no vanity in my frank admiration of the even, handsome features, the deep gray eyes, the superb, towering physique reflected back at me. I stretched myself to my full height and laughed aloud in pure joy at the splendid wealth of strength within me—I who had never known a well day in my life.

"I turned to my work, and began to write. My thoughts fairly flew. I wrote steadily until I was roused by Gram's announcement of breakfast. I perceived that the dawn had deepened into broad day and heard eight booming from the clock in the dining room.

"I heard, too, the knob of Blynn's door rattle.

"Gram looked at me inquiringly. He was coming out of the dining room, and stopped at the sound.

" 'Mr. Kensington, sir; he seems to be in your room, sir. Shall I——'

" 'No. I——' I hesitated. 'Gram, come here.' I lowered my voice. 'Mr. Kensington has had a bad attack of headache, Gram, and——' I tapped my forehead.

" 'Oh, sir,' with a troubled glance toward the door.

" 'Yes, and I am going to keep an eye on him to-day. You know he suffers a great deal and is often beside himself with pain.' God knows I spoke the truth. 'Get a tray and I'll take his breakfast in to him myself.'

"But he refused to touch food, and when I looked in again he had fallen asleep.

"All morning I worked. It is now five in the evening. I wrote till noon; and after lunch I went out for a long walk, wandering I knew not where. I remember getting outside of town and climbing tall hills; and once, as panting from a run down a wooded path I stooped over a spring, my image startled me. For the first time in my life I moved and exercised for the pure love of it and again and again drove the blood pounding into my temples in a sudden burst of speed.

"To-night I am going to perform the great experiment. There is something sublime and, to me, a little terrifying in what I contemplate. Perhaps, after all, this thing—such power—almost omniscience—was never meant for man. Well, I shall try at least. My hand—Blynn's hand—is tired from this

long writing. I wonder what I will have to tell, of wonder and of mystery, when I take up the pen again."

Here followed several pages almost illegible, written and crossed out, that I turned over hastily. My eye caught at a word or phrase here and there; I saw "sin," and again "utterly beyond my control" and one whole sentence—"Paganism, with its stimulation of the sense, is essentially the creed of youth and strength and selfishness." Then more erasures, and finally the writing trailed out of what seemed to have been a philosophical quagmire, and became legible. It appeared to me that I could detect certain changes in it; the strokes were less crisp, and the style had lost something of its eccentric beauty.

The writing continued as given below.

"——and though I have done nothing wrong, in the actual sense of the word, I have been weak, miserably weak! Oh, that I might have gone on that night! A fortnight ago? It seems years. But would that I had gone on and tried my great undertaking!

"When the note came, I was puzzled; then I remembered—a bright afternoon earlier in the year and the girl whom Blynn had brought up to the apartment. I remembered how beautiful she was and how well she had talked; but most of all I remembered how her eyes had lighted when Blynn came into the room. The note is before me. It ends:

"—— and it has been a perfect age since you have been here, or called, or even telephoned—three whole days. Do come over this evening and I will give you things to eat and you can tell me all about the new horse. Affectionately,
M.

"At first I merely smiled and read the note over several times. Then the thought came to me: why shouldn't I go? She would think I was Blynn; I was, to all the world. It would be amusing, novel. I could try the great experiment the next night. So I slipped into Blynn's coat and went out, taking the address from the heading of the note paper.

"I had to be very careful, I thought, for I feared, with great absurdity, that she, that every one, would know what had happened. I was admitted by a maid, who grinned in recognition, twitched stick, hat, and coat from me, and murmured, 'Miss Mah'n'll be raht down, suh.'

"I strolled about, examining the pictures and came to an abrupt halt before an exquisite Whistler etching. I heard a light step and turning saw Marian crossing the room with both hands held out to me.

" 'Well, truant,' she exclaimed, 'what have you to say for——' She stopped abruptly, looking straight into my eyes. I had taken the outstretched hands and still held them. I felt the blood mounting to my forehead.

" 'What is it?' I managed.

" 'Why—nothing—but—I guess——' She seemed entirely bewildered, then laughed and hooking an arm through mine drew me into another room where a log fire blazed up and threw dancing shadows upon a dark wainscoating—a fire purely decorative, for the stamp of spring was in the air.

" 'You looked so very solemn,' she said. 'And why were you inspecting that Whistler—with the sporting section all laid out and ready?'

"The evening sped. Several times I caught a puzzled expression on her face, and checked myself once, with a confused reference to the benign influence of 'Kensington,' in the midst of a heated dissertation upon George Moore.

"And when, after midnight, I arose to go, she walked to the door with me, one hand clasped in mine in such a way as to pull my arm over her white shoulders. I took my coat and stick and stepped into the dim vestibule, my pulses beating strangely high and a warmth singing through my whole frame. She stood, playing with my hat, refusing to give it up. I seized it, drew it toward me; she followed, still holding on, till she stood close beside me, looking up with shining eyes, her hair a pale cloud of poignant incense——

"After that the days, somehow, piled one above the other, so that I did not know what hour was passing. We were together always. The very next afternoon we had a long, long walk, out past the same spring that had startled me with my own face—for I was beginning to think of it as mine—beneath quiet, cool shades where green sunshine filtered through a thin mist of new leaves, tremulous and waxy, and strange dull-white blossoms swayed out from the mold of last year's leaves, and through the air, in a lacy undercurrent of sound, ran the bubblings and contented little murmurings of a thousand glass-

like threads of water that wound among the roots and disappeared into the black earth.

"So the days passed.

"And Blynn? He was sunk in an apathy of sleep and sullen dreaming, scarce leaving his room, never even trying to stray from the apartment, walking with slow steps about the place. I never glanced up, when home, without a catch of the breath at seeing my own stooped body moving with its accustomed feebleness, but with an infinitesimal something—a movement of the bent shoulders—that suggested the Blynn shut up somewhere within. He scarcely spoke, neither anger nor fear were in him. The first horror, passing, had left a dull listlessness that never disappeared. And then, as the happy, glowing, wonderful days grew into one another, I ceased to notice him, a gray shadow shuffling by in the gloom.

"My work forgotten—I moved in an exquisite dream. The days vanished and it seemed that a whole lifetime of development and awakening, of adolescence and knowledge, was fused into the shining crucible of their short period.

"Then—to-night.

"I walked home through the silence, my footsteps echoing upon the deserted street, the soft warmth of the night wind upon my wrists and forehead.

"When I reached my room I snatched her picture from the desk and in doing so knocked a pile of papers thudding to the floor. The top sheets sailed off in long graceful curves and settled falconlike to rest upon the rug.

"I looked from the eyes in the picture to the papers, the manuscript of my book, and suddenly the golden magic of the preceding days dropped from me and I thought of my work, my high purpose, of all that I had forgotten. In a dazed sort of way I set down the picture and collected the papers. As I glanced over the final sentences, it did not appear that I could have written them.

"With something akin to terror, I resolved now, with no further delay, to carry out my great experiment. I made all preparations.

"With tremendous effort I concentrated my mind to induce the rigid sleep of self-hypnosis, the first step. Previously a few moments would have sufficed to enable me to get entirely under the influence. Now repeated efforts failed and it was only after work so intense that my whole frame trembled that I felt the old numbness creeping up and knew that I had succeeded; I saw the point of light grow bigger until it seemed to fill all space; once more I had the familiar feeling of drifting, drifting, toward some mental precipice.

"But—that was all.

"I tried, with amazement and the first stirrings of fear, to go on to do the delicate, sublime thing that it had been given me to discover—to release the conscious mind once more from the inclosing flesh. But something had happened. Gone the delicate mental poise; gone the clarity of vision and all the tempered keenness of intellect—it was as if an exquisite bit of machinery were clogged and gummed with sweet oil, and responded slowly and heavily, or not at all, to the controller.

"And yet, maddeningly, I felt the immense, vibrating force, the physical vitality that I had always lacked, working back of me; a vast reservoir of force to send and project and command the roving spirit—Blynn's strength, my stolen glory.

"What anguish I endured, none know but him to whom all wisdom, the secrets of the stars, have been shown, and denied. For a long, long time I struggled with myself, and when I awoke I felt for the first time since my change, weakness. I staggered to my feet and glimpsed a drawn white countenance in the mirror.

"I had to write, to quiet myself. I have sat here with the picture's sweet eyes looking at me, with the fragments of my book about me, and thought until I grew sick and afraid of myself—until——"

Here came upon the page a long splutter of the pen, a blot, and distinctly black upon the page, several thumb prints below the smeared ink.

Followed the strangest part of all. For the writing continued at once, upon the bottom of the blot. But—it was the writing that had started the manuscript, the same slender, scholar's hand, but traced slowly, with evident effort. My eyes quickly ran over the last pages.

"I have not long left, and it is to this book I turn, now that all is over, as to the sharer of my secret thoughts.

"In the stillness of the night, as I sat writing, not three hours ago, I heard a faint rattle and jumped aside in time to see a

flickering gleam of light and to feel the air hum by my shoulder as a great sword from Blynn's Indian arms collection, hanging upon the wall, bit into the back of the chair where I had been sitting.

"It was all over and done very soon—I had him by the throat, struggling silently in a last endeavor against me as I snatched the sword away and flung it across the room.

"Yet in the fierceness of the short contest my mind worked like fire. I saw the impossibility of going on like this, of living in constant watchfulness of the strange, broken nonentity that remained of my former friend. And so, quite deliberately, my fingers tightened, tightened about the throat, until the grip on my sleeve relaxed and the furious arms grew still.

"Then, awfully, suddenly, blackness rose before me. I fell. Everything went out.

"With awakening came first a consciousness of weight upon my right arm; then pain, familiar pain, and faintness. I opened my eyes, which turned instinctively toward the weight on my arm. Lying on his side upon it, his hands at his throat as if to loosen his collar, lay the body of him who had been Blynn Anderson. In a sort of dull dream I turned him so that the light fell upon his face as he lay, very tall and still, and as fine and splendid in death as he had been in life. And I knew then how much friend he had been, and how little all else counted, the knowledge and power I sought, the high destiny I had failed in.

"I know, through a flaming veil of pain, that the last chapter is being written. Even now the darkness draws nearer and nearer about me. The lamp at my desk burns low and smoky and the first dim prescience of day is creeping through the curtain, in pale struggle with its orange gleam. The shadows swim in and out—Blynn, hot-eyed and tall, and Marian—her arms stretched out—to—which of us? My vision is too clouded to see——"

A continuous rapping on the door brought me finally to my feet, the manuscript in my hand, and I realized that I had been staring out into the darkness that had fallen I don't know when. At the door stood one of the porters who had shown me up. I thrust the diary behind me.

He inquired whether I liked the apartment or not. I did not reply at once.

"Who had it before?" I asked abruptly. The man started and looked up.

"Er, two gentlemen, sir."

"Why did they leave?"

"Why, you see, sir——" The fellow was obviously embarrassed, and facial contortions showed the inward fomenting of a lie. I was too excited to brook delay.

"Come, come," I said. "I know all about it. How long ago did they die?" I was taking a long chance.

The man glanced shrewdly at me and shrugged his shoulders. I pressed a coin into his gaping hand, and he became voluble.

"It was very queer, sir, and we don't like to speak of it, sir. But seeing as you knows, anyhow—they was both found dead, sir, of a morning, the big un stretched out on the floor, an' the little chap, Doctor Kensington, all of a heap beside him. They was very good friends, sir."

"And the cause was——"

"Yes, sir. The coroner said as Mr. Anderson had had a sudden attack of heart, sir, and Doctor Kensington, coming in and finding him so, the shock was too much for him, as he was always ailing and was weak-hearted himself, and had been worse and the least bit queer for the last two weeks. So it took him all of a heap, sir."

I had slowly backed until I came to the chair. The porter had flashed on the lights at his entrance.

In the back of the chair I saw a deep, clean cut, its edges a firm and white V of wood, pressed back by the force of a terrific blow.

ADVENTUROUS CAMERON

RALPH CAMERON, the new United States senator from Arizona, used to be a miner. Before that he was in the fishing industry off the New England coast. One night his boat was wrecked and he and another sailor lashed themselves to a spar, floating about in the icy waters until help should come. When it did come, his companion was frozen to death.

A Chat With You

GETTING out a magazine is like giving a show and not being able to see the audience. We get lots of letters, but in proportion to the people who read the magazine their number is negligible. Applause, calls of approval, even an occasional catcall may come across the blinding footlights, but the audience remains unseen.

"The man who writes 'A Chat With You' is an egoist," writes J. B. Shewan. "Otherwise the magazine is all right. What we want is more Western stories."

And this from D. Robbins of Bradshaw, Texas:

"I want you to know how very much I like your 'Chat' and 'Caught in the Net.' THE POPULAR would mean little to me without these departments."

Here's another from John H. Johnston of Chicago:

"Have one of your writers give us a real Western adventure novel, rustlers, two-gun men and all that sort of thing. What I like in your magazine is the Western stuff."

And listen to the words of J. B. McMurray of Point Edward, Ontario:

"I place my mitt in yours for the long-story stuff and will give you a clap if you cut out the woolly West yarns, as I have suffered indigestion from these cowboys shooting the cow's husband so often. Give us something about a big mail robbery or croaking off a millionaire."

Still another gentleman—we know that he buys the magazine but we don't know whether he's a reader or not— commends our tailpieces to stories but says nothing about the stories. Does he buy the magazine just to look at these ornamentations?

"The decoration as tailpiece on page 154 is a very handsome thing," he says. "Whoever made it should be sincerely congratulated."

The congratulating has already been attended to.

* *

WE have formed a general opinion of what you look like. Imagination abhors a vacuum just as much as nature does, and so we have imagined you as you no doubt are. The trouble with you is that you keep changing all the time.

Sometimes you are twenty-two years of age, tall and slim, just out of college, with a soft collar and a rough suit and callous spots on the hands from playing tennis. As we look at you, you become suddenly shorter and stouter, your hair gets thin on top, there is a cigar instead of a cigarette in your mouth, and an expert can see that you have not played tennis in some time but that you play golf twice a week and get round in the eighties.

We are just getting accustomed to this manifestation when, presto! you change again into another of your many disguises. This time you wear the high laced boots and Stetson of the outdoor fellow, forest ranger, surveyor or engineer. Your face and hands are brown. There are a lot of little wrinkles at the

corners of your eyes and you are smoking a pipe.

WE like you in this materialization, we know you have interesting things to tell. We are just ready to get really acquainted when you switch the signals on us again and there you are—younger, with an unlined face, sitting in the wardroom of a battleship reading a copy of the magazine. This time you wear the uniform of a naval officer.

You look interesting and we clear our throat, ready to speak to you when, confound it, you change again.

And this change, by all the variable gods! is a corker.

WE straighten our necktie, we pull down the collar of our coat, we smooth our hair and hope that we are looking our best. Please, please hold the pose and don't change for a minute. We simply must get to know each other.

For this time the scene is a broad front porch of a big old Southern house. We can smell the honeysuckle and hear the soft *click-click* the hammock makes as you swing back and forward in it. Your hair is fluffy and a most agreeable color, your arms are smooth and rounded. Your nose is tilted up a little at the tip. We are sure that your eyes are blue but they are bent on the magazine you are reading. You are pretty—too good to be true.

You are a girl, an adorable girl, and you are reading THE POPULAR. And what are you reading? We try to see and we verily believe, we are sure that it is this very page, the last one in the magazine.

And now please let us get across to you with the information that we wrote it.

BUT no. The variable gods, the ruthless ministers of Fate, are inexorable. The picture fades as suddenly as it appeared. No longer can we hear the soft swish of the swing hammock nor smell the scented air from the blossomy vine. It is another scent now, not quite so pleasant, but clean and antiseptic. You are a doctor now, those are your instruments in the little black bag. You sit in the Pullman seat abosorbed in some story, but we never can find out what it is.

AND so it goes. That's what editing a magazine is really like. As for the authors, they are so real, so genuine, so amiable and clever that they are an unmixed joy.

But you, oh reader, are the tantalizing entity.

More variable than an April day, more protean than Proteus' self, you it is we are trying to please.

"Now faith," says the New Testament, "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."

And so we do it with faith.

Free Proof That I Can Raise Your Pay

No matter how much you are earning now, I can show you how to increase it. I have even taken failures and shown them how to make, each week, $100, $200, and in many cases even more. I am willing to prove this entirely at my risk and expense.

LET'S have a little chat about getting ahead—you and I. My name is Pelton. Lots of people call me "The Man Who Makes Men Rich." I don't deny it. I've done it for thousands of people—lifted them up from poverty to riches.

I'm no genius—far from it. I'm just a plain, everyday, unassuming sort of man. I've looked black despair in the eye—had failure stalk me around and hoodoo everything I did.

But today all is different. I have money and all of the things that money will buy. I am rich also in the things that money won't buy—health, happiness and friendship.

It was a simple thing that jumped me up from poverty to riches. As I've said, I'm no genius. But I had the good fortune to know a genius. One day this man told me a "secret." He said that every wealthy man knew this "secret,"—that is why he was rich.

I used the "secret." It surely had a good test. At that time I was flat broke. I had about given up hope when I put the "secret" to work. At first I couldn't believe my sudden change in fortune. Money actually flowed in on me. Things I couldn't do before became easy for me. My business boomed ahead. Prosperity became my partner. Since that day I've never known what it is to want for money, friendship, happiness, health, or any of the good things of life. That "secret" surely made me rich in every sense of the word.

My sudden rise to riches naturally surprised others. People asked me how I did it. I told them. And it worked for them as well as it did for me.

Some of the things this "secret" has done for people are astounding. I would hardly believe them if I hadn't seen them with my own eyes. Adding ten, twenty, thirty or forty dollars a week to a man's income is a mere nothing. That's merely playing at it. Listen to this:

A young man in the East had an article for which there was a nation-wide demand. For twelve years he "puttered around" with it, barely eking out a living. Today this young man is worth $200,000. He has built a $25,000 home—and paid cash for it. He has three automobiles. His children go to private schools. He goes hunting, fishing, traveling whenever the mood strikes him. His income is over a thousand dollars a week.

I could tell you hundreds of similar instances. But there's no need to do this, as I'm willing to tell you the "secret" itself. Then you can put it to work and see what it will do for you.

I don't claim I can make you rich over night. Maybe I can—maybe I can't. Sometimes I have failures—everyone has. But I do claim that I can help 90 out of every 100 people if they will let me.

The point of it all, my friend, is that you are using only about one-tenth of that wonderful brain of yours. That's why you haven't won greater success. Throw the unused nine-tenths of your brain into action and you'll be amazed at the almost instantaneous results.

The Will is the motive power of the brain. Without a highly trained, inflexible will, a man has little chance of attaining success. Yet the will, altho heretofore almost entirely neglected, can be trained into a wonderful power like the brain or memory and by the very same method—intelligent exercise and use.

If you held your arm in a sling for two years, it would become powerless to lift a feather, from lack of use. The same is true of the Will—it becomes useless from lack of practice. Because we don't use our Wills—because we continually bow to circumstance—we become unable to assert ourselves. What our wills need is practice.

Develop your will-power and money will flow in on you. Rich opportunities will open up for you. Driving energy you never dreamed you had will manifest itself. You will thrill with a new power—a power that nothing can resist. You'll have an influence over people that you never thought possible. And those are only a few of the things the "secret" will do for you. The "secret" is fully explained in the wonderful book "Power of Will."

I know you'll think that I've claimed a lot. Perhaps you think there must lie a catch somewhere. But here is my offer.

More Proof

Made $500 in Five Days

In five days' time it has made $500. And I have other profitable things in sight."—G. C. Benton, Centerton, O.

Worth $15,000 and More

The book has been worth more than $15,000 to me." — Oscar B. Sppard.

Would be Worth $100,000

If I had only had it when I was forty years old, I would be worth $100,000 today. It is worth a hundred times the price." — S. W. Taylor, The Sante Fe Ry., Milano, Texas.

Salary Jumped from $150 to $800

"Since I read 'Power of Will' my salary has jumped from $150 to $800 a month."—J. F. Gibson, San Diego, Calif.

From $100 to $3,000 a Month

"One of our boys who read 'Power of Will' before he came over here jumped from $100 a month to $3,000 the first month, and won a $250 prize for the best salesmanship in the State."—Private Leslie A. Still, A. E. F., France.

Worth $3,000 to $30,000

"From what I have already seen I believe I can get $3,000 to $30,000 worth of good out of it."—C. D. Van Kersten, Gen. Agent, Northwestern Life Insurance Co., Cedar Rapids, Ia.

$897.00 Profit First Week

"'Power of Will' is a compilation of mighty forces. My first week's benefit in dollars is $900—cost, $3.00; profit, $897.00."—(Figure what his yearly profit would be.)—F. W. Heiland, 916 Tribune Bldg., Chicago, Illinois.

Another 50% Increase

"More than a year ago I purchased 'Power of Will' and I firmly believe that it—and it alone—has enabled me to increase my salary more than 50 per cent in that time."—L. C. Hudgens, Boswell, Okla.

Among over 500,000 users of "Power of Will" are such men as Judge Ben B. Lindsey; Supreme Court Justice Parker; Wu Ting Fang, Ex-U. S. Chinese Ambassador; Assistant Postmaster-Gen. Britt; Gov. McKelvie of Nebraska; General Manager Christeson of Wells-Fargo Express Co.; E. St. Elmo Lewis, Former Vice-Pres. Art Metal Construction Co.; Ex-Gov. Ferris of Michigan, and many others of equal prominence.

SEND NO MONEY

Send no money—no, not a cent. Merely clip the coupon and mail it to me. By return mail you'll receive not a pamphlet, but the whole "secret" told in this wonderful book, "POWER OF WILL."

Keep it five days. Apply some of its simple teachings. If it doesn't show you how you can increase your income many times over, mail the book back. You will be out nothing.

But if you do feel that "POWER OF WILL" will do for you what it has done for over five hundred thousand others—send me only $3.00 and you and I'll be square.

If you pass this offer by I'll be out only the small profit on a $3.00 sale. But you—you may easily be out the difference between what you're making now and an income several times as great. So you see you've a lot—a whole lot—more to lose than I.

Mail the coupon or write a letter now—you may never read this offer again.

A. L. PELTON
Pelton Publishing Company
101-W Wilcox Block . . . Meriden, Conn.

A. L. PELTON,
Pelton Publishing Company
101-W Wilcox Block, Meriden, Conn.

You may send me "Power of Will" at your risk. I agree to remit $3.00 or remail the book to you in five days.

Name .....

Address .....

....

Your Choice FOR 10 DAYS' WEAR FREE

Send Only the Coupon

Yes, free—not a penny to send. Just take your choice of these exquisite TIFNITE GEMS and we will send it on our liberal 10 days' free trial offer. In appearance and by every test, these wonderful gems are so much like a diamond that even an expert can hardly tell the difference. But only 10,000 will be shipped on this plan. To take advantage of it, you must act while this special offer holds good.

Mail the coupon NOW! Send no money. Tell us which ring you prefer. We'll send it at once. After you see the beautiful, dazzling gem and the handsome solid gold ring—after you have carefully made an examination and decided that you have a wonderful bargain and want to keep it—you can pay for it in such small easy payments that you'll hardly miss the money. If you can tell a TIFNITE GEM from a genuine diamond, or if, for any reason at all, you do not wish to keep it, return it at our expense.

Put It Beside a Diamond

The closest thing to a diamond ever discovered. In appearance, a TIFNITE and a diamond are as alike as two peas. TIFNITE GEMS have the wonderful pure white color of diamonds of the first water, the dazzling fire, brilliancy, cut and polish. They stand every diamond test—fire, acid and diamond file. The mountings are exclusively fashioned in the latest designs—and are guaranteed solid gold

Flat Belcher Ring

No. 1. Solid gold mounting. Eight-claw design with flat wide band. Almost a carat, guaranteed genuine Tifnite Gem. Price $12.50; only $3.50 upon arrival. Balance $3 per month. Can be returned at our expense within 10 days.

Ladies' Ring

No. 2. Solid gold latest mounting. Has a guaranteed genuine Tifnite Gem almost a carat in size. Price $12.50; only $3.50 upon arrival. Balance $3 per month. Can be returned at our expense within 10 days.

Tooth Belcher Ring

No. 3. Solid gold, six-prong tooth mounting. Guaranteed genuine Tifnite Gem almost a carat in size. Price $12.50; only $3.50 upon arrival. Balance $3 per month. Can be returned at our expense within 10 days.

Ladies' La Vallier

No. 4. Solid gold throughout. Chain 15 inches long. One-half carat guaranteed genuine Tifnite Gem artistically mounted in genuine latest style black enamel circle. Price $12.50; only $3.50 upon arrival. Balance $3 per month. Can be returned at our expense within 10 days.

Scarf Pin

No. 5. Solid gold throughout. A beautiful open circle mounting. Half-carat guaranteed Tifnite Gem. Price $12.50; only $3.50 upon arrival. Balance $3 per month. Can be returned at our expense in 10 days.

How to Order Rings To get the right size Ring, cut a strip of heavy paper so that the ends exactly meet when drawn tightly around the second joint of finger on which you want to wear the ring. Be careful that the measuring paper fits snugly without overlapping, and measure at the second joint. Send the strip of paper to us with order coupon.

Send No Money

Same low prices now as before war. Most liberal, easy terms. Send no money and no references. The coupon brings your choice of these exquisite rings set with the sparkling TIFNITE GEMS, for 10 days' wear free. Be sure to enclose strip of paper showing exact finger measurement as explained at left.

Accept Our Free Offer

Send now and get a TIFNITE GEM while this liberal free trial offer lasts. Wear it 10 days on trial—show it to your friends and see what they say about it. Decide then whether you want to keep it or not. Send for yours now—today—sure.

THE TIFNITE COMPANY
511 S. Plymouth Ct. Dept. 1966 Chicago

Mail This Coupon

THE TIFNITE COMPANY
511 S. Plymouth Court, Dept. 1966 Chicago, Ill.

Send me .....No.....on 10 days' approval. If satisfactory I agree to pay $3.50 upon arrival, and balance at rate of $3.00 per month until reduced price of $12.50 is paid. If not satisfactory, I will return same within 10 days at your expense.
(In ordering ring be sure to enclose size as described above)

Name .....

Address .....