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WEEKLY APR. 28, 1928
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Volume XC

Number 6

The Popular

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The Sky Buccaneers

A COMPLETE NOVEL

What will world air travel be like soon, with air liners hour? Will there be air bandits swooping down like hawks

CHAPTER I.

THE NIGHT EXPRESS.

ROSS QUENT yawned sleepily and gazed downward through the bottom section of the curved cabin window at the darkness below—a black night that was like a velvet cloth drawn across the glass outside, turning it into a mirror that reflected his young, homely face and the white canvas covers of the folded parachutes strapped to the lighted ceiling. The huge air liner rolled slightly, almost imperceptibly, on its course, with the lazy motion of a ship at sea, bringing into view a tiny spark of light that winked three times, blotted out, winked three times again, and vanished underneath.

Quent consulted his schedule card. Three flashes—that would be Station No. 41 of the Air Guard. They were

making good time, then, in spite of the storm warnings at Chicago. That meant they would reach the Los Angeles airport of the N. Y., P & H. line before noon, and Quent would get a chance to join Harry and the bunch on that fishing trip before the rest of the house party got together.

Scraps of conversation drifted to him from his fellow passengers, a comfortable buzz of talk above the droning vibration of the engines.

“—bought mine right at the go-off. That was a good many years ago, the same year Lindbergh made his hop. Got it below par, too—selling at 38½; but the Amalgamated Air was just consolidating—”

“—talk of a merger in Universal Planes. Awful accommodations and poor management. I understand the Atlantic & Spanish are putting on a new



By **Will**
McMorrow

Author of "Look 'Em in the Eye," Etc.

**crossing seas and continents at several hundred miles per
in powerful cruisers? Read of two who go through it all.**

ship with twenty-four compartments. . . . All nonsense about bandits. I made that trip in '33 in an old-fashioned triplane of the New York, Pacific and Honolulu and we were as safe as in our own. . . . Proper way, of course, is to mix three parts of orange juice. I mean the new grape orange. . . . It gives more of a tone—with half a shaker. . . . And I said to my foreman, 'If that is what the men want, why, give it to them and——'

The cabin steward, white-coated and carrying an armful of linen, appeared through the narrow trapdoor up forward that led down to the double-duty cabin which served as a diner in daytime and a sleeping compartment at night.

"Berths are made up, sir," he announced as he passed Quent. "You won't mind if I changed your position

with one of the ladies. They are nervous, sometimes, about sleeping forward near the engines."

"Not at all," Quent conceded. "I don't mind the engines. They put me to sleep. I see we didn't hit the storm center, after all."

"Went above it, sir, at the Kansas line. Twelve thousand feet." The steward was fussily informative. "But the skipper is a bit worried still. The radio operator has been shooting messages steady to the control cockpit. I think——"

He looked around cautiously and lowered his voice.

"I think there's a ship been lost," he confided, rubbing his thin hands together with an old-maidish gesture. "I gathered from what I overheard that it was one of our own, too, sir—a N. Y., P. & H. passenger ship."

"Really?" Quent whistled. The N. Y., P. & H. was supposed to be one of the safest air lines and hadn't had a crash in ten years. "That's kind of bad."

He wasn't thinking of the effect on the little inheritance of ten thousand dollars' worth of stock he himself held in this very line, a nest egg that was to support him in the first lean years of practice, but rather of the possible loss of life entailed. Even now, with the whole world bound together with crisscrossing air lines, a crash was a serious matter. Ships had been known to drop into the waste spaces of the earth and be unheard of for months, while the survivors struggled back to civilization or the nearest Air Guard station. Some had dropped out of sight forever—passengers, plane and mails. But these last occurrences were rare and confined to transoceanic crossings.

"That is confidential, of course, sir," the steward gossiped, and held to the back of Quent's leather chair as the ship rolled in its course through the night. "It wouldn't do to alarm the others."

"Why?" Quent asked. "There's nothing to fret about if a ship makes a forced landing. Though this isn't the best country for that."

The steward shook his head soberly. "Perhaps it wasn't a forced landing, sir. The radio operator picked up a fragment of a message sent by the operator on the lost ship. There was fighting going on; they were being attacked by a strange plane—"

"Good Lord!" Quent laughed. "That's a romantic notion. Do you mean to say there are air bandits on this line like the ones that they caught over the Sahara two years ago? They've been kidding you, man. Piracy went out in the eighteenth century."

"I hope so, sir. I hope so. But we're carrying mails and bullion."

The steward shook his head again dolefully and disappeared with his load

of folded linen into the forward compartment. The door swinging open and closed behind him carried for an instant into the comfortable cabin the noise of rumbling engines and the sweetish smell of cylinder oil.

Quent swung around in his pivoted chair and looked down the long aisle of the cabin.

There were only a scant dozen passengers on the night plane making the Los Angeles trip; a couple of portly business men from New York, bulgingly fat in their checkered knickers and short coats that were coming back into style; an anæmic young man who had bored Quent all dinner time with an account of the places he had visited for his health; an elderly lady who had complained of the quality of the water aboard; a bald-headed man who might be a government inspector of airports; a studious Japanese bent over a book, on his way, perhaps, to take the Trans-pacific Air Line homeward; some college youths on their summer vacation—not at all the type of people to project into a stirring drama of piracy of the high air. These were people who used the airways of the world because they were safe and faster than the steamship lines—humdrum, everyday folks who climbed aboard and clambered off at their destination, secure in their faith in the men behind the engines up forward, eating and sleeping securely a mile above the earth and traveling two hundred miles an hour without a breath of air to disturb them.

Quent yawned again and stretched his well-hardened muscles beneath the gray linen of his coat.

Adventure! Excitement! Romance! Not a chance—unless the usual prosaic adventures of a poor young medical student of the twentieth century given to golf and hunting and air sports. He craned his neck to view the occupied seats, in two lines ending at the locked door in the rear, behind which were the

mail bags and the watchful, armed guardian that was imprisoned with them.

Quent was not interested in the passengers in view, but rather in one passenger who was not in sight—the slender girl who had come aboard at the Chicago airport. Quent had seen her first in the shape of a scarlet-velvet tam with a scarlet feather above the leather back of a chair. Later he had seen her at better advantage at the end of the diner table, and although Quent was no judge of women's dress that changes with the seasons, he thought a scarlet-velvet cap, scarlet-feathered, jauntily worn above night-black hair and white-velvet skin, vastly becoming, and vastly disturbing to an impressionable young man of twenty-four. He concluded that she had retired and wondered if she were the one who had benefited by the change of berths.

He frowned morosely at the lower cabin window. The chances were that he would miss seeing her at all, now. He was getting out early in the morning, and the rest would sleep on at the airport, most likely. He could have spoken to her in the dining cabin, of course, for the etiquette of the air lines permitted it; but it would have seemed silly to be shouting platitudes across twenty feet of table space, and Quent had a young man's horror of being silly.

He strolled down the aisle, swaying with the motion of the ship, in the direction of the gangway. In the N. Y., P. & H. ships the observation cockpit was on the lower level aft of the sleeping cabin, and Quent had an idea he had better get all the air he could before the elderly lady insisted on stopping all the ventilation in the cabin.

He followed the winding steel ladder that led downward through the padded well, walked silently along the carpeted and curtained passageway and pushed open the door leading to the observation

cockpit, against the pressure of air that held it.

Immediately he seemed in a new world—a world of wind and motion and sound. Overhead, like a cloud against the starred sky, the giant wing of the plane gleamed whitely as it surged through the darkness. Out of the blackness before him gleamed the red-and-green lights of the tail surface. Cool night wind blew in through the grilled opening in the center of the glassed enclosure. A thousand wire strands seemed to hum with the rhythm of a great orchestra; from up forward came the rumbling thunder of the engines; from all sides the soft hiss of air on surface and spar. Below him, through the transparent floor, was nothing—the abysmal depths to the waste lands beneath. It was like looking into a closed well.

"Glorious! Isn't it?"

Quent turned quickly. He had not seen her in the dim light of the tiny electric bulb. Perhaps it was because she no longer wore the scarlet cap. She held it in her hands, letting the wind toss the night-black hair clear of her white forehead, as the wind was pressing her fluttering silk flying suit to her body, bringing out soft curves from throat to ankles.

CHAPTER II.

ATTACK.

QUENT was not usually diffident with women. One met them nowadays in every branch of human endeavor, from taxi chauffeur to governor, and with the abolition of the hampering skirt, the clinging-vine type of girl had about reached the vanishing point, as had the "flaming youth" type of post-war flapper. Quent had had women friends—comradely athletic types that a fellow was at ease with on the tennis court or in the college laboratory.

He discovered something intangibly and tantalizingly different about this

girl, poised on tiny slippers against the force of the wind, silk traveling cape fluttering like a banner, head thrown back revealing the smoothness of a white throat, dark-fringed eyes alight with the mystery of the onrushing night—a discovery not new by any means on this ancient globe, but quite intriguing to Ross Quent.

"I love it," she said, and flashed him a smile of pure enjoyment.

"Your—er—first trip on the night express?" he asked.

She nodded excitedly. "My first trip at all, except for the local air-taxi service back home. And that was nothing like this—the lights below and the sound of the wind in the planes and the motion and everything. I don't see how those people can be satisfied to sit there in a stuffy cabin."

"You'd make a wonderful press agent for the N. Y., P. & H.," Quent smiled. "I'm afraid it's an old story to our friends in the cabin. I hope you'll make the trip oftener, now that you've found you like it."

"I'd love to," she confessed. "But dad is so old-fashioned. He views the air with alarm, and it was quite a job getting his permission to take this trip on my vacation. He still thinks flying is dangerous."

"People are getting over that," Quent assured her. "The older generation is still a bit timid."

"Dad is not timid," she said loyally. "He was in the marines during the Great War."

"Really?" Quent exclaimed eagerly. "So was mine. Quent was his name—Ross Quent. Perhaps your father might have remembered him. He was at Belleau Wood."

"Dad was wounded there." She tossed the flying hair from her face and turned to look more directly at Quent. "I must ask him about it when I get back. Dad is quite wrapped up in the war. You might judge so by the

fact that he named me after one of his battles."

"A battle!"

"Château Thierry," she laughed. "I wasn't born until five years after the war, but that made no difference. Thierry Jane Bradford was a man's idea of what a girl's name should be. But I contracted it to Thea, as soon as I reached the age of reason."

"Not a million years ago," Quent grinned, counting on his fingers. "Let's see, the war ended in 1918. Five more makes '23, and this is——"

"I'm eighteen," she said promptly, "so it won't be necessary for you to go into higher mathematics figuring it out. I'm disarmingly frank about it. Having exhausted history and arithmetic, let's take up geography. The steward said we were on time. What flourishing cities are we passing now?"

"None. We're somewhere over the lower end of the Rockies—the course bends south here to avoid the higher peaks and skirts New Mexico—and it's as desolate in spots as it was before the first ship took the air. It's about the wildest section we cross this trip."

She gazed through the glass at the black void beneath.

"I don't understand how in the world the captain can find his way."

"Easily enough," Quent informed her. "He is in constant touch with stations beneath through his radio; he has a raft of drift indicators, altimeters, compasses, and what not; and there are always the Air Guard beacons along the line, though right in this zone they are few and far between. It's a rather barren country underneath us. Too bad it isn't daytime, so you could see it. It was better populated twenty years ago than it is to-day, and it was never a paradise."

"But suppose we had to land—if the engines stopped, or something?"

"All six of them wouldn't stop together and the auxiliaries, too," Quent

assured her, feeling quite masculine and protective. "Those things don't happen nowadays. And if we got into trouble the radio would bring ten ships here within the hour. Don't let that worry you. Landing would be difficult, maybe; but we would drop flares to light up the ground, and the skipper would bring her down nicely in an open space somewhere."

He smiled to himself when he thought of the old-maidish steward's fears—smiled half-regretfully for the good old days of adventure before the world became supercivilized and machine made.

Things were more humdrum now. Romance and adventure never touched the lives of those who voyaged high in the air, serenely unaware of the land beneath them, comfortably housed and fed in the air liners, traveling from airport to airport over seas and mountains and wild waste lands of the earth like creatures from another planet and—thanks to modern improvements in aircraft—never in danger of being plunged back in a few minutes to the primitive, as in the old seafaring days. There were crashes occasionally, to be sure, but they were mild affairs, and there were sporadic wars and air piracy in the Spanish-speaking confederacies far to the south, but Quent had never traveled there.

"We're getting to be a soft and spineless race," he mused aloud. "All we have to worry about is time schedules and getting our three meals a day on time. I wonder what would happen if we were wrecked in some such forsaken spot as we're passing over now, about five hundred miles or so to civilization, and no way of getting there. I'll bet we'd be a helpless lot."

She gazed at him over a slim, silk-clad shoulder, studying this stalwart stranger with the naive curiosity of her age and sex.

"I don't think you would be helpless," she conceded.

Quent reddened with pleasure. "Well, I hope not, anyway. However, the opportunity to distinguish myself as a pioneer is rather remote, I'm afraid, in spite of our worrisome steward. By the way, speaking of angels—"

He nodded his head toward the glass porthole in the door leading from the observation cockpit to the cabin behind. Centered in the round window like a picture in a frame the steward's pale, spectacled face had appeared. Then the door opened and the white-coated attendant slid through.

"Sorry, sir," he smiled, feebly apologetic. "I must close this door for the night now. It will create a draft through the sleeping cabin."

Quent frowned. "It's a new rule to me."

"Captain's orders, sir," the man whined. "One of the passengers has complained of the cold. Sorry, madam."

Quent shrugged his shoulders and smiled at Thea.

"I told you we were a soft bunch nowadays." He stepped aside and followed her through the narrow door into the stuffy, furry atmosphere of the sleeping cabin. "I shall see you, perhaps, in the morning?"

"I—I think so. That is, if you are going all the way to Los Angeles and are not an early riser."

"Early? Not me. I had nothing special to do," Quent lied readily. "I'll see you, then, at breakfast in the airport restaurant."

The curtain fell into place behind her and Quent made his way along the dimly lit corridor, reminiscent of the old-time Pullman car aisles, to his berth up forward.

He did not start to undress immediately, but lay across the wide coverlet, his chin cupped in his hands, looking out the tiny porthole into the darkness that whirled past.

When a man in the glamorous and romantic twenties gazes for half an hour

at a black and blank pane of glass, without a chance of seeing anything any more than if he were staring into a deep well, the chances are that he is seeing things with his imagination—a scarlet tam, for example, topping a milk-white forehead, full, red lips, wide and lustrous eyes, bobbed hair that wouldn't stay put and rippled like a silken banner in the wind——

He sat up quickly and pressed his face to the glass.

What were they doing? A ground flare, dropped from the observation cockpit, was out of place here in a deserted tract of mountainous country. Another one! What were they signaling for?

Quent watched the light, a spark dropping from aft, disappearing quickly downward and to the rear of the fast-moving ship, flaring up in a white light far beneath for an instant before it swept from sight. A sharp cry sounded overhead, above the rumble of the engines.

He pushed open the curtain and stepped into the silent corridor. Feet appeared on the steel ladder spiraling downward from the upper level—a hurrying pair of feet in laced boots. As the man rushed forward to the door leading into the engine compartment, Quent recognized the leather coat with the braided, winged insignia of the captain of the plane. His usually good-humored face was ruddy in the dim light—and not at all good-humored.

He bumped into Quent, stopped and grabbed his arm.

"Who the hell set off those flares?" he snapped. "What damned——"

"They were dropped from the observation platform," Quent said. "I was just wondering myself why——"

The captain plunged toward the rear. Heads appeared out of the curtained berths. Somewhere overhead a bell clanged loudly, clamorously.

"Keep these people quiet while I in-

vestigate this," the captain jerked at Quent and charged toward the end of the corridor. The door to the observation platform clanged to behind him.

The ship lurched forward at a steep angle, regained an even keel, and Quent caught hold of a curtain to brace himself. Thea's face appeared through the curtain opening as the ship banked sharply.

"What has happened?" she asked in a frightened whisper.

Quent shook his head helplessly. "I don't know. Nothing alarming, I think that——"

"Ridiculous business!" the high-pitched voice of one of the portly business men came from a near-by berth. "There's no excuse for bumping around this way. If there was a competent pilot aboard—make a complaint on this—— Where is that steward? Steward!"

A man in the uniform of the ship's crew hurtled down the ladder. His mouth tightened grimly.

"Everybody up above!" he ordered sharply. "Dress quickly, madam. There is no time to be lost. We'll explain later—maybe."

This last was directed at the elderly lady who was volleying questions and complaints in a shrill voice. Thea, who had apparently not prepared for bed, slipped from her berth fully dressed, bumping into one of the fat men, who was already puffing for the ladder. From aft came the sharp, staccato bark of a machine gun.

"One at a time, but quickly!" the aviator urged. "The second officer will issue and adjust your parachutes. Don't get excited. Chances are you won't have to use them. It's only a precaution."

He turned to Quent as the last passenger vanished.

"You look like a cool-headed fellow. We may need you to help us to get them through the parachute trapdoor, if worst

comes to worst. They get panicky when they have to jump, some of them."

"Ship on fire?" Quent asked, swaying as the floor zoomed upward.

"Not yet. It may be any moment. We're being fired on by some ship in the rear. That's the mail clerk's machine gun you hear. It may be the bullion they're after."

"You mean we're being cha——"

"I mean a couple of ships shied out at us from the clouds and managed to empty the gas tank in the right wing, and they're trying to crash us—that's all I know," the aviator said impatiently. "Have you seen the skipper?"

Quent motioned toward the observation platform and together they stumbled toward the door, careening into one another as the big plane plunged sickeningly and recovered. The aviator swung the door open with a violent thrust of an oil-stained arm and they stepped outside.

Above the dull thunder of the racing engines Quent could hear the crackling fire of the machine gun again. It was answered from two points beyond the huge, swaying tail surface—two places in the blanket of darkness that flashed and spat viciously. Something pinged against the glass inclosure by Quent's head, splintering the surface in a ragged star, as ice is splintered by a steel-pointed blow.

But Quent was not looking that way. He was staring down at the body of the captain sprawled on the floor of the observation cockpit, a thin-bladed knife showing underneath his extended arm and a trickle of blood creeping across the shining surface that heaved and subsided beneath Quent's unsteady feet.

"Dead?" he gasped, and looked at the airman.

"Just as dead as the radio operator," the other muttered grimly. "We found him five minutes ago just like this. Let's get up above. There's going to be hell to pay around here in a minute!"

CHAPTER III.

QUENT MEETS AN UNJUST STEWARD.

QUENT motioned to the body of the captain.

"But this—he wasn't killed by their machine gun."

"Neither was the radio operator," the other interrupted. "Evidently somebody aboard is playing into the hands of the crowd attacking us, and he did away with the operator to prevent him sending for help."

The ship rocked violently, as if a hurricane had caught it under the spreading wings, the nose dipped, sending Quent and the aviator grabbing for support, and the smooth rumble of the engines turned to a desultory sputtering, then stopped altogether, the wind whistling shrilly through the network of spars and wires as the great ship glided downward. Out of the darkness a vague shadow, like the shadow of a giant bat, swept silently over them.

"They've punctured the reserve tanks," the aviator said, springing through the open door and racing for the ladder. Quent followed, making the last few yards in a flying leap as the ship pitched downward at a steeper angle. In the upper cabin the passengers were huddled at one end leaning backward and holding onto whatever came handiest to prevent skidding along the inclined floor. One of the plane crew presided over the pallid group of frightened travelers, helping them wriggle out of the straps of their parachutes.

"Won't need 'em now," he shouted to Quent's companion above the shrieking of the wind. "Too low to jump. We're making a forced landing. Steady, now! You're safer here."

The last remark was directed at one of the portly business men, who seemed about to make a break for the engine compartment ahead. Landing flares were being dropped from the control

cockpit, their white light shimmering through the cabin windows.

Quent's eyes sought Thea. She returned his look steadily, with a brave attempt at a smile. He made his way toward her with the effort of a man climbing the sloping side of a roof.

"They say we're being attacked by bandits," she cried. "Sounds rather absurd in these days, doesn't it?"

"Take hold of that rack above your head," he directed. "It will help take up the shock. We're liable to bump hard at the end of this glide. This is not good landing country."

The rattle of the mail clerk's machine gun came in a renewed burst from the direction of the locked door aft. It was followed immediately by a dull crash that shook the air liner from tail to nose. Apparently the enemy plane carried more than machine guns aboard.

The passenger ship keeled over on the right wing, plunging downward and to the right. Quent swung himself before the girl to help break her fall and gripped the parachute rack overhead—and just had time to do so when the ship struck with a blasting roar of splintering wood and crumpled aluminum, the lights snapped off, and Quent felt himself hurled through the darkness to land with sickening force against the side of the cabin.

For a few moments he lay doubled up listening to faint shouts, the sharp crack of revolvers, low moans from near at hand. Then he twisted from beneath a heavy body, pulled himself upright and wiped away a warm trickle that was creeping down his cheek from a throbbing place on his forehead.

From the direction of the engine compartment tiny blue flames of burning gasoline blew through the door.

"Thea!" he called. Fear gripped him as he groped his way across unconscious forms, wreckage of chairs, parachutes, clothing, broken wood paneling—fear

that this girl he had just met was lost to him again.

A man collided with him, scrambling frantically toward the open doorway.

"They're all dead, you fool!" the man screamed. "Do you want to burn up? The ship is on fire!"

Quent shook off the hand that clutched his arm.

"Thea!" he called again, and his outstretched hand came in contact with the smooth silk of her flying suit, as the flames of the burning gasoline blazed up quickly, lighting the interior of the cabin. She stirred as he bent to lift her in his arms, and her eyes opened.

"I—I must have fainted. We crashed?"

"Sure did. We've got to get out of here right away. Can you walk?"

"I think so. I was just knocked breathless." She clung to his arm as he led the way forward. The thud of hammers and renewed shouting came from the mail compartment. Outside the cabin windows, canted at an angle, due to the position of the wrecked ship, the night was lit up with a noonday glare.

One glance at the twisted steel of the mid-section stairway showed no escape in that direction. But the door that led into the tiny galley was open. Quent helped the girl through the doorway and along the sloping floor that was littered with the pots and pans that had been torn from their fastenings by the impact of the crash. Beyond the galley the curved, air-tight door that led to the outside ladder, was closed.

Quent pushed aside the bolts that held it and pushed the door open a few inches to look cautiously out. He had no desire to subject himself and the girl to another burst from the bandits' machine guns. Judging by their performance so far, the gang that had brought down the N. Y., P. & H. liner were reckless of lives.

From where he stood—twenty-odd feet above the smooth, sandy ground—

he had an excellent view of what was going on.

The air liner had landed in an open space—a natural valley between two ragged, rock-strewn hills—and lay partly over on one wing, which was now a tangle of broken spars and crumpled metal. A few hundred feet away, only dimly outlined because of the glaring lights on the wings, was the attacking ship, a great triplane with a wide-spreading wing surface. In the flood of light that was directed toward the wrecked air liner, men moved in a noisy bustle of activity, swarming over the after part of the wreck, battering down the locked doors, tumbling down boxes and bales from the baggage and freight compartments to the sand, bending under the loads they carried toward the waiting ship, calling to one another in half a dozen different languages—a riot of sound and activity, but with a certain underlying system that was emptying the wreck of everything movable as thoroughly and as quickly as a freighter is emptied by stevedores.

Some of the crates and boxes lay broken open, their contents strewing the ground—canned food, hardware, clothing, merchandise of all kinds. In the center of the space between the ships a broad-shouldered ruffian, half-naked, and with a touse of red hair, leaned on an ax and directed the carriers, stopping one occasionally to rip off the top of doubtful cases to ascertain their contents. At the foot of the ladder, beneath Quent's feet, the passenger who had rushed from the cabin lay sprawled out, face downward and very still.

Quent hesitated. To venture down now might mean discovery. Perhaps if he waited a while until the bandits gutted the ship and left—

A puff of black, pungent smoke eddied about his head. From behind him came the sharp crackle of flames.

"We'll have to chance it." He motioned to Thea to follow him. "They're

busy right now, and if we can get to the underside of the tail surface—Run if they see us, Thea. I'll try to hold them for an instant."

He slipped down the ladder, feeling that a hundred eyes were watching him in the bright glare of the searchlights, expecting momentarily to feel the piercing agony of a bullet in his back.

At the foot of the ladder he swung about for an instant to face the lights. Evidently no one had seen him. The carriers still scuttled across the sand under their loads, the tousled-haired fellow still swung his ax and bellowed his orders.

Quent felt Thea's trembling hand on his arm. He threw his arm about her slim waist and together they darted for the shadowed concealment of the broad tail surface, fifty feet away.

They had covered half the distance when Quent caught the soft patter of running feet behind him. Before he had time to jerk his arm free and face this new development, his arms were gripped from behind, pinioned securely to his sides. He staggered under the impact of the rush, struggled frantically to free his arms, and found himself facing the cabin steward.

He was no longer the cabin steward. The white coat had been replaced with a woolen jersey and an ugly-looking automatic was strapped to his hip. Beside him towered a mulatto with a bluish scar bisecting flattened nose and broad cheek.

The mulatto's eyes gleamed in the searchlight as he tugged a revolver into view.

"None of that, 'Yellow,'" the steward interposed, shoving the weapon aside. "Not this one. The captain wants him kept alive. Chuck him aboard the ship. I'll take the girl along, myself—"

"The hell you will!" the man who held Quent grunted explosively. "She's too fancy a dame fer you, Sims. You lay hold of her an' the skipper will tie

you to the landing gear, like he did— Easy now, before I knock you silly!"

Quent had lashed out with his foot and was writhing desperately and uselessly to reach the erstwhile cabin steward.

"You damned murderer!" Quent choked. "It was you that dropped that landing flare and stabbed the captain when he caught you. You were in league with this gang all the time!"

Sims backed away, rubbing his skinny hands together nervously.

"Hold him, Parrott," he whined. "I don't want to have to kill him. The captain needs him. Grab his feet, Yellow."

Yellow did so immediately. Between them Quent was lifted bodily and lugged toward the big plane. As he passed beneath the whirring propellers toward an open door in the side of the long portholed fuselage he twisted his body around to look back again.

Beyond the bustling line of workers he caught sight of Thea, head thrown back, striving to release her wrist from the grasp of the grinning Sims. Quent felt himself swing in a preparatory cadence and was thrown unceremoniously through the opening. As he slid across the smooth metal floor he heard the door clang shut behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPTAIN HAWK.

IT was hours later—hours that seemed endless to Quent, lying in the dark, oil-smelling compartment listening to the rumble of engines, the whining of wind alongside, and tortured by fears for Thea—when a door in the farther end of the place slid open, daylight flashed in his face and he was bidden gruffly to come out.

He obeyed promptly. Any activity, however menacing, was welcome after the interminable wait in that rolling metal box. He climbed out into the

corridor, blinking in the gray light from a porthole beyond which was blue sky with an occasional ragged drift of cloud scudding by.

The man he had heard called Parrott pointed up the corridor with a black-nailed thumb.

"Captain Hawk is waitin' to see you in his cabin. Drift down that way. An' give her the gas, too. He doesn't like to be kept waitin'."

"Is he the skipper of the plane?"

"Right. He's the lead bird of the flock, old-timer, an' when he droops a wing you'd best get to cover. Don't ask too many questions, either, unless you got a pair of wings sproutin' under yer coat. He dropped the second officer of that N. Y., P. & H. ship overboard at eight thousand feet without a 'chute this mornin' fer gettin' sassy. He's sure hard-boiled."

"Dropped him——" Quent gasped. "You mean he deliberately killed——"

"We didn't go down to investigate," Parrott grinned sourly, "but I guess he hit hard. He was going fast when he left. On your way now!"

Quent wanted to ask about Thea, but the warning shove with which Parrott emphasized his last command indicated to Quent that the discreet course was to obey and not talk. Resistance, with a score of cutthroats within call, was out of the question.

As far as Quent could judge on his short journey, it was quite a sizable plane, almost as large as the air liner they had left burning behind them. It was built for speed on the lines of the new armored military types, and capable of carrying twenty or thirty in the crew and twice that tonnage.

Parrott directed Quent's reluctant steps down the gangway amidships past a swarthy, beady-eyed individual who was cleaning a machine gun in a cubby-hole off to one side, and two equally villainous-looking mechanics who snored in their oil-stained leather coats in a

compartment on the other side. He stopped outside a closed door aft.

Parrott knocked, listened for the answering call from within, and swung the door open.

"In you go," he grunted.

And Quent stumbled across the threshold.

It was a large place for an airplane cabin—the whole width of the fuselage—softly carpeted underfoot, decorated and furnished with the lavish comfort and ornate style Quent had glimpsed in the cabins of the millionaires' touring planes at the airports. Curved, velvet-curtained windows the height of the walls on either side gave an extensive view of bright sky above and flying clouds below, and far beneath, the sparkle of water at intervals, as the ship sped over the white, cottony canyons of cloud bank.

At the end of the cabin, in front of an orderly arsenal of rifles ranged along the wall, a man lolled in a chair of shining red leather behind a carven teak-wood table, and regarded Quent with lazy interest, through black, heavy-lidded eyes.

Quietly dressed, rather handsome in a pallid, sleek way, he had so much the look of a professional man or a sober young banker in comparison with the rest of the tough crew aboard, that Quent felt relieved. Obviously, this was the secretary or supercargo to the formidable Captain Hawk—there could be no doubt about it.

"Sit down, doctor." The man in the chair waved a manicured hand languidly. "Not there, if you please—in the center, where I can see you better. That's it."

Quent took the seat indicated, a straight-backed chair not fastened to the floor as the rest were.

"I—er—understand Captain Hawk wants to see me," he began lamely.

The other smiled politely and mirthlessly—a smile that revealed even and

perfect teeth but no convivial spark in the lusterless eyes.

"He is doing so now, my friend. Hawk is my name—Captain Hawk by courtesy of those childlike and romantic friends of mine, who must have titles. And you, if I may believe my invaluable Sims, who investigated the baggage on board that unfortunate air liner, are Doctor Quent. Is it not so?"

Quent shook his head. "I'm not a doctor—yet. I have another year to go at medical school."

Hawk tapped his chin speculatively. "But you can set a bone, I suppose, and treat minor ailments?"

"Yes—if I had to, I suppose I could."

"I think," Hawk smiled again evenly—"I think you will have to, or take the consequences. We need some sort of medical man where we are going. It is the one thing we lack. Your duties will be light—a gunshot wound occasionally; a broken arm, perhaps. We don't need a genius for that. I instructed Sims to preserve a doctor out of the wreck. You will do."

"Maybe I will and maybe I won't," Quent blurted defiantly. "First of all I want to find out what happened to that girl, Thea Bradford."

Hawk looked out at the cloud stream that whirled by and his fingers wandered to the side of the table.

"You are rather abrupt," he reproved. "Do not be unwise. That charming young lady is quite safe aboard with us. I rescued her from the hands of our friend Sims and have not made any disposition of her case. We shall take up the question of Sims later. At present she is comfortable and not in any danger. But we were discussing you, I believe."

"What is your game?" Quent demanded. "Who are you people, besides being robbers and worse? Where are you taking me?"

There was a steely quality in Hawk's voice as he answered.

"If you are of a romantic turn of mind, my friend, you might say we are pirates—air pirates, twentieth-century brand. If you are of a sensible turn of mind, you will realize that we are in a rather risky game and don't value our lives or yours very highly. As to our destination, you will find that out in time. It is sufficient to say that it is a place where my will is the supreme law and there is neither Air Guard nor civilized government to interfere. You are coming with us, and I trust you will find a large and lucrative practice among us."

Quent frowned at the floor. "You want me to join up with a gang of bandits and sign up to fight law and order."

"Not at all. You will be held forcibly a prisoner, and in the unlikely event that we are captured, you can always make your peace with the law."

"And if I refuse I suppose you will kill me as you did the officer this morning."

"Precisely." The glossy black head nodded. "We would kill you. I regret the incident of this morning, but those things must happen in this trade. I needed a navigating officer and he was foolish enough to refuse. We have wasted enough time discussing this. You have a plain choice. Give me your word that you will not interfere with the working of this ship and you will be let reasonably alone during the trip. For the time being, the girl you are so interested in will be safe. Which is it? We are now over the Pacific. A long dive or a long life and a merry one?"

Quent looked down at the stretches of open sea that shot by the rifts in the cloud bank—ten thousand feet, easily, including the drop to the clouds. A long dive, surely—and Thea, alone in the hands of these cold-blooded killers. If it seemed to him minutes before he decided, it was really a couple of seconds.

"All right," he conceded. "I'll behave. But I don't promise not to try

and make a break when we reach the place."

"It will do you no good," Hawk said, waving Quent from the chair. "Sit over there, please, and I will demonstrate what might have happened to you. We shall use our friend Sims, who has been getting out of hand lately, as an example."

He pressed his finger against a pearl button on the wainscoting. Parrott's heavy, unshaven face looked in the doorway.

"Bring Sims in," Hawk ordered.

"Yes, sir." The blustering Parrott was quite meek and obedient.

"Sims," Hawk informed Quent when the door had closed again, "has been a useful rascal. He acted as a spy for me and did quite well. But in this business we cannot afford to take chances with undisciplined minds and personal ambitions—outside of my own. Sims is a jackdaw that imagines himself an eagle, sometimes—or a hawk."

Quent said nothing. The whole thing seemed unreal. Yesterday he was aboard an air liner—safe, secure, surrounded by the protective organization of a complex civilization, the long arm of the law, the guiding lights of the Air Guard. Then suddenly, out of the night, this freebooter of the air bringing death and destruction—and to-day Ross Quent was a prisoner of this murderous crew and their smiling, urbane chief, and was being hurried across the Pacific at two hundred miles an hour.

Yesterday Quent would have said such a thing was impossible. Now he realized that, not only was it possible, but that it was bound to have happened, sooner or later. The very complexities that made life secure and easy for the traveler had brought this about. Given modern high-speed air travel, an ability to jump across continents and seas in a few hours, a hidden airport somewhere in the barren, untraveled corners that still remained in the world, and a

man ruthless enough to take advantage of opportunity, and the air pirate had evolved to prey upon the merchantmen of the clouds.

"You'll get caught in the end," Quent muttered. "And the game is not worth the candle."

Hawk smiled pleasantly. "Your solicitude is very gratifying; but we shall not be caught—not by a stern chase. This plane was one of the fastest in the Brazilian Air Service. That is, it was built for them until they were careless enough to let me grab it one night. As for the game being worth while, I should judge your late lamented liner netted me half a million——"

"You mean to say this is the *Cordillera*—the air cruiser that was lost in the Carribean last winter?"

Hawk nodded. "But, as you see, it was not lost. The crew were lost, it is true; but one has to start somewhere, and I needed a plane."

The door was pushed open, and Sims, handcuffed and cringing, stumbled into the cabin.

CHAPTER V.

CONCERNING ST. PETER'S GATE.

HAWK pointed to the chair in the center of the carpeted floor.

"Sit there, Sims. We're due to have a little talk, I think."

The former steward's colorless lips parted in a snarl that was half a whine.

"What's the idea of this?" He tugged at the handcuffs. "I only did what you told me to. You can't treat me like this, Hawk."

"Sit down," Hawk said softly again, but there was a menace in his silky tones that made Quent direct a quick glance at him. The air bandit's eyes were two gleaming points of light beneath the heavy lids, and the long, shapely fingers of his right hand strayed, as they had done when he interviewed Quent, toward a spot underneath the carven table top.

Sims perched on the edge of the chair, alert and watchful.

"A little talk, Sims," Hawk purred—"just a little talk to clarify matters between you and me. First of all there is the matter of his girl you were found struggling with outside the wreck last night. It was because you insisted on upsetting our discipline that you were put into confinement. You know our rule about women on these raids, Sims."

"I had as much right to her as any one else," the steward spat venomously. "You wanted to grab her yourself."

"You are quite mistaken," Hawk went on smoothly. "Quite mistaken, Sims. The rule is that women in our community shall make their own choice, and if they refuse to choose, other disposition is made of them later. And under no conditions is there to be any disturbance over them until we are safely home again. You have broken that rule both ways by attempting to take this girl—an exceptionally beautiful one, I concede—forcibly for yourself. That is against the law—and I make the law here for you and for every other sky rat that flies with me!"

Quent breathed more easily. In spite of the anger that smoldered inside him to hear this girl discussed as if she were a chattel, contraband of piracy, he was relieved on the score of her immediate safety. As to the veiled insinuation of her later disposition, Quent made up his mind to have something to say about that when the time came—and he wouldn't say it with flowers, if there was a gun handy.

"What else have I done besides break that precious law?" Sims sneered.

Hawk gazed dreamily out the window at the blue sky wherein the ship seemed to be hung motionlessly with whirring propellers, and he seemed to have almost forgotten the shifty-eyed steward perched on the chair.

"What else is there against me," Sims

insisted, "besides what I did to turn you over a half-million-dollar cargo—an' damned little thanks it was I got for it, too!"

The other seemed to find a dim amusement in the situation. He laughed quietly and turned to Sims again.

"Did you say you were going to make me pay well for depriving you of the woman?" he asked casually. "For instance, to jog your memory, did you try to enlist some of my crew in an attempt to radio the Air Guard and have us all taken?"

Sims licked his dry lips and his eyes darted to the rack of rifles over Hawk's head.

"No," the steward grated. "It's a lie—a damned lie!"

"You didn't send a message to the radio operator by some one you thought was in on your scheme, asking the operator to warn the Air Guard station at Frisco this morning? Think up a good story now, Sims—and think quickly, for I give you my word you haven't too much time left to think at all!"

Sims crouched in his chair. "No—there was no such mess——"

The other tapped his free hand on the table top while his right hand remained out of sight. Delicately, with bent forefinger, he flicked a folded slip of paper across the table toward Sims.

"Is that your writing, you fool?" Hawk said softly.

It seemed to Quent, glued to his chair by the window, that even the vestige of color in the steward's quivering cheeks had run out like the fluid from a broken bottle. Sims did not appear to need a closer inspection of that slip of paper on the carpet. His face contorted with the malignant fear of a cornered weasel.

He half arose from his chair as if to hurl himself forward at the bland and smiling man behind the table. Hawk made the slightest motion with that hid-

den right hand and something clicked sharply above the drone of the engines.

Quent had a swift vision of the white face of the steward, a flash of upthrown arm vanishing from sight, and then nothing—a square opening in the floor, through which the wind sprung sending the damning piece of paper dancing upward to the ceiling.

Quent, dazed with the suddenness of it, looked down through the hole.

Far beneath, a hurtling body, a black speck, star-shaped with extended arms and legs, plunging into the cloud bank, swallowed by the white vapor as a falling pebble is swallowed by the ocean. Slowly, the square, carpeted section of floor swung back into place and the cabin was as it had been before—except for a chair and a man who had crouched in it the moment before.

"What," Quent swayed back against the wall—"what happened?"

Hawk had not left his post behind the carved table. He smiled his chill and meaningless smile and tapped the section of table under which his right hand had rested.

"Nothing of great importance, I assure you," he answered. "A traitor to his own—doubly a traitor; and we are well rid of him. The manner of his execution is more interesting, a very simple arrangement, no bloodletting or messy fireworks. It was originally the parachute drop for the plane. By a contrivance of my own, a spring here under my hand, I open the trapdoor. He drops from sight—in this case, eleven thousand feet into the Pacific. Overland it is just as efficacious. It is a modern adaptation of the plank walking of my more romantic forbears. My men, who like names for things, call it 'St. Peter's Gate.'"

The suddenness of the wretched Sims' death and the callous good humor of this smiling person who had just plunged a fellow into eternity combined to chill Quent's blood.

"What kind of a demon are you?" he cried.

Hawk's thin, black eyebrows rose a fraction of an inch.

"A very sensible and cautious one, my friend," he said meaningly, "and I would suggest that you copy those virtues. The sensible thing for you to do now is to accept your life in return for your services, and the cautious thing is to say little and ask few questions. Now, if you don't mind, you will return with Parrott, who will try to make you more comfortable."

Quent turned at the door. Hawk was smiling smoothly again.

"By the way," he remarked, "you might remember that you, yourself, sat on that very chair a few minutes ago when I gave you your choice of two evils. I congratulate you."

CHAPTER VI.

PRISONER AT LARGE.

PARROTT was waiting outside the door. At sight of Quent in the semidarkness of the passage, the big man started back against the wall, then recovered and grinned sheepishly.

"What's the matter?" Quent asked.

"Er—nothin'," Parrott grunted. "I thought maybe it would be—I was kinda expectin' the other one."

"I see. Thought I'd gone through St. Peter's Gate, eh? I suppose in your trade a man doesn't care much to see a ghost."

"There aren't no ghosts around here. They don't come back after taking the long drop," Parrott growled, apparently not relishing the subject overmuch. "So you can stall yer engine on that, old-timer. I thought it was Sims the skipper meant me to fix up in the for'ard wing cabin. You're lucky."

"This is the second time I've been a subject for congratulation in the last few minutes," Quent remarked dryly. "I'd make it unanimous if I had my feet

on solid ground about five thousand miles from here."

Parrott slouched down the corridor, turned through a compartment heaped with merchandise that Quent identified as part of the loot of the ill-fated air liner, and showed Quent into a narrow and restricted cubicle with a porthole looking out under the shadow of the vast wing.

The place held the usual folding aluminum bed shelf and mattress, a single electric-light bulb in the ceiling, a wicker chair fastened to the floor, and a couple of clothing hooks on the blank wall.

"Not too luxurious," Quent commented. "But it will serve. When do we arrive at wherever we arrive at?"

"To-morrow morning. An' if it ain't so swell here, I kin tell you it's a damned sight better than bein' tied to the landin' gear an' chokin' to death on the wind."

With which pleasant thought Parrott vanished again, before Quent had time to frame half a dozen questions that were clamoring for reply. But these were not persons one could question freely, it seemed, and although Quent had been given the freedom of the ship on parole, he was in no hurry to avail himself of it after his insight into the rather drastic customs of these modern buccaneers.

He discovered he was very tired and found the berth softer than it looked. He drifted off to sleep in the soothing drone of the engines, thinking of Thea, and awoke in the dusk to see Parrott standing over him with a tray.

"Gotta lock you in now," the man said, depositing the tray on the seat of the wicker chair. "Stoppin' for supplies here. There's some grub."

"Where are we stopping?" Quent asked, stretching.

"Ask Hawk," Parrott grinned sardonically. "He's yer information bureau. What you don't know won't bother you. I'll unlock the door after we get up beyond the ceilin' again."

Left to himself, Quent peered out through the round porthole. But it was not meant to be opened and it was in such a position that little could be seen of the outer world except a patch of sky and the broad, shining surface of the upper wing panel.

Quent tried to figure things out for himself. Earlier in the day they had been over the Pacific. They had been under way now almost twenty hours. With a fast air cruiser of this type able to make up to four hundred miles an hour, that meant eight thousand miles. Allowing for a thousand miles from the place the air liner had crashed, to the Pacific, that still left seven thousand miles of travel—far enough to reach to China, New Zealand, the tip of South America, the interior of Siberia—all according to the direction taken; and Quent, without compass or view of the distant terrain beneath, had no idea of that direction. With all his inventions man hadn't yet developed the instinct of the homing pigeon.

The floor beneath his feet tilted forward gradually, somewhere in the recesses of the ship a bell clanged, the growl of the engines gave place to shrill-whining wind, and the porthole was blotted out in white vapor, as the ship dropped through its concealing blanket of clouds toward mother earth.

Five minutes, ten minutes in the wet fog and light appeared once more through the round, glassed hole. Quent had a flash of green field and clumped trees as the ship banked for a turn, felt the light touch as the landing gear struck ground and the ship rocked forward unevenly, as some one swung shut the metal porthole cover from the outside, leaving Quent in darkness.

He switched on the light above his head and attacked the sandwiches and tea on the tray, with an appetite sharpened by a day's abstinence in the chill ozone of cloudland. It was roughly prepared food and the teapot hadn't

been cleaned for a long time; but Quent was not finicky. He was finished long before the activity outside—the murmur of voices, the bumping of bulky objects carried aboard, the splash of gas into the wing tanks—had ceased and the engines awoke to life as they lifted the plane again toward the blue.

But Parrott did not show up right away, as he had promised. It was several hours later—how many Quent did not know, since he slept part of the time and he had neglected to wind his watch—and the plane was again dropping downward, when Parrot appeared.

"Forgot you," he vouchsafed shortly. "Skipper wants you in the control cockpit right away."

Quent hesitated. "What's the idea—another Peter's Gate?"

"Dunno. Best not keep him waitin'. You know yer way there."

Quent did know his way. The *Cordillera* had been built along the lines of the air cruisers he had been aboard at the airports, with the control cockpit well forward of the engines in the very point of the nose. Quent made his way to the corridor running the length of the fuselage, turned through the passage between the engine compartments, and stepped into the wind-swept cockpit.

None of the crew had stopped him to inquire his business as he passed them; none gave him more than a cursory glance up from their work. The leather-helmeted pilot who sat behind the instrument board and manipulated the controls did not even turn his head. It was as if Quent were in very truth an accepted member of the crew.

He looked around the place. Hawk, lean and sallow and urbane, greeted Quent from a deep-padded seat and waved him to another leather-covered chair alongside. He pointed ahead.

"Welcome to our little community, doctor. I hope you will have a pleasant stay among us."

Quent stared moodily at the panorama being unfolded as the ship swam toward the ground.

It was a prospect unpleasing enough to a young man with hopes of escape. Dawn, pouring from beyond the horizon off to the right, was streaking a barren, endless gray waste with light, gilding the tops of rolling wallows with pink and gold, breaking into penciled beams as it topped a jagged range of peaks far off, casting long shadows of lavender behind rocks and stunted, twisted trees. Directly beneath the swinging nose of the ship was an oblong of green, a mile below, and looking like a tiny garden patch in the midst of sterility.

"Doesn't look like a thriving metropolis," Hawk's voice came to Quent in the rush of air, "but it improves on closer inspection. The houses are painted to match the foliage and so escape notice of the air cruisers. Some two hundred souls live down there—counting the women and natives—and I am both law and government to them."

As they dropped closer, Quent made out broad rooftops among the clustered trees, a flash of colorful flower bed here, a gray spiral of smoke there. The ship headed for a smooth stretch of clear sand on the edge of the green, and figures appeared, waving to the ship and hurrying to the landing place. A puff of smoke blossomed out quickly from the verdant foliage and was answered immediately by a boom from amidships, the ship banking at the same time to send the shell bursting harmlessly beyond the waiting throng below. Then more puffs of smoke from the green.

"Our welcoming committee," Hawk pointed out. "Rather wasteful of ammunition, but it is difficult to break them of the habit. I hope they are firing blanks. Last week we were greeted by shrapnel shells by mistake. It is one of the little things that make life interesting and will keep you occupied here."

"You seem quite satisfied that I'll

stay put," Quent frowned. "I warn you I'm here against my will and I'll get away if I——"

Hawk laughed and stood up. "As far as that goes I don't think you will get away—nor try, if you are wise. There is no place to go, in the first place, and you can't get there, in the second. I should say the first five hundred miles would be the worst, with about one chance in a thousand of getting through without being cut to pieces by native tribes and marauding nomads."

"Where are we?" Quent asked huskily.

"A long way from home, my friend; so make the best of it. What you see below us is a tiny patch of the Gobi Desert. There is quite a lot more of it, extending from Siberia on the north to the various Chinese republics on the south, and it is all equally unpleasant for the traveler. Come! Don't look so downhearted. Ours is a new community; but we're not uncomfortable here, as you will see. There are worse places."

CHAPTER VII.

THE "MEDICAL DOC."

THERE might have been worse places, Quent thought, when the huge pirate plane eased down the long landing place to a stop. But he was quite certain that he had never seen a worse-looking collection of human driftwood than surged around the ship a moment after.

They were mixed and various—bearded and shaven, drunk and sober, brawny white men and sleek, expressionless yellow men, excited Latins and hard-faced Yankees, variously dressed in everything from leather pilot jackets to silken opera cloaks—with here and there a slatternly woman adding her voice to the raucous welcome.

But they kept a respectful distance from the control cockpit and the chill

smile of Captain Hawk. He brooded over them from the height of the cockpit like an evil spirit.

"Mostly drunk, of course," he commented quietly, noting Quent's disgust. "But that is allowed. This is their time to play, and my discipline is not as strict here as it is in the air. You don't like your new patients, I see."

"Where did they all come from?" Quent asked.

"Some, like Parrott and Yellow, are old friends of mine. Some more joined us when we emptied a jail at Portogardo the night we took the *Cordillera*, and others joined up on different voyages rather than make the long dive through Peter's Gate, attaching their fortunes and their weaknesses to my strength and leading a life of carefree happiness."

"The carefree happiness of a pack of starving wolves," Quent snorted contemptuously. "Happiness in drunken carousing—"

"Now," Hawk smiled evenly, "you are moralizing. They are scum and measure their pleasures differently from you and me. They're useful to me and reasonably loyal. For instance, all the booty from the air liner they will divide in fair proportions and leave me my lion's share without a murmur. In return I give them my protection and the benefit of my superior intelligence when it comes to organizing expeditions to the outer world. You will share with us of course, while you behave—"

"I don't want any part of your loot," Quent interrupted. "I'll give whatever medical attention I can to those that need it; but that's all."

Hawk shrugged his shoulders. "Suit yourself, as long as you do the work allotted to you. Meanwhile you will be my guest or whatever you wish to call it. You will find it better than the general mess."

He waved his hand to Quent to precede him down the ladder to the ground,

now covered with the bales and boxes and containers that were being hauled from the storerooms of the plane. Parrott, an automatic strapped to his waist, snarled and bellowed at the milling crowd that pressed around him, and directed the unloading.

"Crew first—stand back there, the rest of you! Storehouse with that one—and that big case, too. Keep yer dirty hooks off that silver set. Pancho! 'Tain't fer the likes of you, you swine. Take them books to the skipper's house. Easy, now. You'll get yours. Watch them bottles—"

He waded quickly into the center of a group that fought angrily and noisily over a case of expensive cigars, broken open and being trampled under their scuffling feet. Parrott's huge arms worked automatically; one disputant crumpled under a driving smash to his unshaven jaw, and the others slunk back into the crowd.

Hawk surveyed the man who groaned writhing on the ground, with the detached air of a scientist studying an insect impaled on a pin.

"Jaw broken, I suspect. You were always a thief, 'Parson.' Take him to his shack, a couple of you."

He turned away, beckoning to Quent to follow. "There will be plenty of work here, you see, for a rising young practitioner."

Quent caught up with him and touched his arm.

"You are leaving her behind—Miss Bradford—she is still aboard—"

"Oh, you mean the girl that Sims fancied? Really, I'd forgotten her. She is safer aboard the plane than anywhere else, right now. She is rather extraordinarily good looking, you know, and it might prove embarrassing to display her charms to that half-drunken mob. Besides, they are not a pleasant sight for a person of refinement. I promised you that she would not be harmed. Isn't that sufficient?"

Quent frowned straight ahead. "I suppose it will have to be."

He was conscious of a pair of keen eyes, gleaming from under heavy lids at his profile.

"You take a warm interest in the girl, my dear fellow."

Quent reddened. But the instinct that prompted him to keep his temper under control warned him also to avoid the truth.

"No. I'm only interested because she is so defenseless——"

"She will find a defender quickly enough," Hawk answered dryly; "so don't worry too much on that score."

Quent plodded along through the gritty sand and kept his own counsel while he tried to get the lay of things. As far as he could see, he was absolutely in the power of this up-to-date air-criminal. No desert island was as much cut off from civilization as this spot in a desert off the usual course of the air liners, camouflaged on the ground from prying eyes above, even if an occasional plane should pass low enough to see anything. Quent had a fair idea of the air lines in this part of the world. The Japanese line from Tokyo to Burma passed far to the southward, touching at Shanghai. The British line—the Transasian Pacific, from London to Vancouver eastward—followed a path as far to the north and touched no part of the Gobi Desert south of the Sayan Mountains. As far as inaccessibility was concerned the air buccaneer had picked an ideal place.

The path led abruptly from the blazing heat of the sands, now under the full rays of the sun, into the moist coolness under the trees, and opened out into a kind of trackless street between two rows of makeshift shacks, thrown together out of any material available—canvas, tree branches, crates, broken wing spars, and aluminum fuselage sections. Empty tin cans, broken bottles, and other rubbish graced the doorways

of these unkempt dwellings and added to the impression Quent got of an undisciplined mining camp in the early stages.

But there were two indications of some kind of system in the midst of chaos. One was an overalled sentry slouched over a rifle close to a green-bordered spring by the side of the path. The other was more ominous—the gray, metal snouts of four anti-aircraft guns pointing motionlessly toward the sky, on the edge of the wood.

Hawk pointed toward a couple of still figures swung in airplane hammocks under an awning.

"There's your first job, Quent. Know anything about bullet wounds, or didn't you get that far?"

He stopped Quent as he was about to look the wounded men over.

"Later will do. They've waited a week since the last raid, so it won't hurt them to wait a little longer. I want you to look over the surgical supplies first. You'll find them in that hut there. Maybe they're not quite right. I had to pick what I could out of the stuff we picked up from time to time. Make yourself at home there. I'll let you know when I want you again."

He nodded and disappeared up the path. Quent looked around—at the dilapidated hut made of aluminum scraps and broken boards, through the chinks of which he could see a hammock and a pile of wooden cases—at the opening between the shading trees beyond which showed the littered landing place, noisy with shouts and laughter—at the men in the hammocks he was supposed to doctor out of the depth of his ignorance.

"Well," he muttered, "if this isn't the darndest——"

"Hey, feller!" a hand waved weakly from the nearest hammock. "Could you fetch me a drop of water from the bucket there?"

Quent fetched the water, took a look

at the bullet wound in the man's arm underneath the dirty bandage, and whistled softly. He didn't need a license to practice medicine to recognize the beginnings of infection along the swollen wrist. The patient, a thin, hatchet-faced rascal with a broken nose, blinked up at Quent inquiringly.

"I suppose you're the doc that Hawk was to get us. How's it look—kinda bad?"

"It does," Quent agreed. "How long ago did you get it?"

"Week ago, down near Bangkok—one of them Australian Line air freighters with a machine gun aft. Hawk's a damned fool. He might have knowed they was carryin' mails. An' here I gotta lay like——"

"And you'll lie for a while yet." Quent interrupted grimly, "until I fix you up—if I can. Bangkok! You fellows sure cover some ground. I'll take a look at your friend here."

The other man's case was simpler—a neat hole through the calf of the leg that seemed to be healing despite lack of treatment and unsanitary surroundings.

Quent rolled up his sleeves and went to work opening the cases that were piled in the hut, using the empty boxes as shelves to hold bandages, absorbent cotton, rows of bottles, bed linen, books, anatomical charts, sterilizing outfits, and cases of instruments. By the time he was through he had enough supplies to equip a fair-sized drug store. Whatever Hawk was otherwise, as a collector of *materia medica*, he had been thoroughly successful.

Quent went to work with a will—and not through fear of Hawk, either. On the other hand Ross Quent would have resented the suggestion that he was having the time of his life exercising his unfinished medical apprenticeship on a couple of helpless air pirates.

He had given each a jab of anti-tetanus serum and was applying a wet

compress to the broken-nosed fellow, when he became aware of some one who had slithered silently up behind him from the trees. A skinny, yellow hand tapped his arm, and Quent glanced up impatiently into the bland, expressionless face of a Chinese in white coat and apron.

"Chow," he pointed a finger to his mouth. "Skipper Hawk fill belly. Clome now along me."

Quent stared. "What the heck——" "He's Hawk's chink," the air bandit explained. "Time fer you to eat, I guess. All right, Soo. Throttle her down till the doc gets through with my left wing panel."

Soo squatted on his heels. "Medical doc fix him bad debbil in wing panel, hey 'Java Joe?' Maybe some time he fix 'em debbil in skipper, too."

"What's wrong with the skipper?" Quent pinned the last lap of the bandage neatly in place. "Is he sick?"

Soo shook his head. "Not sick in the belly—sometimes sick in the head. You leady now? Pitty soon skipper laise hell waitin' too long."

"There you are," Quent stood up and surveyed his handiwork. "Maybe a high-priced specialist could have made a better job, but it'll be more comfortable now. We might save your arm after all—though I don't know why the dickens I should be so anxious to help you wreck some poor devil of an air freighter."

Java Joe grinned. "That's all right, doc. I'll save you a piece of change outa the next raid."

Quent turned away abruptly and followed the Chinese, who was trotting along the path beckoning Quent to hurry. They had not far to go.

The way opened out into a broad, open space, scarcely covered with grass, but showing evidences of some attempt at landscaping with flower beds and bordered walks. Beyond, painted green to match the tree branches drooping

overhead, was a long, low bungalow of wood, much more pretentious than the ramshackle huts Quent had seen. Under an awning of pea-green silk—apparently a bolt of expensive goods looted from an air freighter and roughly sewn together—Hawk sat at a table gleamingly set with silverware and crystal and white napery.

Standing behind Hawk's tall chair, a girl, darkly beautiful, exotic, swathed in the colorful folds of a Spanish shawl, watched Quent's approach, and said something in an extremely low tone to Hawk.

He looked up and pointed Quent to a chair across the table.

"Our good physician! I was about to conclude that you had refused my poor hospitality, being wrapped up in scientific inquiry. How are our patients, may I ask?"

Quent scowled at the soiled satin damask of the cloth, toyed with a silver fork, and came to the subject uppermost in his mind.

"Miss Bradford—what do you intend to do about—"

"You may go, Nina," Hawk interrupted blandly. "The señor and I have something to discuss."

The girl hesitated, looking from Quent to Hawk out of the corners of her elongated eyes. Then she slipped quietly inside the house.

"Nina is quite jealous, you see," Hawk smiled, "even when there is no reason for it. I do not even mention the names of other women in her hearing. She is quite unreasonable about it. In this case it would be quite needless."

"Why?" Quent blurted. "I don't put it beyond you, and even Sims—"

"Sims was a fool, my friend. He imagined things. It might interest you to know that Miss Bradford—if that is the lady's name—has never set foot aboard my plane. She was left where we rescued her at the wreck, and by this time I trust she is safely back home."

"But—but look here. You, yourself, told me she was aboard—"

"In order," Hawk laughed, "to give you an incentive to stay with us and not take a long dive through Peter's Gate. No, you can believe me, your friend is not within eight thousand miles of the place. Inquire of the crew and you will find I am telling the truth this time."

CHAPTER VIII.

JAVA JOE, THE JOKESMITH.

QUENT'S eyes narrowed as he studied the man across the table.

Was he lying to him about Thea? Was this a new story, invented to keep him satisfied, dished up for his consumption as the soft-footed Soo was dishing out more palatable food at his elbow? Or was Thea really on the other side of the world and out of danger?

It was impossible to probe the smiling mask before him—to know what lay beyond that frozen countenance and veiled eye. Quent could only hope—with a twinge of regret, too—that Thea was safely out of this, so that he had only himself to worry about.

He bent over his plate, chewing the mouthfuls of curried rice without tasting them, eating the canned delicacies cunningly disguised by Soo, with little relish, while he listened to the smooth drone of Hawk's voice—a discursive monologue, cynical, boastful, mocking—a cold-blooded recital of air piracy that tended to point the moral that Hawk was a clever person, indeed, as compared to the inhabitants of law-abiding world.

Quent nodded moodily from time to time. The man liked to talk—more especially, liked to talk of himself. He seemed to find satisfaction in having a listener, however reluctant. Quent wondered if he had been retained as much for his value as an appreciative audience as for his usefulness as a doc-

tor. The man was certainly dangerous. Best to humor him while——

Quent realized that Hawk was asking a question.

"I beg your——"

"I asked you about your two patients," Hawk repeated. "I don't believe you have given me a report. Will they be of any use to me?"

Quent described the injuries in detail.

"It may be necessary to amputate at the elbow," he concluded, with reference to Java Joe. "If it is gangrene. At any rate, he will be a long time getting well."

"Perhaps," Hawk pondered, "we'd better not waste time on him then. I have no use for one-armed men."

"But we can't sit by and let the man die!" Quent exclaimed.

Hawk's well-manicured hand tapped lightly on the tablecloth.

"I would suggest," he said calmly, "that you save yourself a lot of trouble and me a certain amount of rations by doing away with that extra mouth. Poison would do; or, if you like, I can have Parrott——"

"You—you mean to murder this man in cold blood?" Horrified, Quent pushed his chair back. "Well, of all the cool propositions——"

"Why not?" Hawk's manner showed an amused surprise. "I assure you it is the most sensible thing to do. Java Joe has been a useful rascal, but his usefulness is over; and I am in this business to get money, not to run a sanitarium for cripples. I think even you with your peculiar notions of the sanctity of human life will agree with me that my reasoning is quite sound."

"Absolutely not!" Quent exclaimed hotly. "You can run your own dirty business to suit yourself, but you brought me here against my will and I'm not in on your schemes. Bandits or not, my job is to cure those two."

Their glances fought across the table. For a moment the heavy lid that con-

cealed Hawk's eyes lifted slightly, as a curtain lifts to disclose an enemy crouching behind, and the hand that tapped the table crept toward a bulge underneath the arm of the loose linen coat he wore.

Quent sensed the subtle movement and prepared to spring, even while he realized that he would be too late. But the heavy lids dropped again quickly and it was once more the impassive, smiling face across the table.

"My dear Quent, you are altogether too serious a young man. You must let me have my little joke occasionally. I am glad to see you take your new duties so conscientiously. As a matter of fact, I am very fond of Java Joe. I hope you will take the best of care of him."

"I'll try to," Quent promised. But he had his own private opinion of this sudden transition on the part of the amiable Captain Hawk. "I've got to get back there now while it's still light. By the way, could you spare me an assistant for the field hospital—some one with sense enough to boil instruments and hold a basin?"

"Gladly, my dear fellow, gladly! I'll send my Chinese down there right away. We mustn't let those poor fellows suffer from lack of attention. Savvy, Soo? You bimeby go along medical doc help fix 'em sick feller."

"Al'ight, cap," the imperturbable Soo piped up.

On the way back to his hut Quent wondered just exactly what was meant by Hawk's admonition to "fix 'em sick feller." If the fixing was to be done with a dose of arsenic or a ready knife, Quent determined to fix one sloe-eyed chink himself. Hawk's about-face from a calm advocate of murder to a warm friend of Java Joe seemed too abrupt for Quent's taste. He made up his mind if anything happened to that cutthroat to notify the other air bandits and let Hawk make his explanations to them.

But the more Quent thought of it the less promising seemed to be the outlook of a certain "Doctor" Quent, family physician to a gang of ready-triggered aerial thugs.

He took another look at Java Joe's arm—after ejecting a drunken party who had been celebrating the return of the *Cordillera*, and was sleeping it off underneath the hammock. The wound seemed to indicate opening up and draining. Quent had had some little experience along that line in the university clinic, and he figured he could perform that simple operation successfully.

He was in his own hut getting things ready when Soo slid in unobtrusively. Quent sent him for water and then had him boil a scalpel. While the Chinese worked, Quent tried to draw him out.

"You a good friend of Java Joe's, are you, Soo?"

"Good friend." Soo's face was as expressionless as an ivory carving a thousand years old. "Damn good friend."

"I hope so. By the way, who is the girl in Hawk's house?"

Soo shook his head. "No can say. Maybe some time she come in air flight when skipper knock her boss in the head. Maybe not."

"She's Hawk's woman, hey? She likes him a lot?"

"Maybe some time he gets bad debbil in head and knock her on head, all the same the other white woman one time. Maybe not."

Quent frowned. "He sounds like a nice chap, this boss of yours. Where does he come from and what's his past history? That name of Hawk isn't his real name, is it? Come on, now; let's have the truth."

Soo nodded brightly. "Maybe not."

Quent gave it up. "As an information bureau, Soo, you're all wet. The trouble with you is you have no nose for news. Let's get busy on our pa-

tient. Maybe he'll get better and maybe not."

Java Joe proved to be a more patient patient than Quent had anticipated, especially since it was impossible to give him a general anæsthetic and Quent's hypodermic didn't seem to take hold well. But he stood the pain with a blasphemous hardihood, sweating and swearing where he lay on the bare boards of the floor.

When it was over Quent detailed Soo to dig up some provisions, and Quent prepared the canned food in his own hut rather than make another visit to Hawk, telling the Chinese to notify the skipper that the "medical doc" had to stay by his job for the night. Meanwhile Quent kept his eye on the doorway of Java Joe's hut across the path.

Toward evening he caught sight of a figure gliding around the corner of the wounded man's shanty, and hurried over to see that everything was all right. Java Joe was fumbling with his good arm under the mattress.

"Who was that just in here?" Quent asked sharply.

"Soo. He had something to tell me. He says Hawk asked you to bump me off, me bein' no more use to him. Is that right?"

Quent nodded. "I see the Chinese is a friend of yours, after all."

"He'd oughta be," Java Joe grunted. "I saved his bacon once, in Shanghai. An' he says you wouldn't do nothin' in that line for Hawk."

"Right again," Quent agreed. "I'm not exactly an assassin. But as far as that goes, there may be nothing to it. Hawk claims he was just joking."

"Joking, hey?" Java's teeth showed in a sudden snarl. "I know his jokes, damn his dirty heart! Joking! I've gotta funny one of my own up my sleeve."

He grinned savagely. "An' I helped him in his first jail break! He'll get rid of me like he did Sims back there, he

thinks. Reach under the mattress here, like a good guy. Right there. I can't get to it."

Quent felt the hard lump under the flimsy cotton mattress, tugged it free and caught a glimpse in the fading light of a blue-barreled automatic, as Java snatched it with his good hand.

He shoved it out of sight underneath the blanket. "Now, let's see him start something—him an' his Mister Parrott, the rat! I'll give that parrot a lead cracker in his belly that he'll find hard to digest, if I catch him around this perch, buddy! I'll feed him a cracker with a steel jacket wrapped around it! I mighta knew Hawk had somethin' under his wing fer me. Listen! Do me a favor, doc."

He beckoned to Quent to stand closer.

"You do me a favor an' I won't forget you later. Don't mind this other guy here. He's a greaser an' don't speak English. Go down the line to the end near the anti-aircraft guns an' ask fer a guy they call 'Parson.' Tell him Java Joe wants to see him special."

"I know the man," Quent said. "He had his jaw broken to-day by Parrott. What do you want him for—going to battle with Hawk?"

Java Joe grinned craftily. "Maybe I just want to have a talk with my old side partner, Parson, about the weather or somethin'. Don't you worry none, right now. Just tell him Java Joe wants to see him. They can't say nothin' to you fer visitin' a sick man. If he don't want to come, just say, 'Jerry Small,' kinda confidential. Get busy before he gets drunk."

Quent stepped out into the path, under the trees, where the shadows of the abrupt desert nightfall were beginning to thicken. As he passed between the huts, candles were beginning to glow, showing the contortions of dancing figures, noise and laughter and the heavy odor of liquor puffing out into the cool air.

There seemed to be plenty of gambling going on, too, under the flickering lights. But aboard the *Cordillera*, resting half under cover at the edge of the woods, was silence. Only a single light burning, aft.

Quent stopped a man and asked for the Parson. Following the direction indicated by a pointed thumb, Quent found the person he sought bent over a table and following the vagaries of a pair of dice. Evidently the jaw was not broken, after all, though it appeared swollen, giving the weak, chinless face a lopsided look.

He eyed Quent suspiciously when the latter delivered the message from Java Joe.

"Let him wait. I got money down here on the board. I s'pose he wants me to lend him some. T'hell with him. Let him lay."

Quent drew the man aside from the rest. "He told me to be sure and mention Jerry Small to you."

Parson's face faded quickly to a sickly gray, except for the blue lump on his jaw. His little eyes shifted toward the men about the table.

"What do I know about Jerry Small? Don't you believe nothin' that Java says. He's a liar. Jerry Small squealed on the——"

"I don't know anything about that," Quent said coldly. "I was told to deliver the message. Are you coming?"

"I didn't say I wasn't," the Parson whined. "I'll be right behind you, soon as I get my money here. It won't take a minute."

It took less than that. Quent, on his way back to his own hut, was passed by a skulking shadow that skipped inside Java Joe's shack. Quent crawled into the narrow airplane hammock and drifted off to sleep, listening to the low murmur of voices from across the road.

Evidently all was not as serene in the government and camp of Captain Hawk as that suave potentate imagined.

CHAPTER IX.

THE FOND RECOLLECTIONS OF CAPTAIN
HAWK.

JAVA JOE seemed to have picked up wonderfully when Quent visited his patients the following morning—seemed quite cheerful, in fact, and talked about getting up and about to “visit his friends.” Soo was in evidence, as phlegmatic and as much like an ancient-ivory carving as ever. He had brought food for the wounded air pirate. But the Parson was not in sight.

“Him and me just had a little friendly chat,” Java Joe said, in answer to Quent’s inquiry. “Wot it is fer a guy to have friends! He was right rarin’ to talk to me, was good’ old Parson. I wouldn’t be surprised if he held some kind of a benefit fer me—seein’ as I’m layin’ here so helpless. But I gotta a notion I’ll be up an’ around soon.”

“He wasn’t so keen to come until I mentioned Jerry Small,” Quent pointed out with dry emphasis. “He seemed to know that gentleman. Friend of his?”

“Friend of Hawk’s,” Java Joe grinned, “at Portogardo jail. Poor Jerry got a load of lead the night we made the jail break, an’ some of us has always maintained some one tipped the warden off to Jerry ’count of a woman in Frisco. Hawk—he’d enjoy knowin’ who it was.”

“I see.” Quent waited in the doorway for further information, but Java Joe seemed to regret already his unusual loquacity. He closed his eyes and pretended to slumber, though it was broad daylight outside and the occupants of the huts down the line were making the welkin ring and starting the cannikin clinking as if there had been no intermission.

“What is your game?” Quent asked impatiently. “There’s no need to keep me in the dark, if it’s directed against Hawk. I’m no particular playmate of his.”

“Game?” Java leered up at the younger man. “Bless yer heart. I ain’t cookin’ up no game on good old Hawk. He’s all right. It’s only he’s a joker an’ I gotta laugh or two up my sleeve myself. It ain’t everybody what can see Hawk’s jokes. He’s a kidder, that lad. Speakin’ of games, we used to have a game when we was kids in the orphan asylum—hopscotch or somethin’. One guy would close his eyes an’ the others beat it off somewheres, an’ he’d shout: ‘Come out, come out, wherever——’”

“You’re thinking of hide and seek,” Quent corrected him with a puzzled frown.

“Sure, that was it. I knew it was somethin’ like that.” Java rolled over on the hammock and presented his broad back.

For the rest of the day Quent was busy trying to make his hut as habitable as possible, and kept away from the rest of the colony. No one bothered him, no one paid him more attention than a cursory glance or two. He might have been a regular fixture. Once a ringleted and greasy Greek came bel-lowing for the doctor and Quent treated him for a bad burn on the arm; and again, a soft-spoken Malay, wearing a gorgeous Indian shawl over his shoulder, and half a dozen women’s rings on his skinny hand, consulted Quent about an upset liver. He tendered an engraved watch in payment. Quent pushed it aside.

Occasionally he caught sight of visitors lounging in and out of Java Joe’s shack, one being the red-haired axman Quent had seen on the night of the wreck supervising the distribution of the loot. Toward dark, when the fellow had taken himself off, Quent went in to see Java Joe.

“That fellow is from the ship,” Quent jerked his head toward the departing air pirate. “You can do me a favor now. I suspect there was a woman taken aboard the other night Hawk

says not. I wish you would find out for me from one of the hands whether the girl was left behind or not."

"Sure," Java agreed readily. "I'll find out fer you. Best not go askin' Parrot any questions yourself unless you want—"

His mouth clamped shut suddenly and his free hand reached under the blanket. Quent turned to see what he was staring at and found Hawk standing in the doorway.

"I'm afraid," Hawk said, breaking the rather strained silence first. "I'm afraid you don't care for my hospitality, doctor. I expected to see you at lunch. I ate alone, since my poor Nina was indisposed."

"I've been pretty busy," Quent replied and indicated the two men in the hammocks.

Hawk smiled at Java Joe. "Ah, yes. I'd almost forgotten our unfortunates here. You must take good care of my friend Java here. We can't afford to lose his invaluable services to our unjust cause. It's your shooting hand, isn't it, Java?"

Java Joe's arm stirred slightly beneath the blanket. "I shoot good with both hands, cap'n. I thought you knowed that."

"True," Hawk conceded—"true. So you do. A useful accomplishment."

His tone became gently reminiscent. "I remember Alcazar had that trick, too. You remember Alcazar, who was with us in Portogardo, and fell overboard on the trip back from Bangkok that time? And 'Shorty' Mills—the pilot who committed suicide in his hut? Another of our old crowd. We grow fewer in numbers every day."

Java grinned—frowningly and mirthlessly, in a forced grimace.

"We do, for a fact," he muttered. "Ain't it true, cap'n?"

"All the more reason," Hawk said, turning away carelessly, "that you should look out carefully for my old

partner here, Quent. We mustn't have anything happen to him."

Java Joe's grin seemed fixed in place, as if the muscles that pulled apart his unshaven lips were paralyzed; but he changed quickly when Hawk disappeared out of the door.

"Watch him!" Java croaked hoarsely. "See which way he goes."

"Toward his own house," Quent reported, and turned to find Java struggling weakly to stand on his feet. He waved Quent's protests aside fiercely—impatiently.

"A shot of booze will fix me up. I gotta get on my feet and get busy before he smells a rat. I know Hawk, buddy. He'd a knocked me off then, if he hadn't 'a' knowed I was coverin' him. I'm sleepin' somewheres else to-night, where he won't find me."

He swayed toward the door, the automatic dangling from his hand.

"I know Hawk," he repeated and spat into the road. "Smilin' an' sashayin' around to get me from behind. He couldn't help blowin' about them other guys he bumped off to get their shares. That's his way. You lay low to-night till I send fer you. Maybe I'll play that hide-and-go-seek game an' you can join in."

"I'll take any chance," Quent assured him, "rather than stay in this place."

"It might be outa the fryin' pan into the—— Who is that?"

He backed through the doorway again, pointing the short snout of the weapon toward a ghostly white figure that moved in the dusk under the trees. It approached silently and proved to be the Chinese.

"Skipper Hawk like to know maybe you fill belly along him to-night," he intoned in his high-pitched notes. "Maybe not. Missy Nina feel velly bad to-night."

"Got one of his spells again," Java grunted. "What did he do to her, Soo?"

The Chinese clutched his throat with both skinny hands, flailed the air with his white-coated arm, drooped from the waist, and recovered, grinning at his own pantomime.

Quent's blood boiled. "You can tell your devilish Captain Hawk to go plumb to——"

"Best go along," Java Joe cautioned. "If you don't, he's liable to come snoop-in' around here an' spoil everything. He won't do nothin' to you—not till he's finished with you, anyway. Play along with him; don't let him pump you about me an' my doings; an' watch his pistol hand. He's as quick as a rattler. Let him talk an' tell you what a helluva guy he is. You'll hear from me later on how things is goin'."

He tottered over to the hammock occupied by the man with the wounded leg, fumbled around and returned with a long-bladed knife.

"Here. Shove that up yer sleeve. It's heavy in the blade, so throw high up, if you have to——"

"Good Lord! I never threw a knife in my life."

Java's hoarse voice registered disapproval. "You can't? Where was you brung up, anyway? Well, it won't do you no good, most likely. Hawk ain't the bird to give the other guy time to draw. I've seed him work."

"That's encouraging," Quent muttered dolefully. "I think I'll stick to diplomacy. I'm a prisoner of war, anyway. At the same time, I wish my host weren't so insistent. I have about as much appetite as I'd have if I were sitting on top of a time bomb with the fuse burning——"

A low whistle sounded from the shadow of the trees. Java Joe slid out the door.

"You come now?" the Chinese crooned in Quent's ear. "Skipper Hawk, he wait along of you."

Quent nodded and followed the glimmering white coat along the path.

CHAPTER X.

HOPSCOTCH AT DAWNING.

HAWK was sitting under his barbaric canopy, lighted now with a couple of colorful paper lanterns that shed a soft glow on the table set for two and was reflected in the amber-colored liquid in a half-filled decanter at the air pirate's elbow.

He shoved the decanter toward Quent.

"If your principles permit you. I have none, personally. Perhaps that is why I cultivate you so intensely, my dear doctor, rather than my rather unclean fellows in crime. Here's how."

He lifted the glass he held steadily enough, but Quent sensed that the man was drunk. But there was nothing riotously convivial about his drinking. Quent made a show of sipping the brandy, while he watched the dull gleam in the brooding eyes under the lanterns. He began to regret more than ever accepting Hawk's doubtful hospitality.

That the man had a murderous complex, there was no doubt—as little doubt as that he would do away with Quent whenever whim or expediency prompted it. That had happened to Sims; it threatened Java Joe; it hung like the traditional sword over Quent's head.

He looked at the silent Chinese flitting about the table. What side was he on: his master's or Java Joe's—the disaffected Java Joe who was even now slipping among the trees of the oasis, working out his little game of hopscotch with the whining Parson and the red-haired axman? It was impossible to read anything in that phlegmatic yellow face.

Quent left his food untasted, and presently Soo carried the plate away. Hawk filled his glass and emptied it twice, seemingly unheated, unaffected and unhurried.

"Look here." Quent broke the still-

ness finally. "I suppose there is no chance of your letting me out of this—dropping me somewhere near civilization—ransom and all that, though I haven't much wealth——"

"Your supposition," Hawk said incisively, "is absolutely correct. I have no intention of doing so."

"Well, what are your intentions?" Quent persisted. "Am I to get the same deal that Sims got and Java Joe was going to get?"

Hawk rolled his glass thoughtfully on the table. There was a suggestion of a smile on his thin lips.

"Java Joe. A rough diamond, my dear Quent; but well worth your knowing better. The more you know him the better you will like him. I hope you two will be friends—for you are going to be together a long time. As for my killing either of you, I assure you I have no intention of doing so. I think it will not be necessary now."

Quent did not press the question further. He sincerely hoped any more murders would remain unnecessary from every point of view. To discuss the matter so calmly with this cynical scoundrel gave Quent a chill feeling that wasn't altogether the effect of the cold night air of the desert waste.

Hawk launched into one of his boastful, self-analyzing harangues. The man was all ego—self-confident, vain, blind to all considerations of decency and virtue, untouched by any of the manifold restraints imposed by a law-abiding society, relentless, pitiless and veneered with a superficial culture picked up in Lord knows what backwaters of the nether world.

Quent listened, frowning at the glass before him, feeling the heavy knife sagging in his coat pocket, wondering if, after all, the disorderly ruffians back in the huts were not preferable to this polished jailbird with his ambitions to be a petty King of the Beggars.

"A philosophy, my dear Quent, beau-

tifully practiced by its ablest disciples, the buccaneers of the eighteenth century—to live furiously, not missing a single satisfaction, to be above all the laws stupid, lesser men make to save their skins and fortunes, to die quickly when the time comes and you've had your fill of money and women and the fun of fooling the outside world. I killed a man in Gibraltar one time by one of the cleverest ideas I——"

"Mister Pallott coming," Soo murmured from behind the chair.

Parrott slouched into the light, started to say something, and caught sight of Quent.

"I thought you were alone," the big man growled.

Quent took the hint, glad of an opportunity to escape into cleaner air. From the edge of the clearing he looked back for a moment. Hawk and Parrott were talking earnestly together—smooth, glossy head and disheveled mop close together, while the soft-footed Soo busied himself in the background, as unemotionally calm as if he were, in reality, what he seemed to be; a conscientious servant in a gentleman's home somewhere on Long Island, instead of a slave to a bandit master, breathing air heavy with intrigue, with murder and mutiny stalking the shadows.

In the seclusion of his crowded hut Quent lay on his hammock fully clothed, listening to the night noises—the sough of the cool wind in the branches, the shrill cackle of women's laughter, the crash of a breaking bottle, the harsh snarling of angry men rising and subsiding from time to time, the faint tinkle of a mandolin from the hut of some air pirate of Latin blood.

What was to be the outcome? Was he doomed to stay here years, a useful captive, while Hawk's ship came and went on its forays, until such time as an air cruiser bombed the place to dust from the skies? Suppose Hawk's plane

was downed somewhere on the other side of the world and all hands lost, leaving Quent and the rabble of ground folk to starve here in the midst of a desert, without hope of rescue or escape across a thousand miles. Waterless desert—savage yellow men—no escape from—

He awoke suddenly hours later.

The lopsided square of the door showed the faintest suggestion of pearly light—vanguard of the impetuous desert dawn. Quent blinked at the silhouette of a man crouching over his hammock.

"Who is it?" He swung to his feet.

"Parson," a quavering whisper answered. "Move easy an' quiet! Java Joe sent me for you. Slide down the road after me."

Quent hung back. "What's up?"

"The plane will be up in another minute," the Parson whispered impatiently. "Come on, before we gets left. There'll be hell poppin' around here in two shakes."

He hurried away, looking back once to see that Quent followed, toward the landing field. As he passed the straggling line of huts, Quent saw other shadows emerging in the uncertain light—one here, two there, drifting silently under the black trees in the same direction.

At the edge of the line of starved vegetation a group of men huddled under the shadow of the *Cordillera's* vast wing. Quent recognized the gleam of Java Joe's white bandage, and creeping closer, made out the blank, pallid face of the Chinese. Altogether, there might have been fifteen or twenty men, counting the newcomers from the huts.

"Easy does it," Java Joe whispered. "No noise, Pancho. You know the lay-out aboard. Parrott sleeps aft of the freight compartment. The other guys you can leave to us. You gotta a knife, doc? Give it to Pancho fer his gun. We don't want no shootin' right now."

Quent made the exchange gladly and

pocketed the square weight of an automatic.

"What are you going to do?" he asked Java Joe.

The air bandit's teeth flashed for an instant in his stubble of beard. "We're goin' fer a little joy ride of our own—an' we're not comin' back no more! We'll let King Hawk an' what's left of his friends run this dump alone—until they starve to death. *There's a joke fer him!*"

He turned away abruptly, shutting off further questioning, and crawled across the sand toward the fuselage. Pancho appeared for an instant, a thin spider of a man darting up the ladder to the control cockpit, and vanished. Soo followed noiselessly.

Quent waited with the others. There was no question in his mind but that these men, stealing the ship and leaving Hawk and his remaining followers to die slowly in this hidden corner of the earth, were about to embark on a pirating expedition of their own, under Java Joe's leadership. That meant Quent was fleeing from one evil to another. But, slim as the chance was of getting safely aground somewhere, it would be better than being marooned here with Hawk.

He hadn't long to wait, shivering in the cold wind of dawn.

The door in the fuselage just above his head swung open and a hand beckoned. The air pirates swarmed aboard, Quent in their midst.

Java Joe was waiting for them in the narrow corridor.

"Where's Soo? Damn that chink! Got the keys to the switches?"

The Chinese nodded. "Me catchum all keys along his pocket."

Java Joe snatched them away. "Here, Red. The right auxiliary engine first, so as we can swing clear of the trees. Give him a hand, Scotty. Cloudy Conn's the only guy kin pilot. Remember, now. No racket until we're all set.

Y'ain't got time to warm up, after they once hear the engines. Keep quiet, an' then give 'er hell all together."

Quent turned to the placid Soo, standing near the open door.

"What happened to the crew?"

The Chinese grinned enjoyably and gestured unmistakably with one bony finger toward his stringy throat.

"Stick 'em neck nice an' quiet. Mister Pallott catch 'em smash top side of head. Maybe better Mister Pallott stay along Skipper Hawk to-night. Maybe not."

Hurrying feet pattered along the corridor to the accompaniment of low voices and the clink of metal from the engine compartment. Soo reached out to close the door.

"What did Parrott want with the skipper?" Quent questioned. "Cooking up some new deviltry?"

"Plenty debbils all aloud to-night," Soo said sadly. "Bad place for China boy. Pallott talk with Skipper Hawk. Bimeby bling girl along him for skipper. All the same missy girl sleep along compartment——"

Quent clutched the skinny arm.

"What's this about a girl? You mean a girl from the ship? What did she look like?"

"Plisoner girl—black hair, led mouth all the same like flower—led hat, too, an' she don't like to come along Pallott or——"

Quent pushed him aside and jumped to the ground. The Chinese looked out with a faint show of surprise.

"You no come along us? Pletty soon we go——"

They went quicker than that. From up forward the auxiliary engine burst into thunderous energy. Flames licked from the exhaust—red flames in the gray light. The ship swung around in a whirlwind of its own creation, almost throwing Soo from the open door, and covering Quent with a hail of driven sand.

He jumped aside, as the huge tail surface bore down upon him. Then the other engines leaped into action, drowning the shouts from the awakened huts, and the great plane roared along the landing place toward the far-reaching desert.

Quent plunged along the path the way he had come.

CHAPTER XI.

HAWK'S NEST.

OUT from the purple gloom of the trees a man stumbled and stiffened his arm, emptying his pistol in a futile spitting of pale flame at the big plane that was swinging at the farther end of the landing space preparatory to taking off over the encampment.

Quent brushed by, paying no attention to the inquiring shouts of the marooned air pirates, who were tumbling forth from their shacks. There was something more pressing on Quent's mind than mutiny and starvation in the desert.

Thea was there somewhere—probably in Hawk's bungalow at the end of the path. Quent would have faced a dozen Hawks right at that moment without fear or mercy in his heart. So much for the effect of an hour's meeting with a certain girl, and a few days of living at the mercy of the primitive savagery of the bandit camp, on the usually unwarlike disposition of Ross Quent.

He collided with more than one person in the narrow path, for it was crowded now with the awakened rabble that poured toward the landing place—a horde of yelping men and slovenly women, half of them not realizing the departure of the plane was more than one of Hawk's usual forays at dawn, but adding their voices to the panic of those that sensed their fate.

The giant plane's engines thundered nearer, overtaking Quent's hurrying steps, covering him with the shadow of

its great wings as it dipped down to a few yards above the heads of the mob, in mocking disregard of the fusillade of shots aimed at it.

Something, black against the sky, dropped from the plane, turned over in the air twice, and crashed into the trees almost over Quent's head, with a great snapping of branches.

Quent looked up, and shivered as he recognized, in that broken body, wedged in the crotch of a branch, the burly Parrott. Some grim jester—Java Joe probably—had pinned an air-freight way bill to the dead man's leather coat; and though Quent could not make out the scribbled name below the legend "Perishable—Rush," he surmised it was addressed to Hawk.

The air captain himself appeared at that moment—a rushing fury in a brocaded silk dressing gown, heavy automatic clutched in his hand—and if Quent had had any doubts as to the completeness of Java Joe's surprise party, a glance at Hawk's pallid, contorted face and blazing eyes was sufficient.

"The aircraft guns!" he rasped, and sent a slipped and peroxidized wanton reeling from his path. "The guns, you filth! Get to the guns!"

Quent stepped quickly aside from the pathway and reached for his pistol, jerking at the cold butt as it stuck in his pocket. He had no plan of campaign in mind. None was necessary. Things became suddenly simplified to Ross Quent. Here was the man who had lied to him, had betrayed and robbed and murdered the helpless in half a lifetime of venomous cruelty, and was now reaching for the slim youthfulness of Thea Bradford.

Quent wrenched the weapon free of the entangling cloth and was about to step out into the open before the air captain, when a hand closed softly over Quent's taut fingers.

He whirled around. Nina, the girl

he had seen at Hawk's table, cowered against the side of the nearest shack. Her gay shawl was torn, and a discolored bruise marred the olive smoothness of her forehead.

"What is it?" Quent asked savagely. "Let go. He'll be gone in a——"

"I look for you," she moaned up at him, "all places, señor. He must not have other womans but me. Now he has brought this new girl—so young, so white and beautiful—and he thinks of nothing. At me he no longer looks but to strike. You are friend of hers—her lover, perhaps. You will take her away? So that he may no longer beat me so——"

"Wait. Where is this girl?"

She beckoned to him eagerly. "I will show you. You will take her away, Señor Medico? You will maybe hide her from him, so he will forget her and not have more womans?"

The frail hut shook as one of the anti-aircraft guns blazed into action, sending shell after shell—five of them—tearing through the ether after the vanishing *Cordillera*. And the remaining guns joined in the ineffective bombardment, adding their racket to the shouts of the deserted mob, running amuck in the roadway.

Nina shook Quent's arm. "Now is the time—while he is busy. Only the mulatto is there. Quickly!"

Quent needed no urging. He passed the woman in a stride and made for Hawk's clearing, still gripping the weapon he had drawn. At the edge of the open space he crouched down in the bristly underbrush for a quick inventory of things.

The anti-aircraft guns still pounded despairingly, though the plane was a swimming black thing in the southern sky—a speck poised above the green roof of the house Quent watched. The shells sang over his head with a sound like a snapped violin string, and blossomed out in tiny white puffs high in

the air, over the blank desert. It was as if a madman were bombarding the intangible clouds.

In front of the bungalow, his back turned to Quent, and seemingly interested in watching the effects of the aerial barrage, was the mulatto known as Yellow. In the crook of his elbow rested the tapering barrel of a rifle.

Only a few yards intervened; but to Quent, creeping foot by foot across the coarse yellow sand, it seemed miles. And, when he got within six feet of the negro, Quent discovered that he could not shoot a man in the back, anyway.

"Don't move!" he cautioned sharply, and jammed the automatic against the other's backbone. "Drop your rifle and walk forward a step!"

Yellow obeyed with the celerity and silence of a man to whom the situation was by no means novel. He shuffled forward, and Quent secured the rifle, carrying it in his left hand.

"Now move into the house," he ordered—"and not too fast. Lead me to where that girl is."

They walked under the canopy and into a room furnished with the plunder from half a dozen air cabins. Yellow stopped outside a door with a key in the lock.

"She's in there," he muttered.

"Open it!"

The key squeaked in the lock and the door swung wide.

She was standing in the center of the little room, her head thrown back as he had seen her the first night, her eyes wide with fear and looking larger because of the dark circles of sleepless nights. But they lighted up remarkably at sight of Quent; and she even managed a rather tremulous smile, that might have meant a valiant effort to repress tears of relief.

"You're not— That horrible man said you had been killed. I knew it wasn't the truth."

"Not quite." Quent attempted a

light tone. "I've had as many lives as a cat around here—and I've needed them, too. Just don't worry now and we'll get clear of this mess. There's been a mutiny in the gang and some of them have stolen the only ship. But we've got Hawk to reckon with."

She shuddered. "He's terrible, Ross. The tales I heard from that poor girl that was here—and what that man Parrott let drop when he brought me my meals—about killings and everything—I was a regular prisoner, you know. Then, an hour or so ago, this bandit captain of theirs had me brought here. He talked wildly about his money and his power—"

Both of them had forgotten Yellow, standing inside the room obedient to the urge of Quent's automatic. The man looked carefully over his shoulder.

"You goin' to let me go now, boss?"

"And warn Hawk?" Quent scoffed.

"I guess not. We'll just tie—"

"Don't you worry none that I'll go near to Cap'n Hawk," Yellow protested earnestly. "He'll do me in quicker'n a shot for lettin' you trick me. I'll keep outa his sight, believe me!"

Quent considered this suggestion—was considering it still when he heard a light step in the room outside. He turned as Thea shrank back.

Hawk—once more the smiling, cool master of destinies and lives, with only a suggestion of a glitter under the heavy eyelids to remind Quent of the raging demon of half an hour ago—leaned against the doorpost with folded arms and surveyed the group in utter disregard of Quent's ready weapon.

"Ah, a reunion of old friends!" The air pirate's face turned slowly, with a deadly deliberation, toward the mulatto. "Thanks to our friend Yellow's carelessness, perhaps."

"What do you want?" Quent snapped. For the second time he was discovering that he could not shoot an unarmed man, much as he would have

liked to rid the world of this one. "What do you want here, Hawk?"

"Considering," Hawk replied easily, "that this is my own house, that is rather an odd question, my dear pseudo doctor. Suppose I were to say I wanted my very charming guest left undisturbed, and wanted you somewhere else than here, would it make any difference?"

"No—and keep that hand still!" Quent moved his elbow forward a few inches. "I'm not taking any chances. There's been enough killing around here."

"There may be more," Hawk said coolly. "There aren't enough rations to feed this mob of mine indefinitely—and without a ship it looks as if we were to be here for a long time to come. Suppose we discuss that phase of the situation."

Quent waited, his finger ready and his gaze riveted on the pallid mask before him.

"This thing," Hawk continued, "caught me unprepared, I admit. But a way out suggests itself to me—with your cooperation, and the help of one or two other reliable ones. First of all, we will get—ah—rid of the useless mouths. We'll have plenty of time to attend to that item, and there are many ways of doing it besides starvation. Then we—you and I and our girl friend here—will make our way to the nearest air route and try to signal a passing ship, returning later in one of our own for the money secreted here. It will be easy to arrange a tale of three stranded aviators—forced landing—held by bandits, and so forth. The details I haven't worked out—"

"I see. I'm to be a partner in all this."

"Exactly. Share and share alike. There will be no other participants, and the share will be large when we have disposed of the other folks—"

"Hawk"—Quent spoke quietly but there was a white line at the corner of

his mouth—"as one partner to another, I'm going to be fairer than you would be if I once took up with your proposition and let you get the drop on me—I'm going to give you a chance to get across that clearing. But you'll have to move fast. I've a strong temptation to save some unfortunate executioner the dirty job of hanging you. Get out!"

He waited grimly, feeling Thea trembling close beside him, and watching a tiny muscle in Hawk's cheek twitch and twitch unceasingly. Then the air captain nodded and turned away, Quent following closely at his heels.

Hawk did not look around once nor did he speak, but his silence was more ominous than a volley of threats. Quent watched until the air bandit disappeared under the trees, then returned to Thea.

"Where is Yellow?" he asked.

"He went out the back way. He seemed scared."

"I don't blame him," Quent grinned. "So am I. Are you?"

She nodded, smiling through lips that were colorless. "I must be braver—as I—I should be, with a name like mine."

"Speaking of battles," Quent frowned, "I think we'd better look to our defenses. The front is the only place that needs—"

From the cover of the woods in front a machine gun spat viciously. One of the windowpanes of the living room became a jagged frame, the tinkle of the falling glass lost in a yelping chorus of hoarse voices.

CHAPTER XII.

THE COMING OF THE EAGLES.

QUENT pushed the girl quickly into an angle of the room away from the door leading into the living room, grabbed up the mattress from the bed and jammed it into the single window behind him. He shoved a light chest of drawers against the mattress.

Reasonably safe now from a surprise

attack from the rear, he turned his attention to the defenses. The bungalow was not built to withstand a siege. It was a flimsy, take-down affair of composition board and thin wooden clapboard, as useful in stopping a bullet as a cardboard box. Fortunately, the side windows were effectively blocked up already by cases and boxes—some of which Quent recognized by the stenciling as being part of the cargo of the N. Y., P. & H. liner—piled almost to the ceiling. That left two points of assault—the front doors and windows and the rear door.

Quent felt reasonably sure he could command both entrances from his position at the doorway to the bedroom. At the same time, he knew in his heart that he was fighting a losing battle. A determined rush on the part of the rabble in the woods would swamp him in no time.

Through the broken window across the room he could view only a section of the open space and the brush beyond—a flash of a revolver here, a movement of the leaves there—to show where his enemies were lurking.

The machine gun crashed into action again and daylight appeared in a row of tiny holes near the angle of the ceiling. Quent picked up the rifle, sighted steadily, from a kneeling position, at a point where the leaves quivered, and let fly, working the lever twice.

Catcalls and shouts answered him in raucous derision. But he had the satisfaction of seeing a man lurching between the trees, for an instant, as he made his way to the rear holding his arm.

Some one spoke sharply, and the racket subsided. Quent gripped the rifle tightly in his hands and waited, trying to watch both ways at once.

A man stepped out from the cover of the woods, his hands raised above his head. Quent recognized the soft-spoken Malay in the rose-embroidered Spanish shawl. He walked slowly along the

path toward the house, the sunlight sparkling on the jeweled feminine rings that decked his skinny fingers.

Outside the shattered window he stopped, his blank eyes darting about the interior of the bungalow until they located Quent.

"Sir," he said, in careful, meticulous English, "the captain thinks there have been great misunderstandings. He wishes to speak honorably. He wishes to know what eet is you want."

"Why doesn't he come himself?" Quent retorted. "I'd let him know quick enough."

"He would make," the swarthy one continued blandly, "a sensible arrangement. All are enraged now because you have sent away our ship with your confederate. But he will explain to them satisfactorily—eef you will come out, leaving the woman. The captain does not wish to spoil his house or kill her. She is for him—it is our custom. He will give to you the other—Nina——"

"On your way!" Quent jerked the rifle forward. But the other still seemed unsatisfied.

"It is necessary that you be reasonable," he went on glibly. "The people are quite enraged at what the captain has told them of you. He wishes only your security, and it is impossible that you may escape——"

Something in the glitter of the narrow eyes made Quent turn toward the rear door. It was swinging slowly open.

Quent pulled the trigger of the rifle without waiting to bring it to his shoulder, heard an answering cry of pain, and swung around again to catch a glimpse of the Malay darting aside out of sight.

Thea appeared at Quent's side.

"No," he protested. "Go back. They'll attack in earnest now."

She shook her head, and showed him the automatic she held in her slim fingers. "I—I can fire it if I have to, Ross. I must help you. It is my fault you are here. If you hadn't tried to

help me that night you would be safe and——”

He turned his head to look at her—one fleeting glance into the dark eyes so close to him—a moment of recognition on her part no less than on his, of something above and beyond either of them, that held them more immutably in its power than Hawk or his madened mob.

He shifted his left hand from the rifle and felt the warmth of her hand within his—would have spoken, but for the din that broke loose from in front.

It was everything now—machine gun, rifle and revolver—and Quent could see a dozen men creeping across the ground under cover of this barrage. He fired the rifle, jerked the bolt for another shot, and found his targets blotted out by a black curtain of smoke that burst from the ground in half a dozen places and billowed through door and window. Quent recognized the effect of the aerial smoke bombs Hawk had impressed into service.

It filled the rooms quickly—a choking, dense fog that brought the darkness of night with it, and something else that Quent felt—the burning tang of tear gas. Red flames stabbed through it as the air pirates surged to the attack, firing as they ran.

To be caught in this boxlike bedroom meant a quick finish. Quent took Thea's arm and stumbled toward the rear door. His eyes tingled with the sting of the acid gas, blurring his vision more than had the pall of smoke. His throat and nostrils seemed to be on fire.

The door was still ajar, as the wounded air pirate had left it. Quent pushed it open, just as the front door crashed in and the attackers pounded into the room, firing with a total disregard of one another's safety, in their lust to reach the besieged.

Quent collided with some one at the rear door, and released Thea's arm to swing the rifle barrel viciously—and

miss. It seemed to clear the way, however, and guiding Thea as best he could, he staggered out into the open.

The smoke was there, too, drifting in somber ribbons out across the desert, dissipating slowly, but still obscuring everything in the immediate vicinity.

Quent had no longer an idea of direction. To reach the protection of one of the isolated huts and prolong the unequal battle a few minutes longer seemed to be his only course.

Then he found himself in the sunlight, with the blurred figures of Hawk and a score of air pirates in a huddled group twenty yards away.

But they were not looking at Quent. They were gazing aloft; and for a moment, as he took in the sky scene, Quent wondered if his tortured eyes were playing him tricks.

There was the *Cordillera*—but it was not coming back to roost alone. On its tail, zooming up over it and banking to pour broadside after broadside into the pirate place, were two air cruisers with the tricolored insignia of France on their lower wing panels.

As Quent watched, the *Cordillera* gave a lurch, seemed to try to get into a spiral glide to safety, and side-slipped toward the ground, leaving a trail of smoke behind, flames bursting from the forward part of the fuselage.

“It's down!” some one shouted shrilly. “They'll bomb hell——”

From the edge of the woods shells screamed into the sky as the pirates' battery crashed into action. But this booming was drowned a moment after in a terrific concussion from the center of the camp, shaking the ground, filling the air with a cloud of littered smoke.

Somewhere near at hand a woman screamed incessantly. The group about Hawk broke up, leaving the air captain and the Malay and one or two others.

Quent saw Hawk point his way, saw the Malay slip aside to come at Quent from the rear, as the others spread out

in an encircling cordon, saw Hawk's marble-white face set in cruel lines as the air captain walked stealthily forward.

Quent stepped in front of Thea.

Then it was as if a giant hand had picked him up, stuffing his mouth with sand, tossing him playfully aloft in a soundless whirlwind, until he began falling—falling—

He seemed to have hit the ground on something quite soft and pleasant and sweet-smelling, he thought, when he opened his eyes again.

He did not take in the situation all at once, for there was a buzzing in his ears as of a million locusts, and the horizon was rippling somewhat. But he made out that there was some sort of fringe of lustrous black hair between him and the smiling face of a deferential gentleman in the uniform of the French air service, and the officer seemed to be in the act of addressing a lady.

"An injury of the slightest, madam. One must not be distressed. The concussion of the bursting bomb has made monsieur without his sense for the moment. Unfortunate — unpardonable; but we had no idea, you may imagine, that there were others here than those brigands— Ah! You perceive, madam! Already he opens the eye—he becomes colorful in the cheek—he rejoices in the possession of his sense—in the possession, may I add, madam, of a very brave and beautiful wife."

Quent sat up dizzily, shook his head. He closed his eyes to give the horizon a chance to behave itself—thereby failing to see a pink silk flying suit steal away.

The two big air cruisers, propellers turning slowly over, rested on the ground a few hundred feet away. Behind them the twisted wreck of the *Cordillera* smoldered in a gray haze of smoke. Near at hand, close to a patch of woods that looked as if a cyclone

had hit it, stolid men in horizon blue dug in the sand beside a stark figure.

Quent pointed to it. "Hawk?" he asked.

"I believe he used that *nom de guerre*," the lieutenant said. "One might say ex-Commander Hawkins, once cashiered from an excellent army, and not be mistaken. A remarkable person, from what the prisoners tell me. But there will not be many prisoners. Even after we landed, they resisted with a desperation. A very interesting affair. You improve?"

Quent grinned. "Some. But how on earth did you folks happen to come along?"

"We receive a signal through the radio, which we pick up on patrol. We are from Indo-China. We answer. We bomb. Later we ask questions. It was an amusing thing—this."

He waved his hand to indicate the desert, the oasis, the shattered huts.

"One sees strange things—it is to be expected in his service," he smiled philosophically. "One cannot escape one's fate always, nor fly from evil and the wicked things of one's hands. This leader of theirs, *par exemple*—he makes a wicked thing here. He tires of it and would depart with stealth, leaving the others desolate. He would take with him a woman to start again. A person named Joe of Java, or the like, it appears, had similar ideas. He also must get away, leaving the others desolate. But he waits for no woman. As you see neither get away."

"And you," Quent puzzled—"you got a message?"

The Frenchman tapped a cigarette on his thumb nail. "Still there was another who wished to escape—a Chinese man. He would betray the others. He, too, failed. It was most strange. When we penetrate the wreck, there is our Chinese—dead, of course—seated and tied in a chair aft—"

"St. Peter's Gate," Quent said. "Java

Joe must have suspected he had been double crossed."

"And now," the lieutenant glanced at his wrist watch, "if you and madam will overlook the poor accommodation of an air cruiser, I have been instructed to carry you to the nearest station of the Air Guard, where arrangements will be made to take you in an air liner to your own country. But I fatigue you. You and your wife are tired—would wish to repose, perhaps—"

"Never felt better in my life," Quent said, jumping to his feet, "nor less like reposing."

He looked around and caught sight of a slim figure outlined against the blank line of the desert.

"If you'll excuse me a moment, lieutenant. Slight mistake here. Fact is, the lady is not my wife—"

"But," the Frenchman exclaimed, "I am unpardonable! I have embarrassed her—calling her madam—I am more sorry than—"

"Well," Quent grinned happily over his shoulder, "I may be a conceited fool, but maybe I can arrange that, too. Just a minute."

It took longer than a minute by the lieutenant's wrist watch. But he was a soldier and a gentleman, besides being a Frenchman. So he looked at the far and adventurous horizon, the orchid edge of a slate-gray world—until they came back, hand in hand.

Next week, true to the spirit of spring, our opening novel will take you to a tropical isle. It is a story that will make you hold your breath in excitement. "The Planter at Castle Reef," by Captain Frederick Moore, is the kind of tale that should not be missed.



THE SEA-GULL MONUMENT

MONUMENTS have been erected to almost everything in commemoration of some event in which that thing participated, but there is only one monument perhaps in the world which is dedicated to the sea gull. In the courtyard of the Mormon Tabernacle, Salt Lake, this monument may be seen and it was erected there by the Mormon church in veneration for the gull.

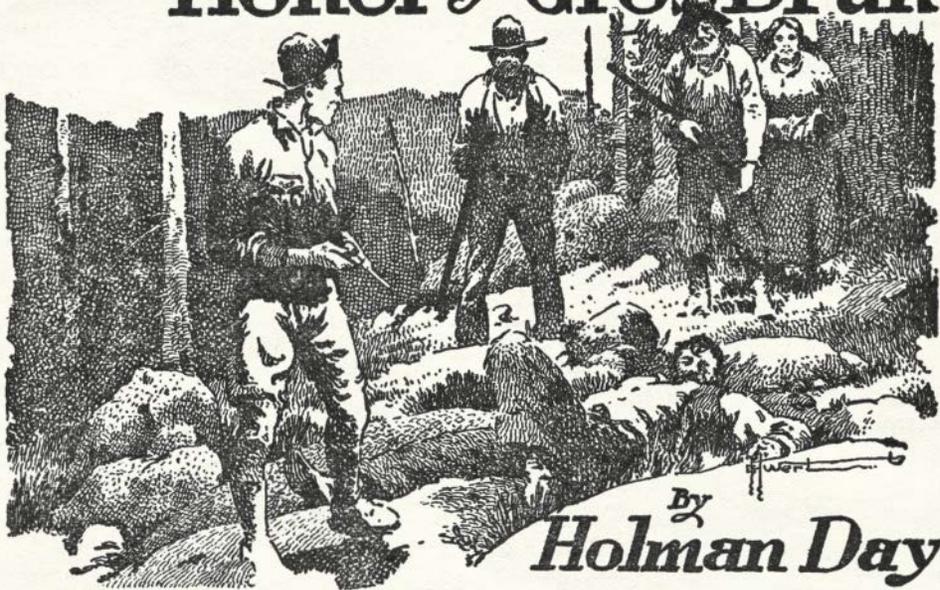
In the summer of 1848, which was the first the Mormons spent in the valley, land was plowed and crops planted in an effort to raise sufficient to feed the colony through the winter as provisions and supplies were short and could only be obtained from Omaha by freight wagons drawn by bull teams.

At the time when crops were most promising and a bountiful harvest was in prospect, assuring the colonists against starvation and hardship the coming winter, millions upon millions of grasshoppers appeared and were devastating the fields.

The Mormons prayed to be preserved from the grasshoppers and to be allowed to harvest the crops. It is said that every soul in the valley joined in these prayers. With the morning of the next day hundreds of thousands of sea gulls appeared in the sky and devoured the grasshoppers, stopping their ravages on the crops.

It is said by old Mormons who saw the visitation, that no gulls had ever been seen around the lake prior to that time. The Mormons believed and believe to-day that the sea gull saved the colony, and the legislature of the territory passed a law making it a felony to kill a sea gull within the State of Utah, and that law is still upon the statute books and is enforced.

For the Honor of Gros Brun



By
Holman Day

Author of "Square Squair," Etc.

The Acadians on the mountain, good at heart, were being corrupted by a smuggler, and only Basil Levesque stood for the right.

A COMPLETE STORY

ON the November morning of All Saints' Day Basil Levesque came down from the rugged heights of towering Gros Brun, into the straggling village of St. Beauce in the valley of Riviere du Loup.

Slung across his sturdy shoulders was the fresh carcass of a buck deer; with that burden he had clambered across crags and had slid on moccasined feet down steep scarp. Now on the level stretches he strode erectly; his hale young strength made little account of his load.

He displayed none of youth's usual exhilaration in entering a scene where one could have a bit of a fling, coming from the mountain wilderness. Balls clicked in pool halls where doors and

windows were open on that day of warm Indian summer. Shops invited with wares. He gave the village attractions no heed but he looked back regretfully at the haze-haloed height outlined against an opalescent sky, his expression revealing his desire to hasten home.

He had come down on a mission of welcome duty; for seven years, on All Saints' Day, ever since he was sixteen, he had brought a deer to Père Simard, the good priest who had christened the child named for brave Basil, the blacksmith, of Grande Pré of the ancient Acadians. This day's duty performed, the young man would hurry back to his mountain. His gaze of regret mellowed into fondness.

The cliffs of the sparsely timbered

mountain showed broad flanks of sepia and russet. The tones of bister in the stunted growth dominated over the motting gray of ledges and lichens. Therefore the valley folks had named the mountain Big Brown. But the isolated highlanders who dwelt among the crags called the mount Gros Brun.

In a way, this choice of nomenclature marked the wide difference between the nondescript lowland folks and the peak dwellers. The latter were descendants from refugees of old Acadia. They had kept their family blood free from alloy, most of them avoiding outlander marriages. They made up a tribe, a clan, instinctively proud of race and of the forbears who were bold enough to break from the ranks of the more docile Acadians; the tamer farmers had submitted to the English and were taken away on ships to the far south, from the Basin of Minas; but the intrepid forefathers of Gros Brun escaped to the northern wilderness.

A man stepped from the door of a small building on the outer wall of which was the sign:

Pierre Vincent, *Avocat*.

He hailed Basil and the young man walked to meet him; Basil listened, not troubling to set the deer off his shoulders.

The two conversed in the patois of their race.

"My folks came from old Acadia, as you know, my boy," said the lawyer, "so I warn you and you must take my warning to the people on Gros Brun. They are helping bad men to smuggle aliens and liquors and drugs. Officers from the States government have come here to spy about and get evidence. Your folks up there will soon be in great trouble unless they mend their ways. Warn them of what I say."

"I thank you, notary. Already I have been doing my best to change the bad things on Gros Brun. But the smug-

glers have made their way with such of our men who are lazy and greedy, giving them money and much to drink. These men are not good Acadians of our kind—yours and mine. When I talk to them they mock and threaten. They are getting so much these days, and so easy, without work."

"They'll be getting a lot more—and right here," affirmed the lawyer, tapping his neck. "The States officers have closed the valley roads and they'll not long stand for the trick of smuggling across Gros Brun. Basil, I'm guessing that your settlement lodges aliens until they can be safely scattered into the States."

"Yes," ruefully admitted the other. "But the good men up there are peaceful. They are afraid of our Dave Sirois and the foolish gang of our men who stand with him. And the smugglers keep their rogues on Gros Brun, ready to hand guns over to the aliens if any fights break out."

"The States men are working here very much under cover," stated Vincent, "making believe buy harvests. But I'm a sharp fellow and have spotted 'em. You'd best let me take you to one of the officers. Tell him what is going on up there. The thing will be taken off your hands."

"No," refused Basil resolutely. "I'll not carry tales like that. It will bring the danger onto all my people, innocent and guilty both. I'm hoping they'll wake up soon."

"That will have to be mighty sudden," warned Vincent. "And when the black mark has been put onto Gros Brun, after every one up there has been keeping mum about what has been going on, the good folks will be scooped in along with the blacklegs."

"Yet I'll not blab to the officers," insisted Basil. "I'm hoping I'll find a way to stop it."

Vincent snapped his fingers over his head.

"Young man's folly! You're all in for a fine raking. And you, son, are up against a devil. Do you know who is bossing the smuggler game?"

"Yes, sir. Lurchin Hysler."

"Aye! The wolf of Riviere du Loup. 'Wolf' Hysler! When he knows you're meddling with his plans he'll come up on the mountain and kill you."

"Unless his understrappers are lying to me, he has already sent word that he will fix me soon if I don't keep my tongue off his work," returned the young man quietly. "If he comes himself on Gros Brun, maybe the matter can be settled."

"But you're no match in hellishness with Wolf Hysler, boy," Vincent protested anxiously. "He has killed right and left among his men—getting rid of the double crossers. The law has not bothered him—he has killed only scum. To be sure, you're not one of his men, but he may be drunk enough to forget that point. What do you mean, saying it may be settled if he comes on the mountain? Will you stalk him and shoot him like you shot this deer?" He stroked the game's grizzled hair.

"I do not kill men," replied Basil sternly. "There are other ways of handling a bad man."

He turned and went on his way along the broad street, the thoroughfare of St. Beauce.

From the porch of the village inn, when Basil came opposite the place, a burly man stepped down and hailed him in harsh tones.

Again the young man walked to meet one who had accosted.

"I'm told your name is Levesque. Of Gros Brun. Saw you talking to that lawyer up the street. Blabbing to the law, hey? Maybe about me!" In tone and manner there was threatening hostility. "Say! For even one dirty look I'll smash you between the eyes." The man was liquor-fired. He shook his fists in front of Basil's face, but the

young man did not lay aside the burden he bore.

"Best not say too much or go too far with him right now, Wolf," called a man from the porch, plainly a familiar who used the nickname that Hysler welcomed from an associate.

"Oh, I don't intend to start anything special here in the village," agreed the chief of the smugglers, shrugging his shoulders. "This is only a barking pup, anyway. But let me tell you, young Levesque! I know all about the yapping you've done on Gros Brun. You keep your jaws close shut from now on up there or you'll be doing the rest of your yapping in hell."

Basil was wholly calm when he replied:

"Your understrappers have given me some such word. I told them I should keep on talking to my people. I now say the same to you."

Hysler clicked his teeth angrily. Then out of his infuriated mutterings came words:

"It's a tough climb to the top o' Big Brown. You ain't excuse enough for a special trip, damn ye! As soon as I have something extry to tend to up there, a job worth doing, I'll be along and look after your case as a side line. Now take that promise with you and do your worrying!"

Basil smiled broadly. One less dominated by fury than was Wolf Hysler would have detected in that smirk an eager desire to taunt, to move an enemy to take the action which had been threatened.

"You know who I be, don't you?"

"Oh, yes! Yes, I know!" It was a rather listless acknowledgment, constituting insult of reputation for prowess.

"After this, you pup, it's going to go for a finish between you and me," growled Hysler.

Basil returned no word to the challenge; he shifted the burden to an easier position on his shoulders and whirled

about to go on his way—spun around with such unexpected suddenness that the stiffened, short tail of the carcass swept across Hysler's blood-engorged face. Wolf drove his hand up under his sweater and tugged at the butt of a gun.

Called the adviser from the porch:

"Unclinch—unclinch, Wolf! Use your head now. Use that other thing when the time is right."

At this moment Hysler's attention was taken wholly by another matter; a man had come hurrying along the street. He caught the smuggler chief's arm and walked Hysler away from the inn porch, out of the hearing of the men sitting there.

"Boss, I've got the goods on Mahar," whispered the newcomer. "All the time you've had him stationed on Gros Brun he has been sinking extry jack, frisking the affens. He has held out on you, dope and rum cash both."

Hysler cursed. Then he twisted his mouth awry in a nasty grin.

"Hell! You ain't telling me very much in the way of news, Jake. I have to use skunks in my game and expect 'em to snitch a few pullets from the roost when I ain't looking."

The informant guiltily shifted his gaze when the chief glared accusingly. Then Jake leaned close and whispered, effectively turning attention from himself:

"Then I'll hand you real news. Mahar is selling you and the rest of us for the reward the States government has put up. Mahar has half a grand tucked in his pocket already."

"How do you know?"

"He showed it to me. Wanted me to come along in with him so as to make the evidence binding, two of us backing up the full story. I'm giving you the goods, chief!"

The Wolf squinted up at Big Brown's outline against the shimmering sky. In undertones he rasped, seeking proof:

"What's the big idea, his making a clean-up?"

"He has fell hard for a girl on Big Brown. But she's straight and won't marry him till he quits the game. He has promised her all the trimmings for a happy life in the city. So he's grabbing all ways for the jack. So help me, chief, I'm giving you the low-down!"

Hysler swung away without reply and started for the inn porch. He sat there, elbows on knees, palms supporting chin, till Basil Levesque returned along the street, pacing briskly, his eyes raised to the mountain he loved. The young man went on, out of the village, and when he was behind the tree fringe at the foot of the acclivity, the Wolf arose with a grunt and went to his room in the tavern.

In that privacy he strapped a two-gun holster about his waist. He removed his sweater and tied the sleeves around his body, letting the drape of the garment hide the weapons. From a jug he filled a quart flask with potent liquor and tucked the flask into a hip pocket. Speaking to his savage face distorted by a wavery mirror, he growled:

"It'll be a tough climb but it's now come to a chore of killing two men—and that makes it worth while."

He poured from the jug a tumblerful of liquor and drank it with avid sucking of his lips.

Then he stamped down the creaking stairs and out into the sunshine.

"Where to, Wolf?" asked the man who had been ready with advice.

"Is it any of your damn business?" retorted Hysler, stopping and transfixing the questioner with a red-eyed stare.

"No! But I can see well enough it's business of your own. Want any help in it?"

"I don't want any help, any advice, any chasing o' me. Have tacks and hammer waiting for me. I'll be nailing

up a few scalps on the sunny side of the barn out back."

He set away at a trot, glad to hear the gurgle of the liquor in the joggled flask; he would be needing it often during the tussle up the ledges of Big Brown!

There were several trails up the flanks of the mountain. Basil went circuitously, taking his time, enjoying with an outdoor man's relish this unseasonable day's hark-back to summer. It was a weather-breeder day, he knew. Right away the snows would swirl down and cover the pretty mosses and blanket the lichens.

Finally he came to the top of the ledge terrace where the settlement of log houses straggled over uneven granite.

In front of the first house in his way he halted, his rifle couched in the hook of his elbow. He caught the eyes of a loungeur who was seated on a bench outside the door. Severity and reproach were in the young man's mien.

The other leered drunkenly, returning Basil's stare.

Fresh from the lawyer's warnings, and so recently passing the challenge with the vicious Wolf, feeling on himself more than ever the burden of Gros Brun's salvation, Basil did not choose gentle words; he had come from the valley with resolve to cry out even more loudly than he had in past time—even if his voice were alone in this wilderness of bribed incompetents.

In the Acadian dialect of ancient Normandy, harsh peasant speech, he blazed angrily:

"You're *cochon*—pig! All the time I'm ashamed of you, Etienne Lavoie! And you have shamed the good Lavoies who are dead and gone."

A woman stepped into the doorway; she narrowed her eyes and gave the young man unfriendly scrutiny.

Basil broke with sharp rebuke on her resentful mutterings:

"Of you, too, I'm ashamed, Madame

Lavoie. You ought to remember you came from the good Sinclairs."

"Monsieur Basil, you carried away this morning a big load on your shoulders. If you come back and pile on all the business of your neighbors you'll be humpbacked pretty soon."

"That load I had on my shoulders, it was honest. I got it by hard chase. But the gold beads on your neck, madame, the silk dress on your back!" He raised eyebrows and arms in scornful suggestion, with Gallic gesture.

She let loose fierce arraignment, exposing the nature of a virago.

Basil was undaunted.

"You show me you have the tongue and temper to make your husband behave, madame. But you encourage him in bad ways, and that's why I blame you. You're making the Lavoies no credit to the honest Acadians of the old days."

She came from the doorway, stood close to him and snapped the fingers of both hands under his nose.

"Who has given the high and lofty Levesques the right to make to the rest of us saucy preachings?"

"We haven't any special right, perhaps! And I'm afraid my talk does not seem so fine as the money Wolf Hysler is giving for the wreck and ruin of the folks of Gros Brun. But I shall make my talk for all to hear, Madame Lavoie." His voice rang out.

At the moment he was manifestly in a way to be accommodated with an audience; from houses and from hidden nooks out of doors, men, women and children came straggling toward the Lavoie home.

Basil went on with his accusation.

"You're in a bad way, people! A way to be damned if you keep on taking Wolf Hysler's money and rum. Taking bribes to help him along in his dirty business! This isn't preaching. It's praying to you to wake up before the law comes and jams you into jail

as partners of a smuggler. I have been to St. Beauce. I have heard warnings. I tell you, I mean to talk on and on in my own warning."

A man, liquor-torched, came and pushed away Madame Lavoie who had been the first to volunteer as defender of the rebels.

"It's no job for a woman. I'll tend to him." This man was the feared captain of Gros Brun's bribe takers.

Basil sturdily stood his ground.

"Now," proceeded the new champion, "you make a lot of bold talk to us on Gros Brun, young Basil. About what our fathers were! They did what they could for themselves according to their ways in old times. Now we do for ourselves in new times. It has been hard to scratch out a living up here. You know that."

"Yes, Dave Sirois!" acknowledged Basil. But none of the fire of reproach was gone out of him. "You and some others find your living more easy now. Plenty of white rum, lots of loafing, gold beads and pretty clothes for the women, provender for your gullets. But it's all done on bribes from Wolf Hysler. You're headed toward hell fire. If I cannot shame you I'll do my best to scare you. So I keep on talking."

Sirois twisted his lips in a sneer.

"If Wolf Hysler is so much danger to Gros Brun and you are so brave, why don't you talk to him?"

"Because the bold Basil doesn't dare!" squealed another man in the group. "There'd be no talk out of him for anybody, after that! Bold Basil stay away from the Wolf!"

The young man set the muzzle of his rifle on the ground and folded his arms across the stock. "I have talked to Wolf Hysler this day, even as I have talked to his understrappers up here. Face to face."

The mention of understrappers served as a cue for a young woman; she essayed a diversion of topic with the in-

stinctive feminine ability to spring the trigger of real mischief.

"Hah, Basil Levesque, there's one understrapper you'd better be talking to very soon!"

He turned slow gaze to the flushed face of this girl, in whose eyes jealousy glittered. The green glint was not aroused by any interest in him, he knew. Furthermore, he was trying to put away the nagging suspicion that her manifest malice had anything to do with another of the Levesques; but his heart was faint at the moment; the suspicion remained insistent.

"And why should I talk to any understrapper, Cecile L'Abbe?"

"You see the faults of all the rest of us! It's too bad you don't look over your shoulder at your own home once in a while," she taunted acridly.

Jeering laughter from others followed her speech. Evidently the community possessed information on what the heckler was driving at.

While the laughter continued, a young man hurried close to Basil. The hand laid on the latter's shoulder trembled. The countenance of the intermediary, showing sudden pallor under the tan, was working with emotion; in the eyes there was more than the concern of a friend; anguish, despair and dread were in the eyes.

"Come away with me, Basil!" It was an appeal whispered hoarsely. "I will tell you. Don't let it come from her, before them all! Hurry away with me."

The derisive girl mocked the conference, shrilling:

"A brother fooled and a lover on the sticks! Basil can shoot a deer but other game he can't catch! Why doesn't he go a-hunting some more?"

It was not wholly the friend's appeal which urged Basil to leave the field hastily; he was conscious of quick fear for his self-control under more of that baiting. If suspicions were confirmed,

if the credit and honor of the Levesques should be exposed to ridicule or malignity in public and in his hearing, he was afraid his acts and speech might make the matter worse.

With eyes straight to the front, hurrying, he went away with the counseling friend.

Somebody voiced sibilantly: "Elisiane!" It was like the hissing of the serpent of scandal. Other voices repeated the name. All of them were even more mockingly sibilant.

"Jules Ouillette, what is this about Elisiane?" There was a tremor in the low tones.

Jules answered between gritting teeth.

"She hides away to talk with that Hysler whelp—the Mahar man."

"Has this been going on for long?"

"I'm afraid so. But I'm just hearing about it."

"Do you know whether she has gone from the house to-day?"

"I saw her walking on the upper ledges—going toward the deep bowl." The lover quavered the statement but pride came to the help of his distress. "I did not follow to spy, Basil. I think she wants to be with him. Yet it's much sorrow for me. I was afraid of what I might do. So, I did not follow."

"It's my own job to follow," stated the brother grimly. He hurried his pace, going toward the Levesque house.

"Mahar is a snake and there may be danger for you in a quarrel," protested Jules. "Let me go with you for a help, Basil."

But the other shook his head.

"She is not yours yet though she is promised to you. I'm her brother and she is still beholden to me, to take my orders in a case like this."

Jules flared with heat of his own. "Let Mahar take Cecile L'Abbe if he wants a girl of the mountain. *She loves him!*"

"Yes!" Basil agreed. "Let him take her and her tongue o' mischief! She

deserves nothing better than a Riviere du Loup sneak."

In the doorway of the Levesque home was standing Onesime, patriarch of the clan. Deep trouble shadowed the father's face when Basil came.

"Where's Elisiane, *m' père?*"

"She walked away against my command. You can hear her mother crying because our daughter disobeyed."

Basil's features were creased with hard lines.

"You guessed she was going to meet Mahar—that's it, eh?"

The old man slowly wagged his head.

"She left me no chance to guess. She stood before her mother and me. She tossed her chin. She is sick and tired of Gros Brun and all its old-fashioned ways, so she said." He went on with a frankness which was brutal, in view of the fact that Jules was a hearer: "She says she hates Jules Ouillette, he is so behind the times, too silly to make the most of life by going to the big town. So she will not take him and live here in a log house. She will go, she says, and be the wife to Mahar in a big town somewhere so she can live in a nice cottage with chimneys of brick and have many pretty clothes like a French girl should have. She said all that and made a face at her mother and me—and she walked away." He twisted his features with a grimace of distress. "Perhaps these are truly new times, Basil. I lifted my hand to beat her but there was no power in my arm. She mocked me. She walked away."

Silence followed after Patriarch Levesque, stoutest prop of the pride of race on Gros Brun, had made his declaration of defeat.

Basil, the rifle in the hook of his arm, paced to and fro, hearing the sobbing of his mother within doors.

In this crisis Jules ventured meekly:

"If she hates me, my good friends, I'll give her back her promise. Though I love her very much! Yet she shall

not think she must run away from her home on account of me."

He was not answered.

Basil had come so recently from conflict with those rebels who were showing stubborn determination in their shameful league with lawbreakers from the lowlands! Now, in his own family they—

He stopped and looked toward a log house outside which several loungers lay sprawled in the sun, shuffling and dealing greasy cards, cursing or laughing.

More of those aliens for whom Wolf Hysler had made a thoroughfare over the mountain into the States! The border line was marked by iron posts set into Gros Brun's ledges. Therefore, as Basil was so bitterly aware, the smuggler was paying well for a good thing—bribing the folks of Gros Brun to silence! Using the settlement for his depot! Scattering aliens and illicit wares from there when scouts found the way clear! Teaming afoot along steep trails the human contraband—men who also served as pack carriers of liquor and narcotics, paying partially in that fashion for Wolf Hysler's service in getting them over the border! There were constantly fresh arrivals and departures.

Truly Gros Brun, after all the years of righteousness and decency, had become the footstool of the devil! Thus pondered Basil while he wrestled with this monster of a situation.

In the crisis of Basil's mental torment, when the father had admitted that he was powerless even to control his own daughter, the young man was dolefully in doubt about his duty. Had he the right to assume arrogantly a leadership in which he would be forcing his will upon the free men of Gros Brun? However, the blood of race was hot in him. It had been heated by the insolence and derision of the rebels. It was boiling after what the father had said about Elisiane's impudence. He knew

well her nature of hair-trigger impulsiveness, her quick shifts of decision; her most recent outbreak was only another phase in the general upheaval of Gros Brun! He looked on the patriarch's pathetic grief; he heard the mother sobbing.

Later, perhaps, his sister would be sorry, but he must grasp the situation and hasten her regret. This family matter has become a brother's business, after a father had failed!

Boldly and honestly he could attack the evil at this special point, letting slip the question of duty to his neighbors. That could wait on deeper consideration.

He settled the cartridge belt about his waist and gripped his rifle more tightly.

When he strode away over the ledges his father called:

"Where do you go, *m' fils*?"

"To find Elisiane." Then, in filial respect, obeying Acadian tradition, Basil halted and turned. "I ask your leave, my father, to take it on myself."

"I give you leave, Basil. I am nothing any more." The father stumbled into the house and shut the door against the neighbors who came peering and hearkening. Jules leaned against the log wall, his head bowed.

Basil trod by way of the zigzag trail which led up the ledgy scarp and dipped in windings to the cliff-hemmed glen which Gros Brun knew as the deep bowl. It had long served lovers as a trysting place; the mountaintop had no groves or shady lanes for privacy.

From the rim of the bowl the trail led between upflung ridges of rock. One coming down was concealed.

The seeker, on his way to the depths of the bowl, heard voices of men—clamorous voices which sent echoes shuttling from cliff to cliff.

Basil halted in concealment, not as mere eavesdropper but as one who sought knowledge on which to base action. He recognized Jack Mahar's high-pitched voice—a voice whose tones

matched his dapper figure and fop's manner. Now, Mahar yelled, with the timbre of a cat's squall in the tones:

"Wolf, you're sizing me all wrong, I tell you! I've been lied about. I haven't double-crossed you."

The reply was like the hoarse barking of a dog who had treed feline quarry.

"I've got proof—proof—proof!" Deeply canine was the sound of that savage repetition. "And say, you girl! You get away from that man!"

"I will not! I will not!" she cried.

Basil ground his teeth, cursing, knowing that Elisiane was thus declaring for a lover. But he also grunted a little note of admiration. She did have the courage of the Acadians who had dared the wilderness, the brother was admitting. All in a wrong cause—but she was brave! Bold enough, even, to defy a father! Again Basil gritted his teeth.

Gruff commands were rasped savagely:

"Mahar, push that girl away from you. Show you're part man, at any rate!"

"Wolf, you're ugly drunk right now. You don't know what you're doing!"

"I allus know what I'm doing! Specially this time! I'm here to get ye!"

"It'll be murder, and the law will get you."

"The hell it will! More like it will give me a bonus for snuffing another border rat. You ain't the first double crosser I've put where he belonged—and nothing ever done about it! But I'll give you a fair chance," swaggered the chief. "Slam that girl out of the way. Then pull!"

"I ain't totin' my gun!" whined the other.

Basil set his tones into rifts in the ledge; he climbed and with caution peered down over the top of the ridge. His cap and shirt of gray wool matched in hue the color of the ledges; it was his dress for deer stalking.

Hysler was standing a dozen paces from Mahar and Elisiane; the girl was making herself a shield, her arms about the threatened man's neck. The gang leader, manifestly half crazed with rage and liquor, teetered unsteadily and menaced with his six-shooter.

Basil knew the reckless savagery of the brute, but it was hard to believe that even Wolf Hysler would try to get his man under such circumstances when a girl's bravado was making her a target, also. However, the brother was driven to fury of his own by Wolf's language in Elisiane's hearing. And the peril was increasing while Hysler raged on; the maddened sot cracked out a shot of warning; the bullet zipped along the ledges, flipping tufts of moss.

Then he raised his weapon to take aim, steadying himself in ugly determination.

Basil, marksman by heritage and by practice, took advantage of Hysler's stiff pose of the moment. To make certain, the young man rested his rifle across the ledge and his one shot, accurate to the fraction of an inch, knocked the aimed gun from Hysler's clutch. After a yell of amazement, the smuggler leaped and recovered the weapon. At the same time Basil slid down the slope, gained his balance after a short run and faced Hysler.

"No more of that talk from you!"

"If there's been any double crossing, Wolf, here's the fellow who's done it," clamored Mahar. "He's after 'em up here all the time with his gab. He's doing all he can to trip plans. He's threatening to blab to the law."

Hysler bored young Levesque with an inimical stare; this was the other man the chief had come upon Gros Brun to deal with. However, the intended victim looked extremely able just then, fully in command of the situation, clutching a rifle with which he had just shown what he could do in the line of crack shooting.

The invader was not finding the occasion opportune. He was wondering whether the gun in his hand could shoot straight after the smash dealt by the rifle bullet; he realized the chances he would be taking if he should try to reach for the other gun in the holster beneath the sweater tied about his waist. This was no time for "bulling" the thing through! He was not spurred to such recklessness even when Basil declared: "I'm doing all I can, Wolf Hysler, to spoil your game up here. I shall not make talk to the law men. It would pile onto my people more of the trouble you have loaded them with. I am doing my best to put trouble away from Gros Brun."

"Meaning it has come to a man-to-man clinch between you and me?" demanded Hysler, narrowing his eyes.

"The bribing—the smuggling across here must stop; that's what I mean."

"Can't you see and understand what kind of a foxy play I'm making, Wolf?" pleaded Mahar. His emotions were in upheaval. He was making the most of this respite, ready to go to the extreme of self-justification, knowing his guilt and understanding that the employer had probed into the acts of a traitor and would exact vengeance; the presence of the bold interloper was merely postponing the evil moment.

"You can't tell *me* anything about your foxy plays! Sly stuff, Mahar, but I'm onto you and have got the proof, I tell you again. You've sold me out and I'll be ripping the dough off'm your carcass after I've done my job on you. This little holdup right now means nothing to me. I'll be getting you damnation soon." For a purpose of his own Hysler was temporizing with the situation. "I come up here and follow you walking along a trail, mushing over a girl. I suppose you'll be telling me next as how this, too, is a foxy play." Threat and venom were in the sneer.

The culprit, terror-stricken, grasped

recklessly at straws of salvation, heedless of what they were, brutally disregarding decency in disclosures.

"It's the foxiest thing I've put over, getting to be friends with this girl. It's all for your sake, nothing else, Wolf. She's this blabber's sister. He's a bomb up here. I've pulled his fuse. I'm going to marry this girl—take her to the lowlands. That's my play. The Levesques have been bossing Gros Brun. My play will ditch 'em. You ought to see *that*, Wolf!"

But the pleader was dealing with a man in whom revenge spirit burned hotly; Mahar's weak attempt to palliate added to the fire.

Hysler cursed viciously, declaring: "So you're out to double-cross everybody, even this girl! See here, Mahar, you ought to know better'n to think a girl belongs in man's business or can help. And look at her! She's throwing you down on account of what you've just said."

Elisiane, the insult whipping new emotions in her, flashed an accusing look at the man whom she had been protecting; she stepped away from him.

Basil shouted:

"My sister shall never marry you, dog of a smuggler!"

"I need none of your commands on that point," the sister declared acridly.

"I'll give you first crack at him, Canuck," maliciously suggested Hysler. "It's the only way you'll make her safe from a slick operator; he'll be putting it over on her again, telling her later he talked that way to me so as to save his skin."

"I do not murder men," retorted Basil.

The high spirit of her race had urged the impulsive girl in rebellion against her family. Now, in revulsion of sentiments, her own people became her sole care. Despite her brother's disclaimer, she was bitterly afraid of the situation and of Mahar's provoking tongue. The

knave had so recently revealed how dangerously he could deal, making speech serve his desperate cause!

"Elisiane, you go home!" Basil commanded sternly. "For once in his life, Wolf Hysler speaks truth. A girl does not belong in this business."

However, this girl, flareback of Acadian intrepidity, fired by stress, performed instantly in that business, according as she saw the light and understood what might trig disaster and violence.

She leaped at her brother with feline quickness, with lithe vigor. She jerked the rifle from his lax hands before he realized her intent. Dodging his clutch at her, she snapped the rifle into aim at Hysler and shrilled:

"Drop your gun! Step back—or, by the sacred name, I shoot!"

He obeyed; this was the hysteria of feminine determination; he had seen it operate in other cases in past times; he took no chances with this flaming girl of the mountain.

Even her brother, agile as he was, was not a match for her in quickness of movements. Again she eluded his rush, picked up Hysler's discarded weapon and escaped, running up the side of the bowl.

Basil started away in pursuit but halted when Hysler called sharply. The latter stretched forth empty palms when Basil turned to survey the smuggler chief.

"She has left us on the basis of even-Steven, Canuck. If it's going to be the man-to-man style in that clinch we've spoken of, suppose you come down here on the level and we'll settle the fuss—that is, unless you're afraid."

"I'm not afraid," said Basil, descending. He glanced over his shoulder and saw the girl disappear over the rim of the bowl.

"You stay here, Mahar," commanded Wolf. Triumph of a certain kind sparkled in his eyes. "This thing seems to

be working out pretty good, even though a girl had to help in man's business. You'll be a bum referee, Mahar, but you can't very well take sides, either. You're done with me and it looks like you'll never get into this Canuck's family."

Dividing an impish grin between the two men who faced him, he swung an open hand toward his hip. "I'm not pulling a gun. I'm reaching for my flask. Going to swig a good drink and settle my thoughts. That girl nigh rattled me. Ain't used to dealing with girls. Maybe I'll take some lessons from you, Mahar, if girls are going to be needed in my line up here." He gulped gustfully and turned the flask upside down, allowing a few drops to trickle on the ground. "You see, it's empty. Sorry I can't ask either of you to join me. I feel mighty fine," he drawled, "and the future looks rosy. Canuck, are you still saying you're going to stick your snoot into my future plans?"

Basil declared firmly:

"I take it all on myself to stop you and your gang from using Gros Brun for your devil's work."

Hysler's eyes were malevolent but he purred his expostulation:

"That ain't going to be a mite neighborly in you, Canuck. After the government snoozers got the low roads high-barred against me, I went ahead and put in a whole lot of time and expense shaping up things on Big Brown. I ain't a-going to kiss my hefty stake good-bye. You ought to realize that! The folks up here are backing me; at any rate, a good crowd of 'em seem to be. Young Levesque, ain't you seeing as how right now—and with a good deal of help from your sister—I've got my big chance to roll you under?"

"No, I don't see!" returned Basil stoutly.

Hysler screwed the cap on the flask and patted the receptacle.

"Your head is empty like this. Too bad! However, Canuck, I've had to have brains and use 'em, carrying on my line. Wouldn't have got where I be to-day, without having brains. You don't think I called you down here to fight with fists, do you?"

"But I'll leave the thing to fists if you'll agree," volunteered the champion of the people of Gros Brun. It was a brave offer; Hysler was stalwart and was known in the region as a pugilist who challenged all comers and held sway over his band by heavy hitting.

Now he scoffed at Basil's offer.

"It wouldn't settle anything, young fellow. You're in my way. Simply knocking you out of it for the time being would be only a waste of my good muscle." He rapped the empty flask against the side of his head. "Brains do my big stuff for me, I'm telling you again. You're going to get all that's coming to you—and for keeps—and you'll remember you've called on for what you'll git. Wait till I put this flask back where I took it from."

Both men blinked at him, mystified by his talk and manner; he seemed to be blabbering merely drunken boasts.

"One o' you has done me all the dirt he could. The other brags he'll do more along his own line." He hid flask and hand under the jacket which draped his hips. "Wolf Hysler would be a damn poor tool in handling his business if he let himself be jacked by either o' you slobs. This is how brains work in taking care o' the two o' ye, both to once!"

He whipped from its holster his second gun and dropped Mahar at Basil's feet. Then Wolf leaped on the fallen man and pulled money from the latter's pockets. Then, evilly grinning, Hysler emptied into his palm the cartridges from the gun's cylinder and walked away, calling over his shoulder, after he had tossed the weapon on the body:

"Canuck, it's always open season for me when I stuff one o' the gang. You'll

be the sucker that's strung up for this killing. Everybody in the settlement must know that you started on the chase after Mahar and your sister. I've heard murder cases tried. Motive is what the law fellows grab onto for a handle. The gun used won't mix 'em too much." He ran up over the ledge rim, laughing.

Unable to think clearly, too unnerved to follow on the chase, Basil stumbled to Mahar and picked up the gun. He stood holding the weapon in pitiful bewilderment, trying to take account of stock. Wolf Hysler's declaration as to where the guilt would be placed by the law men was having its effect on a youth who had been isolated all his life on a mountaintop, without knowledge of the ways of courts. He was realizing well enough that he could not look for stout and honest testimony from the rebels of Gros Brun in his defense; he had set them into vicious antagonism by the talk he had been making to them. Probably they would lie to his damage.

Immediately he was wholly informed as to their attitude.

He heard the babble of many voices. The folks of the settlement were coming. He wondered whether they had been called by the sound of shots or by some unwise statement from his sister.

They came into view, lining up in the defile leading to the bowl. David Sirois was ahead and took it upon himself to be the spokesman.

"So you've nailed him, eh, young Basil? Because he has been courting your sister on the sly, hey?"

There was triumphant accusation in the query. Basil had been looking for this accusation; his expectancy having been fulfilled, he did not reply in the manner which should attach to innocence which was startled and righteously angry.

He shook his head and answered in dull tones, looking down:

"*Mais non!* No, I did not kill Mahar."

A sullen growl from the hearers was topped by the sharp voice of Sirois.

"But you showed all your feelings when Cecile said her say. What you said to your father was heard. And Elisiane ran to the settlement and asked us to come and stop trouble."

Basil looked along the row of faces. Not only the folks of Gros Brun were present but the crowd of aliens as well. His sister was not there.

"We find you alone here with a dead man and we know your grudge against Mahar," pursued Sirois solemnly, severely. "So, Basil Levesque, it all looks very bad for you."

The agreement of the onlookers was suggested by the silence following this speech.

One of the strangers, a shabby nondescript, climbed upon the ridge of the ledge.

"Your sister told us that Wolf Hysler was here, young Levesque. He was threatening to kill Mahar, so she said."

"He did kill Mahar—then he ran away," stated Basil. But he was looking from face to face of enemies—gloomy, accusing faces—and beneath the gloom was a grim satisfaction because the goad harrowing their flanks for so long was now dulled. He had been adjudged already, he knew, their prejudice slipping into the easiest groove, that groove promising a way by which a meddlesome tormentor might be pushed out of the life of Gros Brun. Therefore, for the moment, Basil had little heart for making fervid defense, and even when the shabby man shouted and demanded the full story of what had happened, the young man shook his head.

"I'll wait and tell it to the law."

"You'll have to tell the *law* some better thing than what you just told *us*," derided Sirois. "Wolf Hysler killed that man and ran away, you said. Huh! You, with a gun in your fist, let a murderer run away and leave the brunt to

you! A fine story to tell Acadians who know your good grit, Basil Levesque!"

The others jeered, copying the spokesman.

Basil made no attempt to mellow this disheartening malevolence by saying or showing that the gun was empty; he threw it on the ground with the air of one getting rid of a hateful thing.

The shabby man slid down the slope of the ledge, picked up the weapon, inspected it carefully, turning it over and over in his hands. He tapped his forefinger on the empty cylinder.

"What's the matter with you, young fellow, saying not a yip to square yourself?"

"It will do no good for me—talking to them just now."

"They do seem to be a hard lot, turning this way on one of their own!" admitted the stranger. "And this isn't your gun, is it?"

"No."

"I'm taking a chance on believing what you said about Wolf Hysler killing this man. And this is Hysler's gun, eh?"

"Yes."

"You've got to come out of your trance pretty quick, Levesque. Unless you speak out in court more lively they'll be settling the noose around your neck. What your sister says won't count in law. Talk all free to me and maybe I can help you."

Again Basil shook his head after he had flung a glance of distrust at this person who was plainly one of the herd waiting on Hysler's convenience, to be smuggled over the border.

"You can't always judge a man by the clothes he wears and the company he happens to be keeping," advised the stranger sourly. "But right now, for reasons of my own, I'll be as mum as you are. Levesque, why don't you do a good job for yourself by hustling after Wolf Hysler? Then you can face him in court. Is he carrying a gun?"

"I knocked one out of his hand with a rifle ball and my sister carried it away. His other—the one you hold—he threw on the body."

"Probably he isn't an arsenal on two legs. Carried only the two guns. You ought to be a match for him barehanded if you can catch him. Better hustle—and to make it a clinch I'll lend you a gun." He set his hand on his hip.

Basil threw up a palm of refusal.

"I don't kill men. And even for my own sake I won't stop the bad man from running away. If he's scared off Gros Brun and never comes back, it'll be good for my people."

"You have it in you to be a mighty stubborn fool. I'd go after him myself, but I don't know the mountain trails." All at once he flung back his head and stared at the rim of the bowl, hearing a sound. Basil's eyes followed the man's gaze.

Hysler had reappeared, outlined against the sky, stamping on the ledges in balky fury.

Behind him was Jules Ouillette, threatening his captive with a rifle.

Wolf cursed volubly but came edging down the slope when Jules commanded.

"Hi! you men acrost there—my crowd!" bellowed the smuggler. "Any of you who's heeled pull a gun and pop off this damnation fool. Else there don't any one of you get safe over into the States, no matter if your money *has* been paid."

"There'll be no more shooting," proclaimed the shabby man, speaking for all, "not till we know what's what." His dictum was accepted; even Wolf became aware of the tacit understanding, realizing that his threat had antagonized the aliens.

In silence Jules followed Hysler to the foot of the rim and the two halted on the level where Basil and the stranger were standing.

"You told me not to go with you for your help," the captor said apolo-

getically to his friend. "I hope it was not cheeky because I waited below on the trail, and then this man came running. So I have brought him back here. Maybe you want to see him some more, Basil."

"Yes, Jules, I want to see him very much. He did not take what belonged to him when he hurried away." He turned, facing the shabby man. "Excuse me, monsieur, I give it to him now." He quickly snatched the revolver and proffered it to the owner, but Hysler swore, flapped his hands and backed away, refusing to accept the weapon.

"You grabbed it away from *me*, just like you've done now, to do your job on Mahar," the smuggler declared, so loudly that echoes beat between the hemming ridges of the bowl. "I won't have the damn thing in my hands again."

Basil held the weapon for a few moments above his head; his grasp relaxed and the gun dropped on the ledges.

"Take it or not, it's yours, Wolf Hysler. And I say, for all to hear, you killed Mahar with this gun."

"You're a liar!" Hysler bawled. He loosed all curb on the rage roused by his forced return to the scene where he had left a self-acting proposition running so prettily, according to his stupid line of reasoning. He repeated the charge, adding oaths in further repetition, his bravado increasing when he saw how tamely the young man was enduring the epithets, to judge from the stolid manner and blank face of Basil.

Hysler stepped forward and shook his fist under Levesque's nose.

"You and all the rest o' you upon this mountain were born murderers. Nothing else could be expected from the mucker blood in you. Nobody has had grit enough to kill a man till now—now when it could be easy done. And you done it because your sister was mixed in—because it was only a case o'

grab a gun from me and kill a friend o' mine who had nothing except bare hands—not even a pea shooter on him. Paw that body over—anybody—and prove I'm speaking the truth!" His resentful rage mounted. "I'm talking to the whole o' you loafers lined along that ledge up there! I've paid you aplenty. Now you dump me. Hands out and mouths open for whatever your betters are willing to drop! Born murderers, I say, but staying p'ison mongrels because you haven't had grit enough to be anything else."

It had been insane arraignment. Wolf Hysler knew little and cared little about Acadian natures or what lay deep there under the instinctive pride which shame stirred now. Once more David Sirois took on the job of spokesman.

"You grab the chance to talk and shame us, Wolf Hysler. But the men of Gros Brun are ver' much oblige' for the talk. Because it's loud barking and has woke us up. We do better thinking now we're wide awake! Now we come down to skin a wolf." There was loud chorus of approval.

Basil's cry was joyful, clarion-loud. He snapped out of the apathy which had been holding him in strange bonds. Bewildered by the events crowded into the short hour preceding, he had been unable to translate his emotions which suggested that his people, and with them his sister, were not worth effort and sacrifice; even his own peril in the matter of Mahar's death had found slack reaction in him.

But now, in this manifestly new general awakening of the ancient pride of race on Gros Brun and proclaimed by the ringleader of the rebels, he flung up his hands and shouted at the men who were scrambling down the side of the bowl, on their way to take vengeance on the taunting wretch who had led them into corruption.

"It's for me—me alone! Leave Wolf

to me, good Acadians!" Instantly he flung himself face to face with Hysler and smashed an open hand across the reviler's blatant mouth. "For what you call the people of Gros Brun, you take that!" Again he swung his hand and drove speech back into a choking throat. "And that, too, for saying I lie about who killed Mahar!" Basil scaled away his cap and stripped the jacket from his torso. "By the sacred thunders, Wolf Hysler, now you can have the only thing you understand—fight—fight—fight!"

With berserker rage the challenged brute lunged forward and struck. Basil ducked the thrust sufficiently to leave it a grazing blow which merely swung him so that the weight of his body was behind his arm when he snapped to position, countering on the foe's jaw angle.

Hysler staggered backward, dizzied.

The shabby stranger stepped toward the men who were thronging down the side of the cliff. But they halted where they were, not daunted by his commands but obeying their own volition.

A champion had volunteered for the clan!

In Gros Brun's own arena the conflict was on!

As spectators they were accepting the situation as befitted the sentiments of a primitive race, adopting the transmitted ideas of ancestors who had left to the test of combat by champions the settlement of causes and abuses, of rights and wrongs.

Basil, of the Levesques, was battling to cleanse from his people the stain of ignominy and cowardice smeared by an outsider!

After what Sirois had spoken for the others whose prompt action revealed their changed attitude toward Hysler, the young champion was reacting with valor unclouded by doubts. He knew the deeper sentiments of his people. He was engaged in no mere vulgar, plug-ugly fight with fists; he was contesting

for the honor and the integrity of Gros Brun! The issue was now clear cut in his mind. His people would not accept his championship of their cause and then flout his sacrifice by more dealings with a knave undone. There was pride under all else on Gros Brun, and Basil understood!

Therefore, there were odds against Wolf Hysler in that combat. Moral courage, high resolve, desperate determination were pitted against rage and mere brute force. The young man's resolution involved freeing foolish folk from the slavery which held them in thrall by reason of sloth, appetite and greed.

Muttered the shabby man:

"I hope they'll make themselves worth what he does for 'em—if he does it."

Basil, meeting his antagonist intrepidly, was heartened by knowing that his people, awakened in pride and decency, would be worth it—and that he *would* do it!

But that conflict was not to be won wholly by moral courage nor by the conviction that the cause was just.

Hysler was a trained fighter, according to his style; constantly he had bawled and slugged, working his way in former times to leadership of the timber crews and the driving jacks of Riviere du Loup. Then later, as the head of a smuggling gang, he maintained authority by everlasting fistwork.

The man who now confronted the hardened pugilist was unskillful in tactics and had found little occasion for dealing blows in a peaceful neighborhood. His qualifications were legs which had become steel-muscled by reason of daily climbing among the mountain peaks—legs which enabled him to leap and dodge as nimbly as a buck deer; he had youth in which vigor had not been sapped by carousals; most of all he was fighting for something vital.

Characteristics of feline and canine battlers marked the fight. It was like

mountain cat tackling bear! Any one of Hysler's pile-driver blows would have cracked the cranium of the young man. But agility kept that skull away from crushing impact. The same agility sent Basil leaping close in after Hysler had repeatedly flung himself against empty air. Twice at each plunge, sometimes thrice, Levesque's fist found jaw and temple, eye or nose. Hysler sprayed crimson sweat from his lips, panting, and felt that he was being winded and worn down. Without training, Basil had instinctively adopted in this exigency the newer tactics of the prize ring.

Hysler had bragged previously of using brains in emergencies. It was better than saying he was utterly unscrupulous in planning comebacks.

Tortured by the tattoo of hard fists, unable to land a telling blow of his own, feeling his strength leaving him, the smuggler flared into more vicious rage, and wanted to rid himself of this one and active antagonist, regardless of what the consequences might be. Backing from a savage onslaught, he trod upon the gun which had been dropped by Basil. He seized upon this opportunity and fell, affecting a slip and stumble. Then he rolled upon his face, his hands under his body, the fingers of one hand clutching the gun.

"Jump on him, Basil!" adjured Sirois. "Beat his head off!"

But the young man stepped back, refusing to take advantage of the fall.

Hysler had dropped the cartridges into the breast pocket of his shirt, after he had jacked them from the cylinder; fumbling, hands concealed, he now shoved several cartridges back into place. Gathering himself for the sortie, he leaped to his feet and shot from the hip at Jules Ouillette, whose possession of a rifle made him the most dangerous of the close-at-hand onlookers in the depths of the bowl. Then Hysler snapped around to take more deliberate

aim at Basil. But the latter was quicker than the smuggler. The young man resorted to the *coup de pied*, famous fighting style of the French Canadians. He leaped high and kicked the wrist which held the gun. The gun dropped from a paralyzed hand.

Immediately Basil leaped once more in air and swung his foot while he half turned, free from the ground. The kick caught Hysler in the temple and dropped him in a heap, senseless.

With the sureness of a cat, Basil landed on his feet and ran toward Jules. The friend was struggling up, right hand clasping left arm.

"It's nothing, good Basil!" Jules smiled, though blood was dripping from the hand of the wounded arm. "It's my fault. I was slow."

"Come, you men! Come in a hurry!" summoned Basil. "Give care to Jules. To the rest of you I hand over Hysler. He can give nobody trouble right now."

But ahead of all others the shabby man straddled Hysler who was squirming back into consciousness. While the crowding men reached hands to seize the smuggler, the stranger twisted the captive's arms upright and set handcuffs around the wrists.

"Keep off, you men! Uncle Sam has first call here." Rising slowly from the ironed prisoner, the stranger dredged in his trousers pocket, produced a small badge and held it nested in a palm for all to view. "If you don't know what that is, I'll tell you. It means I'm a special agent—under-cover man—secret service. In another minute I'll be taking marked cash off Hysler—money I paid to him to be smuggled over the border as an alien. I'm calling on all of you to stand by as witnesses."

He scratched the side of his head, looking them over calculatingly, with severity. Then he turned and gave Basil a more benignant survey.

"Young fellows, of course I've got the goods on your Canuck crowd—know the

whole story. Guess you'll agree with me it looks pretty bad for these folks."

Basil lowered his gaze and his chin sagged to his breast in sad and silent agreement.

"And after what you've done for 'em—doing it all alone to get rid of a hellion!" commented the government agent regretfully.

"By the blue hell, take off these wristers," rasped Hysler. "No Uncle Sammer has got the right to grab be. I'm across the border, in the Province."

"One of your eyes is well bunged, I see," drawled the officer. "I'm guessing the other is in bad shape if you can't sight by that marker over yonder." He pointed to an iron post set into the ledge. "When this young chap kicked you in the head, he slammed you over into my jurisdiction. Levesque, you have done some good work all round. I'm afraid I won't be exactly a square-shooter if I don't turn to and do a little something for you. I'm hating to report your people for what has been happening on Gros Brun. Guess they're good enough folks when these renegades let 'em alone."

Basil turned and faced the officer manfully; the brother's attention had been on Elisiane who had come in haste and was attending, with woman's gentle touch, to Jules' bandages after she had pushed away the men who were making poor shift in ministrations. Her remorseful act told Basil much, and there was joy in the eyes into which the officer was looking.

"What you say shows you understand us very well, monsieur. There's no need for me to say anything."

"That's sure modest, young Levesque! But you deserve a prize of some kind after what you did in that championship fight. So here it is—and I hope your folks will never forget how it stands: Ask me good and loud to leave Gros Brun's folks out of the Hysler case. I want 'em to hear what

I say. I'll put you where you belong in this settlement."

"Pardon, monsieur, but I should feel, in myself, as if you had put me on very hot coals. *Oui!* That's how I myself should feel, at any rate. Because I can't allow my neighbors to think they owe obligations to me! I said I thought you understood my people. But I'm much afraid you don't know Acadians who come from the old stock."

The officer nodded.

"Maybe not, but I'm understanding 'em better all the time. Something in the blood, hey? Oh, all right! Look here, you folks! We'll drop everything but this—and unless you're fools you'll understand what it means. You live on the States' side of the marker. Now I'm calling on you as a posse of good American citizens to round up that bunch of aliens and hold 'em till I can run 'em off our soil. And I'll be taking in this sample of what Gros Brun does to a smuggler." He pointed to Hysler,

whose blackened eyes were nearly closed. "And after a look at my prisoner, the boss won't need any say-so from me about how honest you folks are." He slanted a grin at Basil. "I'll merely say the whole settlement pitched in and did this job on Hysler. That phys'og is sure full proof of a patriotic stand, hey?"

The secret-service man walked to where Hysler's sweater had been thrown, picked it up and laid it over the face of the dead man.

Then he strode to the manacled prisoner, pried up with rough thumb a swollen eyelid and scowled into the blood-shot eye.

"I'll have to do your looking for you, Hysler, and I'm telling you it couldn't look worse. And now I'll be going over you for that marked cash money. You won't be needing money for the rest of the life that's left to you, and if you can get any comfort out of that feeling, go ahead and get it, damn you!"

You will be glad to hear that another story by Holman Day will appear in a forthcoming number of THE POPULAR.



TRAPPING HOLDS SOUR DOUGHS

WHEN the Russians sailed along the shores of Alaska, they visioned the future of that great country as bound up in trapping; so they sent to Russia the choicest furs from their American possession. But in more recent years trapping has fallen off to a position of almost negligible importance.

Consequently considerable interest is attached to reports from the Fairbanks district that for the first time in years trap lines are at a premium, with the prices good. The news kept many of the sour doughs in the interior, and hotel accommodations are reported unusually strained, for almost every winter sees an exodus of the old-timers planning a period of leisure in the continental United States.

The revival of the industry in the interior this winter, however, is not looked upon as too encouraging; and the Alaska game commission is making every effort to preserve the game and the fur-bearing animals in the Territory.

In fact, their efforts are making it "tough luck" for any one caught with more than his share. As evidence, the experience of one George Toughluck, native trapper of Talkeetna, might be taken. He specialized too heavily in his specialty of taking beaver—bagging twenty-two instead of the limit of twenty. For the two extra beavers he was assessed a fine of fifty dollars.

Grogan Goes to Heaven



By
**Fitzhugh
Green**

Author of "The Dynamite Drift," Etc.

Two gobs adrift in an observation balloon—in a furious lightning storm!

A COMPLETE STORY

DO you believe in life after death?" asked Ed Grogan, hugging the shelter of the officer-of-the-deck's sacred booth.

Little Mitten, bleary-eyed and frowned from just having been hauled from his hammock for the midnight-to-four-a.-m. anchor watch, on the battleship *Texas* stopped his mug of coffee halfway to his face.

"I don't believe in nuthin' when they make a fellow turn out at a hell of a time like this," he mumbled, then noisily swigged his lukewarm drink. The pale deck light overhead illuminated his thin, freckled face which contrasted strongly with Grogan's ruddy countenance.

Grogan, towering over his small friend, legs braced wide and broad shoulders back, glanced up toward the

stars. Only there weren't any stars. The night was very dark and silent. The sky was overcast and a sinister breathlessness hung over the harbor of San Pedro, where lay the big battleship fleet at anchor.

"Sometimes I think——"

"Get outa here, you boobs!"

Harshly Boatswain O'Callahan's rough voice broke upon Grogan's metaphysical soliloquy.

"Yes, sir," piped Little Mitten, hoping by the "sir" to mollify this official Nemesis that forever pursued him and Ed Grogan.

But an almost uncontrollable sleepiness stifled what little milk of human kindness might have lurked in the massive boatswain.

"I said, 'Get out,'" he repeated. His

tone added: "Or I'll throw you out by the scruff of your neck."

"Oh, all right," said Grogan mildly. "Anything for peace."

Taking the last three words as a definite affront, O'Callahan swung a heavy foot swiftly up toward the disappearing rearward portion of the seaman.

"Fresh piece of cheese!" he observed to himself.

For want of something better to do the boatswain watched the pair amble down the battleship's after deck toward her quarter-boom lights. He saw them pause in the dim shadows just abaft No. 5 turret. He knew what held their attention.

For there moored to the port and starboard stern bits was as queer a contraption as any naval architect had ever dreamed could fit a man-of-war. This contraption looked like an enormous black egg hanging in mid-air a few feet above the deck.

It was a kite balloon. Beneath it hung a small wicker basket, just large enough to hold three men. The purpose of the kite balloon was to permit "spotters" or gunnery observers to go aloft during firing of the great guns and determine the amount by which the projectiles fell short or over the distant target.

Similar balloons were used for observation during the late war. By neat streamlining of their bodies, together with keellike projections of the inflated portions of the balloons, they could stay aloft even in heavy wind. This fact made it possible, with only slight improvement, for the navy to tow similar balloons safely at high speed while turrets belched flame and steel. Telephone connection between basket and deck kept the gunnery officer aware of the progress his marksmen were making.

O'Callahan imperturbably watched Little Mitten and Ed Grogan step up for a closer inspection of the balloon, with especial interest in her basket.

"Might just as well let 'em be," his thought ran. "They'll get into trouble anyway." Then, as if to confirm his apprehension, he added aloud: "They always do."

At that identical instant Grogan was saying to Mitten:

"I tell you, Mitt, here's as good a place to spend the watch as I know. Get in this basket and talk things over. I got a lot to say on this subject of life after death that I ain't never told you before."

Little Mitten held back.

"O'Callahan'll throw us out sure."

"O'Callahan be damned," said Grogan gently, but prudently glanced over his shoulder as he uttered the awful blasphemy. He did not see that the boatswain still watched them from the shadows beyond the turret.

Mitten tentatively put the tips of his stubby fingers on the edge of the basket.

"Come on, Mitt; we'll be out of the wind. And if the O. D. comes along, or that Irish bully, we'll see 'em first and hop out the other side."

A few moments later Ed Grogan and Little Mitten were comfortably ensconced in the bottom of the basket. It was cramped. And there was a certain disquieting moan as now and then a light gust from seaward sifted through the wicker fabric. But it was warm and very cozy. And one could peer through a crack and see forward, the direction in which trouble would come in case O'Callahan or the officer of the deck chose to investigate the absence of two seamen from the accustomed hangout of the anchor watch, which was by the engine-room hatch.

"Now there is two ways of looking at immortality," began Grogan after settling himself comfortably, Little Mitten's body warmly close to his. "One from the viewpoint of the alive, and the other from the viewpoint of the dead."

Little Mitten grunted drowsily. In an indistinct way he felt pleased that

Ed was in a talkative mood. That meant the big man would stay awake and stand guard.

But Little Mitten did not count on the soporific effect of his own small, warm body on the senses of his friend. Grogan's voice dwindled. Mitten's grunts of understanding changed to a gentle snore. Grogan fell silent, snorted, then lapsed into limp quiet.

Dreadfully illegal, perilous, incredible, as it was, the two seamen slept.

An hour passed. Meteorologically speaking, much can happen in an hour along the southern sea coast of California. In this hour the barometer, obedient to Nature's whim, fell half an inch, a huge nose dive of a drop, for this delicate mechanism that warns men of the coming of a storm.

But there was no wind. Still overhead hung the black silence of a sky clotted heavily with clouds. And still that breathless stillness which all mariners know forbodes a storm of truly fearful dimensions.

"Shall I take reading oftener now, sir?" asked the quartermaster respectfully.

"Right!" Lieutenant Sharpe. "Every fifteen minutes."

"Aye, aye, sir."

Turning briskly to O'Callahan the smart young officer commanded:

"Call the first division. Have them stand by their anchor gear. If it comes on to blow hard we may have to get out of here."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"Here, anchor watch!" barked the lieutenant. Then, under his breath: "Confound those loafers. Never here when you want them."

A seaman appeared from the shadows.

"Anchor watch, sir?"

"Where are the others?"

"Dunno, sir. Guess—guess they've gone to the gallery for some Java, sir."

Mr. Sharpe's voice shook with anger.

"Soon as you get back tell them I want to see every one of them—*here*. Now run down double quick and call Mr. Rood. He's the balloon officer. Tell him it's going to blow hard. Better get his balloon up right away. Now beat it."

"Aye, aye, sir."

A marine orderly stepped up and saluted.

"Captain's orderly, sir?"

"Right. Wake the captain. Tell him glass dropped half an inch last hour. Storm warnings just came in by radio. Have called the first division to stand by the anchor gear. Chief engineer and executive officer have been notified."

"Aye, aye, sir."

"And—oh, orderly."

The marine paused in the middle of his gallop, again snapped his heels together and saluted.

"Yes, sir."

"And tell the captain that I have sent word about the weather to Mr. Rood, the balloon officer. I think he will want to get the balloon aloft right away."

Came a scuffling from the near-by hatch and a rattling of the hand chain until there emerged the anchor watch who had gone to the officers' quarters.

"Mr. Rood says get the balloon detail up at once, sir. He wants to unreef just as soon as possible."

"Very well. Chase yourself down to the chief petty officer's quarters and rouse out Higgins. Tell him there's a storm on us and Mr. Rood wants to send the balloon up clear before it gets smashed."

"Aye, aye, sir."

By this time in isolated foci throughout the great ship there sprang up ganglia of activity. Three officers in the wardroom country threw on their uniforms and greatcoats. Muttering men down forward in first-division quarters clumped out of their hammocks and began to drag on sea boots and pea jackets. In the eyes of the ship muffled figures

were already hauling deck lashings off the anchor chain. In fireroom No. 3 an extra water tender was shouting acknowledgment of orders from the engine room for more steam.

In one fatal spot there was a complete and sweet repose; in the basket of the kite balloon where soundly slept Ed Grogan and Little Mitten, anchor-watch detail from twelve to four a. m.

The time was now one thirty-four a. m. by the quartermaster's official clock.

At one forty-seven a. m. the balloon winch was manned. Maneuver of throwing off lashings and unwinding the balloon cable was too simple to require any shouting of orders or clanking of gear, such as might awaken two sleeping men. A trained hand quietly unhooked four light lines. Mr. Rood, blinking with sleep, stood by turret No. 5, and punched twice on a bell button. Chief Higgins, between decks at the electric winch, then threw his switch. At once the dark, bulbous mass rose skyward from the battleship's deck.

If Mr. Rood or the trained hand had, perchance, taken precaution to glance into the basket to see if everything were shipshape inside, they could not possibly have seen the recumbent figures of the two seamen faked down within. Darkness filled the basket as ink fills an inkwell.

Slowly the balloon disappeared skyward into the night. Its movement was gentle and noiseless. It swayed slightly as an ominous gust of wind swept across the harbor, forerunner of the hurricane on its way. But this swaying was as nectar to the sleeping seamen.

When the meter geared to the winch read "400 feet," Higgins moved down his brake lever. He did not throw the handle suddenly. That was against regulation. Abrupt strain on the balloon wire might snap it. By braking slowly it was possible to bring the balloon to a stop at any desired altitude

with the same comfortable motion by which it had been allowed to float into the air.

But Higgins was human. Like Mr. Rood, O'Callahan, Mr. Sharpe and others—not to mention Ed Grogan and Little Mitten—he was sleepy. He had not yet regained fullest command of his faculties. So while he thought he eased down his lever as carefully as usual, in actuality he threw it over with a good deal of a jerk. This jerk was transmitted over four hundred feet of woven steel wire to the balloon, which in turn transmitted it to the pendant basket swaying beneath it.

Simultaneously Ed Grogan and Little Mitten awakened.

"I was saying," began the former after a moment, "that when a fellow dies he oughta try to think how he's been expecting that minute all his life."

Little Mitten made no response. A sudden and horrible feeling of insecurity had come upon him.

"Wish you'd stop talkin' about death, Ed," he said.

"Well, it's a thing we all got to face, ain't it?"

Another gust of wind swung by. The balloon dipped and shifted fifty feet to leeward, noiseless but swift.

Little Mitten sat up, tense.

"Ed, she's rolling. Rolling something terrible. Feel her?"

"Sure. Always does when we lie out here beyond the end of the breakwater."

"Sorry!"

Mitten had twisted about and was peering through the crack in the basket's mesh which, when he had first climbed in, had permitted him to look forward and see the standing lights about the officer-of-the-deck's booth.

"Ed, they've put all the lights out," he announced in a scared voice.

"Shucks! Now listen, Mitt, if ghosts really——"

"Ah-h-h!"

Gripped by some premonition of hor-

ror Little Mitten had risen suddenly to his knees and glanced over the edge of the basket. As he did so the balloon overhead swung sidewise with a deep swoop that carried the basket in a long arc well beyond the black body of the battleship far below. This body, outlined by its anchor lights, the terrified seaman had seen and recognized.

After his first gasp of overwhelming terror Mitten fell with a loud groan to the bottom of the basket.

"What's wrong, Mitt?" queried Grogan. "Bellyache again? Told you them porkies was bad this evening."

"No-o-o! Oh, no!" moaned Mitten. "They've gone and let us loose!"

"What!"

Grogan sprang up full standing. The basket teetered dizzily with his heavy weight off center.

"Don't!" screamed Mitten. "You'll throw us out!"

Grogan clung to the basket lines with taut fingers. Fear came upon him—a man's fear of the unknown, rather than his small companion's abysmal terror.

"O'Callahan done it!" Grogan ejaculated after a moment. "He saw us get in. Thought he'd be funny."

"'Funny'—oh-h-h—" groaned Little Mitten.

Another sharper gust struck the balloon. For a moment the big gas bag tugged violently at her cable, causing the taut wire thread to hum in the rush of air; suddenly then it dived headlong toward the black waters of the harbor in a swift plunge that for a split second left the basket hanging unsupported where it had been when the fearful movement started.

As a result the basket was an instant later yanked after its parent vehicle with an abrupt violence that resembled the swing of a gigantic slung shot. Instantly the insides of the two men within it jumped upward and for a space of four or five long seconds jammed hard against their diaphragms.

Being a good seaman he presented no alibi for his tardiness, but set about mustering his watch.

"Smith—Gudgeon — Rattray—Wilnitsky—Butts——"

"Here—here—here——" from the expressionless countenances before him. "Mitten?"

No answer.

"Grogan?"

No answer.

"Mitt——" In the middle of the name O'Callahan paused with an oath so sharp that it caused the two officers behind him to cease talking and glance his way. O'Callahan looked aft, then suddenly upward. His jaw dropped. His eyes widened and blinked. "Holy Neptune," he breathed with what seemed a kind of reverence. Then he turned and saluted Lieutenant Sharpe.

"All present, sir." He gulped. "All except Seamen Grogan and Mitten, sir. I think they've gone up in the balloon."

"Gone where?" cried Mr. Sharpe.

"Last time I saw 'em, sir, they was climbing into the basket. I guess they wanted to get out of the cold."

"'Tisn't cold," said Mr. Sharpe angrily. "Besides, it was your duty to stop them."

Lieutenant Flood stopped on his way forward.

"Looks bad, Sharpe," he said, raising his voice to make himself heard above the stiff wind now swishing across the deck and crooning in the signal hal-yards.

"Bad!" barked Sharpe. "But do you know the worst?"

Flood glanced aloft toward the balloon he knew must be careening wildly aloft.

"She's not gone yet," he retorted apprehensively.

"Not that. But this bonehead, O'Callahan, tells me he let two seamen get into the basket. He thinks you've sent them up with the balloon."

"No!" fairly shouted Flood. "Good

Lord, man! They'll likely never get down! See that lightning?"

A jagged flash cut the inky dome overhead.

"You know what it does if it strikes that bag of hydrogen up there." Flood made an outward sweep with his spread hands. "*Phooie!* and its gone. Exactly what happened to the *Arizona's* balloon last fall."

The relief officer of the deck thrust himself forward.

"Let's search the ship for them. Then we'll know," he suggested.

"Right," from Lieutenant Sharpe. "Messenger!"

Flood, making for the nearest hatch, flung over his shoulder: "And I'll connect up the telephone. Perhaps I can get 'em. Then we'll know if they're aboard, anyway."

Meanwhile, high above the ship was being enacted a scene as terrible and, at the same time, pathetic as human imagination could possibly conjure. Grogan and Mitten lay in the bottom of the basket clutched in each other's arms. Both had been reduced to a state of hopeless frozen terror, punctuated by a nausea more violent than that of the newest recruit who clings to the lee rail of a tossing destroyer.

To and fro swooped the mad thing over their heads, forever pursued by its captive basket. If the movements of the wind-tortured balloon were those of a wild animal, those of the basket were far worse. For the violence of the swoops and plunges of the gas bag were magnified and changed grotesquely in the case of the basket. The balloon had only its wild buoyancy and the wind struggling to free it from the anchor line; whereas the basket was tormented by a combination of gravity, centrifugal force, wind, thwarted swings and the angry resentment of a dozen supporting ropes, all flinging it wildly this way and that through the black void in which it careened.

Weak and dizzy, abysmally sick, Grogan slowly pulled himself to the rim of the gyrating basket. He shut his eyes that he might not have to see the basket's next dive downward, as measured by the growing number of lights far below.

For an unexpected moment the balloon steadied itself and hung suspended in mid-air. Above the howling of the wind through the netting over his head he heard Mitten moan and say:

"You shouldn't 'a' talked of death, Ed. That's what done it."

As if in supernatural answer to the remark the basket suddenly held another voice, a strange, unnatural croaking tone, that did not articulate distinctly, yet surely spoke words as men speak them. Both seamen were for the moment stricken dumb by this revelation of a divine power. For an instant there flitted across the feverish mind of Grogan that his theories were better founded than he knew. Already, it appeared, he and little Mitt might be across the fateful borderland of death and hearing the voices of those who had preceded them through the Valley of the Shadow.

Then very distinctly both caught the words:

"Hello! Hello! Balloon there! Hello! Hello!"

Mitten, quicker mentally, though less introspective, at once fumbled in the darkness for the telephone headpiece he had previously moved so that it would not dig into the small of his back as he slept. He donned it.

"Yes, sir," he said weakly but with respect into the transmitter.

"Hello! Mister Flood speaking. Are you all right?"

"No, sir. We're up in the balloon, sir. O'Callahan done it, sir. And we're awful sick."

"Tell him we're dying," broke in Grogan fervently.

"Ed Grogan says we're dying, sir."

"Fiddlesticks. You're both all right, but a little sick, I guess. What?"

"Awful, awful sick, sir. Can we come down?"

"No, not yet. Now, don't worry."

In the darkness Grogan reached for the headpiece.

"What does he say, Mitt?"

"Says not to worry, Ed—— What's that, sir? Oh, I was just telling my buddy not to worry, sir."

"What's it to him if we worry?" growled Grogan, then suddenly rose to the edge of the basket, his powerful body heaving convulsively as he leaned his chin between his fingers.

"We're going to keep you up until the wind falls off a bit. Sorry, Mitten, but if we try to bring you down while it's blowing this way we'll wreck the balloon and kill both of you."

Grogan sank back alongside his small friend.

"What's he say now?" he inquired, wiping his wet mouth with the back of his hand.

"Says he'll kill both of us."

"No use, Mitt. We ain't done nothing like that. Besides, we're going to be dead long before he ever gets his hands on us."

"Hello! Hello, sir!"

A sudden blind glare of light surrounded both men in the balloon.

"Ouch!" shrieked Mitten, and cast the transmitter from him. As he tore at the headpiece a deafening burst of thunder crashed from what seemed their very elbows.

Grogan swore loudly and with real show of returning strength as he plucked the telephone connection from between his legs and tried to untangle it.

"Don't do it!" screeched Little Mitten. "You'll be electrocuted! Didn't you see me get a shock?"

"They might tell us how to get down from this here balloon," said Grogan, grimly dragging the holder over his fly-

ing mop of black hair. "Hello! Hello! Hell-oh!"

But the telephone was dead. Their last thread of communication with the living world had been severed. For that instant Grogan would have been glad even to have conversed with their arch-enemy, O'Callahan.

The balloon's swoops were longer now. With the full force of the hurricane acting steadily upon her, she oscillated almost with regularity. Her pendulumlike swings from side to side were certainly two to three hundred feet from extreme point to extreme point. The basket containing the two helpless men carried each time from ten to fifteen feet farther than the gas bag itself.

Howling of the wind through the silk-cord meshwork that supported the basket was like that through telegraph wires on a stormy night, only magnified a hundred times. Once, when Grogan tried to ask Mitten if he had a knife with him, he had to shout at the top of his lungs before he could make himself heard.

It began to rain. At first came only a few sharp drops, large as half teacups of water. Then, suddenly, a drenching shower cut the balloon completely off from view of the ship to which it was anchored. When lightning flashed, it illuminated innumerable slantwise gray lines etched across the darkness like pencil marks across a school slate. Mingled with the rain were thin but solid hailstones that made Grogan pull back his face with a cry of pain once when he undertook to look out.

The wind increased. What had been a steady whine of air jetting through the balloon's rigging became a steady howl, as if all the demons of the tempest were gloating over the frightful predicament of their two helpless victims. It seemed impossible that the silk fabric of the bag could withstand such a buffeting as it now received.

Indeed, no longer did the balloon

drive from side to side. In the throes of the hurricane's grip it seemed to realize that there was no dodging the engulfing blast that rushed in from the broad and roaring Pacific Ocean, now foaming over the breakwater far below. Drawn far down from its full height, the anchor line at a steep angle to leeward, the balloon tore frantically to escape. Just before dawn its frenzy was rewarded. The line parted. The balloon, freed, rose into the clouds.

Almost at the same moment when the howling of the wind miraculously lessened, Grogan and Mitten were aroused from their lethargy of hopeless terror by a lightning flash far brighter than any that had gone before. This flash was followed by a vast burst of flame that illuminated, with a gorgeous yellow radiance, the balloon, the basket, and the scud of storm cloud that swirled about them.

Both men felt sure their ends had come. Neither one spoke. Neither one moved.

Neither one knew that a daggerlike shaft of lightning had just missed their own free balloon, had hit and exploded a sister balloon at that moment still anchored to the U. S. S. *Idaho*, farther down the battleship column.

Daylight infiltrated through the billowing vapor that spread torn and shredded by the storm over the vast Los Angeles valley. Drifting slowly upward through the gray strata rose a kite balloon with a large "U. S. Navy" stenciled on its sides. Under the balloon quietly hung a basket. Over the edge of this basket two wan faces peered.

After a while the balloon emerged above the clouds; whereupon there was presented to the occupants of the basket a spectacle of gorgeous beauty. In every direction as far as the eye could reach spread a rolling sea of clouds. The surface of this sea was about a thousand feet below the balloon. The eastern sky was blue save where at its cloud

horizon a rosy radiance marked the advent of the sun.

While the two awe-struck seamen watched the sun slowly rose, first as a ball of fire, rich, red and not too bright for naked eyes; then so brilliant that they could not gaze upon it.

Just the blue sky; the sea of white, billowy clouds; the warm, bright sun—this was the universe in which the drifting airship floated.

"Do you suppose we're dead already?" finally observed Mitten.

Ed Grogan pointed south of east and below them.

"Not yet," he retorted succinctly.

Little Mitten peered blinking in the direction of Grogan's finger. A black object of ponderous dimensions loomed up through the clouds. Rocks and trees were visible scattered over its summit. A mountaintop. It appeared to be slowly but surely rising to meet them.

Neither man knew that the wild antics of the balloon a few hours before had worn thin a small area of the balloon's flank through the chafing of a basket line. Now this area had shredded slightly, permitting the contained gas to escape. Of its own accord the balloon was slowly deflating.

They landed gently in a pine grove that bordered what appeared to be a main highway. As the basket touched the ground both stepped out and staggered clear of the limp mass that floated down and threatened to smother them with its voluminous folds.

"And now a little shut-eye?" suggested Grogan, stamping the remaining gas out of the balloon.

"I'll say so," agreed Mitten, ready to collapse.

Again they slept, this time bathed in California sunshine, and inhaling the fragrance of balsam that exuded from the trees about them. Their mattress was of pine needles, their blanket a silken corner of the dead balloon.

The sun had ceased to shine straight

down, and was slanting through the western members of the grove when Grogan awoke. He was hungry and thirsty. He nudged his small friend into consciousness.

"Gotta be going."

"Where?"

"Dunno. Road, I guess."

They ambled down to the white highway fifty yards away. Presently a touring car swung around a curve higher up and drew alongside. The driver kindly offered the two sailors a lift.

"Pretty far from home, aren't you?" he asked kindly.

Neither man replied. Both had simul-

taneously caught the headlines of a Los Angeles paper that lay half opened on the seat. Glaring headlines smote the wide eyes of Little Mitten and Ed Grogan:

NAVY KITE BALLOON STRUCK BY
LIGHTNING: TWO DIE.

Seamen Edward Grogan and Goeffrey Mitten lost their lives last night when—

The pair raised their eyes and glanced inquiringly at one another. Grogan was first to speak:

"I told you, Mitt, that there was life after death," he observed sagely. "Look at us."

Other stories by Fitzhugh Green will appear in future issues of

THE POPULAR.



REINDEER OFFER NEW INDUSTRY

FROM Seward Peninsula in northwestern Alaska last year nearly 800,000 pounds of reindeer meat were sent to the continental United States for consumption there. Practically the same amount was sent out in 1926, but with specialization, controlling interests are confident that the industry will advance to new high marks next year.

Seward Peninsula houses Nome, the colorful gold city of the Far North and still one of the best-known communities in the Territory. Practically all the exports are handled through that city.

With the reindeer industry occupying the spotlight, Nome maintains that its gold mining has not fallen into the discard. The exports last year fell off some, but still counted up to about \$1,500,000. The Eskimos of the Far North also take part in tin placer mining, last year exporting 86,000 pounds, as compared with only 22,100 pounds the year previous.

Only twenty-three vessels entered the port of Nome during the year. This is explained by the fact that Bering Sea freezes over early in the winter, and the ice conditions do not decrease until late in the spring or summer. A few ships are sent North with huge consignments of supplies, but during the winter communication with the outside world is maintained by radio, and—more slowly, of course—by dog team overland to the Alaska Railroad, which operates all the year around.

In the last year or two, however, the airplane has entered the picture, and trips that take weeks by dog team can be made in a day or two with the use of planes. Flights in cold weather have been eminently successful and free from mishap. The ships are equipped with skis instead of the customary landing gear.

Flying Hoofs

In Five Parts
Part II



BY Charles
Neville
Buck

Author of "Fool's Paradise," Etc.

Shannon Wiley had thrown off the traditions of a fine old Kentucky family to become a bookmaker—a hard-boiled one and one of the best. When open bookmaking was abandoned he became owner of a racing stable. His best rider was young Joe Bonnie, his adopted son, who also came of good stock. After taking a nasty, shattering spill, Joe revealed to Wiley that he wanted to become a writer. Shannon persuaded him to keep on riding until he was twenty-one, promising to help him then to become whatever he wanted to. Joe is in love with Leslie Ferris, whose father is a wealthy, aristocratic Easterner with whom racing is a hobby. Joe knows that Leslie is miles above him socially, but she is very nice to him. The beginning of a new spring-training season finds Shannon hopeful of winning the Derby with a horse named Hazardous, Joe Bonnie up. Ferris tries unsuccessfully to buy the horse. He tells Wiley that Joe is seeing too much of his daughter Leslie. Shannon advises Joe to lay off, and Joe apparently agrees.

CHAPTER V.

A REAL GIRL.

SHANNON WILEY was keeping secrets as the early training of that season advanced. All outward show of excitement was as strictly forbidden by his code as is a display of fear in the ethics of a soldier, yet under his veiled surface there stirred within him such a tumult as had rarely been wakened before by any angle of the racing game. When in the lobby of the Phoenix at Lexington he was interrogated by that fraternity of breeders and trainers for whom the Blue-grass city

is a mecca, he shrugged a seemingly philosophic shoulder and answered guardedly.

"Gray looks all right," he would assure them, using for his colt the stable name instead of that entered on the thoroughbred record.

Most racers are familiarly known to their intimates by such shortened designations—so the great Exterminator was "Old Bones" in private life and Man o' War was "Big Red."

"Gray looks all right," the owner would muse. "He wintered well; but we haven't got him to the post yet——"

But the man of silence did not add

that the colt which had never, save once, tasted defeat after he struck his two-year-old stride, had filled out during that winter into all the seeming of a super-horse. He did not confide that the horse had shown, even as early as this, one or two work-outs of such dazzling brilliance as tempted his timer to doubt the accuracy of the stop watch.

Those secrets could not be long kept, but as yet they were his own. Here, if all went well, might be another Sysonby, a second Man o' War. And if that were true, there lay ahead of him not only the richest prizes of the track, but all the future triumph of a great sire. These mighty hopes Wiley kept under a seal of silence.

Guarding sternly against the dangers of overconfidence, he and Joe Bonnie were nevertheless gradually coming to believe the young horse invincible.

Then Gray went out one morning and unaccountably loafed through his task with the dull inertia of a plow horse. Coming back to his barn he let the head which was usually carried buoyantly high, drag dejectedly while the sweat was being rubbed out of his coat.

Wiley's eyes hardened a little and beads of moisture stood on his forehead, but he made no comment. There followed several days when the fear of the old perversity descended like a miasma on the farm, and when, though little was said, the royal colt's appearance of apathy and dejection communicated itself to his human court. Yet the veterinarian could find no trouble with him. He was as sound as pure gold. Whatever was infecting the sweetness of Gray's disposition was palpably not a malady of the body but of the mind.

The distraught mood which had temporarily blunted a whetted keenness of spirit into sourness passed as suddenly and as unaccountably as it had come. Gray snapped out of his moodiness and once again his gallops were romps of molten, tireless speed.

"One thing stands out like a sore

thumb, now," Wiley confided dismally to Joe, from whom he kept no secrets. "We've got a youngster here that can step along as fast as anything that ever trod on racing plates—when he wants to run. And we've got a brute that might as well be a dromedary—when he doesn't want to run." He paused, then growled somberly: "And there's not an interpreter in the world that can interview him and get wise as to what he feels like, ten minutes before he goes to the post. He's got everything a horse ever had except dependability; and I'm right tempted to unload him and let him run for Sweeny."

"Maybe I've got a sort of key to his moods," suggested the boy thoughtfully. "I've been studying him pretty close, and every day that he's loafed and sulked I've noticed one thing."

"What's that, son?"

The question was eager; and Joe answered slowly:

"I've noticed that whenever he's disappointed us, it's been when I haven't seen that cat around his stall for a while. I've never seen him fail to eat up his oats and his work if the cat was purring around when he was led out."

For a moment Wiley stood looking at his young protégé with eyes that were deep with thought. Then he jerked his head.

"If what you think is true," he declared, "all our eggs are in one basket and the basket is dragging behind a fire engine." He paused, then added dolefully: "It's a far-fetched theory—yet it's possible. Now, if it were a dog or a goat, we'd know where we stood. Stall companions like that stay put, but how can a man depend on a cat. It's like trying to hold onto the wind."

Joe smiled quietly, and in a low voice, as if talking to himself, he began quoting something that made no sense to his foster father.

"'When the moon gets up,'" he murmured, "'and night comes on, he is the cat that walks by himself, and all

places are alike to him. Then he goes out to the wet wild woods or up the wet wild trees or on the wet wild roofs, waving his wild tail and walking by his wild lone.’”

Noting the unresponsively brooding eyes of Shannon Wiley, the young jockey explained.

“Rudyard Kipling said that—about cats,” he said.

“Did he?” inquired the owner of Hazardous. “Well, he got his dope wrong one way. This cat hasn’t got any tail to wave; he’s a stub-tailed mutt.”

“Mutt or not,” persisted Joe, “he seems able to make this colt worth his weight in gold—or just about what he’d bring for crow bait.”

Wiley considered a moment; then he made a sober announcement:

“We don’t want to let the boys know about this—it would get around that our horse is a four-legged nut. But from now on one of us has got to get mighty wrapped up in that cat. We’ve got to get so damned soft on him that everybody around this barn will treat him like the Prince of Wales.” The elderly horseman made grimace, and added disconsolately: “I don’t fit into that picture, somehow. I could just about as easy sit here in a rocking chair and knit socks, as get mushy over a bobtailed cat. I’d haul off and kick him into the middle of next week before I could stop myself. I’ve always told men to go to hell when I’ve wanted to, and now I’ve got to kotow to a cat.”

He broke off, then went on again:

“As for me, son, I don’t put much faith in your cat idea. But whatever this thing is, it shows a crazy streak in the horse. However, we’ll try it out, and I’m afraid it will have to be you who coddles the stump-tail.”

The boy nodded. And as though to sign the compact of promotion to recognized importance, a small, gray creature with green eyes and an abbreviated tail held upright, strolled out of the stall

where stood the gray thoroughbred and wove its frail body sinuously in and out between the young man’s booted feet.

In a corner of the champion’s stall after that there stood a continually replenished saucer brimming with rich cream. Shannon Wiley studied with savage moroseness, the demands of feline epicureanism and sought grudgingly to satisfy them. So for a time in the small purring breast of the kitten and in the great-hearted chest of the gray colt, contentment reigned.

But Wiley would watch the small stray out of eyes that smoldered with suppressed savagery.

“Suppose the mutt dies on us,” he would suggest to Joe in lugubrious undertones.

“Cats have nine lives. This one looks pretty indestructible,” hazarded the boy hopefully.

But Wiley shook a morose head. “Nine cat-lives ain’t enough,” he grumbled. “Here’s a horse that’s worth a fortune if he goes one way, and not worth the halter he’s stitched by if he goes the other—and he’s pinning it all on an alley cat. If it were just any cat, all well and good—there are cats enough for all. But it seems that only one particular cat will do. I’m afraid we’re out of luck.”

“How about taking out a lot of insurance, Uncle Shan?”

The owner snorted disdainfully.

“What sort of insurance?” he demanded scornfully. “I can insure him against death or injury—which I have done; but even Lloyds wouldn’t insure a horse against losing a cat.” He paused, then added somberly: “Besides, after all, the cat is only part of it. The real point is that the colt’s one of those temperamental beasts that can’t be relied on. He’s liable to fall in love with a rat or a horsefly next, or to take a hate on life in general and mope himself to death. I’ve seen horses do it.”

Wiley was among the first of the horsemen that year who shipped to the

track at Churchill Downs, where as yet the great plant stood in its winter bleakness, with the grass of the infield soggy and the village of barns not yet revived by new paint.

There it was on a morning when there was still frost in the ground that the face of the gambler twisted to sudden fright—instantly repressed, yet demoralizing. It came about when the owner arrived at the barn and was quite casually informed by the trainer, "That damned cat that lays around Gray's stall—he's got stepped on or kicked or something; I guess he's about ruined. I started to put him out of his misery, but I remembered that Joe seems kind of soft on him—so I waited till you came. He needs a shot of chloroform."

Wiley schooled his features with a strong effort and spoke curtly:

"If anybody around here ever hurts that cat, I'll get just about as nasty as if he tried to hurt me."

"If that's the case I'm glad I waited," grinned the trainer, who suspected how nasty Shannon Wiley might get under the spurring of his peculiarly cold fury. "But what are we going to do—just let the cat linger and suffer? Looks like it would be more merciful——"

"Hell, no," snapped out the owner of the Derby candidate, and his voice was like the cracking of a bull whip in the hands of an assistant starter. "I am going to save him. Send for Jenkins and make it snappy."

Jenkins was the veterinarian upon whose skill that village of horses and the attendants of horses greatly depended. At the thought of this court physician being called to attend a cat, the trainer failed to wholly repress his sense of sacrilege.

"Jenkins is a right busy man," he offered in mild remonstrance. "There's a good deal of coughing going through the barns, and the doc's on the run from daylight to dark."

"Have him run here—and tell him to show some foot," ordered Wiley. "I'll

do the talking when he comes. Just tell him I say it's an emergency."

But Jenkins, when he arrived, was not too easy to talk to.

"Mr. Wiley," he announced with an irritated dignity, "my hands are mighty full. I'm here to attend to horses, not cats; and there are more horses that need me than there is time to give them. Right now they're waiting for me at the Whitely barn. Their Derby colt is running a temperature——"

"Listen, Jenkins," interrupted Wiley curtly, "we've done too much business together for you to turn me down when I need you. I'm the judge of when I do need you, and I say it's right now. I'm not asking you what it'll cost. Do your stuff and send in your bill, but get busy now and save that cat."

"And," said the veterinarian, in telling the story, "they call this Wiley hard-boiled. They say he's got no sentiment except for money. But he stands right over me and makes me work like a negro on a damaged cat that isn't worth a zinc dime when he's at his best. He doesn't ask what it costs and he doesn't bat an eye when I make it stiff. If that's not fool sentiment, I ask you."

"Did you save the cat, doc?" inquired an auditor. The veterinarian nodded. "What difference does that make?" he demanded testily. "The point of the story is what a sap Shannon was. But as a matter of fact, I did save the cat."

But the owner of Hazardous had tasted fright and it made him think.

"I spoke too soon," he commented doirly to Joe. "I sure spoke too soon when Jerry Ferris shoved his money right in my face and I shoved it back at him. If he makes another play at me, maybe I won't spurn his rich, red gold so scornfully. Maybe he'll find me coy—but reasonable."

Yet if Wiley had cause to worry over the discovery in his horse of that unstable quality of temperament which is the prerogative of the prima donna, other owners with hearts set on Amer-

ica's most colorful turf classic, had concerns which seemed to them equally grave, and which were more publicly advertised.

The old story of the vicissitudes of the game retold itself. One after another a half dozen of those three-year-olds that had been most talked of as contenders for the Preakness, the Derby, and the Belmont, fell by the wayside.

Gangway, coming up the line from winter glories, verified the adage that "horses that bloom in winter, burn up in the spring." His work fell away to stale mediocrity, and he was thrown out of training.

Stepping Stone, who had won the Futurity that afternoon when Hazardous lost interest in his destiny, pulled up bobbing one morning after a slow gallop; and the veterinarian shook his head over a puffed tendon. It might develop into a bow, he said, and at best it would be weeks before the colt could be set down again to tight exercise.

Then came that most dreaded and persistent of all eliminators. The spring wave of influenza swept through the barns at the Downs, taking its coughing toll. On the stall doors painted in the orange-and-gray colors of Jerry Ferris, hung charts such as nurses religiously keep in hospitals. These charts register the temperatures and health data of each horse, taken each day.

One morning Ferris' head conditioner sent a doleful telegram to New York. "Leg o' Mutton coughing," it said; "temperature hundred and three." That meant that the main dependence of the rich turfman for the classic three-year-old events of the season had gone into the discard of the immediate future, and that if the orange-and-gray was to be flaunted at all in the Preakness or Derby parades, some other colt or filly must carry them.

Jerry, as he held that message in his hand, wore the face of a deeply disappointed man. He had wanted to buy

Hazardous in the first instance—that he might have two strings to his Derby bow. With the gray and the black that had now fallen ill, he would have held a commandingly strong hand. With neither, he was destined to watch, unrepresented, a race upon which his heart was eagerly set.

For a moment Ferris sat staring in chagrin at this scrap of paper so freighted with ill tidings; then he resolutely reached for the telephone and put in a call for Louisville.

"I must have Hazardous at any price," he categorically declared, when at length he had his racing manager on the wire. "Wiley turned me down once. Perhaps that was a clever ruse to boost the price. I care nothing about price. If you regard the colt as up to his earlier promise, go as far as you like. But get him."

"Hazardous looks to have the Derby sewed up," responded the trainer soberly. "He's going great guns and is as sound as a dollar. But Wiley is apt to be a hard child to nurse. Can't you come on yourself, sir? You'd feel more satisfied if you talked to him in person."

Ferris drew his brows into an irascible frown and demurred stoutly. He was busy; he could not spare the time, et cetera. But before he hung up the receiver, he had agreed to make the trip. He was prepared to dislike and distrust the man with whom he had to deal. The callous way in which Wiley had talked about playing with a trick deck of cards had disgusted him; it never occurred to him that the tough-fibered old gambler had been deliberately baiting him. But he wanted the colt; that was the major issue. And so he went to Louisville, taking Leslie with him. Once the deal was closed he could indulge his dislike without concealment.

Jerry did not go at once to Wiley's stable, but passed that turfman with a casual nod and went to look over his own barn. Leslie strolled about the

track and stopped in her wanderings where a young man sat on an upturned feed bucket, painted black and maroon, teasing a stump-tailed cat by gyrating before its face a long stalk of timothy. The kitten crouched, shivered and leaped at the straw in ecstasies of delight. It turned absurd somersaults and lashed upward with soft, electrically swift paws as it lay squirming on its back.

For a moment Leslie looked on silently, then she said:

"Good morning, Mr. Bonnie."

The boy gave as sudden a start as though he had been struck, and when he looked up, the color drained out of his face. Since the day when this girl's father had defined his feeling as to relative social values, Joe had not seen her. Because the Ferrises had gone East immediately thereafter, there had been a merciful escape from explanations, and now she stood there unexpectedly before him, and he was forbidden to be friends with her.

Joe rose, and though he smiled, it was with the tight-faced constraint of repressed suffering in his eyes. Then he recovered himself:

"Miss Ferris!" he exclaimed. "When did you come?"

The girl had eyes that were as observant as they were beguiling. She had noted the pained reaction, the stiffness of misery, and she had instantly decided that this was not the moment to admit seeing it. Instead she gave her whole attention to the kitten.

"He hasn't any tail," she exclaimed. Her laughter rippled out; and the boy thought it as musical as the tinkle of a fountain. Leslie began to sing a queer little song:

"Are you aware that cats have got no tails in the Isle of Man? Does this seem fair when cats have tails in England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales——"

She broke off to stoop down to pick up Gwine-Die-Soon, better known as

Soon, and held it close to her breast. The kitten looked up inquiringly out of large, grave eyes, and began to sing its throaty, bumbling hymn of contentment. In the stall near by, the great colt lifted its head and looked benignly out.

Joe Bonnie had taken up his task of befriending this cat as a reluctant matter of policy. Now, and abruptly, his feeling for it altered. It had been fondled, even kissed, by Leslie Ferris. No longer was it simply a stable stray, tolerated as the next barn tolerated an ill-odored goat—because a crotchety horse demanded its presence, and walked its stall to the undoing of its nerves unless it was thus strangely companioned.

Leslie seemed to Joe, as she stood there fondling the young thing, to have no thought for anything else. He did not suspect that this engrossment was specious, and that under her pretended preoccupation she was seeking to explain to herself why the boy's frank air of comradeship and his old unself-consciousness had somehow died out of his eyes, leaving him haunted by some deep uneasiness. She had not seen him for a long while now, yet it could not be that she had in any way offended or hurt him, because they had last parted gayly and with laughter.

So for a little while she played negligently with the gray bunch of animated fur, watching the boy meanwhile with furtive and sidewise, yet keenly observant glances. Joe had, during their occasional but highly treasured moments of companionship, held a rigid curb on his emotions. At least he thought he had. He supposed that he had kept his unspoken worship a secret; and now at all costs he must see that the seal remained unbroken.

Just now he was making an awkward but sincere effort to stand before her with a sort of forced respect, and it puzzled her. There was some mystery here which called for solving, and she meant to solve it.

Leslie waited for Joe to make some advance of the old friendly sort; and when he did not do so, her own eyes grew grave and her question came with disconcerting directness:

"What's the matter, Joe?" she asked without preamble, and quite unconsciously calling him by his given name for the first time. "Have I done anything? You seem to be off me."

The boy's face burned hotly red, then turned pale. He shook his head miserably, and the abrupt fashion of her question swept him before he could fashion his words, into an impetuous reply—a reply he had not meant to make.

"Off you?" he echoed, and his voice had the strain of clamorous emotions silenced until they had filled his heart with soreness. "It would be a lot better for me if I were."

"Why?"

She put the young cat down, and it began arching its back against the boy's riding boots. Leslie stood straight and slender, and her eyes held an interrogation which demanded forthright honesty of reply.

Joe's eyes clouded to suffering and his throat tightened; then he responded to a tidal impulse and cast away all thought of subterfuge.

"It seems I was in danger of forgetting my place," he told her bluntly. "And your father reminded me of it."

"Father—reminded you?"

She spoke with a low-voiced amazement; and the jockey raised his hand impulsively.

"I oughtn't to have said that," he said penitently. "I guess Mr. Ferris was right. He just sent me a hint—a very polite hint—that riding his race horses was one thing, and riding horseback with his daughter was something else." He broke off, then forcing his voice to a quiet steadiness, he added: "I couldn't tell him that I'd always realized the difference myself. And I guess it wouldn't have mattered much, if——"

Her face had remained almost expressionless, but in her eyes a sort of quiet fire was beginning to smolder.

"If what?" she insisted.

"If I hadn't been thinking about you in a way I hadn't any right to think."

For a moment Leslie Ferris stood, slender but stiffly straight. And then she said, as if to herself rather than to him:

"Why didn't father come to me if he had anything of that sort to say?"

"I guess," admitted Joe bleakly, "he thought that it wasn't worth handling that way. That might make it seem more serious than it ought to be. He realized that you were just kind—and he thought I was impertinent."

The girl remained for a moment more silent while a light of battle kindled and flared in her eyes. Then she said in a tone rather deadly quiet:

"I must talk with father about this. I'd rather not say anything more until—until later. Except that you are a friend of mine, and I want you to know it."

"Thank you," he answered. "That means a lot to me."

When she thrust out her hand with an impetuous frankness, he took it gravely and watched her as she turned and walked away with the high, indignant head of a Valkerie.

CHAPTER VI.

HORSE TRADE MAGNIFICENT.

LESLIE FERRIS crossed the infield and took up her place in the empty grand stand. She wanted to think; and her emotions just now were disturbing and stormy. She had not wished to let her surprise betray her into an appearance of disloyalty to her father. She had never confessed for Joe Bonnie any sentiment other than that of a most natural friendliness, and she found it difficult to understand why that had excited parental fears.

Now the insurgency of youth was

flaming upward in her, fed by an insistent sense of indignation. She was asking herself whether her father's method of dealing with the case had not been cruel and rather caddish. And of the two men, it seemed to her that, after all, the jockey had been more the gentleman in his behavior than had the aristocrat.

Smarting under a sense of coercion, this girl began to acknowledge for Joe a status of heightened importance; and in this new status he took on the guise of an oppressed young man, valiantly fighting to win for himself a worthy place in the world and encountering the rebuff and scorn from those more fortunately circumstanced. Into Leslie's feeling for the boy for the first time stole the warmer colors of something akin to acknowledged sentiment.

While she sat deeply preoccupied in the chill and vast emptiness of the grand stand, her beguilingly curved chin in her cupped hands, her father, who was as yet unconscious of this newly incited spirit, was arriving at the barn she had so recently left.

Shannon Wiley was overseeing the saddling of a set of colts for the track, and looked up impassively as his visitor appeared.

"Mr. Wiley," began Ferris, advancing to the topic of his interest with a directness that cut away preliminary parley, "I suppose you've heard that my colt is coughing and running a temperature. Of course, that means he's out of the Preakness and the Derby."

Wiley nodded.

"Yes, I heard that," he answered. "It's tough luck, but it happens to all of us, at times."

"I tried once before," went on the Easterner, "to interest you in a deal about Hazardous, and you cut me short with a refusal."

Again Wiley inclined his head non-committally. He permitted his visitor none of the gratification of reading even a faint responsiveness in his eyes.

Obviously, thought Ferris, this interview was to be at least in its beginnings, a repetition of the former one; and he stiffened with irritation for the rebuff which he had not yet encountered.

"I want my colors represented in the Derby," he announced, "and I want them carried by a colt that has a chance to win. I'm not trying to haggle or bargain. Of course, I can't compel you to listen to my proposition, but it would at least be courteous to hear me out."

"I'm willing to hear you out," responded the owner of Hazardous briefly. "Why wouldn't I be?"

"If the colt is as good as he was, I want him," declared Ferris, "and I'm willing to meet any reasonable demand. Of course, you may know things about him that others don't. I'd have to rely on you as to your opinion of his present condition."

Wiley shook his head and smiled without warmth.

"I reckon, Mr. Ferris," he suggested, "you haven't come to me without getting pretty reliable information in advance about Gray. I guess your informers have told you how he's wintered and how he's worked."

The would-be buyer admitted that supposition without declaimer.

"Yes, I'm not out to buy a pig in a poke," he said. "I have had all the information that was available. The summary of that information is that your colt looks like an uncommon stand-out in the Derby field."

"He's answered all the questions I've put to him, and answered them all to suit me," Wiley responded. "If he has any blemish or unsoundness of leg or lung I haven't found it. I've known most of the stake horses that have run in this country for thirty years; and it's my belief that when Gray wants to run there's no colt in training that can head him home."

"That seems a fairly comprehensive estimate."

"Yeah, so far as it goes, but that

ain't to say I guarantee anything. If you want to have a half dozen vets go over him, I won't put any trespass sign on the barn door."

"Then I take it you are willing to discuss this sale."

"I haven't said that yet," was Wiley's dry comment. "But you've seemed to be holding it up against me ever since our last talk because I gave you 'no' for an answer right away instead of giving it to you at the end of a parley-voo. This time you can talk if you want to, and when you get through I'll give you my answer. It won't take long. It'll be either, 'Nothing doing,' or 'You've bought a horse.'"

Ferris studied the enigmatical face of the other man for a moment, puzzled yet hopeful. Then he announced:

"I'm not pretending indifference. I've wanted the colt for some time; and I want him more earnestly now, with my own youngster out of it."

"What I've just told you about Gray don't mean so much," Wiley observed in a tone which did not seem to be that of a crafty trader who was anxious to sell. "If the race was going to be run to-day I'd play Gray straight on the nose up to my last dollar, and no man could buy him. But it ain't run to-day. A lot of things can happen in a few weeks. He may catch the flu like your own horse did. He may pick up a nail, or step in a hole, or develop some quirk and turn loafer, as he did once before. All I've said about him is straight stuff, but it's talking about to-day. That's why I might think of letting him go."

So that was the gist of the matter, reflected Ferris disgustedly. This man with the repute of being the most audacious gambler in the betting ring was none the less hard-headed and thrifty. To him the sporting glory of a Derby victory was nothing except a purse. The gratification of seeing his colt's name emblazoned in gilt in that long roster of champions that began with Aristides, was of less consequence than

the sure money of a rich selling price. This was a sure-thing gambler inert to the thrills of sportsmanship.

"Are you going to work the colt this morning?" inquired Ferris, almost too eagerly. "I'd like to see him in action."

Wiley nodded again.

"Joe can take him out there with a pacemaker in a few minutes now," he answered deliberately. "I can take you to the tack room and let you read the scales. But you might keep that detail under your hat. These clockers don't need to know everything. They are still guessing as to whether Gray can shoulder handicap weight. Well, Joe's going to ride with the Derby impost this morning, and a little excess baggage to boot, and he's going to set Gray down for the full Derby distance. You can hold your own watch and form your own opinion."

"But," Ferris said with a note of anxiety, "isn't it too early to have him on such an edge? Won't he turn off before racing time?"

The owner of Hazardous shook his head decisively.

"It's my notion that once he's ready he can be eased up and then brought back quick."

Wiley stepped into the stall, and no one noticed, so absent-minded was his manner, that he lifted a small cat from the straw under the gray stallion's feet and set it carelessly on the rim of the feed box.

A quarter of an hour later, Leslie, still sitting with her thoughts in turmoil and paying little attention to the thunder of hoofs along the stretch before her, suddenly lifted her head and for an instant forgot her abstraction. Usually the onlooker needs a stop watch to gauge accurately the speed of a running horse, yet occasionally one appears whose stride is so tremendous of length, so Mercurially fleet that the unaided eye perceives that time is being splintered. But it was the recognition of the rider on the big colt that had

brought Leslie upstanding out of her reverry and that kept her on her feet with parted lips as a bay and a gray went by. They had broken at the quarter pole, and as they swept past her the lad on the pacemaker was already stinging his mount to the utmost of its speed with heel and whip.

But Joe Botnie, sitting snug on the gray, was holding his high head under the restraint of double wraps and the colt was scudding like driven spray in the teeth of a hurricane.

The girl stood there and watched the pair bank the turn into the back stretch, the bay pacemaker already hopelessly lost in the wake, the gray almost flowing with untroubled, molten fleetness. When at the end of the mile and the quarter Hazardous came by again, eased up, his gray ears were still pricked forward in declaration of untroubled ease.

The face of Jerry Ferris had lost its studied calm. His eyes were eager—greedily eager. He had clicked his watch to a stop, and held it incredulously in his hand as he heard Wiley's emotionless voice saying:

"Well, you've seen him work. Now we'll take him back and cool him out."

The Easterner flushed with resentment for the cold-blooded indifference of Wiley's tone. He disdained any man who could watch such a performance with no tingle of emotion, no heightened tempo of pulse-beat. Once or twice in a lifetime was it given to a sportsman to witness sheer magnificence in animal achievement; and here was a fellow to whom the colt was only a "racing tool"—a fellow with the soul of a huckster!

Standing by the stall door, while negroes scraped and polished the dappled silver coat, Shannon Wiley said unemotionally:

"Well, that's that."

Ferris jerked up his head irritably. To his enthusiasm it was a moment of scalding excitement—of elation upon

which the unstirred words of the gambler fell like sodden rain.

"I must have him," he declared.

"Well, I don't know," drawled the owner. "He's either a super-horse or nothing. It'll take a super-price to buy him."

"Then, at least, you have your price. What is it?"

The responding voice was cool, the words were drawled.

"Yeah, when I figure on how easy they go wrong or die—I have my price. It's two hundred thousand."

Jerry Ferris had been prepared to go far. In his own thoughts he had rather imagined that a hundred and fifty might be asked. But the greed in his eyes had not died out, and it was a greed which took little thought of money. Hazardous, by right, should belong to a man who could appreciate him; and after a moment the millionaire's head snapped back.

"It's an outrageous price," he protested, "but I'll pay it."

Wiley's features stiffened and his eyes narrowed to resentful slits.

"If it's an outrageous price," he offered reminder, "you don't have to pay it. I didn't propose trading."

"You've sold a horse!" snapped Ferris.

The news of both work-out and sale sped about the track, and by the time the check had been drawn, interested spectators were gathering to see the gray colt led from his stall to the barn of its new owner. In these few minutes of settling details, there had developed an atmosphere of animosity between the traders themselves, an animosity which was not to end here.

All the condescension that Jerry Ferris had it in him to show played through his manner now without effort at concealment. His strong distaste for Wiley, which he had perforce held in rigid check until there was no danger of its defeating his end, was released now into overt expression.

Wiley's sphinx face showed nothing of recognition for this disdainful attitude, yet just as he had baited Ferris before, so now he was stung into the temptation of baiting him again.

With his quietly irritating drawl as he folded the check, he suggested:

"And now, Mr. Wiley, for ten thousand extra, I'll tell you how to win with the colt."

The millionaire bristled, and his retort came hot from his heart.

"Our trade is finished," he said bluntly. "As a matter of fact, you've already asked and gotten ten thousand extra—several times over."

Once more the stony face contorted with affront, and for just an instant the right hand tightened into a fist. Once the deal was closed, Wiley had meant to post the now owner fully on the ins and outs of this colt's temperament and vagaries. He had meant to impart the full history of eccentricity as well as achievement. Now he shut up like a clam and turned on his heel. Then, in afterthought, he turned back again.

"Just the same, Ferris," he volunteered curtly, "I'll throw in an extra, if you won't. That cat goes with the colt. You'd better take it along."

"Thank you," the voice was edgy. "I don't need any cats."

"Have it your own way. But I'm telling you straight, the colt is fond of him."

Jake Goodman, trainer in chief of the Ferris string, slipped into the stall and picked up the stump-tailed Soon.

"All right, Shannon; I'll take him along," he volunteered with a conciliatory grin. Then, turning to his employer, he said: "Till he gets used to his new stall, he'd better have his mascot, Mr. Ferris. These colts are mighty curious that way, you know. We don't want him moping with homesickness."

It was only because Soon was safely tucked under the arm of the conditioner that Wiley, whose temper was

smoldering close to outbreak, did not speed his parting with the toe of his shoe. He blamed Soon for much frustration of hope, and deep in his heart he watched the departure of the one great colt he had ever owned with a gnawing misery of disappointed hope.

When Shannon Wiley went back to town before Joe Bonnie had finished his morning riding, he stopped at the office of his attorney. After he had been closeted there for a while, he rose and gave his parting instructions:

"Fix it up for me, judge, in good foolproof shape. But mind you, I don't want the kid to know about it until his twenty-first birthday. That'll come soon enough."

The attorney gazed gravely at his client.

"You're quite sure you want to do this, Mr. Wiley? Your reasons are your own, of course; but unless you've altered your will since I drew it for you, your whole property goes to this boy at your death in any event?"

"Yeah," Wiley spoke with definiteness. "That's another proposition." He hesitated, then went on: "I don't mind telling you my reasons, judge. I've always been a dyed-in-the-wool gambler; and it's too late to change now. I don't know whether I'll die rich or broke. What I want is that Joe shall have this two hundred thousand, regardless of that. I want it fixed so that even if I took a notion to bet it on a sure thing, I couldn't touch a penny of it, see?"

"Yet you don't want him to know that you are making him independent, even rich, until he comes of age?"

"No, not till then. You see, we've got an understanding—him and me. He's one of the best jockeys that ever booted home a winner, and if I was a kid, that would satisfy me. I couldn't live away from the race track if I tried; there'd be no kick left in anything. But this lad is cut out of a different cloth. He's got notions that I don't pretend

to understand. And so we agreed that he was to go my way until he came of age, and then he was to go his own way—whatever it happens to be.”

“Yes?”

“Well, he’s been shooting straight with me and I’m going to shoot straight with him. He’s never complained any of his bargain, but I’ve seen that he was getting restless. His very success has fretted his mind because he’s been sharp enough to realize that now if he decides to quit the saddle before he’s played out his string to the end, he’s giving up a sure thing for a long-shot chance—he’s making a sucker bet on his life. But ever since we made our bargain he’s been studying—educating himself; and I reckon it wasn’t just to ride thoroughbreds that he burned that midnight oil.”

“Whatever he decides to do later, that policy hasn’t hurt him.”

“No, I figured it that way, too. But when he comes of age a few months from now, he’s going to find that he’s got a good stake behind him whether he wears another man’s silks or his own ready-made coat and pants—and whatever happens to me.”

“Is that why you sold the colt?”

“That’s about it—yes. You see, when I bought this yearling for a song, the wise guys all rallied round with loud guffaws. Soon after Hazardous began to show stake class I sort of made up my mind to split fifty-fifty with Joe on him. That is, I would get all the satisfaction of developing and racing a great horse—if he turned out to be one—and Joe would get the money. People have got me labeled a hard-boiled gambler out for the jack—and nothing else. As a matter of sober fact, Jerry Ferris couldn’t get any more kick out of winning the Derby than I would. But horses go wrong too easy. For myself, I wanted the fun of racing him, but on Joe’s account I decided it was safer to cash in on him while the cashing was sure. That’s why I let Ferris persuade

me. Now when Joe comes to his fork in the road, whichever way he goes, there won’t be any poorhouse setting right out in front of him on the highway. Whether he rides horses or writes poems, he’ll eat his three square meals per, either way.”

As the trees began to break into a foam of bloom, so the sporting pages began to blossom with advance gossip of the major three-year-old stakes, and as Jerry Ferris saw his gray colt progressing and escaping the menace of all the spring maladies, his ambitions mounted to more vaulting altitudes.

No longer did the sufficiently glorious prospect of saddling the victor at Churchill Downs satisfy him. He had begun to set his hope on a trinity of achievements which no turfman had yet accomplished; the winning, with the same horse, of the Preakness in Maryland, the Derby in Kentucky, and the Belmont in New York. Sporting writers fell more and more boldly into the tricky habit of prophecy. If Hazardous trained on without accident, they said, no contender in his division should give serious menace to his ambitious destiny.

So when the news was given out that the Ferris colt was to leave the Downs and prepare for the Preakness at Pimlico, then return to Louisville for the Derby, the public had been educated into a blind faith, and had pinned that faith to the gray stallion.

When Jake Goodman had come into the employ of Jerry Ferris, the stable, which had gone through some discouraging years, had begun to come back to the luster with which it had shone in the days of Jerry’s father. Jake had trained overseas for an Indian nabob whose turf ambitions were inordinate and whose methods were regal. Goodman’s gift had been an almost uncanny understanding of the minds of horses as well as of their bodies. Out of several cantankerous brutes he had smoothed dangerous temperamental

wrinkles and into them he had wheedled a spirit of cooperation.

Thus it fell about that when Hazardous passed under the registration of Ferris' ownership, this sage old fellow began a studious appraisal of his new charge. He realized that perhaps he had a super-horse, and assuredly he had a grave responsibility. The queer and viciously prankish streak that had come over this colt at Belmont, when for a little while he had been altered from a creature of willing courage and invincible speed into a spiritless sluggard, was common knowledge. Such a thing might happen again, and of that possibility he had frankly advised his principal before the purchase was made. But if there was a man in the game who could handle a tricky temperament and cope with such a problem, that man was Goodman.

When the bargain had been consummated, and Ferris had cut Wiley short in his offer to tell "how to win with him," Goodman had gone to Wiley's trainer for a heart-to-heart talk. Between these two men stood no bar of personal animosity, and the discussion was candid. The former handler of Hazardous spoke of the cat that had been a stall mascot, but he mentioned this as of minor rather than major consequence, since it was so that he himself regarded it. Goodman suggested that if Wiley could spare him, it might be well to employ the negro stable hand who had been Gray's particular valet and attendant and to whom the colt was accustomed.

To this arrangement Wiley consented, but no one knew that this negro was keeping a secret—keeping it possibly for no better reason than the impulse of African reticence and the love of being mysterious. It had been Mose Clay who had named the cat "Gwine-Die-Soon," and it had been Mose's sharp eyes which had first detected the strong attachment between the big gray colt and the small gray cat.

Mose rode in Gray's box car when Gray made his royal progress out of the West to Maryland. Mose watched over and crooned to the mighty youngster, and while others paid scant attention to Soon, Mose saw to it that his comfort was catered to as befits the familiar friend of a prince.

Joe Bonnie, remaining at Louisville, felt a pang of loneliness whenever he passed the stall where the gray had stood. The stable seemed a place divested of a former greatness and tenanted now by mediocrity.

Ferris had made no contract with Joe for second call on his services. He had wanted to nail his prospects of triumph to the masthead of assurance by having this young man wear his silks in the three major classics; but in his mind lingered unpleasant memories of his talk with his daughter, and with them this boy was disquietingly associated. Then, too, the feeling between himself and Shannon Wiley had, in his own mind at least, assumed the gravity of a feud, and to employ Joe meant calling on Wiley.

But Goodman had been insistent in wanting Bonnie to ride, and two days before the Preakness was to be run, circumstances abetted his urging. The first-string boy of the Ferris outfit was kicked at the barrier by a fractious starter in a claiming race, and sent to the hospital with a cracked tarsus, so the need of calling on Joe became imperative.

"Joe Bonnie is worth ten pounds drag in weight to any horse, Mr. Ferris," pleaded Goodman earnestly. "To this particular colt he's worth twenty. You can't afford to do anything but get him—whatever he costs."

"I'm not thinking of the cost," the owner made dry observation. Then realizing that he could not well discuss the distinctly personal reasons for his prejudice with his trainer, the more particularly because Leslie happened to be present, he added lamely: "I doubt if

he would come. He's riding every day at the Downs."

"Any jock would cancel a few engagements to ride in the Preakness," argued Jake doggedly. "All the more so if he was to ride the same mount a week later in the Derby."

Leslie, who looked on with thoughtful eyes, said nothing; and Ferris, after a hesitant moment, jerked up his head in grudging acquiescence.

"Get him if you can, Jake," he said. "I give you carte blanche."

When Goodman's telegram was handed to Joe as he came out of the jockey room at Churchill Downs at the end of a day's riding, his face darkened and a doggedly stubborn light gleamed in his eyes. He stuffed the yellow paper into his pocket; and then, as he was turning away, he heard a second messenger paging his name, and was tearing open another envelope.

"I hope you can ride Gray," said the second message. "So does Gray himself and so does Soon."

It was signed "Leslie."

CHAPTER VII.

A BLACK BOY GETS FIRED.

ON that Saturday afternoon, a week before the running of the Derby, Shannon Wiley linked arms with a newspaper reporter in the clubhouse inclosure at Churchill Downs.

"I ain't got no newspaper badge, son, but I want you to take me up to the press box," he said briefly. "I've got to hear what comes over the wire about the Preakness."

"Sure," grinned the newspaper man; "I'll fix it. Nobody's got a better right to be interested in Hazardous—especially with Bonnie in the pilot house."

To the doorkeeper of the steep stairway which climbs to the eerie of the fourth estate, the writer said briefly, "Friend of mine," and the celebrated gambler found himself among the scribes and Pharisees. Typewriters rat-

tled between the walls, and a dozen and a half telegraph instruments chattered with metallic hysteria.

The bugle called a handicap field to the post, but Wiley did not join in the rush to the balcony. He sat, blank of face, in the room where presently the wires would crackle a terse and stertorous description of the race being run hundreds of miles away. Wiley knew every race track between the seas, and he had only to close his eyes to see afresh the oval five miles from Baltimore where the cream of the three-year-olds would soon parade for the mile-and-an-eighth struggle of the fifty-thousand-dollar stake. He did not even have to wait for the man at the key to interpret the stutter of the Morse, for in the day when he had run a pool room of his own, Wiley had found it expedient to master the code, and had done so.

At length they were going to the post at Pimlico. As though he were looking over that other course instead of staring at a blank wall, Shannon could see the milling field of starters. The conformation of each youngster, the face of every rider, the colors of every set of silks were to him wholly familiar, but the delay was more nerve-drawing than if he had been taking the picture into consciousness through his eyes, instead of through his ears alone. Then came the dots and dashes which spelled the words: "They're off;" and it was at the same moment that the crowds at the local track voiced into vocal outburst, but for a less consequential conquest.

Wiley bent forward, listening intently, that the clamorous throats of the multitude below him might not drown out the clatter of the key in the receiving box.

"Hazardous breaks on top," came the laconic report, "Stepping Stone second, Rag Bag third."

The veteran's face changed no more than that of a wooden effigy, but to

himself he made satisfied comment: "True to form—so far."

"At the quarter," clicked off the wire's end. "Stepping Stone goes into the lead, Hazardous second, Rag Bag third."

Wiley's straight lips bent in a grim smile. So Gray's ancient enemy, with his one Futurity victory to his credit, was daring the menace of setting the pace in his desperate resolve to stand the gray on his head. But Shannon was smiling in derision rather than in anxiety.

"Hell!" he muttered. "That ain't good enough, young horse. They pay off at the other end."

At the half the story was already told. Hazardous had drawn off to the fore and the others were breaking their hearts in his dust. From there on the young descendant of Roi Herode was breezing, and with closed eyes, the man who had raised him from a yearling, visualized the picture of color and action. He saw Joe's hands with reins wrapped; he saw the slight figure sitting as steady as an effigy and the great stride of the gray youngster eating space in easy, mighty mouthfuls.

He was already risen, as though bored with repetition, when the result flash came:

"Hazardous wins, eased up, by three lengths, Rag Bag second, Star Glimmer third."

He had needed that assurance, and he only made mental observation:

"Stepping Stone burned himself to a crisp trying to run off and hide from Gray. He wasn't in the money."

For a colt to race as Hazardous had raced at Pimlico, then to make the railroad journey from Baltimore to Louisville, to be rested up, tightened up, then to meet the supreme test of his career all in one week's time—that was asking a good deal. In that week between the Preakness and the Derby, with excitement swelled to flood tide, the columns of sports writers belonged to a single

theme. Never before had the same colt been crowned in those two stakes. Could this colt do what no other had ever done?

In the main the prophets and soothsayers of the turf agreed that he could. They even predicted that the presence of the "silver stallion with a golden heart" would rob the event of its rightful uncertainty and convert it into a walk-over. Here seemed to be the horse of a decade, and now he was racing in the colors of a trusted owner.

Under the implication of that last remark Shannon Wiley would have winced, had he had the trick of wincing. It was not suggested except warily and between the lines that since the gray no longer flaunted the silks of a professional gambler he had ceased to be an honest horse in dubious hands. But the corollary was clearly stressed: that running for Jerry Ferris, he went to the post with a guarantee of honest intention upon which the public could bank as upon the integrity of the Bank of England.

Finally, he was to be ridden by the lad who had so grown in favor that his name had become a sort of turf fetish, and it was thus canonized in the enthusiasm of both sportsmen and sports that the descendant of Roi Herode and Le Sancy reached his freshly prepared box-stall at the Downs, to be besieged by photographers, reporters, and sight-seers.

Because the defeat of so prohibitive a favorite would mean many thousands in profit to future book operators when the day of the play-off came, and because unaccountable things sometimes happen, the door of the stall was constantly guarded, and at night a trusted employee remained vigilant at its grating.

But this time the silver stallion remained golden-hearted and golden-tempered. He munched his oats with a placid appetite, and when he lifted his beautifully modeled head and looked

out, a regnant confidence showed in eyes that were tranquil for all their dormant fires. Unexcitedly his small feline companion slept in the feed box or underfoot.

Mose Clay, the negro whose hands had so often curried and brushed that silvery sleekness of coat, yielded, two days before the race was run, to the enticements of his excitement. He had been walking among his colleagues ever since the Preakness victory with the pride of a favored courtier, and as the great day approached, his excitement mounted to a febrile intensity.

Then it was that Mose yielded to his occasional weakness and went on a spree. Usually respectful and quiet about his place of employment, he showed up on this occasion so boisterously loud of mouth that the serenity of the place was disturbed.

Jake Goodman, who understood his servants, was at first inclined to treat the matter with indulgence, but when his good-humored expostulation was met with a hitherto undiscovered defiance and insolence, his face stiffened and his words were few.

Mose was paid in full and ordered off. Moreover the words and the tone in which he received his discharge had in them nothing of uncertainty and much of vigor. Goodman, watching the red and belligerent eyes of the black man, even reached casually for a hay fork as he came to his period, and Mose shuffled away, converted at the instant into one who harbored a deep hatred in his heart.

It did not take the negro boy long, however, to realize that he had been a fool. He who had been the familiar friend of the Derby favorite was now an exile without standing.

"Jes a darcy without no job," he wailed disconsolately to himself.

"Where's Mose?" inquired Joe Bonnie as he swung himself down from the saddle after giving Hazardous his last work-out two days before the race, and

as unfamiliar black hands reached out to take the bit rings.

"Mose, he got lit," grinned the colt's new valet. "Seems like he got some of this here hooch that makes a jack rabbit spit in a bulldog's face. That darcy, he spit at the wrong bulldog, though. He don't work here no more."

Joe said nothing, but late that afternoon he went back to the stall. All day he had been disturbed lest the sudden absence of any familiar member of his ménage might upset the high-strung nerves of the Derby colt. He found Soon purring about the stall; and the colt looked so contented that if horses were possessed of feline gifts, he would probably have been purring himself.

The next day Joe did not go to the Ferris stable. He knew that Jerry and his daughter would be there, and a stiff-necked pride caused him to absent himself on all occasions when he was not summoned.

On that morning, which was Friday, and the day before the big race, Soon found his cream saucer in Gray's stall empty. There was a tenseness of spirit about that place which made for the forgetting of inconsequentials, and the consequence of Soon had never been as duly and fully acknowledged here as in his last place of residence. True, he had been tolerated and fed, but sometimes he had found it necessary to drink ordinary milk instead of the rich, blobby cream that he remembered in the last home which he and Gray had shared.

For a while he went about raising his voice in a loudly insistent line of conversation which had to do with a demand for food. He stropped himself against unheeding ankles and once was even lifted out of the way on a boot toe. It was not exactly a kick, and it injured nothing except the sensibilities—but sensibilities are something. It did, however, persuade Soon that the service in this place was inadequate, and that there was no hope of bettering it by complaints to the management.

When no better occupation offered itself, it was the custom of this feline parasite to wash his face. Now he sat down and so engaged himself with a melancholy reflectiveness. He was deliberating on the altered circumstances of his life, and in due but unhurried course he arrived at a conclusion.

At the Wiley barn he had always been provided with cream, kippered herring, and—in short, such proper delicacies as befitted the demands of an epicurean palate. It seemed to him that the manifestly simple thing to do was to return to his fleshpots, but before starting he stopped complainingly against the fetlocks of the big gray colt and sought to persuade him to join in this truancy.

Whether or not Hazardous understood anything of these urgent lamentations lies in a province of animal psychology as yet unexplored by the human understanding. Even had he desired to go, Hazardous could not have left his box stall by the small orifice in its half door which served Soon as an adequate exit.

So Soon departed and Hazardous remained. The cat passed unnoticed by the guardian at the stall door, and a little way from the end of the barn he paused and once more washed his face.

From here on his course required consideration. The Wiley stable lay almost a quarter of a mile way along the cindered road which was the main street of this immaculately whitewashed village of thoroughbred abodes. Manifestly the most direct and undelayed procedure would be to stroll sedately and with dignity along the dusty path which served this street as a sidewalk, but here were complications.

At Barn M a sheltered family of police dogs, mother and puppies, lived; and though the mother was trustworthy, the puppies might prove otherwise. At Barn Q there was Rags, a rowdy and raucous-voiced fox terrier whose life seemed fanatically dedicated to the ex-

termination of cats. Sometimes he was kept chained, but one could not afford to rely on that assumption.

Soon weighed these matters and turned out into a back-lot detour which would lengthen his journey, but materially contribute to its safety.

The circuitous route carried him across a place where a plank, used as a foot bridge, crossed a drainage ditch; and there in the shade of a tree sat a human figure that slumped dejectedly. The figure was in the direct path, and Soon paused to consider it; then, recognizing a friend, the cat stalked gravely up and arched his back against the coarsely socked ankles.

At first Mose Clay was tempted to vent on this entirely innocent victim all the resentment and ire that burned in him for the outfit to which it belonged, the outfit from which he had himself so recently been expelled.

Then suddenly an idea flashed into his mind from which the alcohol fogs were beginning to clear, and as it came to him his dully smoldering eyes took on a new light that brightened them to a leering sense of discovery.

If revenge was what he craved—and revenge was what he just now did inordinately crave—this small animal was stalking straight up to him like an answer to a prayer.

"Cat," he declared in a low voice suddenly grown tense with triumph, "you've jest natcher'ly done come to de right place at de right time."

He paused and, reaching down, scratched Soon under his chin, a form of caress in which the cat delighted, and to which he responded with an ecstatic rumble in his vibrating throat.

"Thar's things dis darky knows erbout dat stud hoss an' dat none of dem white folks ain't never got wise to, cat," continued Mose as he nodded his head sagely. Then his eyes rolled upward and he savored in advance the sweetness of reprisal.

As yet the idea which had come with

the arrival of Soon was simple, and involved only the plan of hitting back at his enemies; but as he mulled it over it took on new and widening possibilities. These possibilities grew and crystallized. Out of scattered strands they twisted into a cable of unexpected power.

Mose picked the cat up, and stroking its head to keep it in good countenance, made his way to a barn as yet unoccupied. There he deposited Soon in a grain bin, which his scrutiny assured him would serve as a place of safe confinement.

The negro had been paid off and now he was somewhat sobered. As straight as the Fourth Avenue trolley could carry him, he made his way downtown and went to a place of which the police had no official knowledge. There he hoped to be granted an interview with the representative of a certain widely known bookmaker.

Mose was in the ordinary definition an ignorant man. He had been raised a country negro in whom neither taste nor opportunity had run to education, yet in certain matters pertaining to stables and race tracks and the horses that raced upon those tracks, he was endowed with a depth and completeness of lore. He knew that on such races as that of to-morrow, scores, even hundreds of thousands of dollars are played in the winter or future books. He knew that besides the flocks of small-fry hand-bookers—sly, rat-eyed men operating illegally through news stands, cigar counters and soft-drink places—there were perhaps a half dozen of the big guns whose clients gambled on a more magnificent scale. One of these major winter-book operators maintained his headquarters here in Louisville. Mose Clay also knew that for this layer of odds and his colleagues, the victory of an outsider in the Derby meant a clean-up, and the victory of a strong favorite meant a heavy toll of loss.

The representative of the big-bore gambler who sat in charge at the local office was a gentleman called "Dapper Joe" Merrick, though in other times and places he had also worn other names. Mose had seen and talked to this henchman of greatness. He had known his clockers about the tracks, and had even been questioned by Dapper Joe himself on certain matters of training interest. Mose had possessed a certain importance because he had been in daily contact with the favorite. Now he was admitted to a private office and found himself in his presence. Mr. Merrick, well tailored and slender, might have been a professional dancer—and at times had been. Now he looked up and demanded:

"Well, black boy, what do you want? This is a busy day for me, so make it snappy."

Mose turned his hat in his hand, but his eyes were now crafty.

"I've done had a fallin' out at de Ferris stable because I got lit," he began. He chose to be frank, because for what he was about to undertake he must establish a sufficient motive.

"Looking for a job, eh? Well, I haven't any jobs."

"No, boss, I ain't lookin' fer no job." The colored man's voice became almost insolently self-assured. "Easy money's what I'se lookin' fer right now—lots of it. I knows somethin' that's wuth money ter you. That's why I'm here."

Dapper Joe, alias "Broadway Slim," alias the "Spider," bent forward. He smiled skeptically and veiled an interest which sought to manifest itself in his eyes.

"You know something, eh? Well, shoot it!"

Clay shook his head.

"I don't shoot nothin' till after we talks business, boss. I ain't no charity 'sociation."

"What is the business?"

"S'posin' I kin make sho dat de gray colt don't win ter-morrer? S'posin' I kin make sho dat he ain't even in de

money, but finishes way back like he done in de Futurity?"

The gambler shook his head and his smile became disinterested.

"You said you got lit, black boy, but this line of yours listens like hop talk to me. I hoped you were going to spill some sense."

"Ain't it sense if I delivers the goods?"

"But you aren't even at the stable now. You must have gotten away with some sort of raw stuff before, provided you were fool enough to try it. Now you can't get near the stall."

"I don't have to git near no stall. You don't have to pay me nothin', neither, till after de race and after de colt's done been licked like a nickel hoss. But we've got to get down to cases right now an' settle what's comin' to dis darky if I does what I says I kin do. An' ef we don't come ter no agreement—why, I reckon de gray colt, he'll win off by hisse'f."

The white man rose and his thin face was meditative.

"If you could swing it," he said, "we wouldn't wrangle long over the money. But you've got to give me something more to go on."

Mose reflected for a while, then he nodded.

"Nobody but me don't know dat colt plum intimate, boss. I does know him. I've done slep' in his stall. He ain't got no secrets from me. I knows why he blew up in dat Belmont Futurity the way he done. He was pinin' fer a cat. Yes, sah, dat's a fac'. He's got a stall mascot with a stub tail. Ef dat cat ain't in his stall ter-morrer, he won't run nary a lick. An' I've got dat cat. I've got him in a mighty safe place, too. It's dis darky dat says whar de cat's at ter-morrer."

Dapper Joe hesitated as he weighed the matter:

"But don't the stable connections all know about this mascot, too?"

"Dey don't know whar he's at—an

mo'over, dey don't suspicion how much store dat colt sets by dat cat. I'm ther onliest man dat does know hit. Dat's my proposition. My price is five gran', boss. You kin jes natcher'ly take it or leave it."

The negro was no longer abashedly fingering his hat. He had something valuable to sell, and while he knew his protagonist might seek to haggle, he knew also that, on the proposition in chief, he had him sold.

"The future bets are in," mused the white man. "If this thing should go through, a big clean-up could be made with the comeback money at the track to-morrow; but if the colt's moping, won't they see it and scratch him? They can do that up to an hour of post time."

Mose shook his head, and he grinned broadly:

"I done told yo' I knowed dat stud hoss. He'll go to de paddock lookin' spry enough—he jes' won't run when de barrier goes up. Besides, dat cat, he goes an' comes. Dem white folks won't miss him fer a day or two yet. Der folks won't, but de stud hoss, he will; an' ef de cat ain't dar, Gray might jes as well hev a broken leg."

CHAPTER VIII.

DERBY DAY.

THE form sheet of Derby day at Churchill Downs read: "Weather clear, track fast;" but the form sheet is not given to hysterical wordiness and fails in full justice to the radiance of that afternoon.

For this one day Louisville was the capital of the thoroughbred world, to which all roads led teeming as with the hurry of converging armies.

To-day the faithful habitués, the punters and sharp-shooters, who on lesser occasions sat studying the odds with the assiduity of earnest scholars, were swallowed up in a vaster aggregate. To-day the local touch of home-bred crowds

and professional horsemen was devoured and lost in a cosmopolitanism that had swept from far reaches and from every compass point. It was a cosmopolitanism which had broken over the town with the rush of many human Niagaras. It had come with the roar of special trains, with the purr of motors, along dust-shrouded and congested roads—by water and even by air, until the hospitable resources of the city were taxed and strained like the envelope of an overinflated balloon.

Of the several scores of thousands who would to-day pack themselves into the inclosure at the Downs, one in every four, perhaps, would see the horses finish in the home-stretch battle which had attracted them all. The rest would strain and tiptoe and push, and have a short-sighted vision of the back of other men's necks and the rims of other men's hats.

But within the great oval of cinnamon brown, the infield was a monstrous emerald, and over it the sky was a vastness of turquoise against which the flags whipped lightly in a sparkling breeze.

From early morning the turnstiles had been clicking to a trickle of humanity. The trickle had swelled to a tide and the tide to a deluge. Holding grimly to places of vantage along the pickets of the fence, groups early of arrival sat on blankets and rugs, fortified against hunger by lunch baskets and against thirst by vacuum bottles. Only the box holders could take their ease and stroll to their seats without joining in the stern battle of shoulder and elbow.

Of the seven races on the card six were only garnish for the *pièce de résistance*, which was to be battled out near to sundown over a mile-and-a-quarter route by less than a dozen three-year-olds and less than a dozen picked boys, whose tasks would occupy a few seconds more than two minutes.

Many of the eligibles had been fright-

ened out of the conflict by the seeming invincibility of one rival whose coat was a dappled silver and whose heart was said to be of gold; but a true-run race calls for an uncrowded field.

"How does he look to you, Jake?" demanded Jerry Ferris, whose eyes burned with a febrile excitement as he stood early that morning by his barn, gazing at his starter.

It was after a pause that the trainer answered, and he spoke thoughtfully:

"Of course, this is the first race I've ever saddled him for. They say he always knows the day of a race—he senses it somehow from the excitement all around the barn, I guess. Seems to me he's a little different from other days—less tranquil and more irritable; but I reckon it's just being keyed up; he's as sound as a dollar."

Ferris let his eyes linger with unconcealed pride on his horse as he stood there, the veins already outstanding under his silver coat, fires seeming to smolder in eyes that looked out from the shapely head which is a family endowment of the Roi Herodes.

"He looks like a million dollars to me," Ferris declared. "I believe in him."

"Well, we'll know more about it before long," was the philosophical rejoinder. "And there's one set speech for a trainer on the eve of a stake: 'My horse is ready.' If he loses, I'll have no alibi. If Gray wants to run we won't need an alibi; and only once has he refused to run. The farm figures him already in—and they're betting on him in China."

Over in the Ferris box early that afternoon, Leslie was sitting alone and just a little lonely. In the boxes about her were many acquaintances, men and women who had come like herself from the East for this one occasion. Some of them dropped over to speak to her; but they were all folk that one saw at Belmont, at Saratoga, at the hunt clubs when the hounds were out, and at those

fields along Long Island where polo is played.

Her father was somewhere among the gathering multitude, and in the place where almost every square foot of space was a battleground for occupancy, this box with its six chairs was empty save for herself. She had strolled for a while along the bricked areas and the grassed lawn at the front, looking at the carnival color, listening to the carnival hum of the crowds and the blare of the bands. At the paddock gate of the clubhouse inclosure, she had stood for a little while looking out. Beyond that division line the pressure of humanity was tighter and the chorus of mingled voices heavier and coarser of volume—the excitement less restrained. She could see at a distance the railed roof of the jockey room, where already those boys who had donned silks for the earlier races of the card, swung their booted legs as they waited.

Leslie peered over the heads of the mob, seeking among those urchins in their bright motley for a figure which would not come to her box as other acquaintances had come; and she confessed to a flutter at her heart which was not all for the excitement of the day and the race. She did not see the face or figure for which she searched, so she turned and went back to the clubhouse.

In the women's reception room, as she passed its wide doors, she caught a glimpse of her father; and for a moment her brow puckered into a suspicion of frown. Jerry Ferris was fingering a packet of pari-mutuel tickets—those small slips that come from the betting machines—and he was talking to a woman.

It was not the showy, self-assertive beauty of this woman who smiled flashingly on the girl's father through a somewhat heavy make-up of cheeks and eyes, that brought the anxious furrow to Leslie's forehead. She was of that "younger generation" which her father

and she had seen at public gatherings in which show girls had struck her as more conservative of dress and manner than certain members of her own set. She knew that casual deductions from superficial appearances lead nowhere. But there was an air at once intimate and cautious in her father's attitude which told her that this lady was an acquaintance who belonged to that social life which she did not share with him. Instinctively she disliked his companion.

Outside the high fence which surrounds the race-course inclosure at Churchill Downs sits a frame house whose back windows look along the mile chute and the back stretch of the track. In a second-floor room of this building a small force of shirt-sleeved men were ensconced to-day, and they seemed intent on serious-minded business.

There were freshly installed telephones and telegraph instruments; and, by the window, looking across the back stretch and infield, stood a tripod, surmounted by a small but effective telescope. Through its focused lenses an observer was watching something or some one on the grand-stand lawn; and from time to time he turned and spoke to a companion at his back—whereupon the telephone and telegraph wires woke to noisy life.

The hand-bookers and illegal-gambling hucksters may not operate from the track itself, and to their trade the Jockey Club wires are sealed. Yet these gentry must have expeditious information, not only of results but of approximate odds as the betting proceeds and as the official board reflects the cash-register clicking of the "iron men." On Derby day, betting on the big race does not have to wait its turn after the finish of the fourth event, but proceeds from early afternoon with special machines.

Messengers along the palings, who had taken their places before the crush set in, and who were served by sweating,

strong-arm heralds, were flashing signals to the telescope—outside the gates.

As the afternoon progressed toward its great moment, a spirit of surprise and excitement awoke among the workers in that temporary office. The gray colt of the Ferris stable had opened an odds-on favorite, for, as his trainer had said in the vernacular, "they are betting on him in China." The rest were nowhere—or at best were being played "out on the limb," to place or show.

Now the "approximate-odds board" began to show a perplexing change of heart. Palpably there was setting in an unforeseen tide of betting against the favorite.

"That's wise money," exclaimed a heavy-jowled man looking up from the sheets which lay under his perspiring hand on the table. "That can't be anything but the comeback kale trickling in. Some big bookie's got a last-minute tip and the future-book boys are betting it back. Something's gone wrong with the sure thing."

Over the stands, as the afternoon marched through its minor preliminaries, the spirit of excitement mounted as crowd enthusiasms will in championship contests that have been mulled over and wrangled about in advance. The soft breeze carried a golden powder of sunlit dust. The bands blared; the high-flung flags stood out palpitant from their staffs; the thousands, enduring with buoyant complacency the discomforts of elbows in their midriffs and heels grinding on their toes, tautened in impatient eagerness.

These three-year-old colts, somewhat better than other three-year-olds, perhaps—though some of them would be running in claiming races before the season ended—assumed, in the heightened imagination of the moment, a legendary nobility. Like Pegasus they mixed with the blood of horses that of demigods, and now in a little space they would dance out, curvetting with eager-

ness, and submit their high claims to the ordeal of battle.

Through paddock and betting ring clanged the sunmons of the gong, and from the jockey room came the boys. Already the colts had been walking under blankets, and as they walked one of them had been admired with an adulation akin to worship.

Jerry Ferris had been standing by the door of the gray's stall, and outwardly he was the calm, composed aristocrat whom the racing public admired. He was a pillar of the sport who played fair with the public and cared more for glory than for money. It was fitting that his engaging countenance should wear that expression of assured tranquillity. Inwardly, just now, he was a man of tumultuous spirit and almost insupportable eagerness. Shannon Wiley, passing along the paddock wall noted that, as Ferris reached up and fondled the gray ears of Hazardous, his fingers shook ever so slightly.

Wiley himself was not quite so calm as his seeming. He whole-heartedly disliked this man and in watching Gray go out for his supreme testing under the maroon and black, he felt a secret twinge of desolation, much as though he had seen a sweetheart in the arms of another man. Yet the colt was still the Hazardous he had raised and trained and developed. His victory would vindicate the old gambler's judgment, and the old gambler would be mentally riding him every jump from flag-fall to finish. Except for Ferris himself, no other in all those thousands had plunged as heavily on the gray colt's victory.

The boys trooped in. As he came, Joe Bonnie glanced keenly along the faces by the paddock rail. His gaze was searching for Leslie and when he caught her eye his own brightened and between them flashed a message of hope from her, and an assurance of his last best effort from him.

If Ferris caught or noticed that flash between the eyes of his daughter and his

jockey, he gave no indication of it, and he grasped the boy's hand with a seeming of heartiness. The owner remained standing at the entrance of the box stall, while inside the trainer talked in low tones with the boy. The jockey was, the crowd inferred, receiving his final instructions, but his face was turned to the back of the cubicle, and the well-schooled features of Jake Goodman told nothing.

As a matter of fact, that concealment was something of an achievement, because the boy's eyes, as they met those of the elder man, mirrored a deep concern and his words came in a shocked undertone:

"What's the matter with him?"

"Matter with him?" queried Jake, holding his face expressionless. "If there's anything the matter I didn't know it."

"He doesn't look right to me," Joe declared. "He's fretting over something."

Abruptly the jockey demanded:

"Has the cat been around his stall as usual?"

"The cat?" Jake repeated the words, then paused thoughtfully:

"Why, yes. I don't recall just exactly when I saw it last, but I haven't missed it. It's been in and out right along."

Joe's face cleared to relief.

"Maybe he just misses Mose. Mose generally came to the paddock with him, but not always. If that's all, the colt will forget it once he's led out."

A gong clanged and Jerry Ferris turned into the stall. In such a race as this it was proper ceremonial that his own hand should take the boot heel of his rider and toss him to the saddle.

Then the Derby field of eleven colts fell in behind the scarlet coat of the marshal on his piebald pony for the march to the track, and the parade began between solidly tumultuous walls of sound thrown up from a multitude of throats.

Ten of the eleven young horses must taste defeat, but in them all beat pulses of confident ardor, and since the less-favored aspirants could not read the newspapers, they were saved the mortification of knowing that after all they were only outclassed camp followers with no greater hope than that of fighting among themselves for consolation prizes.

So under their luster of new jackets and with the glint of silver-bright stirrups-irons, they danced in a pride which still asserted claims upon royalty.

As the queue sidled and pirouetted on its loop past the judges and then back to the starting chute, the uproar was a massive monument of applause, and most of it was for one colt and one boy.

The starter, heavy with responsibility, was standing on tiptoes with his finger on the trigger as the webbing was drawn across the track and the field was walked toward it. For once they came up as evenly as if threaded on a strand, and grasping his opportunity, he snapped out a word and pressed the trigger. Like unleashed thunderbolts they were away, almost before the crowd realized that they had reached the starting point.

No captiousness could have found complaint with the fashion in which that Derby field left the post, yet so winged was the break of Stepping Stone that he shot ahead rocket-wise as if he had been favored with "a step at the gate."

At his crupper ran a home-bred and home-owned colt which for once had been almost neglected in Kentucky's betting. He was a good youngster with a bright future, but in this field was Hazardous, and to challenge Hazardous was to invite defeat.

The silver stallion was not yet racing nobly. It had been said of him that at the post he chafed against an invisible leash, and that he slipped it as a lightning bolt slips its cloud sheath. Now he ambled sluggishly into action, and as they passed the stand the first time, **with**

a quarter of a mile already run, he was pounding along dully in the rear division.

The crowd caught its breath, but without serious anxiety. This colt could afford to toy with his field in his own fashion. To come from behind and to win going away—that, after all, is the grandest way to stamp performance with superiority, and that, no doubt, was what the gray was now bent upon doing.

But Shannon Wiley, gripping the palings of the stretch fence, was not deluded. He could read the face of Joe Bonnie as he flashed past in a dust-swatched thunder of hoofs; he could read and rightly construe its desperation as the gray took the clouting of backward-flung clay from the plated heels ahead.

As for Joe himself, he could feel that this great mechanism of flesh and blood and power under him was dead to all spirit of combat. He knew that the deep eyes in the gray head were lit today with no eagle fire. Another and less controlled jockey would have stung his mount then and there with a monitory taste of rawhide, but Joe Bonnie fell into no such fatality of error.

If Hazardous had lapsed, as once before he had lapsed, from super-horse to spiritless dullard, punishment would only sour him to the sullenness of a mule. If he could be coaxed, cajoled, redeemed out of this black inertia, he could afford to waste half of his opportunity and still gloriously retrieve himself. If it were needful to send track records or world records crashing down in such a belated effort, this horse might even do that; but if his sulking was confirmed by punishment, the task became hopeless.

The boy bent low and talked pleadingly to his mount. His electric hands on the taut reins sought to carry an infusion of combative spirit. His hold on the head offered support and encouragement. He was cajoling, almost hypno-

tizing, and all the while he knew that he seemed to be doing nothing. He was giving the crowd whose hundreds of thousands of dollars rode with him, no spectacular show of a whipping drive. He was presenting the aspect of a jockey asleep in the saddle on a top-heavy favorite.

All through the straightaway of the back stretch the crowds waited for Joe Bonnie to make his move on Hazardous—and saw no move made.

The multitude wondered, yet held to its faith. The boy knew his mount. Perhaps he was foolhardy in letting the margin broaden so exaggeratedly before he began to demonstrate the pyrotechnic union of skill and speed that could wipe it out; perhaps that was reprehensible, but after all, such a union could not fail.

Only as the field of horses banked for the last turn and the gray, instead of coming up on hurricane wings, began to drop more listlessly back, did the truth begin to break into a ruthless realization.

Ordinarily the roar that goes along the stretch with a finish is a gathering and confounding of many thunders.

The noise of that Derby had all been at its start.

Incredulity, shock, and a despairing sense of outrage had caught at the throats of the many thousands and hushed them into an unaccountable silence.

As the field thundered along the stretch, as Joe Bonnie in a despairing last resort, timed and wielded the whip which he had so long refused to employ, the gray descendant of Roi Herode laid back his ears like a mule and flinched into a floundering bobble under his punishment.

It was last that he passed under the wire. Only an "also ran" would be required for his descriptions in tomorrow's form sheet.

Jerry Ferris had not watched that race from his box. He had known that the crowd would bank too solidly

around the judges' kiosk for passage through it, and it had gone without saying that he must be at the foot of the winding stairs when the winning jockey returned to unsaddle in the chalk circle. He would be needed there to accept from the hands of the governor the gold cup and to acknowledge, with a few well-chosen words, already rehearsed, the congratulations of the chief executive.

So now he was standing there, being crowded and jostled, as the dismayed silence broke into something more like the howl of a lynching party than the acclaim of a holiday multitude.

For once his self-containment had deserted his regular features, and as Ferris turned to recognize Shannon Wiley standing at his elbow, his lips twisted to an instinctively savage snarl.

"Sorry," said Wiley. "It's the Futurity over again."

"Sorry like hell!" rasped out the edged, momentarily uncontrolled voice of the Easterner. "I don't know what the trick was yet—but I know I've been swindled. I guess I can't get you—but I can get the boy that choked my colt for a mile, then whipped him out of a chance in his effort to stall."

Bystanders had caught Wiley as his fist lashed out, and it was from pinioning arms that he replied, already calm again:

"That's a damned lie!"

Ferris, with a purpled face, realized that he had publicly disgraced himself. These were things to be said later and

in private, not shrieked with the coarse frenzy of a guttersnipe in the faces of the thousands.

But the episode taking place at the core of a seething chaos was lost except to a few. That extraordinary silence could not last, and already, as the hundreds spilled over the fences onto the track, the belated cheering for the unexpected winner had been born out of amazement and was vaulting into a roar. No upset could long so paralyze the traditions of a race track, that a Derby winner need return unclaimed to the stands before which he had made himself famous.

The king was dead. Long live the king!

It was almost as an afterthought that many of those who had watched the running, looked up at the board to see just what colt was to be garlanded with the horseshoe of roses.

They found that it was the Kentucky-owned youngster, Hard Boot, and Kentucky turned straightaway from chagrin to celebration.

Shannon Wiley had been led away, but his anger had already subsided.

Ferris spoke across the palings to Jake Goodman, who stood stony-faced on the track.

"You do any talking that's necessary with Bonnie," he ordered curtly. "I can't trust myself yet. Pay him off and tell him I won't need him any more." Then shamefacedly he added: "If you see Wiley, tell him I apologize. I was excited."

To be continued next week.



CLEARING GLACIERS

MAKING a round trip in an automobile from Fairbanks to Eagle Creek, in Alaska, put the stage driver up against sixteen glaciers and three feet of snow. "Aside from that," he reported, "the road was fine."

Passengers and "crew" of the far-northern automobile stage had to get out from their conveyance and chop the path for crossing the glaciers. It was said in Fairbanks that an automobile never before has made the trip so late in the year.



Author of "The Man Who Watched Shadows," Etc.

When Leno's Olympian Tent Show came to East Chazy, Squire Howitt and the gypsy, Spring Jack, locked horns.

A COMPLETE STORY

SWALLOWS, esteemed elsewhere as fowls learned in climatic matters, were without honor in East Chazy. They might swoop all day under the Friends' Creek bridge, or encircle the rusty steeple of the town hall until they were ready to drop, but to no avail, for no East Chazy burgher in sixty years had ever regarded them as harbingers of spring.

Not even if the blossoms whitened the hillside orchards with their odorous confetti, or Old Man Grover set out boxes of seed in his grocery windows, or aged men began hobbling to the drug store to get their annual supply of sarsaparilla at cut rates.

Spring came into East Chazy with a finality that left not a doubt in the

most pessimistic of minds. It came in with great noise, with banners, and trumpeting by six clowns that escorted into the Howitt pasture the grandeurs of Leno's Olympian Tent Shows.

Then it was that citizens began to unhinge the storm doors, put up the fly screens and left home earlier of mornings to avoid the odious task of rolling up and dragging out the carpets for the hired girl to beat in the front yard.

Even the oldest inhabitants, the stubborn ones who in other days never allowed that spring had come until duly announced by bock-beer signs, couldn't remember when Leno's hadn't come around at punctual time. There had been the original Zep Leno in the

days of Lincoln, then Leno, and now "Young" Leno.

And spring, therefore, had been of much profit to the Howitts. There had also been a Squire Howitt as far back as the first Leno. And the carnival had never failed to pitch its tents on those ancestral acres back of the town hall, yeleft the "pasture."

What crop that the Howitts could have planted ever brought them the profit and the prestige as the sowing of tent pegs unfailingly laid down by Leno? The Howitts got two hundred dollars, rent and the compliment of one hundred tickets. But this is confidential information that Leno never let escape from his barred wagon. For generations the Howitts had enjoyed repute as public-spirited folk who had at heart the merriment and well-being of the citizens of East Chazy.

But what, this spring, had got into Squire Howitt? Divine for yourself, if you can. Here he is now, coming out of the post office, with a squarish derby hat on his head, and a new mail-order catalogue under his arm. He is about sixty, with a scrubby, pointed beard like General Grant's, a shaven upper lip and a thin mouth. He struts as only those can strut who have been supported by loyal taxpayers for thirty years.

He is the justice of the peace at East Chazy. Once he nearly got the nomination of the Democratic party for county superintendent of roads. And the State fair at Burlington without Howitt as chairman of the live-stock committee would be unthinkable.

He is an old-fashioned horseman. So much so that his dislike of automobiles extends to people that own them. He unhitched a good-looking pony from the post in front of the hotel, climbs into a shiny red sulky, cracks a whip and rattles off with the aloofness peculiar to people who ride in sulkies.

It was just four in the afternoon, and the last of the scholars were emerging from the East Chazy school as he drove by. And he bowed his head in acknowledgment to the twenty or thirty students who were wont to lift their hats in respect to him. Howitt was also a school trustee. True, young East Chazy cared not a pin for that, and certainly did not salute him on that account.

The reason for this accolade was that Squire Howitt owned the carnival lot. And scholars who got high marks for deportment were put down on the list for a free ticket to the carnival. A hundred tickets go a long way in a small village. Those tickets diminished the receipts of Leno's Olympian Tent Shows by approximately fifty dollars. But they increased Squire Howitt's political capital by five thousand. Their distribution made him a philanthropist. And it pleased the parents. And parents were voters. It is painful to reflect that Squire Michael Howitt was technically, if not *in toto*, a grafter. So Leno, grumbling through the wicket, had asserted a year before, and hinted that a dozen pasteboards would be plenty.

Damn them, but they did come across, after all! He crowed over his triumph, but swore inwardly, for it had been a tight squeeze at the polls. Jim Blair, the livery-stable owner, had been put up to run against him for school trustee. Only the tickets saved the squire, and that by a margin of only twenty votes.

"Ya-hoo!"

"There goes the old kill-joy!"

"Boo-loo-loo!"

"There he goes!"

"Throw a rock at him!"

The squire was shocked. He had bowed his head according to custom, and this was what he got in return! He pulled up and glared about him. They were mocking him. There was

the dirty lad of Tusser, the harness maker. And the down-at-heel O'Halloran twins, and the insolent offspring of Blair. They sang out and jeered at him. The impudence! And what was the meaning of it all? He had half a mind to jump out and wring their necks. Then he decided to report them to the school principal the next morning and have them expelled.

It must have been that row about the carnival. It was already all over the village. The squire flogged the pony and sped to his home, a white house behind elms and a white-washed fence in the élite part of the town, behind the hall. His wife opened the gate for him. She was a tired, sallow New England wife, with a determined mouth, steel spectacles and the eyes of a martyr.

"Looks like they took you at your word, Michael."

"Who? What?"

"The carnival people. They marched right past, with them clowns blowing trumpets, and they stopped here and blew at the house, as if to make fun of you, Michael, and the rough tent men in the wagons began to holler and catcall—and they went straight up to Blair's lot across the river on the road to North Chazy."

"What? Blair's lot! Confound it, but they couldn't do that. Why, they've been coming to our pasture for sixty years. Leno must be crazy."

"That didn't stop him going on to Blair's lot," she sniffed. "Way tother end of the town, and only half as big as our pasture. And what's more, you've lost two hundred dollars and all them tickets. And Sister Ella and her four children coming here day after to-morrow. I told you you were obstinate."

The squire stumbled heavily out of his sulky.

"So that's the way they treat me, eh? Every spring since Appomattox

they came to stay a week on our pasture, and now they go elsewhere! Why, they've broke the unwritten law, Margaret! And just because I wouldn't be bullyragged, and take only twenty-five tickets, they get hoity-toity and leave me flat."

The squire used loud and curious language, unbecoming a school trustee, as he unhitched the pony. He kept it up as he climbed into his overalls and began to currycomb and brush the animal. That was his daily stunt. He prided himself on his skill with horses. The next day he would have another pony in the stable—a Lexington midget brought up from Kentucky, and which Blair was going to have auctioned off the next afternoon. A month or two of feeding up, and it stood a chance of earning the blue ribbon for him at the fair.

He was not so thorough in his grooming this afternoon. His disposition had been wrecked. He pondered, as he curried away, how he could bring Leno to account, even sue him. It was an indignity, a deliberate affront. Further, that two hundred dollars would come in handy at the auction, and if ever he needed tickets, it was this spring, with the local elections only a month away.

Yes, he'd sue Leno and "Spring Jack!" Leno was just a red face and a fat hand to be seen through the ticket-wagon bars. And Spring Jack was one of those ornery fellows.

"Two hundred and the tickets! One hundred tickets and not fifty, Mister Leno! That's my terms!" so the squire shouting through the bars told the reigned Leno that last spring. "And if you don't like it you can go elsewhere!"

Certainly, the squire did not think Leno would be so foolish as to take his words literally. But that was what Leno did. His work now done, the squire removed his overalls, washed his

hands, and adjusted his string tie, then went around to the front porch to sit on the rocker and meditate. Usually he went through the house, but Mrs. Howitt seemed to be in a sarcastic mood, and he didn't want to argue with her. It is sometimes impossible to make a woman understand firmness in business matters.

His eyes dwelt upon the field across the road. It was a level patch, girded about by trees, and if ever a boom came to East Chazy—hardly possible in his lifetime—it would bring him in a fortune. Until then, it was yielding a more than average crop per acre—or it did, until his trouble with Leno. Rage settled on his brow. After all, he had been just. Suddenly he glared into the field. He jumped up and seized his stick. Who should it be, but Spring Jack! There was a piece of effrontery for you!

Meanwhile, there was Spring Jack, whistling cheerily as he set up his little tent, a lean-to from the wagon. He had turned his pair of horses loose to dine on the lush grass. A pot of water was boiling over a fire, and when the ember began to glow, he would grill himself a split young rooster. With sleeves rolled up, he spat on his hands, and swinging a mallet he drove in stakes with a loud *thud-thud* that sounded like pistols in the outraged ears of the squire.

Jack had come there every spring since the first day Young Leno went on the road and swore he would give up unless Jack came along with him to look after the horses. For Jack loved animals, and was a lay veterinary of more than ordinary gifts. The farmers knew him well, and even the squire grudgingly admitted the worth of Spring Jack's mineral oil salve for spavins and bots.

The squire marched over firmly.

"'Afternoon, judge!" the gypsy called out, leaning on his mallet.

A compounder of horse medicine is usually a gloomy person, but not so with Spring Jack. He was as pagan as a faun, and science sat lightly on his head, and, mayhap, on his conscience. With his ruddy cheeks, shiny, curled hair and white teeth, gay shirt with a green kerchief about his neck, and the ends pulled through an emerald ring, he was as exhilarating as the season he was nicknamed after. After peddling his salves at the carnival, he would get atop the platform, plunk a guitar and troll songs, and by way of encore execute some fancy steps. He knew more about horses than anybody else. In short, he was a man born to displease men like Michael Howitt.

"Get out of my property!" said the squire. "No gypsies allowed here. I'll give you ten minutes to vacate the premises, or you will be arrested and sent to the county jail as a vagrant."

"Why, judge—you don't mean to say——" He looked about uncomprehendingly. "Isn't Leno's coming here?"

"Not this time nor ever again. I'll have no more dealings with that outfit, Spring Jack, nor any one concerned with them."

Strollers came up to the scene. Always more eloquent before an audience, the squire became more impressive, thundering and personal. The blacksmith had arrived, the postmaster, a carter, some neighbors, and among them Lem Caro, the son of the Widow Caro, next door, whom the squire had despised ever since a little argument over damage done to his beetroots by the Caro chickens ten years before.

"I stand for right dealing, Spring Jack. I've put up with fly-by-night shows and thimblerriggers and horse crooks long enough. I'm looking out for East Chazy, and that means you leave here inside of ten minutes."

Lem Caro stepped forward.

"You've got some friends here, Spring Jack. If you still like to hang around the old camp ground, you can pull your wagon across the road to our orchard."

The gypsy extended his hand.

"Thanks, kid. If it's all the same to you, I will. And if ever you need some horse medicine, you let me know."

"Thanks, Spring Jack. I'll be getting a horse to-morrow, I reckon. But it will be a sound one, because it's for my girl."

This overture from a neighbor had taken a crimp in the squire's sails, and he was manifestly displeased. The gypsy repacked his things, and led his horse across, while the spectators followed, pulling the wagon along by the shafts. The Caro's orchard adjoined the squire's garden. There was nothing he could do about it, so he stumped back and encamped on his porch. In ten minutes he became aware of the odors of tea and grilled chicken that indicated it was meal time for Spring Jack. It was like a flagrant insult. It was a defiance to landed respectability.

The squire coughed, then withdrew into the house and slammed the door. He retired to the study. The window gave out over a pretty sylvan scene: a bower of apple trees in bloom, and under them a painted wagon, a portable table, and upon that a smoking meal set out, with Spring Jack settling himself to dine as if nothing had happened. The squire hauled savagely at the shade, and with such impatience that it came away in his hand, torn off the roller.

The carnival was in full blast that night. All of East Chazy turned out, all except the Howitts. The village folk drank pink lemonade, bought popcorn, applauded Les Pingtons, the Anglo-French rope walkers, and crowded into the side show to see the menagerie, with its fierce tigers and

lions, and lingered slowly on the way out to listen to the spielers.

Spring Jack drew the largest mob. He stood under two naphtha flares, with an array of labeled boxes before him.

"Step right up here, ladies and gentlemen! Here in this little tin box is a salve that will cure all maladies incident to the noble breed of animals surnamed the horse. From the dawn of antiquity, when the little three-toed eohippus coursed the glacial Manchurian plain, man's noble friend has been a prey to spavins, cracked hoofs, saddle gall and sore muscles. A week of treatment with this sovereign remedy, and the disease is gone forever. The ingredients are all purely vegetable, made of herbs known to the ancients, and to the trainers of such well-known mares as Pegasus, Bucephalus, and Nancy Hanks. One at a time, please. Here you are, only a quarter apiece!"

The gypsy, with his jockey cap pulled down over his eyes, scrutinized the mob, disposed of his salve and bagged the loose change. He espied Lem Caro, and beckoned him over.

"Right-o, kid!" he called out. "Here's your box." Then, dropping his voice: "I'll be there at the auction to-morrow. Don't do anything without me. I know the pony you want. It's the one Howitt has his eyes on. All right—ladies and gentlemen!" he shouted once more. "Only a quarter."

The auction at Blair's stables was the counterattraction to Leno's show the next afternoon. A score of farmers and breeders were sitting on chairs back of the auctioneer's box. Some distance in front sat lesser gentry on upturned barrels and boxes, and among these were Spring Jack and Lem Caro. Horse after horse changed owners with an appropriate flourish of rhetoric and wit. A hostler led out a pony, a plump

and russet cob with a bright eye and neat, high-stepping hoofs.

"One of the famed Lexington mid-gets, gentlemen! I don't have to make any further remark. You will be so entranced with his points that I could talk of the situation in the interior of China, and you'd never know the difference. What am I offered? Squire, here's your chance. Start at fifty. Worth ten times the amount. Fifty—fifty—fifty——"

"I'll take it, Shaw," said the squire. "I offer eighty."

The auctioneer banged the gavel and rattled his pleas. Young Caro, at a whisper from the gypsy, offered ninety. The squire made it a hundred. The gypsy slipped over, appraised the pony, and returned to whisper again. The squire frowned, hunched himself over his stick and muttered to himself, then raised the bid to a hundred and ten. It was the highest he had ever offered for a saddle pony. It was the highest ever offered in East Chazy for such a mount.

"Make it twenty more, for the girl is worth it, kid," breathed Spring Jack. The boy called out his offer.

"Hundred and fifty!" said the squire. He would let the scoundrel know that he had only begun. Spring Jack lurched over, ran a thumb over its spine, gave it a slap on the crupper, then looked it in the eyes, looked at least half a minute, then pursed his lips as if to whistle, and gave the auctioneer a questioning glance.

"Sound as a bell, that pony," said the auctioneer.

The gypsy shrugged his shoulders.

"Goes loco in a few days. I wouldn't take a chance at a higher price."

"Sour grapes," said the auctioneer, with a wink and bang of the gavel. "All right, gentlemen? Then the pony is awarded to Squire Howitt."

The squire's hand shook as he made

out his check, and his countenance was purple. The gypsy and Lem Caro left the yard, burdened with his silent maledictions. It had been a bad week for him, thanks to the Leno outfit. The lot money gone, and the tickets, and now he had had to pay seventy dollars more for a pony than he expected to. But he wasn't going to give in.

"She's a fine girl, eh, kid?" asked Spring Jack of his companion.

"Finest in the world, Spring Jack. I'll bring her round to the carnival in a couple of days, mebbe Saturday afternoon. She's got cheeks like an apple, and wears gingham frocks she makes herself. I promised her a pony so she can ride to high school. She lives four miles out in the country."

"She'll get the pony, kid. It'll cost you a little more than nothing at all. Leave it to Spring Jack."

They parted on the carnival grounds, with the youth wondering. The gypsy, as soon as the boy had left, entered the menagerie and paused before the cage in which a pair of lions were kept. He whistled meditatively. Then he called over a keeper.

"Listen, bo. The old fellow and Flossie look kind of cold. Tell you what to do. Make them a thick bed of straw, and let them frolic on it comfortable for several days. And don't change that straw until I tell you," he added as he walked off.

The squire's new purchase, lodged in its stall, underwent acclimation without any trouble, munched hay, and got thoroughly groomed by its owner who looked upon it with a grudging eye at first, then with growing approval. It slept well at night and behaved in the reasonable manner of normal ponies. But on the fourth night it displayed the most shocking deportment. It uttered unearthly cries. It awoke the squire from a deep sleep.

His first thought was that the sounds

proceeded from a wild cat transfixed through a vital organ. But the noise emanated from the stables. Perhaps a ferret was loose. He dressed, and, armed with a shotgun, opened the door that led to the stalls. With eyes starting out of its head, the horse was alternately giving out frenzied screams, and, sinking back on its haunches, giving vent to roars through a windpipe almost closed by straining at the halter. Its coat was smeared with soaplike perspiration.

It was the first time the squire had witnessed insanity in animals, and he felt helpless. He uttered soothing sounds, with quite the contrary effect on the pony. He cast a bucketful of water upon its back, whereupon it bucked and cavorted and screamed as if he had applied a white-hot iron to its hide.

The caressing, if shaky, remarks of the squire grew fainter as he retreated toward the door, then rose into a cry of terror as the pony ripped off the halter and made for him, head down and his hind legs flourishing in the air. The shrill voice of Mrs. Howitt, convinced of murder, spread alarm into the night. Windows were thrown up and heads were thrust out. The flood of light on the Caros' porch announced that the household was up, and a lantern began to glow in Spring Jack's camp.

Grouped timidly about the Howitts' gate were the women, their white faces peering from beneath shawls. Their presence contributed to the annoyance of the squire who, arrayed in pajamas and certainly not in judicial form, felt unfit to receive any one. Armed with a pitchfork, and hovering irresolutely in the middle of the yard, like a harassed ghost, he was watching the stable door. It shook, then crashed open, and the pony forced itself through, with a great rasping of its sides. Its owner displayed astounding

agility for a man of his years, and cleared the gate in one bound.

"Ought to call in somebody," declared a neighbor in a firm voice. "What's he been doing—abusing the poor animal?"

"Treat animals kind, and they'll be all right," affirmed a sage.

Spring Jack edged through the crowd. "Can I be of any help, squire?" he asked, rakishly, and with hands in pockets. "Heard the racket. Then I said: 'Aha, it's only a pony can make a noise like that.' Hurt you very much?"

"If you know so much about horses," snapped the jurist, "go in and see what you can do with it!"

The gypsy entered the arena. The animal, with eyes bloodshot, mane ruffled, and exhibiting symptoms of acute homicidal mania, squared off at him, but he seized it by the jaw and ear, and with some charm of words held its attention, then stroked its head, until the animal became quiet and permitted itself to be led docilely about the yard.

"Never seen the like since I was a little lad and watched Professor Rarey tame 'em over to Montpelier," said the sage rapturously. "Allus said Spring Jack knew horses."

"There y'are, judge, take him in again, but go easy," counseled the gypsy. The squire led the pony into the stable. The stillness was wrecked by an agonized whinny, then the same violent uproar as before, and the jurist sped out with extreme velocity, and his legs tripping like a ballet dancer's. Mirth arose in the crowd outside the gate, augmented by arrivals hurrying to the spectacle from other parts of the town. It dawned on the squire that his performance was providing a comedy relief altogether too damaging to one in his position.

"What's the matter with the beast?" he demanded of the gypsy.

"Well, judge, I'd say if you haven't been tickling him, that he's gone loco. Weed does it, in the fodder. It'll take six months to pull him through—you know how loco horses are."

Howitt shook his head.

"No, I don't, and I never want to. I'll have it shot, unless somebody wants to take it off my hands, and good riddance to it."

"I'll take him, judge. But it's all business between you and me. You drove me off your field. But to make it even, here's twenty dollars cash in hand. A horse trade without an exchange brings no good luck either to parties of the first part or parties of the second part."

The squire took and counted the bills. Spring Jack departed, leading a pony apparently contrite, and the neighbors dispersed, with a few cheers from the younger and irreverent, and silence again fell on the Howitt homestead. In the morning the gypsy led the pony into Lem Caro's stable and exacted from the mystified youth the nominal payment, and just to obviate ill luck, of twenty dollars.

The conduct of the pony, be it said, was exemplary thereafter. Leno's Olympian Tent Shows came the next

spring with the punctuality of cat tails and bluebirds, and this time rolled into the Howitt lot, as of yore, with the moral of two hundred dollars and fifty tickets to the squire. And this helped establish his peace of mind that had been much shaken daily by the sight of Molly Guerin, Lem Caro's sweetheart, trotting past to high school on the pony that for the space of ten hours had been the squire's. How quick had been its recovery! The squire had been compelled to award a blue ribbon to Miss Guerin for exhibiting the best horse of its class at the fair.

"Pony been all right ever since?" asked Spring Jack of the youth, that next spring when he came to East Chazy.

"Right as a bell, Spring Jack."

The gypsy mused, then chewed at a straw.

"Aye, he'll stay all right if you're careful. Whatever you do, never let old straw from a lion's cage get into its bedding. They smell lion—and dream lions—and get crazy. Shouldn't wonder if some old lion straw got into the squire's stable one way or other. But there's things, kid, you got to keep to yourself. And horse lore's one."

More stories by Idwal Jones will appear in THE POPULAR soon.



BROOMSTICK HOCKEY

UP in Alaska, the so-called land of ice and snow, students at the farthest north college in the world, near Fairbanks, play hockey with broomsticks and scoop shovels.

Although that region experiences low temperatures during the winter, little skating is had because of heavy snowfalls that cover the lakes and rivers. Now the students at the college have devised a plan whereby the tennis courts and surrounding terrain are flooded and cared for by a special committee.

This plan allows skating all the year around. The ice does not become badly cut up, primarily because few make use of the place. On occasion it can be re-flooded.

Leguerre of the Lost Division *(The Red Hand)*



By
Howard Fitzalan

Author of "Gentlemen of Fortune," Etc.

**One of the most curious and dangerous of all Leguerre's
bizarre adventures was his run-in with 416 and the Red Hand.**

A COMPLETE STORY

IN the last half hour a blue haze had been thickening in the musty little Washington back office, whose door purported, with its legend paradoxically suggestive of inner spaciousness and consequence, to open on: "The Central Divisional Headquarters — Intelligence Control."

What the door of magnificent promise really hid was one man alone, at a solitary desk walled around by rows of dust-covered filing cases. He was smoking a black and violent cheroot; but the blue haze, if there be true affinity between brimstone and strong language, might equally well have arisen out of his impromptu and impolite remarks to his cabinets between attempts to raise New York by long distance. Either way, there was a tang of sulphur to the blue.

A dozen times he had lifted the receiver to demand urgently: "Please, can't you rush it? Must I tell you again it's a life-or-death matter, getting this call through in time?"

Yet when finally the phone vented a tinkle of its own volition he stopped to consult his watch before picking it up.

"New York?" he asked. "Grand View seven one nine? Put Mr. Nugent Leguerre on the wire—quickly! No, just tell him it's a long-distance call. He'll understand." Then, after a pause punctuated by hollow clickings: "Leguerre? Hello, hello! This is Gunther. You hear me clearly? Are you in a booth, Leguerre?"

Leguerre wasn't.

"Not in much of anything—but my room, and a puddle. Had a late night of

it. Matter of fact, you've pulled me out of my tub. What's the row, chief?"

At the Washington end of the connection Judge Gamaliel Gunther, director of the Intelligence Control both in its war-time heyday and the later period of poverty and political obscurity, looked at his watch again and emitted a sigh that had much of the substance of a moan.

"You're not even dressed? Then you can't possibly make it. The Century's pulling out in just twenty-four minutes, and I wanted you aboard—had gambled on getting you in time."

Leguerre, as tanned of back as of face, had listened with a shoulder hunched to hold the receiver to his ear while he bowed to convention by knotting his bath towel about his waist.

"You've no idea," he said reproachfully, "how fast I can get into my clothes—and through traffic. Pledge you my word, judge, I can make Grand Central in twenty minutes flat from where I stand! You want me aboard the Twentieth Century Limited, what? Very well, then; consider me aboard it. Is it the idea I go the whole way to Chicago with the Century? And after that?"

Gunther's voice was still glum as it came to him.

"You can't do it—can't possibly. But my plan was to have you go directly to the Earlshire Hotel on your arrival in Chicago."

"Earlshire?" questioned Leguerre. "Must be one of the new ones. Never heard of it."

"No; it's not a new hotel. I fancy I remember it from years ago. But no matter; the Earlshire it is. And gad! I was so sure of getting fast action on this call that I sent off a wire making a reservation for you there. But with the Century missed, the whole thing will——"

"It isn't missed yet," interjected Leguerre; "but we'll have to spare words

if it's not to be. So I jump to Chicago out of the bath, and find accommodations ready for me at the Earlshire Hotel? Then?"

"Not in your name," corrected Judge Gunther. "I made the reservation in the name of J. B. Jedder—J for Judith, E for Edward, D for Daniel——"

"I've got it, chief! *Jedder!* Right-o! I'm J. B. Jedder when I get to Chicago. But—who's J. B. Jedder?"

"About as thoroughly frightened a man, just now," said Gunther soberly, "as it's ever been my fortune to see. At least, he was a couple of hours ago, when Holloway brought him over to me from the Industrial Surplus Bureau. He was in such a funk I couldn't get him to talk intelligibly. Sent him home, finally, to try to get his nerves into some kind of shape."

Leguerre's tone lost a shade of its earlier enthusiasm.

"Another mess in the Surplus Bureau? I can't see how it's any business of the I. C. D."

"It isn't," Gunther said, "—isn't any new trouble in the bureau—and isn't exactly our affair. But it struck me after Jedder'd gone that you were doing nothing particular but the town, up there in New York; and also that it might be interesting to have you keep the Chicago appointment that Mr. Jedder finds so extraordinarily upsetting."

With an apprehensive glance over his shoulder at the window behind him, Leguerre clutched at his slipping towel.

"Too bad we haven't got longer to talk," he lamented. "This sounds—choice. But I say, if there *is* a Jedder, and he's made an appointment with somebody, how the deuce am I——"

"Couldn't tell you a great deal more if there was an hour to tell it in," said Gunther. "But I gather that the people whom Jedder was to meet in Chicago have never seen him—and you and he are close enough to an age, and would both answer so well to the same casual

general description, that I had a mind to chance it."

"And I'm surely willing, chief," averred Leguerre. "But maybe if——"

A very faint and far-away click sounded over the wire. In Washington, Judge Gunther once more had consulted his watch.

"It's twenty-one minutes to, exactly," he said. "If you think you can catch the Century, go ahead and try. Notify me if you fail. Otherwise I'll get further instructions to you through the usual Chicago channel after I've had another talk with J. B. Jedder. For now, good luck and good——"

A louder click signaled the abrupt breaking of the connection; and Leguerre jumped at and into the fresh linens laid out on his bed with a celerity that implied a youth in some large measure misspent in the neighborhood of a fire house.

Twenty minutes afterward, within the approximation of a very few seconds, he sank into a corner in a Pullman smoking compartment and applied a linen handkerchief to his slightly reddened cheeks.

"Do you know," he said, amiably addressing a stout stranger of definitely mercantile aura, already established with his cigar at the train window opposite; "do you know, I fancy I could have won a hat on this? But, rushing and all, you see, I lacked presence of mind—what?—to suggest the wager!"

The taxi driver at the head of the line as Leguerre stepped out of the Illinois Central Station on Chicago's wind-swept lakefront, next morning, made a painful effort of memory.

"Hotel Earlshire?" he repeated. "Let's see, now. Way up on the North Side, ain't it—out Rogers Park section, by the lake? You couldn't say, captain? Well, climb in, anyhow, and I'll find out."

He left the cab for a moment, and

was dubiously scratching his head when he came back.

"Guess maybe you don't know Chicago so well, cap," he hazarded, his uncertainty rising as his gaze traveled back and forth between the sartorial elegance clothing his fare and the smart russet kit bag now reposing alongside the wheel. "What I mean, the Earlshire ain't hardly the house you'd want to put up at. Not that it ain't all right, understand; but the West Side ain't what it used to be, and the old horse-cabby down the line says that Lincoln was splittin' rails last time the Earlshire got a play from the up-to-daters."

Leguerre nodded affably.

"Many thanks for the tip," said he. "Quiet, old-fashioned hotels are the sort I prefer. So glad you've learned the way to the Earlshire."

But a deal of his airiness had deserted him when, after a slow passage through traffic-jammed and banner-hung Madison Street, and a long wait for a bridge to swing behind a freighter crawling in the shadow of canyon walls of brick through a turbid river, he was set down at his destination.

Back in the Loop, he had found Chicago in gala dress. Flags everywhere, flags flying and flags draped, had all but hidden the smoky façades he remembered from other visits. But with the crossing of the river, the holiday atmosphere—he was sure he ought to know, but couldn't quite remember, what holiday it was—had vanished as utterly as if the stream had been a frontier.

The Earlshire Hotel, a venerable and wide-spreading building of dun-colored brick, fronting on a boulevard of once-proud mansions now long past the stage of shuddering at the "Furnished Room" signs they universally wore, made no concession to the spirit of carnival. Flagless and morose, it stared gloomily out over the boulevard's dying trees.

A somnolent negro bellman, inhabiting an ancient threadbare shell of tar-

nished brass and faded blue, shuffled up from a bench at the rear of the Earls-shire's lobby—a stately one in another day, but only fussy now—as Leguerre came in. With something like the taxi driver's surprise, he eyed the gorgeous kit bag.

"A long way f'om ca'pet, sah!" he chuckled, fondling the suave leather. "Sho the yeahs do roll!"

But Leguerre had gone on to the desk and was there addressing himself to a gray and flustered clerk.

"You should have had a wire from Washington, reserving for me. The name's——"

"Jedder!" It came with a promptness suggesting to Leguerre that telegrams of reservation must be matters of high moment nowadays to the Earls-shire Hotel. "J. B. Jedder, I think. Yes; lucky enough, Mr. Jedder. We happened to have exactly the sort of room you asked for, and it's been held for you."

Although the white-wooled bellman was coming up now with the arrival's bag, the clerk brought his palm hard down upon the bell on the counter, and impressively thundered:

"Front!"

"Seven thirty-six, Mose, after Mr. Jedder's registered," he directed, clanging down on the furrowed marble a long-shanked key attached to a brass tag fashioned like a seal. And, oh, Mr. Jedder! There's—ah—I believe there's something in your box. A gentleman was in earlier, asking for you, but said he couldn't wait."

It was a sealed envelope of the house stationery which he handed over, bearing on its upper surface an engraving of the Earls-shire made upon a day when the now empty pavement outside the hotel was thickly and fashionably peopled with ladies in barouches and gentlemen passing, with dignity and courage, on high-framed "safety" bicycles.

Leguerre, grateful for the fore-

thought of the messenger who had thus masked the import of what must be Judge Gunther's promised further instructions, did not open the envelope until he had traveled interminably upward on a doddering cable-pull lift and was alone in his room—a red-plush, commodious apartment which, he was both surprised and pained to discover, had no connecting bath.

The discovery he made on the heels of this, ripping out his message, carried no pain whatsoever, but a very much vaster surprise. It was not the Division's familiar code that confronted him on the sheet from the envelope, but a note from one who was by all odds a stranger to him—and a stranger, at that, who signed himself with a number rather than with a name. The writing was in pencil—the chirography of a crampy and peaked character which gave to each separate line the silhouette semblance of some fancied cathedral city—a chirography of pointed dome and stabbing steeple.

So alien was this writing to any other of Leguerre's experience that he was obliged to study through it a second and a third time before he was sure he had read correctly.

And then he was no less puzzled than at the first reading; for the text, as finally he worked it out and checked it over carefully, most amazingly was this:

MY SIGNALLY HONORED BROTHER: Owing to uncertainty of arrangements, I must go now without seeing you.

Appointment is postponed until some time late to-night. He will explain when you go to him.

Do not leave room until I return. To expose yourself would, I think, be foolhardy in extreme. When you are hungry, use telephone, and food will be sent up. With high felicitation, 416.

There was something in the handwriting that suggested to Leguerre an abnormality in the writer. Out of what slender acquaintance he had scraped

with the art of reading character from pen strokes, that impression arose clear on later and closer examination of the mystery note.

It occurred to him, too, that the number signature was far more revealing in the circumstances than an unfamiliar name could have been. The 416 implied, surely, a connection between the real Jedder and some sort of organized mumbo-jumbo in which, to enhance the appealing savor of secrecy, each member had his number. And the fraternal salutation of 416 stood as corroboration of the thought. There could not be much doubt of it.

In this light his own situation, Gunther's urgency, and the trepidation of Mr. J. B. Jedder, seemed to Leguerre more than a little amusing. In all observation of secret orders he had discovered an inevitable underlying strain of the juvenile; and he grinned in contemplation of the ironically solemn report he would presently be turning in to Gunther—something headed: "Details, Chicago Conclave, Sirs of the Mystic Turban."

Of course, unless Gunther came through with further revelations from Mr. Jedder before 416 returned to the hotel, there must be considered the very likely chance that his unfamiliarity with the ritual would lead to embarrassment. But the prospect of being challenged, exposed, and sternly turned away by an indignant sergeant-at-arms held small terror. On that incident, alone, a rare and rich report could be built that Gunther would take no comfort in reading.

Leguerre had breakfasted early on the train. A new mystery novel he had flung into his bag in the wild packing claimed his attention after he had restudied and reflected upon 416's engaging message; and he had come to the last chapters of solution—and, as usual, disappointment—before appetite made itself apparent.

Ceremoniously he washed at the huge marble lavatory which had lent the final note of elegance to Room 736 in the original planning. He was at the door, headed for the elevator and the dining room before he bethought himself of that sober admonition to keep to his apartment.

He grinned again, decided it might not only be more sporting but more amusing to play out the game according to the rules, and went instead to the telephone.

Luncheon was slow in coming; but when it did come it redeemed many faults of the Earlsire Hotel in departments outside the cuisine. The cooking—surprising in Chicago—was in what Leguerre recognized as the best Southern style; and he could imagine the kitchen still under command of some talented contemporary of the old bellman whose memory ran back to carpet-bag days.

It was after two when the spry negro waiter returned for the tray. He had been called upon, it appeared, to spare the elevator by disposing of two errands on the one trip.

"Gen'leman jus' left this for you, sah," he said, and handed over a long, thin envelope bearing the typed superscription: "J. B. Jedder, Esq., Earlsire Hotel."

It was, Leguerre felt certain, the long-awaited dispatch from Judge Gunther, relayed through the big Chicago wholesale house which by private arrangement frequently assisted the I. C. D. in swift and innocent transmission of messages between field and headquarters.

He made no mistake there, for the tissue sheet under the plain cover bore symbols in the familiar code. But, rather than the more ample information Leguerre had expected, there were only a few lines. Deciphering these, he had:

Full instructions delayed. Jedder failed to appear. Sit tight for further word. G.

Frowning, Leguerre fired up a cigarette and held the tissue sheet in the flame of his pocket lighter.

For the first time he began to feel himself in a box. Trying to bluff his way through as proxy for a person whom he knew to be in Washington would have been more or less a lark. But now the elements of true dilemma loomed.

Suppose Jedder, getting a better grip on himself, had suffered a change of heart—had come on to Chicago himself? That would make a difference. There were possibilities in such a situation of one Nugent Leguerre being made to look, and to feel, a not-inconsiderable ass.

He became aware, and acutely, of a temptation to do his waiting elsewhere than in the Hotel Earlsire. The arrival of a second J. B. Jedder, and the resulting inquest, was no pleasant contingency to contemplate.

Almost at the point of flight, Leguerre conquered the impulse. Tragic or farcical, taking things as they came along must be always part of the game. He called on the telephone for more cigarettes; and in a degree cheered by the discovery that the hotel stocked his favorite brand of Egyptians, settled down to wait it out.

The afternoon dragged away and faded into twilight, with no sign of 416 and no word from Washington. At seven thirty, when the lights along the boulevard had come on, he stirred himself from his coign by the broad window to order dinner. He had no hunger then. Ordering the meal, as on a long train journey, was merely a device to escape utter ennui. Eating, at least, was something to do.

At ten o'clock, long after the dinner tray had been taken out, he yielded to an urge to call down to the hotel office and inquire for a message; and then he cursed himself that he had not asked before.

"Why, yes," came the answering voice. "There is something in your box, Mr. Jedder. Important? Sorry, sir! I'll send it right up."

It was again a long envelope, but a thicker one now; and, as Leguerre saw from the time stamp, it must have been lying below for two hours and more.

There were two closely written sheets of code in this second message, and it was a half hour before he had worked out the full text. Characteristically, Gunther had saved his major revelation for the last.

He had written:

Circumstances compel cancellation of Chicago assignment. Return to New York at once, notifying me on arrival.

Further effort in Jedder affair involves almost certain discovery of imposture and risk I will not ask you to assume. Best possible evidence to hand that Jedder's fear in connection with Chicago trip not unfounded.

Other facts available only what I had yesterday.

Jedder, employed five years as minor clerk, Industrial Surplus Bureau; went yesterday morning to Holloway, his chief, for advice. Said he joined some secret order in spirit of adventure two years ago and regularly attended meetings.

Began after first year to fear society had criminal tendency, but lacked courage to withdraw. Continued weekly attendance, postponing resignation. At last meeting was notified of selection to visit society head known as "Red Hand" in Chicago. Directed wire Earlsire for reservation and go there on arrival. Apparently no further instruction, but money for expenses handed to him at meeting.

Afraid to go, afraid to refuse, Jedder, after sleepless nights, consulted Holloway. As friend of years, Holloway unable to get full details owing Jedder's very nervous condition, brought him to me. I could get no more, but curiosity spurred.

Asked Jedder rest and come back to me yesterday afternoon or this morning, ten o'clock. He did not come. At noon got address from Holloway and assigned Kennerly. K. reported Jedder not home. Hadn't spent night in room.

Police enlisted reported late this afternoon Jedder possibly located. Investigating tip personally, I identified man in morgue. Body,

knife in heart, had been found in field on outskirts Washington.

Believe entire investigation best left to police, therefore. As you suggested, not our affair. Don't be rash. Positive order. G.

Leguerre had pored long over his transcription of the cipher before he applied the flame of the cigarette lighter both to it and to the tissue original. He was soberly watching the last of the ashes float off from the window ledge when, on the door behind him, three light and measured raps sounded.

"Hullo!" he called, startled the more by the realization that he had heard no steps outside. "Who is it?"

A soft voice floated over the transom. "Open quickly! It is 416!"

The abnormality of the man who called himself by the number "416," first vaguely sensed by Leguerre in the peculiarities of his handwriting, was of such character as to claim the eye at first glance.

It was a physical abnormality—apparent the instant the door had swung open; and apparent no less in his long off-center face and his beady, deep-sunk eyes than in the hump of twisted spine that rode his wide shoulders or the hands that hung, apelike, at his knees.

He lifted one of the hands, bony and misshapen like the whole of him, and made a sign which Leguerre found curiously reminiscent of the Moslem greeting: "The eyes, the lips, the heart."

"Jedder!" he whispered. "I bring to you the honor of a number. From this moment you are No. 800. No. 800—a round number, Jedder! And the name is forever gone! He is waiting. Are you ready?"

And there, most neatly presented, was a larger dilemma, even, than Leguerre had contemplated at any time in the course of the whole uncomfortable afternoon and night.

He drew a deep breath, and in the interval thought of two things. Upper-

most in his mind floated those closing words of Gunther's second message recalling him: "Don't be rash. Positive order."

But would following the play through be ratable as rashness—following it through when the lead came from the other side, and all danger of eventual confrontation by the true Jedder was thus definitely cast out? Certainly—he could take oath upon that—the hunchbacked 416 had no suspicion he was addressing an impostor.

Within the same instant he thought of Jedder, dead in the field with the knife stuck into him—Jedder, now in the morgue, his tremblings at end. If that were not coincidence these Sirs of the Mystic Turban, or whatever they might be, went in for far more sinister activities than torchlight parades, and nocturnal goat-ridings, and drills of the uniformed rank. Quite truly, as poor Jedder fathomed too late, they did have a bit of a trend to the criminal.

The twisted 416 seemed, from the gleam of his little eyes, both to appreciate a reason for and to enjoy the hesitation.

"Time is short, 800," he suggested presently. "The Red Hand waits."

Leguerre cast a fleeting and regretful glance toward the kit bag under the window. His automatic pistol, it occurred to him, would be perhaps a deal more comfort in his pocket than left here in the bag. But he shrugged that thought away, and squared his shoulders.

"I am ready," he said quietly, "if 416 will lead!"

The hunchback smiled, and the smile was twisted, too.

"Then let us go at once," he said. "No, not that way! Not by the elevator! No use to let them see too much, so we'll go as I came to you."

The private way of 416 involved, it appeared, the use of a rear staircase. At its bottom it led to a door evidently intended for the use of the hotel serv-

ants. Outside, bulking dark at the curb, stood a closed automobile.

Leguerre's guide opened the door.

"I defer," he said, and now Leguerre was sure there was a bite of acidity in his voice, "to you who are so richly honored."

The hunchback himself climbed behind the wheel. Under his foot the starter whirred.

"We meet for the first time, 800, and it well may be the last," he said. "But I must tell you this: I love you for the immortality you have won—and I *hate* you for your luck!"

Then, with a jerk, the car jumped forward.

The course, Leguerre observed, led back toward the Loop district; but, coming toward a bridge, the malformed driver did not cross. He veered instead to the right and trundled south.

Now they were passing through a warehouse district, deserted at this hour and dimly lighted. Leguerre surmised that the blank and shuttered buildings on his left hand must back up on that captive, tightly walled river.

It was in front of one of these buildings—one identified from its neighbors on either hand only by a vast sign informing the passer it was both for rent and for sale—that the hunchback drew up.

"This," he said, already fumbling for keys as he climbed from the car, "is where he waits. But you will find it more pleasant inside than you think."

Leguerre had caught the name of the street from a sign on the corner-post below, and he took mental note of the number faintly discernible over the door while 416 was fitting his key to the lock.

With even so much information, he reflected, he could draw back now and return later to plumb the mystery of Mr. Jedder's affiliations and sudden death with police at his back. But he had been caught up by the spirit of ad-

venture, as had happened in his life before; and when the door stood opened he stepped quickly through it.

It was a narrow and chilly corridor in which he found himself, with stairs rising steeply out of it. Leguerre saw them briefly in the light of a street lamp before the door had been closed at his back.

The hunchback came groping after him; found and clasped his hand in a steely grip.

"Now—up," he whispered. "I have given the signal. Mind the steps!"

In utter darkness they ascended.

Leguerre counted thirty-four steps, and then found himself on a landing. Another door opened at once, and in the light that streamed from behind it he saw that this was a massive barrier of steel.

A bulky man with a round, red face stood beside it, and to him the hunchback said:

"It is I, Henry—with fortune's child!"

Leguerre, following the strangely ironic 416 into a heavily carpeted and tapestry-hung corridor, felt the curious eyes of the big man fastened upon his back.

The hunchback, after advancing a few paces, turned off the hallway and into a great room whose walls also were tapestried and whose floor was strewn with deep-piled rugs.

Another door at the rear of the room was 416's objective. He rapped at it, and without waiting for an answer threw it open.

"Enter, 800!" he whispered. "*He* sits before you!"

It was a smaller room, but one most luxuriously furnished, in which Leguerre now found himself. A lighting fixture, swung low from the ceiling and hidden within an infolding shade of silk, imprinted a filtered circle of radiance on a rug that registered on Leguerre's startled eyes as the rarest of

Kurdestans. Elsewhere shadows hung thick.

Beyond the circular glow, stood a long carved table. The area of its surface was empty, and Leguerre did not see the man who sat facing them across it until 416 had pushed him forward.

No, not exactly facing him! The term, Leguerre discovered at closer hand, didn't quite fit, for the face of this man behind the table was hidden by a mask. A square black cloth of silk, dropping from the front of a tight black skullcap to his chest, lent him the uncanny appearance of one not only lacking a face but veritably without a head.

Leguerre waited for the masked enigma to speak, but no word came from behind the black cloth. Through the slits in it, catlike eyes that gave off twin flares in the gloom were appraising him.

When "he" did move, after a full minute of that steady, unwinking inspection, there was explanation of his silence in his actions. He must have touched a switch, for suddenly a soft shaft of light from the near wall flooded his table—a shaft that left his body still in shadow.

Onto the table, into the light, came a pair of hands incased in blood-red gauntlets. The right hand held a pencil; the left had plucked from a drawer in the table a stack, perhaps a half inch thick, of blank white cards.

The pencil moved swiftly over the face of the uppermost card, and a red finger flipped the card across the table. The hunchback picked it up, bowed and moved back across the room. Leguerre heard the door open and close. For him the pantomime had been eloquent enough: the man called the Red Hand was a mute!

Yet that had been, it seemed, an overhasty conclusion.

After a moment—and the effect was ventriloquial, startling—a voice fell upon his ears. It was a voice at once low-pitched and grating, and Leguerre

had cast a swift glance into the surrounding shadows before he knew it had come from behind the mask. It had been, though the tone commanded, an invitation.

"Sit down!"

Leguerre's astonished stare induced a chuckle.

"You have heard it about me, Jedder—that I have ears, but no tongue?"

Even at the peak of his amazement, Leguerre congratulated himself that this first question carried its own answer. He nodded as he dropped into the chair drawn opposite the Red Hand's.

"I have heard."

A red glove lightly touched the cards.

"It is—convenient. One is sparing with the written word. But there come times when to talk is better. Times such as—this."

Leguerre confined his comment to another nod. The steady eyes were again taking stock of him, and now he sensed a new quality in their regard. His heart jumped at the Red Hand's next words:

"You are not the man I expected to see!"

Although the voice was still quiet and colorless, Leguerre could fancy himself at the beginning of the end of his blindfold imposture. He sat tense. But for all the ominous ring, the Red Hand's speech had not been a denunciation.

"Not at all the man, Jedder," he went on. "I had another picture of you, I will confess. Slave that you have been, you—you hold up your head. I like your eyes. You have resolution. What is rarer in our ranks, you have balance. But for a trick of fate, you must have gone to the other camp. It is surprising to find one like you among us."

He paused, tentatively.

"It's a long story," said Leguerre. And that was tentative, too.

A gloved hand waved in the yellow light flooding the table.

"Yes; we all have long stories. Some

day I hope to hear yours. Hope all goes well with you, that I may. Yes; I know I would find you useful, Jedder; for you have intelligence as well as courage. But—the wheel has turned. Do you know why you are here?"

"I am listening," very truthfully replied Leguerre.

The crimson fingers interlaced on the table top, and the shrouded head leaned forward above them.

"Only laws can unmake laws," said the Red Hand. "So among us there must be stern laws until all laws are dead. They have showed us the way to the draft, and by the wheel you have been drafted—for the common good. You remember your oath?"

Happily, Leguerre didn't have to remember, for the crackling voice continued:

"You have sworn by your blood and bone, by your life, to give obedience to the death when the Red Hand commands. So all our thousands have sworn, through the world. Now the time for the test has come—the time to strike!

"There are many close to me who would gladly have had the honor. Poor Fornoff—416—pleaded for it. Yes; on his knees, begged for it.

"But that was not to be my way, Jedder. Why have the thousands been brought together in the blood bond? Have they been trained only to an empty ritual, or to obedience—to take active part in the remaking of life? I denied Fornoff. Numbering all names that had not come to numbers in the bond, I employed the wheel. And it was your number, 800, that destiny selected. Yours is the honor!"

Leguerre nodded.

"I have come," he said.

A watch lay now in one of the crimson hands.

"And the hour is near, Jedder. Does your heart weaken?"

"It hasn't—yet."

The hidden eyes glinted through their shroud.

"Somehow, I do not think you will falter. Had you been another sort I would have told you, instead, that you—*dare not!*"

Leguerre shrugged.

"I am happy," he said, "you do not deem me—that sort." Then, after an interval, he ventured a question: "And you have summoned me to——"

A sharp and insistent buzzing intruded upon the sentence.

"The phone!" murmured the Red Hand. "You shall see how men without tongues contrive to use it."

From a small table at his elbow he lifted a telephone. Taking the receiver from its hook he delivered four sharp raps upon the diaphragm case with his pencil, then listened.

He spoke no word. By accepted code, evidently, the pencil spoke for him, asked his questions.

For another moment he stared silently at Leguerre after he had put away the telephone.

"So—you don't know why you are here?" he asked then softly.

"Except that the summons reached me."

"You have not guessed?"

"I wait to hear."

The Red Hand's eyes bored through the mask, their flares returning.

"I believe you," he said. "You have not guessed. And that is well. So I will show you something—something, I am sure, that will interest you." He had pulled open a drawer as he spoke, and one of the crimson gloves delved into it. "It is this!" he cried; and Leguerre found himself looking into the muzzle of a pistol.

"I say!" he protested.

"You have much to say!" mocked the grating voice. "Now tell me quickly who you are, and how you come here!"

"You ask!" exclaimed Leguerre.

"You wanted Jedder, and——"

"And Jedder is dead! I have just had the news. He would have betrayed the bond—and he died. I should have been informed long since. Yes, Jedder has paid, and you are here! Hurry! Speak for yourself!"

Leguerre's eyes were as level as those which sparkled in the mask.

"Can there be two Jeddors?" he asked evenly. "Or could you consider that the death report is—you remember Mark Twain?—exaggerated?"

A rusty laugh sounded behind the mask.

"No need to tell me who you are!" said the Red Hand. "What difference? *What* you are, I know now. You do belong to the enemy. You are a spy, sent by those to whom Jedder went with his running tongue!"

"You take my breath away," asserted Leguerre, and roused the rusty laugh again.

"Perhaps that is prophecy. But I shall take interest first in talking with you. What is written to be, though, you cannot prevent. Jedder himself did not know that—nor dream. Simply, another way shall be found."

He shifted the pistol, and holding it as steadily in his left hand proceeded to write rapidly on first one card and then a second. The writing finished, he touched a button located back of the table.

Despite the thick rugs in the big room outside, Leguerre's ears were alert to the jingle of the distant bell and the padding of footsteps. The door opened behind him, and in another instant 416 was at his side, staring at the pistol.

"What is it?" he cried.

Then he saw the cards and read their message. A new shrillness came into his voice.

"My prayers are answered! Immortality!"

Stumbling in his haste, he wheeled and ran out, slamming the heavy door as he went.

The pistol had gone back now into the right hand of the man in the mask.

"Other hands will do my bidding," he said. "And you," he added to that, in an icy voice of judgment, "you will pay the one part of your penalty by living to know that you have failed!"

He waved the gun.

"Get up!"

Obeying, perforce, Leguerre heard a far-away metallic clang—the steel door at the stairhead, he knew.

"If I may say so," he observed, "this is all very astonishing to me."

"I could say the same," said the Red Hand grimly, "if life left any astonishments remaining to my lot." He reached once more into the drawer, and arose clutching a tubular electric flash lamp. "For the time being, I have a place where you may rest—while I think. Please precede me."

He waved a hand toward a corner of the room where the shadows lay thickest.

There was a second door in the shadows; and this, like the steel entrance gate, opened on a steep stairway. The flash light, stabbing from behind him, showed Leguerre that these steps and the walls between which they descended were of rough stone.

It was as he slowly climbed down them, with the Red Hand's pistol pressing into his back, that the significance of all those flags that the Loop district had flaunted dawned suddenly upon him. A holiday! No; it wasn't a holiday they would be celebrating here in Chicago at this time. Not a holiday in the accepted sense.

It was for quite another reason that the lake-shore city was doing herself proud, declaring out in her best—and, with an inward groan, he saw that reason as an explanation of his own present predicament, the answer to the whole mystery of J. B. Jedder and 416 and the Red Hand and their infernal "bond."

Automatically, he was again counting the steps. Thirty-two, then a landing and a turn. Another eighteen, and at the bottom of them a damp-floored cellar filled with the noises of scurrying rats.

The beam of the flash lamp circled and came to rest on an iron door.

"My accommodations are not of the best," said the Red Hand. "But then, I do not think you would be comfortable anywhere during these next few hours. Later I shall bring you a newspaper—one that will carry bigger news, I think, than the editors now anticipate. In the meantime, I escort you to your chamber!"

Pushed on by the pistol, Leguerre crossed to the iron door. A huge rusty key stood in the lock, and the crimson glove that held the light dropped upon it.

For an instant, as the Red Hand strained at the key, the pistol wavered—and in that instant Leguerre snatched desperately at the wrist which held it.

There was a crash. Flame seared his cheek and an acrid smoke filled his nostrils and blinded his eyes. Somewhere in the darkness there was an echoing crash of falling plaster.

While he forced back the pistol arm, Leguerre's free hand had fallen on the flash lamp. He wrestled it from the gloved grip, lifted it high, brought it smashing down upon the shrouded head again and again until the wrist of the gun went limp within his clasp.

Then, with the Red Hand fallen, he was in utter darkness, for at the first blow the filament in the torch's tiny bulb had snapped.

He felt for the key, found it, put all his strength into a sharp twist. The lock grated. Jerking open the iron door he dragged the Red Hand, legs first, into the blackness beyond it.

In another second he was swearing under his breath. His cigarette lighter had been left in the room at the Earl-

shire, and he was without matches. Not yet was he to see the face behind the mask.

But when he turned the key again, he had stripped his late jailer of his chief trappings of mystery. On the way up the stairs he adjusted the cap and its shroud to his own hand, and drew on the crimson gloves.

His right hand was in his pocket, clutching the grip of the captured pistol, as he stepped again into the room of shadows. Beyond the door he had heard a clamor of excited voices. A half dozen men had collected about the carved table, and the round-faced guardian of the portal was shouting:

"Yes, a shot! Back here! And they have gone!"

Another voice cried:

"He is here!"

A finger was pointing.

Leguerre waved, and nodded, and calmly walked to the Red Hand's chair.

A challenge lay before him on the table—the pencil and the cards. The round-faced man was staring at them—plainly expected some communication to be imparted now by means of them.

Leguerre, looking about the group, saw several pistols parading. He was still in the woods—and all but lost in them now. Trying to simulate a voice would have been a doubtful enough effort at best, but the problem confronting him here was far less simple than that.

At any moment the prisoner below might come to his senses and begin pounding on the iron door; and to forestall investigation of the racket, to pave the way for his own exit, a person named Leguerre would have very shortly to contrive a way of duplicating a handwriting he had never even seen!

Common sense told him instantly that the thing couldn't be done. Then something higher than common sense whispered to him. He picked up the pencil in his left hand, drew the cards to him and arduously but quickly scrawled:

Have locked up man below after struggle. Hurt hand. Plans changed. Must go at once to 416.

The round-faced man was still puzzling over the note as Leguerre walked around the table, and out through the big room and the tapestried corridor to the gate of steel.

He drew the bolt, closed the door gently behind him, and tore off the mask as he bolted down the stairs.

Two blocks below, toward Madison Street, he encountered a straying taxi. Hatless and breathless, he jumped into it.

"Where are the big doings to-night—Gold Coast Ball, or whatever it is? You know, where the— Oh, the Athenæum? Then that's where I want to go. And step on it!"

A crowd that might have numbered thousands was milling about the entrance to the vast, vault-roofed Chicago Athenæum, home of conventions and larger-scale social and civic affairs, when Leguerre came to the end of his dash across the Loop and out Michigan Boulevard.

He plunged into the throng, finding holes or elbowing them, like a gifted half back making the best of a broken field.

It lacked only two minutes of midnight, and somewhere a band had crashed into the opening chords of "Hail to the Chief."

The music had the effect of putting spurs on Leguerre's elbows. Deaf to the remarks that his ruthless passage evoked, he wormed wildly on. At last only the broad blue back of a policeman stood between him and the aisle held open between the Athenæum door and the big motor that had drawn to the curb.

From the motor, a pleasant-faced youth in evening clothes was just then descending. A cheer arose, and he acknowledged it with a wave of his light walking stick as, followed by others

from the limousine, he came briskly forward.

Leguerre recognized the youth—and in the same instant espied and recognized some one else. Across the cleared aisle, standing in the front rank and closer to the magnificent motor, was the hunchback, 416.

His right hand, Leguerre saw, was hidden under his coat.

"Let me through!" he cried.

The blue arm had shot out to restrain him, but he dodged under it. Half stunned by a blow from a flailing night-stick, he flung himself across the open space and onto the glaring-eyed 416.

The hunchback had seen him coming. His hand had flashed from his breast, and there was a revolver in it. Leguerre, faint now from the club blow, had snatched it away as they both went down.

Two faces were close to Leguerre's when, a few seconds later, he opened his eyes. One was that of the youth from the limousine, who was saying:

"Why, I'm sure I know the chap, inspector! He's one of your people who played such ripping tennis at Wimbledon last year. Le—Le—yes, Leguerre. I say, never in the world expected I'd—owe him my life. Oh, you're coming out of it? Look here! Leguerre!"

But Leguerre was looking at the policeman in the gold-braided dress-helmet, whispering an address.

"Hurry!" he begged. "Take everybody in the place. Man in the cellar's—the big chief. My responsibility. Hurry!"

Then his eyes closed again.

He was in bed when next they opened, in what appeared to be a room in a hotel far more modern than the Earlshire. His head was swathed in a bandage, and a person who had a profoundly medical look was bending over him.

At the moment, too, the door was

opening. Leguerre identified the newcomer as that police inspector of a while ago.

"His Royal Highness wants to know —" he began, apparently addressing the doctor.

Leguerre raised himself on an elbow and cut in:

"Let's wait for that. Did I only dream of seeing you before, inspector—and giving you an address?"

"Last night! We've got five men for you to look at, and tell us about. About four of 'em, that is. We had tabs already on one as a wild-eyed anarchist. Him and the hunchback, too!"

"I'd met the hunchback before, myself," said Leguerre. "And the other one's the man you dug out of the cellar?"

"Wasn't anybody in the cellar."

"In a little corner room, behind an iron door?"

"Yes; I heard about that. But the

door was open and the room was empty. Who—who did you suppose would be in it?"

Leguerre sighed.

"Wish I could tell you," he said. "Wish I could tell you a lot of things. But I'll have to get Washington on the telephone before I do; which is very much between ourselves."

He sighed again, and somewhat more deeply.

"So one of your policemen bashes my head, and the Red Hand fellow walks clear, and—I say, it's the devil of a mess all 'round."

But in an instant, as his eyes wandered, he brightened.

"Silver lining, what?" he jubilated. "You know, last time somebody got a room for me in this town, he forgot to include a bath. I say, doctor, it's all right to crawl in the tub while the inspector puts through a long distance for me?"

Leguerre will be in these pages again shortly.



ONE-MAN CITY DESERTED

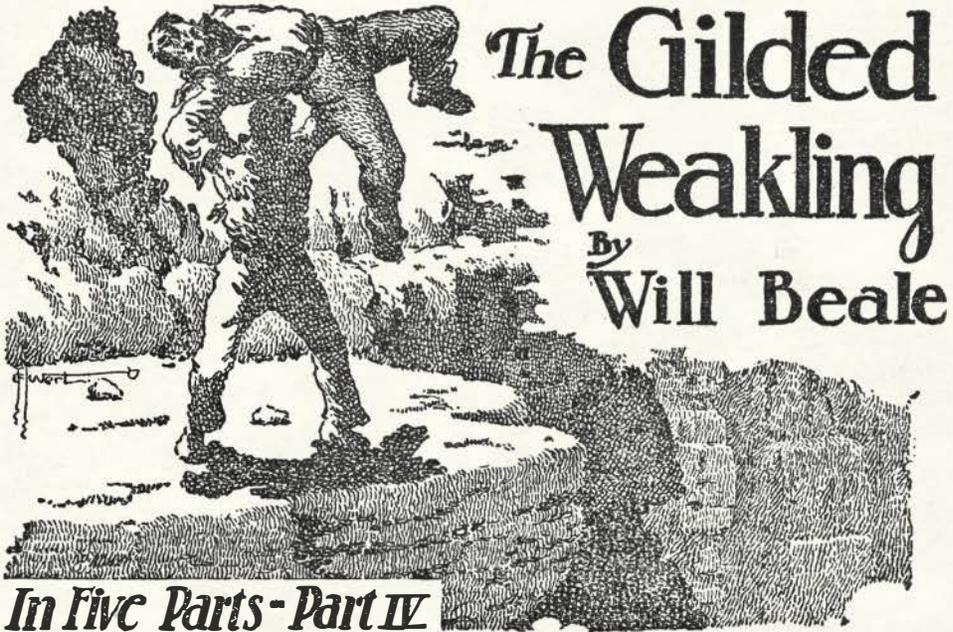
CLINGING tenaciously to the dreams of a lifetime; feeling sure that some day—some day soon—the hopes of a struggle for existence will be realized in full glory. Hoping. Hoping. Year in and year out.

That is the story of Pat Kennedy, who went to Conrad City in southern Yukon Territory, long before the place was a city. He saw color, he panned pay dirt; so he decided. Six years later, in 1905, the boom came. Pat's dreams were realized! He'd known it would come. But three short years saw the five hundred residents drift to other climes, to new fields. Yet Pat stayed on.

He worked the claims he had staked, taking out a little gold now and then—but mostly leaving his first love, his own city, for a while now and then to get a grubstake, and then back to his real job. Then, after twenty-eight years—with Father Time tolling seventy-eight over his withered frame—this optimist of the Yukon gold days, this inveterate prospector of the North, put his withered frame in the hospital—and left his soul with Conrad City.

On the way outside (that's the way sour doughs of the Yukon and of Alaska speak of Canada or of the United States proper) he warned an old friend that: "The boom's coming. Them lots you bought twenty-five years ago are going to be worth somethin'. They're going to be worth a lot. The boom's coming."

POP—8F



The Gilded Weakling

By
Will Beale

In Five Parts - Part IV

Author of "Seed of Glory," Etc.

Wayne, a New Yorker, gets on a ship while drunk and lands in a Newfoundland fishing town. Broke, he goes to the fish-shipping plant and finds, as head of it, a girl, Margaret Mendeth who gives him work. Labor comes hard, but he keeps on until the boat arrives. He tries to save an old man from drowning, but fails, and is despised, for the code of the country is *strength*. Now he feels that he must stay and clear his name. He helps out the granddaughter of the dead man, Hitty Crowe, who loves Alf, Margaret's deaf-and-dumb brother. Margaret goes away on a trip, and Wayne has an encounter with Mockford, a brute who insults Hitty. When Margaret returns, discouraged about business, Wayne secretly places a ship at her disposal. Later, when another vessel founders near by, he engineers the rescue. One of the rescued is Floss LaRue, an actress whom Wayne, while drunk, married in New York. She presses her claim, crashing his romance. Margaret leaves, and Wayne, crushed, is about to go away when he is asked by Margaret's mother to undertake a mission. The company's ship is in a port down the coast, its crew being led astray by Mockford. Inspired by the woman's spirit, Wayne consents.

CHAPTER IV.

AT THE CAFE DUGANNE.

IN the evening two days later, Wayne sat in the rear of the Café Duganne on the water front of St. Pierre, Island of Miquelon. Less than thirty miles off the coast of Newfoundland he had been set down, as it appeared, in a tiny province of old France.

Seated at an obscure table he looked about him with quiet curiosity. He had never seen such a display of drink pos-

sibilities even in the old days of plenty. To the lavish abundance of some of his own old-time haunts might have been added every highly specialized concoction of Paris itself.

A young girl came to serve him. She spoke a quaint-inflected English. He ordered a *sirap* drink, and sat back. He felt certain that here he would pick up something of Mockford.

One of the Tait & Brady fishermen on its way to the Grand Banks had brought him down from Harbour le

Grand and set him ashore at St. Pierre. The bulk of the trip from Newfoundland meant simply the weird, lonely mystery of the great northeast, of peering, cold, gray fogs, and trackless, lonely sea. All the life visible had been the eternally lost Mother Carey's chickens; an occasional whirring little puffin; a couple of whales that at one stage emerged oilily ahead of them, revealing great leathery backs, and giving vent to long, gusty sighs of abysmal loneliness.

After many blank, fog-bound hours, they picked up land—Miquelon. They bore in around a headland, made across a harbor, and came sweeping in to anchorage through a busy flotilla of squid-jiggers. Out of the sea on all sides were being jerked the squirming, writhing, lashing little creatures of hell, squirting swift jets of water or of readier ink—and from the squid boats all about were coming hails, gibes, greetings in careless old-country French.

The quai, the busy little uniformed harbor officials, the open square, flanked by ancient stucco buildings annealed together in long rows, might all have represented a coast town of Brittany.

In the morning, armed with his papers from Mendeth Company—and his own papers of ownership, guarded secretly—Wayne had begun his search for the *Enchantress*. And that feeling of temporary emancipation from Newfoundland, from its austere, rugged morality, grew with every hour. Coming to St. Pierre, Wayne found himself lifted bodily from natural, primitive decency and turned loose in an atmosphere of gay, carefree insouciance.

In his search about the harbor, he encountered ships and shipping of all nations; fishermen of many lands and of a thousand models; great, flat harbor bateaus freighting heaps of glistening salt; quaint, high-board barques of Portugal and Spain painted naïve, childlike blues, and wearing, between mastheads,

great, gorgeous, bellying webs of drying sails, red, and tan, and soft, dusky gold—splotches of color staining the morning in every direction. And about the docks he encountered the adventure-some activity of huge liquor traffic, which held the passing interest of an old acquaintance, now half forgotten.

Men were coming into the café. The business of the evening was picking up.

Wayne sipped his *sirop* and watched. Right next to him was a little cottage piano of French make. It had two candlesticks of ornate hardware fastened upon its front at either side of the music rack. A young girl came in from somewhere in the rear. She sat down at the piano and began to play. Her hair had been screwed into long, sleek curls. There was something pathetic about her youth. For a moment Wayne was intrigued by her inexpert fingering. She played a treacly popular ballad until some one yelped at her reprovingly, at which she fled into a jangle of American jazz. Other girls had appeared, and couples began to dance. The girls plied between bar and tables when the dance was over.

A kindly faced elderly woman superintended the bar. A younger woman, an olive-skinned creature of dark locks and great, black, heavily lidded eyes, managed the room, the customers, the girls. Wayne caught her swift, low-voiced command to one of the girls, and, with a glance in his direction, the girl came over. She smilingly took his glass to the bar and came back with it refilled.

Wayne drank of it. Its *sirop* now held a sharp, potent underflavor. Something in him leaped to it as it went down.

"You've loaded this," he accused her.

The girl smiled, and shrugged ingratiatingly.

"*Mais une petit goutte de rhum pour le santé de monsieur.*" She swung into the arms of a leather-skinned young sailor and they danced away.

For a moment Wayne sat still. Coldly, deliberately, he was testing himself. Already, with the drink, a flight of little enchanting creatures of the imagination were loosed within him, and the little mounting flames of pleasure that were more recollection than sensation lit themselves anticipatngly.

Coldly Wayne appraised himself, and these same little flames. For, in this very moment, he felt himself standing at a crossroad of vital importance. In Newfoundland practically all his betterment, bodily and mental, had been forced upon him. Here, now, he was free, alone, to choose for good or for ill, on his own. He had said to Hagar Mendeth finally: "You have told me that strength begins first within a man, and that it brings its own reward. I have decided to play the game as you have figured it, and"—dully—"may you be right about the reward."

And, now, at recollection of that hour with this woman and all that entered into it, the little flames began to be snuffed out peremptorily. And Wayne was promising himself anew that in this thing he had set himself he was not going to fail. The little flames of the senses fell to nothingness, and in Wayne's breast came a tiny little glow of pride in himself, a little glow that, in his loneliness, touched him. He threw his drink in a sawdust box and sat back.

Immediately his attention was engaged—curiously.

A hilarious rabble was coming in off the quay—a motley crew of many nationalities. At their head was about the strangest leader of such a crew that Wayne had ever seen—a timid, somewhat bemused individual, wavering unsteadily, obviously a man new to drink. Wayne found himself focused oddly on this man. Being hustled insistently along, he was smiling vacantly, in his mild-blue eyes the wistful, groping stare of a mind temporarily astray. His com-

panions were evidently bent on fastening to him tenaciously until his money was gone, but, with Wayne, it was not so much a swift sympathy for the man as the strange feeling that he had seen him before.

Wayne watched.

And it was but a moment before he was realizing that the man would soon be as helpless among his trailers as a stupefied rabbit attended by a jubilant flock of crows. Attached heavily to one limp-hanging arm was a gross, rolling-gaited cockney of a peculiar ferocity, now concealed under the broadly smug manner of a purring old lion; on the other arm hung a hairy, undersized Russian, black and glittering, and grinning like an excited ape. The balance of the throng held faces grinning, sardonic, stupid, but each and all—greedy.

Wayne watched.

At a neighboring table where the rabble had come to anchor he noted all the crude methods used by such to further involve their prey. The girl who had served Wayne his drink lent herself to the scheme with readiness. His companions pushed their host bodily into her encouraging arms and she lurched him hither and yon about the floor, while behind at the table his own mild drink was "loaded" from half the glasses near it.

With growing resentment Wayne watched. And now he was struggling anew with that conviction that the man's face was familiar. It was a face that one would not particularly remember but if Wayne had ever seen the man it must have been, of course, in Harbour le Grand. He considered the thing intently. The incident seemed somehow to hold an unusual significance for him if he could only decipher it. And he was feeling intensely sorry for the chap. He evidently knew no more of the way of drink than a little child. The riffraff would stay by him until they looted him or worse, and—

Suddenly Wayne sprang to his feet. At the other table a certain incident had leaped swiftly to the dramatic. In bringing the man's change, evidently a considerable amount, the girl had laid it on the table. The great paw of the rolling cockney had reached for it openly, at the same time meeting the hairy brown member of the Russian beyond.

In sudden hot wrath Wayne started to interfere. But already the party had blown up. The scavengers were now fighting for the spoils savagely. From out the mêlée a buffeted, besieged face peered up at Wayne with hurt, bewildered eyes. There was a bad cut on the face. It was infinitely beseeching. Wayne flung himself into the fighting mass and dragged the novice forth.

"Quick!" he cried out into the dazed eyes. "Let's get out of here."

In a moment they were outside, Wayne running surely, half dragging the other behind him. Down on the quai they could hear the sounds of pursuit growing hot in the streets behind them. They tumbled into a dory and Wayne pushed her off.

Out beyond the docks a sound like a croak came from his groggy fare: "Ilo Shane! Ilo Shane!"

"What about Isle au Chien?" Wayne demanded. Isle au Chien was an island lying a mile or more down the harbor.

"Banker—anchored Ilo Shane!" the groggy one replied.

A little later Wayne rowed up to a long, symmetrical hull dimly afloat in the dark. It was the only banker in the vicinity and Wayne hailed. A moment and a leisurely watch came to the rail with a lantern. Wayne called up to him:

"Does this man belong with your crew?"

A moment of scrutiny in the light, and: "Aye; looks like our cook."

His passenger had completely succumbed now and Wayne helped the

other get him aboard and carry him below. Down in the fore-castle, Wayne noted that the bunks seemed full of snoring seamen and the air was heavy with the fumes of alcohol. Wayne was examining the cut on his charge's head.

"Better get some water and wash this man up," he advised, and followed the other on deck to return ashore.

There were voices on deck. Other arrivals seemed making the banker. On his way across the deck to his dory Wayne felt, oddly enough, that among the arrivals he recognized the two ring-leaders from the Café Duganne. Then some one confronted him under a light—stopped him with a hand on his breast.

Wayne stared, stunned, at the face opposite his, a face unspeakably elate in the light of the lantern. The face was Mockford's. Wayne knew himself on board the *Enchantress*.

He had a flashing impression of the rolling cockney emerging swiftly into the light. Then something struck him violently on the head.

He fell heavily to the deck.

CHAPTER V.

THE EXQUISITE UNDERLING.

OF the macabre period of his life that began with the next morning—a period in which Wayne sometimes forgot his body for the blows that were raining on his very soul—recollection always slipped back, oddly, to his first impressions on awakening. These seemed to involve his every sense.

First was blackness, the close, heavy blackness of narrow, confined spaces. Wayne had swept up from a bottomless gulf to open his eyes on absolute black void, and to feel swaying, plunging motion. Realization first struck him then: he was in a vessel—under weigh. Then smells flooded him—heavy, cloying, burly smells, reekage of the sea. And sounds—the large, soothing wash of

mighty seas rushing past his ears just a few paltry inches away, and the brittle little chuckling of bilge flushing fussily through the spaces of the planking in between.

He slipped out of the bunk into the blackness, groping about dazedly. Some one opened the companionway now, swung down lightly and struck a match. A dim-revealed figure lighted a little brass lamp swaying in its gimbals above the stove, and then began lighting a fire in the latter.

Wayne crawled out unsteadily from the narrow confines forward. His face was white with concern.

"What are we—shifting our berth?" he asked. Somehow it sounded foolish even as he asked it.

The cook busied himself with the stove. It was strange that now, aboard the *Enchantress*, Wayne should recognize him instantly as a Tait & Brady fisherman seen when aboard the *Enchantress* in Harbour le Grand. He was replying matter-of-factly, between the rattle of his stove covers: "No, sir." And then, cautiously, as though half to himself: "Unless you call the southern Grand Banks shifting our berth."

Wayne stared. There was a hard, painful throbbing in his head from the blow of the night, like something beating steadily upon it with a hammer.

"Well, what's the idea? *I'm* not shipping for the southern Grand Banks. When do I get set ashore?"

The cook was pouring water into a teakettle from a pail.

"You'll have to ask the cap'n, sir." He jerked his head. "He's aft."

Wayne lurched to the companionway. His head seemed blasted with pain. It was making him sick. He managed to drag back the hatch. A big gush of cool, sweet air swept him revivingly and he clambered out.

The world was gray; gray, slopping seas pursued each other endlessly away into eternity under a gray sky, gray

yet in the east. And ahead lay gray fog, rolled up, like a scroll.

Wayne lurched along the deck. Sickness seized him, seeming to flood endlessly through his body from that aching in his head. He leaned up against the mainmast, and stared at the crew occupying the deck. They struck him dishearteningly—derelects of all races. The gross, huge-paunched cockney of the Café Duganne cut squid on top of a barrel. A brisk little Frenchman and a silent New Englander were shackling up, reeving hooks on a trawl. The squat, whiskered sea ape out of Russia, revealing a heavily thatched chest, and with a flat sailor cap on his bushy hair, was hunched on a nest of dories. Some of the toes were missing from his bared feet. They had a gnawed look. Wayne shifted his eyes.

Another tack and Wayne made the cabin aft. Here, seated easily on the cabin was a big Scandinavian, the mate Oehlman. The gaunt, silent creature eyed Wayne as he passed with the distant, incurious regard of a polar bear in a cage.

Then Wayne was down the after companionway with a lurching splay slat, standing on the cabin floor, unsteady as to body, but with his eyes burning straight ahead, into the face of the captain.

And Mockford was undeniably amused.

"What do you mean by a crazy shanghaiing stunt like this?" Wayne demanded. "I want you to make about and set me ashore!"

Mockford clasped his hands behind his back, and rocked himself leisurely up and down on his heels.

"Well, that ain't jest exactly accordin' to marine law, my young friend. As far as I can see, you came aboard uninvited. I'm sort of thinking I'll let you make the trip."

"But you can't do that!" angrily. A tense moment of staring into the evilly

complacent eyes in front of him, then: "Listen; you *must* set me ashore. I'll pay you for a day's time, vessel and crew, on the basis of a full day's catch."

Mockford's equanimity was totally unimpressed. He had learned the day before of Wayne's coming down from Harbour le Grand in the outbound fisherman. After the fiasco in Harbour le Grand, it puzzled him to know that Wayne was still in the country, and he was more than half led to connect Wayne's coming to St. Pierre with himself. Anyhow, as things were he could not have asked for better than to have him safely away from Mendeth Company in his own absence, and, of course, Mockford had never forgotten the little incident of Hitty Crowe.

Now, he puffed at his pipe, comfortably.

"No," complacently. "You're going to make the run with us. It'll be good for you. I understand you sorta wanted to stay on the Newfoundland shore a bit to get strong and manful. Well, here y'are, in, le's say, the graduatin' class; in a craft"—raw pride gleamed a moment in Mockford's face—"in a craft that's the little princess of all crafts; with a good crew of instructors, and a master, if I do say it as shouldn't, that can put you through the course better'n most." He spat, stolidly unmoved. "No. You're in luck."

"You damned——"

"Shut up!" The eyes of the man before Wayne froze into glittering ice. "I'm not through with you, young man." He pointed. "Get out!"

Staring back into the other's eyes, Jerry Wayne knew a sudden animallike hatred that made him want to land on the man before him and veritably bury his teeth in his throat. It scared him a bit.

He wheeled and got up the companionway into the cool air. He stumbled unsteadily along up into the bows, crouched down and stared ahead. With

Mockford at sea, he, himself, with all his authority was helpless. Anger and bitterness streamed through his body. The whole present predicament seemed so hopeless. Hagar Mendeth had trusted him, trusted his cleverness, his brain. On a big self-sacrificing impulse, he had set himself to do a thing of real worth for Mendeth & Company—which in reality meant Margaret Mendeth—a thing that *must* square him with her in some way, and here he was, desperately involved and helpless as a child.

He looked around with hopeless eyes. The heaving sea swept the heart out of him. What a waste! The fog was closing down now—thin, ethereal, cold, lining the great gray void of a world with a saddening softness of lighter gray. And soon it held close, all about, unutterably directionless and drear.

Wayne's eyes followed the tumbling, sluicing gray seas that were racing aft endlessly and breaking into boiling surges of foam as the *Enchantress* lunged on through them. Along with that horrible ache in his head it made him giddy, depressingly giddy. He shivered with the cold. He got upon his feet, swaying, clinging. He was forlornly sick. Gradually the fog soaked him.

It was early next morning, in the close, sordid blackness of a vessel's bunk, sick, in pain, at the bottom of everything that had gone to make existence up to then, that Jerry Wayne seemed really to begin working life anew. Lying still, regarding himself and all he had ever done with a distrust that was habitual, he found himself all at once with a sole small thing of encouragement: back there in Miquelon he had refused to drink. It might be but a trifle in some connections, but in his present situation it began to encourage him enormously. For in that one incident he had turned a corner; for about the first time in all his life he had

met Jerry Wayne himself on his own ground and—defeated him in fair fight. He had made a start on the new code. Now, in the blackness of the outlook this little scrap of new strength that began within burned steadily like a lighted shrine.

He rolled out of the bunk and made out on deck. Dawn was coming upon the sea, a golden advent of heartening splendor, and, weak and shaky as he was, the man stood up forward a moment, held by its beauty. Then he wheeled and set forth to learn his true place in things.

This was disclosed to him viciously, but quite neatly at the start.

He was knowing his body as one vast sack of emptiness, and down at the stove the cook cooked. The smells devastated him. He climbed back down the companionway.

"I'd like to get something to eat if I can," he said to the cook, quietly enough.

"Can't have it, sir."

Wayne looked at the other, dazedly.

"Did I—did I understand you right? Did you say I couldn't—"

"Yes, sir. Cap'n's orders. He says you're to work your berth or find yourself. And he says you're to work first."

Wayne's eyes had come wide. Then there came an odd little crooked smile on his face. He straightened up, climbed on deck and made aft.

It was early but he found the captain already on deck.

"I've got—got your—message from the cook," Wayne stated to him quietly. "What do you want me to do?"

The big Scandinavian mate was steering. His eyes left the quivering, responsive foresail long enough to rest a detached moment on Wayne's face. At one side the squat, hairy Russian grimaced, apelike, in his whiskers, and shifted his gnawed feet.

Mockford's face lit. Coming on deck a little back he had noted Wayne up for-

ward staring rapt at the blazoned yellow sunrise. As ever, Mockford had sensed in the watcher the eternal reaction to beauty; below the outward life of the New Yorker lay things of fineness and appreciation. And now Mockford had a little inspiration. It was at these things in Wayne he was to strike. He spoke to the Russian.

"Skeemo, set this man to cuttin' bait. And then keep him busy till noon."

The man grinned rapturously. Probably some lingering instincts from generations of serfdom in him turned to joy at this chance to himself command.

Grim hours of adjustment.

In dense, clinging, icy fog that came to prevail, Jerry Wayne labored at a task that, weak and sick as he was, seemed to shrivel certain things within him, but keeping at it steadily, until his mind was numb from overdriving and his face was a ghastly steel mask around its unaccountable little smile. At length, when complete oblivion threatened to engulf him he made the forecabin and stumbled down.

There, something happened, something swift, something peerlessly fine. The cook jammed a tin dipper of hot tea and a chunk of bread into his hands with a furtive dispatch.

"Put it into ye, sir, quick!" And he was already up with his head out the companionway, saying loudly to the sea winds: "No, sir. Ye can't have anything t'eat till night. Cap'n's orders!"

Down below, shivering with weakness, Wayne gulped eagerly at the scalding drink, and tore at the hunk of bread. The hot fluid rushed through him in a flood of fire. It brought him back. "Thanks, old man," he muttered to the cook's back. He climbed out and went back to his job.

The next day, Wayne was his own man, beyond all doubt. His splendid physical well-being, newfound in Newfoundland, swept back to ally itself with

the new strength of spirit. He did his work easily enough—odds and ends of jobs, selectively menial. And it warmed him greatly that now he could hold up his own end even among men like these, for the most part, men little above the animals; for some reason or other Mockford had picked his crew foully, with nice discrimination.

On account of the intermittent fog, they were having a slow run, and much of the time Wayne spent studying his captor, the big Limehouser. His hatred of him held peculiar elements; it seemed a basic thing; his scorn of the man went deeper than the fine instincts of his own being—deeper than Mockford's abysmal grossness.

Hour after hour the *Enchantress* soughed on through the trackless seas. And then at evening, with the mate taking soundings, they came in sight of sail rocking here and there on the horizon. On forged the *Enchantress*, busily on, and came in finally among a veritable fleet, wide strewn, dotting the sea with craft hailing from many lands. Closer yet, and in the clearing rays of the sinking sun dories crept and crawled among the seas—five, ten, twenty, now visible, now disappearing, each creeping home to the mother craft.

The *Enchantress'* anchor plunged overboard.

Jerry Wayne was a fisherman on the Grand Banks of Newfoundland.

CHAPTER VI.

SLAVERY—AND BEAUTY.

THREE weeks. With every day did the Limehouser devise new hardships as "head master;" with every day did the New Yorker endure valiantly as pupil. There was no escape; there was no way out. Like a bondsman of old Wayne became slave to every man on board. He came to know such labor as he never thought possible. But, withal, his new strength of spirit was upon him

always, luminously, like an armor of burnished silver.

At dawn the dories went overboard.

Wayne had been made dory mate to the Russian, Skeemo. The man's glee at the arrangement was childlike. And there were times when, to Wayne, his tactics would have been amusing if they had not held, underneath, a cruel, sinister intent purely Satanic. More than once, under the other's manipulation Wayne would row until his hands were cruelly blistered, only to discover later that more than half of it had been unnecessary. If in his inexperience Wayne adopted an arduous, laborious way of doing a thing, his boat mate would allow him to carry on uncorrected until his own ingenuity or his own watchfulness taught him otherwise.

The fishing was good, and Wayne stuck to his own part tenaciously with all the vigor that was in him, and became—a fisherman of distinction. Day after day he went out with the others and did a man's part, at length did it well. He learned to take all sorts of weather as it came, and forget it. At his actual place in the dory he learned finally to hook and ease up his fish with the least expenditure of bodily energy; to handle his gaff adroitly; to row with every easing movement instinctively.

At night, with his own fish pitched on board the *Enchantress*, he was set to wait on the dressing gang, keeping the tubs full of round fish, keeping the dressed fish ready for the splitters, then going below to help salt down.

There were times—some of these earlier nights—when, toiling along far into the hours of blackness, it would seem as if he must break, when it would seem that unless he cast off the horrible strain his will imposed upon him he must lapse into sheer madness. These black hours struck at his most closely guarded instincts of fineness; the constant drench of brine pulled him down; the reek sickened him; the growing

shambles in which he toiled made of the night an ordeal bestial—and hung it about his neck.

In days of fog, when no fishing was done, Wayne was apprentice to the big rolling cockney, on board. Every natural attribute this man possessed was based on grossness. Functioning in his charge Wayne's only recourse was to refuse to think or feel. He became craftsman at it.

Wayne bore all courageously, for secretly these days he was beginning to entertain little forerunners of new and daring plans, plans that in Jerry Wayne, would require a man of fiber, body and soul. These plans, having to do with Mendeth Company and the present run, grew out of his love, for he knew that love held in him powerfully still, and there were times when Harbour le Grand and the girl lived in his thought poignantly. And so, brooding upon this, it was inevitable that he should plan with all that was in him, now that he was here, to bring this run to success and turn his own hardships to the girl's favor. He had always felt that Mockford had his own plans for the trip, and that they were not favorable to Mendeth Company, but when the run was made, he himself armed with his own ownership of the *Enchantress* and Hagar Mendeth's papers of authority, he himself was, somehow, going to take command and get it back.

And so, when Mockford would devise some specially ingenious humiliation for him, the inscrutable little smile would come on Wayne's face and he would go through it, quiet and uncomplaining. For he knew that all this was building him, in very character as well as in body, even as Hagar Mendeth had said, and building him to win.

And the days of his slavery grew.

There were times, however, when wearied of dealing with the things within him, Wayne would give himself to the things without.

He came to know the sea. It came to beget in him a deep feeling of awe, of reverence. At times he would lose himself completely, marveling upon it. Its varied moods were as profound, as petty, as repellent, as fascinating as—life.

Once a storm came out of the southeast like a battery of raging furies. The sea birds had been oiling and washing themselves busily before sundown, which the cook pronounced a thing of ill omen. And in the night Wayne found himself one of fifteen human creatures flicked inconsiderately about on the borderland of life. It drove something big into Wayne, that storm—or took something out of him, or both; he was never quite clear about it. But for the first time he found himself thinking—big thoughts, serious thoughts, long thoughts, about life and death; and he never forgot it. That night more than all left him a man determined, set to bend life to some real good.

And often now in its loneliness Wayne's mind followed its old-time bent of longing for beauty.

There was an awesome, negative beauty in the squalls upon the sea, when the black thunder heads would come marching up out of the south on the wings of great wind, their flanks silver-laced with lightnings, flaring sharply, flickering eagerly like the tongues of lambent serpents.

It would hail.

Then the sea below became a curious thing. It writhed unceasingly through a hundred phases, a hundred colors. From somber purples far back under the squalls it would turn to raw, cold greens in the splotches of light—to emerald and jade and saffron. And mad green seas would begin to huddle and struggle, to slop and to toss, would leap to the sky and comb along against the purple, lightning-slashed murk in hissing, racing outbreaks of crusted, foaming silver.

There was beauty in the soft tranquillity of early morning when the endless wastes, stirred to renewed life, led the eye afar into the infinite.

At nightfall, often these September days, there was beauty, still, thrilling beauty. And to Wayne, watching mus- ingly, would come Masefield's:

The bursting west was like an opening flower
And one man watched it till the light was
dim.

Beauty blazoned on a wondering sky, beauty of rose, of gold, and of scarce tingeing green, of mauve, of slate and the wings of the gull; beauty of brilliant shafts, and soaring rays; of thunderous whorls spinning above sub-lying purple; beauty of light and form, beauty of peace. And the tranquil sea, enamored of the sky, held all close mirrored on a pulsing breast.

Then in upon the Grand Banks came the blue square-rigger out of France, and beauty was no more.

CHAPTER VII.

COQUETTE OF THE SEA.

BRAZENLY, she flaunted herself airily on the rim of the sea. There was something of the coquette about her even then, this gay craft out of France. In her highboard sides of vivid blue, in the rakish lines of her spars and rigging, she held from the start something the air of a flirt of the high seas. And her sails were red. They flaunted limp and disheveled on the air, drying out last night's rain and fog, and the sun coming up clear struck them full. At its first touch they might have been linens drenched with wine. But in drying them out it robbed them of their festiveness, turned their vivid color rather brown and dead, like—drying blood.

When he thought of that last, Wayne, watching her from the *Enchantress*, had a tiny ominous thrill. The other stuff

was natural enough—she *did* remind him of a flirtatious woman, and the wet red sails in the early sun *were* wine red, but that last—

It was Sunday and he sat up forward trying to temper a bit the wreckage of his hands and nails. And glancing up again at the coquetry of the lady-craft off on the sea, he was moved to laugh aloud. From the look of things she might have been living up to her appearance—she *was* attracting the fleet, literally, to her. Dories from the vessels nearest her had taken to water and were speeding gayly across the swell to meet her. And—Wayne stared in amazement—one or two of the remoter fishermen, too far away to row, were weighing anchor and sailing or chugging to a berth whence, evidently, they *could* row.

Mockford came on deck. He took a careful look at the arrival through a glass, turned about and went below. Thereupon followed the thunderous rubble of the engines down aft. The *Enchantress* swayed gently up on her anchor chains to start out her own anchor, and a couple of men went forward to the windlass. A few moments and the *Enchantress*, too, was moving sociably nearer the Frenchman.

The cook came on deck with a pail of parings.

"What's the big idea?" asked Wayne. "That ship slips along in here and everything in sight hotfoots it over to her."

"Ye've said, sir," the Newfoundlander came back gloomily. "Dat am a bad un, dat craft. She comes on dis Banks wid run enough in un for her own crew and every odder fisherman who's got an oilskin or tobaccy to trade fer it. Ye'll see main fair doin's on dis craft before us git a load now." He slouched off.

Something struck Wayne with a swift feeling of depression. The *Enchantress* had scarce half a load of fish in the

hold. He had hoped they might fill her completely.

And now—

Mockford appeared on deck along with the big Scandinavian. And the stump-footed Russian and one other man, each with surging high spirits but poorly suppressed, were making ready to launch a dory over the side. The *Enchantress* had run a mile nearer, and the anchor was let go again. And now the dory pulled away. And a second and third dory followed. Some of the men, as the cook had said, carried little outfits of new oilskins or packages of American cigarettes.

Noon came. Alone, Wayne paced the deck. Restlessness gnawed at him. The cook called him to dinner. Across the forecandle table Wayne spoke:

"When do you think the crew will get back?"

"Hard sayin', sir. Skipper he picked up a bad lot round St. Pierre dis trip. De only kinda man un can git round St. Pierre is bout all de scourin's left round de port drunk f'm odder vessels, sir. Dis crew am a bad lot, sir. Dat am a fac'. If dey go bad nothin' save de Lord, sir, or dis vessel's owners, could save de trip."

"This vessel's owners?"

It stuck in Wayne's mind. *He* was the vessel's owner. Could that fact avail in face of this new menace.

Sundown came. Up forward the Newfoundlander cook was singing: "Dere's a land dat is fairer dan day," sending it sweet and reverent across the empty sea.

Then—the absentees came home.

They came wavering on out of the gathering night shadows, all at once, gloomily quiet, with the exception of one suddenly lifted voice, strident as a crow, upraised in mockery of the voice up forward, which dropped to silence with an odd little sound of abruptness.

They tumbled aboard and spread. Each man followed the type of his own

nature as opened up by drink—and became gay, sentimental, lachrymose, vicious. The mocking singer lent his voice to an indescribable lyric to a sweetheart, irretrievably dead and quite sadly buried.

Mockford?

Mockford stepping on deck might have been some imperial overlord. Mockford was in his own place, somehow. Seeing Wayne, he pulled himself up in sovereign regard and looked Wayne over, humorously, with a thousand things of evil in his glittering eyes.

Something in Wayne shivered. For a moment something in him that was young and fairly clean knew a startled tremor before something in the other that was old in the world even in the time of the Pharaohs, old and devious and very wise. Something that was terribly alien lived powerfully in the man before him. All this before Mockford laughed. He laughed, not in way of any mirth, but after the manner of pleasant anticipation.

For two days not a dory fished.

The third day four dories went out. All dragged back early in the day with fish but did not go out again. Before night, as by common consent, the dories began slinking off toward the French bark lying off to the eastward. Wayne and the cook made two runs for fish, alone.

Aboard, neither Mockford nor the mate had put in an appearance all day. At nightfall Wayne found himself dressing down alone. Across from him, one of the crew was splitting simply because he was too drunk to realize what he was doing. His knife was going instinctively, sliding true and clean through the white flesh, although his body swayed erratically.

And then he slipped down by the table and disappeared.

Wayne finished the day's fish alone. He even managed to split the last himself. He was brutally tired. He was

tired with the dead weariness of an overdriven body, and with discouragement. Stabbing his knife into the splitting table he set out to get the fish down into the hold.

And, somehow, some point of endurance seemed to be passed and he found his mind drifting out of all this, swiftly, and unaccountably far. Wet and slimy in his oilskins, his arms crimson and parboiled, his muscles one common agony, he was suddenly in that room of his back in New York. And instead of the foul, reeking deck and the noisesome darkness he saw the glimmer of shaded lights in pools of mahogany; saw a great golden web of fabric dripping in a shimmering cascade off a grand piano—in its glowing golden heart a black agate bowl gleaming full of the jeweled purples and crimsons of hothouse grapes, of plums and pomegranates—

He was stowing the fish down below now, and the salt was gnawing into his skin.

His bathroom— He saw it a glittering haven. With it came the soft liquid pur of plunging hot water; came fragrant soaps and bath perfumes; lather, velvety, foamy, luscious and never-ending— Then, the soft, caressing feel of a silken bath robe upon his glowing, refreshed body—

Up on deck again it was quite black. The raw smell of fish swept rank into his nostrils. Out of the darkness, a dory bumped the side and Mockford stood leering at Wayne a moment over the rail. With his inscrutable regard flaring full and malicious on Wayne in the light of the lantern, he was a male sphinx of superb evil set fast a moment in the ebony dark.

Wayne watched him aft. Something was happening to Wayne. He no longer felt his body. He seemed simply one burning flare of red-hot hatred.

Some one was yanking at his arm, and Wayne turned.

"Drink this, sir." The cook was be-

side him in the darkness, pressing into his hand a dipper of hot coffee.

Wayne gulped it down. It scalded, revivingly. And now his fire became also a thing of the body. He brushed the cook aside and started aft. He was conscious of the cook seizing him and saying to him earnestly:

"No, sir! Don't go aft to-night, sir!"

But he went.

Down aft the cabin had turned very still. Before the ghastly looking young man at the foot of the companionway, the mate lolled on a locker with a raw, living interest struggling through the liquor in his eyes. The Russian of the hideous feet sat across, grinning expectantly, as though a stage was being cleared for trouble in some vague other world.

Ahead of Wayne stood Mockford. The little cabin lamp fixed just beside his head, slid its light across his face. His eyes took in the drenched, reeking figure, the face of terrible exhaustion before him, and now he grinned.

"You're out late, me young chummy." The ancient cockney showed in his speech, now. "Wot's the matter—ain't the chambermaid up for'ard fixed fresh sheets on yer bed, or"—his arms went folded—"is it that the water ain't been drawn hot for yer bawth?"

Raw, headstrong, bitterly handicapped youth surged up recklessly in the man by the companionway and well-nigh strangled him.

"No, you pirate!" he cried out impotently. "It isn't the menial man-stuff on this craft that's the matter; some of them are nearly *white* men. It's the captain."

Gross surprise was slowly disintegrating all else in the captain's face. Underneath all this fury in Wayne was something big, something strange, inexplicable. And already he was going on recklessly:

"There's no real man to *you*! You

take a commission from some one who trusts you, who stakes you with everything you need at hellish expense. And what do you do? Do you go out and wreck your soul case to make good? You do not! You start in to get drunk like some confounded gutter rat, and to *stay* drunk; you and all your precious gang! And you let your job that some one has intrusted to your hands go hang!" Wayne's voice swept up to a key almost shrill in the dead stillness. "And it makes it a million times worse that the one who is staking you to all this, who is trusting you to make good, is a *woman*. And there's no rottener thing lives than a man who will sit back and fatten off a woman!"

Wayne's frenzied tirade seemed to slip by the captain somehow, for all its rancor. Mockford's face was still the puzzled face of a man busy probing for something underlying. Staring straight into the burning eyes, he might have been reasoning over the matter of a rabbit that had turned on a bloodhound, or a mouse gone vicious over its toying—"You talk as though you *owned* this craft," curiously.

In the dead, close stillness it came—quite simply, with a delicacy wholly shattering: "I do."

It seemed something jolted visibly through the captain's body.

Wayne was fumbling in his breast.

"Here are her papers, running to me from Tait & Brady."

Everything else had cleared from Mockford's eyes now. In the light of the lamp, the pupils flared. To Wayne it was like looking through the tiny lenses of a camera, looking through into a menacing flare of incandescent green. The arms fell unfolded.

"Ye're never goin' to have her," in deadly menace. "So long as she floats this craft is mine. Git for'ard quick," Mockford commanded in a low, still voice, and added, "while ye're able. I'll tend to you, later!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE RIVALS.

MORNING saw Wayne tense, expectant. He had not slept. He could reach no conclusion as to what action Mockford would take save that it would be evil. The night had shown him how puny his papers of authority would be under all the circumstances. In port it might have been a different matter. But at sea the captain was supreme over all save, perhaps, in case of actual crime. Meanwhile, down aft, he knew the day had begun drunk for all hands.

About nine, Wayne watched Mockford and the mate come on deck. Following after Mockford came certain of the crew to whom he gave curt, sullen orders. These moved on the hold, with a strange alacrity; and curiosity for a moment overcame Wayne's tenseness.

The hatches came off. Two men went below and, from the load, began forking fish on deck. Two others forked these overside into a dory.

Wayne got on his feet, staring confusedly. The procedure was so unheard-of that it seemed he must be asleep. He went aft. He snatched at the arm of one of the men busily pitching fish over into the dory.

"What does this mean?" he called out sharply. "What are you doing with these fish?"

"Cappin says the run's off. We're tradin' our shares in—for supplies." The men kept on in high glee.

"But, good Lord! You can't do that! What about the rest of the fish?"

The man jerked a thumb over his shoulder at the captain. Mockford's face, turned on Wayne, seemed set in a cold, brooding menace.

"I'll be responsible for 'em. I want to clean out your craft. I'm goin' to turn her over to you—when I get through with her."

Wayne turned away, sick at his own helplessness. The dory was loaded and

sagged away—to the French bark—and another took her place.

All forenoon, trips were made in increasing high spirits following entertainment on the bark. Wayne suffered acutely. Every fish taken was like taking an actual piece of his flesh. He saw Margaret Mendeth's run, provided for at such cost to all, worse than thrown away. And, too, there was the matter of the *Enchantress*. What had Mockford meant?

At noon a calm befell. Wayne sat up in the bows staring ahead. And a revel of curious distinction had taken up its beginnings in the after cabin. Sitting in the luminous-silver glow up forward, Wayne suddenly knew his tenseness of the morning to be back. Everything within him formed one taut-strung—*waiting*. He could not explain it. The revel back aft was beginning to throw off the novices. Four of the crew had lurched forward, and Wayne was conscious of an ensuing odd activity down in the forecabin. Wayne twisted his hands—and waited.

A little later a couple of sailors' bags flirted up out of the forecabin to land clumsily on the deck—and then two more. The crew might be planning to desert. Down aft a similar thing was happening. Wayne watched helplessly. Tense, he waited.

The sun began going down with the mystery unsolved. And swift behind Wayne's ear came a furtive voice, the voice of the cook:

"Better try and look out for yourself, sir. Cap'n's going to fire her." He was gone.

Realization burst full in Wayne. Moving swiftly, unswervingly, he made aft and down the companionway.

He might have been in the cabin of an ancient Roman galley. There was a corresponding suggestion of revelry—although coarse, beautyless. The traditional big, raw beastliness represented by these men was ungentled by trapping

or adornment. Mockford himself might have been a Roman overlord—in his own place. The cabin was stripped of personal belongings. There was broad confusion.

Wayne stared straight into the black eyes flickering triumphantly with hatred.

"What are you going to do?" he asked.

"I'm makin' my farewells to this craft." A deep, somber shadow, as though of actual pain, shot into the eyes. For an instant it seemed the man might almost have been making farewells to a beloved thing in the flesh. "I'm makin' my farewells before I gives her up."

"But I'm her owner, and——"

"Ye'll never have her!" Mockford's face knotted in a sudden fury. "No man shall have her, least of all you!"

The two faced each other—tense, inimical—rivals.

"But you *can't* destroy her!" It came in a high-keyed impotent cry. Every impulse of Wayne's new-found life was now hinging on the *Enchantress*. With the craft destroyed, and the run lost, even if he got away with his life, what would be left? He turned frantically to the ring of soddenly attentive faces.

"Listen!" he cried out. "I'm owner of this craft; Mendeth & Co. are charterers. You men can't see this thing done!" He halted confusedly before the grinning, sottish masks. "These people who have staked so much on this are women—can't you see? *Women!* And I'm calling on any of you that are men to help me prevent this—this—Ah-h-h!" He threw up his hands in misery, disgust, despair. He was seeing Oehlman—uncanny, remote, a detached Polar Bear on an ice floe; he was seeing the grinning, apelike Skeemo; he was seeing the huge cockney—gross, swinelike in drink; and hopelessness choked him.

Then, "Listen!" he shouted again. "There's money!" To see here and there a gleam of real interest heartened

him—and sickened him. "I can give you more money than Mockford ever saw, if—"

At this, fury burst in the listening captain. He drove at the man before him like a thunderbolt. The mate attended him.

Wayne was back forward.

He was lying prone on the deck, and he was almost completely out of himself. His face was in the scuppers, and deep within him, effectually sapping his remaining consciousness, was a slow dripping hatred of the man back aft that would never cease. In that moment his own clean manhood wandered, unseated, like a faring spark.

And then some one placed big arms about him and picked him up, some one not yet familiar. And another figure, looming huge in the spectral glow of the halyard light, was climbing over the *Enchantress'* rail from some craft below.

Slowly Wayne's eyes cleared of their horrors in a vast wonder.

"Calder," he whispered in awe. And then, "Dave! Oh, Dave!" he cried out on a great breaking note. "Dave, help me, will you? Things are—are getting me down!"

He was clinging to Calder's arms, shivering ceaselessly; and on a big impulse of protectiveness Calder hugged him to his breast in big, strong arms a swift moment, and said:

"Ye're all right, sir. Jest grab hold on yerself a second!"

Wayne struggled mightily with the things within him—fought desperately for control—bit through his lips. He was hearing Dave but distantly:

"Here's Big Alf wi' me, sir," indicating the great figure bulking in the obscurity. "Hagar Mendeth sent we t' look ye oop. At St. Pierre they said ye'd shipped along o' Mockford's cook. And we jist made de fleet dis evenin'."

Now Wayne was—Wayne.

"Quick, Dave!" he commanded. "Mockford is destroying the *Enchantress* and the crew are deserting!"

The three went aft. A thread of smoke was ascending.

Happenings aft were brief. Dave and Alf fell upon the growing blaze in the captain's bunk. In a sort of wild, animal frenzy accorded by unexpected help, relief, Wayne went Berserk. In inconceivable tenacity he devoted himself to the man Mockford, became a swift, lightninglike assailant, no more to be grasped than flaring, whipping flame, an assailant that leaped swiftly, drove surely and sprang away, never ceasing.

Dazed and confused by the sudden turn of things, Mockford cowered. In his assailant, now, he was encountering forces he could not understand, and finally Wayne reached him like a missile, and clung deathlessly—until Dave tore him away.

Quiet came at length—thick, motionless, panting quiet. It marked exhausted depletion of badly beaten-up men. Two of them were bound and lying near the companionway.

Battered and spent, Wayne held yet within him a secret uplift that was regal. Ah, how good it was to be justifying himself! He had endured long and courageously; he had borne without a murmur; he had fought—and he had won. Up on deck, passing forward with Dave Calder's powerful arms supporting him tenderly, his mind knew its first content for weeks. He had overcome Mockford and it was going to be forever. He was now in control of his own craft, and with Dave to help him he would put this run over or die trying. Already could he see it—the great feat of his successful return. And the girl? Would it not overwhelm her? Would she not recognize his vastly changed worth? Would she not encourage him, help him, bear with him—until he should be free?

CHAPTER IX.

THE JOLT OF STRYCHNIA.

IN Harbour le Grand Margaret Mendeth knew times, even in the midst of her intolerable labors, when all her grim resoluteness of purpose would melt and flow swiftly out of her heart while she surrendered herself to thoughts of—love. Day after day, for the most part, she kept recollection of Wayne as completely out of her thought.

And then in a moment of dead weariness, with her forces relaxed, Wayne would suddenly invade her mind again, and half despairingly the girl would give herself to it, would live again, in a very passion of recollection, every little detail of their acquaintance.

As time went on, these little periods grew more and more frequent until at length she found herself trying even to excuse Wayne. When she allowed herself to think, she *knew* with every impulse of her nature that the man had real fiber in him, real worth. She wondered about his disappearance. Something told her he had not returned to his own country. Sometimes she felt her mother knew more about Wayne than she did herself—a strange thought which of course she dismissed.

The girl could not interpret Wayne's having left Harbour le Grand, but she knew that he would return. His wife was still in the settlement, having stayed on when Wayne failed to take the steamer. And she, of course, would not linger if Wayne had gone for good. And here a great wave of outrageous compassion for Wayne would break the girl.

Then one day his wife came to see Margaret. And, following that call, affection for the Wayne of any phase turned rather bitter.

Floss LaRue was finally leaving Harbour le Grand.

The weeks in Newfoundland had been hard on Floss, been too much for her

in fact. She had gone through the men of the fish companies with neatness and dispatch. One of the younger office men had served fairly well, but she had walked and motor-boated to desperation. As she put it, "I'm as fed up on salt water as if I'd gone down with the steamer." As for the village, a place without even a drug store, a place in which for a woman to enter a barber shop was tantamount to her confessing deepest infamy, a place where a movie was a mere incredible rumor—was no place for her. She was going to pieces in it. Her hair was already a wretched, rag-ended wreck; the cigarettes caused her temperamental revulsion; and she was leaving the country flat rather than clothe her limbs in the loathsome old black casings they called hose.

Making her call on Margaret Mendeth, Floss laid aside, for certain reasons, her near-genuine manner of the high world. For reasons, she wished to appear in the natural raw rôle of her own caste, ungilded but convincing. In fact, Floss let herself go.

"I thought you'd be glad to know I'm leaving to-day on the steamer," she began, and she inflected her remark to mean just that. "I'm going to beat it—ooze along—buzz off!"

Margaret Mendeth made a scarcely perceptible bow.

"You are quite right," she responded, with equally significant inflection. "I am glad to know it. You will be far more comfortable in your own country—and environment."

"Yeah—meaning my own gang. Right-o! I had intended to stick it out and wait for my husband to get back, but as time goes on the chances are looming too large; they rilly are." A pause in which Floss' exquisite violet eyes measured the other with faintly smiling malice. "You know I don't like to think of this place and winter—this place and winter, and—*me*. I'm afraid

walruses and me'd never be shipmates. And as for polar bears, I don't mind an occasional specimen smeared on the valspar in one's own boudoir, but I'm not keen for them frisking round the dooryard. I'm crazy about it all here, of course, but when it comes to zoo props, and who decorates who, if you get me, I have my reticences, I rilly do."

The girl before her held herself courteously, making no noticeable return in either manner or speech.

"And I thought, too, you'd be willing to give Jerry a message from me, if you'd be so——"

"I'm sorry," the other cut in quietly, "but it is not at all likely that I shall see your—your husband, if, indeed, he returns to Harbour le Grand."

"Oh, there's nothing to that," lightly. "You'll see him, all right. You know he slipped down to Song Pierre to lay in a few drinks to make up for lost time. But he'll come back here all right—to you."

"Nevertheless, I think you had better not intrust your message to me."

"Well, I'll just take a chance. You see, he claims he doesn't remember all the points of the 'Romantic Affair,' as the front pages had it. Jerry *wouldn't*, once he gets all set for the night. I'll just pass you the facts—I know you're interested in him—and when you give him my message, perhaps you can advise him." Floss eyed the other shrewdly. She wasn't thinking of Jerry. The female in her resented this woman furiously. She wanted *her* to know the story.

Margaret Mendeth had hesitated, the merest fraction of a second. Some unaccountable impulse in her wanted to listen; her love wanted to torture itself, as it were, with the facts of Wayne's New York life, of this wild episode in it.

"I still think——" she began.

"Well, it won't do you any harm to

listen a bit. You see, it was like this: Jerry Wayne never knew how to pick his crowd. He always liked his reputations a bit gamy, but after the first few months, the gang began to swarm all over him. I'd always liked him all right, and he was a fairly decent boy sober, if you could ever catch him at it, so I thought it would be a charity to take him in hand." Floss' eyes narrowed reflectively on the tip of her cigarette. "And it's been some handful," fervently. "When he's lit he's a downright road machine, sister, and to look after him right you've simply got to order out the all-night shift."

Now the half-veiled eyes were on the other shrewdly and Margaret's little recoil did not escape them.

"Sometimes he gets sick," in nonchalant brutality. Floss jammed out her cigarette, and ran on chattily. "And listen here, if ever you're round when he gets sick don't work your gas meter overtime making him hot coffee. Just slip a jolt of strychnia into his arm—strychnia agrees with him."

Opposite, Margaret Mendeth's eyes had widened.

But Floss was running on carelessly enough.

"Well, came the night, as the subtitles say, and nothing would do but some one get married. So we volunteered. Jerry was crazy about it, and I"—a little compact pause—"I didn't have the heart to say him nay.

"Jerry disappeared right after." Silence. "He might have dropped off, for all anybody knew." Silence. "I went to live with his uncles." Floss looked up, slyly. "Uncle James and Unce Jarvis are about as frolicsome as two sinbuncoed souls gypped out of Paradise. Jerry wired for a bunch of money which disclosed his hide, and the greatest joy his uncles ever knew was kissing me farewell."

Floss rose.

"My appearance on Jerry's scene

hasn't been any riot, and I'm quitting. For me, it's back to the uncles rather than the polar bears and walruses—I know them slightly better. But just tell Jerry this, will you? Just say that when he finds this place a bit too chilly, to head for New York. Tell him he has my solemn promise he'll find New York quite warm—regardless of the calendar.”

Floss departed.

Behind her the girl stood still enough, but she was stirred tremendously by emotion. First the things elemental in her, things of fierceness and fire, sprang up hot and swept her. The knowledge that she could have killed this gilded woman with her bare hands for being Jerry Wayne's wife frightened her. The knowledge, too, that, after all, she had loved him so fiercely, loved him still, alarmed her. It was too terrible.

A little, and things subsided a bit. Her present state of mind would never do; life was not successfully compounded so. She pressed her hands to her face; fought it all down.

And now the Newfoundlander super-vened. Margaret Mendeth held within her all the Newfoundland outporter's reverence for the sacred rite of marriage. It was the spirit of her mother that moved within her now, equally potent as the other. For human beings to treat lightly the holy office of matrimony, to defile its sacred ritual and make mock of it, filled her with perplexed awe.

The unpleasant pictures of Wayne which the girl had so craftily worked into her talk came back to her mind. The parties of orgiac laxity—they revolted her so! Wayne's helpless, boyish drunkenness roused a fury of maternal compassion. And the “jolt of strychnia”—ah! this hurt her terribly.

Margaret moved over to the great fireplace and rested her head broodingly against the mantel. Why should this man have come to Newfoundland to wreck her own life with his trail of

weaknesses? Why? So long as he had been a mere heedless boy she could steady him with her own strength, could bring him through. But he had wrecked himself, and her, so hopelessly! And this other woman——

In spite of everything her first bitter turmoil was back with the girl at the mantelpiece; hot bitter wrath, hatred, raged within her. And now against the man alone.

CHAPTER X.

THE “ENCHANTRESS” RETURNS.

WEEKS overdue, the *Enchantress* sailed into Harbour le Grand one morning in November. It was clear. There was sharp frost in the air. The heath and bracken on the headlands showed red and brown and black. There had been considerable snows. There had been two piercing days.

The *Enchantress* was undermanned. Some of her crew had considered it expedient to stay at sea for a while, and had deserted the *Enchantress* to scatter among the fishing fleet. The captain and mate were still on board, but this pair had been kept in close quarters by the great Alf, together with the quiet, outraged Calder and the owner, Wayne, who had somehow become almost permanently bloodthirsty.

But undermanned as she might have been, the *Enchantress* was back with almost a full run of fish. They had struck a place in the Whale Deeps where the fish clamored for the hook in exhaustless hordes day after day. It had been Wayne's wish, fought through by no means gently, that they finish the run, and no man in all the crew had more fish or more labor to his credit, than had Wayne. The crew seemed a bit afraid of him. Most of them knew of certain high-powered possibilities in him, following that fight in the after cabin.

With the *Enchantress* making in, Wayne stood forward watching the

familiar landmarks of the town. Clean in his mind, after the weeks of absence, were coming the various circumstances that had attended his departure. Floss LaRue? Was she still in Harbour le Grand? Hagar Mendeth. He could see her still, enthroned in her chair recounting her life like some impressive sybil of all time. Old Batron, Dave's wife, Hitty Crowe. These last came before him with indescribably tender appeal. Thought of Hitty Crowe dragged in Mockford; it was like a stench in his nostrils. Mockford and his precious mate were safeguarded down below, until Wayne could get the magistrate from Gannet Bay to take charge of things.

The *Enchantress* veered a bit and the Mendeth Company buildings swung into view. And now the one thought that Wayne had kept from entry with the others struggled wistfully into being—Margaret Mendeth. It confused him because he was not able to place her in things, to know how she would receive him. It seemed that he would willingly die to be able to go to her free, sure of her welcome, but—

Leaving Big Alf and the cook in charge, Wayne went ashore with Dave. More than all else just now did he want to get "home" to Dave Calder's. At the last he ran along the little lane, Dave good-naturedly at his heels. In Mrs. Dave's kitchen—clean, trig little place, with its ruddy fire and its pork frying for breakfast, Wayne reverted hopelessly to the young boy—*home* for about the first time in his life.

"Dave!" he cried out, gayly enough but with a catch in his voice. "Can I kiss your wife?" He caught the furiously blushing little creature and kissed her cheek. Dropping her, flustered and happy, he raced upstairs. His tiny room was as he left it—the book of Newfoundland heroes, his own things. A fire was crackling in the airtight stove, and a great wave of something near con-

tent smote him. He went to a window, and stared out reflectively. And now at prospect of all that might lay ahead his heart beat nervously. If the girl would only be generous toward him, he would clean up everything else in his life with the courageous onslaught of a battling warrior.

The day came when the *Enchantress'* crew was being paid off.

Moving along down the lane to the Mendeth office, Wayne's heart was thudding with sickening nervousness. Not yet had he encountered Margaret Mendeth. Old Batron had handled the catch, with Dave Calder reporting to the office when necessary. He, himself, had attended to the matter of Mockford and the mate. He had dispatched a man along the coast to Gannet Bay and from there they had located the district magistrate who was to arrive to-day to take Mockford into custody.

Meanwhile, Big Alf still guarded the two, and for some reason or other seemed to hold the captain in ever-increasing hatred. Wayne himself the great, silent Newfoundland seemed to have accepted into the depths of a strange affection that nothing could change. And Wayne was conscious of it. He wished wistfully at times that the big chap's feeling might communicate itself to his sister.

And now he was at the office, and he paused for a moment.

He opened the door and went in. The odd and not unpleasant smell of the place, of stove heat and varnish and books, struck him with an almost overwhelming feeling of homesickness. But swiftly his eyes went to the desk along by the counter. The girl standing there quietly kept on talking to her fisherman with never a visible sign that she had noted Wayne's entrance. But at sight of her, Wayne's heart executed an unbearable jolt. He wanted to vault over that counter, wanted to walk straight up

to her and take her forcibly into his arms.

Instead, he walked quietly to his place down the rail at the end of the line. Before his turn came, though, his heart had been sped up so that it tired him. How would she meet him? He imagined a thousand little variations.

The man ahead of him disposed of, their eyes met, and Wayne *knew*, knew with the sudden cold relaxing of his every fiber. The girl before him was Mendeth, Ltd., cold, remote, impersonal, and he was her employee. Not the flicker of an eyelash hinted at anything different.

"I have been wanting to see you."

Wayne's heart leaped hopefully, but her next words laid all that.

"Will you kindly explain your grave interference in the run of the *Enchantress*?" With the return of the vessel, Hagar Mendeth had told her daughter something of her request to Wayne—of the mission she had imposed on him, but the girl's mood now was simply to—hurt.

Wayne's eyes were meeting hers with something of their own coldness.

"I did it for the success of the run."

"The success of the run was not a matter of your concern, even though you had been capable of judging such. By what authority did you take it upon yourself to confine the captain and mate and bring them into port in captivity?"

"I suppose it was in the interests of law and order," levelly.

"But you were not qualified to enforce 'law and order.' You know nothing, of course, of marine law of authority. The captain of a vessel is absolute authority on his own craft over every other authority there is, save in certain very grave instances. To interfere is mutiny."

Something in Wayne was hardening to steel.

"His was one of those grave offenses."

"What was the nature of it?"

He could not tell her that he himself owned the *Enchantress*, had bought the craft to place at her disposal, and that Mockford had tried to destroy her. He brushed back his hair with a swift, impetuous gesture. "I cannot tell you." The hard steel within Wayne seemed to have turned white hot, at her unconscious cruelty, at thought of Mockford and all he had suffered at his hands.

"I cannot believe that this thing, whatever it was that Captain Mockford did——"

"He was drunk, and his lid was off!"

His abruptness startled her. Strangely, now, she resented his own coolness, his hardness. Her impulse was to cut deep.

"I realize that you are an authority—a connoisseur on such. Do you mean that the change in a man can be so great?"

"Yes. A man drunk is his real self, with all repressions aside."

"You must release Mockford."

"I will never do it!"

It was quite pitiable. They stared direct into each other's eyes, the great all-possessing love in each for the other for the moment obliterated.

"You must release him," the girl drove on, "although I can understand your summing up of a man drunk. Your wife has quite exhausted you to me. She explained your drinking to me at some length—even to the detail of her treating you with a jolt of strychnia in the arm." She turned away.

Wayne fell lax. Something like sickness flushed through him—deepest sickness. That this girl could want to hurt him so made every other consideration fall apart in shabby flimsiness. And she had shamed him, too. He could never look into her eyes again with the clean confidence of old.

And suddenly—Wayne felt that he *cared* no longer.

He took the money she was holding out. He was smiling strangely, and a sudden fear and remorse seized the girl.

"Do you know what I'm going to do with this money you give me?" He had grasped wickedly at the one thing that would sting her most.

She shook her head, her eyes wide.

"I'm going to buy a drink with it—a great, big, glorious one. It's going to be the Capitoline Hill in Harbour le Grand. And, so far as I can see, beyond that there's but one thing left for me to do in Newfoundland." To the girl it seemed his brown eyes had turned uncannily red. "It's your friend Mockford. If I can but put over what's on my mind for him, I can forgive this country everything—even you!"

He went out. He passed along to the village up at the head of the harbor, his face frozen into the sick, white grin which he bore away from his interview with Margaret Mendeth. But there was no mirth in him. He was tired, sick, hurt somehow, to the bottom of his life.

It was cold.

In an hour the wind off the sea had taken on an oddly bitter chill. All about him the land seemed to have succumbed, to have given in before the approach of inexorable dissolution. The water swayed on past him black and chill; the shriveled heath and herbage huddled stark among the rocks; in all things was a hopeless shrinking before the threatening desolation of winter which might be around the corner of but a single day.

In Thaddy Bragg's little place a brave little kerosene lamp lit up a crudely inked sign in the window:

Soup to-night.

The year was dead in Newfoundland. There remained but the burying, in its eternal shroud of white.

A half hour and Wayne was back in his room at Dave Calder's. On the lit-

tle bureau were two quarts of whisky, smugly contraband in the well-ordered honesty of the tiny room.

Wayne tossed his jacket upon the bed, and ripped off his collar. He poured himself a full tumbler of the whisky and looking up, faced himself in the little mirror. For a second, a weird arrow of sinister interest speared its way even into the numb lethargy of his spirit. His face looked back at him as though it might be forty years old—a hard, lined face, somber burying ground of youth, in which the eyes flared resentfully.

And staring into his own eyes, a great surge of hopeless loneliness caught him so that he cried out—gripping his throat to shut it off. The tumbler of drink went down on the table, and Wayne's arms went up across his stinging eyes.

The little spark of inner strength lit in St. Pierre had suddenly flared bravely. Drink would not help the hopelessness that stared back at him from those eyes. It was not drink he wanted—he wanted only love—

With a fierce gesture the liquor went out the window, smashing among the rocks.

Wayne flung himself across the bed, his head in his arms.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BEAUTIFUL CITY OF GOLD.

IN the early morning Dave Calder was hurriedly bringing his boarder awake, sitting on the side of the bed, shaking him to consciousness.

Disheartened, weary, Wayne came back as though from a long way.

"What's the matter?" he asked at length drowsily.

"Mockford's loose, sir. He's got away."

Wayne's mind shot clear. He sat erect. Then:

"What do they know about it?"

"He near took de calaboose apart in

de night, sir. It all started with Big Alf. For some reason Alf's got after de cap'n like a crazy Husky dog. He came down there late last night and tried to git in at Mockford, sir. He would have tore him up. It took six men t' git him away from de calaboose winda. It was only when the magistrate coom down dat dey could git him t' leave. Alf's afraid o' de magistrate. But Mockford was scared white at it all, sir. Big Alf has always hated Mockford, but somethin's happened to set Alf after him since we coom back."

Wayne felt himself stringing suddenly tight. At thought of Mockford's escaping him, the horrible things in him that he had known at sea, the wolfish things that had so amazed him with their elemental ferocity, were being unleashed anew.

The two were downstairs now and Dave was slipping into his reefer.

Wayne reached for his own coat and cap hanging behind the kitchen door.

"Where do they think Mockford is?" he asked.

"Lord knows, sir. Thaddy Bragg's dory is gone from where she was up on de shore, but it's been blowin' a gale about all night, and Mockford nor no odder man would want to start out o' dis harbor last night."

Outside, Wayne stood a still moment in the wind. It seemed to press his faculties in upon himself. He could think. And oddly he found his mind completely filled with Hitty Crowe. He recalled vividly now what had been but a trifling incident of the day before. Hitty had been passing along the lane from the store when the party bodyguarding Mockford had come ashore. The man, albeit sullen and evil, was traveling along decently enough, but the girl approaching them seemed to go mad with sudden fear.

It was not the still, blanched terror of the mentally poised. It was, instead, the wild, crowding, huddling terror of

a timid animal creature before one that preys—it recalled forcibly to Wayne's mind the girl's terrifying experience with Mockford up on the moor. Big Alf had left Mockford's side and gone to the girl immediately. But Hitty had fled before his uncannily searching gaze. Her big protector had followed determinedly. Wayne was recalling it all clearly. Hitty would have been unable to hold out forever against the earnest questioning of the big mute, and eventually she must have told him.

The course of things had unfolded so clearly, so naturally in Wayne's mind that he knew he had guessed the truth.

The morning light had grown. Now, in the east, the sun pierced through the wind-torn wrack like an eye. And with it into Wayne's mind came a streak of light that he felt to be inspired: Big Alf was the keynote of this situation—Wayne did not know how or why, but things within told him he was right.

Wayne wheeled and left the shore. He made direct for the Mendeth place. On the threshold he opened the door and went straight in. He looked up into the wide, surprised eyes of Margaret Mendeth.

"I wish to see your brother," Wayne announced.

"But that is not possible." The surprise grew.

Wayne's hands tightened on his cap. "Let us be exact. I shall not leave until I have seen him."

Hagar Mendeth had entered and stood silent by the door.

Her daughter turned to her. "He wishes Alf." Then, to Wayne: "You evidently wish to connect him in some way with Captain Mockford. You would do very wrong. We have planned to keep this morning's happenings from him——"

The door from the kitchen opened, and the great mute stood in the doorway. His eyes were locked in Wayne's as though he had been summoned.

Wayne never considered the oddity of it. He simply spoke naturally into the questioning face.

"Mockford is gone," he announced, with a simple gesture of finality.

He stared a moment in wonderment. Alf's face had become the face of another creature. A great animation leaped into it, twisted it into a vast questioning. Then it settled into an ominous mask, all but the eyes, and the big chap turned swiftly toward his coat hanging just beyond. Watching him, Wayne was mumbling to himself, awe-struck: "He's got it! Jove! he's got it!"

Two minutes later they were out in the road, Wayne hurrying along after the mute rapidly. At the turn down to the shore, however, the big leader, to Wayne's amazement, kept on straight ahead. Far along, unerringly as a bloodhound, he swerved from the road and breasted the upland, up, up, gained the top; set out over the flinty, frozen moor, in the direction of Galtus. Far along, in a labyrinth of gullies and ravines, Wayne lost him.

The bright sun, swinging around that morning to shine full into the crevasse in the cliff that was Galtus, had brought to the people of the place not cheer but rather deep apprehension—fear.

It was like this: In those first days of piercing cold a week or so ago, the frost and ice had sunk deep all along the margin of the moor up atop the cliffs, and the ensuing light snow had helped pack it in. The unusual thawing and freezing that followed had split great fissures along the edges of the cliffs, crumbled them as it were. This morning the sun, with its warm, melting rays, was an ominous factor, as Galtus knew of old.

By noon the northern cliff wall where the sun shone directly on it had begun to manifest a threatening activity. At various points, little slips and slides had

started, playfully, at the touch of that warming sun. These moved merrily along down, to clog and pile up upon the solid obstructions. Sometimes a single loose rock would detach itself mischievously and go pelting down the cliff side, would bound far off from some ledge in a great arc, and far below the water of the gut would receive it with a greedy little gulp.

Aside from the uneasy awe this condition always created in Galtus, there was little general danger. Galtus had not built itself along on the north side of the gut where, in winter, the sun smote full on the cliffs. Since the avalanche of '96 across there, scarcely a half dozen cottagers had ventured back, and these were in secure slopes with the possible exception of old Crowe's, Hitty Crowe's grandfather, and this was now empty and boarded up.

It was at noon that things happened.

Watchers across the harbor on the village side saw a man appear suddenly from out the little boarded-up cottage of Hitty Crowe. He stood one still moment in the little slanting clearing, staring down the path below. Well down this trail another man had appeared, a huge being against the sun-smitten shale and rock, who was climbing swiftly upward toward the other on easy, bounding feet like a panther's. To the watchers, the man above began acting queerly. He seemed casting about him wildly, frenziedly, for a way of escape. And there was no way but *up*. He turned suddenly and ran up among the tiny draws and ravines like some frantic goat.

The pursuer, Big Alf, made up after him with little agile, bounding leaps. The cliff here took on a sheerer front. And this the great Newfoundlander went swarming up with a lithe fluidity that was astounding. Climbing with hands, feet and powerful arms, there were times when, apparently flat to the rocks, he flowed up the face of the cliff

like nothing so much as a great vampire bat. It was uncanny. Up above, Mockford was clambering, stumbling madly, making little mindless, uncalculated rushes here and there.

Down across the gut, people were out again everywhere now. Some had climbed to vantage points up the opposite cliff side. There was no mistaking the grim drama being enacted across. To watch the frantic little fleeing dashes of the maddened Mockford, here, there, everywhere—and below, the steady mounting of the great black-bat figure that flowed on upward steadily, implacably, with never a halting, never a miscalculation, brought a chill sickness, a cold, shivering terror.

And now the watchers stirred in great awe. Well along the cliffside, seaward from the pair, stones began rolling downward. A little section of the upper cliff margin slid off with a distant roar.

Mockford spreadeagled against the walls of a tiny little ledge, hopeless of egress as a niche of steel, seemed to stare about him despairingly. He edged along and made to leap. And the bat figure slid up over the ledge and caught his leg.

There was a moment when the watchers stationed about the cliffside across might have been so many rigid statues riveted to pinnacles. Awe-struck, stilled, they faced across toward the intense little drama of life and death being enacted in that niche far up in the face of the rock. There was a slow period when the pair clinched motionless together flat on the ledge, gave the impression of a bat in actuality, feasting leisurely.

Now a section of the upper cliff edge a dozen rods along from the pair, cleaved off, folded over and brawled down the face of things like a thunderous, stony cataract.

A moment later, the giant Newfoundlander rose to full height. He swayed

the other aloft in superhuman strength and hurled him from him into a bed of shale.

And the shale started moving. It slid on downward slowly. And the man was buried a moment, and later churned up out of the mass. And he was buried again, and again spewed out—in a little dark-tinged area drabbed with red. Above, Big Alf stood and watched it. Before his interested eyes, Mockford died quite freely—with many a fling of indignant protest—with many a gesture of magnificent agony.

And his big executioner turned to make down.

Above him now, progressing slowly along the cliff margin toward his own section, rocks were letting go, and crumbling earth. Small slips were creeping down.

The great Newfoundlander, however, unhearing, oblivious, clambered on down—loosely, carelessly. And now—

A vast section of rock far up above him, swung leisurely off from the cliff margin, slowly, majestically, crumbled over upon itself roaringly like a giant comber of earth, and dissolved on down toward the depths, appallingly fluid, like torrential lava.

The watchers across sent up a shout that rent the gut of Galtus into vast roaring echoes.

Stolidly oblivious, the man moved on down, picking his way, carelessly enough, ever unconscious.

Then a little advance shower of pebbles rocketed about him. He looked up and back. He saw the entire face of things *swarming* with motion. The whole mountainside seemed rushing down upon him.

The house of Hitty Crowe was just down ahead. In a flash the great man was inside it, the door closed and barred.

In a roaring, brawling chaos, the sweep of things caught the little house, ripped it up by the roots, moved it on-

ward and downward—down to where it triggered a moment upon Eleazer Crowe's little wharf and spilled clumsily into the harbor.

Its occupant broke away from it at length and swam ashore, brokenly,

All day did the man Wayne lurk about the hamlet of Galtus, his face gray, drained, haggard, searching always like some restless specter. They had not found the great mute of Harbour le Grand. And the matter of the man Mockford had slipped clean from Wayne's mind before a graver consideration still: through him Hagar Mendeth had lost her son, and the girl her brother. The knowledge depressed him terribly.

When the land slips had subsided, searchers from the village crossed the harbor to the rescue of the big mute, but he was not to be found. Every foot of shore they searched. The end of the day found them beaten, and the men from Harbour le Grand went home.

In Harbour le Grand it fell to Hitty Crowe to find the man. And the manner of his finding seemed strange beyond all reckoning. Toward nightfall Hitty, involved within herself all day long, left her work half done, put on an old shawl, marched straight out of the yard and made up the lane toward the moor. Ozro, the great gray gull perched watchfully on top of an outbuilding, launched himself heavily into the air to follow in the girl's wake.

It had begun to snow, and up on the moor big feathery flakes sailed through the air leisurely before coming to rest. Off toward the sea the world was a vast gray void, still, mysterious, unfathomable.

Straight the girl went to the little old fisherman's hut on the headland. In the hut she found the man.

There was a single moment with Hitty on the threshold when the fisherman's hut might have witnessed a spe-

cial dispensation of Divine kindness, a little space when perfect comprehension between these two existed without movement, or touch, or speech.

Alf was on the floor, half reclining against the farther wall, his legs outstretched, his arms resting lifelessly on the rough planks, his hands, palms upward, curled up listlessly beside him. His whole body had a broken look; his limbs were disposed oddly like the limbs of a lay figure that had toppled over.

Hitty poised herself in the doorway that one clairvoyant second, and then, the shawl billowing about her, she flew in and knelt by the man on the boards. He turned his eyes up to hers and smiled. The girl knew he was passing out, and a sort of big aching agony took up a crying in her heart. She seized the heavy hand in hers, tried to warm it at her breast.

"Oh, Alf, Alf! Oh, Alf!" Somehow it was all she could say. The shawl had fallen back about her neck. No Madonna was ever more divinely compassionate than was Hitty Crowe in that little hut. Fondling the hand despairingly against her bosom, she suddenly felt it sensate with strength of its own. Slowly the hand moved up to her throat in an old familiar gesture and rested there. And the great creature was smiling at her pleadingly; he wanted her to sing.

The girl swung round to face out the door. And holding the big, heavy hand gently at her throat she began to sing:

'There's a city that looks o'er the Valley of
Death—

And its glories can never be told,
There the sun never sets, and the leaves never
fade,

In that beautiful City of Gold."

A sort of thrill had come in the giant-fingered hand against the girl's tender throat. The eyes of the man on the floor were out the door now, far out,

voyaging sheer and fearlessly through the great, gray blur of world out upon the sea.

The girl's own eyes were burning hungrily on the man's face. He was *understanding* all the things of her voice, all that she felt—the girl knew it.

She choked back the things that threatened her voice. In her tragic office, now, she had no place for them. She pressed the hand tighter and took up the song:

"There, all sickness and sorrow and death are unknown;

There, glories on glories unfold;
There, the Lamb is the light in the midst of
the throne,
In that beautiful City of Gold."

The great bird creature on the floor at her side began walking about restlessly—here and there—without aim. He spread great wings nervously—wide—wider—and folded them again.

The face of the man on the floor was going gray. But he smiled still. And shrill and high in brave exaltation the girl sang on:

"Every lamb you bring to the foot of the
Cross;

Every lamb you bring to the fold;
Shall be kept as bright jewels His crown to
adorn;
In that beautiful City of Gold."

The hand in that of the girl was a hand of lead now, and the great figure crumpled abruptly upon itself. The bird marching hither and thither about the floor gave a great, weird, clangorous cry, launched itself out through the doorway, straight off through the feathery mystery of eternally wayfaring flakes, became a soft, soaring nebula whirling afar—and was swallowed in the vast gray blur.

Hitty cried now—cried for her own loneliness.

Then she got up and came out.

A man was standing by the side of

the doorway—Jerry Wayne. For five minutes had he stood there a sentinel over the thing of life and death. And somehow in those minutes he had been dragged peremptorily close to the heart of things. And he seemed to *see*, anew. Big Alf was symbolic of the country of Newfoundland—a country great, dumb, alone, struggling on in bravery unspeakable, beaten to its knees but never giving in, the heritage of its strength going on and onward, always and forever. In that moment no small part of this same strength entered into the weary spirit of the watcher by the door—to stay always.

Hitty Crowe had given a little unconscious cry, and then:

"Mr. Wayne, sir, poor Alf that was lost—is *found*."

The sublime simplicity of it, the patient acceptance in it swelled an inordinate lump in Wayne's throat. He wanted to take the little creature in his arms as he might a child. But there was the bravery of all life, the bravery of this very same Newfoundland, looking into his eyes from out her own. He fumbled her arm, gently.

"I'll look after things, Hitty," he said gently. "You come on along home."

They traversed the moor, passed down into the village, and on to the Mendeth house. And now, too, the wonderful tenderness and humanity of the country, a loving kindness that held above all things of life, or death, or one's own sorrow were revealed to him in his little companion.

Turning tear-scalded eyes up to his, the girl said:

"Ye're cold, sir. Ye must come in while I make ye tea."

The man was touched beyond all measure. Then he looked in at the lighted Mendeth window. Within, it seemed that all the world he could ever desire, could ever love, held itself waiting.

But he could not come in.

In his room a little later he stood staring out his little window into the obscure world of whirling snow. More deeply moved than in all his life he brooded sorrowfully over the things within him. From the very manner of his own life, how alien had he been to a land such as this! To every one with whom he had come in contact had his own weaknesses brought disaster. And he was learning that the real strength of a man was not a mood of a day, or a month or a year. From that moment

with Big Alf on the hilltop he had come to see that the strength of its men followed the symbol of the country—carrying on steadfastly even to the end. So long as he remained in the country, it was left to him to do the same.

Here, something drifted in upon him as from vague recognition. From far off in the night his nerves brought him a sound of laughter, moving laughter. And it seemed not so derisive, now, as—sorrowful.

Wayne buried his face.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

CHALLENGED.

A CLEAR call came to the man Jerry Wayne. It was all very strange—a challenge, so it seemed, to things deep within him came from the very heart of the land itself. It came to him in the middle of the night, unvoiced, possibly unheard, but he found himself wide awake and knowing that he had been summoned, somehow, knowing it with a deep intensity, and knowing he must prepare himself, must hold himself in readiness.

Meanwhile, straight upon the affair at Galtus, winter had struck hard. All else aside, the country held Wayne prisoner. Overnight, almost, the craftage of an entire coast changed, was brought into winter sanctuary, disappeared well nigh out of existence before the onslaught. Early, the steamer alongshore had been mutilated nicely, creditably, in a small tentative blizzard. There had been no boat for over three weeks.

Wayne bided his time passively enough. Several things contributed to this. Soon after his return from the Banks he had learned that all was not well with Margaret Mendeth and Mendeth affairs. In spite of all, it disturbed him deeply. For this reason he could not chafe at being held in Harbour le Grand inasmuch as it kept him near the

girl, although he seldom saw her. Following that, a certain situation arose concerning the town itself which, notwithstanding all he had been through, he came to watch with the odd feeling that it held some vital hidden significance for himself. The town was coming to be in actual straits—for food, for supplies. This seeped into Wayne's knowledge first from the grave, silent men about the shore. Details he extracted from old Batron; finally from Dave—Dave whose reluctance at telling him bespoke a very real concern underneath.

It struck Wayne with an odd thrill that, innocently enough, Mendeth Company was responsible. It seemed that Mendeth Company had been betrayed by circumstance. The early setting in of winter had caught them with the bulk of their huge holdings unmarketed. The market since had gone to pieces and the house of Mendeth was being reported as well-nigh bankrupt. There was a feeling among outside interests—and, Wayne was beginning to suspect, among the townspeople also—to the effect that Mendeth Company had played the season ill, and it was a feeling by no means kept secret. As a result of all this their credit was completely demoralized. Even the stock in the Mendeth Company store, which fed half the village, had gone un replenished.

Meanwhile Margaret Mendeth, remote, silent, holding her own council, had signified, according to Jethro Batron, that she had a means of changing things for the better after the first of the year—what that means was, she did not say.

And now Christmas was come, and the land was held in what seemed a never-ending fall of snow. Uneasily, Wayne had been questioning Dave Calder for further information of the Mendeths—of the general situation among the villagers.

“Dey’s no change, sir—none at ahl as I knows on. Up to now dere’s been few winters of starvation on dis coast like dey sometimes has up on de West coast, but now dere’s gettin’ to be so much ice ahl along shore it looks like it’s goin’ to be mighty hard sleddin’ gettin’ grub in even when it’s pervided for.”

There fell a deep silence. In a moment Dave looked up. He was grinning uncertainly, now, like a boy.

“But it’s Christmas, sir—did ye not know it? Miss Margaret says everyt’ing will be ahl right by New Year, and, anyhow, we’m always fergettin’ o’ worries at Christmas. Ye better rest content a while. De woman has been countin’ on ye enjoyin’ de Christmas mummerin’ and ahl, sir. Arter dat, we’ll see.”

Gently, that day, it seemed the whole world of sea and sky was being softly exploded into never-ceasing snow. By nightfall the little cottages of the hamlet, reposing in the endless smooth drifts, seemed like the brave little houses on a Christmas card, their roofs smooth-rounded pads of white, their lighted windows gleaming like little red lanterns and sliding long, red arrows out into the whirling, feathery dusk. It held thus for two days.

The “mummering” began on Christmas Eve. To Wayne, it became a thing at once beautiful and pathetic—this

ceremonial impulse of these people toward happiness, toward play. And, too, this one occasion of Harbour le Grand mummering involved him in a strange episode.

The snow had stopped falling just after noon, and by dusk of the short December day the half-buried village became busily alive beneath its soft-lying blanket. The shovelers were out in an army—old men, boys and no small sprinkling of women. And the vast white covering of snow became slit, and trenched, and tunneled with black-running byways, ambling, winding, criss-crossing hither and yon, and resounding gayly with the calls and outcries of the merry crew tunneling vigorously through the depths.

And then the mummings.

Supper was scarce laid in Dave Calder’s kitchen when the door opened to admit the strangest crew Wayne had ever seen. After his first startled moment, his mind flashed back to events of his boyhood, the days of “horribles,” masquerades, all the fantastic fun-making of eager, carefree youth. The individuals of this group were disguised with masks that were simple, homely makeshifts; they were dressed in the only costumes that would be possible of fishermen’s households—in Harbour le Grand. And their antics were possible only to individuals who believe their identities perfectly concealed.

Already was Dave’s wife cutting ginger cake and pouring tea, while Dave, with intuition that might have been uncanny, if things hadn’t apparently been prearranged, sorted out two of the visitors, evidently adults, and jockeyed them into a remote corner by the cupboard where he supplied them with something stronger.

It was at the dance that night that Wayne experienced the incident that was to stir him so deeply.

He did not want to go to the dance. But Dave and his wife seemed deeply

hurt at his refusal so he went along. They set out through the labyrinth of trenches cut through the snow, encountering lantern-bearing "mummerers" and "Johnnyers" on sudden turns, amid squeals and jokes and much laughter.

The dance was in the little school-house. The seats and benches were piled away, and the little place was brave with kerosene lamps of every description.

Four couples were already dancing. These were absorbedly engrossed in this grave business of releasing emotion, the dance being simple figures of an ancient quadrille gone through rigorously and intently, with a prompter. For these preliminaries, two women upon the tiny platform were obligingly furnishing "chin music," a strange, crooning music, the chin being cupped in one hand, the little finger of this hand being vibrated tremolo by the thumb of the other, while the tune was lilted shrilly through the teeth.

A fiddler arrived.

And the dance took on the splendor of an "occasion." For a brief, illuminated moment, a heavy, drab thing that was life in Harbour le Grand split open to release an abandon that was now disporting happily.

Presently, a masked woman, who might have been a girl, stood before Wayne, bowing, he felt, timidly. The women had been selecting their own partners for the most part so the incident went unnoticed. But to Wayne there was something strange, something different about this woman. He had not seen her on the floor before. She wore an old-fashioned bonnet that completely covered her hair; her costume was a dark dress of ancient cut that concealed her figure completely. Couples were forming on the floor and as Wayne stared, the girl held out her arms invitingly.

"Will you put me through?" he

questioned the mask, and the girl nodded.

All through the physical rigor, the rugged abandon of the dancing, Wayne was stilled somehow, was comforted inside, was strangely happy. And the knowledge of this struck him powerfully with its oddity. He could not account for it. In the figures of the dance the girl was in his arms but rarely, but when she was there he seemed to become so warmly content. In his arms she whirled lightly as a feather. Her hands, in cotton gloves, were soft and small.

The last figure was whirling to a close. His partner came into his arms for the last time. It seemed she crept a little closely into his embrace. Vivid things, heady things burst in Wayne.

Eagerly, he gazed after the girl moving across the set. When she came back to him he was going to know the answer.

But the girl did not come back. The figure finished, she slipped away through the crowd.

Wayne felt as if something of tremendous significance had gone from him. And a wild idea had flashed into his mind, so crazy as almost to stun him with its import. He cut through the crowd, almost roughly, and gained the door. Far along the deep trench through the snow he saw a woman's black-clad figure.

Conviction warring with reason, Wayne shouted: "Margaret!"

The figure kept on—vanished in the vague blackness between the drifts.

Sense rushed back. Wayne's inner excitement died out, turned cold. The brightness was gone. He saw, sliding powerfully up nightward on either hand, unutterable wastes of snow that were the mighty bulwarks of Newfoundland.

He plunged abruptly into the dim, white labyrinth, making for Dave Calder's.

To be concluded next week.

A Chat With You

WHO wrote the first story ever published serially in the English language? Also, what was the name of the book?

This is not an intelligence test and these are trick questions anyway, so we will answer them.

The author was Daniel Defoe. The story was "Robinson Crusoe."

There are just three known copies of "Robinson Crusoe" in the original serial form and one of them was auctioned off recently at a high price. It was an alleged newspaper that carried the serial. It ran a full year from the latter part of 1719 till October, 1720. Sometimes it occupied the whole of the paper. A year is a long time for a serial to run. In this magazine we generally finish one in a month. It is doubtful if Defoe received any remuneration for the serial use of his tale. The copyright laws were not so effective in those days.

* * * *

DEFOE has been called "The Father of the Novel." His own life certainly would make an entertaining novel. Well on in middle life, a silent, dark little man, he sat in a house in Bristol listening to a returned Scotch sailor tell about his experiences on a desert island. As he tramped back to his lodgings through the muddy streets of the seaport town, the plan of "Robinson Crusoe" took form in his brain. That night Fate had chosen him to be one of the immortals.

* * * *

TO write really good adventure stories the indications are that a man must have lived adventurously. Defoe certainly had. He had been a secret gov-

ernment agent and a spy. He had written hundreds of political pamphlets under pen names. Politics was a hazardous profession in those days. If you lost, it was not just losing an election; you might lose your head as well. Defoe kept his head but lost his ears. They were clipped off in prison for some political offense. He wrote over his own name other books, some of them not especially edifying. It was the tale of adventure, written in Bristol and pirated by a newspaper that put him in the hall of fame. He probably thought it the least of his works. You can never tell. It had in it, however, the essence of a stirring and adventurous life.

* * * *

THE authors who help to make this magazine have, generally speaking, lived their stuff before they wrote it. Frederick Ferdinand Moore, who gives us the complete novel next week, knows his South Seas—and other places as well. As a cavalryman he saw service in the Philippines. During the World War he served in Siberia. The tale of his adventures would be a good one.

"The Planter at Castle Reef," which appears complete in the next number of POPULAR, is one of the best novels he has ever done. If you know his work at all you know that it is man's stuff. It rings true to the rugged verities of hard life. This tale, which presents a dramatic situation in which lives tremble in the balance, is a breath-taking performance. If you start it you are likely to finish it at one sitting. It stirs and thrills but it leaves a clean taste in the mouth.

HARRY KNIBBS has one of his best novelettes, "A Debt of Friendship," complete in the next issue. Knibbs is another writer with a background of vital experience to draw upon. At different times he has been a telegraph operator, a Harvard student, a penniless wanderer across country, a poet and a horseman. During all these vicissitudes, whether he realized it or not, he was gathering material for the stories he is writing now. One who knows the West from having camped for months under its stars will inevitably write better things about it than one who has seen it only from the windows of a Pullman coach or the porch of an expensive hotel. There is charm, whimsicality and stirring interest in "A Debt of Friendship." It is the sort of story we want to read over again.

WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY, who also appears in the next issue, uses a pen name. Were he to sign his real name you would possibly recognize him as a great football player, a fine oarsman, an amateur boxer good enough to put on the gloves in other days with Jim Corbett, as well as one of the best all-round newspaper men of his generation.

* * * *

THESE are only a few high spots in the next issue of the magazine. The whole number is written by men who know the outdoors and what they are talking about. Furthermore, it is written by men who have the confirmed habit of writing good stories. It is one of the best in a good while. It might be well if you ordered your copy now. It is out next Friday.

THE POPULAR

In the Next Issue, May 5, 1928

The Planter at Castle Reef **CAPTAIN FREDERICK MOORE**
 Novel.

A Debt of Friendship **HENRY HERBERT KNIBBS**

The Passing of Jack Dempsey—Maybe!
 A Boxing Article. **WILLIAM HEMMINGWAY**

Flying Hoofs **CHARLES NEVILLE BUCK**

A Five-part Story—Part III.

Crossroads in Jericho **WILL McMORROW**

A Two-part Story—Part I.

Mr. Brannigan Stubs His Toe **STEWART ROBERTSON**

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A Chat with You **THE EDITOR**

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