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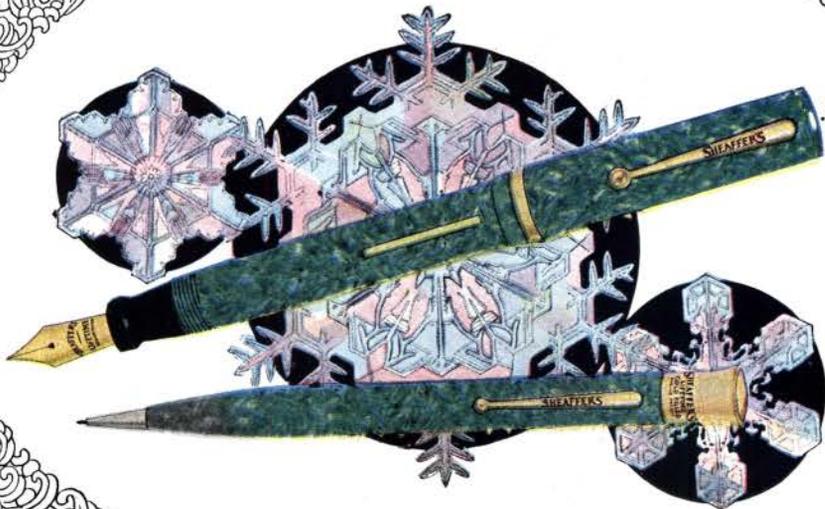


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DECEMBER 1, 1926
VOL. LXVIII
No. 3

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Top-Notch Magazine

T W I C E - A - M O N T H

Vol. LXVIII

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Number 3

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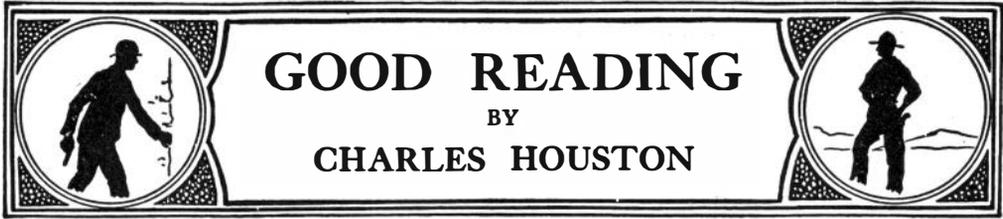
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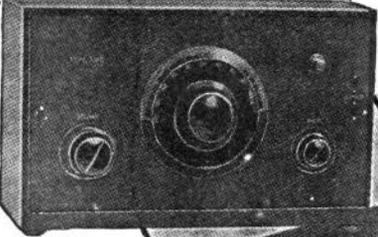
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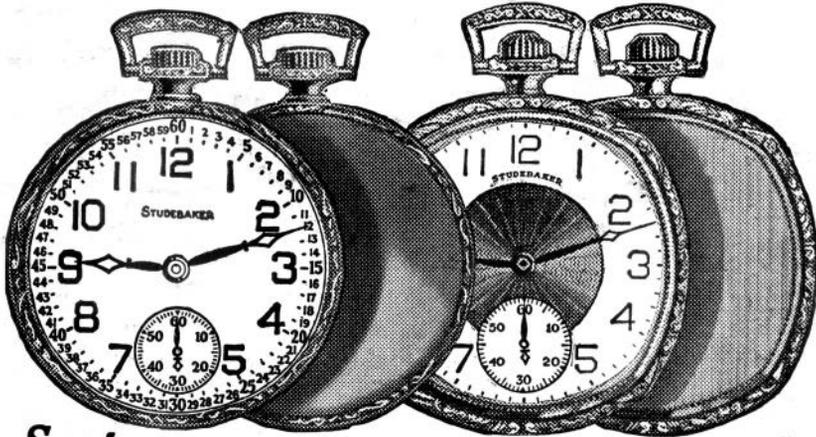
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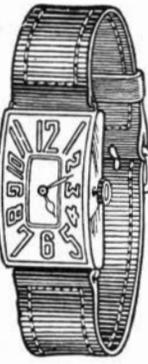
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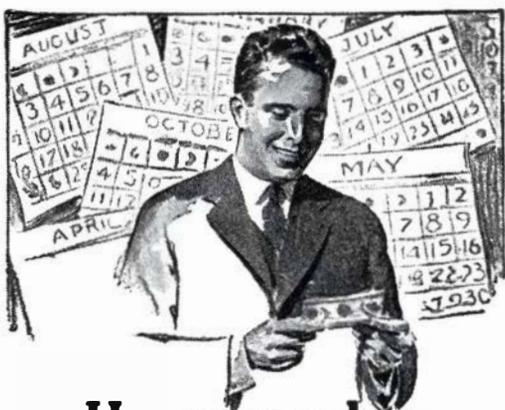
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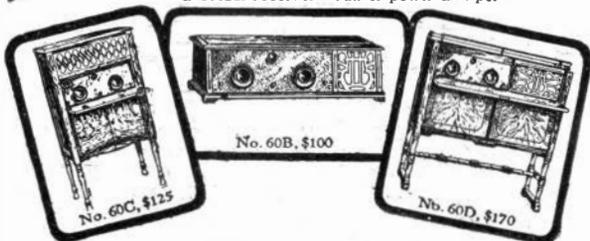
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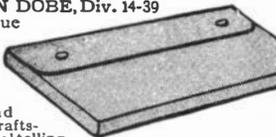
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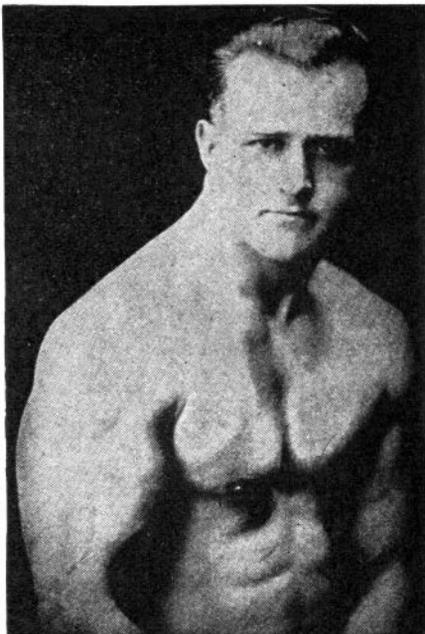
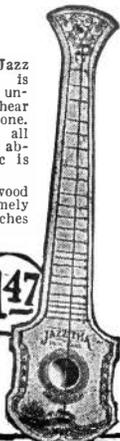
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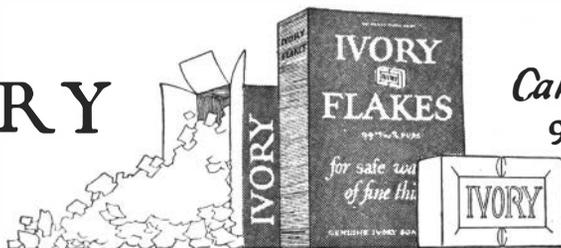


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TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

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The Wonder Workers

By
Ralph Boston



(A COMPLETE NOVEL)

CHAPTER I.

THE BLOCKED TRAIL.

T was a tense moment, fraught with tragic possibilities. There was not much that Jerry Craik could do about it. A startled yell broke from his lips, as the flivver lurched from the trail; then, while it pitched down the precipitous hillside, Craik held his breath and waited for the car to turn a handspring.

There was no time to jump out of the machine. Even if such a move had been possible it would merely have put Craik "on the air" and broadcasted him all over that difficult up-and-down landscape. Clinging to the wheel with a life-and-death grip, he straightened out the flivver as well as he could, braced himself, said his prayers, and even found room in his excited mind for a last, vague thought about the sunrise and the girl.

Craik's topographical troubles began with two tangents and a hairpin turn. The trail had to turn back sharply on itself in order to climb the steep slope; and the way was so narrow that the fenders of the car scraped the wall on one side, while they overhung empty space on the other.

It was early morning when Craik started the ascent. The sun was just coming up, and it was coming up so magnificently that Craik gave it some of the attention which he should have reserved exclusively for the treacherous trail.

Craik was an artist and specialized in sunrises; but this particular upspringing of old Sol from a pink-tinted east into a sky all suffused with color was about the most gorgeous performance of the orb of day that Craik had ever seen.

At the hairpin turn the trail broadened a little, but only for a few rods. As the laboring flivver nosed into the

turn, a staccato note of falling hoofs manifested itself above the wheezy chugging of the motor. Craik had a flashing glimpse of a rider racing past him so close that a stirrup scraped the flivver's side, and the horse's hoofs nicked the running board. This experience was so hair raising that Craik forgot the sunrise.

The rider was a young woman. Her clothes were fluttering about her in the wind of her flight. Her hat was gone, and the rising sun brought out the sparkling glints in her bobbed hair. Those short, flying tresses had the sheen of bronze; they were that particular auburn color which Titian loved to paint.

Not more than three seconds were allowed Craik for his observations. By that time the girl was past the car and taking the straightaway of the down grade, and Craik was past the turn and climbing the straightaway of the up-grade.

Then it was that Craik heard yells above and beyond him, and his amazed eyes beheld four men, mounted and racing toward him. The trail broadened again; and the four men, in single file, flung past the little car. Each rider crouched low in his saddle and gripped a six-gun in his right hand.

Pop! pop! pop! went the guns. Craik saw that the men, from the straightaway above, were shooting into the straightaway below at the girl. So he gathered that here was flight and pursuit, with the girl racing for life down the steep hillside.

The gorgeous sunrise had lost its charm for Craik. The four men, better mounted, were overhauling the girl, and her capture was merely a matter of minutes, unless something intervened that would help her in her extremity.

Then it was that Craik intervened, but not intentionally. Much as he wanted to help the young woman, it was beyond his power to foresee the success of the maneuver which Fate thrust upon him

at that moment. The car left the trail and the upper tangent and, bounding like a frightened antelope, took a short cut to the tangent below.

All the gods of luck were with Craik that morning; for the little machine did not turn the threatened handspring, but remained upright. Shaking, shivering, and hitting only the high spots, it took the clifflike slope on its four wheels and then came to a halt crosswise of the lower trail, tail lamp scraping a rocky wall, and bonnet overhanging a hundred feet of dizzy space. Craik drew a long breath and wondered if he were dreaming. On his left were the four men, their horses rearing back and sliding to a standstill; and on his right was the girl, faring onward at her best speed, her pursuers suddenly blocked by the flivver.

Then it was that Craik realized how he had saved the girl from threatening peril by a perilous accident of his own. The four riders were cursing him furiously for his interference with their plans.

"Git that blamed tin lizzie out of our way!" exclaimed one of the men.

He was a big man in a black-checked flannel shirt, old Stetson, and cowboy chaps. He waved his six-gun menacingly, as he yelled his orders. Craik got out of the car gingerly and stepped away from the yawning chasm.

"You see how it is," he answered; "it's going to take some time and a lot of hard work to get this bus pointed along the trail."

"Y'u done it o' purpose!" declared another of the men.

"Be reasonable, can't you?" protested Craik. "You don't think for a minute that I left the trail up there and took the short cut to the trail down here on purpose. I'm not so crazy as all that. It was an accident."

"Y'u was tryin' to save that moharrie!" said a third of the quartet.

"And he sure made a good job of it!"

grumblingly remarked the fourth member of the party.

All eyes turned to the level desert below. The gray horse which the girl was riding was streaking into the distance, receding toward the sky line and safety under the morning sun.

"What we can do, I reckon," said one of the baffled pursuers, "is to push this blamed old buzz wagon over the cliff and then throw this here cimaron after it. He has cert'nly plugged our game for this mornin,' good and plenty."

Craik reached into the pocket of one of the tonneau doors and took from it an automatic pistol. He was an artist with either a brush or a gun.

"All right," he said genially; "you'll probably 'get' me, but I'll empty a couple of your saddles before you do."

CHAPTER II.

THE ULTIMATUM.

SIX months of studio work in Los Angeles had bleached all the high-sierra tan out of Craik's face. While combing the country on a still hunt for likely marines and landscapes to be transferred to canvas, he wore serviceable golf "knickers." He had on his campaign uniform at the present moment, and the tonneau of the flivver was piled with supplies, a camping outfit, and sketching material. He was hunting pictures, as usual; but—and this was not as usual—on this particular trip he was also looking for a has-been mine that bore the unlovely name of the "Scorpion."

He had all the earmarks of a tenderfoot, as he stood by the stalled car and faced the four baffled horsemen. In spite of the fact that he measured nearly six feet, and had the build and bearing of a champion middleweight boxer, there was a mildness in his blue eyes that gave no hint of the Spartan fibers running through his Craik ancestry. Nevertheless, the caged wild cat was there and watching warily through the

smiling eyes. His threat to empty at least two saddles, if an attack was made on him, caught and held the attention of the four riders. The flashing automatic backed up the threat in a practical way, and the situation in the trail reached a deadlock. Craik leaned back against the side of his car, doubling his right elbow, so that the automatic hung at a "ready," and he took advantage of the impasse to give the girl's pursuers a closer scrutiny.

They were a tough crowd, there could be no doubt about that—rough and grizzled and vindictive, every man of them. Pushing the car over the cliff and then throwing Craik after it would have been merely a recreation for these desert rapsallions; but Craik's coolness and the glimmering automatic gave the horsemen pause.

"Find out who he is, Gordo," ordered one of the four, "and what he's doin' here, anyways."

The man in the checked shirt, evidently the leader, asked Craik about his business.

"I'm an artist," said Craik; "I paint pictures."

This information failed to register. What Gordo and his crowd knew about pictures and picture painters could probably have been checked off at zero.

"Where y'u from?" Gordo demanded.

"Los Angeles."

"What y'u doin' so fur from home?"

"Looking for a desert sunrise that I can put on canvas for a man who is willing to pay fifteen hundred dollars in cash for it."

Silence followed this statement; then the silence was broken by a jeer.

"He's lyin', Gordo," asserted one of the others; "there ain't a hombre in this world fool enough to pay fifteen hundred dollars for a picter of sunup. He's stringin' us."

"If that's over your heads," went on Craik, "try this one: I'm not only looking for a sunrise, but I am also hunting

a played-out mining proposition, known as the Scorpion. It is somewhere on the other side of this hill. Know anything about it?"

Gordo pulled down his brows and turned in his saddle to exchange significant looks with his followers. Evidently Craik had touched a button that gave an electric thrill to the tough quartet.

"Now he's warblin'!" declared one of the four; "now he's gittin' down to cases. Here's where y'u tell him where he gits off, Gordo."

Gordo rode close to the flivver and considered its perilous situation.

"She's got to be straightened out in the trail, that's sure," he decided, "and it's goin' to be a ticklish job. Taranch, you make fast yer rope to that hind wheel. Santos, you tie to one o' them front wheels. When Taranch pulls, Santos, y'u can mebbey keep the machine from goin' over. 'Siwash,' you jest stand ready to bear a hand wherever y'u're needed."

Craik was surprised at this offer to be of service, and he stood to one side and watched sharply, while the operation of straightening the car around in the trail went forward. The work was accomplished successfully; but, when it was finished, Craik discovered that the machine was pointed downhill.

"That's all right, men," he remarked, "only I happen to be bound the other way. If I've got the location right, the Scorpion Mine is on the other side of this hill."

Gordo rode close to him. "I'm givin' y'u a word of advice, *amigo*," said he, "and that's this: 'Fergit all about that Scorpion Mine and go huntin' sunrises. That's why I have aimed y'u down the hill and not to'rd the top. T'other side this hill there ain't a thing for y'u but calamity. Git that—and git it straight."

"This is a free country," protested Craik, "and if I want to go hunting an old mine I am within my rights."

"If y'u got any sense," went on Gordo, with a black scowl, "y'u'll pay attention to what I'm a-tellin' y'u. The buzzards'll git y'u if y'u cross this hill. A scorpion's bite ain't much wussn a bee sting, but there's somethin' a heap wussn a scorpion waitin' y'u at the Scorpion Mine. Why are y'u aimin' to go there?"

"That's my business, not yours," answered Craik, with spirit.

"Y'u'll find I'm makin' it my business," said Gordo. "We have done the right thing by y'u, stranger, straightenin' yer car in the trail and all, but now y'u take my tip, if y'u know when y'u're well off. Keep to the east o' this rise. That's my last word."

Gordo turned his horse. "Ride, hombres!" he called to his men.

Hoofs drummed in the hard trail. Craik stood by the car and watched the four horsemen flicker around the hairpin turn and pass along the upper straightaway. Presently, one by one, they vanished over the crest of the steep hill.

"What in thunder does this mean?" Craik asked himself. "Part of my work in these deserts is to find the Scorpion Mine, and those desert rats can't be allowed to interfere with me. But what's their game? Something's rotten in Denmark," he said, as he got into the flivver and manipulated the self-starter.

He congratulated himself when the pistons took the push, and the engine began to hum. That fall down the mountain hadn't resulted in any very great damage to the car.

"Miraculous, that's what I call it!" Craik was talking to himself. "Didn't even puncture a tire. At the foot of the hill I'll turn around, and then I'll have another try at getting over this grade."

But he changed his plans. At the foot of the slope a voice hailed him from the distance, and he looked around to see the girl on the gray horse galloping toward him.

"Coast is clear, and she's coming

back," Craik told himself. "Fine! Now, maybe, I'll find out just why Gordo and his gang are claiming everything to the west of this rise."

CHAPTER III.

A BIT STAGGERING.

THE gray horse was wheezing painfully when the girl drew him to a halt at the side of the car. His heaving sides were drenched with sweat, and foam flecked his nose and neck. The girl jumped lightly down from the saddle.

"Poor old Poncho," she murmured sympathetically, stroking the animal's neck with a caressing hand. "It was a hard chase we had, and we would have lost out if it hadn't been for the way you blocked the trail." She turned from the horse and gave Craik her full attention. "That was a nervy thing you did, friend," she went on; "I looked back and saw it all. When you jumped that machine off the trail I was sure it was going to be all day with you. But you had it all figured out, I suppose, and perhaps there wasn't as much danger in that performance as I thought. I am certainly under obligations to you, and I came back here to tell you so."

Her eyes were gray, and a warm light suffused them, as she acknowledged her supposed indebtedness to Craik. He got quickly out of the machine and stood beside her.

"I am glad I was able to be of some help to you," he told her, "but you don't really think that I pitched this flivver down the mountainside on a chance that it would land in the lower trail, right side up, and block those men? I've done some crazy things in my time, but never anything quite so crazy as that."

The girl was plainly surprised and not a little embarrassed.

"Then you came to my rescue, in that pinch, simply because you couldn't help yourself?" she asked. "It was just a

lucky chance for me and an unlucky one for you that the car left the trail?"

Craik laughed. "Let's agree that it was lucky for both of us," he answered. "So far as I can see, that drop down the hill didn't put even a dent in the old catamaran. That's partly where my luck comes in; as for the rest of it, because of the accident I am getting acquainted with you, and that is a pleasure. Jerry Craik is my name; I'm an artist in search of a desert sunrise, and my home port is Los Angeles."

Craik, whenever he desired, had a way with him that few could resist. He showed now to his best advantage; for this girl with the auburn hair was both young and pretty, and she appealed to his artistic sense of æsthetic values. Her face was tanned to a warm olive hue by the sun, and she was slender and carried herself gracefully. She wore divided skirts, a mannish blouse, and had a red silk handkerchief knotted rakishly about her throat.

"Well," she remarked, a mischievous light in her eyes, "a desert sunrise isn't hard to find in this part of the country. They happen about three hundred and sixty-five days in the year. There was a beautiful one this morning, just as I topped the hill there, with those looters right at my heels."

"Looters?" echoed Craik.

The gray eyes flashed. "They're desert scum, and they are stealing my property!" the girl declared, clinching her small fists.

"I have been wondering just what was wrong," said Craik. "One look at them was enough to convince me that they're a tough lot. But how," he asked curiously, "did you happen to be on the other side of the hill?"

There was another flash of the gray eyes. "I was attending strictly to my own business, that's how!" she declared. "I ought to have taken a gun with me when I left camp; but then, you see, I wasn't expecting any trouble."

"It was a good thing, perhaps, that you didn't have a gun," Craik commented. "I've business on the other side of that hill, myself, and those four men have ordered me to forget it and keep away."

"Well," she remarked, "you can find just as many desert sunrises to the east of that hill as to the west of it."

"Even so," he returned, "it will take more than that crowd of toughs to keep me from going wherever I please in these deserts."

The gray eyes widened at this warlike talk. "I'm glad we are of one mind in this matter," the girl said; "we can tackle the problem together, if you don't mind, Mr. Craik. My name," she added, "is Alice Wayland, and I'm from Denver. I'm a cyanide expert, if you know what that is."

Craik showed intense interest. "That is," he told her, "you know all the ins and outs of the cyaniding process for the recovery of gold from the refuse heaps of stamp mills? I always thought that was a man's work, Miss Wayland."

"It is just as much a woman's work as a man's," she answered, with an independent toss of her head. "I paid twenty-five hundred dollars for a cyaniding plant and some ten thousand tons of 'tailings,' and I came down into these deserts to clean up the gold and reap a legitimate profit. And what do I find when I get here? Why, those four white men, with the help of a crowd of hired Mexicans, are working the cyanide plant and taking my gold!

"I rode over from my camp, in the early dawn this morning, to see if the trail over the hill would be safe for my freight wagon; and when I got to the old Scorpion Mine, here it was in the hands of this man Gordo and his confederates. I ordered them off; then they ordered me off, and I was outnumbered and had to leave in a hurry."

"Er—what mine did you say it was?" Craik queried.

"The Scorpion. A man named Leverage located it, built the stamp mill, and worked out the vein. Leverage sold the tailing piles to another man named Farrington, and I bought them from Farrington for twenty-five hundred dollars, just as I told you. The tailings assay six dollars to the ton, and I ought to recover sixty thousand dollars' worth of gold. Not a bad speculation, eh? That is," she added, "if Gordo and his thieving pals don't get the most of it before I can dispossess them."

"H'm!" murmured Craik thoughtfully; "it is quite an interesting situation, Miss Wayland."

It was more than interesting to Craik. For in his pocket, at that very moment, he had a quitclaim deed from Leverage to the cyanide plant and all the tailings at the old Scorpion property. Somebody had been bunkoed. Was it Craik or was it the girl?

"It will be twenty-four hours before you can look for another sunrise, Mr. Craik," spoke up the girl, "and why not spend them in comfort at my camp? It's only a few miles from here, and perhaps, at our leisure, we can hatch up some scheme whereby I can help you find your sunrise and you can help me recover my stolen property. By teamwork we might be able to accomplish something which would be beyond either of us, working alone. What do you say?"

Craik came out of his unpleasantly disturbing reverie with a smile.

"I'll go you, Miss Wayland!" he exclaimed. "Shall we hitch the horse to the back of the car so you can ride with me? I'll promise to drive slowly. Poncho is pretty well fagged, and I'll not hurry him."

"No; I'll ride the horse and lead the way," the girl answered; "I don't think Poncho will have much trouble in keeping ahead of you."

She turned to swing lightly up into the saddle and, with a wave of her hand,

started along the range of hills. Craik drove the car at a slow pace, thinking hard every foot of the way, but to no purpose.

"Maybe," he pondered, "all I'll get out of this desert country will be a sunrise, after all. If I lose out on those Scorpion tailings, that new studio I want to build in Alhambra will have to wait until I put over a few more pictures. What was 'Dad' Leverage trying to work on me, anyhow? He never said a word about having sold the mine to Farrington, and I don't believe he ever did. This Farrington is probably a crook and has gold-bricked the girl. If that is the way of it, I don't see how I can take that cyanide plant and the tailings away from her. This is a fine kettle of fish!" he finished disconsolately.

CHAPTER IV.

A MATTER OF HISTORY.

BUT Jerry was not the only Craik on the west coast. Another of the tribe was Oliver Z. Craik, of Los Angeles, sixty-five and a retired capitalist. Oliver Z. had made most of his millions in Los Angeles real estate, but he had begun his wealth garnering with an orange grove near Anaheim. Because he was a careful man and had insisted on installing smudge pots in a grove in a frostless region, he had acquired the nickname of "Smudge-pot Oliver."

Smudge pots, as every one knows, are used by orange growers to heat up a grove when frost threatens the ripening fruit. Oliver Z. never had occasion to fight the frost, but it was his proud boast that he was ready for such a fight if it should become necessary. Then, on the other hand, Oliver Z. had been born with a frosty disposition, although he came into the world equipped with a temper hot enough to make a smudge and prevent his disposition from doing much damage.

Jerry knew all this because he hap-

pened to be Oliver's nephew, next of kin and sole heir. But Uncle Ol didn't approve of Jerry. They disagreed on the subject of art.

Uncle Ol's conception of the highest form of art was a lithograph of a bunch of oranges pasted on the end of a box of "navels." He simply couldn't see any sense in a young man wasting his time mixing colors and transferring nature to canvas, and for years he had stubbornly resisted his nephew's efforts to become an artist. But these two Craiks had minds of their own, and Jerry, in spite of his uncle's antagonism, fought his way to recognition in the salons and sold enough pictures to keep the wolf from his door. Uncle Ol swore he would have to give up his art or give up the avuncular millions, and Jerry stood pat and invited his uncle to wad up his millions and throw them into the sea.

About this time Sim Leverage dropped into the unhappy equation. Leverage was an old friend of Oliver Craik's, had cleaned up a few hundred thousand in the mines, and had come to Los Angeles to round out his days in peace and plenty.

The two old bachelors, Sim and Ol, became as Damon and Pythias, even though they disagreed on every subject under the sun. They locked horns over cribbage, fought about politics, lambasted each other on religious matters; and of course they disagreed violently on the subject of Jerry Craik.

Leverage declared that if Jerry wanted to be an artist then he ought to be an artist; and Oliver Z. retorted that if a young man wanted to be a darn fool it wasn't any reason why his next of kin should stand around and let him. Leverage averred that being an artist did not prevent a young man from being practical in other matters; and Oliver Z. jumped into the air, cracked his heels, and yelled that it did, and that he'd prove it.

"How'll you prove it?" demanded Leverage.

"With your old Scorpion Mine," said Oliver Z. "It's a played-out proposition. When the vein petered out, and you sold the stamp mill and all the mining equipment, you had a lot of stamp-mill tailings left on the mill dump."

"Around ten thousand tons," remarked Leverage.

"You put up a cyanide plant and got ready to take the residue of gold out of the tailings. But you never started actual operations."

"I was old and tired," said Leverage, "and I gave it up."

"Now here's what I'll do," went on Oliver Z., "just to prove that Jerry is as helpless as a babe in arms when you take him from in front of an easel and drop him down in a he-man's environment. I'll give you five thousand dollars for the plant and the tailings at the Scorpion Mine, and I'll turn 'em over to Jerry. He wants to build a studio out at Alhambra, and if he makes good with the cyanide plant he can build half a dozen studios. But he won't make good, it isn't in him, and I'll prove that Sim Leverage knows a heap less about art and artists than he does about mines and and miners."

"All right," agreed Leverage, "we'll hop to it, but only on one condition."

"What's that?"

"Why," continued Leverage, "I'll give the plant and the tailings to Jerry—make him a present of a quitclaim deed. I like him, and I want to help him. And the time will come, Oliver, when Jerry will not be known as the nephew of Smudge-pot Oliver, the millionaire, but you'll be known as the uncle of Jerry Craik, the famous artist. Jerry's art will be remembered when your millions are forgotten."

Here a bolt of temper hit the smudge pots and set them off; but out of the lurid fog came an agreement, and Leverage went forthwith to execute the deed

and take it down to the vicinity of Westlake Park, where Jerry had a studio, up three flights, with a turn to the left.

Leverage was a canny person, and he had a feeling that Jerry would not undertake the cyaniding proposition unless some form of art was wrapped up in the job.

"Jerry," he began, "I'm plumb homesick for the deserts. I'm honin' to see the sun rise back of the bare, bleak buttes of the desert country. But I'm too old to go out there, and I want you to bring to me, right here in Los Angeles, the finest desert sunrise you can find."

"You mean, Sim," said Jerry, "that you want me to go off into that desert country of yours, grab a sunrise, put it on canvas, and then hand it over to you?"

"You've nicked it, son! But it's got to be the kind of sunrise they have around my old Scorpion Mine. No other kind will do. I'll give you fifteen hundred dollars for a sunrise about two feet wide by three feet long, painted right on the spot."

"You've bought something, Sim," said Jerry. "I'll do it. That fifteen hundred will help build the new studio. If you know anybody else that's homesick for the desert, I'll paint anything from a clump of cactus to a striking sidewinder, two by three, on the same terms."

"I don't know any other desert man in this town," continued Leverage, "but I am fully aware that fifteen hundred isn't enough for a regular desert sunrise painted by that famous artist Jerry Craik, so——"

"Come again with that, Sim," exclaimed Jerry; "it sounds good."

Leverage repeated; then he went on: "I've got about ten thousand tons of stamp-mill tailings at the old Scorpion Mine, Jerry, and I've put up a plant there for the purpose of getting out the gold. The tailings will run around six dollars a ton. While you are painting my sunrise for me, perhaps you could

work that cyanide plant; if you could, boy, you could clean up enough to build a dozen studios."

Jerry put down his brushes and wiped his brows on the tail of his smock.

"Now you're talking real business, Sim," he said, with intense interest. "How much do you want for the Scorpion plant and tailings? I can give you three hundred dollars in cash and my note for the balance?"

"It's like this, son," proceeded Leverage; "I'm an old man, and I haven't chick or child in the world. I've wanted to do something for you for a long time, and this is my chance. Here"—and he produced the legal paper—"is a quit-claim deed to the Scorpion plant and tailings, made over to you, lock, stock, and barrel for one dollar, in hand paid, receipt of which is hereby acknowledged. Take that and the fifteen hundred in payment for my desert sunrise."

Jerry was almost overcome by this generous offer. He tried to express his gratitude, but Leverage slapped him on the shoulder affectionately and cut short his protestations.

"Don't say anything to Ol about the sunrise," he requested, "for that would be something else for him to rag me about. Just tell your uncle, if you tell him anything, that I gave you the plant because I'm a Jerry booster and have faith in you and your future.

"And here's another thing: Ol and I are taking a trip together, maybe up in the high sierras to fish, maybe to Honolulu; but we're cutting all our communications and intend to be lost to our friends while we're gone. You'll have to handle this cyaniding operation alone and without any help from me. Your uncle says you can't do it, and I'm telling him you can. For the love of Mike, Jerry, don't let old Smudge-pot put the bug on me in this Scorpion business."

"I'll make good," averred Jerry, with grim determination, "or go down and jump off where the boats come in."

"And here," went on Leverage, handing him a roll of bills, "is a thousand in cash, advance payment on my desert sunrise. You'll probably need the money to finance the Scorpion proposition."

That afternoon Jerry loaded up the flivver, and early the next morning he was on his way toward the desert, looking for the Scorpion Mine and a two-by-three sunrise that would fill the bill for Sim Leverage.

CHAPTER V.

THE GOLDEN SYMPHONY.

FIVE miles from the hill with the two straightaways and the hairpin turn, Craik in his flivver followed the girl on the gray horse into a most surprising scene. They topped the bank of a shallow arroyo and halted a few moments on the crest.

A stream, fed by springs, meandered down the arroyo. In places the stream was a mere dribble of water, but in other places the water gathered into natural reservoirs and took the form of miniature ponds. On the bank, close to one of the ponds, was a little adobe house. A freight wagon was drawn up beside the house, its cargo covered with a canvas. There were other wagons in sight, along the stream, each one loaded with bales of hay and the meager odds and ends of household equipment.

A number of horses, hobbled or picketed, were grazing up and down the arroyo, and there were four or five outdoor camps, with Mexican men and women loitering about them.

"That's my camp, Mr. Craik," said Miss Wayland, with a touch of pride. "The big wagon is loaded with cases of cyanide, carboys of sulphuric acid, a portable assaying furnace, and other equipment needed in the work of cyaniding. I have ten Mexicans on my pay roll—nine of them pick-and-shovel men, and the other one my freighter and manager, Juan Cortez. Juan is my right-

hand man, and his wife, Ysabel, will keep house for me while I am busy around the plant. Every one of the Mexicans is trustworthy; Juan hired them, and he knows."

"You have started operations on a fairly large scale," commented Craik.

"Operating a cyanide plant means a lot of hard work," said the girl. "I ought to know, since I have made cyaniding my business."

"With all those Mexicans," Craik suggested, "you ought to be able to go over that hill and drive Gordo and his gang from the old mine."

"Guns and ammunition are all that's lacking," was the answer. "You see, I happen to have the only six-shooter in our outfit. An attack on Gordo and his crowd with picks and shovels wouldn't get us very far. And, anyhow, I'm a peaceable person. In spite of the fact that I was chased away from the mine, I am still anxious to settle my differences with Gordo without violence, if it can be done."

They continued on down into the camp, and Craik brought his flivver to a halt beside the freight wagon. The Mexicans regarded him with frank curiosity, wondering no doubt where the girl boss had picked him up.

Craik was introduced to Juan Cortez. There was an honest, dependable look about Cortez which pleased Craik, and he felt that Miss Wayland was fully warranted in trusting him. In the little adobe Señora Cortez had an appetizing breakfast waiting for her mistress. Another plate was put on the packing-box table, and Craik had his morning meal with Miss Wayland.

"It was a lucky thing for us that we stopped here on our trek toward the Scorpion Mine," remarked the girl. "The water supply and the deserted adobe appealed to me, so we pitched camp in the arroyo yesterday afternoon, and I made my reconnaissance, on horseback, in the early dawn this morning."

Her face clouded, as she went on: "If the whole caravan had been caught, as I was, on the other side of the hill, everything would have been wrecked by Gordo and his men. What do you think those pirates will do now, Mr. Craik?"

Craik pushed back from the table and lighted a cigarette. "It seems to be a situation as delicate as it is dangerous," he told her. "Before I give you any advice, Miss Wayland, I want to think the thing over. If you were a man, I'd tell you in about two minutes what I thought ought to be done. You're a woman, however, and that makes a difference."

Alice Wayland tossed her head. "The fact that I'm a woman need not influence you," she said; "I have been standing on my own feet ever since I was big enough to walk, fighting my own battles and asking odds of nobody. I am able to look out for myself."

There was little doubt in Craik's mind of Miss Wayland's ability to manage her own affairs; still, the mere fact that she was a woman, pitted against desert raiders of the Gordo type, filled him with a certain amount of perturbation.

"We are making common cause against these pirates and their high-handed methods, Miss Wayland," he argued, "and while I have little doubt of your enterprise and ability, I hope you will give me a chance to prove my own worth in this joint enterprise of ours. I shall have some plans later in the day, and I am going to offer them for your approval."

"I shall be glad to hear them and to pass on them," she said. "Do you know anything about the process of recovering gold from tailings by cyaniding?"

"I have been reading up on it, and I think I understand the theory, but I have had no practical experience."

A dreamy light came into the girl's gray eyes, and she sat back in her chair and gazed into vacancy.

"Cyanide of potassium, sometimes called the 'white death,'" she said softly, "is one of the few known solvents of gold. The cyanide in solution works its way through the stamp-mill refuse, and from the dregs of the mill, as it were, it captures the lost values in gold which escaped the quicksilver of the mill plates.

"Mr. Craik," she proceeded, her enthusiasm touching her olive cheeks with vivid color, "the white death, in its work of reclaiming lost gold, has always seemed to me to be playing a beautiful symphony. It is a deadly thing, this cyanide; but life itself may be a deadly thing. And life, like the white death, is able to recover from the human dross in all of us some portion of the gold which lies locked up in our natures.

"You are young and so am I. But if you are too young to have a great ambition, then I am disappointed in you and sorry for you. We can never get anywhere in this world without a great ambition. I have one, and success at the Scorpion Mine is going to enable me to realize it."

Her eyes were like stars, there in the half dark of that thick-walled, windowless hut, and her voice was clear and vibrant with deep feeling. The artistic soul of Craik was given a thrill.

Here was an odd girl surely; a girl who could read poetry into the prose of a drab commercial project; one who had a great and consuming ambition in life and, woman though she was, went forth into the desert, with a high heart to work with her hands and make her dreams come true. A feeling of admiration for Miss Wayland arose in the soul of Craik. He found himself telling her about his ambition to have a studio in picturesque Alhambra.

"It's going to take a good deal of money," he said, "and I have got to paint a lot of pictures. I am off to a good start with fifteen hundred dollars offered for the picture of a desert sunrise."

"And who is it, Mr. Craik, who appreciates the desert so much?" the girl asked.

Here was ground upon which he must tread warily. He had no intention of telling her about his own interest in the Scorpion Mine, at least, not yet. So far as Miss Wayland was concerned, he was in that part of the country solely to paint a picture. Thus, taking the course of least resistance, he would let matters drift.

"An old man, who loved the deserts and made his money in mines, wants the painted sunrise in his Los Angeles home," he explained, "and I have been fortunate enough to get the commission."

"And you are going to carry out the work successfully, Mr. Craik," Miss Wayland declared; "and in due course you are going to have your studio, become famous; and I"—she laughed a little—"am going to buy one of your pictures, hang it in my Denver home, and every time I look at it I am going to be reminded of the gallant gentleman who helped me to secure my rights at the Scorpion Mine.

"My own ambition is perhaps not so lofty as yours," she continued. "My father failed in business, but I would not let him go through the bankruptcy court. Instead of that, he has obtained time from his creditors in which to pay his debts, dollar for dollar, and get a new start. The white death is going to take care of that for us, Mr. Craik. I put a twenty-five-hundred dollar mortgage on our Denver home, with the consent of my father's creditors, in order to raise enough money to buy the Scorpion plant and tailings; then, on top of that, a little money that I had in the bank supplied this equipment here in the camp. Twenty thousand dollars will pay my father's obligations, and I shall make as much more for myself." She clenched her small fist. "I am going to it!" she declared.

And in that tense moment Craik realized that he was never to have a studio out of the gold recovered from the Scorpion tailings. His ambition was to give way to the girl's, because the girl's was more worthy.

"And I'm going to help you do it," he declared, on his own part.

The girl reached out her hand. "Shake!" she said; "you're a real man, Jerry Craik, and I knew it from the start. A man who could drop down a mountain wall in a flivver, without so much as puncturing a tire or smashing a headlight, is truly being reserved by Fate for great things. You are to help me get my gold, and I am to help you get your picture. Teamwork, Jerry Craik! And be hanged to Gordo and his crowd of pirates!"

CHAPTER VI.

IN THE SCORPION CAMP.

AS the organizer and commander of that little expedition into the desert, Alice Wayland was thorough and efficient. Every man had his place and had been drilled in his duties; and there was not one who did not know the exact niche he was to fill at the Scorpion workings. On the trail and in camp, also, there was a rigid discipline enforced by Juan Cortez, under the alert supervision of the girl, which aroused the wonder and evoked the enthusiastic approval of Craik.

All the Mexicans were married men, and their wives and children were accompanying them to the scene of their labors at the mine. Craik found them a contented lot, although a bit restive as to the cause of the delay in their journey into the desert.

During his day in the camp Craik formulated a plan. Inasmuch as the execution of the plan involved Craik in some danger, Miss Wayland protested against it, but was finally argued into giving her consent.

It was of first importance that the exact situation at the mine should be made clear; and Craik convinced the girl that he was the one to ride secretly to the scene of the Scorpion operations and get all the facts possible regarding Gordo and his men.

It was after sundown when he started, mounted on one of the best horses belonging to the Mexicans. In the flickering light of a camp fire, Alice Wayland looked up anxiously into his face, warned him to be careful and tried to make him take the six-shooter, the only firearm belonging to the expedition.

Craik displayed his automatic pistol. "This will do for me," he said. "Whatever I do on the other side of the hill must be done secretly, and I hope to get into the other camp and out of it without being seen. If I have to do any shooting, it will be as a last resort. One gun is enough, and, if I am successful, more than enough."

He rode away into the gathering dusk beyond the camp fires, and when he came to the foot of the steep hill there was a bright moon flooding the slope with its beams. He gained the crest of the uplift after a hard climb and drew rein there, while he considered the country on the western side of the chain of hills.

The flat desert lay tolerably clear and distinct under his eyes. Clumps of greasewood and cactus became little blots of shadow, and a mile or more from the base of the hill he could see a larger blot, picked out with yellow gleams, as of lamplight.

"There's the old Scorpion property," he told himself, elated to find that it was so near at hand.

The descent of the hill was easier than the ascent had been, and when he left the slope he redoubled his wariness. The trail led onward like a whitish streak in the moonlight, but Craik did not follow it; instead, he struck out on a more roundabout course, hunting the heaviest pools of shadow and melting

into them like a gliding specter. The vague blur on the desert had gradually been defining itself more clearly to his sharp eyes. As he advanced, the serried rows of cyanide tanks began to take shape, and he could even make out the mounds of tailings by which the tanks were surrounded. A lantern was moving about among the tanks, like a firefly, and, a little to the right of the workings, he could descry the black walls of a shack, with light streaming from one of its windows.

He had gone as far as he considered it advisable on horseback. Dismounting and hitching the horse to a whitethorn bush, he cautiously continued his advance on foot. He saw a white gleam of tents, three of them, at the edge of the acre or two of tailing piles. He avoided the tents and came to a rude little corral. There were a number of horses in the inclosure, and a great heap of hay bales flanked it. He crept around the baled hay, crawled under a freight wagon, and found himself at one end of the three serried rows of huge vats—vats in which the "white death" was at work picking the gold out of the tailings. One enormous tank overtopped all the others, and that, as he knew, was the "solution" tank.

The lantern was still flickering back and forth through the shadows, and Craik judged that it was carried by a man on duty as night watchman. This watchman he avoided with the greatest care and, on hands and knees, drew close to the wall of the shack which had a light streaming through an open window. He had a look through that open window, a safe look from the black shadow of a thicket of greasewood. He saw shelves, with bottles, upon an inner wall, a small assayer's furnace, and two men. One of them was Gordo, and the other Taranch. There was another man in the room, but he was out of Craik's line of vision.

Craik moved to another clump of

greasewood to improve his point of observation. Then the other man came under his eyes. He was not one of those whom Craik had encountered on the hill-slope that morning, but was a stranger. Nor was he of the rough and grizzled type, but was better clothed and of a more refined appearance. He sat in a chair, tilted back against the wall, and smoked a cigar. Near him was a table. There was a lamp on the table, and across the table top, beside the lamp, lay four Winchester rifles and four fluted belts filled with cartridges. Craik dropped to his knees and on all fours crept noiselessly to a spot directly under the open window. The hut was built of adobe, and Craik flattened himself out on the ground beside the mud wall and listened intently.

"Why didn't you get his name?" a voice was demanding angrily.

"I didn't reckon it was necessary," answered Gordo, if Craik remembered his voice. "He allowed he was an artist, out huntin' a sunrise." The speaker laughed. "I told him this wasn't no place fer artists, and I warned him off."

"He said he was also looking for the old Scorpion Mine, didn't he?"

"Sure; but I figgered all he wanted here, Nick, was water."

"You don't know what he wanted. He's probably over in the girl's camp this minute. He's a white man, and he'll no doubt try to help her. You ought to have bagged him, right there on the hillside. We're taking long chances, Gordo, in order to get away with the loot here."

"As fer that, Nick, the night's young yet. If he's over at the creek, we can give him his gruel when we bust up the moharrie's camp and scatter her greasers."

Here another voice spoke up. "Supposin' the moharrie goes to O'Fallon and lets the sher'ff in on this? Where do we get off?"

The stranger, Nick as they called him,

chuckled. " 'Buck' Morton is the sheriff, Taranch, and I'm solid with Buck. He'll sidetrack the girl and keep her guessing until we have cleaned up here. Buck is on the make, and I've agreed to grease his palm. Don't worry! he's with us. All we've got to do is to break up the girl's camp and wreck her outfit. She'll not be able to do a thing after that. Every cent she could rake and scrape went into the twenty-five hundred she paid me and into the equipment she's bringing to the Scorpion. Wreck her camp, and we wreck her; that's all."

"Everything's all set, Nick," returned Gordo. "Four of us will leave here at midnight with them Winchesters, and what we'll do to the moharrie's camp will be a plenty. We'll set her and her hull outfit afoot, grab all the grub, smash the equipment, and run off the hosses. And this here artist lookin' fer a sunrise—say, Nick, he'll be crippled complete by the time we're done with him and his buzz wagon."

Craik, listening to all this, fingered his automatic and gritted his teeth. It was well he had made that reconnaissance. If he had not stolen into the camp of the looters just at that time, calamity would surely have overtaken Miss Wayland. He alone stood between the girl and disaster. What was there he could do? Race back to the camp on the creek, inform Miss Wayland of what was going on, and then hastily remove the camp to some distant place?

Craik looked up at the sky and guessed at the time. It was eleven o'clock, if he could judge by the stars. The impossibility of checkmating the looters by breaking camp and getting out of the way was plain to Craik. There was no time for all that. On him alone hung the fate of the girl's project at the Scorpion Mine; he must do something, and he must do it right there in the enemy's camp.

He turned the problem over in his mind. An idea came to him. It was

dangerous and little more than a forlorn hope, but it was that or nothing. Perhaps luck would be with him that night, just as it had been with him on the hillside that morning.

Again he lifted himself to hands and knees and crawled back to the shadow of the brush clumps. He crawled for perhaps a hundred feet, and then he raised the automatic and fired three shots into the air.

There was a commotion in the adobe, and Craik could see the three men rushing out of the door. In the light flooding through the doorway he could see that they were armed only with revolvers. Craik laughed softly and began crawling back through the chaparral toward the hut.

Men were rushing out of the tents, and the watchman's lantern bobbed about excitedly, as it advanced in the direction of Gordo and the two others from the adobe.

"Who did that shooting?" asked the voice of the man called Nick.

"I'm by," answered the watchman. "It seemed to come from south o' the laboratory."

"Comb the brush! Get every man on the job, Gordo! Follow me, the rest of you!"

Then there came to pass exactly the thing which Craik had hoped would happen. Everybody in the camp went bushwhacking for a possible intruder, while the intruder slipped through the adobe's open window, gathered up the four Winchesters and the four cartridge belts, blew out the lamp, and then began to think about clearing out with the guns and ammunition.

CHAPTER VII.

THE ARTISTIC TOUCH.

WITH the fate of Alice Wayland in his hands, Craik was in the heart of the Scorpion camp, entirely surrounded by foes. He did not believe that the excited searchers would find his

horse, as he had taken the precaution of leaving the animal at a considerable distance from the cyanide workings; nevertheless, he had to consider the possibility of losing his mount to the looters and of getting away on foot. But he would take care of that difficulty when he encountered it. His immediate business was to escape from the adobe and to carry the Winchesters and the cartridge belts with him.

As quickly as he could he buckled the cartridge belts around his waist and stepped clear of the hut, his arm full of guns. He could hear a crashing of brush and the shouts of Gordo and his men in every direction, and he made a dash into the blank darkness between two rows of cyanide tanks, the safest course that lay open to him.

There were six tanks in each row, and he made his way through a passage as black as a pocket. He emerged into the moonlight again at a point where the stamp mill had stood. The mill had been removed, but the ore platform still remained, and he gained several rods in the direction of freedom under cover of it. A voice hailed him, as he was about to leave the protection of the platform:

"What y'u doin' there?"

For a split second Craik had visions of all kinds of trouble, but he rallied to meet the emergency in the only way at his command.

"Thought I seen somebody skulkin' around here," he answered, disguising his voice.

A head and pair of shoulders pushed themselves over the edge of the old platform. From the planks to the ground on which Craik was standing there was a sheer drop of seven feet.

"Who are y'u, anyways?" a voice demanded suspiciously.

Craik had only one answer to that. Dropping the guns, he leaped upward and gripped his arms about the man's neck; then, throwing his whole weight

on his arms, he pulled the man, head first, from the platform.

A lurid oath singed the night air. There was a brief struggle, which Craik brought to a conclusion by using a pistol as a club. It was ugly work, and all Craik's artistic nature was in revolt against it. But the only alternative was capture and complete disaster, and Craik did not hesitate for an instant.

The man straightened out with a gasp and lay motionless. He was stunned, nothing more. Craik grabbed his six-shooter, picked up the Winchesters, and streaked it through the moonlight to the next cover of brush.

Crack! A spurt of flame stabbed the night, as a six-gun roared. Craik felt, or imagined he felt, the wind of the passing bullet; and before another shot could be taken at him he was once more in the friendly shadows.

The roar of the gun had drawn the instant attention of all the searchers.

"Who was that?" asked the voice of Nick from a distance.

"Me—Siwash!" came huskily from the dark. "There's somebody in the brush, over east o' the old mill platform. Close in, you cimaroons!"

Craik had been east of the platform, but he was now rapidly getting to the south of it, crouching and running low to gain the shelter of the greasewood tops. He halted a moment and yelled:

"There he is, hustlin' north! Head him off, you guys!"

It was a bold play to throw the looters off the trail; and, as occasionally happens, it was the sort of audacity that won. Bushes had been crackling directly ahead of Craik, and he heard the man or men in that part of the chaparral turning and making off in a northerly direction.

A clear path was open to him, so far as he could judge, and he crowded the captured six-shooter through one of the cartridge belts, settled his load of Winchesters as comfortably as he could, and

placed all his dependence in his flying heels. He was taking the shortest course to the point where he had left the horse, positive that all the man hunters were behind him.

Now, he thought, was that Mexican horse where he had left him? If he was, then all that remained was a flight up the hill, down the tangents and the hairpin turn, and on to the girl's camp at the creek. If the horse wasn't there— This, however, was a bridge he did not have to cross.

He came to the whitethorn and heaved a sharp breath of relief when he saw his mount exactly where the animal had been left. He untied the bridle reins, climbed into the saddle, and made off at top speed.

The shouts of Gordo and his men were fading out behind him when he heard a freshly disturbing note. This was a tattoo of hoofs as horses broke clear of the corral.

"It's going to be a chase," Craik reasoned; "and, if I have to, I can hole up somewhere on the hill and pick off the riders, as they take the slope. But I don't want it that way," he said; "this consignment of guns and cartridges is for the Wayland outfit, and I want to deliver it intact."

The horse was fairly good. Best of all, he was sure-footed and made the upgrade with the ease of a mountain goat. From the crest of the hill Craik could neither see nor hear any signs or sounds of pursuit. It seemed too good to be true. If mounted looters were not following him, what was the reason? Had they taken the wrong trail, or were they laying some trap to the east of the hill?

Craik raced down the steep hillside, whirled around the turn, and came to the flat desert at the base of the hill. There were still no sounds to indicate pursuit, and the trail behind seemed as clear of enemies as the trail ahead.

"My luck still holds," Craik told himself and set off at speed for the creek.

A mile before he reached Miss Wayland's camp, a gray horse plunged into the trail directly ahead of him.

"Mr. Craik," asked a woman's voice excitedly, "is it you?"

"Yes, Miss Wayland," he answered; "they almost had me, but I slipped through the net."

"Are they following?" the girl asked anxiously, riding stirrup to stirrup with him.

"I don't think so," he told her; "still, you never can tell about a gang like Gordo's."

"What have you got there?"

"Four rifles and four cartridge belts stuffed with ammunition. They were for a party that was to raid your camp at midnight, run off your horses, and smash your equipment. Now, if Gordo tries it, we'll be able to put up a fight."

The girl was silent for a moment. "And you went into that nest of scoundrels," she said finally, "and stole their guns and ammunition?"

"Some of it," he answered, with a grim laugh.

"I guess," Miss Wayland said, "that I need not have been so worried about you. I just couldn't stay in our camp, but had to ride over in the direction of the hill. You're an artist, all right, Mr. Craik, and getting those guns and cartridges, right out from under the noses of Gordo and his gang, was an artistic touch to your night's work that has probably saved the day for me. If we ever get safely out of this, and I come into my own, I'm going to show you that I know how to be grateful."

They flung into the camp and found every man in the place awake and ready for whatever might be required of him.

"Pick three of your best marksmen, Juan," ordered the girl, "and throw out a skirmish line in the direction of the trail. There's a rifle and full cartridge belt for you and the three others. Sharp's the word, now!"

After two hours of tense waiting,

during which nothing alarming happened, it was decided that wrecking the Wayland camp had been given up for that night by the gold looters. Sentinels were posted, and Craik, dog-weary, spread his blankets beside the flivver, crawled into them, and went to sleep.

There was satisfaction in the thought that he had done a lot for the plucky little moharrie, and no regrets at all because his night's work had helped to postpone indefinitely the building of his studio at Alhambra.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BIG OPPORTUNITY.

FOR possibly four hours that night Craik slept peacefully, and then he was awakened by some one pulling at his arm and calling his name. It was the girl. He sat up in the chill gray of the early morning and looked apprehensively into the shadowy face bending over him.

"What's wrong, Miss Wayland?" he inquired.

"Please come to the adobe as soon as you can," the girl answered breathlessly; "something important has happened, Mr. Craik, and you ought to know about it."

She whirled away, vanished, and Craik kicked aside his blankets and began pulling on his shoes. A few minutes later he was in the hut, facing Miss Wayland, Juan Cortez, and a young Mexican whom he could not remember to have seen about the camp before.

"This is Manuel Silva, Mr. Craik," said the girl, introducing the stranger, "and he is just from the Scorpion Mine. He brings some news that is interesting to all of us."

"Better be careful," Craik suggested; "he may have been sent here by Gordo."

"No," averred Miss Wayland decidedly; "Manuel is a cousin of Juan's, and he was working for Gordo. Yesterday Manuel heard that Juan was working for me, and that we had pitched camp

on the creek over here. Manuel also discovered, from the talk among Gordo's men, that Gordo was my enemy. Things haven't been going well in the Scorpion camp, Manuel tells us. Some of the Mexicans have been brutally treated and underpaid, and they became dissatisfied and revengeful.

"Last night, during the commotion you stirred up around the cyanide tanks, a little crowd of mutineers, led by a man called 'Big Pedro,' stole horses from the corral, raided the laboratory for half a dozen bars of base bullion, and took to the hills. Gordo, with most of the men left in camp, is trailing the mutineers in an attempt to recover the bullion and the houses.

"Manuel got away during the excitement and came over here to tell his cousin what had happened. He had to walk, and he has been nearly two hours on the way. He doesn't want to go back to the mine and work for Gordo, but would like to stay with Juan and work for me."

Craik pondered over this information. There was evidence, gathered by Craik himself, to confirm Manuel's story. The sounds of pursuit which Craik had heard in his flight over the hill, and which had suddenly given way to silence, must have been caused by Gordo and his men on the trail of the mutineers. Big Pedro had taken a course that had led Gordo away from the hill and the trail taken by Craik.

"You can vouch for this cousin of yours, Juan?" Craik asked.

"*Si!*" declared Cortez vigorously; "the señorita can trust Manuel like she trusts me. What he say is true, señor."

Craik turned to Manuel. "Which way did Big Pedro go when he took the horses and gold?" he asked.

Manuel pointed toward the south. "Gordo not ketch heem, you bet!" he asserted.

"How long do you think Gordo will follow the trail and try to catch him?"

"*Par Dios*, he not geeve up for long time," said Manuel; "Gordo crazee for dat gold, señor. . . But he not get it."

Craik turned to Alice Wayland. "Here's our big opportunity," he told her. "The mutinous Mexicans have left the mine, and Gordo has taken most of the other men and is trying to overhaul the mutineers. There can't be many hands on guard at the Scorpion. It's a great chance, Miss Wayland!" he exclaimed, with mounting enthusiasm.

The girl's gray eyes flashed with sudden comprehension. "You mean," she returned quickly, "that with the guns and ammunition which you brought in last night we can get over the hill and capture the cyanide works from the few men left on guard—and do it before Gordo gets back from his pursuit of the mutineers?"

"That's the idea," said Craik; "but, if we are to carry out the scheme successfully, we shall have to hurry. Possession, you know, is nine points of the law. So long as you hold the works, it will be up to Gordo to prove that he has a better right to them than you have."

"He can't do that," declared the girl; "my position is so secure on the legal side that I have been thinking of making an appeal to the sheriff at O'Fallon."

Craik remembered what he had overheard the night before and protested against any appeal to the sheriff.

"He is hand and glove with the Gordo crowd," he said, "if what I have learned is correct. Instead of helping you, the sheriff would throw all his authority into the scales against you."

"He would do that, wouldn't he, even if we stole a march on Gordo and captured his camp while he was away?"

"Once we are in possession of the mine, Miss Wayland," returned Craik with confidence, "I'll engage to sidetrack the sheriff if he tries to help Gordo. But we must get possession of the other camp—that's of first importance. Now,

here's what we'll do," Craik continued, warming to the work ahead.

"Juan, Manuel, and two more of your best men will arm themselves with the rifles and ride with me in the flivver. We'll strike a quick blow and capture Gordo's camp; while we are doing that, you will break camp here and bring your whole outfit over the hill to the mine. Everything will be ready for you when you get there. If Gordo wants a fight when he gets back from the hills, we'll accommodate him, and we'll have all the advantage on our side."

"You are planning to do all the fighting," protested the girl, "and all that's left for me is to bring up the rear guard."

"No one can do that but you," Craik argued, "and it will be no easy job hurrying all the camp plunder, with the women and children, over the hill and to the mine."

This seemed logical, as Craik put it, and Miss Wayland finally agreed to the plan. Juan selected the other two men to go with Craik in the car, and Craik hastily transferred some of his own equipment to the freight wagon in order to make room for passengers in the tonneau.

The girl was snapping out her orders, and the camp was in a flurry of preparation for the trek to the Scorpion Mine, as Craik started the car and moved on toward the hill with the tangents and the hairpin turn. With her own hands Alice Wayland was hooking up four horses to the freight wagon. She straightened to wave her sombrero encouragingly to the armed men in the flivver and then went on with her work.

"That *mujercita* is one plucky girl!" announced Cortez from his seat beside Craik.

"I'll tell the world!" Craik agreed admiringly. "What's more, Cortez, she's going to win out on this Scorpion proposition, and we'll stand by her until she does."

"*Si, señor,*" supplemented Juan Cortez grimly, "to the last breath, if it come to that."

CHAPTER IX.

TAKING OVER THE WORKS.

THE little car reached the foot of the slope and then labored up the steep hillside, from base to top, in "low." Craik, in passing, noted the spot where he had pitched off the trail, and again he marveled at the luck which had brought him safely into the straightaway after that headlong dive. Truly, he thought, the girl was right, and Fate was reserving him for greater things.

From the top of the hill a fine view of the Scorpion camp opened out under the morning sun. The vast area of tailing piles gleamed grayish-white against the sparkling brown of the desert. There were no horses left in the corral, and it was evident that all the riding and harness stock had been put under saddle by Gordo to meet the night's emergency. The tents were deserted. A pile of wheelbarrows could be seen near the ends of the plank run-aways that bridged the tanks. One man was in evidence on a high derrick, working at a pump. He was pumping the depleted cyanide solution from the sump tank back into the solution tank, where it would be tested, brought up to "standard," and again released to perform its wonder work with the tailings in the huge brown vats.

"*Pronto, señor!*" urged Cortez tensely.

"*Pronto* it is, Juan!" answered Craik and took the down grade, with a speed that caused all his passengers to hang for dear life to the sides of the lurching car.

The man on the derrick took note of the machine and instantly gave over his pumping, slid down the ladder, and raced for the adobe. In response to his frantic summons, a man stepped clear of the door of the adobe, took one look

at the approaching car, and then ran back into the hut. When he again put in an appearance he was carrying a rifle. But the Scorpion camp must have been as short of rifles as it was of men. Only these two men were to be seen, and only the man from the adobe had a rifle. The other was armed with a solitary six-gun. Craik chuckled.

"Luck is breaking beautifully for us, Juan," he remarked, as he hurled the flivver along the dusty trail. "The man with the rifle is the one they call Nick, and I believe he is the king-pin of these looters."

"*Es cierto!*" exclaimed Manuel from the rear seat; "that hombre ees Nick Farrington, señor."

Farrington! The man who sold Sim Leverage's property to Miss Wayland! But this was no news to Craik, and it was of interest merely as proving the correctness of Manuel's information. Gordo, hard pressed, had left Farrington and one other man in charge of the camp. And Gordo had not yet returned. That was the big thing. He and his trusted aids were still in the hills, trying to overtake the Mexican mutineers and recover the stolen gold and the horses.

The old trail led directly to the adobe, and Craik followed it. "Halt!" Farrington ordered, as they drew close. The rifle was at his shoulder, and his eye was gleaming along the sights. Four rifles were immediately leveled to meet this menace. Farrington fired and leaped backward into the adobe, slamming the door. The other man, Craik could now see, was Santos. He had a bandanna handkerchief tied around his temples, and Craik guessed that he was the fellow whom he had encountered the night before at the ore platform. Santos, when the adobe door closed, ducked around the end of the hut.

"We're too many for them," declared Craik, "and they're showing yellow right at the start."

Farrington's bullet had done no more than cut a hole in the top of the flivver. With a caution to Juan and the others to hold their fire and conserve their ammunition, Craik brough the car to a stop, leaped out of it, and ran to the door of the adobe. No bullets were launched at him from the hut, and he hurled his shoulder at the door with all his weight behind it. Cortez ran to his side to help, and between them they smashed the barrier from its hinges.

The adobe contained but one room, and it was empty. "The window, señor!" called Cortez.

The window in the opposite wall was open, just as it had been on the preceding night. Craik hurried to it and caught a glimpse of Farrington fleeing into the chaparral.

"Juan," called Craik, "you and the rest get that other man; I'll take care of Farrington."

Then he plunged through the window and took after his quarry. It was a wild race through the greasewood and white-thorn, and at the end of it Craik came face to face with Farrington. The latter pulled the trigger of the rifle, its muzzle less than six feet from Craik's breast. A hollow click was the gun's only response. The magazine was empty, and once more Craik owed his life to a phenomenal stroke of luck. A savage oath broke from Farrington's lips, and he dropped the rifle. Craik leaped at him, and they went to the ground in a clinch.

Boxing and wrestling were sports in which Craik had always been able to give an excellent account of himself; and if Farrington thought that an artist, flivvering through the deserts in search of a sunrise, could easily be put down for the count, he was destined to receive a rude awakening. The old reliable strangle hold did the business for Farrington, and he gave a gasping cry for quarter in less than three minutes after the struggle started. Craik bound Farrington's

hands at his back with a twisted bandanna handkerchief, added Farrington's rifle to his collection of artillery, and then marched him to the laboratory.

Santos had already been bagged and brought in. He was sitting on the beaten clay floor, scowling at Manuel who, with the other Mexicans, was standing guard over him.

"Y'u're a blame' traitor," Santos was saying with a good deal of venom, "and Gordo'll make y'u hard to find when he gits in."

"Gordo himself is going to be hard to find, Santos," remarked Craik, "so it's a cinch he won't make any trouble for Manuel. Juan," he added, "get ropes on both these prisoners; then place your men in position to guard every approach to the camp. *Pronto, compadre!*"

The prisoners were bound hand and foot with reatas, and Cortez and his three men hurried away to go on guard duty. Craik gave his attention to Farrington who, scowling blackly, was sitting on the floor besides Santos.

"What are you and Gordo doing here at the Scorpion Mine, Farrington?" Craik demanded, taking a chair opposite the bound men and rolling himself a cigarette.

"Working the tailings," was the answer. "What did you think we were doing?"

"By what right have you begun cyaniding operations here?"

"By right of a quitclaim deed from Sim Leverage."

"Leverage is a square man, isn't he?" queried Craik.

"As square a man as you'll find in the Southwest."

"Then, out of your own mouth, you are convicting yourself of robbery. And here's something else," Craik went on. "If a man sells a piece of property, he loses all right to it, doesn't he?"

"Yes."

"You sold this cyanide plant and the tailings to Miss Wayland. Everything

here belongs to her. In spite of that, you use the money paid to you by Miss Wayland for the purpose of outfitting a lot of coyotes and bringing them here to clean up the gold. That's a pretty nervy bit of stealing. You knew the girl would come on here to begin operations, and you and Gordo had planned to wreck her camp, destroy all her equipment, and set her afoot in the desert. That's a fine, chivalrous way to treat a woman, Farrington," Craik added scathingly; "you're a bunch of yellow crooks, acting like a lot of crawling sidewinders—to put it mildly.

"Yesterday morning when Miss Wayland rode over here, you drove her off her own property. If you could have made a prisoner of her, I suppose you would have tried to force her into deeding the Scorpion back to you for nothing. What have you got to say for yourself?"

Craik expected that Farrington would do some tall lying, but the crook took a different tack.

"I'm not saying anything for myself," said Farrington coolly; "we're out here in the middle of nowhere, and I'm just asking you what you intend to do about it?"

"So that's your lay, is it?" returned Craik. "Well, I'll tell you what we're going to do about it: We've got possession of this mine, and we're going to hold it. Miss Wayland is going to begin her work here and carry it through to a finish. I'm going to see that has her rights."

Farrington gave a jeering laugh. "And who are you, if I may ask?" he inquired.

"Jerry Craik, artist, of Los Angeles," was the answer.

"Then listen to this, Jerry Craik," the other went on. "The town of O'Fallon is fifteen miles away, and it is the county seat. That's where the sheriff lives, and the sheriff is on my side. I have a little private deal with him, and he is backing

me. He'll be out here to-day or to-morrow, and when he finds out how you have taken over these cyanide workings by force, he'll take you and the Wayland girl to the O'Fallon lockup. That will leave Gordo and me free to go on with the job we've started. You can't buck law and order with these rough-house methods, Craik, and get away with it."

Craik threw away his cigarette, got up from his chair, and walked to the door. Miss Wayland's fight for the Scorpion workings wasn't finished; it was only begun. A crooked sheriff was throwing the weight of his power and authority to the other side.

Out along the trail there was a procession of vehicles headed by the freight wagon. Alice Wayland, perched on the high seat of the freight wagon, was handling the four-horse team in masterful fashion. Catching sight of Craik, she waved her hat, and Craik answered her.

"I've got a trump card in my hand," Craik thought, as he hurried out of the adobe, "but I don't want to play it unless I have to. I'm here to paint a sunrise for Sim Leverage, and only incidentally to help Miss Wayland hang onto the Scorpion tailings. That's something I've got to remember."

CHAPTER X.

THE POTTER AND THE CLAY.

HE never had any ginger," complained Oliver Z. Craik; "the only way I ever knew him to extend himself was with a paint brush and a lot of paint daubed on a palette. It's like a six-foot he-man selling ribbons in a department store. I don't believe Jerry has got enough nerve to slap a person on the wrist."

They were in the high sierras—Oliver Z. and Sim Leverage. They sat on the bench by the door of a log cabin, and Oliver Z. was smoking a pipe and fixing

the reel of his favorite casting rod. Leverage was sitting with his back to the logs, studying the scenery. The Jap cook was busy with supper, and the sizzle and fragrance of frying trout drifted through the open door.

"You've known that boy all his life, Oliver," said Leverage, "and yet you don't know him at all. You're prejudiced against picture painters; that's all that ails you, and you are prejudiced because you are so blamed ignorant."

The usual fight was on. Oliver Z. flung aside his reel, took his pipe from between his teeth, and roached his back.

"Ignorant, huh?" he asked. "Why, you old sour dough, where did you ever learn so much? Maybe I don't know art," he continued, "but I do know men. If you want an orange tree to bear, you've got prune it and cultivate it and fumigate it and irrigate it and look out for a frost. Same way, if you want a boy to amount to anything as a man, you've got to cultivate his mind, fumigate his morals, irrigate his understanding, and push him out into the cold without his ear muffs, just by way of hardening his stamina. Then——"

Sim Leverage relaxed against the log wall behind him and laughed till he choked. Oliver's pet figure of speech was to liken a man to an orange tree, and the parable was beyond him; he never could get away with it.

"All right," said Oliver Z. savagely, "laugh! But tell me this: What do you suppose would happen if some husky desperado aimed a gun at Jerry?"

"I'd feel sorry for the desperado, Ol," said Leverage; "you bet I would."

"Rot! Jerry would walk lame, lie down and roll over, and play dead. You never saw him in action."

"And neither have you. But I've heard stories about Jerry—how he fought the undertow off Long Beach and saved a girl bather from being carried out to sea; how he went into the ring for ten rounds with a champion

boxer and won the decision; how he——"

"That's all camouflage," asserted Oliver. "Friends of Jerry's started those yarns to see what effect they would have on me. But they couldn't make me swallow 'em. Jerry's a—a—sissy. Instead of bumping up against the world and carving out a real career, he'd rather fool around with a box of paints and a handful of brushes. If he'd paint houses or barns or signs, he'd get somewhere; but no, that line of endeavor is too strenuous."

"Did you ever hear how he fought his way through the snow and grappled with a blizzard, up in these high sierras, just to get a certain picture he wanted?" Leverage inquired.

"That stuff never interested me," grunted Oliver.

"If the same forest ranger who told me about it had talked with you," went on Leverage, "you might have a different idea of art and artists. That's where you get off on the wrong foot, Oliver. You are so set against Jerry's picture painting that you won't give him credit for the really fine things he does."

"Well, listen," said Oliver. "I'll bet you a thousand dollars that Jerry fails at the Scorpion Mine. I know him so well that I'll gamble on his being impracticable. He'll be all at sea when it comes to doing real work with that cyanide plant. Somebody will get the best of him, or he'll just naturally peter out. He'll come back to Los Angeles a failure at the mine, and he'll go on with his painting."

"I'll take that bet, Oliver," returned Leverage promptly; "and, if I win, I'll turn the stakes over to Jerry to help build his studio at Alhambra."

Oliver Z. winced at that. He knew about the contemplated studio, and the very thought of it made him writhe.

"Well, if the stakes come to me, I'll keep 'em!" he replied. "I'd give the boy fifty thousand to help him put up a saw

mill, or an iron foundry, or start something worth while, like a garage, but I'll not hand him a dollar for a studio. Studio—bah!"

"Dinner, please!" called the Jap respectfully, appearing in the open doorway.

The two old friends got off the bench and went into the cabin. Damon had a chip on his shoulder, and Pythias was ready to knock it off.

"You're a poor prune," declared Leverage. "I wish to thunder Jerry was my nephew instead of yours."

"I wish he was, you old weak-minded sardine," retorted Oliver Z. "You'd be two of a kind, that's what."

"Cultivated, irrigated, fumigated," said Leverage. "After all that, I don't reckon any young fellow would need a frost. He'd be cold before the zero weather struck him."

"Aw, cut it out!" fussed Oliver Z.

CHAPTER XI.

THE HAND OF AUTHORITY.

MISS WAYLAND'S Mexicans pitched their tents in the vicinity of the spring, a stone's throw from the laboratory. Orders had gone out that none of the property belonging to Farrington and Gordo was to be touched. No one was allowed in the canvas shelters of the gold looters, and all personal property belonging to them was piled in a certain spot and there left to be reclaimed. An exception, of course, was made in the case of the rifles and ammunition; for, without them, the girl and her followers would have been at Gordo's mercy when he arrived from the hills.

All the equipment belonging to Sim Leverage was retained. Farrington had furnished Miss Wayland with an inventory, and this property, which had been used in the outlaw operations of the looters, was checked over and left on the scene of the work.

The freight wagon was unloaded, and its cargo stored in the laboratory. Craik's camp and sketching material which had been transferred to the wagon in the camp by the creek, was returned to the flivver. Then Craik pitched his own tent and was soon in comfortable quarters. Miss Wayland found lodgings in the laboratory, curtaining off one corner of it with canvas for her own private domain.

There was an interesting scene when the girl met Farrington. This was the first glimpse she had of him.

"You sold me the gold in these tailings, Mr. Farrington," said Miss Wayland, "and then you deliberately tried to steal it."

"We needed your money to outfit us," Farrington told her, brazen and impudent.

The girl gasped. "Then you admit that you were crooked?" she demanded.

"Let's put it this way," Farrington said, with easy nonchalance. "We needed money and made a virtue of necessity."

Anger and indignation flushed the girl's cheeks, and her eyes gleamed.

"How long have you been here?" she asked. "It has been two months since you transferred this property to me."

"We have been working for six weeks," was the answer, given with the utmost assurance, "and have had three clean-ups. They have run around five thousand dollars each, according to our assays of the bullion."

"In other words, you owe me fifteen thousand dollars. Where is that gold?"

"Big Pedro made off with some of it. The rest has been hidden away, and it will be sold as soon as we are ready to turn it into cash. You may look for it, Miss Wayland, but you won't find it. Furthermore, while you have succeeded, with Craik's help, in breaking in here, I have to inform you that you are not due to make a very long stay. Gordo will be back any minute."

"We're ready for him," said the girl.

"And the sheriff is due to-day or to-morrow from O'Fallon. If Gordo fails, then the sheriff will see that we get our rights."

"Your rights!" the girl exclaimed. "You can talk of 'rights' when you admit that you are a thief and a swindler! The law can't help you—won't help you. It's inconceivable!"

Farrington laughed. "You're due for an eye-opener," he observed.

The two prisoners were removed from the laboratory and placed in one of the Mexican's tents, under guard. Hardly had this been accomplished when a shot, from the south side of the camp, carried Craik hurriedly in that direction.

"Gordo, señor," reported Manuel; "he is back with so many"—he held up five fingers—"but not," he added, "with Big Pedro, the stolen gold, and the *caballos*. I told you!"

Juan Cortez had erected a barricade of country rock across the south side of the camp, the direction from which Gordo was expected. He and his armed men, under the shelter of this barricade, were lying on their guns. A hundred yards away, out in the open, the weary and dusty horsemen, Gordo at their head, had been brought to a surprised halt by a shot from the breastworks.

It must have been a most amazing state of affairs to Gordo and his trail-fagged men. They had ridden away to hunt for mutineers and recover stolen property; it was all too evident that Big Pedro had outwitted them, for they were returning without prisoners and with only the mounts that carried them. And there, at the very edge of their own camp, they were halted and denied admission.

"What's to pay here?" asked Gordo, checking a warlike demonstration of the four riders behind him.

Craik, under cover of the leveled guns of Miss Wayland's Mexicans, arose behind the barricade.

"This mine belongs to Miss Alice Wayland, Gordo," he called, "and she has taken possession. Two of your party, unarmed, will be allowed to come in here, load your personal property in the wagon by the corral, and drive away with it."

This announcement filled the baffled looters with rage. "Where's Nick Farrington and Santos?" demanded Gordo angrily. "What y'u done with them two?"

"They're here," Craik answered, "and you can take them with you when you go."

"We want water and grub," Gordo went on, "and that cyanide plant and them tailin's belong to us. We'll have 'em, y'u can gamble, if we have to put the moharrie and her hull outfit out o' business." He turned to wave a hand at the hard-bitten riders at his back. "Move around to the west, you buckos," he shouted, "and we'll bust up this crowd and either plant 'em or drive 'em off. On the jump, now!"

The families of Miss Wayland's workers were encamped on the west of the cyanide workings. If Gordo elected to carry the fighting into that quarter, the women and children might suffer. The whole affair had come to an ugly pass. Miss Wayland shouted to all the noncombatants on the western side of the camp to hurry to the laboratory and seek the shelter of its adobe walls.

The women were preparing dinner and working over their cook fires; and when the girl sounded the alarm, they dropped everything, caught up their *niños*, and raced for a place of safety. It was a human stampede; and Gordo and his men were about to ride in upon it, ruthlessly trampling women and children under their horses' hoofs, when the unexpected happened, and a halt was called in the warlike proceedings.

Three men rode around the northern side of the tailing piles, spurring their mounts furiously and finally drawing

rein between the fleeing Mexicans and Gordo and his men. The latter pulled their horses to a halt.

"Who are you?" demanded Gordo hoarsely. "Where'd y'u come from, and what business y'u got interferin' with me?"

"Somebody here sent for the sheriff," answered one of the horsemen. "Word came to O'Fallon yesterday that everything was *muy malo* out here at the Scorpion Mine. From the looks of things, that report nicked the truth."

"Well, you ain't the sher'ff," declared Gordo.

"The sheriff couldn't come; he's down with mountain fever and plumb out of his head. I'm Bill Scoby, the deputy sheriff, and these two men with me are from O'Fallon. Put up your guns, you hombres, and we'll try to get to the bottom of this trouble."

Craik, who had been almost beside himself with worry, suddenly felt a load of trouble drop from his shoulders. He whirled on Miss Wayland, who stood at his side, and caught her hand.

"Luck again!" he exclaimed; "the biggest kind of luck, Miss Wayland! Here's the law, arriving on the scene in the very nick of time, and it isn't the sheriff who, according to Farrington, had been bought and paid for by these looters, but the sheriff's deputy. Do you get that? This posse here, it's a fair surmise, will see that we get a square deal. I've never cared much for mountain fever, up to now, but from this on I shall treat it with a lot of respect. The fight has been stopped before it was fairly started."

The girl's face had gone white, but now the color surged into her cheeks. A mist of tears rose in her eyes, mute evidence of the strain she had been under and of the relief she was now experiencing.

"All's right with the world, after all, Mr. Craik," she said; "I was beginning to doubt it!"

CHAPTER XII.

THE GODS PROVIDE.

THE deputy sheriff, Scoby, and his two posse men, Holmes and Winslow, were the dispensers of justice at the Scorpion workings. The question was, would they dispense justice, or would Scoby follow the lead of his crooked chief? Craik knew men, and he felt sure that Miss Wayland could bank on Bill Scoby.

The deputy was at least forty years old; he was lean and "rangy" in his specifications, and there was an honest look in his sharp black eyes. All three officers were well "heeled," each man toting a rifle across his saddle and two solid-framed .45-caliber Colts in his belt holsters. Desert rats, like Gordo, Taranch, and Siwash, had a way of singing small when confronted by such a show of authority. Their truculence dropped from them, and Gordo, as spokesman, attempted the rôle of injured innocence.

"I'm mighty glad we're gittin' some law out here at the Scorpion," said Gordo. "It was my pardner, Farrington, that sent to O'Fallon for the sher'ff. We come out here to work these old tailing piles and was gittin' along right fine till this cimaroon"—he nodded toward Craik—"showed up yest'day mornin'. Since then we ain't had a thing but trouble. Some of our greasers vamosed durin' the night with our best hosses and about six bars o' bullion. I'm jest comin' back from a hard chase, durin' which them renegades dodged us complete, and I find this feller Craik has took over our camp. If that don't call for action by the law, Scoby, I'm blamed if I know what does. Farrington and Santos, the two hombres I left in charge here, have been bumped off mostly likely, and I want justice!"

Scoby turned to Craik. "Where are those two men, Farrington and Santos?" he demanded.

"Safe, but harmless," Craik answered. "I'll take you to them, Scoby, in just a minute. Right now, though, I want you to meet Miss Alice Wayland of Denver."

The deputy sheriff had been observing the girl with considerable curiosity. He nodded and touched his hat. Craik went on:

"Miss Wayland bought this plant and these tailing piles in good faith from Farrington; but when she came here to take possession of her property, she found Farrington and Gordo in charge of it and operating the cyanide plant. They are now, and have been for two months, deliberately stealing Miss Wayland's gold and defying her to stop them or put them off the property."

"Is that correct, Miss Wayland?" asked Scoby.

"Every word of it is true," the girl told him.

"That's their side of it," broke in Gordo. "Wait till y'u hear what we got to say."

Scoby motioned to Holmes and Winslow. The two posse men rode alongside the looters and quietly and quickly disarmed them. Gordo protested, but his protests went unheeded.

"Now for Farrington and Santos," said Scoby.

Craik led the way to the tent where the two prisoners had been left under guard. Nick Farrington stared at Scoby and then flung an astonished glance at Gordo.

"This here's a posse from O'Fallon, Nick," explained Gordo. "Buck Morton couldn't come, bein' laid up with mountain fever, and so Bill Scoby rode out in his place."

Farrington scowled. Evidently Scoby, as the sheriff's understudy, was not much to his liking.

"Well," he declared, "I won't talk to anybody but Buck."

"You'll talk to me, Farrington," said Scoby shortly. "Morton is sick and out

of his head, and all his duties devolve upon me. You sold the Scorpion tailing and cyanide plant to Miss Wayland?"

Farrington steadily refused to answer. "Did he?" snapped Scoby, turning suddenly on Gordo.

"Sure," was the answer surprised out of Gordo.

"Shut up, you fool!" cried Farrington.

"This proves it, Mr. Scoby." The girl pushed forward and handed a legal-looking paper to the deputy sheriff. "He can't deny that."

The paper was Miss Wayland's deed to the Scorpion property, signed by Nicholas Farrington.

"You bought this layout from Sim Leverage, Farrington?" went on Scoby, returning the paper to the girl.

"I never saw Sim Leverage," said Farrington.

"Then by what right did you deed the Scorpion property to Miss Wayland?"

"I'll explain that to Buck Morton and to no one else."

Scoby looked puzzled.

"I'd like a few words with you in private, Scoby," put in Craik.

The deputy and Craik left the tent. When they were alone, Craik showed Scoby his own deed from Leverage.

"Farrington is a crook, Scoby," Craik went on, "and he and Gordo are trying to loot this mine and get away with the gold. Their idea was to clean up on the tailings before the girl got here to work them herself."

"I see that plain enough, Craik," returned the deputy. "but where does the girl with her deed from Farrington come in? All this layout belongs to you."

"If I'm satisfied, then you ought not to have any kick coming. I'm an artist, and Miss Wayland is a cyaniding expert."

"I see! She's going to do the work for you, eh?"

"We'll let it go at that, Scoby; but don't say a word to anybody, least of all to Miss Wayland, about this deed of mine. On our part everything is on the square, and I give you my word for it."

Again Scoby looked puzzled. There was a lot about this situation which was beyond him, but there was no doubt in his mind regarding the culpability of Farrington, Gordo, and the others.

"All right, Craik," said Scoby, "I recognize your rights here, and if you want to pass them along to the girl—why, that's your affair. I'll keep it under my hat. But Farrington is a crook, and he's going to the O'Fallon jail."

"That will suit us," returned Craik; "what's more, I want Gordo and his looters to get out of here and take their property with them. I wish you and your men would stick around until they are well on their way."

"I'll do that. If you want me to, I'll take Gordo to jail along with Farrington."

"Gordo will probably take his outfit to O'Fallon. You might land on him as soon as he reaches town. He's a bad egg, and I don't want Miss Wayland to have any more trouble than she has already had."

Scoby nodded and returned briskly to the tent where Farrington was being held. He gave his orders, and Gordo voiced a wild protest. But Farrington held his peace.

"Things will be different," he finally remarked, "when I can have a talk with Buck Morton. Meanwhile, Gordo, you let things ride as they are."

Under the alert supervision of the posse men, Gordo and his followers loaded up their personal belongings. The girl stood by with her inventory and allowed nothing listed in her bill of sale from Farrington to be removed.

Four of Gordo's saddle horses were put in harness and hitched to the freight wagon, and the old vehicle groaned and

creaked, as it left camp and headed for the hill. Gordo rode the only horse that was left under saddle out of his original equipment. Farrington, decorated with handcuffs, had a place in the freight wagon beside Taranch, who was doing the driving. The rest of the looters traveled afoot. Scoby led the way, and Holmes and Winslow flanked the procession on either side.

"Y'u ain't done with us yet!" Gordo turned in his saddle at the edge of the camp to shake his fist at the girl and Craik and yell a parting defiance. "Look out for yerselves, that's all I got to say. I'll——"

Winslow cut him short with a sharp order, and Gordo turned and followed the creaking wagon. Smilingly Craik put out his hand to Miss Wayland.

"Congratulations!" he said; "you have established your rights, and now all you have to do is to begin work."

There was a thoughtful look in the girl's face. "I owe all my good fortune to you, Mr. Craik," she said, "for I never could have won this fight alone. What arguments did you use with Scoby to bring him over to my side so completely?"

"It was just a square-toed talk we had, that was all," Craik answered indefinitely. "The deputy sheriff was a good reader of character, and it was easy for him to see that we had the right on our side."

All the Mexicans had returned jubilantly to their cook fires. There had been no breakfast that morning in the creek camp, and all members of Miss Wayland's expedition were ravenously hungry. The odor of boiling coffee and frying bacon was in the air, and it was heart-warming.

"If the sheriff had come instead of the deputy," murmured Miss Wayland, "I am wondering what would have happened?"

"Let's take the gifts the gods provide," suggested Craik, "and not look

on the black side of the might-have-been. From now on, you will go after your gold, and I'll go after my sunrise."

"Suppose Gordo should come back?" hazarded the girl.

"I don't think he will. Scooby allowed us to keep all the guns and ammunition belonging to the Farrington-Gordo outfit, and that means we are sitting pretty."

Miss Wayland's face broke into a happy smile. "In other words, Mr. Craik," she observed, "we're to let well enough alone. So be it. Ysabel is beckoning to us. That means our dinner is ready. You're to take your meals with me. Let's go."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE ACTIVITIES OF PEACE.

AT once Miss Wayland began her work. In the afternoon her pick-and-shovel men started loading tailings into the tanks, and the girl established all her paraphernalia in the laboratory. She sampled the liquid in the solution tank, experimented with the cyanide to discover just the amount of the "white death" necessary to recover the gold from the tailings, and so brought the contents of the solution tank up to "standard." That evening the solution was turned into the loaded vats, and the wonder work began under the girl's supervision.

It was plain to Craik that the girl was thoroughly conversant with the work of cyaniding. She went about her business with no lost motion; every move she made was direct and certain, the shortest course between two points of an operation so vast and varied in its details that Craik's head was in a whirl.

There were the eighteen tailing tanks, six in a row, placed in tiers and looking like a series of Gargantuan steps. The top of the first row was on a level with the bottom of the second; and the top of the second row lifted itself to the bottom of the third. In

order to place the tanks in an ascending series, the slope of a low hill had been utilized. On the top of the hill, high above all the other huge vats, the enormous solution tank had been set.

This method of placing the tanks chained the law of gravity to the wonder work. The solution flowed downward through iron pipes, entered each of the six tanks in the uppermost row, percolated through the tailings and picked up the gold, overflowed into the middle row of tanks, captured the yellow metal there, and so on.

From the lowermost row of tailing tanks the solution entered a long metal box filled with shavings of zinc. These shavings wrested the gold from the solution and held it safely, while the solution flowed on into the sump tank. It was a very weak solution that was pumped back into the solution tank to be sampled, brought up to standard, and sent once more on its round of the tailings.

This was the operation which Alice Wayland found so beautiful, and which she had referred to as a "symphony." Surely she was not far wrong in her poetical imaginings; for if, in the words of the Psalmist, the morning stars might "sing together," no less truly could all these chemical notes be caught and arranged in one golden anthem.

During the clean-up, the shavings of the zinc box were treated with sulphuric acid, and the residue was refined in the furnace and run into bars of base bullion.

Craik watched the girl that first afternoon she was in charge of the Scorpion plant. There were a hundred things she had to do, all bearing on a different angle of the wonder work, and never for one moment was she at a loss or in doubt.

"You are a wonder worker," remarked Craik deferentially, as the busy afternoon was drawing to a close; "a high priestess in the temple of wonders. I ought to prostrate myself and

knock my forehead on the floor about three times, just to show my awe and admiration."

Alice was in her working uniform of khaki blouse and knickers. At the moment she was perched on a ladder against the solution tank, reaching down into its depths with a long-handled dipper. Hooking the dipper into the rim of the tank, she turned around on the upper rungs of the ladder and looked down at Craik, with a smile.

"We are a pair of wonder workers, if it comes to that," she said. "You work with colors, and I with cyanide. That's the only difference. I'm hoping you will get busy soon and give me a chance to kotow to you, Mr. Artist."

"I work with paints and brushes," returned Craik, "and you work with one of the deadliest poisons known to man. Suppose you were to lose your balance and fall into that tank?"

The brown face above sobered suddenly. "Such a foolish thing could not possibly happen," she told him; "but if it did, Alice Wayland would at once leave the Scorpion Mine and hit the trail across the great divide. A little of this solution on the lips, or taken up in the blood by the merest scratch on the skin, would be fatal. You know how the cyanide comes in tin cases inclosed in wood. A scratch from a ragged edge of tin in opening a case would be equivalent to a one-way ticket to kingdom come.

"But we are careful people here," she added in lighter vein, "and nothing so terrible is going to happen. The cyanide is under lock and key, and any Mexican who comes near this solution tank will have his wages docked. You worry me a lot, Jerry, by the way you potter around," she complained.

It was the first time she had called him by his first name, and he was surprised at the thrill it gave him.

"Alice," he said solemnly, "if you think I haven't sense enough not to take

a drink of that solution tank, you do my judgment a grievous wrong."

She blushed prettily. "Well, I hope you'll get to work on your sunrise before long," she returned, "and then I shall have less cause to fret over possible accidents."

"If we could have a sunrise in the late afternoon," he assured her, "I'd be at work this minute. A sunrise, however, happens only once in twenty-four hours, and I have to wait. But keep your eye on me to-morrow morning."

He was abroad very early next day, posted on a ridge west of the camp. He thought he was alone, but he heard a footstep behind him and turned to see Alice approaching through the chill gray of the dawn.

"Well," he remarked, "this is a happy surprise. But why have you turned out so early?"

"Why," she answered, "you told me yesterday that I was to keep an eye on you this morning. So here I am. What's the great idea, Jerry?"

"Looking for the sunrise. I'm going to get the effect as old Sol rises back of the big Jump-off."

"Jump-off?" she puzzled.

"The hill over there," he explained, "where I dived to your rescue in the flivver. We're going to see something extraordinarily beautiful, if I'm any prophet. Look! There it comes!"

Abruptly, as at the "Presto!" of the Great Magician, the banners of dawn began to tremble in the east. The rugged crest of old Jump-off softened with pearl gray and crimson. Another minute, and a fan of scarlet and gold opened above the hill and fluttered magnificently. Purple shadows still lurked in the west, while the zenith was flooded with a riot of dissolving color.

Both the man and the woman stood entranced on the ridge, as the sun fairly leaped from behind the hill and dazzled their eyes with its golden glitter.

"Wonderful, wonderful!" whispered the girl.

But Craik said nothing. He was racing back and forth along the ridge, seeking the best spot for his easel, the most enchanting view of the contour of the hill, as a foil for the glory behind it. He halted at a boulder, just where the ridge broke away in a steep bank, six feet sheer to the level ground below.

"Here's where I take my stand," he declared, raptly oblivious of everything but the eastern skies; "here's where I plant my easel for one of the finest sunrises west of Switzerland and the Alps!"

"Switzerland and the Alps have nothing to compare with this!" cried the girl impatiently. "I have seen the sun rise over there, and I know what I am talking about." She clasped her hands and lifted her eyes. "Gorgeous, gorgeous!"

Struck with her pose, her mood, Craik looked at her, studied her. Here, he told himself, was a woman after his own heart. She could fight like an Amazon for her rights against smooth schemers like Farrington, or desert rats like Gordo; and then, after the fighting and the violence, she could kneel, as he did, in adoration of the Creator and His handiwork.

"Where are your brushes?" demanded Alice; "where are your paints? Why aren't you at work, Jerry?"

"I am simply prospecting this morning," he answered, "getting the lay of the land and the right angle of view. This boulder is to be my base of operations. To-day I shall move my traps over here and 'block in' the hill; but for the color, I must wait for the sunrise and for many sunrises. I want to catch that at the exact minute of its greatest beauty, and it is going to take many minutes to get the thing as I want it, and as it ought to be. What's that?" he inquired, as a long-drawn-out croaking sound reached his ears.

"It's Ysabel, blowing the conch," said the girl, with a laugh. "In other words,

she is informing us that breakfast is ready. We are coming down to earth with a vengeance, Jerry, aren't we?"

"Oh, well," he answered, "even wonder workers like you and I have to eat, Alice. It's one of the necessary evils."

"And I may come over here occasionally to watch you paint?" she asked, as they descended the ridge and walked, side by side, toward the camp.

"It will be an inspiration for me," he declared.

CHAPTER XIV.

ANOTHER WONDER.

DAY followed day, week followed week, and a month slipped past. In the camp the restless activity went forward, and on the ridge Craik sat under a green umbrella, painting sunrise after sunrise and smudging out his work to do it all over again. Somehow he could not get the effect he wanted. There was an elusive value, a color tone, which seemed to evade him.

The girl, although so busy with the cyaniding work, found time to sit on the boulder and watch him paint. She said nothing, as he discarded one of his efforts after another. Silence is eloquent at times, and in the mutual silences on the ridge, garrulous Fate was knitting in closer bonds the two wonder workers at the Scorpion Mine. Neither realized this, however, at the moment.

There had been two clean-ups at the works, and at the end of each fortnight twelve bars of bullion had been carried into O'Fallon, sold, and the proceeds placed to the credit of Alice Wayland in the bank. In all, she had deposited twelve thousand dollars, and half of that sum had been sent to her father in Denver.

Important matters had been happening in O'Fallon, too. Buck Morton had died of the mountain fever, and the last hope of the looters had faded. Gordo and Farrington dug their way out of the primitive jail and had either left the

country or were abroad somewhere in the deserts. Craik hoped they had left the country, but he could not know that; he could not be sure. As the weeks passed, and nothing was seen of the looters, Craik began to think that they must have taken themselves off to a distant place.

Directly following the second clean-up at the cyanide works, Craik, on his own part, uncovered a wonder that almost left him gasping.

Down the steep bank of the ridge, directly under the boulder beside which he had pitched his sketching umbrella, he had seen a dozen small stones rudely placed in the form of a cross. As he painted his sunrises and smudged them out, it was his habit to concentrate on that cross of stones, while he probed his mind in an attempt to discover the cause of his failure to catch the right "tone" in his painting.

He was long of the opinion that the stones below him had rolled or had been shifted by accident into the form of a cross. And then one morning, after he had scored another failure with his sunrise, he jumped off the bank and gave the stones a close examination. They might have been placed in that position, he decided, either by chance or by design. It was about a fifty-fifty guess, either way.

Scouting around aimlessly, in a clump of brush, he found the head of a pick, broken from the handle. This proved to him that men had been there, at that part of the ridge; and it suggested that the stones had been placed by human hands where he had found them. But why?

He went back to the cross. Inspired by his discovery, he made other discoveries. For instance, close inspection revealed that the rocky side of the bank had been scarred, as by the blows of the broken pick. Stones had been overturned, their weathered upper surfaces facing downward. What did that mean?

Still probing his mind for the cause of his failure to get on canvas the exact sunrise he wanted, he began gouging absently at the bank with the point of a pick. Then came the wonder.

The pick displaced a rock, somewhat larger than the others. It fell from the face of the steep side of the ridge, revealing an opening, a snug pocket, dug into the ridge. He pushed his hand inside and pulled out something that seemed to his groping touch like a large brick. The object gleamed dully under his eyes. The next instant his heart leaped with surprise and exultation. The bricklike object was a bar of bullion.

Again and again his hand went into the little cache, and, presently, he had eighteen of the bars in a pile before him.

It was the gold stolen by Farrington and Gordo, or the larger part of it—what remained after Big Pedro and the mutineers had made their raid and escaped with horses and bullion. Farrington had boasted that it was hidden where Alice Wayland could never find it; and yet—oh, the ways of chance!—here was the hiding place, revealed by luck and the cross of stones.

Swiftly Craik tossed the bullion back into the hole and replaced the large stone at its mouth. Then he regained his place on top of the ridge, picked up his brushes and palette, and feverishly fell to his painting.

With the finding of the gold, the elusive note for which he had been probing, took shape and form in his comprehension. The sun was high above old Jump-off, but Craik carried in his mind all the superb colors of its rising. His brushes leaped to give shape and form to his ideal; vivid memory directed his eager hand, and, as noon approached, he sat back to look with satisfaction on his work.

He had done it. He had realized his ideal. He was just as sure of that as he

was that he was alive. Another morning or two, with the sunrise in front of him, and he could sign his name to the bottom of that picture, give it the last finishing touch, and feel an honest pride in his handiwork.

While he sat there contemplating his picture, he heard a light footfall crunching the shale behind him; then a breathless "Oh-h-h!" was uttered over his shoulder, and he felt the girl's warm breath on his cheek.

He looked at her curiously; but she did not see him, was seemingly oblivious of his presence, so wrapped up was she in his desert sunrise. After a time she turned away, dropped to her knees, bowed forward, and touched the earth with her forehead.

"My congratulations, oh, Prince of the Wonder Workers!" she exclaimed. "At last you have succeeded. Hung in any salan, that sunrise would take the blue ribbon. Copy it for me, some time! Will you?"

He laughed. "Yes, I'm pretty well satisfied, Alice," he told her; "but I have something else for you, something else which ought to cinch my right to the title of Prince of the Wonder Workers."

He got up, lifted her from her knees, and drew her close to the edge of the bank.

"Please go down to that cross of stones," he requested, "and then wait there till I work an incantation."

She looked at him quizzically. "What have you got up your sleeve, Jerry?" she wanted to know.

"Nine or ten thousand dollars, that's all. Doesn't it interest you?"

"Not half so much as that sunrise of yours. Money is money, but your sunrise is art at its very best."

"You'll have me on pretty good terms with myself, if you keep on. But please go down there," he begged, "and watch me do a trick."

Laughingly she descended the ridge, placed herself at the cross of stones, and

waited. "All ready, Jerry," she announced. "Shoot!"

"You'll have to thank the sunrise for this, Alice," he said, "for if I hadn't picked out this spot as the only one in which to plant my easel, I should never have seen that cross of stones. Luck, eh? Or perhaps you would call it coincidence?"

"Show me what it is," she called back, "and then I'll name it for you."

"Pull that boulder out of the wall," he directed, tossing a pebble on the rock that concealed the cache. She did so. "Now reach inside," he added, "and take what belongs to you—something you thought you had lost."

She drew forth one of the dull-yellow bars, and her face filled with amazement.

"Keep on!" Craik urged her. "You have only begun."

One by one she drew forth the eighteen bars of bullion and then stood up and looked down at the heap dazedly.

"They are part of the loot from the Farrington-Gordo clean-ups," explained Craik. "You remember, Big Pedro got away with some of the gold, and Farrington bragged about the rest being hidden where you could never find it. Well, Farrington didn't know how lucky a girl you were, Alice."

She climbed rapidly up the bank, came straight toward him, flung her arms around his neck, and kissed him on the lips.

"It is my luck, Jerry," she said tremulously, "to have you for my good jinni. You have brought me fortune from the first; got this mine for me from Farrington and Gordo and saved me from wreck and ruin. Now you have recovered most of the gold that I was sure had been lost forever. I owe you—why, I can't begin to tell how much I owe you."

"You have paid me," he said; "I am your jinni and slave."

"Not the slave of the lamp?"

"I would rather have it," he con-

tinued, fixing his eyes on the third finger of her left hand, "the slave of the ring."

She drew away from him. "I never talk nonsense in business hours, Jerry." She started off. "I'm going to have Juan come over with a bag and tote this stuff into camp."

"All right," he called after her; "I'll wait here, and then I'll trail along with Juan and bring my sunrise; but there is a more beautiful sunrise that you could paint for me, if you only would."

"Riddles! You'll have to talk plainer than that, Jerry, before I can connect with your meaning."

CHAPTER XV.

THE RAID.

NEXT morning Alice and Juan borrowed Craik's flivver and started for town. Craik filled the gasoline tank from a five-gallon tin he had in the machine and turned up all the grease cups. He would have liked to take that ride to town instead of Juan, who was armed and going along as a bodyguard, but Alice insisted that he remain in camp and put the finishing touches to his picture, while the mood was upon him.

The girl was taking the eighteen bars of bullion to O'Fallon. Craik watched the flivver from the ridge and kept his eyes on the car until its dust had faded from the sky line.

For half an hour he worked with his brushes; and then suddenly his easel went one way, his umbrella another, and his canvas stool collapsed under him, and he found himself sprawling on his back, two knees on his chest and two hands straining at his throat.

The attack was as unexpected as lightning out of a clear sky. He looked up into the scowling face of Gordo and shifted his gaze to another man who stood over him with a six-gun—Farrington.

Two saddle horses were on the western side of the little ridge. Craik, absorbed in his painting, had not heard the approach of the horses nor the stealthy advance of his two enemies.

"Leave him, Gordo," ordered Farrington; "if he tries to get up I'll plug him for keeps. Get the saddlebags and take the stuff out of the cache."

"I'd like a heap to strangle him," Gordo said, withdrawing his hands and heaving himself upright. "He queered our big game here, and he's sure got it comin' to him."

He lurched away toward the horses. There was a commotion in the camp. Craik could hear the screams of the women and the shouts of the men. He attempted to lift himself and take a survey of the tanks, but Farrington pushed him back with an oath.

"You don't have to look; I'll tell you what's going on," he said. "Our men have sneaked up on the laboratory and recovered the guns you stole from us a few weeks ago. They've got the whip hand over there, and before we're through we're going to wreck the whole works. How do you like the prospect?"

Craik refused to commit himself. He heard a fusillade of shots. Farrington whirled in the direction from which the reports came and swore under his breath. Craik, escaping the attention of Farrington for a moment, lifted his head. He could see a horse racing toward the town trail from the camp corral. Manuel was on the animal's bare back, his only bridle a rope hackamore, and he was dashing away, with two men in hot pursuit. But Manuel's horse was Poncho, fresh and fit, while the pursuing horses had evidently come a long way and were trail-weary. Manuel steadily increased his lead to a hopeless distance, and his pursuers turned back.

Gordo, coming to the top of the ridge with two pairs of saddlebags, added his curses to Farrington's.

"That Manuel is another that ort to

have got his gruel," Gordo exclaimed, "and here he's got away."

"Never mind that," said Farrington; "get that stuff out of the cache, then we'll finish up the job and be on our way."

Gordo vanished on the other side of the ridge, and Craik could hear him cursing and digging among the rocks. A minute later there came a wild bellow of rage and disappointment.

"It ain't here, Nick! The stuff's gone!"

"What?" asked Farrington.

Gordo reappeared on the ridge, his eyes glaring, his face red with anger.

"I say them bars o' bullion ain't where we put 'em, Nick," he repeated; "the moharrie must 'a' nosed 'em out."

"Not the moharrie," spoke up Craik. "I was the one who nosed them out. You coyotes lose."

"When did y'u find 'em?" demanded Gordo hoarsely.

"Last night; you're a dozen hours too late."

"If you found them last night," said Farrington, deadly menace in his voice, "then they must still be in this camp. Where are they?"

He bent over to push the muzzle of his revolver against Craik's throat. Craik could have answered that the bullion was on its way to town; but if the flivver had developed any engine trouble—and the engine had been proving a bit unreliable the last few days—and if Alice happened to be held up on the road, the raiders might have given chase and have overhauled the car. It was a long chance, of course, but Craik could not bring himself to involve the girl.

Oliver Z. should have seen his nephew at this moment. He would probably have revised some of his opinions regarding Jerry.

"You haven't the nerve to shoot, Farrington," said Craik, with a jeer. "I am the only one in camp who knows where that bullion is."

He was correct in that statement. Just three people belonging with Alice Wayland's outfit knew the gold had been found and had been loaded in the flivver. The girl and Juan were two who were "in the know," and Craik was the third.

Farrington arose, the gun in his hand. "Get a rope, Gordo," he directed.

Gordo had brought the horses to the ridge. Turning to one of the saddles he removed a reata.

"Tie him," Farrington went on, "and make a good job of it."

Craik felt the sinister trend of events, and conviction arose in him that never before had he been so close to that kingdom come which Alice had once mentioned to him. He made a game attempt to escape the rope and leap from the crest of the ridge, and for a moment there seemed a chance that his reckless plan might succeed. He writhed clear of Gordo's clutching hands and gained his feet, but Farrington struck him with a revolver. Craik was stunned by the blow and sank to the ground. When he revived he discovered that his hands and feet were bound, and that he was being carried by his two captors in the direction of the cyanide tanks.

The camp was strangely quiet. Craik realized that, although his head was throbbing with pain. The mental fog lifted slowly, and Craik, in his next lucid interval, became aware that Gordo was climbing a ladder and hauling him upward by the head and shoulders.

The solution tank! Craik gasped, as the fiendish plans of the two raiders took shape in his mind. He was pushed over the rim of the tank and lowered into it, feet downward.

Under the nervous thrill aroused by the situation, his faculties cleared swiftly. All the solution had run out of the big vat, and he drooped to his knees on its slimy bottom and looked upward into the murderous face of Gordo.

"Siwash," came the voice of Far-

rington, "get up on that derrick and fall to with the pump."

Craik's face paled, and his heart skipped a beat. They were going to pump the solution in on him.

"You devils!" he said, gaspingly.

Gordo laughed mockingly. "Where's them bars o' bullion, Craik?" he demanded. "If y'u want to drown in the solution, like a rat in a tub o' water, keep what y'u know to yourself; but if y'u want to live, tell us what's become of that gold."

Craik clenched his teeth. He saw Gordo lift his arm in a signal to Siwash. Then came the clanking of the pump, and a thin stream of the deadly solution shot from the end of a pipe on the rim of the tank, struck the opposite wall, and fell splashing on the bottom of the tank.

Craik, with a wrenching effort, managed to lift himself on his bound feet; then, inch by inch, he worked his way as far from the gurgling stream as the circumference of the tank would permit. Even so, drops of the deadly solution rained about him, and the mist from it struck his face. He felt something warm trickling down his cheek and, lowering his eyes, saw a smudge of blood on his coat.

Farrington's blow with the gun had broken the skin; and if the cyanide solution should touch that wound—Craik pushed fearfully back from the falling stream.

"Where's them bars?" demanded Gordo, over the top of the tank.

Craik looked upward with filmy eyes, his face drawn and haggard, but not a sound came from his tense lips.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE LAW AGAIN.

THE forebodings of Craik regarding the flivver proved to be well grounded. Three miles from the Scorpion Mine in the O'Fallon trail the

motor wheezed and gurgled and refused to function. Juan Cortez was handy with machinery, but he tried in vain to find the trouble. Alice took a hand at the tinkering and was no more successful than Cortez had been. They had lost an hour and might even be compelled to return to camp for horses.

"I wish Jerry was here," the girl declared. "I'm sure he could fix this flivver so it would go."

Just at that moment a flurry of dust showed to the north, along the O'Fallon trail. It was moving southward in the direction of the stalled car. Cortez called the girl's attention to it.

"Maybe we get help, señorita," he suggested.

Together they watched and saw the dust whip aside and reveal three mounted men, coming at high speed.

"Scoby!" exclaimed Alice. "Yes," she went on, "and Holmes and Winslow!"

"Trouble somewhere," said Cortez; "mebby they don't have time to stop and feex this car."

The riders stopped, in spite of their manifest hurry. "Ah, Miss Wayland," Bill Scoby exclaimed, "have you, by any chance, heard anything about Gordo and Farrington? They were seen yesterday in the White Sulphur Hills, with three or four of their old lawless gang at their heels, and we're out trying to get a line on them."

The White Sulphur Hills were not many miles from old Jump-off and the Scorpion workings, and a look of fear arose in the girl's face.

"We hadn't seen anything of them up to the time I left the mine, Mr. Scoby," she answered, "but if they are in the White Sulphur Hills it's a foregone conclusion they have designs on our cyanide workings."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that," demurred Scoby; "they are just scouting around in their old stamping grounds, trying to kick up some deviltry. They——"

Scoby broke off abruptly, as a dull thump of racing hoofs could be heard to the south. Out of the dust a solitary rider emerged.

"Manuel!" said Alice. "Something must be wrong at the works, or he wouldn't have left the camp."

Manuel was surely in luck to overhaul the machine with the girl and Cortez and to find the acting sheriff and two deputies on the scene.

"*Gracias a Dios!*" said Manuel, as he pulled back on the rope hackamore and halted Poncho. "Señorita, the camp has been raided by that Farrington and Gordo. They are there this minute. Señor Craik has been captured. Me, I get away and start for town with the news."

"Let me have that horse, Manuel!" exclaimed Alice. Then she caught the rifle out of the hands of Cortez. "Stay with the car, Juan," she ordered; "you have a six-shooter. The trouble is all at the mine, though, and you won't have any here. If you can fix up the car, go on to O'Fallon and turn over the bullion."

Manuel dismounted, and the girl, catching the end of the hackamore, leaped nimbly to Poncho's back. In another moment, she was plunging along the trail, side by side with Scoby.

"They'll kill Jerry if we don't get there in time," Alice said, a sob in her voice.

"If they have found out that he owns the works, Miss Wayland," Scoby agreed, "they'll certainly put him out of the way."

"Owns the works?" asked Alice. "What do you mean? I bought the plant from Farrington."

Scoby realized too late that he had betrayed Craik's secret. At that moment, however, he considered the slip of small importance.

"Farrington didn't own the Scorpion property," he explained, "and couldn't sell it. Craik has a deed from Sim Lev-

erage to the plant and the tailings. He didn't want you to know that and pledged me to keep quiet about it. When I saw his deed a few weeks ago, that was all I needed to know, so I drove off the Farrington-Gordo crowd and left you in possession."

"Jerry!" exclaimed the astounded girl. "Why didn't he tell me, Mr. Scoby?"

"I reckon he thought you needed the money from those tailings more'n he did," was the acting sheriff's answer.

The four riders came in sight of the mine and moved onward at top speed.

"There's a man on the derrick over the sump tank," said Alice. "What can that mean?"

"And look at the three by the solution tank," Scoby added, unslinging his rifle. "The man on the ladder is Gordo, and down below him is Farrington and Taranch. Miss Wayland," he added, "there'll probably be some rough work. You better stay behind."

"I'm riding with you," she said through her clenched teeth, "and fighting at your side, if it comes to that—for Jerry Craik. So far he has done all the fighting for me, and it is about time I did something for him."

The horses of the raiders, reins hanging from the bits, were grouped by the ridge.

"If you are bound to help," Scoby told the girl, "take those horses and ride off with them. If we can keep the raiders afoot, we'll soon have them with their hands in the air."

Alice turned aside to pick up the five horses and lead them back along the trail. In the distance she saw the man on the derrick slip quickly down the ladder; and she saw Gordo drop from the rim of the solution tank and, with the others, run in the direction of the laboratory.

But they were not swift enough. Scoby and his two deputies rode in between the raiders and the mud-walled

building; then guns roared, puffs of white smoke arose in the still air, and the battle was on.

Not content to sit idly by, while the fight was in progress, the girl took the five horses into the chaparral, hid them there, and then, with Poncho doing his prettiest, raced for the tanks.

The shooting by this time had drifted away among the tailing piles. The girl saw Farrington, wounded, propped up against one leg of the sump-tank derrick, binding a handkerchief around his right forearm.

"Where's Jerry Craik?" she demanded as she passed the derrick.

"He was killed an hour ago," answered Farrington, with a lurid oath.

Alice reeled on Poncho's back. Laboratory, tanks, tailings piles, and derrick began to dance around her in dizzy circles. And then suddenly a voice drifted to her, a muffled voice, but easily recognizable as Craik's:

"Here, Alice—in the solution tank!"

The girl's brain cleared. With a wild cry she put Poncho to the slope, halted at the huge vat, leaped from the horse to the ladder and climbed to the rim of the tank. Looking down, she saw Craik knee-deep in the cyanide solution, erect on his bound feet and smiling up at her.

"More luck!" he exclaimed. "How does it happen that——"

"You are wounded!" she said. "There's blood on your face, Jerry."

"Nothing serious," he said; "just a scratch."

"The fiends!" she exclaimed; "to throw you in here! Careful, Jerry; be very careful," she went on.

Perching on the rim of the tank, she drew up the ladder and lowered it on the inside; then she went down, untied the rope about his wrists, and, unheeding his protests, plunged her hands into the solution and freed his feet. Then, both of them climbed to the top of the tank, drew up the ladder, placed it on

the outside, and descended to the ground.

Craik, all the time, was telling Alice of his experience with Farrington and Gordo.

"You might have told them I had left for town with the gold, Jerry," said Alice; "it would probably have saved you such a horrifying experience, and they couldn't have overtaken me."

"Couldn't they?" Craik inquired. "Did the old boat run without a hitch?"

Suddenly Alice recalled the engine trouble. She explained to Craik how they had been held up in the trail, had encountered Scoby and his two deputies, and then had heard about the raid from Manuel.

"I guess I was right not to take a chance by telling Farrington and Gordo about the gold," observed Craik; "I had a hunch, Alice, and I always play my hunches. Wonder if there is anything I can do to help Scoby?" he broke off, picking up the rifle Alice had dropped by the tank.

"It's all over, I'm thinking," the girl answered; "here are Scoby and Winslow now, bringing in Farrington and Gordo."

Craik turned to face the four men who were marching up the slope around the end of the platform of the old mill.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COMPROMISE.

AFTER a brief show of resistance, Scoby and his men overpowered the raiders. Farrington was wounded and Gordo captured, early in the scrimmage. The other three men, their leaders gone, attempted to find their horses and flee, but were overtaken and brought back.

When the posse left with the prisoners, Alice and Craik rode with them as far as the automobile. The machine was still stalled in the trail, and Craik immediately got busy with it. In five minutes he had the motor running. Cor-

tez was sent back to the mine with the two horses which Alice and Craik had used to get them to the car. As for Alice and Craik, they had decided to drive to O'Fallon to deliver the bullion.

"Juan," said Alice, as her foreman was starting off with the two horses, "Señor Craik's picture is up on the ridge—the sunrise picture, *sabe?* Get it, Juan, and take good care of it till we return to the camp."

"*Si, señorita,*" Cortez answered.

Scoby and his men, mounted and guarding their prisoners, waved good-bye to the girl and Craik, as the flivver moved on toward town. Craik was driving, and Alice occupied the seat beside him. They had invited Scoby to ride in the tonneau and bring Farrington and Gordo with him, but he had declined.

"We'll all stick together," he explained, "and make a saddle party of it."

The flivver behaved beautifully, now that Craik's hand was on the wheel, and the dusty miles of the trail flew swiftly rearward. Craik was doing all the talking, he noticed presently, and he wondered about it.

"What's the matter, Alice?" he inquired. "You haven't said a word since we left Scoby and his saddle party. Aren't you happy? There'll be no more trouble with Farrington and Gordo, and you are all set to finish your work at the Scorpion with a good deal of profit. It's a mighty pleasant prospect, seems to me."

"It would be," answered Alice, "if it was *my* prospect, and if I had any right to the profits. You own the plant and the tailings, Jerry, and this bullion here in the car is yours. I—I have been swindled"—her voice quivered—"and haven't a dollar in the world. I really believe that you would have let me work over all those cyanide tailings and clear out with the profits. But I can't do that, now that I know the true condition of affairs."

"So Scoby had to let the cat out of the bag, eh?" Craik asked angrily. "Well, Alice, suppose we compromise in making a settlement of the business at the Scorpion? What do you say?"

"Compromise?" she echoed. "How in the world could we compromise a matter in which everything belongs to you and nothing to me?"

He told her how the compromise could be effected; and she, her gray eyes glowing happily and her brown face touched with color, met him halfway in adjusting the difficulty. For several miles Craik drove with one hand.

"This is my sunrise, *mujercita,*" Craik murmured.

"Our sunrise, *novio,*" she corrected him.

"Two telegrams, please," said the Jap cook, up in the high sierras, extending two yellow envelopes to Oliver Z. and Sim Leverage, as they staggered in from the trout stream, with their full creels. "I pay me fi' dollar to the man who bring them, please," he added.

"H'm!" murmured Oliver. "Listen to this, Sim: 'Taking a partner in on the cyanide deal; only girl in the world; thought you might like to know. Married in O'Fallon this afternoon. Happiest man alive.' That's what it says," declared Oliver, "and it's signed, 'Jerry, the Wonder Worker.' I don't know about the wonder part," Oliver muttered, wiping his brows, "but he's a fast worker, all right."

"He's got my picture for me, too," said Leverage.

"Picture?—what picture?"

Then Leverage revealed the secret of his desert sunrise. "I'm going to wire my congratulations to the boy," Leverage added. "What are you going to do, Oliver?"

"Well," returned Oliver, "you write the telegram and make it as strong as you like, and I'll sign my name to it, too."



Opportunity Number Three -

By George F. Peabody-

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

TAKEN TO THEIR HEARTS.

IT was old Mrs. Erickson Seymour's unholy pride in her name and social position that sent her son Andrew from the house of his fathers under a name that was not his, compelling him to take up his abode at a hotel along with nearly a score of others who helped to make up the fighting, scrapping, ambitious aggregation known as the Eagle Baseball Club.

To Mrs. Seymour the idea that one bearing that brilliant and ancient name should work for a living was horrible enough; but when her son, a vigorous example of young America, arrived home from college to reject flatly her plan of a wealthy marriage as a means of restoring their fallen fortunes, and informed her of his intention to play ball for a livelihood, her emotions, a mixture of grief, anger, and consternation, knew no bounds.

In that triple-headed agitation, however, anger triumphed—anger and fear. The anger rose because of Andrew's willfulness; the fear because through his action she saw the triumphs of years of scheming and unceasing effort lost. So there was a hot quarrel ending in

family disruption and the understanding that the young man was not to use the family name in his baseball venture.

The Eagles, for all their fighting and scrappy spirit, were failing to get anywhere, that is, unless one considers fourth place somewhere. Week after week they had seemed right on the edge of stepping out, but their spurts never quite reached. They seemed to lack synchronizing, settling, a balance wheel—something certainly. And old "Doc" Kennedy, the manager, knew what it was. They needed a little more punch with the stick, and too many drives to left and right center were going safe.

"Trap" Greene, so called for his once-great skill at trapping low, looping fly balls, was slowing up, and his hitting was slumping, too. True, he was close to the magic .300 mark, but normally he hit nearer .350, and those fifty points, along with the slow fielding, spelled the difference between fourth and first places.

Therefore Kennedy hailed with delight "Stump" Donley's glowing report on Andy Seymour and the news that the college lad would sign. His name would have no pulling power at the gate, because the school he came from was a modest and little-known one; but for that fact the manager was grateful since

it had prevented other prying scouts from discovering the phenom. This fact also made easy the matter of an alias, and so the youth's name went out to the papers as one "Andrew Duke," and his point of origin as the very thickest of the bushes.

Some surprise was manifested by the fans when Kennedy immediately shoved the newcomer into the line-up. But Duke's first day won them. He flitted about the center garden as if gifted with wings. Back to the flag pole, far to right, far to left, in close to second—he was everywhere. Once he came tearing in at breakneck speed to snatch the ball at his shoetops, and within a stride he had whipped it to third to cut down a runner who had left the sack too soon. That showed him to be alive and proved he had everything a great outfielder needs, so the stands rose to cheer, and excitement rippled.

At the plate he whaled the first ball pitched to him over the wall in right for a homer. Again the stands rose to cheer, and the rookie was taken to their hearts. The Eagles won that game eleven to four, and the papers came out the next day flatly declaring that the team had at last found its punch. And certainly that was true. They won their next ten games in a row, and in less than two weeks were on the tail of the leaders.

Far and wide then went stories of one Andy Duke. Nobody knew where he came from; nobody could find a trace of that name on minor-league or college rosters, so an air of mystery developed about the good-natured but close-mouthed lad, and great praise was heaped upon old Doc Kennedy for his wisdom in finding and picking comers.

The fans loved Andy Duke's fire and dash. He played the game fiercely and with such smashing determination that speedily he became the prime favorite in his home park. His astonishing exploits on the field were made the daily

subject of adulatory news yarns in the daily papers, and great crowds went flocking to Eagle Park, eager to see the amazing young chap whose coming had transformed an ordinary team into a great one. By early fall Andy Duke was firmly fixed among the game's brightest stars.

"What do the folks think now?" Doc queried confidently one day just before game time. Andy had just lifted one over the right field wall in batting practice, and the hero-loving fans had sent a thundering cheer across the field in recognition of it.

"They don't know it!" The young man laughed. "That is, mother doesn't. She never reads anything but the society papers. My sister, though, she's a brick. She comes out quite often and likes the old game."

"Humph!" grunted Doc, "I didn't suppose there was a man, woman, or child in town who wasn't following your career like a hawk; and I judged most of 'em was trying to get in here to look at you. Man, man! look at those stands!"

Andy, however, shook his head. "You don't know the Seymours—the *great* Seymours." He grinned.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNWELCOME ASSIGNMENT.

THE league fight that year was a memorable one. By late summer it had become apparent that the battle for the flag lay between the Eagles and the Buckeyes, and by the middle of September the two teams had crawled eight games ahead of the Lions in third place. The "Bucks" were leading by half a game, and the fever-hot interest of the baseball world waited the final clash between the two teams at Eagle Park. Everybody knew the race would be settled then and there.

It was also the middle of September when Mrs. Erickson Seymour and her

daughter, Milly, arrived home from a most unsatisfactory season at the seashore. It had been difficult to avoid the subject of Andrew. It had been more difficult to hide their poverty, and so the bitter experience of being more or less shunted aside to watch the colorful parade of social glory became Mrs. Seymour's lot. In her heart the bitter feeling against her son took firmer root and grew.

She clung tenaciously, however, to what had been the passion of her life, and though her share in its activities grew less and less, she still held up her head though her heart was often sick. Thus it was she came to draw "Opportunity Number Three."

Opportunity Number Three was one of a series selected and printed at this season each year by the *News*. It was a charity stunt. A number of opportunities for bringing happiness to the needy were published, one each day, and the public invited to care for them. This year a club to which Mrs. Seymour still clung elected to take over the whole list, drawing among their members for those to serve, well knowing that lavish praise and publicity would follow.

"Of course," sputtered Mrs. Seymour to Milly, "it would be my lot to draw this horrid assignment." There certainly was little of charity in the grand lady's heart at the moment.

"What is it?" asked the blue-eyed, fair-haired daughter.

"Read it."

Milly took the communication and read:

DEAR MRS. SEYMOUR: Your name has been selected as the one to care for Opportunity Number Three to-morrow. This is what you are to do: Drive to 1335 Lennox Street, and there get Charley Marks. He will be waiting for you.

Charley is ten and has never seen a real ball game. A victim of infantile paralysis, one leg is useless, but he thinks if he could go to Eagle Park and see a big-league game it would be a perfect day for him.

If you cannot do it please inform me at once, so that a substitute may be drawn. We must not fail Charley, and we must know today, so that correct information may be given the paper. Sincerely,

MRS. HARRINGTON KELLER, Sec'y.

"Lennox Street. H'm! Where is that?" mused the girl.

"I know," snapped her mother. "It's just about the meanest, dirtiest street in town. Of course I shall have to do it. Time was when I could dictate, but thanks to your precious brother, we now do what we are told and usually what nobody else would ever possibly think of doing."

"Why, mother," gasped Milly, "I think it will be a great lark. I'm keen for it!"

"Mildred! You astonish me!" wailed her mother. "I do declare, you're almost as bad as your brother." With an air of deep hurt the old lady founced out of the room to call the club secretary. "You see about getting those horrid tickets," she flung back over her shoulder.

Ten minutes later the girl had her brother on the wire. "Oh, it's too rich!" she told him. "Mother is raging, but she has to do it. Get us a box right behind your dugout, will you, Andy?"

"Will I?" the young man's voice boomed. "Say, sis, this is great! And it'll be fine for the kid. This game will be a corker."

"Who's going to pitch for us, Andy?"

"Oh, you should ask!" he chaffed. "I know that you and Frank Dillon were out riding in his new car last night; he told me all about it! He's to work, of course. We want this game. I'll tell him you're coming. That'll either make him great or ruin him." Andy laughed.

"Just wait till I see that wretch!" said the girl, her cheeks flaming. "But for the crippled boy's sake I hope my presence won't hurt Fran—Mr. Dillon."

"Oh!" mocked the youth. "Just for the cripple's sake?"

"None of your business, you impertinent fellow!" she flung at him. "I won't talk with you any more. Get after those seats."

"Right! I'll fix it," he called, laughing.

CHAPTER III.

SOMETHING TO REMEMBER.

THERE was no doubt that 1335 Lennox Street was not a pretty place. The street itself was not pretty. It looked like a spot the city was trying to forget and had almost succeeded. But having once seen it one wondered how.

So thought Milly Seymour as she and her mother rolled up to the house that Charley Marks called home. Yet she, too, forgot the house, the street, everything, when the shriveled little chap came swinging out on his crutches. He had scrubbed his face until it was a bright pink, yet Milly thought oddly that his color was a sort of halo of happiness, springing, perhaps, from his excited, eager blue eyes. His clothes, the coat much too small, seemed decently clean though shabby, and his shoes, broken-laced and worn through, had been polished. Milly jumped out to meet him. No other person from the house appeared.

"Hello, Charles!" Milly greeted him. "All ready for the game?"

"Oh, sure, ma'am! Took me a long time, but I'm ready," he chirped excitedly. "Is it a sure go? Am—are you goin' to take me to see the Eagles play—honest? I—I couldn't hardly b'lieve it," he added wistfully.

"That's just what we're going to do," she answered, smiling at him, "and there'll be ice cream, peanuts, and pop, too!"

"Oh, boy!" The lad grinned. "Who says there ain't no angels?"

A queer catch fastened in Milly's

throat as she swung open the door and reached an arm round his waist.

"Put him in the rear seat, Milly," came the cold voice of her mother.

"Why—why, mother?" expostulated the girl.

"Look at him," replied the disgruntled old lady; "most unattractive lookin! Really not at all appealing! I don't wish to touch him," she finished flatly.

"Very well," the girl answered grimly, her face suddenly white, but with a rebellious light in her eyes. "Come on, Charles, you and I will sit in the back seat. Don't mind what mother said," she murmured to him.

"Oh, sure not!" he returned softly. "I don't mind; hardly anybody likes to have me around. I got used to that. Say," he went on as he reached for the rear door, "this is a swell bus. You folks must be awful rich."

"Not so very," Milly replied as she almost lifted his slight form into the car and climbed in after him.

Her mother looked around with astonished disapproval. "Milly!" she said severely. "Whatever can you be thinking of? Leave the child there and come in here where you should be. The idea!"

The girl took one look into the boy's worshipful eyes fastened on her face, and a surge of feeling swept her. That one look peeled off what was left of her veneer of caste. One arm went out involuntarily to encircle the little fellow's thin shoulders. "No, mother," she said in a queer, strained voice; "Charles will never forget this ride, and I want to share it with him. Maybe then he'll not forget me."

The old lady gave her a withering glance, muttered something about not understanding her own children, and started the car.

The drive was uneventful. Yet to the crippled boy it was comparable to the triumphal march of a Roman emperor. And to Milly, watching his spon-

taneous delight, it was a half hour of exquisite pain. Such depths of want and deprivation, and over such a small thing so great an exaltation of joy! Closer and closer he snuggled into the circle of her arm.

"Are you a nurse?" he asked in his half-shy manner.

"Why, no," she said and looked at him wonderingly. "Why? What made you think so?"

"When I was sick with my leg the nurse used to put her arm round me just like you do. I like it," he said simply.

"Oh!" breathed the girl, and her heart suddenly ached. Poor little lad, counting his caresses in such pitifully small numbers. As they parked near the Eagle field the girl's eyes had grown misty.

They were early. The stands were not yet half filled, but already from the field came the thud of balls and the crack of bats. Hearing this, Charley's face spread into wider smiles, while the light in his eyes became pure exaltation.

Some magic word had come before them. The man at the ticket window stretched an arm through the wicker to shake hands with the crippled boy. The man at the turnstile picked him up and carried him through the gate. Beyond that were half a dozen sport writers down from their lofty perch behind the plate to catch, if possible, the reaction of this lad to his unexpected happiness. Two photographers had deserted the field to make a glorious picture in the stands.

So, ushers and newspaper men fell to and formed a sort of regal cortège, two husky chaps lifted the excited boy to their shoulders, and with a happy girl leading and a dour old lady following, they went grandly down to a box right back of the Eagle's dugout. Charley was trembling with excitement.

"What do you think of it, Charley?"

chorused the reporters when the party was seated.

Charley's blue eyes were round with wonder, and his lips were parted with awe. "My gosh!" he whispered. "Ain't this great?" Then he found a thin, tremulous voice. "Ain't it pretty? Is—is that real grass out there? I never saw so much before."

"Yes," replied the reporters, looking oddly at one another. "That's real grass. Would you like to walk on it?"

"Oh, golly, yes!"

"All right," said Phillips of the *News*; "after the game you shall stand in the pitcher's box and walk across that grass."

Phillips' voice was a bit queer as he said it. The others coughed and cleared their throats, and Milly dabbed at her eyes with a bit of lace. Only Mrs. Seymour remained unmoved. Her eyes were staring fixedly and coldly across the field at the flagpole.

"Which ones are the Eagles?" was the boy's next query.

"The ones with the white suits. The home team always wear white suits," Phillips replied.

By now the lad had taken in the huge stands, the splendid field, and was getting down to the team itself. "Which one is Andy Duke?" he asked. "I'd know him if he was up close—see, I brought his picture." He fished in a pocket and brought out a creased sport-page photo of Andy.

"He's way out by the flagpole chasing flies," Phillips answered, adding curiously: "Is Duke a hero of yours, too?"

"I'll say!" replied Charley. "Why, he's the star of this old league, ain't he? Hittin' .375 an' grabbin' everything hit out of the infield. Oh, he's the real goods, that boy. I guess he could be president if he wanted to."

"I'll bet he could," Phillips agreed gravely and beckoned to an Eagle player standing near. "Send Duke here when he comes in, will you?" the writer asked.

"I want to introduce him to a genuine fan—one who's seeing his first big-league game."

"Sure!" The player grinned. "And let me shake hands with that fan, please. I've heard about him—we all have. How are you, Charley?" he said as he grasped the boy's small hand. "My name's Lowell. I play third when Hawley's out of the game."

The boy's eyes were popping. "Oh, gosh!" he said. "Shakin' hands with a real big leaguer! I know 'bout you," he added; "you're a whale of a hitter—hittin' .345 right now, but you throw wild sometimes."

"You've got my number," The ball player laughed.

"Say," asked Phillips in wonder, "do you know the batting averages for the whole league?"

"I know the leaders, an' I know what all the Eagles are hittin'," replied the little chap. "You see, I can't play myself, but I read the sport pages, and that kinda makes up."

"I see," said the news writer thickly and got out his handkerchief.

"Milly! Please stop squeezing my arm!" complained Mrs. Seymour.

"Oh, pardon me, mother!" said the girl. Then she leaned close and whispered: "Look, mother; there's Andy! There, at first base, coming this way."

Mrs. Seymour looked, finding first base by following Milly's finger. A little shiver went through the grand lady. Black sheep and rebel though he was, her son was a specimen to set any mother's heart atingle. Huge, lean, and brown, his uniform setting off his splendid figure in fine form, Andy Seymour looked exactly what he was—a real man, gloriously alive.

Up he came in long, swinging strides, and with his approach up went a cheer from the fast-filling stands. There was some living quality in the spontaneity of that cheer that caught the haughty old lady off guard. There was no form

to it, no set words, nothing but a prolonged yell that had in it the thrilling, stirring note of crowd adoration for its hero.

Mrs. Seymour thought to look around with scorn at what her mind called a "mob" action, but her eyes fell on her boy standing out in front, his face tilted up, smiling into the stands. As his cap came off in a graceful sweep and the throng roared again, a strange, unbidden, almost unwelcome, thrill shook the mother's cold heart. This was her boy that these thousands of people were madly cheering! Then she became conscious of the thin screeching beside her. Little Charley was doing his best.

"Sit down, child," she ordered curtly, "before those crutches slip."

It was too late. One did slip on the concrete floor, and the crippled boy brought up in a tangle at her feet. The next instant Andy had leaped the wall and was gathering up the lad.

"This is Charley Marks," said Phillips when the boy was back in his seat. "He's seeing his first game, Andy, through the kindness of Mrs. Erickson Seymour. Mrs. Seymour, may I present Mr. Duke, a man whom the whole city loves, and one who has stepped into the breach to make a great team of the Eagles, possibly to win a pennant for us?"

Introduced to her own son! It was a situation that not even Mrs. Seymour's poise could master. Besides, something was tearing at her heart. Something had awakened suddenly with surprising force. For a moment she wanted desperately to throw dignity, position, everything, to the winds and hug the handsome youth before her. She might have done so, but a word from him chilled her.

"I am happy to meet Mrs. Seymour," he said quickly, "but I understand she is really very little interested in baseball. I came in to see this youngster here. Very fine of you, Mrs. Seymour,

to bring him. I hope you may truly know how great a treat it is—to both of us. Glad to know you, Charley," he added and squatted on his heels before the boy. "How do you like us?"

"Great!" replied the lad in a changed voice. "Gosh, how you do hit 'em! But I—I never 'spected you'd come in to talk with me. I—I——"

"Great Scott! Charley, I couldn't wait till you got here!" exploded Andy. "We ball players like the fans just as well as they like us. Going to pull for us to-day—hard—aren't you, Charley?"

"Pull? I'll say I am! I'll holler till I can't talk. An' you'll beat 'em, won't you, Andy? Lick 'em good? I'd be sick if you lose to-day."

"We'll try, Charley. But don't get sick if we lose. You see we've got to beat Mike McBain to-day and——"

"Yes; I know," cut in the boy. "An' he's beat you five times this year. He's a jinx. But, shucks, he's only won eleven an' lost twelve. Other teams beat him easy enough."

A bell rang.

"Got to go now, Charley; game time. I'll tell the boys what you said, and we'll trim Mike to-day. See you between innings." Andy turned to go.

"Wait a minute, Andy," the boy called as he rose, balanced on his crutches and fished in a pocket. "Here, take this. It's my lucky piece. Had good luck ever since I found it two days ago. Right away came this trip, see? It works!"

Shyly he handed over a big red penny. Tears danced in Milly's eyes, Mrs. Seymour coughed, and Phillips turned away as Andy gravely accepted the gift.

"Thanks, Charley! I'll put it in my hip pocket, see?" He carefully stowed it away with his handkerchief on top and then leaped onto the field.

"Say, ain't he great, though?" asked the boy, turning to Mrs. Seymour. "Bet his folks is proud o' him."

Mrs. Seymour said nothing, but

Milly, looking up, noted that her mother's face was chalk-white and that her lips were pressed tight.

CHAPTER IV.

FACING A NEW WORLD.

THAT afternoon's game is still talked about in league circles. Believing that the first game might well be the decisive one in this closing series, both teams threw their best into the breach. Frank Dillon, knowing that Milly was there, went to the box determined to beat Mike McBain or throw an arm out trying. And McBain, certain that his stuff was poison to the Eagles, worked with all his usual crafty skill. Inning after inning went by, the fans sitting on the edges of their seats and every few minutes rising to roar as some spectacular fielding play cut off a rally.

Far out in center, Andy roamed like a flying ghost. Away to right, across to left, back to the flagpole, then sweeping in close to second he went to snare drives that on leaving the bat brought groans from the vast crowd; groans that ended in wild, almost hysterical cheers when with a leap or a headlong thrust of his body he nailed the ball.

Thirty thousand fans were in the stands by game time that day, and in a sort of daze Mrs. Seymour heard thirty thousand Americans of whom she knew nothing, chanting, cheering, shouting, screaming her son's name. The pallor left her face; a flush had replaced it, and with each new outburst of applause a newborn light in her eyes grew.

"It is most amazing!" she confided to Milly.

"It's wonderful!" declared the girl.

"It's a knock-out!" croaked the crippled boy. He could no longer talk.

In the ninth inning, neither team having scored, Dillon walked the first man up. Immediately a tension swept the crowd, and silence fell. The next man

sacrificed cleverly, leaving a man on second with one down. It was not serious yet, but the possibilities were there. The next man was a dead right-field hitter, and so the whole outfield swung around. But this time the Buck-eye slugger crossed them and shot one screaming to left.

Away went Leftfielder Jones after it and by a magnificent run knocked it down with his back to the plate. No sooner had the ball struck than the runner on second set sail for third. Jones made a noble effort, but that second lost in turning was too much. The heave was high, and the runner rose from a cloud of dust safe at third, while the batter perched on second.

There were men on second and third now with one down. This was bad; but the silent crowd had faith in Dillon. Some of the faith leaked out, however, when they saw the mighty Lowe, clean-up hitter for the Bucks, stride to the plate.

"Oh, gosh!" whispered the tense Charley when somebody spoke Lowe's name. He hits .360; oh, gosh!"

Lowe wasted no time. He landed on the first pitch and drove it high and wide toward left center. Up came the crowd, and on third the runner dug his spikes into the ground, fixed his eyes on the plate, and waited for the coacher's yell to go.

On second, another runner did the same thing as the screeching Buckeyes visioned two runs across the pan. And thirty thousand pairs of popping eyes fastened on the flying Andy racing across the green field. But even if he got it, could he get the ball home before that set runner?

Breathing stopped. One last desperate spurt, a tremendous leap, and Andy nailed it. Breaths came sobbing then. But the crowd saw his feet shift while in mid-air, and in the same instant his spikes touched earth his long arm spun like a flash. Down the path came the

runner like a phantom. In, like a bullet, came the white ball traveling on a line. Set, with the plate blocked, waited Sam Wood, the bulky catcher.

"Slide!" screamed the coacher.

But through the cloud of dust swished the ball, and Sam Wood, teeth set, mask off, grabbed it and lunged.

"Out!" yelled the umpire, hovering over the play.

The throw had won by five feet.

For one breathless moment the vast crowd was still; then like a clap of thunder the tremendous cheer broke. Out from the stands it came like a rolling cloud of noise. And the burden of the cry was "Andy! Andy! Andy Duke!"

Down in the box behind the dugout an old woman shivered and then thrilled. What Andy had done meant not a thing to her, but thirty thousand people standing up, shouting, yelling, stamping, cheering for him meant something. Why, he was a hero! Here was a mighty throng that idolized him, while she, his own mother, had cast him out and forbade him his name so that these shouting thousands knew not whom they cheered! For the first time she leaned and spoke to the voiceless Charley.

"What did my son do?" she asked in a quivering tone.

"Your what?" he asked blankly.

She was aghast. Almost she had given the whole thing away. She coughed and choked and finally managed to say: "That—that ball player—what did he do?"

"Great Scott! Didn't you see it? Oh, you missed half your life!" the boy replied in his hoarse half whisper. "Why, Andy Duke just saved their ol' ball game! Ain't another man in the big leagues could make a throw like that. Nailed him easy. An' he was in here talkin' to me! An' he was carryin' my lucky piece. Oh, ain't he the greatest feller you ever saw?"

The boy's eyes were dancing with light, and his pinched face shone with pride and joy. For the first time in many a long day Mrs. Seymour felt a lump in her throat. She looked at her daughter. Milly was crying.

"Yes," said the old lady in a queer voice; "I guess he is."

On swept the game. After that flurry in the ninth, both McBain and Dillon settled down to heroic work, and the two teams, realizing to the full what victory meant, fielded and threw with deadly sureness and uncanny accuracy. Eleventh—twelfth—thirteenth—and on into the fourteenth with the score still nothing to nothing went the terrific struggle. And the great crowd, knowing they were witnessing a game marked for history, rose again and again to send thunderous recognition rolling across the field as the players reeled off their spectacular plays.

So, wondering and amazed, Mrs. Seymour stood on the threshold of a world strange and new to her. It was a world throbbing and exultant with life, warm with color. It seemed to find a tremendous zest in life, and its noisy joyousness stood out in sharp contrast to the stilted manners that she knew.

She trembled to find in her ordered soul a sudden conflict—reason and judgment telling her she hated this boisterous display, while some inner, deeper spirit cried out that what she beheld was splendid and noble and glorious, a clear picture of humanness that was rich, fine, and good. She was pondering these things, almost unseeing, when Andy leaped into the box.

"How do you like it?" he asked, squatting before the crippled boy.

"It—it's the greatest thing I ever saw," whispered the boy. "But, Andy, didn't that last catch hurt you when you slid on your arms to get it?" There was concern in the boy's face.

"Oh, not much," replied Andy, grinning. "Lost a little hide, but we got

the ball. That's the main thing, Charley."

"Yep," agreed the youngster, his eyes shining; "but hurry up an' beat 'em, Andy. I ain't used to this, an' I can't stand it much longer. Can't you hit a homer, Andy?"

The ball player looked sharp into the little chap's face and saw the ravages of a mighty and unwonted excitement, then shot a quick look at Mrs. Seymour. A trembling seized the great outfielder. In his mother's face he read a look that he never had seen there before—a mixture of wonderment and pride, softened by sympathy.

"He's cheered and screamed for you, Andrew, until he cannot speak aloud, and his nervous system won't stand the strain much longer. If you can end this soon I hope you will. And—and for goodness' sake, Andrew, win!"

A flood of warmth swept out of Andy's heart to run like a glowing fire through him. Those sitting near were astonished to see the dignified and haughty lady seized and kissed soundly by the dusty ball player and then to see him scoop up the shriveled little boy beside her and hug him. Those very close heard his charged voice say: "Listen, Charley; I'm up next, and you just watch. I just pinched that lucky piece, and I've got a feeling I'm going to knock the cover off that old ball!"

"Batter up!" yelled the umpire, as Andy leaped back onto the field, grabbed his bat, and strode to the plate.

CHAPTER V.

THE GREATEST BASEBALL STORY.

BY some mysterious alchemy, perhaps through the look on Andy's face, McBain knew that a critical moment had arrived. Always cautious, he was supercautious now, and with grim patience the batter waited.

A fast one on the inside—ball one. A slow curve on the outside—ball two.

Clearly Andy was not going to hit at bad ones. A high inshoot—strike one. A fast one on the inside—ball three. Next a high, sizzling straight one that just nicked the outside corner for strike two.

A great sigh went up from the crowd as thirty thousand hitched forward to the edges of their seats. Down in the box a crippled boy was hanging over the wall. The next pitch was the big one.

Slowly McBain wound up and, watching him like a hawk, Andy set himself. He knew what was coming—that famous hard one with its dinky but lightning three-inch curve. The long arm swung, the whole weight of McBain's big body behind it, and *swish!* came the ball. Like a flash the crowd saw the batter leap to the limits of the box to beat the break and swing.

Crack! Ash met leather, and an instant later the stands were bedlam let loose. Such an ovation Mrs. Seymour never had heard or seen as the white ball rose. The Buckeye center fielder ran back a few paces, then threw up his hands in defeat as the ball described a graceful arc and disappeared over the wall.

Thirty thousand fans were screeching their joy, but on his way from second to third Andy thought of but one—the little cripple whose limp form he saw hanging across the wall. The fans thought the great hitter was waving his cap at them, but the voiceless boy knew better and, sick with delight, weakly waved a crutch in return.

By the time Andy reached the plate half a thousand fans had jumped the wall to greet him, to cheer him, to carry him on their shoulders, but by clever footwork he eluded them and fought his way to the box behind the dugout.

"Oh, Andy," whispered the lad, "you done it! You done it! I knew you would! I knew it!" Tears of joy were running down his face.

"Yep," Andy replied; "we did it." Then he stopped short.

Tears were coursing down his mother's cheeks, too. Instinctively and blindly she reached for her son. "Andrew," she said brokenly, "I've been a blind, foolish woman—cruel, narrow, and mean. I'm sorry. Can you forgive your mother, son? Will you? And— and come home, won't you, Andy, please? I—I need you. And—and can't we take this little chap with us? I—I owe him much. Through the boy's eyes I've at last seen things as they are. I'm not going to be silly any more, Andy. Will you come? Please! We'll begin again, Andy."

"Mother!" roared Andy. "Will I come? Why, you dear old goose, of course I'm tickled pink to come! And Charley will come, too, won't you, Charley?"

"Come where?"

"Why, this is my mother, Charley, and this young lady is my sister, and we want you to come and live with us. Will you do it?"

"Me—*live with you!*" The crutches clattered to the floor as the ball player caught the boy's falling form.

"Ye gods!" bellowed the *News'* reporter, Phillips. "Thank Heaven, those other birds left in the fifth inning! This is a scoop! Let me out of here! I've got to find a typewriter to turn out the greatest baseball story ever written!" And he did.

Perfect Gallantry

"You have heard what the last witness said," persisted counsel, "and yet your evidence is to the contrary. Am I to infer that you wish to throw doubt on her veracity?"

The polite young man waved a deprecating hand.

"Not at all," he replied. "I merely wish to make it clear what a liar I am if she's speaking the truth."



A Story of Maisie, the Sprightly Stenographer.

Off on the Wrong Foot-

By Nell Martin-

(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

COMPLETELY PUZZLED.

SAY, judge," Maisie St. Clair cried cheerfully from her desk in the main reception lobby of their suite of offices, "s'posin' a bozo was to owe me ninety dollars, an' he give me a check for it, an' I marks the bill 'Paid in Full,' an' then finds out his check was the sheep's dandruff—I can slam him in the jug, can't I?"

George Dorsey, attorney and counselor at law, looked up from his study of California Reports, Vol. 87; *Dobbs vs. Crunkle*, and frowned heavily. This was the third time during the morning that Maisie had peremptorily disturbed him in his search for a precedent upon which to base the defense of this Halbriter case, and he didn't like it.

It was not exactly because she had asked him three separate and distinct kinds of legal questions that he didn't like it; and it certainly was not because she displayed a thirst for legal knowledge that he resented her interruptions. He didn't really know the reason he was getting angry. It was

a habitual resentment of the fact that Maisie continued in power, the unbeloved tyrant of his legal life; he had a smoldering hatred of her bland insouciance in the face of his dissatisfaction—not with any particular thing, but with her entire mode of conduct. The inquisition had continued for two years now, and he had about given up hope of an end to it.

Another thing, small and unimportant, gnawed at his consciousness as she fired these casual questions of law at him—why in the world did Maisie Snclair—as he pronounced her name—want to know whether you could make a neighbor pay for a concrete wall that supported your property if he let his hose run so much that it ruined the wall you had and it fell down? She, who had neither concrete walls nor hose—and probably not even neighbors; or at least so George thought, testily.

And why should she be interested to know if you could change your mind about the person you left your insurance money to, once you had taken out insurance and named a beneficiary? And if you could change it, what did you have to do? Was it to be supposed

that Maisie Snclair was carrying life insurance? For whom? He had thought her the sole survivor of the late lamented Cyril St. Clair, tight-rope artist extraordinary, well-known through Oklahoma, Arkansas, Kansas, and points south. Well, then! And now this—and not even a “Please, Judge Dorsey!” Just—“Say, judge!” What did she think he was? His annoyance increased.

“—d’you get it?” She was pursuing the subject. “A bozo owes me ninety dol——”

“I understood you, Miss Snclair,” George interrupted coldly, a reproving forefinger keeping his place in the printed recital of *Dobbs vs. Crunkle*; “and the answer is that you cannot have the person incarcerated. It is not a crime to pay a preëxisting debt with a check which has no funds behind it. If the person had cashed the check, that would be fraud.”

“But about that receipt in full——”

“That is only prima-facie evidence,” George broke in with dignity. “Your remedy is a suit for the amount. The debt is not discharged, even though you receipted the bill.” He removed his finger from his place in the reports, the subject closed. But he could not resist adding: “You seem to have a good many things troubling you this morning, Miss Snclair.”

“Oh, nothin’s eatin’ me. I just—was wondering about things——” Her blithe voice trailed off vaguely.

She certainly chose peculiar things to wonder about. And when she should be devoting her time to issuing that manifold set of affidavit forms in that Hempstead Street condemnation suit! Well! Things were getting pretty thick. George went back to the contemplation of the Halbriter case. It was a curious set of legal complications in itself. There must be some way that a shrewd lawyer could defend such a foreclosure suit.

A sudden spurt of sound from the street nine floors below drew his attention to the fact that it was lunch time, so he took his hat.

“Those affidavits—they will be ready to turn over to Hemingways at one o’clock, I take it?” he remarked musingly, as he made for the outer door.

“Wel—mp—m——” Maisie gulped a little. “My heavenly codfish! I never knew they was comin’ after them today! I been so busy—— I’ll try to rush them through.” Feverish activity accompanied her words, but there was an absent gleam in her eyes.

“I shall not tolerate any delay on those affidavits, Miss Snclair,” said George coldly, and went on to a disturbed lunch. That Halbriter case worried him. There was a way out—but what?

It was practically the same thing that was worrying Maisie; a way out—but what? All morning she had been devoting her time and energy to something personal and private—if anything so public could be said to be private—to the detriment of the production of a wholesale order of affidavits. And Hemingways—another firm of attorneys—were to call for those affidavits at one o’clock! What a lot of dust she would have to create—all by herself!

But then it came—the way out. Why all by herself? There was a public stenographer on the floor below, of course. Gathering up a page of typed inserts, healthily involved paragraphs which she had deciphered early in the morning from her notes and typed for a copy, as being much more easily typed from than the notes themselves, when filling out the manifold affidavits, she seized an armload of the documents and flew hallward.

A few minutes later she returned and went to work with avidity, typing rapidly, filling out another folio of those same documentary Jonahs. And at one, when George returned, placated not at

at all by the fact that the luncheon had been inferior and he had thought nothing at all about the Halbriter mix-up, there they were, a hundred of them, each with its four carbon copies. It was a mess, when towns wanted to cut streets through the property of people who didn't want it done, and it was a lot of fuss complaining against it. But that was done; and in due time the affidavits were delivered to the Hemingways' agent, who called for them.

Only slightly mollified, George went back to the California Reports. But his head buzzed, and his eyes watered. He was catching a cold, his neck ached, and he wished that when he was in law school he had devoted more time to the theory and practice of law, instead of taking the easy route of memorizing, parrotlike, the entire printed course of studies.

He could, even now, recite the codes, paragraph by paragraph, but it was availing him naught in a matter like this. And Halbriter was a good client, one George would like to impress by his skill. Of course, he could go to Mr. Wing, the elderly, semiretired tenant of one of the suboffices, but his pride forbade that as long as there was hope that he could figure a way out of the tangle by himself.

"I ain't had no lunch yet," Maisie remarked. "An' I gotta errand to do, too, so I'll be gone for a little while."

George felt like refusing her the privilege of lunch, but that couldn't be done. She had worked through the lunch hour to get out those plagued street-condemnation papers. He nodded gruffly, hoping only that her lunch would disagree with her as his had with him. But because her absence brought him a sense of relief, he resolved to get his mind off his problem for a little while. Then, coming back to it clear-headed, he no doubt could think of his remedy at once. He would try reading the noon edition of the afternoon paper.

CHAPTER II.

A BRIGHT IDEA.

IT was quiet in the reception room. There were no appointments for a little while. George glanced at the baseball scores; read about the jail break—almost a staple item for each edition lately; cast a scornful eye upon "Advice to the Lovesick"—fools; caught a headline with the far edge of his mind—"Free Legal Advice." Well, this was something new.

He read the standing head. Realizing that there were innumerable small problems which daily troubled a muddle-headed world, the newspaper would furnish legal information free to those desiring it. It could not, of course, undertake to represent any one in a legal action, but it would be glad to tell a puzzled public what its legal remedy would be in any given case.

The newspaper hoped, optimistically, that this service would be appreciated by the case-ridden and overworked attorneys of the city, relieving their shoulders of some of the burden of answering too-often foolish questions, for which service they were unable to make a charge on account of the questions' relative unimportance.

George read a few of the questions and answers. A. B. wanted to know how her husband, who had gone to Mexico, could be made to pay the back alimony he owed her; and Blackstone, Jr., editor of the department, said that she could have the debt reduced to a judgment and then sue to collect on a foreign judgment. George was interested to know that. Not that he was contemplating either collecting alimony or going to Mexico, but it was something he hadn't known.

Oh, thunder! That brought him back to thinking about the Halbriter foreclosure. And then like the clap of that same thunder he had uttered, it came. Why not put his case to Blackstone,

Jr., under a name not his own, of course, and get the benefit of this Solomon's knowledge and experience. He could carefully disguise the circumstances so that recognition would be impossible, but could get the main outline of what the procedure would be. It was an idea! No one would ever know that he had asked for outside help in building his theory of the case.

Feverishly George got at his letter, and presently he had it worded to his satisfaction, typing in one-finger exercises, on plain paper, with one eye on the paper and the other watching the door for Maisie. At that, he finished just a nose ahead of her entrance. She caught him leaving the machine.

"Well, I hope nothing important has broke while I was out? Was it something you had to have right away?" She opened wide eyes.

"I was merely writing a personal letter," replied George coldly.

"You ain't got nothing on me." She grinned amiably.

George wanted to choke her. The more amiable Maisie grew, the more familiar her all-including smile. And George hated to feel that they shared a secret—which was the way she made him feel.

"I gotta answer some letters myself, as personal as possible!" She laughed loudly.

"I was going to dictate——" he began.

"Oh, don't dive in with your shoes on," she broke in. "I wasn't at all intendin' to incroach on office time. I'll do 'em after we get the decks cleared and swabbed for the night."

And she popped a really overwhelming stack of letters into a drawer. She certainly had a large personal correspondence, thought George. But she would. Only he was surprised that they were letters, instead of picture post cards. They would have been less astonishing.

George addressed and sealed his letter, attached stamps sufficient for special delivery, and then went out and himself dropped it into the slot. He had inclosed stamps for a reply, calling himself "John Darcy," and had asked for a mail reply instead of a printed one. Would he get it? Determinedly he shook off his worry. Halbriter would not be in until the following afternoon for a report on what George thought of his case. There was plenty of time.

Quite pleased at his ingenuity, he began some dictation—routine work that required no heavy thinking. His voice droned on.

"Just a minute!" Maisie stopped him presently. "What was that you said about 'without his knowledge or consent?' I got kinda lost."

"Well!" He looked at her disapprovingly. "That was several paragraphs back."

"Well, you see, right after that you said something about trespass, and I got to wondering if an agent was to knock at your door and bother you when you was busy, and you had a sign up 'No peddlers or agents,' would that be trespass and could you have 'im jugged or not?"

"Great Scott, Miss Snclair!" George exclaimed. "What has that to do with the dictation?"

"Oh, nothin'; nothin' at all. But I got to wonderin'."

"Would it be possible to confine your wondering to the case upon which we are working?" George retorted cuttingly.

"Why, sure as lockjaw!" Maisie agreed breezily. "You was sayin'——"

"I guess you might as well go and type the answer as far as I've gone," he directed. "I've lost the thread of the dictation now. I think I shall look over some citations before continuing." That was a clever reproof, thought he. Let her know that she had completely disorganized his afternoon's work.

"Sall right with me," she commented

airily and withdrew, leaving the door open.

Then, just as George had reached the end of a first paragraph in a most interesting recital of a trial, in "Classics of the Bar," a twelve-volume work which he was confident would assist in developing him so that he might become a spectacular—and no doubt well-advertised—jury trial lawyer, she cried merrily:

"Say, while you're looking the reports through, keep your eyes open for anything about whether or not you gotta pay taxes on somepin' which is wished on you an' ain't yours an' you can't find the owner—like bulldogs."

"Miss Snclair!" George gasped. "I'm not concerned with other people's bulldogs. But it does amaze me that you seem to be swamped with unusual troubles. I can't see how you manage to get into so many intricate transactions." Then a thought struck him: "Or is it that you have so many friends who do not wish to be obligated for legal advice?"

"You'd be surprised!" she commented brightly, dropping the subject.

George was furious.

"Well, I object to having this office made an information bureau!" he snapped.

"You wouldn't fool me, would you?" She grinned.

George closed the door—behind him. He had to get away from this madhouse effect. He would go to the law library, or the movies, or drown himself. There seemed no alternative. Even as he left the outer lobby he heard her ringing voice:

"Hey, Mr. Wing! S'pos'n' somebody goes away and wished a trained dog on you, which is val'able, an' the tax man wants that you should——"

Groaning, George fled the faster. Why didn't some one turn that trained bulldog loose where it would be most effective? He could give directions.

CHAPTER III.

A DAMAGING MIX-UP.

THE next day George made three trips to the post office before he had any luck. At the third call for John Darcy's correspondence, there it was. Anxiously he tore the envelope and scanned the page.

Well, he had to admit, Blackstone, Jr., had the right idea. That was a logical avenue of escape from bankruptcy through foreclosure for the Halbriter person. And explained concisely, as it was, it seemed so simple as to be almost obvious. It was astonishing that George hadn't thought of that method of procedure himself.

To be sure, in his study he had approached the clew which would have given him the solution, pursued properly. He might have stumbled upon it had he gone on. That in itself proved that he was capable of finding out for himself what the evidently more-experienced lawyer had explained to him. In fact, he practically proved that George was as good at legal deduction as Blackstone, Jr., a man who had experience enough to be able to answer questions for an entire world. At least, that he would be, with a little more experience.

Carefully memorizing the procedure outlined in the letter, George tore it into minute pieces and let them be scattered from his hand by the breeze. And he rushed back to the office greatly elated. Halbriter would see that he had come to the right lawyer when George told him of his ingenious and practically bomb-proof method of settling his complicated business troubles. Yes; it paid a man to go to a shrewd and studious lawyer.

His elation, however, was quickly damped; in fact, it was punctured and blown up with a loud and juicy *plop!* upon his entrance into his office. Waiting for him was a man whose first words drove out all thought of Halbriter

and his peculiar problems. It was the clerk of Hemingways'; and he held in his hand a sheaf of documents. One glance showed George that they were the affidavits in connection with the Hempstead Street widening.

"Now what?" he demanded.

"Well, take a look," replied his caller, separating the sheaf into parcels.

George took the recommended look. And there was no need to ask more. This was the end!

"Well, Miss Snclair," he thundered so that Maisie dropped a number of letters, "if you can spare the time from your personal correspondence, perhaps you will be good enough to come in here and explain this piece of idiocy!"

"Huh?" gasped the startled girl, retrieving the dropped letters and cramming them into a desk drawer. "Whatta you done now?" Then she bit her tongue.

"What have I done?" George fairly electrocuted her with the lightning of his anger. "Take a look at these affidavits."

Meekly, Maisie came in and took a look. Parts of them were made out as intended, but others—and it must be admitted the majority—were neither fish nor fowl nor good red herring. Paragraphs which should have set out legal descriptions of properties involved in condemnation proceedings for street widening set forth the amazing information that "it is no crime to give a bum check for a preëxisting debt. If he'd got the cash on it, you could have him jailed. You can still get your money, and a receipt in full don't mean anything whatever. It is primary facial evidence."

"Cripes!" gasped Maisie. She turned a page. Other documents bore reference to concrete walls and a running hose; and others to the beneficiaries on insurance policies. Darn that public stenographer! Hadn't she brains enough to know that these things didn't fit?

Why hadn't she called and said that Maisie had brought her the wrong copy?

"They look as if somebody pulled the wrong teeth, ain't it the truth?" she gulped. Then she grinned. If she hadn't grinned, the storm might have passed.

"You may take those affidavits and make correct copies," George said politely. "And this is your notice that they will be the last things you will make for this office. No doubt you will appreciate being allowed to have all your time for the study of the intricacies of legal practice. That is all, Miss Snclair."

"That's enough!" she chirped brazenly. "Oh, well, this office is gettin' almost too busy anyway. Y' have to work too hard for the sal'ry connected with the job."

With that Parthian shot she retired in dignity—injured dignity at that. And the outer rooms heard the click of flying keys.

CHAPTER IV.

A KNOCK-OUT ANNOUNCEMENT.

LEAVING the Hemingways' messenger to await the completion of the documents, George went back to his burning topic. Halbriter telephoned that he would call in half an hour. And then George strolled out and down the lobby to Mr. Wing's office.

"Well, we've finally been released from the two-year's war," he offered placidly.

"What's that?" Mr. Wing looked up from a newspaper.

"Miss Snclair is terminating her employment," George explained.

"I'm sorry to hear that," Mr. Wing returned. "But I've been thinking lately that it would probably come soon. It's a sad fact that the young and earnest workers, when they climb, do climb. That girl was bound to advance herself. She never overlooks an opportunity to improve herself. What position has she taken? Or did she say?"

Taken unawares, George could only gasp at this reception of his news. "Why, she isn't quitting. I've fired her!" he cried. "For the most flagrant piece of carelessness it has ever been my misfortune to see."

"Oh!" Mr. Wing bit his lip. He had heard George on this subject before, however, and his credence was elastic.

"You may be right about her improving, but it's not in the avenues that are appreciated in this office," George continued. "And we are not exactly standing still here, either. In fact"—George's measurements underwent a slight growth, chestily speaking—"in fact it is only now that I've felt that we were properly appreciated in some of our work. I—that is, I don't mean it in a boasting way—but I've just taken in a piece of business that I think opens up the way to larger things for my office. And a tricky thing it was, too."

He had a sudden burst of self-confidence. Mr. Wing thought Maisie was developing the office of George Dorsey, attorney at law, did he? Mr. Wing, perhaps, might be interested in this new problem and its solution.

"You see, it was this way," he said almost pompously. "My client had leased a piece of ground and erected a large office building upon it; through trouble with the contractor its completion was delayed, thus the expected income was slow in forthcoming and my client was pressed for cash. He fell behind in his payments." George continued with the intricacies of Halbriter's dilemma. "Now, the question was how to get Halbriter's release from the existing mortgage and to relieve him from an assignment of the land lease which he foolishly made early—"

"Oh, that's that case, I see," interrupted Mr. Wing. "My solution was to have the present owners sell to a third party, who would foreclose the lease, thus making the assignment valueless; then to get a sale between—"

"Why, how did you know? Had Halbriter come to you first? I—why, how do you—" George's mind had leaped ahead, and he saw that Mr. Wing knew not only the nature of the trouble but its remedy. A sharp suspicion stabbed him.

Maisie? Had she been listening to Halbriter, when he stated his case? And if so had she gone and repeated the facts to Mr. Wing? He said as much to the elderly lawyer.

"Why, yes," replied Mr. Wing. "She came to me with that. I looked into it for quite a while before I advised her as to the procedure."

So, one more crime! George was sorry he had already fired her. Firing her twice would not avenge this last and greatest treachery. But he could at least unburden himself. And for that purpose he turned swiftly toward the lobby.

"Well, here's the last of those affidavits," said Maisie brightly. "And I'd like to say—"

"Whatever there is to be said in this office, I will say," George interrupted. "You have forfeited your right to be heard, Miss Snclair! I have just learned that you listened to a client's private conversation with me and then ran to Mr. Wing with the information you received—"

"Now that'll be all o' that!" Maisie broke in, drawing herself up. "I may be dumb, or I may make mistakes, Mr. Dorsey; but I ain't never done you a crooked deed, an' I ain't figurin' to. An' Mr. Wing'll tell you the color o' your eyes if you try to tell him a thing like that. You're off on the wrong foot and gone a block past your corner. This is Thursday."

"I repeat," George insisted, white to the lips, "you have carried tales about the Halbriter matter. Mr. Wing said you asked him how to work that case out, to clear a first mortgage and a release of an assignment of lease—"

"Great Maltese goose flesh!" shouted Maisie. "The Halbriter matter?" Laugh would be a mild word. Maisie hooted, and Maisie rocked. And after a moment she dried her tears.

"I ain't got the heart," she said then. "But you go right back in there and ask Mr. Wing what I asked him about that case for. I did figure to tell you, but——" She grinned. "You bawled me out for askin' you so many."

Surprised, George stared, but automatically he reached for the ringing telephone. His mind wasn't on the words he heard over the wire, but on the mystery. Surely he couldn't be stepping into another of those automatic traps which sprung up like mushrooms for the protection of this girl no matter what her intrepidity!

"Yes; this is Judge Dorsey," he said into the mouthpiece.

"Well, this is the *Evening Broadcaster* speaking, judge. Would you speak to your secretary, Miss St. Clair, and tell her that there are two more batches of those letters down here, and that if it is convenient, we'd like to have her get them this afternoon, so

that you can have the answers ready for the morning edition. Some of them are sent special."

"The *Evening Broadcaster*?" George repeated stupidly.

"Yes; on that column that you're running, judge—'Blackstone, Jr.'—— Hello! Hello! Can you hear me? Is this Judge Dorsey? Your column—Blackstone, Jr."

"Yes, sir," said George meekly, and he hung the receiver on the hook. He, George Dorsey, attorney at law, had written to ask Blackstone, Jr., how to solve a legal tangle. He, George Dorsey, was Blackstone, Jr.!

"About those affidavits, Miss Snclair," he said sadly. "I spoke hastily. Can we not consider the whole episode closed and the slate washed? We—we all of us make mistakes——"

"I'll tell a asking world we do," interrupted Maisie.

"An', say, listen, judge," she went on, "that column's good stuff for a up-an'-at-'em lawyer. When I get the next batch, shall I just send 'em on in to you?" Her face was a study.

"Yes, do," replied "Blackstone, Jr."

YOUR GOLDEN CHANCE

By Louis E. Thayer

ALONG life's way we idle and dream of things we'll do
 On some fair day, in some rare place, that we are coming to.
 To-day seems drab and hopeless; our tasks seem scarce worth while,
 But, on the golden morrow, the sun is sure to smile.
 We'll buck the line to-morrow, but we must rest to-day;
 We'll toil and slave to-morrow—to-day was made for play.
 But though upon the future we feast an eager eye,
 A little bit of now is worth a lot of by and by.

No battle ever yet was fought, no race was ever run,
 No deed of any kind performed beneath to-morrow's sun.
 For all that ever happens, no matter where or how,
 Is written on the pages of the ever-present now.
 To-day is always with you; to-day's your golden chance;
 The future that you dream of lies always in advance.
 Though on some fair to-morrow we hopefully rely,
 A little bit of now is worth a lot of by and by.



White Fury ~

By J. Wendel Davis ~

FROM the Hudson's Bay Company settlement at Fontenac two men had taken the trail to get the murderer of Harvey McVeigh, the subfactor of Post Mackenzie. Sergeant McBride of the Northwest Mounted had captured "The White Wolf," to whom the clues pointed. Brent Kars, assistant to John McTavish, the old factor of Fontenac, had gone to the help of Nicol MacCoy, in charge of a company station in the hills.

McBride, after securing his prisoner to the bole of a tree, stopped to interview Hans Larsen, the big Swede assistant to the murdered Harvey McVeigh. McBride suspected that Larsen was involved in the murder. When he returned to get his prisoner, the White Wolf had escaped with the sergeant's dogs. With a fresh team supplied by Larsen, McBride lost no time in pursuing his man. In a storm he found a breed who was sent out by Larsen to get McBride. This breed was forced by McBride to lead him to the lair of the White Wolf. Two days later he sent the breed back to Larsen and pitched camp.

In the meantime Kars had made his way into this same valley and had come face to face with the White Wolf, who said he was Homer Karmack. Pointing to an old squaw, the Wolf told Kars she was his mother and he was Homer Karmack, his father. At an unsuspected moment the Wolf struck Kars from the rear and was about to kill him when McBride, alarmed by the unearthly snarl of a dog in the valley, reached the scene just in the nick of time to save Kars' life. The next morning Kars set out alone with a one-dog team on a long trail into the arctic circle. He was bent on discovering the truth of Homer Karmack's story before he again saw Helen McTavish.

CHAPTER XIII.

WHITE FURY.

DAY after day Brent Kars munched alone into the white expanse of the North. There were days when blizzards raged about him, and he held his course by the slant of the stinging wind; and there were frost-bright, bitter, blinding days when the sun dogs burned on the rim of the frozen world, and he marked his course by his shadow on the crusted snows.

But bright or stormy, the trail was a trail of white fury, blinding the eyes with its dazzling glare, or smothering the lungs with its raging might; and, as he trudged on into that trackless world of empty silences, the dull fire of brooding grew deeper in his swelling eyes, and his strength wore down to the hard iron of endurance.

In the thick dark of the twilights and the early dawns he munched his food beside his brushwood fire. He had only two mouths to feed, his own and Omri's. Now conditions justified his wisdom in choosing a single team. He killed his food for himself and his dog with his rifle and took what he needed and traveled light.

It came a time when the Chinook

blew warm out of the Southwest, and he knew that he must reach his goal shortly before the snow crust broke beneath the weight of his body, or he would perish in the three-foot slush. It was then that he overtaxed his inflamed and smarting eyes; for, eager to accomplish that which had brought him on this danger trail, he mushed too long in the open in the blinding glare of day, seeking the sign of tepees, as he topped each high rise and squinted down the vast, far-reaching valleys of endless snow. Time and again he thought he saw the peaked shapes of tepees lifting on the white expanse, but ever when he neared them they proved but dwarfed spruce points piled with the melting snow.

Disheartened, he plodded on with swelling lids and straining vision, until at last the white glitter pierced his eyes like diamond-pointed blades, and he was forced, against his will, to fall back from the lead and trust more and more to Omri to break trail on the forward, fateful march.

The sturdy Malemute took the lead, as one who understood, and forged ahead, dragging the man, clinging to the gee pole. His nose was pointed into the wind, sniffing at it with a questing instinct; and, since he had been given the command, he took authority of the trail and turned out of the north into the west, eager now and tireless on a scent his keen dog nose had picked out of the air.

Brent Kars knew naught of the change in the trail, but, with eyes now bandaged tight against the glare, he followed listlessly and blindly, at the mercy of dog and chance.

That night in camp the great beast sat with his ears perked, listening only partly to the babbling, camp talk of the lonely, brooding man. There were strange sounds on the wind, sounds which human ears could not catch, and scents which made his eyes gleam and

brought up a deep rumble out of the husky throat.

On the next day Omri took the lead again with an eager tug at his collar, and he pointed his nose still more into the west. It was perhaps noon, when the sun was high, that man and dog topped a high ridge, ice-rimmed, and before them stretched a wide, glistening valley. The dog stopped abruptly and growled deep in his throat, while his mane bristled.

When Kars lifted the bandage from his eyes and squinted from beneath it, he felt a pain like fire burning out his sight. He had a flashing glimpse of a broad expanse of snow gleaming in the glare of the sun, and in the center he saw tepees. This vision dissolved in a bursting flame in his head, and he went mad with agony.

"Mush!" he commanded, and by a miracle his hand fell upon and gripped the gee pole, and the pull of the sledge carried him on without volition.

Indians in the valley watched a black, moving object crawl across the snow. Eventually it evolved into a great Malemute drawing a sledge, followed by a man who staggered and stumbled among the drifts. As they watched, the man fell across the sledge, and the brawny brute stiffened under the added weight, but came steadily on and entered the village. Here he halted, with a snarling gleam of white fangs that dared any to touch his burden, a white man who raved in delirium, snow-blind and helpless.

Three weeks later Brent Kars opened his eyes to the dim obscurity of a tepee. By the side of his fir couch sat Nokomis; at his feet lay the great dog, Omri; over him stood an aged Indian, whose shoulders were bent with the passing of many winters.

It was this old Indian who had lifted the herb poultice from his eyes, and who now grunted in satisfaction at Kars' return to clear, normal vision. It would be days before his eyes could stand the

strain of travel, but by then the ice-jammed, flooding streams would be sufficiently free of the floes for the use of canoes. The shriving of the white world from the winter's curse had been swift during those long days of his fight against blindness, and early spring, with its bright days, demanded still a period of patient waiting for his eyes to mend.

Many powwows with the Indians had brought a subtle understanding between them and a great hope into Brent Kars' heart.

"Wau-bo-zoo greets his white brother," the old Indian now said in the Ojibwa tongue. "Before many suns have passed he will trail south with his brother on the breasts of many running waters."

Kars' hands gripped, as he replied: "And Wau-bo-zoo will speak at the post of the great white chief the things sealed on the dead lips of The White Wolf?"

"Wau-bo-zoo has much talk for the ears of 'Little White Father,' alone."

"It is well," Kars said. "The little père will set things right that have long been wrong."

It was all he could get out of the old Indian, but it was enough. He had followed Fate into the far North when the white fury had frozen its seal of death on this cruel world, and, with hope in his soul, soon he would again be trailing with Fate, this time south, on the warming currents of the running streams.

As he lay on his couch waiting, he saw many things as in a dream. In the lower country the "break-up" of the ice jams would be earlier, and the brigades would be going down to Fontenac with their strange commerce of a frozen world. The York boats would be making ready with their heavy loads of fur packs for the freighting trip down to Athabasca, "end of steel."

In his mind's eye Brent Kars saw old André Valois standing in the stern of his great lead boat, with his steering

paddle in his hands, as the York fleet pushed out into the stream. He heard old Valois cry "Bo-jo!" to the crowding throng on the landing, but he himself would be among the "missing." His absence, he liked to think, would temper for many the joy of the occasion. Yes, they would miss him.

Now he heard Valois shout again to John McTavish, watching the great flotilla swing into the current, with a sweep of the bending bodies and a flash of the leaping blades. "Bo-jo, m'sieu, I bring back wid me dat leetle Helen McTavish, an' wid her I bring back de sunshine to Fontenac."

Kars' eyes were closed on his dream, and he smiled. Swiftly they opened and clouded. Aye, and the York boats would bring back a Karmack to Fontenac, too.

Two birch canoes started south on the head waters of a little stream in the far North. In one was a white man and a dog; the other bore an old Indian and a wrinkled squaw. They went south by the sun; south by the stars; south with the flow of the waters. They went south, down to Fontenac, and there the consummation of the tragic drama of the North quickly followed.

CHAPTER XIV.

A KARMACK COMES BACK.

IN the North country June wears still a bitter smile. The bursting of buds on poplars and birches announces the approach of the short summer, but on the air is yet a touch of the arctic's breath which to the "soft outsider" is a breath that chills to the bone.

It was late in June now, and into the wind, with a swirl of white water at their prows, the broad-bellied York boats, returning from Athabasca, were making back to the home port. Empty of cargo and riding high, they threw a froth of spray into the wind, as they entered upon the last lap of the journey.

It had been an eventful trip for old

André Valois. In his lead boat was Helen McTavish, the factor's daughter. Her cheeks were glowing, and her eyes were sparkling with the very joy of life, and old André dropped his eyes to the brown glory of her hair, shot with golden glints of sunlight, and smiled with a gleam of white teeth. In pure ecstasy of joy he uplifted his voice in a gay little song, as carefree as a Canadian lark.

In the fore of the boat, facing the girl, was another passenger, incased in furs to his ears. This was the new district manager, who was coming to relieve John McTavish of his command at Fontenac. Murray Karmack was "soft" to the country and felt the sting of the sharp air keenly. He was perhaps of an age with Brent Kars, dark-skinned and with a well-set-up body; he was not as tall nor as straight-limbed as Kars, and soft living had not put the same fiber into him. He affected a short, stubby mustache that sat under his protuberant nose like a dark smudge. His black eyes were set wide under the cover of habitually lowering lids, that gave him a sinister appearance, which was not improved by thin lips drawn in a straight line across his face.

Between shivers he gazed through the slits in his lids at the girl before him, drinking in the glory of her with approval. Anon his crafty glance trailed backward of Valois, standing at his steering place in the stern of the craft, to the York boat following them. In this boat a hooded stranger sat who kept his face averted from the forward boat and made a mystery of his presence. The stranger's conduct drew Karmack's attention, and gave him an uneasy feeling of being under surveillance ever since this river trail began. With each thwarted, backward glance he would sink deeper in his seat under the boat's high prow and return to the warm contemplation of the girl.

Helen McTavish meantime was giving

all her attention to the joy of her return to the North. The tang in the air heightened the color in her cheeks and filled her with a sense of physical well-being. Every bend of the stream opened a new delight to her. The river sparkled under the glow of the sun, like a long, twisting strand of molten metal. The boat cut a white path in it with a purling ripple that sounded like a merry obbligato to the Frenchman's chant. With brown eyes shining happily, ears attuned to the song, her red lips followed the rhythm of the words, as she ostensibly avoided the rude regard of the man who was to be her father's successor.

The girl's studied avoidance angered the new manager. Now he adjusted his fur coat, with a scarcely veiled shiver, and lifted his frowning eyes to the singer and scowled.

"Stop that infernal noise!" he commanded irritably.

André Valois, with a tantalizing grin that showed a remarkable row of white teeth, brought his song to the end of a bar with a little flourish and stopped. Helen McTavish clapped her hands in approval.

The Frenchman's smile broadened. "You glad get back dis countree, *ma chérie?*" he asked with a twinkle in his eyes. "You don' shiver wid de cold—no? But eet get *chechahco* ev'ry tam, you bet you. She's bri't wid de sun, but she's lak Eskimo igloo. to dem sof' feller."

"I love it, André, and I'm very glad to get back."

"*Bien!* Dat spok' lak you b'long. You no *chechahco*; but you bes' look out, jes' sam', you don' catch cold. Dis wedder, she's bad beezness. She keel off lot dese sof' fellers. Dey get seek queek in de lungs wid——" He paused, trying to recall the word.

"Pneumonia," she said, taking the cue with a smile.

"Dat's heem. Wrap up your t'roat,

lak Meester Karmack dare. No? You warm plenty? All right; but ef m'sieu lak tak' dis steering blade leetle while, eet warm heem op, sure t'ing."

Karmack knew he was being taunted, and it threw him into a fury of rage. "You are drawing wages to steer this boat, my man," he said. "It's your business; mine is to see that you do it."

"My beezness, m'sieu!" Valois laughed. "Phoof! I got no beezness! My beezness ees jes' living. I do dis biccuse I lak do heem. I don' do heem for wages; I reech plenty."

The big Canadian's eyes twinkled. "You don' savvy dat, eh?" he asked. "Dat's biccuse you don' onderstan'. You wan' get reech queek, maybe. Me—I plenty reech jes' to be free man in dis beeg countree. I mos' tam loafer feller. I enjoy myself all tam; summer, winter—all sam', no matter. But"—a swift change came into the Frenchman's eyes—"I'm nobody's man, m'sieu; don' you forget dat."

The new manager met the fire in the Frenchman's eyes, and the flouting of his authority with clashing resentment. "I won't forget," he said. "This is your last trip on company pay, my friend."

"Phoof!" The big fellow grunted contemptuously. In his philosophy this man was an interloper. Brent Kars was the man to fill the old factor's place if it must be filled, and they had sent in this "sof' feller" to perform a miracle in a he-man's world. "Phoof!"

As though the Frenchman's thought of Kars had brought the name into Karmack's mind by some subtle telepathy, he now flung up a question suddenly. "This fellow, Kars, I hear so much about," he said, "I would like you to tell me, my man——"

"*Ma foi!*" exclaimed Valois. "I tol' you biffore, I not your man. I nobody's man, by gar!"

Karmack smiled viciously. "Ah, true," he said unpleasantly, "you are not my man. We'll let that stand as it

is; but you may tell me what you know of this half-breed."

Again came that swift clash of the eye between the man of the North and the man from "outside." "You pret' queek fin' out for yourse'f, m'sieu," answered Valois. "Ef you call heem to hees face what you call heem to me, you fin' out tam queek."

"Stick a knife in my back, eh, if he got the chance?" asked Karmack sneeringly. "The red in a mixed breed shows treacherous like that, I've discovered."

"M'sieu, you t'ink so? Brent Kars, he don' talk moch, lak you. Som' tam he talk, dough; maybe he tell you ef he's half-breed. You ask heem."

The thought of that asking and the result brought a return of the good-natured smile to the Frenchman's face; and, as a sudden sweep of the river, with a show of white water, demanded his attention, with a shrug he let the matter stand where it was and gave his thought to his steering.

"What do *you* think of this Kars, Miss McTavish?" Karmack asked, noting suddenly the danger signals that had leaped into the girl's eyes at his words, and feeling a keen resentment.

"As one would think of a brother, Mr. Karmack," she answered with curt finality.

"Only as a brother?" he persisted, with a disagreeable smile.

"How dare you, sir!" she exclaimed and flashed the old McTavish spirit, and a pair of lovely, feline eyes blazed a white trail into the soul of Murray Karmack that made his pulse beat fast.

Ah, he thought, what a girl to provoke a man's interest. At the lonely post to which they were going, where propinquity would be a natural sequence, what a wonderful opportunity would be his to study her. His half-veiled lids lifted slowly to dwell on her face. There they met the icy blast of a cold, contemptuous stare, and they dropped again quickly.

"No offense," he murmured, gather-

ing his fur collar closer at his throat, as a sweep of the wind hit them squarely at a bend of the stream. "I meant as to his being all white."

She looked at him contemptuously. "The last time I saw Brent Kars, he was all tan from a life in the clean open, and he wasn't afraid of the cold, Mr. Karmack."

The rebuke brought silence and a grin from Valois which strained all the blood out of Karmack's face and swept the mask from before his eyes, revealing something that Helen McTavish had never seen in a man's eyes before. It startled her, and when he settled his gaze upon her again his eyes frightened her.

The silence that followed this play of emotions remained unbroken until the journey's end. Shortly and unexpectedly the landing at Fontenac burst upon the view with a rounding of a sweeping curve of the river. The settlement, with its big house on the hill, the company store, the cabins in the background, and the gleaming tepees of the Indian trappers fringing the shore, like a dream city suddenly materializing in the heart of the wilderness, brought flaming joy to the girl's heart, like the open port of an enchanted land.

A long, echoing shout from the great lungs of old André Valois brought an answering shout from the post. In a moment a throng had gathered at the landing to welcome the returning freighters home, and, as the York boats stretched out on the last, long sweep of the river, cheers rose to greet them on the clear air, and booming laughter wafted to them on the breeze.

Helen McTavish, with cheeks flaming crimson and eyes gleaming as the boats swept up to the old landing, searched for and found the stalwart, vital form of Kars, standing soberly apart from the throng in the background; then her gaze turned to her father who, with his arms thrown wide, stood to receive the

leaping form of her, as she sprang, like a fawn, out and into them with a glad cry.

Brent Kars, with a swiftly beating heart, followed her every move, seeing only her. He had observed that first roving glance of hers, pausing only as it met his eyes, and he marveled as one in a dream. Four years had added only the charm of maturity to Helen McTavish. She was coming back into her North, with the same love of it shining in her eyes, and he was glad.

Murray Karmack also had observed that swift, searching glance, and with a scowl he glued his eyes on Kars and made a mental note of every detail of the man whom he reckoned now as a rival. Unreasoning rage filled his soul with the venom of jealous hatred, and his gaze was full of it. Suddenly the steel-gray eyes of Kars turned from the girl and shot like a streak of flame squarely at him.

There were other things hid in the soul of Murray Karmack that caused his gaze to drop away from Kars swiftly, his self-satisfied poise torn to threads, like a tattered rag. With clumsy effort now, his fur coat impeding him and the cramp of long inactivity in his legs rendering him awkward, he made an undignified exit from the boat and tripped over a rope.

Gathering himself together and sweeping irritably aside an Indian woman with her papoose strapped to her back, he strode up to John McTavish, older than twice his years, and said in a rasping tone of cold authority: "Well, McTavish, you have finished here. I have come to take this district under my command."

CHAPTER XV.

THE HOODED STRANGER.

A STUNNED silence followed the arrogant speech. It was like a chilling blast of cold wind and it froze the smile on laughing lips and brought swift re-

sentment into the hard, trail-seasoned eyes that strained out of the crowd.

Old John McTavish dropped the hand he had lifted in a greeting. "Aye, so I see, Karmack!—so I see," he said, with a grim smile, cold as ice. "And may the Lord help ye in the job, man, and give ye a bit o' His wisdom in it, for I fore-see ye'll be needing it badly."

"Sentimental bosh, McTavish. All I want is the unquestioning obedience of every white man here and a quick cleaning out of the thieving half-breeds," was the equally cold answer. "You have been too tolerant with the breeds. I understand you have one in charge of an important post, contrary to the rule of the company."

"Meaning—whom?" asked the old factor.

"This man Kars, of course."

McTavish's overhanging, gray brows uplifted in a wide stare of astonishment. "Don't start here by being a fool, Karmack. Brent Kars is the most efficient servant of the Hudson's Bay Company in this territory."

"But a breed, nevertheless."

An ominous hush now fell upon the throng at this swift jumping into the middle of things before the cramp was well out of the new manager's legs. There was a sense of suppressed and overcharged excitement in the air. Kars, who had never taken his gaze from Karmack's face from the moment it had fixed upon it, pushed through the fringe of the crowd and confronted, with a steely smile, the new commander of Fontenac.

Hard-muscled bodies tensed and crowded closer together, and harsh, expectant breathing filled in the pause, as the two men faced each other.

"Well, my man, what is it?" Karmack demanded when his eyes could no longer hold to the searching gaze of Kars' cold contempt. "Out with it—and be quick about it."

"Just wanted to get a close look at

you, Karmack," Kars returned. "The set of your jaw and the color of your skin, particularly the left temple hid under the flap of your cap, interest me."

Karmack's face turned a pasty gray. Into his eyes shot a swift flame of fear which he beat back with an effort, as, with a nervous motion, he swept his fur cap from his head.

Both temples were white and there was no damning mark of red on either.

"Satisfied?" he asked sneeringly.

Kars' face went white, and he stood in helpless bewilderment, as though dazed by a blow, staring in blank, dumfounded amazement; so sure had he been of finding what he was looking for.

The effect of the whole tableau was to mystify completely the onlookers; all, perhaps, but the hooded stranger, who had unobservedly passed into the circle and watched the strained events with great interest. He alone of all of them saw the triumphant gleam that came from beneath Karmack's lowered lids at Kars' discomfiture and understood the subtle details of the situation.

Karmack's lips now curled into a snarl. "I have no time to waste on you, my man," he said. "You are Kars? Well, you can report at the office for the orders I'll have for you—when I send for you."

With this deliberate insult he turned his back and walked away, leaving Brent Kars frozen into immobility, the butt of curious eyes which gazed on him in dull wonder that he stood up and took the insult without a blow.

Kars was too stunned by the tumbling down again of his house of cards even to hear what Karmack was saying to him. It had all seemed so clear to him on the long trail out of the North, with the old squaw Nokomis to verify his claim, and the old Indian, Wau-bo-zoo, with his first-hand knowledge of the thirty-year-old facts, to substantiate everything; but there was no telltale birthmark on Karmack's brow. He was

still gazing dazedly at the place where the man's face had been, when a voice brought him back out of his maze of disappointment with a jolt.

"Are you not going to wish me a happy home-coming, Brent Kars?"

It was Helen McTavish speaking, and Kars turned toward the soft voice slowly, gray-faced. Perhaps nothing could have brought home to him the utter hopelessness of his failure so surely as the smiling eyes of this girl fixed full upon him. The light of joy in them was unmistakable.

For a second he met her look of gladness squarely, and for a second only he surrendered to an emotion that swept everything else from him but his great joy in her nearness. For that second he laid bare his hungry soul to her; then he straightened, and his tragic fight for self-control left him hard and cold and motionless.

"Of course, Helen, I wish you all the happiness in the world," he said in a dead voice.

The girl could not understand. She felt a chill creep into her heart like ice. Her quick uplifting hands clutched nervously at her dress, and the color fled from her cheeks. The hurt that came into her eyes was like the turning of a knife in Brent Kars' heart.

"Oh," she whispered, "you are not glad at all."

Kars' eyes closed in dumb suffering. How could he make her understand that honor sealed his soul to her, and that he wanted nothing so much in the world as to sweep her into his protective arms and to shout to the winds his joy at the very sight of her.

"Don't you understand, Helen, why I——" He paused.

Her eyes dropped, tear-filled, and she drew back from him.

"Helen—please——" He moved toward her now impulsively.

"Don't!" she said, and turned from him with a catch in her throbbing throat,

and returned to her father, leaving him confused and unhappy.

Karmack had watched the little scene from the tail of his eye. He saw the girl go to Kars with the flame of gladness glowing on her marvelous skin; he saw her turn from him with the crimson glow dead on her blanched face. He swept a malicious challenge to Kars and turned to the girl.

"Ah, Miss McTavish, there are some of us to whom your return to Fontenac means all the gladness in the world," he said with meaning hardly to be misunderstood.

Old John McTavish, busy with André Valois, had seen nothing of these happenings. He now turned to Karmack. "Come, Karmack," he said, "we will go up to McTavish House, which you are to consider home until you get properly settled."

Karmack offered his arm to Helen McTavish who accepted it mechanically. With an ostentatious triumph of alleged possession and a covert sneer at Kars, he escorted father and daughter up the hill to the great house.

The throng broke into muttering groups and disappeared, leaving Brent Kars still standing where he had met the one crushing defeat of his life. He was now startled out of his gloomy thoughts by a voice at his side.

"Because for the moment one is cleverly checkmated is no reason why he should stand gazing through a glass darkly, my friend."

Kars wheeled and looked into the face of the hooded stranger who had come up with the York boats, keeping himself quietly unobserved by eyes that might have known him.

"What do you mean?" Kars demanded, beating back the swift anger that assailed him at the intrusion.

"That you should not be dismayed because you failed to find that which you sought," was the stranger's startling answer.

There was something tense and forbidding in the stranger's eyes that held Kars' interest fixed on them in spite of himself:

"What do you know of what I sought?" he asked.

"Enough to damn the one who wears it, my friend," the man replied.

Kars gave him a penetrating look. "But it was not where I had good reason to seek for it," he said.

"Seek again, my friend. I said you were cleverly checkmated and should not be dismayed."

"Who are you?" Kars demanded suddenly. "You must have come up on the boat with this man who claims to be old Jeffrey Karmack's son."

The words were almost snapped out of his teeth. "He is not Jeffrey Karmack's son."

Kars caught his breath in a quick reaction; he felt suddenly as though a damp, mental fog had been lifted from him. He now grasped this strange man's arm in a grip like clamping steel, as he asked: "Then who and where is Jeffrey Karmack's son?"

"That is what I came into this district to find out, my friend," the other answered. "There were two who might have solved that mystery; one was Karmack's mad brother—dead, I understand, in a tragic manner; the other, perhaps dead, also, was an old Indian named Wau-bo-zoo."

Kars beckoned to an aged Indian who at the moment was striding toward them from the direction of a tepee on the river's shore.

"This is Wau-bo-zoo," Kars said, when the stolid old brave stood before them.

The stranger started backward in a gesture of surprise and stared searchingly at the red man. "Thirty years is a long time to remember," he said, "but I really believe this is Wau-bo-zoo."

A gleam of recognition shot for a second's flash into the inscrutable eyes of

the old Indian. "How," he said in the proverbial Indian grunt.

"I brought this Indian in a week ago," Kars explained. "He will not talk except to Père Junôt who has been absent from the post. The priest has just returned, and I was only waiting until he had rested from his long journey before we went to see him. The tale this Indian has to tell concerns the tragic happenings of thirty years ago."

"My red brother of the Ojibwas," the stranger now said in the tongue of the Indian, "we have each grown old with the passing of many winters, and it is with wisdom that we may now make long talk together with the Little White Father. Come, let us go up to the mission house."

Brent Kars, as one who might be dreaming, stood and watched them go. A puzzled wonder was in his mind, for the moment replacing the gloomy forebodings that had crushed him to earth. He saw them advance slowly to the little priest's door; he saw Père Junôt, as he opened his door, start perceptibly, as he stood on his threshold and fixed his eyes upon his callers. A subtle comprehension came in his face as he recognized them.

But Brent Kars did not hear the little priest exclaim in a tone of suppressed excitement:

"*Mon Dieu!* So you got my message and heeded it, and here you are, my friend."

CHAPTER XVI.

M'BRIDE TAKES A HAND.

THE stage was swiftly setting at Fontenac for the rapid rush of a startling climax. The temper of the post was strained to the breaking point. Karmack, after settling himself at McTavish House, had returned to the company store, assuming at once the pose of a stern dictator. That he was determined to force the issue with Brent Kars was manifested from the start. He

called each subfactor before him, except Kars, and laid down the hard rule of his authority in the North.

It was plain to be seen that here was no easy-going John McTavish to deal with, and behind his omission to call Kars lay some hidden purpose, shortly disclosed, which created a tense excitement at the post and a trickle of suppressed gossip.

With the Swede, Hans Larsen, Karmack spent the good part of an hour closeted in the little office in the rear of the store. What passed between them no one knew; but after this secret conference the news went swiftly forward that the new manager would hold open court after supper, and that Brent Kars would stand before the court to answer certain charges which would then be brought against him.

There was an ominous hush in the air, as darkness fell, and into the stillness of it Sergeant McBride, unseen, came trailing out of the North with a prisoner whom he locked up securely in his strong room back of his little barracks. He did not even make a light in the place, but ate his supper in darkness, after which he went out and quickly possessed himself of the rapid happenings at the post. When he got wind of the court he smiled grimly.

Meanwhile supper at McTavish House that night only added to the spleen of the new manager; for Helen McTavish refused to respond to the new manager's crude efforts at pleasantry. His elated, self-conceited triumph stung her into frigid resentment. A gross slur on "Indian blood," palpably directed at Kars, brought from the girl a cold reply that caused red anger to leap into Karmack's face.

"It is but the part of a coward, Mr. Karmack," she said with scornful contempt, "to cut at the reputation of a man when he is not present to defend himself!"

Karmack was stung to the quick.

"He'll get the chance to-night, Miss McTavish. Pardon me, but I was not aware that there was anything serious between you and this half-breed."

Whereupon the old factor's daughter, without a glance at her father's successor, left the table abruptly. Karmack, in a flare of rage, gulped down a glass of water and, turning on his host, said viciously: "This Kars, I see, has the wool pulled over all your eyes, McTavish. I will quickly prove to you in a little while that your idol's feet are made of clay."

Each rose and glared at the other, the old man's bristling brows shadowing the smoldering anger that had been gathering in his eyes, while Karmack's glared viciously, and his muscular hand gripped the glass it held until the shell cracked and shattered.

"Hard clay, Karmack," the old man replied; "baked in the crucible of the North. Be careful they don't tread upon you and crush you, as that glass was crushed!"

A sneer curled Karmack's lips. "I'll do what crushing there is to be done here, McTavish, and I'll do it swiftly," he said.

"You'll play the fool, my friend, at your present rate of speed. If you start in to handle this post like that, you'll rip it wide open, as your father did before you."

"What my father did is nothing to me, McTavish. I am commanding this post now."

"For how long, Karmack?"

"Until a better man than I takes the command from me, McTavish."

"Well said," the old factor answered. "Come, let us have done with this farce quickly, for I am of the opinion, Karmack, that you will be meeting that man sooner than you expect."

A shadow, unseen, trailed them to the store. The place was crowded, and brooding in it was an ominous silence. Hard eyes followed them, as they en-

tered it and pushed through the throng. No one noticed Sergeant McBride pass into the place on their heels and conceal himself in the shadows back of a counter; nor did any one observe the dark form that followed the sergeant.

Karmack made his way to a desk which he had before arranged at the center of the rear of the long room. He shot a significant glance at the Swede, Hans Larsen, seated at the side on a bale of pelts, as he passed. At the desk Karmack turned, facing the straining eyes fixed upon him. Mechanically he rapped for silence, but his gesture was solely perfunctory. A deadly stillness already pervaded the room. He swept the throng with a quick glance, and a gleam of satisfaction shot into his eyes.

"Where is this man, Kars, whom I ordered to face this court and answer to certain charges?" were his first words. "It would appear, he is afraid to meet them; this is a count against him at the very start, as I call you to witness."

As a matter of fact, he had not notified Kars, but had secretly counted on making this very point. One thing, however, he had not counted on, the subtle spirit of this North with which he was dealing.

Old André Valois stepped forward at once; he was grinning behind the mask of his wrinkles, and anticipation glittered in his coal-black eyes in little gleaming flashes of light.

"I speak here for Brent Kars, m'sieu," he said, "an' what I speak shows dis crowd hee's 'fraid ov you for sure. He say, m'sieu, for you—go to hell."

It was cleverly done. A roar of laughter upset the dignity of the court, and the tension broke; the North had spoken to haughty authority. The crowd settled down to a happy, noisy interest.

Karmack, with a snarl, rapped loudly for order. Having lost his advantage, he now sought to regain it by swift pro-

cedure. "Hans Larsen, stand up and take the oath!"

The Swede, shifting his catlike eyes to the new manager's face, went through with the formality.

"Larsen," now said Karmack, "I understand you were Harvey McVeigh's assistant at the time he was strangled to death."

"I was," answered the Swede, lowering his gaze to the floor.

"You took over the post after he was murdered?"

"I did."

"Did you see anything on the day McVeigh met his death to arouse your suspicions? I refer to the things you mentioned in the report you sent in to headquarters—over John McTavish's head."

This was news, of course, to McTavish, and he began to sense the farce now as a cleverly prearranged bit of staging to destroy Brent Kars. Before McTavish could speak his mind, Larsen was answering, and he held his peace.

"I see Brent Kars at McVeigh's post on dat day. He quarrel wid McVeigh, when McVeigh accuse him of fur stealing. I left Kars dare alone wid de factor when I go out on de trap lines."

"And the next day?" Karmack was coaching his witness.

"De next day," Larsen continued, "I com' back an' find McVeigh dead on his bunk."

"With a seal line about his neck," swiftly put in Karmack. "It took a big, strong man—say a man like Kars—to do that strangling, eh?" He paused for the effect of his words to sink into the consciousness of his crowd. "Now tell the half-breed's admirers here, what your scout, Jules Fanchèt saw some days later when he was out trailing fur thieves in the hills."

Larsen licked his lips, parched with a fever of nervous tension, and kept his eyes to the floor, as he replied: "Jules Fanchèt, he saw Corporal Donahue

killed by one who shoot at him from de brush."

"Ah!" Karmack pursued. "Did he see the one who shot the corporal—the face of the killer?"

Again the silence was tense, as all waited with breathless interest the answer to that question.

"It was de sam' who kill McVeigh; it was Brent Kars."

A murmur of incredulity followed this, and Karmack stilled it with an up-lifted hand.

"Good enough!" he said. "What more do you want, men, to convince you that your idol has feet of clay? First, to cover his fur thieving, discovered by Harvey McVeigh, he strangles the factor to death with a seal line; then, later, to prevent Corporal Donahue from warning Nicol MacCoy of a raid on his post, he shoots the corporal down from ambush."

"Wrong on both counts!"

The voice fell like a shot in the silence of the room. With a swift, spasmodic motion all eyes turned toward the speaker, as Sergeant McBride pushed forward, smiling grimly, into the center of the floor.

Hans Larsen's eyes blinked green with fear, as he saw the police sergeant whom he thought safely dead under the arctic snows.

McBride broke the tenseness of the scene with a crisp, ringing sentence. "Look like a ghost to you, do I, Larsen? Your scout, Jules Fanchèt, tricked you nicely with that button, eh? I have just brought Fanchèt in with me, and he tells a different tale from yours, my slippery fox. Jules Fanchèt, come here, and tell this crowd just what happened up there in the hills!"

McBride turned, and from behind him stepped the breed. It was the prisoner he had brought in with him from the trail. Fanchèt, facing the crowd, opened his mouth to speak, when Larsen crouched and, sweeping a knife from

his belt, sprang at him. The sergeant's hand fell like lightning, and the gun barked at his hip. The Swede crumpled, groaning and gripping at his shattered fingers. In a second the steel shackles of the law snapped on the uninjured wrist.

"Larsen, you coyote, in the name of the king I arrest you for the murder of Harvey McVeigh. He was not strangled to death, as you well know, but was shot by you through the heart, as he lay helpless on his bunk, and this breed saw you do it. When you try to fasten it onto Kars, you overlook one little thing; you left McVeigh's diary in his pocket, and it gives your story the lie.

"As for Corporal Donahue," he continued, turning toward Karmack, "he was stabbed by the knife of a cowardly skunk who fled after the deed was done. Donahue dragged himself, bleeding to death, all the way to MacCoy's post. He saw the face of that skunk, and, like all the dauntless men who wear the Mounted uniform, he spent his last remaining strength in writing up his last report; in it he details accurately what he saw on that face. Across the left temple of that man runs a red birthmark which cannot be mistaken."

The effect of these words on Karmack was so startling that John McTavish drew away from the man in a horror of surprise, and the sergeant's gaze intensified and fixed on him in a steely glitter.

The hard, cruel face of the new manager had gone white, blotting all the color out of it, and on the thin, cruel lips formed a snarl, like the snarl of a beast.

Into this surcharged atmosphere, electric with strained passions, walked suddenly Brent Kars himself, little Père Junòt, and the unknown stranger who had come up with the York boats from the south. Upon the stranger, now hoodless, Karmack's wild eyes flared wide with recognition and shock; he was

Looking into the stern, grim eyes of old Jeffrey Karmack, the commissioner himself.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE COMMISSIONER SPEAKS.

FOR a full moment Karmack's gaze was fixed on the commissioner's face, then it shifted to Brent Kars. Instantly he was seized by a blind fury that swept everything from him but the deep venom of his unreasoning hate. He crouched, like a cat about to spring upon its prey, and flung an insulting epithet at Kars.

Those who had seen Brent Kars stand in stultified inactivity at the previous insult of this man, now felt a nervous tingle run up and down their spines, as the sharp "smack" of an open-palmed blow sounded through the room, like the flat-sided slap of a birch blade on still water. Such a blow is the deadliest of insults to the Northman! It is to adjudge a man too great a weakling to harden one's fist against.

It sent Karmack reeling backward, and he would have fallen had not McTavish and the grinning Valois caught him and held him erect.

"Let go!" he said, regaining his poise and struggling against the restraining arms. "Let go, curse him!"

"Ef he hit you wid hees fist, m'sieu, he keel you," Valois said, still grinning. "You bes' be glad he geeve you jes' leetle slap in de face."

The words stung Karmack to renewed fury. His face twisted into a rage to which he could no longer give voice. Hatred robbed his eyes of the last spark of human sanity. The lids drew back from them, like a wild beast's, and the thin lips bared the man's white teeth. With the strength of a madman he broke loose and hurled his body like a catapult at Kars.

Kars took the force of the human avalanche of fury as a York boat might have received the ramming jam of a

water-soaked log. His body rocked backward from the unexpected suddenness of it, taking the mad blows of the hammering fists with stoic calmness; then he braced himself, and met the second mad rush with another open-handed blow to the side of the head, which sent Karmack spinning into the circle of straining faces that were grinning in the dull flare of yellow light.

One could almost hear the beat of his neighbor's pulse in the stifling air, as that peculiar fight progressed; for this was authority receiving such a stinging rebuff as the North had seldom witnessed. Karmack fought with mad rage and his knotted fists, and Brent Kars parried the violent blows skillfully and fought back smilingly, using always the flat of his open hand contemptuously.

Each time that Karmack flung himself forward he hurled insanely through his gritted teeth the words "Half-breed!" and each time, as Brent Kars slapped him back into the circle, old André Valois cried out: "Tak' dat from a half-breed, m'sieu!"

It was a fight which Karmack could not endure for any length of time because of the very intensity of his violence. He staggered back eventually, panting and sputtering. Ready hands grasped him at a sign from Kars, as the old commissioner's voice boomed into the deadly hush.

"Hold that madman!" Jeffrey Karmack demanded.

Old John McTavish now stepped forward and confronted the commissioner, his first shock of surprise at the other's presence in the North having been wiped out in the swift run of events. "Perhaps you can answer, Jeffrey Karmack," he said, "now that you are here, why you send a madman and a fool like this to the responsible management of Fontenac."

"I can answer a good many things, Friend McTavish, now that I am here," the commissioner answered, "and in

good time I will, my friend. First, I am exonerating him whom you call Brent Kars from fault here. He could have killed that madman, but——”

His further speech was interrupted by a croaking sound, as a pushing form forced its way through the crowding circle. Into the light came the old squaw, Nokomis, shuffling like a bent old witch, her bony fingers spreading out and pointing like talons at the face of the new manager.

Then all saw what the old squaw was pointing at in the yellow glare of the light. On the left temple of the man, where Brent Kars' blows had swept it clean of the pigment used to conceal it, was that fatal birthmark which Kars had sought and failed to find.

“*Him Nokomis' son,*” declared the Indian woman in triumph.

As if he but waited the fatal signal, Sergeant McBride stepped forward and snapped the irons on the man's wrists. “Murray Karmack,” he said, “in the king's name I arrest you for the brutal murder of Corporal Donahue. And I must warn you that——”

McTavish stood aghast. “How can that be?” he asked. “This man has not been in the North! He is the commissioner's son.”

“Ah, no, Friend McTavish,” answered Jeffrey Karmack. “That man is the mad offspring of my own mad brother, and he was in the North, my friend. His were the brains that formulated the whole plot to despoil this district. His aversion to the cold caused him to leave before the plot was fully carried out; that is all.”

“But, man, you have named him factor of Fontenac,” McTavish replied.

“Read again your orders of institution, my friend. I named my son as the factor of Fontenac.” He turned and swept the startled crowd with his old eyes, gleaming with a strange light. “Gentlemen, my son has in him the finest steel that goes into the making of

a Northman! Thank God, this is my son.”

The old man's hand fell proudly upon the broad shoulders of Brent Kars, and into the hush of pent expectancy burst a bedlam of cheers that shook the post.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MOONLIGHT MADNESS.

THERE is a little madness in all of us, my friends,” remarked Père Junòt the next evening after supper at McTavish House. The three old friends, the commissioner, the factor, and the priest, sat on the veranda of the great house, smoking and watching the silver tracery of moonlight trickle through the spruce fronds. There had been a long, thoughtful silence among them, and this bit of philosophy fell into it suddenly with a shock that brought them back to the present abruptly.

“Of what are ye thinking, *mon père?*” asked John McTavish, shifting his gaze to the shadowed face of the priest.

“For one thing I am thinking of the heart of my North torn with the lust for blood,” the priest answered. “It was by the merest chance that our sergeant of police saved his two prisoners from a lynching.”

“Ah, but did ye note how swiftly Brent Kars had the crowd in hand?” returned McTavish.

“Brent Kars! Ah, yes—Brent Kars.”

“Will it ever be aught but Brent Kars?” asked the old commissioner wistfully.

“I fear it will stick, Friend Karmack!” said the priest. “It is the way of the North.”

“Where is my son?” demanded Jeffrey Karmack. “One would think him not too well pleased at discovering a father after all these years.”

“Pleased!” exclaimed the priest, with a smile. “Man, did you not see the flame of gladness light his eyes? There is more of rejoicing in the heart of

Brent Kars than the finding of a father. He has also found emancipation. That Helen McTavish, now, where is she? I ask you that."

This subtle shift threw a sudden light upon the problem, and the priest chuckled as McTavish made answer. "I know not. It would seem, Karmack, that we are in the same boat as concerns these young people of ours."

"Of a truth, McTavish; I mind now a suspicious silence about them both. Not many words did either of them speak at the supper table."

"But did you note the eye talk each had with the other, hearing naught of the remarks of their elders?" demanded the priest. "Disappeared almost at once, without touching their dessert. Gentlemen, it is a clear case of moonlight madness, I'll wager. While we old fools

are smoking here and mooning over troubles, they are—— Sh! There—— what did I tell you! Theirs is the innocent madness of young lovers whose hearts are pure."

Two moving forms blended as one, when they came slowly out of the soft shadows of the trees into the silver path of the moon. The little priest, with a finger to his lips, motioned his companions to their feet and pushed them gently back into the shadows from which three pairs of spying old eyes watched the age-old mystery of youth.

"You knew it all the time," whispered McTavish accusingly.

"Sh!" cautioned the priest, chuckling.

One single sentence only did they catch; it came from the girl before the man, stooping, smothered the sound of it with his lips: "Brent—Brent Kars!"



HIS ENDLESS QUEST

By S. Omar Barker

MY tireless arms swing ax and pick to hew
 Footpath and highroad for the feet
 And wheels that come to drive me on; and you
 Who bring meek plows for planting wheat,
 Where grass has grappled with the years,
 Say, "Look! Here we are pioneers!"

My rifle, ax, and lonely little tent
 Move on again. You cannot see
 How houses, wheels, the growth of settlement,
 Oppress the very air for me.
 The land I've won from wilderness
 Grows strange to me and comfortless.

This is the lot of him who blazes trails,
 The fate of vagrant pioneer:
 To learn how soon the outland country stales
 When those who follow him appear.
 My ax, my gun, have tamed the wild,
 But I, untamed, unreconciled,

Must wander on to some new "West"—
 One more frontier my endless quest.



The Kicking Fool

By
H.R. Marshall~

(A NOVELETTE)

CHAPTER I.

A REGULAR FELLOW.

CHUCK" CHEEK—you know him, or at least have read about him, All-American half back in 1920—blew into our Terrapin Rancho the last summer before he burned up the football grid-irons, or whatever they call the battle-fields.

We were running a "dude wrangling ranch" that summer. For the fun of it? Rather not! But cattle were worth nothing-minus on the hoof, and Owner Keith had to do something to get together enough simoleons to pay the gang of cowboys over which I was major-domo. The "dude ranch" idea hit him as an easy way to earn money.

It was not an easy way. Not a-tall! One short experience as a dude rancher was plenty for the boss and too much for my buckaroos. In less than no time we all had a bellyful of the whole thing. Criminy, how we hated the tenderfoots! Even the broncs disliked them. One thousand fool questions per square inch,

twenty complaints per minute, three dozen crazy notions every day—that was the average tenderfoot.

But not Chuck Cheek; he was a regular fellow. What's more, his mind was too occupied with one thing to let him get into all the trouble the other tenderfoots did, such as falling into cholla cactus, getting lost, or breaking the legs of broncs.

You see, Chuck Cheek was using the Terrapin Rancho as training grounds. He was captain of the football team at Southwestern University, a big school over the mountains in California. Already he was a humdinger on the andiron, but he packed to the Terrapin Rancho with a trunk full of footballs, determined to make himself stronger, faster, and more skillful at the arts of rough stuff, tripping, diving, bucking, or what-have-you in a football game.

He succeeded. Yes, sir; when he left the Terrapin Rancho to reënter the college that fall he was hard as a cactus spike and as tough. There was a reason. He took his training darned serious. Up at dawn, he was, and running in ab-

breviated underclothes five or six miles across the desert. Then he put on some cleated shoes and kicked the footballs around for the rest of the day. At sundown he straddled one of our desert ponies and rode for a couple of hours. At nine he was in bed, paying no attention to poker games or phonograph dances, but planning to run twice as far the next morning.

We boys at the Terrapin got an awful kick out of watching him at first. We laughed at him, kidded him, played tricks on him, such as filling his footballs with sand and water. But he was a regular guy and laughed right back at us. Before long we got to like him real well and kind of respect his ambition, he was so darned steadfast.

In spare moments some of the boys used to try to kick the footballs with him. That was a joke. He could make that ball squirm through the air half the length of the corral. It took my boys six or seven kicks and as many cusses to get it halfway back to him.

One day Hal McBurney entered the kicking game. Hal was a new fence rider I had picked up over near Big Pine to help entertain the dude wranglers. Just a kid he was, but one-and-a-half-man size; thin as a spine of Spanish bayonet and as hard. Tall? Like a Joshua tree! Six foot nine when he straightened up, which he seldom did.

He had one of the queerest architectural elevations I ever saw on a human being. His legs were twice as long as the rest of his body; he seemed split right up to his shoulders. Honest, he could sit on a small bronc and trail his feet on the ground. Likable kid, straight-shooting, and modest, he was, and looked like a pair of big blue eyes mounted on stilts.

As I was saying, Hal McBurney began to stroll out in the corral when Chuck Cheek was kicking the oval balls around. The sport seemed to appeal to Hal's childishness. He had natural abil-

ity, too. In a month's time he could kick that ball just as far as Chuck Cheek. Not as accurate, understand, not by a darned sight; but that long right leg of his would leap up in the air and hit that ball a terrific whack. Then it'd go sailing away a mile a minute, no one knew in what direction.

Chuck Cheek, seeing there was some natural ability in the kid, began to instruct him real serious. "Punting," he called it, and a fool sort of a kick called "drop kick." Hal was a quick pupil, right-o, and moved to the head of the class real fast. Before Chuck Cheek left the Terrapin Rancho for the college gridiron that fall he had trained young Hal to kick the ball back to him every time. Sort of retriever, Hal was, and a great convenience for Cheek.

The second week of September, Cheek went back to Southwestern University. Because we had become rather fond of the stubby fellow we read the occasional newspapers which came our way and followed his success with interest and satisfaction, as the testimonials say; especially Hal McBurney, who was plumb loco about football. When Chuck Cheek joined the All-American team about Christmas time we were all happy for the kid because we knew that had been his ambition all the blistering days of that summer.

I don't know what became of the All-American team that year or how much it got paid or anything about it. I suppose probably it played the All-Chinese team, the All-Russian team, and some of the others, if that's what the All-American is for. Anyway we lost all track of the boy.

CHAPTER II.

A WONDER AT KICKING.

BEFORE long we had forgotten about Chuck Cheek. We were darned glad to erase all thoughts of that terrible summer with the tenderfoots from our

minds, if any. The only reminders we permitted to exist were four footballs which Cheek had left when he went back to college.

Hal McBurney got a lot of fun out of those balls. Fact is, he seemed to go loco about them. Every spare minute he had, out he would go to the corral and kick them around. Every day he could kick them a little farther than the day before. The ball would twist, too, like Chuck Cheek had made it do. "Spiral," I thing he called it. By and by he got so he could punt, or whatever they name it, so hard that the ball would sail and bound the whole length of the corral, which is a neat hundred yards. Honest! That long leg of his would shoot up in the air and hit that ball like a pile driver. Then away it would go, almost out of sight. Wonderful leverage that boy had, a leg like a derrick.

When he got so that he could kick from one end of the corral to the other he spent his time practicing the drop kick. He got to be a bearcat at that, too. Straight as a government survey he would send that ball, end over end, eight or ten rods over a kind of a cross-bar letter "H" that Chuck Cheek had set up.

There's no accounting for tastes or recreations. For four years Hal kicked those footballs, kicked them until they were worn out, kicked them until he learned to punt them up so far that it looked as if they would never come down. Only fair to middling he was as a fence rider; no good as a broncho buster. But say, as a catch-as-catch-can booter of footballs he was a wonder!

Four years! A fellow ought to get good at almost anything in four years if he practices every day. Especially if he has the right temperament and the proper physique. Hal McBurney had both, and a leg just made for hoisting footballs higher and farther than any football had ever traveled before.

"What's the idee?" I asked Hal one

day after he had put ten kicks in succession over that H affair. "What you working so hard at nothing for? That isn't earning you a ranch or a gold mine, is it? Haven't you got any ambitions in the line of cattle riding?"

Hal flushed under his tan and dirt. "Not so much," he replied. "Watch this one!"

He stepped back, dropped the ball, and lifted it with his toe over the cross-bar. I paced off the distance—a full sixty yards.

"Not so bad," I conceded.

"I wish," Hal McBurney said, "that Chuck Cheek could have seen that one. He used to think that a kick half that long was pretty good." He stared at me without another word for a minute. Only his big blue eyes were solemn and wistful. "You suppose Chuck Cheek'll ever come back?" he asked.

"Maybe!" I hated to encourage him. "But you'll be fired long before that—for general laziness. Get out of here," I added, real gruff, "and go over on Juniper Mesa and help the boys cut out the High Society herd."

"If Chuck Cheek ever comes back——" he began again.

"Shut up!" I roared. "Beat it!"

CHAPTER III.

HIS BIG MOMENT.

ONE day Chuck Cheek did come back. He puffed and rattled through the sand in a little tin automobile that very spring. Soon as he saw me he let out a whoop of delight which brought all the boys from the bunk house. We gathered round him and his little gas horse which had struggled so far through the sand.

"I've been up by Big Pine and Lone Pine for the opening of the trout season," Cheek explained. "Had to stop over here on my way back to see you boys."

See us he did, and we saw him; al-

most the same Chuck Cheek as he had been four years before when he worked from dawn to dusk, preparing to be an All-American half back. "Almost the same," I said; not quite. He was a little fuller around the equator; a little balder on the forehead; just the least bit pudgy. But he had the same big smile and happy way. Just the sight of him was as good for my boys as fresh water on the alkali flats.

Questions were thrown at him real fast. "What you doing now?" demanded "Lop Ear" Pete. "Still playing with that All-United States team?"

"No," Chuck told him. "I'm coaching at Southwestern now. When I finished college they made me an assistant coach, but now I'm the chief."

"How'd the All-American team come out against the All-Chinese team?" I asked, hopeful, hating the Chinese on general principles.

"Didn't play them," replied Chuck Cheek. He saw the look on my face and added: "We'd have wiped the earth with them if we had." He went on to say something about the All-American team being an honorary affair. But suddenly I had seen Hal McBurney, and I was too interested in the kid's actions to pay much attention to Chuck's words.

Hal was hanging in back of the crowd, his eyes bigger than I had ever seen them, staring at Chuck Cheek like a starving coyote stares at a luscious rabbit. Immediate I nudged Chuck Cheek. "There's a boy there," I said, "who's itching to show you some plain and fancy kicking. He's been working four years for this minute. Don't torture him any longer."

With a laugh, Chuck Cheek turned to Hal McBurney. "So you've been practicing kicking, have you?" he asked.

Hal nodded, speechless.

"Let's go out and boot a few," invited Cheek, just to be obliging.

Hal McBurney dived into the bunk house like a gopher into his hole, dashed

out again with two footballs, and raced for the corral. Chuck Cheek entered into the spirit of the thing and sprinted after him, yelling and whooping. He made a long-distance dive, caught Hal around the waist and threw him. They were both up in a jiffy, and one got at each end of the corral. Of course my whole crowd of curious fence riders ambled down there, too.

Hal McBurney had the two footballs, and he motioned for Cheek to get farther away. But Chuck just grinned.

"Come on," he said. "Lift her. I'm fifty yards away now."

Young Hal booted the ball then, and he sure did boot it. He threw it real hard at his foot; his leg came up in the air like a broken piston, higher than his head, and the way that ball sailed! It hadn't even started to come down when it went over Cheek's head.

The Southwestern coach stared at that ball, half a mile in the air. Then he stared at Hal McBurney. His mouth dropped open. He gasped, real audible. Then he turned and ran after the ball. Very humble, he retrieved it for Hal, brought it back to him. "Do that again, please," Cheek ordered real quiet. He backed up fifteen yards farther this time.

Once more Hal McBurney's long leg took a poke at that ball; once more it sailed over Chuck's head like a buzzard which has sighted a beef carcass in the distance.

Slowly Chuck Cheek went after the ball. He was pondering deeply; that was sure. When he picked up the football he examined it very careful, looking to see if it had wings, I suppose. He carried it all the way back to young Hal.

"Maybe," he suggested awedlike, "you can drop-kick, too. You practiced that with me that summer, you know."

Without a word Hal turned and faced that H affair which Cheek had erected. This was the big moment of Hal's big day. The boys all knew it and were as

quiet as pack rats when Hal got ready to make that kick.

Sixty yards from the crossbar he was. He dropped the ball. Just as it hit the ground, his long leg shot forward. Straight as a bullet that ball went toward the goal; end over end it floped, high over the crossbar.

Very solemnly Chuck Cheek paced off the distance just as I had done a few days before. "Sixty-one yards," he announced real solemnly. "As I remember, the world's record drop kick is sixty-three yards."

"Hell!" said Hal McBurney. That was the first word he had spoken, and appropriate enough. "I can put her over at sixty-five yards. Easy!" He dropped back four or five paces and made good his boast.

Chuck Cheek gazed at the lanky fence rider, dumfounded. He was looking at a prodigy, and he knew it—the combined result of a leg most six feet long, four years of practice, and a fierce determination.

"Would you—would you do it again?" Chuck Cheek asked real humble.

Hal McBurney did it again. All morning long he booted those old worn-out footballs for the edification of Chuck Cheek. When the two came into the dobe bunk house for chuck that noon the football coach's face was bathed in surprise and admiration.

Right after we had eaten, Chuck Cheek took Hal aside. "Keep at it this summer," he told the boy. "Next fall, about the fifteenth of September, I'm coming up here to get you. You're going to enter Southwestern University and be the greatest kicker that ever lived."

I couldn't help laughing. Hal McBurney in college! Real funny it was, and I told him so.

"That's all right," Cheek answered for Hal. "The eligibility rules aren't very strict at Southwestern. He'll play on the team at least one season."

"Take him, then," I said real sarcastic. "I'm glad he's good for something. As a cowboy he's nix. If you can use that long leg of his, which he never shakes at work, use it!"

CHAPTER IV.

REAL SNAPPY.

TRUE to his promise, Chuck Cheek came back to the Terrapin Rancho and picked up Hal McBurney about the middle of September. The boy had practiced harder than ever that summer, neglecting his duties as a cowboy something scandalous. I liked the kid real well, but just the same I wasn't sorry to get him off the pay roll. As majordomo, I was responsible for the efficiency of the Terrapin outfit, and Hal McBurney sure was a drag.

For six weeks after he left we heard nothing from him. Then, the first week in November, came a letter. It said:

DEAR MAJ: Howre all the boys? Im well too. I like it here fine but have got to quit soon. They let me play football tho. I wish you could see me. Why dont you? The fall rodeo is over isnt it? Why dont you an the boys come over and see me play?

You could take the stage to Mohave and come down the Tehachapi Pass. It isnt much of a trip. Why dont you come? Our team plays the University of California on the 18th. Its the big game of the season. This is the longest letter I ever wrote. Goodbye.

HAL.

P. S. If you come Ill go back with you.

That postscript wasn't any inducement for me to go to the football game a-tall, but I read the letter to the boys, most of them not being able to read. They just grunted at first, but, funny thing, enthusiasm kind of grew on them. Itching, they all were, I guess, for a change of scenery. They cared a lot more about that than seeing a football game. Anyway on Thursday, the sixteenth, we all loped away from the Terrapin Rancho toward Mohave; got there the morning of the seventeenth, and

went down the Pass that night, headed for Southwestern University at Del Sidio and a gangling, long-legged ex-cow-puncher named Hal McBurney.

The last seventy miles of our trip we made on the cushions of a passenger train; quite a treat for my boys. Being real smart, I wired ahead to Hal, addressing him in care of the Southwestern football team and telling him to meet us at the station.

He did. He was there, crazy-glad to see us. I didn't know him at first in his citified clothes; thought he was one of those advertising men like the one I saw on stilts once in San Francisco with a sign on his back. The kid had sort of uncoiled and stood straight as a stick. I think he had grown another couple of inches, too. Anyway, he loomed up over that crowd like a telephone pole over a creosote bush. He was so big that he completely hid a little girl who was at his side.

Well, we piled all over Hal, pumped his hand and pounded his back; we whooped and yelled, and he grinned at us real happy. When the noise had died down a little he said, politelike: "Permit me, gentlemen, to interduce Miss Estelle Naylor."

My boys came back real snappy, and I was proud of their gentlemanly ways. "Pleased to meetcha." "You sure are some dame!" "You can pack your shoes in my trunk any time." And a lot more flattering remarks like those.

"Come on," interrupted Hal McBurney. "You boys will want your chow. I've arranged a special table for you in training quarters."

We all let out a whoop at this and stampeded toward the street. We hadn't gone more than fifty steps when I noticed the girl was lost. I had liked her real well and didn't want any harm to come to her. She was just a little thing, but she had big smiling blue eyes, a great mass of yellow hair, and the prettiest face you ever saw. When she smiled it

made my heart skip two beats and then race to catch up. Yes; I missed her and said so to Hal.

"Where's the little doll?" I asked him.

"Oh!" said Hal, and his voice dropped real sorrowful. "She's waiting for some one else. I just happened to meet her at the station."

"Yes; you did," I jeered.

"Honest! The California team is due in on a train from the North. She's waiting for that. You see, she attended California for a year, studying book-keeping and stenography and all that. Now she's secretary to a big lawyer-fellow here. But she knows some of the California players. One fellow in particular. Neder is his name. He's their big star. Yes; and he's a very good friend of hers."

He was silent for a minute, then added, real heavylike: "Very good! Too good! Too damned good!" He had the look of a starving cow just before she topples.

"Oh!" I said, seeing the conversation was hurting him. "And where is this eat house?"

CHAPTER V.

GETTING THE NEWS.

WE had no idea what a famous fellow Hal McBurney had become until we got out on the football field. Even there we didn't know right away. We were too astonished at the number of people to know much of everything. More people than I ever saw in my life! There they were, layer upon layer of them packed around the gridiron, twenty or twenty-five thousand. Gosh, what a crowd!

Hal had got us seats in a box right down on the field. There the five of us sat, real lonesome in that crowd, almost deafened by the jabbering and chattering and the cheering which was led by a little dancing, nervous fellow in an orange-and-black costume.

I guess Hal had arranged for a seat for that heart-breaking little Estelle Naylor, too. Anyway, she was in the box with us, at the far end. I waved to her, and she waved back, real friendly. Her eyes were sparkling and her cheeks pink. Excited already, she was, and so was the rest of that mob. I felt kind of funny myself.

After a while I noticed a little fellow sitting next to me, a thin, fidgeting, scanty-haired fellow. "Big crowd, isn't it?" I asked, by way of making conversation.

The teams hadn't come on the field yet so he condescended to answer. "I should say so," he said. "And most of them came to see just one player."

"Who's that?" I queried, not really caring.

"Hal McBurney. I came three thousand miles to see him myself."

"Who?" I shot at him.

"Hal McBurney," he repeated.

"What's he done?" I asked.

"Done?" exclaimed the stranger. "He's broken more football records than any man who ever lived."

"Go on!" I scoffed.

He stared at me sorelike, as if I had called him a liar. "Listen," he said. "I'm assistant sporting editor of a New York newspaper. It's my business to know about football, and when I say that Hal McBurney has broken more football records than any man who ever lived, I mean it!"

"Oh!" -I subsided.

"Way back in '82," resumed my new friend, proud of his knowledge, "a fellow named Haxall kicked a goal from placement of sixty-five yards in the Princeton-Yale game. In 1915 a fellow named Payne made a drop kick of sixty-three yards. Pat O'Dea, Wisconsin, the greatest kicker of his time, made a drop kick of sixty-two yards, one of fifty, and one of forty-five. Those are records, see? All right! This young McBurney comes along and in one season drop-

kicks one goal of sixty-seven yards and three of sixty."

I had nothing to say to this so the fellow resumed: "Take the number of field goals in one game. Robbie Robertson of Purdue place-kicked seven goals in a game in 1900. Several fellows, including the famous Walter Eckersall of Chicago, have kicked five goals in a game. Then this fellow McBurney pops up.

"Listen! In the game against Occidental last week he drop-kicked nine goals. The week before he made seven against Pomona College. There's a couple more records. And punting! Say, that fellow can stand on one goal line and punt to the other, if the ball gets any fair kind of a bound. Yes, sir. He punts so far that it gets the ball in position for a drop-kick. The greatest kicker that ever lived. Say, that man is a football team in himself! All the Southwestern coach has to do is to train a line to hold. Then McBurney can win games single-handed. Yes, sir."

The boys of my crew were leaning over me listening to the sporting writer's words. Their eyes were big, amazed, and full of unbelief.

"Is he any good at the rest of the game?" asked Lop Ear Pete.

"Doesn't have to be," the newspaper man answered. "At that, I guess he isn't so bad. You see, he has the longest legs in the world, and once he gets started he travels fast."

By that time I was rather proud of my young fence rider. "You don't have to tell me about those legs," I said. "I brought up that boy."

The newspaper man turned on me, real interested, jerking a piece of paper and a pencil stub from his pocket at the same time. "Tell me about it," he ordered, already beginning to scrawl.

I was in the midst of a picturesque description of Hal McBurney's life at the Terrapin Rancho when a great shout

stopped me. Out on the field came the Southwestern team, real colorful in their orange-and-black jerseys. Above them all loomed Hal McBurney. Say, he looked like the original skyscraper. I yelled at him. "Hello, Hal!" He didn't seem to hear me, but I noticed him glancing at our box and then saw that Naylor girl wave to him.

For a minute or two the team ran up and down the field with the ball, all in a bunch. Then Hal dropped back for kicking practice.

You never heard such a roar in your life as the first time Hal kicked that ball. That's what that mob had come to see, a little football shooting away from the toe of that gangling, split-bodied boy: They saw enough, right-o. That first kick traveled and bounded the whole length of the gridiron; so did the second and the third. Then Hal began lazily to boot over drop kicks from the middle of the field.

The little newspaper man beside me was jabbering and muttering, most enthusiastic. "A genius," he said. "That boy can clean up one hundred thousand dollars any time he signs a movie contract. Why, he could play for a professional team at the end of the season and get twenty thousand dollars a game!"

"What's that?" I asked, being interested in the big-money figures.

"I said he could earn a hundred thousand dollars a season," the man repeated. "Easy!"

"But Southwestern University will keep him on their team for life, won't it?" I asked.

"Afraid not," the newspaper writer returned. "They tell me that he's a dumb-bell in his classes. Southwestern has lax eligibility rules. They let freshmen play on their teams. But no school could keep a man like that on the team unless he really did college work. If they tried it, no other team would play them."

"Oh!" I said, and was trying to for-

mulate another question when the game started.

"Smart stuff!" barked the newspaper man.

"What?" I demanded.

"The California team won the toss and are receiving the kick-off. They plan to keep the ball away from McBurney as long as they can."

Just then a whistle blew, and I looked around for a policeman, but it was just the signal for the game to start.

CHAPTER VI.

TIME FOR ACTION.

I DON'T know enough about football to tell you all that happened in the next few minutes. But I saw some grand pile-ups of men; like cattle in a stampede. I saw some fancy running and diving and kicking and jumping. Gosh, those boys were fast and daring! The teams worked like machines and dived and smashed and bumped something terrific.

Suddenly the stands behind me began to roar all together: "Hold 'em! Hold 'em! Hold 'em!"

"What's the matter?" I asked my newspaper friend.

"The California team has carried the ball right down the field," he answered. "They're almost to Southwestern's goal line. It's fourth down, and they have two yards to make."

"I see," I said. But of course I didn't. A minute later another great shout went up from the Southwestern stands, full of joy. The Orange and Black team had held, I gathered.

There was another line-up, and way in the back of it stood Hal McBurney. The ball was thrown back to him. I watched him real careful. He hurled the ball at his foot as hard as he could. The long leg of his shot up in the air and away the ball went.

All the other roars that had gone up from the stands that afternoon were

small compared to the one which came as that ball sailed over the gridiron. Up, up it went, until it looked like a pea; on, on it traveled. Before it hit the ground it was almost at the other goal line. It took a bad bound, though, and came back down the field a little ways, where a California man picked it up. Three or four Southwestern players were waiting for him, and they all went down in a heap.

Out of the corner of my eye I looked at Estelle Naylor. She was dancing up and down just like the rest of that wild mob. Pleased, she was, at that tremendous boot of Hal McBurney's. Across the field I could see the short, stocky figure of Chuck Cheek walking up and down like a caged mountain lion.

"Now," said my newspaper friend, "California has got to start all over again. They're the better team, but they'll have to go some to beat that McBurney."

I began to get some sense out of the game by this time, and I could see California taking the ball real steady down the field. Suddenly one of their blue-sweatered men came around the side near us. He dodged, squirmed, twisted, and first thing we knew he was running in the open; no one near him a-tall. His little short legs twinkled; he ran like a scared rabbit. From the stands a great groan went up.

"That's Neder," the man beside me said. "Great player! It's a touch-down!" he added excitedly.

"Yes; it was a touchdown, whatever that means, and after it a kick. "California now has seven points," the newspaper man explained patiently a minute later.

Just out of curiosity I glanced at Estelle Naylor again. She was all smiles and excitement. That California friend of hers, Neder, would have liked the look on her face just then. Yes; that girl had two stars out there on the field, and she knew it. And

right now the one I didn't care about was shining brightest.

"Why doesn't Hal McBurney score some points?" I demanded angry.

"He will," my friend answered. "Just give him a chance."

Hal had the chance, and he scored. The Southwestern team caught the next kick-off and carried it back almost to midfield. There were two or three pile-up which didn't seem to change the position of the ball. Then Hal McBurney dropped back again.

"He's going to punt," I said, real proud of my knowledge of the word.

"Maybe," the newspaper man returned; "more likely drop-kick. He's on the sixty-five-yard line." Suddenly he jumped up and yelled. "Wowie! Look at that!" he shrieked. "It's going over. Sure, it's—it's—over! Sixty-five yards!" There was terrific awe in his voice.

The stands were shaking with roars; the air seemed to shake, too, as people screamed and shouted. The man beside me was quieter now. He just whispered to himself again and again: "Sixty-five yards!" Beyond him in the box a girl was laughing shrilly with excitement; Estelle Naylor, of course.

That football game went ahead just like it started, which meant that it was a contest between Hal McBurney's wonderful kicking and the great all-around play of the California team. That stock little Neder fellow was a deer on roller skates. He could run! Four times he took that ball half the length of the gridiron. Out around one side he'd swing, then streak it down the edge of the field. Every time he was stopped by the last man on the Southwestern team.

Then the Orange and Black players would fight with their backs to the goal line and manage to get the ball. Immediate, Hal McBurney would boot the daylights out of the leather, drive it back where Neder had started with it.

On the California team would come again, with that bird, Neder, flashing around and ahead.

Once the two team changed goals. That was to fool each other and the spectators, I suppose. It had me going for a while. A couple of times Hal McBurney had a long-distance shot at the goal post, and both times he drop-kicked the ball over, much to the delight of the crowd.

"The half's almost over," my newspaper friend told me.

"What's the score?" I asked.

"Nine to seven in favor of Southwestern. It's been the queerest football game I ever saw. One man's long legs against eleven well-trained and beautiful players. At that, the Southwestern boys deserve credit for holding on their goal line like they have and giving McBurney a chance to— Woo-oop!"

I turned quick and looked out on the gridiron. That fellow Neder had broken loose again. This time he streaked it down the edge of the field, right past me. I made a grab for him as he went by. Tried real hard to get him, too, but couldn't quite reach. No one else stopped him, either. He passed the last Southwestern man as if he were standing still.

"It's a touchdown!" my companion from New York told me. "That gives California thirteen points. Well, they've earned it."

I started to say something, but my little friend nudged me into silence. Let's see if they kick this goal," he said.

"It counts three points?" I asked.

"No. The goal after a touchdown counts just one if they make it. There it goes!"

The ball started from the kicker's foot straight toward the goal. Maybe it was a little low. Anyway, the tall figure of Hal McBurney rose up in the air like a man on stilts and picked off the ball.

Just then a gun was fired. I reached real quick for my holsters. If there was going to be a fight I intended to be in on it. But the firing just meant that half of the game was over.

"The score is now thirteen to nine," my friend told me. "In favor of California."

I didn't like the looks of that, nor did the boys of my outfit. They wanted Chuck Cheek's team to win; they wanted Hal McBurney to beat those eleven other fellows. Especially with that Naylor girl looking on. "It's that Neder jack rabbit that's beating him," I explained to them.

"Well, let's stop him," suggested Lop Ear Pete meaningly. He stared at me, intense, and made the motion of drawing something through his hands. I knew right away what he meant.

"Go ahead!" I told him. "Get five. As fast as you can."

Lop Ear Pete piled out of his seat and over the fence behind us to the aisle beside the grand stand. His bowlegs flashed as he raced toward the gate.

CHAPTER VII.

SURPRISING "INTERFERENCE."

IT was a long wait between halves, but we were kept busy enough. Every time the band played we had to jump up, take off our hats and look solemn. I expected a parson to give some sort of funeral speech, but my newspaper friend said the sad music and the melancholy ceremony was a rendering of the college songs.

At last, after we got tired of imitating a game of squat-tag, the two teams trotted back onto the field. Right away things happened. California kicked off this time, and Hal McBurney got the ball. His long legs moved slowly, but covered a lot of ground. He was almost back to the middle of the field before he began to imitate the Leaning Tower of Pisa.

At last he fell, two or three California men clinging to his ankles. Three times more the Southwestern boys lined up, but they couldn't make any headway. Then Hal McBurney dropped back and made another beautiful drop kick.

That made the score thirteen to twelve, and the crowd was as wild as mountain cattle. Three minutes later Southwestern got hold of the ball again, and once more Hal McBurney made a field goal, an easy one this time. But it put Southwestern ahead, and the crowd in the stands went crazy, absolutely crazy. I saw Chuck Cheek across the field jump into the air, come down, and hold himself still by main force.

"What'd I tell you?" demanded my newspaper man fiercely. "That makes five goals for that giraffe already and the game not three-fourths over. He'll get a couple more before the end. Say, every time the ball gets to midfield that bird's good for three points!"

"Who's going to win?" I asked him.

"It's a toss-up yet," he told me. "If that Neder gets free again, it'll put California ahead."

"He won't get free," I promised. Right away I began to watch, real anxious, for Lop Ear Pete. It seemed to me he had been gone an hour. I kept my eyes focused on the gate, and at last I saw him coming on the run. He vaulted over the fence into our box, choking and gasping for breath. He had a big package in his hands which he tore open immediate. There were five new strings of rope, each forty-five feet long.

"Ain't as good as real rawhide lariats," Pete gasped, "but I reckon we can manage them all right."

"Sure! Now listen, Pete," I said, distributing the ropes among my men; "you and Steve McAllister go around the field to the other side. Do it real quiet and easylike so no one will stop

you. You know what to do after you get there."

"Sure!" Lop Ear Pete grinned.

"'Perky' and Ramon and I'll stay here."

The two boys slipped away, and I turned my attention to the field again. Apparently I had arranged my men just in time, for the California team had the ball again and was running down the field with it right steady. I began to coil the rope in my hands, and Ramon and Perky did the same. Suddenly that Neder fellow came streaking it around the bunch of players. Right to the edge of the field he went, playing his usual trick. Then he cut down toward us, running like a scared coyote.

"Ready, boys?" I called, real low, as the fellow dashed closer with the ball.

They nodded with that set look in their eyes that they get when they're sizing up distances.

Neder flashed by us. Say, he was an easy target. We couldn't have missed it. He didn't get five yards beyond us when three ropes snaked out through the air, three loops went over his head. Me, I jerked my rope real quick, and it caught that flying jack rabbit around the neck. Perky let his slide farther down and pulled it around Neder's waist, while Ramon's string lassoed his knees. We braced ourselves for a shock. It wasn't a big one, not like a charging wild cow. That Neder fellow went down in a heap, all tangled up in ropes.

All of a sudden everything was quiet. The stands, which had been shrieking and yelling when Neder started his run, were like a deaf-and-dumb convention.

"There," I said, "we stopped him that time." Real proud I was, not over the easy job of lassoing that fellow, but of the idea behind it.

I said it was quiet. It was; for just about twenty seconds. Then all hell broke loose. Half of the California players ran to Neder to pull off the

ropes and see if he was hurt. The other half piled right over into our box, ready for instant murder. The referee and umpires and the other high moguls were right behind them. Chuck Cheek suddenly appeared and tried to hold the others back. It was no use.

I had foreseen some sort of counter-attack, and very speedy I eased myself over the fence. Perky Perkins and Ramon Chico weren't far behind me. But even there we weren't safe. That crowd which had yelled so hard for Southwestern now seemed real mad at us for trying to help them. They pushed us back and forth and called us unladylike names. At last we had to jerk our guns from our holsters and wave them as if we meant business. Immediate the crowd backed away, and even the California players didn't seem so anxious to commit assault.

The feeling of the butts of those guns in our palms reassured us, and we climbed back into our box again. Right in front of us an awful argument was taking place.

My newspaper friend was trying to listen to it, but he was choking as if he had an attack of acute asthma. Tears were running down his thin face, and I gathered that he was laughing. I grabbed his shoulder and shook it.

"What's the argument about?" I asked. "Why don't they go on playing?"

He turned to me, trying to be real serious. "Friend," he said, and his voice wavered and shook, "that was a noble idea! But the officials don't see it that way. They're allowing California the touchdown."

"They are, are they?" I roared. "I'll see about that!" I started over the railing to the field, waving my guns, but the newspaper man jerked me back and held me.

"You've done enough for one day," he said. "Calm yourself!"

"But those gazebos haven't any right

to give California the touchdown. They didn't make it."

"That's right," he replied, "but I'm afraid the referee's ruling is correct in the circumstances. The same thing came up at the Great Lakes Training School once," he added, proud to show his knowledge. "Only that time it was a substitute who ran out on the field and stopped a runner. The referee gave the other team a touchdown, and the ruling was generally accepted as correct. So you see the officials to-day have a precedent."

"Precedent be damned!" I said. "They don't give that California team anything that they don't earn."

The newspaper man put his hand on my arm and looked straight into my eyes. "Friend," he said, "I advise you to keep your shirt on. There are twenty-five thousand people here to-day, and most of them are in an upset mood. If you don't want twenty-two football players, four officials, seventy policemen, and twenty thousand rabid fans jumping your frame you better lie as low as you can."

The man was sincere. There was no doubt of that. I slumped back in my seat and waited. Well, it turned out just like he said. After a lot of arguing they gave California the touchdown, and Neder kicked goal afterward. That made the score twenty to fifteen, California on the big end.

CHAPTER VIII.

KNOCKED OUT.

IT was not for long, however. Southwestern caught the kick-off and worked the ball back to the center of the field. Once more that marvelous leg of Hal McBurney booted goal. The two teams changed ends again. On the next kick-off, which California tried to catch, there was a fizzle or fumble, or whatever they call it, and Southwestern got the ball. They tried real hard to

put it over the goal, but at last Hal McBurney had to make an easy drop kick. He was only a few yards from the goal posts, but he booted the ball so hard it went almost up to the top of the grand stand.

"There you are!" shouted my newspaper friend excitedly. "That puts Southwestern one point ahead. Say, if this isn't the damndest game——"

"How much longer is there to play?" I interrupted anxiously.

"Just a few minutes," he replied. "But gosh, that doesn't mean anything. Either team is apt to score two or three times more."

That big blue California team was desperate now. They got the next kick-off and started straight down the field with it. They banged, leaped, pounded for all they were worth. Only when they got almost to the Southwestern goal were they stopped. Then some fellow made a wild pitch of the ball, or something, and Southwestern got it. Right away Hal McBurney booted it back up the field again.

Criminy, what a fight it was now! Those California players were giving everything they had, and Southwestern was doing its best to hold them. Chuck Cheek kept sending in fresh men, but California seemed to have that Orange and Black team on the run.

Maybe that Neder fellow got a little overanxious. Anyway, he dropped the ball down in front of his goal, and a little runty Southwestern player fell on it and hugged it as if it was his sweetie.

Without any preliminaries this time Hal McBurney dropped back for another field goal. I guess he was excited, too. Anyway, when the ball came to him he messed it up something awful. It hit his finger tips and bounded away. He reached for it, and again it trickled from his fingers. Then he threw himself at it and missed it clean.

But that Neder fellow didn't miss it. No, sir! He picked up that ball as it

rolled toward him and started away, while Hal McBurney was hoisting himself to his feet.

Right then a real hollow groan went up from the stands, like the wind whistling down Red Gulch Cañon. There was no one between that Neder fellow and the goal, and he was picking up speed every minute.

"There goes the old game!" shouted the newspaper man beside me. "There goes the old game!" I looked at that Naylor girl. Her face wasn't pink any more; it was white and strained. I don't know whether she was feeling sorry for Hal McBurney or proud of Neder. I don't think she knew. On the other side of the field Chuck Cheek had turned his face away.

Yes; it looked like a sure touchdown. There was that Neder fellow, a blue streak cutting down the field. The nearest Southwestern player was Hal McBurney, and he stood kind of dazed, unbelieving. Suddenly he shook himself into action, began that forlorn dash after the California half back.

Slow his long legs were to get into motion. Neder was leaving him as if he was standing still. He made twenty yards while Hal was covering ten. But that was only the first twenty. In the next twenty the two ran on even terms. Those long legs of McBurney's were eating up the ground with terrific ten-foot strides now. His head was down, his arms were flapping at his sides, and I could see that his fists were clenched.

Boy, how those thin legs were functioning! Like locomotive pistons they were—drive, pound, drive, pound! Now it was Neder who looked as if he was standing still while Hal was doing all the running.

Say, if any one had wanted to bet that Neder would be stopped before he crossed the goal line the odds would have been a hundred to one, easy. The fastest man on the field, he was, by far. But something more than speed entered

into this race. There was that desperate determination of Hal McBurney; there was a stanch, fighting heart, and there were two unhumanly long legs pounding away with almost impossible speed.

Maybe Neder was tired; maybe he didn't dream that any one could possibly catch him. I don't know. Anyway, he doesn't need any excuses. No man alive could have kept ahead of that gangling ex-fence rider at that minute. A couple of rods from the goal line Hal caught the blue half back. Hal didn't dive; he just fell forward the last two yards onto Neder's heels. The stocky little half back went down with terrific force. Hal slid on over him. The two rolled and then were still.

Knocked out? Yes; both of them were. Men with water buckets rushed out onto the field, and the two teams raced down to find out about their stars.

Neder came around first. In a couple of minutes he was being walked back and forth in the arms of two of his team mates. Just his breath knocked out, I guess, or maybe a bump on the head. Anyway, he suddenly threw himself free of his attendants and pranced around, ready for action again.

A half-hearted cheer went up for him. But most of the crowd was watching that little group clustered around Hal McBurney, and I tell you I was, too. I turned just once to look at that Naylor girl. She was leaning over the box looking whiter than ever, her little clenched hands pressed to her cheeks.

"I guess he's badly hurt," my newspaper friend said. "Look, they're lifting him."

Four players had picked that long, lean body of Hal McBurney from the ground and were carrying it toward the side lines. The crowd was silent, frightened. With all the power of my will I projected my eyes to study that thin, limp figure. Yes; I saw Hal's head move. He wasn't dead, anyway. Then

I saw his right leg. It was dangling loosely like a piece of rope.

"Broken leg," I said.

"Gosh, you've got eyes!" the newspaper man exclaimed. "Anyway, he's out of the game. That's sure."

Yes; Hal McBurney was out of the game. His teammates carried him to the side line and gently placed him on a litter which had mysteriously appeared.

Chuck Cheek dropped on his knees beside Hal, talked to him. Then four men started bearing him slowly from the field while the crowd watched, like at a funeral.

Suddenly, near the far corner, Hal McBurney raised his head. He waved a hand at that crowd. Heroics? Yes; of course. But he didn't know it. He just wanted to tell the crowd he was all right. Not the crowd either, I guess, but a little girl who was leaning over the rail of our box.

There was a cheer then, the most awful, ear-splitting, stupendous, vibrating volume of noise I ever heard. But I couldn't cheer, and that Naylor girl couldn't cheer. I looked at her and saw something in her eyes which I wanted to tell Hal McBurney about.

The game was resumed half-heartedly, but I didn't stay to see the finish of it. I had to get to Hal, and I vaulted over the fence behind me. I wasn't alone in my intentions. Behind me, begging me to wait for her, came Estelle Naylor.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL ARRANGED.

LEG shattered like an icicle. Just like a long, thin, brittle icicle. Three places. But that isn't the worst. His kneecap's broken, too. That means a stiff leg. His football days are over."

Those were the cheering words which Estelle and I heard when we had pushed ourselves into the trainers' room of the Southwestern field house. I stood on tiptoes and looked over the shoulders

of those ahead of me. There was Hal lying on a table. His football clothes had been cut off with a scissors, and his right leg was the awfulest piece of raw rope I ever saw. The boy was looking at it himself and trying to smile. But he looked real white and faint.

One look was all I wanted. I grabbed hold of Estelle. "Come on," I said. "Let's get out of this. It's no sight for you to see." Feeling real sickish, I was, and wanting the open air. Estelle went out with me. At the door she placed her little paw on my arm.

"Mr. Forensee," she said pleading, "you'll stay with him, won't you?"

"Why in h—why in the dickens should I stay with him?" I demanded. "He's big enough to take care of himself. Anyway, he'll be in the hospital for six weeks."

"But he's been waiting for you to come," the girl protested, stabbing me with her blue eyes. "You see, there are about a hundred business deals that he wants some advice on. He said he wouldn't take it from any one but you."

"Business deals?" I repeated, real mystified.

"Yes. People wanting him to go into vaudeville or movies. And there is a whole army of men who want to pay him to let them name things after him. Dynamite and derricks and golf clubs and engines and—and everything. He's told me about some of them. Those fellows have offered him real money, a lot of it, and he was just waiting for you before he closed with them."

I stood and looked at her with my mouth open. "Oh!" I said at last. Suddenly a big idea struck me. "Say, didn't Hal tell me that you work in a lawyer's office?"

The girl nodded.

"Then you're it!" I exclaimed, real enthusiastic. "Sure you are! You're his manager, Miss Naylor. I appoint you. Sure, I do! Only," I added, "you'll have to kind of watch him. He's

so darn much in love with you he might make a nuisance of himself."

"Oh!" I felt her little fingers crushing tighter into my arm. "Do you really think so?" She didn't seem at all afraid; quite the reverse.

"Think so?" I repeated. "I *know* so. I saw a look in his eyes at the station and—well, never mind, only I know so."

"He's always been so shy," the girl caroled. Yes; caroled is the word. Her voice was like a song.

"Then you'll manage him?" I asked.

"Yes," she answered simply. "And during our vacation we"—get that *we!*—"we will visit you at the ranch. He loves it, and I know I will, too."

"Fine place for honeymoons," I began, but she pushed me back into the building.

"Go tell Hal how you've arranged it," she said. "Tell him I'm waiting to see him just as soon as they'll let me."

Out on the gridiron a gun barked, followed immediate by the thunderous roar of thousands of voices.

"That means California didn't score again, and Southwestern won," Estelle announced. She grinned at me. I grinned at her. Then I went in to grin at young Hal McBurney.

Ready to Eat

THE sweet young thing gazed pensively at the peaceful rural scene.

She: "Why are you running that steam-roller thing over that field?"

"I'm raising mashed potatoes this year."

A Matter of Preference

MAGISTRATE: "You say this man stole your watch. Do I understand that you prefer the charge against him?"

"Pat: "Well, no, your worship; I prefer the watch, if it's all the same to you."

• A Newspaper-Detective Story •



The Sacred Cow

By
E. B. Crosswhite

(COMPLETE IN
THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

HIS JOURNALISTIC WINDFALL.

LEANING forward over the newspaper outspread on the desk before him, Henry Bolivar added a mustache to the pursed lip of a prima donna on the San Francisco *Herald-Ledger's* drama and music page. He considered the result with the eye of a connoisseur. Then, very carefully, he traced a thimble-shaped wart, surmounted by three hairs of varying length, onto the arrogant lady's porcine nose.

"Another day and I'm going to say something," he muttered.

Bolivar was pondering; and deeply. With him, the thought process and the fashioning of mustaches formed a sort of coöperative proposition. Each aided the other loyally. It had been said that the hirsute trend of his art had led to his first taste of blighted love. A pretty college sophomore, visiting his room during a dormitory "open house," had thrown down his fraternity pin and left in tears and a huff upon discovering a heavily penciled lip adornment of the walrus variety on one of her photographs propped on his study table.

Bolivar had always denied the story earnestly, adding: "And, besides, I explained that I had been cramming for an ex the night before, and I had merely drawn on the first thing handy, but she didn't seem to understand."

Most people didn't understand the spare, solemn young man. It naturally followed that on those rare occasions when, in confidential mood, he voiced a deep-hidden wish to own an elephant, he was invariably pained by the gales of laughter which followed.

"Of course," he would hasten to explain, "I'd want one only if I had money enough to feed him and care for him properly, you know." But people always laughed anyway.

At the *Herald-Ledger*, where Bolivar's name had but recently been grafted to the pay roll, he was one of those anomalies of journalism known in the parlance of the fourth estate as a sacred cow. That is to say, he had been placed on the city staff at the behest of the publisher's office and against the wishes of Gregg, the city editor. Not that Bolivar was particularly undesirable—beyond the fact that he knew nothing of newspaper work—but his presence meant just one more cub to break in, and Gregg was a busy man.

The boss, who should have concerned himself only with circulation figures and auditors' reports, had that trick of going over Gregg's head every so often and sending down a green man to the already crowded editorial department with the simple statement that he liked the recruit and was adding him to the staff. Bolivar's almost somber personality had appealed to the boss and hence his incarnation as a twenty-dollar-a-week sacred cow. Hence, also, his present state of preoccupation.

"Ah, the Right Honorable Bolivar doth meditate." The flat voice of Ergtle, one of the star rewrite men, caused him to look up, pencil poised above the prima donna. Ergtle's words held the trace of a sneer.

"I was just thinking," explained Bolivar.

"Avie tells me you have a date with her to-night. That's what you were mooning over." Ergtle tried to speak disinterestedly and failed. Outside office hours he and the sacred cow occupied more nearly equal positions as rivals for the favor of Miss Avis Patterson, a particularly representative specimen of the genus humdinger.

"No," replied Bolivar slowly, wondering why he had never noticed until that moment the hard lights which flickered in Ergtle's onyx-brown eyes. "No—or rather I should say, yes and no. I am expecting to call upon Avis to-night, but just then I was not thinking of her at all—er—I'm afraid that sounded rather uncomplimentary——"

"Perhaps the professor now will tell us what really was on his mind. I'll bet he was worrying over that big assignment he has to cover to-morrow," jeered the other.

"That's just it!" Bolivar was astounded to find himself turning gratefully to Ergtle as a confidant. "That's the whole thing. I haven't any assignment. And I haven't had one—a decent one—during the four months I've

been on the staff. Here I am, twenty-four years old, and all I'm allowed to do is to trot around to the smaller hotels and one of the branch police stations every morning and dig up a dozen piffling briefs."

He paused in that flush of embarrassment which follows an unburdening of the heart. "Any one of the copy boys could do what I do," he added, hoping that Ergtle would deny it.

"Yes," Ergtle agreed.

"And now to-day has come and gone and not a chance at a real story. Not even an ordinary suicide!" Bolivar felt a bleak comfort in the multiplying of his woes.

"If you're such a glutton for work, why don't you ask Gregg to let you cover that séance the scientists are going to attend at Madame Dorial's to-night? Chance for a good future. I'll suggest it to him for you."

Bolivar smiled eagerly as Ergtle lounged over to the city desk, offered Gregg a cigarette, and stood chatting for a moment before a late police story called him to a telephone booth. What assurance that fellow had! Perhaps, thought Bolivar enviously, that was what he lacked in his own make-up. He hoped that he would be able to do to-night's story up right. He would. Maybe they would put it on the front page. Maybe they would banner-line it!

Expectantly he waited for Gregg to bawl his name in summons to the assignment; but not a glance was turned in his direction. Gregg continued calmly sorting photographs for forthcoming layouts, and his two assistants edited copy in a race with the replated edition dead line. After an interval Gregg arose, put on his coat, grunted some instructions to the toiling assistants, and padded from the room.

Bolivar watched the squat figure amble down the long hall and around the turn to the stairs. He knew that his chief had left for a biweekly orgy of

golf. Mechanically he continued to smile. Then, slowly, the grimace faded, and his face became a ludicrously tragic mask of disappointment.

"Perhaps he forgot," he told himself. But a louder inner voice had something different to say. "He didn't forget. He just didn't think you could handle the story," the voice cried gleefully. In emphasis of the taunt the telephone on Bolivar's desk jangled discordantly.

A heavy voice began speaking as he lifted the receiver.

"Bolivar? This is Gregg talking from the switchboard downstairs. Forgot to tell you that I want you to go out on a story to-night. Police are expecting to round up a bootleg ring at the old Griswold house about midnight. You know the house, don't you? Out on Ballard Street in the north end of the town. Place where Griswold and his wife were mysteriously killed several months ago. Bootleggers are expected to be there with a cargo of bonded stuff they've just landed. Better go out there now and hide in the house—it's empty—and get a firsthand story when the raid comes off. About six hundred and fifty words. Have the story ready for the first edition to-morrow. Goodby!"

Bolivar clattered the receiver onto its hook with trembling fingers. He crossed to the city desk in three strides. "Mr. Gregg just phoned for me to go out on a story for to-morrow," he told one of the assistants in what he believed was a calm, dispassionate voice.

"Go ahead!" said the man, without looking up from his red-penciling.

Bolivar struggled into his coat and jammed his hat, back to the front, on his head. He folded a block of copy paper into a memo pad and saw to it that his four lead pencils were sharp.

Then, his high-bridged nose held proudly in the air, his mild gray eyes alive with enthusiasm, and his solemn features transformed by that exaltation which must have been the portion of the

Crusaders when they fared forth on their quest of the Holy Sepulcher, Bolivar strode from the room, trying to restrain his eager feet from running.

Over their editing the assistants grinned cynically.

At a chain drug store he telephoned Avis with the double purpose of acquainting her with his journalistic windfall and postponing the evening's call until later.

"Oh, Henry, I'm so proud and glad for you! I knew they'd have to give you a chance." The loveliest voice in the world floated over the wire to cause delightful little tingles in the region of Henry Bolivar's heart. "It all sounds so exciting. Are you sure it won't be dangerous?"

"Nothing to worry about, Avis. I have my revol—my gat—you know." His left arm squeezed assuringly against the police-model weapon in new tan shoulder holster—an exact duplicate of the equipment carried by Preston Morse, police reporter and subject of Bolivar's idolatrous envy.

"But, Henry, you just must be careful!" The wonderful voice trembled with concern. "Don't shoot at those horrible burglars unless you simply have to. And make that editor put your name on the story in big letters."

CHAPTER II.

A BIT OF LUCK.

TWENTY minutes later Bolivar swung down from the Ballard Street car at the end of the line and walked rapidly toward the house which stood alone in that block as if ostracized by its less-notorious kind.

Aloof and forbidding, the old Griswold mansion reared its dingy pile above a yard fettered by an iron fence and overgrown with tangled masses of weeds and ground creepers. Although the sun of late afternoon still bathed the rank wildness of the inclosure in light, the

towering structure managed to convey an impression of darkness.

The windows of the lower stories, framed in jagged glass, gave vague glimpses of shadowy, empty rooms within. High in the square turrets which rose here and there from the gray shingles of the roof, small diamond-paned oriels reflected back the rays of the waning sun with sinister glints. As the groan of the departing car died away down the street, the silence which hovered over the brooding house seemed to pulse in the air like the approach of some unseen, winged thing.

Pushing open the rusted gate, Bolivar stepped knee-deep into the lush growth which hid the path to the house. Like a man wading a still, green river, he picked his way gingerly around to the rear of the place. At the end of the lot, backed by a shallow grove of rustling eucalyptus trees, was a huge barn, converted for modern purposes into a double garage, but still bearing the ornate roof decorations of a bygone era. Midway to the barn, a dilapidated summer house leaned crazily in a phalanx of dead bushes and flower stalks which once had formed a garden.

What a deserted layout it was! Bolivar shrugged as if to shake off the feeling of depression which had fastened upon him, and turned toward the back steps of the old residence. Beneath the matted grass his foot trod on something soft.

It was a leather bill fold, bulky, but containing only a small photograph of a woman. Bolivar's hands shook. "The queen of that bootlegging ring! Talk about luck!"

He examined his find closely. The photograph was a likeness of a rather plump brunette, standing in a bathing suit before the crudely painted waves of a seaside portrait studio. Across the picture had been written in a childish backhand: "To Benny Boy from Vi." On the reverse side, in a masculine

scrawl, was the notation: "Barbour Beach, September 20."

Bolivar placed the wallet carefully in an inner pocket. "This is luck," he said, while his features achieved a real beam of satisfaction. "I have here evidence probably worth more than money. It probably——" The lengthening shadows warned him that it was time to seek his hiding place in the house.

He creaked his way through the cobwebby, old-fashioned rooms on the lower floor, the sound of his cautious footsteps multiplying in echoes which died away in far-off whispers among the upper reaches beyond the stairs. Although he felt certain that he was alone in the place, he explored the other stories, revolver in hand, before settling himself for the long night vigil.

As a place of concealment he had chosen a little alcove in a room on the lower floor, midway between the front and rear of the house. Faded hangings, thick with dust, shut off the nook from the room. At the farther side of the alcove, a French window opened onto a tiny porch.

From his retreat Bolivar not only had a direct view of the back door, but through a front window he could see the iron gate and a goodly portion of the street on either hand. With a wooden crate from the pantry as a seat, Bolivar decided that the alcove would serve as a comfortable sentry box until the coming of the midnight visitors. The French window, he reasoned, would provide a handy means of escape if need be.

He seated himself and looked at his watch—six forty-seven. He shook the timepiece and held it to his ear. Yes; it was running, but what ailed it? Surely he had been there longer than twenty-five minutes. Why, it was over an hour ago that he had found the wallet.

Bolivar took out the photograph and again scrutinized the inscriptions upon it. "Barbour Beach." Ten to one that

was the place where the bootleggers had landed their contraband cargo. Something in the handwriting held his attention. Each of the "B's" was finished off with a peculiar flourish. The writer, in making the lower loop of the letter, had carried the line around to the left, over the top and down the other side, inclosing the "B" in an almost complete circle. Some fancy penman for a mere bootlegger!

Bolivar quickly pocketed the wallet, for a sound had drifted through the dusk—a sound of hurrying footsteps. What could any one be doing in that neighborhood? The houses ended a block down the street. Beyond, the open country began, verging later into scattered farmlands. He pressed his arm against the shoulder holster. Maybe one of the gang was arriving to reconnoiter.

He strained his eyes through the gloom beyond the front window. Into his line of vision swung a dark figure, a man who carried a small satchel. At the gate the stranger paused, looked back down the street, and quickly entered the yard. Straight to the front steps he made his way, mounted to the porch and, shading his face with his hands, peered through the window into the room. He withdrew and a moment later a series of heavy knocks sounded at the door.

Bolivar gripped the handle of his revolver. Had his presence in the house been discovered? Was the man a crack shot? Gosh, he wished now that he had practiced oftener at the downtown pistol range!

A final knock and the man hurried down the steps and out to the sidewalk. An instant later he had disappeared down the street. After an interval of uncertainty Bolivar ventured to the door and peered out. The street was empty. A gleam of white by the side of the door caught his eye. There, showing ghost-like through the gathering darkness,

was a newly tacked notice of street improvements.

Bolivar shut the door and went back to his alcove. He looked at his watch, making out the position of the hands with difficulty. It was six fifty-five. He must have the fool thing looked after to-morrow, sure. It had lost some more time.

He sank upon the crate and leaned gratefully back against the wall. Faintly through his pocket he could hear the ticking of the watch. Why hadn't he thought to bring a flash light, or at least matches? A few more minutes and he wouldn't be able to tell the time at all.

From somewhere above, a thud sounded, followed by a vague rustling.

"Shutter blowing in the wind," Bolivar assured himself. Unwillingly he recalled that the Griswolds had been found strangled to death in an upper bedroom. A board at the top of the inky stairs creaked suddenly. Farther down, another made a protesting squeak. Then there was silence.

"My imagination," grunted Bolivar. Midway on the stairs sounded a louder squeak.

He felt for his revolver and tried to pierce the darkness with his eyes. As he waited, the ticking of his watch became a clamor. On the stairs, stillness grew like a jet-black cloud.

The minutes crawled by. Gradually his taut muscles relaxed, and he squirmed once more into a comfortable position against the wall. Through the broken windows came the chorus of crickets, answered at intervals by the hoarse croak of a frog somewhere near the gate.

An hour passed. A pleasant lethargy was stealing over Bolivar. He closed his eyes to shut out the throbbing blackness of the room. His head fell forward, then jerked quickly upright. After a time it fell again and remained drooping. Bolivar slept.

CHAPTER III.

TO THE RESCUE.

THE moon was shining through a side window when Bolivar awoke with a jolt. While striving to collect his wits he wondered dully who had screamed. He thought it was screams that had awakened him. He listened, but the house was as still as ever. Outside, the crickets and the frog had ceased their din.

"Ho, hum!" Bolivar yawned.

A cry, frantic, terror-laden, rang suddenly through the house; then another. They sounded from the street.

With a leap, Bolivar was upon his feet, his hand clutching the weapon. He raced to the door and threw it open, while his eyes blinked to a focus in the shimmering moonlight.

Beyond the gate a bulky figure was clutching at a slighter, struggling form. Again a scream split the night.

Bolivar hurled himself across the yard. "Stop that, you!" he bellowed, thinking disgustedly, even in his excitement, of the utter inanity of the command. The moon shone coldly blue on the barrel of the revolver.

With a curse, the heavier figure detached itself and fled down the street. A surge of rage swept over Bolivar. The hound!

Aiming deliberately, he pulled the trigger—once, twice, and yet again. The hammer clicked harmlessly. Again he pulled savagely at the trigger, while the figure faded away in the gloom. More clicks were the answer. The gun was empty.

With the waning of his excitement, he remembered the other person, now crouched by the gate sobbing hysterically. He bent over the huddled form.

"Oh, Henry!" The voice was drenched with tears.

Then and only then did he notice the tumbled shock of wheat-gold hair. "Avis!" he cried in an agony of ap-

prehension. "What are you doing here? Are you hurt?"

"I c-came," the girl answered, trying to master her sobs, "I came to tell you to come away—that it w-w-was only s-snipes. And then that awful tramp g-got me. Oh!" She covered her eyes with her hands.

"Snipes?" echoed Bolivar, mystified.

"Yes. Tracy Ergtle was over to-night, and when I told him you were out on a big story he laughed and said it was a story about snipes; that he had sent you s-snipe hunting. The editor didn't phone you this afternoon. It was Tracy, imitating the editor's voice, and he made up the scheme to h-have you come and stay in that horrible old house all night for nothing. Tracy's a beast, and I told him so!" The girl stamped her foot.

"And you came by yourself to this lonely place to tell me about it?" Bolivar's voice had grown suddenly deep and tender.

"Mother is out of town and daddy is at a lodge smoker, and there wasn't any one to come with me. I would have been all right if it hadn't been for that vile man." Her voice threatened to break.

Suddenly, Bolivar found himself holding a slender little form close to his breast. On his lapel a tousled head was pillowed as if that was the most logical place in the world for it to be. After an exquisite moment, two dusky eyes looked shyly up, and Bolivar crushed his lips to a mouth as dainty as a half-opened flower.

"Avis, oh, Avis!" he breathed.

Soft arms reached up to encircle his neck, and her lips answered in a caress sweeter than anything Bolivar had ever known.

In rapt silence they walked through the velvet starlight to Avis' home. Not until Bolivar bade the girl good night did his manner betray a mood of dejection underlying his happiness.

"Don't feel bad about Tracy's trick, Henry," she pleaded softly. "He didn't realize how cruel such things can be."

"It isn't that, Avis, darling." Bolivar flung his arms out in a gesture of despair. "I'm just so disappointed. I thought I was being given a chance to do something at last. To be anything but a glorified errand boy, earning twenty a week."

"Oh, Henry——"

"Yes; that's all my job amounts to, and you know it is. And I had hoped, if I put the story right, they'd give me a try on the rewrite staff, with a regular salary so that I could make the only real dream I ever had come true."

"You mean that you would buy your elephant?" Behind Avis' words lurked the imp of mischief.

"Some time I'll tell you just what I did mean," he answered. And in order to make that rather indefinite promise, he had to gather her into his arms again

CHAPTER IV.

USEFUL, AFTER ALL.

AT the office next day Bolivar found himself profoundly grateful to his once-despised "beat" as a means of taking him out of the place and away from the barrage of gibes directed at him from the time of his arrival in the morning. Ergtle had noised the story of the fake assignment throughout the various departments of the city room, and the harassed young man could see chuckling groups in almost any direction in which he cared to look. He noticed that Gregg's face was impassive, but he felt sure that the city editor had heard of Ergtle's jest and had laughed with the others.

Therefore Bolivar left earlier than usual to make his tedious round of the Duchess, Bydelong, and St. Gare hotels, and the Thomas Street police station. He determined to spend as much time as possible on the beat that day.

The Duchess yielded him nothing but a fifty-word item concerning the presence in that hostelry of a woman field secretary for a fraternal insurance organization. Reluctantly he abandoned that unfruitful source and set out for the St. Gare.

"Haven't got Queen Marie of Roumania registered with you to-day, I don't suppose?" he inquired of Allen who presided in pomaded condescension behind the desk.

"Look it over. Not even the usual fifty traveling salesmen." Allen turned the register about for Bolivar's inspection and resumed his admiration of his rather flat and very pink finger tips.

It was a typical dull-season list of nobodies. Bolivar began with the late-afternoon arrivals of the preceding day and told off the names one by one down the ink-stained page:

"Mr. and Mrs. W. K. Dorkley, Amarillo, Texas. . . . Delbert Turnbull and wife, South Amboy, New Jersey. . . . Nothing exciting so far, that's sure. . . . Mrs. Mae Vorrان and Master Jackie Vorrان, Hollywood, California. . . . Wonder if that Jackie is a kid movie star . . . probably not, or his mother'd have dragged the brat over to the office to pester Gregg for a write-up. . . . B. L. Boonesmith, Reno, Nevada. . . ."

Bolivar paused and reread that last signature. Something about it had reached out and speared his attention. But what? The answer flashed to him. It was the peculiar formation of the first and last initials of the name. By a sweeping flourish of the letters' lower loops, each "B" had been inclosed in an almost perfect circle. There could be no doubt about it. He was staring at the same handwriting as that on the back of the photograph he had found in the weeds behind the old Griswold house.

He fumbled for a pencil and absently traced a nose and drooping mustachios

on one of the flamboyant "Betas." Now just why should this fellow Boonesmith have lost his wallet at that deserted place? Why should he have been there to begin with? Perhaps the man owned the house. Maybe. Sure; that was the answer. Bolivar had heard some one at the office say that the Griswolds had rented for more than twenty years from an out-of-town man. Very probably Boonesmith had gone out to look over his house after the murder happened, and now was in the city to see about getting the place fixed up for renting again. Simple! The thing to do now was to give Boonesmith his wallet. Room 317. Not in, more than likely.

"Nix, don't mark up the register." Allen's tone was aggrieved.

"Three seventeen in?" asked Bolivar, adding a final pencil stroke.

Allen nodded glumly while he applied an eraser to the mustachios.

The first knock at room No. 317 brought no response. Bolivar thumped louder and at length. Down the hall, a maid poked her head around a corner of the passageway. The occupant of No. 319 sang "Ye-e-es?" in impatient feminine crescendo. The door of No. 317 opened to form a narrow frame for B. L. Boonesmith of Reno, Nevada.

Bolivar held forward the wallet. "I thought maybe this might belong to you."

Mr. Boonesmith seized the offering and closed the door with one apparent motion. In that fleeting instant Bolivar noted—in addition to his first impression of deep amber spectacles and a Vandyke—a large nose with a flanking mole where the base joined the triangular face.

"Eccentric fellow, our Reno friend," reflected Bolivar.

The door of No. 317 opened. "I neglected to thank you," said Mr. Boonesmith. "I'm sorry if I appeared rude. My nerves—" The door swung shut again.

"Sure is eccentric!" repeated Bolivar as he walked down the hall.

A loitering visit to the Bydelong Hotel, where three trifling news briefs were created from boresome interviews with a voting-machine inventor and a couple of stodgy English manufacturers, and Bolivar began the last leg of his beat, the walk to the branch police station.

Rowe, the desk sergeant, was telephoning when Bolivar entered the dingy outer office and leaned dejectedly over to lift the blotter from its shelf. The only two notations on the day's sheet concerned a small brush fire on a nearby vacant lot and a Mrs. Hollowitz's report of a missing Pekingese named Lord Kitchener. Bolivar replaced the blotter. He wished Rowe would get through telephoning.

Beside his elbow was a pile of newly received police circulars offering a reward of five hundred dollars for information leading to the arrest of one Jimmy Phile, alias Ted Bowman, alias Ted "The Ferret." Below the heavy lettering, the face of a nondescript, smooth-shaven man looked out with colorless eyes. The man's popularity with the authorities was explained at length:

Jimmy Phile, alias Ted Bowman, alias Ted the Ferret, is believed to have committed the brutal double murder of August and Martha Griswold in San Francisco, California, on the night of January 17, 1925. When last seen he was in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

An involved description, which might have applied to almost any one in the world, followed.

The Griswold murder! The mention of the crime brought afresh to Bolivar's mind his humiliating sojourn at the old house the night before. Would he ever get a real story?

His pencil became busy sketching mustaches on the printed face of Ted The Ferret. Gosh, but Avis was a little thoroughbred! What should he get her for her birthday?

He completed the mustaches, added a short, pointed beard, and circled the eyes with two black rings for glasses. Would she like a set of combs? No; Avis didn't wear combs.

He began a wart as a finishing touch to his work. But a wart was already there. A photographed wart—or rather, a mole—dotted the man's cheek at the base of his large nose. Bolivar started in sudden amazement. Glaring at him now from the circular was the Vandyked and bespectacled Mr. Boonesmith of Reno, Nevada.

The desk sergeant turned from the telephone. "Hello, Bolivar! Crime business ain't so thrivin' to-day. Nothin' on th' blotter but——"

"Rowe!" Bolivar's voice was almost compelling. "I know where this Ferret fellow is. I just saw him over at the St. Gare. Come on over with me, and I'll show you!"

The officer scanned Bolivar's face for signs of a hoax. "Y' sure?" he queried warily.

Bolivar's figure fairly radiated earnestness. "I'm positive! He's wearing dark glasses and whiskers, like this." Bolivar exhibited the reconstructed face on the circular. "He has that same mole that shows there. I know it's the same fellow. We'll have to hurry if we're going to get him."

Sweet visions of a captaincy danced before Rowe's eyes. In a moment he became metamorphosed from a blocky, shirt-sleeved mass of flesh into a blue-jacketed man of action.

"Ten to one it's some soap drummer, but I'm with you. I'll have Joe sit in for me while I'm gone."

Then they were at the St. Gare, where a surprised Allen assured them that the occupant of No. 317 had checked out hurriedly an hour before and would they please leave the name of the St. Gare out of all mention of whatever had happened?

From one of the switchboard oper-

ators Bolivar gleaned the fact that the man in No. 317 had telephoned to the Southern Pacific to ask the time of the next train to Chicago. He had been told that it would leave at ten o'clock, the girl added.

Bolivar glanced at the clock above the clerk's desk. It was exactly ten fifty-two.

Rowe sighed. "It's a case for the central station now. The chief can phone and have 'em take him off at th' next stop. That's at"—he seized a blue time-table from the rack on the desk and thumbed through to the Chicago schedules—"Richmond, ten forty-eight—no; he's passed there—Port Costa, eleven twenty. They'll get him at Port Costa. We'd better hotfoot it to central and start things movin'."

The officer's sigh was echoed by Bolivar.

"No; I guess I'll go on over to the office and report," he said, with the utter resignation of just one more blasted hope. "With the central station handling things it will be Preston Morse's story."

CHAPTER V.

BEFORE HIS MIND'S EYE.

BOLIVAR was mildly surprised at the stir which his announcement of Mr. Boonesmith's finding and disappearance caused in the city room. Gregg flung out a question or two before putting in a hurry call to Preston Morse, over the direct line to the central station press room.

"Morse!" he snapped. "Beat it in to the chief, quick, and see if Sergeant Rowe of the Thomas Street station has come in yet. If he hasn't, stick with the chief until he does. Then sew up that story he's bringing in about Ted The Ferret. Sew it up tight! It's the biggest scoop of the season if you work fast. Ring me back and let me know how things come out."

He lumbered into the glassed-off room

where the clatter of wire service tickers sounded like miniature riveting guns.

"Has your wire got a correspondent at Port Costa?" he asked Jordan, the Coöperative Press representative.

"No; it's too little. We have a man at Richmond, a few miles away. What is it, Gregg?"

"Better wire him to go right over to Port Costa. They're going to take the man who killed the Griswolds off the train there. If another train doesn't go through right away, your correspondent may get over before they start back with the fellow. It's Ted The Ferret, they think. Nothing definite yet."

Gregg hurried back to his desk and bawled Bolivar's name.

"We'll be lucky if every paper in town hasn't got that story by this time," he growled. "Give me all you know about it from the beginning. All the facts you can remember."

While the flustered young man told of the finding of the photograph and the events at the St. Gare which dove-tailed into that circumstance, Gregg jotted down hasty notes.

"How did you happen to be out at the Griswold place?" he asked, when Bolivar had completed his narrative.

"Why—um—I was just out there. I'm interested, some, in old houses—er—"

"I see," said Gregg dryly. His telephone buzzed. "Yes, Morse; how about it? They've got him, you say? Already? He's what? Are you absolutely sure? That's a real story. Dictate three hundred and fifty words for this edition and put in some of The Ferret's record if you can. We'll look up the history of the Griswold case here and tack it on at the end, so don't bother about that."

With the editor bellowing orders, Bolivar was forgotten. He wandered over to watch Peterson taking Morse's story over the dictation phone. Word by word the story which Bolivar had

hoped to make his own clicked out under the strokes of Peterson's thumping fingers:

Jimmy Phile, alias Ted Bowman, alias Ted the Ferret, who has been sought throughout the United States on a charge of murdering August and Martha Griswold at their Ballard Street home on January 17th of last year, was arrested to-day at Port Costa and made a complete confession of the crime, according to a message received from that community by Chief of Police Tolman. Phile's arrest resulted from exclusive information furnished the police by the *Herald-Ledger*.

The alleged Griswold slayer was taken into custody while en route to Chicago aboard a Southern Pacific train, and, in a state bordering on collapse, signed the confession of the fiendish double murder.

According to the message, telephoned from Port Costa by Constable Hawkins, Phile admitted facts which may lead to the arrest of a Mrs. Violet Koenigsbild, his alleged accomplice in a series of recent hold-ups."

Bolivar turned away. So much for the story that might have been his.

While the long afternoon dragged by, he sat at his desk, trying vainly to keep from thinking. Scores of penciled mustaches registered the depth of his pre-occupation. Once, vaguely, he heard Ergtle say: "Pretty good scoop we just put across—thanks to Gregg." But he made no reply. After an eternity it was four o'clock, and he pulled himself to his feet.

"Bolivar!" sounded Gregg's voice across the room. Automatically, Bolivar hurried to the city desk. Why did Gregg have to rub it all in?"

"Bolivar, we were almost scooped to-day because you didn't follow that story through and sew it up for us."

"I know. I made a mess of things all right, Mr. Gregg."

"It was your inexperience." Gregg drummed against one of his front teeth with a pudgy forefinger.

Bolivar waited like a man about whose head the black cap is being adjusted. Couldn't Gregg fire him without this preliminary torture?

"You have been more or less of a sacred cow around here, haven't you?" continued the inquisitor.

"I suppose so, Mr. Gregg."

"Have you enjoyed your bovine state?" The editor's voice was grave.

"I—I beg pardon?"

Gregg sat forward in his chair and began to clear off his desk.

"Bolivar, you showed real ingenuity this morning in placing Phile's identity. I have decided to see what you can do on the rewrite staff. Sixty-five to start. With some experience you ought to work into a newspaper man."

Bolivar tried to pour out the gratitude which welled within him like a pent-up fountain, but he could only nod his head while his lips moved soundlessly.

Gregg arose and locked his desk. "Take my advice, Bolivar. Don't let that ingenuity of yours run away with itself. Just recently one of the reporters became so ingenious that he felt it necessary to give out a fake assignment. To-morrow he is going to take a week's vacation without pay, in order to let his enthusiasm along that line cool a bit."

"I'll remember, sir," said Bolivar, having found his tongue at last.

Halfway to the door, Gregg wheeled ponderously. "Came within an ace of forgetting—that five hundred reward offered for Phile will undoubtedly go to you. The *Herald-Ledger* will see to that. The constable who made the arrest will try to claim the money, of course, but that's as far as he'll get. Good night."

Bolivar sat down very suddenly in his chair. His brain was looping the loop. He drew a mustache. He drew a second mustache. He drew more mustaches.

A wonderful panorama unrolled before his mind's eye—tidy cottages, stucco palaces, Spanish bungalows, with *Avis* in the doorway of each. He envisaged himself coming home tired from work and being greeted by her on the threshold of each abode in turn.

That process completed, a modest English-Colonial house was chosen and furnished.

Then he began another mustache and the selection of a neighborhood for the new homestead.



UNDER THE MISSISSIPPI MOON

By Pat Costello

ON de Mississippi gleams de big ol' scarlet moon
 Dat can aggravate de heart of any Southern coon;
 An' aroun' de many levees colored folks are gay,
 Thumbin' polished banjos at de closin' o' de day.

Wondeh what de good Lawd did to make de moon so red?
 It can dye to crimson clouds o' cotton overhead.
 It can stain de river till de river gran' to see,
 It's a sight locked in ma heart, an' Ah've done lost de key!

If yo' ever see a Mississippi moon hang low,
 Like a jewel in de sky, no finer sight you'll know;
 Yo' will fin' it mighty easy then to understand
 Why a Southern darky always pines fo' Dixielan'.



THE dog lay stretched on his mat outside the kitchen door; his nose rested on his extended paws, and his eyes were closed. Gloomily, "Heck" heard the voice of his young master, Jimmy Whitmer, issue from the dining-room window, not five feet from the tip of his dejected tail.

"Here it is, mother. The veterinary said it would fix him up in no time. The directions are on the bottle. 'Dose: one tablespoonful. If not effective, repeat in three hours. By closing the nostrils with the hand and inserting the spoon between the clenched teeth, the patient may be made to swallow with a minimum of trouble.' Where's Heck?"

Immediately Heck rose to his feet and disappeared with a minimum of noise. As he trotted down the alley that ran behind the row of summer cottages facing the bathing beach, he heard Jimmy calling from the back porch: "Heck! Oh, Heck! Heck!"

Turning a deaf ear, Heck increased his gait. Being a dog of a sagacious understanding, he felt a temporary absence from home was clearly indicated. Jimmy, his young master, was all right as masters went, but he did not have the diagnostic ability to distinguish between soul sickness and stomach sickness. Medicine to cure the one would only aggravate the other. Besides, Heck was on the outs with his family, for they had

practically ignored his misfortune. Only Sally, the housemaid, had shown him proper consideration.

"Got yours at last, eh?" she had said on his first appearance after the catastrophe.

Philosophers are divided as to the extent of a dog's intelligence; but every true lover of dogs knows they possess certain well-defined human traits and can follow conversation with fair understanding. We are compelled to presuppose that this was the case with Heck, for he had rolled his eyes at Sally, as much as to say that she might have been a bit more sympathetic and less jubilant.

As a matter of fact, Heck's misfortune had been enough to crush a strong man, much less a poor canine. For eight seasons past he had been undisputed king of the bathing beach at Alton-by-the-Sea, ruling the other dogs, with tooth and claw, petted and flattered by children and grown-ups, and acquiring eventually the distinction of being pointed out to new arrivals as one of the sights of the resort. And now this eight-year-old reputation had been scattered in as many seconds.

II.

TWO mornings before he had visited the beach to give his customary approval to the children's bathing hour, a daily routine that had acquired in time

something of the solemnity of a State procession. Having cast a languid eye over the poppy-headed children in the frothy shallows and a disciplinary eye over the lesser dogs that made up his summer kingdom, Heck had retired with stiff-legged dignity to his favorite nook in a corner of the Tompkins' Beach tent, only to find the nook occupied by a stranger.

This was "Ludie"—short for Ludendorf—Polly Tompkins' new pet, a German police dog of tender years, but adequately muscled and spirited. It had been two years since Heck had been obliged to do more than show his teeth to another dog; but this time his growled orders for the other to vacate the beach tent met with a snarled defiance. What followed was still cloudy in Heck's mind, though the noise of the combat had caused a near riot among children and nursemaids. But the sequel, alas, was only too well remembered. The police dog had won, thanks to youth and superior jaw power. Heck's shaggy coat, an Airedale-Gordon-setter legacy, alone saved him from serious physical injury.

But though he had escaped unscathed as to body, the injury to his spirit and reputation had been well-nigh mortal. He had fled from the beach, a cowed, heartbroken figure, followed by the yelping jeers of the other dogs and the laughter of children and grown people who had witnessed his discomfiture. On his return home he had lapsed into a protracted fit of the sulks, which had resulted in Jimmy's arrival with the dreaded medicine bottle and a determined look on his face.

Heck thought things over doggedly, as he made his cautious way along back streets in the direction of the Inlet, a narrow strip of water lined with boat-houses and fishing shanties. His haven of refuge was a tumbled-down shack, somewhat removed from the main artery of this miniature Venice. This was the

property of one Lawton, a ne'er-do-well, clam digger, and boat tender by turns.

In Lawton, Heck had a friend of unquestioned understanding and discretion. Heck had visited him in the past, much as any other king might visit a humble friend incognito, secure in the knowledge that there he could relax without losing either position or dignity. Under Lawton's roof he could drop his kingship and become his natural self, a much-desired metamorphosis in his present state of harassed and bewildered bad temper. But to his disgust he found Lawton engaged with a fellow nondescript of equally unsavory reputation,

"Jimmy Whitmer's dog," Lawton informed his companion, greeting Heck with a curse and a kick, timed to miss his head by a fraction of an inch.

"Thought I'd seen him somewheres," said Mr. Nondescript, unintentionally returning Heck's sniffs of investigation with an agreeable odor compounded of a hundred different substances and occupations, the accumulation of as many waterless days and nights. "And what kind of breed would you call him, Lawton?"

"He's a thoroughbred Brunswick stew," Lawton answered. "One third Airedale, one third Gordon setter, one third plain dog. Take and mix well and bake in a hot oven, and you have Jimmy Whitmer's prize poodle."

"I'll say he's big enough and ugly enough to be most anything," said Mr. Nondescript, giving Heck a side glance that was far from favorable. "But now let's you and me get down to business again. So far things have been sitting pretty, like you said they would. But how about the police from now on?"

Heck bristled at the word "police," emitting a low growl of such furious intensity that Lawton's nondescript friend consigned him to perdition, with a flow of language that would have made Heck his friend forever, if the big dog had been his usual appreciative self.

"It ain't nothing; he's as gentle as a lamb," Lawton interposed hastily. "He's death on other dogs, but he wouldn't bite you; no, not if he was starving. Now, to get back to where we was before you begins to swear. That's McGuire's beat, and McGuire don't dare do nothing when I tells him to lay off it."

"How come?" asked the other, with undisguised interest.

"It's just because of a little something I knows and McGuire knows, but what McGuire don't want nobody else to know," Lawton replied with a meaning wink. "Policemen ain't a bit different from other folks. You leave it to me, and I'll slip McGuire word to be looking somewheres else when we pulls the trick."

"But suppose he don't fall for what you tells him?" said Mr. Nondescript.

"He'll fall for it, all right," said Lawton. "He knows what I knows, McGuire does. One word from me, and they'd run him out of town so quick he wouldn't have time to change his uniform."

"How come?" Nondescript asked a second time.

"You remember Judge Russell's pocketbook don't you, the one he left in his automobile, and somebody stole from him?" Lawton replied in a husky whisper. "Well, McGuire was the one done the stealing; I knows, for I seen him when he done it. A fine policeman, eh? One word from me to Judge Russell, and McGuire's busted higher than a kite. People nowadays won't stand for crooked cops any more than they'll stand for traffic regulations."

III.

IN the small hours of the following morning, Heck slunk home, with much to think about. He had not understood all of his friend Lawton's speech, but he had associated the word

"police" with the blue-clad figure of Officer McGuire, and he had caught, with that sixth sense granted intelligent dogs, the contempt in Lawton's voice when mentioning the policeman. Later he had accompanied Lawton and Nondescript on an expedition that had resulted in the transfer of certain bulky wooden boxes from a derelict motor boat to an equally derelict automobile, passing in transit the somnolent Officer McGuire, who, at a word from Lawton, had turned brick red and continued on his beat instead of interrupting what Heck knew must be a highly illegal enterprise.

Up to now the big dog had honored all policemen impartially, having great respect for their blue uniforms, brass buttons, and large feet; but, since he had become the victim of a police complex, the very name had acquired an irresistible fascination.

The look on Officer McGuire's face when confronted by the two blackguards carrying the mysterious boxes, was precisely the look worn by Jimmy Whitmer when detected stealing doughnuts from the cook's pantry. Heck himself had not been above such momentary weaknesses, and he remembered vividly how detection in crime brought absolute loss of courage. At such times even Sally, the housemaid, assumed gigantic proportions, and he would have fled, terror-stricken, before the attack of a Pekingese. If such had been his reaction, why not a similar reaction in the case of another? He had just seen it work in the case of Officer McGuire. Why not apply the same formula against another of Officer McGuire's species? Weren't all police alike, their terminations interchangeable? Police—policemen—police dogs!

Heck's logic may have been faulty, but his sincerity was unquestioned. One third of him, the Airedale third, wanted to hunt his enemy and have another go for the title of "King of the Beach" on a simple basis of fair stand-up fight.

Another third, the plain-dog third, kept whispering that he had been whipped once, and once was enough. But the remaining third, which was pure Gordon setter, kept telling him that craft was a virtue in fighting as well as in hunting.

Thus the pull of his varied ancestry, added to the urge of his smoldering anger against his supplanter, enabled Heck to get through another twenty-four hours and survive a double dose of Jimmy's medicine.

IV.

HECK'S better," Jimmy told his mother the following morning. "That's great medicine! I think I'll keep a bottle on hand in case he gets sick again."

Listening to this conversation, Heck promised himself good health for the remainder of the summer. If simply thinking about his enemy's overthrow had improved his physical looks, the actual extinction of that pretender would put him on a pinnacle from which all medicine bottles would be forever barred. And Heck trotted off to the beach as cheerfully as though he had not been ousted from his time-honored throne by an upstart of a German militarist.

But, instead of dashing boldly out among the assembled bathers, as had been his invariable custom, he skirted the beach tents and approached one located a little back and aloof from its fellows.

"Fifi," the French poodle curled on a rug within the tent, though a perfect lady, was the type Heck detested. Only sheer necessity could have driven him to seek her company, but the Gordon-setter third was in the ascendancy, and the Airedale-plain-dog two thirds was forced into submission.

"Have you given my proposition due thought?" Heck asked in the language of dogdom, which, for the benefit of

those who do not understand the language of dogs, we will translate into current idiom.

"I have indeed given it due thought, and I have decided to help you, because that *boche* is a barbarian," Mademoiselle Fifi replied with spirit. "Since his triumph over your unpreparedness a few days back his actions have been unendurable—simply unendurable!"

Heck acknowledged with becoming gravity mademoiselle's delicate allusion to his defeat at the jaws of the police dog, after which the allies went into conference. It was a bright, sunny day, and the beach was crowded. The new king, well brushed and sleek in his summer coat, swaggered from group to group, as though sand and surf and bathers had been brought together solely to do him honor. Lesser dogs moved aside, as he approached, maneuvers that made his eyes glisten and caused his heavy tail to swing with satisfaction; and this satisfaction was vastly increased by glances of feminine admiration he presently intercepted from a near-by beach tent.

The police dog, young and vain and having a way with the ladies, approached to pass the time of day with Mademoiselle Fifi, having intercepted another languishing roll from a pair of inky optics. It was, he declared by way of introducing himself, a lovely day for a fight or a gambol; but, seeing there was no dog in his class to put up a fight, he must give the ladies a treat. This statement was received by Mademoiselle Fifi with the roll of a seductive eye and the bashful acknowledgment that martial prowess was a short cut to every female heart.

"Fancy," she continued, treating the new King of the Beach to another optical assault and battery, "that old fellow, Monsieur Heck, who has reached such an age that mange cure no longer is efficacious in concealing his baldness, has declared he can be King of the Beach

again whenever he chooses to assert himself. But a young and gallant man will not continue to submit to his intolerable insolence."

The "young and gallant man" displayed his long fangs on hearing this and announced that, having licked Mr. Heck once, he was ready to lick him again if given half a chance. He was King of the Beach from now on and dared any one to dispute his title.

"You *gendarmes* are terrible boasters," said Mademoiselle Fifi.

"I never boast," said the police dog.

"Perhaps not; but you do a great deal of talking," Mademoiselle Fifi retorted, yawning to show a curled pink tongue between glistening ivories. "But what is talk? Actions, ah, actions, alone are sublime! Why, even that poor old Monsieur Heck was a man of veritable action. One had but to suggest, and behold, he had accomplished your desires while you were still engaged in forming them. Truly an admirable trait in a gentleman, Monsieur Gendarme."

The police dog, his vanity now thoroughly aroused, promptly declared that when it came to accomplishing a lady's desires he had his old opponent, Heck, backed off the boards.

"Words," said Mademoiselle Fifi, "are cheap."

"Tell me something you want, and I'll show whether I'm boasting or not," declared the goaded police dog.

Mademoiselle Fifi raised a small paw and flicked a grain of sand from her inky nose. Out of the corner of her eye she had been watching the adjoining tent where William, eldest son and sole heir of the house of Bailly-Bascomb, was lording it in all the grandeur of his three years and astonishing rotundity. William was not merely plump; he had achieved the distinction of being a fat boy. His cheeks and stomach alike were objects of admiration and wonder. His capacity for food was exceeded only by

his capacity for protest when denied or angered. His lungs expanded and his diaphragm contracted with equal readiness; which means that he ate or cried, or cried *and* ate, from the time he was brought to the beach to the time he was dragged, yelling, screaming, and chewing, to the waiting motor.

At the moment chosen by Fifi to bring the vainglorious police dog to the point of a rash promise, William had one chubby fist around the end of a hot-dog sandwich, the far end being hidden from view behind two moist and gormandizing mandibles. Mademoiselle Fifi licked her own chops, sighed hungrily, and lisped:

"I'm simply dying for a bite of that hot-dog sandwich!"

V.

NOTHING could have been plainer. It was a command such as a queen might make to a favored courtier. The police dog might have answered that cannibalism was abhorrent; but—*cherchez la femme!* Thrones more durable than his had been lost for a pair of bright eyes. It is true he hesitated, but his hesitation was short-lived. A glance around showed no adult humans in the immediate vicinity; a look at his temptress revealed an expression in which doubt and desire were blended into subtle provocation. This shattered the police dog's last remaining scruples, and he rose from his haunches and approached the gluttonous William.

It was Herr Ludendorf's misfortune to be a newcomer at Alton-by-the-Sea, and therefore ignorant of the qualities possessed in such noble proportions by the scion of the house of Bailly-Bascomb. William regarded him at first with an air of fatuous complacency; but when the bandit, emboldened by the quiescence of his victim, padded forward and caught the visible portion of the hot-dog sandwich between crunch-

ing jaws, William made the welkin ring with his anguish.

This caught the ears of his nurse who had been helping a handsome life guard pass a few moments of boredom. The hot-dog sandwich, being made for consumption and not for combat, had developed in the meantime what might be termed a solution of continuity. William retained the major portions in fist and mouth, but enough remained with the police dog to damn him forever in the eyes of the nurse and life guard who were rapidly bearing down on the scene of action.

"Steal from a baby, would you!" exclaimed the nurse, aiming a kick with a well-shod foot that reached the unfortunate Herr Ludendorf at the instant the waiting Heck charged from his place of concealment within a near-by tent; while, to make matters more interesting for the semiparalyzed victim of his own vanity, Mademoiselle Fifi, carried away by Gallic ardor, attacked from the flank and rear.

It was a débâcle. The police dog might have held his own against shame.

He could have held his own against Heck, as the fight of a few days before had amply proved. But he could not hold his own against shame and Heck, assisted by Mademoiselle Fifi and the booted foot of the enraged nurse-girl.

When the growling, yelping, choking bundle of dog had risen and been resolved into its competent elements, the police dog straightened out and made for the tall timber, with the triumphant Heck in close pursuit. In that order they passed from sight, followed by the plaudits of the assembled bathers.

"That Heck dog is sure some fighter!" the life guard remarked to the nurse, as soon as she had pacified the wailing William with another hot-dog sandwich.

"Some fighter is right!" agreed the nurse-girl.

Both had forgotten Heck's defeat by the police dog some days before; but forgetfulness is an attribute of those who pay homage to power and authority. They were saluting His Majesty Heck, King of the Beach for eight years and now entering another term after a brief period of dethronement.



ROADS TO NOWHERE

Mazie V. Caruthers

UP steps which lead to nothing
 Awearily I creep.
 My feet, once sandaled with the wind,
 Like flame could run and leap;
 But now, with leaden weight they toil
 These countless stairs and steep.

The roads which lead to nowhere—
 How desolate they are!
 Still, when heart faints, and endless seem
 The miles so lone, so far,
 God opens up His sky windows
 And cheers me with a star.



The Death's Head Ring-

By
Hapsburg Liebe



(COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE)

CHAPTER I.

THE HILLMAN'S STORY.



FLOOD of light from a moon as big as a cart wheel and as bright as new gold, gilding the long streamers of moss that hung from the roadside live oaks. Cabbage palms reared themselves beyond the live oaks, and beyond the palms was a forest of mysteriously whispering long-leaf pines. The guttural wak-wak of a night heron, that flew lazily overhead broke the silence, and the mournful cry of a chuck-will's widow came from some hidden marshy place. The old man turned a sharp bend in the sandy road and saw in the distance the twinkling lights of a Florida backwoods town.

"I reckon that air Pineville, at last," he told himself wearily, in the musical drawl of a native of the Southern hills. He talked to himself a good deal now.

Pineville it was. Though the night was still quite young, the crooked main street was almost deserted. The old mountaineer found a townsman who directed him to the sheriff's office and asked no bothersome questions.

Sheriff Jeff McAuley was tall, lean, quiet. He was a backwoodsman born, but he had read much. The newcomer walked in without the formality of rap-

ping at the door. McAuley sat at a scarred, roll-top desk, smoking a pipe, soberly eying a small photograph of a man whom the law wanted.

"Howdy, sheriff, and good evenin'. I air the Reverent Bill Sharman, f'om Breathitt County, Kentucky, sir."

McAuley let the little photo fall to the desk. "Have a seat, reverend," he invited, indicating a varnishless straight-back chair near by. "Is there something I can do for you?"

"Mebbe so, sir. I hope so." Sharman put his old-fashioned valise down at his feet, shook road dust from his almost threadbare black clothing, and removed the black slouch hat from his iron-gray head. Then he dropped into the straight-backed chair and began to comb his spade-shaped, iron-gray beard with knotty fingers. His upper lip was smoothly shaven and suggested strength of character.

"I air here in Floridy to see ef I can find out what's become o' my son Jim," he announced. "Jim left home more nor two year ago, and the few letters we had f'om him was mailed in this here town, Pineville. He was a good fiddler. Did you know my son?"

"I've lived here all my life, and I never heard thè name before," McAuley answered promptly.

"Air that so?" The Reverent Bill

Sharman seemed perplexed and disappointed. After a moment he went on: "A tall, fine-lookin' young feller, he was, and a good fiddler, as I said. Sheriff, I got a strange tale to tell you. It won't sound right to you, but, afore the Lord, it air the truth:

"Jim carried a silver watch which I'd gi' him on his twentieth birthday, and he wore a 'normous big silver ring with a skull and crossbones on it. Tom Sharman, my oldest brother, who was allus 'clined to be 'venturous, brung the ring f'om Mexico. It was a hoodoo ring. Tom had hard luck whilst he wore it, and at last he took sick and died. He left the ring to another brother o' mine who said no hoodoo could git the best o' him; and this brother also had hard luck, and soon he'd took sick and died, too.

"Well, then my son Jim he enherited the ring. Jim swore he'd lick the hoodoo. It had become a feud, with us Sharmans on one side and the ring on the other, that grinnin' death's-head ring. Jim had hard luck, jest like his two uncles'd had. It nigh drove the boy wild. He even stopped fiddlin'. But he was game. He'd break every lookin'-glass he seed, walk under ladders, take thirteen ca'tridges with him when he went a-huntin', and plan things on Friday—stuff like that—a-defyin' the hoodoo."

The weary old Kentuckian paused for breath and then pursued doggedly: "Jim took the wanderin' notion, jest like Tom'd had, and goes off to Floridy a-sayin' he was off to seek his forchune, not even a'takin' his fiddle with him; the truth is, it was that damn hoodoo—kin'ly pardon me, sir; I jest couldn't help it, preacher o' the Gospel though I am—it was that hoodoo that drove him. Well, as I told you at fust, sheriff, the few letters we had f'om him was mailed in this town, and we ain't heard nothin' f'om him now fo' some sixteen months."

In the beginning, Jeff McAuley had not been exceedingly attentive. The end of the hillman's story, however, found his lean countenance alive with interest. He opened a little drawer of his scarred desk and took out a large, death's-head silver ring.

"Was it something like this, reverend?"

Sharman examined the trinket closely and weighed it in his hand. "This air shore it, sheriff, the same one. Where'd you git it?"

"One of a party of hunters found it down in Big Cypress Swamp, a month or so ago, and brought it to me," said McAuley. "Lying close to the edge of a pond——"

He was a man of iron, undoubtedly, but he found himself loath to go on with it. Old Sharman was now sitting up in his chair, and his eyes were fairly glistening with mingled eagerness and apprehension.

"My son, was he dead?"

The officer took a new grip on himself. "The wearer of this ring was only a skeleton, reverend," he said regretfully. "But maybe it wasn't your son. Let's hope it wasn't."

Sharman settled back limply. He looked rather pitiful. "It was Jim," he declared, his voice bleak. "The end o' the world couldn't ha' made Jim part with the ring. It was the hoodoo he'd swore to lick. Well, it air my turn now, sheriff. Us Breathitt County Sharmans allus stuck together, live or die. You won't mind me a-keepin' the ring, sheriff." The hillman slipped the trinket on his left third finger, and it was a trifle loose even in passing the knotty second joint.

CHAPTER II.

TRUE TO PRINCIPLES.

AFTER a long silence Sheriff McAuley began to speak. "There's no such thing as a hoodoo. Connected here is a sort of psy—psychic element that

will bear a lot of thought. I read a couple of books on psy"—again he stumbled over the difficult word—"psychic stuff, reverend, and I think I understand this odd case of yours. Your brothers who had 'hard luck' and died under what you think was the influence of that outlandish piece of Mexican jewelry, carried a fear, that they didn't know anything about, in the backs of their heads, and it made them easy prey to misfortune; that is, they expected hard luck, though they didn't realize it, and that helped it to come." The sheriff was silent a moment.

"Yeuh?" Sharman didn't half believe it.

McAuley nodded. "Yes; and there's another angle, reverend. The misfortunes and death might have come anyway; don't you see? This son of yours—poor boy, I'm sorry for him, honestly—what I said about your brothers applies equally to him. You being a preacher, you shouldn't take any stock in this hoodoo bunk."

"No? I believe in the power o' the Almighty," Sharman replied quickly, "and I also believe that Satan has power. This here death's-head ring air got some o' the power o' Satan behind it. Brother Tom told us, when he'd arrove back f'om Mexico and fust showed us the ring, that it helt the curse o' a Yaqui woman a hundred year old, and he laughed about it; but later he didn't laugh; and yit he wouldn't prove hisself a coward by throwin' the thing away. And my other brother wouldn't part with it, and I know my son Jim didn't, and me—I won't, neither, and I'll lick anything the hoodoo puts in my path, or else I'll die in my boots, which is the Sharman way."

It was not a boast. It was a simple statement of cold-iron fact. Jeff McAuley shrugged; then he smiled. "Maybe you should carry a rabbit's foot," he suggested. McAuley could be cynical when he so wished.

"I do!" old Sharman exclaimed. "Here in my left vest pocket, sir."

He produced it, then put it back. McAuley's smile faded out. Then the officer opened one of the larger drawers of his desk and brought to light a much rusted, frontier-type revolver, with handles of discolored walnut.

"The hunter," he explained, "found this gun near the skeleton, and each of the six chambers has a cankered, empty cartridge shell in it. Evidently your son, reverend, if son of yours it really was, died in what you called 'the Sharman way.'"

The mountaineer sat dumbly staring.

McAuley continued: "It was found within a few miles of a swamp lumber camp, which stands on slightly higher ground which is known as Carter's Island. This outfit works men from everywhere, and it's likely that your son and the man who killed him belonged to the Carter's Island crew. The skeleton was later buried on the 'island.'"

Still the Reverend Bill Sharman stared dumbly. At last he spoke: "Jim—he was a good boy. Ef he shot that six-gun empty, he done it in defense o' his own life. The man who killed him air guilty o' murder, and I'll make it my business to fetch him to jestic. It'd make me feel some better, sheriff, ef you'd swear me in as a deputy on this case."

"There are certain reasons why I can't do that," McAuley replied. "The trail is too old, reverend, anyway; you'd never find your man now. You see, lumber-camp crews come and go, and this killing must have taken place at least a year past."

Sharman rose and turned the death's-head ring idly around on his finger. "How do I go to git to Carter's Island, sheriff?"

The officer told him. Then McAuley took the little photo from his desk and passed it to the visitor. "If you happen to see this fellow anywhere, let me

know. If I get him through you, I'll see that the full amount of the reward comes to you, reverend, and maybe you could find use for it."

Sharman was bending over the picture, which was one of a series that McAuley had just had made. According to typewritten lines on the lower margin, two thousand dollars would be paid for the arrest of the photograph's original, a man known as Ab Sheddars, alias George Moon; he was wanted for highway robbery and a killing or two."

The hillman tossed the picture back to the desk. Not a line of his countenance had changed.

"All right, sheriff," he said. "I won't fo'git that face. I'm much obliged to you, sir, fo' so much o' yore time. So long."

He put on his black slouch hat, took up his old valise, and went out to the moonlit night.

"A queer bird," Jefferson McAuley told himself—"with all the courage of his convictions."

It was infinitely better for a man to be true to false principles than false to true principles. Illiterate, the reverend was, but his was certainly no mongrel blood. McAuley was becoming a thinker.

CHAPTER III.

LUCKY THIRTEEN.

ALL the way from the coastwise railroad to Pineville, Bill Sharman had walked, because he had only a little money left. He now looked for and eventually found Pineville's cheapest lodging house. Had it not been for the ravenous mosquitoes, he would have spent the night under some friendly tree and saved his half dollar.

"Ab Sheddars, alias George Moon," he said to his bright-eyed reflection in the mirror of the cheap dresser. "Ab Sheddars, alias George Moon."

Another morning dawned, and, as had for many years been his custom, the hill

preacher began the new day by shaving his upper lip. He talked to himself a good deal now, a fact that has already been recorded; there was a measure of solace in it.

"That there sheriff wanted to laugh at me fo' a-carryin' a rabbit's foot to offset the hoodoo. Well, I'm a-goin' to throw it away. I don't need no rabbit's foot now."

He tossed it far from his bedroom window, and it fell, as though from the blue sky, directly before an old negress who was passing with a basket of clothes on her head. Sharman smiled. He'd made somebody a little happier.

The Carter's Island lumber camp did not give old Sharman the object of his search, and he was there barely long enough to earn a week's pay as an ax-man. Of the entire crew, only the boss had heard the mountaineer's name before. Yes; Jim had worked there. A good man, too, he was; a peach of a lumberjack; he'd worked much overtime and saved his money. Funny what a great hate he'd had for mirrors; broke every one he saw, regardless of who owned it; for good luck, he said, when anybody should know that it meant seven years of bad luck. Another thing the boss remembered. Jim Sharman had set a ladder up at the bunk-house porch in order that he might walk under it thirteen times a day without bother. The number thirteen he fairly doted on. The crew had nicknamed him "Lucky Thirteen."

"He was a good fiddler," Jim's father said. "Did he fiddle any whilst he was here?"

Not that the boss remembered. But Jim had counted an enemy there in the outfit, a bitter one, too. A mouthy rat of a fellow, it was. The ill feeling had started over Jim's being kidded because of his perpetual war against bad-luck signs. The crew had known the enemy as "The Badger." The death's-head ring? Jim Sharman had worn a ring

something on the order of that one; perhaps it was the same one, come to think of it, the skeleton which the hunters had found, had on a ring like that. Maybe it was Jim's skeleton—eh?

Old Bill Sharman was now a little pale under his spade-shaped beard.

"Well, it would shorely sawt o' look like it, wouldn't it?" he asked, and his gaze was narrow. "You don't rickollect jest when it was that my son quit work at this here outfit?"

The boss shook his head. "More than a year back and prob'ly on pay day. Most-o' the men that leaves me, leaves on pay day. Drifters, the gen'al run of 'em."

CHAPTER IV.

FATHER TIME.

FROM one Florida lumber camp to another went Bill Sharman, seeking, forever seeking, and finding nothing. He worked in the woods when his funds had run down to pennies, and he spent no money that he didn't need to spend. Weeks passed and months. An unremembered number of woods outfits he had visited fruitlessly; and then, one blistering-hot afternoon in July, he followed a narrow-gauge railroad through a dense swamp of cypress to the most southerly lumber camp in Florida.

They called it Chuckaluskee Flats, and it reminded him of Carter's Island. Over it lay a seemingly tangled network of rusted iron rails. Some half worn-out skidding and loading machinery, together with a number of broken-down log cars, stood on a rust-red siding before a repair shed. In the center of everything was a rambling and paintless boarding house of one story, with the office and sleeping quarters of the boss occupying a single room in a front corner. Both shed and building were weather-beaten and sunbaked; the boards that had gone into them were apparently doing their utmost to warp themselves free of the binding nails.

Sharman, now in cheap blue overalls and ragged blue shirt, still carrying the old valise, walked into the Chuckaluskee Flats office without rapping at the door. The boss was a middle-aged rail of a man; he, too, seemed sun-baked, dried-out, and warped.

"I want a job o' work," the old mountaineer announced, and there was a hint of desperation in his voice.

The boss looked up from a pile of tally sheets on the homemade table that served him in lieu of a desk. He raked a string of moisture-beads from his brass-brown forehead by means of a hooked forefinger. The sun was down now, but the swamp heat was still oppressive.

"You're along in years," he said. "Well, I need men, and I'll try you. What's your name, old-timer?"

"My name's Bill. I got a good reason o' my own fo' not givin' any other name, sir."

"Humph!" The camp's high light grinned knowingly. "Well, you're not what I'd call a bit unusual. I got a whole bunch o' jaspers here who don't publish who they are, either, for reasons o' their own. Well, it ain't no funeral o' mine, long as they works, and they works."

"There's somebody who calls hisself Ab Sheddars or George Moon. Does he work here?" Sharman asked.

"No; I think not—not under them titles, anyhow. Well, go around to the cook and tell him I said to feed you. The rest o' the crew has e't supper a'-ready. Also, the cooky'll show you the bunk house. Good-by."

The cook fed the newcomer to Chuckaluskee Flats, and then he pointed to a doorless doorway at the other end of the dining room. Sharman picked up his valise and started for the doorway. Lying here and there on the rough, tiered bunks were the camp's workers, all of them silent, tired, or sullen. Most of them wore beards of one length or

another, though they were youngish men.

The mountaineer found a vacant bunk and tossed his valise into it. At that instant a high-pitched, derisive voice came from the shadows of a near-by corner.

"Hello, Father Time! Hey, boys—look at Father Time!"

Bill Sharman's full beard was considerably grayer and longer than it had been on the day of his arrival in Florida, and the nickname was therefore not far-fetched. He stood straight and gaunt, and his eyes began to blaze with quick anger, Breathitt County anger. Minister of the Gospel he was, to be sure, but he was not a god, and he had already suffered much. Then he crossed the bunk-room floor with footsteps that shook it, thrust a work-hardened hand into the gloom of an under bunk and jerked out to the dim evening light the lumberjack who had made sport of his patriarchal beard.

Other lumberjacks gathered to see it. But Sharman remembered, and the great fist that had for decades pounded pulpits in behalf of erring souls did not now fall in wrath.

"You mustn't call me that any more," he said, and that was all.

There had been in his voice a quality that prevented audible comment or laughter—for the present, at least.

Sharman rose early on the following morning. He found a rusted tin basin and half filled it with water, hung a small mirror on a nail in the wall beside one of the bunk room's few windows, and prepared to shave his upper lip. The valise, open wide, was on a shelf just under the mirror.

The man who had scoffed on the evening before—about thirty, he was, with decidedly bad eyes, receding chin completely hidden under a ragged growth of sunburned beard, buck teeth, and an oddly slanting forehead—stole up behind the hillman, ready for more of the

vicious sport that was so dear to his inhuman heart.

"Why not cut off all the brush, Father Time?"

Nothing in Sharman's countenance showed that he had heard. He began to study the bad eyes in the mirror, as he plied his old-fashioned razor. Suddenly he saw the scoffer's face go white, and he knew it was because the scoffer had seen the death's-head ring on the razor hand. Here, at last, was the object of Bill Sharman's patient search. With amazing quickness the old mountaineer snatched from his open valise a pair of manacles that he had bought in a pawnshop, wheeled with an agility that would have done credit to a much younger man, and snapped one half of the irons on the scoffer's wrist and the other half on his own.

"Fo' the murder o' my son!" he cried triumphantly.

The other came to himself, bared his buck teeth like a cornered wolf, and showed fight. The hillman's free hand dove into the valise and came back filled with walnut and steel, the walnut and steel of a six-gun's butt.

"I'd a heap ruther take you to the law alive," he said bitterly, his weapon threatening, "but ef you'd ruther go dead, I guess it's all right with me. I'll tell you in edvance that I've done throwed the key to them handcuffs away. You got a long, hard walk a-comin'. Now march!"

As the revolver's cold muzzle bored into the scoffer's ribs, he marched, and not one of his former associates put forth a hand to interfere.

There came twenty-five hours of constant trudging, without food or rest, through cypress swamp and sawgrass plain, woods of scrubby pine and black-jack oak, and mercilessly hot palmetto wastelands. The two moved according to the mountaineer's inborn sense of direction, with the help of the sun by day and that of the stars by night. Sharman

was heading for Pineville, feeling that Sheriff McAuley was more or less his friend, believing that this was the correct procedure, since the crime that concerned him had been committed in McAuley's county. The few backwoods folk whom they met were curious enough, but nobody made any attempt to render aid to the captive.

And so at last they came to Pineville, a ragged and muddy, bedraggled pair, wan and starved-looking and staggering. Sharman found the way to the sheriff's office without difficulty.

Jeff McAuley sat with his feet on a leaf of his desk, reading a new book on psychic phenomena. For a moment he did not recognize the old hillman.

"I'll be hanged if it isn't the reverend!" he exclaimed, rising. "Who's that you've got ironed to you? Oh, I see now—Ab Sheddars, alias George Moon, or I'm a piebald gopher!"

"I don't know, sheriff," Bill Sharman said weakly, half falling into a chair, as his captive slumped to the floor. "I don't know nothin' 'cept that he's the skunk that killed my boy. He—he remembered the hoodoo ring. A hundred—two, three hundred—men'd seen it afore him and never turned a hair; you see, I knowed the murderer wouldn't fo'git that ring. I ain't took neither my eye nor my gun off o' him sence yeste'day mawnin'. I had to drag him part o' the way, and once I—I cussed him. There ain't any key to them handcuffs."

Already McAuley and one of his deputies were trying to unlock the manacles. "Just you wait, reverend," the senior officer said, "and you'll see when he's shaved that he's Ab Sheddars, a born killer. We'll have to send for a smith to cut these irons off, I guess. Where'd you find him?"

Sharman told the rest of his story, a few words at a time, wearily. McAuley laughed a little.

"Well, hoodoo or no hoodoo, that ring

is bringing you twenty-five hundred dollars, reverend. The reward has had a boost since you were here before. Not so bad, eh?"

Sheriff Jeff McAuley was correct; it was the highwayman killer, a born killer. On the day after he had been paid the full amount of the reward, the Reverend Bill Sharman boarded a train with his passage paid to Breathitt County, Kentucky. He wore new black clothing now, and on the knotty third finger of his left hand there was still the death's-head silver ring.

In the baggage car ahead of him went a skeleton in the best burial raiment and the best coffin that Pineville had to offer.

CHAPTER V.

LICKING THE HOODOO.

A BIG, old hewn-log church back in Kentucky's everlasting hills, with mud wasps droning lazily about their nests under the eaves, and a bee martin industriously chasing bees above the weathered-gray board roof. Surrounding it was a grove of white oaks, stately and magnificent trees, with wagons and horses and dogs, here and there in their kindly shade; their sensitive leaves quivered in a soft morning breeze out of the rock-ribbed west. Inside the church was a capacity congregation of hillfolk, all of them very still except for a tiny babe that whimpered sleepily at its mother's breast. Pasteboard fans were moving slowly, and frequently a handkerchief stole tremulously upward to wipe away a prodigal tear. On low wooden stools before the worn, homemade pulpit rested a long and shining box with white-metal handles, and on it were shocks and sheafs of old-fashioned roses and zinnias and honeysuckles; placed among the flowers was a scarred fiddle, with a bow that shaking hands had just broken in dramatic and pitiful significance.

Now there rose back of the pulpit a gaunt old man with a full beard, almost

white; he was meeting the Gethsemane of his life on his feet; he himself, never a quitter, was going to preach the funeral of his beloved son. On the foremost of the homemade benches, dressed in cheap black, sat a young woman named Sadie, who had wept until the fires of her grief had burned dry the fount of her tears.

The Reverend Sharman's hands were gripping the edges of the leather-backed pulpit Bible. Then he began to speak, and the congregation barely heard him.

"Brothers and sisters, we have gathered together here in the Lord's house fo' the puppose o' payin' our last respects to my pore boy, Jim——"

He broke off and at once spoke again: "It looks—like Jim—— My God, ef I only 'magine it, wouldst Thou take away this bitterest of all my bitter cups——"

Straight through the open front doorway he was staring, wide-eyed, deathly white. The congregation turned their heads to look, and Sadie Moreland went to her feet, with her hands clasped in wild hope against her breast. Almost filling the narrow doorway came then a stalwart young man, rather fine-looking for all of his deep sunburn, wearing excellent clothing and very nicely groomed.

"In the name o' goodness, pap," he began thickly, but half laughing because of the great joy he knew in his soul he was bringing into that church, "I'm told that this is *my* funeral you're holdin' here to-day. Why, I'm the alivest man on this hill or any other blessed hill in the whole State o' Kaintucky."

On the third finger of his left hand a death's-head silver ring gleamed dully. Old Sharman saw it, glanced down at the one he still wore, and realized suddenly that there were at least two such rings in the world. The house had not yet recovered from the shock of this thing that had come like a bolt from the skies. Jim Sharman walked briskly

up to the pulpit and put his hands out toward his father in a manner of pleading.

"Pap," he confessed, "I got so dern blue in my hard luck that I simply couldn't even write home to you. I'd say to myself: 'Better let him think I'm dead.' Then one day I got plum' reckless and invested all o' my saved-up lumber-camp money in thirty acres o' Florida land. When I went out later to see it, it was under two feet o' water, with a fine crop o' moccasins on it."

He stiffened himself with a visible effort and went on: "Then I sailed, a heap disgusted, on a schooner that was headin' out for Central America. When I got back to Florida my thirty acres was all dry; they'd been drained off in the drainin' of other land, and a town was bein' laid out close by. They wanted me to pay 'em five thousand dollars for drainin' off my land, and I didn't have a dollar; I'd spent all o' my ship pay money for clothes. You see, the town company thought I was a big boob. Well, I figgered I'd better use my head a little, and I done it.

"'You put that water right back on my land,' I tells the town company. 'If you don't,' I says, 'you can get ready for a whale of a big damage suit. How in thunder, am I goin' to make the greatest commercial fish pond in the State on dry land?' I says. You'll notice I didn't tell a p'int-blank lie, pap.

"So the next day the town company's lawyer looks me up. He says to me: 'If you'll name a reasonable price for your thirty acres, maybe the company will buy you out,' he says.

"Well, I looks down at my hoodoo ring—there was a good many o' them rings in Florida, all Mexican made, by the way. The dern thing had got to seem alive to me. I thought I could hear it say: 'You'll be lucky if you even get your saved-up money back,' and that made me as mad as a wet hen. So I flared right up.

"I'll take a hundred thousand dollars for my thirty acres, provided I get the money, every cent, in hard cash, before I start my damage suit," I tells the lawyer.

"And I got it, pap. Money flowed like water down there. Pap, I claim I've licked the hoodoo, and licked it good and proper!"

Still they stared at him as though they didn't understand. Jim Sharman

saw the scarred fiddle and the broken bow lying among the flowers, and the significance of it gripped the heart in him. He looked back to his father, and then he looked at Sadie, the sweetheart of his boyhood and youth.

"Come down here, pap," he said throatily; "and come here, Sadie, and hug me and tell me everything is all right!"

They hurried to him.



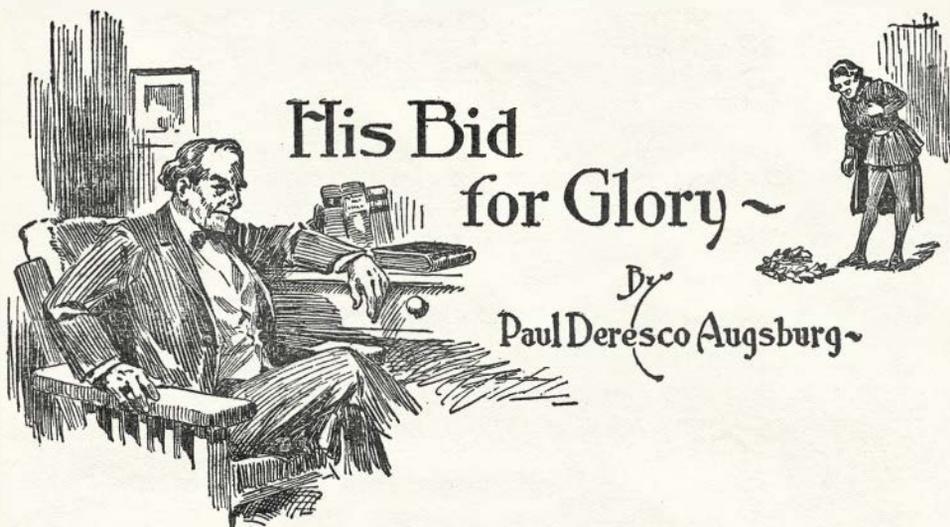
SONGS OF THE CRAFTS—THE HARD-ROCK MAN

By Ted Olson

MEN'S trails reach out from east and west
 To a common rendezvous,
 Till they halt where the stark sierra's crest
 Juts white to the sky's chill blue.
 When Nature vetoes their pygmy plan
 With her granite "No Thoroughfare,"
 It's then they call on the hard-rock man
 To make them a gateway there.

Against the might of a stubborn star
 We match our puny will,
 For, strong as granite is, stronger far
 Are powder and fuse and drill.
 And strongest of all is the cunning brain
 And the heart that says "I can!"
 And the wall where the ages knocked in vain
 Gives way to the hard-rock man.

We have tunneled the spines of the continents;
 We have delved to the earth's red core;
 Her shell is hived with the caverns whence
 We have plucked her gems and ore.
 And still to the last outposts of space
 We press and, still in the van,
 Breaking trail for the conquering race
 You'll find the hard-rock man.



IN the picturesque parlance of the stage, Gerald Mottsworth Hansom was a ham actor. Eggs often go with ham, and more than once, as Gerald Mottsworth Hansom executed a rapid exit left he had been accompanied by his complement. Or, rather, shall we say that Gerald Mottsworth Hansom had been accompanied by the scrambled compliments of the audience?

Perhaps you have seen him. If you lived in a small southern or Middle Western town in the late 'nineties, if you were beguiled by those posters which heralded the approach of "East Lynne" or "Ten Nights in a Barroom," if you were breathlessly present in the "opery" house while the gaslights fluttered and the "orchestry" rattled into its overture—then the chances are that you have seen the man.

Gerald Mottsworth Hansom trod the boards of every tank town known to Rand, McNally. From the day he was eighteen until the Muted Muse of Hollywood supplanted buskins with celluloid, his name showed bravely, in the job-printed programs of a repertoire ranging the wide Thespian gamut from

"Hamlet" to "Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model."

His own name was one that the actor viewed with pride; a distinguished name, as sonorous and majestic as the "to be" speech of the Dane; a name which would become a byword at a million family altars.

Gerald Mottsworth Hansom raised a great crop of eyebrows and acquired a fur collar against the day when he should be a star.

However, the day never came. A hint of gray intruded among the dark luxuriance of the eyebrows, and many generations of moths ate up all the collar, and electric globes replaced the wavering gaslights; but still Gerald Mottsworth Hansom toiled as one of the supporting cast.

In "Hamlet"—and, like every true actor, his soul yearned to play Denmark's prince—he first appeared as the dead king's ghost, then courtiered a while as *Guildenstern*, and concluded his evening's stint as the first of the gravediggers. The following night he would be the farmer father in "The Old Homestead." And sometimes he wore a sword and, when the hero was en-

gaged in mortal combat with the black *Marmaduke*, drew his own blade with a flourish and shouted to a yawning stage hand:

"Have at you, caitiff!" Exit right, waving sword.

II.

SO went the youth and the prime of Gerald Mottsworth Hansom. A great bitterness settled upon him, a chronic disappointment. There was a girl—but she had married after waiting for him ten patient, hopeful years. Sometimes, now, while he sat in his elevator in the old Curtain Theater Building, "Ham" Hansom thought of Gloria.

Mostly he remembered her as he had first seen her, sparkling eyed and dimpled under the ghostly gaslight of that Indiana "opery" house. He was then a youth of twenty-two, slim and fetching in his uniform of the exiled prince, and he had a spirited exchange of lines in the first act beginning: "My lord, false *Farmingham* is a horse with twice five hundred men!" and ending when he knelt and said with a brave quiver of emotion: "My life, my heart's blood, I shall gladly give to save you."

For the remainder of the act he just stood and looked grim with his sword.

It was in this interval of standing and looking grim with his sword that Hansom's eyes met Gloria's. Before the two sections of curtain had been yanked creaking to a reluctant reunion, he made his great vow to become a leading man and then wed yon beauteous maid.

The following day he met her and they were plighted: Under a blossoming apple tree he repeated his solemn vow. The meadow larks were singing, and the girl's soft eyes were shining, and the eyebrows of Gerald Mottsworth Hansom were already giving promise of their later bushy splendor.

Ten years, ten patient, hopeful years, went by. Then had come that half-querulous, half-tender letter to tell Han-

som that on the morrow Gloria would marry William Isely. A prosperous farmer was Isely, with many apple trees and cattle and fields of corn and rye; a prosperous farmer, Isely—and Hansom was still a ham who flourished his sword and cried: "Have at you, caitiff!" exiting fiercely right.

III.

AT last there came a magic, modern day when stranger things than mail planes sped through the restless air.

Once the winds of heaven blew dust and smoke and clouds and ships and derby hats; and sometimes, feeling sportive, they took a barn or a cow for a ride; and sometimes they pushed over a church steeple just to prove that God was, as the good pastor had assured his congregation, indeed almighty.

However, now even a plain nor'wester can't howl a bit without getting tangled in a most amazing assortment of saxophone blues, stock quotations, tenor grace notes, hints on how to hold a husband, and what to do when your partner bids three hearts—all rushing relentlessly to keep a rendezvous with the "peepul."

Nor are these the sum of strange things that the plain nor'wester encounters. Sometimes it runs into a play being broadcast over the radio. A voice cries: "Stand back, you bully!" and the nor'wester, amazed, asks: "Who-oo-oo?"

This is where Gerald Mottsworth Hansom, bitter and beaten, operating his elevator in the fifty-fifth year of his age, found glory and fame at last. For station KGX formed a stock company which once a week—every Wednesday evening at eight o'clock—radiocast a play from its downtown studio.

There were six "actors" in the company, and in lieu of the rustling programmes KGX's announcer read off the cast of characters before the invisible curtain was raised.

There was Alice Vandalyne, the leading lady, who was really two leading ladies in one, unless you reckoned by her chins, when she was three. Once Alice Vandalyne had been light and lissome, a delight to the eye, an adornment on any stage. But now, in her middle years, she was smothered in avoirdupois; it had been a long day since she last saw the startled dial hesitate at two hundred pounds.

Was fat Alice Vandalyne, then, dismayed? Not fat Alice Vandalyne. For her voice was still clear and queenly, with that noble quality, that slight hauteur, without which no leading lady may lead. Hearing her in the parquet seats of their homes, facing the loud speakers or sitting silently with the head phones, tens of thousands took Alice Vandalyne at her voice value and accorded her all the slenderness and beauty that ever a woman could wish for.

And Robert Headly, who lost his leg in the war, and who has mild, sad eyes and a quiet little smile—what radio listener, hearing Robert Headly's sneering laugh and bullying baritone, could envision anything but a rat-eyed, slick-haired villain, cynical and sneering, double dyed and arch?

And there was Georgia Metcalf, the ingénue, thirty-eight last birthday; and Alexander Rush, the juvenile, a law student sadly in need of money; and Tom Trufant, the character actor, whose versatile voice often handled three parts, including a butler and *Duke of Buckingham*, in a single drawing-room scene.

And there was Gerald Mottsworth Hansom.

Not without cause is he set apart, dignified and austere, in that separate, simple paragraph. It is thus that one would introduce Booth, or Sir Henry Irving, or Forbes-Robertson himself. For Gerald Mottsworth Hansom was leading man of the KGX Players, the hero who always won through to final victory, the darling of countless grand-

mas and farmers' wives and romantic, wistful maids.

His voice, like Alice Vandalyne's, had come through untouched by time. It was still rich and full and theatrical. He could roll as pretty an "r" as ever tickled an ear. He could put tears in it, and heart throbs, and brave, soul-stirring defiance of that villainous Robert Headly.

Hansom studied his parts in the slack intervals when no impudent messenger boys or impatient business men claimed conveyance in his elevator. He would tarry in the upper stratum of the old Curtain Theater Building; and many a languid stenographer, loitering on a lower floor, has paused open mouthed at a resonant voice resounding down the elevator shaft:

"Drop that gun, Jack Wilson, or I'll blow you straight to perdition. Drop that gun!"

Once little Miss Slavich of the Madison Multigraphing Company—"Last door at the end of the corridor, sir"—screamed and all but fainted. She had pressed the button, and when the descending elevator stopped before her, a madman with, blazing eyes under great terrifying brows shouted: "At last we have met!" and made as though to throttle her.

IV.

IT is true that Ham Hansom joined the KGX Players because of the five dollars he was promised for every appearance. He felt properly contemptuous of radio histrionics. Of what use were his marvelous eyebrows when none of the audience could admire them? Wherefor the practiced gesture, the fine curl of his upper lip, the superb bow and ardent kiss when no one is present to see them? The method of ethereal acting is distressing to one who has felt the footlights' glow and known the tense eyes of the gallery. No make-up, no glittering costumes, no pistols or shining

spears, no wings in which to exit with a savage lunge of the rapier!

Here would stand the announcer, reading the cast of characters into the stupid face of the microphone. And there, arranged in the order of their appearance, each with his book in his hand, would wait the actors, like the queue in a cafeteria; first Trufant, then Georgia Metcalf, then Headly with his crutch.

They monopolized the first few minutes of the play; and so the rest would stand by, watching while each in his turn stood up to Iron Mike and sent hurtling over the prairies those words of unseen drama. The queue would form and reform, the dialogue wax and wane—and there would stand Gerald Mottsworth Hansom, bending his eyebrows and taking deep breaths like a warhorse impatient for battle.

He hated the sham of it, this gray and bitter man who had spent his whole life shamming. Did the stage directions call for a pistol shot, they cracked two sticks together, while shooter and shootee stood around like a pair of weary stage hands! The love scene reached its climax with a passionate solo buss; the hero did all the kissing himself, smacking his lips in front of the microphone as though he were calling a dog.

It disgusted Gerald Mottsworth Hansom. "Is an actor an actor, or is he a confounded talking machine?" he demanded after his first appearance before that phantom audience.

There were compensations, however. If he could not hear the applause or see the intent faces of the "house," neither was he in jeopardy of vegetables and barnyard produce. No turnips or ripe tomatoes came whizzing down from the gallery; eggs and cabbages were denied him; his ears never burned from catcalls.

Nor was his audience one that could be compressed within the four blank walls of an "opery" house. Not the

Metropolitan itself could have held the crowd which heard him now.

Did Ham Hansom play Jones Corners last night? He did; and Danville, and Kenosha, and Vincennes, and Muskegon, and Chicago, and—— Well, there is no compiling the towns he played on that one-night stand last evening. Ham Hansom's voice was everywhere, over the prairies and lakes and woods, riding the circumambient as far as one thousand watts would take it. Never had leading man played to such a "house"—not Joe Jefferson in all his glory, nor Edwin Booth the Great.

Hansom began to get letters from his audience. A woman up in Saskatchewan had *so* enjoyed his performance. A girl down in Shelby County—ah, well he remembered Shelbyville, that night in '94, when *Hamlet* said: "There is something rotten in the State of Denmark," and the gallery backed his statement. A girl in Shelby County wrote three idolatrous pages and concluded with a prayer for his picture. A farmer's wife in——

But this is no filing catalogue. It is the story of Gerald Mottsworth Hansom and how he became a star and broke a thousand hearts. With the perusal of his first batch of fan letters his contempt for radio left him. He lost the dejected droop of his shoulders. He dyed his eyebrows, restoring them to their pristine grayless splendor. He watched the secondhand shops for a proper new fur collar.

A favorite photograph, showing him as a young man in his later twenties, with arms folded across his chest, sword hilt visible, eyes a gleam with the fires of genius, was printed in job lots by a struggling Halstead Street photographer and autographed with many flourishes by Gerald Mottsworth Hansom.

The KGX director doubled his stipend. Hansom bought a cane and a pair of pearl-gray spats. In the daylight hours he handled his elevator like a

spirited charger faring forth to meet false *Farmingham* and his twice five hundred men.

V.

THEN came the proud night of his triumph. It was the anniversary of Shakespeare's death, and KGX would honor the bard with hautboys and flourish of trumpets. "Hamlet"—a condensed, summarized "Hamlet"—was to go on the air at eight. Denmark's gloomy prince would stalk, like his dead father's ghost, broadcast o'er the land. The atmosphere would soon resound with his iambic-pentameter footfalls.

In the studio the cast was assembling. There sat Professor Glickman of the university, ready to pronounce an authoritative judgment on Shakespeare. There sat Alice Vandalyne, two hundred and thirty-five pounds of maidenly *Ophelia*. There sat Headly and Miss Metcalf, Trufant, and Alexander Rush.

The clock said seven fifty-five. Vance, the director, frowned and compared it with his watch. He rose; but at that instant the door was opened by a colored elevator boy, who grinned at the assemblage and hastily stood aside.

"Hey!" called Vance. "What's the idea?"

The idea was Gerald Mottsworth Hansom. He was arriving, as it were, at the stage door. He was arriving as a great tragedian should, with silk hat atop his head, with cane in his brown-glowed hand, with—though the month was April—a fur collar upon his great-coat.

He paused at the threshold, scanning each wondering face with gleaming eyes. Then gravely he handed his hat to the colored boy, his cane, his gloves, his coat, and strode forward to shake hands with Vance.

"This is to be my farewell appearance," he announced a moment later. "It is highly fitting that my long career as an actor should close with Shake-

speare's immortal "Hamlet." In my youth I made the mistake of playing the ghost and the first gravedigger too well—they despaired of ever replacing me, and so I never played the prince. But now——"

"But, Hansom, why so sudden?" demanded Vance, dismayed.

"In every actor's life comes a time to retire and enjoy the fruits of his toil," said Gerald Mottsworth Hansom. "I am now fifty-six. I have much to look back upon, to contemplate. There are my memoirs to write, and——" He paused with an eloquent gesture. "But, willy-nilly, the time has come and I shall retire to my pleasant estate in the country."

Vance gasped; but the clock said eight, and the green signal lamp was flashing. He advanced to the microphone and introduced Professor Glickman. The play was about to start.

Hansom scorned the book. He spoke his lines from memory, his head thrown back, his hand at his breast, his eyes sparkling and flashing as he took each cue with fervor. Sometimes *Ophelia*, in her immensity, did not get away from the microphone fast enough, and he would impatiently push her aside. Then Alice Vandalyne—coy lass—would stifle a girlish giggle.

And so Gerald Mottsworth Hansom, as *Hamlet*, came at last to that prose passage which begins: "If thou dost marry, I'll give thee this plague for thy dowry." As he spoke, his mind's eye carried him back three long decades and more. He was not looking into the microphone, but at a sparkling-eyed, dimpled girl under the ghostly gaslight of an Indiana opera house. He saw himself, slim and fetching in his uniform of the exiled prince—a mere youth of twenty-two, but his eyebrows giving fair promise of their later bushy splendor. He saw himself under the apple tree repeating that solemn promise. And the girl's soft eyes

were shining, and the meadow larks were singing.

"Get thee to a nunnery, go; farewell. Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them. To a nunnery, go; and quickly too. Farewell."

As he stepped aside to let *Ophelia* speak, there was a broad smile on Hansom's face. Vance regarded him with amazement. Never had he seen the actor out of character a single second. Hansom was of the old school; he lived his parts every instant the play was on; to smile after a solemn speech were treason to Melpomene, sad muse of tragedy.

Why, then, did Gerald Mottsworth Hansom, in the hour of his great triumph, playing mad *Prince Hamlet* after years of bitter rue—why did he smile when he uttered that line on marriage?

Because he was thinking of one who sat listening in her Indiana farmhouse, impatient for the morrow and for what the limited train would bring her. Her letter, which Gerald Mottsworth Hansom had lately received, was in his pocket. The last part of it read:

I have listened with tearful pride every Wednesday evening. I can no longer keep silent, Gerald. For now that you are at last a leading man, there is nothing to stand between us any longer. Poor Mr. Isley was laid away five years ago last month, and since his death I have had my hands full managing all the property. I need you so much, Gerald.

Still your "Apple Blossom," GLORIA.

Fame, and then something perhaps even more to be desired, had come to Gerald Mottsworth Hansom.

Good Reasons

A MINISTER who had not been long appointed to a church in the South of Scotland asked one old lady how she liked his preaching.

"I didna like it at a'," she replied.

"And, pray, why not?" he asked.

"Weel, in the first place," she answered, "ye read yer sermon; an', in the second place, ye didna read it weel; an', in the third place, it wasna worth the readin'."

Safety First

HER dearest friend had come to tea, and she was telling her all about the attempted burglary.

"Yes," she said; "I heard a noise and got up, and there, under the bed, I saw a man's leg."

"Good heavens!" gasped her friend. "The burglar's?"

"No," replied the other; "my husband's. He had heard the noise, too."

They Proved Useful

As Mr. Dunner ascended the stairs he fancied he heard a moan from the room in which Mr. Fergusson lived. But it ceased as he reached the door, and he walked in.

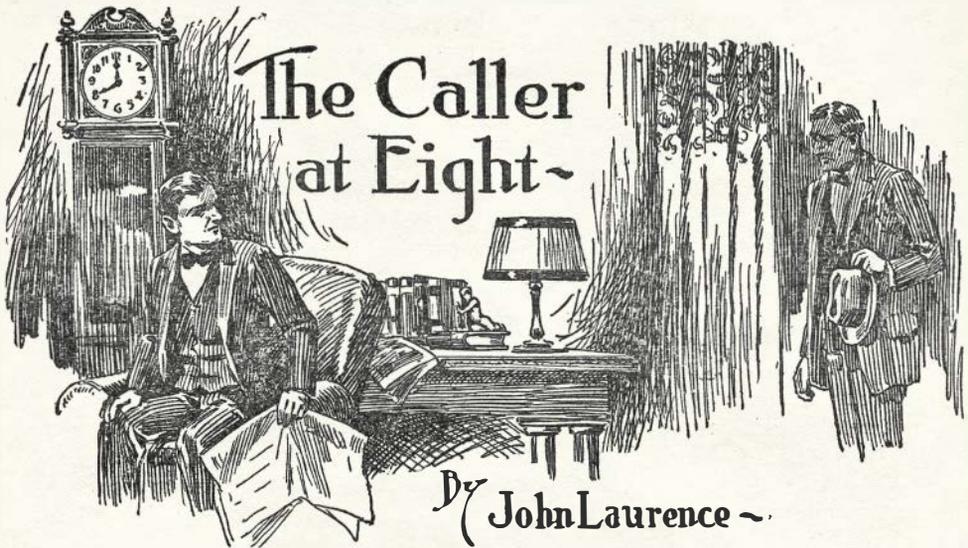
"Now, Mr. Fergusson," he panted, "about that little bill of yours; we cannot wait any longer, and—thank you, your stairs are rather exhausting. I will sit down."

But as he sank heavily into an arm-chair he felt something soft beneath him, and suddenly that something gave vent to the most terrible scream the mind of man can imagine.

"Good gracious!" he cried, springing up in alarm. "I've killed the child!"

Portly as he was, he rushed out of the room and down the stairs at a rate which would have shamed many a professional runner.

"Well," said Fergusson, as he removed his set of bagpipes from the arm-chair, "wha wad hae thocht the wee pipes wad hae been sae useful?"



AFTER he had taken a fresh cigar from the box by his side, Robert Fleming lighted it carefully. He frowned slightly as he threw the match into the fire, and his cold blue eyes stared once more at the letter on the table. The handwriting and the signature were unknown to him, but the contents were significant. The letter, brief and to the point, read:

DEAR SIR: I shall call to-night at eight o'clock to see you with regard to a new point that has arisen in connection with the fortune recently left you by John Richmond.

RICHARD KING.

The letter had arrived by the half-past-seven post.

For a quarter of an hour exactly Robert Fleming had turned it over carefully in his mind, and had then rung for the butler, and curtly informed him that he expected a visitor at eight o'clock. "Show him in here at once when he comes," Fleming ordered.

During the next few minutes he made certain preparations. His own easy-chair was placed, for example, so that the shadow of the electric lamp fell on his face. The companion chair was so

placed that the light would fall directly on the face of any one sitting in that chair. From a drawer, which he unlocked, in the writing table, he took a small revolver and slipped it into his right-hand jacket pocket. It seemed curiously small in those heavy, fat hands, but it had a look of deadly efficiency.

The little clock had just ceased chiming the hour when the library door was opened and the butler announced: "Mr. King, sir."

II.

THERE entered a man whose face had a ghastly paleness about it, a man who looked as though he had been fighting a losing battle for many months. He shivered slightly as he entered, and drew his threadbare coat closer around him. He gave one the impression that he had been a bigger man, physically, at one time, an impression strengthened by the slight stoop. He stood by the door without speaking, until it had closed behind him.

"Mr. Fleming?" he asked then, and his voice had a harsh tone.

"Yes," replied the other, his eyes losing nothing of his visitor's appearance.

"Won't you take a seat?" He indicated the leather chair.

Richard King sank slowly into it and turned his white hands toward the cheerful blaze in the hearth. "It is cold to-night, bitter cold," he remarked. "Bitter cold, Mr. Fleming. You got my letter?"

"Yes. What do you want?" asked Fleming irritably. "It has only just come. I might not have been in."

This man annoyed him by his very contrast with himself. The world had done well by Fleming, and the world most certainly had not done well by Richard King. However, Fleming did not allow his irritation to get control of his nerves. He wasn't a man of that kind. He had always prided himself upon keeping his emotions well within their proper limits. His success had, indeed, depended upon his self-control.

"One is always in to visitors like me," replied the other, and his unnaturally bright eyes looked up into the other's. "If you had not been in I should not have called."

"What do you mean?" Fleming asked sharply.

"I have come to talk to you about John Richmond," continued Richard King, ignoring the question. "His death was of great interest to me."

"Yes?" The monosyllable was colorless, but Fleming's hand moved quickly from the arm of the chair to his jacket pocket.

"You recall the exact circumstances of his death, naturally," continued the caller. "It was comparatively recent, and it meant such a change to you."

Robert Fleming leaned forward, and his clean-shaven jaw seemed to project more than usual. Somehow that word "naturally" had jarred on him. "If you can't come to the point of your visit," he said with irritation, "you must go. I can't have my time wasted."

"Whatever I say will not waste your time, Mr. Fleming," replied the other,

rubbing the backs of his hands as though they were still cold. "It is necessary that I should recall to you the exact circumstances of the death of your employer. Perhaps," he continued with a reflective air, "perhaps you would prefer me to recall the circumstances to Inspector Draycott?"

"Go on," said Fleming harshly, keeping his hand in his pocket.

"Well, then, John Richmond was found dead in his private room at his office six months ago to-day," continued the man who called himself Richard King. "You will doubtless recall that the discovery was made by yourself on your arrival at business, and you immediately summoned one of the clerks and ordered a doctor to be fetched. Mr. Richmond was sitting in his chair with his head on his desk. By his side were an overturned glass and a half-emptied bottle of whisky. To cut a long story short, it was afterward shown that Mr. Richmond had died from poisoning."

"Prussic acid, I believe," said Fleming impassively.

"Prussic acid, you know." King spoke decisively. "At the inquest you gave evidence, as being the one most closely in touch with the man, that he had been unusually reticent the last few months. You gave the impression that your employer had not been his usual self, that he had been worrying over something. The coroner caught that impression from you and forced, from you, reluctantly, of course, that John Richmond had received a number of murderous threats from his nephew, a notorious spendthrift."

III.

AFTER throwing open his coat, King paused. "Do you mind if I take it off?" he asked softly. "I find this room is very warm."

"The coroner adjourned the inquest a week for the attendance of the

nephew," continued King, as he placed his overcoat carefully on the back of the chair, which he moved a little farther from the fire. The shadow of the electric light fell across his face, as it had done all the time across that of Robert Fleming.

"Four days later," the visitor went on, the harshness of his voice seeming to become steadily more pronounced to his listener, who sat immovable, expressionless, "the body of a man was found on the railroad tracks near Streatham Common station. The face was unrecognizable, for the wheels of the train had passed over it. A blood-stained paper, torn into pieces by the train, was found near the body.

"Those fragments," King proceeded, "were with difficulty pieced together, and as far as the police could make out the original wording was, 'I killed my uncle. Arthur Richmond.' The body was afterward recognized from a tattoo mark on the wrist as being that of the dead man's nephew. He had been staying at a common lodging house at Blackfriars, and had disappeared a few hours before you gave your evidence."

He was silent for a moment and his bright eyes wandered around the room, resting appreciatively on the rows of books. John Fleming neither moved nor spoke; but his blue eyes seemed colder than ever as he looked unwinkingly at the visitor.

"Arthur Richmond was the old man's only relative," continued the man who called himself Richard King. "And it was proved that his uncle had twice threatened to cut him completely out of his will, as it was also proved that the nephew had been overheard in the lodging house saying that he had a miserly old uncle whom he wished some one would do in, to use his own phrase. One of these wrecks of humanity even dared to assert that the nephew had told him he'd do him in himself if he had the chance.

"As a result of those discoveries a verdict of willful murder was returned against Arthur Richmond, who was declared to have committed suicide. You will remember, Mr. Fleming, that you were asked when you had last seen Arthur Richmond, and you stated that you had never seen him in your life, that you did not know him."

"That was what I did state," said Robert Fleming, and only his lips moved. His whole body was rigid, his hand in his jacket pocket, his eyes fixed on the man before him.

"John Richmond's will caused a day's sensation in the newspapers," continued the visitor in his harsh voice. "You will remember the astonishment you publicly expressed at the contents of the will. There was no doubt as to the genuineness of the document, for John Richmond's own lawyer drew it up, and it was signed and witnessed in his office. Of course, it is a mere platitude to recite its contents to you. John Richmond left all his property to his nephew, Arthur Richmond, failing whom——"

His voice ceased suddenly, and Robert Fleming could hear the caller's soft breathing. The strain on Fleming's nerves was increasing, but the iron control he exercised prevented any outward sign.

The clock seemed to have ticked interminably, before his visitor spoke again.

"Failing whom," King finished, "the whole of John Richmond's property was left to his confidential clerk, Robert Fleming."

His voice dropped, and the grip of Fleming's right hand slowly relaxed.

IV.

ALL this, Mr. King," Fleming said evenly, "is public property. I thought, while you were speaking, that you were going to tell me something that wasn't known to everybody."

"I am." The visitor's voice had taken on a stronger tone. "You told the coroner you had never seen the dead man's nephew, just as you gave evidence that the murdered man had told you of the threats he had received."

King was beginning to speak rapidly now, and his voice was rising. "But Arthur Richmond had seen you, Mr. Robert Fleming, if you hadn't seen him. Arthur Richmond knew you, Mr. Robert Fleming, knew that in one part of your story you were lying and guessed you were lying in all. Arthur Richmond knew you had murdered his uncle, and——"

"You are suffering from delusions, my friend," broke in the toneless voice of Fleming. "Arthur Richmond was found on the railroad tracks, dead."

"A dead man was found on the railroad tracks," cried his visitor. "His face was unrecognizable. The tattoo mark on his wrist was an anchor. Hundreds of men are tattooed on their wrists with an anchor. I am."

He pulled up his sleeve with a quick motion and thrust it under the light. "Look! Look carefully, Mr. Robert Fleming! My face is not crushed. I am not unrecognizable. I—I am Arthur Richmond, the man you've never seen!"

Robert Fleming laughed discordantly. "You're a fool as well as a liar, Mr. Richard King," he began, and then changed his tone; "but you've guessed too much, and guessing's not good for anybody! Don't move, or I'll blow your brains out. There's a revolver in my pocket and my hand's on the trigger. I'm a first-class shot and these walls are practically soundproof. Now then, you silly, prying idiot, who are you?" He spoke savagely, his left hand held out with a threatening gesture.

"For Heaven's sake," cried Richard King, "put it away! I didn't mean no harm, sir. I thought I'd bluff. I want money. I'm starving. I—I met——"

"You were in that lodging house in Blackfriars with Richmond?" asked Fleming sharply. He was thinking rapidly now.

"Yes, sir. I—I saw you——" King began, shrinking into his chair.

"You—saw—me—with—Richmond," said Fleming, and each word seemed catapulted out. "And how many people have you told that to, you fool?"

"No one, sir. I swear it!" the other cried, whining. "I swear it! I thought that——"

"You thought!" interrupted Fleming. "You're past thinking, you dog! You saw me with Arthur Richmond, and you know too much. You know I killed him, so you may as well know I poisoned the old fool, his uncle; but you'll never live to prate your knowledge. You'll——"

Fleming broke off with a snarl of rage as a pair of arms like steel pincers closed on him suddenly from behind, and the man who called himself Richard King sprang out of his chair, jerked his wrists together, and held them there with cold steel.

"I arrest you for the murders of John Richmond and his nephew, Arthur Richmond," cried Robert Fleming's visitor. "I am Detective Sergeant Wilkinson, of Scotland Yard."

A figure stepped from behind the handcuffed man. It was Chief Inspector Draycott. "You ought to have been an actor, Wilkinson," he said dryly.

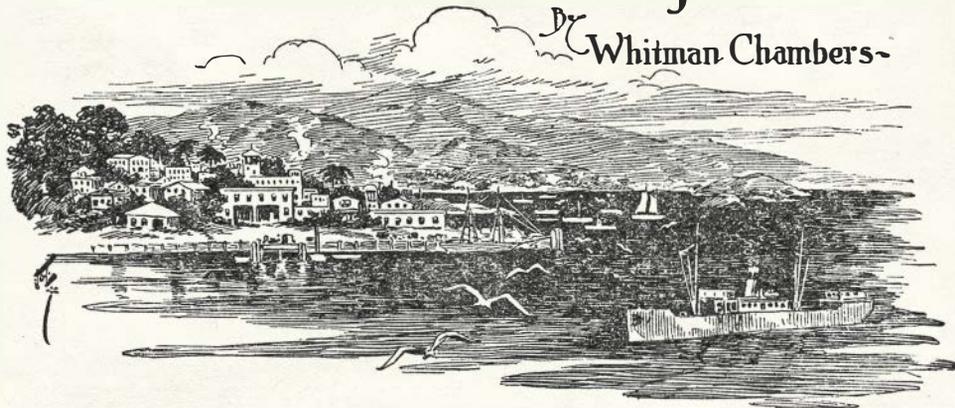
An Everyday Drum

JOHNNY had requested that his birthday present should be a drum, and as his birthday drew near he began to stipulate very particularly that it should be a Salvation Army drum. He was so earnest on this point that his mother asked him his reasons.

"It must be a Salvation Army drum, 'cos I want to play it on Sundays!"

The Coast of Intrigue ~

By Whitman Chambers-



CHAPTER I.

AN ODD SITUATION.

LEANING back in his deck chair, Bob Atwell watched the low shore line slip slowly by. The afternoon was hot and sultry; there was no breeze save that occasioned by the movement of the little tramp steamer, and ten knots were little better than no breeze at all. The sea was blue, a deep tropic blue, and glassy smooth. The *Mazatlan* rolled slowly to the long ground swell.

Atwell's dark eyes, scanning the shore line, were as eager as a boy's. Condota—Andegoya—South America! These were magic names to him who had spent twenty-eight years in the placer fields of California. His earliest playground had been a gold dredger on the Yuba. As he looked back over the years, it seemed that he had never been out of sight nor earshot of one of the big boats. Their ceaseless din, the roar of their bucket lines, and the rattle of rocks on their tailing piles were sheer music to him.

From bankman to oiler, from oiler to winchman, from winchman to dredge master, from dredge master to superintendent—thus he had mounted the rungs of the ladder. And now, within a few

days, he was to climb to the topmost rung; he was to become an independent operator of a platinum dredger.

Platinum was a magic word, for platinum was a metal worth nearly ten times as much as gold. Small wonder, then, that there was an eager light in his keen brown eyes, that he could hardly wait for the little tramp steamer to drop her anchor inside the bar at Condota.

The shore line at last gave way to a small indentation that marked the mouth of the Condota River. Two miles away, dim in the haze of dancing heat waves, Atwell made out the sprawling city of Condota. Apparently lifeless it lay, drab, squalid, uninviting, in a little pocket in the hills. Far from alluring, to another it might have been repelling. But to Bob Atwell, after three weeks aboard the *Mazatlan*, it was a more than welcome sight.

There was a clang of bells below decks, and the little steamer's throbbing engines slowed. A hail came from the starboard side, and, swinging his chair about, Atwell saw the dirty sails of the pilot boat close aboard. A moment later a swarthy South American, clad in a makeshift uniform of soiled white ducks, clambered up the sea ladder and made his way officiously to the bridge.

"Well, another half hour and we'll be ashore."

The speaker, who dropped into a chair beside Atwell, was a tall, rather prepossessing man of thirty-five or so. His tanned face, with its closely clipped mustache, was strong, although a trifle hard, particularly about the mouth. He was very tall and very straight, almost commanding. Although, for some unaccountable reason, Atwell had taken an immediate dislike to the man, he had tried to appear friendly toward him during the long trip down the coast from San Francisco, just as he might have been friendly toward a cellmate in a prison. And now, with their destination almost reached, he saw no reason why he should not keep up the pretense. After all, he had no just grounds for disliking James Hackwood. And, too, it was foolish to start off in a new country by making an enemy.

"It won't be any too soon to suit me," the younger man answered the other's remark.

"Eager to get on the job, are you?" the tall man asked.

"Very. I'm as bad as a kid waiting for the last day of school." Atwell laughed. "The last three weeks have got on my nerves."

"On mine too," said Hackwood, grinning good-naturedly. "I suppose your partner will meet you in Condota."

Atwell nodded. "I cabled him I'd be in with the rest of our dredge machinery on the *Mazatlan*. He's been down here for two months, you know, getting the dredger together. I'm bringing down the winches and the last of the machinery for it. We only have about two months left in which to get to work, according to the terms of our concession."

Hackwood nodded thoughtfully, his eyes on the squalid town toward which their boat was steaming under a slow bell.

"What did you say your partner's name is?" he asked quietly.

"Cunningham—'Shorty' Cunningham. He's rather well known down here in Andegoya, I believe. He's been here for years, off and on."

"Yes, I've met him."

There was something in the other's tone, some vague shade of reticence, that caused Atwell to glance at him sharply. The man's eyes, however, were still on the town; they revealed nothing. Atwell wondered. After a time, thinking to draw the other out, he remarked:

"I don't know Cunningham very well. In fact, I was only with him for two weeks. He bought this platinum concession on the Condota River—paid thirty thousand dollars for it—and came to the States to raise money to buy a dredger. Cunningham had been in partnership with my father years ago, and he started to look him up, not knowing that he has been dead for five years. He got in touch with me, and I managed to raise the money. We bought a second-hand dredger and shipped it down here. We should have it working inside of a month."

"Well, I certainly wish you the best of luck," Hackwood said earnestly. Deliberately or involuntarily, Atwell did not know which, there was a suggestion of doubt in the man's manner. What had caused it? the young man asked himself. Did Hackwood know Cunningham? Did he know that the mining man was not trustworthy?

For a moment Atwell felt a vague uneasiness creeping over him. Every cent he had in the world was tied up in this venture. If Cunningham proved to be crooked—Hastily he put aside the thought. Cunningham was all right. He'd stake everything he had on his partner's integrity; indeed, that was exactly what he had done.

And this man Hackwood wasn't going to sow any seeds of suspicion in his mind, either. He had been suspicious of Hackwood from the first, for that

matter. To the casual observer the man seemed all right; but there was something about his eyes, some vague disinclination to meet the gaze of another, that Atwell did not like. Hackwood's eyes were not shifty; it wasn't that exactly; still, there was something about them that had put Atwell on his guard and made him suspect that Hackwood was not the honorable mahogany operator he pretended to be.

The *Mazatlan* ran the bar in safety and dropped her anchor a quarter of a mile from the shore.

"They won't allow us to tie up to the dock until to-morrow. Quarantine regulations," Hackwood remarked. He rose from his chair. "We are privileged to go ashore, however. Coming along, Atwell?"

"No; I think I shall stay aboard until Cunningham shows up," the other answered. "I suppose he is in town and will come right out. I don't know much about things down here, and he will have to make the arrangements for getting our machinery up the river. If I landed I might miss him."

Hackwood laughed, all but his strange gray eyes.

"From the way you talked, I thought you wouldn't waste a minute getting ashore. I know, for my part, I've seen enough of this dirty tub. Better come over the side with me; there's a good hotel in town. A regular meal and a few cool drinks should go pretty well after three weeks of this stuff. I'll be glad to take you around and show you the town. Better come along."

"Thanks." Atwell shook his head. "I'll wait until Cunningham shows up."

Hackwood hesitated; then he shrugged and strode off down the deck toward his cabin. Something told Atwell that there was more than casual friendliness behind the tall mahogany operator's invitation. Hackwood had impressed him all along as not being entirely sincere. Now, particularly, he

sensed that the man had been actuated by some other motive than mere sociability.

What was that motive? Indeed, why should James Hackwood, reputed to be one of the biggest exporters of mahogany in the Republic of Andegoya, take any interest in him?

Atwell rose from his chair and took a turn up and down the deck. The hot steel burned through the soles of his shoes, and he finally climbed the ladder to the after-deck house and went into his cabin. Not a breath of air was stirring. The little cubbyhole was like a furnace. Yet Atwell dropped onto his berth and relaxed, grappling with the problem which lay before him.

Five minutes passed, during which no solution presented itself. Then he heard footsteps on the deck outside. He recognized instantly the short, mincing steps of that fat skipper, José Munoz. Then a low voice came to his ears. It was Hackwood's. The man spoke in Spanish. Atwell caught only a single sentence: "*Nosotros tenemos que echarlo del vapor!*"

Atwell repeated the sentence slowly to himself. His Spanish, learned in high school, was not too fluent, despite the fact that he had spent the last three weeks brushing it up. Yet he was able to translate that single sentence: "We will have to get him off the ship!"

Who did Hackwood have in mind when he had made that declaration to Munoz? Atwell smiled grimly. To whom but himself could he have referred? Hackwood certainly had not been talking about a member of the crew, and there were no other passengers aboard.

"H'm! Rather an odd situation," Atwell reflected. "Now why, in the name of common sense, does Hackwood want to get me off the ship? And what interest has the captain got in me? H'm! I certainly wish Shorty Cunningham would put in an appearance."

CHAPTER II.

A FRAUDULENT LETTER.

HE is a hard-headed young fool, José," James Hackwood remarked shortly to the captain of the *Mazatlan*. "I knew that the minute I set eyes on him. I am afraid we are going to have trouble with him."

An hour had passed, an hour of bustle and confusion, with the port authorities swarming over the decks and delving into matters that did not concern them. Now they had gone. The *Mazatlan* swung quietly at her anchor. But Captain José Munoz was still in an unpleasant mood. Port authorities always irked him. He was a short man, very fat, with beady black eyes set in a round moon face. Impatiently he filled two glasses with whisky and handed one of them to Hackwood. Then he dropped onto the transom at the side of his cabin and rubbed a pudgy hand over his greasy forehead.

Hackwood drained his glass at a gulp. The captain sipped his liquor slowly, staring at his companion through half-closed, resentful eyes.

"Why bother me about him?" he demanded, speaking in Spanish, as Hackwood had done. "In another hour it will be dark. One of my quartermasters is very handy with a knife. Why not pay him fifty dollars and get our young friend out of the way for good and all?"

Hackwood scowled and dropped into a chair, hoisting his feet to the table.

"José, you are impossible," he remarked disgustedly. "Do you not remember that at least twenty of Atwell's friends saw him off in San Francisco? If they do not hear from him, what will happen? There will be an investigation, of course. Your master's ticket is not any too secure, as it is. One more shady job, and you will lose it. Not that I give a hang about that, but we need you right now and cannot afford any

kind of an investigation. Murder is foolhardy at all times, José, and it is particularly foolhardy at a time like this when we must play our cards carefully."

The fat shoulders shrugged; Munoz took another sip of liquor.

"An entry in the log. Storm. Lost at sea."

"Yes; a fine explanation, particularly after the port authorities have just looked over the log, and no report has been made of any one lost at sea. No; that is quite out of the question, José."

"Get him drunk," Munoz suggested with another shrug of his ponderous shoulders.

"But the fool doesn't drink," Hackwood objected testily.

"Think it out for yourself, then; it is not my affair. I am going ashore now to arrange for the launches. At midnight I shall be back with them. We can have them loaded by four, when the tide is high enough for them to slip out over the bar. Atwell—I shall leave him to you."

"Very kind of you, I am sure, Señor El Capitan," Hackwood remarked dryly, rising from his chair. "I shall see what I can do with him."

Hackwood passed out of the cabin and paced slowly down the narrow deck. His eyes were on the town of Condota. The air was beginning to grow cooler; the town would soon awaken. There was a comfortable hotel there, fairly good food, cooling drinks, music in the plaza, and a certain young woman whom he wanted very much to see. And yet he faced an unfinished task aboard the *Mazatlan*; a hard-headed young American must in some way be forced to go ashore. How could the trick be turned?

Hackwood suddenly smiled, nodded reassuringly to himself, and strode into his cabin. Opening his suit case, he pulled out a sheet of letter paper and an envelope. "Dear Bob," he wrote and then shook his head.

"No; that won't do," he mused. "I don't know whether Cunningham would call him 'Bob' or 'Mr. Atwell.' Besides, I don't know what the old man's handwriting is like, and Atwell probably does."

Getting another sheet of paper, he started again. This time he wrote:

MR. ATWELL: Shorty Cunningham has asked me to tell you that he has been called up the river and will not be able to meet you until morning. He wishes you to take a room at the Hotel de la Plaza and wait for him there.

Hackwood paused and then signed the first name that came into his head: "Edward Templeton." Sealing the note and addressing it to Robert Atwell, Hackwood called a mess attendant and ordered him to deliver it to the other passenger, with the information that it had just been brought out from town. He waited five minutes by his watch and then walked down the deck to Atwell's cabin and knocked on the door.

"Come in," came the younger man's voice.

Hackwood opened the door and strode nonchalantly into the cabin.

"I just thought I'd drop in and say good-by, Atwell," the tall man said disarmingly. "I am going ashore now and may not see you again soon. I shall probably be going up the river in the morning."

Atwell was still holding the note that the mess attendant had delivered to him. He glanced at it for a moment without replying. Was the young fool suspicious? Hackwood asked himself. How could he be? Still, to all outward appearances, he seemed to be weighing its authenticity. When Atwell finally glanced up, there was decision in his cool brown eyes, and he rose to his feet.

"I've changed my mind, Hackwood," he said. "I will go ashore with you, after all. Another night aboard this ship is more than I can stomach. Can you wait until I pack my bag?"

"Gladly. I'll meet you on the forward-well deck."

The tall figure passed out of the stateroom. Atwell's lips twisted in a faint smile, as he watched him go. His face clouded, however, as he glanced again at the note in his hand. Then he shrugged, crumpled it into a ball, and tossed it into the corner. It was a ruse, of course, he told himself.

"Something is up," he mused. "A blind man could see that, and yet I'm so blamed green that I haven't the faintest idea of what it's all about. But I guess the only way to find out is to go ashore with our mysterious friend. So here goes."

The town of Condota was squalid and indescribably dirty. Small, ramshackle shops and warehouses crowded against each other, apparently for mutual support, on either side of the narrow, cobbled streets. Natives, scantily clad, lounged in the shady places. Children and dogs thronged the streets. A profusion of odors, as unrecognizable as they were unpleasant, assailed his nostrils. Atwell's lips tightened, as he walked along beside his tall companion. If this were a fair sample of the Republic of Andegoya, he almost wished he had stayed in California.

But, as with cities the world over, Condota put its worst foot forward. As they progressed up the main street, the buildings gradually became more impressive, the streets less dirty, the smells less offensive. The big plaza, with its palms and tropical shrubs and tinkling fountains, was quite inviting. And the hotel was a pleasant surprise. It was a large, rambling structure, two stories in height and built in the Spanish mission style. The room which was assigned to Atwell looked over the sea.

The palm-fringed dining room, in which they ordered dinner, was cool and inviting, with its fresh linen and sparkling silver and dim lights.

"Quite a change from the saloon on

the old *Mazatlan*," Hackwood remarked, as the waiter came up to them. "This hotel is one in a thousand. You won't find many on the west coast of South America as good as this. Rich town, Condota; progressive, too. Untold resources, Atwell; absolutely untold. Mahogany, platinum, gold. The Choco, as we call the jungle up the river, is one of the richest sections in the world. All it needs is the money to develop it—money and initiative and daring. You've got to have them all, Atwell, if you expect to get ahead in this country."

Hackwood broke off to order their dinner. After the waiter had departed, Atwell's host rose and excused himself.

"Back in a moment. A little business that I must attend to."

Atwell's eyes half closed, as he watched the tall form stride across the room and disappear into the lobby. What was he up to? What, in the name of common sense, was the man's game? Something underhanded was going on. Just what it could be was more than Atwell could even conjecture.

Of course, Cunningham had warned him that there might be trouble. The concession that he had acquired was worth a small fortune. Other interests had been out to get it, and the mere fact that it had been awarded to Cunningham did not mean that their efforts would cease. But what motive could impel any one—Hackwood, for example—to hasten his departure from the *Mazatlan*?

While these thoughts were running through his mind, and while he was considering an inclination to bolt from the dining room and go back to the *Mazatlan*, he saw a man and a woman enter the dining room. Singly, either one was more than enough to compel the attention of an observer; together, they formed as striking a couple as Atwell had ever seen.

The man was tall, fully as tall as Hackwood, and walked with the military

bearing and grace of a soldier. Obviously a native Andegoyan or some other South American State, his features displayed none of the mingling of negro blood which Atwell had already learned was almost a universal characteristic of the peoples south of the Canal. His nose was straight and aquiline, his black eyes piercing, his forehead high, his lips firm and strong, despite a slight suggestion of cruelty and ruthlessness. Across the left breast of his spotless white uniform were a half dozen medals.

His companion was under thirty, tall, as graceful in her movements as a lioness. She wore a tight-fitting black gown which accentuated the unusual whiteness of her skin. Her eyes were large, black, languorous; her lips were full and exquisitely chiseled. Her black shining hair was worn straight back from her forehead and was adorned with a long, curving comb of ivory. Standing in the doorway of the dining room, gazing languidly from table to table, she made a most compelling picture.

Atwell's eyes were still on the couple, and he was wondering vaguely who they might be, when he saw Hackwood hurry up behind them and tap the man on the shoulder. The tall native turned, his face lighted, and he shook hands warmly with the American. The woman, too, extended her hand to Hackwood. For several moments they stood talking. Then, motioning toward his table, Hackwood led the way across the dining room. Atwell rose.

"My two best friends in Andegoya," Hackwood explained, with a warm smile. "Señorita de Rico, Mr. Atwell."

The girl's eyes met Atwell's. They were warm and vaguely provocative. The hand she extended was slender and graceful. Atwell clasped it only for an instant, but in that brief space he felt strongly the powerful magnetism of her personality. No ordinary young woman

was this, he told himself, half breathlessly. No, indeed; here was beauty as pure and fresh as desert rain, power to sway kingdoms, strength of character and vitality.

CHAPTER III.

ATWELL DECIDES.

HALF dazedly, in halting, high-school Spanish, Atwell acknowledged Hackwood's introduction. With his words the woman's lips curved in the most delicate of smiles, and there was a momentary flash of pearly, even teeth.

"I am very glad to make your acquaintance, Señor Atwell," she said in the mellowest of contralto voices.

The young man flushed hotly; he might have known a woman of her type would speak English!

"And this, Atwell," Hackwood went on with the introductions, "is Señor Xavier Juarte, the *entendente* of Condotá. In the States you would call him the governor."

Atwell shook hands with the *entendente*; a strong handclasp, a faintly whimsical smile on Juarte's lips, a steady, penetrating gaze from piercing black eyes.

"Señorita de Rico and the *entendente* have honored us," Hackwood went on grandly, "by consenting to take dinner with us. I know you would like to meet them, Atwell."

"Indeed, it is a great pleasure," that young man responded.

"Atwell is a partner of Shorty Cunningham's," Hackwood went on to explain to the *entendente*, as they seated themselves. "They have taken over a platinum concession up the river, I believe."

Juarte nodded gravely. "I am very well acquainted with Cunningham," he remarked in perfect English. "In fact, I awarded him the very concession he is going to work. It is very rich—very rich, indeed. You are fortunate, Señor Atwell. That concession will make you

a rich man, richer than you have ever dreamed. If only I had been able to command sufficient money to bring in a dredger of my own!" He waved his long tapering hands in an expressive gesture of resignation. "Alas, it is the same with all my countrymen. Boundless resources we have, but no capital to exploit them. We are compelled to stand idly by, while the Americans, the English, and the Germans develop our great land."

As Atwell half expected, when he saw the trend of the other's conversation, Juarte could not keep a certain bitterness from creeping into his voice. Atwell had been warned of this attitude on the part of the native Andegoyans. And, in a way, he resented it. After all, if Americans and Englishmen and Germans were willing to risk their money in a foreign land, why should they not reap a profit? The risk, surely, was theirs. And from all the tales he had heard of South America, particularly of the west coast, the risk was certainly great enough to justify huge profits. He had no opportunity to give voice to his thoughts, however, even had he been so inclined. Hackwood took up the conversation, in much the same manner that Atwell himself might have done.

"You must admit, your excellency, that our enterprises down here are not what we in America would call sure-thing propositions. There is a great element of chance. Suppose, for instance, that Andegoya should become torn by revolution. What, then, would happen to our investments here?"

"Nonsense, señor!" The *entendente* shrugged his broad shoulders deprecatingly. "We have not had a revolution in ten years. President Quilla is a most able and respected man."

The talk went on, chiefly between Juarte and Hackwood. Commonplace for the most part, touching on many and varied subjects, Atwell nevertheless sensed a vague undercurrent of irony.

Hidden meanings, significant glances, and an air of mystery and intrigue, were apparent. He wondered if it might be only his imagination, if he saw these things solely because he had been expecting them.

So absorbed did he become with these speculations, that he was halfway through with his dinner before he recalled that his own presence there was under peculiar circumstances. He knew now with definite certainty that Hackwood had deliberately conspired to get him off the *Mazatlan*. And again the question: why? What interest had Hackwood in him? Why should this influential and prepossessing mahogany operator interest himself in the affairs of a junior partner in a dredging enterprise?

Throughout the rest of the meal, while he talked more or less constrainedly with Señorita de Rico of his work in the gold fields of California, these questions were racing unanswered through the back of his mind. In a way, he regretted his haste in leaving the ship. He had acted on impulse more than on anything else. Sensing that Hackwood wanted him to leave, he had felt that his departure might hasten a solution of the mystery. Now, more than anything else, he wished he were back in his stuffy cabin aboard the *Mazatlan*.

Despite the gracious presence of Señorita de Rico, and the extremely pleasant consciousness that she seemed interested in him and his work, the dinner progressed slowly. His companions ate sparingly of the many courses that were set before them, but with exasperating lack of haste. Their manner seemed to tell him plainly that the whole evening was before them, that there was no more enjoyable way of passing the time, and that a few hours more or less, spent at the table, were by no means wasted.

Patiently Atwell resigned himself to

the inevitable. Coming from a country where the average person sits down to table only to satisfy his hunger and is up and on his way again as soon as possible, this dallying irked him immeasurably. But he knew better than to say anything or even to attempt to excuse himself. Such an action would be construed as little short of an insult to the *entendente* and his beautiful companion. And Atwell knew enough of South America to know that the success of his whole enterprise depended on keeping in the good graces of all and sundry officials whom he chanced to meet.

Señorita de Rico's personality, he found, as he grew better acquainted with her, was even more captivating than her beauty. She was charming in every sense of the word. But underneath her charm and her singular beauty he sensed that there were hidden fires, fires that waited only the slightest provocation to burst into flame. He felt that this young woman was something of a tigress, and equally ruthless. Her voice, her glance, her very presence, made his nerves tingle.

He hoped that in the months to come he would grow better acquainted with the Señorita de Rico; hoped, yes, and feared, too. There was something awesome about her, he felt vaguely. Her charm and beauty and freshness and vitality were obvious qualities. But there was some unknown power that, used for good, might work miracles, and, used for evil, might kill as ruthlessly as a tigress. Ruthlessness! Yes; that was the word, though it seemed almost a sacrilege to apply it to this Madonnalike creature. Yet it fitted her undeniably. What powers were hers! What powers to love and to hate! He hoped that he might never incur her enmity. Her love—well, the thought was a little staggering and quite presumptuous.

It was after nine o'clock before they left the table; another half hour passed

before Juartez and Señorita de Rico had spoken their good-bys and departed to keep an engagement at the home of some government official.

"It has made me very happy to meet you," was the young woman's adieu to Atwell, spoken in the quaint way that was peculiar to her. For an instant she held him under the spell of her dazzling eyes; then her long lashes half hid them, as she added: "I hope it will be my pleasure to see you again."

Although he was conscious of Juartez's cool glance, Atwell nevertheless met her compliment in kind.

"The pleasure has been all mine, Señorita de Rico. Nothing could make me happier than to see you again—and soon."

Flashing him a most entrancing smile, she took the governor's arm and started toward the door. She glanced back once, and this time her eyes were for no one but Hackwood. She smiled faintly at the mahogany magnate, a smile that was oddly enigmatical. Hackwood caught her look, and a strange light came into his eyes. Was it jealousy, bitterness, or pique?

Atwell did not know. Certain it was, however, that Hackwood was on more than familiar terms with Señorita de Rico; and it was almost equally certain that he both respected and feared the *entendante*.

The young man smiled to himself. South American duplicity and Latin intrigue were in the wind. It always was in these smaller South American republics, he had been told. He sensed it in the soft, languorous air that blew in through the open windows, in the fragments of Spanish that came to his ears from the various guests who thronged the lobby, and in the typically Latin-American atmosphere that pervaded the whole city.

Atwell wondered with quickening pulse if he would ever become involved in it. He hoped, for his own well-being,

that he would not. But he knew, even as he was conscious of the reckless fire of youth that coursed through his veins, that he could not become a part of this republic for long and still keep out of it.

"Beautiful, isn't she?" Hackwood's words were almost inaudible, so absorbed was Atwell in his own musings. "Quite a romance connected with Dolores de Rico."

Atwell looked up at this. "Yes?" he asked politely.

"She was raised by old Juan de Rico and his wife, who were very high-class people. They were one of the few pure-blooded Spanish families in the country. Both are dead now, however. Dolores was about six months old when she was taken into the family. According to the tale, Dolores' mother and father were unfortunate lovers, whose parents frowned upon their marriage. Often happens down here, you know, where the parents make the matches. These two lovers didn't care for the match-making of their parents, so they ran away and got married, quite as an American couple would do.

"However, there seems to have been something faulty about the marriage. The girl was under age or something. Anyway, her folks found them after about two years of searching, took the mother and the baby away, and had the marriage annulled. The baby was given to the De Ricos to raise, and they did a good job of it, as you may see. Incidentally, they left her a small fortune when they died."

"And her mother and father—were they ever united?" Atwell asked, only mildly interested.

"Oh, no! The mother killed herself a year or two afterward. For that matter, no one even knows who Dolores' parents were. The whole affair was kept very secret, of course. It would never have come out at all if old Juan de Rico hadn't got a bit talkative just

before he died. His mind was wandering a bit, I guess. However, he never did tell who the mother and father were, and he carried the secret to his grave."

Hackwood paused and then, locking his arm in Atwell's, went on hospitably: "Well, what can I offer you now? There is the inevitable band concert in the plaza. The music, however, is abominable. There is a motion-picture theater in town, but the best people don't patronize it. Really, there is very little in the way of excitement to offer you."

"That suits me exactly," Atwell returned with some enthusiasm. "Excitement is the last thing in the world that I am looking for. That trip down the coast tired me out. I don't know why it should, with nothing to do all day long, but it certainly did. I am quite willing to call it a night and go to bed."

"Suit yourself, old man," the other returned genially. "I don't know but what I'll hit the hay myself before long."

Atwell thanked his host for his hospitality and kindness, bade him good night, and walked over to the desk for the key to his room. He pocketed it and glanced over his shoulder to assure himself that Hackwood had not followed him across the lobby. Then he addressed a question to the clerk.

"Is Edward Templeton in the hotel?" It was the name that had been signed to the note bidding him come ashore.

"Edward Templeton?" the clerk repeated with a shake of his head. "We have no such guest, señor."

"Have you ever heard of a man by that name in Andegoya?"

"No, señor; the name is unfamiliar."

"Very well. Thank you."

So he guessed aright, after all. The note had been a ruse, probably written by Hackwood himself. Atwell went up to his room and dropped onto the bed, without removing his clothes or turning out the light.

What was Hackwood's game? He

asked himself this question for the hundredth time since coming ashore. Suddenly he recalled a remark of Juartez's at dinner. The *entendente* had wished that he had possessed a dredger to work the concession which he had sold to Cunningham. Atwell sat bolt upright. There was a clew. Hackwood and Juartez, working together, intended to steal their dredge machinery from the *Mazatlan*. That was Hackwood's reason for getting him off the ship.

Still, that wasn't exactly logical. The machinery that he had brought down from San Francisco on the *Mazatlan* was only a small part of a dredger; without the other parts it would be useless. And he knew that Shorty Cunningham had the other parts safely transported up the river and assembled. Of course, Juartez and Hackwood might have gained possession of them in some way; but that was hardly plausible. The country wasn't as lawless as all that.

No; there must be some other explanation of Hackwood's unwonted interest in him. And he knew that there was only one way to find that out, and that was to go back aboard the *Mazatlan*. Rising from the bed, he removed an automatic pistol from his bag and slipped it into his pocket. Then he walked calmly out into the dimly lighted hall and made his way toward the back of the hotel.

CHAPTER IV.

HIGH-HANDED TACTICS.

AS Atwell had expected, there was a rear entrance to the hotel, and he soon found himself in a dark alley behind the building. It was an eerie place, this alley in an unknown town of a strange country. From all about him came the myriad sounds of the city: the faint blare of the band in the plaza, the metallic twang of a guitar in a near-by building, the raucous call of a street vender, the plaintive crying of a baby.

Atwell felt oddly alone and friend-

less, as he made his way out of the side street and down along the main thoroughfare toward the water front. It wasn't exactly homesickness; for years he had not known the meaning of a home. Rather, it was merely an unusual depression—unusual, because his spirit was not one easily depressed.

The atmosphere of this strange city seemed tense with menace. The darkness, the deep shadows of the squalid buildings that lined the lower section of the street, the slow-moving, almost stealthy natives he encountered, the warm, humid air he breathed—everything conspired to dampen his spirits and fill him with uncertainty and anxiety.

He wasn't afraid. It wasn't that, exactly. So far as he knew, there was nothing as yet to be afraid of. But the feeling persisted, even grew apace, as he neared the docks. He was slightly angry now, and he took a firmer grip on himself and on the automatic in his pocket. He wished Cunningham had met him, as he had cabled him to do. Where was the old man, anyway? Why the devil hadn't he shown up, as he had agreed?

Atwell was in an unpleasant frame of mind when he reached the dark gloom of the docks. His nervousness had almost got the better of him. Every shadow seemed to be peopled with crouching forms. A dozen times he felt an inclination to glance over his shoulder; he could almost feel the presence of some one close behind him. But he put it down resolutely. No one had observed him leave the hotel. He had taken precious care to see to that, and he had most certainly not been followed through the town.

In the shadow of one of the ramshackle warehouses on the dock he found a watchman. Mustering his best Spanish, he asked where he might find a boat to take him out into the harbor. The man regarded him curiously, not

to say suspiciously, for a moment before he answered.

"There are no boats to be had at this time, señor," he told Atwell at last.

"But I must get out there!"

"I am very sorry, señor. What ship does the señor wish to board?"

On the point of replying that it didn't make a damned bit of difference what ship he wished to board, Atwell realized that his Spanish was not quite fluent enough for such an emphatic retort. Instead, he merely said:

"I must board one of the ships out in the harbor immediately. Surely you can help me get a launch. I will give you ten dollars if you find me one."

But the watchman shook his head hopelessly. "I would do much for ten dollars, señor, but that I cannot do. In the morning——"

"The morning will be too late. I must have a boat now." And then, as an afterthought: "In the morning my ship will have sailed."

"No ship is leaving the harbor tonight, señor. It is impossible to cross the bar except at high tide. That will be at six to-morrow morning. By that time a boat could be arranged."

Atwell saw it was useless to argue the matter further. Apparently there were no boats to be had at that time of night; either that, or this man was disinclined to tell him where he could get one to take him out.

"Very well," he said shortly. "I shall have to wait until morning."

Turning, he started up the street toward the center of the town. He walked only a block, however. Then he slipped into the shadows and swung back toward the docks. Moored to another pier, a hundred yards from where he had talked to the watchman, Atwell found a small skiff. He hesitated a moment, as he regarded it. To take it would be stealing, of course. No; it would just be borrowing. He would see to it that it was returned in the morning

and would pay the owner for the use of it.

Dropping to his knees, he swung down over the edge of the dock and dropped into the boat. The oars lay across the thwart. Shipping them quietly, he untied the painter. The tide was still ebbing, enough to carry the skiff noiselessly away from the dock. Atwell waited without dipping his oars. The boat drifted with exasperating slowness. Finally, when he was fifty feet from the dock, he bent to the oars. A half mile away, where he had carefully remarked her position that afternoon, he made out faintly the riding lights of the *Mazatlan*. He headed toward them with a smooth, powerful stroke.

He had rowed less than a hundred feet when he heard a babble of voices on the dock. In the faint moonlight he saw the running form of the watchman and, close behind him, the tattered uniform of two *soldados*, the police officers of the city. A shrill challenge rang out across the water. He did not catch the words, but he recognized their portent readily enough. "Halt" sounds the same in almost any language.

Atwell debated an instant, still bending to the oars. He was in an unpleasant situation, if not in actual danger. He had been caught in the act of stealing a boat; and somewhere he had heard that larceny is a rather serious offense in South America, particularly when committed by an American. For him to turn back to the dock would result in his immediate arrest. If he kept on rowing—well, there was a chance that he might elude them.

He glanced quickly over his shoulder. The moon was on the horizon; in another five minutes the harbor would be in darkness. A heavy tropical mist was drifting in from the sea. That, too, would help him. There was little to gain in going back and much to lose. He quickened his stroke resolutely. If they wanted him, let them come and get him.

The shouting continued. Atwell caught the word "shoot."

"Shoot and be damned to you!" he growled under his breath and threw every ounce of his strength onto the oars.

He felt little fear in disregarding the threat of the *soldados*. Their marksmanship was notoriously poor. Besides, he knew that not even a crack shot could shoot over water in moonlight with any degree of accuracy. So, when the first shot rang out, echoing against the darkened warehouses, he felt little trepidation, only a cool contempt for officers who would waste ammunition on such an uncertain target.

He rowed steadily, unmindful of the shots that plopped into the water around him. Gradually the figures on the pier merged into the darkness of the buildings behind them. The firing ceased. The moon sank swiftly below the horizon. Save for the hazy, distant lights of the city and the anchor lights of the half dozen ships which swung at anchor in the bay, utter darkness shrouded the harbor, a darkness so complete that Atwell could barely see the stern of the skiff.

The water was glassy smooth; it was not difficult to row noiselessly. Once the dock and the *soldados* were blotted out by the darkness, Atwell settled to a slower stroke. He knew that it would not be wise to approach the *Mazatlan* too soon. The anchor watch had undoubtedly heard the sound of the shots and might be awake. Better to let them go back to sleep, for sleeping on duty was only one of the many weaknesses of the crew of the *Mazatlan*.

Half an hour passed before he approached the ship. It loomed out of the darkness at last, silent, ghostly, and lifeless, as far as he could see. He swung in under the stern, reconnoitering cautiously. No one hailed him. He felt certain that, even had a lookout been on watch, he would have been unob-

served in the darkness. Pushing cautiously out from under the overhanging stern, he rowed slowly to the sea ladder on the starboard quarter.

He hesitated an instant, undecided whether to secure the skiff or cast it adrift. Then, making up his mind, he swung up onto the sea ladder and let the boat go. Better not take any chances of its giving away his presence; easy enough to look up the owner to-morrow and pay him for it.

Climbing the ladder, he peered cautiously over the railing and up and down the deck. Although there was a light in the captain's cabin, none of the crew was in sight. As he gained the deck and headed aft toward his own cabin, he heard the hiss of escaping steam from the cargo winches and knew that the ship had not been secured for the night. The hatches on the after-well deck, too, were open. Something was afoot. What it was, or how it concerned him, he was yet to learn.

Gaining his cabin, he glided noiselessly inside, closed the door to a mere crack, sat down on the edge of the bunk, and awaited developments. Half an hour passed; an hour. Now and then a foot-fall sounded on the deck outside. Tiny waves beat a ceaseless refrain against the sides of the ship.

Seven bells struck. Through the port-hole of the cabin he could see the lights of the city moving slowly across his line of vision. For an instant he thought the ship was under way. Then he realized that it was merely swinging about with the turn of the tide.

The minutes dragged by slowly. He began to regret his hasty action in returning to the ship. If anything were afoot, it was ten to one it didn't concern him personally. Possibly some smuggling matter that was vital only to the captain and Hackwood, but which they naturally wished to keep secret from any prying American.

Eight bells struck—twelve o'clock. The sound had hardly died away when Atwell heard a boat grate against the side of the *Mazatlan*. Instantly he heard the ship rouse to action, the patter of feet on deck, and the muffled hiss of winches. Gratified that at least his trip had not been entirely in vain, Atwell rose, walked to the door of his stateroom, and opened it cautiously. All the activity, he saw, was on the after-well deck, just below his cabin.

He watched a moment, saw that preparations were being made to transfer cargo to a tug which lay alongside. An uneasiness swept over him. The dredging equipment which he had brought down from San Francisco was in that section of the hold beneath the after-well deck. Was an attempt being made to steal it? Or were these men after some other part of the cargo?

He crept out of his room cautiously. The upper deck at the point was deep in shadow, and, as no lights were being shown on the well deck, he knew that he could watch proceedings without being observed. No time was wasted by the crew. A cargo boom swung over the hold, dropping its sling into the yawning pit below. The winch growled. A heavy box swung up out of the hold. Raised to the height of the upper deck before being swung over the side to the tug, it came so close to Atwell that he could have put out his hand and touched it.

In the glow of the anchor light he saw the black letters on the side of the box: "South American Dredging Company, Condota, Andegoya." It was the name of the company which he and Cunningham had formed.

So that was Hackwood's game, after all—trying to steal his dredge machinery! Well, he'd have a few words to say about the matter, and there was no time like the present to say them.

Drawing his gun, he stepped forward against the rail. On the well deck be-

low, directing the operations, he made out the squat, corpulent figure of Captain José Munoz.

"Just a minute, captain," Atwell barked. "What is the meaning of this?" And then, realizing that the captain's knowledge of English was limited, he repeated his demand in Spanish.

The light was very faint, but still it was strong enough to reveal the look of pained surprise that came over the skipper's fat countenance. The men on the deck, too, turned startled faces upward. Atwell knew that he was in command of the situation, and he made haste to force his advantage.

"Captain, order that box put back aboard the ship, or I'll shoot you down in your tracks," he commanded as sharply as his halting Spanish would permit.

Munoz stared at him for a long moment, his loose mouth agape. Then he spoke haltingly, plainly sparring for time.

"Señor, do you realize that I am the captain of this ship? You have no right to threaten me in this way."

"Haven't I? Well, what right have you to try to steal my cargo?"

"The cargo is not yours, señor."

"But I saw the name of my company painted on that box you put over the side."

"There is some mistake, señor," the captain muttered.

"No; there is no mistake," Atwell contradicted shortly.

Munoz slowly removed his cap and ran an unsteady hand through his hair. Then, apparently making up his mind, he gave a hasty order to his men. It was spoken so swiftly that Atwell could not catch the portent of the words. Their meaning was made plain an instant later, however, when half a dozen men jumped for the ladder leading to the upper deck.

Atwell's blood chilled. He knew that he was in the wrong. He knew that

even in his own country, on a ship of American registry, his high-handed tactics in threatening the captain's life would plunge him into serious trouble; and in Andegoya, with its unfamiliar laws and its antipathy toward foreigners, such a course might lead to the gravest consequences. Taking no chances of being ultimately held to answer to a charge of murder, he pocketed his gun and faced the ladder with clenched fists, determined to put up some sort of a fight at whatever the cost.

He met the first man who appeared at the head of the ladder, with a crashing blow against the jaw. The sailor toppled backward to the deck below. But Atwell, misjudging the distance in the darkness, lost his balance and came dangerously near to following him. He caught the rail just in time, however, and swung out over space for an instant. By the time he had recovered his footing, three men had gained the upper deck. They came at him together.

Atwell singled out the largest and launched a vicious attack against him, fighting off the other two as best he could. He had the satisfaction of seeing the man crumple under a rain of blows. As he swung about to meet the others, he was conscious that more sailors had streamed up the ladder behind him. He turned quickly and knocked one of them down with a powerful uppercut. A moment later he was in the vortex of myriad swinging fists.

He fought doggedly for a time, head down, surging this way and that, striving valiantly to keep his footing against the many clutching hands which strove to drag him to the deck. Suddenly he heard the screech of a siren close aboard. Then the silver rays of a powerful searchlight cut the darkness, swung the length of the ship, and came to rest on the fighting mass of tangled forms on the after deck.

The sailors withdrew abruptly, staring wild-eyed into the silver pencil of

light. Groggy as Atwell was by this time, the meaning of the searchlight penetrated his fogged brain instantly. A revenue cutter, with government officials! Thank Heaven, an interruption had come before these greasers had put him out. He chuckled to himself. The fat skipper would have some explaining to do before he got through with him.

Atwell faced outboard and opened his mouth to hail the cutter. In that instant the heavy butt of a revolver crashed against the back of his head. The rays of the searchlight seemed to burst in every direction, like a gigantic pyrotechnic display. Then darkness closed over him like a blanket and he slumped to the deck.

CHAPTER V.

A CAPITAL OFFENSE.

WHEN Bob Atwell awoke it was daylight. He realized this much without opening his eyes. His head pained fearfully, and his whole body ached, as though it were a mass of bruises. He had heard somewhere that greasers wouldn't fight. Well, he consoled himself, he had found out differently, if he had accomplished nothing else.

It was with considerable effort that he managed to force his eyes open. Both were badly swollen, one so much that only the faintest light came under the puffed lid. Lying on his back on some kind of a rough cot, he appraised his surroundings slowly. He did not recognize them. The room in which he lay was indescribably dirty and very gloomy. The only light came from a small window high in the wall directly above him. Something about the light it admitted puzzled him. Then it dawned upon him that the window was barred.

He jerked his head around, groaning at the pain the movement caused him, and stared across the small room. An iron door met his gaze, and, behind it, staring at him through the bars, he made

out a *soldado* in a tattered uniform. Atwell cursed softly through swollen lips. So they had thrown him in jail, had they? Probably they were holding him for stealing that cursed skiff. Oh, well, he shouldn't have a great deal of trouble getting out of it, particularly when he was quite willing to pay the owner for the loss of his boat.

He sat up and swung his feet around to the floor. With the movement, the *soldado* shuffled off down the dismal passageway outside the cell. Atwell sat on the edge of his bed for a time, ruminating at the unfortunate turn events had taken. At any rate, he reflected philosophically, he had succeeded in keeping Munoz and Hackwood from stealing their dredger machinery; or, if it had been stolen after he passed out of the picture, he at least knew who to hold responsible.

Atwell's thoughts were interrupted by the arrival at his cell of a small, officious young native, foppishly attired, supercilious of manner. He was accompanied by three *soldados*, one of whom unlocked the door, admitted the officious person, and hastily turned the key again. The subprefect, for such he proved to be, began at once a rapid barrage of questions, addressed in English.

"Your full name, señor, and your occupation? Your birthplace? Your age?"

He wrote the answers in a large book which he spread out before him on the cot. There were a dozen more questions, and all of them seemed to Atwell quite irrelevant.

"Now just a minute," the young American began impatiently at last. "You're not going to write a biography of me. Let's not beat around the bush any longer. I'm willing to pay for that boat I took, and I'll pay a good price, too. And if I'm charged with assault and battery and disturbing the peace, or any other fool thing, I've got plenty of money to pay a fine and get out of here.

Now let's get down to brass tacks. I don't like the looks of this hoosegow of yours, and I want to get out. How much will it cost me?"

The subprefect stared at him aghast, his small black eyes blinking swiftly; then he shrugged, grinning in rather a sickly fashion. "I am afraid, señor, this is not the time to joke."

"Joke? Who wants to joke? I want to get out of here. *Que mucho dinero?*"

"But surely the señor knows that bail cannot be arranged when one is charged with a capital offense," the sleek official pointed out.

"Capital offense your foot! I haven't killed anybody."

"The señor is not charged with murder," the subprefect answered calmly.

"No? All right, then; come clean. What's the charge against me?"

"Smuggling arms and ammunition into the Republic of Andegoya," the official pronounced steadily. "And that, señor, under the laws of my country, is a capital offense."

A sledge hammer could hardly have struck a harder blow than these smooth, oily words of the subprefect. Atwell recoiled visibly, mustered his wits with an effort, and took a firm hold on himself.

"Now just let me get this straight. I, Robert Atwell, have been charged with smuggling arms into this country. Is that right?"

"That is correct, señor," the official admitted coldly.

"H'm! All of this is news to me," Atwell remarked grimly. "Suppose you tell me a little bit about the case. Naturally, I am more or less interested in it, and, frankly, I haven't the least idea what you are talking about."

The subprefect sighed audibly and resignedly. He spoke in bored tones.

"You were arrested last night aboard the steamship *Mazatlan*, while in the act of attempting to unload certain packing cases addressed to the South Amer-

ican Dredging Company. The captain of the *Mazatlan*, Señor José Munoz, an esteemed countryman of mine——"

"And a damned scoundrel!" Atwell muttered under his breath. "Go on, señor."

"Captain Munoz, returning to his ship some time after midnight, found that you had forged an order for these packing cases and had induced the crew to start unloading them onto a tug. Captain Munoz remonstrated with you and was finally forced to use violence to subdue you. It was found on investigation that the packing cases——"

"You need not go on," Atwell interrupted. "I got you the first time. The packing cases contained guns and ammunition. Your esteemed countryman, José Munoz, and my countryman, James Hackwood, not so esteemed, are very, very clever. No, señor; I am not a gun runner, but, in a contest for a prize fool, I'd carry off first honors without a struggle."

Atwell rose suddenly, his half-bitter, half-jocular mood slipping from him. "Now, señor, I want the American consul," he declared sharply, "and I want him *pronto*. If he is not here within one hour, I'll pull you to pieces the first chance I get." He grasped the little subprefect by the nape of the neck and the seat of his trousers and tossed him toward the door. "Get moving, señor."

When the barred door had clanged behind the frightened subprefect, Atwell threw himself back on his cot.

"What a cursed fool I've been," he muttered bitterly. "Might have known that business of getting me ashore wasn't for any ordinary reason. A sweet mess I've got myself into—a sweet mess! Why didn't I let well enough alone and permit them to land their damned arms? Probably substituted their contraband on the dock in San Francisco, and I didn't have brains enough to break open a couple of cases

after they put them on the ship. H'm! Rotten situation."

He cursed suddenly and vindictively. Then, subsiding, he said: "And my dear friends, José Munoz and the hospitable Mr. Hackwood, are quite in the clear. They go on about their business as usual. The finger of suspicion never points to them. While me—I'm the goat. H'm! Munoz certainly thought fast last night. Didn't believe it was in the old boy. H'm! Hell of a mess."

Atwell washed some of the caked blood off his face in a tin washbasin that was brought to him, made his toilet as best he could, and breakfasted on the coarse, unpalatable rations that were passed around. His spirits revived somewhat after breakfast, although his head still ached dully, and every movement brought darts of pain through his muscles.

The guards had removed the remnants of his breakfast, and he had dropped onto the edge of the cot to try to reason things out, when he heard a familiar voice at the door. Atwell started, as much surprised as angered, and swung slowly about. James Hackwood, immaculate in his white ducks and Panama hat, was smiling through the bars at him. Dazed into speechlessness by the man's effrontery, Atwell could only stare at him in amazed bewilderment.

"Surprised to see me, are you, Atwell?" the tall man began genially. "Well, after you've been in this country a while, you'll learn that we Americans have to stick together. I heard about your arrest as soon as I got up this morning and came right over. It's bad business, my boy." He shook his head slowly, while a look that was not without admiration came over his countenance. "You certainly had me fooled. A quiet young fellow like you being mixed up in a gun-running game. I'd never have suspected it in the world."

In all his life Atwell had never ex-

perienced such an example of insolent assurance. For Hackwood to come to him at such a time, for Hackwood deliberately to accuse him of the crime that rested on his own shoulders—it was almost unbelievable!

A biting retort was on the tip of Atwell's tongue, but he choked it off. Hackwood, judging from his actions, had no suspicions that Atwell connected him in any way with the gun-running plot. It might be better to keep his own counsel, the younger man told himself swiftly; to voice no accusation, to continue to play the fool. There would be time enough to settle with Hackwood when Atwell got out of jail.

"It is decent of you to come, Hackwood," he said, controlling his anger with an effort. "As a matter of fact, I am quite up in the air about the whole thing. The first I knew or heard of any contraband arms was when the subprefect told me a short time ago that I had been charged with smuggling them into the country. It is plain to me that I have been made the victim of some kind of a plot."

For a long time Hackwood stared through the bars, eyeing the young prisoner, apparently weighing the truth or falsity of the statement. His acting was perfect; there was just the proper shade of doubt in his gray eyes. Atwell longed to reach through the bars and throttle him where he stood. At last the tall man shrugged his shoulders, with a faintly ironical smile; his manner was that of one who has not yet heard all the evidence and does not care to pass an opinion.

"One way or the other," he told Atwell at last, "we're going to do all we can to get you out of this or, at least, to see that you get a fair trial. I have sent word to the American consul, Mr. Theodore Montague. He should be here any minute now, and he will certainly do all he can for you. If it were possible, I would arrange bail

for you; unfortunately, a person charged with the smuggling of arms cannot be admitted to bail in this country. It is a capital offense, you know."

"Yes; that is what I have been told," Atwell answered and reflected grimly that Hackwood was mighty lucky that they were separated by the heavy bars of the cell door.

"Well, I have some business to attend to, so I'll have to run along," Hackwood remarked. "If there is anything I can do, don't hesitate to send for me. I'm mighty sorry you slipped up, boy. *Buenas dias.*"

"Thanks." Atwell dared trust his lips no further. So Hackwood was sorry he slipped up, was he? Of all the sheer, unadulterated nerve, this man Hackwood's took the prize! Sorry he slipped up, and he was as guilty as the devil himself. Atwell fell to pacing the floor, angry with himself because he hadn't come right out and accused the other. He knew, however, that such an action would have served no good purpose. Better to keep Hackwood in ignorance of his suspicions. The man seemed inclined to do what he could to help him. And, so long as Hackwood was indirectly responsible for the position in which he found himself, why not accept his offer of assistance?

It was rather a bitter pill for Atwell to swallow, nevertheless. But he was friendless and in a strange country. Cunningham was probably up the river on the concession. His cablegram to him had without doubt been intercepted in some way, leaving his partner in ignorance of his arrival. He certainly had need of all the assistance that was offered him. The evidence against him, if properly presented by that scoundrel, Munoz, and his corruptible crew, could be made most damning. And Munoz, with his own liberty at stake, would lie until he was black in the face.

All in all, the situation was anything but encouraging. Atwell faced it hope-

fully, however, quite unacquainted as yet with the swift, relentless justice that is meted out in these South American republics.

CHAPTER VI.

PHYLLIS MONTAGUE.

HALF an hour after Hackwood's departure, the *soldado* outside of Atwell's cell unlocked the door, threw it wide, and announced in Spanish: "The consular agent, sir."

Atwell rose to his feet and immediately felt an inclination to sit down again, as he saw that his visitor was a young woman. The fact that the consular agent was a woman, when he had always understood that only men were eligible for the consular service, was not so extraordinary. Her beauty, however, was breath-taking and bewildering.

Under other conditions and in another country, he might not have found it so. But in this filthy cell, in the squalid city of Condota, thousands of miles from home, the appearance of such a lovely woman was so unlooked for as to be completely disconcerting. Atwell stared at her in frank amazement, hardly realizing for the moment whether her hair was dark or light, her eyes blue or brown. He knew only that she was an American, and that she was very young and very beautiful.

Then his vision cleared, and in the brief instant before she spoke her every feature was impressed indelibly upon his memory. Hair as golden as any nugget he had ever reclaimed from the placer fields; large, expressive eyes, as deeply blue as a mountain lake at twilight; a piquant, friendly nose; lips that were made for smiling. More than sheer beauty, more than perfection of feature, there was character in the face of this trimly dressed young woman. There was dignity, too; an unexpected characteristic in one who could not be much past twenty. There were reserve and firmness and pride as well.

Atwell felt suddenly and unbearably ashamed. His clothing was wrinkled and dirty, his hair was disheveled, his features were puffed and swollen, and he was badly in need of a shave. Of all times and all places to meet such a girl as this! He was for the moment, and for long afterward, very, very bitter.

"Mr. Atwell?" the girl asked softly.

He took a deep breath that was half a sigh and nodded, leaving his head bowed.

"I am Phyllis Montague," she went on, in a businesslike manner. "My father is the American consul in Condotá. He would have come to see you, but he is not well to-day. I came in his place, as the government provides him with no assistant."

Atwell searched frantically for words. He thought of telling her it was nice of her to come, and then he realized that such an assertion would be quite banal, and he held his peace.

"My father," the young woman went on, quite at her ease, "wants to assure you that he will do everything in his power to see that you get a fair trial. Maybe if you would tell me the circumstances of your arrest——"

Atwell found his tongue at last. "Circumstances of my arrest!" he burst out. "I think the police know more about that than I do. I was unconscious when I was brought here."

Did she shrink from him slightly—or was it only his imagination? Then a terrible thought struck him. To all appearances he might have been a common drunkard who had been dragged in from the street. He made haste to explain.

"You see, I came down here with a shipment of dredging machinery belonging to a company in which I am interested. Last night I came ashore. Having reason to believe that some attempt would be made to steal our machinery, I took a boat down at the dock

and went back to the ship, the *Mazatlan*. I found the captain removing our machinery from the hold. I ordered him to stop, and there was a fight. Half a dozen greasers pitched into me, and when I woke up I found myself here, charged with smuggling arms into the country.

"Of course, I realize now that I was the unfortunate victim of a plot. A shipment of arms was substituted on the dock in San Francisco for our machinery. If I hadn't blundered out there last night, I suppose they would have landed the arms or got caught trying to land them, and they would have made some sort of explanation to me about leaving our machinery behind. That, in a nutshell, is the situation. The captain, of course, realizing that he was caught by the authorities, saw the opportunity to save himself by throwing the blame on me. So here I am, with not a chance in the world, so far as I can see, of proving my innocence."

Phyllis Montague regarded him for several moments, her lips pursed thoughtfully. Would she believe his story? Probably not, for he realized, as he reviewed it swiftly in his mind, that it had sounded none too convincing. There were several loose ends to it; his suspicion that the machinery might be stolen, was one. He was not yet ready, however, to reveal Hackwood's connection with the affair.

It was only a matter of seconds, but it seemed minutes that the girl stood scanning him and weighing the story. He was able to stand the suspense no longer.

Almost humbly he asked. "You believe me, don't you, Miss Montague?"

Her lips curved upward in a suggestion of a smile. "It doesn't make much difference whether I believe you or not, Mr. Atwell," she said coolly. "It is the judge whom you must convince, not me."

Like a physical blow were those quiet

words. The meaning behind them was plain. They might well have been: "No; I can't quite believe you are telling the truth." And Atwell's head bowed before her direct gaze.

But it remained so for only a moment. When it raised again there was a fighting light in the dark eyes, a firm tilt to the strong chin; the boyish lips were set in a straight line. In that brief instant the most vital thing in his life had come to be the proving of his innocence to this calm, self-possessed young woman.

His thoughts did not go beyond that point. The future, his acquittal, his release—these were as nothing compared to the single aim that had sprung, full-blown, from the unvoiced indictment of Phyllis Montague.

"I am very sorry that you don't believe me," he said calmly, meeting the steady gaze of her blue eyes with a look that was just as unwavering.

And now her eyes were the first to fall. A little shamefully, perhaps, she stared at the tip of her shoe, tapping softly on the dusty floor.

"I am afraid you misunderstood me," she answered. "I did not say that I didn't believe you."

"Do you, or don't you care to commit yourself?" Atwell pressed the issue.

Her eyes raised swiftly to his. "I am not afraid to commit myself, although, as I told you, it makes little difference what I believe."

"I should like to know," Atwell told her humbly.

A single shake of her head was her only reply. Could she have known the stab of pain it wrung from Atwell's heart, she might have answered otherwise. It must have been reflected on his bruised face and in his bloodshot eyes, for almost at once she made haste to explain herself.

"Things like this happen almost every day," she said impetuously. "It is not

only gun-running. It is a thousand and one crimes, committed by drifting Americans, ne'er-do-wells, the backwash of the United States. My father is ill a great deal. In many of the cases I have been forced to take his place and give what aid I could in the matter of lawyers and interpreters and money. And always they are guilty, Mr. Atwell—always." She paused, and her eyes met his appealingly. "And have I any reason, any real reason, to suppose that you might be the exception to the rule?"

"None at all—none at all," he answered slowly, with a regretful shake of his head. "I am very, very sorry."

"You have nothing to be sorry for," she reminded him. For the first time she really smiled, and such was her smile that Atwell wanted to turn his head away to hide the pain it caused him. "Whether you are guilty or innocent, my father and I will do all we can to help you. That is what we are here for. Now tell me, have you any friends in Condota?"

"Yes, one—Hiram Cunningham, a dredger man," Atwell answered miserably. "He should have met me, but my cable must have gone astray. He is probably at our concession, fourteen miles up the river."

"That's fine. We'll send for him immediately. And—and money?"

"Plenty—a letter of credit—in my bag at the hotel."

"Good. Would you like me to engage a lawyer for you?"

"If you would be so kind."

"It isn't kindness, Mr. Atwell," she reminded him gently. "It is merely our duty, my father's and mine."

Power of woman to wound! Cheerfully Phyllis Montague had departed, innocent and all unconscious of the havoc she had wrought.

The succeeding chapters of this novel will appear in the next issue of TOP-NOTCH, dated and out December 15th.

TOP-NOTCH TALK

News and Views by the
Editor and Readers

DECEMBER 1, 1926.

The Courageous Ones

I DARE do all that may become a man," says a character in one of Shakespeare's plays. This same spirit will be found in the characters who appear in TOP-NOTCH stories—and in the readers of this magazine.

For those who have the desire to achieve are eager to learn of those who have outwitted failure, to gain new courage from these dauntless ones who have defied defeat. Though fiction heroes are supposedly imaginary people, they are nevertheless real in the minds of authors and readers. And as they march jauntily across the printed pages, intrepid, unafraid, they take on substance and being, they become friends and companions, and are as much a part of our lives as any one we see every day.

These friends and companions of the printed page live daringly. Their courage and resourcefulness make them admirable and beloved. Fate or human antagonists try to thwart them; enemies plot and scheme; the forces of nature even seem in league against them. But to no avail. For those who live daringly never fail.

It is courage, the never-say-die spirit that fills TOP-NOTCH from cover to cover. The rashness of youth, the grim determination resulting from hard-won experience, the nonchalant confidence of a man who is sure of himself! In many and varied situations, here at home or at the ends of the earth, to-day and yesterday and to-morrow, these adven-

turous ones display, in this magazine, qualities that make them interesting and worth while.

They are defiant before disasters; they toss aside disappointments as being not worth consideration. They are bold, yet they exercise care and caution. They are brave, but not unthinkingly foolish. They look danger squarely in the eyes—and are undaunted.

It is this indomitable spirit that makes them invincible. Young or old, frail or strong—courage forces them on. And while this clear flame of fearlessness is burning, there is no such thing as defeat. These daring, adventurous ones survive and conquer because they refuse to believe that their goal is beyond their reach.

When men meet and talk—in the mountains, the desert, the tropics or in the land of eternal snow, at sea, or on crowded city streets—stories are told of those who are audacious and unafraid. Men who know the pitiless menace of the ocean, the ruthlessness of the desert, the crouching danger of the jungle, the changing face of fortune in every clime—these men spin yarns of the undismayed ones, feeling akin to every gallant fighter of whom they speak. And, in TOP-NOTCH, stories of bold achievement and courageous enterprise are read by other men, and this same feeling of kinship, of fellowship, of sharing in the adventures of those who are stout-hearted, is experienced.

' Strong men talk of feats of strength. Those who are brave recall feats of valor. And men who admire courage, and who possess courage, remember and read of the stirring adventures of those who play the glorious game of life light-heartedly and without fear!

What He Missed

Editor of TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE.

DEAR SIR: Have been a constant reader for fifteen years—started when I was twenty. I have not missed very many copies in that time—none in the last ten years—although I missed a lot of good stories in the early part. The first five years I would always look for the sports, baseball, basketball, et cetera, and leave the novels, serials, and other short

stories. So you see I have missed some real good stories, if they were half as good as the present ones. They are my favorite ones now, although I still enjoy the sports.

My favorites, if I were asked to vote on them, would be Standish, Cook, and Boston, although I like all the long stories.

Hoping your authors have a long future ahead of them, I remain,

Toronto, Canada.

GEO. R. KIRBY.

How did you like this issue of TOP-NOTCH? Which stories appealed to you most? If there were any stories you did not like, please tell us that, too. What kind of stories do you enjoy best?

Letters from our readers are a great help to us in getting out a magazine for your entertainment, and we want to hear from every member of the TOP-NOTCH circle.

THE EDITOR.

Out December 15th

The CHRISTMAS Number of Top-Notch Magazine

A Complete Novel

Christmas By Proxy, by William Wallace Cook

A man who never had a "regular" Christmas has a plan.

A coast-guard story of novelette length

Brogue But No Blarney, by Frank Richardson Pierce

Making movies has its exciting moments.

Short Stories that every one will enjoy!

The Torch of Tombstone Bend, by Hapsburg Liebe

When Christmas came to the mountains.

Romping with Royalty, by John Miller Gregory

"Speedy" Swift, the peppy press agent, puts over a peach of a plot.

Starlight and the Girl, by Edward C. Boykin

A story of the Southland.

For the Honor of the Horse, by Herbert Phelps White

A Western story of the sport of kings.

And others

Another installment of a wow of a serial!

The Coast of Intrigue, by Whitman Chambers

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The CHRISTMAS Number of Top-Notch Magazine

Out December 15th



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Eat two or three cakes regularly every day, one before each meal: on crackers, in fruit juices, water or milk—or just plain, in small pieces. For constipation dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) before meals and at bedtime. Dangerous habit-forming cathartics will gradually become unnecessary. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days.

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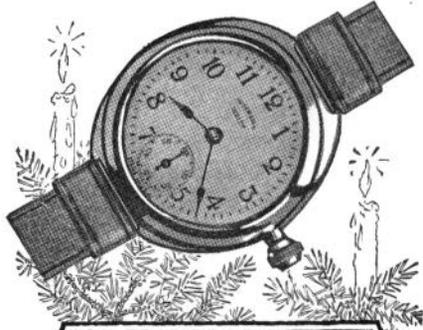
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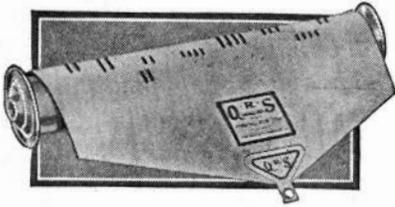
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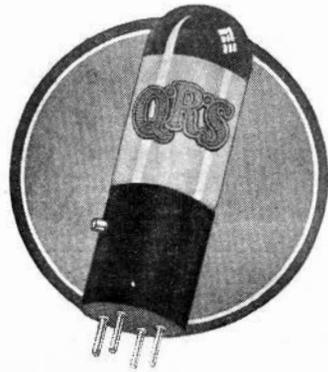
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