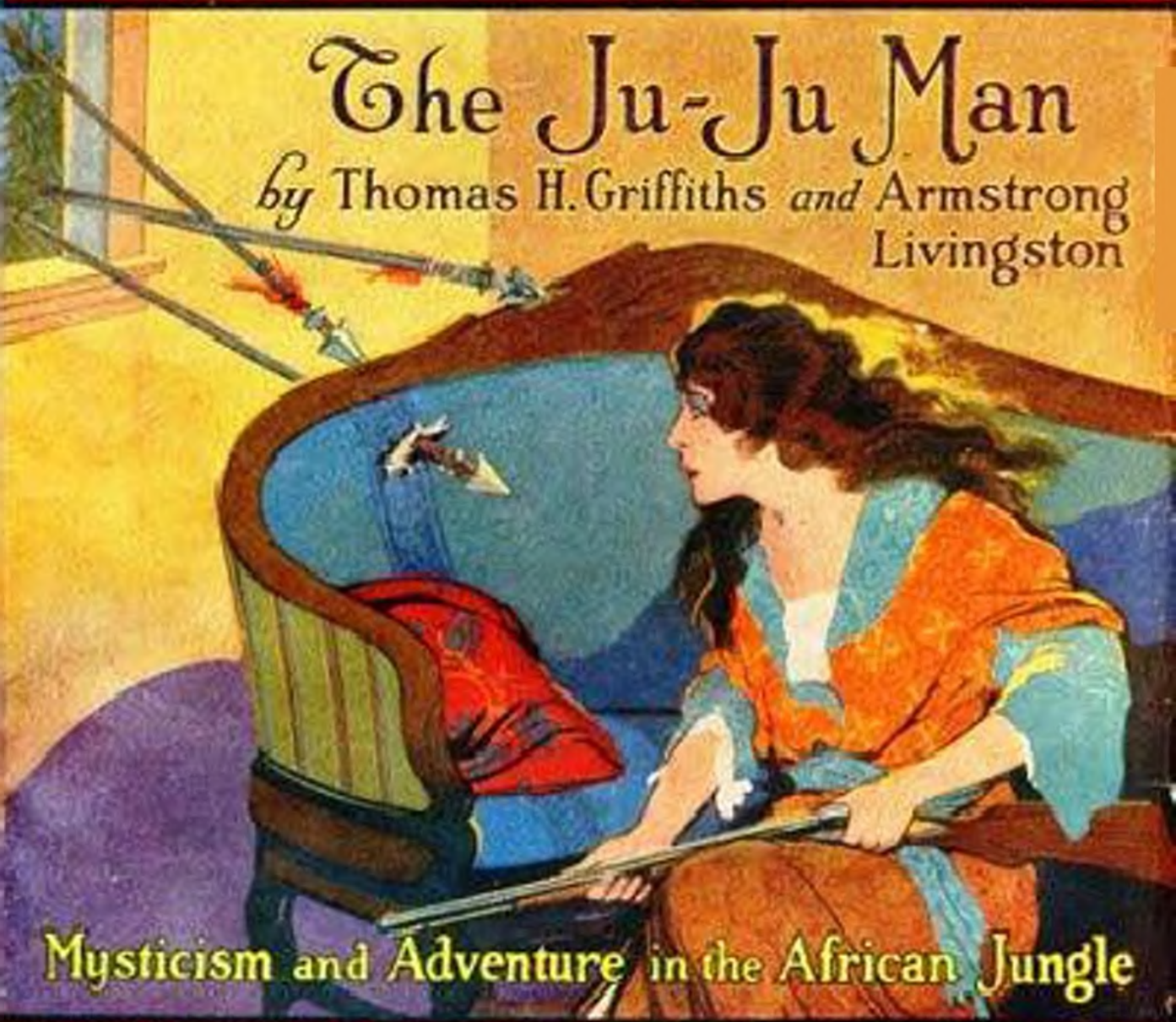
ARGOSY ALL-STORY WEEKLY

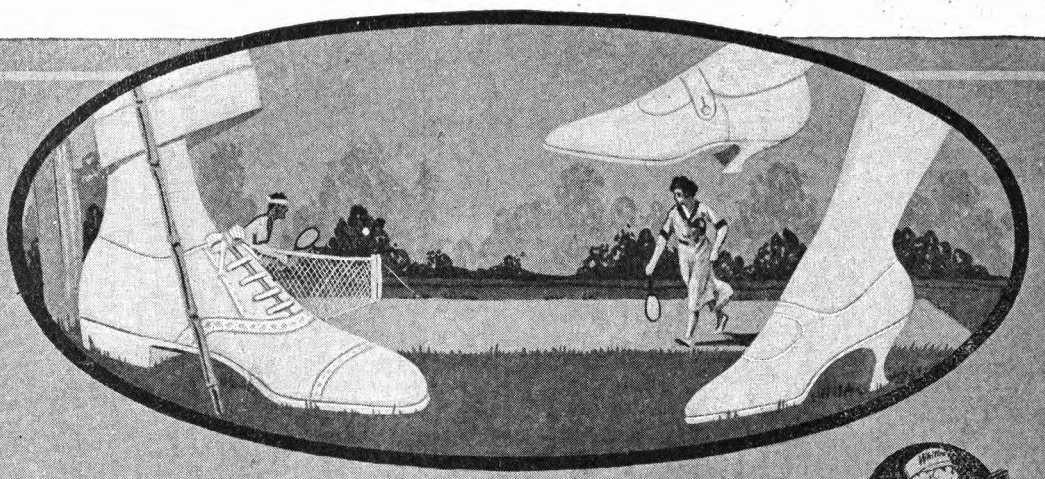


The Ju-Ju Man

by Thomas H. Griffiths *and* Armstrong Livingston

Mysticism and Adventure in the African Jungle

10¢ PER COPY — JUNE 17 — BY THE YEAR $4.00



To Clean
White Canvas Shoes

There is nothing quite so good as

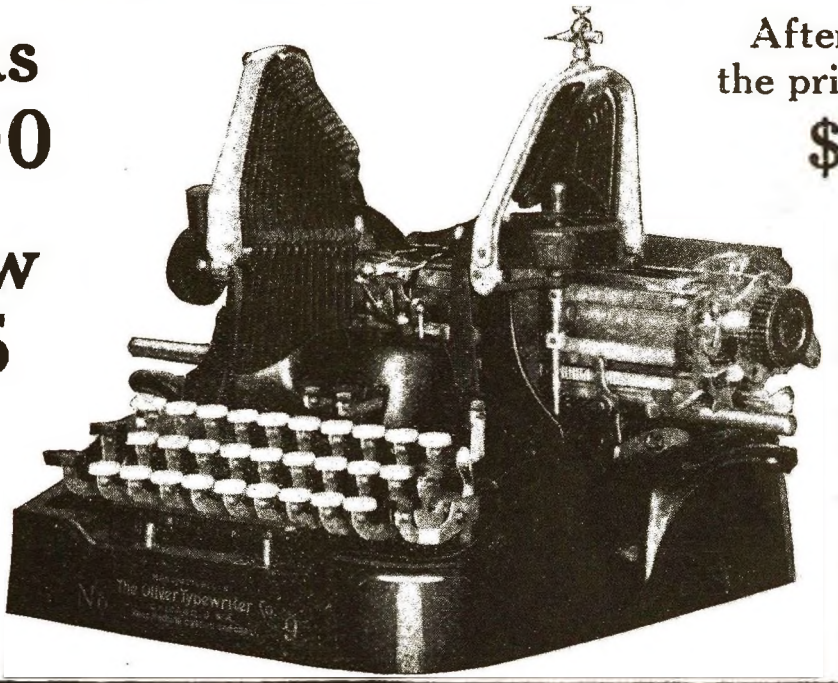
Whittemore's

QUICK WHITE

In liquid form with sponge ready to use
Won't rub off — No white dust — Does not clog or shrink
the finest texture
Gives to canvas shoes that desirable, summery, pure crisp whiteness
IN DRY FORM USE ALBO IN WHITE CAKE
For Heels and Edge use Whittemore's White Heel and Edge Enamel
WHITTEMORE BROS. Sole Manufacturers CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

Was $100

Now $55



After July 1st the price will be $65

The present price of $55 has proved too low, so in order to maintain Oliver quality the price will be $65 after July 1st. This advance notice gives you the opportunity to save $45 if you act quickly.

ONLY $4 A MONTH

AFTER FREE TRIAL

Merely mail the coupon *now*—send not a cent in advance. Act quickly—the present price lasts but a short time. The Oliver comes to you at our risk for five days free trial in your own home. Decide for yourself whether you want to buy or not. If you don't want to keep the Oliver, simply send it back at our expense. If you do agree that it is the finest typewriter, regardless of price, and want to keep it, take over a year to pay at the easy rate of only $4 a month.

Last Chance to Save $45

During the war we learned many lessons. We found that it was unnecessary to have such a vast number of traveling salesmen and so many expensive branch houses. We were able to discontinue many other superfluous sales methods. As a result, $55 now buys the identical Oliver formerly priced at $100.

After July 1st, the price of the Oliver will be $65. As the present price of $55 has been widely advertised, we want to be perfectly fair and announce the price change in advance. If you act quickly, you can obtain the $100 Oliver for $55. Note that the coupon must be mailed before midnight, June 30th.

Our Latest and Best Model

This is the finest and costliest Oliver we have ever built. It has all the latest improvements. It has a standard keyboard so that anyone may turn to it with ease. Try this Oliver five days free and prove its merit to yourself.

Among the 950,000

Oliver purchasers are such distinguished concerns as:

Columbia Graphophone Co., Pennsylvania Railroad, National City Bank of N. Y., Boston Elevated Railways, Hart, Schaffner & Marx, U. S. Steel Corporation, New York Edison Co., American Bridge Co., Diamond Match Co., and others of great rank.

Send No Money

No money is required with the coupon. This is a **real free trial** offer. All at our expense and risk. If you don't want to keep the typewriter just send it back, express collect. We even refund the outgoing transportation charges, so you can't lose a penny.

Mail the Coupon

Note the two-way coupon. It brings you an Oliver for free trial or our catalog and copy of our booklet "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy."

Canadian Price, $79

The OLIVER Typewriter Company

376 Oliver Typewriter Bldg., Chicago, Ill.

THE OLIVER TYPEWRITER COMPANY, 376 Oliver Typewriter Building, Chicago, Ill.

☐ Ship me a new Oliver No. 9 Typewriter for five days' free inspection. If I keep it I will pay $55 as follows: $5 at the end of trial period and then at the rate of $4 per month. The title to remain in you until fully paid for. If I make cash settlement at end of trial period I am to deduct ten per cent and remit to you $49.50. If I decide not to keep it, I will ship it back at your expense at the end of five days.

My shipping point is .....

☐ Do not send a typewriter until I order it. Send me your booklet "The High Cost of Typewriters—The Reason and the Remedy" and further information.

Name .....

Street Address .....

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

Occupation or Business .....

This coupon not valid unless mailed and postmarked before midnight, June 30, 1922.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

VOL. CXLIII | CONTENTS FOR JUNE 17, 1922 | NUMBER 4

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FIVE CONTINUED STORIES

ONE NOVELETTE

SIX SHORT STORIES

WHEN Myra Carson obeys the impetuous command of an unknown girl and accepts a sable coat, she plans to return it the next morning. Instead, she is thrown into a tumbling whirlpool of adventure, finds her reputation assailed, and loses her fiancé.

THE FUR CLOAK

BY EDGAR FRANKLIN

Will run for five weeks in ARGOSY-ALLSTORY, starting next week.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, $4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; $6.00 to Canada, and $7.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

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COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

"B.V.D." Underwear is Identified by This Red Woven Label

MADE FOR THE

B.V.D.

BEST RETAIL TRADE

(Trade Mark Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. and Foreign Countries)

No Underwear is "B.V.D." Without It

The "B.V.D." Red Woven Label is the Trade Mark by which The B.V.D. Company assures you the far-famed comfort, long wear and dependable quality of its product.

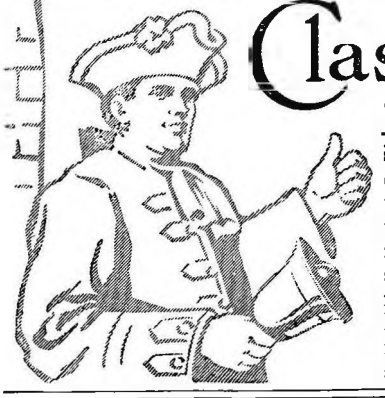
The B.V.D. Company
New York.
SOLE MANUFACTURERS OF "B.V.D." UNDERWEAR

"B.V.D" Sleeveless Closed Crotch Union Suits (Pat. U.S.A.) Men's $1.50 the suit, Youths' $1.00 the suit.

"B.V.D." Coat Cut Undershirts and Knee Length Drawers, 85c the garment.

The B.V.D. Co.

4



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in the Munsey Magazines:

	Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50
Argosy-Allstory Weekly	2.50

Minimum space four lines.

Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 2% cash discount

July 22nd Argosy-Allstory Forms Close June 24th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

AGENTS — MAKE $7 TO $14 A DAY. BRAND NEW ALUMINUM HANDLE CUTLERY SET. You take orders, we deliver and collect. Pay you daily. Full or spare time. No experience necessary. No capital. We need 1500 Sales Agents, men or women, to cover every county in the U. S. Demand enormous. Write quick. JENNINGS MFG. CO., Dept. 1809, Dayton, Ohio.

AGENTS! 1922's GREATEST SENSATION. 11 piece toilet article set selling like blazes at $1.75 with $1.00 dressmaker's shears free to each customer. Line up with Davis for 1922. E. M. Davis Co., Dept. 58, Chicago.

WE START YOU in business, furnishing everything. Men and women, $30.00 to $100.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories" anywhere. Opportunity lifetime; booklet free. W. Hillyer Ragsdale, Drawer 93, East Orange, N. J.

SALESMEN EVERYWHERE—NEW INVENTION SELLS on instant demonstration. Weight, one pound. Every one a prospect. Make $5 every sale. A gold mine for men with cars. GREEN, 514 Van Buren St., Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS—MAKE A DOLLAR AN HOUR. Sell Mendets, a patent patch for instantly mending leaks in all utensils. Sample package free. Collette Manufacturing Company, Dept. 306-B, Amsterdam, N. Y.

$10 WORTH OF FINEST TOILET SOAPS, perfumes, toilet waters, spices, etc., absolutely free to agents on our refund plan. Lacassian Co., Dept. 614, St. Louis, Mo.

MAKE 600% PROFIT. FREE SAMPLES. Lowest priced Gold Window Letters for stores, offices. Anybody can do it. Large demand. Exclusive territory. Big future. Side line. Acme Letter Co., 2800 F Congress, Chicago.

BIG MONEY AND FAST SALES. EVERY OWNER BUYS GOLD INITIALS for his auto. You charge $1.50, make $1.35. Ten orders daily easy. Write for particulars and free samples. American Monogram Co., Dept. 54, East Orange, N. J.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

$10 TO $50 DOWN! Starts you on 20, 40 or 80 acres near hustling city in Michigan. Balance long time. Only $15 to $35 per acre. Write today for big free booklet. Swigart Land Co., Y-1245 First National Bank Building, Chicago.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

EXCHANGE PLOTS FOR $$—Photoplay ideas accepted any form; revised, typed, published, copyrighted. Sold. Advice free. UNIVERSAL SCENARIO CORP., 918 Western Mutual Life Bldg., Los Angeles.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; $10 TO $500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 388 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

AMBITIOUS WRITERS, send today for Free copy, America's leading magazine for writers of photoplays, stories, poems, songs. Instructive, helpful. WRITER'S DIGEST, 601 Butler Building, Cincinnati.

WRITERS: HAVE YOU A POEM, STORY OR PHOTOPLAY TO SELL? Submit MSS. at once to Music Sales Company, Dept. 60, St. Louis, Mo.

FREE TO WRITERS—a wonderful little book of money making hints, suggestions, ideas; the A B C of successful Story and Movie-Play writing. Absolutely free. Send for your copy now! Just address Authors' Press, Dept. 19, Auburn, N. Y.

STORIES, POEMS, PLAYS, ETC., ARE WANTED for publication. Good ideas bring big money. Submit Mss., or write Literary Bureau, 110, Hannibal, Mo.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

$13.45 FOR A STYLISH MADE-TO-YOUR-MEASURE 3-PIECE SUIT—regular $25.00 value. We are making this bargain offer to prove our remarkable values in tailoring. Write for our big sample outfit showing how agents make $35.00 to $40.00 extra every week taking orders for high-grade tailoring. SPENCER MEAD COMPANY, Dept. F-204, Chicago.

AGENTS—Our Soap and Toilet Article Plan is a wonder. Get our Free Sample Case Offer. Ho-Ro-Co, 137 Locust, St. Louis, Mo.

$1,080 MADE BY WINGO IN SIX WEEKS SELLING NEVER FAIL RAZOR SHARPENERS. Purdy made $40.50 first day. Other inexperienced men cleaning up big money. Applewhite, La., six orders in thirty minutes. Hurry—investigate. Exclusive territory. Write today. NEVER FAIL CO., 148 Allen Building, Toledo, O.

SELL HOLMES TIRES AND TUBES. No capital required. $100 weekly income. Price sells them, quality gets re-orders. HOLMES RUBBER CO., 1500 W. 15th, Dept. A, Chicago.

Big Profits. Sell handsome Windshield Wings, Mirrors, Spot Lights, guaranteed Tires, Tubes, etc. Prices that win. Car owners, dealers buy one to gross. Write for booklet and sensational agency prices. Rapid Sales Corp'n, 20-D, Grand Rapids, Mich.

AGENTS—$5 TO $15 DAILY INTRODUCING NEW STYLE GUARANTEED HOSIERY—latest modes and shades—nude, camel, silver, etc. Big profits. Repeat orders bring you regular income. You write orders—we deliver and collect. Experience unnecessary. Outfits contain all colors and grades including silks. MAC-O-CHEE MILLS CO., Desk 226, Cincinnati, Ohio.

LARGE SHIRT MANUFACTURER wants Agents to sell complete line of shirts direct to wearer. Exclusive patterns. Big values. Free samples. Madison Mills, 503 Broadway, New York.

TAILORING AGENTS WANTED to sell guaranteed tailor-made clothes. We ship free prepaid large traveling sample outfit, 250 all wool fabrics at $15.00 and up, fit and workmanship absolutely guaranteed. Write for Fall and Winter samples. Jay Rose & Co., Dept. 800 M, 411 S. Wells St., Chicago.

A BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN. Make Sparkling Glass Name Plates, Numbers, Checkerboards, Medallions, Signs. Big illustrated book free. E. PALMER, 500 Wooster, Ohio.

WANTED—Tailoring Sales Agents. Big profits every day—$75.00 to $150.00 weekly. Our big All Wool line sells itself. Satisfaction or money back guarantee. Get into this profitable business today, without a penny's investment. Write for full particulars, giving your experience as salesman or tailor's sales agent. Mr. Alfred R. Aton, Sales-Mgr., Lock Box 483, Chicago.

AUTOMOBILES

Automobile Owners, Garagemen, Mechanics, Repairmen, send for free copy of our current issue. It contains helpful, instructive information on overhauling, ignition troubles, wiring, carburetors, storage batteries, etc. Over 140 pages, illustrated. Send for free copy today. Automobile Digest, 500 Butler Bldg., Cincinnati.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. WRITE FOR FREE ILLUSTRATED GUIDE BOOK and record of invention blank. Send model or sketch and description for our opinion of its patentable nature. Free. Highest References. Prompt Attention. Reasonable Terms. Victor J. Evans & Co., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. HIGHEST REFERENCES. BEST RESULTS. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and opinion as to patentability. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS. If you have an invention write for our Guide Book, "How To Get A Patent." Send model or sketch and description, and we will give our opinion as to its patentable nature. Randolph & Co., 630 F, Washington, D. C.

Classified Advertising continued on page 6.

Have You The Courage To Start Over?

JIM BARTLETT was my best friend. He was a successful business man and he talked straight from the shoulder. There was no mincing words when he started telling me what I ought to do.

"Bill," he said earnestly, "the trouble with you is that you have fallen into a rut. You get up early and go to work every morning and you work hard all day. But you don't get anywhere. It isn't that you haven't a good head on your shoulders—for you have. But you don't use it. You don't think three feet beyond your job."

"But what can I do?" I asked helplessly. "I have a wife and child. I'm too old to take chances."

"Too old!" fairly shouted Jim. "Why, if anything, you're too young!

"At 35, Henry Ford was working in the mechanical department of the Edison Electric Light & Power Co. for $150 a month. At 38, John H. Patterson, who founded the National Cash Register Company, was the proprietor of a small and none too successful country store. At 25, George Eastman, president of the Eastman Kodak Company, was earning $1400 a year as a bookkeeper in a savings bank. At 22, Edison was a roaming telegraph operator—out of a job—too poor, when he arrived in New York, to buy his own breakfast!

"Success wasn't handed to these men on a silver platter, Bill. They worked for it and worked hard. Did they quit when they found themselves temporarily blocked or working up a blind alley? You bet your life they didn't. They had the courage to start over. And you've got to have that same courage if you ever want to get anywhere."

FIVE years have passed since I had the above conversation with Jim Bartlett.

I remember going home that night to a frugal supper. I remember sitting in the parlor thumbing a magazine. I remember reading the story of a man just like myself who had studied in his spare time and had gotten out of the rut.

As I read on I felt new ambition rise within me. I decided that I, too, would have the courage to start over.

So I tore out that familiar coupon which I had seen so often and mailed it to Scranton. Information regarding the course I had marked came back to me by return mail.

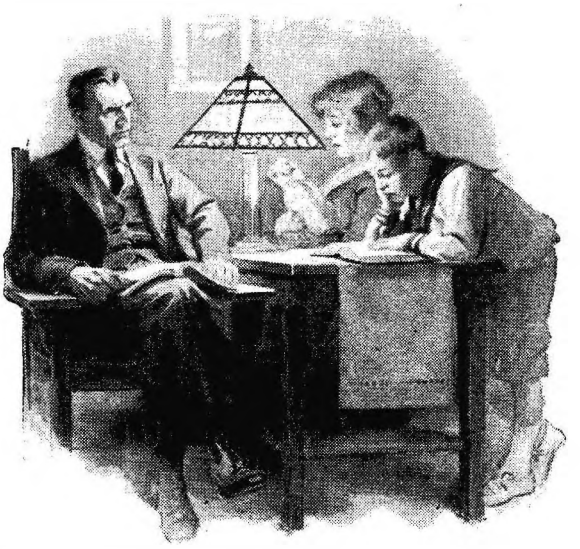
I tell you frankly that I had no idea the course would be so interesting—so easy—so fascinating—so profitable.

My employers learned of my studying, saw evidences of it in my work and in four months I received my first increase in salary.

Advancement followed advancement, for I was always thinking beyond my job—always studying to get ready for the job ahead. And just the other day I was made General Manager.

HOW much longer are *you* going to wait before taking the step that is bound to bring you advancement and more money?

No matter where you live, the International Correspondence Schools will come to you. No matter what your handicaps or how small your means, we have a plan to meet your circumstances. No matter how limited your previous education, the simply-written, wonderfully-illustrated I. C. S. textbooks make it easy to learn. No matter what career you may choose, some one of the 300 I. C. S. courses will surely suit your needs.



This is all we ask: Without cost, without obligating yourself in any way, put it up to us to prove how we can help you. Just mark and mail this coupon.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS
Box 2143-C, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me full information about the subject *before* which I have marked an X in the list below:

BUSINESS TRAINING DEPARTMENT

- ☐ Business Management
- ☐ Industrial Management
- ☐ Personnel Organization
- ☐ Traffic Management
- ☐ Business Law
- ☐ Banking and Banking Law
- ☐ Accountancy (including C.P.A.)
- ☐ Nicholson Cost Accounting
- ☐ Bookkeeping
- ☐ Private Secretary
- ☐ Business Spanish ☐ French
- ☐ Salesmanship
- ☐ Advertising
- ☐ Better Letters
- ☐ Foreign Trade
- ☐ Stenography and Typing
- ☐ Business English
- ☐ Civil Service
- ☐ Railway Mail Clerk
- ☐ Common School Subjects
- ☐ High School Subjects
- ☐ Illustrating ☐ Cartooning

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL DEPARTMENT

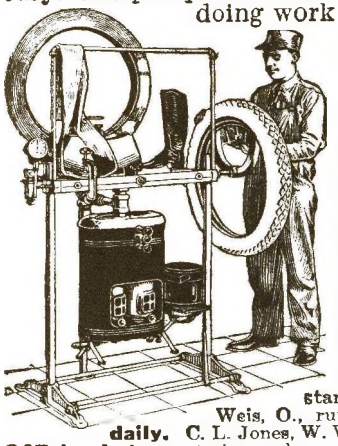
- ☐ Electrical Engineering
- ☐ Electric Lighting
- ☐ Mechanical Engineer
- ☐ Mechanical Draftsman
- ☐ Machine Shop Practice
- ☐ Railroad Positions
- ☐ Gas Engine Operating
- ☐ Civil Engineer
- ☐ Surveying and Mapping
- ☐ Mine Foreman or Engineer
- ☐ Steam Engineering
- ☐ Wireless ☐ Airplane Engines
- ☐ Architect
- ☐ Contractor and Builder
- ☐ Architectural Draftsman
- ☐ Concrete Builder
- ☐ Structural Engineer
- ☐ Plumbing and Heating
- ☐ Chemistry
- ☐ Pharmacy
- ☐ Automobile Work
- ☐ Navigation
- ☐ Agriculture and Poultry
- ☐ Mathematics

Name.....
Street
Address.....
City.....State.....
Occupation.....

Persons residing in Canada should send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada.

Make $1,000 Easy!
From Evening Work

Skidmore of Ohio started last Nov. Has made **$3000** to date! Greatest proposition of century. Grasp it quick! Make **$30** to **$50** a week doing work at home evenings.



Do Not Quit Your Job

Make big money on side. Turn spare hours into cash with my **new home outfit.** Vulcanize automobile tires. Mend tubes. Repair gum boots and rubber goods of all kinds. Do **thriving neighborhood business.** Many men started economically. L. D. Weis, O., running better than **$15 daily.** C. L. Jones, W. Va., averaging more than **$47 day** during past six weeks, and so on.

Little Money Starts You!

Write me. Get my help. Begin **now.** Season **just opening.** Tire repair **work** galore **everywhere.** I furnish **everything,** including machine, tools, clamps, materials and directions. No experience needed. Everything **plain and easy.** All instructions **learned in one evening.** Can't go wrong. Marvelous proposition. Wm. Howe, Mo., says: "Biggest little machine I ever saw." Steve Marchand, Texas, writes: "Am having wonderful results with your machine." Others are making **extra money**—you can too!

Mail Postal To Me, Tonight!

Get full details. It's a proposition you can handle. Place machine anywhere—garage, shed, basement. Has **wonderful capacity.** Work is **easy, pleasant** and **fascinating.** Starts you in big paying business. Puts you on road to independence. Send quick for full information. Address me personally. M. Haywood, Pres.

Haywood Tire & Equipment Co.

828 Capitol Avenue, Indianapolis, Ind.

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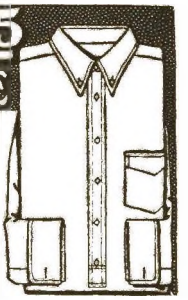
2 for $4.35
SILK FINISH PONGEE



An amazing offer, 2 beautiful extra finely woven Silk finished Sonsette Pongee Shirts for only $4.35 for both. Guaranteed worth $3 each. Attached buttoned-down collar, 4 button coat front, newest style, 1 button soft-cuff. Double stitched full cut; double yoke and collar; convenient pocket. Not a mail order shirt, but the kind sold in high-class shops only.

Send No Money Just name and address. Pay Postman only $4.35 plus postage for the 2 shirts. Examine them. Compare them. If not worth $3 for EACH, money back at once. Tan or white. Fast color. Collar sizes 14 to 17. State size. Write for free catalog.

F. V. FRANKEL Dept. 22, 353 5th Avenue, New York

EARN MONEY AT HOME

YOU can make $15 to $60 weekly in your spare time writing show cards. No canvassing or soliciting. We instruct you by our new simple Directograph system, pay you cash each week and guarantee you steady work. Write for full particulars and free booklet.

WEST-ANGUS SHOW CARD SERVICE
72 Colborne Building Toronto, Can.

LAW
STUDY AT HOME

Become a lawyer. Legally trained men win high positions and big success in business and public life. Greater opportunities now than ever before. Lawyers earn

$3,000 to $10,000 Annually

We guide you step by step. You can train at home during spare time. Let us send you records and letters from LaSalle students admitted to the bar in various states. Money refunded according to our Guarantee Bond if dissatisfied. Degree of LL. B. conferred. Thousands of successful students enrolled. Low cost, easy terms. We furnish all text material, including fourteen-volume Law Library. Get our valuable 120-page "Law Guide" and "Evidence" books FREE. Send for them—NOW.

LaSalle Extension University, Dept. 632-LB Chicago, Ill.

Comfort Baby's Skin With Cuticura Soap And Fragrant Talcum

For sample Cuticura Talcum, a fascinating fragrance, Address Cuticura Laboratories, Dept. D, Malden, Mass.

The MUNSEY

No other standard magazine approaches the Munsey record in putting across successful advertising campaigns single-handed. The Munsey has established successful businesses, built factories, made fortunes for advertisers—single-handed. The Munsey pays advertisers so richly because Munsey readers have money to spend, ambition to want, and initiative to go and get what they want. They go and get The Munsey at the news-stand every month. They go and get any advertised article they want. Have you such an article? Tell the Munsey readers about it, and get what you want—results.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 B'way, N. Y. City.

Classified Advertising continued from page 4.

HELP WANTED

Make Money At Home. You can earn from $1 to $2 an hour in your spare time writing show cards. Quickly and easily learned by our new simple "Instructograph" method. No canvassing or soliciting. We teach you how and guarantee you steady work at home and pay cash each week. Full particulars and booklet free. American Show Card School, 202 Ryrie Bldg., Toronto, Can.

SELL US YOUR SPARE TIME. YOU CAN EARN FIFTEEN TO FIFTY DOLLARS WEEKLY writing showcards at home. No canvassing. Pleasant, profitable profession, easily, quickly learned by our simple graphic block system. Artistic ability unnecessary. We instruct you and supply you work. WILSON METHODS, LIMITED, 64 East Richmond, Toronto, Canada.

RAILWAY MAIL CLERKS, STENOGRAPHERS, CLERKS, TYPISTS, wanted by Government. Examinations weekly. Prepare at home. Write for free list and plan T, payment after securing position. CSS, 1017 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia.

HELP WANTED—MALE

BE A DETECTIVE—EXCELLENT OPPORTUNITY; good pay; travel. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

ALL MEN—WOMEN OVER 17, willing to accept Government Positions $135 (Traveling or Stationary) write MR. OZMENT, 198, St. Louis, Mo.

BE A RAILWAY TRAFFIC INSPECTOR! $110 to $250 monthly, expenses paid after three months' spare-time study. Splendid opportunities. Position guaranteed or money refunded. Write for Free Booklet CM-30. Stand. Business Training Inst., Buffalo, N. Y.

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN, SLEEPING CAR, Train Porters (colored). $140—$200. Experience unnecessary. 836 RAILWAY BUREAU, East St. Louis, Ill.

RAGTIME PIANO PLAYING

RAG JASS PIANO, SAXOPHONE, OR TENOR BANJO in 20 lessons. Christensen Schools in most cities, or learn by mail. Write for Booklet or money-making teacher's opportunity. Christensen School, 441, 22 E. Jackson, Chicago.

SONG POEMS WANTED

WRITE THE WORDS FOR A SONG. We compose music. Our Chief of Staff wrote many big song-hits. Submit your song-poem to us at once. NEW YORK MELODY CORP., 403 Fitzgerald Building, New York.

TRADE SCHOOLS

EARN $10 TO $12 PER DAY. Learn Sign Painting—Auto Painting, Showcard Writing, Decorating, Paperhanging, Graining, Marbling. A Real School. Catalog Free. CHICAGO PAINTING SCHOOL, 152 W. Austin Ave., Chicago.

BIG FACTORY SALE

Brand New—Strictly Firsts

These strong **High Grade Cords** made from **fresh stock** at 50 per cent saving. Absolutely Brand New—first, in original wrapper with manufacturer's name and serial number on every tire. **Guaranteed 10,000 Miles** and adjusted at the list price on a mileage basis. *(These prices include Tube Free.)*

Sizes	Price	Sizes	Price	Sizes	Price
30x3	$ 9.95	33x4	$17.50	35x4½	$25.75
30x3½	11.75	34x4	18.95	36x4½	26.15
32x3½	14.40	32x4½	23.50	33x5	26.75
31x4	15.65	33x4½	24.10	35x5	28.00
32x4	16.90	34x4½	25.00		

Send No Money—just send your name and address, together with size and number of tires wanted. All tires shipped C.O.D. subject to examination. **Send Today.** Special 5% discount for cash with order. *Shipments same day order received.*

Webster Tire Corporation

323 E. 33rd. Street, Dept. 369, Chicago, Ill.

FRECKLES

Now Is the Time to Get Rid of These Ugly Spots.

There's no longer the slightest need of feeling ashamed of your freckles, as Othine—double strength—is guaranteed to remove these homely spots.

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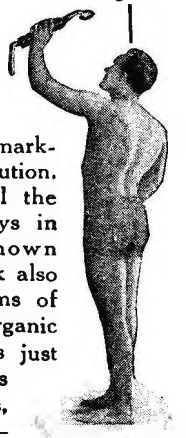

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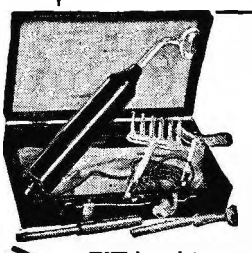

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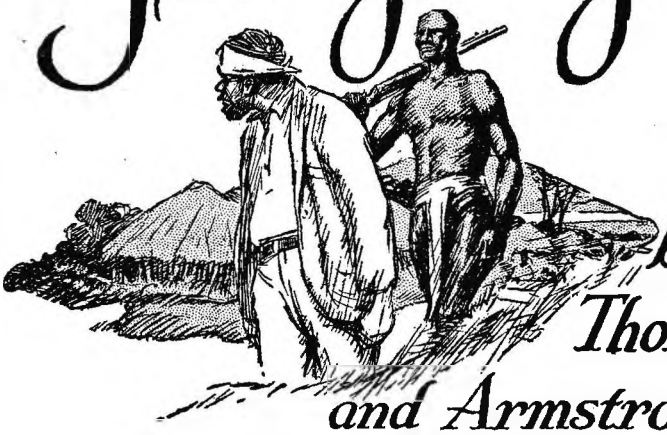
The Ju-Ju Man

Part I



by Thomas H. Griffiths and Armstrong Livingston

Authors of "The Soul of the Lamp," "The Diamond Theft," etc.

CHAPTER I.

TWO BAGS OF GOLD.

PIET SMALE, Boer renegade and hero of a dozen unsavory adventures, entered the little African trading town of Mafadi and limped along its main street with a dragging step that told of many a mile of painful effort. His linen clothes were torn and stained from contact with the bush, his beard was matted with dust and dirt, and some physical injury was indicated by the filthy, blood-stained rag about his brow.

At his heels strode a gun-bearer, tall and broad and muscular, whose elastic step and light carriage showed him to be built of sterner stuff than his master. He was a Bololo, black and shiny as a silk hat, and his movements were unhampered by any garment except the customary breech-clout. Upon his right shoulder he bore the two heavy-calibered rifles, brightly polished and well oiled, that constituted the sole traveling kit of the Boer.

It was high noon, and the blazing sun beat down on a village that to all appearances was deserted by every living soul. Not even a dog was to be seen moving, but the silence and solitude presented no problem to the sophisticated mind of the adventurer.

"All takin' a siesta," he muttered, and yawned himself at the very thought of slumber.

He shaded his eyes with one hand and peered through the heat waves that danced and shimmered. His attention was caught by a patch of vivid color farther up the street, and he promptly identified it as a native policeman clad in the bright red trousers and blue coat with which the Belgian Congo authorities lure recruits to the force from the fascinated Senegalese. He was taking a nap in the shade of a small warehouse, his bare feet thrust out before him and his scarlet fez canted down over his eyes. It was clear that he expected no outbreak of crime to disturb his dreams, and his attitude of complete repose spoke

well for the orderly and peace-loving disposition of the town's inhabitants.

Smale walked toward the sleeper. As a rule he much preferred the police when they slept, but he was obliged to arouse this particular representative of the law to further his own ends. He stooped and caught the chromatic figure by its shoulder, shaking it vigorously.

"Wake up!" he commanded.

The man sprang to his feet, alert on the instant.

"Where is DaSilva's café?"

There was a brief interval of silence while the Boer waited impatiently for the question to penetrate the mental fog that protects the brain of an African policeman from the too sudden intrusion of an idea. At last a glimmer of intelligence flickered across the ebony features, and the man swung an arm up the street.

"Dere him lib," he said proudly.

Smale's eyes followed the gesture and rested upon a rambling two-storied building, constructed of the inevitable corrugated iron, that boasted a rusty tin signboard which stuck out over the door. An obliterated line at the top of it marked the spot where some former proprietor's name had flaunted itself in the gaze of trader and traveler until his successor came along and erased it; but the more important word "Café" still shrieked its invitation to the thirsty in blood-red letters on a white background. Smale moistened his lips and gave a sigh of relief as he limped toward it, for he had come to the end of his journey.

The frenzied yapping of a small fox terrier greeted him as he thrust open the door of the barroom, and in response to the alarm a tousled head, with sleepy eyes, appeared above the bar. This was DaSilva, a burly half-breed Portuguese, who had been stealing forty winks in judicious proximity to his stock of liquor. As the bulk of his great body heaved itself into view it could be seen that his hands were busy beneath the counter, and they finally emerged with two tall glasses that he slapped down upon the rough wood of the bar. A man of few words, he raised a questioning eyebrow.

"Gin and soda," answered Smale. "Take what you like yourself."

DaSilva nodded, filled the glasses with the desired mixture, and lifted his politely toward his new patron. The Boer wasted no time in such idle ceremony, and he drew a long breath of contentment as he returned his empty glass to the bar. He proceeded briskly with his business.

"Have you seen anything of a man named Burk? He's a tall cove, ugly as sin, with a machete scar across his homely phiz that sort of improves it. Red hair and blue eyes—"

An expressive jerk of DaSilva's head interrupted the flow of description, and Smale glanced in the direction indicated. He observed a closed door, apparently that of a rear room, and stepping across to it he turned the handle and flung it open expectantly.

A man lay asleep upon a low couch, which, with two rickety chairs and a beer-stained table, comprised the whole furnishing of the apartment. He was clad in ducks of spotless white, and an immaculate pith helmet, evidently new, lay beside him on the lounge. The great frame of his body, nearly six feet four in length, stretched from a pair of stupendous feet to a thrusting shock of red hair that no amount of combing could ever keep untangled. Beneath this flaming wilderness was the face that Smale had described, cruelly marked by the crimson scar that ran from his left eye to the chin; if his sins were as ugly as he, then Dan Burk, sometime scholar and all-time scoundrel, was as deep-dyed a villain as drew breath between Cairo and the Cape.

Smale had barely time to realize his presence before the sleeper awoke and sprang to his feet, his hand slipping swiftly to his belt with the instinctive movement of a man who never knows to what he may awaken. He checked the motion, and his crooked features relaxed into a welcoming grin as he recognized the Boer.

"'Lo, Piet!" he greeted him. He advanced with outstretched arm and the two men clasped hands for an instant. "You're on time to the day, but you look as if you'd had your troubles gettin' here. Who bashed you on the nob?"

Smale grunted indifferently and sank

into one of the chairs. "Barroom fight in Mapra," he explained, touching his head tenderly. "Somebody beaned me from behind—with a railroad tie, I guess. A Bololo boy pulled me out of the scrimmage. He wanted to get back to his own country, which is near here, so I brought him along as a bearer." He stretched his legs and yawned. "Where do we sleep?"

Burk pointed upward. "I've got a room in this shimbeck," he replied, "but if you can keep your pretty peepers open awhile, there's something I want to tell you about first."

Smale nodded assent. He opened the door and called to DaSilva for two glasses and four bottles of beer, and then drew his chair up to the table. Burk, for his part, strolled to the one dingy window of the room and glanced speculatively out of it. There was nothing to be seen except two languid Krooboys who were keeping up the fire beneath a kettle of palm-nuts, and a still more languid monkey on a chain who was sleeping fitfully between flea-bites. The adventurer, however, was no man to take unnecessary chances; he closed the window tight against possible eavesdroppers, and when he sat down again the two men put their heads close together before venturing to speak in whispers.

"You've got your share safe?" asked Smale.

Burk's hand burrowed in his vest until it found a small buckskin bag that hung from his neck by a stout bit of cord. He loosened the string about its throat and poured a number of rough diamonds, of good size, into the palm of his huge hand. "There they are, bless 'em," he said. "Much better off than when old Israel Gough of Cairo wore them next to his greasy heart. Where's Izzy now, d'ye suppose?"

"In hell," replied Smale with conviction. "That knife of yours sank pretty deep."

Burk restored the diamonds to their resting place and laughed easily. "We made a good get-away! No one suspected us, and they'd hardly look for us here if they did." He pulled a pipe from his coat pocket and filled it carefully. "Not," he added slowly, "that I expect to stay long in Mafadi."

The Boer raised his eyebrows inquiringly. "Thought we were going into the trading business?"

"So we are," said Burk, gayly. "We are going to trade our wits and our energy against two fifty-pound sacks of gold."

Smale's eyes were lit by a swift gleam of avarice that vanished as quickly as it came. He shook his head doubtfully. "Too heavy to carry," he objected. "I'm not as young as I used to be, Dan, and when I'm leaving a place in a hurry I don't care about much baggage."

"You'll leave this place in a cozy canoe," explained Burk, "and the gold will rest nicely in the bottom of it. We'll go straight down the Congo."

"Where's the stuff?"

"It belongs to an American trader named Holden, whose factory is about half a mile up the river from here. I was strolling past it last evening, and I happened to see a light in his office. The old fool didn't know enough to shade the window, so I got a pretty good view of what was going on. He was talking to a big, black chief of the Batatekes, and after a while the chap handed over a pouch of gold dust to Holden, who poured it into a canvas sack that he took from a big iron safe in the corner of his office. When he put it back he pulled open the door of the safe a bit wider, and in the back of it I saw another sack just like the first. I came away after that before any dog, or some of the boys, could spot me."

Smale stroked his beard, and a note of doubt crept into his voice. "Do you mean to say he did all this in front of the Batateke? How do you know that other sack is gold dust? He wouldn't be keeping anything like that around the place; he'd ship it away."

Burk shrugged his shoulders.

"I know it sounds queer," he admitted, "but I'm only telling you what I saw. He may have some reason to trust the Batateke. As for the dust, the story about town is that he and his daughter are going to the States next month, and he is probably figuring that it will be safer for him to take it along than to ship it. He can keep it right under his own eye until it is turned

into cash. The main thing, Piet, is that I know it's there, and that it will be a mighty nice haul for us if we can get our hands on it."

"Have you made a plan?"

"Only part of one, but it looks as if things are playing into our hands. I strolled past the place this morning early, and by a bit of good luck I noticed a Belgian overseer superintending some work in the compound. Of course I'd made a few inquiries in town, in an offhand way, and I knew that Holden employed this chap, and that his name was Kaven. He doesn't enjoy a very good reputation even among his own scoundrelly countrymen here, and I had already begun to wonder if we might not be able to use him. From all accounts, he has the makings of a first-class villain in his system if I could once get him started. So I looked him over pretty carefully, and you can imagine my surprise when I recognized in Kaven our old friend Krafft."

The Boer uttered an exclamation of astonishment.

"The man we got out of that scrape in Madagascar?"

"The same. I managed to catch his eye and beckoned him to follow me into the bush. He came, but could only stay a few minutes. He told me that he has been with Holden over a year and is properly fed up with it, and the way he said it nearly made me laugh in his face. The story here is that he's crazy about Holden's daughter, a girl from all accounts who is too darned good to be wasted in the African bush, and she won't look at him. If she cares for any one it's for a young American named Rushton, who is Holden's manager.

"That is the history to date of Mr. Krafft, alias Kaven. I believe he can be of use to us, and I asked him to come here later this afternoon and talk things over. I knew that you would probably turn up in time for the interview, and so you have."

Smale puckered his forehead thoughtfully, and his eyes narrowed until they were mere slits. "Two bags of gold," he said musingly, "and three men to share them. It is not good!"

The glances of the two men met for an instant, and whatever suggestion was contained in that silent communion seemed to satisfy them both. Whether or not it would have been equally satisfying to Kaven is a question, but that unfortunate tool of men cleverer than he was not there to catch the hint of danger.

It was quite late in the afternoon, and the shadows were lengthening fast, when the Boer again entered the back room, much refreshed by a few hours' sleep in Burk's bed. He found his friend deep in conversation with a scrawny, sallow-faced individual whom he recognized at once as Kaven, and drawing a chair up to the table he settled himself to take a share in the talk.

"We've got it nearly worked out," said Burk. "Some evening next week, whenever we are ready, Kaven will manage to dope the food of the Krooboys and that of the whites as well. He can get the stuff from a fetish doctor, who has his diggings near here, and if it is what he claims it to be, they won't wake for an earthquake. We'll have plenty of time to lift the key, open the safe, and bag the gold. With any luck at all we'll be fifty miles down the river by the time the old man finds out what he has slept through. Nothing can stop us then."

Smale nodded absent-mindedly. He had noticed something that was concealed from Burk, and it was making him think. The Belgian's hands were beneath the table, but Smale was seated in such a position that he could see them, and he observed that they were continually opening and shutting in a manner indicative of intense nervousness. The shrewd Boer, trained to study human nature and to profit by its frailty, was convinced that the Belgian had something on his mind that he had not yet revealed, and with consummate patience and determination he set himself to find out what it was. One searching question followed another, and by watching the telltale fingers beneath the table he was able to judge whether his queries were missing or nearing the mark.

The truth finally came with a rush. Smale had asked who the Batateke was who had brought the gold to Holden, and whether Kaven knew anything about the

source of the precious metal. The Belgian rose from his chair and half flung his slender body across the table in the sudden passion of excitement that gripped him.

"That is eet!" he cried. "I mus' tell you. I can no longer keep him from you. Alone I can do nossing — nossing! You mus' help me. Listen to me!"

The three heads drew closer together.

"The Batateke is M'Buli, the chief of hees tribe. Two weeks ago I hear him talk to Holden, an' he tell heem that he is the only one of hees people who know where the gold is hidden. Before that I haf always thought that he bring the dust as it was washed by the natives, but then I hear that it ees all in one secret place—*une cache.* M'Buli brings it in as eet is needed for food an' medicine for hees people.

"But, observe! The Batatekes haf long fought with their neighbors, the Bololos, and they haf been getting killed—killed—killed! Now M'Buli is 'fraid he may die too, an' the secret with heem. He do not trust hees own people, so he come to Holden, who I t'ink ees—what you call eet?—hees blood-brother, *n'est ce pas? Bien!* They haf sworn the oath that no man breaks, an' M'Buli haf drawn a map an' given eet to hees white brother!"

A moment's silence hung over the men as he finished speaking. Burk and Smale regarded each other steadfastly, until the former put their thought into words.

"A map!" he said softly. "A map! If we could only get that!"

"And if we got it," asked the cautious Boer, "what then?"

"A raid!" burst out Kaven. "We get the gold, pack eet on the donkey, an'—poof—we are away to the south before any one can make us the trouble!"

"A raid into the heart of the Batateke country?" repeated the Boer. "You are mad. It would mean an expedition—and we have no money for that!"

"The Bololos!" cried the Belgian. "I haf thought eet all out. They will help us get the gold eef we will help them to destroy their enemies."

Burk regarded the enthusiast with something akin to admiration.

"You have ideas, my young Machiaveli; but what will the Congo government be doing while we are setting two tribes by the ears?"

"The government — pah!" Kaven snapped his fingers derisively. "The commandant in charge of thees district knows which side of the butter is hees bread! Leave heem to me. He has no love for Americans—an' as for the natives, why, the more they kill each other the less work for heem. We promise heem a small share, an' he keep hees hands off!"

Again Burk and Smale exchanged a long, thoughtful glance.

"If we pull this off, Piet, we can quit."

Smale laughed scornfully, but a gleam of excitement began to creep into his eye. "That is what you always say! If we get away with this scheme the next thing you will want to do will be to steal the whole bloomin' Congo!"

Burk grinned wickedly. "It's been a pet idea of mine for a long time," he admitted. "But if you think there's anything in this present plan, let us fix up the details. That is your job, Piet; you have all the brains of the party."

The Boer turned to Kaven.

"The safe is opened by a key?"

"Yes."

"How will you get it?"

"After I haf drugged Holden I will get it from hees room."

"That is not safe. Do you ever handle it yourself?"

"Oh, yes! I often haf eet during the day. But he would miss—"

"Hush! You cannot steal it, but you can bring me a drawing of it, or an impression, and I will file a key for ourselves."

"That ees possible," said the Belgian, obviously relieved that he would have to run no physical risk.

"Do you know the road to the Bololo country?" interjected Burk.

Kaven shook his head, and the tall adventurer turned in his perplexity to Smale. "That makes it awkward, doesn't it?"

The Boer was seldom at a loss for a ready answer, and he had one now.

"What is Providence for but to pro-

vide?" he answered sententiously. "It foresaw my need, and in Mapra it sent me a Bololo boy to guide my way!"

CHAPTER II.

THEFT.

THE Holden trading house, or factory, was quite a pretentious affair that rose in the center of a good-sized clearing about a mile from the outskirts of Mafadi. It was a two-story building, every inch of it carefully sheathed in the corrugated iron that affords protection against a multitude of pests that beset the foreigner who lives in Africa.

On the ground floor was a large storeroom for the heterogeneous collection of wares that constituted Holden's stock of trade goods, a smaller room, always carefully locked, where rubber and ivory were kept until they were shipped away, and adjoining this was Holden's own office, where he transacted a considerable part of his business.

This room had no connection with the rest of the lower floor. It had one door which opened upon the outer world, and a second in the rear wall that gave egress to a short flight of stairs that led to the second story. Both doors were heavily constructed, and secured at night by stout wooden bars that lay in deep sockets. The window was guarded by a shutter of thick planking which also was fastened in place by strong bars.

The second floor was devoted exclusively to the living rooms of the Holden family and the trader's white staff. Here were the bedrooms, the kitchen and dining room, a small parlor, and a few closets for linen, clothes, and the choicer brands of canned foods that Mrs. Holden picked out for their own use.

Fred Rushton, the young American manager, of whom Burk had spoken, had his quarters on this floor, and so, too, did the Belgian overseer.

Kaven had no difficulty in obtaining the sleeping powder from the native he had mentioned, and when he received word from Burk two days later that all was in readiness for the attempt he lost no time in carrying out his share of the preparations.

He made his way, just before the dinner hour, to the edge of the compound where it joined the virgin jungle. Here were several rough outbuildings comprising the kitchen and sleeping quarters of the Krooboys employed by Holden. The Belgian entered the cookhouse, where the evening meal of palm oil chop was already simmering in one big pot, and after sending the cook away on an errand he calmly shook the greater portion of his soporific into the stewing mess.

He gave it one or two precautionary stirs with a big wooden ladle before sauntering carelessly off to complete his arrangements in the kitchen of the main house.

Mrs. Holden herself usually superintended the Gaboon boy, who had been trained in the duties of a chef, and Kaven anticipated some little delay in the execution of his plans. He congratulated himself that he had been in the habit of dropping into the kitchen at odd times for a half hour's chat with Mrs. Holden; his presence there now would excite no interest, and he would need only an instant of inattention on her part to accomplish his purpose. As it turned out, luck favored him almost immediately.

He had barely said good evening when Mrs. Holden sent the boy to the storeroom for a tin of salmon and followed almost immediately on his heels to see that he got the right kind.

Kaven was left to himself, lolling back in a chair, and the moment the sound of her footsteps had died away he sprang up and slipped across the room to the stove. He had his eye on the coffeepot which stood ready to be placed on the fire.

He raised its lid, held the paper of powder over it—and hesitated. In that brief instant his evil nature was swayed by a momentary impulse toward good, and he checked his hand while he contemplated adding treachery by betraying his fellow conspirators. There passed before his mind the vision of a tall girl with dark hair and blue eyes—eyes that laughed the livelong

day—and his fingers slowly withdrew from the pot.

Only for a second, however. The vision faded and was replaced by another of the same girl, her eyes flashing angrily and her lips curled with contempt, as she looked the other day when he had jokingly thrown his arm around her waist. *Sacré!* With a quick motion of his hand he emptied the drug into the liquid. He tiptoed softly back to his chair and was idly whittling a sliver of wood when Mrs. Holden returned to the kitchen.

There was a crescent moon that night, and the adventurers, planning an early hour for their burglarious raid, counted upon its light to aid them in their get-away. There was little danger of their being either seen or heard, for the African savage fears the night and only moves by day. As for the incidental noise that they might make at the factory, the two ruffians pinned their faith to the potency of Kaven's powder to keep their victims unconscious.

A trader and his family do not keep very late hours, and it was only eleven o'clock when the Belgian stole from his room with a step as light as a breath of air. He crept downstairs, hugging the wall to keep the treads from creaking, and cautiously unfastened the door that led to Holden's office. He opened it silently, crossed the room like a shadow, and raised, inch by inch, the heavy piece of wood that held the shutter of the window.

As the bar slipped out of its socket he lifted it free and stood it against the wall. Then he sank to the floor beneath the level of the sill, and waited.

In a few minutes a low whistle sounded outside, and the shutter was gently raised and secured. A man's head was framed in the moonlit opening. It was Burk, and with a nod of recognition to the Belgian he drew his great body over the sill and into the room. Smale followed at his heels. The Boer closed the shutter behind him, foreseeing that they would have to use a light.

With his usual careful attention to detail, Piet Smale had given the duplicate key he had made to Kaven on the previous afternoon. The Belgian found an opportunity to try it in the safe, and reported that it worked like a charm. Burk produced it with a flourish and slipped it into the keyhole. He turned it gingerly, fearful of trouble at the eleventh hour, but the lock shot back smoothly, and the big Irishman jubilantly swore in a whisper that the devil himself was no cleverer that Piet.

He pulled open the iron door.

Smale had brought an electric torch, which he now thrust into the black interior of the safe. The two canvas bags were in plain sight, and the powerful hands of Burk seized upon them and lifted them soundlessly to the floor. Then the slender ray of light played from pigeonhole to pigeonhole, each of them crammed tight with papers, and Burk uttered a dismayed oath.

Kaven came to his aid, however, indicating a small drawer marked "R. Holden. Private." The big scoundrel snatched it forth; it was filled with small account books and loose memoranda that he dumped unceremoniously upon the floor. He scuffled rapidly through the pile until his heart jumped at the sight of an envelope marked "M'Buli's Map."

They had found what they came for, and Burk searched no further. He thrust the precious document into his pocket and rose to his feet with an exclamation of triumph. "Fortune favors the bold! Out you go, you two. I'll bring the gold."

Kaven and the Boer obeyed instantly. They swung across the window sill, fastening up the shutters to get it out of Burk's way, and dropped lightly to the ground.

The Irishman, still holding the torch, bent down for the canvas sacks. He had scarcely touched them when a cool, crisp voice spoke from the door of the room.

"Who's there?" it demanded sharply.

A woman's voice! Had it been a man's, Burk would have exercised due discretion. As it was, he recklessly flashed the ray of his torch in the direction of the speaker, and had one brief glimpse of her that he never forgot.

A slender girl, tall and graceful, was revealed by the searching light. Her dark hair hung in loose masses upon her shoulders, her bare throat and arms shone white

in the radiance, and her eyes looked fearlessly into the shadows behind the torch. She made out the open door of the safe and the vague outline of a man crouching before it.

Celia Holden was as brave as she was beautiful, and as determined as she was brave. Burk had barely time to appreciate the picture she made when he saw a streak of flame dart from her side. She had shot from her hip, and as the stillness of the night was shattered by the crash of her revolver he dropped the torch and clapped his hand to his ear with a sudden cry of pain.

Unfortunately for the girl, she had been quite as reckless as the man. She had needlessly exposed herself in the doorway, never dreaming that danger lurked beyond the open window, and Piet Smale had seen his opportunity. He snatched a heavy hunting knife from his belt and sent it flashing through the air with deadly aim. Only a miracle saved her life, for it was the hilt of the weapon that struck her fair between the eyes and not its point. She reeled back and sank unconscious upon the lowest step of the stairs.

" Run, you beggars!" shouted Burk.

He caught up the two sacks, one beneath each arm, and took a flying leap through the window, alighting firmly upon his feet in the soft grass.

No trained acrobat could have done it better. In a moment he was racing through the dim moonlight in pursuit of his vanishing comrades. He threw a glance over his shoulder as he ran, and saw that lamps were moving from one room to another of the factory, and he silently cursed the Belgian for the apparent failure of his sleeping powder.

Burk and Smale had stolen a canoe from Mafadi and paddled up against the current until they reached the Holden clearing, where they had left the frail boat in charge of the Bololo boy while they looted the safe. It was a scant hundred yards from the house to the edge of the river, and Burk swore afterward that they made the return trip in world's figures.

They tumbled hurriedly into their places. The canoe was a small affair of native manufacture, a hollowed log barely able to contain the four men and their heavy loot, but it was the best that chance had offered them. The Bololo took the stern, the white men correctly assuming that he was best qualified to steer. Kaven sat in front of him, then Burk, and the keen-eyed Piet plied his paddle in the bow.

" Let her go!" whispered Burk.

The Bololo needed no interpreter. A steady, powerful thrust of his paddle against the bank sent the canoe twenty yards from shore and into the swift current. Kaven, Smale, and Burk bent to their task, and their dripping blades flashed in the moonlight.

" All clear!" panted the Irishman.

The words had hardly left his lips when a shot rang out and he heard the angry whine of a bullet past his ears. Five more followed in swift succession, but the only damage was a hole through the canoe well above the water line. Silence fell again upon the night, and it was clear that their pursuer had emptied his revolver. Burk turned to the Belgian, who was shaking in every limb.

" Who's your friend?" he asked.

" It mus' have been Rushton," was the quavering response.

" My word!" exclaimed the Irishman. " He didn't lose much time in picking up the trail. Probably he's what they call a ' hustler ' in the States, don't you think?"

" Doubtless," muttered Kaven gloomily.

" Cheer up, my boy! The faster they follow, the faster we'll lead."

" We better move fas' now," urged the Belgian. " They will come after us in big canoes. Can we not go more quicker?"

Smale overheard him.

" Do you think I'm a fool?" he growled. He called gruffly to the Bololo. " You, Billy! Did you do as I told you?"

" Yas, massa. Me took um big rock. Put um t'ru bottoms ob boats."

" That 'll stop 'em a while," said the Boer with relish. " They'll get nothing else nearer than Mafadi."

Burk laughed joyously.

" Good old Piet!" he cried. He threw back his head and swept the heavens with his gaze. " They can never catch us now.

We're going down with this current at ten knots an hour."

He burst into rollicking song:

"Oh, we're floating down the Congo—Congo—Congo—
We're boating down the Congo—Yo! Ho! Ho!
There are crocodiles to bite us,
Hidden bars to fright us,
Savages to smite us—
Low bridge—*low!*

Oh, there's danger in the Congo—Congo—Congo—
To a stranger in the Congo, want and woe!
There is poison in its pleasures,
Treason in its treasures,
Murder in its measures—
Low bridge—*low!*

Love is waiting on the Congo—Congo—Congo—
There is mating on the Congo—don't I know?
There are willing maids to hear us,
Dusky charms to cheer us—
Jealous blacks to spear us—
Low bridge—*low!*"

There was silence as his voice died away until the Boer spoke crossly.

"I suppose you know that is a very damn foolish way to act. Why must you tell the whole Congo where we are?"

"They know already," answered Burk lightly. "Surely, Piet, you've knocked about Africa long enough to know that news travels by means we don't understand. Hark now!"

The muffled cadence of a distant drum floated through the quiet air with a steady insistence that could signify a message of grave importance. It rose and fell with a dreary monotony of beat that was altogether meaningless to any ears save those for which its information was intended. Not one of the men in the canoe could guess what it was saying. Smale shot a question at the native boy in the stern and drew blank.

"Batateke drum, massa. No savvy him palaver."

They had no reason to believe that the mysterious teller of tales bore any portent of evil for themselves, but instinctively they put more strength behind each thrust of their paddles in a vain effort to lose the disheartening sound.

The canoe swept on, carried by the swift stream and driven by the efforts of its crew, until presently the pale moon sank behind the trees and an impenetrable blackness swallowed up the river and its banks. The men did not dare to continue their journey without some light by which to guide their tricky craft, and they were compelled to disembark. Two valuable hours were lost before a faint grayness in the sky heralded the approach of dawn and gave them courage to venture once more upon the water.

An hour later Smale gave an exclamation of pleasure and relief. His quick eye had detected, on the river bank ahead of them, a shapelss mass of twisted iron and charred woodwork. He recognized it as the wreck of an old stern wheeler the last page of whose history is a grim incident in the story of the Congo, and he knew, by patient questioning of their guide, that an old trail to the Bololo country left the river a few hundred yards below the scene of the disaster.

That trail was their present objective, and his gratification sprang from the reflection that they would soon be off the treacherous water and safe upon terra firma.

The canoe swept around the stern of the wreck and headed for the shore. It was almost impossible to distinguish objects on the stream, and Piet Smale leaned forward anxiously in an effort to keep a good lookout.

Presently he called a curt warning to the Bololo.

"Logs! Keep to the right!"

The boy obeyed promptly, and their way seemed clear. An instant later, however, the Boer noticed a black shape in the water directly ahead of the boat, and he quickly divined the truth.

"Take it easy!" he cautioned sharply. "We are running into a nest of crocs!"

It was too late to check the way of the canoe, and the men lifted their paddles helplessly as the frail boat drifted toward the great saurians. No serious menace threatened as long as nothing occurred to frighten or anger the watchful animals.

They were soon in the midst of them and had all too close a view of long leathery

heads and little blinking eyes that stared back at them curiously. There were a number of the creatures just floating lazily on the surface, while still others came and went from the gaping hull of the wreck, where they evidently had their home. Smale held his breath as he kept an agonized watch ahead and motioned his directions to the steersman by a slight movement of either hand.

All might have been well had not a solitary crocodile suddenly risen to the surface exactly in front of their bow. Smale gave a gasp as he expected each moment to feel the canoe rise upon the creature's back, and be promptly flung out of water, but fortunately the beast itself moved slightly and the stem of the dugout barely touched it behind the shoulder.

Instantly all was confusion. The crocodile exploded into furious energy, heaving itself half out of the water, and the Boer had a fearful vision of two gaping jaws before they clashed savagely upon the edge of the canoe within a few inches of his hand.

Simultaneously a piercing scream ripped the atmosphere and a violent shock careened the dugout. The tail of the huge lizard had described a vicious semicircle through the air and had struck the unfortunate Kaven full upon his chest. The force of the terrific blow lifted his body clean out of the boat and hurled it into the water on the other side. It was only by a quick movement in the opposite direction that the Bololo, who saw what was happening, was able to right the canoe before it threw them all into the river. At the same moment he gave two or three convulsive thrusts with his paddle that drove the dugout from the area of danger and sent it swiftly shoreward.

A series of ear-splitting shrieks proceeded from the doomed man as he realized his fate. Burk and Smale, shaking in every limb with the horror that held them motionless, stared back at the terrible scene which ensued. A score of black snouts were darting toward a common point, where they met in a tangled swirl, and for one ghastly moment the watching men saw Kaven's body tossed from the water by the impetus of the attack. A dozen widespread jaws reached up to catch him as he fell.

CHAPTER III.

THE CHASE STARTS.

IT not often happens that some unforeseen circumstance or combination of circumstances will set at naught the best laid plans of villains and heroes alike. It was such a grouping of incidents, simple in themselves, but freighted with the workings of a predestined fate, that had arisen to upset Kaven's calculations.

He had been obliged to leave the dinner table to speak to one of the Krooboy headmen on some matter of immediate importance. He shot a quick glance about him as he rose and saw that each of his companions was provided with a full cup of the drugged coffee. When he returned, the empty cups stood at each place and he was perfectly satisfied that his scheme was proceeding according to schedule. There was nothing to show him that Celia Holden had decided not to drink any coffee that evening and had passed her cup to her mother, who drank it as well as her own. Mrs. Holden, in order to get it out of her way, had passed her first empty cup to the girl, thus leaving no indication of the change that had been made.

So it happened that Mrs. Holden, with two cups of coffee before going to bed, slept like a log, while Celia, who had none, remained awake for some little time and then fell into a light, broken slumber.

She did not know just what aroused her, but she awakened to the consciousness of some one moving on the floor below. She was a fearless young woman, well accustomed to acting on her own initiative, and she did not hesitate at this moment to investigate the noise by herself. Armed with a small revolver, she crept out of her room and down the stairs. She had no intention whatsoever of arousing any other member of the family to what might easily prove a false alarm; at the very worst, she conjectured a depredatory native with designs on the canned goods in the storeroom.

She chose the stairs that led to her

father's office for her descent, intending to slip out of the building and launch a rear attack upon the unsuspecting thief, and her first warning that something more serious was afoot came with the discovery that the door at the bottom of the stairs was ajar. She might even then have retreated, but when she saw that her father's safe was open and that a man was crouched before it, she determined to attempt his capture single-handed rather than give him a chance to escape. There was sufficient light from his torch to show her that the rest of the room was empty, and she never dreamed that danger might lurk beyond the dim, square of the open window. She challenged him, and when his only answer was to turn the blinding ray of light into her eyes, she unhesitatingly pressed the trigger of her revolver and had the satisfaction of hearing the cry that marked her hit. Then some bright object flashed before her vision, and its crashing impact upon her forehead temporarily dazed her. Her knees bent beneath her and she sank to the floor.

Her shot, however, had served to alarm the sleepers above. Kaven's drug, effective enough in ordinary circumstances, was not proof against the reverberating echoes of a pistol shot. Holden and Fred Rushton each sprang from his bed, seized a revolver, and tore downstairs. The younger man was slightly the swifter, and it was he who checked his headlong pace at the sight of a white figure lying upon the steps below him. It was by some instinct born of anxiety that he identified the person of the girl he loved. Forgetful of everything else in the world, he dropped to his knees beside her and slipped his arm about her shoulders.

"Celia!" he cried. "What is it? Are you hurt?"

She was already beginning to recover from the effects of the blow she had received. She struggled to a sitting position, and with her returning senses came the memory of what had happened.

"Robbers!" she gasped. "Out the window! Follow them!"

"But you're hurt!" he protested.

"No, no! I'm all right. Follow them!"

Her second command inspired him to the performance of his obvious duty. He crossed the room in two leaps and was out of the window at a third.

Had he glanced in the wrong direction first there might have been no indication to point the way the scoundrels had taken, but chance led his eyes toward the river just in time to see a figure darting from the moonlight into the shadow of the mango trees that grew along the bank. He tore off in pursuit, careless that his bare feet were being lacerated by sharp stones and stubby grass. Thus he reached the edge of the Congo in time to see a small canoe rapidly disappearing downstream on the vigorous impulse of four thrusting paddles. An excellent shot under most circumstances, the swift motion of the canoe conspired with the dancing shadows of the trees to confuse his aim and waste his cartridges. He reluctantly returned to the house, picking his path this time with due consideration for his bruised feet.

The rifled safe told its own tale of the vanished results of nearly a year's trading. It was the work of only a few more minutes to discover the damaged canoes, to guess at the use of a drug, and to realize that the malefactors had followed a carefully preconceived plan. By the light of a flickering lamp, Holden, Rushton, and Celia settled down in the office to a council of war.

Robert Holden was a tall, gray-haired, iron-jawed man of the typical mold in which pioneers are cast. Confronted by such a crisis as this, his stern nature infinitely preferred to rely upon his own powers rather than appeal for help to any governmental authority—a trait in his unbending spirit from which Celia undoubtedly inherited her qualities of courage and self-reliance.

It was characteristic of the old trader that he should now be discussing with Rushton the best means of trailing the robbers and recovering his gold instead of adopting the more obvious course of sending a messenger posthaste to the commandant at Mafadi. No doubt he was swayed to this congenial decision by a shrewd suspicion that if ever the police got their hands on the gold they might go the thieves one better, and by the knowledge that Kaven, whose complicity was clearly shown by his

disappearance, was on more or less intimate terms with his official countryman.

"I have sent a boy to Mafadi to borrow all the canoes he can get," announced the trader as they sat down, "and also a runner to M'Buli asking him to join us here."

Celia, holding a moist cloth to her aching forehead, uttered an exclamation of surprise. "To M'Buli?" she repeated. "What will he be able to do?"

"I am sorry to say that he has suffered by this outrage as much as ourselves. One of the things stolen from the safe was a map that I drew at his direction showing the location of a store of treasure that belongs to the Batateke tribe. I confess I don't see what good it is going to do the thieves, who will hardly venture into the Batateke country by themselves, but still, it's not a document that he'd care to have knocking around all Africa. He'll be anxious to recover it, and he will be able to do many things that we cannot. For instance, our knowledge of the scoundrels is limited to the supposition that Kaven is one of their party. No doubt they have landed somewhere by now and are lost in the jungle, where only a native can find them. That will be M'Buli's task. Once he has shown me where they are, I will guarantee to do the rest"

Rushton looked dubious. "A hard job even for M'Buli," he commented, "but I agree with you that he is our best hope. It will be late to-morrow afternoon before you can possibly hear from him."

"That is true," assented Holden, "but the delay cannot be helped." He turned to Celia with parental sternness. "Be off to bed, young lady, and give that aching head a chance to rest."

The girl rose obediently and moved to the door, sending a smiling glance over her shoulder at Rushton. The men watched her until she vanished up the stairs, and then their eyes met.

"She is as plucky as she is beautiful," observed Fred abruptly, and colored at his spontaneous outburst.

Holden smiled, evidently pleased at hearing his daughter praised, and then regarded the young man thoughtfully. There was a manifest kindliness in the expression of his face and the tone of his words when he spoke again, but there was also a hint of firmness.

"She will make a wife for any man to be proud of," he said. "Mrs. Holden and I have decided that we have no right to keep her much longer in this wilderness. She must have her chance to see more of the world and of people in general; when we go back to the States next spring we will probably leave her with relatives of her mother."

Rushton felt his heart sink. He sensed in Holden's words a plain, if kindly, warning that no impoverished factory managers need apply.

He had come to no understanding with Celia, but with the intuition of love he felt certain that she returned his regard and would be willing to share his fortunes—whenever those same fortunes would permit him to make a definite proposal. He had reason to hope that this would be soon, for he was learning the trading business rapidly and would presently be in a position to remind Holden of the promise of a partnership as soon as he was qualified to take over the older man's burdens.

He had come to Africa as soon as he had graduated from an Eastern college, lured by the spell of a country that was so ancient in history and so new in the ken of other nations. He brought with him warm letters of introduction to Robert Holden, who welcomed him cordially and gladly made room for him in his own business. The trader had accumulated enough money to enable him to retire whenever he felt inclined, and he was only too pleased to discover a steady, responsible young man upon whom he could lean in his old age.

In the meantime Fred had found himself more and more in love with Celia. He reluctantly admitted the justice of Holden's contention that she should see something of the outer world, but he appreciated the fact that much of the girl's present feeling for him must be due to propinquity, and while he was quite willing to concede that she should have an opportunity to meet other men before coming to the most important decision of her life, it was still painful to reflect that new scenes, new faces, and

new friends might easily turn her thoughts away from the very ordinary young man she had left behind in Africa.

He was recalled from these gloomy thoughts by Holden rising and stretching himself wearily.

" There is nothing we can do for hours to come. We may as well snatch a little sleep while we can. You've never been on a long safari, Fred, and you don't realize what we've got ahead of us."

Rushton moved restlessly in his chair. " Can we really do nothing? It is maddening to sit here while those scoundrels get farther and farther away!"

Holden merely shrugged his shoulders and smiled. He was filled with irritation and resentment at the loss of his gold, but a lifetime spent in the hazardous business of African trading had accustomed him to accept either fortune or misfortune with an outward show of calm.

" We must wait for M'Buli," he repeated as he went slowly from the room.

Rushton followed his example, and in spite of the excitements of the night, his head had hardly touched the pillow before he was fast asleep.

It seemed to him that he had only slept a few minutes when he woke to find it dawn. He was thoroughly roused a moment later by the unusual sound of many voices chattering in the native tongue, and leaping from his bed he rushed to a window of his room that overlooked the compound. To his amazement he saw below him the stalwart figure of M'Buli, the Batateke chief, surrounded by at least a hundred of his warriors. He was still gazing in dumb astonishment at the appearance of the natives, so many hours before they were expected, when Holden came out of the building and exchanged a warm greeting with his blood-brother. The trader returned to his office, followed by the chief, and Rushton hurried downstairs to join the conference.

The African's explanation of his presence was brief and, to Rushton, unsatisfactory. He only vouchsafed the bald statement that he had learned of the robbery five hours before and had started forthwith to offer his white brother whatever aid he could supply. Fred looked at his watch incredulously and turned to the trader in perplexity.

" It is only six hours since it happened," he remonstrated. " How in the world could he have known about it an hour later?"

The trader smiled. " I don't know. The main fact is that he is here, and now we must lose no more time in picking up the trail of those rascally thieves. I will send a boy to the river to find out how many canoes our man was able to borrow in Mafadi. Celia and Mrs. Holden will go to the storeroom and lay out provisions for a trip that may last several days. M'Buli will tell off the men who are best at the paddles."

There was a grunt of protest from the Batateke headman, whose sharp eyes had watched the expression of Holden's face while his mind grappled with the difficulties of a foreign language. He talked rapidly for a few minutes in his own tongue while the trader listened with growing surprise. Holden's knowledge of the native speech sufficed to permit of his catching the drift of the chief's argument, and he translated it for Rushton's benefit.

" He thinks it quite useless to follow them down the river. He says they only took that direction for a blind and have already landed. They are following a rough trail that leads to the Bololo country, and he proposes that we march directly overland and try to cut them off before they reach their destination. As far as I can gather, we will be taking a line representing one side of a triangle while they are following the other two, and the difference in distance may offset the start they have."

" Is that more black magic?" demanded Rushton with a gesture of good-natured despair. " How does he know what they're doing?"

" When you've been in Africa as long as I have," answered Holden, " you won't ask so many questions that have no answer. I've seen things happen that would drive a man crazy if he tried to puzzle them out, and half the time he wouldn't be able to understand them even when they were explained to him. I can tell you this much: if ever this chap comes to me and says that he can understand the language of

the birds, or that he knows who the next President of the United States is going to be, I will certainly hesitate to believe him a liar!'

Rushton laughed. "This beats ouija boards!" he exclaimed. "He must be a mind-reader, at least."

"I think it was drums," ventured Celia, who had appeared in the doorway in time to catch the last few remarks. "They were beating half the night, and I can still hear their rhythm inside my head."

Rushton accepted the explanation in default of a better, though he felt that it left much to be explained. He would have liked to know what anonymous friend had wielded the drum-sticks, and whether his information was likely to be reliable. For a moment he entertained a suspicion, which he dismissed as absurd and unjust, that M'Buli himself might have had a finger in the pie. The chief might have looted the safe of the gold that he had traded in, and taken the map for a blind; but here Fred came to a pause in his thoughts as he caught the frank, straightforward gaze of the Batateke fastened upon him.

The old trader was quick to make decisions and even quicker in acting upon them. In less than an hour from the moment he determined to fall in with M'Buli's suggestion, the entire party was ready to follow wherever the headman should lead.

There was first a brisk argument between Holden and Rushton. The young manager wanted to go alone with the Batateke war party while the trader remained behind and kept an eye on the factory and the business. Holden ridiculed the idea of anything going wrong at the house, and urged the importance of having two good shots with the expedition when it overhauled the thieves. He reminded Fred that the Batatekes, however courageous they might be, would suffer heavy losses if they pitted their inadequate strength against several white men, desperate and probably armed to the teeth, and Rushton was obliged to admit that the trader was right.

With shouting and singing and much ebullition of savage mirth, the blacks formed into single line of march and turned into a narrow trail that plunged straight into the heart of the jungle. M'Buli led the way, taking his place as headman at the front of the column, and he started off at a long, swinging stride that promised to eat up the miles in quick fashion. At his heels came Holden, erect and grim, and behind him was Rushton.

Fred had lingered for a brief farewell to Celia. She laughed at his parting caution to keep a sharp watch against all possible danger, and he was obliged to smile himself at his groundless fears. With a force of faithful servants about her and a strong police guard a scant mile away, no ordinary harm could befall her. She besought him rather to heed his own warning and apply it to his coming experiences in the bush, and with a laughing promise to do so, and a cheery wave of his hand, he hurried off to take his place in the file.

At noon the column reached the small village of Kesonga, where M'Buli called a halt for lunch and for a rest during the greatest heat of the day.

The inhabitants of the village, a set of meanly clad, ill-fed creatures, came timidly out of their grass huts to learn the cause of the invasion of their quiet backwater. Their curiosity was replaced by extravagant joy when they discovered that two white men accompanied the Batateke war party, and from their excited chatter it was presently possible to glean the reason for their transports of pleasure.

It appeared that the village had recently been suffering from the depredations of a band of gorillas that had taken up its residence on the outskirts of the settlement. The big apes had contented themselves at first with tearing up the scanty crops that the Kesongans had planted, but when the villagers mustered the courage to attack them with their pitifully inadequate weapons, the gorillas had taken a bloody vengeance. During the day they lurked in the well-nigh inaccessible depths of their jungle fastness, stealing out at night on their errands of death and destruction. Everything that came within reach of their hairy paws was torn to shreds. Two men had been caught and killed, and on the previous evening a baby had been snatched from its mother's arms and brained before her

eyes, even though she had at the time been sitting within the light of a fire.

The village headman, with tears of entreaty in his eyes, begged Holden to break his journey long enough to hunt down the vicious apes and try to kill at least the leaders of the band. In return for the service he promised a rich reward of ivory, which, to do the old trader justice, was an unnecessary inducement. M'Buli, however, proved a serious stumbling block in the way of introducing any retarding side issues into their own campaign, and Holden was reluctantly compelled to forego his altruistic instincts. He explained their need of haste to the village chieftain as best he could, and promised faithfully to stop on his return and round up every gorilla in a radius of ten miles.

The march was resumed, but scarcely half a mile had been covered when an incident occurred that amply demonstrated the truth of the Kesongans' story. Rushton, who was dreaming of Celia as he strode steadily in Holden's footsteps, was rudely awakened by a terrified shouting and commotion behind him. He was nearly knocked from his feet by a frightened savage who tore past him, dropping his spear as he ran. Before the young man could recover his balance he was swept aside once more by the rush of a massive, hairy body, and he was only vaguely conscious of the jaws that clashed within an inch of his shoulder. The creature did not stop to attack him again, but continued its fierce career and reached out two long arms in the direction of Holden. The trader was too cool a hand to lose his self-possession, and he fired into the charging animal as it plunged toward him. No bullet could stay that rush. In an instant he was grasped by a pair of immense paws and swung aloft as easily as if he were a figure of straw.

Fred Rushton would never take any credit for what followed, admitting truthfully that he acted from instinct rather than reason. He had no coherent recollection of seizing the spear that the fleeing Batateke had dropped, but nevertheless it was gripped in his two hands as he sprang to the rescue. The raised arms of the animal, as it held the trader on high, gave him his opportunity. With every ounce of his weight behind the blow, he drove the copper head of the spear into the creature's side and squarely through its heart; an almost human scream came from its throat as it released its grip on Holden and crashed to the ground.

The whole business had not taken thirty seconds. Rushton and the trader, trembling from the reaction, found themselves staring at each other in stupefaction across the body of a tremendous bull gorilla. M'Buli stood beside them, his eyes round with asonishment as he regarded the size of the creature that Rushton had killed with a single thrust of his spear. When the headman had recovered his equanimity, he signified his immense approval of the young man by stepping up to him and patting him, solemnly and affectionately, on his chest. It was the accolade of one brave man conferred upon another, and Fred felt a thrill of pleasure such as he had never before experienced.

Holden was unharmed except for a few bruises where the gorilla had clutched him, but no one knew better than he how narrow had been his escape from death. He held out his hand and silently took Rushton's in a tight clasp that spoke more than words.

CHAPTER IV.

SMALE'S PLAN OF BATTLE.

BURK and Smale were still shuddering from the horror of Kaven's death when the stem of the canoe grated on the bank and they stepped ashore. Dry land had never seemed so good to them, accustomed though they were to scenes of blood and violence.

Before them, almost overgrown from long disuse, was the faintly distinguishable opening in the bush that marked the beginning of the trail to the country of the Bololos. They paused in the gray light only long enough for a scanty breakfast, and Burk took his first chance to examine and bandage the wounded ear that he carried as a souvenir of his introduction to Celia Holden. When he had washed away the congealed blood and discovered that the en-

tire lobe of his left ear had been shot away, he cursed like a trooper and swore that his beauty had been irreparably ruined—which drew a callous chuckle from Smale.

The powerful Irishman took possession of one of the sacks of gold dust, and the other was secured upon the back of the Bololo boy, who was accordingly invited to walk in front and by no means to get out of sight. Smale took his two rifles and also Burk's, slinging the weapons across his back and content to rely upon the revolver in his belt for any emergency. Each of the three men carried a portion of their slender stock of provisions, and none of them would have welcomed a feather-weight addition to his load as they struggled painfully along a rough trail that never seemed to go any way but uphill.

It wasn't long before Smale began to grunt protests at the pace set by the tall Irishman and the hardy Bololo; but Burk forged relentlessly onward. He could still hear the whistle of Rushton's bullets past his head, and he would brook no delay.

The sun rose higher and higher, and although its direct rays could not penetrate the tree tops, the jungle grew ever hotter. Perspiration streamed from them all, until shortly after noon Smale sank upon the ground beneath a small baobab and swore he wouldn't go another yard for all the gold in Africa. Burk grudgingly conceded half an hour for rest and food. The native guide was picketed a hundred yards to the rear to guard against any surprise attack from possible pursuers, and the two villains busied themselves with can-openers and a flask of gin.

"Stuff yourself to the limit, Dan," urged Smale politely. "The more you eat the less I lug!"

Burk laughed, and produced a treasured pipe as he finished the last morsels of his meal. "What do you think of our chances?" he asked.

"Fair enough so far," grunted the Boer. "Too late to turn back now. That hustlin' Yankee must be after us by this time, an' we'll hear from that pesky revolver of his if we don't get to Gama pronto."

"What in—Africa—is Gama?" demanded the other.

"The place where Lombo, the high muck-a-muck of the Bololos, hangs his hat when he's home," explained Smale, who had lived in every country in the world and enriched his vocabulary with the slang of each. "I was chewin' the rag with an old fossil of an elephant hunter last night, just before we lit out for Holden's shimbeck, an' he gave me the dope on the lay-out of this country."

"Lombo," repeated Burk musingly. "A good, round, mouth-filling name. What's he like?"

"Just an ordinary lump of black fat," answered Smale carelessly. "As crooked as a ram's horn an' as brainless as a March hare."

"That's good news. He ought to be glad to see us!"

The Boer was beginning to nod, and Burk yawned in sympathy before springing energetically to his feet.

"No time for sleep!" he cried. "I won't do that comfortably until we've got about a hundred husky Bololos gathered around our downy cots. Shoulder your load, me lad!"

They summoned the Bololo and wearily resumed their toilsome march.

It lacked barely an hour to dusk when they topped a small eminence and came unexpectedly on an open view of the country that lay before them. The low hill apparently marked the end of the jungle, and the two villains found themselves overlooking a rolling stretch of tall grass that ran as far as the eye could reach. About ten miles ahead of them several columns of smoke indicated a village, and the Bololo boy greeted the sight with a cry of pleasure. His white teeth flashed in a broad grin and his eyes shone with delight.

"Him Gama!" he announced proudly. "Me lib for dere!"

Smale had slipped his load of rifles to the ground. He kneeled beside them, under pretense of adjusting the straps, and rose again to his feet with one of the guns in his hands. He regarded its heavy stock with tender approval.

"Your home, sweet home, is it?" he repeated softly. "Then take a good long look at it—"

Some inflection of his voice, some shadowy hint of menace, caught the quick ear of the savage, who cast a startled glance at his master. There was no misreading the gleam in the cruel eyes of the Boer. Like a frightened antelope, the boy turned and sprang into the bush, but his movements were hampered by the heavy sack on his back. He had not taken five steps before the massive butt of the rifle crashed home against the base of his skull. He fell face downward, his arms flung out toward the home he had not reached.

Burk struck a match and lit a cigarette.

"What was that for?" he asked coolly.

"For safety," said the Boer. "Now we will not have to tote a hundred pounds of gold into a village whose headman," he added virtuously, "we have reason to believe may be dishonest. Besides, I was gettin' fed up with carryin' all this truck. We'll just bunk the dust where we can find it again, an' then we can spring the map on Lombo an' never let on about the gold we've already got. Of course the boy here would 've spilled the beans."

"Piet, I never cease to marvel at your unending wisdom," remarked Burk admiringly. He cheerfully lent a hand with the necessary arrangements.

Smale had selected a moment when they had just passed a swift stream of water. They took the gold now and sank it beneath the tumbling surface, well pleased with their idea and satisfied that no one could ever locate it but themselves. The body of the Bololo they carried some yards from the trail and tossed heedlessly upon the ground, knowing that it would be stripped to the bone before morning.

"Come along, old son!" cried Burk, when these details had been attended to. "It will be dark pretty soon, and if I'm not mistaken there's the father and mother of a storm coming up."

"You're not mistaken," the Boer assured him. "I noticed that half an hour ago, an' counted on it to wash out our tracks."

Burk smiled as he picked up two rifles.

"You get along in front," he commanded, his twisted features writhing in an evil grin. "You're too full of happy thoughts to-day!"

Smale acknowledged the compliment with a grim smile as he led off at a brisk gait. He was a "killer" first and last, never sparing a life when a judicious murder seemed likely to advance his convenience. The load on his back was lighter for this latest cold-blooded crime, and the burden on his conscience was not any heavier.

He would have entertained serious doubts of his wisdom, however, if he had been able to watch what occurred at the scene of his latest murder almost before his retreating footsteps were cold. Not two minutes after their departure, the bushes along the trail were parted by a cautious hand, and a grotesque figure stepped upon the path. It was a thin, wizened, odd native, his black face a mask of deep wrinkles from which two piercing eyes darted restless glances in every direction. In addition to the customary loin-cloth, he wore at his waist a good-sized leather pouch ornamented with quills and beads; about his neck was a slender copper chain from which there hung a talisman in the shape of a leopard's claw; and his head was surmounted by a fantastic creation of bright beads and vivid feathers that marked him for a fetish doctor.

It was C'Wayo, the dreaded juju-man, whose friends and foes alike had christened him the "Leopard" in recognition of his favorite token.

He darted now from spot to spot, as silent and as swift as a bat flits through the shadows, his lean body bent double as he followed the faint tracks of the two white men. They led him first to the edge of the stream where the two scoundrels had sunk their treasure, and C'Wayo, who had watched the performance from a discreet distance, carefully memorized certain unalterable landmarks by which he could find the spot again. Then he cast back to the trail and followed the footprints to the place where lay the body of the unfortunate Bololo boy. He turned the stiffening form upon its back, peered intently at the boy's face, and rose to his feet with a grunt of recognition and surprise. He stood thoughtfully gazing in the direction that the murderers had gone, the ghost of a diabolic smile twitching at his lips.

It was quite dark before Burk and Smale, stumbling and cursing from fatigue, arrived at the collection of huts that comprised the village of Gama. They strode unchallenged up its single street until they paused in the light of a huge fire, when they were immediately surrounded by a crowd of curious blacks who displayed no fear whatever of the newcomers.

The Bololos were a tribe of fighters, whose unquestioned courage and stubborn endurance in the stress of battle bade fair to make them eventually supreme over all the neighboring races.

Even the Batatekes, who had fought them most successfully, were beginning to weaken under the strain of constant warfare, which had led M'Buli to entertain fears for his own safety and that of his precious store of gold.

Smale's sharp eyes roved about him like a pair of microscopes, missing no detail of the warriors' dress, physique, or weapons. The latter consisted for the most part of dangerous-looking spears and battle-axes, with an occasional trade musket of the muzzle-loading type that did not appear so formidable. Taking them all in all, the Bololos were a hard-looking lot, and the crafty Boer was well pleased that he did not have two tempting sacks of gold to hide from their quick eyes.

A native with a smattering of English thrust himself forward, and Burk demanded an interview with Lombo. The boy departed, and presently returned with a polite message to the effect that Lombo was leaving the village at that moment with Anoka, his fetish doctor, on a matter of urgent importance. A hut would be placed at their disposal and food brought to them, added the message, and the headman would be glad to talk with them early in the morning.

Nothing could have suited the two scoundrels better. They were in no mood to drive a bargain with an unscrupulous native chief that night, and welcomed the idea of a good rest before opening negotiations that promised to be difficult at the best. They retired promptly to the quarters allotted them, anxious to escape the ceaseless scrutiny of the crowd of blacks that ringed them in, and flung themselves wearily on the rush-strewn floor. The meal that presently arrived was excellent of its kind, and eked out with some of their precious canned stuff and washed down by copious drafts of gin, it left them at once contented and very sleepy.

They were awakened by the arrival of breakfast, and with it came the interpreter to tell them that Lombo was ready to see them as soon as they had finished. While they ate they discussed the coming interview, trying to formulate some definite plan of campaign, but finally decided to let events guide themselves. Very often in the past they had found that their best schemes sprang full-fledged into being at the eleventh hour, and it was with the hope of some such conclusion to the present interview that they left their breakfast and sauntered slowly along the street to the big hut that stood in the center of the village.

Lombo was squatted upon a grass mat at one end of the big room, evidently awaiting their arrival. He was more gross than ever their fancy had painted; if a superabundance of fatty tissue could be construed as an indication of prosperity, then Lombo, the chief of the Bololos, must have been a very Crœsus among African headmen. Smale, regarding that enormous bulk with astonishment, roughly estimated that he must stand about six feet four and weigh all of three hundred pounds. Later he was to learn that those massive limbs could move with amazing celerity when occasion required. To the big Irishman, who had more imagination than his stolid companion, it seemed that Lombo resembled nothing so much as a huge and peculiarly repulsive toad, his squatting attitude and a nervous blinking of the eyes with which he was afflicted helping to bear out the illusion.

Their attention swiftly wandered to the native who sat just to the right of his chief, a middle-aged man of medium build whose malevolent countenance was a card index of every evil passion that the mind of man has conceived since he ate of the fruit in the Garden of Eden. They recognized by his costume that he was a witch doctor, but even without that his occupation would

have proclaimed his profession. A little fire of twigs blazed in front of him, filling the hut with an aromatic smoke, and from time to time he fed it with more fuel, or with pinches of powder that produced leaping flames of crimson, orange, and green. He never took his fixed gaze from the heart of the snapping fire, but remained with bent head muttering endless incantations. Burk and Smale exchanged a quick glance. Neither of them was deceived by the man's apparent indifference to them. They correctly assumed that this was Anoka, the confidant and counsellor of Lombo, and that it was he who would determine their fate.

By previous arrangement it was Smale who did the talking for the two adventurers, the interpreter sitting at his elbow and translating the gist of his words. The Boer began with expressions of polite regret that a long series of mishaps had prevented them from bringing a dash worthy of being offered to such a powerful chief. This was the cue for Burk to draw from his pocket a many-bladded knife that he had picked up when the shopkeeper wasn't looking—in Cairo; its blades shot forth and were locked by a concealed spring, and the big Irishman toyed with the mechanism until he was sure that the covetous eyes of the Bololo were fixed upon it beneath their blinking lids. Then he turned it over to the chief with a manner nicely blended of readiness and reluctance, and Lombo pouched it with glee before giving his attention with renewed interest to the representations of Smale.

These preliminaries so satisfactorily concluded, the Boer lost no more time in broaching the business that had brought them to Gama. He plunged directly into the heart of his story. The Batatekes had a rich store of gold. He and his friend knew where it was hidden. Yes, they were quite sure of their facts—did white men lie? Lombo, with a grunt, seemed to imply that he had known such a thing, and Smale's sunburned face assumed an expression of injured innocence that spoke eloquently for itself with no need of the interpreter's services. He and his friend, said the Boer, had handled some of the stuff, and were prepared to risk their lives to prove their truthfulness. They could not carry out a raid into the Batateke country by themselves, but they were willing to lead a war-party of Bololos if Lombo would provide the men—for a third share in the treasure.

The chief and his juju-man would have made an excellent pair of poker players. Not a feature of the chief's face showed any sign of interest; if there was possibly a gleam of avarice in his eyes it was well hidden by the flickering lids that blinked more swiftly as their owner realized that there was a bargain to be driven. As for Anoka, his gaze never shifted from his little pile of blazing twigs, to which he continued to add fresh fuel. Burk, in his devil-may-care fashion, was secretly amused at this battle of wits between his wily comrade and the cunning savage.

Smale finally finished and waited with studied indifference for Lombo's answer. That adept bargainer was quick to grasp the importance of his position in its respect to the plans of the two scoundrels. He pointed out that they certainly could not proceed without his aid, and suggested that a more equable division of the spoils would allot him two-thirds to their one. The Boer, with honest indignation, denounced this idea as monstrous. He reminded Lombo that it was they who had discovered the gold and could locate it, and added that their presence as allies in an expedition would go far to help the Bololos in breaking for all time the power of the only neighboring tribe that could still resist their encroachments.

Whatever reply the headman might have made to this tempting outlook was interrupted by a sharp exclamation from Anoka. The fetish doctor thrust his malevolent countenance into dangerous proximity to the blazing fire in front of him and broke into a series of short and excited sentences whose import was quite lost on the white men. Lombo, however, sprang to his feet with a cry of astonishment and alarm. He hung breathless upon the words of the seer, and Smale seized the opportunity to grip the interpreter by the wrists and demand a translation.

Almost incoherent from excitement, the black boy told him that the magician was visioning in the smoke the rapid approach of a large force of Batateke warriors, who were distant scarcely three hours march. An even more serious menace to the Bololos was contained in the additional information that two whites accompanied the party.

Smale glanced at Burk in frank dismay. "Can you beat that?" he demanded.

Burk frowned. "These confounded Yankees! They do move fast!"

"This ugly blighter never got that out of the smoke," commented the Boer, but there was nevertheless a hint of dubiety in his voice. He had seen strange things in Africa. "What's his game?"

"Give it up," said Burk promptly. "What's yours?"

For answer the Boer suddenly snapped open and shut the lock of the magazine rifle that lay across his knees. The sharp rattle of metal against metal brought swifter attention from the two savages than any spoken word. Their regard centered upon Smale, and while there was nothing threatening in his face or voice, it could hardly have been a matter of chance that the muzzle of his weapon had swung around in their direction.

"Tell your master," he said to the boy, "that we can no longer palaver with him. If there's goin' to be trouble, it's our tip to vamose while we can—unless he wants to make a deal with us on our terms! It's up to him."

The boy translated rapidly. There was a moment of indecision on the part of Lombo while he glanced from the expressionless face of his adviser to the rifle in Smale's hands. The Boer rose to his feet with an air of finality, and Burk followed his example, whereupon Lombo exploded in a succession of quick gutturals. He knew he was beaten, and proceeded now to appeal to the kindness of "his brave white friends."

"That is good," approved the Boer, and added dryly, "if our tame wizard here will tell us what else he sees in the smoke we can then make a plan." He turned to Burk. "What do you say?"

"Carry on!" assented the Irishman. "You're the field marshal."

The conference that followed was brief but thorough. Lombo drew a map of the surrounding district in the dust of the earth floor and expounded a campaign of decoys, ambushes, and surprise attacks on the enemy, flank and rear, that would have done credit to a West Pointer. Smale remained silent, however, his brows drawn together as he pondered over the diagram at his feet. He suddenly pointed to a small circle in the dust and turned to the interpreter.

"Lake Bwalo?" he asked. The boy nodded.

Smale grew still more pensive as his cunning mind worked out the details of a plan that was Napoleonic in its scope and possibilities. He took a small stick and drew swift lines in the dust, and abruptly began a hurried description of his scheme.

"Here!" he said. "This is where they're comin', direct from Mafadi to Gama, through a country that's mostly grass at the end. Now I propose that first of all Lombo sends away his women an' children to some other village where they'll be safe, an' then, instead of waitin' here for Holden an' his bunch to arrive, we will set fire to the grass in front of him. At the same time, a couple of good runners hustle off an' get behind the Batatekes an' touch off the grass in their rear. With fire in front an' behind them, they'll be forced to move sidewise to Lake Bwalo, an' there they'll stay for a day or two anyway. Meanwhile, Lombo and his bunch will come with us, as hard as we can lick, for Holden's factory. We'll clean it up in a brace of shakes, get all the food an' stuff we need for our trip south, Dan, an' then hoof it for the Pallaballa Mountains an' cop the gold. The whole business won't take three days if we keep goin'. Gettin' all the provisions we need from Holden will make things much simpler for us."

Burk nodded understandingly. His face was working with excitement to an extent that Smale had never seen before, and instead of answering immediately, the tall villain strode off to one side and fell into a deep reverie. The Boer meanwhile pains-

takingly went over his scheme again for the benefit of Lombo, struggling patiently with the stupidities of the interpreter and wishing heartily that the Tower of Babel had never been thought of.

The big Irishman temporarily forgot the affairs of the moment while his memory played with an incident that had occurred —when? Was it only thirty-six hours ago, or was it thirty-six years? He lived again through the vivid instant when his eyes rested upon the slim figure of a beautiful girl, attired only in a nightdress whose linen was no whiter than her neck and arms. He reglimpsed the dark masses of hair tumbling about her shoulders, and the proud fearlessness of the eyes that searched the shadows behind his torch. He heard again the sharp crack of her revolver — and he grinned as he raised his hand to his head.

"Faith, and I like a girl of spirit," he murmured, "but that was a trifle too rough for an introduction. I'm minded to make ye pay for that, Miss Celia, me darling!"

He sauntered back to the council of war.

"Lombo agrees!" cried Smale.

Burk smiled his pleasure.

"If we pull it off he'll be doin' himself a pretty good turn," continued the Boer. "It seems he has a contract to deliver any prisoners he takes to an Arab slaver named El Rassan, who raids through here now and then, an' he expects to pick up a few of Holden's Krooboys. D'ye twig?"

"I twig!" answered Burk gayly. "Lombo gets the Krooboys, you get the stuff in the storeroom, and I get—"

"What do you get?" asked the Boer curiously.

"Oh—I get the rest!" laughed Burk.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Ghost Lights

by Hamilton Thompson

A NOVELETTE—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

CAPTAIN HUGH STRONG was in a cynically black mood as he strode down the street leading to the wharves. He looked neither to right or left. His face was set, his hands clenched. A rough, virile, ruthless man—and a pugnacious one. Even a stranger would have guessed him—a good man to leave alone.

The fascination of a dangerous presence, always irresistible to the small boy, magnetized half a dozen urchins who tagged him wide eyed and silent, at an awed distance. Men and women nudged each other and turned to look at him as he passed.

For days the newspapers of the town had been full of the grim, sinister personality of this man as it was pieced together from ascertained fact and only partly dispelled

rumor. The Strong trial had been an absorbing topic and the town had made the most of it. On his coasting schooner, the Sea Wolf, Strong had been charged with inhuman treatment of the crew. It had been shown that he had beaten several of the men unmercifully. But it had also been shown that the men had refused to obey orders; that under the leadership of a " sea lawyer " named Oleson they had become practically mutinous, and that when Strong, single handed, fell upon the men with his fists and pounded them into submission he he had no more than exercised his prerogative as master of a ship at sea. So he had just been acquitted of the charges brought in the Federal court by Oleson. The court authorities even suggested action for mutiny against the men, but this Strong refused to take part in. He was through with them, he said. Let them go to hell.

But much else had been brought out by the trial, partly in the court room, partly in the papers and in the gossip of the town. The harsh, rude intolerance of the man, his his sudden black temper, his ever ready sledge-hammer blows, his eager willingness for any part of a physical encounter; his lack of respect for the nicer discriminations of the law—these things became part of the community's picture of Captain Hugh Strong. In court he admitted having taken part in a South American revolution; that he had mixed up in gun running and in at least one bloody filibustering expedition. He had hunted gold in Alaska and stood off legalized claim jumpers at the muzzle of his rifle. He had starved and suffered and bullied huskies on an ill-fated polar expedition—and refused to answer questions concerning a certain predacious sealing trip for which it was hinted half the crew had been shanghaied.

Strong had been painted as a swaggering bully. One reporter intimated that a century earlier he would undoubtedly have been a pirate outright—and been hanged from a yardarm. And it was with this aspect of him controlling its mind that the community paid little attention to his own declaration that he had handled men all his life and never yet treated one of them cruelly unless it had been absolutely necessary to preserve discipline in his ship. Nine out of ten of the townspeople would have pronounced Strong a bad, dangerous, brutal man, without any substantially redeeming quality.

So it was that Strong, in soured, resentful consciousness of his evil, stalked defiantly along, in a mood for any reckless outlet for his smoldering anger.

Rose Granger emerged from the post office doorway as Strong passed by. She was the town's one visiting nurse, a beautiful serious-faced girl, tall and strong. As the sailor swung past, giving her a bold, straight stare, she paused on the steps a moment and looked after him with a studious interest. Like the rest of the townspeople, she had lately been made aware of Strong's reckless, rough career and his reputation for brutality. But there had come to her knowledge, within a few days, a circumstance which did not wholly accord with the general opinion of the man. It arose clearly before her mind.

She saw Strong swinging open the door of the drug store down the street, an old fashioned door with the glass panels set high. A tiny girl, carefully holding a bottle of medicine in one hand, was reaching for the knob, on the inside. The door, as it opened, upset the child and dashed the bottle from her hand, breaking it. Strong picked up the child and set her on her feet.

" Oh! Oh! Me mudder's med'cine!" cried the little girl, weeping. " An' she's awful sick."

Strong patted the child's head, quieted her, picked up the broken bottle and had the druggist replace the lost medicine, meantime buying some cigars from the clerk. As the druggist gave the fresh bottle to the child and the latter started for the door, Strong called her back.

In the drug store the town florist had his counter. A small selection of flowers, including one big bunch of roses, caught Strong's eye. He crossed to the flower counter, took the roses from the vase and handed them to the child, throwing a bill to the girl attendant in payment.

" Take them home to your mummy, kiddie," he said, and hustled the child out of the door.

The child's mother was one of Rose's patients. The nurse was at the poor home when the child returned. The child explained that the flowers were given by " that big man that was pinched for lickin' them sailors." She related the whole circumstance with childish minuteness of detail.

It was this incident that Rose vividly recalled as she watched Strong's strong figure swaggering down the street; and she smiled very slightly as he disappeared, then she ran down the steps and set off in the opposite direction.

Meantime, though he disdained to turn and look back,Rose had not been altogether absent from Strong's thoughts. He had seen this " nursing girl," always conspicuous from her uniform, before. He had noted her cool, competent, self-possessed manner; and that she was one of the very few people in this town who did not look at him as if he were a wild beast on exhibition. Just now he caught himself picturing a girl like this one, sitting across the breakfast table from him, in a home of his own—a cottage home overlooking the sea. The dream lasted for a moment.

" Give up the life of a he-man to be the tame cat of a nagging, sniveling woman? To hell with it!" and he tramped along, lonelier and uglier than before.

Strong's schooner lay in the harbor with no one on board but a faithful old cook, lame and simple-minded. The rest of the crew were ashore—for good, Strong told himself, as far as he was concerned. It was for the quieteude of the Sea Wolf's cabin, and for the accustomed self control that came from the feel of her deck under his feet, that Strong was headed. He wanted to get away from the curious goggling of the town's eyes and away from the wagging of the town's tongues—before he boiled over and hurt somebody—and got into more trouble. He wanted to cool down and get this seething ugliness against the whole human race under some sort of whip hand before he found himself with an excuse to smash somebody's face or break somebody's arm and legs.

Then, on the very last block of his route to the landing where his boat was moored, fate intervened. Strong almost ran over a group of excited foreigners gathered about the doorway of a cheap tenement house. Women were wringing their hands and men cursing. At the instant a man appeared in the doorway, a huge Polack—and he was dragging a shrieking woman by the hair. He hauled her to her feet, struck her on the side of the head with his great open hand and knocked her flat on the sidewalk. Then he kicked at her.

Strong saw red. What the row might be over he did not even guess. He saw only a weak thing being beaten by a strong one. The simmering passion and repressed fury of a week burst forth in a wild tidal wave of action. Thrusting aside the onlookers as if they were straws the sailor reached the big Polack in a single stride. Twice he struck the giant a smashing, brain-rocking, blood-bringing blow like the thud of a sledge hammer on either side of the huge, bulking stupid face. Then, while the Polack's senses were all a-reeling, Strong grabbed a handful of the great brute's shirt front in his left hand and, poising him like a punching bag, brought his flexed right arm up in a pistonlike uppercut that landed with a ghastly crack under the very point of the jaw.

The Polack, with one gurgling grunt, sank to the ground, limp. But Strong's mad, murderous lust to smash and hurt was not yet satisfied. As if the giant had been a basket of clothes, Strong picked him up, even as the Polack had dragged up the woman from the sidewalk, and threw him with all his force against the building. The Polack fell, bleeding and unconscious, to the ground.

Then, as suddenly as he had burst upon the scene Strong turned and rushed away, paying no attention whatever to the frantic cries of approval from the foreigners—nor yet to the lamentations of the beaten wife over her brutal husband's plight.

A few hours later Strong was in the newspapers again. Both the town's papers had the whole story. And both, having adopted the same line of policy toward the sailor from the beginning of his case, made little of wife beating and everything of the violence of Strong's treatment of the man.

Rose Granger, reading the story at the

dispensary just as she was on the point of leaving for her home, found herself torn with conflicting emotions.

"But the creature was beating a woman!" she said to herself. "Yet—such a brutal, brutal punishment!"

Sudden reaction from the wild burst of ferocity that he had vented on the big Polack brought to Captain Strong a revulsion of self disgust.

"No wonder the world votes you a thug," he muttered bitterly to himself, "you—you fool! Pah! It'll take four fingers of booze to get the taste of that crazy stunt out of my mouth."

II

At the very end of the street, and directly facing the docks, was one of the typical waterfront saloons numerous in every New England port before the days of prohibition. A dozen of Strong's long strides brought him to it and he entered.

In the place was one of those oddly assorted gatherings commonly found in barrooms of its class, frequented as they were principally by a shifting clientele of seafaring men with a sprinkling of townspeople. Clustered at one end of the bar were Captain Jake Andrews, skipper of a menhaden fishing steamer; Captain Gus Littlefield, commander of the schooner yacht Coronet belonging to banker Stillman, whose palatial summer home stood on the opposite shore of the bay; Ezra Crocker, a local character known as a chronic gloom-hound, and Augustus Kennebec Jones, the affable old town clerk, who spent most of his time, when not at his desk, in this particular drinking place.

At the other end of the bar was foregathered another group. Most conspicuous in it was Bill Boardman, a big hulk of a man with a barrel-like body, long gorilla arms and a bullet head. His companions were rough-looking sailor men who obviously made this saloon their headquarters when ashore. The proprietor was also a shipping master and part of his income was derived from shipping crews for vessels in the harbor.

Though a blue water sailor, and so a man of all the world, Captain Hugh Strong had been long enough in the coastwise trade to be no stranger to most of these men, even before his notoriety of the past week. But that they looked on him as a man apart, and one to be feared, was as patent as that he had been the subject of their conversation, for the babble of voices suddenly ceased as Strong pushed open the swinging door and entered the place.

The newcomer made no offer to join either of the groups at the bar. With a perfunctory nod toward each he ordered and poured out a big drink of whisky, swallowed it, and was on the point of leaving as unceremoniously as he had come when in the mirror of the back he caught sight of the face of Captain Littlefield. Littlefield, with a wink and a covert nod of the head in the direction of Strong, who stood at the bar back of him, made some remark behind his hand to the town clerk. Strong heard none of the words, but could not miss their import. His blood boiled. Deliberately he poured out another drink, paid for it and carried it to a table across the room at which he seated himself alone. He would see whether this brass button sailor—who had quit the man's work of the merchant service to become, in Strong's point of view, a private servant, a lackey—had the nerve to offer him open affront. Certainly he would not let him get away with the notion that Hugh Strong could be ridiculed like a dock rat.

Littlefield had borne Strong a sailor's grudge for months. The previous summer it had happened that the Coronet and the Sea Wolf came out of the head of the Sound together one day when a stiff breeze was blowing. Strong was at the helm of the Sea Wolf and Littlefield steered the Coronet. The Coronet was slightly in the lead as they entered the Sound. In a wind that was half a gale the rough-looking but splendidly modeled coaster crept up on the exquisite, immaculate yacht. And gradually, inch by inch, foot by foot, she passed her. Then Strong, in one of his rarely facetious moments, stood at the after rail of the Wolf and significantly dangled a length of rope in its wake—a world-wide formula of ridicule on the sea—the offer of a tow. Between

strangers it is an unpardonable insult. Littlefield hated the captain of the Wolf from that moment.

Under the boldly scrutinizing eye of Strong, Littlefield was far from comfortable. Whatever of liquor he had taken did not suffice to render him willing to risk a quarrel with Strong; but it did serve to spur his wits and give him courage for sundry remarks nicely calculated to rasp the raw temper of the other without giving the man of notoriety an excuse for picking him up.

Strong, his nerves frazzled, stood this kind of gas attack as long as he could. But presently, realizing that in another instant he would yield to a mad impulse to make what would appear an utterly unprovoked attack on Littlefield, he jumped to his feet, stamped across to the bar and poured three drinks of liquor down his throat in hardly more than that many minutes. The whisky momentarily had a curiously mellowing effect. The malice and innuendoes of Littlefield shrank in importance. His own grievance against the world lost its acute edge. Fellowship with the rest of mankind seemed the easy, the natural thing. Strong found himself leaning an elbow on the bar and listening quite tolerantly to the gabble of the men of Bill Boardman's party. It was mostly of the sea—and rank with the superstitions of the forecastle.

"Now the Flying Dutchman—" began one of these, a square-faced Finn.

"Flying Dutchman be damned!" interrupted Boardman in a loud, truculent voice. "No ship that ever went down, ever come up and went sailing around again—not yet. That's all bunk!"

As Boardman uttered this conclusive verdict little Ezra Crocker, who had been helping himself to a pickle and a piece of hard bread from the free-lunch counter and was on his way back to the company of Andrews, Littlefield and the town clerk, stopped in his tracks close beside Boardman.

"Don't you go to bettin' on that there, mister," he said. "Guess you never heard about the Palatine, did ye?"

"What's your lubber's idea of a Palatine?" inquired Boardman, winking at his friends. "Think it's something to play tunes on?"

"It's something that'll make you sing a darn sorry sort of tune if you see it," responded Ezra, wagging a mournful head.

"My friend," the ever-resourceful and record-loving Kennebec Jones interrupted, "it is history that because a great crime was associated with the loss of the ship Palatine, off Block Island, many years ago, the vessel, with its ghastly crew, will sail and continue to sail—as a phantom ship—to burn and to sink in the sea, year after year—in memorial of the tragedy."

And then, more impressively, the venerable town clerk continued, "It is also written that to those who see the phantom ship will come a great disaster."

"Aw, rats," guffawed the scoffing Boardman, "you're loose in yer jib." But there was a glitter in his eye and an interest hardly concealed as he continued.

"And what does the bloomin' ghost ship look like? You tell me, matey."

"I have it from an eye-witness," explained the town clerk, "the poor fellow was lost at sea with all hands, the following August—that it appeared as a blazing ship. A full-rigged vessel with its hull on fire. Gradually the flames communicated to the spanker and the forestaysail, and then the blaze shot up their entire height. Then the heavy mainsail and the foresail caught fire, and the mad flames rushed up them, stopping for an instant at the yards, and leaped to the topgallants and royals. Then the jibs, one after another, and there stood in view the complete outline of a burning ship." The town clerk paused to add dramatic effect to his recital and continued:

"The ship sailed on—steadily on. And—the fire gradually receded, and the ship slowly lapsed from view. Then all light disappeared, save for the faintest possible one on the surface of the sea—"

The town clerk, as if suddenly impressed with the idea that the big hulking Boardman was scoffing, stopped in his discourse and looked curiously at him.

"How does it happen that you're a sailorman, and never heard about the Palatine?"

"Didn't say that I didn't, Old Topsail, so don't rile yer bilge. Tell us some more," with another broad wink to his companions.

"It's my belief, sir," replied the town

clerk, with the dignity becoming a town official, "that you do not believe what is written in the town's records."

"Stow that lingo. Maybe I've heard about this 'ere ghost ship, and maybe I ain't. Let's hear some more about the bloomin' old hell buster," settling his arms in a more comfortable position on the bar.

"Some one else will have to do that, sir. Perhaps Mr. Crocker will oblige," as Jones turned to his neglected glass.

"Here, Captain Jake, here's some seagoing folks that never heard about the Palatine. Tell 'em about her," immediately responded the irrepressible Ezra.

And presently Captain Jake Andrews, past master story teller, was deep in the tale of the Palatine and the ghost lights, with an audience that soon embraced everybody in the place, though the story was an old one to most of them.

III.

Captain Andrews' narrative was as follows:

The good ship Palatine, twenty-seven days out of Plymouth, was rapidly nearing the American coast. A dim speck was discerned in the distance, and the cheering cry of "Land Ho!" had come from the masthead, when there began a grim tragedy.

The passengers of the Palatine were emigrants of the better class, bound to new homes in a new land. There were about fifty families—men, women and children.

Among them were Elizabeth Pettingill and her brother Paul. Elizabeth was a tall, handsome young woman—good to look upon. The brother was younger.

The principal characters among the crew of most interest in the story were "Bull" Hazen, a sailor—a huge-bodied, bewhiskered villain who knew no scruples, and Robert Armstrong, the second mate—a wild, adventuresome man—reckless to the extreme.

The murder of the helpless emigrants did not enter into Hazen's plan of mutiny and piracy as outlined to Armstrong. It was to be robbery only. Armstrong was willing to participate in the robbery, but he was not quite up to the murder.

A concerted attack was made on the cabin where the passengers were resting. The attack was unexpected. Blood began to flow. Led by the brute Hazen, men, women and children were struck down right and left.

Armstrong was appalled and tried to stop the killings. He made an unsuccessful attempt to save Paul, Elizabeth's brother. Young Pettingill was savagely cut down before Elizabeth's eyes, who realized at the time it was Armstrong who saved her life by interposing his body when "Bull" Hazen rushed upon her.

Meanwhile, the blood-crazed men, after despoiling their victims, set fire to the vessel, and huge sheets of flame shot to the crosstrees.

The attack came just before a storm struck the craft. The gale broke in all its fury. The terrific wind tore the sails to ribbons, and mountainous seas washed her decks. With the glare of the fire, the furious wind, whirling sea, and its accompaniment of rain, thunder and lightning, the scene became a veritable inferno.

Among those who safely reached shore were Armstrong, Elizabeth and Hazen. Armstrong never knew how he was enabled to hold to Elizabeth and at the same time keep afloat in the terrible sea. Hazen probably was too wicked to drown.

Armstrong managed to secure a footing on the rocky shore, where a tremendous wave had thrown them. With a last supreme effort he staggered to a higher and safer place among the rocks, where he dropped his burden and fainted. For some time the two unconscious bodies lay side by side. Armstrong's shirt was torn half off and on the left side of his body close to the shoulder a curious loop-like birthmark showed.

Hazen, whose villainy was responsible for the killings, reached shore at a different point and crouched behind the rocks, peering out upon the scene before him. He made no move to aid the stricken couple.

Armstrong was first to recover his senses. Elizabeth knew that her life had been saved by the man whom she believed instrumental in the murder of the emigrants, but she was an embittered woman.

Standing erect, her wet hair streaming in

the wind, she held her arms aloft and asked God to visit his wrath upon those responsible.

She cursed Hazen and the crew, and then, with the light of prophecy in her flaming eyes, she declared that the *victims of the Palatine would forever haunt the murderers, and that the Palatine would sail the seas again and again, until the vengeance of God had been fulfilled; her coming would portend disaster on the sea to all who were guilty—and the curse would descend upon all, family to family, until there is none left.*

IV.

In another part of the town there was another group, all women. It was the sewing circle of the Baptist Church, presided over by the parson's wife. A member of the group was Nancy Baker, the original "mourning kid," as she was often facetiously called. Nancy always sat in whereever any one was dying and had a lovely time. She was happiest when there was trouble. She thrived on gloom.

Nancy got into the spotlight when the talk of women, many of whom had men folks on the sea, turned to the subject of the expected August gales which everybody feared. Nancy was saying that something told her trouble and death would surely follow the next appearance of the "ghost lights." This elicited an inquiry from the parson's wife, a newcomer to the town, as to the character and origin of the omen. And Nancy, eagerly availing herself of the opportunity to revel in tales of disaster, related the legend in full, as did Captain Andrews, and almost at the same time. Nancy was a better story teller even than Captain Jake. She thought of a lot of things that the captain overlooked. Particularly she dwelt on the fate of the women and children.

At the very outset of Nancy's tale she was interrupted by the entrance of Rose Granger, who had come to the meeting to direct in the making of some sick-bed clothing which the circle had undertaken for the benefit of Rose's impoverished patients. After the first greetings Rose took her place among Nancy's auditors, knowing that she could not hope to get the full attention of the gathering to the business in hand until the story telling had been finished.

At first she gave the tale merely a polite measure of attention, but presently became deeply interested. The legend affected her strongly, as it always did, for the grim tragedy had been kept fresh in her mind during her whole life by frequent references to it by her grandmother, the Elizabeth Pettingill of the Palatine's company. Rose clasped her hands over her breast, hanging onto every word of the story teller. She evidenced emotion when mention was made of Paul, the younger brother who was cut down in the presence of his sister.

Nancy, who knew every angle of the story, told how Elizabeth Pettingill married John Granger, Rose's grandfather, and settled in an adjoining town, only recently passing away. And even in her old age she gave evidence of her former wonderful beauty.

"Rose," said Nancy, "is the image of her grandmother."

The parson's wife asked about the other survivors of the Palatine—the two men of the crew, Hazen and Robert Armstrong, the second mate.

Nancy related that Hazen afterward was killed in a saloon on the Barbary Coast, San Francisco—knifed by a Lascar whom he was torturing for fun. At least, so it was said. He had had a daughter, but she died, widowed, before her father's murder, leaving a child, which was sent to an orphanage. Whatever became of it no one knew.

As for Armstrong, all trace of him was lost. He simply disappeared immediately after the Palatine affair, and no report had ever been brought home of him, except a vague rumor that he had gone into the China trade. Whether he had ever married or not was a question to which there was no clew.

V.

Back in the saloon, under the influence of his whisky-begotten tranquillity, Captain Strong listened with a new interest to Captain Andrews' long spun yarn of the Palatine, though he, too, knew the story well. As Andrews, with the native skill of a

born raconteur, drew a boldly sketched but convincing picture of the beautiful Elizabeth Pettingill, it seemed all at once to him that he knew, with a curious intimate knowledge, precisely the emotions of that man Armstrong who, after risking his life in the service of the girl, heard her pronounce upon him and his that devastating curse. In his own person he experienced the fiercely bitter pangs of remorse for a crime, unintended though it might have been, that hurled Armstrong out of the heaven of Elizabeth Pettingill's gratitude into the hell of her searing condemnation. In his half dream-state he became in fancy this very Mate Armstrong—and a crude, stark sense of justice told him that the girl was wholly right, and wholly angelic in her righteous anger.

Strong was awakened from this strange, almost clairvoyant condition with a suddenness that brought him down, sobered, to his own habitual standard of emotions with a crash. The sailor Boardman stood where Strong had been looking straight at him with unseeing eyes. All at once it came upon Strong that this man was reveling in the recital of the Palatine crime with a loathsome greed and relish for its horrid details. The word picture of Elizabeth Pettingill's virgin beauty seemed to fill his eyes with the light of bestial lust, and he winked at his cronies with a vilely suggestive leer. Hot anger flamed up in Strong. He wanted to take this toad between his fingers and crush it for its filthy presumptuousness. But he remembered the Polack—and held his peace. Yet he watched Boardman with unwinking eyes.

The man was brute to the heels. It was not only his cynical sneer over Captain Jake's description of Armstrong's change of heart in the midst of the Palatine horror; nor his joyous gloating over the limitless cruelty and bloodthirst of Hazen; nor his squalid description of the prophetic Elizabeth invoking divine vengeance upon that evil crew, when he called her a " damned yowling she-cat " that proved his receptivity to the influence of the tale. As the picture grew on the practiced tongue of Jake Andrews, the contagion of its violence excited Boardman, already fired by much liquor, with a wild lust for blows and blood, even as the pulsing rataplan of banjoes stirs in a young negro the irresistible urge to dance.

Boardman had not failed to catch the undisguised disgust with which Strong was regarding him—and in his new born belligerency he welcomed it. Thereafter he addressed himself again and again to Strong, in flagrant pretence that he expected the latter to agree with his shocking comments. Receiving only uncompromising silence in reply Boardman at last forced the issue.

" Hah! " he exclaimed. " If I'd been that Hazen I'd a copped off that baby for me—you bet your head. No leaving pickings like that for a white-livered sap like this Armstrong guy! "

" Whatya think, matey "—and he turned full on Strong and squared himself in an attitude of challenge—" how do you think the pretty lady'd fall for a full growed bloke like me—eh? "

" I think," replied Strong, " you're drunk. And I think the lady would want to do what I'm going to do." And without moving a muscle but continuing to lean backward on the bar, he spat full in Boardman's face.

With a wild curse Boardman swung a heavy fist at Strong's head, missed—for the head was not where it had been — and staggered frantically backward under the impact of a single terrific punch into which Strong put all the disgust and revulsion the creature had inspired in him. The bullet-headed ruffian was still reeling when Strong was upon him. One more of those terrible piston-like jabs, landing with a thud in Boardman's midriff, shot him through the swinging door and dropped him in a heap on the sidewalk. Quick as thought Strong sprang through the doorway, reaching Boardman just in time to bring the heel of his heavy shoe down on the hand that already, even before the man made any effort to rise, held the ever-present knife.

Boardman turned over on his face and squawked like a hen, " Don't kill me! "

And it was from this that Captain Hugh Strong looked up—into the face of Rose Granger.

She was standing, white, scornful, utterly without fear, just where the flying body

of the beaten sailor had stopped her progress.

As he looked into the face of this woman, in which for the first time he read the same belief in his worthlessness that the rest of the community held, Strong experienced the utterly novel sensation of shame. He had never known the meaning of the word in all his life.

But this was a mood that he would not tolerate. Should he, Hugh Strong, who had held his head up in a hundred lawless adventures all over the world, and had never feared to look God, man or the devil in the eye, take water under the gaze of a pulling she-thing? He raised himself to his full height, towering above Rose, forced an impudent grin and made her an elaborate obeisance, sweeping his cap across his breast in cavalier fashion. But he kept his foot on Boardman's knife hand.

"Pardon, ma'am," he said, "for blocking your highness's way! Let me remove this rubbish from your path." With a deft thrust of his foot he sent Boardman's knife skittering down the walk, far out of reach, and deliberately kicked Boardman into the gutter.

"Stop it!" cried Rose. "Stop it—you bully! I know you, Captain Strong! I know what people say of you. They say you're a brute, but brave. I say you're a brute—*and a coward!* No other kind of man would do that. *You're afraid of him—afraid to give him a chance!* I think, Captain Strong, the men you have bullied and beaten at sea must be a poor lot!"

Sheer disappointment of her hope that Strong might be, after all, a whole man at heart, had carried Rose off her feet. The injustice of her flaunt at his courage stung Strong as nothing else could.

"Listen," he said, thrusting his face truculently close to that of the girl; "nobody alive ever got away with that before. Here—look at this swine," he grasped Boardman by the collar and hauled him to his feet—"a sweet bird, isn't he? Big enough and ugly enough and mean enough—eh? And his little willing helpers here—more nice safe kittens. Fine, pleasant lot of shipmates, eh?—with a knife up every sleeve. Here, you—" Strong turned upon Boardman, whom he had been holding by the collar—"have you got the guts to go mate in the Wolf—and ship your whole gang of throat slitters along with you?"

The evil eyes of Boardman gleamed at the chance. At sea, with Strong alone against him and his crowd, scores could be more than fully paid. "Sure thing, cap'n," he said eagerly.

"All right, *Mister* Boardman," declared Strong, "it's your berth. Come on, bring your bullies and we'll sign it in red liquor."

As all hands trooped back into the saloon, Strong turned to Rose Granger, who had taken a step or two on her way to the waterfront home she was about to visit, and called after her:

"Don't worry, ma'am. I'll treat 'em gently. They're my own kind, you know!"

But Rose, a little frightened at the consequence of her ill-considered interference, hurried on without reply and without looking back. Littlefield, evidently well acquainted with Rose, overtook her as the crowd broke up and the last Strong saw of them as he lingered an instant in the saloon doorway, was a backward nod of Littlefield's head toward himself as the brass buttoned yacht captain made some obviously derogatory remark on the scene just closed.

VI

It was several days before the Wolf could sail. She had been hauled out for repairs and painting. Meantime Rose Granger's conscience troubled her. She had a guilty feeling that she had goaded Strong into an association which was likely to drive out of him any possible spark of decency and right feeling. But Littlefield, who sought her company on all possible occasions, made her believe that Strong's offhand offer to take the Boardman crowd into the Wolf was staged for effect. He told her that Strong had already engaged Boardman as mate, days before the fracas, and that the fight had resulted from a drunken dispute over the shipping of one or two of Boardman's men. So Rose decided to dismiss Strong and his affairs from her mind as altogether unworthy.

She seemed fated, however, to be continu-

ally brought into contact with Strong. A Mrs. Getchel, who kept a boarding house patronized by waterside men, was under contract with the government to take care of such sick sailors as became government charges in the port, there being no regular hospital. She was a busy woman, however, and welcomed the daily visits of Rose Granger to her house whenever there was a sailor patient there. Rose was at Mrs. Getchel's, one rainy evening, changing the dressing of a head wound for a Swedish sailor.

That same evening Bill Boardman and two of his rowdy friends were sitting at a table in a particularly hard little groggery directly across from the docks. A third Boardman satellite came in, hurriedly, and whispered to Boardman:

"He's up to Ames's rope walk—and Water Street's as dark as a pocket; lights all out."

Boardman leered significantly as he slid his knife out of his pocket and onto the table, keeping it partly covered by his hand. He patted it lovingly. Then, returning the knife to his pocket, he got up, nodded to his pals and sauntered out, almost immediately followed by the others. Outside, the three overtook Boardman in a few steps and they disappeared in the darkness of Water Street.

Some minutes later Strong, splashing down Water Street—which paralleled the river front—came under the ray of light from the window of a tumbledown house. A second afterward the figures of four men flitted down from around the corner of the house. Simultaneously one leaped on Strong's back, another seized either arm while a knife in the hand of the fourth flashed twice, and Strong became a heap of clothes in the dark—and the shadowy figures were gone. A few minutes later Strong was discovered lying in the rain by a man who emerged from the house with a lantern. The police carried him to Mrs. Getchel's, and summoned the port physician, who met them at the door.

Strong's wounds were superficial—one a mere scratch along a rib, the other a thrust under the left shoulder, the knife blade having been deflected from his heart by a vest-pocket notebook. But loss of blood left Strong insensible when he was carried into the room next to the Swede's. At that moment Rose emerged from the latter's quarters and the doctor saw her.

"Lend me a hand, Miss Granger," said the physician. And so Rose again found herself in the presence of Hugh Strong.

She sat by the bedside as the physician cut Strong's shirt away from the wounded shoulder. Suddenly she leaned forward, all intentness. Just above the cut was a birth-mark. Its nature was visible only to eyes which were close to it. Rose started in agitation, but controlled herself at once as the doctor said crisply:

"The iodine, Miss Granger."

She performed her duties thereafter as coolly as though she had never seen Strong before, and was excused by the doctor just before the patient regained consciousness.

Strong made little of his injuries, laughed at the physician when the latter called the next morning and found Strong dressing himself. He insisted on settling accounts with the doctor and Mrs. Getchel, and left the house.

"I always pay my bills," he declared grimly, and as he did so he stood for a moment in abstraction, with the vision before his eyes of four shadowy figures falling upon him in the dark—and the face of Bill Boardman was in the picture.

"I always pay my bills," he repeated.

But when, that same morning, Strong encountered Boardman on the street, he merely said:

"We'll sail at high water, night after to-morrow. Have 'em aboard."

And he passed on while Boardman, looking after him, shrugged his shoulders and grinned evilly.

On the day before the sailing of the Wolf, Rose Granger again came out of the post office as again Captain Hugh Strong swaggered down the street. And this time, as once before, he looked her defiantly in the eye. She ran down the steps and confronted him.

"Captain Strong," she said, "I want a word with you."

Strong, grimly silent, stood and awaited what she had to say.

"I practically dared you, the other night,

to put yourself in the power of that man Boardman. I am told what I said had nothing to do with your shipping them. But if it had I'm sorry. I should hate to think I had helped you to more—violence."

"Thanks," replied Strong. "That would be consoling—with a six-inch blade between my ribs. I'll remember it. But don't flatter yourself, ma'am. You don't cut any figure at all—not a mite. I run my ship—and my business. I'm a bold bad man, you know, headed for hell. But I steer my own course—with the devil in the crow's nest."

"Oh," cried Rose, "you're hopeless!" And she turned on her heel and hurried away, her head high but her cheeks burning with mortification and anger.

"A bully and a rough—that's all!" she told herself.

Strong's fist clenched at his side as he momentarily looked after Rose's departing form. He was obviously disquieted by the result of his own deliberate rudeness. In spiritually mauling this girl, he had taken something of the same savage delight that he had often experienced in beating to a pulp some husky, fighting brute of a man. But he found little satisfaction in her retreat and his victory. He could almost have hurried after her and apologized—but his domineering soul would not let him entertain such a thought. With a contemptuous shrug of his shoulders, he swaggered off.

But once more the path of these two crossed. It was on the night of the sailing of the Sea Wolf.

VII.

To understand what happened that night one must bear in mind that at the foot of the principal street of the town was located a long public wharf at the extreme end of which was located the terminal of the tiny ferry that ran to the East Side, across the river. Half way down this wharf, on the down stream side, were several landing ladders where small boats from vessels in the harbor tied up.

Rose Granger, whose duties called her only to the homes of the poor, had obeyed a summons to a stricken family in the East Side. She returned on the ten o'clock ferry, the only passenger. She had no fear, for she was in the habit of moving about the water front streets at all hours and had never been molested; so she walked down the long, almost dark, wharf without thought of danger. It was, nevertheless, a lonely spot, for besides the length of the wharf there was a considerable space, traversed by the tracks of the railroad, between the dock and the buildings of the town.

She had traversed half of the length of the pier when she encountered Bill Boardman and his gang of ruffian cronies, drunk and boisterous. They were on the point of going aboard the Sea Wolf. Rose attempted to pass far to one side, but one of the men caught sight of her and with a whoop staggered across the pier and headed her off. Boardman and the rest, grinning in drunken glee over the opportunity to badger and frighten an undefended woman, stumbled toward her. But when Boardman got close enough to recognize Rose, whom he had noticed many times and whose beauty of face and form had excited his brutal admiration, he blunderingly tried to play the hero in her eyes. He flung aside two of his rowdies, and, with a grotesque attempt at gallantry of manner, lurched up to her.

"Leave the pretty lady alone!" he commanded with mock severity. "She ain't seekin' the company of no tar-fingers. A gent like Bill Boardman is the class for her." He turned to Rose, who was hemmed in by the grinning ruffians, and added, "Eh, sweetness?"

Rose, speechless with indignation, turned away and attempted to force her way through the circle of men, but they blocked her path, and Boardman, seizing her by the arm, leered into her face.

"See?" he cried. "It's Bill—or the bunch—for yours, pretty lady. Better be nice to Bill. Come"—and he flung his arms about her and crushed her to him—"give good old Bill a pretty kiss."

Rose's right hand was free, and she struck with all her strength at the face of her persecutor. The blow, which was a sturdy one, landed full. Its effect was to infuriate Boardman.

"You cat! That'll cost you something!" he bellowed. "I'll strip you and throw you to these dogs—after I'm done with you!"

His hairy paw gripped the fabric of her gown at the throat. His arm was flexed to tear the clothing from her body with a single ruthless stroke—when the pile driver fist of Hugh Strong thudded against his jaw and with a grunt he went down.

Strong, coming up the pier in the dark, had been only a few rods behind his ruffian crew. He had not been greatly interested in their boisterous rowdyism. Even when he found them grouped about a woman he made no haste to interfere, for he assumed that it was some sailors' drab they were mauling about. But when, over the heads of the encircling men, he saw Rose Granger in the grasp of Boardman, he flashed into wild fury. Strong was far more in the mood of a rival beast than in that of an heroic rescuer, and it would have gone badly indeed with Boardman if Strong had been free to follow up his attack.

But Boardman's roughs, excited by their leader's promise to share the girl with them, and wildly drunk into the bargain, had no idea of being cheated out of their quarry in this way. Boardman's body had no more than struck the planks of the pier than the men were upon Strong, one of them meantime seizing Rose.

The fight that followed was a battle between human brutes. Boardman's allies were all hard, powerful men, used to giving and taking blows and adept in the pitiless devices of rough and tumble. Strong's sole chance lay in his being sober—and a wilder and more ruthless fighting animal than any of them. As he battered these determined antagonists with fist and head and heel, and as they battered him, he managed to keep his own body between the girl and her assailants, for the man who had seized her was the first, after Boardman, to feel Strong's terrible knockout punch. And gradually he maneuvered the course of the fight across the narrow pier to the point where his dinghy was moored, still keeping the girl behind him and the cursing, fighting sailors in front.

Boardman, who had been out of the battling since the beginning, had recovered consciousness and was struggling to get upon his feet. In another moment, Strong too well knew, he would come charging into the mêlée with that murderous knife of his—and it would soon be over then. At that instant one of Strong's antagonists stumbled and fell, and another of them tumbled over him and went down. Still another had stooped to help his fallen mate to his feet. Three men confronted Strong. One of these, who was in the act of swinging a terrific blow at his captain's head, Strong uppercut and he went down. Almost at the same instant he kicked another full in the stomach and the man doubled up and tumbled over on his side, gasping like a fish. The other was closing in, but Strong, throwing the weight of his body at him with the backs of both hands touching his own breast, shoved the fellow with a mighty heave that sent him somersaulting backward over the struggling forms of two men who had become tangled on the ground.

Then, picking up Rose Granger as though she were a doll, he swung her over the side of the pier and dropped her into the dinghy. She had scarcely landed in the boat before Strong had leaped in after her, whipped out his clasp knife and cut the mooring line. He had taken advantage of a respite of seconds only, for as he gave the boat a great shove away from the pier, one of the sailors leaped for the dinghy, missed it by a foot and splashed into the water.

As Strong seized the oars the rest of the crowd, including Boardman, could be seen shaking their fists and gesticulating on the edge of the pier, while two of them, having found a rope, were bunglingly trying to rescue the man in the water.

Rose, who had been dazed and confused quite as much as she had been frightened by her experiences in the midst of the mêlée, scarcely sensed her whereabouts until Strong had rowed almost to the Wolf.

"You could set me ashore down at the fish pier, Captain Strong," she suggested. "There would be no danger there."

But Strong made no reply till he arrived, a moment later, alongside the schooner. Then he gruffly remarked:

"Climb aboard."

And he pointed to the rope ladder hanging at the schooner's waist.

Rose hesitated. But this man had just saved her, most heroically, from a dreadful fate. It was difficult to antagonize him in what he probably believed to be the safest course. Perhaps he was right. At all events there seemed nothing to do but go aboard the Wolf. She did so, and Strong leaped aboard after her.

VIII.

As a matter of fact Strong, in his battle for this girl, had been aroused to a wild desire to possess her. She had flouted him, pricked him with her scorn, aroused his antagonism, belittled him. If she had been a man he would have rejoiced to beat her with his fists till she cried for mercy. Being a woman, he longed to humble her, to bring her to her knees, to demonstrate a bitter, ruthless mastery over her.

It was but a step from this mood, which had been growing on him for many days, to the flaming passion to enslave her. The contact of his body with hers in the midst of the struggle on the dock, the closeness of her lips to his as he swung her into the boat —and now the sense of having her physically in his power—set up in Strong an intoxication that his wild undisciplined soul made little effort to resist. He was not accustomed to regulate his desires by conscience.

Besides, was he not a fatalist? And had not fate played into his hands?

"Welcome to the pirate's ship," he said sardonically. "Make yourself at home, ma'am. You're going to be here a long time."

"What do you mean?" Rose asked coldly.

"I mean," said Strong, "that I play my luck when the devil sends it. You're here by the fall of the cards—but now that you're here, by Heaven, you stay!"

Rose stared at him. She could not quite understand his meaning. The obvious interpretation that he meant to detain her by force seemed ridiculous, incredible.

"I do not comprehend, Captain Strong," she said. "Do I understand that you expect me to remain here, on your ship, for more than a few minutes?"

Strong laughed roughly. "More than a few minutes!" he jeered. "Listen. You're going to stay for days—for weeks. You're going to stay till I say you can go. Look: I've taken a fancy, all at once, for something soft and pretty to play with—something soft and pretty and full of spunk and scratching claws, like a kitten. You're it. And so you're going to sail, to-night, with me. You're going to be queen to a pirate king. You're going to be tough, bad, bloody Hugh Strong's woman. He wasn't quite tough enough and bad enough to suit you and your sanctimonious friends so you made him out a damn sight worse than he ever was. And now he's going to play the game. Come, give your *master* a kiss."

Rose had been standing stock still, listening with dilating eyes to this reckless speech. But as Strong started to take her in his arms she sprang to the rail of the vessel where the small boat was tied, and essayed to climb over. Strong seized her arm. She was facing the shore, where occasional lights were visible, and she uttered one long cry of "Help!" before Strong, clapping his hand over her mouth, picked her up bodily and carried her to the cabin companionway, down the cabin stairs and thrust her into one of the four tiny staterooms, the door of which he locked.

There he left her, and, going forward, routed out the cook, whom he ordered to make coffee and get some lunch for "the lady aft." The cook grinned and started to comply, but shook his head dubiously as the captain disappeared.

"No good come of that—never yet," he grumbled.

Strong returned to the cabin, where he stood for a moment lost in thought. Then he went to the chart drawer and spread a map of the world upon the cabin table. He stood and studied this frowningly for a minute or more. Then, with sudden resolve he returned to the drawer, ran his thumb over the edge of the stack of charts, and drew out one of the Society group, Polynesia. He put his finger on one of the smaller, remote islands, nodded his head in decision and put map and chart away.

Outside the wind and sea were rising. Even at her anchorage in the river the Sea Wolf began to chafe at her cable and the water was growing rough. Strong went on deck with his night glass. He turned the glass on the weather lights displayed above the roof of the custom house. Red warning lights, arranged in code formation, burned against the ink black background of a stormy sky.

"South-east gale of hurricane proportions," muttered Strong to himself, quoting the code. "Well, so be it—and be damned to it!"

At this moment his keen ears caught the sound of oars thudding against tholepins. Peering into the darkness he made out the vaguest outline of an approaching boat. He hailed:

"Boat ahoy—what boat is that?"

"The Sea Wolf's. That you, Captain Strong?" It was Boardman's voice.

"Yes. Come aboard, Mr. Boardman."

In the boat one of the men whispered: "He says 'Mister.'"

"He must be going to stand for us." Boardman jabbed the man in the ribs and laughed silently.

"Aye, aye, sir," he sang out. "That is, sir, we want to come aboard—if everything's all right. We didn't know it was you, sir, that we was sluggin'."

"Where are the others?" demanded Strong.

"Scared of you, sir," replied Boardman. "They'll come off in the morning, though."

"The morning be damned," exclaimed Strong. "Were sailing now. Hoist the boats aboard, loosen your gaskets and get your anchor; the tide's turned."

Boardman stared at the captain. "Sailing? In the teeth of that?" he asked, dumfounded, pointing to the red hurricane signal ashore. "And short-handed!"

Strong looked at Boardman contemptuously:

"Sailing? Yes, in the teeth of that? Yes. That is, the Wolf's sailing. And if there's any sailormen aboard her with the guts of a rabbit, they're going in her—now! Come, are you mate of this ship—or are you a lily-livered beachcomber that's afraid of a capful of wind and does all his sailing over the bar? Get your men to work, or get ashore! The Wolf is no ship for swabs."

Boardman was no coward, physically. He could not withstand the taunt, especially from the man who had beaten him and whom he hated. His three followers were mere brute beasts who, lacking all imagination, feared nothing an hour away.

"Oh, I'm game for it—even if she's got her papers straight to Davy Jones's locker!" Boardman hastened to answer. "Here, you hairy apes—lay for'ard."

And so the Wolf, undermanned, with a cutthroat crew and a captain spurred by a wild and reckless passion, weighed anchor and slipped out of the safe refuge of the river's mouth into the blackness and perils of an approaching tempest. And Rose Granger, white-faced and open-eyed, stared into the darkness of her tiny prison in helpless, hopeless agony of soul.

IX.

As she cleared the shelter of the river-mouth points the Wolf ran into high wind and heavy seas, precursors of the growing storm. Strong laid her, close hauled, and under jib staysail and double reefed mainsail, on an easterly course. He hoped to clear the last of the New England headlands in an hour or two and beat straight out. The lee shore lay too close aboard to suit him. He knew that he was taking a dangerous chance, with a deadly rockbound coast thundering off there to port; but he would not change his course. He was full of the wild spirit of the night and dared fate in sheer bravado. Nevertheless he had not forgotten that Rose Granger was locked in the little stateroom below, without a fighting chance for her life if the schooner did strike.

He called one of the seamen, lashed the helm, and when it was secure he slipped into the cabin and stealthily turned the key in the stateroom door. Then he returned to the deck and took up his place near the wheel, watching the Wolf narrowly as she tore along, all aslant, through the ever rising wind.

As the vessel pitched and rolled, the catch of the door of Rose's room slipped and

the door swung violently open, letting into her prison the light of the swinging lantern in the cabin. Rose was startled out of her half-coma and struggled to her feet. When she found that she was no longer locked in she went into the cabin, started to climb the after-companionway steps, hesitated, retraced her steps and sought for some other outlet. She found the forward entrance, in the " break of the poop." The door was fastened with a hasp on the inside. She undid the fastening and the companionway door flew open under the force of the wind as she attempted to open it herself. She fought her way up the three steps to the deck and stood there, holding fast to the companionway, her hair streaming and her clothes whipping about her body, a beautiful picture in a wild and sinister setting.

Forward, Boardman and his three followers were grouped at the forecastle door. Boardman had a bottle of whisky and was making it common property. The men were already more than half drunk. It was obvious that they were worried by the threatening aspects of the weather, and were drinking for courage. Boardman played upon their nerves.

" He's trying to drown us all—sticking along ashore, this way, with half a crew!" declared one of the men.

" Sure," assented Boardman. " Mashed on that skirt he's got aft—like a damn dude—and sore 'cause she's fussy."

" Are you going to let him do it, Bill? Going to let him stick us on a lousy reef, some'res, without a kick? Whyn't you grab the ship, 'n' save our necks?"

" Save—hell! Might as well go ashore as turtle or swamp? We're on our last trip, I'm saying. This blow's only starting. Here's to it—have a drink!"

They finished the bottle and Boardman promptly produced another, knocking the neck off with his heavy knife.

" Last night afloat, boys, like enough," he cried, drinking again and passing the bottle. " By God! Let's make it a good one! Who's game to declare in on the skipper's tea party with the girl? If we're going to hell a-flukin'—let's go with the feel of nice soft arms 'round our neck—and damned lucky it ain't a noose! Come"—he flung the empty bottle far overside—" we'll go get this crazy lubber that's trying to fling good men's lives away. And get the girl! First grab first share!"

They rushed aft in a race, Boardman leading.

The old cook, emerging from the galley, almost collided with Boardman as the latter hurried past. He attempted to lay a restraining hand on the mate's arm, but the latter did not even see him. The cook, however, planted himself in the path of the seamen and in excited protest sought to detain them. One of the men picked him up bodily and hurled him against the galley. His head struck the corner of the structure and the old man rolled to the deck, face up, with the blood showing at his temple.

Strong, who had momentarily left his lashed wheel to better scan his vessel, was standing at the break of the poop as the men approached. It was plain enough that they meant mischief. He stepped down from the raised poop deck to meet them. It was at that instant that Rose Granger appeared in the companionway.

Boardman, knife in hand, rushed straight at Strong, who, as always, was unarmed, and struck at him. Strong sidestepped and the blade ripped the left sleeve of his reefer as Boardman's foot struck an obstruction and he stumbled, falling to his knees. Strong might have thrown himself upon his assailant, but the three sailors, a couple of yards behind the mate, had caught sight of Rose and with a yell made for her. Strong seeing this, neglected his advantage over Boardman and threw himself in front of Rose just in time to intercept the grasp with which the first of the men attempted to seize the girl. As this man, struggling with Strong, butted him under the chin and rocked the captain's head back, the other two tore belaying pins from the rack at the mainmast and rushed toward Strong. At the same instant Boardman scrambled to his feet and crouched to spring upon the hopelessly handicapped captain.

At this instant, when it seemed inevitable that he was to be overwhelmed and killed, there came to Hugh Strong a blinding white light of revelation. He saw himself lying

dead on the deck. And he saw the indubitable consequence of his death—Rose Granger, in all the beauty of her virgin womanhood, vividly desecrated by these bestial creatures, befouled, beaten, slain—to be at last thrown into the sea like so much carrion. And he realized, as this horror enacted itself before his spiritual eyes, that the thing which these brutes were about to do was, after all, only the thing which he himself had deliberately planned to do—done merely after the fashion of men of their kind.

"Merciful God," he prayed—for the first time in his stormy life—"give me the strength to save her."

Desperately his steely fingers tore into the flesh of the man with whom he was at grapples and with superhuman effort he flung the fellow crashing to the deck. But the other two were upon him and already Boardman's blade was poising for the final stroke. There seemed no chance for Strong and the girl!—no chance at all.

Then came a blazing, blinding flare as if the universe had exploded into quivering flame—and a crash like the meeting of worlds. With rush and roar and infinite clatter the main topmast of the Wolf came swirling down from the opaque blackness overhead, swinging terrifyingly by its stays. The schooner had been struck by the storm's first lightning bolt.

Momentary paralysis held every hand rigid, every foot rooted to the deck. And as they stared about them, in awed, scared inquiry as to what had happened, every eye aboard the schooner was held spellbound by a strange, terrible new aspect of the night. Far off to seaward a weird, tremulous light illumined the rushing sweep of the great swarm of billows that raced along the horizon, and reached far up into the sky, with its savage death dance of tattered black clouds.

Even as the company of the Sea Wolf, frozen by the dread of the moment in the midst of their tragedy of hate and lust, gazed open mouthed at this compelling phenomenon, the great light, shifting and like an aurora, took on a shape. It was a ship—a ship on fire, with great streamers of flame lapping upward over hull and into rigging. The sails became alive with curling tongues of fire. Ribbons of flame outlined shrouds and crosstrees and topmost spars. For a moment this stupendous spectacle endured—and then, defying trend of wind and all the fury of the storm, the flaming ship slowly turned in her sea of limpid light and came sailing straight toward the Wolf with appalling, impossible speed.

It was Boardman, of all the people on the Wolf, who first found voice. In a fury of superstitious terror, his face distorted by the intensity of his dread, he shouted: "The ghost lights! The Palatine! It's the girl that's brought 'em! She's a Jonah-woman! Overboard with her, before the ghost ship runs us down!"

But before Boardman could take a step toward her, Rose Granger, her eyes gleaming with clairvoyant light and her slender figure towering like that of an avenging angel, stepped in front of Strong and pointed her outstretched hand at the mate. "I know you now, Hazen," she cried, her voice vibrant with supernatural power. "You are the man! I see you now—murderer of women and little children—as you cut down the helpless emigrants of the Palatine. You have lived on and on, while others grew old and died—because God has saved you for this—for the vengeance of those ghostly dead out there! They are coming, Hazen—fiend!—coming for you!"

X

BOARDMAN writhed and cowered in his superstitious fear. But the wild beast in him translated his terror into violence. With slobbering lips and gurgling speech he snarled: "You lie, you crazy witch! It wasn't me. I wasn't born. I wish I was. I'd 'a' given something to hear 'em squeal—the rabbits! It's in the blood—the good black Hazen blood! Me, 'Bull' Hazen, you doll-faced fool? No! But Bull Hazen's grandson, by Heaven! And here's where he makes good—and ghosts be damned!"

This tirade of Boardman's had been [illegible] same sort of psychologic phenomena as the war dances of savages. By means of it he had been working himself up into a state

of murderous rage. But he had rendered himself, in his raving, half unconscious of what was going on about him, shaking his fist at the universe and stamping like a madman.

Strong, who stood motionless under the clairvoyant magnetism of Rose Granger during her denunciation of Boardman, was the first of the group to come to a realization of things as they really were. In another instant, when Boardman had passed through his ghost-dancing stage, he would be galvanized into murderous action, would bring his ruffians down upon them with renewed violence—and the end would come.

But the diversion, momentary as it had been, had given Strong one unhoped-for chance. He jumped at it. Seizing Rose around the waist with his right arm he swept her clear of her feet and forced her through the companionway door into the cabin, all with one motion. And in the fraction of a second he had leaped inside, slammed the door to and jammed the pin into the hasp. Then, tearing through the cabin to the after-companionway he locked that, too. For the moment they were safe.

Boardman was only one jump behind Strong—so close in fact that the companionway door, slamming shut, intercepted a swinging blow of his knife and the blade was buried in the wood. As he wrenched it clear and turned to his men, yelling for them to help him break in the door, he found them standing, still and awe-struck, gazing at the still approaching fiery ghost of the Palatine, now close aboard.

The phantom ship, a mass of quivering flame, towered high in air, and the strange unreal aurora radiance that emanated from her made the deck of the Wolf and the sea all around almost as light as day.

Boardman, too, was recalled to the presence of this supernatural visitant. Like the others he stood rooted, staring at the oncoming specter ship. And as he looked he saw himself, in the person of "Bull" Hazen, dripping with innocent blood, the central figure in the horrible orgy of the Palatine murders. He covered his face with his arms and cowered before the spectacle. But slowly the flames were losing their intensity; gradually the outlines of the burning ship were becoming less definite and the nimbus of light fading away, until, as the phantom vessel seemed on the very point of riding down the Wolf, she dissolved into a mere luminous cloud that swept over the Wolf like an April shadow—and was gone, leaving the schooner and her occupants alone in the midst of the tumbling sea.

Boardman, first to recover himself, laughed defiantly. "Go get an ax," he ordered one of the men. "We'll dig out these birds." To the other two: "Come, we'll have a look aft." And they made their way to the after cabin entrance, where they battered at the companion hatch unavailingly.

Meantime, in the cabin, Strong and Rose Granger faced each other. Strong stood with bowed head, overcome by remorse and stunned by realization of the sheer baseness of which he had been guilty in bringing the girl into this terrible situation. But as he stood thus, his eyes not meeting hers, Rose regarded him without that degree of loathing which he had a right to expect. Certainly she showed no fear of him, but appeared rather to be studying him with absorbed intentness. Strong turned away with a despairing gesture, faced the girl again and spoke:

"There is nothing to say. I am guilty as hell! It's the blood—like that in this devil Boardman; the blood of the Palatine mutineers. I'm a son of the son of Bob Armstrong—and born to the hangman's noose. See!" Tearing off his reefer coat, the sleeve of which was slit by Boardman's knife, he thrust his fingers into the rip in the flannel shirt beneath—for the knife had gone through to the skin and left a line of blood on the arm—and wrenched it open to the shoulder. He thus exposed to the sight of Rose, close to the shoulder and within an inch of the freshly healed stab wound, a looplike birthmark.

But Rose was neither astounded nor repelled.

"I know," she said quietly. "I have seen that mark before—when you were wounded and fainting. It is the same as Elizabeth Pettingill—my grandmother—saw on the shoulder of Robert Armstrong—when he saved her, at the end, on that

dreadful night—and was washed half naked on the rocks. I think, somehow, that I have always known."

"And yet," Strong said incredulously, "you were less bitter than the others. Knowing all you did! The taint of Palatine slaughter in my veins!"

"But Robert Armstrong would have given his life for Elizabeth's; he almost did. And he did his best for Paul. I think—perhaps—he was redeemed. Who knows?"

"Would to God that I could buy your life with mine!" cried Strong. "Well"—and he pulled himself together in sudden new resolve—"I can make a man's best try!" He strode across the cabin and from the chart drawer took a revolver and a small single shot derringer. He laid the latter on the table beside Rose. Their eyes met in a grave, steady gaze.

"I understand," said Rose quietly. "At the very last."

"At the very last," Strong repeated solemly. And, revolver in hand, he laid hold of the fastening of the forward companionway.

Meantime, as Boardman and the other seamen were searching for an ax and planning how best to break into the cabin, the wind had suddenly dropped out. Lightning played on the horizon. The schooner, riding on the swell, had lost her "way." The night became absolutely black. From the eastward came a low, moaning, sinister sound—portent of a paroxysm of nature.

And at the very instant when Boardman and his fellows were rushing aft, one with an ax and the others knife in hand—and when Strong was on the point of coming on deck, the hurricane hit the Wolf.

It beat her down upon her side. Twice she feebly tried to right herself, but each time the cyclonic blasts knocked her down again on her beam ends. And as she still struggled to regain her equilibrium the foremast was rolled clean out of her, ripping up the deck as it fell and leaving her a mere wallowing hulk.

Mountains of water swept over the Wolf. The first great wave had washed Boardman and the seamen into the scuppers where they were fighting for their lives, grabbing at loose ends of rigging and debris. And as Strong clawed his way to the poop, by the light of a long, quivering lightning flash he saw, right under the lee of the Wolf, the spouting white fountains of foam that tell the story of rocks!

The Sea Wolf was doomed. The end was a matter of seconds.

Strong plunged back to the cabin. "We're on Hogback reef," he shouted. Better die in the sea than in this trap."

Rose, pale but calm, let Strong support her to the companionway. But before they could escape, the Wolf struck, throwing them to the floor. There was a horrible crashing and grinding of timbers. The vessel careened far over, rolling Strong and Rose across the cabin. The ship lifted, fell back, surged forward stern first and struck again, smashing down squarely on the knifelike edge of the reef—and broke in two, the whole forward section sliding back into deep water and going down, carrying Boardman and his men with it. The after section, a mere fragment of wreck, was carried over into the broken water inside the reef. Broken deck beams barred both companionways. Rose and Strong were prisoners. The forward end of the cabin tilted downward, and as the flooring burst upward a great rush of water poured in, half filling the place.

Strong flung himself frantically at the clutter of timbers. But immediately there was a second and greater inrush of water as the severed hulk sank deeper in the sea. Strong, realizing the utter futility of his efforts, abandoned them and throwing his arms around Rose's waist, helped her to stand erect on the steeply slanting floor. The water was at their feet.

"It is the end, is it not?" she asked him, tremulously but dry eyed.

Solemnly the man bowed his head in answer.

"Do not blame yourself too much, Captain Strong," she said, "I think you have been, after all, just a man."

XI

Driving on before the hurricane the waterlogged wreck remnant at this instant

struck a great isolated craggy rock far inside the main reef. Under the impact the planking of her sides smashed like an eggshell. She rolled over. The sea poured in through the big, ragged opening. And through that opening, Strong, his arms thrown about the girl, struggled just before the hulk, now all awash, went down.

Powerful swimmer he was, and the girl was no helpless child nor panicky coward, but struck out bravely in her own behalf. It was the instinct to fight for life to the last gasp that made them struggle on and on. Then there came sweeping down a giant wave something blacker than the blackness of the sea. Frantically Strong made for it, guiding the girl and holding fast to her. It was the forward hatch of the Sea Wolf.

Strong fastened upon the drifting timber a grip like the grip of death.

"When it settles—in the trough—climb on!" he gasped. And Rose, obedient and agile, seized the one still moment when they and the little floating platform were sunk in the valley between the waves, to draw herself upon it. She reached her hands to Strong. "You, too," she cried.

"No. It won't float us both," he managed to answer. "I'll stand by."

"You're throwing yourself away—for me," Rose cried in an agony of distress. "Don't—in Heaven's name, don't! I want to share my chance of life with you!"

"Little enough—God knows—after what—I did. But I'll stand by—while I can."

And so through the night. Again and again Rose pleaded with him to share the aid of the hatch, to which she clung—while the man, holding to the rag of tarpaulin covering as best he could, swam by its side.

Three times his hold was broken. And each time, by fortune or by sheer desperate effort, he regained the tiny support of the float. But the last time left him at the end of his strength. He was breathless, exhausted. Rose saw his distress. Frantically, at hazard of her own life, she strove to drag him upon the hatch. But he thrust her back; then deliberately cast loose his hold, and let himself go. He had done his best. He could do no more.

But as he threw up his hands in mute good-by his feet found bottom. A wave lifted him and hurled him onward, close beside the hatch. He felt bottom again, this time in shoaler water. He struggled for a footing, gained it at the end of the next wave's thrust, seized the hatch just in time to catch Rose, who had succumbed at last to the terrors and exhaustion of the night and fainted, just as she rolled off the raft into the sea. He gathered her in his arms, fought his way on and on—and presently, with the last remaining fragment of the strength he had borrowed from desperation, he staggered up a wave-swept beach and fell, beside his senseless burden, safe beyond the fingers of the murderous sea.

And far out, where the water mountains shattered themselves against the farthermost line of rocks, all that was left of Bill Boardman, battered to death in the first minute after the Sea Wolf struck, was hurled back and forth by the breakers—still maintaining a grotesque leadership as the corpses of his three followers trailed along in ghastly procession, in his wake.

In the east the faintest radiance climbed the sky. Above, the tattered camp followers of the hurricane were flying. Seaward the long gray ground swell, aftermath of the elemental horror of the night before, swung inshore—and the jagged reefs spouted foam. Rose Granger, sitting on the sands, her chin within her hand, looked at the worn, stern face of Captain Strong, sunk in the sleep of utter exhaustion.

"He has seen his ghost light," she murmured. "Out of the bad wild days his specter ship has brought to him—redemption."

Strong stirred uneasily. His eyes opened. He stared at Rose uncomprehendingly, then leaped to his feet and looked about him—at the sea, at her face, gently, as one in awe. For a moment they gazed into each other's eyes. Then Rose, shaking her head as though to arouse herself to the present, extended her hand to him.

"Come," she said, "Life lies ahead."

And side by side they made their way down the long reach of sands toward the far distant tiny village on whose houses and single spire the first light of day was shining.

(The end.)

The Gun-Fanner

Part II

by Kenneth Perkins

Author of "The Fear-Sway," "The Blood-Call," "The Bull-Dogger," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

"YOU marry Nan Harvess and half of that herd is yours," old Scrub Hazen promises Saul Meakin. Nan is Hazen's ward, and the old rancher wants to shift his responsibilities to younger shoulders. Realizing that Nan is a romantic girl, Hazen plans a rodeo, the winner of most points to gain the girl's hand; immediately he talks it over with Meakin, and chooses only exhibitions of skill for which the younger man is noted. It is a pretty frame-up, and quite agreeable all round until Cal Triggers, a gun-fanner and killer, unexpectedly enters the town in search of a wife.

Triggers is more a bad man through reputation than fact; it is true that he has several killings to his credit, but in each case he has justified the act, and has been acquitted by juries. His tremendous physical prowess and uncanny speed of trigger deserves respect—and arouses fear when he enters the saloon. The bartender, his only friend, and the only one present with courage enough to face him, takes him into a back room where he tries to get Cal Triggers to leave town because of Hazen's ridiculous contest. Meanwhile Triggers has seen Nan, and decides to stay. If there is to be a rodeo with so priceless a prize, he will see Hazen and enter the lists. Realizing that the men in the barroom are waiting to start a fight, he reënters calmly, rolls a cigarette, then turns to them with: "I'm looking for a gent named Scrub Hazen."

CHAPTER VII.

TRIGGERS HORSES IN.

IMMEDIATELY the significance of the remark was apparent to the entire crowd. Cal Triggers, they realized, had heard of the contest for the hand of Hazen's foster daughter, and he intended immediately to announce his desire to compete. The trap must be laid for him without further delay, and the men, instead of glancing at Hazen, turned furtively toward Saul Meakin and the sheriff.

Cal recognized the neat outfit of the man whom he had seen talking with the golden-haired girl in the buggy. He also recognized the man behind him—a tall, corpulent, white-haired official with a rusty star. Scrub Hazen meanwhile did not think it a diplomatic move to answer to his name. He edged himself behind the crowd and held his breath.

The sheriff, realizing that Scrub did not choose to sit in on the game, played a card of his own.

"You ask for Mr. Scrub Hazen, stranger?" he said carefully.

"Yes, Mr. Sheriff. But seeing I did not make myself clear, I'll say that I'm not looking for a man with a star, but for Scrub Hazen."

The sheriff coughed politely and played

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another card. "When a stranger comes into my county looking for a gent I don't generally set back and say, 'Go ahead, Mr. Stranger. Go as far as you like.' No, sir, I never do that. I ask—natural like, 'What has this bird done, Mr. Stranger, that you come horsin' into my county like a United States marshal axing for to see him?'"

"I'll tell you. I want to sign up as one of the contestants in the rodeo that's being pulled off in this town."

This complete confirmation of the sheriff's worst fears tied his tongue for a moment, and the man at his right hand knew that it was his turn to play a card.

Saul Meakin came to the point without hedging.

"A list of the contestants is tacked up there over the free lunch counter, Mr. Stranger, and every man who wants to get in on the game can sign his name. But I don't figure you'll be signing yours."

The crowd immediately widened, surging backward so that the sheriff, Saul Meakin and Cal Triggers found themselves together in a large ring of sawdust-covered floor.

Triggers paused a moment, smiling at the sudden melting of the crowd. Then he looked into Meakin's face.

"Why not?" he asked coolly.

"Because the girl who's giving her hand to the winner of this rodeo is particular about the sort of men who participate. It's not open to any half-breed on this or the other side of the Rio Grande who—"

Cal interrupted the sentence by whipping out his gun, but he did not level it at Saul Meakin. One look at Meakin's mouth —a handsome but womanish mouth—convinced Cal that this man was not brave enough to stand up before him and insult him to his face.

Cal furthermore had been warned of a frame-up, and he knew from experience that the man who provokes a fight in a frame-up is only a decoy. The real danger was behind Cal's back. Instead of leveling his gun at the decoy he whirled about.

Sheriff Pickering, whose hand had snapped to his own holster, found himself covered. He threw his pudgy hands toward the ceiling and let the burden of the fight fall entirely on Meakin.

Saul Meakin had not bargained for this outcome. He had entered the frame-up with the understanding that he was to use only his tongue, and now that his backer was standing with upraised arms Saul felt a quiver in his stomach which for a fraction of a second unnerved him.

When he collected himself he drew his gun. That little second of delay was his undoing. Cal Triggers turned and caught him on the jaw with a crashing left, and Meakin's gun fell clattering to the floor.

His knees weakened and he crumpled in a heap on the sawdust.

Having rid himself of these two principal adversaries, Cal sprang backward to the bar so that he could face what remained of the crowd. In the moment of scuffling the saloon was practically emptied. A few men—the slower ones—afraid of turning their backs on the gunfighter, remained as if caught in their tracks near the door to the street and the big entrance to the dance hall. A few others had backed to the wall and to the little door which led into Jo's inner office.

The whole tension of the situation was broken by Jo himself walking out with a bucket and sponge and leaning down by the prostrate form of Saul Meakin. But Triggers did not immediately replace his gun in its holster.

Facing the sheriff, he said: "Now, then, Mr. Pickering, between you and me, I want to say something. You being a sheriff, I don't figure I ought to break you in front of your citizens. It wouldn't look right. But is there any honest-to-God reason, Mr. Pickering, why I shouldn't plug you right now before I give you a chance to plant another fight on me?"

The sheriff had been in many nerve-racking situations during his career, but he was not quite brave or experienced enough to stand unflinching before such a question. A quiver came over his lips which was almost like a whimper.

"You ain't goin' to plug me right in the belly while I'm standing up defenseless before you, are you, Triggers?" he asked.

"Why not?" Cal rejoined. "Why

shouldn't I send you crawling into that sawdust—down into the bottom of hell? Is there any good reason?"

"I'm thinkin' you won't do that, Triggers—not you. From what I hear tell of you, you're a brave man. You wouldn't stick a man up like this in front of you, plague him, and then drop him cold without giving him a chanst."

"I'll give you a chance. Take out your gun."

The sheriff loosened the tension of his upraised arms, kept his eye on Cal's hand, and then changed his mind.

"I ain't lookin' for to fight you, Cal," he pleaded.

Triggers took this as a surrender—at least as a momentary one. He replaced his gun, and allowed Pickering to drop his fat hands.

"When you say you aren't looking for a fight, sheriff, you're a ornery, shaggutted liar!"

"Now, look here, Cal," Pickering whined softly, "you yourself should ought to understand the situation I find myself at. Believe me first that I ain't looking for a fight. I never looks for fights. But when you come into town every one here gets it into their head that you're a gunman comin' for to shoot the place up.

"They look to me as sheriff as the one responsible for you and your doings. Now I admit I was ready to pick you up on any quarrel—but now that I think of it this here Saul Meakin, who's gettin' his face mopped, acted ungentlemanlike. He took it kind of personal when you said you wanted to try out for this gal. And he said things which he hadn't ought to say.

"You give him what he deserved, and I'm thinkin' he won't talk to you again without he considers hard first. In fact, if you'll let me say so, Cal, I'll guarantee that he won't start no more fights. It was his fault then, and I don't blame you for doing what you done."

"What you say, Pickering, doesn't convince me that you're going to guarantee anything. I know damned well that the first chance you get you're going to get me—and like as not you'll do it in your yellow, white-livered way: you'll wait till some one else starts something, then you'll get me so that you can say—damned liar that you are—that you're upholding the law.

"In plain terms, Pickering, I'm the one that's going to do the guaranteeing—not you. And what I'm going to guarantee I'll say here before all of you—and you too." He looked down at Saul Meakin, who, with the assistance of Jo, had picked himself partly up so that he was sitting against the rail and the bar.

"I'm going to guarantee that as long as I'm in this town I'll not pick a fight with anybody. I'm not going to draw on anybody. I've come to town as a man of peace. But if I smell another trap like this one, Sheriff Pickering, I won't hesitate—the next time—to drop you. You get that?"

"I get that, Cal, and I consider it a fair arrangement," Pickering rejoined. "And you too—aye, Saul?" He turned to Meakin. "The gent says he's not going to fight nobody, and he ain't lookin' for to draw on anybody. And he's come like a man of peace. So that means you stay outen a fight with him. You get that?"

Meakin pulled himself up, wiped his mouth, and stood leaning uncertainly on the bar.

"I'm not looking for a fight, sheriff," he mumbled doggedly.

"A drink on the house now, gents," Jo called out loudly. "And we're all set."

The crowd in the doorway shambled in, and the few men who had witnessed the last stages of the argument followed the sheriff and Cal Triggers to the bar.

Saul Meakin's head, which had been whirling in a dizzy stupidity, cleared with the first drink of whisky. But he felt that he was a different man. Just a short while before he had occupied a position something like that of the leading man of a play. He felt that he was to be the town's hero. But now even before he had a single chance to show his prowess he realized that some one had beaten him.

He was no longer the invincible wooer, the heroic contender for the hand of a beautiful girl. He had been knocked down, practically counted out, and when his brain was clear he found himself standing at the

bar drinking with a bunch of men who had decided to call the fight finished.

But he, Meakin, would not call it finished! He looked at the scarred, sunburned face of the man on the other side of Sheriff Pickering—the man who had shorn him of his glory. His head was still throbbing, and he could not see any too clearly. He was wise enough to keep his feelings to himself—and merely watch Cal Triggers out of the corner of his eyes, measuring his height, noting the big upturned jaw as the gunfighter tossed off his drink, studying the huge breadth of shoulders hidden under the beaded Hopi vest and black shirt.

"I must bide my time," Meakin said, setting his teeth.

With this resolution firmly impressed upon his mind, he watched Cal throw his little glass back on the bar, turn around, walk through the wide lane which opened up for him in the crowd, and step up to the free lunch counter. Here he took the little stub of a pencil which was tied to a nail just below the list of rodeo entries.

It was thus that Saul Meakin, still with jaw set and lips tightened into something almost like a grin, saw Triggers sign his name at the bottom of the list declaring himself a contestant for the hand of Nan Harvess.

CHAPTER VIII.

NAN PICKS A LOSER.

THE little Western town which had decided to play a game awoke now to the fact that the pretense had become reality—the play had become life. In the depths of the heart of every rugged, rough-necked, blasphemous cowboy in Red Town there was awakened a dormant spark of chivalry which was the spirit of Scrub Hazen's framed-up "tournyment." It was a chivalrous thrill age old in story and song: the word was passed about from mouth to mouth, from stockman to mucker, to gambler, to chowcart driver, to cowboy, that a beautiful girl was in distress.

For the sake of the girl the entrants to the rodeo doubled until every man who had ever practiced fanning a gun or running a herd signed up in the vain hope that he might be the hero.

Older ranchers, who in their days had toted guns and raked "high rollin' horses," or driven coaches from Red Town to the mountain mines, decided to go in and risk their leather necks in one last fling at the dangers of a rodeo.

The excitement grew, and men began to argue again about the chances of Meakin, who had always been invincible, coming out by some stroke of luck as the winner. If this happened his name would most surely travel throughout the prairies as an epic hero. He would be as great as the fabled warriors of the Hopi tribes, whose exploits were woven in baskets and painted on pottery. The fever of betting again began to grip the town until the more enthusiastic began to argue themselves into the belief that Saul Meakin, the crafty as well as the mighty, would find a way to win.

But some of the older ones and the wiser ones thought over the matter with the sobering truth of pessimism. The gunfighter could outride Saul Meakin on any horse, and outfight him with any gun known to the citizens of Red Town.

No man had ever yet stood up against his fist or against his draw. His fame was far spread as a bronc-buster in the rodeos of New Mexico and Arizona. And even that very morning he had covered Sheriff Pickering when the latter drew behind his back. Above all else, the citizens reminded each other, he had floored Saul Meakin with a simple crack on the jaw at the same time that he was sticking up the sheriff.

The situation was hopeless in the minds of the wiser ones; and the women—who had not worked themselves up with the fervor of betting—clamored that the rodeo should be prevented. Nan Harvess was a young girl, they pointed out. She knew nothing of the seriousness of the fact. She was being led like a lamb to the slaughter, and if nothing else could be done—if the gunfighter could not be prevented from entering the contest, at least the contest itself could be prevented.

Sheriff Pickering was led to see the saneness of this attitude. Scrub Hazen, the

girl's guardian, was finally convinced that it was the only thing to do. And finally Saul Meakin himself, who had no desire to meet the gunfighter in any kind of argument—except, of course, the soul-satisfying argument of lead—admitted that the girl should call the game and all bets off.

Accordingly the sheriff, Scrub and Meakin decided to approach the girl, explain to her how everything had turned out, and advise her that the best thing she could do now was to announce that she had changed her mind.

They met Nan in the sheriff's office, and while most of the townsfolk had congregated at the northern end of the town at Cow McGintry's corral to watch the preparations for the rodeo, Nan and the three men held their conference.

Scrub Hazen approached the subject in a diplomatic way by showing the girl the list of contestants. Nan took the little crumpled paper on which had been scrawled a number of scarcely legible names, some written in a light girlish hand, others drawn so blackly that the paper was torn—and the whole smirched with sheepdip, grease and dirty thumbprints.

"Now, that's the list of your knights!" Scrub said with a significant sneer on the last word. "Knights! Baw! It's a bunch of sousing cowdogs—that's what it is!"

The girl ran her eye down the list, making out certain names and flushing—partly in pride, partly in astonishment at being linked in her romance with certain of the men; but in most part with an excitement which had constantly increased as the hour of the rodeo approached.

She noted the name of Tom Caborca, of Jack One-Horn, a handsome young chief, and at these she blushed angrily. Below she saw the name of an old stagecoach driver, which brought a merry laugh. Then she saw the signature of Saul Meakin, a new wave of color going over her face. About midway down the list she came to the name, written in a big heavy scrawl:

CAL TRIGGERS, TEXAS

The men saw the word on her lips, and as she mouthed it they saw the blood fade from her cheeks.

"This is the man they call the gunfighter?" she asked softly.

"Yes," Scrub rejoined. "And it's about that we came to talk to you."

"Did he put his name down in time?" she asked. "You gave them an hour—as I remember."

"Sure he put it down in time. That's the trouble. He put it down, and he gets in on the game without any comeback from us. There's no reason in the world for our keeping him out."

"I put up a reason to him," Saul Meakin said. "I said that no half-breed on this or the other side of the Rio Grande was going to insult you by thinking he was good enough for you."

"That's the trouble," Scrub said. "I made the proposition so general—that I got us into a big mess. I'd orter made it plain that we didn't want everybody. Instead I made it include any man that came from the four corners of the earth."

"That's the way to put it," the girl said enthusiastically. "It would not have been a real contest otherwise. We put no limits, and the right man should win."

The sheriff and Scrub looked up at Saul Meakin, who took this as a very definite compliment.

"We been figurin', ma'am, that perhaps the right man won't win," the sheriff explained carefully. "What if you got shoved off on a hellbender like this bird from Texas?"

"Is there a chance of his winning?" the girl asked, failing this time to keep the tremor of excitement—or perhaps of fear—out of her voice.

"There's a hell of a big chanst, if you'll excuse my language, ma'am!" the sheriff cried.

Nan turned to Saul Meakin.

"You said that you wanted a chance to win me—and to win me by fighting and by showing what was in you. Why have you come here now with Daddy Hazen and the sheriff? Do you want us to keep this man out—this man whom you call a gunfighter?"

Saul cleared his throat as if to make a speech, but then found he had nothing very important to say. Finally he got started.

" Well, ma'am," he said, " the game that we began has changed a bit, and what we're all thinking of is your own well-being. I'm not afraid of this Cal Triggers, and I'm going to fight him. If it's not in this contest, I'll fight him some other way. He took me by surprise back there in Jo's Jackdog and slugged me.

" I'm going to repay that if I never repay another blow in my life. But I'm not so crazy mad with revenge that I'd want this contest to go on, even if it does give me a chance for a comeback. I'm thinking of you now. And I'm of the honest opinion that if I should lose—if there should be a slip-up—say one of the buckers caught me by forestriking and laid me out so that I couldn't go on playing—there's a big chance that this gunfighter would win you.

" It's the opinion of all three of us—of Hazen and the sheriff here—that it's better to call the whole game off—rather than to give him a chance to claim you. If a man like that, who's a killer in every cell of his body—if he gets a claim on a woman, it's good night. He'd fight the whole world for her."

" Would you?" the girl asked pointedly.

" Why, yes, of course," Saul stammered.

" Would you fight him—I mean in a fair fight?"

" Of course I would fight him!"

" Then why do you want this rodeo stopped?"

Scrub Hazen broke in with a rasping, truculent voice: " You don't mean to say you're going to stick to it, gal?"

" I do!"

The three men were speechless. Each one stammered for words.

The girl alone was cool enough to go on: " I told you, Daddy Hazen, that no matter what happened I would not take back my word, and I'm not going to now. If Saul Meakin wants to win me, this is his biggest chance."

The sheriff, being the calmest of the three men, was the first to reply.

" Miss Nan," he said deliberately, " bein' as I'm a old friend of the family, I want to give you a bit of advice. We went into this game at first as a sort of lark. There bein' no doubt of Saul Meakin winnin', we thought as how it would be a romantic sort of a show to have the whole town contendin' for your hand—just in fun, of course.

" But you yourself made it a serious affair by saying that once you give your word you'd stick to it. Well, even then we thought as how it was all fixed. ' Saul Meakin will win,' we said, ' so on with the sport! They ain't nothin' serious about it,' we all said. And now comes a gunfighter to town, and you, still wanting to stick to your word, are offerin' yourself to him, so to speak, hands down."

" Has Saul no chance of winning, then?" the girl asked, her eyes widening in surprise.

Scrub and the sheriff hemmed and hawed for a moment until Saul himself came to the defense of his own honor.

" Of course I have!" he blurted out angrily.

" Yes, he has, ma'am," the sheriff admitted, " but—"

" If he has a chance, he will win!" the girl cried. " I am putting all my trust in him. Now is not the time to call the rodeo off. If Saul gives up—even without trying—I will not accept him."

" Have the rodeo, then, damn it!" Saul cried impetuously. " And if I lose you, and you find yourself claimed by this gunfighter—very well! The whole town will know that it is of your own choosing."

" I will not give myself to the gunfighter," the girl said coolly. " I expect you to win!"

Scrub, who was the only one that knew the girl well enough, saw that further argument was useless.

" Let her have her own way!" he cried despairingly.

" Then you're not taking our advice, ma'am?" the sheriff asked with an ill-concealed touch of exasperation.

" The rodeo will be held," was the girl's answer.

" But if Saul Meakin loses—"

" He won't lose."

Sheriff Pickering threw up his hands in despair.

"Well, I'll be damned!" was all he could say. And his tone showed irritation.

CHAPTER IX.

"BITE 'IM, COWBOY!"

NAN HARVESS awoke from her dream. She had clung tenaciously to the hope that Saul Meakin would save her from the fate which all Red Town feared awaited her. But she awoke from this as some one who is awakened by a series of terrific blows. This was the series of events in which Saul Meakin—her champion—went down to humiliating defeat. From the very first contest that afternoon it was a foregone conclusion that Nan Harvess—if she kept her word—was lost.

Up until the climax of the rodeo—the stagecoach race—the events whirled through the girl's mind as if in a single flash. Before she realized that any time had elapsed she knew that Meakin had fought futilely against a greater man. And the big, sinister figure of this greater man—mounted on his vicious-looking, snub-nosed outlaw—rode through the scenes of that afternoon like a specter in a bad dream.

He galloped in among whirling herds of steers with a madcap recklessness that shocked the crowd and blanched the girl's face with fear. He raked the sides of notorious buckers till they were raw, and stuck to them even when they rolled on the ground. And he threw himself pell-mell upon the horns of a Texas bull, turning a somersault that all but broke the neck of both man and beast.

Cal Triggers was the greater man.

That was all she could bring herself to think during that dreadful afternoon of churning dust, of shouting men, of humming, twisting lass-ropes and charging steers. One thing beat into her mind consistently: Cal Triggers was winning her from the man she had prayed would win.

But just before the final event, Nan—as well as every man and woman of the vast throng of spectators—clutched at one last straw of hope: the stagecoach race.

"Saul Meakin will win this!" she cried.

Her foster father, Scrub Hazen, stood beside her in their box which had been erected for them out of two-by-fours next to the judges' stand. Scrub was exhausted with his yelling, as well as with the excitement of the preliminary contests. His face was streaked with sweat and dirt, and his voice weak and hoarse.

"There's no chance now, gal," he said. "The end has come. That there hell-bender has showed he can handle a coach and six broncs better'n any man in this here State. What I advise you to do is to let me announce that we've decided to change the reward to a silver-studded hand-tooled saddle and a purse with a thousand bucks."

The girl turned upon him abruptly and said: "Saul Meakin will win!"

Sheriff Pickering, who with the two other judges occupied the box next to Scrub Hazen's, stepped out into the corral and bared his white hair preparatory to making a speech. The dust of the maverick races and the trick riding had cleared away, leaving a scene of striking varieties and colors. Behind the sheriff were row upon row of cowherders, sheepmen, saloon men, ranch girls, Mexicans; some squatted on the ground, others perched like lines of buzzards and kites along the cattle-proof fence; and above them, ranchers sitting in buckboards, long strings of them; and behind them, other strings standing, and still others seated on the edge of the shacks which bordered the corral.

On the sheriff's right were the bull pens, where the longhorns that had served that afternoon in the steer-roping and hog-tying and lass-throwing contests were corraled. Near them were the Hopis, Choctaws and Kickapoos, who had wandered into town to sell beads and pottery and trade horses during the round-up. On the sheriff's left was a picket line of the show-buckers, outlaws and mustangs, and near them the bronc-twirlers who had entered the contest.

As a background to this entire scene the great herd in Scrub Hazen's stockyards kept up its constant mooing, rumbling, "growling," churning up its endless curtain of fine mist even when corraled.

" La-adies and gents!" Sheriff Pickering brayed out. " As you are all aware, this here rodeo is held for to find the best man in the county who can ack in the capacity of a bridegroom. The preliminary events, as was also made known to you, was to eliminate such as was not fit. The three judges, which includes myself, has come to their decision regarding the three men which it is our opinion should ought to contend in the final event of this rodeo—the big chariot race.

" Only, instead of chariots we're goin' to have stagecoaches, which in my mind is better than chariots anyhow, bein' as they capsize easier; and what we been after in this here rodeo is excitement!" The crowd greeted this introduction vociferously and quieted again on the sheriff's signal. " The coaches is going to be the regular leather, thorough-braced Concord coaches—and it is needless to say you'll have the pleasure of seeing once again the ole six-line stringers of the days gone by!

" The three contestants will pick their own passengers, which will ack as ballast. But be it understood here and now, gents and ladies, that the ballast ain't goin' to ack like lashers or stringers. The only stringers as will ride in these coaches is the contestant hisself. And likewise the only bird who will do any lashing is the contestant hisself. Which in plain terms, folks, is this: the stage driver in this here contest is going to handle reins, brake and lash hisself, and not take no help from nobody—exceptin' of course the hosses.

" Now that brings me to the point concernin' these here hosses. Folks, we're going to have eighteen range-fed, wild fuzz-tails, which will make three teams to each driver. Six hosses to a coach. These here fuzz-tails, gents, are wild as any bronc which has been rid this afternoon. The three contestants will each take six hosses—drawin' for them by lot and harness them hisself—and then the shot of a gun, and—bing! the race begins.

" Now, wait a minute, gents, afore you interrupt!" the sheriff went on. " I'm appointed by the judges for to announce just what this here race is to be. Well, it's to be a five-mile course beginnin' thar in front of that box where the judges are settin' at. It's to pass through this here corral, round the dipping vat at the west end, enter the main street of the town, through the town to the east, and around the Jackdog Saloon parlors back into the corral agin. That being one mile, it 'll be one lap in a five-lap race. The winner of this contest is to get the hand of Scrub Hazen's gal, which is the greatest honor that can be bestowed by this here community exceptin' the star of the sheriff which was bestowed on me two years ago!"

A slight cheer arose when Pickering called a man from the group of contestants who were standing by the picket line of horses. The first of the three entrants in the final contest caused somewhat of a surprise among the spectators, but not a great deal of enthusiasm. In fact, Sheriff Pickering, realizing that the reception given this first contender savored more of a jeer than an ovation, found it necessary to make an explanatory introduction.

The man who shuffled out to the center of the corral was the stock superintendent of Scrub Hazen's outfit, Tom Caborca. He was an undersized, crooked little man with a long nose which curved out of a mop of jet-black shreddy hair. Copper-riveted overalls, tremendous Napatan boots of a new and brilliant yellow, hands that were long and almost as black as a Mexican's on the backs and light brown in the palms, did not make a very pleasant-looking candidate for the position of Nan Harvess's bridegroom.

Sheriff Pickering introduced him.

" Now, then, ladies and gents! They's been some question among the judges as to whether we should orter give this here Mr. Caborca a chanst to ride in the finals or not. But bein' as how he was the only one in the steer-throwin' contest that did not disqualify hisself by hoolihanning, we give him a point or two extra there. The other two gents both hoolihanned and liked to have broken their backs when they somersaulted over the cow—not to mention the poor cow herself!

" Then you will remember, gents, that this here Mr. Caborca did some good lasso-rope work, throwin' his catches far and

clean; did some purty fancy spinning, and proved hisself as sticky a hoss-gentler as any in this here afternoon's performance. Gentlemen, ladies, Indians and sheepmen, I present to you Mr. Caborca!"

Again an ovation of cheers mingled with boos and catcalls swelled up in response to the sheriff's words. Pickering considered it advisable to counterbalance the presentation of Caborca by immediately introducing the man for whom the whole town had yelled during the entire afternoon. "The next entrant, ladies and gents, is a bird you all know and like. He's done the best bit of showbuckin' we ever seen in these parts —not to mention the way he saddled and rode that eleven hundred pounds of jerked beef we call Flying Bull!"

The spectators, knowing that Saul Meakin—on whom they still pinned their hopes as the savior of the girl—was about to be introduced, slowly swelled their voices to a cheer, and as Meakin came out every man got to his feet. The cheers grew to a shout, sombreros and lop-brimmed hats were tossed in the air, and for a long moment of pandemonium Sheriff Pickering was unable to go on.

Finally his upraised hand quieted the crowd. "This here gent, folks, has fought like hell all day long, but in one or two of the events he got beat, and for good reasons. Bein' as how he didn't have a good hazer during the steer-throwin', and bein' as how his hoss wasn't old-manned properly before he mounted him, and the pick-up men was scared outen the way because of the hell his man-killin' bronc tried to raise, and bein' as how—"

The sheriff got no further, for the crowd, eager to receive Saul Meakin as their champion, thundered back their approval of him. Luck had been against him, as the sheriff said. They would all believe it, and now hope fervently that in this final event he would come into his just deserts. The sheriff cried out at the top of his lungs: "I'm introducin' to you Mr. Saul Meakin!" But no one could hear him.

When the third and last of the contenders was brought forth the deafening applause dwindled into a terrific silence, as if some one had hushed the babble of a carnival by striking a death-knell. This silence was the reception tendered Cal Triggers, as he swaggered out into the center of the corral, kicking up the dust, sticking his hands in his belt, spreading his legs, and looking around at the mob—his enemies—with a mocking smile.

"This here bird is Cal Triggers," Sheriff Pickering said, assuming a tone at once suave and condescending. "He's done some pretty rough work, and the other two judges aside from me says as how he's won a place in the finals. Cal Triggers is his name, and mebbe most of you ladies and gents has heard of him before. I thank you!"

Immediately the eighteen bronchos which were to be used in this, the most dangerous, event of the rodeo were driven out of a corral at the eastern end of the lot, and while the stable mozos lined them Sheriff Pickering held out his sombrero and turned to the three drivers.

"They's five black hosses and thirteen pintos. In my hat I have thirteen hearts, ace-low to king, and I have likewise five spades, nine to king. You three gents will each draw six cards from my hat, and you will pick out your hosses according to the cards you draw. Spades represent black hosses; hearts, pintos; and queens represent mares.

"Further and more, you will count them hosses from left to right; so if you git the three of hearts, you take the third pinto over there. If you git the queen of spades, you take that thar black mare second from the left. In this way, gents, you can figure for yourself that you're takin' a even chanst. Some of them hosses are man-killers, others will probably work in double harness like a peaceable married man. So go to it!"

The men accordingly drew their cards, while the spectators waited restlessly for the race to start. Already the sun was reaching the row of shacks on the western side of the corral, and the race, they feared, would be lasting beyond dusk.

Tom Caborca and Meakin, having picked their six horses, led them to the lower end of the corral. Cal Triggers led his teams down a moment later, and fell to examin-

ing the hoofs of each horse. During this wait that preceded the signal to start in hitching Saul Meakin approached Caborca and asked him for a light. The little foreman struck a match and held it to Saul's rolled cigarette.

"Look here, Caborca," Saul said softly, "you aren't going to win this race."

"I know I ain't. Cal Triggers, over there—he's going to win—and he'll also win the girl."

"No; I'm going to win. Otherwise, I will still be your acquaintance and not your master."

"I am satisfied with that."

"No. If I win, you will get a reward. You will get a thousand head of steer, with which you can go across the border and establish for yourself a cattle ranch."

Sheriff Pickering and the starter walked up to them, and both Caborca and Meakin fell to examining the harness which was thrown over the tongues of their two coaches.

"Now, then, you three birds," he said, calling the contestants together. "You understand that you can pick out any one you want for ballast, and do it quick afore that thar sun goes down, or you'll be smashin' into each other and bustin' up a few of the town's saloons!"

Cal Triggers's only acquaintance in the town was Jo, the barkeep; and Jo had no desire that his friend should win, inasmuch as the prize was that masterpiece of the devil—a woman. But Cal, in his extremity, prevailed upon the saloon keeper to round up a half dozen cholos. These having, by Jo's own munificence, attained the fighting braggadocio of drunkenness, consented to help Cal out—each to receive a quart of red-eye.

"Dead weight is all they'll be, Cal," Jo said. "But that's all as you want. And if they fall out they won't get hurt, as they are pie-eyed with hootch."

During the assembling of horses and ballast Meakin took the breeching which he held in his hand to Caborca's coach, borrowed the latter's knife and punched a hole in the breeching strap.

"Drive slowly enough so that Cal Triggers's coach gains a lap on you," he said as he dug the knife into the strap for another hole. "When Triggers catches up to you on the next lap ahead you are to spill him. A thousand steers is worth twenty thousand dollars."

Saul Meakin returned to his own coach. All three men, having adjusted their harness, stood ready for the signal to bridle and hitch their teams. The crowd had worked itself up now to a furor of excitement, and when the starter stepped out with pistol in hand they arose in a hullabaloo of cheers.

Nan Harvess, waiting breathlessly for this final conflict between her champion and his enemies, spoke in a soft, inaudible voice:

"Saul Meakin will win! I put my trust in him!"

CHAPTER X.

THE STAGECOACH RACE.

THE crack of a pistol, the shout of many voices, the thunder of horses' hoofs, the rattle of the old stagecoaches on the uneven ground of the corral—these were the first details which struck into the mind of Nan Harvess as the race was on.

By the time they had reached the end of the long lines of spectators they had torn up the soft earth so that a big cloud of dust enveloped them. The looming forms of the coaches careening and sailing along looked, as they passed across the low red sun, like galleons in a storm. A moment later they had wheeled around the shacks at the western end of the corral and were thundering down the main street of Red Town.

Here the dust cleared, and the three coaches banged over the hard-packed road, passed the rows of little saloons, barber shops, lunch stands and dance halls, all the horses bolting, lashed into a panic by the long rawhide snake which hummed and whistled over their heads.

Thus the three teams, terrified by the screaming of voices and the waving of hats, raced almost neck and neck as they reached the eastern end of the town, rounded the

Jackdog Saloon, and tore down into the corral again, finishing the first lap. As they passed the box where Nan Harvess was standing the girl noticed that Caborca's lead team was no longer nosing up to the lead of the other two coaches.

The front pair was losing ground so that as they neared the end of the corral on the start of the second lap they were neck and neck with the swing pair of Cal Triggers's outfit. Rounding the curve at the western end, Caborca's leads had dropped back so far that they were now racing Cal's wheel horses. Rounding into the main street again, Caborca's coach, emerging from a dense cloud of dust, had lost the inside to Cal Triggers and dropped behind the entire length of a coach and six, while Triggers and Meakin plunged ahead.

The girl waited breathlessly for them to pass through the town and round the Jackdog Saloon, when they would again be visible as they entered the corral for the finish of the second lap. As usual, the turning churned up the dust, enveloping them so that all that could be seen was the silhouettes of the two coach bodies riding in the clouds. Then they appeared, the passengers in each hanging out as far as they dared over the spinning rim of the wheels to keep the top-heavy stages from capsizing.

As they passed the box the girl caught a glimpse of both men. One—her champion—his face contorted and black with dust and grime, one hand upraised and frantically whipping the air, the other hand holding a jumble of sawing, banging reins. Then Nan, in a single flash, saw the other man—grim, with set jaw and determined mouth, an arm outstretched, holding the six heavy reins taut.

The girl whitened as the truth of the situation was revealed to her: Cal Triggers was holding in until he was sure of an absolute control of his six bronchos. And now as he came into the long stretch of the corral with the fear of capsizing temporarily gone, he gave the horses their heads, and lead, swing and wheel pairs shot off like thunderbolts. At the end of the stretch he slowed to the turn a full length ahead of Meakin's team.

But Meakin did not slow up to the turn. He had nothing to lose now, and his only move was to make up time on the turns by risking the lives of his men. He lashed his teams into such a panic that they bolted around the curve, the old coach careening on two wheels, saved only by the four passengers who hung from the windows and door and like acrobats swung from the top of the coach. At this point Meakin knew that he had lost control of his team.

The hazard he had taken lessened the lead of his rival so that when they rounded into the main street for another straightaway they were again neck and neck. Then as they were starting on the long stretch Caborca's coach came rumbling into the corral a third of a lap behind.

The girl, the judges, Scrub Hazen, the whole audience, were only mildly interested in this third contestant, who, it was apparent, had already lost the race. One of his wheel horses was keeping up with the others only by a series of long straightaway bucks, and the driver, instead of gathering in the bucker's head, had given him full rein and was lashing him mercilessly with his whip.

The swing horses were seesawing back and forth without keeping the traces taut. This made the madcap gallop of the lead pair futile; for instead of dragging the coach, they were merely dragging the team of horses behind them. Only one horse seemed to be exerting any pull on the lumbering old ship—the off horse of the wheel pair. By the time Caborca reached the farther end of the corral Cal Triggers thundered in at the lower end.

Cal was now a good two lengths ahead as Saul Meakin rounded the curve again on two wheels. The frightened shouts of his passengers, who now realized that their driver cared nothing for their lives, could be heard above the roar of the spectators. But Meakin was not the one to listen to them.

Again he passed the girl's box without brakes, without a thought to the reins, lashing his beasts like a madman. The girl, as well as every one in that mob, knew that it was futile.

Cal Triggers was driving his teams with all traces taut—every horse pulling at the old bouncing coach and responding to the pull of the reins as they slowed to the turn. Whirling about again into the street, Cal found himself clear of Saul Meakin's lead pair, and widening the distance at every second. Now for the first time he noticed Caborca's coach a hundred yards ahead of him, rocking along in a storm of dust. Caborca, Cal suddenly realized, had dropped behind a whole lap.

Just before they entered the corral again at the end of the fourth lap Triggers saw that he must pass Caborca's coach or else lose the lead he had gained over Meakin. He estimated that he would pass Caborca on the outside of the track as they turned into the corral.

Caborca looked back, saw Triggers's leads swerving outward, eating up the distance between. The two teams raced for a moment, Caborca's a full length ahead. Both men lashed furiously at the horses, sailed around the Jackdog Saloon, and thundered into the corral.

Then came the smash-up.

Caborca yanked his leads to the right so that they dashed directly across the path of the oncoming coach. Cal Triggers, if he had turned still farther to the right, would have crashed into a cow shed unless he was able by a miracle to bring his six horses to a sudden stop.

If he were able to accomplish this latter feat, both teams would have been clear of the track, giving Saul Meakin a chance to pass and to spring into the lead.

Triggers, sensing the fact that he had been framed, decided at all hazards to stay in the track, and in the event of a smash to block the path of his adversary. Caborca had not bargained for this possibility. He had plunged ahead directly in the path of Triggers, and in his eagerness to accomplish this he had urged his horses too precipitously.

They jumped into their traces and swung the old coach across the very noses of Cal's team. Cal, instead of being shoved off the track to the right, banged on his brakes, and lashed his leads over to the left. They cleared the rear of Caborca's coach, the swing horses followed, and then the wheel pair turned, dragging the dead weight of braked wheels which crashed sharp up against Caborca's coach.

The next instant Caborca's horses, men, and wagon piled up in a tangled heap. The driver leaped from his seat, saving himself, but his men were tangled with the pawing horses in a mass of harness and splintered wood.

Cal Triggers's own coach was caved in on the off-side door, his drunk Indians had leaped for their lives, and he found himself in an empty coach, which was skidding on two wheels.

When it was clear of Tom Caborca's mass of debris, the empty coach bounded off, careened, and, as the team with Cal's last frantic yanking at the reins, slowed down, the old rumbling shell capsized, tearing up a cloud of dust for a distance of twenty yards before the horses came to a stop.

Cal, having jumped from the driver's seat as the coach went over, picked himself up, shouted to his men to come and help him as Saul Meakin's team rounded the curve and thundered into the corral for the last lap. Such of Cal's men as had not been hurt in their jump went to him. They threw themselves on the upturned wheels, and Cal, having quieted his horses, swung them about, using their traces and the strength of his men to right the coach again. Six horses, four men, and the right trick could do it.

Before Meakin had reached the end of the long stretch on the final lap Cal had vaulted up to the rider's seat, gathered the reins, lashed his horses and started in pursuit.

CHAPTER XI.

"AND THEN THE TIGHT ROPE!"

THE big miracle of the race was not the act of Cal Triggers's saving his coach from the smash-up which had been intended for him. It was something else that had taken place in the mind of one of the spectators. Nan Harvess found herself watching the last lap with a new thrill.

She had seen Cal Triggers pick himself out of defeat by a dogged determination that enthused the girl with a new fire. As the two coaches again thundered along in a smothering storm of dust she found herself watching with the enthusiasm not of a woman who had bet her life on the weaker man, but with the excitement of a spectator watching a thrilling combat. She forgot herself; she forgot the tragedy which, it had seemed a moment ago, she had escaped. Now there was a curious desire within her that Saul Meakin should not win her—for if he did it would have been by luck, by a disaster which had overtaken his adversary.

These were the feelings of Nan Harvess in that riotous few moments when Meakin's coach rounded the curve at the western end of the corral, followed a moment later by Triggers. She saw them disappear beyond the curve and heard them clattering back down the main street of Red Town for the last time.

Through the shacks she caught glimpses of the two coaches, the one in the rear slowly eating up the distance which separated them; the sound of the horses' hoofs banging in her ears, and the rattle of the wheels mingling with the last hoarse screaming of the mob.

Then came the final curve, which both coaches rounded, their lead pairs racing like four horses abreast.

Out of the thick cloud at the lower end of the corral the two coaches came, leaping, bounding along, thundering past the judges' box, crossing the line with Cal Triggers's wheel pair a neck ahead of Meakin's leads. As the coaches were brought to a stop a furlong farther down the field, their teams steaming and lathered, the girl noticed that the cheering for the first time since the smash-up was hushed.

The glory of the race dwindled with the shouting, and Nan's thrill at the terrific suspense of the outcome died, giving way to a pang.

"Saul Meakin has lost," she heard a voice at her elbow say. It was the cracked voice of old Scrub Hazen. "And you're lost. What are you going to do?"

The girl could not believe her senses.

"Cal Triggers has won?" she asked tonelessly.

"It kinder looks thataway. 'Less the judges want to disqualify him for gettin' upset. But they ain't no rules that keep a man from upsettin' if he has a mind to—leastways not in any rodeo I ever heard tell of."

"They can't disqualify him," the girl retorted. "He did win."

"Then you're goin' to admit it!" Hazen cried. "You mean to say you're goin' to let him claim you!"

"He won!" The girl turned to old Hazen. Her face, although she had obviously tried to mask her feelings, suddenly quivered to a sob.

She put her hands up convulsively and cried: "No, no, Daddy Hazen! What have I done? I cannot!"

No one immediately noticed what was going on in the little box. Sheriff Pickering had stepped out into the middle of the corral; the mozos were unhitching the exhausted horses; spectators were crowding into the ground of the arena, and in the twilight a confusion marked the end of the rodeo.

While the sheriff, standing bareheaded in the slanting rays of the sun, was announcing that the winner of the contest was Cal Triggers, the girl collected her thoughts and turned again to her foster father. "I have given my word, Daddy Hazen!"

"You don't know what you're saying. You're a crazy little child!" Scrub replied petulantly. "I will not let this go through. I have something to say. And it's all off, I tell you! It was a game. We was only pretendin'! And now it's all off!"

The girl went on quietly, as if he had not spoken: "I am not going to speak to him here. I can't! I can't stand up before this mob and smile. If I tried to smile I would break down. I am going home to the ranch, and you are to tell him that I am there."

Scrub Hazen saw that the crowd was now about to transfer its attention to the "prize." He had no inclination to argue with his foster daughter at that time, particularly as he noted that there was a general gathering toward his box. In another

moment Cal Triggers himself would come to claim her.

"All right, gal," he said. "I'll do as you say. It don't look right that we should have a argyment out here. And I ain't goin' to stand for you talkin' with that thar hellbender before this mob. We'll ax him out to the rancho and tell him thar."

"I know what I'm going to tell him," the girl said. "I am going to tell him that he has won—that I will stick to my word—but that I hate him!"

"Ah-h! That's talking, gal! You stick to your word and say you hate him, and everything's jake. Of course you hate him—the damned two-gun man horsin' in and breakin' up our little game! You stick to that? Now get into your buckboard and let Tobin drive you home. I'll meet the gunman myself and I'll ax him quiet like to come out to the ranch."

Just before the judges and the victor crossed the corral the girl, accompanied by one of her ranchwomen, slipped out from the box, elbowed her way through the crowd, and passed between two of the shacks of the town out onto the main street, where she mounted her little buckboard and drove away.

Scrub Hazen remained until Sheriff Pickering and Cal Triggers, followed by a big crowd of cowboys, Indians and townsfolk, stepped up toward Hazen's box. It was then that the mob began to realize that a new and much more serious combat was about to take place.

Some of the men had seen Nan leave, and the word spread about to every one that Cal Triggers was coming for his prize, and that at the last moment the girl had lost her nerve and fled. To Scrub Hazen was left the disagreeable task of making explanations.

And it seemed doubtful to the jammed mob around the box who saw Cal Triggers and the little wizened cattle king meet face to face whether the latter was equal to the task set before him. His face was gray, and his wrinkled upper lip had twitched into a very uncomfortable sort of smile. Finally having been introduced to the victor, he realized that it was time for him to deliver his speech.

But he had no intention of telling Cal Triggers what he had promised the girl he would tell him. He much preferred to let Cal know the truth now than to get him out into the lonely background of the Hazen ranch, as the girl suggested.

"Mr. Triggers," he said softly—so softly that he was heard by few except the sheriff and Cal himself—"I am informed by the judges that you-all have been declared the winner of this here rodeo. And I will say, Mr. Triggers, that there ain't the slightest doubt but that you're the best bronc-twirler, the best spinner, the best steer-thrower that we ever seen in these parts." Scrub, having found his voice, now spoke so that a large number of the men immediately surrounding could hear. Saul Meakin, the loser, who had edged his way as near to the box as he deemed diplomatic, could now hear some of the words of Scrub's speech. "There ain't a man in this here corral but what 'll admit that you won. You won every event hands down, and that's where we take our hats off to you."

Cal waited with a nonchalance that showed these encomiums were going into one of his big red ears and out of the other without making the slightest impression upon him. He looked around at the faces of the spectators with a complacency which threw them all completely off the track. It occurred to no one that Cal was looking for the face of Nan Harvess!

Scrub cleared his throat and resumed the more delicate part of his speech: "I want to say now confidentially, Mr. Triggers, that they's been a slight misunderstanding regarding this here rodeo."

Cal looked up, and a slight movement in the crowd responded to his look. It consisted of those in the front trying to recede and to elbow themselves into the background without making too much noise.

"Afore you claim your prize—which there ain't no one here goin' to refuse it—I say afore you claim this girl Nan Harvess, I want to set the whole business clear before you. They was a understanding in this here town that Nan Harvess and my friend, Meakin, was to get hitched up in matrimony. And bein' as Saul Meakin was supposed to be the highest card here in cattle

country sports, we all figured as how it would be a good celebration to have a rodeo and let him win the contests, and—in a spirit of fun—we all said the bird as wins the rodeo will win the hand of Nan Harvess. That was the game we started, and it was sort of with that understanding that the contests was pulled off."

"Then I come in," Cal said with a slight twinkle in his eye which was evoked by the growing nervousness of little Scrub.

"Then you come in," Scrub admitted politely. "And I understand they tried to explain to you in the Jackdog Saloon just what this here contest was. But the bird that did the explainin' was my friend, Saul Meakin hisself, and he didn't do it exactly diplomaticlike—"

"As you are explaining it," Cal said significantly, "I can see what you're trying to aim at, so come to the point without talking any further. Where the hell's the girl?"

"Ah-h, yes! You've axed me a question there, mister. And I'd admire for to answer it straight out. But I have too much respeck for my hide to answer it. As soon as I tell you where the gal's at you'll throw a gun on me and like as not bump off a few more of us—judges included—afore you stop to think."

"What am I to stop to think about?" Cal asked.

"Think about this, mister, good and hard. What I'm goin' to tell you the gal herself told me to tell you and I'm only a messenger. It ain't my sentiments what I'm goin' to say—it's the gal's. And I've been thinkin' afore you go claimin' the prize—which, mind you, we all allow you deserve—might you'd like to hear the gal's sentiments?"

"I would!"

"Wal, the gal tells me to tell you, Mr. Triggers, that she'd admire to have you keep away."

"She'd what?" Cal Triggers assumed the soft, guarded voice of the old rancher.

"She said as how you was easily the best man in the rodeo. But she can't stick to her promise. You can see for yourself she's run away."

Scrub Hazen saw Cal's face harden. Its power, livid under the thick coat of red tan, made his cheeks, his jaw, his lips take on the semblance of red-hot iron. Scrub began to think that he had chosen the wrong time to break this news to the gunfighter. He reflected it would have been better in telling a man something that would wound his vanity, to tell it to him alone. The mob of witnesses to this scene sharpened the humiliation.

"Of course you'll get a prize—a good big one," Scrub hastened to say placatingly. "It 'll be worth much more to you than a girl who ain't set her heart on you."

This was as fair a step as it was futile. The crowd in the tense moment that Cal stood tongue-tied, edged back, some of them tensing ready to bolt. Finally Cal gave his answer:

"The prize that I will accept will be the girl."

The men watched him as he stepped down from Scrub Hazen's box and elbowed his way out to the open corral. Here he mounted his big calico horse and rode through the silent groups of spectators to the street, where he disappeared behind the row of saloons, dance halls, and lunch counters.

The spectators immediately surged around Sheriff Pickering and Scrub Hazen. The latter, finding it no longer necessary to modulate his voice in any degree, rushed to Pickering and shouted desperately:

"Sheriff, that gunman's goin' to start in shootin'. He's up to somethin' and I know damned well what it is. If you let that bird kidnap that gal right under our very noses, you'll never serve another term as sheriff in this here county!"

"If he tries that, Scrub," the pompous fat Pickering replied with a vain attempt at composure, "I'll appoint every man on the range as a deputy for to get him. Then what?"

The sheriff, being an agent of the law, was averse to uttering the word "lynch" before so many witnesses. Instead by a single gesture he made every man there understand the fate he intended to mete out to Cal Triggers. That gesture was a tightening of the red, wampum necktie which the sheriff wore about his khaki shirt collar. At the same time he stuck out his tongue and the crowd, knowing the signal, broke

into cries of, "That a boy, chief! We're all behind you! Start your posse now, chief! And then the tight rope!"

CHAPTER XII.

TOM CABORCA PAYS.

SHERIFF PICKERING, galloping his roan saddle horse down the main street of Red Town in pursuit of Cal Triggers, found himself at the head of an excited rabble of horsemen. The street was a nondescript jam of buggies, horses, and the crowds of spectators who had left the scene of the rodeo. Pickering was confused at the spectacle, undecided for a moment which way to turn. Meanwhile Saul Meakin and Scrub Hazen, who were riding by his side, were shouting at every one about, asking which way Cal Triggers had ridden. Conflicting replies baffled them, and it was not until they had ridden to one end of the town that they learned Cal Triggers had been seen at the other end, entering the Jackdog Saloon.

Accordingly the sheriff and his followers wheeled about, and picked their way through the mob in the street. Squaws and children blocked their path, buckboards trying to turn about, frightened saddle ponies, and finally a crush of people where the county road crossed Mule Street, delayed them. Opening their way by oaths and threats, the sheriff, Meakin, and Scrub finally reached the door of the Jackdog, where they dismounted and rushed in.

One-eyed Jo had already returned from the rodeo and was preparing for the rioting which the night promised. "What 'll you have, gents?" was his usual noncommittal greeting.

"You know what we'll have, you dried-up little mole!" the sheriff barked out. "We'll have that thar gunman which it is my opinion is a friend of yourn. You hide him from us and I'll lock you up—or else turn you over to the crowd for tarrin' and featherin'!'

"*Me! Me* get tarred and feathered!" the barkeep cried, breaking out respectfully into a fit of trembling. "I ain't got nothing to do with that thar hellbender, sheriff. I'm a peaceable barkeep and I'm on your side, now and forever more!"

"Don't stall for time, Mr. Barkeep!" the sheriff roared, banging the wet pine bar with the barrel of his gun. "Where's Cal Triggers at? You tell me—or all that the town will have to tar and feather is a soggy carcass."

Jo preserved his equanimity by screwing a towel rapidly into a whisky glass. "All righto, chief," he snapped out. "All righto! Cal Triggers was in here—damned guzzling coyote that he is—and he took five slugs of gin! Damned guzzling skunk!"

"And then what? Hurry up with your answer."

"And then Caborca, your foreman," Jo said, nodding to Scrub, "he come horsin' in and cussin' about his coach bein' upset. He didn't see Cal Triggers till he got his belly smack up ag'in' the bar! And then you'd orter heard him change the subject! Wow!" Jo burst out into a guffaw so that the whole company saw a gaping, toothless mouth. "Zowie! But he sure did find out that he was in the wrong church!"

"That's not telling me—'

"No, sheriff, I know. I'm tellin' you where Cal went. I'm tellin'! That's the point I'm leadin' to. Cal and Caborca exchanged sentimental remarks and Cal began makin' up epitaphs which I, bein' a God-fearin' man, can't repeat here afore so many respectable cow-gentlemen."

"Look here, barkeep—"

"The last I seen of him," Jo hurried to say, noting the sheriff's trigger finger trembling with excitement, "the last I seen of him he was follerin' Caborca into that thar booth. Now when I say follerin' I mean that Caborca was walking backward tryin' to get his hand to his gun and Cal was skippin' like a boxer after him, landing wallops all over Caborca's body and talkin' to him ungentlemanly all the time. By that I mean, he was callin' him unmentionable names which I can't repeat, and accusin' him for the smash-up in the race, which, says Cal, was a frame-up."

The sheriff and his followers did not hear the last few words of the barkeep. They had turned toward the dance hall and were hurrying to the booth which Jo had indi-

cated. On the way an overturned gaming table, a broken chair and the scattered glass of a lamp corroborated the barkeep's testimony that there had been a good fight. And in the booth Caborca himself lay sprawled across the floor, his nose bleeding, his eyes glassy. As the sheriff reached him Caborca collected his wits, sat up on the floor, and looked about at the crowd with a dazed stare. Then suddenly realizing that he had been in a fight he snapped out his six-gun and shot wildly into the air.

Jo, the barkeep, ran into the hall. "Now look here, sheriff, I ain't goin' to have my place shot up no more. You stop him, sheriff. He was knocked out ten minutes ago and he still thinks he's got a chanst!"

Pickering reached for Caborca's hand, wrenched the gun away and helped the bewildered cow-puncher to his feet. "Come to yourself, Caborca, and tell us what's rilin' you!"

After the stumpy, bowlegged little foreman had awakened himself with a series of oaths, he admitted that he was not fighting the sheriff or his crowd. "Cal Triggers was here, and when I went up to the bar for a peaceable drink he picked a fight with me!" Caborca cried. "And he said me and Saul Meakin here framed the race so there'd be a smash-up with the coaches. I didn't mind his accusin' me, sheriff, but he was bellyaching about Saul Meakin as well! So I told him where he could get off at, and called him a lousy pup!"

"And then what?" the sheriff asked.

"Then what?" Cabora said, wrinkling his narrow forehead in a puzzled effort to remember. "I cain't seem to remember what happened then, sheriff. After I called him a lousy pup everything seems to be a blank!"

"And you can't tell me where he went?"

"I can't tell exactly," Caborca rejoined. "The last I remember he was standin' up before me, but I do recollect somethin' he was axing the barkeep. It was just before I stepped up to the bar, and he was axing Jo here the shortest and quickest route to the Hazen rancho. I remember them exact words, sheriff. And he was fillin' his flask with water and scoopin' up some grub from the free lunch. Like as not he hopped to his cayuse and shagged out the town, sheriff—and it's my opinion he's rode out to the rancho for to git Scrub Hazen's gal!"

"That's all we want to know," Scrub cried.

"I'll plug the gunman on sight!" Meakin shouted, seconded by cheers. "Damned if I won't!"

Scrub Hazen and Meakin turned and elbowed their way toward the front entrance of the saloon. When midway across the floor the sheriff called to them.

Pickering had heard the angry mutterings of the crowd outside, and experienced as he was in cases based on the lynching instinct, he knew that he had a complicated problem in mob psychology to handle. Out in the street the jam of men was composed of many elements, many desires. The only men who could be relied on as real gun deputies were Scrub, Meakin, Caborca and Nan Harvess's own cowboys who had followed the sheriff into the saloon.

"Now look here, men," he said. "We got to get our heads together and do this thing right. I don't want the mob messin' in and ballin' this thing up. If we get the whole town clatterin' out to Scrub Hazen's ranch in their buckboards and ridin' their fuzztails our game will be balled up. Now I'm goin' to pick a few good deputies and then well get our guns and mount horses and get this here Cal Triggers right where we want him. The mob wants a lynchin'—but as yet they ain't no cause for lynchin'. But if Cal Triggers lays a finger on that gal, we got him. It 'll be the first chanst he's given us for to nab him, and believe me, it's all the chanst that any of us wants."

"That's the best plan, sheriff," Scrub Hazen put in. "We don't want no mob. We want a small posse of regulars. So let's get 'em and hit out for my ranch without no more palaverin'!"

"The first deputy will be Saul Meakin," Pickering announced. "And I want them two boys that come out ahead in the sharpshootin' contest in the rodeo. We'll want some of that thar sharpshootin', I'm thinkin'. That 'll be three men. Scrub, you'll make the fourth. Caborca, Cow McGintry and Wop Pedro will make seven. That's all as I want."

Pickering turned to the gang of spectators that had jammed into the saloon. "Now the rest of you birds stay put, while me and my posse sneaks outen the back door. After we're gone ten minutes you can blab all you want. But I don't want you follerin' us out!"

Ten minutes later the sheriff and his seven men, whose horses were brought to them in a remote corral at the western end of the town, mounted and rode off across the sage-plains. By the time the town was apprised of the fact that a posse of men had ridden to Hazen's ranch to save Nan Harvess from being abducted, the sheriff and his men had crossed the plain.

Here they cantered up through the first barranca of the foothills and came out again where the defile opened on a gently rising mesa. It was now dark and the posse was well out of sight of the crowd from the town. When they mounted the hill, which sheltered the ranch from the winds of the plain, the big group of houses, calf sheds, barns, bunk-houses and vats lay in a blue mist of starlight.

The sheriff halted his riders and gave final directions.

"It's to be understood by you men that we took this bird because he was attacking the gal. If he's just settin' down thar in the patio with her playin' the banjo you've got to pot him, anyway. The mob back thar is all het up for a lynchin', and if we let Triggers fly the coop, like as not they'll lynch us."

He divided the posse into four parts, designating that they close in on the ranch from all four sides. "The front of the ranch which opens out on the sage plain will need three men for to guard it. And you two sharpshooters with Caborca will attend to that side. You'll have fifteen minutes to round this hill. Then close in and wait for me to start the shootin'. Remember, the gal's in the ranch and likewise her servants, so you can't go pottin' the place haphazard."

"And I got some weanin' calves there, too, sherriff," Scrub said. "Don't pot them. They ain't done nothin'."

"Wop Pedro and McGintry will go into the ranch from this here side," the sheriff went on. "And, Scrub, me and you will ride around to the north. That leaves only one little narrow barranca which had orter easily be guarded by one man. That one man will be Mr. Saul Meakin here who has the biggest grievance of us all, and will probably shoot straightest bein' as how the gal's hisn."

Having received these commands, the men, eager to accomplish their task and return for the night's carrousel at Red Town, rode out on the siege.

CHAPTER XIII.

A GUNMAN COMES TO THE LAZY H.

NAN HARVESS had ridden home in company with one of her ranch hands, a scrawny, dyspeptic-looking woman known as Tobin. She had driven her team and buckboard to within a few miles of her ranch before she noticed a little dust cloud, scarcely perceptible in the mauve light which spread over the desert between sunset and starlight. A mile farther on Mrs. Tobin ascertained that this dust cloud was caused by a dappled gray horse, ridden by a man with rolled, lop-brimmed sombrero. It took no superior intuition on Nan's part to conclude that this was the calico outlaw on which the gunfighter had entered Red Town, and that the rider was Cal Triggers himself.

Eager to get within the refuge of her ranch before this rider caught up, she spurred her team on, cut through the cañon of the foothills, crossed the mesa and rounded the shoulder of the hill, beyond which the Hazen outfit lay.

From this hill Nan could see the stretch of the sage-plain she had crossed. The sky in the east was a dark blue and the stars which had been coming out one by one were brilliant in the thin desert air. Both the women could discern in a vague way the lines of dust crossing the mesa which, to the practiced eye of cattle country people, marked the course of a large band of riders.

Nan Harvess knew then what had happened. Cal Triggers had been told of the girl's returning to her ranch and he had

broken away from the mob at the rodeo to follow her, and now he himself was being pursued.

She lashed her team and the little buggy went clattering down the hill toward the ranch, which was now in view. The two nags being comparatively fresh, they gave Triggers's calico mustang a good race. Triggers's horse was all but exhausted after its work in the rodeo that day, and it was unable to overcome the handicap of the buggy team until Nan drove into the front yard of her ranch.

The Hazen outfit was one of the old landmarks of the country. The main ranch-house was built in adobe with roofs of red tile, and two wings extending backward, forming the usual patio dear to the heart of the early Spanish settlers. About this picturesque old dwelling were grouped the calf pens, bunk-houses, dipping vats and chutes of a prosperous modern cattle ranch. The unpainted weathered oak of these shacks struck a disagreeable contrast to the quaint old adobe house with its vine-covered emparrado, its portales and its big front door of mission oak.

It was before the old portales that Nan Harvess drew rein. In company with Mrs. Tobin she dismounted, ran up to the veranda, entered the big door and slammed it shut after her. She felt a sense of security behind the big walls, but it was only momentary. Most of the ranch hands had gone to the rodeo and there was only one old stable mozo, Miguel, who had hobbled out to the front court to take care of the horses. Nan called to him, and he shuffled up to the window as old Mrs. Tobin was lighting the lamps in the big sala.

"Is there any one on the ranch besides you, Miguel?" Nan asked.

"Some of the women are down at the calf sheds getting out the maize meal and oil for the evening fodder."

"Are there no men here?"

"The herders all went to the rodeo, *señorita.*"

"Then, Miguel, we must rely on you!" Nan said hurriedly. "You get your shotgun and stand out there in the emparrado. A man is coming, and he must be kept out until your master returns with the boys."

"Kill him when he comes!" Mrs. Tobin ordered in her dry voice.

"I'm an old man, *señorita!*" Miguel pleaded. "And I can fight no longer."

"I don't want you to fight. You are *not* to shoot at him. You must keep him away. Just frighten him with the gun."

Old Miguel, with only a vague and dreadful fear of what was about to happen, hobbled off in dismay to the bunk-house, where a moment later Nan saw him emerge with a sawed-off shotgun.

"Old Miguel is no good," Mrs. Tobin said. "He can frighten nobody. You'd orter have commanded him to shoot. What if this gunfighter calls his bluff and walks into the house?"

"I will receive him—as a visitor."

"You mean as a bandit. Like as not he'll kidnap you!" The ranch woman's voice betrayed no excitement—no emotion. She uttered the words, "Kill him!" with a dry tone that made Nan shudder. "If he touches you *I* will shoot him," the old woman said. She stepped to the mantelpiece where a shoulder holster was hanging. "If Cal Triggers comes in here I will stand in the dark and cover him."

"No, no, Tobin, you must not! I will talk to him. He won't touch me. I have things to say to him. I will appeal to some greater thing that is in all men who are fighters."

The old woman snapped out an answer—it was something like a sigh. Nan thought she was laughing violently without making a sound. To break that hideous silence the girl hurried on: "I will tell him that he has won me. According to my word I am his. But I will say this: 'Do you want a woman who has no love for you? Do you want one who will hate you?' Yes, I will tell him that—that I hate him. Then we shall see what he'll do."

"I know what he'll do," the old ranch woman cried with something akin to bitterness. "He is a man—he is like all men except that he is worse. Most men are afraid and therefore they can be cast away. But this man is not afraid. He will take you in his big, ugly, hairy arms and crush you!"

"No, no!" the girl cried desperately.

" By that time the posse will be here, and until they come I am going to receive him—perhaps I will receive him as my guest. Perhaps he will really fall in love with me—*then* I can manage him!"

Again Nan heard the old woman's voiceless, almost soulless laugh. Tobin, holding the revolver which she had loaded, slunk to the window. The ugly, nerve-racking silence of her laugh was broken by the sound of Cal Triggers's horse galloping on the road.

Nan rushed to the barred window.

Looking up toward the hill she caught sight of a big man with tall-peaked sombrero, riding a raw-boned calico mustang. The horseman pressed his mount on, galloping across a field of stubble, around a mound of alfalfa, and then with a final hurdle over the fence, landing directly in the front court of the ranch-house.

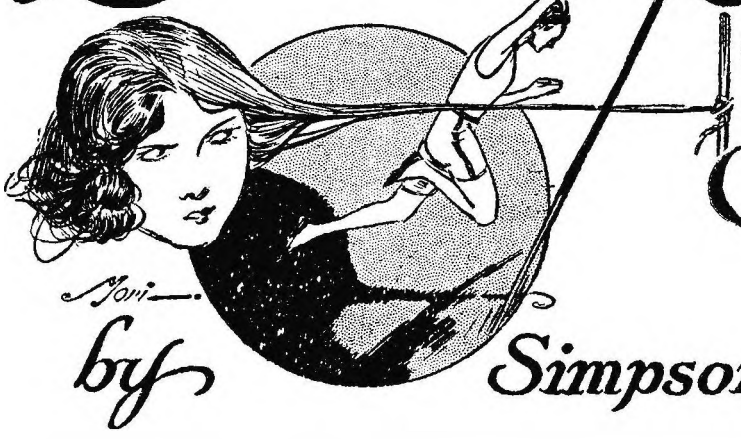
Nan heard the old woman's voice whispering into her ear. The breath, as it struck Nan's temple, was cold. " If Miguel is afraid to kill him," she said, " and if the man comes into the house—"

Nan put her hands up to her ears so that she could hear no more of the old woman's whispering. With a revulsion of feeling, a hatred for the dried-up old hag, and a horror at this imminence of death, she pushed the woman aside. For a moment she paced the floor, panic-stricken, rushing to the door, coming back, turning aimlessly to the window.

And there—as she looked through the grating at the starlit court—she waited for Cal Triggers.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

Love at First Sight



by Simpson S. Nicol

THIS is a love story. Oooh, goody-goody! The Elgada Theater is situated in a brightly lighted and fashionable district of Chicago's North Side, and is devoted to the presentation of high grade motion pictures.

Along about eight thirty one evening, an automobile rolled up to it, and Mazie Tuller and her mother alighted therefrom. After giving some directions to the chauffeur, the two women went into the theater, not stopping to purchase tickets nor needing any to gain admittance. In fact, they were made most welcome by none other than the manager himself, who had been hurriedly sent for by the doorman when he had espied them at the curb.

For Mazie was one of filmdom's stars. She was only nineteen, but was loved the world over by movie fans of both sexes. Much ink had been spilled in many magazines upon the subject of her eyes alone, and pretty nearly everybody thought she was " so sweet."

Mazie visited the Elgada often, and the manager was not only highly pleased to admit her free, but he would gladly have paid her to attend. Mazie never would consent to "just say a few words from the stage" for him, still her frequent presence was an asset. It made a wonderful ad for him, and added no end of prestige to the house. While he dared not make mention of it publicly on his signs or in print —oh, my, no, the Elgada was too swell for that—still by telling some one, seemingly casually and confidentially, but always with a dozen or more other patrons close by, and in the tone of a train announcer, that "Miss Tuller is one of the audience to-night," he had pretty well instilled into the neighborhood's mind that celebrities were often to be encountered at his theater.

This particular evening, Mazie had come to witness her own latest release, "The Empty Decanter," and to study the audience as it watched the picture. It was to be an evening more of business than of pleasure. After exchanging a few pleasantries, the manager offered to show her to a seat himself, but this she refused, feeling that attention might thereby be invited her way, and defeat her purposes. She espied two vacant places in the thirty-fourth row, and to these the two women quietly betook themselves.

Some twenty minutes later, another well-known person—a young man—approached the Elgada, afoot. He, however, was well known only to those who followed university athletics. Accordingly, he paid his fifty cents—or was it fifty-five?—it really doesn't matter—and selected a seat in the twenty-second row.

This young man, who by the way is the hero of this tale, was Earle Statler. Earle was a student at Woodward University, situated in a suburb, but he made the trip home to Chicago every day. Earle was an athlete—a great athlete—in fact, Earle had won first prize in the pole vault in the intercollegiate meet just two weeks previous.

Earle should have been at home this evening, studying the classics. Instead, here he was in the twenty-second row of the Elgada. But, in all justice to him, it is only fair to state that he hadn't come to see Mazie Tuller in "The Empty Decanter." He didn't know what feature was being shown that night. Nor did he care. He was there to see Topical Review No. 31, which contained among other things some scenes of Earle Statler winning the pole vault.

You don't blame him, do you? Athletes, even great ones, are human. You and I, too, would have laid aside the study of Virgil—yea, you might even stop reading *this* story right here—if you were to learn that you were appearing on some screen near by.

No one but the usherette—or is she an usherine?—ventured to show Earle to a seat. Fact is nobody connected with the theater knew him. Yet, Earle was one of the chief players in that evening's program. His acting was every bit as good in its way as Mazie's was in hers. His vaults thrilled the audience and made it gasp as Mazie never will be able to do. But Earle's name on the billboard did not drag the folks out of their Morris chairs to the theater, whereas Mazie's did. And there you are.

It was Earle's misfortune to enter just after the scenes of the meet had been shown. The christening of some ship was then on view. However, he knew the Review would be run through again along about eleven o'clock, and he resigned himself to the long wait.

II.

LET'S pay a little attention now to Mazie and her mother, back in the thirty-fourth row.

Mazie, of course, saw the Review in its entirety. She saw Earle vault. She saw him clear the bar at a height which the other contestants could not reach. She thought it to be as graceful a performance as she had ever witnessed. She knew that the handsome men with whom she acted at the studio could not begin to duplicate Earle's feat. And when, later, a close-up of the winner was shown, she experienced her first case of love at first sight.

Love! Love! What a wonderful thing is love. And how unimportant business seems when one's in love.

Mazie couldn't get interested in "The Empty Decanter." She had no more idea how the audience was "taking" her in that picture than you or I have as to how many sharks there are in the Indian Ocean. At its finish, when mother arose to go, Mazie rather angrily said: "No, not yet. I want to see that Review again."

On this second showing, she drank in all of Earle's scenes with those wonderful eyes, those eyes that made so much money for her. She further made a mental note of: "The Winner. Earle Statler of Woodward University." repeating it again and again to insure its retention in her memory. Then she and her mother started home.

But Mazie didn't know that she had left the theater, that the manager had been all attention and courtesy in showing her to her machine. She didn't know she was speeding home. Mazie was in love for the first time in her life—love at first sight.

III.

To just the extent that Mazie was *not* interested in "The Empty Decanter," our hero *was*. I don't know as he cared much for the story, but, oh, how he *was* interested in Mazie. He had never seen her before. The movies had never produced so beautiful, so perfect, so delightful, so lovely an actress. He found himself growing jealous of the men playing around her in the picture. He was actually hating the leading man.

You know what that means. He was in love—love at first sight.

Love! Love! What a wonderful thing is love. When "The Empty Decanter" came to its end, followed immediately by "Waterfalls in Japan," fully half the audience left the theater. Earle along with them.

From those who did stay to see the Falls, particularly from the ladies, could be heard emanating several "Ohs." and "Ahs," and "Isn't that beautiful?" and "My goodness, isn't that lovely?" yet, you and I know that if these same women were actually in view of these falls in Japan they would pay no attention to them. Instead, they would be discussing the probability of bustles again coming into style or complaining of how fussy Fred is about his eggs in the morning.

Earle didn't really know he was leaving the theater. He did ask the usherette—or is she an usherine—if the feature would be shown again that night—"No"—would it be presented the next day—"No"—did she knew where he could see it the next day—"No, but you can find out in the newspapers"—then went out into the street toward home. Not until he was in bed did he realize that he had *not* seen Topical Review No. 31.

Mazie passed a restless and a sleepless night. Furthermore, she had no appetite for breakfast.

Earle passed a restless and a sleepless night. Furthermore, he had no appetite for breakfast.

Eight o'clock, of the following morning, found Earle at the office of the Pelorus Film Company, also situated on the North Side and not a great distance from the Elgada.

The Pelorus was one of America's largest film producers, in reality being a combination of several companies. It turned out all classes of movies, although the name Pelorus was only attached to the first-class pictures. The Topical Review was one of its products. The general offices and studios were located on the same "lot."

Only a negro janitor was present when Earle entered and asked for the general manager.

"Mr. Wiener? Oh, he don't get here till after ten o'clock. You're too early to see him. Yaas, much too early."

"It 'll be all right if I sit down here and wait for him, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. Yes, sir," and the colored man went on with his dusting, while Earle betook himself to a bench placed next to the telephone switchboard, which also served as the information desk.

A few minutes later the porter asked Earle: "You're comin' around to see about a job, are you?"

"No."

"You don't want a job here?"

"No."

"Oh!" The negro resumed work. But

curiosity again got the better of him in a few moments, and he asked: "Did I hear you right before when I understood you to say you didn't come here for a job?"

"You did. Is there anything strange about that?"

"Strange? I guess so. I been workin' here three years and you're the only man I ever knew to come around this time o' mornin' and not want a job."

Earle felt uneasy at this remark, but said nothing.

"If you *do* want to get on as an extra, you want to apply at that door around the corner. But you'll have to hurry if you want a good place in line."

The colored man was evidently surprised that Earle kept his seat and did not bolt for "that door around the corner."

By this time the office employees had started to come in, and three or four of them asked him if he wanted a job, to all of whom he merely said: "No, thank you. I'm here to see the general manager." They all vouchsafed him the information that the G. M. didn't arrive until about ten thirty, and Earle promptly told them he would wait.

At eight thirty, the young lady who held the combination position of telephone operator and information clerk, took her place at the switchboard. While she thus almost brushed elbows with Earle, he barely noticed her. This in spite of the fact that in most men's eyes, Miss Farrell — for that was her name—Louise Farrell—was very easy to look at. But when we are setting up any certain person as a little god, all the other people in the world seem mediocre. Earle had been worshiping Mazie for the last twelve hours, and if Miss Farrell had been Venus de Milo he would not have been interested. He *did* glance at her, but if he thought anything at all, the impression was an unfavorable one. He saw she had red hair, and red hair, in his eyes, was absolutely ugly.

It was a fifty-fifty proposition, though, with her. She saw him sitting there as she came to the board, but no particular impression of him was registered on her mind. It was no great event in Miss Farrell's young life to have a young man sitting beside her on that bench. It was all a part of her daily work.

She inserted and pulled out a number of plugs, got some pencils and paper out of the drawer, fixed her hair, powdered her nose, and when she felt that she was ready to start the day a going, she turned to Earle and said: "You want a job, do you?"

"No, ma'am."

"You don't?"

"No, ma'am." Earle was getting peeved at this oft-asked question, and his tone, in reply, was angry.

"Who is it you wish to see," asked Miss Farrell, no less sweetly than before. Angry tones didn't feeze Louise.

"I want to see the general manager."

"Mr. Wiener personally?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"He's a hard man to see. He's very busy while he's here. Won't some one else do?"

"I hardly think so. I'd rather talk to the manager himself."

"All right. He isn't in now and won't get here till after ten."

"It 'll be all right for me to wait here, won't it?" and sarcasm was in his query.

"Sure thing, sure thing, Mr.—Mr.—"

"Statler."

"Statler?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Just make yourself at home. Have you seen the morning paper?" and she handed him her copy.

He started to peruse it, but he found himself not interested — not even in the sporting page. Instead, he discovered himself watching Miss Farrell at her work. Not that he was loving Mazie any less. Oh, my, no! But he could not help but admire the efficiency of Louise at the board and in meeting callers, and he noticed that no matter what the occasion, she never seemed to lose her even temper. He kept recalling how he had become ruffled earlier in the morning on far less provocation than she was meeting with every few minutes.

While thus engaged, he came to a sudden start upon hearing the operator say to the board: "Good morning, Miss Tuller. Yes, Mr. Wiener will be down at the usual time so far's I know. Good-by."

What a wonderful chance for him to talk about Mazie.

"Do you know Mazie Tuller?" he asked Louise, very pleasantly.

"Yes," was her reply, and it must be admitted she was surprised at his opening up the conversation in this way, after his former curt remarks.

"She's pretty, isn't she?" Earle continued.

"*I* think so. *I* think she's very sweet."

Earle wondered why she accented the "*I*." Didn't everybody in the world think Mazie pretty and sweet?

"I guess everybody thinks she's mighty nice, don't they?" he went on.

"Well, some of the folks here don't like her."

"They don't? Why?"

"I don't know. Some of them think she's awfully fussy and cranky, but she's always very nice to me."

"I guess these other people are jealous of her, aren't they?"

"Maybe," she replied, smiling.

Earle *knew* it was jealousy. No "maybe" about it. He had often read and heard about the jealousy in this profession, and recognized this as such.

"Did Mazie ever appear on the speaking stage?" he asked.

"No, but she says she's going to some day. She goes to every play that comes."

This gave Earle an idea. He'd take Mazie to a theater that night. The "Follies" had come to Chicago just that week. He'd take her there. He could get the best of seats at a hotel some two miles from the studio. He'd go over there right now. That would be a good way, too, of spending the hour or so before Mr. Wiener would arrive.

"I'll be back again Miss—" and he walked out, briskly.

IV.

At four minutes to ten, Mazie entered the office. (I know that I should have her getting to the studio by eight o'clock at the latest—don't the movie magazines tell us about the long, hard days the stars put in—but remember, folks, Mazie earned forty-one thousand seven hundred dollars a year. Forty thousand her salary from the film company and one thousand seven hundred from her "gifts" of her autographed photos, which cost her a nickel apiece, and for which, in requesting them, her many admirers enclosed a quarter. If the twenty-five cents was not enclosed, the letter invariably "went astray" in the mails. Now, folks, if you were earning forty-one thousand seven hundred dollars a year, would you get to work at eight in the morning? Same here.)

"Has Frank come in yet, Louise?" asked Mazie, referring to the general manager.

"No, Miss Tuller, he hasn't. He ought to be in any moment, though."

"I'll wait for him in his office," and to his sanctum she went.

Mr. Wiener's name was not Frank. It was Moses. Moses Wiener. But a competitor had one day dubbed him "Frank Futter," and Frank he had been to his friends ever since.

All through Moses Wiener's life, particularly as a kid, the aged question had been asked of him: "Where was Moses when the lights went out?" Naturally, he got tired of it, but when he was ready to make a start in life, he decided to use this weather-beaten query as a hunch, and entered the picture business. Of late years, when this ancient interrogation had been put to him, he was wont to say: "I'm on Easy Street, and every time the lights go out I move a few feet farther up the Avenue."

He was right, too. Wiener had made good. He had made *very* good. And he had done it by giving the public what it wanted. Not what he thought it should have—but what it *wanted.*

Shortly after ten he arrived, and went direct to his office, emitting a few "Good mornings" *en route.*

"Hello, Mazie," he said, on entering and finding her in his chair. "How are you?"

"Fine, Frank. How are you?"

"Never felt better, Mazie. Are you my first caller to-day? You have no trouble, I hope."

"Trouble? No indeed, Frank. I want you to do something for me. I want you

to arrange, if you can, to have me meet a certain young man."

"You bet you, Mazie. Who is he?"

"Here, take this down. He is Earle Statler, of Woodward University."

"Oh, he's not in pictures."

"No, no, no. He's a pole vaulter. He's an athlete. He's a fine looking fellow. I saw him in the Review over at the Elgada last night. He—"

Mr. Wiener's phone had been ringing for some time, and at this point he answered it.

"A young man to see me. What does he want? It's very important, eh— Yes, it's always 'very important'— What's his name? What?"

The name Wiener heard over the phone was "Earle Statler." He glanced at the memo on his desk, and then, using the same set of brains that had made him president of this large concern, said: "Send him in, Louise," and hung up.

(Well, well, folks. There you've gone to work and guessed how this story's going to end up, haven't you? But don't go. Stick for the final clinch. You haven't anything else particular to do, have you?)

"Would you mind stepping into the directors' room a minute, Mazie, while I see this man?" Wiener asked her. "It 'll just take a moment, and then I'll talk to you again about this fellow you're interested in."

"Now don't be long, Frank," and she stepped into the desired room adjoining. This room was not only private, but seldom occupied.

Earle, as you have surmised, had returned, having purchased the tickets. But he had also brought a box of candy for Miss Farrell. He did this latter little thing for two reasons. First, he hoped this might tend to compensate for his abrupt words with her an hour earlier; and second, and of far more importance, something told him if he couldn't get past her, he'd secure no interview with the manager.

As he stepped into the private office and encountered the manager, he was nervous. The thought that he was going to ask to meet Miss Tuller because he was in love with her suddenly seemed terribly ridiculous to him, and he wished he could back out. But it was too late, now, and so, recalling the faint heart adage, he bucked up.

"Are you the manager, sir?" he asked.

"Yes."

"My name is Statler. You get out the Topical Review, don't you?"

"Yes."

"You've got some pictures of me in your last one doing some pole vaulting, Mr. Wiener, and I—"

"You want to see if you can't get a duplicate of as much of the film as you appear in. Mr. Huddom out in the commercial department will fix you up on that all right. Is that all, then?"

"No, sir— No, sir. I hadn't thought about getting any film at all, although that *is* a good idea. What I came to see you about is this. Mazie Tuller is one of your actresses, isn't she?"

"Yes."

"I—I'd like to meet her if I can. I think she's the finest girl I ever saw. Er—uh—will you—can you—will you arrange to have me introduced to her?" Earle felt very relieved at getting this question out of his system.

"That's a rather odd request, Mr. Statler, but I guess it can be arranged. Would you mind stepping into the directors' room —that one right there — for a few moments?"

"Yes, sir," and Earle moved toward the door; "and I thank you very, very much. This means a great deal to me— Oh, Mr. Wiener, there's a lady in here," and he stepped back.

"That's all right, son. She's harmless. She won't bite you."

Earle Statler walked into the room.

V.

MAZIE'S first impression of this stranger as he stepped in was rather one of amazement at the coincidence that his face greatly resembled that of Earle Statler. But she thanked the Omnipotent One that he was *not* Earle. This fellow was so gawky. He looked like a rube. Whereas the man she had seen in the pictures the night before, and of whom she had been thinking ever

since, was so splendid appearing—so clean cut—so live—so wide awake—so dashing.

The secret's out. Earle *did* look gawky. He *did* look like a rube. In track togs or bathing suit, he made a splendid picture of a finely developed male figure—a feast for all eyes. But put him in street clothes—and he just simply wasn't there, that's all. Ready-made or tailor-made, it mattered not. He was one of those unfortunate fellows on whom clothes do not hang right. Even the simplest of apparel made him appear awkward. When he tried to emulate his college-mates in their fancy designs and their vari-colored raiment, the result was almost invariably a nightmare. For instance, on this particular morning, he was wearing a yellow tie on a lavender shirt. Now, some men can do that, but not Earle.

Mazie was constantly associated with finely-dressed men, and, although she knew not nor cared not who this fellow in the room with her might be, she unconsciously felt an antipathy toward him. She found it very consoling, however, to contrast him with the splendid appearance Earle Statler would make when she would meet her hero.

Now, what was Earle's first impression of Mazie as he stepped into the room? It's hard to say. He knew not who she was, nor did he care to know. He was very much in love with Mazie Tuller at the moment, and since this girl was evidently not Mazie, he wasn't interested particularly one way or the other. He noticed she had pretty eyes, that they were somewhat like Mazie's; but, oh, they were not near as beautiful as Mazie's. He also saw that she was very neat, and of about the same height and build as Mazie. But what of that? She was just an ordinary, pleasant appearing American girl, and was probably one of the actresses, or maybe an extra lady, about the studio. At any rate, she wasn't Mazie, and consequently didn't take up much space in his mind.

These impressions of the two consumed no time at all, and Earle had been in the room only a few seconds when Mr. Heath, a play director—who had been hurriedly sent for by Mr. Wiener—entered. Paying no attention to Earle, he accosted Mazie.

"Good morning, Miss Tuller. I've got some bad news for you, Mazie."

What, thought Earle, is this young girl Mazie? No, no, it couldn't be. And yet, this man had called her "Tuller" and "Mazie."

"We had a small fire in the developing room yesterday," Mr. Heath continued—and as this conversation was purely invention, he was thinking fast. "Some of the film of 'Why Not Now?' was burned. We'll have to take those scenes over again, Mazie."

With a sad face and a sadder heart, Earle concluded that this girl must be the one over whom he had lost so much sleep, and because of whom he was away from his classes at the moment.

"Oh, dear, oh dear, oh dear! Do I have to do those scenes over again?" Mazie shrieked, almost hysterically. "Are those the ones in the kitchen? Do I have to wash those dishes and work around that stove, and everything again? Can't you run this studio without having fires? I won't do them over, *I won't do them, I won't do them.*" She was stamping her feet, and her voice had risen to a high pitch when she had got this far.

At this point Earle tiptoed out of the room and found himself in the manager's office again.

"I thank you, Mr. Wiener," he said, and walked out. A less shrewd man than "Frank" might have wondered for what the youth was thanking him, but this man knew.

VI.

"COME to think of it, Mazie," the director said, when he had noticed that Earle had departed, "it wasn't any of your scenes that were burned. They were all Lulu Jefferson's. I'm sorry I caused you this little anxiety," and, after going to a desk and pretending to be taking a certain bunch of papers therefrom, he left the room, and left Miss Tuller in there, again alone with thoughts of her hero, Earle, the pole vaulter.

Mr. Wiener then went to the door of the directors' room and said: "All right, Mazie. You can come out now." Which she did.

"Let's see, what was it we were talking about, Mazie?" he asked when she had seated herself across from him. "Oh, yes, you wanted to meet some young man. What did I do with that memo? What was his name again?"

"Earle Statler, of Woodward University," she answered.

"Statler? Why, that was Statler who was in the room with you there a moment ago."

"*What!*"

"Yes, sure. That was the boy."

"Now, Frank. Don't fool with me this way. I'm serious. I want to meet Mr. Statler."

"I'm not fooling you. Maybe I can catch him before he gets very far. I'll call him back," and he rose and went toward the door.

"No, no, no, no, no, Frank." Mazie had recalled her first impression of the man who had been in the directors' room with her a few moments before, namely, that his face had looked so much like Earle's. Alas, alack, he must have been Earle. The hero worship stopped right there, and, with a sinking heart, she only knew that she wanted to get away by herself, alone. "No, no. I don't want to meet him," she went on. "I've just been having a little fun with you, that's all."

And then Miss Tuller laughed. It was an hysterical laugh.

Moses Wiener laughed in return so heartily that if we didn't know otherwise, we'd be sure he thought himself the victim of a good joke.

Mazie quickly went to her dressing room. Once inside, and the door bolted, she had a dandy little fit of quiet weeping.

VII.

On his way out of the building, Earle stepped up to the switchboard. "I've got a couple of tickets for the 'Follies' tonight," he said, "and if you've no other engagement, I'd be delighted to escort you there, Miss—Miss—"

"Farrell."

"Miss Farrell."

"Why, I'd just love to go, I'm sure, Mr. Statler, but you know we've not been introduced, and—"

"Oh, that can be easily arranged," and back he hastened to Mr. Wiener.

Before long the white light indicating the general manager's phone appeared on the board. In another moment Louise had risen and was walking quickly toward the private sanctum of that man.

As she entered, Earle noticed that her hair was of a beautiful shade of auburn.

On a Wednesday evening some two months later, and shortly after he had presented Louise with a diamond ring, she suggested that they go to the Gem Theater and see "Why Not Now?"

"It's a dandy picture," said Miss Farrell. "Over at the studio they say it's the best one that Mazie Tuller's been in yet."

"Is *she* in it?" remarked Earle. "I don't want to go."

"Why? Don't you like her, Earle? I think she's sweet."

"I think she's punk."

THE 152ND NOVEL, ORIGINALLY PRINTED SERIALLY IN THIS MAGAZINE, TO BE PUBLISHED IN BOOK FORM IS

TWO-GUN SUE

BY DOUGLAS GRANT

Author of "The Fifth Ace," etc.

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His Third Master

Part III

by Max Brand

Author of "The Garden of Eden," "Gun Gentlemen," "The Untamed," etc.

WHAT HAS ALREADY HAPPENED

FOR seven years Dickon Greene has gone through the motions of living without progressing in any direction. On the evening of his thirtieth birthday a telephone call from an acquaintance, Harrison Gilmore, who is also assistant cashier in the bank in which Greene is a teller, takes him to a social club de luxe in lower Manhattan. He is presented to the proprietor, Silverman, whose patrons are unconsciously puppets in his scheme of self-amusement; in an alcove he meets John Vincent, cynical purveyor of information concerning those who frequent the club. Lydia, a woman of ice in the motley gathering of sensation-seekers, holds Greene's attention until the advent of Marie Guilbert, who, with her "angel," has just come from a night of popular success on Broadway. On the following morning he gives up his position in the bank; he has been merely existing—and wishes now to live, to change drab certainty to glamorous romance. Walking up the avenue, after leaving the bank, his attention is attracted by a middle-aged man of impressive features; in keeping with his new scheme of adventure-seeking, Greene follows him. It is apparent by the way the man eyes food displays in restaurants that he is hungry. Following an impulse Greene calls a cab and orders the starving man to join him.

Arrived at the apartment the young teller arranges for a meal to be sent in. They converse, and Greene learns to his amazement that the man is a valet who has served only two men during thirty years; both of these were men of great importance socially, but more than that were so thoroughly gentlemen as to have won the respect of their servant. When North suggests that Greene accept his services the young man is first amused, then nonplused—for he has only five hundred dollars and no prospects. North immediately assumes command, deciding upon a social career for his new master. One of the first steps is to secure a suitable apartment. Unable to afford an establishment on Park Avenue, North suggests Greenwich Village as the only alternative, and through a butler friend, engages furnished rooms near Washington Square. They outline a campaign, with Cynthia Rainey, an heiress, as goal. In the same apartment house with Greene a distinguished sculptor, Plummer, is going to give an informal tea for members of the elect. How Greene can manage to be present at the gathering, and in that way assure himself of further entree, is the important question.

CHAPTER XV.

HE STARTS TO ATTAIN IT.

"TELL me two things," demanded Dickon suddenly. "How old is Plummer and when did he first make his success?"

"About fifty years, sir, I think; and he received no recognition until he did his 'Portrait of a Girl' five years ago."

"Forty-five years old before he made a place for himself," murmured Dickon. "Then he is probably both vain and irritable. North, attend to this, if you please.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for June 3.

I am going into that library alcove yonder and read until Plummer appears."

"Appears, sir?"

"You will borrow one of his men at once—one of the men who are cleaning up his place for him."

"Yes, sir."

"I want you to detain that workman until Mr. Plummer in person comes for him. Keep him here; my things will arrive very soon, and when they do, get out a bottle of old rye and use it on your man. In these dry days it ought to hold him. In the meantime have the pictures we are storing piled on that table, and on the farther end of it gather the bric-a-brac—that jade vase, for instance, and above all, be sure that you put 'The Bronze Swordsman' with the rest."

"'The Bronze Swordsman'?" echoed William North. "That is highly praised, sir."

"It has to go; have it placed with the rest, but don't move anything from the room until you hear from me. Is that clear?"

"Perfectly, sir."

By the faraway look in North's eye it was clear to Dickon that his valet was completely in the dark and it was not unpleasant to leave him there; Dickon strolled into the alcove, selected a broad-seated Louis XIV chair that allowed him to loll at ease, and picked from the shelves beside him the first book on which his hand fell. The leather binding was pleasant to his touch, but the glance of Dickon was not for the pages of the book; it lingered over the pleasant lines of the groined ceiling springing from solid pilasters along the sides of the alcove. In such houses as Dickon had lived in before this would have been an ugly little rectangle instead of a place that filled him with quiet. His gaze dropped to the top of the bookcase and rested on a bronze miniature of that ancient Egyptian masterpiece, 'The Scribe,' his hand poised, his patient, ugly face waiting for the dictation; looking down to the book at last Dickon found that he was holding a copy of "Boccaccio," and he closed his eyes with a smile. Egypt, the Italian Renaissance, the court of Louis XIV, the early Norman ceiling—he felt that four ages pressed in upon him, and all harmoniously.

Time drifted softly past him in the library alcove; the steps of William North and the working man who North had brought up from Plummer's rooms were hushed by the splendid rug of the studio room, and in the wide spaces of that apartment their voices came to Dickon only as a murmur. The movers brought in Dickon's few articles of furniture; and even their raucous voices felt the influence of that spacious place. They were gone again, and Dickon picked up the train of his thoughts in which the meeting with the sculptor and Mrs. Littleton were already taken for granted, and he was plunging through a fragrant future in the quest for Cynthia Rainey. The name, together with William North's all too brief description, spelled out an imaginary personality for Dickon. Into his mind from far away—a neighboring apartment or the street, perhaps—floated a woman's laughter and the bubble of Cynthia Rainey burst into filmy shards and formed again as the girl of Silverman's, radiant, slangy, compelling Marie Guilbert. For some reason the thought of her always took his breath, made him sit up in his chair as if she in person had stepped into the room. She had left in him a chord of emotion which that random laughter struck again; and when this passed away Dickon heard William North fumbling in the cabinet which held his store of liquor. There was the telltale chink of bottles and the shrill chiming of glasses.

"B-r-r!" said the workman, his voice grown suddenly gruff and loud. "That ain't bad, what? I figured a bird with a joint like this wouldn't drink nothin' but wine and thin stuff like that."

"Quite so," said William North in such a voice that Dickon smiled.

There was a distant knock, the opening of a door.

"Say, Joe, the boss downstairs wants to know what's keepin' you?"

"Business," said Joe instantly. "Business is keepin' me. Tell him that."

"But you was only loaned to this gentleman?"

"Sure, but he ain't done with me yet."

"The boss is in a hurry, Joe."

"To hell with him. Tell him *that*."

The door closed with a bang and the voice of Joe continued: "Might as well have another while the stuff's around. Old, ain't it?"

"Over twenty years," said William North coldly.

"The hell you say!"

The liquid trickled musically forth. "Well, here's lookin' at you." A pause; a sigh. "What next, general? Shall I pack the stuff down to the basement now?"

"Not yet. Sit down and chat a while."

"Suppose the boss comes back and sees me perched here?"

"He wouldn't mind. Very democratic, I assure you."

"That so? Well, here's drinkin' to him. Takes a real gent to carry booze like this; what? But maybe I better finish this and get back downstairs. The old boy down there is scared stiff he won't get the place fixed up in time."

"Maybe you'd better," admitted William North, and Dickon started in alarm. Would he allow the fellow to escape? "Because," went on North, "if you stay away he's apt to speak sharply to you about it, eh?"

"Hey?" grunted Joe. "Speak to me? Call me down? Get this, bo; they don't none of them come any funny stuff with me. That sawed-off runt call me down?"

His laughter pealed.

"But," went on North, "you'll be apt to lose your day's pay."

"What do I care? Money is money, but whisky is out of that class these days."

There was another hurried rap at the door, and then a husky voice: "You, there; what's this about, sir?"

And Dickon knew that J. Gidding Plummer had come; and that his own time was arrived. He stood up, ready to enter at the most opportune moment.

"Can't a man rest?" said Joe, his voice already thickened by the whisky. "Do I got to work me soul away every minute?"

"You're needed badly downstairs," said Plummer after a moment, during which he was probably laboring to control himself.

"Easy, easy," said Joe. "There ain't any call for hurry. One job at a time is what I say. Finish one thing before you tackle another."

"Will you," said Plummer hotly, "suggest to him that you are finished with his services?"

"That, sir," said North, "had better come from Mr. Greene."

"It is he who rents this apartment now?"

"Yes, sir."

"May I see him at once?"

"I shall see if he is at leisure."

William North appeared at the library alcove and bent an inquisitive eye upon his third master; the latter brushed past him.

"You are he from whom we borrowed this man?" said Dickon.

"I must have him back," said J. Gidding Plummer. "I have already sent for him once." He was so angry that he began to ruffle his mustache under pretense of stroking it carelessly. It was a jet black mustache, as brilliant and living, it seemed, as the eyes of the sculptor, but his short, pointed beard and his flowing hair were a thick and dirty gray with tufts of pure white here and there. Altogether, it was a spectacular face with a muscular neck and shoulders below it, telling of many a year's labor with the heavy mallet.

"I appeal to your sense of humor," said Dickon. "How the devil can I live in this place without going distracted if those intolerable pictures are left on the walls?"

The sculptor opened his lips and raised his hand to say something violent, but controlled himself strongly.

"I am truly sorry," he said. "I suppose you may even have to carry the objectionable articles to the basement yourself."

The sarcasm apparently floated without harm past the head of Dickon; and he noted Joe covertly filling the pause with another glass of whisky.

"But," continued Plummer, "I most imperatively must have him now. My place is an inferno—a chaos, I assure you."

"Yet," pleaded Dickon, "you see what will be left on my hands if they aren't moved now?"

He stepped forward and pointed to the end of the table where the small casting and copies of statuary stood, plaster heads, plaques, ornaments, small bronzes.

" Can you imagine a life with these, sir?" said Dickon, and he invited an inspection with a gesture which terminated with his hand resting lightly on the head of " The Bronze Swordsman " itself.

The eye of J. Gidding Plummer followed that gesture with angry impatience, but in the end his glance also rested on the little copy of his work and remained there, fascinated.

" Ha!" muttered the sculptor.

" You see," said Dickon, " what's before me? Some people collect for the sake of number—for the sake of blindly gathering. For instance "—and here he raised " The Bronze Swordsman " in his hand—" why in the name of Heaven will a man buy such an atrocity as this?"

In the distance Dickon was aware of William North, agape; and though he seemed to be looking at the statuette and shaking his head commiseratingly, he was also conscious of the black frown that twitched across the forehead of the sculptor, though it was immediately banished again by a conscious effort. J. Gidding Plummer smiled benignly; he felt that he was about to secure an honest opinion from one who did not know him, and he bent upon Dickon a glance full of the hungry timidity of the artist.

" You find—that—particularly trying?" he asked, and striving to make his voice casual it became fluidly cold.

" Impossible," said Dickon, " as you will see if you have studied sculpture."

The ghost of a smile touched the lips of Plummer.

" The conception," went on Dickon glibly, " might make a very excellent black-and-white illustration, but as sculpture it is impossible. The swordsman is apparently Swiss—one of those medieval fellows from his enormous two-handed sword. He has just finished the stroke—see how his body lurches forward, following the sway of the heavy weapon? And he looks now to observe the effect of the blow. That carries one's eye out of the statue, out to the thing at which the swordsman stares. You agree?"

Plummer was studying his work with a frown.

" And yet," said Dickon, " I have heard it said that it is the work of Plummer." He replaced the bronze on the table. " Which shows how easily collectors are taken in."

" You are sure it is not by Plummer?" asked the sculptor. He searched the face of Dickon fearful lest he were being quizzed but Dickon was impervious.

" Certain," he answered.

" Well, sir, I am equally sure you are wrong."

" Tush!" smiled Dickon. " My dear fellow, I tell you it is impossible. I have seen the ' Portrait of a Girl,' its repose, its smile, its throat." He shook his head. " The same man cannot have done both things."

" Mr. Greene," said the other, " I must save us from mutual embarrassment. My name is Plummer."

" What!"

" Yes," smiled the sculptor.

" Not J. Gidding Plummer?"

" The same."

" My dear Mr. Plummer," said Dickon, taking the other's strong hand, " I'm delighted to meet you, and I'm equally sorry that it isn't under more auspicious circumstances."

" No more of that!" said J. Gidding Plummer heartily. " Shall I tell you the truth? I quite agree with you about The Swordsman. It is an early work."

" Ah, yes," said Dickon still, apparently, dubious.

" You must drop down to my studio and look over my things, if you're interested."

" A great privilege, sir. By the way "—he turned to Joe—" I am quite through with you. You will go back to Mr. Gidding?"

" I'll send him back as soon as I can to clear away The Swordsman and the rest of this mess."

" Mr. Gidding—" began Dickon, seemingly confused.

" Tut, tut! I understand perfectly; I'd leave him here now except that I'm rescuing my place from anarchy and trying to get it ready for a tea this afternoon. Perhaps you'll drop in?"

" Kind of you. Let me see—" And Dickon paused in thought.

"Or any other time you choose," Plummer assured him.

"I may manage it for a moment this afternoon," said Dickon.

So Plummer was gone, and Joe lumbered reluctantly in his rear with a parting glance for the whisky bottle.

CHAPTER XVI.

HE FIGHTS THE SECOND BATTLE.

IT was not until after the door closed on them that Dickon turned and surprised William North smiling, and though the smile was instantly banished Dickon chuckled openly.

"North," he said, "what a comfortable thing it is to have people smile *with* you instead of *at* you!"

Which brought from the valet a profound bow, and the bow fixed in Dickon's mind a new, important truth: William North had accepted him until this moment as his master by right of birth and nature, but now he was something more: the master by force of intellect. In the library alcove again he considered the past interview carefully, rehearsing it, and the more he brooded upon it the more satisfied he became that this insignificant meeting was really the first step upward in his social progress. The incident of 'The Bronze Swordsman' became a big thing—his entering wedge by which he should pierce the ranks. He felt, in short, as he used to feel in football when he had crashed through the solid line of the enemy and had the dangerous but half-open field before him requiring more speed and alertness than strength.

William North prepared luncheon in the kitchenette, which was a miracle of compacted serviceableness. However limited the cooking facilities, the table service was finely appointed, and Dickon found himself eating a delectably browned chop from a plate of transparent fragility, and the cup from which he drank William North's tea was a thing of grace. He had dined from good service before, but never with the same sense of possession, and once it came jarringly home to him: "What if I should be torn away from this, and from these prospects, and thrown back into the bank?" His face grew hard at the thought and his eyes glittered. He had a way of justifying himself for his plans and a way of believing that he would buy what he obtained in the future by address and keen wit; subconsciously he knew that there would still be a balance to pay, but he shrugged away the guilty thought. Perhaps that shrug was the first item in his payment as the old simple, warm-hearted Dickon Greene melted away or crystallized into a new being, hard-minded as a diamond point. After all, what harm had he done? The deception of J. Gidding Plummer was innocent enough, he assured himself, but behind his mind there was a knowledge that he had thrown away scruples and armed himself with indifference.

In the background moved William North softly. To him, apparently, there was no question of cunning subterfuge in the conversation between Dickon and the sculptor, for no doubt he accepted whatever the third master did as justifying itself. But Dickon knew that he had begun to build a wall of sham—that he must keep the valet away from a knowledge of his true self. He accepted even this burden calmly enough, confident of power of infinite dissimulation.

He pondered much over the hour when he could best appear at Plummer's tea, for above all, he did not wish to go early and stay late; yet if he did not do this he very probably would miss Mrs. Littleton, who was not apt to come for more than a few minutes in view of her social obligations of that evening. He concluded, finally, to post William North in a strategic position at a front window of the apartment from which he could sweep the pavement east and west and bring word when the social leader arrived. The time ran on to four—to half past four, and still there was no word from William North, and Dickon began to fear either that she had not been included in the invitations or that she did not intend to come, when the valet appeared, his long face flushed with excitement.

"She is here," he announced. Dickon sprang to his feet. "One moment, sir,"

went on North, producing from somewhere a clothes brush. "There is lint across your shoulders." He began to brush vigorously, and was panting when he stepped back. "Not the top button!" he warned, as Dickon fastened his coat. "It is already too tight across the back. A certain negligence is very desirable at such an affair as this, you know, sir."

"She'll be gone before I get there!" groaned Dickon. "Let me go, North!"

"The way of the tortoise is better, sir," said North with maddening deliberation. "Now turn about, slowly—slowly!"

And while the third master pivoted, North looked at him with the eye of a tailor.

"You have something too much in your inside breast pocket," he warned. Dickon produced a wallet, and the valet calmly appropriated it. "That's all, sir. You may go."

He entered the big studio perfectly calm, coldly self-confident. The sculptor met him at once, breaking away from a group to do so; he wore a blue coat, together with brown trousers, and the explanation of this strange appearance was not far to seek. In the corner stood a life-sized figure on a low, strong pedestal with the sculptor's ladder beside it. Around the pedestal lay chips of marble and a powdering of marble dust so profuse that it gave one a picture of the artist attacking the stone in divine fury and hewing away to the heart of his idea. What that idea might be was concealed by a cloth flung hastily over the statue—so carelessly, indeed, that from beneath one edge of the cloth a foot of heroic model appeared, roughly blocked out and full of the inspiration which makes quick sketches live. It seemed that Plummer had labored at his statue until the very moment of the tea and then seized the first coat he found and rushed into it. What mattered his appearance? The man lived, talked, appeared in his work; every one at the tea, sooner or later, picked up one of those marble chips and wondered at the address of the man who dared to strike so fiercely into his marble. What a miraculous sense of his line he must have, they muttered to each other, and when the guests departed it was found that they had taken most of the larger chips along with them. Small matter to J. Gidding Plummer; he had a bucket of chips from which he could have furnished forth a dozen teas larger than this. All of this Dickon perceived in two glances.

"I am sorry there are so many," he said as he shook the hand of the artist. "I had hoped to talk with you."

The sculptor glanced over the crowd. "He is estimating the number of prospective commissions," thought Dickon.

"We shall have our talk," nodded J. Gidding Plummer.

"Pardon me," smiled Dickon, "we could chatter, but we could not think."

The eyes of Plummer twinkled with a certain frankness that warmed the cold heart of Dickon Greene, for he felt that he was liked.

"Then tell me if you wish to meet any of these people—or do you know most of them already?"

"No introductions," answered Dickon, shaking his head. "I'm not in the mood for talking with strangers. Let me sit in a corner—with 'The Bronze Swordsman' perhaps."

The artist laughed with the utmost good nature, and noting from the corner of his eye that the group he had just left still held together and waited for his return with expectant looks, he felt that this was a tribute to his power and decided to linger another moment with his young guest.

"You are sure," he repeated, "that there is no one I can take you to?"

Silently Dickon cursed himself for not having secured from North a description of his social queen; here he stood in the robbers' cave surrounded by spoils beyond price, and yet he had not the single word which would open the door. He scanned the crowd with frantic haste, hunting for the least hint which might guide him aright.

"As a matter of fact," he said, "I never go about a great deal; not interested in chance meetings, but—" And in that instant pause his eyes noted a thousand details and his mind sorted them. He must point out some one, otherwise this occasion might well be barren of results. What he

saw first of all was that the heads of the people in the room were on the whole turned toward certain centers, just as iron filings group themselves around several magnets held under a piece of paper. In this case, each one of those centers might be either some artist of note or else a power of wealth or social standing. Plummer himself, for instance, was the center for the group which he had just left; in the corner sat a woman with a face that shelved out from the forehead to the chin and the unconcerned eyes of a man, and about her a small number hung on each of her few words; close to the statue a big man with fuzzy hair and a high collar talked with smiles and bright eyes, but what he said kept those near him exceedingly grave; near the fireplace, now screened with a brush of greenery, a woman of forty, perhaps, but with a beauty which defied time, held the largest number of all; and Dickon, as he swept the crowd with that first intense look decided that she must be Mrs. Littleton. He was, in fact, about to point her out to Plummer and request an introduction there, but he was held back by a small scruple of doubt. The beautiful woman by the greenery was distinguished, no doubt, both in looks and in standing of some sort, but she did not give Dickon the impression which he expected from Mrs. Littleton, who held, as it might be said she did, a social throne which no one but Mrs. Baldwin-Dexter really disputed. Aside from William North, he knew this from the newspapers and from rumor; Mrs. Littleton was a national figure. And for that reason Dickon cast another glance over the crowd. All this occupied only the split part of a second, and now he observed that aside from the four distinct centers of interest there was another point about which the whole room seemed to gravitate, much as a dozen solar systems swing in turn through a terrific orbit about some far-off, mysterious sun, unknown to man except by implication. In some such manner Dickon guessed at this fifth power, for now and again he noted that heads turned for a glance toward the farthest corner of the room—just a fleeting glance, no more. But the only woman in that corner was a drab figure with whom, at that instant, no one was speaking; indeed there was nothing to catch the eye except the utter pallor of the face, a sickly colorlessness, or when she turned her head, as she did at that moment, and one caught the delicately true line of her profile. It could not be Mrs. Littleton, but Dickon swiftly and coldly reasoned that it must be she. His deductions brought him straight to her and then stopped point-blank; she was either very great or else she was nothing at all.

"There is only one face in the room," he said to Plummer, "that really attracts me at the moment. Will you tell me the name of the drab little woman with the exquisite profile?" He nodded toward her.

In return the sculptor fixed him with a glance of bright suspicion; the suspicion cleared and left only open amusement. "The drab little woman?" he echoed, and laughed. "Mr. Greene, that's the second quotable remark you've made to-day to me. I'll do better than tell you her name. I'll introduce you."

He led the way, and when she looked up from her cup of tea Dickon saw the cause of that impression of extreme pallor. It lay in her lips, which had scarcely a vestige of color; but the moment he met her eyes he knew that his guess was correct. He hardly heard Plummer say, "Mrs. Littleton, this is a new friend and a very good friend of mine, Mr. Dickon Greene." She invited him to take a chair beside her with a smile that lighted her somber eyes and all her face; it was a change as sudden as when a man lights a cigarette at night and his features appear in the darkness. Plummer lingered near them for a moment.

"I haven't had an opportunity," he said, "to thank you for coming on a day when you have so many things to do."

"It's simply a chance of escape," she answered. "My ears have been ringing for a week with decorators and musicians, and I've studied the guest list until my eyes swim."

"Yes," sympathized the sculptor, "the musicians are impossible this year."

"Not half so bad as the entertainers," said Mrs. Littleton. "I'm running a continuous vaudeville bill, you know, near the ballroom, and I've been bowing steadily to

the numerous kings and queens of the footlights."

"There is only one way to avoid the difficulty," said Plummer, "and that's to talk their language."

"And unfortunately I've never studied a dictionary of slang. Besides, they're fearfully jealous."

The sculptor chuckled. "I know. If you ask a star to appear in a list of mediocrities he says he will not associate with a crowd of 'ham-and' artists; and if you try to place him with other stars he is afraid that they'll steal his thunder."

Mrs. Littleton smiled; she was generally so unexpressive in her face that the faintest smile was equal to laughter in another.

"Melor, the lightning cartoonist," she said, "agreed to work for me because he knew that I was trying to get Smithson, the shadow-man; but when Smithson found out that I was going to have Melor he refused to come; then Melor declined because he would have no opportunity to outshine Smithson. And there I was. All I have is a list of mediocrities—positive sleep-producers, Mr. Plummer. The stars give one glance to that array and take no pains to conceal their scorn for me and my ball."

"I wonder," suggested Dickon Greene as Plummer moved away, "if I can help you?"

"I'm almost past hope," she said, and turned toward him slightly; he found her eyes fascinating with the purple, faint shadows beneath and a particularly pleasing sense of receptivity in them. Dickon began to understand why Mrs. Littleton was a social power; her very distress, with only slightest variations of voice and expression, gave an effect of infinite reserve powers. He knew at once that she could talk to a circle and make each man in it feel that she was addressing herself particularly to him above the rest. "Do you know a great many actors?" she was asking, and he read, in spite of her skill, the careless question behind her eyes. He was so insignificant that she hardly took pains to conceal her thoughts. Was he a member of the sporting world? Was he some social sponger? Dickon regretted intensely that he had forced the conversation to a point and resolved in future to take lesson by this example and make his point after a casual opening. It might not be too late to remedy the fault and convince her that he was not simply struggling to curry favor.

"I know very few," he said, and allowing his glance to wander from her for an instant, he smiled at an imaginary jest across the room. "But if I can be of assistance you will call on me, Mrs. Littleton?"

"Thank you," she said carelessly, and then looked at him again; something seemed to catch her eye in that second glance. She had dropped the subject of the entertainers for her ball definitely, but the second thought—or else her real worry about the vaudeville show—made her revert to it an instant later. "I've tried to negotiate with Mme. de Barré," she added, "and Gertrude White, the dancer; the Sanger Sisters would hardly receive me." She chuckled at something she remembered in that interview. "You see, I've been so worried that I've gone about myself almost tapping at stage doors."

In his desire to seem amiable, it was Dickon's first impulse to seem cordially astonished that she should have gone so far in person. He checked that first impulse, for he was beginning to be able to think twice.

"Amusing, I imagine," he said indifferently. He added: "Have you tried Wilbur, the violinist?"

"I did; he sent me a typewritten answer signed by his secretary." Again she smiled; Dickon felt that a door had been opened to him.

"Marie Guilbert?" he suggested.

"Marie Guilbert!" echoed Mrs. Littleton, and she looked curiously to Dickon; really, as if a veil had been brushed from before her eyes and she were seeing him for the first time. It might have angered him had he not been so coldly filled with his purpose. "If you know her," said Mrs. Littleton, "you surely understand that she never appears in private houses. A point of professional pride with her, I believe."

"Really?"

"Oh, yes. Anything above Fifty-Ninth Street is slumming for Marie Guilbert. Mrs. Baldwin-Dexter tried to get her for her reception last month." A new light

came into Mrs. Littleton's eyes—a light of chilly satisfaction. "I believe she offered Marie Guilbert a fabulous sum; however, the girl did not appear. No one could blame her for trying," added Mrs. Littleton, as if fearing she had gone too far. "Of course Marie Guilbert would be a sensational effect—her dancing and her voice. If I could get her—" She made a little gesture, one of those graceful, careless motions which only women with lovely hands know how to manage. "People would forgive the stupidity of the rest of my entertainers."

"I suppose so," nodded Dickon. "That funereal gentleman wishes to speak to you, I believe. Shall I go away?"

A tall, spare man buttoned into a long black coat approached them with a girl on his arm.

"It's Ezra Boone, the poet," answered Mrs. Littleton, flashing a glance at Dickon. "And please stay here with me."

The poet arrived and bowed in a sort of jointed fashion.

"Mrs. Littleton," he said in a nasal voice, "I have the honor to present to you Miss Irene Sommers. Miss Sommers, Mrs. Littleton."

Miss Sommers bowed; her high color of the moment before faded away to two artificial spots, one in either cheek, and she looked at Mrs. Littleton with such narrowed eyes that Dickon knew her heart was in her throat. As he stood up for his own introduction he watched her curiously and understood at a glance that the girl had ambitions of a sort which the social dictator could ban with a glance or make with a single phrase accomplished realities. The crisis continued only an instant, and then the glance of Mrs. Littleton swept over the girl and turned upon Ezra Boone with some word about a mask he had recently presented in an open air theater. It all passed in an instant, but Dickon knew that the girl was damned to outer darkness; she went on with Ezra Boone, and Dickon resumed his chair, studying the bowed shoulders of Miss Sommers in the distance.

"But," said Mrs. Littleton, coming back to their broken conversation promptly, "do you know Miss Guilbert? I've always been intensely curious about that girl; she has a touch of emotion, a glimpse of the grand manner even in some of her slangy monologues, you know."

"I've never seen her on the stage," said Dickon. He added without enthusiasm: "I'll speak to her about coming to your ball, if you wish."

There was no question about the enthusiasm of Mrs. Littleton. But a burst of uproar and laughter from the nearest group, drowning all possibility of talk for an instant, Dickon turned his head toward them. He knew that Mrs. Littleton wanted an unguarded moment to look at him, and he afforded her a perfect opportunity; when he turned back he saw that her mind was made up about him. Just as he had known at a glance that Miss Sommers was banished into oblivion he understood now that he was at least tentatively accepted.

"Will you do more than that?" she asked him. "Will you bring Miss Guilbert?"

"Thank you," said Dickon. "It's tonight, isn't it? Yes, I can come."

"Of course she can name her own price."

"I beg your pardon," said Dickon, "she would not come as a business stroke, I'm afraid."

"Oh!" said Mrs. Littleton, and her brows raised a bewildered trifle; she did not know whether she should place Dickon as a personal friend, a professional admirer, a patron, or a chance acquaintance of Marie Guilbert, and consequently she could not give her own words the exactly correct pitch.

"Odd, isn't it?" said Dickon, and set Mrs. Littleton at ease instantly with that phrase. To a certain extent he might be sacrificing Marie Guilbert with those careless words and making her seem merely a freakish member of her profession, but it established a perfect entente between Mrs. Littleton and himself. She no longer watched him with instinctive caution, but with a quick softening of voice and eye she began to accept him. That was the moment Dickon chose for leaving before that thawing process might be stopped and frozen by some wrong word.

"Some ugly looks have come my way," he said, rising. "I fear that I've monopolized you, Mrs. Littleton."

"You've given me great hopes, Mr.

Greene," she answered, "and I really expect that you'll accomplish the miracle and bring me Marie Guilbert to-night."

Crossing the room Dickon saw that he was being noted on every hand; in fact, that he had talked with Mrs. Littleton too long not to be observed. Miss Sommers, as he passed, favored him with an open smile of invitation, but Dickon went coldly on. He could not afford to blur his success by taking up the battles of the defeated, and now he drew Plummer aside from a group.

"A charming party," murmured Dickon, "but you see there is no opportunity for us to chat. You will let me see you again, sir?"

"I look forward to it. Good-by, Mr. Greene."

"Au revoir."

When the door closed behind him, shutting the rush of voices to a distant humming sound, Dickon leaned his shoulders against the wall, tilted back his head, and laughed long and silently; out of his exultation a thin, shrill cry formed in his throat and vibrated against his teeth. He kept it back; if it had come out it would have been a shout like the "good hunting" of a warrior on the back trail and by restraining the cry an overflow of happiness appeared in his face when he entered his own apartment. As if he had been summoned by the soft click of the latch William North appeared at the other end of the room.

"I have met the enemy," said Dickon, "and the battle is on."

"It is half won, sir," said North, "if you were successful in the beginning."

"With ordinary people, yes," said Dickon. "But not with Mrs. Littleton. She is certainly a woman of wonderful resource, North; she looks into the marrow of men and events, and so far I have only tickled her curiosity. No, the struggle is hardly begun. She must be conquered, her scruples put to sleep, her whole energies brought over to our side, and to-night will tell the tale. I am going to the ball at the Clermont. Get out my dress clothes, if you please; ring up Marie Guilbert's theater and find out when she will be through with her act. In the meantime—"

Pausing for breath, he gave William North an opportunity to murmur: "It is the crisis, then?"

"It is."

"May I make a suggestion, sir?"

"Of course."

"In crises, sir, it was the habit of Mr. Devening to retire and sleep soundly until the very moment for action."

Something snapped in the brain of Dickon Greene and he became aware of a great weariness; ever since the morning his nerves had been tuned to the breaking point; the interviews with Plummer and then with Mrs. Littleton had sapped his strength.

"North," he said, "you're always right. I'm going to sleep."

CHAPTER XVII.

INTERNATIONAL LAW.

IT was nine o'clock before Dickon awoke with the hand of North on his shoulder and the sound of water running in the bathroom in his ear; then a cold tub, a quick supper, a glass of wine, filled him with morning freshness—all that zest which generally comes only when the air is chilled with dew and a sea wind whips the blood into the face. He felt these things while he slipped into the clothes which were so accurately laid out by North; and while he ate cold, thinly sliced chicken, dry as bread, and sipped a glass of cherry-red wine. About him drifted North, no more obtrusive than a shadow. The only things about the valet which were real were his hands, pale, well-kept, precise, which removed dishes from the table and set others before him soundlessly. One gesture of those marvelous hands brushed the rough edges away from life. When he rose from the table he stood under a bright wall light and turned slowly about while North looked him over for the last time. His collar seemed to worry North slightly—it seemed a little too tight for comfort—and something had to be done to the wings, some small bend which made the collar perfect. His trousers, too, were too short to please North. He stood off at a distance and frowned critically while Dickon loos-

ened the suspenders a hairbreadth at a time. And at last, satisfied, North brought out the overcoat and slipped it over Dickon's shoulders after he had arranged the neckcloth; then his gloves; then his hat.

"The stick!" cried North suddenly, and glanced around him like one lost.

"I never use a cane."

"It is not too late to remedy that slackness."

"Too late, North. I haven't a sign of a cane."

The valet waved his hands and brought them together in resignation.

"I would have answered for you, sir, a moment ago. But without a stick—" He shook his head.

"After all, North, you must admit that canes are distinctly un-American."

"Sir?" gasped North.

"A European habit. Besides, what earthly use is there in them? I still have a moment to spare. Tell me in a word."

He found an eye of cold displeasure fixed upon him.

"Sir, I cannot attempt to dismiss such a subject in this summary fashion."

The exuberance of his good spirits carried Dickon blindly past the danger signal.

"Personally, North, I think canes are a damned silly affectation."

"Ah?"

"You don't agree?"

"You cannot expect me to enter upon the philosophy of canes extempore, sir."

"But the basis of the philosophy; the germ of the great idea, North?"

"In walking, sir, the best gloved hands are objectionable. Their swinging seems idle and purposeless; they are in themselves strong and they should be occupied. 'I prefer,' said Anthony Caswell on one memorable occasion, 'a man who stutters to a man without a cane.'"

"H-m!" said Dickon.

"Whereas," said North, relaxing his severity when he saw that the third master was no longer flippant, "a cane swung well, but not too forcibly, gives occupation to the clumsy hands; also, and this is not the least important feature they accent a proper step."

It occurred to Dickon that if he smiled he would fall an irrecoverable distance in the esteem of North; instead, he frowned with attention.

"And when a man stands still," went on North, bringing his argument to a close of crushing strength, "his hands become positively ludicrous. I remember in all my life only one man, the late Geoffrey Gall, who could stand still and manage his hands so that they became something less than dangling encumbrances."

"It becomes an art," said Dickon gravely.

"In a month, sir, you may master the rudiments of the use of a cane; properly, one must be born to it. But," he added as an afterthought, "if you do not intend to walk to Miss Guilbert's house, it will be quite excusable to appear without a stick."

"Then," said Dickon, "I shall by all means take a taxicab."

But once upon the street he dismissed the thought of William North and turned down the pavement at a sharp pace, hurrying north. It was a twenty-five block walk, but that was nothing for the swift, effortless stride of Dickon; besides, the time required for the walk would bring him to Marie Guilbert's apartment at the correct hour. She would be back from the theater in all probability; if he could persuade her to go with him to Mrs. Littleton's ball they would arrive there at the most effective hour—just when the hostess was abandoning all hope of their appearance, in fact, Really, Dickon had small hope of bringing Marie Guilbert—it was presuming too much upon the strength of their single meeting; but even without her he could go to Mrs. Littleton, express his regrets, and probably be bidden to stay with her. Oddly enough, he saw Mrs. Littleton's colorless face against the background of Marie Guilbert; two extremes.

So in time he reached the apartment, and pausing before he entered he allowed his glance to wander up and down to the softly humming drift of automobiles along the pavement and to the stars above, very faint through the glow of the city. It was the first time in months—years, almost—since he had noticed the stars. The tops of the

skyscrapers generally shut them out quite effectively.

He gave his name to the hall man, and the latter paused with his hand on the telephone to glance Dickon over thoroughly.

"Most of them that was announced to-night," he said, "ain't been invited up; them that just went up and rang the bell has had better luck."

"Ah! Miss Guilbert is ill?"

"Grouchy—that's all," replied the other. "In the profession," he added with another careful look at Dickon, "you know how they are?"

"Thank you," said Dickon; "then I'll go up without being announced."

He extended such a handsome tip that the hall man accompanied him to the elevator and rang the bell for him.

"Temperament, you know!" said the man in livery. "Something went wrong at the show, and now they come to sit around and mourn with her."

It gave Dickon something to think of on the way up in the elevator. At the door of her apartment he stood for a moment and listened shamelessly—there was not a sound, except for the soft tinkle of a piano. The door was opened by a maid.

"Another!" she said gloomily.

"Will you announce me to Miss Guilbert?" said Dickon, giving her his card.

She glanced at it and shook her head. "It ain't any use, Mr. Greene. D'you know who was here last? Ham Bellamy! And she turned him away from the door!"

"But she must be receiving some people; I hear the piano."

"The bunch that's here are in Dutch and they'll find it out pretty quick. Take it from me. If you're a friend of Miss Guilbert, beat it and come back another day."

"But another day won't serve. I must see her to-night."

She turned with a look of relief.

"Here's Mr. Sparini. He'll let you know."

The manager in person had come to meet the latest arrival, and the maid gave him the card.

"He says it's important," she explained. "He's got to see her."

But the eye of Sparini was not for the card, which he crumpled carefully between his fingers, but for the face of Dickon Greene.

"You!" he said melodramatically. "Leave me alone with him, Céleste. Step in, sir!"

Céleste retreated through an inner door which she closed after her in a manner that plainly told Dickon she would listen at the keyhole. He found himself facing the Italian in a little reception hall. The handsome face of Sparini was growing momentarily paler and his black eyes glittered with anger.

"It is impossible for Miss Guilbert to see you," he began.

"Pardon me, but you must be wrong. I'm sure she doesn't even know that I'm here."

"It is unnecessary; besides, when I have spoken to you I think you will see a point in leaving at once!"

His control departed, and the last two words rang. Dickon thought first of the face of Céleste listening at the door, and his hand contracted to a fist; but he remembered secondly that he was the third master of William North and he made himself smile straight into the eyes of Sparini.

"I shall listen," he said.

"Thank you. In my country, sir, even a gentleman may be guilty of a faux pas, but he will invariably acknowledge it later and give a satisfactory explanation."

"That will pass, I think, for an international law."

"Then I am waiting."

"Yes?"

"For an explanation of your inexpressible conduct at Silverman's, sir!"

"I beg your pardon."

A large vein stood out on the temple of Sparini's forehead, and Dickon, with a cold eye, watched its pulsation.

"It is too much!" broke out Sparini, and then, as if to make doubly sure before he proceeded to an extremity: "Your remarkable conduct in taking Miss Guilbert from Silverman's without a word to her escort of the evening! Will your answer me, Mr. Greene?"

He rolled his "r's" in a manner that made Dickon wish to smile, and on second

thought he obeyed the impulse. It drove Sparini to a silent frenzy.

"I fail to follow you," murmured Dickon. "In my country, Signor Sparini, a gentleman does not mention such a place as Silverman's except in given moments. Certainly a lady cannot often be seen at Silverman's, and I am sure that Miss Guilbert could not have been there."

"Is it possible?" stammered the manager. "Is it possible? You deny that she was there?"

"Certainly, unless she was misinformed as to the character of the house—grossly misinformed by her escort, sir."

And as Sparini gaped he added quietly: "And certainly Signor Sparini could not have been guilty of such an atrocity."

"God of my fathers!" moaned Sparini in swift Italian. "I am insulted!"

"No," said Dickon, "you are merely informed of something which may not be an international law." He let all his coldness creep into his voice, for as the talk went on he had been growing steadily more and more angered. "But in my country, signor, the code is fixed, absolutely." He made himself smile again. "I suggest that you remember it!"

He stepped past the Italian and opened the inner door suddenly. Céleste nearly stumbled upon him.

"You have probably heard Signor Sparini say that he thinks Miss Guilbert will see me. Will you announce Dickon Greene to your mistress?"

He was aware of a faint spluttering sound behind him, then of a flash in the eyes of Céleste. She vanished through an opposite curtain.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE THIRD BATTLE.

DICKON closed the door behind him, shutting out the bewildered murmur of Anton Sparini, and looked about him. From the Dutch sideboard in the corner and the long, narrow refectory table at one side of the room he was apparently in a dining alcove, and stiffly ranged by the wall stood chairs with narrow, rigid backs and a sort of prim personality lingering about them. It astonished him to find such a room belonging to Marie Guilbert—he was rather prepared for chintz, very gay, or plush, and odd splashes of color here and there, half artistic, half barbaric. Here a draft waved aside the curtain through which Céleste had disappeared, and the tapestry was held back by the current of air as if by a hand; it allowed him to look into the living room of the apartment, a spacious room with a low ceiling, which made its dimensions seem yet more commodious. Shadows possessed most of the room, and the one glow of light fell upon a gay mingling of green and gold and blue and crimson—Marie Guilbert, lying on a couch in a Japanese kimono. Her head was turned and his heart leaped as his glance ran over the clear, sure lines of her profile. She was very lovely, very pale—her eyes were closed, and the great lashes marked a definite shadow on her cheek. The light came from behind her, leaving the face comparatively dim, but it struck white and dazzling against the arm which supported her head and from which the loose sleeve of the kimono fell back. Céleste hesitated beside her mistress, fearful, perhaps, lest Marie Guilbert slept; and from behind another curtain came the piano music, softened, a slow, sad rhythm. There were others in the room—a woman with her back turned to Dickon, the smoke from her cigarette appearing to twist up out of her hair—and men, three, four in sight, and all facing toward the mistress of the house. It impressed Dickon like some dolorous wake, all these come to sit beside the beautiful corpse. There was not a word spoken; the music became ghostly.

The lips of Marie parted.

"Bert!" she called.

The music went on, but a voice from behind the curtain answered, "Yes?"

"Choke that, will you?"

The piano was still, and Bert appeared at the parting of the curtain, a smooth-faced youth with very black, glistening hair slicked straight back from a low forehead.

"Why, Marie," he complained, "that's that swell thing by Yid Kauffman. You used to be crazy about it!"

She deigned no answer; she did not even open her eyes, but disengaging her hand from beneath her head she held forth a slender, languorous arm.

"Smoke!" commanded Marie.

Four men rose from their chairs in shadowy haste, and rushed to her; a moment later they fell back as the lucky one lighted her long Russian cigarette.

"Wait till I'm a stiff, Bert," she said, still without opening her eyes, "before you play my death march, will you?"

"All right," whined Bert. "If Yid Kauffman ain't good enough for you, pass me up!"

Céleste chose this moment to lean and whisper at the ear of the mistress.

"Tell him to beat it," sighed Marie. "We're crowded now. If he won't go, tell the boys to throw him out."

The heads of the men turned hastily toward the door, smiling, but the smiles died away when they saw the big shoulders of Dickon standing framed in it. Céleste leaned and murmured again. Whatever she said it brought Marie Guilbert suddenly to a sitting posture. In a flash she was standing with her kimono caught across her breast with one hand and her dark eyes—wide as though with fear—fixed upon Dickon.

"You!" she breathed.

He bowed, and when he looked up the long cigarette smoked idly on a Persian ash tray of enameled bronze and with one raised hand she was sweeping her hair into shape. She sent a covert glance at the others in the room; they were all standing as if they expected an order. Then she laughed without obvious effort, and came to him with the kimono masking her steps and whispering and rustling over the rug. She took his hand.

"Will you believe that I've forgotten you were to come, Dickon?" she said.

It took the breath of Dickon Greene, but he had discovered a moment past in talking with Sparini that if one looks squarely into the eyes of another one's composure is based as upon adamant. So he looked quietly into the eyes of Marie Guilbert, and though he had a foolish desire to smile, remembering the soft pressure of her hand, remembering that she had just called him by his first name, he repressed that desire.

"You've been in trouble," he said, "and that's why you've forgotten this is my night. It's quite all right—Marie."

A slight widening and contraction of her eye as he spoke the familiar title, but that was all. For some reason she wished to appear in terms of old intimacy with him.

"Trouble?" she echoed. "They've got a stage manager at the theater who's the closest thing to the missing link that ever climbed a tree or balled an act. He put on the Lewis Brothers juggling cannon balls without a mat on the stage and after they've beaten it to a pulp he sends me out to dance on a floor covered with splinters. Can you beat that? You can't!"

There was a step behind Dickon, and the girl turned a little.

"You should have had your eyes open, Sparini!" she cried. "Didn't you see there was no carpet rolled down on the stage for me?" An inarticulate rumble answered her. "Anyway," she went on to Dickon, "right in the middle of a number when I was turning some fancy stuff with a long satin train—when I have the audience in my hand, see"—she made a sweeping gesture, that somehow called up in Dickon's mind the picture of a vast crowd beyond the footlights following the sway of the dance with eyes and nodding heads—"right in the middle of it I do a pirouette and—*bingo!*—the train caught on a splinter on the stage—there's a rip that cuts the train away and tears off the dress to my knees and a jerk that sends me sprawling head over heels. Don't laugh!"

She paused in the midst of her swift narration and her eyes blazed at Dickon; it was a threat as strong as if she had raised her hand, but Dickon, carefully, slowly, made a smile appear on his face and grow there. She stared at him as if her breath were taken by his temerity; behind her he caught a glimpse of the amazed faces of her companions, and still he smiled, while her anger swelled and ebbed. Suddenly her eyes grew friendly, though she was still flushed.

"They laughed at me; they shrieked;

the galleries were whistling—at me!" She caught her face between her hands and shuddered in an agony of memory. "It was your fault!" she cried, whirling upon Anton Sparini. "You saw there was no rug on the stage. You shouldn't have let me go on. You made a fool of me—a fool! I never want to see you again—never!"

"Marie!" whispered Sparini with chalky face.

"I'm done with you. That's plain, isn't it?"

He threw out his arms in a gesture of imploring, but she turned her back on him. And while Dickon watched the anguish of Sparini with deep enjoyment he remembered once more that he was the master of William North, and instead of smiling at the humiliation of the Italian, he looked away; he studied something vague upon the wall. A moment later the manager was gone and not until then did Marie turn.

"Trouble?" she repeated to Dickon, almost as if he also were to blame. "First, half New York laughs at me, and then I break with Sparini. That's enough for one night, I guess!"

"As for New York," said Dickon, "I suppose there are some six millions who will never hear what has happened to-night; as for Signor Sparini, I think a word will bring him back." He observed a slight movement of the curtain through which the Italian had just left. "I'll go call him back," said Dickon.

"No! No!" she protested.

But Dickon Greene had already reached the curtain with a few noiseless steps and now he swept it aside and revealed Sparini standing there, his face intent with listening. There was a strangled cry of shame and anger from the manager, and then he whirled and fairly fled from the apartment.

"Shall I follow him and ask him back?" said Dickon, turning to the girl. He found her sitting on the couch wrapped in her arms and rocking back and forth in an ecstacy of mirth.

"Let him go! Let him go!" she cried. "Sparini listening behind the curtain!" Her laughter broke out again, but presently she stood up. "Thank you for coming—every one. Do you know Mr. Dickon Greene? Bud Langer; Harry Fortesque; Bert Mills; Rudy Montgomery — and — Bess, excuse me—Miss Elizabeth Anderson."

They greeted Dickon with the ease of those who have been presented to countless thousands, and Elizabeth Anderson with a careful stage smile.

"I should have told you that he was coming for me," Marie was explaining by way of hurrying the others off. "That shows how fussed I've been. Run in again —thanks for coming—Bud, I'll run through that Two-in-One with you any time you say—Bert, I've been a terrible grouch, but you'll forgive me like a good pal—so-long, everybody!"

They were off in a babel of voices and then she turned back to Dickon, flushed and excited.

"Sparini will never forgive you—but, oh, it was worth while! Now, what is it, Mr. Greene?"

He could not help admiring her swift change of tone. A moment ago she had treated him like any other one of the group, but now she introduced a subtle formality. The very way she gathered the kimono about her as she sat down placed him at a little greater distance.

"I wish you would go on acting," he said frankly.

"Yes?"

"You see, I like the other way better; it made me feel as if I were one of you—as if I'd known you a long time. Do you mind?"

"Not a bit! I was so glad to see you that I wanted to sing; it gave me a chance to get rid of those croakers. They were all up here trying to make me break down. Dead silence, soft lights—all that sort of thing. Quiet music, and every once in a while Bess dropped a word about how awful it had been. She pitied me, she did—the cat! It was getting on my nerves; I wanted to jump up and shriek; and then you came. But go ahead; what's up?"

"You said I might call."

She studied him shrewdly.

"It's more than that. You'd have sent word beforehand if it was only a call."

"As a matter of fact, I would have had myself announced from below, but the hall-

man said that he would close the door in my face."

"H-m! I'll see him later on."

"I've come to ask you for a favor—a big one."

She nodded. "You have something big coming. I'll promise you before I hear it."

"Don't. You may not like it. A friend of mine is giving a ball at the Clermont—"

"Mrs. Littleton. I know; she sent to me for an act."

"And you refused?"

Marie Guilbert chuckled. "I'll tell the world I refused! They pay big for entertainment, but they get the whole price out of you. Put you on exhibition along with the ten-thousand-dollar vases and the crystal chandeliers and the old masters on the wall. They have you tagged the minute you step into the ballroom. 'This is Gloria de Bink, the well-known star; I pay her a thousand bucks for appearing here, but nothing is too good for me. By the way, have you noticed the Japanese goldfishes in that bowl?'"

She lowered her voice to a throaty smoothness as she spoke the last, and froze her whole manner into an affected dignity.

"Not for me, Dickon Greene! Ask me to do number one on the small time, and I'm yours without a wink; or I'll do a buck-and-wing on Park Row; but not a song and fancy dance at Mrs. Littleton's ball! The kale looks good to me, but not that sort of coin!"

"Exactly," nodded Dickon. "I guessed that, and I told Mrs. Littleton that you wouldn't come for money."

"You said that?" She was obviously pleased.

"But I presumed on our one meeting, and told her you are my friend and that I'd ask you to do it in friendship."

"You didn't presume. I hope we are friends. You've come clean with me and I don't forget it." He was astonished to see her bite her lips and redden. "About Silverman's," she said uneasily. "I want to explain—"

"Please don't. It was a lark to go there, wasn't it?"

"I loved every minute of it," she said honestly. "But after you spoke to me"—she hesitated—"I saw things in a different way. You know how a nifty front puts over a bum show? It was that sort of thing that put over Silverman's with me—and, it's the first time I've ever gone there!"

She sighed with relief as she finished her little speech and her eye dared him to doubt a word of it.

"Do you know," he smiled, "that I've never known a girl who didn't like to dip into the slums now and then and take a look at things? Just a spice of difference and danger, you know! But about Mrs. Littleton's affair, I'm sorry you won't go to it."

"If you really want me to go—" she said suddenly, and paused. He could see that she was checking a strong impulse to commit herself at once.

"I won't press you a step," said Dickon. "I didn't understand your attitude, that's all. I thought it would amuse you, but if it's irritating we'll drop it at once."

"Amusing?" she echoed. "Amusing in a crowd like that? The men have a way of looking at you as if your gown were cut too low, and the girls make remarks that just carry to your ears. Nice remarks—the sort of things they say about horses and dogs they admire!"

"Of course they're terribly envious," said Dickon. "Perhaps you don't know how much time they spend learning how to stand up and sit down and walk across the room and do all sorts of things that come like second nature to a stage artist who is anything. And when they see a girl like you they eat their hearts out. As a matter of fact, I thought that was the very thing which would amuse you!"

"Look me straight in the eye, Dickon Greene!"

He obeyed.

"You make me feel as though you were winding me around your finger," she said thoughtfully, "but I guess you're not." She continued to study him with a growing smile. "And even if you are, I like it. I'm going to the ball!"

She sprang up. "Five minutes to dress," she cried, and sweeping through the door she was calling: "Céleste! Céleste! The

orchid-colored dress! Where are you, Céleste? Hurry, stupid!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE PRETTIEST GIRL IN NEW YORK.

SHE came out well within her five minutes, a miracle of speed such as only an actress could achieve with a perfectly trained maid, and Dickon saw her wearing a wine-red wrap furred softly about the throat and shoulders with a great pyramid of gray stuff. He stood up, and as in the old days, he was about to mutter some commonplace and start with her for the door; that would have been his way, and now Dickon deliberately, coolly faced her and let his inner delight break out.

"By Heavens!" said Dickon. "You're lovely, wonderful!"

What a flash of happiness came over her!

"Thanks!" she whispered, and catching her own image in a long mirror, she pirouted, laughing. "Not bad; you won't be ashamed of me to-night. Hurry. We'll be too late!"

Céleste, with eyes as large as moons, opened the door before them, and as Dickon stepped through she whispered guardedly: "M'sieur, you are magic!"

"Magic," repeated Dickon inwardly as she took his arm in the elevator. "Black magic!" For he felt that to-night, at least, he had a power over this girl. She moved under his dominance; he could make her grave, or happy, or mocking at will. It was a thrilling new thing for Dickon. To be rich was exciting, to be famous was glorious, but neither could give this peculiar intoxication of stepping into the personality of another and holding it at beck and nod.

The sky had clouded swiftly while he was in the apartment house and a sudden shower had drenched the city, so that now they swept in the taxicab over flashing streets.

"You are happy, Marie?"

"I've forgotten that there's a trouble in the world!"

She had accepted the familiar name without a stir of protest, quite as a matter of course.

"What's wrong?" she asked a moment later, laying her hand on his arm.

"Nothing."

"Tush! Your face was black just now."

"I was thinking of a rather disagreeable duty."

It was Cynthia Rainey who had cropped into his mind out of nowhere, and behind her the figure of William North, grown ominously dominant. A duty to be done; it was impossible, somehow, to imagine a life without William North, and it was equally impossible to imagine William North without money. Absurdly enough, he felt that he was plunging toward a marriage of convenience for the sake of his valet. If not Cynthia, then some one else. He was still gloomy and silent when they reached the Hotel Clermont, and Marie Guilbert watched him in concern.

When they had left their wraps they learned that the hostess was in the ballroom, and they went straight for her. It was a huge place in white and gold, with vast chandeliers of crystal cascading down from the ceiling; Corinthian columns at one end of the room supported an arcade screened with greenery where the orchestra sat; and behind another arcade of similar design at the opposite end of the apartment was the gallery for those who wished to look on without dancing, lounging chairs, and card tables for the elders. The floor was swarming with a dance when they entered, but in a corner of the great room Dickon saw the colorless face of Mrs. Littleton. She disengaged herself from her group and came straight toward them.

"Miss Guilbert," she said as Dickon presented them to each other, "you will save me. Do you know that for two hours I've been praying for you or for the end of the dance? My entertainment is atrocious, positively! Come and see the crowd in the next room."

She led them into a smaller adjoining apartment and in it they were met by the music of a new orchestra, smaller than the main one for the dance. A stage had been improvised at one end of the place, and scores of chairs placed before it; but to enjoy the "Black-face" act which was then being presented there were not half a dozen

people in the room. The small size of the crowd reacted on those on the stage, and they dragged monotonously through their parts.

"You see," said Mrs. Littleton in a whisper, "it's a tragedy. People are laughing at me for it!"

A pudgy little man came up to them, perspiring with anxiety.

"Awful, isn't it?" he gasped to Mrs. Littleton.

"Words don't fit the case. Mr. Jackson, this is Marie Guilbert. Will you see that she has everything she needs?"

"I don't need a thing," said Marie. "I can go on behind those footlights without make-up. What shall I do, Mrs. Littleton?"

"Something quickly!"

"I'll go on as soon as their turn is done, if I may," laughed Marie Guilbert. "Mr. Jackson, will you show me up behind stage?"

"Where shall I stay to run errands and be handy man?" asked Dickon at her ear.

"Don't come near me," she whispered in return. "I won't be fit to speak to until this place is jammed with an audience. Good-by till the very end of the ball."

"No matter what she wants," sighed Mrs. Littleton, turning away with Dickon, "I'm glad to have her. Dickon Greene, you've rescued me and I'm grateful from my heart."

"She won't take money. I think I told you that before."

"Seriously she won't? That piles my debt to you a little higher, then." She broke off easily as a group swept up close to her. "When is Marie Guilbert going on?" she asked Dickon in a voice which was a little more distinct than was absolutely necessary.

"Almost at once," he answered gravely.

"Did you say Marie Guilbert?" cried some one of the newcomers.

"Mrs. Baldwin-Dexter, this is Mr. Dickon Greene. Yes, she is about to go on for a few turns."

Mrs. Baldwin-Dexter was a willowy brunette, high-colored, and her years showed in nothing except the unfortunate sharpening of her nose.

"You lucky girl!" she cried. "You *lucky* girl! How do you do, Mr. Greene?"

"It's entirely due to Mr. Greene," said the hostess. "He persuaded her to come—slumming away from the theater district."

"Ah?" said her somber rival. She had brushed Dickon by with a glance a moment before, but now she turned and smiled at him and he knew that he was indelibly fixed in her memory. A murmur had run through the rest of the little crowd; there was a swift drift of people toward the entertainment room and Mrs. Baldwin-Dexter joined the swirl.

"Look!" cried Mrs. Littleton. "Look! Didn't I tell you I was saved?" She explained rather breathlessly: "It was the one great flaw, you see!" She seemed to have taken Dickon into her confidence, and now as he watched her eyes brighten her whole body relaxed, and Dickon guessed at many things. She stood at the top of the social whirl, perhaps, with only Mrs. Baldwin-Dexter and a few others to rival her, but every day of her preëminence was precariously maintained. One social blunder, one black mark against her, and she would slip from her place, she to whom second place was as nothing. He understood why she smiled so openly at him; at that moment she was consumed with gratitude.

"Tell me some return I can make."

"A very simple one," said Dickon.

"Well?"

"I understand that the prettiest girl in New York is here to-night."

"The prettiest girl? Perhaps!"

"Will you introduce me to her? Cynthia Rainey?"

"Cynthia Rainey?" she echoed, and looked at him in bewilderment. "You know," she confessed, "that there's such a host here that I don't know half of them except to nod at the right time. Who is she?"

"I've only heard her mentioned once; but don't bother about it."

"But the prettiest girl in New York!" breathed Mrs. Littleton. "I want to know for my own pleasure. Elizabeth Gilder, some say; but Cynthia Rainey! Who called her the prettiest girl?"

"Quite a connoisseur."

He hunted desperately for some name with which to back himself; he felt that at the very moment of victory he had trapped himself. Who should he name as his judge? Some fictitious person?

"A connoisseur?" murmured Mrs. Littleton eagerly. "Who?"

"James Vincent," said Dickon weakly.

"He!" cried Mrs. Littleton. "He's here somewhere. I'll have him find her for us."

Fear prickled coldly up and down the spine of Dickon. How could he have dreamed that James Vincent would come to such an affair as this?

"I've never known James to make a serious mistake about such things," she was saying. "The prettiest girl in New York!"

The phrase seemed to haunt her as it now began to haunt Dickon. There was not a chance in ten that Vincent had even met the girl; and here was Mrs. Littleton sensing a new social trophy and eager to reach it. He saw his small lie looming to gigantic proportions.

Rescue swept toward him in the form of a voice that called, "Mrs. Littleton!" It was a tall, dark woman with an almost masculine length of stride.

"Judge Alden is leaving at once," she said, "and he wishes to speak with you."

The hostess started, and then exclaimed in vexation.

"Don't let me keep you an instant," said Dickon, overwhelmed with relief.

"Miss Pasmore will take my place, I know. Miss Pasmore, this is Mr. Dickon Greene. He's just brought me Miss Guilbert, you know, and now he wants to meet Cynthia Rainey. Will you take him to her?"

Dickon saw the eye of Miss Pasmore turn inward with reminiscence.

"Of course," she said, after the hardly perceptible moment of pause. She had remembered; perhaps she was Mrs. Littleton's secretary.

"You'll look me up again?" said the hostess.

"Thank you," said Dickon, bowing, and he went with his social guide.

The floor was again crowded with dancers, and as he steered a waving course along the outskirts of the room, Dickon let his eye fill with the swirl of color, the sparkle of eyes, the cold fire of jewels. All the world seemed young, happy, beautiful; a moment later he was thinking swiftly and coldly. He must reach James Vincent, somehow, before Mrs. Littleton spoke to him and the lie was exposed; compared with that necessity the meeting with Cynthia Rainey was a triviality. She was, indeed, a goal, but through Mrs. Littleton he could reach a dozen such goals—or at least the way could be opened to him.

"Miss Rainey is dancing, I suppose," said his guide, "but there's her mother. May I introduce you to her and run along?"

"You're very kind," said Dickon. "That will be bully!"

CHAPTER XX.

MRS. WILLIAM RAINEY.

DICKON stared at Mrs. Rainey with the gloomy eagerness of one about to see some foreshadowing of his fate; automatically he sighed with relief. She was, indeed, perfectly dressed; neither too young nor too old; and though there was about her costume a suggestion of that same perfect uniformity of pattern and color which in a house is certain evidence that an interior decorator has been at work, nevertheless, her dress would decidedly do. He looked next at other less important details. It was a stern face, handsome in an aquiline way and pleasantly softened by a flood of fine silver hair; the eyes were particularly large and dark. She sat somewhat too stiffly, but it might be said to be the stiffness of one used to command—a dominating nature. And Dickon was about to sigh with relief when his glance dropped to the hands which were folded in her lap.

They were hopeless. He knew that when William North saw them the terrible valet would shake his head. They were as large as the hands of a man, almost, and they had that thickness which comes from only one cause—work! Miss Pasmore was presenting him, and Dickon was troubled to see in the eye of the matron a shadow as she greeted him.

"By the way," said Miss Pasmore, as she left them, "if you wish to find Mrs. Littleton later on she'll probably be in the refectory room."

It was a lucky chance, that mention of Mrs. Littleton, and under the sun of that magic name Mrs. Rainey blossomed suddenly. When Dickon turned to her he met a radiant smile.

"I heard that you are from the West," said Dickon. "I've ridden in Wyoming quite a bit."

"Yes?" she murmured with a marked lack of enthusiasm.

"Busting bronchos," rattled on Dickon, "does more for a fellow's hunting seat than anything I know."

"I suppose it does," nodded she, smiling again. "But my daughter Cynthia says that riding the jumps is quite a different thing."

"It is, in a way, but you get the feel of a horse with long stirrups, you know. Shall we go up into the gallery and watch them dance this out?"

She cast a hurried glance behind her and he knew that she was worried lest Cynthia again should return from that dance and find the maternal eye and the maternal direction missing. Unquestionably Mrs. Rainey held the reins of that social adventure. But she went with Dickon, and he seated her above close to a pillar of the arcade; below them the big dancing floor spread out in brilliant groupings. She rested her hand on the railing—her capable hand, able to retrain a horse or swing an ax, he guessed—and stared anxiously down. It was apparent that one thought obsessed her; but having located her daughter she leaned back in her chair again.

"Wyoming," she repeated, to open the conversation. "We never were there."

"A fine big country and a lot of fine big men. It seemed to me when I was there that Westerners run two or three inches taller than we Easterners."

He saw that she was glad to know that he was from the East; only those, he guessed, were desired for Cynthia. And also it was apparent that she could not possibly talk with fluency about any subject removed from her daughter. He hunted for an opening which would bring the conversation in line with her wish. His eye fell on the groups of those who were not dancing, some coming back and forth from the refectory room, or from the entertainment hall, and still others lingering along the edges of the ballroom beneath them.

"Have you noticed," he said, reverting to an image which had occurred to him earlier that day at Plummer's tea, "how they gather in crowds—like iron filings around magnets. The girls are the magnets, of course. Five—seven—nine around the one in the old rose dress. You notice?"

"I've watched it," she said with a solemnity which showed that she had watched little else that night. "A pretty face is a power, isn't it?"

"I don't think it's altogether that," said Dickon. "There's the girl in gray nearest to us with not a soul beside her. And yet, by Jove, she could give cards and spades to the old rose. Don't you think?"

"What does it?" she said rather bitterly. "What's the secret? Money? Clever chatter?"

"I don't think it's either of them. Notice our friend in the old rose. She listens, but she hardly says a word."

"What is it, then?"

She let a certain amount of desperation come into her voice as if she vaguely hoped to learn the secret in a formula of set words. She spoke with such energy that Dickon knew perfectly well she had rarely failed in her life; but she was the engineer desiring to write a poem; the poet desiring to build a bride. She was out of place in this world and baffled because her downright powers could not smash through to the successful marriage she wanted for Cynthia.

"It's a vulgar thing to say," remarked he, "but if you'll pardon me, I think it's simply advertisement that accounts for most of it."

"You do?" cried Mrs. Rainey. By the flash of her eye he knew that she was registering that information for future reference. Perhaps she thought first of billboards placarded with the face and name of Cynthia.

"On the stage, for instance," said Dickon, "a good advertising campaign does

more than talent, a good many times. I wonder if it isn't the same with these girls? They become known to a group and the group begins to revolve around them and gathers substance as it turns."

"It rains because there are clouds in the air," she answered gloomily, "but what puts the clouds there? The dance is ending, and I think I'd better go back. There's Cynthia looking for me."

"Yes?"

"The girl in the blue dress."

"By Jove!" murmured Dickon.

It was quite involuntary. She stood out from the people around her as if she were illumined by a light within; her skin was radiant crystal, and the light glowed and tangled in her hair.

He became conscious of the keen, delighted eyes of Mrs. Rainey. "By Jove!" he muttered purposefully as he turned to her. "May I meet her?"

"Of course. We're going down now."

"She will look me up from head to heel," thought Dickon, as they went down the stairs, "and, Lord! what will she find? Poor William North!" He added more comfortably: "She's only looking for the key that will let her into the holy places; perhaps I can turn the lock!"

There were three men gathered about Cynthia when they reached the floor of the ballroom; but he knew from the mother's face that they were nobodies. She had almost rather that her daughter sat alone than with such nonentities. He found himself face to face with Cynthia, being presented, but what he saw was William North when the valet had dropped the mass of clippings to the floor and lighted upon the discovery. She was lovely, indeed, with that pale, gleaming hair and the white brow which painters of the Italian Renaissance loved to paint.

"We're going into the entertainment room, mother," she was saying. "Marie Guilbert herself is there; see how the crowd flocks in? We'll have to hurry if we want seats!"

"I'll stay here," said Mrs. Rainey. "Do you wish to go, Mr. Greene?"

"Thank you, no!"

He knew that the mother was looking at him in wonder as the four moved away, but he stood purposely wrapped in apparent thought, staring at the floor to make her speak first.

"Why," said Mrs. Rainey, almost angrily, "the whole city is raving about Marie Guilbert. Don't you care for her, Mr. Greene?"

"Oh, yes, yes," he answered absently. "I brought her here, you know."

"Oh!" murmured Mrs. Rainey. He knew that she was watching him with painfully sharp interest and he continued to study the floor; it was essential that she should never forget his face.

"She is," he said to himself.

"I beg your pardon?" queried Mrs. Rainey.

"The loveliest girl in New York," brooded Dickon.

"Marie Guilbert? I suppose she is. There's enough talk about her."

He started as one suddenly recalled to himself.

"Not Marie Guilbert." He waved her into the outer darkness.

"Who?"

"As a matter of fact, I've been thinking aloud. Forgive me?"

"Of course." He saw that she had to force that concession from her curiosity by main effort. If it was not Marie Guilbert, might it not be her daughter that he meant? It was a seed that would grow to a large plant in Mrs. Rainey, or Dickon had completely misjudged her.

"I've already stayed too long, I'm afraid. Will you excuse me?"

"Of course. Sorry that I can't talk Wyoming to you, Mr. Greene. Won't you drop in for tea some day? Mr. Rainey knows the whole length of the Rockies like a book."

"Thank you. When may I come?"

"Monday, then."

He mixed swiftly with the crowd. The first step into the Rainey family had been made, that first and most difficult step of all, but it remained to find James Vincent and handle him so that he would be safe when Mrs. Littleton met the connoisseur.

(To be continued NEXT WEEK.)

A Crooked Deal

by Jack Bechdolt

IF you have ever served a good stiff sentence of solitary confinement or put in a term or two as winter watchman in a salmon cannery as God-forsaken as the Steelhead Syndicate's plant at Siwash Point you will have no trouble in understanding this story.

Otherwise you may have to use your head.

Clam Shell Dorgan and his yellow cur dog Jackpot had nothing in the world to do but sit close to the red-hot iron stove and listen to the demoniac chorus of the first big blizzard of winter.

The Steelhead plant at Siwash Point was thirty miles from the town of Steelhead where the syndicate's Alaska offices were located. Steelhead was the only sign, remnant, vestige or chemical trace of civilization for hundreds of miles about that part of the country and so far as it concerned Clam Shell Dorgan and his dog it might have been ten million billion miles away—on Mars or some other convenient planet.

The winter ice was in and shut off the Siwash Point cannery from everywhere, the mountains preventing access from the land side.

The drifts were piling high around the great gaunt block of building that squatted with its back against the inhospitable rocky shore. The tall, rusting iron stack, without a spark in it now, rocked with the wind. The warehouse and cannery were black, echoing caverns from which the smell of fish never would depart nor even freeze, no matter how cold it got.

The one oasis in all this desert of gloom was the room, snugly partitioned off, used as the cannery office in summer, used as the watchman's quarters in winter.

There Clam Shell Dorgan had set up a cot, a table, several nondescript chairs and his simple cooking appliances. There he had brought a bundle of old magazines and papers, the gift of a good-natured boarding house lady in Steelhead, and his dog and plenty of tobacco to solace his leisure which was limitless.

Dorgan's duties consisted of a daily round of the empty cannery buildings, making sure all doors and windows were barred fast. His business was to see that no vagrant Indians trespassed on the property of the Steelhead Syndicate while the cannery was shut down.

He had served at Siwash Point the winter before and was beginning his second season without having seen one solitary, decrepit Siwash. He had not even the faintest hope of any trespasser to comfort him through the blank eternity that now stretched before him, the eternity of waiting until spring came back again and the ice went out and the cannery crew returned to make Siwash Point, for a few months, one of the busiest

little hells of industry on the broad map of Alaska.

A graying, middle-aged, nondescript man of short stature and wizen face was Clam Shell Dorgan as he crouched beside his glowing stove and spelled out an article on household budgets in *Hearths and Firesides,* a very domestic magazine he had found in his library. Not that he was at all interested in domestic finances, but the bundle was sparse and the semiarctic winter long, and Dorgan, with thrift sired by grim experience, had learned how to make his reading matter last by allotting so many pages and no more, to each day's perusal.

Jackpot, Dorgan's dog, roused from deep slumber to point his lean nose upward and sniff. The hair along his neck stirred and rose.

Jackpot bore a curious resemblance to Dorgan. He was a sober, nondescript, middle-aged dog, with many white hairs in his whiskers and his eye was brown, a little watery and a little saddened in expression, like his master's.

The dog sniffed again and growled low. It rose stiffly and trotted to the door that opened on the weather and scratched.

" Jackpot! Lie down, you old fool!"

Dorgan said it without bothering to look up. The dog dreamed and talked in his sleep often.

Jackpot began to scratch at the planks. He made eager, whining sounds in his throat.

Dorgan reached for one of the heavy shoes he had removed for after-supper comfort and shied it across the room. His dog dodged the boot, but returned to the door and renewed the noise.

The peculiar excitement of the dog communicated itself to the man. Jackpot acted exactly as if the cannery had a visitor.

" Don't you know it's November?" Dorgan reasoned. " Can't you use your head nohow, you old Sourdough? It's November and there ain't nothing stirring but timber wolves, and what's more, there won't be for the next ten million years or so. Come away from that door!"

The dog slunk away at the command. Presently it went back again, whining and scratching.

" God Almighty!" Dorgan roared. " I've a mind to kick you out and let you spend the night with them timber wolves, you yellow-bellied son-of-a-Siwash!"

Nevertheless, he approached the door with more interest than he had shown in his reading. The dog seldom betrayed excitement without cause.

Jackpot leaped and barked as Dorgan got the door unbolted. When it swung ajar and let in a whirlwind that sent every loose thing eddying about the room, the dog sprang out into the night with a shrill yelp.

Dorgan could not see Jackpot, but heard him barking. He stumbled after and was guided by the racket to a lurching gray bulk that proved to be a man, wandering in erratic circles not fifty feet from the doorway to fire and food and a new lease on life.

As he came upon him, the wanderer floundered into a drift and fell. Dorgan pulled him to his feet and dragged him into the cannery office, the dog following with stub tail a-wag.

The man was too far gone to talk. Dorgan had to get snow to rub the frost out of his nose and cheeks. He got him onto his cot, stripped off his outer clothing and put the coffee pot on the stove.

The stranger lay in a stupor, like a man made of wood. Dorgan, brewing a black, scalding potion to force between his clenched teeth interrupted his task to stare curiously at him.

He stared for several minutes and forgot about the coffee. He pulled back the blanket and found the stranger's left hand, noted that the third finger had been amputated at the joint and nodded his head rapidly.

From the wall the watchman tore down a comparatively new handbill offering a reward of two thousand dollars for one Tutwiler Kirby, wanted for the robbery of the Steelhead Syndicate's safe in the main office at Steelhead.

He made further comparison between the printed description on the handbill and the man who lay on his cot; then Dorgan rummaged out a duffel bag from a corner, folded the reward bill small and slipped it into the toe of his town shoe, replaced the contents of the bag, put the bag away and went

about his business of first aid to the traveler with a strange glint of interest in his melancholy eye.

Fate had just tossed two thousand dollars directly into Clam Shell Dorgan's pocket and Dorgan had plenty need for that amount of money.

II.

Two thousand dollars looked big to Clam Shell Dorgan.

The watchman was getting on in life. He had followed his luck through California and Nevada in earlier years, through the Mojave down in the south and up to the Klondike, the Susitna, Cook Inlet, Teller, Nome—up and down, back and forth, making a stake here and losing it there and accumulating nothing but gray hairs and an ambition to own an acre somewhere around San Diego, where the weather is warm the year around and garden stuff can be coaxed out of the ground without undue effort. Dorgan had a daughter, a widowed woman, who was waiting for him to make a lucky strike so that she could stop clerking in a San Francisco store and keep his house for him.

The arrival of Tutwiler Kirby, the fugitive, automatically solved Dorgan's problems. He foresaw no trouble in keeping his prisoner throughout the winter, since there was nowhere else for Kirby to go, and in the spring, when the ice went out again and the first gas boat came around from Steelhead, it would be simple enough to hand him over to the proper authorities and get the reward.

This was the idea in Dorgan's mind when he removed the reward bill from the wall and concealed it in his town shoe. He took the additional precaution of making sure his guest bore no firearms and keeping his own pistol in its holster, strapped under his arm.

Having taken these precautions Clam Shell Dorgan was free to attend to the duties of hospitality.

Plied with coffee and care, Tutwiler Kirby came out of his coma and by another day was about again, feeling tolerably well. He owned to his right name and told Dorgan he had been prospecting in the mountains, had lost his cache through a snowslide and was driven to the coast.

"Meaning after you robbed that safe you made a big try to get as far as Kayak and catch the last mail boat to outside," Dorgan commented to himself. "The ice got into the straits ahead of you and you was cut off with no place to go. That's about the truth of it, my lad!"

Publicly, Dorgan professed to believe all that his guest told him. It was plain enough that he and Kirby had at least five months of enforced companionship ahead of them. Why borrow any trouble from next spring!

Tutwiler Kirby, thawed out and restored, proved a man of about Dorgan's age with similar antecedents.

Unlike the watchman he was tall and gaunt; his hair a faded, sandy red; his face long and gloomy like a horse's. In spite of his equinine countenance Kirby proved a talkative, companionable sort of person. In a day or so it dawned on Clam Shell Dorgan that he had found more than two thousand dollars when his dog led him to the fugitive perishing in the blizzard. He had discovered also a companion who would alleviate the horror of the months of solitary confinement he dreaded.

In the cannery was plenty of grub for two men, plenty of blankets and fuel and enough tobacco. If that shelter was a Godsend to Kirby, Kirby's companionship was a priceless gift to Dorgan.

III.

Tutwiler Kirby was talking.

"It seems they got the second one of these Hazy boys up in the Snoquamish Pass, come March of next year. That would be Frank—Ed was the one I was telling you busted his leg in a windfall, trying to cross the divide in the dark. I was one of the posse that was made up to bring Frank back and, sir, when we found that old-timer—"

Kirby glanced up, stopped and frowned irritably.

Clam Shell Dorgan had picked up a magazine, one of those damned ladies' magazines, too, and was oblivious of his tale.

Kirby said to himself, angrily: "The

damned old clam! I might's well sit here and try to entertain a barnacle. He ain't even human any more!"

Dorgan was saying to himself: "He's got a tongue just like a water-power wheel. Opens up the sluice and goes off and leaves it running! That makes the eighth—or is it the ninth time I've heard that? And if he begins on the one about the Swede up on Indian River again I'll do something I'll be sorry for!"

Thanksgiving Day had passed. Christmas had passed. New Year's was wiped off the calendar.

Clam Shell Dorgan and Tutwiler Kirby had about exhausted one another socially.

The sight of Kirby's horse face always somewhere about that little room had begun to rob Dorgan of his appetite for meals. Kirby's oft-told stories Dorgan knew by heart and their repetition was like rubbing salt in a raw wound.

Kirby had a most damnable habit of whistling dolefully when thoughtful.

Now, at sight of Dorgan's absorption in the magazine, he stopped speaking and presently began to whistle. He flatted when he whistled.

Dorgan threw down his magazine.

"Oh, for the cat's sake!" he shouted.

Kirby stopped whistling long enough to ask: "What's up, old-timer? Ain't that a good recipe for embroiderin' tidies?"

Then he resumed his whistling.

"Listen!" Dorgan shouted, rising and glaring. "Ain't you got anything better to do than that?"

"What?"

"That whistling. Ain't you got something better—"

"Ain't you got something better than to read all the time? Mighty sociable and pleasant you are!"

"I don't disturb other parties—"

"No, neither does a corpse. If I had my choice I'd take a corpse for company—"

"Oh, you would!"

"Yes, I would!"

A breath would have started them at each other's throats. Instead, Clam Shell Dorgan was reminded of something.

He rummaged out his pack and found a deck of cards.

"Clean forgot I had 'em all this time!" he said. "How about some two-handed stud?"

"I'm the *on*luckiest bird ever sat in a game," Kirby confessed with a smile beginning to light his long face, "but to oblige a friend and member of this club I'm with you!"

Dorgan had some fifty odd dollars tucked away in his duffel bag and Kirby produced about forty of his own. They began to play a table stakes game.

Dorgan's luck was bright. In an hour he had all of Kirby's money and a handful of I. O. U.'s.

Then Kirby began to win.

Lady Luck came and sat in his lap and refused to go away. With every hand Kirby's face got longer and more doleful.

Good luck apparently blighted his life.

"I don't figure out how my luck comes to run thataway," he apologized frequently. "Sometimes it does and it gets everybody to hating me like I was a leper."

Dorgan would grumble under his breath and deal another hand. They played throughout the night and stopped only for a hasty bite of breakfast. By noon Dorgan had lost fifty odd dollars of real money, a thousand in promises to pay, his claim on the Iditarod and his town clothes.

Kirby looked on the point of bursting into tears.

"It's just kind of a fate," he said solemnly. "It's my curse, you might say."

"Mighty funny curse!" Dorgan sniffed. "About time I was cursed that way."

Having exhausted all other counters in the game they divided their supply of matches and the game kept on.

They played all that night and into the next day.

Kirby kept on winning.

Kirby was on the point of tears.

"I'm trying to lose!" he protested. "I'm doing all I can to throw my luck, but it rides me when I get going thisaway. I can't seem to do nothing about it!"

"No," Dorgan growled with deep meaning, "*you* couldn't. Pretty slick at handling the deal I notice—"

"What d'you mean by that?"

"Oh—nothing."

Kirby almost sobbed. " I tell you I don't want to win!"

" Oh, hell, deal 'em, and don't cry about it. I can stand your winning, but your sobbing makes me sick!"

They were red-eyed from lack of sleep. Their heads throbbed from the close air of the room. They were sore all over from the task of sitting so long and fixedly. Their nerves were jumping.

Kirby dealt.

Dorgan got aces back to back—they were still playing stud—and he bet all the matches remaining in front of him.

Kirby met his every raise until the limit of Dorgan's pile was reached. Then the horse-faced man pulled a long, strangling, shaky sigh that seemed to come from the deepest wells of his being and turned over a third deuce to match the two that were showing.

Clam Shell Dorgan sent his five cards fluttering about the room. Kirby raked in the last of the matches.

" Never saw luck to beat mine. *On*canny, I call it!" He rolled his eyes mournfully.

" Yes, if you call it *luck!*"

Dorgan was white and his hand shook violently.

" Well, what 'd you call it?"

" May be luck," Dorgan murmured viciously. " Never met a man, woman, boy or Chinaman ever saw or heard tell of luck like that—"

" Just what do you call it?"

Kirby's tone was peremptory. The sad horse's face was getting red.

Dorgan was launched on a monologue. " Luck it *may* be. Don't say it ain't. But I been in places where a man with *luck* like that don't make a good risk for life insurance. They's some men is kind of superstitious about pressing their *luck* so far as you do, Kirby, and—"

Kirby roared out: " Say it! Damn you, say what you're driving at! You mean to hint I been stacking them cards—"

" Funny you should mention that!" Dorgan sneered.

Kirby turned as white as he had been red. " That's what you mean. You mean to say I'm crooked—and you dealing just as many hands as I did—and losing 'em—"

" I don't mean to say nothing," Dorgan shouted. " I don't say nothing, but—but—but—" He stuttered and blazed out suddenly: " That damned horse's face of yours is more'n any white man can stand and by the eternal I've got beyond standing it. Grouching, grouching, grouching! Shedding crocodile tears and raking in the pots! Making believe your heart is breaking because you win! Thank God it's a free country and I don't have to stand for what makes me sick. I'm going!"

Dorgan snatched up coat and hat and stamped out of the cannery, slamming the door behind him.

Kirby glared at the closed door and shouted sudden and loud at it, " Go to hell, then!" Dorgan was already out of all possibility of hearing through the door, but the shout relieved Kirby's feelings.

He sat down in a chair and began to whistle thoughtfully. Presently he got himself something to eat and tried to nap. He could not sleep. Thoughts of Dorgan wandering homeless worried him.

At first he hated Dorgan, so he was glad he had gone and he went so far as to hope Dorgan would fall through a hole in the ice. Then, more reasonably, he began to blame their isolation, the monotony of their enforced companionship.

" The air will do him good," he muttered. " Blow the dust out of his brain. I'll get a special good supper for the old-timer. Kind of cheer him up!"

But Dorgan did not show up for supper. Kirby ate finally and began playing solitaire. The atmosphere of the empty structure became uncanny. There was a silence about this bitter cold, still night that roused more terror than the crash of lightning bolts.

Kirby got too restless to follow the cards. Finally he put on his coat and cap and mukluks and went out. He had no idea of where to look for Dorgan, but he was afraid now, badly scared that Dorgan would never come back.

It was the yelping of Dorgan's dog, faintly audible in that still cold that led Kirby to Dorgan at last. Dorgan had gone up the mountainside behind the cannery in his first irritable impulse to get away from Kirby and the cards and his bad luck. His weight

had broken the snow bridge that covered a wide fissure in a great bowlder, and his leg had plunged into the crack and was held fast there. He had not many more hours to live when Kirby rescued him.

Kirby got him back to the cannery, and for some days nursed and waited on him with an anxiety and loving thoughtfulness that Dorgan's own mother could not have bettered.

IV.

For all of three weeks they played no more poker. Sometimes they played solitaire, Dorgan having found a second deck of cards, but poker was a topic avoided.

The quarrel had cleared the air of electricity. The two men were on the best of terms.

It was Dorgan who proposed stud poker again. He said he deserved a chance to win back some of his property.

Then, for another blessed two months, Lady Luck could not choose between them. Dorgan won back some of his losing, lost some of his winnings again and the game seesawed.

They remained in the best of temper until suddenly Dorgan began to win as Kirby had won, in a game that drew into a contest and from that into a grim struggle for survival of the luckiest. And it was Dorgan who won finally, won everything at the end of a four-day session.

Kirby managed to take his losses with excellent philosophy until the end. Then outraged nature demanded some satisfaction and he flared up with, "Damn funny how you can win and win and win! Never saw a man or woman, boy or Chinaman that heard of luck like yours before! *Luck!* Hunh, in a lot of places they'd call it something else—"

"Mean to say I ran a crooked deal?" Dorgan shouted.

"Call it any damn thing you like, and what about it?" Kirby snarled back.

Kirby sprang for him, and only the chair in his path prevented a blow from landing. Dorgan seized him by the arm and a remnant of common sense prompted him to drag Kirby to the door. "We'll fight outside," he promised.

But once he had Kirby outside he caught him and dragged him along. "We'll fight after we've walked for just one hour," Dorgan declared.

At the end of the hour they had calmed down.

Standing out there under the gray, hard winter sky, with the white and black landscape of desolation on every side, the distant cannery but a child's doll house in the wilderness, they saw the futility of the quarrel.

They walked back to the cannery in silence. Cards became again a subject taboo, except solitaire. Sometimes one of them would watch the other's game, but in silence, not even so much as the flicker of an eyelid betraying his opinion.

There came a day finally when both men knew with a thrill that went through their blood that the prison bars were weakening. It came heralded by a soft, warm wind and the wind had in it a spicing of a something far away—something fragrant and alive—as if it blew to them directly from some flower-laden languorous islands on the other side of the world.

The wind brought days and weeks of rain.

Snow began to wear bald in spots, exposing the rock and earth beneath. The ice in the little bay rotted and broke up. Leads of clear water appeared. When the sun shone, which was rarely, it was wonderful to feel.

It was then, with release so close at hand, that waiting became intolerable. The devil of restlessness was in both men and they got to growling at one another and pacing their narrow quarters like two sore-headed old bears.

Outside, the rain pelted down in a gale. In the cannery the two men were sentenced to idleness when spring stirred in their blood and urged them to action. Breakfast had scarcely been tasted, for beans and bacon were loathsome to their palates now. The dishes were heaped up unwashed, certain indication of some great crisis pending. On either side of the table sat Dorgan and Kirby, each playing solitaire, not for pleasure—for by now the cards were hateful to them—but much as the polar bear at the

zoo rhythmically paces off six to the right and six to the left when the soft spring wind sets his nerves jumping.

Dorgan was nerving himself to his rôle of Judas. He needed that two thousand dollars mighty badly. His daughter's lungs were weak; he wanted to get her out of the San Francisco store and into the country. He argued with himself he had justly earned the reward. But he found it hard to turn against the man who had shared with him the hell of winter monotony and saved his life into the bargain.

He screwed up his resolution to break the news to Kirby, and, looking up, found Kirby staring at him.

Kirby looked startled.

"Well?" he growled.

Dorgan growled back: "I saw you slip that deuce out from under the jack. A hell of a note when a man has to cheat at solitaire!"

Kirby had been about to say something that had been preying on his mind. He was glad of a diversion.

"Watch your game!" he snapped. "That king goes on the queen, and the seven of diamonds belongs over there. Trying to hold out on yourself?"

For a moment they glared, then went back to their games. But Dorgan knew he must say what was on his mind.

"Kirby—"

"Huh?"

"The ice is out. Gas boat's liable to be coming from town any time now."

"Well, what of it?"

"Oh—nothing."

"Good Lord! Ain't you got the guts to say it? All right, then, I will! You aim to hand me over to the Steelhead people and collect the two thousand dollars reward they posted for me."

"How in Tophet did you guess I knew that?"

"Easy. Time you hurt your leg I was rustling through your bag, looking for dry socks. Found the reward bill stuck in the toe of your shoe. You wouldn't have hid it there if you hadn't meant to do that."

Dorgan grew red and wriggled uneasily. "Well—you see—there's my daughter sick, and all."

"Never told you about that safe robbery, did I?" Kirby asked. "Told you 'most everything I know but that, I suppose. Couple years back I saw a chance for a man with a gas boat to make a good thing trading along the coast. I trapped for two long, damnable winters, and got enough stake to buy the boat. I'd had it about three weeks, and one of the Steelhead tugs run me down in the fog, and that was the end of my boat.

"The rotten court they've got bought up held they wasn't to blame, and I never collected a cent damages. I heard there was money in the safe that night, money going outside by steamer next day. I broke into the office all right, but, Dorgan, I give you my word somebody had been to the safe ahead of me!

"It was busted open and empty. I didn't get one cent of Steelhead money. But an Indian seen me, and next day they was on my trail."

"Who got the money, then?"

"Don't know. My hunch is it was Wendell, the company manager. He went south next day. He was always a kind of a sport and a tin horn."

"I bet it was Wendell!" Dorgan agreed. "Well, look here, old-timer, can't you prove you didn't get it?"

"Prove it? Me? A fat chance!"

Dorgan shook his head slowly in agreement. "No, I reckon not—with that old grudge known—and everything—specially your running out on 'em."

"No; not a chance. Well—I just wanted you to know, Dorgan. And—well, I don't hold it against you, your taking me to jail. Two thousand is a good stake, and with your daughter sick, and all—"

"Who says I'm taking you to jail?" Dorgan shouted angrily. "I ain't no yellow dog. You saved my life when I hurt my leg, didn't you? Hell! Now, look here, they's a dory in the warehouse that the Steelhead people ain't going to miss. You take some grub and get out of here in that dory damn quick!"

Kirby shook his head obstinately.

"Damned if I do. You saved my life, first place. Second place, you need that stake worse than I want to get away."

Dorgan rose and shook his fist in Kirby's face.

"You go! You hear me? Make your tracks quick."

"I won't go, and you can't put me out."

Kirby had risen, too, and stared defiantly straight into Dorgan's eyes. Their faces were not a foot apart.

"My gun says I'll make you go!" Dorgan whipped the weapon into view.

Kirby did not turn a hair. "Your gun! Shucks—I pulled its teeth and threw all the cartridges away, time you was laid up with that leg."

Dorgan depressed the muzzle and pulled the trigger rapidly. The pistol was empty, as Kirby said.

"Then I'll beat you to a pulp, and make you go!" Dorgan shouted.

Across the table they glared like two angry dogs. Each waited for the other to make the move that would send them to battle. They hesitated fully a minute. Kirby relaxed his rigid pose.

"Hold on," he said. "We've been pretty good *tilikums,* everything considered. I will make you a sporting proposition, Dorgan."

"What proposition?"

"Cards. We'll draw off the deck. Whoever gets the ace of spades has his way about it. Fair?"

Dorgan considered. "Fair enough," he agreed.

Kirby gathered up the deck with which he had been playing solitaire. Dorgan swept his solitaire deck onto the floor. Kirby arranged the cards, laid them in the center of the table, and drew off one, a harmless eight of clubs; Dorgan drew a ten of spades.

Card by card they robbed the deck.

Kirby kept his eyes on Dorgan, Dorgan on Kirby. Their hands took a card in turn and faced them up with a dread hesitation. Half the deck was gone and no ace of spades. Both were breathing noisily.

Two-thirds of the deck gone, the remaining pile pitifully small. Kirby's horse face was shining. His melancholy eye held Dorgan's. Dorgan looked gray and wrinkled and his hand was shaking. He revealed the queen of hearts and swore vociferously. Dorgan snatched a card off the pack and slapped it face down, his big hand covering it. Kirby reached out, in turn, to take a card.

Their eyes never wavered from that watchful, challenging glare, but Dorgan's big paw darted out suddenly, as though it had eyes and a will of its own, and caught Kirby's hand before it had touched the cards.

"Le' go my hand!"

Dorgan said nothing, but applied a wrist pressure that spread Kirby's fingers in spite of his effort to keep them close. Kirby made desperate efforts to release his hand and shouted again, "Le' go, damn you!"

Dorgan grunted with triumph as he forced the fingers and palm open. A card dropped out of Kirby's hand. It was not a card he had drawn from the deck, because he had not reached the deck when Dorgan caught his hand. It was obvious as the fur on a cat that Kirby had cheated. The card he held was the ace of spades.

"Trying to palm cards, were you? You tin horn—"

"I'll teach you to break my arm, you crook!"

Simultaneously they leaped at each other, and the table went down between them. That flimsy table, separating them still, prevented immediate murder being done.

Dorgan seethed with a hot desire to dissect Kirby limb by limb and scatter his parts. Kirby had cheated at cards. The crook! The fact that Kirby obviously was palming the ace of spades in order to lose to Dorgan—in order to go to jail for Dorgan, so that he might collect the reward—this meant nothing to Dorgan now.

Kirby was caught cheating! That was all Dorgan knew at the moment. All the irritations of those long months of confinement were fused into one grand explosion by the confirmation of his suspicions that this horse-faced pest was a cheat.

Kirby was just as mad as Dorgan. He had meant to sacrifice his freedom to aid Dorgan, but he forgot that generous impulse now. He was just as tired of Dorgan—just as sore and irritated as Dorgan was at him.

Kirby had but one desire—to batter Clam Shell Dorgan all over the floor of that big cannery.

Kirby, who fell on top, got himself disentangled from the table and staggered to his feet. His eye, quick with murderous inspiration, spied the stoneware cups and plates of recent use, heaped ready for washing. He snatched one up and aimed it at Dorgan's head.

At the same time Dorgan heaved to his feet and let fly the table full at Kirby.

Table and plate crashed together, but Kirby, with the reserve ammunition in his favor, filled the air with stoneware. Dorgan tried to rush him, but a coffee cup, big and heavy as a good-sized rock, caught him in the chest.

With a howl of rage he wheeled about and darted out of the door leading into the warehouse.

Kirby snatched an armful of missiles and followed.

Outside the cannery Dorgan's dog, Jackpot, was yelping excitedly. His claws could be heard digging at the planks of the outer door.

Dorgan had dodged into the dark warehouse. With savage cunning he swerved aside in the dark and planted himself flat against the wall, in the shadow, right beside the door he had come through.

Kirby, ready to hurl more china thunderbolts, rushed after. Dorgan launched himself upon him and bore him down. The combatants rolled over and over, grunting, kicking, striking, gouging.

Jackpot was trying to annihilate the outer door and yelping like mad. Dorgan's face was cut in three places, and Kirby's nose spouted a red tide.

"Card sharp!"

Whang! Kirby's fist drummed on Dorgan's ribs.

"Cheat!"

Dorgan set his teeth in Kirby's hand.

The outer door burst open, and a half dozen men drummed across the wooden floor. Rough hands separated the fighters, dragged them to the light, and identified them both.

The Steelhead company's gas boat had come out from town most opportunely. It was thus that Clam Shell Dorgan was discovered as the hero who, single-handed, had subdued the desperate Tutwiler Kirby, wanted for robbing the syndicate's safe.

Clam Shell Dorgan visited Tutwiler Kirby in the jail at Steelhead.

"Old-timer," Dorgan whispered huskily, "don't you worry none. I'm going to hire you the smartest lawyer money can buy from outside. They'll never get you—never! Money is going to flow like water to get you out of this."

"Money!" Kirby gasped. "What money are you talking about?"

"The two thousand dollars the company posted for you," Dorgan grinned. "They paid me their check to-day."

Alf Winslow, Federal deputy marshal at Steelhead, came to them hastily.

"Kirby, I got some news for you!"

Kirby blinked. "What kind of news?"

"Listen! Steamer Dora's just got in, first trip from outside. Brings word this fellow Wendell that was manager here last year is in jail in Seattle for embezzlement. He's confessed, besides, that he robbed the company's safe last fall. That lets you out as soon as the court can sign the order."

When congratulations were over and Dorgan and Kirby had a moment alone, Kirby said:

"Now, old-timer, you take that stake and join your daughter, pronto! You sure earned it."

"Nothing stirring!" Dorgan declared. "Kirby, we'll use that stake together, buy us another gas boat, go to trading and earn us a real stake, big enough for both of us to go to San Diego for the rest of our lives."

Next week's Complete Novelette will be
"THE DEVIL'S HOOF PRINT," By Garret Smith
a story of rather unusual type.

Brass Commandments

Part V

by

Charles Alden Seltzer

Author of "Riddle Gawne," "Beau Rand," etc.

CHAPTER XXI.

BRASS COMMANDMENTS.

LANNON stepped a little way into the room. Bannack stood, pallid of face, tense, staring at him. Bannack's hands were raised above his head, where they had gone immediately upon Lannon's appearance in the doorway. Lally had not moved. He stood near the wall, facing Lannon. His hands, like Bannack's, were in the air above his head. Bolton and Tulerosa had got out of their chairs, and they stood in front of them, motionless, silent, fascinated by Lannon's blazing eyes.

Clearwater was pale. He was breathing fast. His eyes were wide with joy over his deliverance. He knew how close he had come to paying for his treason toward the men who had been torturing him with their deliberate delaying of the moment of attack. His color began to come back; his eyes grew vindictive. He had regained his lost courage.

Lannon's intention could be plainly read. There was no doubting it. His white face, his stiff lips, that seemed almost ready to curve into a smile of bitter derision, and which gave the men a hint of the terrible passion that gripped him; the designing squint in his eyes, with pin points of a strange, light intensity; the steel-like rigidity of his entire body; the alertness of him, the atmosphere of violence that seemed to surround him—all betrayed the deadliness of his thoughts. Facing the men in the room was the Lannon of the old days.

Clearwater had not raised his hands. He knew what was coming, and he drew his gun, stealthily, lest he precipitate the action before Lannon willed it. He watched the men warily, eagerly.

"Bannack!" said Lannon, "you've been doing the most talking. I'm getting you first! You and your gang of buzzards have done a bad night's work. You've been swaggering around the basin, robbing people and murdering innocent men. You've made folks think you're bad. You've got reputations as gunfighters; you've scared the honest people in the basin half to death. You've had your own way too long; you've got too arrogant. I'm the law right now, and I've pronounced sentence on you. But I'm giving you a chance. You think you are gunslingers. I've got my guns out. There are four of you. If you're as good as you think you are, one of you ought to get me. *Flash them!*"

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 20.

With the downward sweep of his arms, Bannack tumbled forward, seemingly to meet a flame spurt that darted from Lannon's left side. Lally appeared for an instant to be pinned against the wall by another stabbing flame streak; then he pitched forward. Tulerosa's gun came out spouting fire. But the fire streaked floorward as Tulerosa crumpled, the gun falling from his loosening fingers. Bolton was dragging at his weapon before Lannon gave the word. He never got it out, for Clearwater, watching him with hating eyes, shot him before the muzzle of the weapon cleared the holster.

For an instant Lannon stood, peering downward through the acrid smoke that floated heavily in the room. Then with a grim look at Clearwater, he wheeled, leaped out of the doorway and ran around the house. He found Polestar where he had left him, leaped on his back and sent him down along the side of the house toward the basin. Polestar fled through the basin lightly, responding instantly to his rider's mood, which seemed to him to call for speed. He followed the course that had been taken by Ellen Bosworth in her ride to escape from Clearwater; a stretch of high ground that led northward to the upland slope. He went up the slope with long, catlike leaps, lightly, as though unhampered by the weight of the man on his back. Stretching out on the level he fled eastward.

Shaken, trembling, Clearwater had come to the door of the ranch-house. He had not recovered from the shock of his deliverance, and he had gone from one to the other of the bodies of the men who lay in grotesque positions in the front room, amazed, incredulous, seeking to vindicate the judgment of his senses. The men were dead; he had stood there when Lannon had appeared in the doorway; he had seen Lannon's guns blazing; his own had roared death to Bolton. And yet it seemed to him that this thing could not have happened; that it had not happened. It had seemed to him that with the four men confronting him there had been absolutely no chance of his escaping death at their hands. He had not, when confronting them, even thought of attempting to fight them. Then Lannon had appeared in the doorway, his guns had flashed, the men had withered in their tracks, died; and Lannon had gone. It had all happened in an instant; swiftly, surely had Lannon wrought the terrible magic of the black-handled guns. From the doorway Clearwater saw Polestar bounding along the rim of the basin, slipping eastward, a silvery projectile in the white moonlight. Clearwater thought of Bannack's words about Gloria Stowe, and he laughed aloud as he watched the silver shape glide over the mesa.

"Devake," he said, "if you knowed what I know you wouldn't be hangin' around Bozzam City this night! What a man! What a horse!"

Clearwater then turned back into the ranch-house.

Polestar went down the far slope of the mesa carefully, snorting his disgust of the smother of dust that enveloped him, tossing his head in contempt of the bowlders that, dislodged by his hoofs, rolled down the slope ahead of him. He took no notice of Lannon's voice, nor of Lannon's gentle patting hand on his neck or flanks. Nor did he betray any sign that he knew Lannon was on his back.

When he reached the bottom of the slope he leaped forward, made the three or four mile run across the basin, mounted the upland where Clearwater had been overtaken while pursuing Ellen Bosworth, and threaded the range of hills in which Ellen Bosworth had disappeared that day. Beyond the hills was another plain, grass covered, vast. He ran easily, smoothly, steadily, seemingly without effort, with a great, long, powerful undulating movement, his flexible muscles working with machine-like regularity.

The big level lay flat in the moonlight, desolate, silent. There was no movement on all its broad surface except the silvery shape that fled eastward into the flooding moonlight. Polestar ran on with tremendous speed. He was breathing deeply and regularly, his sinewy muscles were still flowing smoothly under his beautiful gray coat; the spring of unlimited strength was still in his stride; his coat was dry under

Lannon's investigating hands; he had not yet warmed to his work.

Cold, was Polestar, cold as the chill, remote star that glittered over Lannon's left shoulder from the soft, velvet blue of the sky; as cold as the planet which Lannon had named as godfather to him, and as steadfast. There was never a response to Lannon's voice or hand, never a sign that the magnificent beast knew his master was riding him; and yet Polestar swept on, into the great void of moonlit space, speeding with meteor-like swiftness against the whipping, hissing wind that beat against Lannon's eardrums until they pained, spurning the hard, dry sand with his flying hoofs, disdaining to slow down for the dangerous depressions that flashed into view; leaping them and thundering on over the dim trail, steadily, resistlessly carrying his rider eastward.

Once again they came to a slope, to the end of the great tableland over which they had thundered. One minute before the plain had stretched before them smooth and unbroken, seeming to extend many miles eastward; the next minute Polestar was pausing on the brink of a steep slope above a dark, wide valley. He sank into it without urging, without hesitation, and slid down until he reached the floor of the valley. He made slow progress through the dark aisles of the forest through which the dim trail led; he had to pick his way down the sloping walls of gorges that loomed suddenly before him, and a broad river that flowed through the center of the valley he had to ford with care lest he sink into a quicksand into which he had stepped in the old days. But soon he had left these hazards behind and was again running an upland covered with sage and mesquite, which led to the continuation of the tableland he had traversed. When he reached the crest of the upland he halted. He was now breathing hard, and he stood for some seconds with braced legs, shrilling breath into his lungs.

Lannon did not urge him, though Lannon was tortured by a conviction that he would be too late to save Gloria from Devake. He sat in the saddle, staring ahead into the vast eastern space, aware that he still had many miles to ride, and that the moon had risen until his shadow was short behind him.

His pulses leaped with a savage joy when Polestar tugged impatiently at the reins and was off, at first slowly and then gradually increasing his speed until he was running as smoothly and easily as before.

Lannon was strangely glad that he had reached the Star in time to prevent Bannack and the others from killing Clearwater. He had always liked Clearwater, and it had been a shock to him when he had discovered what had seemed to be convincing evidence that Clearwater had misled him in order to permit Campan's men to revenge themselves upon him by slaughtering his cattle at Bear Flat. His faith in Clearwater had been destroyed, and had he not answered the impulse to go to the Star there was no doubt that Clearwater would have died, convicted of collusion with the rustlers. Bannack would have killed him. Lannon would have believed Clearwater guilty. Clearwater's innocence would never have been known.

Bannack, Tulerosa, Lally, Bolton. At a stroke the four had been eliminated. Two still remained. Devake he would kill before the night was over, providing the man did not strike before he reached Bozzam City. If not to-night, then later. Devake was doomed. If the man succeeded in getting Gloria away he would ride his trail until he found him. That task would fill his time. Devake must die. It would make no difference whether or not he succeeded in his designs on Gloria. He had presumed to think of her, had laid plans against her. Therefore he was doomed. Lannon's thoughts ran with terrible definiteness to the task before him. He began to peer eagerly into the eastern distance, against the ghostly, moon radiance that flooded the world, for he was getting always nearer to Bozzam City and Gloria. He saw where the mesa ended; where it narrowed, swooped downward and merged with a high ridge below. He could trace the bold line of the ridge as it wound away into the distance. Polestar was still running with undiminished speed, his great muscles working tirelessly, his spirit undis-

mayed, his courage untouched. As though contemptuous of distance, of effort, he ran on over the mesa, took the descending slope to the broad back of the high ridge with light, mighty leaps, flattened out, a white streak racing ahead of a continuing dust cloud.

CHAPTER XXII.

"WHAT DID THRONE SAY ABOUT ME?"

A SMALL, slender man, who wore faded overalls and a flannel shirt that was much too large for him, sat on the sofa in the hotel office staring at the elk head above the mantel. He was smoking meditatively, though occasionally he turned his head and glanced at Gloria Stowe, who was standing behind the counter writing with a pencil which she wielded mechanically, as though her thoughts were far from the paper in front of her.

At last she seemed to finish, for she laid the pencil down, folded the paper, tucked it into a book on a shelf behind her, and gazed with big, reflective eyes at the little man. The little man was he who had seen Lannon whip Throne in Blanchard's store.

"Corwin," she said, "I reckon I'll close up. It's getting late, and I ain't looking for anybody to get in hyeh on number ten."

"Time's certainly runnin' along," returned the little man. "Time's sure got that habit." He grinned engagingly at Gloria, but made no effort to leave. Instead, he seemed to settle himself more comfortably on the sofa.

"Your dad's gone away, eh?" he asked, seemingly unaware of Gloria's narrowing eyes.

"He's gone to Laskar. He got word that a man over there wanted to see him on important business. He left on number six."

"Expect he'll be gone long?"

"I can't tell. Likely he'll be home tomorrow."

"H-m." There was a moment of silence. Gloria pressed her lips together and stared at the little man's back. She was about to speak when the little man turned around to her.

"Seems like Lannon's commandments is doin' some good in the basin," he then remarked. "Things has sort of quieted down now."

She nodded quickly, and interest glowed in her eyes.

"H-m," said the little man. He shot one bright glance at Gloria's face, turned his head and smiled enigmatically. "There ain't nothin' moved since Lannon burned them shacks over in the cache an' killed them two Pardo men belonging to Campan's bunch. It's curious about that guy Lannon, now ain't it?"

"Corwin," she said impatiently, "you're talking in riddles, I reckon. What's curious about Lannon?"

"Wa-al, I don't know, exactly. Everything about him is curious, I reckon. He's sort of odd. Seems to run his own game a heap. He's got a big outfit over at the Bosque Grand. There's plenty of guys over there which would be glad to throw a gun for him most any time, an' with mighty little provocation. But Lannon don't call on 'em. He fans it around the country by himself. Look at what he done to Campan. Takin' chances with a sneak like that! Givin' him a chance to pull his guns. I was right close to the post office that night. I seen the whole thing. I was leavin' Blanchard's store. I'd come out once an' had gone back to get another seegar. Steppin' out I seen a gang in front of the post office. Campan was there, facin' that notice Lannon had stuck up. Seems like Campan was intendin' to pull the notice down. When I see him he had his hand raised. He kept his hand there. Then I seen Lannon standing in the middle of the street. His hands was hangin' at his sides. I heard him call to Campan. Campan turned around. His face was dead white. Lannon told him to draw, an' he did. But Lannon didn't draw till Campan had got his gun out. Then he bruk Campan's wrist an' tore half his face off. Workin' two guns! I never seen such shootin'. What gets me is why he'd let Campan off that way without killin' him. I've heard a story about somethin' that happened one night at Benson's. Seems you was mixed up in that some way."

"Corwin, I don't want to talk about that."

"Sho. Wa-al, I reckon that's settled. But I didn't know but what Throne was mixed up in it some way."

"Corwin, what do you mean?"

Gloria had heard that Lannon had had trouble with Throne. Rumor intimated that the trouble had been over a woman, but she had heard no woman's name mentioned in connection with the incident.

"What do I mean? Wa-al, I reckon I mean just what I said: I didn't know Throne was mixed up in the deal with Campan an' Lannon. I noticed that when Lannon came into Blanchard's he had a mean look in his eye; an' when Throne began talkin' about you that look was a whole lot meaner. I never seen a man with a meaner eye. He steps right up in front of Throne an' says in a tone of voice:

"'Throne; stand up!'

"Throne done so. An' Lannon hit him. He pulled Throne to his feet an' hit him again—an' some more. Then he stood watchin' Throne. Then he says: 'Throne, if I ever hear you speaking Glory Stowe's name again, I'll kill you!' An' I reckon he meant it! He stood there—"

"Jeff Corwin, you don't mean to say that quarrel was over me?"

"Sure as you're born," grinned Corwin.

"Throne mentioned my name?"

"How could Lannon tell him not to mention your name again if he didn't mention it once. Tell me that, Glory!"

"Corwin, you're not making any mistake about it? You were right there; you heard Throne talking about me?"

"I reckon."

"You're sure you didn't hear that from some one, instead of seeing and hearing it yourself?"

"I reckon I seen it an' heard it, Glory."

Gloria's face was now very white and her eyes were very bright. Her lips were pressed tightly together.

"Corwin, what did Throne say about me?"

"It was a thing that a man ain't got no business sayin' about a woman," replied Corwin, uneasily.

"Corwin, you've got to tell me!"

"My memory ain't very strong on that point, Glory. Throne talked, an' Lannon hit him. But what Throne said don't seem to stick in my mind right close."

"Corwin, you're going to tell me what Throne said. I can tell by your eyes that you remember. You don't want to tell me for fear of hurting my feelings. You can't hurt my feelings. I've got over that. I've got another reason for wanting to know. Corwin, I must know! You've got to tell me. Do you hear!"

"I don't remember Throne's exact words, Glory. He said somethin' about Devake an' you bein' alone here in the hotel; somethin' about you wantin' to be alone with Devake."

Gloria smiled strangely. She leaned her elbows on the counter and looked at Corwin with eyes that seemed to hold a fierce joy. Her cheeks were now glowing with color; they were redder than Corwin had ever seen them. The girl seemed to palpitate with exultation; there was a wild glory in her face.

Corwin watched her; amazed at the sudden change in her. The transformation was wondrous, inexplicable. Doubt, awe, seized Corwin. He was oddly embarrassed. She seemed to be overjoyed to discover that Throne had talked about her. She should have been angry. If she had raged Corwin would have felt that things were pursuing their natural course. A woman ought to be enraged over a story such as he had told her.

Corwin had expected her to be indignant. Instead, she seemed delighted. Corwin's brain grew muddled; his confusion shone in his eyes. It was strange about women; they never did what one expected them to do. They were contrary, contradictory. Amazingly so. Corwin wanted to ask questions, but he felt that if he did he would make mistakes. So he kept silent and wondered. And at last, when he observed that Gloria was not paying the slightest attention to him, he got up, sidled toward the door, reached it.

"Wa-al, I reckon I'll be goin', Gloria," he said.

Understanding that she did not hear him he stood for an instant, watching her won-

deringly. He did not speak to her again, but went out of the front door wagging his head from side to side.

CHAPTER XXIII.

"I'M GOING TO MAKE YOU LOVE ME!"

OUT on the plains west of Bozzam City a gray shadow raced, sweeping along with terrific speed, followed by a continuing dust cloud. There were spots where scarcely any dust arose; there were other places where it ballooned upward heavily. Any one watching the progress of the gray shadows would have thought of a ricochetting shell touching infrequent corrugations of a level.

The gray shadow thundered out of the west, passed over the vast level, and vanished into a wide depression eastward. Only the dust of its passing could be seen rising above the depression, dust that traveled with amazing swiftness. Then the gray shadow reappeared on a distant ridge, a leaping silhouette against the silver sky line; then it had vanished again. Later it was a mere speck on a far level, diminishing, swallowed in space.

Along a ridge near Bozzam City, Polestar was astonished to feel the sting of the spurs on his flanks. He had been doing his best; he now had discovered that his best had not been sufficient. He gathered his sinews for a mighty effort and was gone from the ridge in a smother of dust. He saw lights flickering ahead of him; they came up magically; he flecked past them as lightly as a leaf in the wind. Then a knee press warned him.

He stiffened his body, braced his legs and slid almost on his haunches for a distance of fifty feet to a halt. He felt the reins drop over his head; the weight left his back; he got his legs under him again, set them asprawl, drooped his magnificent head and heaved a great sigh. He had done his best to fulfill his master's demands.

Lannon was across the gallery of the hotel in two or three light leaps. As Polestar came to a halt Lannon had seen a light in the office of the hotel; and when he reached the threshold of the big front door the black guns leaped into his hands. Devake, he felt, would be inside. Devake would be clever enough to conceal his intentions toward Gloria until the moment he intended to act. Devake was the kind that played the hypocrite before striking.

Lannon stepped stealthily down the big hall. There was no sound from the office. The light streamed from the office into the hall, and it seemed to Lannon that there was something ironical and mocking in the silence.

With a conviction that he had arrived too late, and his face flaming with a terrible rage, he stepped into the archway between the big hall and the office, the big guns rigid in his hands.

One sweeping, inclusive glance revealed to him a scene of peace and apparent tranquility.

Devake was not there. Apparently he had not been in the office. The big lamp suspended from the ceiling seemed to flicker benignantly; the elk head above the mantel seemed to watch him with stoic curiosity, as though mildly wondering at his warlike appearance.

Also, Gloria Stowe was watching him, though with amazement. She was standing behind the counter; she had been leaning upon it, for she was now rubbing her elbows as though long contact with the wood top of the counter had numbed them. She looked at the guns in Lannon's hands, then up into his eyes, her own probing his as though to ask the meaning of his threatening manner.

"You expaicting to shoot somebody, stranger?" she asked.

"Is Devake here?" he asked shortly. He ignored her sarcasm. The cold earnestness in his voice was unmistakable. Gloria knew from his words and manner that he had come to kill Devake—that for some reason he had expected to find Devake in the hotel.

"Devake ain't hyeh; he hasn't been hyeh. It's mighty curious you should come in hyeh looking for him, stranger! Devake ain't in the habit of coming hyeh."

Bitter disappointment gripped her; a wave of anger surged through her. Only a little while ago, leaning upon the counter,

she had figured it all out, and had provided an explanation for Lannon's attack on Throne.

She had misinterpreted Lannon's manner toward her during the ride to Bozzam City after Ellen Bosworth had left her; she had thought that Lannon was like all the other men of Bozzam City who had attempted to take liberties with her; she had thought that, like the rest, he had come to believe his advances would not be unwelcome. His action in slighting her in the presence of Ellen Bosworth had seemed to prove that his thoughts had that trend, and when he had laid his hands on hers, telling her at the same time that he " wanted " her, she had been sure his thoughts were dishonorable. But when Corwin had told her about his whipping Throne for talking about her, she had been equally certain that she had misjudged him.

Now she felt there was another motive behind his action in whipping Throne—jealousy of Devake! He had burst into the hotel office, his gun in hand, looking for Devake, asking for him. It was evident that he expected to find Devake in the office with her.

Not answering her, he wheeled, strode down the long hall, peered into the dining room and the kitchen, and then returned to the office. Gloria confronted him outside the counter, where she had quickly stepped to watch him as he had walked down the hall. Her face was white with rage; her eyes were blazing with the fierce resentment she felt for his insulting suspicions.

" Stranger," she said, " for a few minutes to-night I was pretty near convinced that you could be a regular man if you tried hard enough. I see I was mistaken. My word that Devake wasn't hyeh wasn't enough for you. You're a miserable, suspicious critter, and I want you to get out of hyeh right this minute."

He sheathed his gun, and stepped close to her. In spite of her anger, she was fascinated by the cold light in his eyes.

" I don't know what you are trying to get at," he said shortly. " This isn't a time for nonsense! If Devake isn't here now, he'll be here later. He sent your dad away in order to have you here alone. He's going to kidnap you."

" And you rushed right in hyeh expaicting to find him doing it?" she scoffed. But there was a queer break in her voice which betrayed her fear that he was speaking the truth; that there was foundation for his apprehension. Yet her resentment would not permit her to let him see that she was inclined to believe him, so she laughed into his eyes.

" I reckon you're imagining things, stranger. There ain't no one going to kidnap me. Dad's gone over to Laskar on business; that's true. But nobody's going to kidnap me, and don't you forget it. I'm mighty grateful to you for rushing in hyeh to warn me."

" Glory, Devake means to do it. That is, he planned to do it. He won't do it now, because I'm going to kill him on sight. It pleases you to scoff and ridicule. You are like a good many others in this basin; you don't believe I am in earnest."

" I reckon you're right there," she said. " You've been mighty unfortunate in making me believe you are in earnest." She tried to laugh, to show her contempt of him, but the bitterness in her eyes made the forced mirth sound hollow and insincere, so that he looked keenly at her.

He smiled wryly at her, touching his cheek with a finger, pointing to where her quirt had struck him, leaving a white welt that was still visible.

" Evidence of your earnestness," he said. " I reckon I deserved it. There will come a time when I will prove mine."

" To Ellen Bosworth, I reckon," she said, her cheeks reddening. " According to you, she's the only lady in the basin."

" I respect Miss Bosworth, Gloria."

" Stranger, I've told you not to call me that. I'm not ' Gloria ' to you, and I never will be! A girl like Ellen Bosworth is the only kind you can respect. She's Eastern, like you, and she knows how to talk to men. And she knows how to make them behave to her without hitting them in the face with a quirt."

Lannon had a flashing glimpse of the agony in her eyes, but almost instantly the emotion was whelmed by defiance. She

regretted striking him; she had regretted the action during every wakeful moment since. The white mark on his cheek had its counterpart in her heart; she felt the pain of it as she looked at his cheek, and she would have given anything to undo what she had done.

The deed had been a result of her inexperience and of the furious passions that raged within her—passions that she was ashamed of, that awed her. She felt that had she been reared like Ellen she would have been able to suppress her passions—would have been able to suppress Lannon with a look or a word as effectually as she had suppressed him with the quirt.

There was a strange, leaping light in Lannon's eyes as he watched her. "You are always going to be 'Gloria' to me!" he said. "Words or quirts will make no difference. I respect Ellen Bosworth; I respect you."

"I'm not asking for your respect, stranger!" she declared defiantly. "I don't want it. I can get along without it."

There seemed to be no reason for the wild resentment that stirred her at this minute. Her better judgment told her that he did respect her, in spite of the slight he had put upon her. She had known all along that he had given her the real reason for his sin against her; she had seen the truth in his eyes more than once.

She knew he had meant no wrong when he had tried to take her hand that day on the trail; she knew what his motive had been when he had thrashed Throne for talking about her; she felt his earnestness at this minute. But all this knowledge was subconscious—it was her calm judgment lying dormant behind the lashing sea of passion that tortured her. She felt it only instinctively, as a thing that ought to be. It was not a keen conviction, as was her belief that Ellen Bosworth was more worthy than she to be beloved of Lannon.

She was aware of it, and that was all. But she knew Ellen deserved Lannon; she felt her own inferiority, and could advance no valid reason why Lannon should choose her instead of Ellen. She was not jealous of Ellen; she would have denied that. She was merely hurt; she was enraged over her own shortcomings, resentful because she lacked the graces of mind and body that would have made her as attractive in Lannon's mind as the Eastern girl.

Lannon's hands came out suddenly and were laid on her shoulders. She trembled under his touch, her cheeks whitened. But she did not attempt to free herself from his grasp. She stood there looking straight into his eyes, her own ablaze with defiance.

"Gloria, you keep bringing Miss Bosworth's name into our talks. I have told you why I didn't speak that day; I've apologized for it. I respect Miss Bosworth. That's all."

"I reckon Ellen deserves your respect, stranger," she said steadily. "Well, you've given it to her. There's no reason why you should be telling me about it."

"There is, Gloria. I've tried to show you, since I was fool enough to do what I did in Miss Bosworth's presence, that I respect you as I do her. It's a mighty hard matter to get at because it's difficult to make you believe it after what I did. It's hard to make you believe I am sincere."

"It sure is, stranger," she said coldly. "I reckon I'll never believe you. There's no reason why I should. Besides, I don't want to believe you. Even if I did want to, I reckon I couldn't. You keep saying one thing, and doing another."

"What do you mean?"

"Stranger, you're two-faced. You keep telling me you respect me. Then you go riding with Ellen Bosworth and talk about me being 'impossible.'"

Lannon started, his face reddened. "Impossible" had been Ellen Bosworth's word, applied to Gloria. Word of how Gloria had been seen riding with Ellen had reached him; vividly he now recalled Ellen's strange manner that day; her bantering, her veiled sarcasms, the polite ridicule in her voice.

He even remembered Ellen's words: "She is interesting, I suppose. As an untutored child of the desert she is diverting. As a type, that is. As an individual she is rather impossible, don't you think?" He recalled his reply to that. He had told Ellen that he considered Gloria "raw gold." He had meant that as a compliment. He

could not be certain about Ellen's reasons for having twisted his words about, in imputing to him things she had herself said, but he felt she must have been amusing herself with Gloria or maliciously revenging herself upon him for his defense of the girl. Yet he could not accuse Ellen of deliberately lying about him.

"Gloria," he said earnestly, "I never said that. Miss Bosworth is mistaken."

Gloria laughed scornfully.

"I reckon she ain't mistaken, stranger. Your face tells me that; you look guilty. I ain't going to listen to any more of your lies!"

She wrenched herself free and stepped back, her eyes seeming to snap with disdain.

"You get out of hyeh, now! I'm going to close up. You've been trying to ride straddle ever since you come hyeh. You talk big, and you do darn little. Maybe you're fast with a gun, and maybe men are scared of you. But you can't fool me! You're a sneak with women! You don't mean anything you say to a woman. It's likely you've come hyeh to-night telling me that tall story about Devake intending to come here just to hev an excuse to talk. Ellen has told me about you; about how you've been fooling around Eastern girls. Stranger, you can't make a fool of me!"

Lannon had been watching her, noting the flashing of her eyes, the proud curving of her lips, which were quivering in spite of the great effort she was making to appear calm. Over him as he looked at her surged a wave of longing—a yearning to take her into his arms and tell her that he had loved her from the day he had first looked into her eyes; that it made no difference to him what anybody had said or what he had done, and that her attitude at this moment only made her more desirable to him.

The mood was not to be resisted. He stepped forward, his arms went around her. She was drawn toward him, surprised into passivity. For an instant she lay quiet in his arms, while he kissed her fiercely upon the lips. Then, setting her down, he spoke, while she stood at a little distance from him, pallid, so furiously angry that her wonderful eyes seemed like two blazing pools of wrath.

"There," he said vibrantly, "I've done what I've wanted to do since the first time I saw you. Some day I'll be doing it again. I'm going to make you love me!"

He turned, walked out the front door, leaped upon Polestar, and rode him around the side of the hotel to the rear. There he dismounted, led the horse into the stable, and stood for a time patting the animal's neck. Polestar seemed unmoved at this exhibition of affection, and Lannon spoke to him softly, aloud:

"You're pride and ice, Polestar. She's pride and fire! Two thoroughbreds!"

He stepped out of the stable, moved along the rear of the buildings, keeping in their shadows, and came at last to the street, which was deserted. He stood in the shadows, looking toward the hotel. The light from the office still flickered out of the front window into the night.

CHAPTER XXIV.

'DEVAKE!"

OTHER lights gleamed out of buildings farther down the street. Blanchard's store was illuminated; the post office was closed. A saloon across the street was wide open; some one was jangling violent music out of a piano; voices issued from the door and assailed the flat, dead silence outside.

A rim of light showed around the curtained window of a brothel opposite where Lannon stood; somewhere a dog bayed at the moon. A glimmer stabbed futilely outward from the station squatting beside the railroad track; the platform held several boxes and crates awaiting shipment.

Through the window of the station Lannon could see the agent, bent over a desk. The corrals beside the switch yawned emptily, the gates wide open. Above the dim tracery of the town's buildings loomed the distant peaks of mountains northward, clearly outlined in the moonlight.

Along the hitching rail on the far side of the street stood several ponies. A canvas-covered wagon had been pulled into a

vacant space between two buildings nearly opposite the hotel, its huge tongue sticking partly over the sidewalk; a ranch wagon in for supplies. It was safe to assume that the driver would be found in the saloon or the brothel.

Lannon grimly took in the grisly details of Bozzam City's existence. Day after day, year after year, life here was the same. No variety, no progress, but a deadly monotony of vice and crime and violence. His five years' absence had made all this repulsive in his sight. And yet he had returned instantly to plunge into the old life, to dominate the wild life he detested. But as he stood there a glimmer of pure white light seemed to filter through the gloom of his thoughts—Gloria!

He was thinking of her when he saw a man step out of the door of the saloon across the street. Lannon could not see the man's face, for the light from within shone on his back as he stood for an instant outside facing the street; but his form was familiar.

The man was Devake.

Devake walked to the hitching rail in front of the saloon. He stood there a few minutes gazing up and down the street and at the lights that shone from the windows of the buildings across the street. He seemed to be particularly interested in the light in the office of the hotel, which was still burning.

Presently Devake walked around the hitching rail, tightened the cinches of the saddle on one of the ponies, untied the reins, threw them over the pommel of the saddle and mounted. Wheeling the pony, he rode to the middle of the street, halted for an instant and then went on again, toward the hotel.

He rode past the front of the hotel, slowed, peered into the lighted window and then passed out of view around the far corner of the building. Lannon did not move, for he suspected Devake had merely ridden around the corner so that his pony would not be seen by any one who might chance to be abroad, and that he intended to return and enter the hotel from the front.

Within a few minutes Devake reappeared. He paused for an instant at the corner of the building; then stepped upon the gallery and moved slowly toward the door. He paused in the doorway and looked back toward the street. Then he entered.

For a moment Lannon waited, to make sure Devake would have time to enter the hotel; then he ran forward.

Lannon was in a grimly malicious mood. He meant to cheat Devake in the latter's moment of victory. According to the custom of the land he would have been justified in shooting Devake on sight, for he had warned the man. In yielding to his malicious impulse he was merely prolonging Devake's life a few minutes while giving him a demonstration of one of life's ironic principles—that death often comes in a moment of victory.

When he reached the door through which Devake had entered, he heard the latter's voice:

"Glory; it's pretty late to visit; but I reckon I'm welcome."

Devake's voice was low; it held an ingratiating note. No doubt the man had meant his voice to be pleasant, but he could not keep the triumph out of it.

"Devake, you get out of hyeh! I'm just closing up!"

There was apprehension in Glory's voice, the suggestion of a break.

"No hurry, Glory; no hurry," said Devake, softly. "What's five minutes or so between friends?"

"Devake, I'm no friend of yours, and you know it! I'm not going to hev you prowling around here! I want you to get out, this minute. If you don't I'll scream and call Lannon!"

"Haw, haw, haw!" laughed Devake. "Lannon! That's good! I reckon by now Lannon is running around in circles wondering where he's at! He'll be busy over in Bear Flat till morning, Glory; he'll be tolerably busy. Lannon don't need to bother you. Besides, I didn't come here to talk about Lannon. I come here to see you, Glory. There's a heap I want to talk to you about."

Lannon detected the insincerity in Devake's voice. He paused in the hall, just before he reached the archway opening into the office. He heard Gloria's voice, its ring of command carrying a note of fear.

"Devake, you keep away from me! Keep away, I tell you!"

Lannon stepped into the archway. His hands were at his sides, but his feet were set apart in the odd way he always stood when the guns at his thighs were in mind; he leaned slightly forward from the hips; his hands were spread wide.

He saw Devake and Gloria near the center of the room. Devake's back was toward the archway; he was facing Gloria, who was backing away from him, seemingly fascinated by something she saw in his eyes. Her lips were white.

"*Devake!*"

Lannon whispered the name. Devake halted, drew his feet together. But he did not turn then. His hands dropped to his sides; the fingers were twitching. His shoulders moved with an odd motion, as though the muscles were quivering. He seemed to cringe; his knees sagged. His head slowly turned as he followed Gloria's movements. The girl had backed away from him, a little to one side; and now she reached the end of the counter and slipped around it. Lannon, though watching Devake, could see the girl's face. It was chalk-white. She held her clasped hands high over her bosom. The fingers were twining, untwining; she knew Death was in the room.

Devake, it seemed, also knew. He stood where he had stood when Lannon's whispering voice reached his ears. His shoulders still moved with the curious, jerky motion. It appeared he was trying to turn, that his brain had issued the order, but that his body was powerless to obey.

"*Devake!*"

Lannon's whisper seemed to rock the room. It stung Devake to action. Like a flash he wheeled, his right hand moving at his side with a swift, upward motion.

Lannon shot him. He jerked backward; his chin sagged to his chest. He had got his gun almost out of the holster. Now his fingers loosened on the handle and the gun dropped back into the sheath. His hands fell to his sides, his knees doubled, and he pitched gently to the floor, face down.

The deafening report of Lannon's gun seemed not to have been heard by Gloria. She was leaning forward on the counter her hands covering her ears, her eyes closed. A heavy layer of blue-white smoke was floating lazily below the swinging lamp, and trailing in grotesque wisps out of the open window.

Lannon looked at Gloria. She would not raise her head; she seemed to shrink, knowing he was watching her.

"I reckon there won't be any kidnaping to-night," he said. "I'm leaving you. I'm not regretting what I've done. There'll be men here to take Devake away. You'll find he is mighty dead."

He walked to the front door, saw some men in front of a building far down the street; called to them:

"Right down here, boys!"

He saw the men start toward him, but he did not wait for them. He moved around the corner of the building, sought the stable; stood inside near the door and reloaded his guns while listening to the sounds of voices that came from the front of the hotel. Then he went to Polestar, unhitched him and led him out of the stable into the moonlight that streamed down into the yard.

When he got into the saddle he held the impatient horse for an instant while he gazed toward the street and again listened to the commotion. Then he rode around the hotel to the street and sat, grim and silent, in the saddle while some men carried Devake out of the door. The men went past him, veering off when they saw him and saying no word to him. He saw other men in the hotel office; and Gloria, her face pallid, turned once toward the window. Then as though he had ridden to the street merely to catch a glimpse of Gloria, Lannon sent Polestar southward, toward the Bosque Grand.

CHAPTER XXV.

"I RECKON YOU'VE STRAYED—"

IN telling Ellen Bosworth the story of what had happened to her on the night Lannon had killed Devake in the hotel office, Gloria had been silent regarding one incident. She would never tell anybody that Lannon had kissed her. She felt that

Ellen would laugh at her, and somehow she had a feeling that the incident should be held sacred, even though she had been the unwilling victim of Lannon's passion. Gloria had studied Ellen with covert interest, for the purpose of attempting to emulate the other's easy-going manner, her nonchalant indifference toward men, which seemed to make her more attractive to them. Ellen seemed to have a quiet confidence in herself that Gloria lacked. Gloria felt the confidence was founded upon Ellen's knowledge of the world and of men. She had a way of looking at men that made them stand up straight and reach for their hats. They seemed to be more eager to serve her than to insult her. It was this strange power over men that Gloria sought. It was a thing that she could neither define nor describe. It was as intangible as air, but as unmistakably existent. Gloria was certain Ellen's bearing had something to do with it. She was equally certain it was an inward force, perhaps a subtle dominance of the will, expressed by a look. Gloria studied Ellen in order to make certain. And while she watched Ellen she began to get illuminating glimpses of Ellen's character.

She had no great admiration for what she discovered, and no longing to be like Ellen. But she was learning to imitate Ellen's manner toward the world and its people. She was this morning practicing polite reserve, and noting its effect upon Ellen.

She had stayed all night at the Lazy J, having ridden over there the previous afternoon. Now she was riding beside Ellen, eastward, to explore Salt Cañon. Bosworth had told them they might now risk a ride there, for news of what Lannon had done had reached the Lazy J, and Bosworth exultingly told them he believed the rustlers would not return as long as Lannon remained in the basin. Connor also expressed that belief.

" Lannon's wiped most of them out," said Connor. " Them Pardo men will stay over at Pardo. They'll not want any more of Lannon's game; it's too dead sure certain! Besides, there's nobody left but Campan, an' he's keepin' himself mighty quiet. Nobody's heard of him but that Pig-pen man who reported that Campan was perfectin' his draw so's he'll be able to match Lannon when they meet again. If I was handin' out advice I'd tell Campan that he'd better pull his freight while the pullin' is good. But I figure Campan is bluffin', an' that the farthest north he'll get from now on is Pardo. He'll stay there an' do his talkin'."

The girls were riding the rim of the basin above the Star buildings when Ellen spoke Lannon's name for the first time that morning.

" Connor brought word last week about Lannon's shooting Devake. And only a few hours before Connor came home with that news Clearwater rode over and told us about the shooting at his place. Gloria, I am beginning to believe Lannon is a savage!"

" I reckon Lannon is just like the country," returned Gloria. " Nobody blames him for killing those men. In fact, Lannon is respected more now than before."

" Of course you would defend him," smiled Ellen. " He rescued you from Devake. Do you really believe Devake meant to kidnap you?"

" I had only Lannon's word. He told me Devake intended to force me to go with him. Then Devake came. It certainly seems as though Lannon told me the truth."

" Oh, then you had a talk with Lannon before Devake came?"

Gloria's cheeks reddened and Ellen smiled faintly.

" Yes—we talked." Gloria looked straight at the other. " I told him I knew about him telling you he thought I was ' impossible.' "

" How did he take it, Gloria?"

" I reckon he felt mighty guilty," Gloria answered, remembering Lannon's flush when she had charged him uttering the slighting remark.

" He didn't deny it?"

Ellen's voice was low; she watched Gloria with eyes that held a malicious glint.

" He didn't say anything. He just stood there, blushing."

" Oh, Lannon wouldn't think of affirming a statement of that sort, of course. And I had no idea you would speak to him about it, or I should not have told you about it.

I merely wanted to warn you to be on your guard against him, Gloria. Lannon has had so many affairs that any sort of an adventure would be merely an adventure, to him, though it might be a tragedy for you. It would be a mistake to take Lannon seriously in a love affair. He has had many of them and has not been captured as yet."

Gloria's face was very pale. "You don't mean that men in the East—and women—are in the habit of pretending they love one another?"

"Oh, no doubt they feel they are really in love at the time," laughed Ellen. "But they soon tire, become convinced they have made a mistake, and seek elsewhere."

"Hev you done that?"

"I have thought myself in love a dozen time, at least, Gloria."

"And the men you thought you were in love with, did they think they loved you?"

"Well—I think so. At least, they seemed to be. But how is a woman to tell? A man may seem to be in love and yet may only be amusing himself."

"I don't think I'd care much for men and women like that!" declared Gloria, frowning. If she had been aware that Ellen had merely described a type and not the great body of men and women who constitute the rock upon which civilization rests, Gloria's frown would have been deeper.

There had come a chill over Gloria's enthusiasm for emulation. At a stroke Ellen had cheapened herself in the Western girl's eyes. Several times during the next half hour Gloria cast furtive glances at the girl who rode beside her, trying to hold in her mental vision the image of Ellen that she had endeavored to emulate. The ideal was no longer there. She now saw worldliness where she had seen purity, righteousness and gentleness; she divined faithlessness where she had looked for honesty and nobility; she sensed moral laxity where she had hoped for honor. She had depended much upon Ellen's character, for she had meant to shape her own by it in order to reach the perfection at which she aimed. Ellen had destroyed her ideals; Ellen had destroyed Lannon for her.

Gloria felt like refusing to go farther. Salt Cañon had lost its interest to her, though she had ridden there many times, enthralled by the beauty of the place. But she kept on, riding beside Ellen, aware of the difficulty of explaining her position, her feelings, to the cynical woman who was watching her with a strange smile. She had a desperate hope that Ellen had not meant exactly what she had said; that she had exaggerated merely to shock her. Each instant she expected Ellen laughingly to repudiate her confession. She wondered what Ellen would say if she knew that Lannon had kissed her, had threatened to kiss her again? No doubt Ellen would dismiss the incident lightly, or slyly taunt her. But to Gloria Lannon's action had not been amusing. The kiss had thrilled her, had awakened in her a strange, fierce responsiveness which persisted in spite of her efforts to fight it off. She knew that was because of her hope that Lannon had been serious. Ellen's talk had destroyed that hope, and now she felt shamed, guilty. She rode on, her face scarlet.

"Blushing?" laughed Ellen, peering intently at her. "I believe I haven't blushed in ages! Blushing is a sign of self-consciousness, Gloria!"

"I don't care a darn what it is! I think this is a rotten old world!" Gloria's voice was low and tense, though her lips were quivering.

"Why, Gloria!"

Ellen urged her horse close to Gloria's; laid a hand on her shoulder. Ellen's manner was sympathetic, but there was an eager, designing, mocking light in her eyes.

Gloria shook the hand off her shoulder and rode on, her face still red, her eyes flaming indignation through a mist. Ellen again urged Silver close.

"Gloria, what has happened to you?"

"Nothing. I'm just sick of everything."

"Tell me what it is, Gloria; perhaps I can help you?"

"I reckon nobody can help me," returned Gloria, somberly.

"Is it something I have done or said, Gloria?"

Gloria pulled her horse to a halt and faced Ellen.

"I reckon it's you," she said steadily, her gaze unwavering. "Ever since you

came to this country I've been watching you. I've been trying to be like you. And now you've been telling me those things."

"What things? What do you mean?"

"About men; about the way you act toward men; about you being in love so many times. I reckon a woman can't be in love with more than one man at a time and be decent."

"Oh!" gasped Ellen. She was silent for an instant, watching Gloria with amazed, wondering eyes. Then she laughed.

"I see," she said; "I've destroyed some of your illusions. You feel hurt because you find life to be slightly different than you thought it was. Don't take it so hard, Gloria. The older you grow the fewer illusions you will have—if you are wise. Illusions are like fruit; they blossom in youth, and are very beautiful. Experience kills them."

"I reckon I don't want any experience."

"Ah, but you will get experience whether you want it or not, Gloria. If I am not mistaken you are getting it right now. Surely my confession about my having been in love with more than one man has nothing to do with your blushing a while ago? You did not blush for me, Gloria?"

Gloria rode on, not answering. Ellen rode beside her, studying her face. The girl was really beautiful; and of course she was in love with Lannon. "I think the jewel is quite unconscious of the enthusiasm of the prospector," Lannon had said on the day they had been discussing Gloria and Lannon had referred to the girl as "raw gold."

Ellen thought the jewel was not so unaware of Lannon's enthusiasm as the latter had indicated by his words. In fact, it was Ellen's belief that Gloria knew more about Lannon's feelings than he. The "poor prospector" was either not pressing his claim ardently or he had done something to hurt the feelings of his "jewel."

"Gloria, has Lannon been one of your illusions?"

"I don't care anything about Lannon!" declared the girl shortly.

"Which means, of course, that you do," was Ellen's dry thought.

Ellen meant to lead Gloria into further confidential talk before the day was over. There would be plenty of time. Therefore she cleverly directed the conversation to more trivial things, and by the time they reached Bear Flat, Gloria was smiling and seemed to have become more optimistic.

Bear Flat was beautiful, and deserted. The short-cropped grass through which they rode showed why there were no cattle there. The girls went westward through the narrowing neck of the basin into a gorge whose sloping walls of rock shot upward like the sides of a wedge. Ellen had not ridden here before, and she kept glancing around, admiring the rugged beauty of the place. Gloria, evidently yielding to a recurrence of her former mood, rode steadily onward, her gaze straight ahead.

When they reached the opening of the big cañon, Ellen was awed and amazed, and rode close to Gloria as though she felt the need of human contact. As they went farther into the cañon, Ellen ceased talking and watched Gloria with reluctant admiration. The Western girl seemed so unconcerned, so sure of herself. She seemed at home here. An hour or so before, when they had had the talk about Gloria's illusions, Gloria had seemed pitifully helpless and inferior, so that Ellen had exulted in her own superiority. Down in this appalling place Gloria appeared to be quietly capable and efficient. She belonged to the country; the primitive in her matched the ruggedness, the wilderness of her surroundings. She was unawed, unamazed; even indifferent to the aching silence, the brooding calm. Ellen had a queer feeling that the superiority she had felt had been more or less imaginative; that it had really not existed. It was she who now felt the need of sympathy, and she began to believe that her cynical talk about illusions had been rather wild and baseless. One could not feel cynical here!

She rode close to Gloria. She had grown silent and thoughtful. The farther they rode into the cañon the more she was struck with the conviction of Gloria's indifference to the awe-inspiring ruggedness of the mighty chasm; the more humble grew her thoughts, the less conscious she grew of her own importance. Gloria had become the

dominating personality; Gloria, with her primitive reasoning, her old-fashioned moral sense, her elemental passions, and her childish illusions, had suddenly become great in Ellen's eyes.

When they reached the point where the waterfall sent its spume in straggling wisps of mist over the floor of the cañon, Ellen's voice was a mere whisper: "Gloria, I really believe I am afraid of this place."

"There's nothing hyeh to be afraid of," replied Gloria. The shortness of her answer reassured Ellen; and after they had watered their horses they rode on again.

It was nearly noon when they reached the point in the cañon where the floor went upward sharply; and with Gloria leading, the two girls crossed a stretch of broken country, threaded a tortuous way around the bases of some hills and came at last to an open stretch of land, hard and dry, that sloped gently downward to the edge of a vast, gray waste of sand.

"The desert!" exclaimed Ellen. She shook with agitation. Gloria saw her shudder and cover her eyes with her hands. "What an awful place!" she breathed. "But oh! It is wonderful, magnificent!"

"I reckon you've strayed off your range a little, ladies," said a voice behind them.

Startled, they turned.

Sitting on a horse not more than thirty or forty feet distant on the trail over which they had come, a broad smile on his face, satiric because of the great scar on his left cheek, which drew the skin together oddly, eyes brilliant with satisfaction, was Campan.

Where he had come from they did not know. They had not heard a sound behind them; he had appeared silently, as though he had suddenly risen from the rocks that littered the back trail.

CHAPTER XXVI.

CAPTIVES OF CAMPAN.

NOTING the fright in Ellen's eyes and the steady hostility of Gloria's gaze, Campan laughed.

"Surprised you, eh?" he said. "And I'm not welcome? Well, there's nobody around to see us, and there's no use of pretending. I'm mighty glad to see you. I was just coming out of the old cache back in the cañon when I heard your horses. So I just rode behind the underbrush and saw you ride past. It struck me that you were pretty far from home to be without an escort. That's why I'm here."

"Campan, we don't want any escort!"

Campan kicked his horse in the ribs and rode forward, halting close to Gloria.

With his left hand he removed his hat. Then he bent forward in what Gloria thought was to be an elaborate bow. Too late she grasped at the butt of the small caliber gun in its leather holster at her hip. Her fingers struck the leather; there was a glitter of metal in the white sunlight, and her gun lay in Campan's right hand.

"You were just a thought too late, Gloria," he mocked. He turned in the saddle and threw the weapon far back of him into the waste of rock. At the same instant Gloria's quirt lashed his face. He spurred his horse to a safe distance, uncoiled the rope at the saddle horn, and smiled derisively.

Seeing his purpose, Gloria leaped her horse. She had not ridden a dozen feet when Campan's arm straightened, the rope traveled a sinuous course toward her, and the noose settled over her shoulders, pinning her arms to her sides.

She pulled her horse back suddenly, for she had no wish to be jerked from the saddle, and for an instant fought the noose. But Campan was alert. The noose tightened, holding her arms to her sides in a terrible grip. As though having roped a steer, Campan's horse settled back, keeping the rope taut, while Campan slipped out of the saddle, ran to Gloria, lifted her down, lashed her feet together with a short length of rope, did the same to her hands, loosened the noose and stood erect, smiling.

"Run, Ellen!" screamed Gloria.

Terror had evidently paralyzed Ellen. Gloria's voice seemed to bring her to a realization of what was happening. She slapped Silver's flank, jerked his rein. Silver did his best to obey his mistress, but Campan's ruthless grip on the reins close to his mouth could not be ignored. He reared, plunged, then settled docilely down.

Campan wrenched the reins from Ellen's unresisting fingers, threw them over Silver's head, grasped Ellen's arms and pulled her from the saddle, tied her hands and feet as he had tied Gloria's, and then stood, cool, easy and deliberate, smiling down at his helpless captives.

"Just proving that you need an escort, ladies," he said.

"Campan, you'll regret this!" stormed Gloria, her eyes flashing.

"Perhaps. Who knows? It is enough that we have to deal with what is before us. Just now I am pretty well satisfied."

Campan's face was hideous. The huge scar had transformed him. The grin on his face seemed permanent, a dolorous smirk, for his mouth was awry, being pulled up and drawn in on one side. And yet otherwise he seemed physically unimpaired. He was as lithe as ever, as strong.

He said nothing more to the girls as he worked with the rope. He led Silver close to Gloria's horse and tied one end of the rope to Silver's reins. The other end he fastened to the reins of Gloria's horse. Then catching the rope by the middle, he threw it over the pommel of the saddle on his own horse. He now approached Gloria. Stooping swiftly, he untied her feet. She knew what was meant by his action in tying the two horses to the ends of his rope so that they could be led. He intended to force them to ride with him.

"Campan," threatened Gloria as she sat on the ground and stared wrathfully up at him; "you're a darned coward! I sure regret not letting Lannon kill you that night at Benson's!"

He was touched; his face reddened, a gleam of hate came into his eyes.

"Well, Lannon ain't here now," he answered, his voice dry and light.

"That's what Devake said that night. I told him Lannon would get him for fooling with me. He said just what you said. But Lannon was around, and Lannon killed him!"

Campan's eyes dilated with alarm. Involuntarily he cast a glance over a shoulder at the back trail. At the instant Gloria threw herself forward and grasped with her shackled hands at Campan's gun. Her fingers were gripping the butt before Campan realized what she was attempting. He seized her hands, brutally twisted them, and shoved her, so that she fell heavily. Then, before she could regain her feet, he ran to her, his face working with passion, seized her about the waist, lifted her and threw her astride her horse. Despite her frenzied struggles he lashed her feet in the stirrups. Stepping back he grinned at her, paying no attention to her dire predictions of coming vengeance.

Ellen was too frightened to resist when he placed her on Silver, lashing her feet as he had lashed Gloria's. If Gloria, capable and unafraid, could not cope with Campan, what chance had she?

Campan mounted his horse. He twisted in the saddle and stared backward for some seconds, scanning the country northward; then he faced south and stared into the reaches of the desert. Apparently he saw nothing alarming, for he smiled at the girls and urged his horse forward, leading the others.

Campan rode straight into the desert. As before, he paid no attention to Gloria's talk. He merely smiled when Ellen screamed. He rode steadily down the long slope that descended to the desert, for the sand was hard and made good footing for the horses. But once in the desert he was forced to walk his mount, for the sand grew deep and heavy, and the two led horses showed an inclination to hold back. Gloria's horse especially seemed reluctant, and after they had traveled a quarter of a mile, Campan looked back at Gloria.

"Got him trained to your knees, eh?" he said. "Well, it won't do you any good. If he keeps pulling back that way I'll shoot him and put you on with Ellen. I reckon you'd better make him quit it."

Thereafter Gloria ceased guiding her horse by the pressure of her knees. She felt Campan was in earnest, and she did not want him to kill the animal.

Their progress into the great sand waste was slow, but steady. And yet, after they had traveled for more than an hour, Gloria looked back, to see that the broken country they had left seemed not more than half a mile distant. Though she had ridden

to the edge of the desert many times, this was the first time she had ever entered it. From its edge she had been able to appreciate its vastness, the desolation that seemed to encompass it. But being in it was different from gazing at it from its edge.

From where she had viewed it many times it had seemed beautiful. For that matter it was still beautiful, though in its beauty now was a sinister threat, a promise of dire things to come. She saw that the section of broken country at the mouth of the cañon was shaped not unlike a peninsula sticking out into the surface of a calm, level sea. The gray waste of sand stretched far inward on both sides of it.

Back on the edge of the desert, in the stretch of broken country, in the hills they had threaded after leaving the cañon, and even in the cañon itself, there had been sound—the twittering of birds, the gentle whispering of the wind, the monotonous humming of insects, the rustling of leaves and the creaking of branches. The stillness here was so complete that the eardrums ached in seeking sound. It was monstrous, incredible. The senses expected sound; they seemed to resent not hearing it. Riding here was like swimming in a vacuum, for only the undulating movement of the horses convinced the girls that they were not swimming. The hoofs made no noise in the deep, heavy sand. Had it not been for the creaking of the saddle leather and the grunting of the horses as they labored, the girls might have been convinced that their senses were leaving them.

Campan rode ahead, frequently looking back, watching them with a satisfaction that had grown malicious.

They went always southward, though it seemed they made little progress. Gloria could still see the beachlike slope on the desert's edge; trees and rocks were clearly defined, though they had dwindled to toylike proportions. Gloria finally ceased looking back, for she had little hope of rescue to-day. Perhaps when they did not return to the Lazy J at dark, Bosworth would begin to worry about them; but not until then. Very likely he would send out searching parties for them after nightfall, and he would send directly to Salt Cañon, for Ellen had told him of her intention of riding there. But in the dark Bosworth and his men could not find their trail, and by morning the shifting sand would obliterate all traces of their passing. With their hands and feet bound there was no hope of either girl succeeding in dropping into the sand any object which a probable rescuer might find.

Ellen cried much, and the tears left streaks on her cheeks where they ran like tiny rivulets through the dust that had settled on her face. Gloria did not cry; she was too furiously angry to cry. She kept scanning the desert, seeking for salient features by which she might find her way back to the cañon should she by any chance succeed in escaping Campan. Far to her left was a region where small hills thrust their rounded peaks through the sand; once on her right she noted a low granite escarpment, its top a dull red in the shimmering sunlight. Straight ahead was a dun-colored mesa, its top making an unwavering horizontal line against a rose veil that seemed to stretch across the horizon behind it. The mesa was low, and perhaps a mile long. The sun was far down in the west when they reached it and rode around its eastern side, close to its wall, in the shade. The shade was welcome, for the heat had been intense.

Campan kept close to the slope of the mesa and rode on silently. Gloria saw they were going around the mesa, for once, looking back, she could no longer see the broken stretch of country they had left after Campan had seized them. Her thought was that Campan, fearing pursuit, meant to keep the mesa between them and the edge of the desert.

They were an hour or more in reaching the southern side of the mesa. And then Campan brought his horse to a halt and wheeled it, facing them.

"I reckon we'll stop here for a little while," he said. "It's likely both of you are yearning for grub, and a rest. If you're sensible you'll get both. If you go to cutting up any monkeyshines we'll get along."

Neither girl spoke. Campan grinned at them.

" That goes, I reckon?" he insisted.

" Your word is law right now, I expaict," answered Gloria. " But darn your hide, Campan, you'll pay for this!"

" Mebbe."

He swung down, threw the reins and approached Gloria, unlashing her feet. He helped her down and she stood stiffly motionless while he led her horse close to his own and shortened the rope. He performed the same service for Ellen; then led all the horses to a rock some distance away, where he tied them. Returning to Gloria and Ellen he released their hands, and without paying any more attention to them, went to his horse, unstrapped the slicker on the saddle, laid it on the ground, unrolled it and began unpacking some cooking utensils and food.

The sun, like a huge crimson ball, was vanishing behind a mountain peak that seemed to guard the rim of the desert. A flood of saffron light suffused the great waste, the white sky was turning to pearl and amethyst. At any other time the beauty of the sunset would have appealed to the girls. But now the glowing glory seemed to mock them. The burning, flaming prismatic spots that came and went, were unappreciated. The varied colors, slowly blending, the delicate rose veil that seemed suspended between earth and sky to be pierced by ever-widening streaks of crimson and gold; the deep purple shadows that were stealing toward them from the base of the distant mountain range — all were wasted upon Gloria and Ellen.

Busy at a fire he was kindling, Campan seemingly gave them no attention whatever. Obviously, having possession of the horses, he would be able to catch them before they could run very far. And they were perhaps a dozen miles from the edge of the desert.

(To be concluded NEXT WEEK.)

Business is Pleasure

by Murray Leinster

JACK found it difficult to be his natural self, even with the most wonderful girl in the world in the porch swing by his side, wearing his ring, and even with the first meeting with his prospective parents-in-law satisfactorily completed. His conscience hurt. He had been lying, unskillfully and grudgingly, but none the less lying, to people he genuinely liked. Still, no man wants to meet his future-in-laws with the confession that he has just been fired and is practically broke, which was Jack's case.

The porch was discreetly shadowed. Grace's profile was but a soft outline in the obscurity, her eyes flitting shyly to him now and then.

" So I've got to go on to Springfield in the morning," he was saying, unhappily, because it was quite untrue, " and get to work at my new place."

His entire capital consisted of a few dol-

lars and the fare to Springfield. Work was a thing to be sought with prayer and—considering his finances—every prospect of fasting. He considered the future gloomily.

"Jack," said Grace suddenly, "I want you to talk to dad."

She slipped away from him and returned a moment later, leading her father. The older man was smoking his after-supper cigar and looked oddly weary and a trifle discouraged.

"Didn't mean to bother you yet, Jack," he said slowly, "but Grace tells me you're thinking of going on to-morrow. We want you to stay over."

Jack waited. Grayson sat down on the porch steps and looked somberly out at the tree-shadowed street.

"I've a proposition I want to make you," he went on after a moment. "I knew your father, and you're going to marry Grace, and—I rather like you, Jack."

Jack grimaced a little, in the obscurity. His conscience hurt abominably.

"If it wouldn't be impertinent, sir," he said after an instant, and sincerely, "I'd like to say that I—well, sir, it's mutual."

Grayson nodded, unsmiling.

"I'm pretty old, Jack. Maybe Grace has told you about my business. It's in your line. It's running to seed. I don't know about the new ways of doing things, and I'm afraid I'm too old to learn. Now, I know you're ambitious. I rather gathered that you resigned your last place because there was no chance of your becoming a partner—or having a say in the way it was run."

"It—I guess you might call it that," said Jack with an inward twinge. As assistant manager in the store he had quit he had tried to put over a merchandising idea in spite of the opposition of the manager. The conflict in authority had left him jobless.

"Well"—Grayson puffed on his cigar and carefully knocked off the ash—"I know there are people who want to hold on to everything. And I know that a young man with any get-up-and-get about him wants to buy into something, so he'll be working for himself as well as others. I want you to look over my business to-morrow, Jack. You might like to buy in. I'm not going to make you a definite proposition, but I'd rather like to interest you. You see, we like you a lot, son, but we would like to have Grace near us. She—she's all we've got."

His tone was painfully matter-of-fact. He stood up suddenly.

"I'll talk to you in the morning," he added abruptly. "You and Grace have a lot to say to each other."

"All that I have," said Jack, feeling for his words, "is—er—tied up so I can't get at it right away."

It was—tied up in the future, and it was up to him to shake it loose. Grayson, however, understood him differently.

"All that can be arranged, I imagine," he said slowly. "I will see you in the morning."

He went inside, and Jack was left in the soft, warm summer night with Grace. He was wretched—utterly wretched. But what man can tell the girl who loves him that he is utterly broke, that he hasn't eaten a really decent meal for two days, that the box of candy he has given her was earned by a steady diet of hash and coffee? What man could confess to such a state of things?

When he went to bed, Jack had still failed of confession. Grace talked loyally to him. Wherever he went, she would go, but she begged him to consider her father's offer.

Lying awake, he writhed.

"You know, Jack," she had said, "if you think you'd better go on to Springfield, I'll come, too, but—if something isn't done, dad will lose his business. He just can't come up to date, and he knows it. The only thing that can keep him from losing everything is somebody like you. We'll still have our home—dad wouldn't mortgage that even to keep the business going, for mother's sake—but dad will just fret himself to death—"

II.

JACK woke in the morning, unrefreshed. Grayson waited for him after breakfast.

"Want you to take a look, son," he said cheerfully. "Maybe it won't strike you as a good proposition, but you might give me a suggestion or two, anyhow."

They walked down town. Grayson waved a hand at the clanging trolley cars.

"Good things, those trolleys," he commented ruefully, "but—somehow, I never could get used to the darned contraptions. I'm an old-timer, and I'm ashamed of it, but I haven't been able to change."

Jack, despite his bad night, could not but feel more cheerful after the walk. Burkton was a small town and a quiet one, but an eminently prosperous one, too. The professional instinct woke up in Jack, and he surveyed the passers-by with shrewd eyes. Grayson looked at him quizzically.

"Look here, son," he said amusedly, "I notice you're looking at every woman that passes. I'll have to tell that to Grace."

Jack did not flush.

"In our line," he pointed out, "it's the women that are buyers. I'm seeing what they've got on, so I'll know what they want."

"I'm hanged if I can figure it out." Grayson plodded along in silence for a block or more. Then he waved his hand. "Our main business street. There's my store there."

Jack looked up and down. A double trolley track in the middle, stores on either side, and a fairly vigorous early morning traffic. There was a traffic policeman—the only one in town—plenty of motor cars, even a motor bus, discharging passengers, and a generous sprinkling of those pert and fluffy, but amazingly capable young women who make cabalistic signs in ruled notebooks and decipher comprehensible letters out again.

For a moment Jack was not a young-man-out-of-a-job, but a business man, and he nodded in satisfaction at what he saw.

"Peach of a location, good trade, lots of passers-by, and plenty of window space," he commented. "You surely shouldn't be short of business."

Grayson led the way to his place and opened the door.

"Now, Jack, look 'er over and tell me the worst," he directed, though with a little twist at the corners of his mouth. He had been in business for forty years. It was not easy to beg advice from as young a man as Jack. "Ask for any information you want, and see that you get it. I'm going up to the office and "—his mouth twisted unhappily again—"and look over some bills."

He vanished, and Jack plunged in. For two solid hours he went over the place, talking to the three clerks, examining the stock, and growing more and more intent on the problem. He began to see some light, too. Jack was not purely a young man with a swelled head. He had literally worked up to second place in his last employment, and he did know his job. When he knocked on the door of the office and went in he was prepared to discuss the situation with knowledge of what he was talking about.

Grayson looked up and tried to smile. There was something of humiliation and a great deal of anxiety in his eyes.

"Well, Jack, what's the verdict?"

Jack sat down.

"Good and very bad," he said directly. "Your store is full of good stuff. Every bit of it is quality. Linens, silks, muslins—everything you've got is the best possible grade. Your ready-made stuff is good. It's sound, sensible stuff. The prices aren't too high. When a woman comes in this store she knows that what she buys is going to be of good quality and at a fair price. Some of it's underpriced. She knows she won't make a mistake in buying anything you've got on sale—from the standpoint of quality and service. It's only common sense to buy here. I'd like to make a bet that the bulk of your trade is with regular customers—people who wouldn't think of buying anywhere else."

Grayson nodded.

"That's right," he admitted. "But all the same I'm not making money. I believe it is common sense to buy here, but many people don't."

"Oh, yes, they do," said Jack firmly. "Women know what they're getting. They know they get good stuff and at a fair price here."

"Then why don't they?" demanded the older man helplessly. "Isn't that what they want?"

Jack grinned.

"Grace taught me something," he said

confidentially. "She made a comment once that I had to think over a lot, and it works out to this. Women want good values. They want good wear. They want to buy with common sense. *But they don't want to look that way!* They want to buy things that are serviceable and cheap and easy to wash and so on, but they'd be ashamed to wear them, if they looked like it. They want stuff that looks as if it would perish if worn more than once—and they want it to wear like iron. Your stock is conservative. It's just what women would buy if it didn't look conservative. They insist on looking extravagant, but they glory in economy. They've got a lot of common sense, but they'd die rather than look that way."

Grayson drummed on his desk.

"Maybe you're right. I believe you are. I'll take a flier on it if you say the word, anyway. I've got confidence in you, somehow, Jack. Are you game for a try at making this store over?"

"Like a shot!" said Jack fervently. "I'll get in a bunch of stuff and make the women flock in this store. They'll come in here to look at things that seem utterly useless and are just as good as the stiffest of silks and thickest of linens. They'll come to shop and remain to buy. And they'll buy what you have in stock now, too, if they're lured in by the other stuff."

Grayson heaved himself up from his chair.

"A thousand?" he queried. "That 'll do the trick? Can you manage it?"

Jack's eyes narrowed. He did not quite see what Grayson was driving at. He was momentarily the business man, considering a problem.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "A thousand, easily."

"Let's go on over to the bank," said Grayson, picking up his hat. "I needn't tell you, son, that I'm tickled to death you've decided to stay. I rather imagine that Grace—well, she'll tell you that herself."

Jack came to himself with a start. Grayson believed that he had a thousand dollars to put into the store. Grayson considered that a partnership agreement was to go in force, with Jack putting up at least a thousand dollars, and with Jack to initiate new sales policies that would make the business a success again. There was no question in Jack's mind but that the business was a good one, nor that with better-informed—because later-informed—methods it could be made to pay. The thing that gripped at Jack was the knowledge that he did not have a thousand dollars. And most particularly, he realized that his utter pennilessness and even the humiliation of his discharge was all bound to come out before the father of the girl he wished to marry, and in a very few minutes, too.

III.

GRACE was waiting for them when they reached home that evening. Jack saw her run down to the gate, her figure a slender white shape in the dusk. His face was curiously set, but Grayson was cheerfulness itself. They turned into the walk that led up to the house, and Grace lifted her face for her father's kiss and then—after a moment of shy hesitation—she proudly held up her lips to Jack.

He was unutterably wretched. He felt like a felon. These people had taken him into their home. They had intrusted their daughter's happiness to him, and now the father was taking him into partnership on terms that were generous in the extreme—and he was deceiving them.

At the supper table Grayson was in his element.

"Grace," he announced, "I've decided that Jack is a treasure. We need him in the family. He's a business man."

Jack winced. Grace's mother looked from one to the other.

"It's settled, then?" she asked anxiously. "Jack's going to stay here?"

Grayson laughed hugely.

"You couldn't drag him away!" he bragged. "I took him down to the store and he went over it with a fine-tooth comb. In two hours he came and told me more about my business than I knew myself. I took him over to the bank."

"What happened?"

"Why, I told Jerrod, the president, you know, that I wasn't going to close up after

all, that Jack was coming into partnership and we were going to make things hum. He knew Jack's father, as I did, but for all that he was pessimistic. Urged me to sell out and quit the business. Said it wasn't paying and couldn't be made to pay. Jack kept pretty quiet until he'd shot his bolt, but I egged Jack on then and you should have heard him talk!"

Grace shot Jack a glance of such infinite, innocent pride that Jack's soul writhed within him.

"He told Jerrod just what was the matter with the business, just how to fix it, just what sort of stuff he'd buy and just where he'd buy it, and when he'd finished, Jerrod said in that dry way he has: 'Young man, if I had one-half your enthusiasm and all my own brains, I'd make Rockefeller look like an amateur.' But Jack convinced him all the same."

"What arrangements did you make, dad?" It was Grace who asked eagerly.

"Jack's a full partner, with a half interest. He's to put up a thousand dollars, to be used in buying new stock. The bank will carry what notes I have. And since Jack told me last night that his money is tied up so he can't get at it right away, I told Jerrod I'd give him a mortgage on this place to cover Jack's note for a thousand. We could have fixed up the whole thing right then and there, but Jack wouldn't do it."

He was talking into a silence and stopped. His wife's expression was peculiar.

"You—offered to put up our home as security, Harry?" she asked slowly. Her eyes were filled with dread.

He hastened to reassure her.

"It's just to cover Jack's note," he told her urgently. "Jack will be security enough for that. He's going to be our son-in-law, isn't he?"

She managed to smile.

"Of course it's all right, dear. Only—we'd promised each other we'd never risk our home, no matter what happened."

Taken at his own valuation at the moment, Jack could have been purchased for something less than the price of his bone collar button. Grayson had gone ahead, at the bank, with such jubilant satisfaction and complete confidence that he had had literally no opportunity to protest the arrangements being made. Grayson assumed as a matter of course that Jack had saved at least a thousand dollars for his marriage and could realize upon investments and put it in the store.

Jack was in torment. His every instinct told him that the plans he had outlined to Grayson were feasible and sound business. He knew, absolutely, that he could do all that he had said, except put up the money. And now when he confessed Grayson would have every reason to believe that Jack had deliberately deceived him. Grace would lose something of her trust in him. It would be in nowise remarkable if her parents insisted on breaking the engagement. He would have humiliated them and Grace too.

He did not sleep well that night, and in the morning there were rings under his eyes. Grace was solicitous at the breakfast table, but Grayson went off in high fettle.

After breakfast Jack could stand the strain no longer. He put Grace off with the excuse that he wanted to take a long walk and mature his plans—feeling more and more of a hypocrite as he did so—and hiked himself nearly into exhaustion, thrashing the matter out.

On the one hand, he knew that he could put the thing through. Grayson's management had been old-fashioned, but conservative—too conservative. He held on to his old customers, but got no new ones. There was no doubt in the world but that, with modern sales methods, the store could be made to pay well.

But, on the other hand, he was little better than a swindler. Jack knew perfectly well that Grayson would have given no one else in the world the chance and the confidence he had given his daughter's fiancé. To no one else would he have subordinated himself, after forty years of business on his own. Jack could, by accepting Grayson's offer to put up his home as security, go through with the plan, and by the time his note was due have shown a sufficient improvement in the business to make his half interest in the firm worth

many times what the note called for. The business was inherently sound, but inadequately managed. A half interest would be worth ten, twelve, perhaps fifteen thousand dollars. He had only to let the thing go through and everything would be perfectly all right. But—

It was a very pale young man who was ushered into the office of the president of the bank. And he was resolute, almost grim.

"Mr. Jerrod," he said without preliminary, "I've come in here to call that matter off—the matter Mr. Grayson was discussing yesterday."

The banker looked at him through shrewd, estimating eyes.

"It seemed to me a rather good bargain for you," he commented.

"It was," agreed Jack desperately. "Too good. Look here, I'm going to leave town in about an hour. There's a train at one twenty. I want you to make some explanations for me."

He plunged into his story, sparing himself nothing, from the fact and the cause of his discharge to his present practically penniless condition.

The banker listened gravely, now and then tugging at the corners of his graying mustache.

"And now, sir," Jack finished grimly, "you see why I can't do it. If I had the money I'll swear to it I'd ask nothing better. I'd cheerfully borrow the money, with every confidence of being able to pay it back a dozen times over. If Mr. Grayson could spare the additional thousand I would not hesitate an instant, though a half interest in the firm would be much too great a reward for what I could do for him. But I can't let him put up his home on my say-so. I've deceived him, though I didn't intend to deceive him this far. I'm going to ask you to explain to him."

The banker looked up from the paperweight with which he had been toying.

"Why don't you do it?" he asked.

Jack hesitated.

"I—I like him, sir," he said unhappily. "I like him, and I'm engaged to his daughter, though this will probably finish that. It's bad enough to hurt him by running away. It would be a lot worse to have to face him."

Jerrod put down the paperweight.

"Tell me again why you were discharged," he said thoughtfully. "It interests me. I knew your father, you see, and it sounds somewhat like him."

Jack repeated the story.

"Very much like him," commented Jerrod. "You wanted to install new showcases all over the store and adopt a policy of two-page advertisements, and carried your fight over the head of the manager, so you were discharged. What do you think about your idea now?"

Jack hesitated.

"Well," he said honestly, "I think it would have paid in the end. But I rather think, now, that the remodeling was pretty drastic. It should have been done gradually. But, basically, the idea was sound."

"Basically," said Jerrod rather caustically, "those ideas are sound enough. Lack of them has put Grayson where he is. But they must be done gradually, if you don't want to wreck yourself on overhead expenses. Tell me just once more why you really think you were discharged."

Jack's lips set, then he tried to smile.

"If you want the truth of it," he said grimly, "I guess it was because I was too big for my pants."

Jerrod faced Jack squarely, and the trace of a smile appeared on his face.

"There, son," he said quietly, "you have hit on a big discovery. A man's real progress dates from the time he realizes what a fool he's been. Now, I'll tell you something. As the president of the bank, last night I decided that I wouldn't let Harry Grayson put up his home as security for a wild experiment by an enthusiastic but rather radical young man.

"Your agreement wouldn't have gone through in any event. But for a young man with enthusiasm and a sound conviction that he has made a fool of himself once, and particularly for a young man with decency enough to refuse to go through with a thing like that, even at great benefit to himself, I'll do a lot."

He paused and tugged at his mustache. "In my own proper person, not through

the bank, I'm going to lend you yourself a thousand dollars. I'm going to take an assignment of your partnership as security, and I'll be very glad to return it when you pay back to me, in profits, the sum I'm putting up. Then you will have earned the thousand I'm advancing."

"My—my Lord, sir!" Jack gasped. "You're offering to save my life!"

"Not quite," said Jerrod, still smiling faintly. "I think I'm going to make some money out of the business Grayson, Blake & Co. will throw my way after this. There is just one thing, son. I knew your father. If I were you I'd get myself married as soon as I could. It will make you work harder. And I'd tell my wife the whole story, right after I was married. I don't see why Harry Grayson should ever find out, though."

Jack rose to his feet and gripped the hand the banker held out to him.

"I'll tell him, sir, some day, as soon as I've proved myself. I'd like him to know and share my own opinion of you. You're splendid, sir."

The banker nursed his hand for an instant after Jack had left, treading on air. "'Splendid,'" he murmured gruffly to himself. "Nonsense. Business is business. That's all. And that's a good proposition. 'Splendid!' Nonsense!" But he was smiling, all the same, when he turned to his desk.

IV.

AGAIN the softly glamorous romance of a summer night. Again the discreetly shadowed front porch of the Grayson home. Again the quietness and peace of Burkton after business hours. Fireflies flitting here and there. Children playing "London Bridge is Falling Down" a little way up the street, in that fleeting, precious hour between supper and bedtime. The glow of after-supper cigars on an occasional porch. The hum of distant conversation. Peace and quietness, and the infinitely gentle contentment of homes unhurried and at rest. Again two figures sitting on the porch swing.

There was a feeble flicker of light, a tiny sparkle, from the ring on Grace's hand. Her face was a little grayish blur in the darkness, heartbreakingly dear. Her eyes, lifted to Jack's face, lighted up with soft happiness.

Jack was talking. "And—and, my dear," he was saying, almost awed, "he's going to do it. He asked me to promise to tell you after we were married. I thought you'd love me enough to marry me if I told you before."

Her hand closed tightly on his.

"We'll tell dad, too, just as soon as you have proved you're right," she whispered. "He'll be awfully proud of you, Jack."

"Nonsense," said Jack ruefully. "He'll probably be very angry, and I shan't blame him. But Mr. Jerrod said one more thing, Grace. He urged me to get married as soon as I could. Said it would make me work harder."

There was a breathless silence.

Grace's hand was warm and moist. She bent her head.

"I—I—have," she said uncertainly, shyly—"I have my hope chest almost full. And if it would be wise—"

Jack drew her very close.

"It would," he told her. "It would make me work harder, and that's good business. In fact, it seems to be a case where business is pleasure."

And, considering everything, she agreed with him.

"The Wreck," one of our most popular serials, by the late E. J. Rath, has been dramatized by Owen Davis, and as "The Nervous Wreck" scored a hit in Los Angeles preparatory to its New York showing.

The Unconquered Savage

by Richard Barry

Part IV

Author of "Petroleum Prince," etc.

CHAPTER XVI.

SUREFOOT TAKES THE TRAIL.

AS Ray Custer and the tall Cree chief left the dwelling—a lodge, the lofty Cree called it—in which Dan Whipple was being detained by silent Indians, the aviator felt that again his star was in the ascendant.

He felt secure in the presence of Surefoot. Despite the full knowledge he possessed of the Indian's stoic unconcern for human life, despite the fact that he had seen him ruthless in his punishment of whites, still he had an unshakable belief that Surefoot would not fail him now.

"It's Philippa!" he panted, grasping his friend's hand as soon as they were away from Whipple.

The eyes of the Indian gleamed with suppressed concern, then coolly closed, until only a narrow slit revealed their alert pupils. "Is it not well with her?" he asked, with level voice.

Ray stammered in striving to tell quickly all of his story. He skipped most of the details, but managed without delay to describe the false attack in the night, the killing of Wood, his own narrow escape, his loss of consciousness, and the probable escape of Philippa. He watched the Cree narrowly to note the effect of the tale on him, but the phrase "like an Indian," well describes the manner in which Surefoot accepted this account of deception, death, and attempted abduction.

"Good!" was the one word the Indian uttered when Ray had finished, and remained in an attitude of deep thought.

Ray was frantic. "But you can do something—surely!" he cried.

"Oh, certainly," said the Cree. "I will save her—if she is still alive. Come."

"But they have horses."

"So?"

"You can never overtake them on foot."

"We will not try."

"But you said you would save her."

This colloquy continued, rapid fire, as Ray trotted along at the side of his dusky friend.

"That all depends on how soon I can reach her. I know the Panther. It may be too late."

They had now reached a turn in the rocks in the rear of the collection of mud and bark huts, or lodges. As they passed a bowlder Ray saw a corral with a score of horses grazing inside. Hope leaped into his heart. He expressed his excitement.

This story began in the Argosy-Allstory Weekly for May 27.

A grim smile passed over Surefoot's face. "We, too, will have horses," he said. "You take the roan. This black is mine."

Saddles and bridles lay to hand. In a few minutes they were ready to start.

"But the Panther was not alone," Ray protested, as Surefoot turned his pony's head into the trail that led back to the camp. "There were a dozen or more with him."

"He is never alone—unless he wishes to enjoy his evil plunder."

"Ah! Then you think he may be alone now?"

"Perhaps."

They struck into an easy lope that quickly carried them from the sight of the encampment. When they had ridden a short distance Ray pulled alongside the crupper of the accompanying mount. "Teddy!" he called.

"Well, my friend?"

"I want you to promise me something."

"Yes?"

"When we find him—when we find them I want you—I want you—to let me—me alone—deal with him."

The Cree looked the white boy—for Ray seemed no more than a boy—squarely in the eyes. "You love Miss Horton?" he asked.

Ray nodded his head.

"You wish to marry her?"

Gravely Ray nodded.

Surefoot looked straight on. "Then let me attend to the Panther!"

"But I insist," Ray protested as he urged his pony to keep abreast of the other. "It is only right—it is only fair that I should have my chance to even the account. Did he not try to kill me?"

Surefoot countered grimly. "And do you think he has never made a similar attempt on me?"

"That may be," Ray continued, "but in this case I think he belongs to me. If you're a good fellow, Teddy, you'll leave him to me."

The Indian did not change the grave aspect of his face, though the corners of his mouth were drawn if possible a trifle tighter. "We will see," he said.

"But I want your promise."

"You will have your chance," the Indian said laconically, concluding the brief colloquy.

There was little chance to talk further now, for they entered a cleft of the hills that Ray would not have dared attempt alone, even if he had been on foot. Considering that they were mounted, the climb seemed perilous in the extreme.

It appeared that a mountain rose directly above them. As Ray saw Surefoot direct his pony apparently straight up its precipitous side he made an involuntary protest against such foolhardiness. However, even as he spoke, the Indian disappeared, and, a moment later, he himself arrived at the turn whence his friend had passed out of sight.

Ahead was a gentle declivity that led among sparsely grown cedar saplings. From below, one who did not know the country never would have guessed that a way lay thus up the very side of the precipitous mountain.

After they had gone a thousand yards or so along this declivity, Surefoot made another abrupt turn and found another upward path which led the ponies in a climb where their feet struck fire among the glancing bowlders. By means of a stiff ascent for half a mile they lifted themselves thus rapidly into the upper regions of the mountain.

Ray was bewildered, but he felt quite safe with this master of woodcraft who guided him on so surely. At the end of two hours the ponies emerged, breathing desperately, wet with foam, on a ledge at the very top of the peak. Surefoot halted and surveyed the country, scanning the horizon anxiously in all directions.

Looking far below at their feet, but miles off, Ray thought he detected the corral and the remaining tepees of the encampment from which he had so narrowly escaped the night before. He called Surefoot's attention to it.

With few words, but with eloquent gestures, the Indian pointed out how indirect had been Ray's route back to find him. The white man gasped in amazement as he saw clearly that while the Panther's camp lay but a few miles away as the crow flies,

it was several times that by the circuitous path he had chosen.

Perceiving this fact his heart bounded with a new belief. "Then you'll know how to head him off from where he's bound for now!" he cried to his dark companion.

Surefoot made no direct reply. Instead he seemed immersed in the remarkable occupation of bending a bow from the limb of a near-by tree. As soon as he had accomplished his seemingly purposeless object he fitted it with a bent branch, barely a foot long, and sent this spinning into the air, through the trees. It fell a few hundred yards away. Then he lay close to the ground and listened intently.

To Ray's ears there was no reply, but the Indian seemed gratified in a moment, for he rose, still without speaking, mounted his horse, signed for Ray to follow, and plunged into the woods on the top of the mountain.

A few minutes later the blue shirted, khaki clad form of a Cree scout appeared through the underbrush. He came silently forward, and for a few minutes swiftly communicated with Surefoot in the native language.

Then, at a wave of his master's hand, the scout disappeared whence he had come. Surefoot beckoned again to Ray, who followed him obediently as his pony struck into a long lope down the opposite side of the mountain.

"What's the news?" Ray asked.

The only answer was a shrug of Surefoot's shoulders. Half an hour later, however, they were obliged to dismount to let the ponies pass through the defile of the rocks, where they had to be led.

In the breathing space they took after this Ray again asked what Surefoot had learned from his scout.

"The Panther has gone to his central camp," the Cree said; "my men have picked him up as he came that way."

"And you know where it is?"

Surefoot merely nodded his head as he mounted his pony.

"How far?" Ray asked.

"Two hours."

Again they were loping along down the other side of the mountain, but a deadly fear obsessed Ray. Something in Surefoot's reserved manner seemed to indicate that all was not well.

"Is the Panther alone?"

"He has a woman."

"Your scouts report that?"

"Yes."

Ray glanced aloft. In less than an hour the sun would be down. "Are you sure you know the way?" he demanded.

His skepticism merited no answer, and Surefoot was silent, though he urged his pony on recklessly through the dwarf pine and chapparal.

"Two hours!" Ray muttered to himself as he strove valiantly to keep up.

It was at this very moment that Philippa, crushed, sank into the divan in the cabin of the Panther, while he closed the door with the remark that she might have two hours to decide as to which she should choose—his attentions or those of his men.

The two little windows, previously described, were above her reach. She brought a stool, placed it under one of them, and by standing on it managed to look out. She could see only the woods, but the light was growing dim in the late afternoon, and she felt that a way of escape lay there if she could manage to get through the window.

However, she resolved to try for an escape in that direction. Piling a box on top of the stool she managed to get a fair purchase for her arms, and slowly, with exceeding difficulty and a strain of which she was unaware, so fierce was her desire to get away, she raised her body to the level of the window. Then she poked her head out, and looked. The way was clear.

In an instant she had wriggled through. She fell to the ground, but promptly started to her feet, and in another instant would have been safely in the shelter of the woods.

However, just as she rose to her feet, two stalwart forms appeared, seized her roughly and conducted her rapidly back to the door, which they opened. Then they trust her unceremoniously within the cabin.

She heard the bolt slip again in place, and a minute later a log slipped over first one window and then the other, blotting out the little remaining sunlight.

She was now in total darkness, alone, with a very short time left, and the feel of those Indians on her arms. An even nearer proximity of these abominable savages was her "alternative" to the almost white Panther.

She shuddered, but her eyes were dry. There were no tears left.

Some miles away Surefoot came to an open, clear space, and gave his pony his head. A voice from the rear caused him to rein up.

"Ease up, Teddy, old pal!"

It was the voice of Ray Custer, who was trying to stumble along as best he could and keep up with his companion. "It's dark. I can't see a hand in front of my face."

"Keep close to me, then," the Indian insisted.

"How can you find your way in this night?"

"Don't talk. Come along. Keep close to me."

They proceeded more slowly after that, but with the coming of night Ray's spirits fell. He realized that Philippa might possibly escape the claws of the beast during the daylight, but with the fall of night her chances were slim, indeed.

And there was no sign of habitation, no sign of a light, no sign even of a trail.

Only the plodding figure of the patient Surefoot sturdily astride his intelligent and obedient pony gave the white man courage.

Thus they urged a way on through the night and into the deeper wilderness.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE PANTHER'S PREY.

ALONE within the cabin Philippa felt that she was ready to the Panther's hand like a snared animal — the prey, indeed, of the ferocious beast who had caught her. Outside the area swarmed with his followers; how many, she had no way of knowing. She had seen several as he pointed them out from the door; two had seized her when she had gone through the window. Enough to make escape hopeless.

The certainty of the accomplishment of what she dreaded crushed her with its surety. Gone was her power of action. Her body ached with the grip first of the savage mongrel himself, and then of his still more savage followers.

She felt that her moral breakdown was all but complete, and yet—

As she groped, hideously forlorn, along the walls, her hand came in contact with the butt of a pistol. She grasped it as might a drowning man a straw. Here was something better than life; here was death. And in death alone now lay honor.

She cried aloud with a little peal of joy, and a swift answer came to her cry with the grating of the bolt in the outer door. She must hasten. Another minute and it would be too late.

She directed her last thoughts toward Ray Custer. He had been the one love of her life, and now she would pass out before he could really know it. For an instant she thought she would find some way to write him a note, a mere word, a scribble of farewell. But how, in the dark, without paper, without even a pencil?

Then the door opened and the rays of light from a lantern protruded across the floor. With a great sob of fear that she had waited too long, she thrust the muzzle of the weapon against her temple and pulled the trigger.

A click rewarded her; a deadly, tiny, dull, ineffective little click! The pistol had missed fire! And at the same moment the gruff voice of the Panther sounded through the struggling lantern's rays:

"Well, my beauty, and is your mind composed at last?"

She hurled the pistol on the floor in a rage and sprang at him. He wore a knife at his girdle, and with unerring deftness she snatched it from him and ran to the far corner of the room while she raised her hand swiftly to strike herself with all her strength in the breast.

Even as the knife reached within an inch of her skin her hand was seized and a crack of the wrist opened her slender clasp. The weapon cluttered to the floor. The Panther hurled her to the divan and sat on the box, facing her, his eyes blazing.

"You fool!" he muttered. "I left that empty gun to see if you'd go that far—but I had no idea you'd have the nerve to try to steal my knife. Ha! Ha! What a testy temper we have to-night! Come! I am not half so bad as you think me."

He paused for her reply, but she cowered away from him and buried her face out of his sight. Roughly he seized her and forced her to look into his eyes.

"There, my beauty, look at me! They call me the Panther because they know how sure I strike; but I can purr, too."

He tried to caress her, but as he reached for her she leaped on him, first, and dug her nails with terrific fury into his face. It required much of his strength to quell her, but he could not induce her to remain quietly in his arms. She wriggled and twisted free and dashed to the farther side of the room, where she stood, panting and sullen, at bay.

He stood stanchly, feet wide apart, head lowered somewhat, facing her. He seemed like some wild bull angered by resistance and ready to charge to the death. Yes, even as his virile intrepidity asserted itself in his conquering pose, his left shoulder twitched. As if convulsively it clung closely to his side. Absentmindedly he pressed it back and eased it with his other hand. Not a movement was lost on the observing Philippa.

Strange how that little gesture of automatic physical relief on the part of the renegade sent anew a thrill of mounting hope through the harassed girl! She had just faced death. She had, in fact, to all intents and purposes, and with practically all the sensations, marched to the very door of death in the few minutes preceding. An accident, a fatal trick, or, as she guessed from the Panther's taunt, his sardonic toying with her—like a cat with a spent mouse—had saved her life.

Her eyes were awake to the slightest move; her ears were keen to sense the bending even of a twig; she felt there must be a projection of her consciousness and that she must call out of the hereafter the spirits of her progenitors to find a means for her to combat and to slay this monster who seemed now so sure of his prey.

In this highly sublimated state, in which her reason and her subtle animal instincts were roused to the keenest sensibility, the twitching of the Panther's left shoulder and the caressing of it with his strong right hand somehow offered a promise.

She had dressed the wound; she knew its anatomical structure. Her mind instantly seized upon that and began to build. True, the bone had not been touched. Not even the major muscles had been severed. And yet it was something—it offered a slight opportunity.

Doubtless she would not have thought of it if the Panther had not himself advertised his irritation. Her eyes were not deceived. She realized that he was unconscious of the irritation. She had no idea that a vigorous creature of the wild like this could either suffer or be deterred by a wound so slight.

Yet on it she evolved a plan to outwit him. There was a step to take first, and in taking it she became for the moment an actress. Up to that moment her emotions had been real. Her swooning, her despair, her rage, her insensate fury had come from a quick heart and an outraged spirit. Then sophistication intervened, and the subtle female appeared to match wits with the stalwart brawn of the unprincipled male.

Only the fraction of a minute had passed, but suddenly she lurched forward as if she would fall into the Panther's arms. Eagerly he advanced to take her in his embrace.

As if entirely by chance she swerved ever so slightly and evaded his clutch by an inch. She caught herself on the edge of the corner cupboard, but in a way which, in the dull light of the swinging lamp, could appear to his passionate and unsuspecting eyes only blind accident.

In an instant he was beside her and had his well arm about her, but in that instant she had rapped her head against the cupboard, and thus was permitted to pretend that the rap brought her to her senses.

Then, mistily, as if unaware, of his proximity, and controlling with an effort her intense repugnance for him, she sidled toward him, looked dreamily into his face,

and waved weakly toward the shelf. "A drink! I want a drink!" she moaned.

With an alacrity only too willing he followed her suggestion. Hoping, perhaps, that at last the change he had striven for had come to her, he reached for the bottle, picked up two glasses, and poured forth into each a generous drink.

One he handed to her, the other he raised to meet it. For a brief instant her mind canvassed the possibilities of disposing of the liquor otherwise than down her throat, but she promptly realized this was impossible unless by some ruse she could not discover at the instant.

His eyes were eagerly on her; she could not hesitate too long, else he would see through her shamming.

She raised the glass weakly to her lips, opened her mouth, and slowly began to pour the contents into her mouth. Meanwhile she watched him from beneath lowered lids. To her immense relief, she saw him raise his glass.

He drained it at a single gulp, but even that gulp took a few seconds, and in that tiny fraction of time she accomplished her object—she managed to pour the liquor not down, but into her throat. Then she coughed, and was seized by a spasm in which she managed to expel the hot, burning stuff.

Only a few drops trickled down her throat; enough to stiffen her nerve, but not enough to give her wits the least fraction of uncontrol.

The Panther dropped his glass and thumped her roughly on the back. She righted herself and gazed into his face with a slow smile.

"That's good!" she said, as if wonderingly and realizing his presence for the first time.

For an instant the burning fire in his eyes seemed equalized by the firewater he had poured down his gullet. Was it possible that at last this redoubtable girl was to give in to him, and peaceably? He liked to have women resist, but he liked it even better if, after a prolonged and vigorous resistance, they surrendered.

She, meanwhile, had straightened her body and was weaving sinuously past him. Just over their heads, hanging down from the corner of the cupboard, hung a twisted lariat, its loops resting easily a foot above her reach.

It was toward this loop of rope that her strategy was directed. It must be in such a position that when she wanted to use it she would have to reach but a few inches, and when she did reach for it she must accomplish her purpose with the proper upward motion to free it. At best she would have only an instant, and what she did must appear to be another accident.

Naturally he reached for her as she appeared to pass in a spirit—he hoped—of coquetry. As his fingers closed on her she leaped upward instead of in any of the other directions that were plausibly open to her. Just as inevitably his grasp followed her, and then she sank to the floor inside his arms, with him after her.

But when she came down it was in the center of the lariat. She had managed to project her head through the loops, and, with the deft movement which she had desired to make, accomplished with remarkable certainty, had dislodged the rope from its resting place. Now it swirled its coils about her and impeded his grasp as he sought again to inclose her in his good arm.

With an exclamation as if of annoyance, though secretly elated, she scrambled to her feet, half helped by him. She had managed this so she would come up on his left side, while part of the lariat was still clinging to her.

This was the moment for which she had planned. So far all had come out as she had hoped. And now she struck with the speed of a reptile. And it was on the sore arm—the arm already slightly wounded by her little twenty-two-caliber bullet. Her nails dug into the flesh which she had bound up so skillfully a short time before, and they dug with a terrific intensity. Even a girl from the city could hardly have hoped to incapacitate a strong man of the woods with so futile an attack, for this insignificant hurt could only infuriate him. That is exactly what she desired to do, and her purpose bore instant and happy fruit. The Panther went wild with rage.

The sudden revelation of a really maleficent, hidden purpose in the charming girl coincided with the poignant pain of the newly opened wound and the tearing flesh of the slightly healed shoulder. For the first time he completely lost control of himself. He plunged after her with a frank unloosing of a passion different from the one he had been shrewdly calculating to satisfy at his leisure and in a fashion most pleasing to his depraved tastes.

This was not lust; it was anger. And anger cost him his dearly won opportunity. As he sprang Philippa swerved half around his back, and as she swerved she brought with her the lariat, looped securely about the good arm and now deftly switched about the torn one.

With a strength which seemed not to come from her frail body she threw the rope about him and knotted it tightly. It must have been the summoned spirits of those brooding ancestors which assisted her in this, for otherwise it seemed impossible that a mere girl could have so easily snared so alert and so strong a man.

Yet an instant later there he lay, bound, helpless, panting, glaring, at her feet. And she was free! Free except for those uncounted redskins in the shadows outside the cabin. She shuddered as she thought of them, and resolved to stay where she was until morning.

Surely some one must be searching for her even now—surely relief must be on its way. And now she felt secure. The danger past, her nerves gave way, and she subsided to a chair, consumed with dry sobs.

But, even as she sobbed, a terrific danger enveloped her again. The call of a jay resounded through the cabin. It was night, and they were indoors, and yet the jay called and called again, as he had that day on the mountainside.

She looked toward the bound and helpless Panther. Too late she realized her mistake. That slitted mouth was twitching with suppressed intensity. As she watched it she felt as if she actually could see the cry of the jay issue forth.

With a great sob of regret she leaped toward the stricken man and gagged him with the sleeve of her coat, which she tore desperately from its moorings. Only then did the jay become quiet, but a look of satanic defiance from the blazing eyes of the bound man made her tremble with apprehension. There ensued a period of mortal terror, in which Philippa listened acutely for sounds from outside.

She had previously seen his horses respond to this call of the jay, and now she had seen whence came the call. Could there be any doubt that his men would respond at least as eagerly as his dumb creatures?

The only chance for her safety lay in the possibility that it had not been heard. She crept softly to the door and listened. She heard slight noises as of things stirring, but that might be the wind in the branches of the trees.

For an instant she was tempted to put out the light in the lantern, but decided that was not wise, as its ray might filter through the chinks of the door and windows; and if the men did hear the jay call and came to the cabin to investigate, they would find the light still burning, and with no further sound from inside might possibly conclude they were mistaken. Doubtless they were filled with respect for their leader which would cause them not to attempt an entrance to his dwelling if there was any chance of disturbing him in such circumstances.

Even as these thoughts consumed her she was horrified to realize that the log which covered one of the windows was being removed. Hypnotized, terrified, she gazed on it as it fell away. Then the face of an Indian appeared in the aperture through which Philippa had a fleeting glimpse of the stars in the blue sky. An instant later a body wriggled through and dropped lightly to the floor of the cabin.

At the moment when Philippa leaped up to project her body through the lariat Surefoot and Ray Custer were picking a precarious way, pony back, through the woods on the mountainside above, less than a mile away.

Surefoot had dismounted and was leading his pony as he picked a course slowly

on foot through the tangled underbrush. An ivy creeper of peculiarly tough fiber abounded in the woods in this vicinity, and this rendered doubly dangerous any rapid advance on horseback, especially at night, when one could not see distinctly. Previously Ray had been caught about the middle and swept from the back of his pony as he tried to follow the Cree who was leading him. After that Surefoot proceeded on foot and insisted that Ray come after on horseback.

As he rode thus at ease the white man reflected that his red friend was permitting him to conserve his strength for the final test, which was sure to face them when they emerged at last to confront the wily Panther. Doubtless he would have need of all his strength, for it seemed to him now a foolhardy thing to come alone, two men, thus, after a band which numbered many more.

Why had not Surefoot brought his followers? This reflection began to outweigh in Ray's mind his gratitude for the rest he was securing on the back of the faithful pony. He began to recall the many peculiar phases of Surefoot's actions—his shooting down of the renegade Indians who opposed him, his arbitrary arrest of Dan Whipple, his calm gaze on Philippa. That look which Surefoot had given Philippa bothered him most of all. It was quite unlike the frank, insulting stare of the Panther. But was it not more menacing?

Alone in the vast wilderness of the Rockies, intrusting himself to the faith and mercy and skill of one Indian to hunt down and punish the treachery of another, Ray suddenly trembled with apprehension.

He longed for at least one white man to stand by him.

And yet what could he do but go on?

"Dismount!" came a low order from in front. Obediently Ray got down.

"Tether the ponies here. We will continue on foot.

Ray again obeyed, and they proceeded. "How soon?" he whispered.

"A few minutes. Sh-h!"

Surefoot crept on as silently as if he had been a soft-padded cougar stalking a sleeping deer.

Philippa hid herself in the shadows of the cabin as the Indian came to his feet on the floor and swiftly made a way to the side of his bound leader. In another moment the Panther stood free again. There seemed no need of words between him and the faithful follower who had answered his call so promptly.

Without a word the Panther conducted the Indian to the door, unbolted it, and saw him out, then bolted it again, flexed his arms refreshingly, came to the light, and examined the torn shoulder—evidently with satisfaction—and then advanced easily toward the cowering girl.

"You are worth the trouble," he said coldly, as he gathered her in his arms.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BATTLE TO THE DEATH.

PHILIPPA was mute. Ice seemed to fill her veins. To what purpose had been her superhuman activity, her almost miraculous struggles to escape? Here she had come at last to the dread end against which she had fought with all the powers she possessed.

Even when she had placed the pistol to her head and pulled the trigger, she had not been resigned. That had seemed but an avenue of escape. It was only now, for the first time, that she gave up hope. The fighting spark within her was quite without ifle. She was listless, inert—the same as dead.

She was not conscious of his touch as the Panther took her in his arms. He held her for a short time, then rained passionate kisses down on her lips.

He did not relish her lack of response. Muttering an oath, he dropped her seemingly lifeless form and strode to the cupboard, where he took a deep draft from the whisky bottle. Then he returned to Philippa and plied her with the drink, which only poured idly down her neck. Her teeth were fast shut; her eyes closed; only a low respiration gave evidence of life.

Finally, with a furious cry of baffled resentment, he reached back as if to strike her, when his hand was arrested in the very

act. Two shots rang out in quick succession. His alert ear told him they were not from the same gun, but that they came, rather, from widely separated positions.

He listened intently now, permitting the girl to rest on the divan and poising himself lightly on one knee. His trained ear detected sounds of stealthy advance in the underbrush. Was he to lose his prey now?

First he took the precaution to drag Philippa to a chair and bind her there with the lariat she had used to tie him. The process brought her to consciousness.

He worked very rapidly, muttering vile oaths as he went deftly about his precautions. As he thrust the last knot into place he picked up from the floor the knife she had previously taken from his belt. Evidently he was about to replace it, but some premonition of what he was yet to face seemed to cross his mind, for he advanced on the helpless girl, took her by the throat and brutally held the knife against it as if to slit her windpipe.

There must have been a gleam of satisfaction in her eyes, for he quickly placed the knife in his waist as he muttered, savagely, "No, that's too easy."

Then a dozen shots rang out from the doorway outside, and he crossed warily to the window. Lifting himself on the box beneath he looked out cautiously.

Philippa, from her bound position in the chair, faced the door in one direction and the window in the other, now fully conscious she could observe, by the light of the lantern, all that happened.

The two shots that had first halted the Panther had come as he surmised from different weapons, wide apart. The first had been fired by his guard stationed a hundred rods in front of the cabin on the trail that entered the woods above. This guard had detected two forms slipping along, like shadows, and striving to execute a flank advance on the cabin. He had fired without warning and the shot whistled between Surefoot and Ray.

The second shot came in instantaneous answer from Surefoot's revolver. It had the flash to aim by, and it had a better marksman to drive it. As a result the guard fell, shot through the head.

"So far, so good," Surefoot observed quietly to Ray as he called softly: "Now run for it. See the light in the cabin? Make for that."

But a good space intervened, and it was filled with the Panther's men before the two could get to the door. At least, it seemed to Ray that the space was filled, but he quickly got an accurate count of their enemies from his guide and companion.

"You take that one on the left," Surefoot whispered, pointing out a figure emerging from the side of the cabin, "and I'll see to these three on the right."

"You're on!" replied the aviator as he whipped out the two revolvers he had been carrying. He fancied himself back on the football field, starting to buck the line after the signal had been given.

At this point began the fusillade which the Panther heard from inside the cabin as he crossed to the window.

Ray never was able to tell exactly what happened in those few minutes. He realized that he had only one Indian to account for, and the consciousness came to him that in the final strategy Surefoot had kept his promise to the very best of his ability, under the circumstances. In alloting himself three-fourths of the enemy he was clearing the way as best he could for Ray to have his chance at the final rescue.

The aviator was inspired with gratitude as he took aim on the advancing skulking figure. Whatever happened now, whether this was his last moment on earth, or whether he emerged triumphant, he would never forget the fidelity of the mighty Cree.

As if to seal the bargain and give it weight his first shot went unerring to its mark. His revolver and that of his antagonist exploded as with one flash, but his was the surer aim, doubtless due to the fact that he was dim in the shadows of the wood while the Indian stood out clearly silhouetted in the clearing surrounding the cabin.

The Indian fell headlong to the earth, and Ray dashed on with a glad cry. "I got him!" he yelled, reassuringly, to Surefoot as he dashed forward.

But he had reckoned without the arch enemy of all, the Panther himself, who at that moment leaned out of the window,

which, unfortunately for Ray, was located on his left, the side he had been assigned by Surefoot.

Surefoot, accustomed to all the ruses and subtleties of this sort of warfare, would not have cried out, would not have advanced so swiftly in the open. As it was, he was now conducting his little private battle with the three who opposed him with skillful craft of the wood. He made no response to the premature jubilation of his white friend, for only one of the three was as yet accounted for.

The Panther, by the light of the stars, saw his follower fall, heard the cry of Ray and saw him dash for the cabin door. Leaning out securely he took a careful aim and fired. Ray merely hesitated for a second and then kept on. A second shot, almost at point-blank range, stopped him.

Ray crumpled in a little heap at the corner of the cabin, and lay stark and still under the pale starlight. The Panther leaned out and took careful aim for a third shot which he evidently purposed to fire, for good measure, into the prostrate form.

However, a string of shots from around the corner caused him to hesitate. He concluded to save his ammunition. He had recognized Ray as the young aviator whom he had planned to dispose of the day before, but he realized that there was far greater danger in Surefoot, should he be in the attacking party. So he held his fire and waited. Ray was *hors de combat,* at any rate, and, for all he knew, dead.

Silence now intervened that lengthened into minutes. The gaunt form of the Panther had withdrawn to the safety of the cabin, but his eye swept the clearing from the window. He expected to get word from some of his followers that the attack had been repulsed, and to receive news of the casualties.

But nothing happened. To the Panther this argued but one of two conclusions: either his men had all been killed with the same result for the pursuers, or else one or more of the pursuers had survived. As he puzzled over this problem, with its possible imminence of danger to himself, he let the minutes drag into half an hour, and then on to forty, and fifty minutes.

In this weary, interminable time, all but suffocated by the tightness of her cords and the mystery of the night, her nostrils sickened with the fumes of powder, her brain exhausted with alternate despair and hope, Philippa finally was unable to remain quiet longer. A single dry sob escaped her.

The Panther responded by coming to her side. His demoniac face, now tense with the sense of danger, and alert to avoid the final payment for his evil deeds, glowered over hers. He could not see plainly enough, and so turned up the light.

As he did so a shot came through the window. Instantly and with astonishing swiftness the Panther dropped to the floor, seeming to propel himself with uncanny directness to a position directly behind the chair occupied by Philippa, in this way placing her between him and the window.

Thus, crouching behind her chair, and in a sense protected by her, the wily savage drew his revolver and opened fire on the figure which had now dropped lightly inside.

It was Surefoot, unhurt, calm, silent.

Philippa, now fully alive to the situation, was between the two Indians; one the full-blooded Cree, the other the part-blood who seemed to have inherited the bad qualities of both races and the virtues of neither.

The Panther, from behind the chair in which she was tied, opened fire first. Slowly, one shot at a time, and with deliberate aim, he discharged three bullets across the room in the direction of his antagonist.

Even before the first shot Surefoot had apparently concealed himself along the floor. He had managed to secure one of the buffalo robes that stretched from the foot of the divan and had slipped under this. It rose in hillocks so that one could not tell just where he lay.

The Panther, evidently more familiar with his enemy's methods than the observant but inexperienced Philippa, could be heard making a sharp address to the hidden man under the buffalo skin. It was in the jumbled Cree dialect, so Philippa could not understand it, but its accents were those of defiance and jubilation; evidently the war-whoop of a warrior about to kill his adversary.

Then came the three shots, discharged

each in an apparently vital portion of the buffalo skin, or at least where one might suppose the vital part of a man's anatomy would be if he lay hidden under the skin.

There was no response. The skin lay as still as if it were no more than a casual floor covering. Philippa's heart sank. Of course the Panther must have been successful. How could he fail, at a distance of twelve feet, and with such a target? Why, she herself could not have failed under these conditions.

After a long time she saw the Panther "break" his revolver and make to reload it, but a search of his waistband revealed there were no more cartridges there. Then he slowly, but with utmost caution, as he kept a close eye on the buffalo skin, began moving toward the door where hung a belt filled with cartridges.

The moment he had proceeded a distance of two paces beyond Philippa, and when she was quite clear of the line that passed from the Panther to the skin, the covering of the departed buffalo shook violently. An instant later Surefoot stood poised before them, a knife in his hand, while he dropped his revolver at his feet.

Evidently his ammunition, too, was gone, or else, perhaps, he preferred to fight the last fight on more even terms. He uttered one staccato word in Cree and raised the knife as if he would hurl it at the breast of the Panther.

With a shrill answering cry, also in Cree, the Panther turned and leaped to meet Surefoot. For a moment the two men looked into each other's eyes. To Philippa's straining vision, over-alert in the lantern light, it seemed that the knowledge of death came at that moment to the cruel pupils whose conformation was seared into her memory for all time.

They rushed together, and in the first exchange of blows she saw the knife slip from the hand of the Panther and go clattering to the floor. Immediately Surefoot threw his also into a far, dim corner.

Again they faced each other, hands spread wide, like two wrestlers seeking a grip. Now Philippa felt confident that Surefoot had not fired because he wanted the supreme savage pleasure of making her torturer suffer. She closed her eyes at this contemplation of the primal man, but it was only for a second. With the sound of flesh striking flesh she opened them again.

Perhaps the knowledge that his friend, Ray Custer, lay dead or dying beyond the door, inspired Surefoot with redoubled courage. Perhaps the thought that this precious white maiden had lain agonized and helpless in this renegade's hands gave him the needed strength. Perhaps it was enough to know that at last the outlawed creature whose life had been a menace to the integrity of his tribe and an offense to its traditions was at last in the power of his own naked hands. This hatred of an hereditary enemy of all that he held sacred was doubtless enough to inspire him with the required physical strength and mental resource.

But Philippa was romantic, and she saw in Surefoot the avenger of her own threatened innocence. Despite herself, and for the moment, she forgot Ray, forgot her feminine revolt at the intensity of physical conflict, and gazed with fierce desire for Surefoot to win the mortal combat.

She exulted exceedingly that she had had her part in the fight, first in shooting the Panther's shoulder and then in tearing it further open. She prayed that this arm might have no effective use in the struggle.

With the sure instinct of a crafty fighter for the weakness of his opponent, Surefoot immediately sensed that the Panther was weak in the left arm, so he threw his weight on that and bent it until it cracked, but at the same time the Panther got a tight hold on the chief's throat with his powerful right.

The Panther was fighting for his life, and he was a man of unusual strength. He was conscious of this strength, but as his wounded arm cracked at the first onslaught, he was made to realize effectively the superior strength of the Cree chief. With one mighty toss of his shoulders the latter threw off the Panther's grip on his throat.

The Panther lunged, like a football tackle, grasping Surefoot about the knees and bringing him down to the floor. Then the two swayed and writhed for long minutes, thumping the rough boards with resounding thwacks of their heavy bodies. And as they writhed they muttered snatches of the Cree

dialect. Were they oaths? What were they saying?

Philippa could only guess the nature of this language as the contest went on, but she was conscious acutely of one thought only—this was her last chance. If Surefoot lost there was no further hope.

She found time to consider how strange it was that she had no apprehension. She had abandoned all hope, had indeed prepared herself first for death and then for the worse agony, with less reason than she would have if the chief failed.

Yet a wondrous calm possessed her.

And now—strange indeed is the psychology of woman—a horrible revulsion obsessed her. She began to feel fear of Surefoot himself. It was not because there was any doubt of his winning; it was because of the exultant brutality with which he was forcing the life from the Panther.

Surefoot had at last worked his adversary into the position which pleased him. This was on his back, with his neck partly supported by a stick of wood, and Surefoot's knees in his chest, while both hands were closed about his throat.

Thus, with his weight crushing the Panther's breast, with a confident smile swisting up the corners of his lips, Surefoot slowly—very slowly, with an evident enjoyment of the lingering torture, choked him slowly to death.

The dying man's body writhed in its last agony and twisted like that of a convulsive snake. Finally the blood burst from his nose and mouth and flowed over the strong fingers which held him in the lethal grip.

As she saw the look of satisfied triumph and revenge light the countenance of Surefoot, Philippa swiftly closed her eyes and groaned. Here was to her, as she believed, a revelation of the primitive savage drunk with lust for blood. She swooned.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE REWARD OF SUREFOOT.

HOW long she remained unconscious Philippa did not know. When she again could see and think clearly she was unbound, but she had not been removed from the chair. As she looked up her vision immediately comprehended the stalwart form of Surefoot in the doorway.

The fact that she had not been laid on the divan; the fact that the whisky which lay almost to her hand had not been pressed to her lips; the fact that the cloth with which she had bound her nether limbs had not been touched—these things came to her equally with a realization of his presence.

They blotted out that last horrid picture. Now she could think only of her rescuer. To this man she owed her life. That his skin was of a color different from her own mattered nothing at all.

Quickly she undid the cloth. Then she swallowed a sip of the whisky. Raw and pungent, it almost burned her throat, but it restored her to strength and to quick thinking.

Then she swiftly crossed the room and touched him on the shoulder. He turned and regarded her gravely. Wonderingly she looked into his face. Its thin, ascetic lines reassured her; the clear eyes gazed on her untroubled.

Perhaps with the thought that she had misjudged him the tears sprang to her eyes. She was too choked for utterance. So she mutely held forth her hand. He took it by the fingers, and reverently bowed and kissed them.

She did not know how to answer this, so she leaned wearily against the opposite doorpost.

Thus, for a few minutes, they watched the dawn come in. Its wan light seeped through the trees coldly until a pale gray ghostly radiance covered the little clearing. Bit by bit things became clearer.

When at last it was clear enough for her to make out the body of an Indian lying face down in the grass she shuddered and turned back to the interior of the cabin. She hardly dared look around there, for fear she would come upon the sight of the body of the Panther.

It was not there. Another score for the delicacy of Surefoot. Again it was borne in on her poignantly that she had misjudged him.

Now, for the first time, she was able to note with an eye practical to other eventu-

alities than the preservation of life and honor what lay to her hand. There were things to eat in the cupboard, some tins of biscuit, a skin of cheese, a side of bacon, a can of coffee, sugar, flour, raisins. In the hearth was a pile of wood waiting for a match. The blackened chimney said plainly that here was the location of warmth for living comfort, while the crane and pot hanging above proclaimed that it might also be a kitchen stove.

"Aren't you hungry?" These were her first words to Surefoot. The incongruity of their casual sound struck her and she smiled at the inadequacy of speech. She had not given expression to her dominant thought, but to think this of him, in even so slight a way, seemed but a small return for all he had done.

He nodded his head, but he was so cool about it that she was encouraged to speak the thought uppermost in her mind.

"Where is Ray?" She asked it almost casually.

He had dreaded this. In the moments after he had freed her he had made a hasty survey of the clearing. In this he had discovered the forms of the four Indians. Then, finally, he had come upon that of Ray, lying still, at the very corner of the cabin. It was still dark and he had knelt hastily to discover by means of feeling if there was any signs of life.

Just as Surefoot had passed his hands lightly over his friend's unresponsive body he had heard something that he imagined was a sound from the interior of the cabin. He had rushed back to prevent Philippa's coming outside and finding the gruesome evidence of her loss.

Once inside he had found her still unconscious, but moving her head and moaning, and he had decided to wait in the doorway until she quite recovered. He had little doubt that it was an end of Ray. Then had ensued what has been described, but he still wished to spare her as long as possible.

Meanwhile, it was no more than natural that his own thoughts should be busied with the lovely maiden who had long filled his mental horizon to the exclusion of all other women.

He well knew that he was an Indian, and that in her eyes there was the barrier of race. This, however, was a barrier which troubled him in a way different from the consternation it caused her. The exact nature of this barrier he was yet to determine.

And now he had to face the direct question. He promptly decided it was best to lie direct.

"I don't know," he said.

"But didn't he find you?"

He shook his head. It went against his nature to deceive, but he was persuaded that she should not know until it was absolutely unavoidable.

"Didn't he tell you how we were surprised in the night; how the Panther raided and attacked us?" she insisted.

Gravely again he shook his head.

This seemed to concern her very deeply, but she rallied with her responsibilities and began, almost mechanically, to prepare breakfast. She cut some slices of bacon and fitted them in a pan she found hanging on the wall. She prepared coffee in the pot.

Meanwhile Surefoot lit the fire. A moment later the bacon was sizzling merrily and the aroma of coffee filled the cabin. Now she found a basin with some water and soap, which she offered to him, but he stood aside so that she might use them first.

Later, as he washed his hands, she again shuddered as she saw the dried blood cleansed from his fingers.

Then, as he continued immobile, aloof, practical, silent, she regained her composure. It was only with an effort that she realized she was utterly alone, many miles from another human being, with this strange red man in a primeval forest.

As they ate the meal she had prepared, and which both eagerly consumed, the need for conversation fell first upon her. She felt that she must say something.

"I would be afraid if you were not here," she managed at last to utter. It seemed banal, but something must be said to break the monotony of silence.

He said nothing.

After a while she volunteered: "I always thought I would be afraid of Indians—until I knew you."

He glanced sharply at her. He saw the wondrous smile that lit her fresh, youthful countenance, and his blood pounded more swiftly in his veins. He turned away and closed his eyes as he recalled that evening at Ithaca, after the Cornell-Carlisle football game, when he had been seated beside her and for a moment had almost believed she was treating him as one of her own kind. Then the disillusion of that moment stabbed him again as he recalled her coquetry which had ended in her denunciation of him.

Of course much had happened since then; much to make her the better understand the ways of Indians, and the difference in them, but—

As he closed his eyes, his back being turned, there came to him a vision of his dying father, who with the final message to his son as he uttered his dearest wish, that Surefoot might succeed to the chieftain of the tribe, had said:

" Always remember that the blood of our race, which I transmit to you pure and undefiled from your ancestors, shall never mingle with any but that of the pure-blooded Cree."

He, too, had his race prejudice, and it was as strong as hers! Philippa might have been piqued to know this, but she was never to learn it from him.

" Tell me," she asked as they concluded their breakfast, " something of your people. I do not understand how much a man as the one you call the Panther could be of the tribe."

" Nor was he," said Surefoot, laconically.

" But tell me—tell me," she demanded eagerly, " I must know more about the Crees."

So he tried to tell her in his halting way, for he was little accustomed to speech, and his years at the Eastern college had merely taught him the use of the white man's language; they had not taught him the ease and freedom in conversation of the white man. However, after a fashion, he did tell her.

He told her of the ancient history of his tribe, of the legendary fact that it had occupied these lands—the lands of northern Montana and of southern Manitoba, for generations and centuries.

He explained to her as well as he could the Cree belief that these lands belonged to the tribe; a belief shared by other tribes and respected throughout the Northwest by all Indians, no matter of what extraction. The lands, too, were respected by the white man, and by the governments of the white man, both in Washington and in London.

Then came the prospector, who found precious minerals and valuable timber on the lands of the Cree, and the white man desired these things very much for his own use, and would go to any length to secure them, even against the laws which he himself had made, and which he had agreed with the honorable Crees were fair to both.

But the white man would not have found his way easily into the stronghold of the Crees if it were not for renegades, " bad " Crees, or part Crees, who sold their birthright or their knowledge of it for the white man's firewater and the white man's other " bad medicine." Such a man, such a renegade, had been the Panther.

As he said this her eyes widened. For the first time she saw her uncle's complicity; for the first time she realized that her uncle had employed this rascally redskin to betray his own people; no wonder, then, that he had betrayed his employer.

She declared her condemnation of her uncle's methods, not yet realizing that at that moment he lay some miles away, a captive in charge of Surefoot's men. Surefoot smiled at her vehemence.

" But do not the Crees want the gold?" she incredulously inquired.

" The Crees believe that the gold is of the devil. It is sinful, we are taught, for man to delve into the earth and take the yellow metal for his own use, sinful for the Indian as for the white. The Great Father punishes all who covet it."

He said this simply, without any apparent sense of the moral adjuration that lay behind it, but to her he suddenly assumed huge proportions as an upright man. She had come now to a complete and final confidence in his integrity. She revealed this as she faced him squarely and exclaimed:

" I think you are wonderful!"

He neither smiled nor blanched. In his heart was racing that desperate longing born

so long ago in the Ithaca drawing-room, a longing that his lifelong training, his inherited instincts told him was not for him. He felt that he was fighting a more desperate battle than the one he had waged a few hours since with the Panther.

Perhaps the silent internal conflict gave him a greater distinction, left him a trifle more pale, and a bit more reserved, for it drew her to him, unconsciously, and she lay a hand on his arm.

"I was mistaken about Indians!" she said, just as if she had previously taken him completely into her confidence about her aversion.

Nothing could have more fully told him how completely she believed in him, how thoroughly she wanted to make known her friendship.

Yet a desperate fear of her came over him and he drew away. "We must go," he said huskily. "I have two horses in the woods. Wait here and I will get them."

"Two horses!" she exclaimed, and he saw then that he had made a mistake, but he quickly covered it by explaining:

"I thought you would be glad to have one."

He urged her to get ready quickly. In a moment she joined him, and together they walked into the sunlight which now suffused the clearing.

As they stepped out a movement in the brush near the corner of the cabin caught Surefoot's eye, and he quickly crossed the intervening space, arriving by the body of Ray before Philippa could realize what he was doing. He tried to hide the sight from her, but then as he felt of the pulse he knew this was no longer necessary.

"Here!" he called. "He is living!"

Philippa knelt by the side of the man she loved and by a supreme effort conquered her impulse to embrace him and cry. She cast one questioning glance toward Surefoot, who humbly tried to explain in a single sentence:

"I thought he was dead!"

Her look was of perfect understanding and afforded a slight recompense to the heart-hungry Indian, but the next instant she was crooning over the body of her lover.

They lifted Ray inside and examined him. They found that the first of the Panther's bullets had gone through one lung and that the other had touched the spine causing temporary paralysis. Heart and pulse and fluttering eyelids told that life was still strong; time alone would tell if a complete recovery might occur.

Surefoot stood aside as he watched Philippa minister to the stricken aviator. If there had ever been any doubt in his mind of her devotion or of her loyalty to the little man who had been her idol since her early college days it would have been removed in the next few minutes, for as she dressed his wounds she stopped, now and then, to kiss him tenderly, on the neck, the brow, the lips.

Surefoot went inside. After all, he reflected, the place for an Indian is in the woods.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BREAKING OF BLACK DAN.

SUREFOOT called Philippa to him a little later. Ray had previously opened his eyes, had recognized Philippa and then had blissfully slipped back into a curious state of coma which alarmed the girl, although it was plain to see that his heart was working right.

"Miss Horton," said the Cree chief as he handed her a rifle, "do you think you could use this, if necessary?"

She was taken aback, but promptly asserted that she could.

"Then," he continued, "I will feel safe in leaving you for a time. I do not think it will be all day, and positively I will return before nightfall."

"Where are you going?" she demanded, alarmed, not so much at the thought that he was leaving her alone with Ray, crippled and near to death, as by the suggestion of danger in his manner.

"For a doctor. Custer's life hangs by a thread. Only expert attention can save him. I know where I can get a doctor in less than twenty-four hours, but much less than that will be enough for me to send the message. Meanwhile, you must stand guard. I am not sure that all the Panther's

men will stay away, especially if they get wind of the fact that only a girl is here alone. Are you afraid?"

She shook her head bravely. She realized that it was the one chance to save Ray's life.

A moment later Surefoot was gone, up the trail into the woods where he had tethered the ponies the night before. An hour later he was signaling with his improvised bow. Before noon one of his runners had appeared and was off with the call for the doctor.

Shortly after noon Surefoot returned to the cabin, but as he appeared in the clearing a bullet sped past his head. He dropped to the earth and crawled toward the window. Looking in he saw Philippa standing in the doorway, the rifle at her shoulder, waiting for something to appear.

He called from the window and she turned, tense with alarm, and dropped the rifle at sight of him. Then she sank wearily to a seat. Surefoot said not a word as he rejoined her, but with a sense of guilt and incompetence she clung to his arm, pleading to be assured that she had not hurt him. Overwhelmed with the realization that she had mistaken him for one of the Panther's returning men, and that if her aim had been sure she would have killed him, she was stricken with acute remorse. Her hands hovered near his face, and he seemed to enjoy, in his stoic way, the demonstration of concern.

Finally he laughed. "It is good you do not shoot as well as you can do—well, other things—eh?"

She buried her face in her hands. He did not venture to touch her as a white man might have done. Instead he turned away as he said: "There, all is well now. I found one of my men. The doctor will be here before morning. Let us look after Custer."

Ray was breathing in the slow, steady manner that had characterized him since they first had found him, but blood was oozing fom the corners of his lips. It was this, Philippa brokenly said, that had so unnerved her that she had made the mistake of firing on their best friend.

"And made you miss, too," Surefoot added, as he examined Ray carefully. He reassured Philippa. The location of the bullet hole caused him to believe that one lung had been punctured, but that was not necessarily a fatal injury. She must have courage, at least, until the arrival of the doctor.

The wait seemed interminable. The day passed, with Surefoot always on the lookout, while Philippa sat by the side of the unconscious man, striving to soothe him and urging a few drops of whisky down his throat, from time to time.

When night came Surefoot told her to bolt the door and try to gain a little sleep, while he remained in the clearing, on guard.

"But how will you sleep?" she anxiously inquired.

"You sleep; I watch?" he replied with such finality that she felt the futility of protesting.

Thus they spent the night, the girl asleep on the buffalo robe at the foot of the divan where lay the comatose aviator, while outside in the still dark the lynx eyes of the Cree chief swept the silent horizon for signs of life, wondering which should come first —the friendly doctor or the inimical renegades.

It was an hour after dawn before a shout sounded from the trail and a stout little man on horseback hove in sight. Surefoot replied with an answering shot, and shortly Dr. Peters, from the nearest settlement, came ambling along on a piebald horse, while two of the Cree's men trotted at his side.

Ensued an anxious half hour while the doctor examined his new patient. His verdict was prompt. "One bullet through the left lung; another imbedded near the third vertebra. The first wound will heal if we properly assist it. The second bullet must be extracted without delay. If we can do that there is a chance of recovery."

He said this to Philippa and Surefoot together. Then he addressed the Indian alone. "I want you to assist me, chief—you, alone." He turned to Philippa. "I will have to ask you to leave, miss."

She pleaded that she had been trained as a nurse, but the physician asked her pointedly, "Is this man your husband?"

She blushed. "No," she said.

"Your lover?"

"If you wish to put it that way—yes."

"No harm, miss. You know what I mean, and if you've been trained as a nurse you'll also know that I can't have you near in a delicate operation like this—not when it means so much to you sentimentally."

Philippa was obliged to wait outside with the two Crees who had come as guides with the doctor. A long hour elapsed before Surefoot appeared.

"Miss Horton," said he gravely, "come in."

"Is he—is he—is he dead?" she implored.

Surefoot shook his head, but did not speak. This practical, unconcerned attitude told the story too well.

The doctor, seeing Philippa's distress, added softly: "He still has a chance. Another twenty-four hours will tell. I got that second bullet, anyway."

Five days later Ray weakly smiled in the faces of Surefoot and of Philippa, who leaned over his couch. He had survived the crisis; the doctor had just departed with instructions that he should not be disturbed for at least two weeks, and with predictions that with the proper nursing, which Miss Horton seemed quite competent now to furnish, the aviator who had skimmed so narrowly the borderland of the other world would be again right for his mortal sphere.

Ray heard the instructions. The words woke a lobe long asleep in his brain. As soon as the doctor was gone he spoke to Surefoot. "Two weeks!" he said. "Did that sawbones say I couldn't move for two weeks?"

"But that is no time at all—not to heal such wounds as yours. If it were not for this glorious climate and your splendid health and your youth it would be much longer."

"Two weeks! Two weeks!" Ray repeated to himself as if gathering from the remote past something long forgotten. Then he addressed the Cree directly.

"Teddy," said he, "how long since Wood and I left your camp?"

"One week."

"And the condition was that Wood must go to Washington and return within two weeks with a promise that Congress should not pass the bill carving up the Cree lands, or—or—"

He glanced at Philippa, suddenly remembering that she had not known of the imprisonment of her uncle, had not known of the condition Surefoot had made, of how he had converted her uncle into a hostage with the price of life hanging over his head if Wood did not return successful within the stated fortnight.

Surefoot answered the question directly without parley. "Whipple is still my prisoner!" he asserted with unemotional directness.

"Your prisoner!" Philippa exclaimed.

Then Ray told her of the whole scheme Surefoot had evolved whereby he hoped to save the lands of his fathers from the white man's dominion. Already she knew enough of the Indian traditions to comprehend his purpose, and now she understood it sympathetically, as she might never have seen it, if it had not been for that terrible night alone with the Cree chief in the cabin of the slain Panther.

Yet her uncle was this man's prisoner, with the price of life on his head.

"Can't you get Uncle Dan here?" she pleaded. "I must see him."

"He will be here to-morrow night," said the chief.

And he was there the next night—the stalwart Black Dan, bearded, forbidding. He seemed slightly relieved to find Philippa unharmed and very little concerned over the plight of the aviator. The only thing that upset him was the news of the fate of Harvey Wood. He swore softly at that, but his oaths assumed a louder tone when he was told of the end of the Panther.

"That son-of-a-skunk had it coming to him, all right, but I figgered I might have to do it myself some day."

"He was in your pay," Surefoot asserted dryly.

"Well, what of it?" Black Dan replied.

Then Philippa gave him a slight idea of the uncertainty of the last night of the

Panther's life; she told him a little, but only a little, of the peril she had faced for so many horrible hours.

His hands clenched at this. "I should have done it myself," he commented.

She took both his huge prospector's hands in hers. "Now, Uncle Dan, listen to me," she continued.

Surefoot started to go, but she detained him and went on with her plea to Whipple in the presence of the Indian. "Uncle Dan," she insisted, "is it true that Congress may pass a law taking some of these lands from the Crees?"

"If the committee reports favorably on it this week she goes through—at least so I believed a week ago. But Surefoot here knows better'n me. He has a pipe line into Washington. Eh—Surefoot?"

"The bill will be reported favorably within a week unless Whipple intervenes," said the Indian.

"Then I want you to promise that you will go direct to Washington yourself," Philippa went on to Black Dan, "and see that that bill does not go through to cheat these good Indians out of their fathers' lands."

Whipple looked shrewdly toward Surefoot to see what response was there. Surefoot made not a move. Philippa took his hand and pressed it warmly with both of hers. "My uncle will save you," she asserted confidently.

Surefoot looked to Black Dan.

The prospector rose to the occasion. "If you let me go, chief," he asserted with bluff heartiness, "I give you my word the Crees will be treated more handsomely than any Indians were ever treated by Uncle Sam since old Columbus landed on the Atlantic side."

"Go!" said the chief.

Two weeks later Ray had convalesced so satisfactorily that he had been lifted to a seat in the clearing before the cabin. There he was basking in the sun, with Philippa seated beside him, when they detected the breaking of the underbrush in the trail above, and in a moment Surefoot came in sight.

The chief had never been demonstrative, so the two were not quick to notice any unusual taciturnity in his manner. After the greetings were over, and he was reassured as to Ray's satisfactory condition, he drew a paper from his shirt and handed it over silently to Philippa.

"Read out loud," he said.

It was a "confidential report from the headquarters of the Cree commission in Washington, addressed to their leader in the home land," and it ran:

> The Cree land bill, engineered by Daniel Whipple, yesterday passed the second reading of the joint congressional committee, and will undoubtedly be favorably acted on by Congress within a few days. An amendment, suggested by Whipple, provided that only a short strip of the ancient lands, already recognized by the government of the United States as belonging solely to the Cree nation, shall be thrown open to public entry, but on the express stipulation that whoever files upon this land shall be compelled to pay as royalty fifty per cent of the gross proceeds from any mineral or oil discovery or from any timber removal. The act further says, "these royalties shall be assembled into a fund, to be administered by an official of the United States government, who shall distribute the proceeds equally among the registered and recognized members of the Cree tribe or nation, of which the present chief is one Theodore Jones, known to his people as Surefoot.

Philippa was delighted with the apparent generosity of the implied terms. Ray, also, seemed to think them splendid. Surefoot regarded his friends with his accustomed Indian calm.

"Uncle Dan kept his word," Philippa asserted. "He said Uncle Sam would be generous."

"Handsome!" Ray corrected her.

"Right," admitted Philippa. "He did say 'handsome,' and don't you think this is handsome?" Surefoot made no reply. She turned to Custer. "Don't you think so, Ray?"

"It means that the white man does all the work of prospecting and development, takes all the risks, and then gives the Indians half of all he gets. I'd say that was handsome," the aviator replied.

Surefoot turned silently away. This was the tragedy of the red man, to be endured again, as ever before, alone. For over four hundred years this had been going on, the

whites steadily encroaching on the lands of the Indians, the whites forever victorious—sometimes by scheming conquest; sometimes by open treaty; sometimes by brutal cunning; again, as now, by terms which, according to their standards, were fair and honorable.

But always and forever the Indian retreated. Always and forever the Indian gave up the precious heritage that had come down to him from centuries agone!

Philippa stood at his side. "Dear, dear Surefoot," she said, "what more could Uncle Dan have done?" she pleaded.

"He could have attacked us in force and have given us a chance to die—in battle—like Crees—honorably!" slowly asserted the hereditary chief.

He was so quiet, so matter-of-fact, so much one of them there, entwined in their memories with the never-to-be-forgotten spirit of the alma mater, that she had no comprehension of the gulf that separated and that would forever separate them.

"You ferocious, adorable redskin!" she exclaimed, as she seized him in her arms, and gave him a vigorous hug, while she winked at the smiling Custer, who looked up happily at them from his chair. "You don't mean a word of what you say!"

His face grew suddenly tense with the contact of her body, offered, he knew too well, as might be offered in affectionate embrace that of a sister.

Without a word, without a gesture he walked away. At the edge of the clearing he turned, lifted his hand high, and gravely inclined his head. It was the Cree gesture of farewell.

Then the woods swallowed him. Ray and Philippa looked at each other blankly.

EPILOGUE

TEN years later. An afternoon in early June. Scene, the dooryard of a mansion erected on a commanding height at the edge of the Cree country. A magnificent place—a show place, the reporters from distant cities called it when they came that way, as they often did, for the district had become famous as the center of the latest oil development.

A limousine stood in the dooryard. A liveried chauffeur sat at the wheel. Except for the proximity of the mountains and the towering grandeur of the peaks and their wooded slopes the limousine might have been waiting outside a Fifth Avenue mansion.

Presently a young man, still in his early thirties, smartly tailored, strode in from the barn, and called to the chauffeur: "Tell Mrs. Custer I am ready—and to bring Teddy." He stood by the side of the car, waiting.

In a moment Philippa appeared, a bit more plump, a bit less nervous, but still the same old Philippa. Beside her walked a sturdy youngster, quite nine years old. As the three were about to get into the machine a man hastened from the barn, calling, "Mr. Custer! Mr. Custer!"

They waited. The man came excitedly with the message that a strange Indian had suddenly appeared, "right out of the woods," and had asked to see young Teddy.

Philippa looked at Ray and Ray at Philippa. The same thought flashed into each mind. "I wonder if—" said Philippa slowly.

"I believe it is!" Ray shouted as he turned to follow the man. "Wait for me. I'll fetch him."

While Philippa waited she took her young Theodore in hand, straightened his tie, slicked down his hair, righted the front of his coat, wiped the dust from his shoes, and told him he must be very good, for his godfather might come at any moment.

Then, as she waited, she contemplated the vista that lay below. Oil derricks appeared on every side, but there was a deep glow of satisfaction in realizing that each of those derricks represented an income of about a thousand dollars a week—and there were more than fifty of them. Of course half went to the Crees, but the half that was left had made the Custers enormously wealthy.

Black Dan Whipple had struck oil in that vicinity ten years back. The spouting of the oil had put in the shade any of the prospects of gold, although the gold mining was not without its value. Indeed,

it was often said that after the oil gave out there was enough gold in the hills to keep a generation or two busy getting it out.

But the oil had made everybody around there rich, vastly rich. Not only the whites, but, thanks to a paternal government, the Indians, too. In fact, the old order had been reversed. Now the whites did the work, and the Indians rested.

Every Cree within a hundred miles was a potential millionaire. Old squaws rode about in their limousines and with white chauffeurs. Young bucks sent for Omaha tailors to come to them and cut their clothes to measure. The maidens wore diamonds and pearls. Velvets and silks and fine linens pompously enveloped the old cabins which were mostly replaced by modern monstrosities costing much money but making no great demand on taste.

Yet, not once in that ten years had they ever managed to see Surefoot again, though they had often tried. When the boy was born he was named Theodore, after his mother's savior and his father's devoted friend.

But, in the flesh, they had not been able to put hands on that savior and friend. He was as elusive as the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, and in their case much more so, for they had found their pot of gold a very huge one, but not their friend to whom they owed it all.

Then, one day, soon after the birth and christening of little Theodore, a government agent had arrived with an official paper announcing that the Cree chief, Theodore Jones, had made over formally to his namesake his share of the Cree royalties.

For years the Custers had refused to accept this portion for their son. They did not need it. He did not need it. There was enough for him without it. The money lay idle in the State bank, waiting the appearance of Surefoot.

Yes, it was Surefoot at last. Ray proudly appeared with him, arm in arm. Ray's figure had filled in rotundly. Philippa had grown plump. But Surefoot had not changed. If anything, he was more slender, his eye keener than when he had left them that day in the clearing before the cabin of the predatory Panther.

Royally they greeted him, while the chauffeur stared, and the man from the barn hung around in sheepish curiosity and with eyes popping with delighted admiration. Every one in that part of the country knew of the Cree chief, never seen by whites, but still the acclaimed and hereditary chief of his people.

Briefly—too briefly—as if it were a matter of the least moment, he accounted for himself in the past ten years. He had moved back with his people; back to the reserved lands; he was the same as ever. They had searched for him, had they? Yes, he had heard of that, but his duties kept him occupied. And had not the white man guaranteed him freedom from molestation?

"But, good Heavens! Man alive!" Ray protested, to the accompaniment of a football hug. "Why cut us out?"

Surefoot glanced at the house and at the limousine. "You are happy," he said, not as a query, but as a statement of fact.

"Perfectly happy, but we want you to share it."

A cloud appeared on the face of the Cree. "Share this?" He gestured sternly toward the machine and the mansion. Then he shook his head.

Meanwhile his eyes devoured the boy, and little Teddy, overcoming his aversion to the strange man, came close to him and felt the rough cloth in his coat.

"And that money you gave to our boy —our Teddy—he can't take that," Ray protested.

"Why not?" gravely.

"He don't need it."

"Then let him dispense it as he will."

The chief spoke with a finality it is impossible to describe. There was a majesty, an air of authority about him which these two newly rich persons vaguely resented, but could not oppose. Why should he not be affected by the Aladdin-like tale of their wealth? They tried to point it out to him. He listened politely, but with the very least of interest.

And, after half an hour thus, he turned to go. They urged him to ride with them in the fifteen-thousand-dollar machine; they begged him to stay and dine with them and taste the cooking of their Italian

chef; they pleaded that he remain the night in their finest guest chamber.

"No," said he, as he left them, with his simple gesture of farewell. "I am still a Cree, and there are not enough of us left for me to desert my people now."

"Desert? What do you mean?" Ray demanded. Somehow there was a vague impeachment in the attitude of the good old Surefoot, that stalwart Indian he had so often called "Teddy" as he related the story to his friends.

"Nothing that you would understand," said Surefoot. "Good-by! Good-by, Mrs. Custer. Good-by, Teddy. I will return the second summer after this."

And he was gone—like that—as easily as a patch of sunlight obscured by a vagrant cloud.

They felt the utter futility of trying to stop him. He had come into their lives and was out of it, like an element of nature. Somehow he had measured up to their highest standards, and, in some way they could not understand, was far beyond them.

But it all annoyed Philippa. She stamped her foot as she entered the tonneau, and bade the chauffeur drive to town.

"After all, he is just an Indian!" she protested to Ray, as if there was a vague discredit in his racial classification.

"But a *good* Indian!" Ray replied.

Teddy chirped up from the seat beside the chauffeur, "Papa! Papa!"

"Yes, my boy!"

"When I get bigger I want to go off and live with Surefoot. Can I?"

Mother and father looked sheepishly at each other. Finally Ray answered gently, "We'll have to see about that."

(The end.)

Springtime in the Heart

by Garrard Harris

SIS' LILY CALHOUN, fat, black and comely, was leaning on the gate in front of her comfortable cottage. She had just pinned a bunch of pink verbena on the coat lapel of Deacon Mose Johnson when the Rev. Zachariah Topp hove in view.

Mose was disturbed, for there was a fancy-looking young man sitting on Lily's front porch. A cap was adjusted at a rakish angle over his left ear. His suit was flashy. His feet were incased in violent yellow shoes, with purple socks showing above. A cigarette hung pendulous from his lower lip as he dreamily extracted barber-shop minors and chords from the guitar.

"Who dat loafer?" demanded Mose.

"He ain't no loafer. It's Twickenham Watts. He lives in Nyaw 'Leens, an' he's a chuffer."

"Says which?"

"A chuffer to autymobeels."

"Well, why ain't he chuffin, den?"

"He come up to see his maw, and she sont him over to see me. He sho'ly is one fine dresser, ain't he?"

"Huh! I don't take no stock in fancy town niggers."

"An' he plays de sweetes' music on dat dere git-tar. I do shorely crave music!"

Sis' Lily clasped her hands and rolled her eyes soulfully, while Mose glowered.

The neat cottage and lot left to Lily by Judge Calhoun in his will, in recognition of her services as cook for twenty-five years, was worth three thousand five hundred dollars at least, and Mose greatly fancied living there. Moreover, Sis' Lily had saved her wages and had them at interest in bank for these many years; also, she had collected six hundred dollars from the Sons and Daughters of Sheba in America, on account of the decease of her husband, Josh; and altogether she was very well fixed indeed. She made current expenses as a fancy cook for weddings and parties in Natchez, and never touched her principal or interest. Decidedly, she was most eligible.

Mose glared banefully at the Rev. Zach Topp, who, attired in his best clothes, was tacking about in the offing waiting for Mose to move on.

"Well, I got to be goin'. You don't like dat old brokedown Zach Topp as much as you does me, doos you?" inquired Mose tenderly.

Sis' Lily threw back her head and laughed in a tantalizing way, showing a mouthful of perfect teeth.

"Dat's for me to know an' fer you to find out!"

Mose scowled at the approaching figure. "Dat ole nigger ain't able to s'pote you like you oughter—like I kin. De Big Bethel congergashun is powerful stingy."

"But de rev'ren' is a good truck grower an' makes a livin' innerpennence of Big Bethel."

"Yeah, but if he was a reel good pasture de flock would s'pote him better—"

"An' he suttingly do expoun' de mos' beautifullest langwidge." Her eyes grew dreamy and she smiled a welcome at the approaching Zach, who could bear to wait no longer.

"Mawnin', rev'ren'!" greeted Lily in dulcet tones. "We was just excussin' of you, an' I says you sho' is one powerful 'zorter. Didn't I, Brer Mose?"

Mose grunted inarticulately, aghast at thus being used to adorn a tale to his deadly rival.

"See you all later!" he flung over his shoulder, hastening down the road, vastly disturbed.

"I got a idee, Sis' Lily, dat man been a low-ratin' of me! De Good Book say 'de wicked flee,' and Mose was in a powerful hurry."

Again Sis' Lily laughed, with the light of admiration on her face.

"Can't fool you, kin dey, rev'ren'? He was sayin' your income as pasture of Big Bethel was skasely nothin', an' not enough to live on."

"Dat slimy rascal oughter know; he passes de plate, an' when de perceeds reaches me dey is 'vaporated down to buttons an' pennies."

"Come on in, rev'ren', an' try a piece of cake I jes' baked, an' some of my elderberry wine, an' meet Misto' Twickenham Watts."

"Sis' Lily, dem is de fondes' things which I is of. I are proud to accep' yo' inwite."

The discussion of Mose continued, but Twickenham took no part, except interrupting to compliment the cake, the wine, the sweet peach pickle and cold fried chicken and beaten biscuits Lily produced under stimulus of great appreciation. Twickenham played on his guitar, and was hailed as a marvel by his listeners.

Twickenham was around the next day, and the next. Envy and a peeved feeling of being neglected for a young and more fashionable person from the metropolis possessed Mose.

Similar sentiments burned in the bosom of Rev. Zach Topp. Both resented the attentions and delicacies showered upon Twickenham by Lily.

Their mouths watered as they thought of the cake, the chicken, the peach pickles, the wine, the flaky biscuit, the buttermilk and the like being wasted upon a total stranger

—an intruder upon their preserves, as it were.

" You mus' be fattenin' dat fancy Nyaw 'Leens nigger ter 'zibit him at de county fair," Mose remarked viciously to Sis' Lily.

" Is you payin' for it, you nosey ole tom-cat?" she flared. " What business is it of yourn? It's no money out of yo' pocket, you ole busybody! Dis yer boy is de only son of my bes' frien' when we was young gals. We got married de same night, an' we 'greed to name one of our chillen atter each other. I ain't never had no chillen, but Janie had dis boy, and he is name atter me. My maw used to belong to Cunnel Bolivar Twickenham, and Twickenham's my fambly name. An' ef I can't be perlite to mer namesake an' de son of mer bes' frien', who I gwine be perlite to?"

Just to punish Mose she was conspicuously entranced by Zach the next time the men were in proximity, and the flood of rage and resentment in the heart of Mose was increased greatly.

Next day Mose came around to the house. He talked fast and long of his financial condition and prospects and urged himself as the proper helpmeet for a widow of her substance and standing. He ceased only when Twickenham Watts arrived with a phonograph and a bundle of records under his arm.

" Here's the change, Mis' Lily. Twenty-five dollars for the box an' six fifty for the records. You gimme thutty-five dollars."

Mose gasped at such extravagance and started to protest.

" Set down, Mose, an' lissen. We got some reel rag music, de ' Memfis Blues,' an' ' Casey Jones,' an'—oh, a lot of 'em. I's crazy about music, an' wiv all de money I got I been doin' widout until Twick sugges' I buy me a fonygraft!"

Lily beamed on Mose, and he sat down. He wanted to await further developments.

Twickenham set the machine on the center table, dusted off " Casey Jones," and started the record unwinding that lilting strain.

" Man, I sho' could dance to date chune if I jes' knowed how." Sis' Lily was patting time with one foot and nodding her head in unison with the persuasive music.

" Why, Mis' Lily, anybody what's got music in dey soul is got it in dey feets likewise. I kin teach you the slow drag what goes wiv ' Casey ' in ten minuets," volunteered Twickenham.

Sis' Lily rose, determination stamped upon her countenance. She shoved chairs back against the wall and dragged the center table into a corner.

" Crank dat contraption, boy, an' come here an' learn me!" She balanced herself, ready to do or die.

In exactly seven minutes she had the secret of the slow, dragging shuffle which went with the syncopated strains of " Casey Jones."

" You got it—you done got it!" excitedly encouraged the perspiring Twickenham. His arm could not begin to reach around her, and his fingers were aching from clawing at her ample back for a hold, for up to that time main strength was needed.

" I sho' is got it—whoopee, niggers—watch me, watch me!"

Sis' Lily went into that slow drag with her whole heart and soul. She swayed, she dipped, she glided, and she danced all over.

Three times did Twickenham crank the machine and set the needle anew on the record. Just as he dug the nails of his right hand into her back for the home-stretch finish the door opened and Rev. Zach Topp entered. His knocks had been drowned by the music.

He glared at Mose, who glowered at him, and both cast furious glances at the animated couple making the floor shake and the pictures flap on the walls from the two hundred younds of highly animated Lily and the one hundred and thirty-five of her partner.

" Sis' Calhoun, dis is plumb scannalous!"

Zach's shocked, protesting voice was as one feebly crying aloud in the wilderness.

Lily's eyes were rolling and her head was thrown back. As she put her whole heart into the dancing she chanted:

" Hush, lil baby, quit yo' cryin'—
You's got a daddy on de 'Frisco Line—
Casey Jones, he runs de eenjine—
Casey Jones."

She added a few didoes and pigeon wings to express her condition of complete beatification.

Zach stood appalled. There was no use saying anything until that machine ran down. When it trailed off into raucous scrapings Lily stopped and mopped her radiant face.

"An' jes' to think, I been a missin' all dis all dese years! Crank 'er up, Twick—le's try hit once more. I sho' is got to do a lot of dancin' to catch up wid what I ain't done!"

"Lemme get my breff first!" gasped Twickenham.

"Sis' Calhoun, as yo' pasture, I pertests—"

"An' as a dekin in yo' church, I objects to dis yere owdacious displayfication!"

Mose and Zach had made common cause for once.

"Why, rev'ren', you is behind the times! Down in Nyaw 'Leens the church where I 'filiates has a clubhouse and we dances, an' our preacher dances, too. He says it's a innercent and healthyful amusement," explained Twickenham with an air of finality.

"I don't care what dey does in dat dere Sodom an' Gomorry of a town—I is talkin' of de rules of de Big Bethel Innerpenent Church," asserted Zach.

"Now, lemme tell you somethin'—dis here is my house, an' if I wants to dance in hit whose business is hit to stop me?" Lily, planted with arms akimbo and rising wrath, demanded answer.

"But, Sis' Calhoun, dancin' is de inwention of de devil," asserted Zach.

"How come, den, dat King David danced?" Lily fired back with great precision. It was a bull's-eye. "An' don't de Good Book tell in lots of places whar dem ole prophets an' saints an' sich danced in de temples an' before de ark an' de altars an' so on?"

"Well, King David never danced no slow drag!" blazed Zach, his wits scattered.

"He never heard 'Casey Jones,' or he would of. Can't nobody hear dat chune an' not want to slow drag!" contributed Twickenham, laughing.

"You keep your mouf out of dis, you Smart Aleck town nigger!" growled Mose, "You keep yourn, or I'll cyarve you like a barbecued pig, old tar baby!" retorted Twickenham, deftly extracting a razor from his shoe.

Mose subsided.

"Dancin' is sinful!" asserted Zach.

"Sinfulness is 'cordin' to de way you does a thing!" retorted Lily. "Crank her up, Twick, we's losin' vallyble time arguin' wiv dese ole busybodies whose room would be a heap more 'preciated dan dey company."

As the strains of "The Memphis Blues" filled the house the two rivals in joint defeat made a retrograde movement out the front door, and Lily did not even notice when they departed.

Outside the gate they went into executive session.

"Mose, we gotter do somethin' to git dat fancy nigger away from Black Bayou settlemint," suggested Zach.

"We sure has! He's corruptin' Sis' Lily wiv his newfangled notions. She ain't like herself!"

"Hit's plumb owdacious an' scannalous!"

"What we gwine do?" queried Mose.

"Le's go swear out a warrant for him for vacancy—he don't do no work. He's a lazy loafer!"

"Dat's a true fack, rev'ren'. I'll go wid you."

"When dey puts dat fancy young buck on de chain gang wuckin' de roads, he won't be able to do no slow draggin' den!" chortled Zach, living over their triumph in anticipation.

The affidavit was duly made before Squire Dugger. A constable with a warrant interrupted the dancing lessons by haling Twickenham before the magistrate—and Lily Calhoun promptly signed his bond for appearance for trial Monday at ten o'clock. The arrest was late Saturday afternoon.

Sunday morning at nine fifteen Twickenham Watts suddenly stepped before Deacon Mose as he majestically perambulated down Bullfrog Alley on his way to Big Bethel. At nine nineteen Mose had been thrashed within an inch of his life, and was running as hard as he could pelt.

Proceeding blithely toward Big Bethel, Twickenham overtook the Rev. Zach Topp, and managed to administer a fair licking before Zach escaped and sought sanctuary in the church edifice.

Accounts were thus partially adjusted.

Monday morning the majority of the colored population of the settlement milled around the abandoned store where Squire Dugger was accustomed to hold the sessions of his court. Seldom had there been such a sensation and such suppressed excitement.

At ten o'clock precisely there rolled up to the front a brand new six-cylinder seven-passenger car. Attired in a natty olive-green serge uniform and chauffeur's cap, gauntlets and leggings, Twickenham Watts was at the wheel.

On the back seat, and garbed for the occasion in raiment which would have made Solomon in all his glory fade into the background, was Sis' Lily Calhoun.

Twickenham nimbly descended, flung the door open with a flourish, assisted her from the car, and touched his cap visor in a snappy salute. The assemblage gasped at these metropolitan activities.

Squire Dugger was long on horse sense and short on form and ceremony in his court. He lit his old corncob pipe, called the case of Twickenham Watts, and read the charge to the defendant.

" Boy, these two old niggers charge you with being a vagrant, in that you have no visible means of support or settled occupation and are an idle and pernicious individual, contrary to the peace and dignity of the State of Mississippi and the county of Adams. What you got to say about it?"

" Judge, it ain't so. I don't live here—my home's in Nyaw 'Leens, where I been workin' steady as chuffer for Colonel Lafaye until I come up here two weeks ago to see my mother," responded Twickenham deferentially. " I don't drink nor gamble, judge, and I have saved up a hundred and sixty dollars of my wages and got most of it yet, so I ain't beggin' nobody for anything."

" Well, now, you tell a straight story, and it don't sound like vagrancy to me. You going back to work?"

" Just as soon as you discharge me, judge. We leave in two minuets afterward. I'm goin' to drive Mis' Lily through the country in her cyar—she's goin' to Nyaw 'Leens."

" Looks to me like this charge isn't sustained. Case dismissed, and Zach and Mose fined five dollars and costs each for bringing a frivolous charge in my court."

" Thank you, judge!" said Twickenham, and bowed with pleased deference.

" Look here, Lily, have you gone and bought that car?" demanded Judge Dugger.

" Yas, suh, jedge."

" What you want with an auto?"

" Gwine let Twickenham run it as a taxi in de city."

" Say, have you gone plumb crazy?"

" No, suh—he say he can make as high as twenty dollars a day wid a fine new car like dis. He knows all de quality folks down dere, an' dey'll ride wid him.

" You know anything about this boy?"

" Jedge, I's knowed him since he was a hour old!" she laughed.

" Maybe so—but do you know you'll get what the car earns?"

" I'll be dere to keep a eye on dat, too. An', jedge, you might's well tend to dis, too!"

She rose and handed him a folded document.

Judge Dugger looked at it and dropped his pipe in great astonishment.

" There's no fool like an old fool! I believe you have lost your mind, Lily! I've known you for thutty years or thereabouts; I knew your husband, Josh, and you-all have always been regarded as among the very best colored folks in this county—"

" Yasser, an' thanky, jedge, but I knows what I's doin'. I spent fifteen hunnerd dollars cash for dat cyar, an' I got more as dat left. Ef she blows up I ain't busted—an' I has my home, rented out, too."

" But, Lily, you are fifty, and this boy isn't but twenty-six, according to this—"

" Nemmine dat, too, jedge. All my life I has been nothin' but a beast of burden. I never is had no fun. I never had none as a girl. I used to dream 'bout havin' fun an' good times like girls ought to have, an'

wished for 'em, but never had 'em. Nothin' but work. Den my folks talked me into marryin' Josh when I was mighty young, an' dat sure did settle things. Josh was a powerful sollum an' sot man, an' didn't believe in nothin' but work an' religion—"

"Yes, old Josh was mighty steady," agreed the judge.

"So, Twickenham comes along an' teaches me to dance. He belong to a church dat has a dance hall an' what don't believe in lookin' solemncholly in order to be a good church member. Dey believes in happiness and what pleasure one can git outen life widout hurtin' nobody ner doin' no wrong."

"I believe in that, too. I go fishing on Sunday if I want to. And I used to be a fine dancer." There was a note of regret in Judge Dugger's voice.

"An' dere's de movies, an' de parks, an' a whole lot of things I been missin'. I'm goin' to enjoy 'em an' ride in mer own cyar. Dis boy is a lot younger than I is, but years ain't nothin' if you got springtime in yo' heart!"

"Lily, you sure said a mouthful!" Judge Dugger banged his table with his fist. The judge was sixty-two, and was courting a widow in the early forties.

"And, Twick, he didn't know nothin' ner care nothin' about me havin' property an' money. He just come over an' tried to be nice an' sociable, an' played for me on his git-tar, an' bragged on my cookin', an' never reckermended hisself highly all de time, like dem two old onery hipperpottermusses whut's been naggin' de life out of me, tryin' to marry whut money I has. Dey spent de time tellin' me how much dey got an' how much dey make, an' not a word about love!

"I don't keer whut dey got or ain't got. I jes' wants a little 'preciation in my life, an' some love. Twick here was jes' tellin' me how he was savin' up to buy him a cyar an' go in business for himself—an' I pupposes myse'f to buy dat cyar an' let him run it, an' we be pardners. Den later on he shows he likes me lots an' pupposes us get married, for he reely loves an' 'preciates me.

"Jedge, I dunno if it lasts or not. Ef it don't last but six months I done got dat much more outen life dan I would 'a' had if I hadn't."

"'Springtime in the heart,'"—it's the only thing worth while, after all." Judge Dugger dreamily voiced his musings on the buxom widow.

"So, I's gwine marry him—"

"You better be careful, Lily!"

"Jedge, bein' keerful is the principalest thing which I is. He got to learn me to drive dat cyar fust thing, so if he flickers on me as a husban' I ain't gwine lose husban' an' chuffer too."

"That's sensible."

"Yas, suh; husban's is easy to pick up 'most anywhar, but I heard de white folks say a good chuffer is skase as a hones' man, which de Good Book say, next to a bird in de hand, is de noblest work of de Lawd. So I learns to chuff hit merself."

"You reckon you can handle it, Lily? Them contraptions is powerful contrary."

"Jedge, I done handled one contrary nigger man more as twenty-five yeahs—an' I knows I can handle dat masheen."

"Oh, well, then—all right. Stand up."

"Come on, Twick—le's get dese yere obsequeys over wif. I yearns to be on mer way to Nyaw 'Leens an' percolate around on dat big dance floor you been tellin' me about. Stand up here, honey, an' take de bridle an' bit!"

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TULIPS

IN a glory of crimson and gold the sun
Smiled down on the bare, brown earth,
And the earth smiled back in the crimson and gold
Of tulips come to birth.

Ella Oldham Burroughs.

One Eighth of 6-B

by Marc Edmund Jones

MERCIA DARROW was well aware that she looked like a million dollars as she hurried into the lobby of the apartment building which was her home in New York. Yet the thought brought her no pleasure, but rather bitter reflection, for the cancer of loneliness ate at her heart.

It was not the bare fact of loneliness, for she knew there must be thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of lonely girls throughout the great city. Loneliness of itself she felt she could have borne with fortitude. More than anything else her unhappiness had its birth in the odd trick played upon her by the turn of fate. For Marcia Darrow, except in this lack of companionship, had come to New York with everything a girl might wish—money, available in amounts far beyond her most extravagant needs; an introduction, through a branch of a family socially prominent for generations.

Now, as she entered the lobby, she was very conscious of her furs, of her hat—not a thing she had on but was the best product of the best shops on Fifth Avenue. Nevertheless the pert blonde at the switchboard failed to give her a second glance, while the taxi driver trailing behind her followed as impersonally as the shadow of a stone post moving with the sun.

Mercia thought—it was a thought that came with a hot flush—that at the least she might have been permitted by the gods of chance to select for her shopping excursion a taxi with a driver willing to give her the satisfaction of a few glances of admiration and perhaps a wistful smile and a longing "Thank you, lady!" But there was a reason for this man's indifference. Just at the corner, where the car had swung down from Broadway, there had been a girl standing on the walk. The girl had called. The driver had waved. Both had smiled, and the girl was pretty, and he rather good looking.

Was this all a gigantic part of the trick of circumstance upon her? It could hardly be that every one in New York except herself was coupled off in happy twos. Yet the elevator boy, on the way up to the sixth floor, hardly looked at her. And she knew why, for as soon as he returned to the lobby he would dart back to his seat by the switchboard, there to feast his eyes on the little blonde. Even on the few occasions when there were other tenants in

the elevator, these were wrapped up in their own affairs. No one spoke to her. She was becoming desperate.

Mercia led the way to apartment 6-B, opened the door with her latchkey, then stood aside to let the taxi driver precede her.

"Put them in the first room to the right," she said.

In a moment she was alone. She went on into the wide front room, which overlooked Riverside Drive through three ample windows, and there stood before the big console mirror in the sunlight.

A pretty picture confronted her. It was a slender, graceful girl poised poutingly erect in the glass. Her coloring was brunette, brown of the shade just short of the depth of black. Her hair, for all the attentions of the expert dressers, revealed an inherent democracy. And then she allowed her big fur coat to slip back, to drop carelessly to a little stand beside the mirror.

But it was not her new spring frock, nor the girlish contour of throat, nor the youthful roundness of elbows as she put slender hands to her cheeks that were worthy to arrest attention. Rather it was the wide wondering eyes, eager for all that there was to be seen in life, and the red fullness of lips drawn together wistfully now for a taste of romance and adventure.

Mercia was twenty. And because seriousness at twenty measures its duration in terms of minutes and seconds only, she laughed at herself suddenly. Then, with the eagerness of anticipation, she hurried back into her own room, full of the scheme she had conceived, determined she would be lonely no longer.

Yet at the door to the chamber which was hers she hesitated again. This room brought depression always. Of course it was unavoidable circumstances, but somehow she had felt herself limited to this one set of four walls for all that she had had the run of the apartment. The room was magnificently furnished, as were the other seven; and it was outside with southern exposure, so that she had the sun all day through two windows — but the fact remained that during the illness of her host she had felt ill at ease except in this room, and as the apartment, so far as her acquaintanceship went, represented her world in New York, so her one room represented the extent of her real domain in that world.

"I feel like one-eighth of 6-B!" she had written in her diary.

Of course the Sargents, whose apartment it was, had been more than cordial to the girl. It was at the invitation of Mrs. Sargent that she had planned to leave Webster Groves and all the girlhood associations of the Missouri town. Mrs. Sargent and Mercia's mother had met in finishing school; then each had married. Mercia's father had developed the touch of Midas; the Southwest through the gateway of St. Louis yearly increased his wealth beyond all bounds. And because he worshiped worldly success, he refused to leave it. Mercia's mother, too loyal to him to take the girl East herself, had determined for the full score of years that her daughter should have the opportunity of New York social success.

Hence the arrangements with the Sargents. Burton Sargent was related to half the best families in the city. He had the tastes of the four hundred, without the money-making genius of the pioneer male members of the families making up that set. Of course it was not to be known that Mercia Darrow paid board at 659 West One Hundred and Forty-Third Street, or that the many projected social functions would be financed by Darrow funds.

The odd turn of fate was that the sudden good fortune of Mercia's coming was too unexpected a let-down in the nerve strain under which Burton Sargent had been laboring. The realization that it might even be possible to pay his creditors enough to satisfy them, that he need no longer worry over the possibility of his landlord actually carrying out the threat of legal dispossession—after a much too hilarious night preceding Mercia's arrival, Mr. Burton Kendrick Sargent, at the ripe age of fifty-two, found himself not only unable to get out of bed, but seriously sick, and on the verge of going out of his head altogether.

Mercia perforce was left to shift for herself. Social functions were impossible,

even introductions. Finally, after ten days of deep concern, it was necessary to rush the sick man south in order to save his life. Mrs. Sargent, on the pretext that she never knew anything of her husband's affairs, and didn't know what to do to get money, borrowed the necessary funds from Mercia and left, taking Katy, the faithful old maid who had done all the work in the apartment for years.

Now Mercia laughed. The real facts about the financial condition of the Sargents were unknown to her, a bit of consideration on the part of Mercia's mother. But even in the ten days she had felt her isolation, as would a girl who had known every man, woman, and child in Webster Groves, Missouri, and all about them. The physician had been rather young and good-looking, but married and busy. The consulting doctor had been feeble, and gray-haired. The grocery boys and tradesmen had been shut off by the dumb waiter, and of course—she had been carefully coached in this regard—she had the matter of social position to consider.

She laughed because the situation, with the whole apartment on her hands, was worse than with the sick man home. Mrs. Sargent had told her how to go about getting another servant, or servants, temporarily, but Mercia shuddered at the thought of being waited upon in lonely state. Just once had she cooked a meal for herself. That, in rebellious mood, she had eaten in the kitchen.

It had been much better to eat about in the little restaurants of the Washington Heights section. Yet they had brought her no companionship.

And as if to rub it in, she noticed that people always went about in couples; the young ones, that is. Not always boy and girl, perhaps, but male chums and feminine intimates. Where there was no romance there was companionship. She remembered the lonely girl she thought she had discovered on the Fifth Avenue bus, a young girl with a wistful look, plainly dressed with a tam-o'-shanter drawn down over her ears. All the way to Washington Square Mercia had been tempted to speak to her. Then at Eighth Street had come the discovery. She was with the conductor! The girl's eyes had lighted revealingly as he poked his head inside to speak to her.

"If you'll ride around again," he coaxed, "I'll take you to supper at a nifty little place I've—"

But Mercia laughed, shaking off the mood. On the bed in her room was a formidable pile of newspapers, complete files for several weeks of two leading dailies. It was this load which the taxi driver had carried in for her; for the carrying of which she had taken the taxi from the stand out in Broadway down to Park Row and back. With a little jump she curled up on the bed beside the papers, drawing feet up under her, Turk fashion. With almost a giggle of excitement she began to go through them, spreading them out in systematic fashion.

"Robberies," she said, to no one in particular, but talking aloud as though her solitude had been months rather than days, and out in the South Sea Isles rather than on prosaic Manhattan Island. "I want to get the accounts of every robbery in the past few weeks, and I also want the minute details—"

Of course Mercia knew that there was a vast difference between the metropolis in which she found herself and Webster Groves. But she had heard her father say, and had read in books, and rather felt instinctively that human nature was little apt to vary much with time or location. A robbery in Webster Groves would be the talk of the town. Of course, if she should be robbed in apartment 6-B of 659 West One Hundred and Forty-Third Street, it would hardly make headlines in the newspapers, but it might well become the talk of the apartment house. That, she had decided, was her objective. Mrs. Sargent had particularly remarked upon the worth while people dwelling in 659, and had promised several definite introductions; names that slipped Mercia's memory through their unfamiliarity.

"Oh, but wouldn't it be dreadful, however," she exclaimed, "if I should be found out? I must make sure that I have every detail correct. Here—" She tore out a half-column account of a burglary, read-

ing: " ' Fur thieves caught by finger prints on price tags '—"

She looked at dainty fingers, shuddering. In imagination she was embarrassed at the possible future identification of marks they might make.

Then her thoughts wandered once more. Was she really so tremendously lonely? Was she justified in staging a fake robbery to gain attention, and sympathy—and possibly to strike an acquaintanceship with some fellow tenant? Was she sufficiently skillful?

Just the night before she had gone to the theater. One previous occasion she had gone alone, and had been aware that the fact attracted attention. So she had bought two tickets, using one seat for her fur coat, leaving those about to assume that her escort was late. Then, to carry out the pretense, she had looked at her watch frequently, and frowned. But it was no use. Her supposed plight had gained her more attention than upon the first occasion.

Yes, Mercia Darrow was desperately lonely; so lonely that she viewed the entire universe through tinted glasses. With a shrug of determination she turned to the newspapers, rapidly finding and studying the various accounts of recent robberies in the greater city.

Then she went out into the dining room. This room was to be the scene of the supposed robbery for a number of reasons. First, its far window opened on the fire escape, providing a logical mode of entrance and exit for the hypothetical robbers. Then here was the little wall safe, which Mrs. Sargent had shown her, together with the combination, but which she had not yet found occasion to use. Too, the heavily beamed ceiling and massive mission oak woodwork suggested the somber things of life to Mercia, and she was sure it would be easier for her to maintain her story of the robbery in a somewhat gloomy room such as this, especially if later it should be necessary to claim her valuables were found and there had been no robbery.

First she opened the wall safe. She could see that it was a simple combination, and she knew that expert crooks could open it by listening to the tumblers or using other devices known to them. Wiping off the dial of the combination and the surrounding metal, she eliminated her own finger prints. Cleaning out the inside carefully, for there were no marks in the dust to show that jewel cases had been deposited there, she left it slightly ajar.

Next she went to the pantry, and in a bottom drawer, far back, found a battered hatchet stored away with an old set of nut crackers, presumably employed for a similar purpose. Returning with this she used it as a jimmy to break the lock on the window leading to the fire escape. Into this detail she put considerable thought, so that the job would have as professional a look as lay within her power; then she returned the hatchet to its place.

Finally she inspected the room. It seemed much too orderly, but she knew that jewel thieves and cracksmen were neat and careful. At last her eye caught a brass-potted fern right at the window, and giggling in joy at her own cleverness, she kicked this over with a tiny heel, so that the dirt from the plant scattered over quite an area of floor.

"Now!" she exclaimed, aloud. "When shall the robbery take place?"

To give herself a chance to think it out carefully again, so that she could be sure she had made no mistake, she went out to supper. After a rather full meal she returned. Still she was hesitant. It would not be dark for a full hour; it would be advisable to wait until later in the evening, or even into the small hours. The people whom she hoped to meet through her pretended misfortune would not come in at the time of the excitement, but would be led to know her later, and the time therefore would make little difference once it was dark.

As a matter of fact it was about ten o'clock, daylight saving time, when she felt she could wait no longer. She rushed to the phone.

"I've been robbed!" she cried. "All my jewels! The men have just left, by the fire escape!"

She expected an immediate influx of apartment house employees, at least two

policemen, and perhaps as many tenants. Actually the elevator boy came running. When he discovered that the robbers apparently had left some number of moments before; that there was no danger and no trace of the intruders, he hurried out again, and she was alone. About eleven o'clock the superintendent of the building came. He looked over the room with great care. He asked questions and jotted down the answers in a pocket notebook. Then he left. The police arrived at midnight in the person of one jaded officer, who explained that in view of the crime wave and everything else it was hardly possible that the jewels would be recovered. If some stool pigeon brought in information the crooks might be apprehended, he thought.

Bitterly disappointed, Mercia surveyed the disorder of the dining room, to which each visitor had contributed. Then she went to her own chamber, her one-eighth of the apartment, and there flung herself upon the bed when only half undressed; and so spent the night. Once she waked, cold, and pulled some covers over her. But she slept soundly. That was youth.

And with morning there came more action, for the superintendent came again, this time with a young man in tow.

" This is Jack Kramer, a friend of mine, Miss Darrow, and a fine detective. If you would permit him to look over things—"

Mercia suddenly found that she was looking into a pair of eyes as brown and as deep as her own. The detective's shoulders were stalwart, and she liked that. A tiny barely controlled twitch at his mouth told of a sense of humor, and she had always insisted to herself that she could only love a man who possessed a sense of humor.

Second thought was chilling. This Jack Kramer was a detective, a man who lived in a world entirely separate from her own. Mercia was not a snob, but she knew that life was far different from the stories in books, and that actual detectives—had not her father employed many of them?

Then came her ever ready laugh. Why, this was more than she had really anticipated, especially after last night! A special investigator.

" They broke the window lock," she began, pointing. " And—and "—meeting his glance unexpectedly, she found it easy to simulate excitement—" and they took all my jewels from the little safe there—I'm sure I turned the combination after I wore my necklace last time, and—" Here Mercia stopped.

" Just what did you lose?"

She noticed that he took out the very book in which the superintendent had jotted down the information the night before. But she had been careful to commit the items to memory well, and made no mistake.

He went over to the little safe, taking out a magnifying glass.

" The finger-prints have been wiped off very carefully," he announced.

" Aren't thieves and robbers always careful about finger-prints?" she asked, and then flushed. She had subconsciously yielded to a desire to talk to him.

He looked at her searchingly, then went to the window, where he gave every detail of the woodwork and lock a minute examination. Next he looked at the overturned fern. Then he clambered out on the fire escape, and at that she gasped. It had never occurred to her to arrange marks or tell-tale " evidence " of some sort out there. Of course he would not find anything.

Nevertheless he came back through the window, looking at her rather coldly and soberly.

" It is as I suspected, Miss Darrow. This is the work of the gang I am after. I guess they found themselves suddenly in need of funds for chemicals or supplies, and resorted to robbery."

" I—I don't understand!" she exclaimed.

He opened his coat, so that she had a flash of a silver shield of some sort. " I'm a secret service man for Uncle Sam, Miss Darrow, and for weeks I have been on the trail of the gang circulating a spurious twenty-dollar bill, a very fine piece of work that is almost impossible to detect. Just day before yesterday I traced them to this neighborhood, and I believe that their plant and hiding place is in this very building."

" But—" Really there had been no robbery!

"The only thing that puzzles me," he went on, looking at her very searchingly, "is how they knew about these jewels of yours. In some way they must have been watching you, or they must be very close to you."

"I—I never showed the jewels to any one!" Naturally.

He turned away without a word, saying something in a low voice to the superintendent, and then they made their way to the door.

Mercia started to put out a hand to thank him. But when he faced her for the last time she saw a vague coldness in his expression; in fact it seemed almost suspicious to the girl, upset by the unexpected turn of events.

Then she was alone. He could—certainly he could not have discovered that there had been no robbery! And it was impossible to believe that he suspected her of any connection with this gang of counterfeiters!

All at once Mercia giggled at her plight. She had wanted companionship, excitement, romance. And a gang of counterfeiters in one of the finest apartment houses on Riverside Drive! She could hardly credit it.

Yet she was lonely still. She read the morning paper through. No one else came to the apartment, though, and on this morning there was not even the ring of the dumb waiter. In desperation she went out. But afraid she might miss something if she stayed away too long, she employed her time on the little walk in the purchase of supplies for a luncheon. Back in the apartment she prepared it with care and set the table in the dining room for one.

Telltale color in her cheeks betrayed her inner thoughts. There was enough salad, and cold meat, and creamed potatoes, and hot bakery buns, and many other things—but she did not even admit to herself that she hoped the detective might return; that she might have the chance to invite him to share the luncheon with her.

The afternoon wore on. At three she was desperate. This was the first day since the departure of the Sargents that she had remained home. But what to do? Movies, theater, dinner downtown — nothing appealed to her. She studied her image in the glass; glanced at her hands. A manicure — perhaps to have her hair dressed again would occupy the balance of the afternoon.

And then she smiled, for she remembered little red-headed Alice at the beauty parlor around on Broadway; the extremely talkative Alice who always did her hair. That was it! Conversation of any sort.

But the little red-head was almost in tears.

"Oh, Miss Darrow!" Busy fingers kept at their task, of course. "My big handsome man has gone back on me," she continued, with a catch in her voice. "We quarreled terribly last night. He said—he said I had changed, and I hadn't changed at all. He—he said it didn't give him a thrill to kiss me no more, and—and honestly, Miss Darrow—"

Mercia's ready impulse of sympathy suddenly transformed itself into something akin to joy. Why—why here was another lonely girl. Almost before thought she raised up her head a bit, and got soap in her mouth.

"You want to forget it, Alice! No man is worth worrying about. Now I tell you what you do. You fix yourself all up as prettily as you can, and I'll go home and change my clothes, and we'll call a taxi and I'll take you to the finest restaurant we can find and we'll have dinner, and see all the people, and forget that there's a shadow in the world!"

The fingers of the little red-head began to tremble.

"Oh, Miss Darrow! Will you do that for me, honestly?"

When Mercia called at the beauty shop later, in the taxi, the diminutive hair-dresser indeed had fixed herself up prettily, and tastefully. It would be all right to take her to one of the big hotel dining rooms. But it was a rather forlorn young lady who cuddled up against her benefactor.

"Oh, Miss Darrow! My big man was out there, watching me, and I'm afraid. He'll follow us, and—and—"

"Nonsense," soothed Mercia.

Under the spell of the luxurious sur-

roundings, fascinated by their table right at the sidewalk of Fifth Avenue, so that they could watch the passers-by and the traffic as well as the people in the Waldorf dining room, Alice found her many-hinged tongue loosed from all restraint. Only Mercia saw the man stare through the window hungrily. Only when he entered the dining room and strode up to them did Alice gasp.

"Listen, little lady," he began, ignoring Mercia and addressing the smaller girl, "I'll give you just two minutes to choose, by my watch. Either you walk right out of here with me, and we'll be married as soon as the license window opens in the morning, or you say good-by and remain here with your swell lady friend. But I'll have you know"—his voice was tense—"it's the last time you'll trample my heart to cinders and ashes!"

Alice giggled apologetically as she caught Mercia's eye. "You won't mind, Miss Darrow, if I go? You—you mustn't take him too seriously. He's—he's even jealous of the landlady who takes my rent from me, but—but he means that about the two minutes, and—"

She rose, and the two hurried out. Mercia laughed; then her own gnawing loneliness gripped her again. She pushed the untasted dessert away.

"Check, please!" she called briefly to the waiter.

When he presented it she gave him a twenty-dollar bill. Then an amazing thing happened. A man she had not noticed rose from an adjoining table, stopping the waiter. With a quick, hardly noticeable gesture he flashed something pinned inside his coat, whereupon the waiter allowed him to examine the twenty-dollar bill Mercia had just presented.

It was the detective. Though he did not look at her, though he nodded to signify that the money was perfectly all right, cold fear clutched at Mercia's heart. It was impossible that he believed her connected with the gang of counterfeiters. Yet if he merely suspected that some of their counterfeits had come into her possession, surely he would have asked her to show any twenties she might have had.

She hurried home. Never had she felt the oppression of the apartment so keenly. With morning she felt that she must get away from her surroundings, even if it were necessary to return to Webster Groves. It was a beautiful day. Finally she called a touring car and had herself driven for a long swing out and around Long Island, lunching at Long Beach, where already preparations for the summer crowds were under way.

But there was no more satisfaction in driving alone than in going to the theater alone. She felt that the chauffeur pitied her—a feeling which made it impossible for her to engage him in conversation. And of course she felt it impossible to ride in the front seat with him.

Supper—a sign of her growing feeling of rebellion—was at the apartment, upon the remains of the lunch of the day before. Besides, she wanted to be home in case the robbery brought some of the other tenants in to show neighborly feeling.

The pretended robbery, however, had been an utter failure, so far as expected results were concerned. To find occupation for the evening she resorted to the newspaper, and under the heading, "Events To-day," she suddenly discovered that a "Mid-Missouri Club" was meeting down near the theater section. And of this sort of thing she had heard vaguely.

Of course! What was more natural than that people from the same State should feel a bond of neighborliness in another part of the country? She would go, although she had no idea what it was all about. Actually it was a dull affair. She was greeted warmly at the door, and an admission fee, labeled "contribution and dues," exacted. Then came a slow program of near-vaudeville talent, and a speech upon the "Spirit of Missouri." After that the Missourians were given a chance to meet.

"Yes, I live in St. Louis," the girl with the green hat confided to Mercia—"out in them new apartments on Delmar, near King's Highway. And I go through Webster Groves when I go to Meramec in summer; but, listen, Miss—"

"Darrow."

"Miss Darrow! I like it in this burg.

There's dandy dances every weekday night at Cossack's Hall over in Brooklyn, and several of we Missourians go twice a week. You get to know some dandy fellows, and—"

On the street once more, Mercia breathed a deep breath of fresh air after the close atmosphere of the hall above. But to get a taxi seemed hopeless, for this was the theater section, and a thin spring rain had come up. All at once a firm hand took her arm.

"May I take you up to Washington Heights on the subway? If you are looking for a taxi it may be a long wait."

The detective!

"I've never been on the subway," she giggled.

He took possession of her, and the ride uptown was in silence. A vague uneasiness in her mind was mixed with an odd sort of contentment to have him here by her side; and yet—

At the door of 659 West One Hundred and Forty-Third Street she spoke.

"You have been following me?"

He laughed easily.

"You are my only clew to the counterfeiters at the immediate moment, Miss Darrow. I don't mean to worry you."

"But—but you don't suspect—"

"No, indeed! I would like to look at any twenties you have, though."

She emptied her purse. There were none.

"I don't understand how I can possibly be the only clew to the counterfeiters," she protested.

"I—I can't explain," he admitted.

She went on in, and there a telegram awaited her.

> Arrive to-morrow afternoon. Burton immensely improved.
>
> MARIAN SARGENT.

At last! Her loneliness would soon be over. Yet there remained a night and another morning. She would sleep, of course, but the one morning would go interminably slow. What could she do?

When morning came it was beautiful, and she went for a long walk down the Drive. All at once she spied a familiar figure on a bench, and realized that it was her detective, and that he was not following her, for once. But would he? This was her last morning alone, and suddenly she admitted to herself that she would like to see him, speak to him once more before the social whirl swallowed her up. An odd impulse came.

She turned toward Broadway, and in the first shop presented two ten-dollar bills, asking for a twenty. The proprietor, with a peculiar expression, did as she asked. She went out, and from the corner of an eye saw the detective.

With studied carelessness she had trouble getting the twenty into her purse. Then she presented it in another shop, and, as she expected and hoped, the detective came up behind her and asked to see it.

"It isn't counterfeit, is it?" asked the storekeeper.

"No!" After giving a look, he added: "It's all right."

Suddenly a third figure stepped up, a large somber man. "Let me see that bill. "Why, it's one of the phoney ones, sure as you're born." He turned to Mercia's man. "Hello, it's young Mr. Caxton. What's the idee?"

"Beat it, Henry!" exclaimed the one addressed as Caxton. "This is what I borrowed that old badge for, and I'll see you later, and meanwhile I have some explaining to do." Then to Mercia: "I'm not a detective, but a young fellow trying to keep out of mischief. I live in your apartment house, and wanted to meet you." A smile. "I bet you planned that fake robbery because you felt lonely up there in 6-B with the Sargents away, and—"

"Fake robbery!" She tried to be indignant.

"The window lock was broken on the inside; not a mark on the wood where the jimmy would have to be used; and there was a beautiful aluminium French heel mark on that brass flower pot where you kicked it over."

"And you pretended to—"

"Mrs. Sargent for weeks has been telling me about you; promised an introduction and lots of social affairs, and I—"

"Mrs. Sargent will be here in a few hours," Mercia murmured.

A Breeze from the South

by John Edward Weik

THE Santa Colima, a steam freighter of two thousand tons cargo-capacity and 14-knot speed, nosed her way lazily through the long Atlantic swells a hundred miles off the coast of Georgia.

On her bridge stood Captain Dinty, the Santa Colima's short, rosy-cheeked, genial-natured skipper, together with First Mate Flanagan.

The latter sniffed the air ecstatically. A warm breeze from the Caribbean was dispelling the frigid atmosphere that had surrounded the Santa Colima ever since she had weighed anchor in New York Harbor and poked her rusty bow-plates into the wintry waters of the northern Atlantic.

"Wind's from th' south, captain!" cried First Mate Flanagan joyfully. "A breeze from th' lands of palm-trees an' coconuts, pretty brown gur-rls an' singin' an' dancin' in th' tropical moonlight!"

Captain Dinty sniffed in.audible scorn.

"Pretty brown girls?" he remarked skeptically. "Who ever heard of a brown girl in the Caribbean? They make 'em black down there—not tan."

First Mate Flanagan's spirits refused to be dampened by the captain's cynicism.

"Yer not married, captain, I take it?"

"No."

"Then ye can never realize the feeling of unqualyfied happiness that comes over a man who is married, and all of a sudden feels th' breeze from a land of freedom an' sunshine blowin' on his cheeks. 'Tis comfortin' as well as invigoratin'. Especially to one like meself, who has just spent a couple of winter months with his wife in th' frozen wastes of upper Harlem."

"I imagine," stated Captain Dinty judicially, "that it all depends on the kind of wife a man has."

"Right ye are, captain," replied Flanagan approvingly. "And I have no hesitation in statin' that th' wife I'm blessed—or cursed—with, would make a one-armed ribbon-clerk hanker to swim th' Gulf of Mexico to get to a land of liberty an' peaceful rest, where th' only sounds in his ears would be the lispin' of th' waves on th' shore an' th' buzzin' of th' mosquitoes tryin' to crowd one another off th' choice feedin'-places on his shins."

Captain Dinty laughed.

"Is your wife as hard to get along with as all that? And if so, why haven't you separated from her long before now?"

"Answerin' th' first part of yer question," replied Flanagan, "I would say that me consort is considerably worse than th' brief an' mild description I have just had th' pleasure of givin' ye. And as for th' second part of yer question—why I haven't separated from her—I belave it would be a

good bit easier for a man to get rid of his shadow than for me to separate from me clingin'-burr of a wife. She won't let me out of her sight when I'm ashore; and if I sign on for a cruise she comes down to th' shippin'-office with me to make sure me contract spaycifically states I have to make th' return trip to New York."

Captain Dinty laughed once more.

"You only hope of getting away from her for good," he remarked, "would be a shipwreck. Then you'd be free to go wherever you pleased, in case you got to shore alive."

"Exactly!" Flanagan's eyes shone with contemplative joy. "I don't wish th' Santa Colima any harm, captain, though th' Lord knows her rusty plates would take in enough water th' first hard blow to swamp her—but it wouldn't offend me in the layst if I was to be stranded in an open boat with th' privilege of steerin' whichever way I wanted to go. I'd make for an island—a little, lonely island with palm-trees an' coconuts an' a spring of fresh water on it, an' there I'd spend me declinin' years in peace an' sunshine an' quiet, with no female voice shrillin' into me ears 'Mike, where th' divil have ye been th' last fifteen minutes?'."

He stared wistfully over the port rail of the Santa Colima. "Me kingdom for an island!" he continued plaintively.

"And I suppose you're hankering for the Santa Colima to founder, so that you can get to your island," remarked the captain rather irately.

"'Twouldn't make me shed any tears if th' old bucket should take a header for th' bottom," agreed the first mate, "as long as I was left ridin' high an' dry in a boat that I could steer toward me palm-tree paradise."

Captain Dinty snorted.

"A *fine* way for a mate to talk," he stated disdainfully. "Hoping that his ship will sink! You'll live to regret those words yet, Mr. Flanagan; mark what I say!"

Flanagan nodded his head. "Maybe I will," he agreed. And then, in softer tones, the vision of his island retreat blotting out all else in his consciousness: "Maybe I won't, Captain Dinty! Maybe I won't!"

Two days later, when well down into the Caribbean, the Santa Colima ran into rough weather that strained her rusty plates and caused the bilge-pumps to work day and night trying to keep the decks of the old freighter above water.

Twenty-four hours after the storm had struck them, Captain Dinty and his mates held a consultation, and decided to abandon ship, leaving the Santa Colima to her fate. This fate appeared to be clearly marked out for the vessel, for part of her well-deck aft was already awash, and one of her bilge-pumps was broken while the other wheezed and groaned in the throes of impending dissolution.

First Mate Flanagan had been struck on the forehead by a flying rope-end while the storm was at its height, and he was lowered unconscious into the captain's boat, a wide white bandage around his head.

As they rowed away from the foundering Santa Colima the injured man began to rave in delirium.

"South!" he cried loudly. "Keep her head p'inted south, captain. An' make for the second island to th' left—th' one with the coconut-palms stickin' up like feathers in a woman's hat!"

"What's he ravin' about, captain?" asked one of the seamen at the oars.

"He imagines we're going to land on an island," replied the captain. "He figures that if we get there, he can stay the rest of his life without having to go back to his wife in New York."

The seamen laughed.

"Make sure it's a lonesome little island, captain," pleaded the delirious first mate. "Take care ye don't let anyone know about our landin'; no use takin' any chances of me wife findin' out where I am. She'd be on me neck in a minute, if she ever guessed I was tryin' to get away from her."

Flanagan waggled his bandaged head about feebly, and settled down into the bottom of the lifeboat.

"Palms," he muttered thickly, "an' sunshine, and heavenly peace an' quiet! Glory be! All th' rest of me life I'll do nothin' else but watch the monkeys climbin' up an' down th' trees, with th' hot sun

ironin' out th' kinks in me tired body, an' no sounds in me weary ears but th' waves rollin' in over th' coral reefs."

He lay back in the boat and passed off into happy smiling unconsciousness.

Fourteen hours later the boats from the foundered Santa Colima were picked up by the steamship Mary R. Dinsmore, bound for New York with hides from the Argentine in her hold.

Flanagan was still unconscious when hauled over the rail of the Mary R. Dinsmore, and at the request of Captain Dinty he was put to bed in a stateroom, and given what medical attention of an unskilled sort it was posssible to offer on the ship that had picked them up.

One of Captain Dinty's first thoughts, after notifying his own relatives by radio of his rescue, was to send word to First Mate Flanagan's wife that her husband was alive and well. He remembered Flanagan's New York address, and smilingly dictated a message to the wireless operator informing Mrs. Michael Flanagan that the first mate of the sunken Santa Colima had been picked up by the steamship Mary R. Dinsmore, which was *en route* to New York.

" No lonesome little island for him now," remarked the captain to himself as he left the wireless-room of the Mary R. Dinsmore. " Good-by forever to coconut-palms and coral reefs. She'll be waiting on the dock when the Mary R. Dinsmore arrives, or I miss my guess. I couldn't very well have neglected to send that message, just the same."

Three days after he had been taken on board the Mary R. Dinsmore, though unaware of the passage of time on account of his unconsciousness, First Mate Flanagan of the Santa Colima, awoke in a strange bunk, in a strange stateroom, and found himself clad in a suit of strange pyjamas, with a bandage wrapped around his head.

" Where in th' name of Heaven am I?" He gazed wonderingly about the stateroom.

It was night, and the tiny room was dimly illuminated by a small electric lamp of possibly four candle-power.

" 'Tis quite evident I have not yet found me lonesome little island with th' palm-trees," he remarked.

Searching his mind and memory for some explanation of his present surroundings, he recalled the storm that had played havoc with the rusted plating of the Santa Colima's underbody. There was also a dim recollection in his mind of being stowed aboard a lifeboat and rowed away from the sinking freighter.

" 'Tis rescued I am," he concluded. " An' th' next question is—where is th' ship that rescued me bound for?"

He seized his trousers from a nearby hook, and swiftly pulled them up over his lanky legs. Then he put on his shoes over his bare feet, and, jamming his mate's cap upon his bandaged head, opened the door of the stateroom and stepped into the passageway that led to the deck of the Mary R. Dinsmore.

At the end of the passageway he came across a seaman walking forward along the deck.

" Tell me, me lad," he demanded, " just what port this packet is due to dock at?"

The seaman looked at him, surprised. Flanagan made a weird figure with his cap awry on his bandaged head, his loose pyjama-shirt that ballooned in the breeze about his lean torso, and his unlaced shoes. There was a five-days' growth of beard on his face.

" We dock at New York," replied the sailor finally.

Flanagan let out a yell of dismay that carried from one end of the ship to the other.

" Sufferin' saints! New York—an' me wife there waitin' to grab me soon as I step off th' ship! Of all th' places in th' wide world where I don't want to go, New York comes first!"

He hurried aft along the deck. Gazing over the rail of the Mary R. Dinsmore, he noticed that the ship was anchored close to land.

The night was clear and moonlit. Etched against the starry sky he saw the fronded crests of a cluster of palm-trees.

" 'Tis me lonesome little coral island!" he exclaimed. " An' they're gettin' ready to take me away from it—back to New York and me clingin'-burr wife."

No sooner said than Flanagan kicked off

his unlaced shoes, and diving over the after-rail of the Mary R. Dinsmore into the warm ocean, began to swim rapidly toward the land that loomed up blackly a short distance from the ship.

On reaching shore a few minutes later he found himself confronted by a steep bank that shut off any view of the land beyond. He clambered up the bank on his hands and knees.

At the top he discovered himself at the ocean end of a well-paved boulevard, illuminated by ornamental street-lamps and bordered by handsome residences set far back from the roadway and surrounded by closely cropped lawns and groups of shrubbery.

" In th' name of all th' holy saints," cried the dumfounded first mate, " where am I now?"

The *clop-clop* of thick-soled shoes echoed on the cement pavement near by. Flanagan crouched low.

" Hey, you!" came a peremptory voice. " Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Flanagan looked up to behold a blue-clad policeman bearing down on him, waving his night-stick threateningly.

" 'Tis not me lonesome little island, after all," remarked Flanagan sadly to himself. " There'd be no palaytial risidences or policemen on a coral island."

He rose to his feet, his wet garments clinging to his lanky frame, and a shower of sea-water fell from him as he shook himself.

" Where am I, me friend?" he inquired of the approaching policeman. " Can ye tell me that?"

" I can, and will," replied the other succinctly. " You're in Jacksonville, Florida. And now kindly answer a little question of mine. Where did you come from, and who are you? And why is it that you are crawling about on your hands and knees like a lunatic?"

Flanagan sighed deeply.

" D'ye see that ship ridin' at anchor a hundred yards or so off-shore?"

" Yes. It's the Mary R. Dinsmore—bound for New York, but laid up temporarily at Jacksonville for repairs to the steam steering-engine. I read about it in the paper this morning."

" That's th' ship I just left. As to why I left it, that's no concern of anybody but meself. I'll have the grace to inform ye, however, that it's not me intention to return to th' Mary R. Dinsmore unless I'm bound hand an' foot an' knocked on th' head to boot. In closin', me name is Michael Flanagan—at yer service! Have I answered all th' various parts of yer little question?"

" You have," replied the policeman sarcastically. " But your answers are a long way from being satisfactory. And presently—after you've dried off a little more—I'm going to take you by the arm and lead you to the desk sergeant at headquarters. I'm undecided right now whether I'll charge you with being a suspicious character or with vagrancy. And now tell me, which do you prefer?"

" I've never reflected on the subject," replied Flanagan. " Charge me with arson, highway robbery and assault an' battery with intent t' kill, if ye wish. But, bear this in mind, both ye and yer desk sergeant! I'll not return to th' Mary R. Dinsmore! An' put that in yer pipes an' smoke it!"

Captain Dinty was the first person on the Mary R. Dinsmore to discover First Mate Flanagan's disappearance the following morning.

On going early to the injured mate's stateroom to pay him his regular morning visit, the captain found the door open wide and the bird flown.

A hue and cry was raised at once, but no trace was found of Flanagan, and there was no clue to his method or time of departure the night before.

All that day Captain Dinty waited for the first mate to reappear, suspecting that he had rowed or swam ashore for purposes of a spree, and that he would return some time during the day.

When twenty-four hours had passed and there was still no sign of him, Captain Dinty had found himself rowed ashore with the idea of searching discreetly within the environs of Jacksonville.

Noting the deceiving cluster of palm-trees that topped the steep bank of the

shore, Captain Dinty guessed correctly the reason for Flanagan's departure. He laughed as he pictured to himself the first mate's dismay at finding that, instead of landing on the lonesome little island, to which he had looked forward with so much anticipation, he had selected a busy metropolis on the southern Atlantic seaboard for his escape.

After landing in Jacksonville it was in Captain Dinty's mind to journey to police headquarters to see whether they knew anything of the missing mate. But he was saved that trouble.

While walking through the residential district he came across a lanky figure dressed in blue serge trousers topped with the shirt portion of a suit of pyjamas, with a pair of sneakers on his stockingless feet and a mate's cap pressed down upon a bandaged head.

He was escorted by a burly policeman of patently Irish extraction. He hailed Captain Dinty jubilantly.

" 'Tis me old captain himself! And what do ye think of yer first mate now? Doesn't the Hon. Michael Flanagan make a handsome an' dignified appearance in his present garb an' surroundings? But first let me introduce ye to me escort an' protector "—motioning toward the grinning cop—" Patrolman Thomas O'Flaherty! Captain Dinty, Misther O'Flaherty!"

The captain and the policeman shook hands.

" 'Tis th' law in whose arms I am now nestlin'," went on Flanagan. " Th' charge happens to be a combynation of vagrancy an' suspicious appearance. For two days now I've been a pris'ner, with an occasional airin' like th' one I'm takin' at th' present time for purposes of me health, seein' as how I have a cracked head."

He reached into the left hip-pocket of his trousers and extracted a folded slip of paper.

" Furthermore," he continued, " th' police are continuin' to cast th' eye of suspicion at me, on account of a letter me wife wrote th' chief here in Jacksonville, based on yer swate little radio message. Here's a copy th' sergeant was good enough to give me. Kindly look it over."

The captain unfolded the slip of paper and read the following letter:

THE CHIEF OF POLICE,
Jacksonville, Florida:

Dear Sir—I have recently received a wireless message from the ship Mary R. Dinsmore, informing me that my husband, Michael Flanagan, was picked up at sea and is being brought back to New York.

On going to the office of the Mary R. Dinsmore's owners I find that this ship is by now anchored off Jacksonville for repairs.

Knowing my husband's strange and eccentric tendency to try to escape from his marital obligations and leave me alone in New York whenever an opportunity offers itself, I ask you kindly to keep an eye on him in case he leaves the Mary R. Dinsmore. If you locate him under these conditions and will notify me—preferably by telegraph—I shall come to Jacksonville at once in order to bring him back with me to New York.

Very truly yours,
MARGARET A. FLANAGAN.

Captain Dinty laughed aloud.

" 'Tis not so funny after all, captain," remarked the first mate, rather sulkily. " Especially when th' chief's wired me wife, as she asked him to do, and she's likely to show up here any time now."

The captain reflected for a moment.

" Suppose," he said to the policeman, " that you should happen—voluntarily or otherwise—to let this man escape. Would they treat you roughly for it at headquarters?"

" Maybe so and maybe not," replied the policeman cautiously. " He hasn't been exactly a model prisoner, and it costs the city money to feed him. I don't imagine the chief would be sorry if he were to get away. But why should I let him escape?"

" Are ye married?" asked Flanagan.

" Yes." The policeman grinned.

" Then perhaps ye realize what it means to be chained for life to a woman who drives ye mad with her talk an' senseless curtain-lecturin', an' who won't let ye out of her sight for a minute for fear—an' rightly so—that ye'll take th' opportunity to leave th' house an' never come back!"

" My wife's not much of a talker," replied the policeman.

" Then ye're a thrice-lucky man, an' should be layin' awake nights praisin' th' saints who gave her to ye."

The policeman pondered soberly.

" Suppose," he said, " that I step into yonder cigar-store to buy some tobacco, and leave you here standing on the sidewalk until I come back, will I find you here when I return?"

" Ye may," replied Flanagan jubilantly. " An' may th' Lord shower blessings on yer head for yer kindness of heart!"

After the policeman had left, Captain Dinty and First Mate Flanagan hurried off, arm-in-arm, down the street, turning the next corner to avoid the eye of the generous cop.

" See here, Flanagan," said Captain Dinty thoughtfully, " are you really in earnest about getting to that lonesome little island of yours?"

" Never more in earnest in me life."

" Then why don't you take the New Orleans boat as far as Key West. I understand the boat stops here to-morrow afternoon. At Key West you can get any of those hundreds of rum-smugglers or tramp schooners to take you to Cuba, and from there you can head for any island you please. How does that plan strike you? Assuming, of course, that if your wife ever looks me up in New York I'll tell her you disappeared from the Mary R. Dinsmore at night and nothing more was seen of you aboard ship."

Flanagan slapped Captain Dinty on his plump back.

" Ye're a life-saver," he cried, " and that's th' Lord's own truth! Yer scheme is perfect—with one exception."

" What's that?"

" Where am I to get passage money?"

Captain Dinty thought a moment.

" I'll buy your ticket, and you can instruct your New York bank by mail to refund me the money when I get home."

" Fine! Captain, ye're a jewel. I'll never forget yer kindness."

" Don't mention it," replied the captain dryly. " I happened to bring my bankroll with me when the Santa Colima foundered, and I'm able to fix you up without inconveniencing myself. Here are two fifty-dollar bills you can use to buy yourself dinner and a room for to-night, as well as some new clothes to wear aboard ship. I'll expect to see you to-morow afternoon when the New Orleans boat docks."

" Ye'll see me!" promised First Mate Flanagan joyfully. " An' by to-morrow night, at th' least, I'll be *en route* for me island—me lonely little island with th' palm-trees an' th' coconuts. Sunshine, peace, an' blessed quiet! An' nothin' in me ears but the breakin' of th' rollers on th' reefs!"

The New Orleans boat from the north docked at three thirty in the afternoon. Captain Dinty found Flanagan on hand, as he had promised, dressed in a new gray civilian suit, carrying a new rattan suit case.

" Here's your ticket," remarked the captain, handing him the strip of paper.

As the gangway was lowered and passengers began to debark Flanagan clasped Captain Dinty's hand in grateful farewell.

" A few months from now," he said, " I'll be settled nicely on me lonesome little island. An' then ye must pay me a visit. I'll treat ye to coconuts on th' half-shell, and perhaps I can manage to have some coconut-milk aged in th' wood, with a kick in it. An' ye can lay around all day an' look at th' blue sky an' forget yer troubles."

He turned and walked up the gangway, waving a last farewell to Captain Dinty.

A tall, spare female figure detached itself from a group of passengers on deck and rushed toward him.

" Mike!" she cried jubilantly. " Mike!"

The first mate took a step backward.

The woman clasped him to her breast.

" Mike," she cried, " how did ye know I was comin' on this boat after gettin' th' chief's telegram? And ye're all dressed up in a nice new suit to meet me, aren't ye, darlin'?"

Captain Dinty saw an expression of utter hopelessness come over Flanagan's face.

" Let's get right off th' boat," went on the shrill voice of Mrs. Flanagan, " an' buy our tickets back to New York. Don't ye think we'd better make th' trip by rail, darlin'? It's faster, ye know!"

Captain Dinty chuckled to himself.

" Coconut-palms and coral reefs!" he murmured. " And rest and peace and blessed quiet!"

He was whistling Tosti's " Good-by Forever " as he turned and left the dock.

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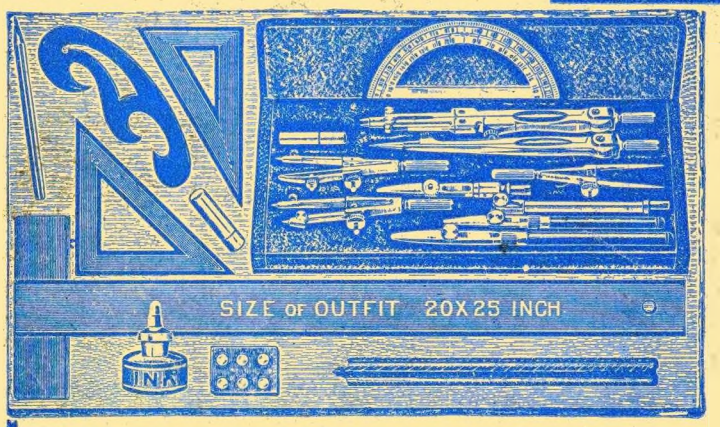

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