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BY BURTON E. STEVENSON

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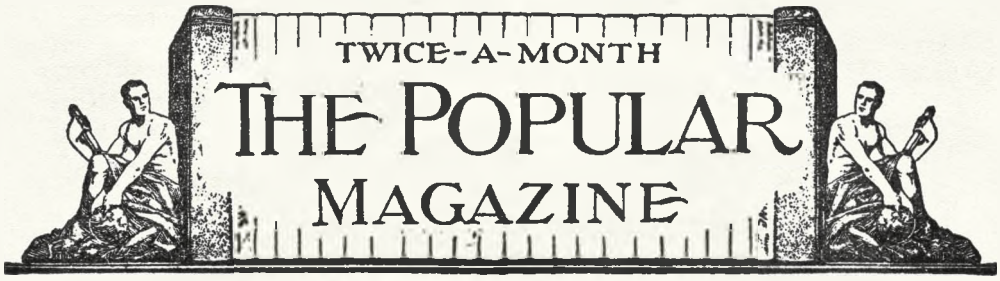

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

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Fluid of the Sun

By Clay Perry

Author of "The Two Reds of Travoy," "The Roleo," Etc.

When the coal veins of the earth are hollow and empty and the last oil gusher has shot a final black column spraying toward the blue of the sky; when the primeval forests of North America have been replaced by a useless black stumpage—then will be tapped the great power that lies latent in dammed water. Tumbling Niagaras will move vast dynamos to feed and clothe the world and "white coal" will be the basis of industry. This was the mighty dream, the great urge that brought Gail Halleck, the blond young engineer, to the pine country and to a romance that no mere dream could encompass.

CHAPTER I.

A VIKING ON THE HILL.

EVE, the daughter of François Gascoigne, the old lumber king of Whitewater Valley, stood in her window, high in the white house on the hill, and through an old brass telescope regarded the figures of four persons across the river, on the summit of an eminence which was the twin of the one which was topped by her home.

Three men and a woman were there. One of them Eve knew; the others were strangers to Axle, the little lumbering town which was dominated by those twin hills. Curiously she watched their different attitudes. The tall man with the tawny hair interested her most. He

seemed to be gazing always to the north, up to the snow-capped summit of Mt. Seward. The other strange man was dark, a stubbled beard covering his face, and he kept his gaze down, as if he were probing the earth.

Then, there was the woman, with hair like gold, shades brighter than the tawny mane of the tall man. She, too, turned her face toward Mt. Seward. It seemed as if these two chose to ignore the wilderness of blackened stumps and scrub timber, the shack town of Axle. Eve Gascoigne, too, ignored this wilderness made by man. Her father had made it —but up the river a few miles bulked the dark, rich growth of evergreens, spreading far east and west from the stream, which spoke of a wealth of timber left. It was strange to see it, bordering abruptly on the cut-over land.

THE tall, tawny-haired man seemed pointing it out to his fellows now. Eve wished she could hear what he said, as easily as she saw his lips move, for the telescope was powerful.

"That is Axle forest," the tall man said to the dark-bearded one. "For years François Gascoigne has fought to regain that tract, which was taken from him by eminent-domain process, as a State domain. Now he has lost the long fight."

"Well," responded the bearded one, with a jerk of his head toward the town, "if Gascoigne has lost, Halleck, there ain't much to worry about. The town—why, a few pounds of dynamite would finish it! Hardly a soul around, it seems."

"You'll see more life in Axlé within a week, Jim Harriman," answered the man called Halleck. "The big drive is coming down the river. Five million feet. Gascoigne doesn't know it—but this is his last drive."

"Ah! No one knows what is to come!" exclaimed the fourth member of the party, a swarthy, quick-eyed man of short but powerful figure, who had a shrewd and somewhat furtive manner of studying the faces of the others.

"I have got to break the news to Gascoigne, Rambault," said Halleck, with a sigh. "It's not a nice job. When his drive is down, he will lose the river."

"He has held it thirty years," returned Rambault. "That is his house, over there on the hill. They call it Mont de Gascoigne. This is called Knob Hill, here. He chose a splendid location—and, you will notice, it is aloof from the town, on the opposite side of the river. He is a proud old man."

"The house tells its story, up there—the story of a man who made and ruled a town," commented Halleck.

"It is time the rule ended!" Rambault spoke with a flash of white teeth, as if he enjoyed the idea. "You have considered what I said about Louis Gascoigne, his son?"

"I do not like the idea very well, Rambault," Halleck spoke doubtfully. "There must be some better way of winning him over to our project."

Again Halleck's blue eyes lifted and sought the white-topped mountain, as if inspiration came to him from there. His hand brushed his soft, fine beard. It was longer than Harriman's black stubble—his hair had grown almost to his collar and curled up at the ends—yet he did not seem unkempt, shabby, like the darker man, despite soiled, stained clothing, eloquent of much outdoor life.

"Why, Louis Gascoigne will do anything for money!" exclaimed Rambault.

"But money will not do everything, Rambault," Halleck retorted.

"Almost!" Rambault laughed. "It is enough to destroy this miserable town and build——"

"Not just money," Halleck cut in. "It takes vision, first. Anthony Antrim had the vision; he inspired others. The money came afterward."

"To be sure," Rambault agreed politely, his sonorous accents betraying his Gallic blood, despite his exact English. "But there are men whose vision extends no farther than the dollar before their eyes."

Gail Halleck's gaze happened to encounter that of Greta Harriman, the woman of the golden hair. Her blue eyes had clouded suddenly, flitting to her husband's face. Harriman was studying the ground.

"When can I begin to dig?" Harriman asked, with gruff impatience. "Every day I lose means I lose money on the job."

Halleck, noting Greta's flush, restrained a smile.

"You can dig in just as soon as Gascoigne has been notified," he replied. "Are you all ready?"

"I've been shipping my machinery. It will be at Timberlake to-morrow. I brought a few things on that caboose train we rode in from Timberlake, mostly for putting up the shacks. I'll have to get more lumber from Gascoigne's sawmill down there, I suppose."

He waved at the sprawling, unpainted lumber mill, which stood below Knob Hill, on the river bank.

"How about men?" Halleck queried. "They are all in the woods still. They will not come down until they run the drive."

"And they will not want to work until they have spread their axle grease," Rambault chuckled. "It takes one who knows them to handle them. It is their custom, every spring, to go down to Timberlake with their money and spread it about—like grease. A spree, a few fights—the money is gone; then they are content to go to work—and continue if they are handled right. Now, I know the very man——"

"I'll see about getting you some men in a day or two," Halleck interrupted, speaking to Harriman.

Halleck moved over toward where Greta stood on a rock, as high as she could get, for a better view of the distant mountain.

"Now, what are you dreaming, Greta?" he asked banteringly.

Harriman, circling, with bent head, picking up handfuls of soil, fingering it as if feeling its texture, overheard the query and answered it, almost mockingly.

"Dreamin' of the Seven Hills of Rome," he declared. "Ever since we've been married she has been doin' that—wantin' to go there. Oh, I promised her we'd go when we could afford it!" he finished challengingly.

"We have never been able to afford it," Greta caught up, smiling bravely. "Perhaps after this job——"

"We'll lose on this job," Harriman interrupted. "I just learned from Chief Engineer Halleck we got to start the diversion canal downriver from that hill over there, dig all around it. If we could start upriver now, with the current helpin' us——"

"Mr. Antrim insisted we must not interfere with Gascoigne's drive in any way," Halleck explained. "That is in the contract. It must be done this way, no matter what the cost."

"Tell me," grumbled Harriman. "Does Gascoigne own all that hill over there?"

"I believe it is all homestead property. Antrim wouldn't hear of trying to acquire it. Besides, we don't need it. All we need is Knob Hill, here."

"Humph! The old river pirate will roost right on our job—and make it as hard for us as he can, I suppose."

"Oh, we have a right of way around the hill. Gascoigne, in fact, has nothing but water rights left."

"When will that drive be down, do you think?"

"It is to start running this week, perhaps to-morrow, if the thaw holds on."

"I see where I lose twenty thousand on this contract," grumbled Harriman.

Halleck's smile broadened. "That's a good sign," he said. "When you begin to figure your loss, it means the dirt will fly."

Through her telescope Eve Gascoigne studied these two faces closely.

"The golden-haired one is the wife of the black one," she murmured. "She is feeling sorry for herself, and the tall man—he is sorry for her. I do not believe he is in love with her—yet. I wonder if he is married? No. He is not."

By what strange intuition or witchcraft Eve Gascoigne arrived at these conclusions—particularly the last one—it would be difficult to say. It happened that she was right.

CHAPTER II.

MARK OF THE BLIZZARD.

IN the wet, cold darkness of the forest Gail Halleck dragged himself painfully toward the distant log cabin, guided by the light from a low window. One foot was useless, both hands numb, his clothing soaked through; his strength was almost spent. He had been caught in a sudden blizzard on the river trail, coming up from Axle, on the trail to High Lake, headwaters of the Whitewater River.

A plainsman, Halleck was unaccustomed to mountain weather changes. Lost, with one ankle twisted until it was useless, one foot frostbitten, his hands nipped, he had kept on, dragging himself on hands and knees, seeking the river by the slope of the land It was in a sort of numb daze he came out at an ancient log landing which hung above the torrent of the mountain stream. There he had first glimpsed the cabin light. It had taken him half an hour to gain to the clearing where he now was. He managed to rise, as his hands touched a low step, supported himself by planting his numb fists against the door jamb and knocked with his knee.

The door opened inward. Halleck stared into the face of a girl, in blank surprise. He had expected to see a bearded lumberjack. The girl was slight, graceful, dark-haired, black-eyed. She was apparently alone. The warm air from a roaring fire in a red-hot, sheet-iron stove rushed about him. There came a roaring in his ears which seemed like that of the rushing river that had sung its savage song to him all this weary crawling journey—but this roaring came from within himself, a wave of weakness.

He muttered an apology, then his hands slipped from their position and he lurched forward. The girl, with a lithe, quick movement, caught him on her shoulders, grasping his arms as they swung before her, then got him across the room and into an open bunk.

For a time she stood and looked down at his face, panting from her exertion, for he had been a heavy burden.

"The man of the hill who looked up at the mountain," she muttered. "No, he is not a woodchopper, going up to the camps. He is—he looks—like a viking."

She brushed the wet hair from his face; a little smile crept over her piquant features. She became expertly busy, investigating his pulse, bathing his hands in cold water, removing soaked shoepacks, soggy socks, with an exclamation of pity at sight of the frost-whitened flesh. Her movements were darting, birdlike—but infinitely tender.

"There!" she said, as she finished, and covered him with a blanket, warmed at the stove. "There, that is that! Perhaps it is well I am here, eh? I wonder if that other woman, with her so-golden hair, could do for you as I do?"

She seemed fascinated by the leonine head of the man, with its long, uncut,

tawny hair. It was a head at which any woman might look twice. His mustache had grown long, too, but it curled inward gracefully, toward his lips. There was the beauty of strength about the head and face. It was the head of a man who could trace his blood back to the vikings.

"I like to know why you go runnin' around in the woods like this," she said, speaking like a woman to a child, as much to herself as to the unconscious man.

Gail Halleck had been fifteen hours in his desperate struggle with the elements and a strange country. For four hours he had crawled on hands and knees in freezing snow, which was slush in the swamps, knowing he was lost and feeling the drowsy hands of sleep closing in on him—sleep and death. The unconsciousness which gripped him was uneasy; he began to talk. The girl hovered over him, listening breathlessly.

"I am an engineer and a dreamer!" he babbled. "I came into the mountains to find the fluid of the sun. It is that strange white light which hovers over Seward Mountain. Long ago, in ancient Greece, men knew of that mysterious force. It came from amber. Men rubbed it with wool and got blue sparks and they called the stuff by the name which means amber—and yet which means more. It means fluid of the sun! It is the force of all life. It is everywhere and yet men can capture it only where swift water runs or coal lies hidden or can be brought to burn. It is light and force and life. Long ago a great man dreamed, a man with a vision, dreamed of finding it up here. He sent me and I found it.

"It is up there at the top of the mountain, that white light which sometimes seems blue. It is this way: The sun draws water from the sea and into the clouds and they discharge it and trees grow and rivers run. This river, the Whitewater, is like a black horse with a white mane. Sun and clouds, forest and mountains, river and reservoir. Fluid of the sun!"

As his voice sank into stillness, the girl breathed three words, her face a marvel of vivid joy.

"All my life!" she said.

Her eyes were on his face, and his own eyes opened, bright blue but unseeing.

"Hair like amber," she murmured. "Eyes like the blue sparks from amber —fluid of the sun!"

"The word they called it is 'electron,'" he muttered. "That means amber and it means fluid of the sun. The great man with a vision dreamed of just such a mountain, just such a river, just such a town. He knew that the town would be ready to die. But he wished to bring new life and sent me, and I have come to bring that life down from the mountain and send it out to the world. That was *my* dream, too."

"What a dream! What a wonderful dream!" the girl said. "All my life I have——" She sighed deeply.

A LITTLE later Gail Halleck came back to consciousness. He looked about him in wonder. The cabin was fitted up as any river-patrol shack might be—for men. The girl's presence astonished him. He did not, at first, remember having seen her. She was at ease and at home, as she became busy about the stove and a deal table, where some dishes stood.

She was dressed for the mountains and the storm. She wore a warm sweater of coarse wool, a short woolen skirt and high, leather leggings fitted over moccasins of moosehide. Snowshoes stood close to the door. She came over and gave him a hot, bitter drink which caused him almost immediately to perspire and his body to relax. Very soon he slept.

His first question, when he awoke, was: "How far to High Lake?"

She regarded him with astonishment. The storm shrieked outside, sent flakes of snow through the crack of the door, and they did not melt when they struck the floor. The gale and the cold seemed increasing.

"Ah! Then you are going on to High Lake this morning?" she queried lightly.

With a gasp he looked at his wrist watch. It was three o'clock. Three in the morning!

Oh, it is only five miles up the river," she answered his question mockingly.

He swung his feet from the bunk. To his surprise, except for a violent tingling in his feet, a dull pain in the right one, which he had injured, it did not hurt so much to bear his weight upon them. But at his first effort to walk in the wool mules he found beside the bunk, the girl darted over and steadied him, slipping her shoulder under his arm.

"You are a brick!" he said impulsively. "I don't even know who you are, yet, but——"

"A brick," she suggested briskly, "is hard and not square. I am not a brick."

"Well, then you must be an angel."

"I am only a woman—Eve——" She checked herself.

"That is appropriate!" he laughed. "For my name is Adam. Now, if you only have an apple!"

Black eyes flashed to his face in quick, startled question.

"I mean I am half starved. Is there anything to eat, here in Eden?"

She broke into a merry laugh, eased him to a seat on a bench beside the stove and, shoving back a pair of curtains from a box cupboard nailed to the wall, revealed an array of canned things. After they had eaten Gail got up and hobbled briskly about the room.

"Five miles to High Lake," he muttered. "How did you get here? Caught in the storm?"

"Yes. But suppose you stop thinking foolish. I do not intend to allow you to commit suicide trying to go on to High Lake. You are a veritable invalid. I must take care of you."

Gail regarded her as she stood before him, sleeves rolled up on rounded arms, her head held high, her piercing black eyes meeting his fearlessly. He rose from the bench and thrust out his hand.

"Shake!" he said. "You are a good sport, Eve."

Her eyes seemed to grow brighter. "There are two ways that men say those words," she remarked. "You say them the right way." She gave him her hand.

A tremor seemed to flow up his arm from the contact. It was hard for him to release the hand.

"I came up yesterday from Axle to see father, at the camp," she said. "I started down, late in the day, and here I am."

"Your father will be worried, because of the storm."

"Oh, no! He knows I can care for myself. I know the river trails and always, when I travel alone, I carry this with me."

She drew from her blouse a small automatic—but she laid it carelessly on one end of the bench where he sat, as if she did not care to keep it with her now.

"I suppose you wonder who I am and what I am doing here?" he ventured.

"Oh, you are an engineer who seeks water power in the mountains," came her quick response.

He started, halting as he was about to put on one of his socks, now dry.

"How do you know that?" he demanded.

"Only from what you have told me."

"I—I told you!"

"But it was only a dream. But what a marvelous dream! M'sieu' Adam, of

the amber hair and blue sparks for eyes, you are seeking the fluid of the sun. You talk so wonderfully in your sleep that——"

"Eve!"

"You are sorry that I know?"

"Not sorry. It is only that I don't remember——"

"You gave away a secret?"

"Yes, indeed. Why, there is no one in the whole Whitewater Valley who knows—except one man. And I am not sure—Eve, I wonder if you know this man? Do you know one named Georges Rambault, of Timberlake?"

"Oh, yes!"

"Do you like him?"

"Why do you ask me such a question?"

"Because I am anxious to know what others think of him. You are a woman of perception."

"Ah! Surely that is not flattery. A man who seeks to flatter does not praise a woman's perceptions. And because you are blunt and frank, I shall tell you that, as a woman—of perception—I should not trust him as I have trusted you, by putting my gun where you can reach it. Not even if he were an invalid."

"Thank you. But I am no invalid."

"Your eyes are dark with pain," she declared. "Those cold, blue eyes!" she added, with a little laugh.

"Since I have already unwittingly told you my secret," he went on, in a strange, muffled voice, "I will tell you more. I have distrusted Rambault ever since I met him—and yet he is the man who has been chosen to help me, here in Whitewater Valley. He is highly recommended by Vance, vice president of the firm by which I am employed. Vance knows him well, for he has hunted and fished in this section. If you distrust him——"

"Oh, I do not! He is a friend of mine," she contradicted. "I only said that I should not trust him—as I do you—Adam. You are of a different race, northern, cold."

Somehow, he did not quite know how, though he had to take several steps to reach where Eve stood, he had her in his arms and his lips to hers.

"Eve, I love you!" he murmured, in a tone tremulous with emotion.

It had come like a flash of the blue fire from the amber.

Later, she picked up the automatic. He was then standing near his bunk, his eyes fixed, staring wonderingly upon her.

"Good night," she said softly.

She was on the opposite side of the room. He said, "Good night," then slipped into his bunk and fell into a dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER III.

HURRYING LOGS.

IT was broad day when Gail awoke, and spring again. The freak of a late-April blizzard had vanished from the air, driven by the warm breath of a south wind and bright sun. Water was dripping and running everywhere. It ran a thin stream down the river trail which he traveled, with Eve going on ahead, for he was now in a hurry to get to High Lake.

Quite suddenly, at a bend in the trail, they came upon a scene of titanic activity. Gail heard it before he saw it. It thundered in his ears and he hurried to catch up with Eve, who had clambered on a high boulder and stood waiting for him. With her hand helping him, he got up beside her and his eyes told him that his ears had not played false.

The drive was on!

Two hundred yards up the river was a dam and a wide sluice gate. Below the sluice, on both sides of the river, clung a remnant of a log jam, wedged

onto the rocks which ran out from shore. Logs were hurtling through the sluice from a reservoir above, pitching wildly into the smother of the rapids, hurrying on, upending, shooting clear out of the water, dancing on end along the bottom like live things harried by a fierce pursuer.

Atop the sluice stood the magnificent figure of a man. To add to his giant height, a flare of grayish-black hair stood erect on his bare head. He held a long pike pole in his hands.

ABOVE the gate the pond was floored with logs. Men in colorful costumes labored upon them, making their way about as if the floor was solid, though it was as unsteady as water itself. They were herding the logs to the sluice gate.

"The river is like a black horse with a white mane," said Gail, in Eve's ear.

"As you said in your dream," she retorted, with a smile. "It is Grisel, the giant horse, carrying logs to the mill. And isn't that Georges Rambault, up there at the end of the dam?"

She pointed to the right bank. A sudden shifting of the little knot of men who had gathered there prevented him recognizing any one.

"I do not know why he should be up here," he said. "I did not even tell him I was starting."

"Oh, but Rambault comes up often. He is a friend—of the family. He and Louis are constant companions."

"Louis? You—— And isn't that François Gascoigne, up there on the sluice gate?"

"Oh, yes!" There was a note of pride in her voice, he thought.

"He is magnificent, isn't he? It is too bad," he added, half to himself.

"Yes, for him to labor so hard. He is an old man—but he loves this sort of work. It is life to him."

"I mean, it is too bad he is all through with this. It is his last drive."

The girl stared at Halleck. "His last drive? Oh, no! It is his last cutting up here, but down there is Axle forest, of virgin timber, and when he has won his appeal from the decision of the State commission, he will have plenty of timber."

"But Gascoigne has lost his appeal. That is something I did not tell you—in my sleep." He laughed a little.

A spasm of something like sharp pain swept the girl's beautiful face.

"He has lost?" she cried.

"I feel almost as bad about it as you do," Halleck declared, "though I do not suppose I can sympathize as much, since you know him."

"Oh, no, you cannot feel it as I do!" she muttered. "But who are you—Adam? Do you realize that I do not even know your name?"

"Gail Adam Halleck is my name in full—if you wish it. I have been satisfied with—just Eve. I am chief engineer for the Mountain Power Company. We are going to build a big dam down at Axle, between the two hills, and erect a hydroelectric power plant there. The company has obtained the rights to the river, you know.

"In fact, it has bought out the whole town of Axle and, through agents, secured the cut-over timberland up here, which Gascoigne recently sold. Now you have the whole secret, Eve. Tell me a little."

He was smiling, but his lips stiffened as he saw her face. It had gone white, her eyes had shrunk to pin points; and she regarded him with an expression so malevolent that he wondered what he had said or done to hurt her.

"You—you——" she stammered. "You are Anthony Antrim's man!"

"Why, yes—he is president of the Mountain Power Company. Eve, what is the matter?"

"You declare this is François Gascoigne's last drive!" she burst out.

"You say that he is through, that your company has taken the river! And you kissed——"

She swept the back of her hand across her mouth with a gesture of repugnance. "You are Anthony Antrim's man—and Antrim is the one who robbed us of Axle forest, when he was chairman of the conservation commission! Antrim has obtained control of the Whitewater —Antrim has bought Axle. He is responsible for this! Do you expect me to believe you?"

"If you will come up on the sluice gate with me, you will hear me inform François Gascoigne of those very things—except that Antrim did not wrong Gascoigne, or benefit himself personally, when he took the Axle forest. It was for the people, the State, as a public forest reserve. To be sure, Gascoigne planned to log that virgin timber. Antrim stopped him; that is all. But why are you so bitter against Antrim? What have you to do with all this old fight which has dragged through the courts for so long? You understand what it means to the valley to harness this river to make electricity."

"I understand—yes!" she burst out. "Of course I do! It means—— Well —*I am Eve Gascoigne.*"

She swept her hand in a meaning gesture toward where the big lumberman loomed against the blue sky and the white top of Seward, far beyond the reservoir.

"François Gascoigne—is your father?" gasped Halleck.

Her bitter, ringing laugh was answer enough. "The last drive, you say! You are sorry? It will not be the last drive, even though Antrim has robbed him again. He holds the river. Remember that!"

"But only for so long as it will take him to drive these logs down," returned Gail obstinately. "Don't you understand, Eve, that I——"

"Out of my way!"

She pushed past him, leaped like a deer from the dangerous height of the rock and was off up the trail to the dam. Before Gail realized what she was about, she was out on the top log of the dam, running to the sluice gate. She fairly flung herself into the arms of the river boss, Gascoigne; then pointed out Gail to him, her gestures telling a story in themselves.

THERE came suddenly from the throat of the riverman a bellow like a battle cry. He jumped down from the staging onto the logs which floated in the reservoir. Gail, still too bewildered to move, saw the figure of Georges Rambault hurrying down the trail toward him. Rambault was shouting, waving his arms.

"Hurry, hurry!" came his shout. "Gascoigne is going to jam up the sluice!"

Halleck began to run. While he ran, inwardly he cursed himself for a blundering, sentimental fool. Behind him Rambault panted out details and explanations.

"Eve has told him that you have come to take possession of the river. He will jam the sluice and sit here, just to spite you. You've got to stop him. I just got up from Axle. I was afraid something like this might happen, when I heard you had come up. Harriman told me. The telephone line was down, after the storm. Louis Gascoigne was in Timberlake and I came up with him. I was working on Louis. I wired Vance, and he tells me to go ahead and get Louis at any cost. I have got Louis' promise to help us. He is in charge of the reservoir gang now. We must get his help. He will resist his father. How on earth did you happen to tell Eve?"

"No matter," Gail replied, in a muffled tone. "Look here, Rambault." He halted and swung about toward the other

man. "I told you I was not in sympathy with your plan to secure Louis Gascoigne's support. I want you to understand that I am in charge, up here—not Vance. True, it was Vance directed me to get your help. He told me you were the one man to handle or help handle the natives. I've taken your advice right along—but you go too far. I shall not back up any move to bribe Louis Gascoigne——"

"It is not bribery!" broke in Rambault, panting. "It will merely give Louis the labor-supply contract."

"You mean it will give it to *you!*" snapped Gail, with sudden comprehension.

Rambault shrugged. Gail had his answer. Angrily he turned away and started out along the dam. He was in a savage mood.

At the sluice gate he looked down upon the feverishly active figure of François Gascoigne, and Eve beside him, a pike pole in her hands, as active as he. Up the reservoir, at the end of a boom which had formerly confined the logs and was now opened to let them down, stood Louis Gascoigne, leaning on a short pike, a group of men about him. He had halted the operation of breaking out logs from the boom field. But a great mass of them lay close to the sluice and François Gascoigne and Eve and a few men were working their hardest to try to tangle a mass of them in the sluiceway and jam it. It would, if effective, entirely prevent the run of timber.

Rambault ran up shore toward the end of the boom on which Louis Gascoigne stood. Gail shouted to the old riverman below him, first in English, then in his best book-learned French.

"Gascoigne, if you jam this gate, your riparian leases will be canceled. Do you understand?"

Gascoigne gave no sign that he heard. To Eve, Gail made a desperate appeal.

"Explain to him that what he is doing will most surely rob him of the river, at once!"

"I do not know you," came the sharp response from the girl, and she made a low-toned remark to her father, in patois.

CHAPTER IV.

CALLING A BLUFF.

THE situation was desperate. If the river were choked with the log drive, it meant delay, if nothing else, in the plans of the Mountain Power Company, and probably the loss of much money—certainly, for Halleck, the loss of his own self-respect, if not his job. Immediate action was necessary.

The Mountain Power Company had acquired land along the Whitewater River from its source, at High Lake, a distance of ten miles to the northern boundary of the State forest reserve, Axle forest, as it was called, and from its southern boundary, down to and through the town of Axle. It had done this through a corporation called the Mountain Real Estate Company, which had acted through agents, to buy the land, much of it from Gascoigne—but had allowed Gascoigne to retain river rights through giving him leases upon the stream. The leases provided that Gascoigne must drive his logs "with utmost dispatch" or forfeit his rights. But the old lumberman was in a mood now to forfeit rights on paper, while he took possession rights; Gail could see that. In fact, while his timber lay jammed in the river, Gascoigne would hold the upper hand.

Antrim had warned Halleck against any move which might entail legal entanglements, particularly with Gascoigne. For years Gascoigne had fought in the courts against the inevitable halting of his lumbering operations, through seizure by the State of the rich stumpage lower down the river. The old tim-

ber king had spent a small fortune in the frantic endeavor to get hold of that property, to regain what he considered had been stolen from him. Eminent-domain proceedings, by which it had been taken, he regarded as high-handed robbery. Antrim, as chairman of the conservation commission, personified to Gascoigne the power which he had grown to hate. And now that he had learned of Antrim's connection with the Mountain Power Company and the threatened invasion, he was ready to fight more fiercely—even to jam his own drive.

Gail retraced his steps to the shore, hurried up the reservoir, passing groups of rivermen who had retired to dry land, there to rest, smoke and pour water from their shoes. The crew on the reservoir seemed to have separated into two detachments. Down at the dam, a dozen men, apparently old employees of François Gascoigne, were helping him in his effort to plug the sluice. The rest, the younger element, seemed indifferent —or else they were waiting to hear Gascoigne's further orders.

Gail noticed a cache of dynamite, fuses and trimmed poles, material for blowing up a jam, lying on the broad top of a stump. His foot slipped on a bit of wet wood. He stopped, suddenly aware that he was not shod for log running. He exhibited his slimy-soled shoepacks to one of the men, dickering for a pair of drive shoes. He drew from his shirt a great buckskin pouch which contained tobacco, cigarettes, matches, pipe—the riverman's high-water satchel. He passed cigarettes and tobacco. He got the shoes.

Gail had learned the trick of log running years before, in the Great Lakes lumber woods. The stiff, wet boots hurt his tender feet, but he ignored the pain and started out to where Louis Gascoigne and Rambault were standing, in gestureful conversation.

AS he approached them, Gail thought and reached a decision. It was a time for quick action and no quibbling. He had met Louis Gascoigne, through the offices of Rambault, once before at Rambault's suite in the Mountain House, in Timberlake. Halleck had been presented merely as an engineer of the Mountain Power Company, not wishing to reveal his true identity. He had sized up Louis Gascoigne as a somewhat strong-headed youth with considerable tendency to run wild—and he suspected Georges Rambault catered to Louis Gascoigne in the young man's love for Lady Fortune. Rambault, quite frankly, "ran a game" in his rooms at the hotel.

"I have agreed to recommend that you be given the labor-supply contract for the construction job of which I am to have charge at Axle," Halleck said bluntly to Louis, when he reached the end of the boom. "Rambault will tell you that I have the power to put it through."

"Yes, I have just been telling Louis that you have," responded Rambault, with a hint of sly humor in his tone.

"There is one condition," Gail added, as the face of Louis Gascoigne betrayed his eager interest. "We must have your help at once to prevent your father making this mistake. He must not jam that sluice."

"Well, I and my men are with you," came Louis' answer, with a swagger which told, better than anything else, how hard Louis was trying to appear not only master of his men but of himself. He attained a sort of truculence —but showed also a hint of power. "We can break up that jam as soon as it is made."

"That will mean rough-house—and perhaps it will fail after all," Gail warned. "There is a better way." He regarded Louis keenly. "You play poker!" he stated.

Louis went brick red. Rambault turned away.

"Poker is the great American game of bluff, drawn to a fine point. I'm going to suggest that we try that game."

"I don't know what you drive at," Louis said suspiciously.

"I was speaking figuratively. I want you to get your men together and rush the gang at the sluice right now."

Louis whirled and let out a sonorous shout. From boom log field and shore the men answered him on the run. He spoke rapidly to the leaders in French. Grins broke out on sober faces; a shout or two spoke of pent-up impatience ready to break forth.

"Can you control this gang?" Gail asked Louis Gascoigne.

"Watch and see," was the proud reply.

"All right. Let's go!"

Gail turned to Rambault.

"Beat them to the sluice," he commanded curtly," and spread the news among those old-timers that if the sluice is jammed, they'll lose their jobs and be arrested for trespass."

Rambault nodded, winked and showed his teeth. "I think you have an ace in the hole!"

The field of timber which covered the reservoir was being constantly knitted tighter by the flow of logs from a reservoir above. This was No. 2 reservoir and sluice. Still another intervened between it and High Lake, out of which the logs had originally been fed from the winter cuttings. The loose jam offered fair footing all the way to the dam. Directly above the sluice gate, however, was an open space where the logs had jammed up tightly and only a dribble was being worked out by François Gascoigne's small crew. Here the current ran deep and powerful, straight for the gate.

Louis Gascoigne, at the head of his timberjacks, charged down the field, peaveys and pikes in hand, clanking and flashing. Louis ran the logs with an ease that gave some hint of his leadership.

Rambault had sped ashore and was running swiftly toward the dam. When the charge was halfway down, he appeared at the sluice and Gail noticed a halt in the operations there. Rambault motioned toward the charging gang of half a hundred, with Louis leading them. Gail went ashore and walked slowly along the bank until he came to the dynamite cache. He limped a little on his right foot. He stooped and laced the drive shoe tighter, keeping his eyes on the impending clash.

IT was averted suddenly. The break came when one old man in a faded Mackinaw dropped his pike and, with a cry, sought safety on the dam.

The charge came on. Menacing yells burst from the half-wild pack of rivermen running the log field. Rambault was talking earnestly to François Gascoigne. Eve stood on a great log, dangerously close to the gate, treading it with an expert carelessness, as it rolled, while she shaded her eyes from the sun and regarded the oncoming offensive. François shook his big pike threateningly toward them. But his men broke and fled. Some of them did not halt until they had gained the shelter of the woods at the end of the dam. There, they paused and watched.

François Gascoigne and Eve remained, facing the onslaught. Gail regarded her with admiration, despite the bitterness of his heart. Then Louis gave an exhibition of his control of the wild gang. With a shout and a gesture he halted the charge, not five yards from the objective. The men scattered, right and left. Only Louis kept on, until he was close to his father and sister.

Gail waited, conjecturing as to whether it was the charge or Rambault's

message which had caused the desertion of the older men and wondering what fierce argument had sprung up between Louis and his father. Suddenly the elder man shot out his pike, stabbed its point into a log on which Louis balanced and with a jerk and a twist unfooted the lad. Louis leaped desperately, this side and that, to regain his balance and footing. Then he circled away from the menacing point of the old man's great pike.

It looked as if François Gascoigne had called the bluff. Eve clambered up on the platform, stepping almost over Rambault as he clung to the staging, tossing her head as he turned and made some remark to her. François pursued Louis a few steps, then turned and joined Eve, high up on the staging.

He proceeded, there, with Eve's help, to try to complete the beginning of a jam in the sluiceway. And Gail gasped as he saw that Gascoigne had succeeded in starting a dangerous tangle of small logs, by forcing their ends through the open spaces in the "cribs" which made up the sides of the sluiceway. The sluice gate shook and trembled as the current was made to swirl against it with greater force. It was the beginning of a jam.

CHAPTER V.

MENACE OF DEATH.

GAIL turned to the dynamite cache, caught up a handful of the greasy cylinders, a length of fuse, a trimmed pole and a burlap sack. He got a strip of red flannel from the same source, tied it to the tip of the pole, thrust the dynamite in the sack, with the fuse running down into it, its other end lashed to the tip of the pole. Then he started out on the logs.

Only Louis was near the gate, trying to deter his father from his desperate purpose, the while the old man continually labored like a demon to build up the jam. Louis whirled, as he heard the warning cry:

"All away!"

Gail was coming rapidly toward him and his burden was easily convincing of the danger suggested in his cry. Louis sped for shore, calling up to his father to run.

"He is going to blow the dam!" Louis shouted.

"Look out!" Rambault cried, making for shore along the top log. "It is dynamite!"

Gail ran swiftly to the open space before the sluice, intent on a crevice in the knotted timber at the mouth of the gate. He saw Eve drop her pike and clutch at her father's sleeve. He halted, knelt and fumbled in his pocket. His hand came out, struck and produced a spurt of flame. He applied it to the dangling end of the fuse, rose and raised the heavy, weighted pole, like a padded tilting pole, crying, "All away!" then shot the pole deep in the current, just above the blockaded gate.

The pole seemed to strike bottom. The tip remained above the surface, and the current caused it to tremble, the tiny red flag danced and shook. Smoke-filled bubbles formed and burst. Gail walked back a distance of twenty feet and folded his arms, waiting.

François Gascoigne, his eyes bulging, dropped his pike, swept Eve in his arms and leaped from the platform to the top of the dam. He put her down, halfway to shore, pushing her forward, then ran back. A cry of horror rose from the rivermen on shore. Eve screamed. Gascoigne paid no heed. He got his pike and began stabbing savagely at the slim tip of the pole which vibrated just above the surface. The pike hit it again and again, but glanced off the slippery, hard maple and the flag ducked maddeningly, then came up.

Gail joined his warning to the chorus. Gascoigne gave another lunge, roared

in baffled rage, then leaped from the platform and charged Gail, crying fearful vengeance upon him.

Gail waited until Gascoigne was near him, then retreated—but his retreat was an advance about the open space, to the other side—and *toward the sluice and the dynamite.*

HE caught up a discarded pike from the logs and calmly began to work at the jam. He disregarded Gascoigne, though the old man was coming on, roaring. Gail's first jab was lucky. It rolled one of the crisscrossed spruce logs free. A heave on another and the lightly hanging mass broke and went thumping down the wooden apron of the sluiceway.

François Gascoigne halted. His roars of rage changed to sudden horror.

"Get out! Get out!" he cried. "You will be blown to bits!"

Gail waved a hand unconcernedly. Then he looked up as another voice came to him, and saw Eve, standing atop the gate, a pike in her hands.

"Save yourself!" she cried. "I will stay here and jam the gate again if you do not run."

Gail felt his pulses leap. He smiled up at her, and without moving from his tracks drew a cigarette from his pouch, lighted it and flipped the match at the tip of the red-flagged pole.

"It is a long fuse," he said, shouting it so she could hear.

"Run! Have you gone insane?" she implored, and her father roared similar advice.

"Insane? Perhaps crazy over you," he responded, laughing. "So crazy that I prefer to remain here as long as you stay there."

She flung down her pike and stretched her arms out, palms upward. "Go! Go! Run! *I will keep it clear.* I will keep him from jamming it again. Only go. Save yourself!"

"That's a bargain, Eve," he said. "You will do that—keep him from jamming——"

"Yes, yes, yes!" she half sobbed.

Gail was close to the pole. With his pike, he hooked about the maple, and caught in the flag. He pulled the deadly thing up and out. Eve screamed, but she stood rooted to the spot, as if fascinated. François Gascoigne ran toward the gate, gasping and sobbing to his daughter. Then Eve got a glimpse of something that caused her to gasp, as Gail drew the dripping bundle from the water, lifted the pole, laid its loaded end on the logs carefully, took a knife from his pocket, cut the burlap and pulled the pole out—with three feet of unburned fuse above the dynamite.

The fuse dangled, harmless as a bit of string. The rest of it, running up the pole, had been entirely consumed. Gail clambered up beside the girl, with the length of fuse in his hand.

"Look closely," he said to her, "and you will see that I am neither insane nor murderous."

Wide-eyed she took the fuse in her hand, looked at one end, then the other.

"You—you cut it in two, before you had——"

"After I lighted it," he broke in, with a smile. "I wanted to clear the jam, not blow the dam."

She glared at him, stiffened, then sagged down, going white. Gail caught her in his arms. At his touch she trembled, then went rigid again.

"Bluffer!" she cried. "You tricked us."

"I even neglected to put a percussion cap on the end of the fuse," he added, with a chuckle. "It was a bluff, to be sure—but not so perfect as your own."

"What do you mean?"

"Oh, you were very clever, to get my secret from me and then run to your father with it and warn him. How easily you pumped me! And made me

believe I had talked in my sleep. You knew, all the time, who I was and why I had come."

"That is a lie!" she flashed, shaking loose from his steadying hand.

Gascoigne came thundering up on the platform. He made for Gail with murder in his eyes. Rambault followed him, shouting a warning:

"Watch out or he will kill you!"

Gail stood his ground. He could not well retreat. A side step sent a shock of pain up from his ankle. He waited, setting himself for the conflict, which must end by one of them—or both—being flung from the high platform, down to the rushing rapids below, or into the powerful, irresistible sucking flood above.

IT was startling, almost uncanny, how Gascoigne's murderous purpose was melted by a touch on his arm from his daughter.

"Father, this is the man who saved me from the storm, down the river, saved me when I was lost in the woods. I want you to thank him."

Gail caught only part of her speech, above the thunder of waters, but he heard enough to make him gasp. That was a magnificent lie, indeed!

She held up the bit of fuse. "See here, father! It was a—a joke. He wished to save you from doing wrong. If you jam the sluice, it means—it means you will lose the river now, at once. It means—the law. Have we not had enough of the law, father?"

"And of Anthony Antrim—and his men," growled Gascoigne, in broken English. The veins of his neck swelled to great, blue cords.

"This man is but an engineer, sent to do his job," Eve went on. "And he saved me."

"He saved you! Then why did you warn me? You said that he——"

"I did not understand completely. Father, you must not jam the sluice. There must be some way we can—compromise."

"I should like to talk this situation over with you quietly—you and your daughter—and your son," suggested Gail, with a grateful glance at Eve, in which he tried to convey to her his tremendous appreciation of her brave lie, told to save him from the savage impulse which had held François Gascoigne when he came up on the gate.

To his surprise, Gascoigne extended his great right hand.

"I will hear what you have to say now," he agreed shortly. "But leave my son out. Louis—he has been corrupted."

The thunder of waters was so deafening that Gail suggested they retire from the gate to shore. Gascoigne shook his head.

"I shall remain here, on guard," he returned.

"Mr. Halleck will agree to allow no further move until we have come to some understanding," Eve prompted quickly.

"Yes, that is a promise," Gail declared. "Mr. Gascoigne, your daughter has not told you that she saved me——"

"Mr. Halleck had an injured foot," broke in Eve as she pushed her father ahead of her toward the edge of the platform and the shore. "And he believes that my prescription of a tighter, stiffer shoe to support it helped him." She laughed aloud, and long, but with a metallic note in her mirth that made Gail uneasy.

At the end of the dam, as Gascoigne headed directly for a log cabin which stood half hidden in the trees at some distance, Rambault slipped up behind Gail.

"Then it is all fixed for Louis?" he queried. "He is impatient, anxious to be sure. You see what he will do! He is a valuable man. The labor-supply

concession—the camp store, and he will be a king-pin man for you here."

"He will have to talk to Harriman about the store," Gail responded, halting. "Mrs. Harriman is planning to run it."

"Mrs. Harriman, eh? The golden-haired young wife of that old man? Well, Louis may not insist on the store then—because he has met Mrs. Harriman." Rambault gave a quick little laugh, with a world of meaning in it.

"I shall recommend the labor-supply concession for Louis," said Gail shortly. "You may tell him that, and it will go through."

"It will be interesting, for so beautiful a young woman, married to such a grouch of an old man, running the construction-camp store," Rambault said, and smiled.

Gail turned upon him quickly. "I have known Greta Harriman since she was a child," he remarked coldly. "She is a woman of rare qualities. I should feel myself responsible for her—safety."

"I do not blame you," was the quiet response, with a hint of mockery in the tone. "Neither do I blame Louis for being soft-hearted. He could make more money on the store than on the supply contract."

"You are coming?" called Eve, who had halted a little way along the path.

"Go ahead," Rambault urged. "I will follow after I have seen Louis. Your game is to stall for time. Make a long story of it. Let the Old Man cool off."

"I am going to try to tell him the whole story."

"That is good. Keep him interested."

Gail bit his lip as he limped on, not so much from the physical pain as from the rack of emotions that rose out of this crazy situation, in which he had involved himself with a vengeance. Briefly he recapitulated it.

"I have made love to Gascoigne's daughter—and she hates me," he told himself. "I am bribing his son against him. I am playing into the hands of a crook. I have got to stand guard over Greta. It is a great game! Worse than poker. I wonder how Eve learned so much of my mission? Eve!"

CHAPTER VI.

A BITTER VICTORY.

ONCE inside the fir-screened cabin, a complete change came over François Gascoigne. He turned to Gail with a bow and invited him to be seated, removed his hat, but remained standing, and, with a word to Eve, had coffee served from a huge pot simmering on the stove. It was evident that the habit of courtesy to a guest was strong in the old Frenchman.

Gail began to talk to Gascoigne, but the river boss showed signs of imperfect understanding of English—and difficulty in speaking it freely. He kept turning to Eve, who interpolated and interpreted in French. Her manner was polite, cold, formal, and, Gail thought, hostile.

Rambault came in quietly, seating himself and, with an elaborate bow, accepted a cup of coffee. He spoke to Eve in the river-French or patois. She answered him, but Gail thought her language was more nearly like the classical tongue he had studied in school and knew very slightly, for conversational purposes. Rambault seemed much at home, very much a friend of the family.

Gail marveled. Knowing the man as a go-between, suspecting him of readiness to profit for himself by whatever advantage he might take from friend or acquaintance—that is, from Gascoigne or himself—Gail wondered that his presence here was acceptable.

"Mr. Gascoigne," Gail began, "you must know that the Mountain Power

Company is a public-service corporation. It is chartered by the State, with power to condemn or seize land by eminent domain."

"That was Antrim's way of old," muttered Gascoigne.

"But in this case," Gail went on, "no land at all has been condemned. The company has bought land outright. All the property you sold to the corporation known as the Mountain Real Estate Company was bought for the power company. Even the railroad station which was owned by your nephew, Telesphore Gascoigne.

"There remains the railroad, the T. L. & A. While construction is in progress, we shall need its services. After the dam has been built and we are ready to flood the reservoir thus created, we are planning to exchange, for the railroad property, a strip of land, a right of way lying on high land, which will be the shore of the reservoir—and to give the T. L. & A. a new inlet to Axle. The town will grow up again on higher ground. We shall give the T. L. & A. trackage across the new dam, which will be of earth, very broad. It will give access to the eastern side of the river."

Gascoigne evinced much interest, asking many questions, and showed a keen knowledge of the rights and privileges of a railroad as a common carrier.

All through their talk a dull roar murmured, through the log walls of the cabin. But Gail began to notice a difference in the sound. It was punctuated now by a continuous, muffled, booming note.

Gail shot a glance at Rambault.

"I beg your pardon," Rambault murmured to Gascoigne, bowed to Eve and slipped quickly out of the door. He was in a hurry.

Gail looked at Eve and saw her sitting, alert, on the edge of her chair, in a listening attitude.

GAIL gave a sketch of the plan for the power dam and reservoir. He predicted that Axle, after the old town had been razed and had become the bottom of a lake, would grow to greater size and prosperity than before. He plunged into the complicated subject of riparian rights.

"The court of appeals has dismissed your claim for a new award for the Axle forest land," Gail said. "The decision was handed down yesterday. The State now has clear title to the tract and you will be paid the original sum offered, which was the maximum the conservation commission is allowed to offer for land taken for public domain."

"That is all trickery," muttered Gascoigne. "And the courts connive with the politicians."

"I understand you desire to retrieve that timber land," Gail continued. "You wished to continue to log down this river. You retained water rights for this reason. And Mr. Antrim was willing to let you have those rights—just as he is willing for you to retain your homestead property at Axle, your sawmill, and to give you water power to operate it—or hydroelectrical power."

Gascoigne broke into a harsh laugh. "Very generous of Antrim to sell me power from the river which I have had as my own for thirty years! I would have to install motors and——"

"The M. P. Company would not charge you for water rights and will install motors at their own expense."

"What does Anthony Antrim want for this—generosity?"

"Nothing but clear way on the Whitewater. Delivery of your drive, without delay, to give us the chance to build a diversion canal about the hill on which your house stands, to divert the channel for our fill. What is the name of that hill?"

"It is Mont de Gascoigne," Eve said proudly.

"I shall live within my rights," Gascoigne declared, after a moment, in which Eve answered several questions her father put to her. "I control the river until I have taken down my last run of logs. It is in the leases."

"And this is your last drive," Gail declared, as firmly. "If you hold it up, by any means, we can treat you as a trespasser and bar you from the river."

Gascoigne took two or three restless steps.

"Remember your promise," Gail said, in a low tone to Eve.

"I promised only because I thought you were a fool!" she cried. "A fool, seeking death—and you only make a joke of us!"

"And now that you have discovered I am not a fool?" he queried lightly.

"You are a beast, a blond beast!" she muttered.

"No, that is Teutonic." He smiled, but winced inwardly. "And I am Norse. But your promise was that of a woman of perception and——"

"That is enough!" she exclaimed, her face reddening.

Gascoigne seemed deaf to their conversation. He was rapt in his own thoughts—or perhaps did not understand their rapid speech. Georges Rambault entered, with a murmur of apology about having forgotten something. His face was suave and triumphant. Through the door came a rush of thunder.

"What is that?" demanded Gascoigne.

"Rambault, you can tell him," Gail suggested.

Rambault shrugged. "I do not know what you mean," he said.

"That is Louis, sluicing through the drive," Gail said. "But I assure you it is without my sanction, for I promised that——"

Eve interrupted him, with a fierce verbal assault upon Rambault, who bore it smilingly.

"Why do you interfere, Georges Rambault?" she demanded. "You come as a friend of—of Louis and——"

"And of the family," Rambault supplied smoothly. "And I have been acting for your best interests—as well as for Louis'."

"By setting him against his father!"

"He is his own master—and he has his reasons for what he is doing. He is a man. Whether your father regards me as a friend——"

"He does—but it has been because of what you have done for Louis. And I, too——"

"That must stop!" came the harsh interruption from Gascoigne.

He started for the door.

Eve halted him. "Mon père, you must not! I have given my promise that you shall not jam the sluice."

"I understand. It is because he"—he nodded at Gail—"he saved your life. That is right—but I made no promises—and I can close the gate."

"No, no, no! My promise covered that, too. You must not make light of my promises."

"In return for this, Louis is to have his reward," put in Rambault. "He is to supply labor for the construction gang. If you wish him fortune——"

Eve gently held her father by the arm and, all at once, the giant sank on a bench, with a groan, burying his face in his hands. Eve stood beside him, her face drawn, smoothing with one, soft hand the harsh growth of her father's graying hair. Gail rose and, with a nod toward the door, indicated to Rambault that they must leave.

Rambault, with a shrug and a grin, went out.

"I want to thank you," Gail said to Eve. "Some time, perhaps, I can repay you."

"Never!" she burst out. "You trickster! I hope never to see your face again!"

"Au revoir, Eve."

"Go!" she cried, but there came a throb in her voice which might have been a sob. "Go! I should have used the gun."

Gail felt that he had won a victory—but it tasted bitter in his mouth.

CHAPTER VII.

A GLIMPSE AT THE LYNX.

"RAMBAULT, I must confess that you are a puzzle to me," remarked Gail bluntly, as he rode down the muddy mountain trail in the buckboard in which Georges and Louis had driven up. "This coup to-day with Louis Gascoigne must put an end to your standing as a welcome friend of the Gascoigne family; at least, so far as François is concerned. I do not understand how you can retain your close relation with them after this."

Rambault smiled. "Between you and me, I have pushed my advantage pretty far," he said. "I gave my promise to Vance to do anything in my power to further the aims of the Mountain Power Company. And to-day, in order to fulfill my promise, it was necessary for me to act quickly and—at risk. However, I saw that it was absolutely necessary to ally the Gascoigne family, in some manner, with the Mountain Power project.

"Now that Louis is with us, that job is done. Louis is a close friend of mine. He will never be denied the door at the old home, no matter what he may do for you. Eve controls her father, as if he were a child. And there is fair hope that, in time, the house of Gascoigne will be united with the house of Rambault."

He finished with a smug soberness, a purring assurance which intensified the first shock his statement gave Gail. Eve Gascoigne married to this man! Gail regarded him in profile. For the first time he caught the curious suggestion of a wily animal about the dark, hairy physiognomy of the man. In certain positions his head bore a remarkable resemblance to that of the fierce, wily, Canadian lynx. A revulsion of feeling came to Gail, so powerful that he bit his lip to restrain an outburst.

Fortunately, Rambault jumped out of the rig to open the gate which barred the Axle forest. Gail got a grip on himself. He saw that he must use this man, Rambault, and would have to make the best of him. He must not antagonize him at the start.

"The M. P. will have to do something for you," he remarked tentatively, as Rambault resumed his seat in the buckboard.

"It is my idea to share with Louis, to some extent," Rambault said. "He will have the labor-supply contract and act as a foreman on the job. The customary fees will be paid him by the men whom he furnishes to the M. P. I shall bunk them; that is, furnish them with cots at a nominal rental each week. I have talked it over with Louis—and with Mr. Vance."

"How about Harriman?" inquired Gail dryly.

"Louis and I had a talk with him yesterday. It was then that we met the charming Mrs. Harriman."

Rambault showed his teeth in a grin. "Louis was taken head over heels," he chuckled. "You may thank the golden-haired one for making him an ally so easily. It will not be hard to be contented at the M. P. construction camp, with so angelic a storekeeper."

Gail chose to ignore the implication of Rambault's remark. But he resolved to watch The Lynx closely. This talk of Louis' being infatuated with Greta seemed a bit too frank. It might hide—or be intended to hide—something of Rambault's own intentions.

"I shall have to move up to Axle from Timberlake," Rambault went on, "and give up my quarters at the Mountain House."

"Are you going down to Timberlake to-night?" Gail asked.

"Yes. Drop in at my suite. Room No. 9. I shall be glad to have you sit in with us. It is a gentleman's game."

Gail glanced at the man's hands. The fingers were long, small, white and carefully kept; the hands were those of a gambler.

"Louis plays?" he inquired casually.

"Frequently—but most when he is on a spree. He hits it rather hard, when he is down out of the woods. It is his way of—expressing himself. I caught him yesterday in time to save him from starting on a tear at just the wrong time."

"It is a good thing for him that you are a friend of his," remarked Gail, with a meaning emphasis.

"I am a gambler," was Rambault's quick response. "But I play for higher stakes than the wages of a woodsman. Louis has his points. He is a Gascoigne and they are the only ones who amount to anything, up here at Axle."

"I'll drop in on you some time soon," Gail promised.

THEY passed through the second gate, at the south end of the uncut forest which had been saved for the State. Gail was nursing his injured ankle, holding it on his knee. Rambault noticed it.

"You had better rest that foot," he said. "I know a good doctor in Axle who will take care of you. Your bluff was magnificent. I'd like to see you in a game with our most dangerous poker player, Editor Goulet, of The Timberlake *Echo*."

"I play cards very little—but a game now and then sharpens the mind, I think. By the way, I shall ask you to take some telegrams down to Timberlake with you. I do not care to trust them to Telesphore Gascoigne, at the Axle station."

"Any service I can render——" Rambault bowed.

Gail thought that he was beginning to dislike the man more than ever—and distrust him, too. However, Rambault put himself out to get Doctor Bruyère, who was missing from his office, hunted up lodgings for Gail and waited while Gail got his ankle dressed and wrote messages to the New York office.

Gail was being shaved and having his hair trimmed in the barber shop when he first heard the excited talk which had spread through Axle. Harriman's quartet of foremen had arrived and these hard-faced, short-spoken men had brought the news into the village that they had come to tear down Knob Hill, throw it into the river and turn Axle into a lake. Various persons who had sold property, in the midst of an apparent local real-estate boom, were comparing notes in the barber shop—and finding that there were no exceptions; every one had sold out to an agent of the Mountain Real Estate Company.

Jim Harriman and his "old guard," as he called the quartet of foremen, had already begun the erection of tar-papered shacks on Knob Hill. It was the beginning of a considerable settlement which would house laborers, engineers, tools, supplies, machinery.

Jim Harriman hunted him up at the hotel, one of his foremen having got a glimpse of Gail in the village. Harriman was gloomy.

"I have been down to see about getting my machinery shipped over this dinky railroad from Timberlake," he said, "and I find that there is some hitch. We have got to make a deal for freight haulage with the president of the T. L. & A.—and that is François Gascoigne."

"I see!" exclaimed Gail, with vivid recollection of the old lumberman's interest in the subject of the railroad. "Well, I have tried to sell him the idea of a new right of way—but the old pirate is hostile. He tried to jam the river on us."

He briefly described his experience with Gascoigne, up at No. 8 reservoir, then added: "I shall leave the freight matter to you, Jim. I don't want to ask him for anything, right now. When you go to see him, you had better take Greta with you. He does not speak English very well. She can talk to him in his own language. It is nearly the same as she learned when you were in Montreal. She may be able to make friends with his daughter, Eve. I believe she went to school at Montreal."

"Well, we shall begin to dig to-morrow, somehow," Harriman grumbled. "If it's only with dynamite and pick and shovel. My steam shovels are at Timberlake. Did you get me any men?"

"Louis Gascoigne will supply you as soon as the drive is down. Pick up what you can here and at Timberlake."

"Then Louis has the supply job?"

"I shall recommend it."

"He's a handsome young brute. I don't trust these Frenchies too far."

CHAPTER VIII.

MATCHING WITS.

WITH a copy of the *Echo de Timberlake* clenched in one fist, François Gascoigne stood in the great bay window of his house. He had been reading in his native language the formal statement of the court edict which meant his last hope of regaining possession of the Axle forest was gone. Across the valley he saw the tar-papered shacks on Knob Hill and a little group of men busily trimming brush and blasting out stumps.

In her room on the second floor, Eve Gascoigne stood in the window, her gaze on the same significant scene.

Below her, her father raised his clenched fists and cursed.

"It is true!" he said. "It is Antrim, who now will rob me of the rest that I possess! By Heaven, I shall make him pay through the nose for every spadeful of earth he moves!"

Upstairs, Eve rummaged in a closet and got the old brass telescope. She leveled it at the near summit of Knob Hill.

"Blond beast!" she cried.

Gail Halleck sat in front of the shack Harriman had erected for him. Close by was the larger one where Harriman and Greta were living and where the camp store was being established. On the table lay blue prints and maps and a pair of binoculars. Greta borrowed the glasses and swept them north, and for a long time studied the bold, white cap of the mountain.

Finally she swept them eastward. A plume of smoke from the chimney of the white house across the river attracted her. She focused the binoculars on the windows of the house. Her sudden exclamation caused Gail to look up from his maps. He got the significance of her absorbed attitude.

"Some one at home?" he queried. "Let me see?" He reached for the glasses.

She hid them behind her teasingly. "You must not look," she said. "It would not be fair to spy on a girl."

Gail's flush rose swiftly. He advanced on Greta, reaching for the glasses. "I want to see if François Gascoigne is down river," he said.

"She is very beautiful; I do not blame you," she laughed, retreating. The wind caught her mass of golden hair and blew it about her face.

Gail accepted her challenge to get the glasses. There had been a time when he and Greta had played tag and pull-

away as schoolmates, and every now and then the old play spirit flashed up. He lunged for her and she ran. He caught her in front of her own cabin and, holding her by one arm with one hand, tried to get the binoculars with the other. For a moment they struggled, then she broke away and ran into the huge, empty storeroom and he after her.

He dropped the game when he saw Harriman, not because Jim ever had shown the slightest jealousy of him, but because it occurred to him that now was the time for Harriman to see Gascoigne about the freight contract.

Harriman was ready to beard the lion in his den. He got Greta's ready consent to accompany him and act as interpreter, if need be. When they had gone, Gail leveled the binoculars on the white house—but the windows were empty.

TWO hours later Jim Harriman strode up the hill, his face dark with anger.

"The old pirate says we can't ship freight on the T. L. & A. at all!" he exploded. "He owns the whole shebang, except for the railroad station. He says we've bought that off his nephew and we can move it away, burn it down or do what we want with that—but he'll tear up the tracks before he'll haul our freight. He is going to cut out everything but the spur track that runs to the mill and he won't let us use that. The girl seemed as bitter as he is. She's a spitfire. What has she got against you? She seemed to bristle like a cat when I mentioned your name."

Gail frowned.

"They started back upriver as we left," Greta added.

"I might have guessed he owned part of that road," Gail muttered. "I didn't tumble to it. Vance should have warned us. We've got to have service from the T. L. & A. I'll go up and see him. Louis is up there, sluicing through at No. 2. I'll see if we can't get a few men right away. Jim, we've got to have a phone line up here at once."

"I'll put one in. I told you I was going to lose on this job!"

"Not if I can help it, Jim," Gail promised grimly. Then, with a sudden inspiration, he exclaimed: "There is a highway to Timberlake—and motor trucks——"

"I sold mine this spring, when I got this contract—because of the T. L. & A. and information I had that the highway is no good for trucking. It's not surfaced and runs for miles in swampy ground. We'd have to rebuild it."

"Build a road, eh?" mused Gail absently. "Jim, you never play poker, do you?" he queried, with apparent irrelevance.

"Pinochle," was Harriman's glum answer.

Gail laughed. "You can't bluff much in that game. In poker, you can bluff—but it's well to have an ace in the hole."

"We got to get the shovels moved in pretty soon," growled Harriman.

"What did you do to Eve Gascoigne?" queried Greta, after Harriman had plunged, grumbling, into the store. "Didn't you make love to her, when she expected it?"

Gail shot a searching glance at Greta "Why?" he asked shortly.

"She called you a trickster."

"Yes, I know," Gail sighed sadly, then quickly he demanded of Greta half jokingly: "Which one of the two dark Frenchmen who were here yesterday made love to you—Rambault or Louis Gascoigne?"

"Neither one!" Greta denied hotly—but her cheeks flared with sudden color.

Gail went in and spoke to Harriman. "Jim, if there is any road building to

be done, the M. P. will do it. I am going down to Timberlake, if the T. L. & A. will carry me as a passenger. I'll get Antrim on the phone and to-morrow we'll begin to make the dirt fly. Or the fur fly."

GAIL caught a midafternoon caboose train to Timberlake and got Anthony Antrim at his office, on the long-distance phone. At the end of a half hour in the hotel booth, he emerged, mopping his face, but with a grin, a fighting grin which narrowed his usually wide-open eyes and set his good-humored lips in a straight line. The grin was still on his face when he knocked at the door of room No. 9, at the head of the stairs which led to the second floor of the old, wooden hostelry. Rambault, in a dressing gown of violent lavender, his eyes sleepy, admitted him.

"Had a rather long session last night," Rambault explained, "and I've been catching up on sleep."

"Have you ever done any railroading?" Gail asked directly. "And how strong do you stand with the editor of the *Echo?*"

"No railroading, except to supply a crew one summer for the Grand Trunk short cut, north of here. As to the editor of the *Echo,* he cleaned me out last night—and I am, therefore, a very good friend of his at present."

"Then you are appointed president of the Axle & Timberlake Railroad Company," said Gail calmly.

Rambault, though he seldom betrayed surprise, blinked at Gail. "Axle & Timberlake? The M. P. is taking over the T. L. & A.—changing the name?"

"No. This is a brand-new railroad. It is backed by the M. P. I should expect that an announcement in the *Echo* to-morrow morning might weaken François Gascoigne's determination to block us out of Axle by refusing to carry our freight."

"I see, I see!" Rambault's eyes gleamed. "Suppose you drop in to-night and play? Goulet will be here. But—I should not care to have my name appear as president of this——"

"It need not. In fact, it will be better for us to keep this strictly confidential. Your salary will begin at once, and you will be paid in cash, by myself. Get hold of Goulet this afternoon and tip him off to the news. Then get copies of the paper early in the morning and be ready for a trip up the Whitewater with me. Now, listen!"

He sketched to Rambault a prospectus of a proposed new railroad from Timberlake to Axle, to be known as the A. & T.

"Fine, fine!" applauded Rambault. "And if you drop in to-night, sit in and lose a little, discreetly, to Goulet—as 'an engineer of the M. P.'—it will help. We shall have him sewed up like a seam."

When Rambault opened the door of room No. 9, later to admit "an engineer of the M. P.," he whispered: "He has swallowed it whole."

Gail was pleased to lose awkwardly to Editor Goulet, at a game of stud.

CHAPTER IX.

A BLUFF CALLED.

AS he rode in the seat of a buckboard up the Whitewater Trail, early the next morning, Gail Halleck read the *Echo de Timberlake* in snatches.

"They should be sluicing the head of the drive out of No. 3," Rambault observed, as they passed through the second gate of Axle forest and were able to get glimpses of the river.

"Who will be handling the head?"

"Louis, I think. He has the whitewater men. The old man has the mossbacks, the older men, and will be sacking down from No. 2. That is my guess."

"Then we'll separate at No. 3 trail. You go in and see Louis, and I'll go up to No. 2 and interview François Gascoigne about railroads."

Gail noticed no sign of running logs in the river and spoke of it.

"Perhaps a jam somewhere is holding them up," Rambault conjectured.

"There has been no blasting."

"It may also be a bluff. Gascoigne may be holding out on you. Perhaps he, too, is playing the great American game."

Gail recalled the impressions he had got in his stay at room No. 9 the previous night. He eyed Rambault keenly. He had learned that the man did not depend upon running a small-town poker game for a living. The reek of alcohol in the apartment had told its story.

"Harriman," Gail said casually, "is anxious to know what sort of man Louis Gascoigne really is. He has been rather shy of giving the labor-supply men any sort of job in his camp, since one of them turned out to be a bootlegger and the stuff he peddled made his labor drop off every day—and the supply man plugged the gaps and collected more commissions."

"Louis will play the game straight," Rambault declared. "I'll watch him. I am moving up to Axle, you know."

Gail knew—and wondered why Rambault should desert his establishment at Timberlake. He began to suspect, and he resolved that he, too, would keep watch.

Rambault plunged into the firs, along the trail which led in to No. 3, the last reservoir of the system, while Gail went on up the road. They left the horse grazing. To his surprise, Gail found Louis at No. 2, instead of François, hard at work with a gang sacking the straggling timber off the shores and herding down the tail of the drive.

"The 'Old Man' insisted he would run the head—or nothing," Louis explained. "I think he was afraid to let me handle it. Or else he would not trust me. He is pretty badly cut up. As for me, I have seen this coming, the end of our logging. I am sick of the game, anyhow. A man might as well be a tree. You go in early in the fall, and until spring you do not get out, you do not turn a card, tip a drink or see a woman. There is no life up here in the woods. It is merely existence."

"Your sister visits the camps often?" Gail asked.

"In the spring you cannot keep her away," Louis responded, and Gail warmed to the touch of pride in his tone, as he spoke of his sister. "She runs the Old Man, you can see that. But for her he would have jammed the gate tight. That was a close call for you. I understand now what you meant when you asked if I played poker.

"The Old Man isn't so bitter against you, since he found that you took care of Eve in that storm," he added.

"Louis, that was a lie she told to save me from your father's anger," Gail blurted out. He had been writhing under the pretension forced upon him for two days, and he felt better when he made this confession.

"That is just like her!" cried Louis, with a laugh. "Oh, what a joke on Georges! He believed it, too! And, believe me, he was furious. Oh, he doesn't show it—but he is as jealous as a cat. What a joke I shall have on him!"

Gail gripped Louis by the arm.

"You are not to speak to Rambault of this," he said harshly. "Look here, Louis, do you trust Georges Rambault?"

Louis flushed, his voice dropped back into the surly tone he had first used. "Georges is all right," he replied. "He plays the game on the square. He is a good friend to me."

"And to your sister?" Gail muttered, a trifle dryly.

Louis did not comment on that.

"I want to see about getting some men down on the job at once," Gail said.

"How is the head going at No. 3? Did you go in?" Louis inquired.

"No. But there must be a tie-up somewhere. Rambault thought it a jam."

"That is what comes of putting the old mossbacks on the head. They are too slow. Well, I can let you have some men. How many do you want?"

"Two hundred, as soon as we can get them. How many do you employ up here in the woods?"

"Over four hundred during the winter. Fully one hundred have gone out already. Another gang is sacking up about High Lake and pulling booms. I have one hundred and fifty on the river, and if all goes well at No. 3 to-day, the Old Man can handle the rest of the run with his mossbacks. What does Harriman pay?"

"Three and a half to five a day, according to their jobs."

"Good summer wages, with my fee taken off," Louis agreed, "I think I'll go down to Axle with you to-day. What is Rambault doing?"

"He went in at No. 3, expecting to find you there. Louis, I have something to show you." Gail pulled a copy of the *Echo* from his Mackinaw and pointed out the article concerning the A. & T. R. R.

Louis whistled as he read the headline and asked at once: "Has the Old Man seen this?"

"I don't know. I intend he shall," Gail replied. "What effect do you think it will have on him?"

"Well, it will ruin the T. L. & A.—but that is almost on the rocks now. What's that?"

The question was caused by the sight of a riverman who came running up the trail, shouting hoarsely and waving his arms as others flung queries at him. He came as fast as he could to where Louis and Gail stood, at the end of the reservoir dam, poured out a volley of gasping patois, gesticulating wildly.

"Well, he has seen this!" Louis exclaimed. "The Old Man has jammed the gate at No. 3!"

"Rambault——" Gail began angrily, with a flash of suspicion which changed when he saw Rambault himself coming rapidly up the trail.

"Gascoigne has called our bluff," he cried. "As soon as he saw the *Echo* and read the story of the A. & T., he plugged the gate tight. He had a copy brought up by a man who was in Timberlake this morning. Then I had to admit my knowledge of it——"

"You mean——"

"Not my inside knowledge," Rambault protested. "I told him that there must have been a leak; that perhaps it was not all true—but he believes every word he sees in the *Echo*. Goulet gets considerable financial support from Gascoigne, and has never dared print anything against him or his interests. You noted his scathing editorial against 'vested outside interests stealing power from the Whitewater?' "

"Yes, I did. I thought it admirable. But you mean to say that Gascoigne did the job while you were there?"

"Before my eyes. They were just pulling the sluice boards when I arrived, and ready to chute them through. Gascoigne stood on the gate, as he always does, and Eve with him. The paper was brought to him. He asked Eve to read it to him, and as she read, the old fox separated the younger men from his sluicing gang and kept his old-timers near him. Suddenly he gave the order, jumped down and began to choke the sluiceway. It took less than ten minutes. The timber piled up, under the flood, so that it must be bottom deep now."

"Eve Gascoigne was there!" mused Gail. "How did she take it?"

"She reminded him of her promise to you—and his promise not to jam the sluice up here. But he said: 'This is another sluice, another day, and this'—he pointed to the *Echo*—'is another railroad. I am going to hold the river.'"

"He has turned up his ace," remarked Gail, then imperturbably he swung about and asked Louis: "How much do you know about laying steel rails?"

"I was water boy when the Old Man built the T. L. & A.," responded Louis. "Then I worked on the Grand Trunk short cut last summer as timekeeper and learned all about the job."

"Louis, if you can put two hundred men at work to-morrow, you can have the job of construction superintendent for the Axle & Timberlake Railroad *—which we are going to build.*"

"You turn up your ace!" cried Rambault.

Louis' face kindled. "Then it is the M. P.?" he asked.

"It is. And I'm following up my bluff—which your father called—by turning *my* ace. We are going to build a brand-new line up the east side of the river, from Timberlake to Axle."

CHAPTER X.

OPEN WARFARE.

IT had not been Gail Halleck's intention to build a railroad—except on paper, when he inspired the article which appeared in the *Echo*. He had no desire to ruin François Gascoigne by building a rival line and he had hoped mightily that the "paper railroad" would force Gascoigne to abandon his stubborn attitude. Halleck played, however, with his "ace in the hole."

The appointment of Rambault as president of the A. & T. R. R. Gail had made as a move to convince Rambault of the sincerity of the purpose and, through Rambault, the editor of the *Echo*. Now Gail ignored Rambault's official position, not pointedly but casually. He dealt with Louis under Rambault's nose, and the wily Rambault could find no reason for revealing to Louis his appointment.

Gail felt he must undermine Rambault's position as a middleman, a go-between. Already Rambault had hinted, too broadly, of his very friendly relations with Vance, the vice president of the M. P. Gail resolved, at his first opportunity, to discover just what was responsible for this understanding between them. He wanted to be sure, also, just where *he* stood with this smart Frenchman.

"I am going down to talk to your father now with Rambault," Gail announced to Louis. "I'll see you again before I go to Axle."

It was with stirred emotions that he traveled the trail which he had ascended only a few days before with Eve Gascoigne. He had scarcely had time to analyze his feelings toward Eve, but without volition, his emotion had begun to crystallize. That breathless moment when he had held her in his arms and declared he loved her was not a mere sentimental interlude. His pulses beat fast, as he neared the old patrol shack where they had met.

The snow had gone, save in the thickets. Its melting swelled the Whitewater to freshet flood for the second time.

Long before they got to No. 3 evidence of the effectiveness of François Gascoigne's jam became plain. The swift rush of logs down the current began to be checked. Knots of logs were piling up like jackstraw puzzles.

"No. 3 was high when he plugged the sluice," Rambault told Gail. "Louis kept flooding out of No. 2, supposing the head would move out fast. It gave François his chance."

As they passed the patrol shack, ap-

parently deserted, Gail's heart leaped at sight of a glove lying on the wide window ledge. He managed to divert Rambault's gaze from the shack, until they were well past. It was a little buckskin glove which could fit none but a woman's hand.

In the reservoir the driving force of flood water had wedged logs higher and higher. They must soon force the timber, below them, to the bottom and build a solid bulwark.

"It is a bad one!" Rambault exclaimed, shaking his head. "The worst I have ever seen on the Whitewater."

"Yes, old Gascoigne holds the river," Gail agreed. "An injunction is all that can wrest it from him—and that takes time, money and isn't certain, after all."

"He has possession."

"To-morrow we shall take possession of High Lake," Gail declared grimly. "We shall hold all the headwater up and use it when we want it. There is Gascoigne!"

THE great head of the lumberman was limned against the blue of the April sky, far down the stream. Atop the sluice platform, he leaned on a long pike pole, its handle thrust up over one shoulder, pointing to the sky. He seemed regarding the scene of confusion he had caused.

The jam spread about him like the wreckage of a thousand log cabins leveled by a convulsion of nature. It flowed in a solid, frozen wave against the sturdy dam and sluice gate, thrust like a glacier through the gate and down in the gorge below.

Gail saluted the riverman cheerfully. A slow smile spread over the old man's face as he waved his hand in a gesture of mute triumph, as if to say:

"You see what I have done? Now it is your move."

"I have come to talk business," Gail announced.

"I am glad to speak, always, to one so gallant to my daughter," was the response. "You I shall regard as a friend, regardless of whom you represent."

"That—that was nothing," stammered Gail.

Further conversation was carried on with Rambault acting as interpreter, most of the time.

"While you hang up your drive," Gail said, "we shall go ahead, down at Axle. Instead of starting our diversion canal below your mill, we shall start it above Mont de Gascoigne. You will be forced to dribble your logs through, when it is completed, under control of the Mountain Power Company. You know what it will mean to have them come out below your mill. You will have to haul them all by power, up the current to the mill. I understand that you have jammed your drive because the M. P. is going to build a railroad from Timberlake.

"We do not wish to build that railroad. But we must either have accommodation from the T. L. & A. or we shall go the limit in competition with your line. Coöperate with the M. P., and we will build a track for you up the high-water mark of the reservoir, from where you run into Axle, to the west end of our dam, where we will erect a concrete station and then give you right of way across the dam to the east shore."

Gascoigne considered the proposition a long time. It seemed as if he must yield. Only along the east shore of the river could a railroad be built to tap the hardwood forests, and this was Gascoigne's only hope of continuing his lumbering. Only by bridging the river could he project such a logging road.

"Anthony Antrim has authorized this generous proposition I make to you," Gail added.

The mention of Antrim seemed to act

upon Gascoigne as an irritant. "I shall have to turn down your offer," the Old Man said. "I can do nothing to aid the M. P. I have been driven to this by the injustice Antrim has done me. I shall oppose him to my last dollar."

From this stand he could not be budged. "Never! Never!" he cried. "Never shall I accept any favor from Antrim! It will be only the bait for some trap."

"Well, we shall start cutting the channel to-morrow—and set two hundred men at work building the railroad."

This was Gail's final statement.

Gascoigne bowed, with a bleak smile on his strong face. "Meantime, I hold the river," he said.

On shore again Gail turned to Rambault. "I hate to give him up," he said. "I am going up the trail, to No. 2. Suppose you, as a friend of the family, were to advise him?"

"I can try it," Rambault responded. "I'll do my best."

"Not a word about our High Lake plans!" Gail warned.

GAIL covered the distance to the patrol shack in short order, despite the bad condition of the trail. His heart sank, then leaped up again, when he saw that the glove had vanished from the window. He rushed to the door, then halted, hesitant. When he opened it finally, he saw Eve on a bench near the stove, her head bowed. She looked up, with a start.

"Why are you here?" she demanded.

"I saw your glove in the window, as I came down the trail, and came to get it—thinking you had forgotten it. I am sorry to intrude. Eve, I must thank you, at least, for your unselfish kindness to me. You saved my life—and your father from hating me. Now, it seems, I have won your hatred somehow."

She jumped to her feet and a storm gathered in her face. "I hate myself!" she cried, in a shaking voice. "I am ashamed of myself. I suppose you believed the glove in the window was a signal. You have a right to think so of me. I have been a little fool. But I warn you I am finished with that—and I still carry the gun."

She drew out the little automatic. The fire in her eyes and the savagery of her tone told Gail she had lashed herself into a dangerous mood. But he smiled at the gun and advanced, with his hand extended.

"I think I understand. I shall tell your father the truth, that it was you who saved me."

"No! Don't dare tell him!" she burst out. "Do you think I wish him to believe that I am under that sort of obligation to you? No. That is the reason I told him what I did."

"I don't understand. He now believes that I saved you!"

"Of course you would not understand!" She burst into wild laughter. "I told him that you found me snowbound in the cabin *in the morning* and dug me out and helped me upriver. He would believe—something else—if you told him I had lied. That sort of obligation is—— Oh, it would be like you, blond beast that you are! Go away and leave me alone! I shall always hate you and despise myself. You thought that I was a silly little fool of the woods, an easy conquest, and that you could win favor with the Gascoignes by being—gallant. Why, my father would wish me dead rather than to believe I had listened to you! How I deceived myself when I trusted you! I should better have trusted Georges Rambault."

"Eve!" he cried, shocked by her wild speech. He took a step toward her.

With a motion graceful and menacing as the stroke of a cat's-paw, she leveled the gun at his breast. "Stop!" she muttered, in a low, savage tone. "No farther or I shall kill you! Do not try

to touch me! I have that much self-respect left that you shall never touch me again, after holding another woman in your arms before my eyes."

"Eve! What do you mean?"

"Go, go!" she commanded, and she advanced, the gun in her hand trembling. "Not another word! Even a little fool may learn. Go! Try to unlock that jam! I am glad of it, now. Better for me to be poor than profit by the dishonor of the Gascoignes, by turning traitor. I shall fight on my father's side, not on the side of his enemies. I know you too well, now, Adam of the amber locks and pretty eyes. They are too pretty to be true."

He could do nothing against such an outburst—and, like a man, he failed completely to understand its real cause. He stumbled blindly on, up the trail to No. 2, with his brain seething. What "other woman?" For a long time he could not fathom that—then suddenly it flashed upon him. Two could play at the game of spyglasses, of course! It must have been his thoughtless, innocent struggle with Greta, over his binoculars, that Eve had seen.

He halted with a laugh, half turned to retrace his steps, then shook his head and went slowly on. He knew that it would take more than an explanation now to wipe out the bitter prejudice she had against him. Now she was an out-and-out enemy he admired her more—for a moment. Then the reaction came. His tortured heart complained.

Rambault! She had spoken of him as one more to be trusted than himself. How quickly she had charged him with thinking her glove in the window a signal! Rambault had come up that trail, before he came down. Perhaps she had even accompanied him, as far as the cabin. Gail began to laugh at himself as a credulous dupe. Were Eve and Rambault playing him between them? Certainly there was some secret, mysterious understanding between the girl and this suave, cheeky gambler.

CHAPTER XI.

GOING OUT!

LOUIS was still sluicing from No. 2 when Gail reached the reservoir.

"It is a bad jam, Louis," he said, in answer to the young riverman's eager query. "But the jam is not our most immediate problem. We must have railroad facilities between Timberlake and Axle. I want you to report to Harriman to-night with as many men as you can take down. He will put a man in charge of some of them to go up to High Lake and build dikes at the outlet, and a higher sluice gate, so we can hold up more headwater. Every man you can furnish will draw five dollars a day."

"Well, I can take the whole gang down," Louis declared eagerly, "I have spread the news and they are strong for the new jobs. They do not relish the idea of trying to break out the Old Man's jam."

Gail ordered the sluice gate at No. 2 closed, shutting off the morning flood.

"The tighter the jam settles down," Gail observed, "the worse it will look to François Gascoigne."

"It will be tough on him if he cannot get it out at all," Louis said doubtfully.

"That is not to concern you at all," Gail warned him. "You are in the employ of the Mountain Power Company. If you have any regrets, now is the time to——"

"None at all! I am sick of the woods, the logs, the constant bickering and fighting!" Louis exclaimed vigorously. "And I promised Georges I would stick, in spite of everything."

There it was again. That mysterious influence which Rambault exercised over the Gascoignes irked Gail, though it had been used to his advantage. Ram-

bault stuck like a thorn in Gail's side, intrenched as a suitor of Eve—and a confident one, and as a "friend of the family," able to play the go-between without losing his hold—mysteriously backed by Vance—and so recently shoved into a position from which it was going to be awkward to remove him, and awkward to keep him, president of the A. & T. R. R., by Gail's own act. Gail had acted, however, in response to Antrim's suggestion in this appointment. Now he suspected that Vance had been the one who put Rambault's name in Antrim's mouth.

Two things Gail resolved he must do very quickly: One was to see Vance and come to an understanding with him about Rambault, the other was to learn the patois of this strange corner of the country. Greta would teach him that. He wanted to be able to talk to old Gascoigne directly without needing an interpreter.

He had lunch with Louis and Le Maire, a foreman who spoke fairly good English and seemed intelligent. Le Maire possessed a thorough knowledge of the works at High Lake. After a talk with him, Gail decided to put him as second in command on the dike-building job at High Lake. Without exposing his plans for High Lake, Gail designated Le Maire as acting river boss, in Louis' place. Then he went down the trail with Louis. Rambault was waiting at the rig, having lunched with François and Eve.

"I had a long talk with the Old Man," Rambault reported cheerfully. "I believe he can be smoothed out if it is worked right."

"I am not going to try to smooth him out," Gail announced decisively. "He has his own knots to untie now. We are going ahead on another line."

The exodus of the rivermen began at once. Soon after Gail, Louis and Rambault began the descent in the buckboard, there trooped out an army of men, with their turkeys slung over their shoulders, headed for Axle. They sang, shouted, leaped high, kicked at trees, played rough tricks on each other.

François Gascoigne stood at the junction of the main trail and the lead-in to No. 3 and glared at them as they passed, as if they were deserters from a beaten army. To one who innocently started down the lead-in toward the dam, Gascoigne presented the steel point of his pike. The man, thinking it an attempt at rough play, ducked under. Gascoigne felled him with his fist.

"None of you shall ever work for François Gascoigne again!" he shouted, shaking his fist at them. "You go over to my enemy. Ingrates!"

"We go to work for Louis," one answered. "Five dollars a day."

"Old Gascoigne is done!" cried another boldly. "He has killed the goose that lays the golden egg. Eight hours a day and no more beans, pea soup and johnny cake."

"You, whom I fattened from a scarecrow!" roared Gascoigne.

"The axle grease is running out!" jeered another, and a great laugh went up.

Eve came running up the path, attracted by the altercation, and drew her father away.

"Do not antagonize these men," she pleaded. "Perhaps you will need them again very soon. You have only a handful left on the drive—the old men."

"I can get better river rats than these from over the border," Gascoigne growled. Then he went, head down, back to the dam and regarded the scene moodily. Already the jam was settling, as the flood water ran out.

Next morning when Gascoigne looked from the door of his cabin, at the end of the dam, the logs lay on the bottom of the reservoir, save for a narrow channel in the middle. The Whitewater was only a half-dried-up brook now. It was no longer a roaring stream. The reser-

voir was drained by the shutting off of the sluice at No. 2.

WORK on the new railroad line from Timberlake to Axle began from both ends at the same time. The Mountain Power Company had taken up waste land along the river, from Axle to Timberlake, and, by influence at the headquarters of the Grand Trunk, was able to obtain a lease on a track which crossed the river at Timberlake, on a bridge, and swung into their yards to a siding.

Three hundred men reported to Harriman in the morning. The contractor, with Gail's help, divided the crew into three parts, sent fifty men to Timberlake under the charge of Louis Gascoigne, put one hundred at work with Pasquale D'Angelo as boss—Pasquale was one of Harriman's old guard— digging away at the foot of Mont de Gascoigne with pick and shovel, for the opening of the diversion canal. Another hundred were strung out southerly from Axle, along the east side of the river, to work on the roadbed of the A. & T. R. R., which three young engineers, Gail's assistants, and a gang of surveyors had already lined out.

It was to be a rough roadbed, with as few cuts and fills as possible, trestles and curves taking their place. Harriman established a two-truck transport line over the muddy road which ran through the swamps that lay between towns. He groused and growled because his steam shovels were standing idle and useless in Timberlake, but was somewhat mollified when, at the end of the second day of the attack on the railroad line, he learned that one steel-jawed dirt eater was a mile nearer Axle than it had been, having helped to claw its own way along the right of way.

The construction camp sprung suddenly into a town, overshadowing in size and activity the village of Axle itself. Daily it extended itself along the slope of Knob Hill. Near the top stood the big store building and Gail's shack. The thunder of dynamite blasts went on all day and all night, for Harriman was lavish with the blasting powder, using it in the effort to make up for the lack of steam shovels and hydraulic drills.

Harriman's trucks brought a supply for Greta's store. The first few days there was little trade, but on the first pay day Louis Gascoigne directed his men to the pay window—and it was a front window of the store. Greta paid off. Louis stood by, counting noses—and identifying faces. He collected for himself his fee as labor-supply man and, for Rambault, the "bunk fee"—and all paid cheerfully, whether they used the canvas cots Rambault furnished or not. Rambault himself did not appear.

Greta's trade boomed. The French laborers found that she could speak their language, and speak it well. Louis chatted with her continually, as the men filed up. Very soon Greta had to be relieved by her husband to attend to the clamorous demands of men in the store.

"You work very hard," Louis said to her, in a lull. "Why do you do this?"

"To make pin money—— Well, not exactly pin money; I call it my bank ballast," she responded, with a puzzling smile.

"Bank balance?" he queried.

"No, ballast. The sort of thing they put in ships. I don't know much about ships, except that they sail across the seas and I intend to take one some day."

"To what port?"

"To Rome."

"Ah! And Paris?"

"I—I had not thought of that, but I should like to go there."

"Some day I am going there," Louis declared.

She regarded him in surprise. Just at this moment the dark face of the young man was lighted by an inner

glow. Greta gasped inaudibly. He was really handsome, this lad, who had seemed so swaggeringly surly among the men.

"To Paris, I mean," he went on. "I have always wished to travel—to get out of—the woods. But"—he added, with a reckless laugh—"I have always managed to throw my ballast overboard before I even got out of port."

"You will be making a great deal of money this summer," Greta reminded him, taking an unaccountable interest in this would-be voyager. "Why don't you save some?"

Impulsively Louis dipped in his pockets and brought out handfuls of silver.

"Keep this safely for me, will you?" he implored. "This is velvet. I'll use my salary to pay off—to spend."

Greta saw no reason why she should not do him the favor. Frequently she had acted as banker for men at work on her husband's jobs.

"Suppose you let me deduct your fees from the pay envelopes every week and put it away for you?" she suggested practically.

"That will be fine! Then I can't help saving money!" Louis leaned forward enthusiastically, and watched her jot down the sum of his pocketful of silver. But his eyes strayed rather to gold than to silver, as she bent her bright head above the ledger.

That was the beginning of a transformation in Louis, the lumberjack. It was the first time in his life he had ever saved money. Also, it was the first time he had ever looked at a woman with such respect that it amounted almost to breathless fear.

CHAPTER XII.

CHANCE FOR A RAKE-OFF.

TEN days passed. Gail slipped away and took a train for New York. He laid before Antrim the details of his doings and was heartily commended by the president of the M. P. He had expected some censure.

"You have done just the right thing in following up the railroad project," he said. "It may turn out to be a money-maker for us. I am negotiating with a woodenware concern to locate at Axle. They will need hardwood. It was a ten-to-one gamble the paper-railroad bluff would work and I realized that. As for Gascoigne, it is well to let the sleeping lion lie. I happen to know that he is getting into a tight place. He cannot meet his obligations unless he begins sawing timber very soon. His long lawsuit against the State cost him a mint of money. Everything depends on his getting down his timber. He has got to give in, after a time. But I am the last man in the world to force him."

"And I am the next to the last," Gail commented, with an earnestness that caused Antrim to glance sharply at him.

"This girl, Eve Gascoigne," Antrim said, referring to Gail's casual mention of her previously. "Is she intelligent?"

"Very," Gail answered dryly.

Antrim smiled. "You might try to win her interest in the new Axle. Is she social-minded?"

"She is educated, but scarcely social-minded, as you mean it. I fear that welfare work would not appeal to her, if that is your idea. And I am afraid that I have not been very successful in making friends with her."

"Can you work on her through Louis?"

"That is what I am trying to do, but —there is another influence—— Well, I won't bother you with details. I'll keep trying."

"Use your best judgment and keep me posted."

Gail had resolved to say nothing to Antrim of his suspicions concerning Rambault and his strangely close relations with Vance. Vance himself was not at the offices; he was in Chicago, but expected back momentarily. Gail

haunted the office for two days, hoping to see Vance, and was successful in catching him there on the afternoon Gail was to return to Axle.

"I want to talk to you about Georges Rambault," Gail began bluntly, after the first greetings. "I can't quite make him out."

"Hasn't he been treating you right?" Vance inquired.

"Perfectly—but I like to know more about a man when I have to depend on him as I shall have to depend on Rambault, from now on. He makes frequent and confident mention of private communication with you—and I take it as a sort of polite warning that he is —that he considers himself intrenched."

Vance smiled. "Very like him," he said. "Frankly, the man once did me a great favor; that is how I happened to make his acquaintance. I was in a bad mess. I had been hunting up in the mountains, shot a doe out of season. Worse luck, got caught with it. The natives have their 'long beef' regularly, but I was a fair mark for the game protector. I needed five hundred dollars cash in a hurry, and Rambault put it up and helped me out of the scrape. He had influence.

"Mind you, I had met him only casually, in a little game at the Mountain House. Oh, I know he is a gambler, but he seems to be on the level. I admire that sort of man. He lives by his wits, on his nerve—and Rambault can call by their first names every man of importance in Whitewater Valley. Frequently he 'calls' them," Vance chuckled.

"What rate of interest did he charge on the loan he made you, if I may ask?" drawled Gail.

Vance flushed, but laughed it off. "Ten per cent, but it was worth it. He didn't know me—then."

"You know him quite well?"

"Why, I've met him five or six times since, once in Montreal, twice in New York and once in Timberlake, when I went up, following your first trip to the Whitewater. It was when I went up for Mr. Antrim, to make the deal about the Axle property. The Mountain Real Estate proposition, you know. That was, in fact, my own proposition—and it turned the trick, didn't it?" Vance crowed a little.

Gail was not to be detoured. "You know he is a gambler and a bootlegger?" he queried.

Vance gave a sharp exclamation, scowled and fumbled at papers on his desk importantly. "He may run in a little booze for himself and friends," he admitted, in a way that convinced Gail that Vance knew more of the affair. "What of it?"

"Nothing, except he threatens to move up to Axle and I'm not crazy to have him in or near the camp. And he is nominally president of the A. & T. which is almost a running railroad today. If he comes into Axle and sets up an establishment like he runs at Timberlake—— Do you want to accept the responsibility, Mr. Vance?"

Vance laughed scornfully and too loudly. It grated on Gail. He had not liked, too well, the ruse of the Mountain Real Estate Company. Vance had organized and operated it as a dummy corporation, and had succeeded in worming his way into the Mountain Power Company through the advantage he had in obtaining possession of Whitewater property. All this, however, was none of Gail's business. He had tied up to Anthony Antrim, was devoted to him and his interests. Antrim was the man with the vision; Vance the practical, scheming financeer.

"What has Rambault asked of you?" Vance inquired, with none too polite an implication.

"Nothing. In fact, I've had to ask favors of him. It isn't comfortable to hear him refer to 'his friend, Mr. Vance,' so confidently. I am supposed to be running the job up there."

"Look here, don't let this bother you," Vance said, with a change of manner. "Let's go out and have a lunch somewhere and talk it over leisurely and less formally."

Gail caught a hint of some desire for secrecy in the suggestion. He glanced at his watch, then jumped up in genuine haste. "I've just time to catch my train," he said. "I can't stay away any longer."

"I'll get you a taxi. Look here, Halleck, what little Rambault may pick up at stud or red dog and—— Pshaw! Some one is going to supply that gang of hunkies with hooch, you know that as——"

"Not if I know it," Halleck cut in.

"Whether you know it or not," Vance went on imperturbably. "It might as well be Rambault, whom we know and can—control. Suppose we talk this over again. I'll try to run up there next week."

"I have nothing more to say," Gail returned bluntly, "except this: If Rambault tries to open a place in Axle, I'll dump him as head of the A. & T. He has served our purpose."

Vance jerked the phone toward him. "Sorry you've got to go," he said. "Halleck, I recommended Rambault to you because I knew him and his capabilities. I didn't say he was an angel. You admit he has not asked you to do anything for him. When in Rome play the Roman games. In Axle play along with Rambault; that's my advice."

"Thank you. I know where you stand—and where I stand," Gail responded coolly. "Now I'll run along—and chuck Rambault out if he tries to peddle stuff in my camp."

"Halleck," Vance's voice was low, his gaze sharp, insolent, "how much of a rake-off do you want?"

Gail looked at Vance for an instant, straight in the eyes, then threw back his head with a laugh and went out, banging the door after him.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE LYNX'S DEN.

FROM the window of her room in the white house on the hill, Eve Gascoigne stood and watched, through the old brass telescope, a locomotive moving slowly but steadily up the gleaming new tracks on the east side of the river. It was headed straight for Mont de Gascoigne, but the tracks curved about the base of the hill. The locomotive bore the significant lettering on its tender "A. & T. R. R."

The locomotive crawled about the curve and was hidden from her by the shoulder of the hill. A few minutes later it reappeared to the north of Mont de Gascoigne, and halted, with a plume of steam bursting from its whistle and a screech that rent the air. Workmen dropped their picks and shovels, threw their caps in air and tried to rival the long-drawn whistle of triumph.

An agile figure leaped from the cab and was soon surrounded by a crowd, pressing eagerly forward to shake his hand.

"It is Louis!" she murmured. "It is Louis. He did it!"

Sadness and pride were mingled in her voice.

The locomotive was the first rolling stock to enter Axle over the new railroad. Just three weeks from the time the first shovelful of earth was turned on the roadbed, the rails were laid so that wheels could run upon them. It was a record-breaking job.

Flat cars behind the locomotive bore a fleet of steam shovels; box cars were crammed with smaller machinery, with cement, tools, supplies of all sorts. One car was marked "Dangerous-Explosive." It was loaded with dynamite.

The terminus of the A. & T. was at the western end of the earthen dam which was already being shoved out, at both ends, into the river bed. A spur track was thrown out, from the begin-

ning of the curve at the south of Mont de Gascoigne, to the river and here, already, were huge rafts which Harriman had constructed and upon them men began to load the steam shovels for transportation across the river to Knob Hill.

Never once did Eve raise the telescope so that it pointed to the summit of Knob Hill, where still stood, aloof but dominating, the large and the small black buildings, the store where presided the golden-haired woman—and the shack where for hours at a time the "blond beast" sat out at a table, with maps and blue prints before him.

Louis Gascoigne was not given long to celebrate his triumph. He was put in charge of the canal job. A concrete dam was begun at the upper end of the canal, with a spillway forty feet wide and a sluice gate half as wide, overflow and outlet for the lake which was to be created where Axle steeped in the sun.

The big fill was begun in earnest on the first of June. Ten days later the Whitewater began flowing through its new channel. Henceforth, and until the solid rock which made up the base of Knob Hill was bored through for a penstock to carry water to turbines, the river must all run through the canal.

Gail Halleck hunted Louis up and congratulated him warmly. The railroad job had put Louis in the position of an employee of the Mountain Power Company. Louis flushed at Gail's compliment. Praise from the chief engineer was rare.

"I have learned a lot about building a railroad," Louis chuckled. "I did not realize there was so much to it. You would not believe the son of a railroad president could know so little as I did."

"And I learned a lot, too," Gail responded. "By the way, how is the president of the T. L. & A.? I have not seen or heard from him. And how is your sister?"

"I have not been at home very often," Louis replied. "It did not seem—comfortable. Not that I am unwelcome but then——"

"I understand, Louis. I hope you will make yourself at home in my lowly diggings. There is room for a cot, if you want to drop in for a night's sleep any time. I'll have one put in for you."

"That will be fine." Louis seemed overwhelmed by the offer.

Gail liked young Gascoigne. He had been uneasy concerning Rambault's influence upon Louis. Of Rambault, Gail had seen nothing since the day on the mountain. Nor had he heard from or seen Vance. Whether Rambault had moved up from Timberlake, Gail did not know. He hoped not.

"I need some one to practice my French on," Gail told Louis. "I have been taking lessons from Mrs. Harriman in the patois."

"Ah! She speaks it excellently—a little too well for us who mangle it."

Louis' eyes glowed when he spoke of Greta Harriman. Gail wondered if he was doing right in welcoming Louis to his quarters, so close to Greta's store, where she presided all day long. He justified himself by the thought that Greta's influence on Louis would be better than that of Rambault, at any rate.

Circulating among the workmen, Gail, with his better understanding of the border jargon they used, began to pick up bits of information he could not otherwise have learned. Gail found that they believed him unable to understand what they said. He heard some comical comments on himself. He learned, also, the next day after the completion of the railroad, that Rambault had come to Axle and had established headquarters on the second floor of the old railroad station, which was an ancient house transformed.

IT was a coincidence that Rambault should have come at just this time—for Louis Gascoigne had failed to appear for work this morning. Gail had

a sort of hunch about Louis. He went direct to Rambault's rooms.

"Bonjour! Come in!" Rambault greeted Gail heartily. "Welcome to the new No. 9! I have seen nothing of you, you have been so busy. Sorry I have no coffee made. But I can offer a little Canadian ale, just freshly arrived."

"Not so early in the day," Gail refused, looking curiously about the shabby room he had entered, a sort of reception room, it appeared to be, with a few chairs and an old sofa as its chief furnishings. "This is unique," he laughed. "The president of the A. & T. established in the T. L. & A. Railroad station! By the way, have you seen anything of our construction superintendent?"

"Louis?" Rambault looked surprised. "Not of late. He, too, has been too busy even to look up an old friend. He spends much of his time at the store up there. Perhaps you will find him there now, assisting the storekeeper."

There was sly malice in Rambault's dry remarks. Gail felt that Rambault knew more than he admitted. A murmur of voices behind the closed door of the room adjoining spoke of visitors whose presence Rambault did not see fit to mention.

Rambault chattered on, apologizing for the dusty, unkempt condition of the room. "I only moved in yesterday," he said, "and have not had time to get settled."

Some dispute was going on in the next room. It concerned somebody's aunt. One doubted that another's "auntie" was present and was vigorously assured that she was and that some one else had better hurry up with his relative of the same degree.

"And I'll raise you," came the phrase, clear-cut and rasping, over the door.

Gail listened, with one ear, to Rambault's chat, but his other caught a name which sounded very much like "Gascoigne."

It was not surprising to find a game going on in Rambault's establishment even at ten o'clock in the morning. There came a call for Rambault.

"Pardon. I am wanted. My friends came late and stayed early," he commented, with a laugh. He entered the other room, opening the door just wide enough to slip through, closing it behind him.

The voices within were hushed. A puff of tobacco smoke and a wave of alcoholic scent came to Gail's attention, released by the opening of the door. Then a voice rose angrily. It was unmistakably the voice of Louis Gascoigne.

"Sorry I cannot invite you to sit in," said Rambault, returning, "but they are anxious to finish as they stand. I asked them about Louis Gascoigne. They were discussing how well he did on the railroad job. He is making good, as I predicted, isn't he?"

"He had done well. By the way, I came principally to see you concerning the A. & T. You understand that, as the head of the railroad company, there are certain duties as well as privileges to enjoy. It has occurred to me that, with your other interests, you might desire to be relieved of——"

"Are you suggesting that I resign?" Rambault cut in quickly.

"Not at all. I am suggesting that you devote more time to the job; that is all—and even if it requires you to neglect other interests." Gail's eyes were on the door, behind which the game progressed noisily.

Rambault bowed mockingly. "I understand. Allow me to explain my apparent inactivity. I have been practicing diplomacy. You warned me that my official connection with the A. & T. was to remain secret for the time. I understood the necessity. As a friend of the Gascoigne family, it would hardly do for me to appear as the presiding genius of the rival line. I am still persona grata with the family. Indeed, not

long since, Louis Gascoigne and I were discussing a way in which the considerable obstruction to the flow of the Whitewater, which exists up in the vicinity of No. 3, might perhaps be relieved."

"That is interesting," Gail commented dryly. "In what way might that be done?"

"Sit down!" Rambault insisted. "Have a cigar and content yourself for a moment while I attend to the immediate desires of my—my other guests, if you will pardon me again."

Gail took a chair and Rambault vanished through the hall door. He listened sharply for the sound of another door opening, for he suspected that Rambault might have some way of providing retreat for his "guests," from the game room, other than the passage through this reception room. He was about to step to the hall door and look out, on some pretext, when the door to the game room swung open. Louis Gascoigne stood on the threshold, swaying, staring dull-eyed and with the old surly truculence in his face.

"Huh! Followin' me roun', eh?" he sneered at Gail. "Let me tell you I'm not goin' stan' for it!"

CHAPTER XIV.

A CROOKED GAME.

GAIL had never seen young Gascoigne intoxicated, but he realized now that liquor brought to the surface all that was bad in the boy. It revealed to him in a flash the real reason of Rambault's hold upon Louis. Something had happened, some time, with Louis in this condition, which had given Rambault an advantage upon which he played in his crafty, subtle fashion.

"Look here!" growled Louis, advancing toward Gail waveringly, but closing the door behind him carefully enough. "I got to have money. Lot's of money. Don't pay me enough. Big job."

"I agree with you," Gail responded, smiling. "Has Harriman dropped your salary below the railroad level now?"

"Hell, I ain't talkin' 'bout the job an' salary. Got to have big money, see? What I care 'bout job?"

"Well, I wondered. Harriman has been worrying about you."

"Old fool ought to worry," was Louis' quick reply. "What right has he got to have pretty girl like Greta, eh?"

Gail stirred on his chair, but restrained his tongue, though the maudlin remark stung him sharply.

"Greta, she's good frien' of yours," Louis went on, relapsing into the confidential craftiness of the drunken man. "You can tell her that ol' man's not fit for her. He promise to take her to Rome. She fell for it. He take her? No!

"Halleck, I ain't dam' fool," he continued drunkenly. "Got lot of money comin' to me from Ol' Man some time. Ol' Man's a fool. Tied up his drive and lose all his money. I got to go to work like dirt digger and can't make enough money to stay in good game. Say, I got to have some money!" He returned to the main grievance, to Gail's relief. "S'pose you let me have hun'red dollars? I pay you back nex' week. That's good fellow!"

"Look here, Louis," Gail said, adopting the same confidential tone the lad had assumed, "I came to try to horn in on a game myself. Suppose I take your hand and you lie down and catch up on your much-neglected sleep, here on the sofa?"

Louis swayed and blinked, as he revolved the suggestion in his clouded brain. Finally he nodded sagaciously.

"You play poker?" he asked. "Sure you do! I 'member up at No. 2. Good bluff. Had an ace in hole. Say, I tell you what! You take my place an' trim them robbers in there. Where's Rambault? Got to have 'nother little drink."

He started for the hall door, but Gail rose and took him firmly by the arm.

"Rambault's gone out," he said. "I'll rustle a drink for you and here's the place for a nap."

Louis allowed Gail to get him onto the sofa. He dropped off almost instantly into a muttering slumber. Gail covered him with a blanket.

Rambault opened the hall door, having some difficulty with the knob. He bore a heavy box in his arms. "Package of express I had to have. Have to rustle my own stuff. Service on the T. L. & A. is wretched. My guests bother you?"

"No. But one of them is half dead from thirst—or from drink." Gail indicated the covered figure on the sofa. "He has asked me to sit in for him while he sleeps it off—if that is possible."

"Who is it?"

"Our mutual friend, the missing Louis," replied Gail.

Rambault flicked the blanket from Louis' face and bent over him. He straightened with a shrug. "I am sorry," he said. "I did not wish you to see him in this condition. I hoped to straighten him up and get him back on the job."

"If you had his interests at heart, you would never allow him to get in this condition," Gail charged sternly. "It is a shame, Rambault. It forces me to fulfill a promise that I made to Mr. Vance. I had not intended, when I came here, to ask it—but I demand your resignation as president of the A. & T. now."

"My supposition, then, was correct!" sneered Rambault. "You only sought an excuse. And I am sure you misunderstand me."

"I have—but now I understand you, perfectly, Rambault. You are nothing but a scavenger at heart. You were given a wonderful opportunity to become a man of genuine worth in this community, but you threw it away. You have cashed too many time slips for our workmen; we have had too many men laid off, half dead with poison liquor, in the last few days.

"I promised Vance that if you opened an establishment, here in Axle, like you had in Timberlake I would not have you in our organization. I cannot prevent you making a living as you prefer, but I can stop you making a mess of the lives of others. I am going to take Louis Gascoigne out of here."

"Do me that favor!" snapped Rambault, white with anger. He opened the hall door, meaningly.

Gail lifted Louis bodily and carried him out the door. It was necessary to support him, with an arm about him, to get him down the stairs to the street.

When Gail told Rambault that he could not prevent him running a gambling den in Axle he was almost literally correct, so far as enforcement of law went. The preservation of law and order depended largely upon special police maintained by the Mountain Power Company and these men had no authority in Axle. Telesphore Gascoigne was a constable, but no one had ever heard of his making an arrest.

The spectacle of one man helping another in an unsteady condition along the street was ordinary. Of late it had been growing quite frequent. Gail glanced up and down, as he supported Louis at the foot of the stairs in front of the old station. A truck parked in front of the general store caught his eye and he headed for it. It was one of Harriman's trucks. Gail proposed to get Louis to his own shack, on Knob Hill, sober him up and have a serious talk with him.

Gail had never forgotten Antrim's casual remark: "Work through Louis." He knew that Eve Gascoigne felt an almost maternal responsibility toward her brother. And he was still doubtful that only liquor and gambling made

Louis and Rambault friends—there might be some other bond between them.

ALMOST to the truck, Louis revived enough to look about him and find himself in the open air. He asked a question which seemed meaningless at the time.

"How much you give him?"

"Oh, I broke about even," Gail answered, at random. "Louis, that is a crooked game."

"Sure! I know it!" came the fierce reply. "Say, I want to go home."

Gail regarded the lad's face with increasing anxiety. It was frightfully white; his lips hung slack; his eyes were glassy.

A glance toward the truck gave Gail a start. His gaze caught the flutter of black and white, the figure of a graceful girl, standing on the steps of the store. It was Eve Gascoigne. A surge of something like terror came up in Gail's heart. He could not face her, but he kept on, trying to support the increasingly more helpless Louis as if they were walking in a friendly manner, arm in arm—but Louis lurched against him and made it certain that Eve would comprehend his condition.

Gail got him to the truck and was helping him up to the seat when Louis resisted. He, too, had seen Eve and he lunged toward her, only saved a fall by Gail's hold on his arm. Eve came rapidly down the steps and toward them.

It was the first time Gail had seen her in feminine finery. She wore a summer dress of soft silkiness, white, with narrow black stripes.

She confronted Louis with a stare of wide-eyed anxiety; then met Gail's eyes with such a look of reproach that he shrank inwardly. Louis swayed toward her, blurting his words brokenly.

"Eve, got to have some money," he said. "Borrowed hun'red dollars off'n Halleck. No, he sat in game an' lose it for me; that's it. All gone. Can't help it. He's good poker player, but game's crooked. He says it's crooked, anyhow. Maybe he can't play's good as he thinks, eh? Say, you let me have some money; that's good girl. Say, I got 'portant message for you. Tell you later, private. No, I tell you now! He can't tell what's all 'bout. I tell you. Listen!"

He began to speak in the patois, apparently forgetting all about Gail's recently acquired knowledge of the dialect. Gail understood only too well and unwillingly.

"Georges, he say he let me off if you meet him on the hill by the brook to-night ten o'clock," said Louis.

And all too well he heard Eve's response. "Tell him I shall meet him at the usual place," she returned.

Gail stepped back, but Louis staggered and, to prevent Eve the shame of having to support her drunken brother, he stayed beside him, holding him steady.

"You will come with me, now, Louis," Eve said, ignoring Gail. She, too, spoke in the patois.

"No, I got to go back to work," Louis declared, forgetting his plea of a moment before. "Halleck, he took my hun'red dollars an' sit in game an' lose it all. Got to get to work. He promise' to get me raise in salary."

"Louis!" Eve's voice came, sharp and accusing. "You have been gambling with this man?"

"Sure!" responded Louis. "Why not? He's the big boss. Can't turn down the big boss. Eve, Georges, he wants that money I owe him and I can't pay. So why don't you give me some money and I pay you back when drive comes down? You know I got percentage comin' on the drive."

Gail locked his lips, determined to deny nothing, to act as if he did not understand. It was none of his busi-

ness. Louis did not realize what he was saying; no doubt Eve would allow for that.

"Louis, Louis!" she cried, in a tone that wrung Gail's heart. "You know that I have no more money. I have given all I had to father for his trip. He has gone away."

"Old Man's gone on trip, eh? No money! Then I can't pay Georges and he's got to have it, I tell you. Old Man went and hung up the drive and—— Well, then you got to see Georges to-night, Eve. He wants to see you and tell you—— You know, we got to have money, Eve," he finished argumentatively.

Eve spoke to Gail for the first time, meeting his gaze with eyes that were cold and accusing.

"Mr. Halleck, I would appreciate it if you will let Louis alone after this," she said. "Your influence——"

"Where's Old Man gone?" Louis broke in suddenly.

"Father has gone to Albany."

"Hum! Left drive stuck and went to Albany. Oh, I know! He's gone to get money for Axle forest, eh? Have plenty money, then."

"Louis, I want you to come home with me!" Eve appealed to him.

"Don't want to go home," Louis declared, groping for Halleck. "This is my boss. Got to go back on job. He says I'm good man for him. Can't anybody do it like I can. I can make those river rats work, I can. When's Old Man goin' to get back?"

"He'll be gone several days. Come, Louis!"

Gail could not keep silent any longer. "Miss Gascoigne, I promise to take care of him," he said. "I'll get him home to-night. I am taking him to my own quarters."

"Sure! He's giving me bunk in his shack. Come on!" Louis had veered entirely about in his purpose.

"With your permission," Gail murmured, and helped Louis get into the seat of the truck.

Eve gave a shrug of the shoulders which expressed a world of contempt and anger and turned abruptly away, without another word.

Gail clambered to the wheel and started the motor. The driver came on the run from the store, but grinned knowingly when he saw Gail and his passenger. Gail drove rapidly toward Knob Hill, with Louis swaying beside him.

Steam shovels had cut a terraced road to the top of the hill. Gail drove to the door of his shack, eased Louis down and carried him inside. The lad was now unable to use his feet. His condition had taken a suddenly alarming turn. He was rigid from head to foot, his jaws locked and his eyes, when Gail lifted the lids, showed only their whites. Greta Harriman was at the door as Gail turned to go for Doctor Bruyère.

"It is Louis Gascoigne?" she queried breathlessly. "Is the poor boy hurt?"

Gail shook his head. "Not injured. I am afraid, though, he has been poisoned. Where shall I find Doctor Bruyère?"

"Oh! He is in the hospital building, down the hill. I—I will do everything I can, Gail. Oh, poor Louis!"

She went in and knelt beside the cot.

CHAPTER XV.

A PROBLEM PRESENTED.

RAPIDLY Eve Gascoigne climbed the hill to the white house. It had stabbed her to the heart to see Louis in such condition. Every instinct within her rose violently against the man who was with him. She hated Gail Halleck now with a bitterness she had not believed possible.

Curiously, Eve had never suspected Georges Rambault of being connected with the wild sprees and gambling orgies which claimed Louis periodically. She

did not dream that Rambault was a professional gambler. She thought him a man of affairs.

He had been politely attentive to Eve for years. His suave, well-informed talk was different from that of most of the men of her world. He had traveled, he had gone through romantic experiences of many sorts—and had made love to her, mildly but persistently, since she was fifteen.

It was Georges Rambault who had wakened in Eve Gascoigne what had been responsible for that strange exclamation when she heard Gail Halleck, in his delirium, up in the patrol shack on the river, build a word picture of the quest of the "fluid of the sun."

"All my life!" she had said—and it had meant a wonderful thing, then.

All her life, it seemed, she had dreamed of a fairy prince who would come into these woods and unlock for her the door to dreams and romance. Then came this tall, handsome viking, with the fair hair and blue eyes who spoke the language of her own dreams.

Then—he turned out to be her father's enemy, a tool of the ogre, Antrim. The pressure of dire necessity had driven François Gascoigne to the State capital, taking with him his lawyer from Timberlake. Gascoigne had to have money at once. The payment due from the State for the Axle forest had been held up, bound round with red tape of some sort.

He hoped to cut the knot by a direct appeal to the conservation commission. Since Antrim was no longer connected with the commission, Gascoigne could do that. After paying off the army of men who had worked in the woods for him all winter, meeting a note at the Timberlake Bank which he could not conveniently have renewed, Gascoigne found himself squeezed for funds.

The T. L. & A., never a source of revenue, was already affected by the new railroad. Gascoigne's sawmill was idle. The old lion of the river had weathered many financial squalls during his stormy career, but this was the hardest of them all.

Gascoigne found that he was unable to realize on the mortgages he held on the cut-over timber land he had sold, up the river. The M. P. had arranged to pay for the land by installments. This was Vance's scheme. Gascoigne blamed Antrim for it. The mortgages were of value only as security. Gascoigne had been obliged to accept a loan from Eve to pay his traveling expenses and his lawyer. Also—unknown to Eve—Gascoigne had borrowed from Georges Rambault.

This was not Rambault's first loan to a Gascoigne. Eve knew the obligation under which Louis had placed himself to Rambault. But she had grown accustomed to this; she had grown to think of Rambault as a sort of clever, tolerant elder brother. What stabbed her was to see Louis, drunken and penniless, blabbing of a loan from Halleck.

This night meeting with Rambault was not unusual. Frequently she had met Georges Rambault in odd places, on short notice—always ostensibly because of Rambault's interest in Louis, and to help get Louis out of some scrape.

Eve Gascoigne had promised her dying mother, years ago, that she would look after Louis. She had gone beyond that promise; she had looked after her father almost as maternally as she had Louis. Her influence upon the volatile, blundering old fighter had saved him many mistakes.

Beneath her practicality were romantic ideals; and Gail Halleck had fitted in with her dreams—a striking, nonchalant, heroic figure. Now however her faith in him had vanished. As she understood it even after a careful review of Louis' contradictory utterances, Halleck had got Louis into a game and cheated him. Louis had borrowed,

again from Rambault. Georges wished to see her. Georges had asked her help, many times, to straighten her brother out in his financial tangles.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHANCE.

"THERE is only one way out of it, Eve," said Rambault. "I hesitate to say it in this way, but you will understand, I am sure. Marry me and I shall have the influence with Louis which I need—and I can save your father from complete ruin."

"Marry you! But, Georges, why cannot you do that, anyway? Why can't you help father, just as well——"

"I am an outsider," Rambault broke in significantly.

They were at the clump of willows bordering a tiny stream which trickled down the western slope of the Mont de Gascoigne.

"You see, Eve?" Rambault queried. "I have done all that I can, as an outsider, with what money I have. If the drive were down——"

He left the rest to her imagination and reasoning. She caught at the suggestion quickly. His proposal of marriage had not taken hold of her, it did not seem a possibility.

"Father has gone away at a bad time," she mused. "He had to go, though. He should be back within three or four days."

"If he gets the money for Axle forest, it will not be enough!" Rambault declared. "And nothing that I can say or do, as an outsider, will avail. You see I joined forces with the M. P. so that I could work from the inside. They will wreck your father's business as ruthlessly as they are tearing down Knob Hill. To do anything, however, I must have Louis—and you. You first of all, Eve. Marry me and I will get hold of Louis and we will stop this juggernaut that is grinding the Gascoignes into the ground. I cannot fail! Remember I have their confidence, I know their secrets."

"How can you stop them, Georges?"

"Working together, Louis and I, what can we not accomplish? You and Louis and I—and your father too! You do not seem to realize what Anthony Antrim is about. Antrim is damming the Whitewater because of his grudge against Gascoigne. He will drive your father, his ancient enemy, to the wall. And you know how close François Gascoigne is to the breaking point."

Eve shuddered at the picture but bravely she murmured: "He holds the river, still."

"And what of it? Why, it is his foolish, desperate effort to hold the river with a log jam that is helping to break him! He should have seized and held the works at High Lake. Now the M. P. has taken possession and controls the headwaters, while they have also begun to dam the river down there and are even making it flow in a new channel of their creation. And Louis is building it."

Eve followed his nod, with her gaze. The blinking, spitting lights of torches showed, reflected in the river, the glowing, ruddy fires of steam boilers where steam shovels were being stoked, all through the night, as they clawed away at Knob Hill.

"Within sight of your home they are wrecking the town your father built," Rambault went on earnestly. "In a month there will be left of Axle nothing but driftwood on the surface of a lake. The town will be swallowed up, forgotten. Your house alone will remain, isolated, with a railroad thrust beneath its nose, a canal at the bottom of the hill. The picture is not enticing, is it?"

Rambault had taken Gail Halleck's dream and had drawn the reverse side of the picture. Eve recognized it—and forced herself to see it as Rambault did, though it was hard, for there still shone

in her inner mind a brighter picture, a happy, clean little town, built anew, high up on the bank of the lake—and the shining white top of Seward with its "fluid of the sun" dominating all.

"It is time for action if anything is to be saved," he said, drawing closer to her. "Say that you will marry me next month, and I will show you what I can do. Louis and I will work together and we shall win. You and I will leave this wilderness then and travel. I will show you the great places of the earth —London, Paris, Rome. I can save Louis from the evil influences of these careless, scornful strangers. I can save him from himself—you and I together."

Rambault fell silent, then. Eve's heart was wrung by Louis, with each new outbreak, each escapade. She did not stop to think how Rambault was going to do what he promised so confidently. He said he would save Louis from himself and from this cold-blooded blond beast—Gail Halleck—who had decoyed him, drunken, to the gaming table.

"That woman up on the hill is playing a game with Louis, too," said Rambault, with almost uncanny appropriateness.

Eve's voice shook when she spoke. "Georges Rambault, if you will bring Louis to me sober, sane and reasonable, and with the assurance that he and you are working together, I promise—I shall promise, then—— Louis owes you money?" she broke off.

"Oh, that is nothing, Eve!" cried Rambault hoarsely. "It will be all a family matter."

He stepped closer, seeking her hands. She recoiled.

"No, no!" she cried. "There is a condition to my promise."

"I shall bring Louis home," he declared, "and then——"

"You—you must do what you are going to do before father returns," she murmured, in a stifled tone.

"There will be action at once, plenty of it," Rambault declared. "Watch what happens, Eve!"

His voice was thick. He talked like a man on the verge of committing some tremendous and dangerous deed.

"I shall watch," said Eve, more coolly than she had spoken before. "Now I must go."

She turned and went swiftly up the hill in the moonlight. Georges Rambault, gambler, bootlegger, opportunist, adventurer, watched her and his hands clenched tightly and his eyes blazed. Then with a great effort he calmed himself. He descended the path to the fill, which could be crossed dry-shod now. He entered the construction camp for the first time. He headed directly for the top of Knob Hill.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE LYNX CROUCHES.

ON a camp stool sat Doctor Bruyère, beside the cot where lay Louis Gascoigne, as Gail had placed him. On the other side was Greta Harriman, one of her hands held tightly in the grip of Louis' fingers. Louis breathed stertorously, painfully. Greta had scarcely moved since she first hovered over him.

It was a case of wood-alcohol poisoning, Doctor Bruyère had said. He knew the symptoms well, for he had doctored many timberjacks after a spree in which they drank anything and everything with a "kick" in it. But the condition of Louis Gascoigne was aggravated. He had started on his spree at Timberlake and had consumed quantities of alcohol in various guises and disguises, drinking steadily for almost twenty-four hours, living on it, without food, without sleep. The best the doctor could say was that he hoped to pull Louis through.

Louis had roused but once from the coma which gripped him, then he saw the golden head of Greta near him; he

had grasped her hand, muttering her name pathetically.

Greta thought of Louis Gascoigne as "that poor boy," a wild, reckless, likable youth who had proven himself worth while, who had fallen into trouble through bad companions. He had continued, every week, to allow her to deduct from the pay envelopes the fee which was his, and had refrained from touching it.

"That is yours until the job is done," he said. "It is as if it does not exist, for me—except that you tell me to take it." Greta was thinking of his naïve dependence upon her, as he lay there so very ill.

"How you goin' to get them logs out of there, anyway?" Jim Harriman asked Gail, as they talked outside. Greta could hear her husband's question.

"There are two ways we can move the jam," Gail responded. "We can try to flood the logs out with a big head from High Lake. If that doesn't work, we can rig derricks and carriers. I have been urging Mr. Antrim to consent to immediate extension of the railroad up toward High Lake. He is willing to consider it, after negotiations with the woodenware people are finished in our favor. Once that deal is clinched the railroad must go up after the hardwood."

"Huh! Then Gascoigne will have to pay freight on his logs, instead of driving 'em down river for nothing. That ought to learn him something, the old pirate!"

"Unless we can flood them out, they will have to ride rails," Gail agreed, "but I have an idea Antrim will waive freight charges, provided Gascoigne will sell us the T. L. & A."

"He won't, I bet you. Gascoigne is stuck!" Harriman's voice was triumphant, "I hope he gets it good and plenty. He's made trouble enough for me. This wild colt o' his," Harriman gestured with his thumb into the shack, "is showin' the stuff he's made of. I knew he'd been too good to last. I been watchin' him, hangin' around the store. Never liked his looks. Pretends he's learnin' Greta to talk French. Humph! She knows French better'n he does."

Harriman raised his voice toward the last, although Gail sat close beside him. Gail began to see a light. Harriman was jealous of Louis.

"I've promised to try to get him home to-night," Gail said, rising. "Can you rig up an ambulance for me?"

"I'll get a light truck with a high body. We can sling the cot in it." Harriman, too, rose.

"Not just now. Wait until Doctor Bruyère comes out and we know—I wouldn't want to take him home so ill—if there is any chance of his dying."

"Better to have him home than here, wouldn't it?" demanded Harriman gruffly. "We'll git blamed for enough, anyhow."

The careless, boorish speech brought a cold chill to Gail's heart. Truly, he would be blamed—by Eve.

"What you want?" Harriman's voice broke in on his meditation, addressing a man who came up in the semidarkness.

"I am looking for Louis Gascoigne," came the mellow, suave voice of Georges Rambault.

Gail laid a hand on Harriman's shoulder and advanced toward Rambault. "And I am looking for you, Rambault," he said, in a low tone, but sternly. "Come down the road a little; it is something I don't want to discuss right here."

GAIL strode off, fifty paces from the shack. Rambault followed nonchalantly, almost with a swagger.

"What do you want of Louis?" Gail demanded, turning to face Rambault.

They stood at a bend in the terraced roadway. Below ran another terrace, fifteen feet deep, below that another, and so on, to the bottom of the hill.

Tracks ran on these terraces, to carry dirt trains to the big fill. The flare of fires, now and then, threw the whole hillside into ruddy light. Gail studied Rambault's face in one of these bursts of hot brilliance.

"His sister has sent me to get him," replied Rambault. "She wishes him to be brought to his own home, where he belongs."

"She sent you? She trusts *you* to take him?" Gail's voice was scornful, condemning.

"Most certainly. And why should she not trust me? We are to be married next month."

Gail felt a cold chill sweep him. He set his teeth hard, to keep down the incredulous exclamation that sprang to his lips, then he said quietly:

"That is a lie, Rambault. No girl would marry a man who had poisoned her brother. Louis Gascoigne lies at the point of death from wood alcohol—which you gave him to drink."

"*That* is a lie!" countered Rambault sharply. "I gave him nothing to drink. Did you see him get anything in my place? No. Does he claim I gave him anything? I can prove that he had nothing from me save good Canadian ale. *You were with him after he left me.*"

There was no missing the implication in Rambault's words. Gail chose to ignore it, however.

"You can prove nothing to me, Rambault," he returned grimly. "I believe nothing you have told me, and especially that you are going to marry Eve Gascoigne. You have forfeited any right you might have to her regard. If she does not know it——"

"You will lie to her and help out!" sneered Rambault.

"If Louis Gascoigne dies," Gail said slowly, "your arrest will be sufficient information for her, I am sure."

"If he dies? If he dies, it will be on your hands."

"Rambault, let me tell you this. His sister saw him after he left your rooms, and she saw me drive directly to my shack with him, where he has since been under the doctor's care. I don't care a fig for your poisonous statements, any more than for the poison you peddle—but I tell you this, that you are going to get out of Axle. If you are not out of that place down there by eight o'clock to-morrow morning I shall throw you out. I don't want you around. Get out!"

Gail towered six inches above the stocky Frenchman. Menacing and powerful as he looked, he had no intention of laying a hand upon Rambault at this moment. Perhaps Rambault sensed this and hoped to draw an attack. He laughed in Gail's face.

"By what process will you dispossess me?" he inquired ironically. "It is not as easy to dispossess a tenant of the T. L. & A. station as to depose the president of the A. & T. You will throw me out? You and who else? The State troopers? You are all wrong. I have friends! Further, I have a lease —signed by John Vance, vice president of the concern which owns that building—and which employs you to attend to your business."

"John Vance will not harbor a potential murderer, even if he is paid a rake-off on the poison you handle," Gail snapped.

Again Rambault laughed sneeringly, tauntingly. "You are not pulling a bluff on poor François Gascoigne this time!" he crowed. "This is Georges Rambault, to whom you speak. Let us get down to business."

"Business?"

"The real root of your antagonism toward me. It is jealousy, of course! I have never interfered with you, in one thing. I have kept my hands clean. Now, you want to chase me out of Axle! Why, I can buy you and sell you twice over, engineer!"

He lowered his voice until it was almost a whisper, as he added: "If I do go, half your working force will go with me. I can call them off the job with a snap of my finger. I am talking business. Why waste words? I come on a legitimate errand. I come to take Louis Gascoigne to his home, to his sister who desires him home. Perhaps you think to hold him as a hostage, a decoy. Do not think of it. You haven't a chance. You philander too openly with the blonde."

A menacing, sinister note was in Rambault's voice, erasing completely the usually mild, mellow accents. The Lynx had crouched for the leap.

Gail, stung to action, white and furious, swung back his fist and sent it to Rambault's face, crying out hoarsely, as Rambault staggered back: "Get out! Clear out of camp! Go, before I beat you to a——"

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LYNX LEAPS.

THE LYNX had leaped and struck. Gail's words were cut off by the crash of a blow on the temple. Rambault, crouching, had rushed, with the hitch kick, swinging one foot with a flailing motion, while in the air. He had administered the vicious coup de pied.

Gail went reeling, then toppled, blinded. Rambault was upon him as he fell, kicking at his face, his head, his ribs silently, murderously. His breath came in panting gasps, like the breathing of an enraged beast. Gail was stunned by the kick, but the continued assault sent new pain shooting through him and roused him. He rolled over and over and off the edge of the terrace. Clutching, he fell down the perpendicular bank of earth and landed on his feet, close to the wall and within a few feet of steel rails which, had he fallen flat, would surely have broken his back.

He groaned as he leaned against the moist, crumbling earth, digging his fingers into it with the convulsion of pain that gripped him. His ribs seemed thrusting through one of his lungs, on his left side. He managed to stagger forward and, resting every few steps against the cliff, made his way slowly to where the terrace joined the climbing roadway. A great lump rose on his temple, and his fingers became wet when he felt of it. He was sick with pain, but fought it doggedly and kept on going up the hill. Rambault was not on the road; he had disappeared.

"I should have struck harder," Gail groaned, and this was his only regret.

He had struck at Rambault as instinctively as a man hits at a treacherous, spitting beast. That Rambault, in retaliation, had tried to kill him, he was well aware. Only one with murderous purpose kicks at a man's head when he is down.

Gail made his way toward his shack. His face was stained with red. The old injury to his ankle had been aggravated by the fall. Remembering Greta, he veered from the path to his shack and went toward the store, with the purpose of sitting on the steps and leaning against the building until he could breathe more easily. He saw mistily, so that it was not until he was almost upon the bowed figure, that he knew Greta was there.

"Greta!" he gasped.

"Ga-Gail!"

"Why, you—you are crying!"

She did not lift her head from her arms, bowed on her knees.

"What is it, Greta?" he asked, wondering what had happened.

"N-nothing. I'm afraid he'll die!"

"Louis? You mean——"

"They—they loaded him into the truck. Jim—Jim wouldn't let me stay any longer—not even to help lift the cot. Jim thought that I—he struck me and drove me out."

"Oh, Greta!"

Gail forgot his own desperate pain at this. It was as if some one had struck his sister.

"Georges Rambault came," she half sobbed. "Jim had sent for the truck and Doctor Bruyère—let them take him. I—I am afraid he will die!"

That cry, wrung from the tortured woman's heart, told Gail more than if she used words. He stifled a groan that came not so much from his smashed ribs as from his heart.

"Then Rambault took him?" he said, and he got to his feet.

His voice made Greta look up.

"Gail, what has happened?" she cried.

"I fell," he answered curtly. "Where is Jim?"

"He went with the truck. Gail, you must not——"

She put out a protesting hand. He took it, pressed it gently, pulled himself up, setting his teeth in his lip and walked away, straight, tall and steady, though it cost him torture.

"I'll go up and see if Louis is all right," he said, without turning his head.

"Oh—oh, thank you, Gail!" She choked it out in a hurried little gasp, her voice breaking with something that was not pain or sorrow.

Gail had one fixed idea. He must see Eve Gascoigne and learn, from her own lips, whether it was true, as Rambault had said, that she was to marry Georges. Gail could not, would not believe it yet.

AT the bottom of the hill, he heard a truck braking hard, and Gail tried to hurry. Going downhill was worse than going up, being more painful. His senses swam as he came to the fill and heard the truck, in first gear, grinding up the opposite slope toward the Gascoigne house. His head whirled with a deathly sickness. He mopped at his face with a handkerchief.

The sound of the truck brought Eve Gascoigne to the door. She was standing on the broad piazza, limned in the light, when Gail hurried up. He staggered as he approached, but managed to keep his head up. He got to the steps and clutched at the railing.

"You—you wanted Louis home?" he queried thickly. "You sent for him? Georges Rambault said——"

She gave a little gasp and he hesitated, wondering her expression. He could not see that she was looking, not at the truck, but at him.

"I am sorry that you think I"—he began—"that Louis——" He could not control his tongue for a moment. "Is it true, Eve," he said slowly, careful of his enunciation, "that you have promised to marry Georges Rambault?"

They were having considerable trouble in the truck, unlashing the cot from the stakes to which they had tied it, for they had carried Louis out of the shack on the canvas camp cot to put him in the improvised ambulance. Dimly Gail made out three figures. Harriman, Doctor Bruyère—and Rambault, he thought.

"Of what interest can that be to you?" came Eve's cold query. "Why do you ask?"

"Because——" His brain buzzed. He seemed carried swiftly backward, disembodied. Her face grew small, dark; she was slipping away from before his eyes. "Because"—he whispered desperately—"because I love you."

Weakly, foolishly, he grinned at himself an instant later. He had started falling, feeling backward, but his hold on the porch pillar kept him on his feet. It let him swing in a silly half circle and the pillar had come between him and Eve. He was stung to momentary clarity of vision by her voice.

"You dare, in your condition, to speak to me? You dare to question me?"

Then she ran down the steps to the truck. Gail sank down, too weak to

follow. He wiped his forehead with his hand. His breath caught in his lungs so that he gasped when he tried to inhale.

"Ah!" he groaned huskily. "She—she thinks—she thinks I'm drunk!"

The next he knew he was lying flat on his back, bathed in perspiration, the pain lessened some. By the swaying of his body he knew he was in the truck, homeward bound. His head was strangely light and seemed about to roll off. Just beyond his head he heard the rumble-grumble of Harriman's voice, an answer from Doctor Bruyère. A third man sat at the tailboard. He turned and Gail saw his face. It was not Rambault; it was Pasquale, one of the foremen.

"Stop!" he called. "I forgot to ask her again if——"

It ended in a groan as the truck lurched.

"Possibly two broken ribs," came Doctor Bruyère's voice. "And perhaps a slight concussion of the brain. I don't know how he even managed to get up the hill. Drive to the hospital, please."

"No!" shouted Gail, in a terrible voice.

The doctor said soothingly: "At your own shack, yes; I will care for you there. Oh, yes!"

Saving himself for a long time, Gail got the breath and the strength to ask another question.

"Rambault?"

"I did not see him after we left your shack, with Louis."

So Rambault had not gone up to the white house with Louis at all! Why not?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE GREEN MONSTER.

STRAPPED about the chest with surgeon's tape so tightly that it seemed like bursting his body to breathe, Gail went down the hill, before eight o'clock the next morning, and directly to the door of the suite of shabby rooms Rambault had taken in the railroad station.

He knocked at the door, but got no response. The door resisted when he tried the knob. He kicked at the panel and the hollow sound spoke of vacancy. He descended to the ticket office and inquired of Telesphore Gascoigne, a withered, round-shouldered caricature of his uncle, concerning Rambault.

Telesphore grinned insolently at Gail, knew nothing, shrugged, pretended to be very busy. When Gail was at a safe distance, he cackled with laughter.

"The coup de pied!" he shrilled to himself. "He got it!"

It seemed scarcely possible that Rambault had actually heeded his warning to clear out. Perhaps, though, fright at Louis' condition had caused the man to flee.

Returning toward his shack, along Axle's one street, Gail was conscious of many eyes upon him. He thought little of it, except that his bandages and his limp made him conspicuous. At his shack, he found Harriman in a towering rage.

"What is this, a Canuck holiday?" Harriman raged. "Half the men have laid off. That gang Louis Gascoigne was bossing hasn't showed up at all. More than two hundred are missing."

"They must have heard about Louis being sick or else, perhaps he has—— Have you heard anything from him?"

Gail was suddenly alarmed. He said nothing of Rambault's threat to call off the men. How could Rambault control them? It was Louis who had the labor contract. But was it really Louis? He recalled his own charge, when Rambault asked for the concession for Louis, that it would really be Rambault who would be the supply man.

"Wait until noon. If I don't find out the real reason then, I'll make a few inquiries in another direction," Gail advised Harriman.

Doctor Bruyère answered Gail's question about Louis with, "He rallies. He grows better."

Gail went to the store, ostensibly to buy matches, but really to see Greta. He found her calm, though pale and with a look in her eyes that hurt him.

"Louis is better," he informed her shortly.

"Thank you. Gail—please will you forget everything I said last night?" she implored, in a strained voice. "I was not myself."

"It will be better for all of us to forget things, Greta," he answered. "None of us were ourselves last night."

She did not answer, but her gaze went out the window to where Jim Harriman stood stolidly, his back to them. The look in her eyes intensified.

At noon Gail got hold of Le Maire, formerly Louis' foreman on the river and recently a gang foreman on the railroad job. Le Maire had reported for work as usual. Gail sent him to the Gascoigne house. Le Maire did not return.

Jim Harriman, cursing, climbed into a truck and charged up Mont de Gascoigne full tilt. He returned very soon, cursing more violently.

"Well, Louis Gascoigne forfeits his contract!" he sputtered. "He isn't furnishin' men."

"Did you see Louis?" exclaimed Gail.

"No, but I seen this Rambault. He seems to have charge of the place up there. He met me at the door and told me to get to hell out."

"Anything else?"

"Well, I asked him what about the men young Gascoigne was supposed to furnish for the job, and he said to ask the engineer—that's you, I guess—and you could tell me, all right, what about the men."

"I see. Well, it amounts to sabotage, Harriman. Rambault is trying to tie up the job. Last night he threatened to call the men off. I didn't believe him."

"Oh!" ejaculated Harriman, regarding Gail with sudden enlightenment. "He's the bird did that roughing to you, eh?"

"He got in a kick or two," Gail grinned. "I found he had been bootlegging and ordered him to clear out. It was Rambault fed Louis the stuff that laid him out. He has deserted his headquarters at the old station. Jim, you weren't yourself last night. You should not have let Rambault get Louis away from here—and there was another thing. I'm not going to mention it. I want to forget it. I'm hoping that every one will forget it. Greta——"

Harriman's face was swept by a spasm of emotion. He looked older and more hard.

"She better forget—*him,*" he gritted out, and walked swiftly away.

Gail's first impulse on hearing of Rambault's presence at the Gascoigne house was to go up and demand to see Louis, to force a show-down from Rambault. Second thought caused him to abandon the idea. It would mean he must face Eve and humiliate her. He had no doubt now that Rambault's declaration that she was pledged to marry him was the truth.

LABOR trouble was the most immediate problem. This was not a strike. No demands were presented. No complaints were made—but next day more men went off. Gail sought for a clew to the grievance, if one existed. The only hint he got was a remark from one workman, whom he heard in conversation with another, that the job was "too dangerous."

Accidents suddenly began to happen. Machinery went out of order. Harriman set a double night guard over the machinery and the dirt railroad lines. The accidents continued.

The woodsmen who remained loyal professed ignorance of the source of these accidents, but they began to mani-

fest an ominous uneasiness. Harriman roamed the works, glum and savage, making things worse instead of better by his morose attitude and snapped commands. Gail improved slowly, but was unable to clamber about the rugged slope of Knob Hill as much as he had used to do.

Harriman's increasing rage burst out in a quarrel with Greta, whose pale face and bleak eyes had been a continual reflection of her husband's glumness. The quarrel started when Harriman, looking over the pay-roll accounts, happened upon the deposit book Greta had used to keep an account of the fee money Louis had turned over to her for safe-keeping. The book was one of a dozen similar accounts, among them Pasquale's, and it would have attracted Harriman's attention no more than the others save for the name on the cover. He called Greta to the tiny cubicle built in a corner of the store, which served as the pay office.

"What's this mean?" he demanded curtly, rapping the deposit book with his knuckles.

"That is an account of deposits made by Louis Gascoigne," she responded.

"It's his fees, ain't it?"

"Yes. He asked me to bank them for him."

"Well, they're forfeited," Harriman declared. "He's broke his contract. I'm goin' to take charge of 'em myself."

"That is his money. You cannot take it. It would be——"

"Stealin'? Huh! He *gave* it to you, didn't he?"

"He—he trusted me with it," she answered.

"He gave it to you—and I'm takin' it away from you. Is that stealin'?"

"You have no right to take that money, if that is what your question means—no more right than you have to strike me—even if I am your wife."

Greta's face was white. Thick red flooded into Harriman's bearded cheeks. The muscles of his jaws bulged.

"I didn't strike you, I pushed you out, that's all."

Greta rolled up her sleeve and exhibited a black-and-blue bruise on her white arm.

The sight of the bruise seemed to anger Harriman still more. He seized her by the arm with a grip so fierce that she winced.

"I pushed you out. It ain't my fault if you was blind—with tears you was sheddin' over that young frog. You hit your arm on the door. I saw you. I pushed you. Now I'm goin' to hold you. Maybe it'll hurt—but I'm goin' to hold you. A man has the right to *hold* his wife."

Greta relaxed, ceased struggling. Her lips seemed to grow thin. "You can hold me this way," she said, in a low tone. "But you have no right to do it."

"I tell you this fee money is forfeited and I'm takin' it. That's my right. You deny that?"

"Yes."

"It's stealin', eh?

"Yes."

He could not browbeat her. Only by physical force could he conquer her—and that was not conquest, it was merely cruelty. The knowledge made him furious.

"What kind of a thief is it that steals a man's wife right from under his nose?" he demanded harshly.

Greta did not answer. She only closed her eyes against the pain of his fierce grip.

"That's stealin', too," he growled. "I'm goin' to stop that. You understand?"

Harriman let her go, pocketed the account book, but failed to take out of the safe the amount represented, and walked out without another look at Greta.

"I suppose you think," he said, as if

to himself, "that you're savin' for a trip to Rome."

The green monster, jealousy, had seared Harriman's soul.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL ROADS LEAD TO ROME.

THE next morning, Louis Gascoigne reported for work. To Gail, who was at the store, Harriman being at the other end of the works, he declared himself entirely ignorant of the defection of his men and at a loss to account for the "accidents" that had happened. He was eager to get back to work. Since Harriman had transferred one of his own foremen, Harding, to the canal excavation job, Gail directed Louis to go to the dynamite dump and secure blasting powder for clearing a new terrace on Knob Hill. Before he went, Louis promised to try to get all the men back to work.

Louis was pale, his face puffy and his eyes had a hang-dog, guilty expression. Gail refrained from questioning him concerning Rambault. He was anxious to have Louis actually at work and with some of his men back, before Harriman saw him.

When he left Gail, Louis Gascoigne went to the store to get the keys to the dynamite dump. It was usual for Harriman to sign an order for whatever dynamite was required, but since he was not at the store much of the time, the keys to the dump, gate and door were in Greta's possession.

The explosive was kept in a dugout behind a spur of rock some distance back of the store. It was surrounded by a high, tight, barbed-wire inclosure, with an iron gate. Of late an armed guard was on duty at the gate, day and night. The man was at the store when Louis appeared and it was to him that Greta gave the keys.

"Mr. Halleck will give you the order," Louis said.

"That is all right," Greta answered. "Are you feeling better, Mr. Gascoigne?"

"Thank you—I am all right. And you?"

His eyes lifted to hers for the first time. She evaded his gaze, affecting to be busy with some things on the counter.

"I am fine."

That was all that passed between them, but color rose in Greta's face as Louis went out—and the dogged, truculent look in Louis' eyes softened.

At the dump, after Louis and the guard had counted out the desired quantity of half-pound sticks of dynamite and carried it outside the inclosure, Louis looked about for the truck which was to carry it. It had not appeared.

"I shall have to phone the gatehouse and have a truck sent up," he said to the guard. "I'll take the keys back while you stand watch on this pile."

GRETA was alone when Louis returned. She stood behind the counter, her head bowed in deep thought, her right hand clasped upon her left arm. It was the arm which bore the mark of Jim Harriman's fist.

"Greta!" Louis burst out at once. "I have not had a chance to thank you for what you did for me when I was—sick. I have thought constantly of you since."

"What I did was nothing!" Greta protested, but the pink flooded her cheeks. She could never forget how pitifully he had clung to her hand.

Louis spoke in the patois, a language, that had furnished the first bond of sympathy between them. "I would know you, Greta, if I were dead," he declared. "Yes, you could bring me back to life—you only! It is because of you that I have come back here to work."

Greta's hands fumbled restlessly with some bright-colored tins on the counter.

Louis leaned over and grasped one hand, gently but firmly.

"This is the hand to which I clung and it has lain upon my heart ever since," he said. "Now, I shall never let it go. Greta, Greta, I am mad about you! I can keep it back no longer. Greta, I love you!"

"Louis! Louis Gascoigne! You must not—— You are not yourself! You must never talk to me like this, Louis!"

She struggled to free her hand, her face suffused with color. His black eyes were afire.

"Let go, Louis! Jim——"

"Jim!" he spat out. "Jim Harriman has made a slave of you! He has turned the most beautiful woman in the world into a drudge to make money for him. It is shameful. Oh, Greta, I must speak! I must tell you because—— Do you not care for me, even a little?"

"No," she denied. "I belong to Jim."

"That is a lie!" Louis cried, with vehement passion. "That old man! Greta, why do you throw yourself away on him?"

Greta went white. It was not the first time she had heard her husband described thus. Other men had made love to her; it was inevitable that the flaming glory of her beauty should make her the object of men's devotions.

"Jim Harriman thinks only of his dirt digging and how much money he can pile up like dirt," Louis went on. "You who should wear fine clothes and never be required to lift a finger to anything heavier than a flower! I worship you! Greta, do you know why I have saved that money? Why, I would not use it for anything—*except to take you to Rome!*"

Greta shrank as if she had been struck a blow. It was a double blow, for she had foolishly—and she thought lightly—confided to Louis, in one of their conversations, that she had dreamed for years of visiting the Eternal City. And now her husband had taken possession of the book of accounts she had kept for Louis Gascoigne. But what sent a chill through her was that Louis was promising to take her to Rome!

She wrenched her hand away. "Is that possible!" she cried harshly. "Do all you men promise Rome? Jim—and you?" She broke into mocking laughter. "You are stealing his stuff," she sneered, in English, and with as much rasping, slangy inflection as she could accomplish. Then she dropped back into the patois, swiftly warning him.

"Jim's coming! Go away! Go away!"

"Greta, I love you, no matter what you say to me," Louis persisted. He was very white. "I shall keep on telling you, always——"

He went out, passing Harriman, who did not look up.

Long moments after Louis had gone, Jim Harriman, his face deep-lined, stepped into the store and stood looking at Greta with an expression so strange that she was alarmed. His eyes were smoldering.

"Greta, we are going to lose heavily on this contract," he said. "I am sorry —for your sake."

She gaped at him dully. What did this mean? Was this some new way of inflicting torture? She braced herself for the shock—and it came.

"I had planned to take you——"

"Do not say to Rome!" she screamed.

CHAPTER XXI.

DYNAMITE.

GAIL was impatient for action against François Gascoigne. He no longer had any compunction against making an aggressive move upon the lumberman to root him from his intrenchment in the Whitewater. The New York office instructed him to report at once on the date he could deliver headwater.

Gail read and reread the letter, which

was unusually blunt and formal, bearing only the signature "Mountain Power Company" without Antrim's familiar initialed superscription.

"Vance!" Gail exclaimed, and put in a call, on the phone which had ben installed in his shack, for the M. P. office. He asked for Antrim when the call went through.

"Mr. Antrim is out of the city," was the answer of his secretary. "He will not be back for several days. I believe he is in Washington."

"Is Mr. Vance there?"

"I will give you Mr. Vance."

"This is Halleck speaking," said Gail, when the connection was made. "I have your letter. I can only repeat what you already know. So long as Gascoigne's jam blocks the river, I can give you no guaranteed date for delivery of headwater. My question is—how soon can I depend on starting to extend the A. & T. up to High Lake?"

"There is no immediate necessity of that, so far as I can see," came Vance's sharp response. "Action will be instituted against Gascoigne in due time, to dispossess him, force him out. Don't forget that it was your negligence that got us into this fix. We are sending notices to-day to the inhabitants of Axle, warning them to move out. We expect you to begin flooding the reservoir, for a preliminary test of the dam, next week at the latest."

Gail hung up the phone. Vance made his blond hair bristle. The injustice of Vance's demand, when he admitted they had not yet taken any legal action against Gascoigne, stung Gail like a nettle.

Gail was in an uneasy, nagged mood. His mending ribs annoyed him continually. He got little sleep. It was too easy for a man, lying on a cot opposite a screened door, to see the lights of a big, white house on the hill across the river.

Rambault was there—with Eve. The Lynx! Gail had ascertained that Rambault apparently had abandoned his quarters at the station. If he frequented Axle at all, Gail did not encounter him.

A telephoned report from the High Lake gatehouse demanded Gail's attention during the afternoon. There had been several days of rain, heaviest in the mountains, and the water in the lake had risen so high that there was danger of overflow, if not destruction of the new earthen dikes erected to impound the water. He promised to go up next morning with Harriman.

All night long the steam shovels worked now. It took but a few men to operate them and the dirt trains which carried away the earth and rock. Harriman roamed the works late at night and was frequently up before daylight. He was still trying to discover the source of discontent among the workmen. "Accidents" had ceased for the time, but Harriman kept guards at strategic points.

He relieved them at daylight personally, receiving their reports of the night's observation. He started out after a hasty breakfast, and his first call was at the dynamite dump. The guard had a tent just outside the iron gate and served night and day, sleeping most of the time between dawn and noon, in his tent.

THIS morning it was misty, as Harriman stepped out in his long, slow strides toward the dump. He could see little farther than his own length before him, for the sun had not risen. He carried no light, knowing his way about perfectly—and he preferred to give no warning of his approach.

The watchman was stretched out under his blankets, in the tent. Harriman kicked at the man's boot soles, expecting speedy reaction, but the slumberer did not stir. A moment later he was being shaken until his teeth rattled by an angry boss who shouted:

"You been drinkin' hooch! Where did you get that hooch! Tell me or I'll cave your head in!"

The man protested thickly that he had not had any hooch.

"No—but some beer," the Italian mumbled. "Only a leetle of the beer. One half bot' of beer an' it's Canada ale, fresh across the line. One half a bot'."

"Half a dozen, you drunken rat! You're fired. Wait a minute! Who gave you that ale?"

"Dunno who," the watchman protested surly, now that he was fully awake and understood that he had lost his job. "Fellow want light for his pipe. I tell him no light match aroun' here and tell him to git out, but he say thank you and geev me dreenk from hees own bot'—of ale."

"Ale—hell! It was hooch!"

"Santa Maria, no! It's beer, one half a bot'! He geev me all of eet an' I dreenk. Then I get sleepy. You know I been keep awake, almos'—— Wha's matter? you theenk I'm a bat?"

Harriman was pawing about in the grass for the bottle. "What did you do with it?" he demanded.

"T'row heem over de edge. I hear heem strak on stone, on the road below."

"Get out of here before I throw you over the edge. Get your time check this morning. Head out. Back to New York for you. Here, give me that gun! And the keys. You got 'em?"

"Aw, tha's all righ'," mumbled the surly Italian, handing over an automatic. "The keys is all right. I geev them to the gang boss who get the dynamite."

"What gang boss? I didn't send any one after dynamite. Did you get an order? Who?"

"Eet's all ri', I tell you, because I hear heem say the big chief he will geev her an order."

"Who?"

"The beeg chief, the engineer."

"He's got the keys?"

"Naw, its that young Frenchie who's goin' to blow the stump off the other side the hill. He taka them keys back to the store."

Harriman swore and rushed to the gate, tried it, circled the inclosure—and there, in the back, he found his first evidence of something wrong. It was the marks of wheels in the sod, narrow-tired wheels which at once suggested to him a carriage. When he returned to the gate, the watchman was gone in the fog.

Swearing, like a fiend, Harriman rushed to the back door of the long shack which served as store and living quarters for him and Greta. He woke Greta roughly, shaking her by the shoulder. She looked up into his red-rimmed eyes in fright.

"What's the matter, Jim?" she asked.

"You got the keys to the dynamite dump?" he demanded curtly. "Go get 'em."

Greta's eyes fixed in a stare. She struggled up on her elbow, her lips opened.

"Snap out of it!" Harriman said. "I want them keys."

"The keys—the keys are—I haven't got them, Jim!" Greta's voice broke. "What has happened?"

"You let—that—Frenchman—have them!" came Harriman's charge, deliberate, like a whiplash laid on several times.

"No, no! I gave them to the watchman."

"Well, the watchman sent them back to you—by that Frenchman."

"He—he must have forgotten—to give them back to me." Greta's voice trailed off.

"Forgot, eh? Louis Gascoigne was the man that got dynamite, the watchman says. You let him have it—without an order from me?"

"I—he—Gail gave me an order. I mean—he said Gail would. I saw him

talking to Gail before he came here—to the store. You ask Gail. Jim, there hasn't anything happened to—to——"

"To the Frenchie? No, but, by the Eternal, something is going to happen to him! He's stole the keys and—— We'll see whether he *forgot* or whether he's stolen some dynamite!"

Greta paled. For a moment Harriman stood over her and their eyes met—and in them was no love, no understanding. In Harriman's eyes was sneering, jealous hatred; in Greta's fear and loathing.

"I believe you gave him the keys," he said.

CHAPTER XXII.

RUMORS OF DANGER.

GAIL struggled to a sitting posture on his cot as Harriman burst into his shack.

"That damn Frenchie has stolen some dynamite!" Harriman declared furiously.

Gail grunted, as much from astonishment at the charge as from his sore ribs. "You mean Louis? Don't get excited, Jim. I gave him orders to take it and start clearing for the new terrace. What makes you think he stole it? Oh, I know; I haven't turned in the order to Greta."

"Order—hell! Some one was at the dump with a carriage last night. Gascoigne had the keys, kept 'em from yesterday. I'm going to find out——"

He rushed away and left Gail struggling into his clothes, roused to sudden anxiety. With a pickax Harriman forced the gate and the door of the dump. Gail found him inside the door, his shaking hands holding the tally card which always hung there, with its record of supply and removal. He was taking a rapid inventory of the stacked-up boxes.

He faced Gail, a moment later, with stark fear in his face. "Four hundred pounds gone without accounting for it," he announced hoarsely. "I ought to have killed that drunken guard."

"The guard was——"

"Drunk on hooch. He claimed it was nothing but a little Canadian ale, but I know better. It put him to sleep so sound I could hardly wake him up. I've fired him. I wish I hadn't. I'd like to ask him——"

"Canadian ale!" Gail exclaimed, with a flash of memory. "What makes you think Louis Gascoigne had anything to do with this?

"Because he kept the keys—the *keys!*" Harriman screeched, half beside himself. "Because this place was opened with the keys. Take a look at them buggy tracks back of the dump."

Gail shook his head when he saw the deep-cut marks of a narrow-tired wheel in the sandy sod. "A buckboard," he said, "and heavily loaded. Jim, the place to look for that stuff is up the mountain there—on the river trail."

Harriman snorted. "What makes you think so? If it ain't planted all over these works——" His face went gray. "In the fill!" he half whispered. "They're goin' to blow it!"

"I don't believe so. They've taken it upriver to blow the jam—not the dam, Jim."

Harriman gaped, open-mouthed.

"When you said 'Canadian ale,' it reminded me of something," Gail went on. "The last time I was at Rambault's place in the station he spoke of having some Canadian ale, just over the line and——"

"That's what the guard said the fellow told him who gave him some. I wish I could find that bottle he threw away."

"Never mind dead soldiers, Jim; our jog is to find Georges Rambault."

Gail was starting off along the deep-marked trail of the buckboard. It ascended close to the crown of the hill, avoiding the terraced roadway. Harri-

man followed him in stunned silence for a few yards, then he burst out:

"Rambault? It was Louis Gascoigne had the keys to the dump, can't you get that?"

"I know. But it was Rambault had Canadian ale. Look here, Jim, I feel responsible for this. I sent Louis to work without letting you know; in fact, I didn't see you after he came back on the job, and the news from High Lake —the dikes endangered—drove the matter completely out of my mind. But even if Louis had the keys, it doesn't mean he took the stuff last night. Not to me."

"It does to me! Greta——"

"Jim, you're not capable of reasoning straight—in that direction. I know it. Now you come with me. I tell you that we'll find the dynamite when we find Rambault—at the end of this buckboard trail. Get your old guard and give 'em guns. We'll take a three-seater and start up the river."

Harriman stood stock-still, his head swinging slowly about until he faced the white house. He nodded in that direction.

"Why not start up the hill over there?" he demanded. "It's there you're more likely to find Rambault—and Louis—and the dynamite."

"Not unless these wheel tracks take us to the river's edge, Jim," Gail contradicted, with a grim smile. "Think straight!"

"Hell, you don't think straight when you look up at that white house yourself," growled Harriman.

Gail did not answer. For a moment the two faced each other. Harriman spoke again, with a quality in his voice that was like the rough edge of a saw.

"I'm thinkin' of the dam," he said. "You can go up the river, if you want to. I'm goin' to look over every inch of these works. I'll send you some men —Pasquale and Harding and one or two others—if you want 'em. I won't go upriver. I won't leave these works. If they go up—I'll go up with 'em."

Gail agreed to the separation—but he left with Jim Harriman's last words ringing hollowly in his brain. There seemed something sinister, almost prophetic in them.

Harriman's first move was to station a man at the dynamite dump, one of his "old guard." He sent three others of this outfit down to the village to meet Halleck. Then the contractor resumed his tour of the works, after securing a gun from his quarters.

GAIL went directly to the village livery barn, where hack service of limited sort was furnished. He hired a team of strong draft horses and hitched them to a democrat wagon. Pasquale and Harding arrived before the team was ready, bringing with them Steenrod, a hard-bitten Texan who, by the tides of chance, had drifted from the range up into the northern hills as a locomotive engineer—and who was handy with one gun or two. This morning he wore two, bulging at his belt beneath his coat.

"The boss says the telephone line to High Lake is out of commission," Harding reported to Gail.

"Climb in," Gail ordered. "Steenrod, you handle the reins. You're the horseman. Drive hard."

"Yup. Which way?"

"Up the river road. The hostler rented his other rig—a buckboard—last night. It hasn't come in yet. He 'didn't know' the man he rented it to."

"Um! I'll try to pick up the tracks. I used to be good at trackin' along the tricks."

The democrat wagon was two miles up the river when the camp, down at Axle, began to wake up. One man slept like a log. It was the discharged guard who had staggered down the hill to the main camp, found a vacated bunk and dropped into it as if he were drugged.

He spoke to no one, awake or asleep. But it was strange how the alarm spread, like clouds of smoke in a low wind.

At first, the rumor was that a large amount of dynamite was mislaid, somewhere about the works. The camp woke up in more than one sense. Not a man would go up on the terraces, and the fill was avoided as if it were a plague spot.

Jim Harriman's tour was a lonely walk. His orders to his remaining foremen, to "continue work as usual," were not carried out. Fires burned low in the boilers of the locomotives, the shovels, the donkeys. The rumor grew and became a distorted, fantastic tale. Every fire box was "planted" with dynamite; the fill was peppered with it; it lay beneath the rails of the dirt-railroad lines.

This was the talk. Strangely, none of it came to Harriman's ears for some time—but it reached Greta very early. Bitter as she was, she was loyal to the job. Axle dam had come to mean more to her than she realized, more in fact than anything else.

Greta refused to believe that it was Louis Gascoigne who had robbed the dynamite cache—if it had been robbed. She would not at first believe the rumors which were brought to her at the store, and she suspected that her husband had been trying to frighten her, with his mysterious allusion to Louis and the missing keys—no more information than that had he given her. She did all she could to counteract the wild stories, which grew wilder by the moment.

Callers at the store became fewer and fewer as the cloud of danger that hovered, in men's minds, above Knob Hill became darker and more ominous. The telephone rang constantly. Most of the inquiries were for Harriman. Bravely she told them:

"He is out on the works, as usual."

CHAPTER XXIII.

FACE TO FACE.

AT last Greta could stand the strain no longer. She locked the store and walked down into the village. The street was alive with men, an excited, uneasy, gesticulating throng of idlers, milling about like strikers. She went direct to the post office.

She got a sort of composite story of the wild rumors in circulation. Her quick mind detected one central theme to them all, like a scarlet thread through a rope. This was the reiterated declaration that a warning had been issued several days before—and that the men who had quit work, at the first, had been given the warning direct.

A warning! Then, this was the climax—or the verge of it—of a plot which had been hatched up at about the time the first Frenchmen dropped off. Greta felt the tightening grip of nameless terror, the fear of the unknown, sinister force behind this mystery.

Sick at heart she turned to retrace her steps up the hill—for she had nowhere else to go—and she came face to face with Eve Gascoigne, at the post-office door. A pair of black eyes met her own with a compelling stare. An eager question burst from the pretty, pouting lips.

"You are Greta Harriman?"

"Yes. And you are Eve Gascoigne!"

It was the first time either woman had seen the other face to face, but Eve had the advantage. She had heard Louis rave in his delirium, calling out this woman's name, babbling for the soothing touch of her hand. And Eve had seen her, once, through a telescope, a blurred impression of her. Eve was taken aback when she first looked into Greta's eyes. She had built up a different picture of Greta, the picture of a wicked woman, a siren who had lured Louis into trouble. This fresh-faced, clear-eyed, beautiful young woman with

the drooping mouth, full of trouble, was not at all the type Eve had imagined.

"You see I—— My brother has——" she began, stammering, then flushed. "You are *Mrs.* Harriman, the wife of the contractor?" she finished bluntly.

"Yes, I am Mrs. Harriman." A flush rose in Greta's white cheeks, as she felt the reproach of Eve's emphasis.

But Eve was not reproachful; she was half incredulous. Eve had seen Jim Harriman several times in the village, and had thought of him as an old man and of his wife as a faded vixen.

"Oh, tell me, please!" Eve appealed, drawing Greta to one side. "What is this trouble in the camp? What is all this about dynamite planted in the works, the dam, the machinery? Do you know where Louis is? He did not come home last night. Oh, tell me, if you do know!"

Staring men began to cluster about them, every man seeking to learn something new from every one else, so that he could repeat it, trade it for more. They all knew Greta of the golden hair and so did they all know Eve. There was, too, a hint of drama in the way the two women faced each other—and more than a hint of contrasting beauty.

Greta thought quickly. This girl had cause for anxiety even greater than her own—if she had any inkling of the suspicion which hovered over her brother. She felt an instinctive sympathy for Eve

"It is too crowded, too public here," she murmured. "If you will come up to the store, to my place——"

"I—I am to meet my father at the station when the morning train arrives," Eve objected. "I am anxious to find Louis, before it arrives—and it is almost due."

François Gascoigne was coming home! Greta grasped at this news as if it presented, somehow, an answer to this whole ghastly riddle.

"Perhaps your brother will be at the station," she suggested. "I will go with you, if you wish. We may be able to find a quiet corner there. I know very little save what I have heard, but——"

"Yes, yes! Come with me, please! That is good of you. I am so worried —because of father, you see. He will hear only the wild rumors—and I must know the truth."

From around the corner of the store, as they stepped to the sidewalk, came a wagon piled high with furniture. It halted them. Both noticed for the first time the evidences of hurried evacuation, all along the street. It looked as if the villagers had taken such alarm they were fleeing from this danger. Neither of the women knew of the recently issued removal orders from the M. P. offices.

CHAPTER XXIV.

REVELATION—AND A RISING RIVER.

THE railroad station was crowded, the excuse of a train about to arrive attracting more of the aimless mob of workmen than any other thing. Some had heard that François Gascoigne was coming home. There was no privacy for Eve and Greta in the waiting room nor on the platform. Greta shook her head, smiling ruefully. The two had drawn close together; they were very much alone in this throng of men.

"I think I know where we can get away from this crowd and be alone," Eve whispered in Greta's ear; "I have been all over this old station, when it was my uncle's house. The upper floor is empty. It has always been open. We can sit at a window and watch for the train. Perhaps we shall see Louis."

Greta followed her up the dusty, rickety stairway. Eve went to a door which stood open, a little way along the upper hall. But as she was about to enter, a man backed out, dragging a big circular table, covered with green cloth. At Eve's exclamation, he ducked, grinned and struggled to make way for her.

"Why, Jean!" she said. "I did not know you lived here!"

"Pardon! It is not I who live here. I only come to pack up and move out the things of M'sieu' Rambault. Pardon! You will enter?"

"Georges is here?"

"No. No, there is no one. It will be all right for you—and the other mamselle. M'sieu' Rambault is finish wit' the place now. I shall leave chairs for you. It is a terrible crowd downstairs, is it not?"

Jean vanished, ducking and grinning.

"He is an old servant of ours," Eve explained to Greta. "I thought he lived here—and was moving, like the others."

"Did he say that Mr. Rambault lived here?"' Greta queried.

"It is—— It was, I believe, his office."

Eve was staring at the green-baized table curiously, where it leaned against the wall. A strange article of furniture, so large, so perfectly round of top, with funny little shelves beneath its top. Eve remarked about it, with a little laugh. She stepped inside the room, then through the door between the two rooms of Rambault's old suite.

THERE was a bizarre atmosphere about it which piqued and puzzled her. The inner room had many chairs, many cuspidors, a litter of cigar and cigarette stubs—and along one wall were stacked cases filled with empty bottles. The rooms smelled of stale smoke—and something else, acrid and unpleasant to her delicate nostrils. Old clothing hung on hooks behind a door. She recognized a coat sweater, once worn by Rambault. She turned to the window, which was open wide.

"We can sit here," she said to Greta. "If you will, please. Now tell me——"

"You are sure no one will come and find us in such a place?"

"It is only an old office, abandoned." Eve laughed—but on a false note. It was scarcely the right term for Rambault's establishment, which shrieked loudly of a business that was sinister.

In moving a chair, Eve slid a poker chip from its seat. The poker chip rolled round and round on the floor. Eve regarded it as if fascinated. Then her face flooded with color—but she tossed her head as she met Greta's inquiring eyes.

"M'sieu' Rambault," she said, with a smile, "appears to have been entertaining his friends here. He has many affairs—of business—and naturally——"

Her voice trailed off. She looked out the window. She was conscious of an ironic reversal of her position. She had, for a long time, told herself she would like to face this "blond siren" who had decoyed Louis into strange ways—and now she could not even meet that limpid, wise gaze from the beautiful blue eyes. She had led this woman unwittingly into her fiancé's rooms—and she saw a gaming table rolled out the door, a poker chip on the floor, hosts of empty liquor bottles stacked up.

The worst blow, however, came when she swept her gaze about the room again, and her eye lighted on a cap, lying in a corner. It was Louis' cap, one he had worn on the day of his triumphant finish as boss of the railroad job—and the next night he had been brought home without it. Yes, she remembered —that he had been bareheaded when she met him with Halleck on the street. The first glimmer of truth began to thrust itself upon her.

"It is like the judgment day," came Greta's voice. She was regarding the exodus of excited Axleites, the milling, shouting, gesticulating throng on the station platform.

"Tell me, what is the cause of all this, Greta Harriman!" Eve burst out.

"They are excited because it is believed some dynamite has been stolen," Greta replied. "I do not know how much—or if it is so. All I do know is

that Mr. Halleck and some of our men have gone up the river road, in a hurry —and they are armed. You have heard the rumors and wild stories, in the village. I cannot believe they are at all true. But—I am in agony. The keys to the dynamite storehouse were in my charge. A—a man came yesterday and got them. He wanted dynamite for blasting stumps, on Knob Hill. He—he forgot to return the keys—and I—I forgot to ask him for them."

"And this man? Who was it?" asked Eve.

Greta seized Eve's hand. "It was your brother, Louis."

"Louis!"

"But I do not believe he—that he stole any dynamite," Greta declared. "Louis is a good boy. He only forgot to return the keys and some one——"

Some one stole them from Louis, do you think?" Eve's voice was cool, though her eyes burned. "And that one? Who is that?"

"I do not know. I can only guess at most of it. Whoever took the dynamite has got the watchman drunk—or drugged. The man swore that he had taken only a little Canadian ale like the——"

Greta checked herself—but she could not hide from Eve's sharp eyes, the wooden cases, piled at the back of the room. Eve turned and glanced fixedly at the green-glass necks of bottles protruding from the top row of cases.

"And why should any one wish so much dynamite?" Eve whispered.

"I do not know!" cried Greta. "I can say that my best guess is—the log jam."

"Ah! Greta Harriman, tell me all that you *think*."

"I have told you. I think that Louis —or some one else—must have wanted dynamite for the jam. But I am sure Louis himself would not steal—that way. For he knew that I was responsible for the keys, you see?"

Eve's face was paler than Greta's, though her skin was more dark. She got from her chair and stood staring fixedly through the window. Beyond the single track of the railroad, the river was to be seen, from shore to shore. From here, too, the brown bulwark of the earthen fill, the bright concrete of the new structure which controlled the flow of waters in the diversion canal, the whole impressive scene of the construction works were plainly visible, for the window faced from a corner of the building.

"Look out there!" cried Eve, pulling Greta up beside her. *"Do you see that the river is rising?"*

CHAPTER XXV.

THUNDERING LOGS.

STEENROD was not a conversationalist, for which Gail was grateful, but when the Texan did talk he said things.

"Buckboard went up here last night with a load," he remarked, when they had got out of the village and began the ascent of the rough mountain road. "One horse, weighs about nine hundred fifty. Pullin' hard. Giddap!"

He urged the lean, hardy horses into a trot and kept them at it. It was a cold morning for June and the woods were wet. Gail sat in silence beside Steenrod, bitten by anxiety. They came to the density of Axle forest at four thirty. At five they were at the beginning of the second rise, a long, steady ascent which brought the road to the brink of the ravine where flowed the Whitewater.

At the top of the first long hill, Steenrod stopped the team to breathe. A view of the river, flowing directly toward them from around a bend, attracted Gail. The stream looked tiny, far below through the tops of evergreens and spindling hardwoods. Gail got out of the rig and walked along the

edge of the ravine. He found an outthrust rock from where he could get a clearer, longer vista up the stream.

For a long time he studied the flow of the river, then went back to the democrat wagon and climbed in beside Steenrod.

"No more stops," he said. "The river is flooding. Something has happened up above already. We may be too late."

"Giddap! You think they'd blown the works at High Lake?"

"Or opened the gate. I won't make any predictions. We are two miles from the trail that runs into No. 3. We'll know more about the business when we get there."

"Giddap!"

The horses got no more rest until the trail was reached. There they were halted, covered with lather, blown and panting. Every one jumped out, instinctively anticipating a climax. Gail noted that every one of the three men was armed. The "old guard" was rough and ready—for action, but they stood silently, awaiting his orders.

"I don't want to hear any guns popping up here," he said, "unless——"

His voice was drowned out in the roar of a tremendous blast which shook the ground beneath them. All started toward it as if it were a signal, pell-mell down the path toward No. 3. A series of rumblings followed the big blow. One of the men shouted to Gail, who coughed painfully at the unusual exertion:

"They're still at it. How about popping now?"

Gail laughed aloud and raced on. He was leading the others despite his sore ribs and his bandaged torso. The blast had blown a load of anxiety from his mind. He was only eager to get there in time to see——

The rumbling noises continued.

"They must be—blowin' hell—out of her," panted Harding, at his heels.

"That isn't blasting!" Gail yelped. *"It's logs on the move."*

They ran into a burst of crashing thunder which made their ears ring as they emerged from the thicket of firs and into the clearing at the west end of the dam—or what had been a dam.

Gail gave a whoop as he saw what had happened. The dam was buried, burst, thrust down by an uneasy mass of writhing, heaving timber, logs shooting forward and upward. The dam had vanished. Only a bit of the earthen embankment remained to show where it had been. From bank to bank was a groaning sea of moving wood.

The reservoir was flooded even higher than the top of the dam, with a tremendous head of water, pushing, pulling, boiling and spurting in and through and behind the log jam. The resistance of the stacked-up logs caused the water to rise more rapidly. As it rose, it surged forward. It lifted the jam almost as a unit and thrust it ahead, disintegrating, thrashing and thundering, like a living thing. The black horse with the white mane, broken loose, was again galloping down the mountain track. Gascoigne's drive was once more on its way.

"Whoopee!" burst the wild yell from Gail's throat, the victory cry of the riverman. "There she goes! I don't care now if they've blown the bottom out of High Lake! The jam's broken! We can build dikes and gates again."

"Anyhow, those fellows know how to handle dynamite," observed Steenrod.

The remark brought home to Gail the almost forgotten object of his coming here—to find the man who had stolen the dynamite. There was no one in sight, up or down the shore. Gail went to the edge of the ruined dam and sought for sign of some living thing. A movement, far down the rock gorge at the first bend, caught his eye. He waited a long time before he saw it again, then made out the darting form

of a riverman running out to dislodge a tangle, retreat quickly ashore after a thrust or two of his peavey.

"They're on the head of the drive!" he shouted. "Running 'em down. Steenrod, you and Harding go up and Pasquale and I will go down. Comb the shore. Look for Louis Gascoigne."

"You think he blew her?" queried Steenrod.

"Who do you think?" Gail retorted.

"I jest think," was Steenrod's cryptic comment.

Gail looked at him a second time. What he saw in the steady gray eyes brought a grim smile to his face.

"You come with me," he said. "Pasquale and Harding can go upriver. I'm looking for Rambault."

"Kind of like to see him myself." Steenrod grinned. "He slings a wicked mixture which he calls Canadian ale. I got tangled up with it, once—together with a slippery pack of cards. I'd like to meet up with him."

Gail turned to Pasquale. "Keep on going upriver until you find some one—up to High Lake if necessary. If you happen to run across Georges Rambault anywhere, bring him down here. I want to see him."

Though Gail was more than anxious to apprehend Georges Rambault, it was Louis Gascoigne that he sought first. The memory of a certain pair of velvety-black eyes, filled with reproach and pain, was vivid.

"Looks like they used a lot of stuff," Steenrod observed, as they faced down the river.

FURTHER evidence of the great force of the "blow" was scattered all along the shore and far back into the firs. Logs had been flung bodily out of the jam; others were blown to slivers. Gail stooped over and picked up a twisted, iron bar which he recognized as having been bolted through a twelve-inch hemlock timber in the middle of the sluice-gate "crib." It had been torn out and tossed ashore.

The river trail ended abruptly a few yards down from the dam. The rapid rise of the Whitewater had torn loose a great section of the bank and the rush of wood and water had carried it completely away. A twenty-yard gap stretched ahead and below the sheer granite wall of the gorge, a gap filled with raging water and rumbling logs. To reach the other side of the gap would necessitate the ascent of the gorge cliff, which rose thirty feet high. A little earth slung to the bottom of the wall, some roots thrust into cracks. Gail halted.

He looked up, then down—and his eyes lighted upon something which sent a shock through him. It was the body of a man lying half in the water, his hands clutching the ends of ragged roots. Logs battered at him, threatened him with death.

"Steenrod, you can run faster than I can—now," he said to the Texan. "Go back to that smashed cabin and find a rope or a pike pole. Hurry! It is Louis Gascoigne."

"Watch yourself!" Steenrod cautioned, as he saw Gail testing that scanty line of earth along the base of the cliff.

Gail kicked for footing in the wet, slippery, crumbling dirt. Once he got his foot set, but when he was about to swing out along the cliff, he slipped and only a slim vine root saved him going backward into the river. Louis' body was being swung and swayed by the current and the thumping logs in a dangerous fashion. Gail got halfway to him when he had to halt and hang on for his own life.

The flow of the jam made Gail dizzy. He closed his eyes and waited for strength. Then a coiling line settled about his shoulders and was drawn swiftly taut. Steenrod, with the skill of a roper, had flung it from atop the cliff, where he stood with the rope bent about

his hips, sliding over one knee. The end of a pike pole projected over the edge of the gorge.

Gail signaled Steenrod to get the pike pole to him. The Texan slid it down, then let it drop and heaved back on the rope as Gail lunged for the tool. He caught the pike pole, but lost his toe hold and swung heavily on the hemp. By the aid of the pike pole, with its good tamarack handle, he recovered balance and foothold. Steenrod snubbed the rope about a tree and sat down, on the very edge of the cliff. Gail, looking up, saw the Texan calmly flipping a cigarette into shape with one hand—and he grinned. Gail began working himself along until he hung directly over Louis Gascoigne.

The wash of the water already had loosened the tough roots upon which Louis had a deathlike grip. Gail got the hook of the pike into the unconscious man's clothing, then he had to signal for slack so he could get down and cut the roots with a knife and free Louis' desperate hold. He got his arms under Louis' shoulders and straightened, knee-deep in the water, with logs hammering at his shins.

Steenrod stood up and, setting his heels, lifted the two a foot, rested, bent and lifted again. Each time he gained he slipped his slack about the sapling he had used as a snubbing post—and Gail was grateful he had chosen the taciturn fellow. It was a fight to get back to the trail.

He had the dead weight of Louis' body dragging at him, and the rope about his chest was like a cutting band of steel. Like a steeplejack he walked along the cliff, bowing his body outward to keep Louis from being banged against the rock. His feet slipped more than once and he brought up with a sickening jolt as the noose tightened about him. He was almost insensible, when at last he got to solid ground and let Louis lie inert.

Steenrod descended and found them both prostrate. Gail was conscious, but helpless for many moments. Louis was cold and blue about his lips. When Steenrod, under Gail's direction, began working over Louis, using artificial-respiration tactics, Gail caught the odor of liquor at the first gasp from Gascoigne's lungs.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OVER THE WIRE.

LIKE a revelation, there flashed through Gail Halleck's brain a picture of what had happened at No. 3. And like a lightning bolt, rousing him from painful proneness, came the threat of greater danger.

Rambault, with his liquor—Louis—dynamite—High Lake!

Gripped firmly in one of Louis Gascoigne's hands was a short length of waterproof fuse, such as is used to carry fire to submerged dynamite.

"Yes, Louis blew this," Gail muttered, sitting up and rubbing his sore body. "But Rambault——"

"We better make it fast up to High Lake, eh?" queried Steenrod.

"I don't know how fast I can move," Gail groaned.

"You moved fast enough down there in the gorge," the Texan returned admiringly. "Thought you was goin' to take a trip down the river with the jam before I could sling my noose over you. Say, this lad's in bad shape, I guess. He's blue in the face. Must have gulped a lot of water."

"And something else. Canadian ale, for instance."

"Yeah. Anyhow, I don't know but what he ought to have a doctor look him over, pretty quick."

Gail frowned. He crawled over to where Louis lay and bent over him. Then he nodded his head.

"Steenrod, we've got to go down to Axle," he said. "Not only because this man's likely to die—if we don't get

medical aid for him—but the drive and the headwater will hit our dam pretty hard. I'd take him down, alone and leave you up here to get——"

He paused, regarding the Texan critically.

"You mean to *get* him?" Steenrod drawled, his hands hanging meaningly over those two bulges under his Mackinaw.

"No, I don't mean that," Gail said. "So you had better drive the democrat. I'll stay."

Steenrod's face fell, but he stooped and lifted Louis, with a dexterous shifting of his body, and stamped up the path toward the main trail.

Gail followed. They passed the ruin of the old log cabin where Steenrod had dug out rope and pike pole. Something strange tinkled in Gail's ears, above the grind and groan and fume of the moving jam. He refused to believe it could be what it seemed, at first. Again it came, a tiny, metallic, whirring tinkle.

"Steenrod!" he called. "Did you hear anything that sounded like—like a bell?"

Steenrod swung about. "A telephone bell?" he inquired. "Wouldn't be surprised. I seen a telephone under the edge of that door"—he nodded toward the fallen shack—"when I was after the rope. Yeah, I hear it."

GAIL plunged for the door. The cabin had been blasted backward, and its front stood at an angle of forty degrees with the ground. The lower portion of the door Steenrod had kicked or pounded loose, to crawl beneath it. Gail thrust his head and shoulders into the hole which had admitted the slim Texan. He reached the telephone. a portable set standing on the floor, as the bell began buzzing again. Some caution made him cover the transmitter with his hand while he raised the receiver to his ear.

"And I'm going to finish the job, as I told you." The voice of Georges Rambault surged into Gail's perception. Rambault was speaking in French. "Louis did the job at No 3 and I shall do my part up here."

"But the dam!"

Gail started as if he had been struck. That was the voice of Eve Gascoigne, crying out sharply, anxiously. He held his breath and waited, covered his open ear with his palm while he held the mouthpiece against his chest, the better to hear those faint accents, coming over the buzzing, roaring line which ran up from Axle to High Lake, with connections at the several reservoirs.

"The devil with the dam!" Rambault's voice returned harshly. "Let it go out. You tell me that there are no workmen on the fill to-day. Good! It is the right time. The flood will sweep everything before it!"

"But what is it you are going to do, Georges?" came Eve's inquiry. "You tell me that Louis has blown the jam at No. 3 and the logs have started moving downstream."

"I think so. But I am not sure. I got no report from him at all. I heard the blow. It is true there is a good head laid up in No. 3, for they had to open the gate up here, two days ago, to relieve the pressure on the dikes. However, they have strengthened their dikes and now there is plenty of water—plenty to force everything. It will sweep out No. 1 and No. 2, clean the river—and when it strikes Axle——"

"Georges, you must not! Think!"

Gail's heart leaped until it seemed as if he must suffocate. He lay on his side, one elbow crushed under him—and crushing against the recently strained fracture of his ribs.

"There will be danger to Louis, don't you see? Perhaps he is at work on the jam."

Gail replaced the receiver on its hook with desperate care, crawled swiftly out of the ruin and yelled at Steenrod. The Texan had been waiting, but now, with

his burden, was moving slowly up the trail.

'Steenrod! Come back!"

The Texan returned, his face a study.

"We must try to revive him," Gail panted, and helped Steenrod ease Louis' limp form to the ground. "We've got to revive him and make him talk—over that telephone. Hurry! Get water!"

"Say, it ain't no use!" Steenrod snapped impatiently. "The man's gone for a good long time. He couldn't talk if we did bring him back. His head's hurt."

"All right," Gail bit off the words. "Never mind. I'll——"

He was back in the hole beneath the caved door, diving head foremost, reckless of himself. But gently he lifted the receiver, listened an instant, gently replaced it. Then he thrust two smooth stones into his mouth, worked them into his cheeks and, grabbing up the receiver roughly, began to turn the crank of the portable set and to shout: "Hello, hello!"

"Oh, hello, Georges? Is that you?" He spoke in a gruff, panting patois hurriedly. "Georges, this is Louis. Hold the blow! I'm hung up, here at No. 3. I've got to have more stuff. Understand? More dynamite. Send me down—— No, I will send a man after it. Here——"

Deliberately Gail jiggled the hook up and down, shouting: "Hello! Hello!" Again he came in on the line.

"Don't blow the gate, Georges, until you hear from me. I've got them working on the jam and——"

"Hurry up!" came the quick command from Rambault, and Gail knew his deception had worked.

He hung up the receiver. When he lifted it again slowly, carefully, no voices sounded.

Fifteen minutes later, in the democrat wagon, Steenrod in the driver's seat and the other two seats taken out, Gail sat on a bunch of hay, with Louis Gascoigne's head in his lap. The horses were headed down the trail toward Axle. Steenrod drove like a fiend.

Gail suffered from every jolt, but set his teeth and bore it. Dazzedly, as through a mist, he glimpsed the Whitewater, at the point where he had got out on the way up to view it. No logs appeared.

"We—we're beating the drive, Steenrod!" he gasped. "Keep going—hard."

CHAPTER XXVII.

AT THE THROTTLE.

FUMING like one in the grip of an insane passion, Jim Harriman, charged here and there about the works, seeking for the men who had vanished. Not even those accustomed to sleep in tents alongside the steam shovels, or in the high coops which housed the donkey engines could be found. He climbed from one terrace to another. A dirt train, half the cars filled, stood with its locomotive steaming at low pressure on the newly laid track. The railroad ran about the hill, in a slowly descending grade, until it had looped the hill twice, when it shot off at an angle down to the fill. At the middle of the broad earthen bulk the rails ended. A strong bulwark or bumping post had been driven deep in the soil.

Harriman found the steaming engine deserted, too. Clambering into the cab, he stood looking down the hill. Not a machine moved; not a human being was visible in the entire expanse of fresh-turned earth. Over at the new cement gate a faithful tender paced the wall. Every other man on the job had gone. The hum of many voices rose, from Axle village; there was the faraway hoot of an engine whistle.

Jim Harriman bowed his head between his hands and burst into a flood of profanity. After a time he was silent. But again his voice rumbled out, one word in a terrible voice.

"Greta!" he said, and his face was contorted into a twisted mask of jealousy and hatred.

And then, as if in answer, Greta's voice came to his ears. "Jim, Jim, where are you? Oh, Jim, I must find you!"

Greta toiled wearily up the steep grade, walking at times on the high-raised ties, at times in the shifting, loose soil which made footing difficult and walking a painful effort.

"Jim, Jim Harriman!" she called.

Harriman thrust head and shoulders out the cab, one hand on the whistle cord. An unlovely smile was on his face. Greta stood for a moment, staring wide-eyed at him, then she burst out, running toward him, on the ties:

"Jim! Where have you been? You've got to do something, quick. They've blown the jam, up the river. It's coming down—*against the dam!*"

Harriman's response halted her. It was a harsh laugh, then the harsher questions. "Well, who did it?"

A sob choked her. She swayed, her head moving from side to side. "Eve—Eve Gascoigne telephoned—and Rambault—he is going—to blow the High Lake works—too."

"Who blew the jam? It was Louis Gascoigne, eh? Louis—Louis—— *You* did it!"

Harriman seemed insane. The new danger, if it penetrated his warped mind at all, served only to bring his growing hysteria to a head. He pulled the whistle cord, and the whistle pealed out a warning, sharp signal.

Then he moved his hand to the throttle. There was a hiss of steam, a trembling, hoarse puff, and the wheels of the locomotive spun round on the rails. It moved slowly forward. For a moment Greta stood transfixed between the rails. It was not until the whistle screeched again that she seemed to comprehend her danger—and Jim Harriman's purpose.

He was taking the train down the hill.

"Oh, thank Heaven!" she murmured.

She stood aside. The loaded train began to curve about the hill, leaning oddly where the tracks had been ballasted high on the outer side of the curve. It quickly gathered momentum. The locomotive was a standard-size railroad engine, running on standard-gauge strip of track.

AS the last car passed out of sight on the brow of the hill, Greta stood and watched for the locomotive to reappear far below.

In the window of the old railroad station, second floor, Eve Gascoigne leaned out, straining her eyes upon the brow of Knob Hill, wishing for her old telescope, wondering what it meant to see a construction train move and disappear. She caught a flutter of blue and white where the train had stood, and knew it for Greta Harriman.

She heard, too, the far-away hoot of a locomotive—not the sharp one of the construction engine—and knew that it was the belated incoming train on the T. L. & A., the train that was bringing her father home. Turning her head, Eve could see far up the river, to the dark bulking mass of Axle forest. Out of the dark green came the river, dancing, glittering, leaping. Beyond the dark bulk rose and glittered the snow-white top of Seward.

She swept the near-by river with a keen, comprehensive glance—and gasped. The water was rising faster and faster. Then, in the street, she sensed a commotion. A wagon came rattling in from the north, the horses galloping, a spare, sharp-faced man in a wide-brimmed hat standing up and lashing them with the ends of the reins. The crowd surged from the station platform to follow the wagon. But Eve, from her perch, looked straight down into the body of the wagon and into

the upturned face of a prostrate man—and she gave a little scream.

"Louis!"

It seemed an age before she got down the stairs to the street. Another age before she could overtake the rapid, rattling conveyance. Into her brain crept the impression of another figure in that democrat, the bowed, sagging figure of a man with bare head, that head gleaming in the sun, amber-colored—holding in his lap her brother's head.

Then Greta grasped her by the arm. Greta was breathless, her eyes staring.

For an instant they stood facing each other. Questions leaped into their eyes, faded, unasked, were erased by a bigger question.

A GREAT, grinding, thundering crash sounded from the direction of the big fill. Then came a dull boom—a thunderous, hissing sound. The street was filled with cries. Men ran this way and that, flung themselves flat, rolled over, got up and ran again. Others stood stock-still and stared about them, vacantly.

"A blow!" cried one. "Not so big after all, eh?" "Look out, maybe more to come!" "It is the dam! No it is there, still! What is it?" "Keep away!" "Look! How high the river is now!" "A dead man in the wagon." "They say it is Gascoigne. No, the younger—Louis. And the engineer. A fight?"

The voices, the questions, the answers buzzed dully in Eve's ears. She was still staring into Greta's wide, dazed eyes.

"Jim!" breathed Greta. "Louis! Gail!"

Then she collapsed in Eve's arms. Strong hands relieved Eve and she followed the men who took the unconscious, golden-haired woman to the place in the village where everything centered—the general store.

Greta Harriman and Eve Gascoigne had become very well acquainted in their long conversation, in the window of Rambault's tawdry suite. They had been drawn to each other unconsciously by a common anxiety. Greta feared for the dam; Eve feared for the safety of Louis, learning of the grim expedition that had gone up the river road. Yet each held something back.

Greta was unwilling to speak of Georges Rambault, because she had heard he was affianced to Eve. Yet she ached to warn Eve against him. And Eve as studiously avoided any mention of the man. The silent witness of the gaming table, the liquor smell, the empty bottles, the poker chips was plain enough. The rooms reeked with evidence that Rambault had run a resort in which cards and liquor were the stock in trade.

Or else it was Gail Halleck, using Rambault as a tool or decoy! A decoy to lure Louis? She could not believe that, after the first thought. Not even when she remembered what Louis had said about playing cards with the "boss." The alternative was that Georges Rambault was the cause of Louis' desperate condition that day.

But Rambault had promised to try to help Louis! Indeed, he had hinted that he would get Louis with him and they two would bring down the jammed drive—before François Gascoigne's return. Rambault had pledged himself to that—in return for her promise.

Plagued by her own thoughts, Eve Gascoigne at last had left Greta and had gone down to the ticket office to use Telesphore Gascoigne's private phone, connected with the system of the logging works, mill, Gascoigne house, stables and patrol shacks. It was from there that Eve talked with Georges Rambault—though she had sought to get Louis on that line—and had learned of Rambault's actions—his and Louis'. They had blown the jam at No. 3—and

Rambault was at High Lake, in possession, ready to blow that out, too.

She heard the voice that purported to be Louis', begging Rambault to hold his blast, saying that the jam was hanging up, still at No. 3. Before she could speak to Louis—as she supposed—he had hung up.

Frantic, she had rushed upstairs again. It was Eve had given the first warning of danger to the dam—to Greta. And Greta rushed for Knob Hill, to find Harriman and warn him.

Now Eve Gascoigne stood before a broad counter in the general store, a counter padded hastily with blankets. Side by side—because there was no room elsewhere—lay her brother, unconscious, and Greta Harriman, her hair loosened, unbound, flowing out and brushing Louis' dark cheek.

Doctor Bruyère arrived. Eve looked up at the sound of his brisk, anxious voice—and looked into the eyes of Gail Halleck. They were dark, as she had once seen them before, dark with pain. He stood in a stooped position, leaning slightly to one side. He breathed in short, painful gasps.

With professional directness, Doctor Bruyère dismissed Greta Harriman's case with a word.

"Fainted."

It seemed hours afterward, to Eve, that he pronounced the verdict over Louis. Eve felt very weak.

"He is in a dangerous state," was the doctor's verdict. "He had better go to the hospital at once."

That brought Eve out of her weakness. "I shall take him home—and her, too," she said.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WHAT THE GATEMAN SAW.

THE river was lapping at the rails of the T. L. & A. when the long-drawn whistle of a locomotive burst upon Axle and drew the curious, milling crowd, back to the railroad station. Every one seemed to rush there—every one save Eve and Greta, who had waited so long to meet François Gascoigne—and Gail Halleck and, of course, Louis.

Perhaps it was more than mere curiosity. A story of something that had happened up the river had spread as rapidly as that smoky suspicion concerning the "planted" dynamite. The roar and rumble from the dam had seemed to pass without any further effect than noise. The water lapped at the rails—and at the dam, crawling higher.

A faithful gate tender, all alone near the big fill, shouted himself hoarse, but would not leave the gate. He was chained there, under the necessity of raising the great gates higher and higher, to accommodate the increasing volume of rushing water which came to the diversion canal and sought its way through. Afterward this man became white-haired and was a "village character." Because of what he alone saw happen, he won fame—and lost his reason.

The men who carried Louis Gascoigne and Greta Harriman up to the white house on the hill took a roundabout way. They crossed the river on the footbridge, down at the sawmill. Not one of them would venture on the fill. So they missed the gateman.

Gail Halleck, with the Texan two-gun man, Steenrod, went down and walked out on the earthen bulk. At first he noticed nothing except the high-water mark, the creeping, swirling flood which seemed to be melting the dirt as if it was sugar. Then he noticed something else.

"Steenrod!" he cried, turning toward the Texan, as they went out slowly from the west end of the embryo dam. "Steenrod—when did Harriman remove that bumper?"

"I dunno. It was there when I drove my last train on."

Side by side they stared. Gail felt the hair prickling on his scalp. The bumper was a twenty-foot spile, driven three-quarters of its length into the soil, bolted to other sturdy posts driven to their very heads, ten feet deep, beside it. A pile of ties backed this bulwark. The bumper had disappeared.

Then Gail raised his eyes and caught sight of the dancing, jiggling figure of the gateman. The gateman gave a turn or two to the iron wheel which raised the gate an inch at a time, then ran to the end of the spillway, waving his arms, shouting. Back again he went to the wheel, raising the gate another inch, while the brown flood curled against its lower edge.

A FEW yards and Gail came to where the bumper and its backing had stood. The huge posts were sheered clean off. Beyond them lay a scattered sprawl of ties, a deep gash in the earth which extended for many yards more, to the upriver edge of the dam. That was all save some greasy bubbles and the dancing gateman.

"Looks like a train——" Steenrod began.

"Where is Jim Harriman?" Gail broke in, asking himself the question as much as Steenrod.

The gateman, poised perilously on the very end of the spillway wall, was pointing, shouting and pointing. He seemed trying to call Gail's attention to something in the water, just above the fill.

"Let's see what——"

"Say!" Steenrod burst out with his first showing of excitement. "There's been a train along here! See them ties, how they're ripped? That wasn't there when I ran the last train over this track yesterday."

The fill was level, almost as if laid out under a spirit rule, from shore to shore, except for that deep, fresh gouge in the surface, beyond where the bumper had stood. Gail could not believe the evidence of his eyes—nor his ears.

If there had been a train on the rails —where was it?

A few minutes later he had the answer in the frantic raving of a wild-eyed man who spoke a phrase, then gulped and ran to turn a wheel.

"He ran it into——"

Gail followed him, soon joined him.

"He ran it right into the river! I saw it——" The gateman tugged at the wheel. "Jim Harriman himself——" Another tug at the wheel. "He started her at the top terrace—— Slow, so slow, till after he rounded the loop—— Thought he'd never come in sight again —from back of the hill—— *She* was up there—— Came down before he showed again—so she didn't see it—— I saw it, and say—— The way it plowed through them spiles—— Ha, ha, ha!"

Gail's hair seemed to creep on his scalp. "Let that wheel alone, man!" he commanded roughly.

The gateman drew back a threatening fist as Gail laid a hand on the wheel. "Don't you touch that!" he cried. "I'm takin' care of my job. You see, I couldn't leave like the rest did. Had to keep the gate up. Told me, if the river rose, to keep the gate up and let her through—— There! She's gainin' on me! Damn nonsense, dumpin' that train in the river. I'd 'a' told him—Harriman—it would only make the water go higher! Ye see! But he dumped her! Plowed right down the hill and cut that bumper—— Ha, ha, ha!—— Round you go, again! I'll keep her up! Run the hull train into the river, engine and all. See the bubbles! Ha, ha, ha!"

Not even Steenrod's two guns would drive the crazed gateman away from his job—nor keep him from running back and forth, from wheel to spillway, to stare into the swirling river, to point to the oily bubbles and laugh.

"Jim Harriman ran the train off?"

demanded Steenrod harshly, with the muzzles of his guns sticking out from beneath his coat.

The gateman did not even notice the guns. "Sure! Harriman himself! Nobody else on the job—except me. I couldn't leave the gate! His wife tried to stop him, up top of the hill. She went up there. I yelled to her, but she wouldn't pay any attention to me. I'm only the gateman, but——"

"Let him alone, Steenrod," Gail ordered. "He'll be just as well off. He'll take care of the gate. We've got to take care of the dam. Steenrod—we've got to get more dirt on this dam, trainloads of it, right away—*and bury that other train deeper.*"

"Yes, that's what we got to do," Steenrod agreed calmly, I'll go get my fireman. He must be downtown."

CHAPTER XXIX.

"DIG DIRT!"

WHEN the train, consisting of an engine, a few freight cars and a caboose, crept into Axle over the T. L. & A. line, just before noon, the wheels sprayed water. A log was thrown aside by the cowcatcher.

François Gascoigne leaped off the train from the front steps of the caboose. The cindered platform was still a few inches above water. He turned and waved to a distinguished-appearing man of middle age, grayish of hair and mustache, wearing a gray suit who followed him and whose first remark, when he struck the platform was:

"Where is Halleck?"

No one answered. Gascoigne's lawyer took the jump next. The river had risen five feet in as many hours. No one knew—no one here at the station, at any rate—that five million feet of logs were tearing down through Axle forest on the biggest head of water that had ever shoved its crest down the rocky gorge.

But there were men on the platform with a grievance—and women, too. Not all the inhabitants of Axle had taken seriously the orders which had come to vacate the homes they held by sufferance. Those who had piled up their belongings and hurried out of the valley had been actuated as much by the dread of a mighty explosion as by the command to make way for the flooding of the reservoir. Now they saw the river rising, threatening to drown them out before they could salvage their household goods. Some one suggested that François Gascoigne would stop that flood, that he still held the river and would order the gates closed, up above. Had he not commanded the river always? He was the boss. Let us go and appeal to François Gascoigne!

Now that they faced him, and the stranger who seemed to be his guest, they were diffident, abashed. No one wanted to be spokesman. However, there were enough who had courage to voice their grievance in grumbling, ejaculatory complaints, not directed at any one in particular. François Gascoigne, who for days had strained his poor English to make men understand him and had strained his ears to comprehend them, was sharp of hearing among his own.

"What is this?" he demanded of Telesphore Gascoigne, his nephew, who had come out to receive the train, as an official of the road.

"You see!" exclaimed Telesphore. "They have loosed the flood. Only yesterday came the orders from the Mountain Power Company to vacate so that the reservoir could be filled. But no time was set. Vacate at once! They gave us no time. We shall sue them!"

He turned to the lawyer hopefully, the light of legal battle glittering in his eyes.

The man in gray faced Telesphore. He answered him in his own tongue, the patois.

"Let me see a copy of the order," he said. "I know of no such order."

Telesphore Gascoigne whisked off his battered cap with a flourish, dug out a sheet of paper and handed it to the man in gray. The man glanced at it, grimaced and then spoke to François Gascoigne.

"This is all right," he said. "A little earlier than I had planned, but not irregular. It is according to the agreement, signed by each and every one from whom we bought property. However, the flood is something——"

"What is the cause of the flood?" François Gascoigne asked Telesphore.

"Oh, that is because Louis and Georges Rambault have broken the jam at No. 3," was Telesphore's calm response. "And I believe that Rambault has opened the gates at High Lake. I was here when Mamselle Eve telephoned to him; that is, she was trying to get Louis on the line and Georges answered."

"And Louis, he is badly hurt," volunteered one who had seen the democrat drive into the village, and had followed to the store and saw them bear Louis up to the white house. "It appears that the big engineer rescued Louis after he had been flung in the river by the blast."

"Broke the jam! High Lake—and Louis is hurt. How badly?"

A shrug was the only answer, and the casual remark: "He seemed asleep when they took him home."

"Most assuredly we shall sue the Mountain——" began Telesphore.

"Sue the Mountain and stop the flood, then!" broke in François Gascoigne, impatient of his nephew's small talk. "Louis——" He broke off, his face dark with apprehension.

THE train was backing slowly away. It made a diversion. The unorganized grievance committee forgot their grievance to watch the train creep through water six inches deep.

Then Gascoigne turned to his companion. "We have got to save the dam —here," he said.

"The men have all quit work," Telesphore informed them maliciously. "No one will go on the work for fear—— You see, there was some sort of an explosion down there, only a short time ago."

"On the dam?" cried the man in gray.

"Oui. A great noise. I was at the telegraph. Your train was so late——"

Gascoigne swept the crowding faces about him with a bewildered, inquiring glance. It was as if he could not quite believe Telesphore, with his ready information.

"Yes, that is true," came the answer to his silent question. "There was so much dynamite taken—and the warning —— We did not care to be blown to pieces at our work. No one will go on the works."

"We have got to save the dam," Gascoigne repeated slowly, his boring, direct gaze lighting first on one face, then another. "I do not believe there is any danger—from dynamite."

"You are right, François Gascoigne! There is no danger from that."

The voice was that of Gail Halleck, who pushed through the throng, Steenrod behind him.

"Oh, here you are, Halleck!" The man in gray thrust out his hand toward Gail.

"Mr. Antrim!"

"I am astonished to find you flooding the reservoir so soon," was the instant exclamation from the man in gray. He said it soberly, almost accusingly.

Those about him held their breath. So this was Anthony Antrim—he whom François Gascoigne had opposed so bitterly for so long! And here they were together, as if they were friends! It was unbelievable. In the silence Halleck's painful, slow reply, made so by his hurts, was distinct to every one

there. He spoke in French, as Antrim had done.

"The flood is something for which I am not responsible, Mr. Antrim. I have just come down from No. 3 reservoir; Louis Gascoigne blew the jam successfully there. And I believe now," he gave a glance at the river, which was beginning to creep even upon the high, cindered platform, "that Georges Rambault has wrecked our works at High Lake. They had over four hundred pounds of dynamite, taken from Harriman's dump. And Harriman is dead—buried in the fill. He ran a loaded dirt train off the rails into the river and went with it. He was trying to save the dam alone, single-handed. His men had deserted."

There fell a silence. One man looked at another.

"Buried in the river!" breathed one, at last.

"Then that was what we heard! That was the explosion!"

Steenrod, his coat bulging awkwardly at the pockets, climbed on a truck and from that elevation darted keen glances over the crowd. His gaze lighted finally upon the figure of a Canadian on the outskirts of the throng.

"Hey, Antone!" he called sharply. "Tony Rousseau, come here!"

All eyes turned to Steenrod—including those of the one called Antone Rousseau. He grinned and waved a hand.

"Come here!" Steenrod demanded.

"Why?" came the query from Antone.

"You come here and go with me," Steenrod answered—and from each bulge of his coat an automatic appeared as if by magic, and he held them with the deadly menacing carelessness of a man accustomed to such toys. "Come on now! We got to fire up No. 5 and take another load of dirt onto the fill—right away. Come here!"

Antone advanced sheepishly, his face paling. At the truck, within reach of Steenrod's long arm, he found himself lifted almost bodily up to the same elevation as this convincing engineer of his locomotive.

"Talk French now," Steenrod commanded the bewildered, frightened fireman. "Tell this gang here that they ain't any danger of a blow on the works. They took all the stuff up the river. That noise they heard was Harriman crashin' into the fill with an engine and train off the top level of the embankment. Talk big now!"

WITH the muzzle of a black gun digging into his back, Antone "talked big," waxing eloquent as he proceeded. His speech was received in silence, however—and with unbelieving stares and negative wags of the head—except for one person. That was François Gascoigne.

With a movement of his great body, Gascoigne plunged to the truck where Steenrod and his grimy fireman stood. He got upon it with an agility surprising for his bulk and years, wheeled and faced the crowd.

"You will all go back to work and help to save the dam from the flood and the drive. The drive is coming down. In a few hours it will be here. The logs will batter down that earthen dam. It must be saved. That gentleman"—he indicated Antrim—"has assured me that you shall all have better homes, up there about Knob Hill, than you had here by the river. The Mountain Power Company will give you the land and will help you to build new houses. But you must go back to work and help us—help me, François Gascoigne!—to save the dam! Do you comprehend?"

A breathless silence, then a roar of comprehension, a babble, a milling about, disorder, noise above which no voice could make itself heard—then the bark of a gun.

It was Steenrod, firing in the air.

"Come on, you hunkies!" he cried. "Dig dirt!"

Whether they comprehended all his words, they had learned two which meant business. Harriman had taught them what it meant to "dig dirt."

CHAPTER XXX.

"SAVE THE DAM!"

"YOU came direct from Washington, here?" Gail Halleck asked Anthony Antrim as he and François Gascoigne and Lawyer le Févre walked rapidly down the street, wading ankle-deep in muddy water, toward the fill.

"From Albany. I was not in Washington. I met Gascoigne at Albany."

"Oh! They told me at the office you were at Washington."

"I see. I said I was going to the capital. I heard from my old antagonist, Attorney le Févre," he turned with a smile to the lawyer, "that Gascoigne was in trouble with the conservation commission."

"And he got me out of the mess," put in Gascoigne.

"We reached an understanding, what's more," Antrim continued, and Gascoigne nodded vigorously. "A very good understanding. I am sorry I did not come here long ago. I should have done so. It was because Vance seemed to know the situation so well——"

Gail gave a muffled exclamation. At Antrim's question, his grin replaced the drawn lines of pain in his face.

"I was thinking that it is almost a miracle," Gail said in English. "There has been so much—misunderstanding."

"It is all right, now—but what is all this talk about stolen dynamite—danger to the dam? What does it mean?"

Gail told him; and when he came to the grim story of Harriman's tragic effort to load the fill with more dirt, he made a brief eulogy of the contractor—and it was the only eulogy that Jim Harriman had.

Jim Harriman was buried in Axle Dam.

Futile efforts, taking a precious two hours, to recover the body were in vain. Only by raising the locomotive could it have been dragged out of that grave, and instead of taking away from the crumbling fill, it had to be added to at once.

Gail had much to do, a big job to do—but the hardest job he had was to tell Greta the news. At the end of the futile, heartbreaking effort to raise Harriman's body from the rising, yeasty swirl of waters at the edge of the dam, Gail sank down on a railroad tie, trembling, wiping sweat from his forehead.

"Gail, you are hurt!" Anthony Antrim exclaimed.

"I've been knocked about some," Gail admitted, "but the thought of having to tell Mrs. Harriman——" He gulped.

"Where is Mrs. Harriman?"

Gail waved a hand toward the white house on the hill. François Gascoigne, who stood beside them and had overheard—and comprehended—spoke to Gail.

"You and Mr. Antrim shall come up to my house," he said. "There we shall talk. It is a long story, worth telling—and worth hearing."

"Thank you. I—as soon as I can leave. But I cannot leave now. There is so much to be done. Good, strong double booms must be laid across the river, to ward logs off the fill."

"I shall take the news to Mrs. Harriman, Gail," Antrim volunteered. "I shall have to ask her—if we can proceed with the fill."

Gail shuddered.

"It will be his monument," Antrim said softly.

"That is true. Oh, she will look at it—the right way. I will tell you!" Gail sprang up, galvanized by a thought. "Gascoigne, your daughter is up there. Your son is very—is injured. How badly, I do not know. Doctor Bruyère

is attending him. Gascoigne, you must leave it to Eve to break this news to Greta. She can do it—best."

"You should be in bed yourself!" Antrim told Gail.

"Last place in the world for me." Gail spoke with a catch in his breath. "I don't sleep very well anyway," he went on, with grim humor, "and we have not a moment to lose. Gascoigne, can I have timber for booms? Before you answer, let me warn you that when your logs do come down, we shall have to shunt them through our sluiceway, into the canal and let them run on downriver—and you have no booms below the mill to hold them."

"Boom timber?" Gascoigne said, ignoring the warning as if it meant nothing. "All you need, at the mill. And look here! I shall take care of the booms. Up here at the dam. This dam," he stamped a foot on the ground, *"must not be broken!* It is the beginning of a new prosperity for the Whitewater Valley. I can see it now. That mountain," he swept a huge hand toward Seward's top, "will send us down new life—the strength that is drawn from the sun. What is the name you have called it? My daughter told me —— Ah! Fluid of the sun, is it not?"

Gail could only nod his head. Something reached his throat and shook him. Eve had quoted his phrase to her father! Fluid of the sun! As in a dream he heard Gascoigne's next words:

"Send men to the mill. Mr. Antrim, will you come down there with me? Mr. Halleck, when you can leave here, come also. The doctor will have to take care of—Louis." The grim old warrior was bracing on his armor for a new fight.

Attorney le Févre got off an epigram. "When real men get together, there can never be war," he said. "If it were not for politics, we should all be friends."

Steenrod, at the throttle of engine No. 5, eased a dirt train down onto the fill. As in a trance Gail stood and watched the cars creep over the twisted, warped track and come to a halt. It extended almost from shore to shore.

He turned and looked fixedly down into the rising river. Steenrod waved a hand inquiringly. Gail beckoned to him and the intrepid Texan climbed from his cab and came to Gail.

"Let the train stand," Gail ordered. "We are going to lay booms. All the dirt of Knob Hill won't stop that drive from battering down the fill—unless we can divert them to the canal. You've got to take charge here, Steenrod. You are promoted to head foreman. Get teams, trucks, men, peaveys, chains, steel cable. Get hold of all the real rivermen—men who know how to knock booms together and string them in a current. We've got an old-time riverman on the job for that end of it, but you have got to take Harriman's place."

"I got you. Hey, Antone!"

Thus the Texan took charge.

LOUIS had left his bed against the doctor's orders, twenty-four hours ago, so Doctor Bruyère did not mince matters about his condition.

"He was in no shape to stand this sort of shock," the physician told Eve. "He should not have gone to work at all. The poison was not yet out of his system from the other—time. He added more to it and lying in icy water, battered by logs, did the rest. His heart action is slow. He is likely to remain in a coma for some time—and I dare not stimulate. It might bring reaction that would be fatal."

Greta Harriman had recovered quickly from her unconsciousness. Overexcitement, overexertion in her climb up Knob Hill—and the sight of Jim—his words—his eyes, all these had combined, with the shock of what Eve had told her, to bring senselessness for a time.

Louis Gascoigne came out of his coma

surprisingly clear-headed. "Greta!" he demanded, the first word from his blue lips. "Please send for her. Ask her to come with Mr. Halleck."

Eve thought he was delirious.

"I am not raving," Louis murmured. "Do this and you will not regret it. Both together, please, for I have something which they must hear—and you, too, Eve."

Doctor Bruyère nodded. He was more worried over the murmurous calmness of his patient than he would have been if Louis had tossed and raved.

Greta stood in the wide window of the large living room when Eve came from Louis' chamber. The window was a vantage point from which one commanded a view of the town and the valley and the mountains. Greta turned from contemplation of the beginnings of scurrying activity down at the fill.

"He is——"

"Louis is better," Eve answered, "and he asks for you."

"For me?"

"He wishes to see you and Mr. Halleck, too. I am going to find Mr. Halleck down there."

"Shall I—go in? No, I had better go with you. I have been wondering. Do you see that dirt train down there, on the dam? They are trying to strengthen the dam. Men are going back to work. Jim must have got them to go. Or else it was Gail."

She spoke her husband's Christian name with an unconscious, hesitant little inflection. Eve noted it. She noted, too, the spasm of pain which passed over Greta's features, as if she feared to go and face her husband.

"I think," Eve said, "it would be the doctor's wish for you to remain here."

Greta was grateful for that delicacy of Eve's. Later she was to learn to the full how wonderful an intuition, how marvelous a tenderness this dark-haired, black-eyed girl possessed—and how brave she was.

EVE had to be brave, for it was harder for her to descend that hill than to climb it. She did not know how she was going to face Gail Halleck. The dark pain and reproach in his eyes when for only a moment she had faced him over the still form of her brother, down at the store, had shot anguish through her, shame and bitter self-recrimination. How unjust she had been to him!

Georges Rambault had told her more, over that buzzing telephone line, than Gail had heard—and more than he intended to tell. He had boasted of having "done up" Gail—and Eve's quick mind recalled Gail's battered, sick condition when he had come up the hill, that time Louis was brought home first, poisoned—and she had come to the conviction Georges Rambault had been responsible for the poisoning.

"I blamed Gail Halleck for Louis' being poisoned," she muttered to herself, as she descended the hill path. "Then I accused him of being drunk—when he was half dead from Rambault's assault! What shall I say to him now? How can I ask him to come, even at Louis' request—for Louis is one cause of this danger to his work? If the dam goes out——"

Her problem was solved for her in quite an unexpected and startling fashion. Gail Halleck, driving himself to work when every breath cost him a pang, fighting the river, side by side with François Gascoigne, slipped into the icy water. He would have gone down without a struggle had not François Gascoigne shot a pike-pole handle to him and pulled him out. Gail could scarce find strength to cling to the pole.

"Up to the house!" Gascoigne commanded.

The wetting was but an incident of every-day occurrence in the work to which Gascoigne was accustomed, but he was wise enough to know that if Gail collapsed entirely, the fight would be a losing one.

Gail had refused to allow any more fill to be dumped on the dam. He had set men at work laying two more lengths of track, had ordered two trains, loaded heavily, drawn onto those tracks. He had ties piled on the ground as high as the car floors, earth thrown over them and rocks in front of them, with more earth to fill the crevices, then laid sections of tracks, taken bodily from the terraced hillside, stood these on edge and supported them by piles driven at frequent intervals.

He had builded a strong dike on the top of the dam. It gave four feet more of safety. The river could rise that much above the level of the fill before it began to run over—and tear the dam apart. The booms, however, were his first line of defense. If they gave way, there was a bare chance the dike would hold, backed by the loaded cars. If the dike gave way, dam and cars and everything would go.

Greta Harriman had been watching every move in the game from the window. She wondered why they did not dump dirt down the face of the fill.

The question was the first thing that came from her lips as Gail entered, dripping, leaning heavily on the arms of the two men who had accompanied him.

"Jim ought to pile dirt and stone as fast as he can on the face of the fill," was the way she expressed it. "Why doesn't he? Why don't you make him? If I were down there—but he wouldn't listen to me, Gail."

"No, Greta—Jim wouldn't listen to you," Gail returned slowly. "Jim has done—everything he could—to save the dam. That's why we don't—why we can't dump onto the face of the fill. Jim ran his train off in there—and went with it."

Eve had opened the door. She stood staring at Gail—then her gaze shifted to Greta's face and she moved swiftly to her side.

But Greta was far from crumpling under this shocking news. In her eyes was the fire of devotion—but it was not devotion to Jim Harriman. It was devotion to the dam, to the white light that shone about the top of snow-clad Seward—to the job, to the dream of those men who had set out to harness the white waters of the river that flowed down, under the compelling, burning rays of the sun, from the white top of the mountain—fluid of the sun.

"The dam must not go!" she whispered. "Not even—— Jim would want you to do it! Yes, he would. Gail, I loved him—once. I believe he loved me, too. But he forgot me when he began—to dig in the dirt. That was it. He forgot. I am sorry it had to happen. I tried to be loyal. *But save the dam!* Jim Harriman has done one noble thing; he has killed himself, trying to save it. I am willing—I command you to bury him in the fill!"

"Ah, but it is you who are noble!" cried Eve.

Then Gail had to forget Greta and her tragedy. Eve took her from the room. Greta went quietly, unprotesting.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE GOOD FIGHT.

THE telephone at the white house was quickly connected with a portable set at the end of the line of booms, on the other shore of the river, almost directly opposite. Gascoigne's home became the headquarters of the Mountain Power Company. Over the phone the chief engineer directed the man who had been boss of the river in the work of keeping it from tearing down the dam.

Through his binoculars, Gail saw Gascoigne, with Antrim beside him, working like a veritable fiend on the booms. A hundred agile rivermen spiked and chained and linked long timbers together as if by magic, shoved them out, saw

them whirled away, but dragged them back and tried again.

Steenrod flung out another crazy track on the very edge of the fill and ran a train, his own hand at the throttle, on this precarious line. When the dump cars were tilted, an avalanche of earth and stone slid into the water—and Gail bowed his head for a moment. These were the first clods on Harriman's grave. After that it was not so hard to watch.

Three times the booms were laid; three times they were swept away. While the fourth desperate attempt to join two long sections in midriver was beginning, Gail turned his glasses upstream. Then he grabbed the phone.

"The drive!" he shouted.

From the room where Louis Gascoigne lay came a feeble echo. "The drive!"

That shout reached others ears, too. Greta Harriman heard it and came swiftly into the room. For a moment she stood far back and stared at Gail as he barked orders over the phone. Then her eyes turned slowly to the door of the room behind Gail—and she gasped.

Louis Gascoigne somehow had got to his feet. He stood in the door swaying, grasping the jambs with his hands. He seemed about to fall. Greta ran toward him. He straightened, looked at her pleadingly. Almost in a whisper he spoke:

"Greta—I did not—steal his stuff!"

She helped get him back to his bed. Eve came in from the kitchen where she had begun to prepare a pot of coffee and many sandwiches, to feed those toiling men down at the river.

The alarm that came to the hurrying workers sent an extra thrill of desperate strength into them. Those rivermen knew what it meant and worked the faster. A dribble of logs came first and slipped through the gap which yawned between the boom ends. Steenrod came to the rescue with a donkey engine, a winch and a strong cable. A daring pair of river rats carried the cable across the gap in a bateau, and bolted it to the boom end thrust out from the west shore. The donkey engine panted; the winch wound—and with not a moment to spare the first boom was made fast.

Then the drive came in.

Gail watched it, his heart in his mouth. Those hurrying, crowding, bumping logs, all the way from the mountain forests—how fast they had come, how resistless they seemed, like a stampeded herd of cattle!

Over the phone Gail could hear them, groaning, pounding, bumping, and under all the sullen, angry voice of the river. If the boom held—good. If not —— He clenched his fist and reached out as if to stop the wooden herd—and touched the arm of François Gascoigne who stood smiling down at him.

"Well," he said, with a great sigh, "now that job is done I shall ask for the loan of some men to help string booms below the mill."

"It will hold?"

"Unless the cable breaks—steel cable, which I have had stapled along the top of the boom. Did you ever see a boom as straight as that? They pulled it tight with the winch. Yes, it will hold."

"Take all the men you want. You have not protected yourself at all? I thought you would use some of the booms for yourself!"

"There was no time. The dam first. It had to be made secure. If that went out, of what use would anything be below?"

"That is so. But you risked your whole drive. The logs are going through the canal at a great rate; they will be carried on down and scattered in the marshes and bayous—beyond recovery. You have made a great sacrifice, François Gascoigne."

"Oh, I have been an old fool long enough!" ejaculated Gascoigne, with a gesture. "I have found a man whom

I despised as a contemptible enemy was really a man of honor—one who has really been my friend, protecting my interests instead of robbing me, as I had thought. Why, it was he who got me the money at Albany to save me from bankruptcy! While he did this, you saved my son from death. I have heard all about it from the man from Texas. There is a man! Well, suppose my drive is swept away, suppose my mill is leveled, suppose I lose everything—I shall still have my son, my daughter, two friends worth more than all the rest. I am an old man and I have learned in a bitter school the value of these. Oh, I shall save what I can! I am an old man, but I fight. That is part of life. It is good to fight the river!"

In his ears Gail could almost hear the clarion "Yo-hey!" of the river boss, as he first had heard it over the roar of the rapids, far up the Whitewater.

THE deserters, to a man, had come back to work. The evacuation of Axle was accomplished in short order, trucks sent down from Knob Hill helping to move everything out of the buildings and to high ground. Anthony Antrim had offered François Gascoigne the salvage which would come from the lumber of those buildings. Gascoigne said he would salve it as driftwood along with his logs. Let the river be the wrecker. A trainload of household goods was borne out of the village over the T. L. & A.—the last train to leave the old station.

A thrashing stream of logs crowded down the canal and were disgorged into the lower river, far below Gascoigne's jack works and with no booms stretched across to hold them back. The gibbering gateman still twirled the wheel, to keep the gate high above the tawny flow which rushed through the sluice and bore logs with it. Men lined the boom that rocked in the current and shoved the logs toward the sluice.

On the way out of the room, François Gascoigne encountered Greta Harriman. Hurried as he was, he stopped and bowed to her.

"I have heard of your sacrifice," he murmured. "You honor us by your presence here. You have done much for my daughter."

Something in his knowing tone seemed to strike Greta deeply. "And your son? Have you heard——" she answered, faintly but proudly.

"The kindness of a good woman certainly cannot injure him. It is what Louis needs. Ah, Louis is not bad! He is wild—and he has had bad advice, bad companions. Why, even what he did to-day—breaking the jam—was a mistaken, selfish, wild idea. There was nothing noble in it—it was only partly right by mistake."

"So many of us," Greta murmured, a trifle bitterly, "are only right by mistake—or force of circumstances."

"And you understand human nature, madame," said Gascoigne, and departed.

Greta went in to where Louis lay. He was quiet; he smiled faintly up at her as she entered. He did not know of Jim Harriman's death. To her she was unattainable, inaccessible—and he a guilty, cowardly wretch.

"I should like," he said, "to sit up in the window out there. I would feel better, I am sure."

Greta sought Doctor Bruyère. After a look at Louis and a test of his pulse, the doctor gave consent.

"A little normal excitement will do him good," he declared.

Normal excitement! Did the doctor think that the sight of Greta's golden head was normal excitement? Scarcely! He knew only that Louis' pulse had quickened. That was good.

Eve came in.

"Have you heard from Rambault?" Louis asked.

She shook her head.

"Eve," Louis burst out, "I hope you

will never see him again! He is not fit ——" It ended in a little groan.

Eve bowed her head, without a word of answer. Greta grasped her hand and pressed it softly.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LOUIS TELLS THE TRUTH.

"CAN you believe me? I intended no harm to your work, Mr. Halleck."

In another deep, cushioned chair, Louis Gascoigne sat in the window beside Gail Halleck.

"Can you believe me?" he asked Greta. "I did not intend to keep the keys. I was not myself."

"I believe you, Louis," said Gail. "Here is my hand on it."

Louis took it gratefully, a flush coloring his pallid face. It seemed as if he dare not turn his eyes to Greta again. He waited. Eve Gascoigne, sitting lightly on the arm of her brother's chair, seemed waiting more anxiously than he for Greta's answer.

"You—you did not mean—what you said?" came Greta's voice, low, throbbing, as if about to break.

Louis looked at her, startled. His lips trembled. "Oh, I did!" he cried. "Yes, I mean that! But—you did not really think I would steal——"

"There are worse things than stealing," said Greta shortly.

Sensing some strange battle between them, Gail broke in, in an easy tone: "As it is turning out, your risk is going to work out for the best." I think we have passed the crisis. The flood cannot beat us unless something unforeseen occurs. All the dams, up beyond Axle forest, have gone out. There is no bigger head to come. What you did may turn to be a benefit, Louis."

"What I did!" cried Louis sharply, "I do not know what I did. I did not have my full senses for an instant after I had left the store on the hill over there yesterday. I ask you to believe that, too. What I did! Rambault knew, but I——"

The telephone at Gail's elbow tinkled.

"They've got Rambault," Steenrod reported. "Got him up at Higb Lake. What shall I do with him?"

Gail hesitated an instant, then with a grim look on his face he said: "Send Rambault up here."

His eyes strayed to Eve's troubled face and he would have countermanded the order, but she seemed to divine his intention.

"That is right," she said. "This is *your* office. So my father has arranged."

"They have taken Rambault!" exclaimed Louis. "Well, I shall tell you the truth, before he comes—just the truth. I have been a big fool. I took courage out of a bottle and it ran away with me. Yesterday I was crazy enough to annoy Mrs. Harriman with—attentions unwelcome to her. It is part of the wrong I have done. I swear to you, Gret—Mrs. Harriman—that I forgot that I had the keys to the dynamite storehouse. Won't you try to believe that?"

"I believe—you are honest—Louis," Greta murmured. There was deep meaning in her tone.

"Your hand!" Louis begged. She gave him her fingers and he clung to them tightly. "Ah, I know what you mean!" he said. "Too honest, sometimes. But this is honestly spoken, though it hurts: I showed the keys to Rambault as a joke and he persuaded me to let him use them. I should never have done it—no, never!—but for liquor. It seemed to burn in my brain."

He turned toward Gail. "I am sorry I cannot claim to be a hero who broke the jam and won the fight. The truth is that I did not realize what I was doing at all. I only knew that I needed to have money and could get none unless the drive came down. Rambault promised to help me. He said he had

no money with which to buy dynamite and we must—borrow it. I had borrowed from him—and he told me that Eve approved of this plan to blow the jam—and High Lake works, too."

Eve gasped.

"And I had lied to her, when I was not myself, so that she believed wrong of you, Mr. Halleck," Louis continued. "She thought you had persuaded me to gamble and drink. I know that now."

The color came and went in Eve's face.

"That was a drunken lie," Louis went on. "My head is clear now. Perhaps it had some sense knocked into it, when the logs banged at me up there."

He raised himself on one elbow and stared down at the river which seemed to have risen rapidly, filling the valley. Louis had not glimpsed that flood at all. It startled him—but gradually a smile crept over his face as he regarded the scene. The flood was at the door of the old railroad station. There were workmen knee-deep in water, tearing up the rails of the T. L. & A.

"Well, the old Axle is going!" he cried. "I'm glad of that! It was a hell hole for me. Whitewater is good for that dirt."

Eve had tears in her eyes. One of her hands crept into Greta's, and the golden-haired one sat as a living bond between brother and sister.

"I kept the keys forgetfully," Louis continued. "But I was full of false courage, poured into me from a bottle, when I planted the charge at No. 3. It was Georges who gave me that 'courage.' It was poison. He said it was only Canadian ale—but I know better now. To give him credit, he took a chance on his own——"

"He allowed you to take the chance!" Eve flashed.

Louis shrugged a little. "But he took the big chance in going up to High Lake, which was guarded. I was to wait until I heard him spring his blow. If it did not come at five o'clock, I was to blow the jam at No. 3. After that I was to join him and his gang at High Lake. I waited. At five o'clock I had heard nothing. I had been drinking steadily, but my head seemed clear. The excitement gave me false judgment. At five thirty I planted my stuff. Two hundred pounds, deep under the logs that were jammed in the sluice gate, another hundred in the gorge below. Rambault was to have furnished electrical rigs to set off the dynamite blasts, but he failed."

Louis laughed a little. "My fuse was short. I had to build a bonfire on the logs and lay a train of rope soaked in kerosene from the fire to the short fuse. Then the fire failed. The rope dropped into the water. I had to light each short fuse separately. It had to be fast work. I had sent my men down the trail to keep the head clear when the jam broke. I lighted the fuse at the gate first; then ran down to the gorge plant and cut off two inches of fuse to make it go quicker, timing it with the other."

Greta was biting her trembling lips. She could feel the pulse in Louis' hand pounding rapidly. Gail, too, had a quicker pulse, for he followed in imagination, visualizing every move that Louis had made, as the lad described it.

"I ran—but not quite fast enough. I had overdone the liquid courage. The concussion caught me on the trail, not a hundred feet from the forge plant, and knocked me flat. I found myself in the water, grasping for a hold; logs hammered me. The earth seemed to have given way under me. Curiously, the last thing I thought of was that I should have tried to get Rambault on the telephone——"

"Louis, you did!" broke in Eve.

"No, that was my voice that you heard," Gail explained. "I overheard your conversation. Louis wasn't there."

"No, I did not telephone," said Louis. "I did not think of it being in order, until too late. But that is all I remember. What a fool!"

"You heard?" Eve repeated, puzzling over what that must have meant to Gail Halleck, to hear what she had said to Rambault—and Rambault to her. "Then you think that I approved of—this? And that I promised——"

"No, I did not believe you approved of it," Gail interrupted, "because you were pleading with Rambault not to endanger the dam here at Axle, when I came in on the line."

"But it moved the jam!" Louis exulted. He looked about at them all. "It moved the jam," he muttered, in a lower tone. "Perhaps, as you say, that did some good. Well, now I am ready to take the medicine which Jim Harriman will give me," he finished.

There was a strange silence. Gail broke in, unable to bear the hunted, haunted look in Greta's face.

"Jim Harriman is dead," he said. "Buried in the dam—where a train he was driving rolled off."

"Ah! My fault——"

"No!" The cry burst from Greta's lips in an agonized sob. "No! Do not think that! *I* should be held responsible. I should have remembered the keys, Louis."

For a moment they stared into each other's eyes, dark eyes striving to plunge their question into the blue ones and blue ones at first repelling, defending—then yielding their secret. Louis gasped.

"Greta!" he cried.

There came a knock at the door.

"Rambault!" whispered Eve. "I will open it."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LYNX'S LAST SPRING.

AT that moment, Doctor Bruyère insisted that his patient retire to his own room and lie down. He was puzzled and a little alarmed at the quick rise in temperature displayed by Louis. Since Greta went with him, supporting him on one side, and Eve hurried to help, Louis was quite willing to go.

With a gesture Gail had prevented Eve opening the door to Rambault. The man was virtually a prisoner and Gail wished to spare her the shame of seeing him thus. But as soon as she had seen Louis to his room Eve returned. The men who were escorting Rambault to the house had halted at the steps and were apparently waiting for further orders.

For a moment Eve stood silent, regarding the group, then over her face crept a mocking, almost malicious smile such as Gail remembered first seeing on her lips, up in the patrol shack that stormy night.

"I am going to leave him to you," she said. "I am carrying the gun—and I am afraid——"

She whirled swiftly away, entering the room where Louis lay. Her brother had sunk into a deep slumber, and he held Greta's hand in his own tightly, almost convulsively, as he had when he lay near death in the little shack on Knob Hill. Greta put her fingers to her lips. Eve closed the door softly.

Louis' deep breathing filled the silence. Then they heard the outer door open, the shuffle of heavy feet, as Rambault was brought into the big room.

"Eve," whispered Greta, "you *were* going to marry Georges Rambault?"

Eve gave a little shrug, raised her hand and dropped it, then shook her head in hopeless self-reproach.

"I was," she replied, "principally because I had no courage—not even the courage of my poor brother. And also," she smiled bitterly, "he said he would take me to Rome."

"Oh!" gasped Greta.

Eve sank in a chair beside the bed.

"We are strange creatures, we women," Greta said. "I married Jim Harriman because he said he would take

me to Rome. And I thought that I hated Louis because he—he wanted to take me to Rome. But now I know that I love him," she finished wistfully.

Eve had stiffened at the rumble of voice in the other room. She got to her feet and took a few restless steps across the floor.

"They are together," she said, in a whisper.

"Eve, do you care at all for Georges Rambault?" asked Greta bluntly.

"I despise him!" Eve burst out, in a hissing whisper.

"Then—do you know what Gail will do with him? He believes that you love Rambault. Rambault has told him you are affianced. Gail will let Rambault go."

"Gail Halleck does not even look at me!" Eve declared, wildly. "Not since that——"

"You do not know him. He is a man of strong repressions. But he fought me for his binoculars once, because he wished to look at you. That was after he had been up the river trail in that storm."

Eve stared strangely at Greta. "He fought you?" she inquired haltingly. "Greta—he has never—made love to you?"

Greta laughed softly. "He does not even look at me—when you are in sight."

EVE almost ran to the door. When she reached it, she halted. Instead of flinging it open, she turned the knob softly and let the door swing only an inch ajar.

Rambault stood in the window, his back to the light. Gail sat facing him, his back to Eve. Rambault had been allowed to enter the room unguarded, at Gail's wish. Outside, on the porch, the two men who had brought him waited.

Gail made a signal through the window. Eve heard the men descend the steps. He waited, then spoke to Rambault.

"I sent for you to come up here," he said, "because I wished to inform you that, so far as I am concerned, there will be no action against you for the theft of dynamite, the destruction of the works at High Lake, for fomenting sabotage among the men, for bootlegging poison liquor, cheating at cards and criminal assault upon myself. Luck has been with you, Rambault, or you would be a murderer. Perhaps the realization of that may be punishment enough."

Halleck spoke in a clear tone, metallic, controlled. Greta had come to Eve's side, at the partly opened door. She gripped Eve by the arm. Eve swung the door open a little wider.

The reflection of the sinking sun lighted the bay window, leaving the rest of the room in deep shadow. It was a light that turned the dark face of Rambault darker and brightened the flaxen hair of Gail Halleck.

"And it would be quite difficult to prove these lying charges, for one thing," Rambault responded insolently.

"Proof would be only too easy," Gail retorted sharply. "But I shall not attempt to prosecute you at law. For one thing, you might be so desperate and despicable as to claim the connivance and accessory knowledge of a man who happens to be an official of the concern to which I am bound by profession and loyalty. But that is not the main reason why I shall not prosecute you. There is a condition to my proposal, however. It is that you will cancel all debts you hold over Louis Gascoigne. They are not honest debts. You cheated him at cards after you had poisoned him with liquor. You pretended to be his friend, you robbed him, used him—and played upon the sympathies of his family for your own advantage."

Rambault made a violent gesture.

"That is something you will have to prove or I——"

"No, I do not have to prove it," Gail broke in. "Your position, as a friend of the Gascoigne family, makes that inadvisable. I should be the last one in the world to wish publicity to prove you a villain. My hands are tied. But Louis realizes something of what I have just charged against you. However, if you have a spark of manhood in you, you will make up to him and to his father—and his sister, for what you have done. It is no fault of yours that Louis is not ruined. François Gascoigne is, as yet, unaware of the extent of your treachery. And as for Eve——"

Gail halted, breathing heavily. A gust of emotion more violent than pain seized him. It was the emotion of despair. It overpowered him. He burst out harshly: "Rambault, I shall do everything in my power, short of prosecuting you, to prevent your marrying her!"

"Ah! That is it! You had me arrested and brought here, a prisoner, in order to threaten!" Rambault snarled. "That is quite a new variety of blackmail, and black as you paint me, I do not agree to that. I prefer prosecution."

Gail laughed. "I shall have to deprive you of that noble sacrifice. I shall merely drive you out of this country—as an undesirable—unless you take steps to right all these wrongs I have mentioned. And I do not see you doing that. You are vengeful rather than repentant."

Rambault's eyes glittered. He cast a furtive glance out the window. The guards were out of sight. He advanced a step toward Gail.

"I should have finished you that night," he growled, with the ferocity of a wild animal.

His body seemed to curl into a spring. Gail felt his danger. He struggled to rise and meet it. Rambault's hands hung at his sides, but his knees were bent, his back bowed—in a crouch. Gail threw himself from his chair and shoved it quickly between him and Rambault—but his slippered feet caught on a rug and, in trying to keep balance, he wrenched himself badly. The pain bit into his chest.

Like an animal, Rambault circled, walking on his toes, his calks biting the floor like sharp claws. He gathered himself for the same maneuver, the same leap and thrust of the foot with which he had tried to kill Gail on the terraced road of Knob Hill. The demoniac purpose of the man was written all over him. He must have known how defenseless his antagonist was, for Gail could only hold himself erect by gripping the chair back with both hands clenched.

At the end of a sidewise dash, Rambault rushed forward. Gail shoved the chair toward him. Steel-shod feet gritted into the floor as Rambault leaped, launched his body in air, one foot swinging out and swooping sidewise at Gail's head.

Only the accident of a fall saved Gail. He went to his knees as the chair slipped away from him, then fell flat on his face. He lay helpless, with his head whirling.

Rambault flung the chair aside, raised his mailed foot above Gail's head to jam the sharp calks down. Then a shot rang out.

Rambault fell heavily.

When Gail Halleck turned his head, his senses reeling, he saw Eve Gascoigne coming toward him. In her hand she held a little black automatic. On her face was a smile.

A groan of agony came from Rambault's throat.

"I have not killed him," she said calmly. "He will live—but he will never again administer the coup de pied. His knee will be too stiff. Gail! Are you hurt?"

CHAPTER XXXIV.

AMBER AFTERGLOW.

ON the way toward the white house from the camp hospital, where he had gone after Louis fell asleep, Doctor Bruyère reported to François Gascoigne the substance of a telephone conversation with Eve. In consequence Gascoigne and Anthony Antrim went along with the doctor and they gathered into their cavalcade Pasquale and Harding, the two who had brought Rambault down the river road and then up to the white house. All hurried up the hill, but Pasquale and Harding ran. When François Gascoigne and Antrim arrived on the porch, they met Rambault coming out—feet first, borne by his former guards.

Groans and oaths testified that Rambault was very much alive. Doctor Bruyère had him put on a camp cot which was set up on the porch.

"Take him to the hospital," the doctor said. "It will be necessary to operate and remove the kneecap. It is shattered."

"What is it?" panted François Gascoigne.

Harding, taciturn, gruff old sand dog, spoke: "He was kickin' against the boss' orders," he said, "and he struck his knee on somethin' hard."

Rambault, though perfectly conscious and aware of question and answer, did not contradict the statement. He swore.

François Gascoigne went to the door and looked in—but did not enter. What he saw, in the dying glow of the sunset, made him pluck at Anthony Antrim's sleeve and draw him away.

Gail Halleck had found one position in which the pain from his injuries did not seem so bad. In fact, it was almost negligible. Perhaps that was because, in this position, he could look up into the face of a girl whose eyes seemed pools of warm, velvety tenderness. At any rate, he did not seem to mind the fact that he still lay on the rug, where he had fallen—save for his head and shoulders, which Eve supported.

François Gascoigne and Anthony Antrim, side by side, stood until darkness fell, watching the activity in the crater which was becoming Axle Reservoir, agleam with torches and searchlights and fires from a laboring army of men. The last rays of the sun still touched the top of Seward until its whiteness was rosy, its bright, hard light was soft and warm. Still no lights appeared in the white house. François Gascoigne grew uneasy.

"I will go and see——" he suggested, and stamped up the steps, crunched loudly across the porch and rattled the knob of the door. It was necessary for him to strike a match, in order to see anything in the room. He lighted a hanging lamp. When he looked about, it was to meet the luminous eyes of his daughter, looking up from where she sat on the floor, a tawny head against her shoulder.

François Gascoigne gasped, then chuckled and called to Antrim.

"Eh bien!" he exclaimed, as Antrim entered. "I suppose this is all right. He is an excellent engineer, that is a fact. It is not every engineer who can divert a river from its channel and arrange for a back current to pull the logs upstream."

"What is it?" Gail inquired.

"It is true that you have made the river run upstream," Gascoigne chuckled. "How do you account for that? This is my last drive, I am sorry to say, or I should have a job for you. It is the first drive I have ever seen run upriver, though there is a tradition concerning such a drive, which was directed by the fabulous Paul Bunyan in Minnesota. You are from that section of the country. Are you, by any chance a descendant of Paul Bunyan?"

Gail laughed, in a puzzled fashion. "Paul is the granddaddy of all lumber-

men," he said, "and I am the son of a lumberman."

"That accounts for it then!" Gascoigne roared aloud. "Here is what has happened. All my logs, shooting from the canal into the river below, where there were no booms and little time to lay them, were caught in a back current which lodged them up against the base of the fill. Voilà! There they hung up and gave me time to lay booms. They ran into the backwater like cattle and, like cattle, thrust their heads into the stanchions. It is a remarkable engineering feat, grandson of Bunyan!"

"It is no child of my brain, I am sorry to say," Gail returned. "It is an accident. I had not even thought it would happen."

"It is a simple law of hydraulics," Anthony Antrim remarked. "Nature abhors a vacuum. The Whitewater first filled up the vacant space behind the fill and took the logs with it. Yes, there is always a back current somewhere in the most turbulent stream."

"That is so!" Gascoigne burst out. "I have been caught up in that quiet, powerful back current myself. It has swept me into quiet water, my friends. My life has been a turbulent stream. It needed to be diverted into a new channel and you—you are a great engineer—*my son.*"

IN September, toward the end of the month when the first frosts creep down from the mountains, there lay a great lake in the Whitewater Valley, where once had stood an ugly little town. The lake faithfully reflected, in its placid depths, the high head of Seward, hoary and shining still, after all the suns of summer. It reflected, also, the lesser hills which marched up towards Seward out of the valley.

The lake was colored with the myriad images of the turning hardwoods, on its shores. In the air was the spice of the early autumn, mingled with the tang of fresh-sawed lumber. The song of the saw mingled busily with the *rat-a-tat* of steam drills biting deep into rock and the sibilant, blatant hiss and clank of steam shovels digging away far up the shore of the lake toward the mountains, for a railroad. The drills were busy boring at the great rock tunnel which was being cut through the base of Knob Hill—what was left of it.

Through that tunnel would soon rush the water of the lake, Axle Reservoir, into the turbines which would turn the dynamos and generators of a rising power plant. From the base of the hill, already there gleamed bright copper wires, stretched down the valley many miles. There was something of the same burnished gleam to those wires as showed, along toward sunset, at the summit of Seward, an emanation of strange light, suggesting life, power—electricity. After the sun sank there remained, hovering over mountain and valley, a soft amber afterglow.

In cities, many miles away, where the lines of wire ran, men waited for the coming of a mighty force. They called it electricity. Few thought of a snow-topped mountain, gleaming in the sun, as the source of that power; few thought of there being anything in that crackling, mysterious element comparable to the rays of sunlight, but then, they could not see Mt. Seward, nor the lake with its reflections—nor the eyes of a tawny-haired engineer, with a dream in them.

Executive offices of the Mountain Power Company were in the white house on the hill, which is known as Mont de Gascoigne. It has lost its twin, the plebeian Knob Hill. Knob Hill lies in the bed of the river, holding back the tamed Whitewater.

IN the window on this autumn day sat a tawny-haired, blue-eyed, dreaming viking, looking up into twin pools of velvety tenderness and pride, the

eyes of a black-haired beauty who occupied one of the chairs which helped make the window an office. In those eyes he could see reflected, again, the mirrored picture in the lake. He did not need to turn about and look out the window to see his dream fulfilled.

"By the middle of October, Louis will have finished the tunnel," spoke a golden-haired girl, who was gazing down toward the big fill. How young she looked, this day! It was Greta who spoke.

"And then——" queried Eve, of the velvety eyes.

"We are going up the mountain. I have long wanted to climb to the top of Seward."

"And Gail and I, too!" exclaimed Eve. "We plan to establish a base at a certain old patrol shack, up above where No. 3 reservoir once stood."

"We are going to have the one at No. 2," said Greta.

"We will climb it together then. We will all dip our hands in that bright light, up there—fluid of the sun!"

Gail Halleck laughed happily. "It will be cold," he said.

"Ah! But the sun will be warm! That is what works the miracle, isn't it? It turns snow into electricity. I wonder"—she changed the subject abruptly—"if there are any sparks in your amber hair. I am going to see!"

Something electrified the hydroelectric engineer. Perhaps it was warm fingers in his hair.

William West Winter, whose novels of the West have often appeared in THE POPULAR, *has written a splendid, book-length story that will be published complete in the next issue. It is called "The Veiled Prophet." September 7th is the date. It is an adventure-mystery-action yarn you'll like.*

COUNTED OUT

THERE is drama implicit in life. In an Eastern penitentiary an old lifer had laid careful plans for his escape into the blue and sunshine of the "outside." He carried out these plans, and had with water and a concealed knife loosened the vertical iron bars which framed the daylight in the narrow end of the one window in his cell. The night for self-deliverance had come; help was waiting without the walls. The prisoner removed the window bars and crouched on the ledge, preparatory to jumping to safety. Just then a heavy motor truck came rumbling along the darkened road which ran in a perpendicular line almost up the prison walls. The big, bright searchlights without intention picked out the man squatting on that window ledge. He was a gray silhouette against a black rectangle. A patrolling guard detected the escaper and blew shrilly upon his whistle. The game was up. Chance is liable to hold trumps against any man in the gamble of life.

Holdouts and a Holdup

By John L. Considine and Patrick Casey

Authors of "Brown's in Town," and Other Stories.

It was just a political maneuver, that's all. But it was one of those complicated things that some men have the facility to engineer but not the luck to crawl out of. Yet looting the State treasury, even when that State is in a part of the West we are accustomed to attribute deeds of fantastic daring to, is—well, very unusual.

CIUDAD was, ordinarily, a town of some four thousand souls, but at this period the legislature was meeting there, primarily to elect a man to the United States Senate, and the crude and meager accommodations of the frontier capital were taxed beyond capacity by the precipitous influx of assemblymen, State senators, lobbyists, newspaper men and political bosses and henchmen.

In the tiny cardroom off the extensive bar of the Monticello House, four of the principal powers of the State had reached an impasse in their game. According to accepted traditions, the impasse was of that extreme nature which warrants tragedy. But no one drew a gun. In fact, notwithstanding that this was the West where men are supposed to be men, no one carried on his person such a lethal weapon.

They were, of course, not the ordinary roustabouts, prospectors, desert rats. Judge Barclay had always followed the law, though Lafe Humphrey, before his election to State treasurer, had been for many years a miner and prospector; while "Black" Ballard, previous to becoming political agent for the powerful Q. & Z. Railroad, had been a cowman.

The fourth party to the game and, above all, to the impasse, was Jim Lantry who, up to the time of his appointment to the wardenry of the State prison, had also been a cattle rancher. His rôle at the present moment, however, was a subjective one; for it was under his coat sleeve—not up it—that

"Boss" Ballard had just found the hold-out device.

They were Westerners, bred if not born thus. Yet had any of them possessed a gun at that critical moment, not one would have used it. They behaved, instead, as any four Americans in any other section of these United States might have done under similar circumstances.

THE round pale face of the culprit, Warden Jim Lantry, went a shade paler, and a slight beading of perspiration showed about the edges of his slicked, lemon-colored hair, down even along the neck. An uncommon flush stole into old Judge Barclay's withered cheeks—Lantry was, after all, his son-in-law.

Lafe Humphrey, the State treasurer, sat big and grave as usual, yet with an expression of commiseration molding, indescribably, his solemn features. The piercing black eyes of Boss Ballard, however, gazed sardonically at the cheeks from beneath hedges of eyebrows that were thick and black as smears of graphite.

Lantry was the first to break the silence.

"Gentlemen, when a man is caught with the goods, as I have been, there isn't much to be said. But it won't do any good to gab of what has happened here. I will give back every dollar and penny I have won to-night and, as a guarantee that no friends of yours may ever lose through me, I will pledge myself never to play again. In return, naturally, I'm asking you to say nothing about this—this unfortunate affair." And while awaiting their verdict, he drew with a flourish, and from an inner pocket, a thick roll of bills.

Judge Barclay was the quickest to respond.

"I will give you my word, Jim," he promised. "Of course," turning to Lafe Humphrey and Ballard who sat side by side, "the fact that Warden Lantry is my son-in-law motivates me considerably, I must admit. But, as he has said, it will serve no good purpose to ruin his reputation, and I therefore join with him in asking you to keep this happening a secret."

"Supposing Warden Lantry returns our money first," suggested the political boss.

"How much do I owe you, Mr. Ballard?" asked Lantry politely.

Ballard fingered a small stack of chips, then examined his pocketbook. "I had seven hundred dollars when I sat down," he summed up. "I have just three hundred and twenty-five now."

Jim Lantry counted out three hundred and seventy-five dollars in bills, shoved the sheaf over to Ballard, and turned to his neighbor, the State treasurer. "How much for you, Mr. Humphrey?"

"Not a red cent, by gravy!" declared Lafe Humphrey. "Poker calls for a keen eye, an agile brain and a plentiful lack of confidence in human nature, and I'm afraid I've fallen down on all three points. I've been guilty of what the judge here would call contributory negligence, and I stand liable for my losses in toto." Rising, he put on his hat.

"Don't go," urged Judge Barclay, always the mediator. "It's only the shank of the evening, Lafe. You and Ballard and I can play three-handed."

"No, I'm sorry. But I'll have to work until midnight as it is," said Humphrey, and went out.

"Humphrey doesn't row in our boat," remarked Judge Barclay, as the door closed behind Lafe. "Yet you've got to take off your hat to him in some ways. I'll bet he hasn't a hundred dollars to his name this very minute."

"You win," was the dry, side-mouthed comment of Black Ballard. "For me, I think that any man who won't take money whenever and wherever he can get it ought to have his

head examined. Possibly you may consider him a hero, judge, but I maintain he hasn't brains enough to comprehend the mysteries of a quail trap. While you're singing his praises, please don't overlook the fact that he made no promise regarding this little unpleasant break of the warden's."

The judge pooh-poohed the insinuation, to the evident relief of the silent Lantry.

"For that matter," he pursued, "you have made no promise yourself, Mr. Ballard. I'd like to remind you that the warden was appointed on your say-so, that he has always played the political game with you, and that his brother, by the by, still controls Maverick County."

"Judge," replied the boss coldly, "in my dealings with the Lantry boys, there are no outstanding obligations. The present affair is, therefore, a matter that lies strictly between the warden and myself. I want to talk to him about one or two other important issues. May I ride out to the prison with you, Jim?"

"Certainly," assented the warden rather eagerly. "My buggy is down at Creighton's stable."

Leaving the judge to play solitaire, the two passed out through the bar. On the edge of the plank sidewalk in front stood Lafe Humphrey, smoking a cigar, his back to them and his attention apparently engrossed by the darkened shacks opposite. They turned down the street and had gone but a score of steps when he swung off after them.

Humphrey saw them enter Creighton's livery stable and then, unnoticed by them and in an abruptly thoughtful mood, continued on his own way toward the capitol itself.

The façade of the square, two-story State Building was shadowy with darkness, so the State treasurer passed around to the rear where two heavily curtained windows to one side of the south entrance betrayed glimmering signs of a light within. Mounting the short flight of steps, Humphrey tapped on the window nearest the door. The door opened presently to reveal the silhouette of a man inside.

"Hello, Conny," Humphrey hailed the night watchman.

"Evenin', Lafe."

The door swung wide. Humphrey stepped within and Connerton, having carefully locked the outer door, opened another just inside the corridor through which poured the light from an office. The solitary occupant thereof arose from his seat near the stove and offered his hand.

"Hello, Tom," Humphrey greeted. "Waiting for me?"

"Just dropped in for a little chat," responded Assemblyman Grannan.

THE office was big, with the high ceiling peculiar to the era. In the north wall appeared the large door of an old-fashioned safe, the depository of State funds. Ranging the east wall was a longitudinal tall desk, one of the kind at which clerks customarily worked, either standing or mounted on high stools. A barrel-shaped stove stood in the center of the room. Around it were grouped, as for a political meeting, three capacious chairs upholstered in black leather.

Humphrey and Assemblyman Tom Grannan seated themselves in two of these and were joined a minute later by Connerton, who had paused to secure the office door. While Connerton was night watchman of the entire capitol building, he made his especial care the treasury. He had been appointed by the State treasurer and enjoyed Humphrey's complete trust.

Lafe also entertained a vast respect for his political acumen, as Connerton knew the history of the State, inside and out, and was, besides, a shrewd judge of men and motives. Once a personage of means, he had been Hum-

phrey's chief bondsman at the time of the robbery of the treasury of Hornsilver County, and he had stoutly fought the scandalmongers who whispered that the robbery was an "inside job."

"Well, what's new?" inquired Humphrey of the assemblyman.

"Nothing much," said Grannan, "except that Boss Ballard was after me today again, giving me the old typewriter wheeze about 'Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their party.' I told him the quick black fox wasn't going to put anything over on the lazy dog this session, if I could help it. He wanted me to vote for Jewett."

"And of course you'll do that," remarked Humphrey, with an ironical smile.

"I told him there was just one man who could get me to vote for that old rascal, and he was you, Lafe."

"Thank you, Tom," said Humphrey, with his characteristic gravity. "I don't care to be the keeper of your political conscience, yet I must admit it would be a calamity to send that man back to Washington. I suppose Ballard quit you cold when he heard my name."

"Not at all. He went on to say that while Jewett had the legislature, 'body, boots and britches,' as he put it, he wants to make the contenders look foolish and for that reason offered me five thousand dollars just to stay away tomorrow morning. Now I know he wouldn't waste five thousand dollars on a mere grand-stand play—still, just what does that offer mean?"

"Easy as all-git-out," returned the treasurer. "The State senate and the assembly meet separately to-morrow morning to cast the first ballot for United States senator, and the man who can get a majority in each house is elected then and there. Jewett holds the senate, nine to seven, but the assembly stands tied, fifteen to fifteen. If you stay away, Jewett carries the assembly, fifteen to fourteen, and becomes senator. But if the assembly remains tied there will be no choice on the separate ballot, and the two houses will then have to get together and ballot jointly until a senator is elected."

Grannan regarded the other with a puzzled frown.

"But," he protested, "if the vote stands fifteen to fifteen in the assembly and nine to seven in the senate on the separate ballot, Jewett ought to win by twenty-four to twenty-two when they get together for the joint ballot."

Humphrey's solemn face was lighted by a smile.

"Looks plain as a pikestaff, doesn't it? But if there is ever a case where two and two don't make four, it is in politics. You see, it's like this: Ballard got to work on the nominating conventions last fall, when it looked as if Jewett was to have no opposition, and he had easy sledding in tying these legislators up to Jewett. But now, with five other senatorial candidates in the field, these pledged legislators are r'arin' to break away. They consider themselves honor bound to vote for Jewett, but only to the extent of the first ballot. If it ever goes beyond that to a second shuffling, it's the bone yard for Mr. Jewett and nobody knows that better than Black Ballard."

"There ought to be a field of six against Jewett," suggested Grannan quietly, looking directly at his friend. "I'd like to vote for you, Lafe, for senator."

Humphrey's large features showed an odd expression of wistfulness. But he shook his head.

"No, Tom, it's too high for me. My chief aim was to clear my name after that robbery. It took me a score, yes, twenty years, to win vindication, but the slate was sponged and cleared off when I got this office. That's about all I can ever hope for now."

The night watchman then took a hand.

"Yes, you should be in the senatorial fight, Lafe," Connerton urged. "That field is a bunch of four-time losers, excepting Congressman Cadwalder, and he's as crooked as old Jewett, only the people aren't on to him yet. He's my idea of a perfect Pharisee. Give me an out-and-out scoundrel before such a canting old hypocrite, every time."

"I believe," said Grannan, "I'll vote for Merkel."

"He's about the best of the four old has-beens that think they are running neck and neck with Cadwalder," conceded Connerton. "But why," he persisted, "don't you take your coat off and make a fight for Humphrey?"

"The only thing that holds me is that I'm practically green here."

"You used to be a pretty good hand at conventions," reminded Connerton, "and the legislature is just like a convention, only more so, if you get what I mean."

"No use, Conny," protested Humphrey. "Don't waste your time on me, Tom."

"Well, one thing you can bank on, Lafe Humphrey," said Grannan, rising and reaching for his hat. "My vote is yours to do with as you please, old man. Coming uptown?"

"No," Humphrey shook his head. I'll be working hours from now. My predecessor had some original notions about bookkeeping and I'm straightening out the kinks."

ABOUT the time that Connerton was locking the back door of the capitol building behind the departing assemblyman, Warden Jim Lantry was slipping the key into the door of his apartments on the second floor of the prison building. He effected entrance, switched on the lights, and stood aside to allow Ballard to enter first into the spacious, comfortably furnished room. The political boss threw himself into an easy-chair and looked quickly about.

"Are we alone?" he inquired, lifting his heavy, black brows.

Lantry nodded and seated himself opposite.

"My family is visiting the coast," he explained.

"Lantry," said the boss then, leaning forward and laying a hand on the warden's knee, "I want a burglar."

Lantry's naturally large, round eyes grew larger and rounder.

"What?"

"I want a man to commit a burglary —open a safe—and I want him now, to-night."

But the warden only continued to stare. The ticking of the ormolu clock on the mantelpiece became a suddenly distinguishable sound.

"I want you to furnish the man, Jim. But wait a moment!" Ballard lifted an admonishing hand. "Listen before you object and when you do spiel, be brief, as time is precious."

He sat back in the chair.

"It's not a real burglary," he elaborated. "It's merely borrowing some money from the State treasury for a few hours. Jewett needs another vote and, by hook or crook, we're going to get it. Lafe Humphrey owns this man, Grannan, body, boots and britches, and I'm going to put the screws on Humphrey till Tom Grannan comes through with that vote."

"Lafe will balk," declared the warden, with conviction.

"He won't," retorted the boss as confidently. "When he was county treasurer of Hornsilver, nineteen or twenty years ago, that office was robbed and there were ugly rumors afloat. The happening all but broke his heart. He's never forgotten it and he never will. This office is the first he's held since then, in all of twenty long years. Suppose now the State treasury is burglarized. And I can clear him of it, or allow him to be held for it. What's the answer? Will he knuckle under and do

what I demand, or not? Answer me that!" Ballard selected a cigar from his coat pocket with the air of a man who knows his stuff.

Lantry gazed almost fascinatedly at him.

"Ballard," he said at last, and with obvious admiration, "you do beat the devil! I have heard you would stop at nothing, but never before this did I understand what that nothing meant." He looked away, presumably for a match with which to light the chief's cigar. Having found it, however, he made no move.

"The trouble with your scheme, Ballard," he pointed out, still averting his gaze, looking down at the match between his fingers, "is that it means a conspiracy which would put us both in stripes downstairs were it to be proved on us. I would do mostly anything to oblige you, but I quit at crime. Don't ask me to do a crooked job."

The boss drew the match from his fingers, struck it against the sole of one shoe and touched the flame to his cigar. He puffed several times, all the while eying the warden opposite with cynical amusement.

"No, you wouldn't do a crooked thing, Jim, provided it wasn't safe," he commented. "But I'm here to tell you, Mr. 'Holdout Man,' that you're going to do this! I can break you socially—and if I have to do more, I'll go ahead and strip you even of your soft job. I'm no Lafe Humphrey. Men are my tools, and if I can't bend 'em, I break 'em! Take your choice—my burglar to-night or the holdout scandal on the streets in the morning." He paused, to resume with passionate vehemence. "Why, damn you, Jim Lantry, your risk is nothing compared to mine! You'll be asleep here in your comfortable bed while I'm going through with the holdup."

"Never fear that I'll sleep," returned the warden bitterly.

At this sign of surrender, the boss took a firmer grip on the cigar in his mouth and relaxed into the easy-chair.

"But I can't," pursued Lantry. "I simply can't take a man out of this prison without some officer being aware of it. There is a guard on duty in the main cell room all night."

"You don't need to take him out of the cell room. Of all those trusties whose cubbies open on the main drive, isn't there one among them that is, or was, a safe cracker, an A1 peterman?"

This gave the warden a new turn, and he considered it.

"There's Murdock," he ventured. "Yet I wouldn't call him an expert soup boy. He's in for embezzlement, though he has jimmied a safe or two in his time, I believe."

"He'll do," decided Ballard. "This safe is a rusty old-timer, a regular tin can."

"But you don't know these fellows, these zebras!" objected Lantry, with faint ardor. "They'll all blab."

"Not if you promise Murdock a pardon in this case. You tell him, my boy, that at the July meeting of the prison board, he'll get his going-away papers. I'll guarantee you, warden, that the goods will be delivered."

"He'll blab afterward, then."

"Let him! What's to stop us from calling him a thorough-paced liar? And who will believe the wild, improbable yarn of an ex-convict against the word of the honorable warden?" He lingered over the word "honorable."

Lantry winced. "But suppose he should get away from you?"

"You can rest easy on that score," said Ballard grimly, "if you'll just loan me a gat from your armory. Now, listen to me, Jim Lantry, 'cause we've talked too much already. Get Murdock, bring him up the little secret staircase to these apartments and fit him out with a pair of pants and an overcoat to go over his prison togs. While you're downstairs, before you let Murdock out,

order the hostler to bring your buggy round in front of the door below.

"Here's the plan. I'll drive down the road a pace and you can follow with Murdock, away from the lights of the main entrance, and put him into the buggy. I'll let him drive, with my gun ready to shove into his ribs if he tries any monkey jumps. Depend upon it, you'll have him back before daylight. On second thought, that *will* let you in for a wakeful night, as you'll have to be on watch in order to put him back in his cell."

"Oh, don't worry yourself about my sleep!" retorted Lantry sourly, exposing for the first time the distressful state of his nerves. "Don't think I'll enjoy any shut eye before I know exactly how this affair has turned out. Me, I can foresee all sorts of complications—Humphrey resisting, perhaps killed, or maybe a man in striped clothing dead on the floor of the State treasury with me to explain how he got there."

Ballard laughed, rather harshly. "Where's your courage, man? You have, I'm afraid, too vivid an imagination for a warden. I know the State house better'n the man who built it; I have keys to all its doors, how or why don't ask me; and I know, besides, the habits of every man jack in it. There'll be no trouble, my scary officer of the law. But even if Murdock should be croaked—which he won't be—you'll have your alibi, all ready and neat. He escaped from the prison, aided by confederates on the outside. Who would know, or guess, that you were the confederate?"

IT lacked but a few minutes of midnight when Connerton, who was dozing by the fire, glanced at Humphrey, still toiling at the desk, cocked an eye at the clock, arose and, leaving the office, descended into the basement for more fuel for the stove. As he turned, bearing an armful of wood, to ascend the staircase, a billy impinged upon his cranium and he sank in a heap.

Three minutes later Humphrey felt a hard pressure against the small of his back and obeyed, without pause or quibbling, the command of "Hands up!"

Five minutes later, gagged and thoroughly trussed, he lay upon the floor, while one masked man became busy with the door of the safe and the other, revolver in hand, sat in one of the easy-chairs by the stove, watching Humphrey.

There was something strangely familiar about the hands of this sentinel. They suggested a pair Lafe had recently seen shuffling and dealing cards. But of the three pairs of hands in action that night, which were these? Lafe discarded Lantry instanter; the warden was round, pudgy and blond even to his hands, and these opposite were long and lean, with a growth of black hair. They couldn't be Barclay's; the judge was elderly, fragile and nervous, and these hands were powerful and firm, without sign of tremor. There remained Ballard. But that supposition was, of course, out of the question. Ballard was many kinds of a legalized criminal, but he was no burglar.

Humphrey turned his attention to the man at the safe. Back turned, fingers febrilely working on the combination of the safe, about all to be observed of this party were the clothes he wore. A plaid cap drawn down over his ears barely revealed a strip of neck. Then came a long dark overcoat of fine material, below which showed a pair of wheat-colored trousers, herring-bone pattern and also of a fine weave. But they seemed rather short for the man, as they plainly disclosed about the ankles the presence of socks of a cheap white shoddy and absurdly thin for winter wear.

To finish off, the shoes he wore were in keeping with the socks, in that they were outrageously out of sorts with the

overcoat and trousers. Of heavy cowhide and crudely fashioned, Humphrey tried in vain to recall just where he had seen brogans like these before. He had seen them somewhere, he was convinced, yet where? He closed his eyes. His head was buzzing. What did it matter. Nothing could save him now.

At the sound of jingling coin, he reopened his eyes abruptly. The man in cap and overcoat was dropping bags of money into a canvas sack held open now by the second burglar. Lafe Humphrey counted the bags as he heard them fall. A moment later, without further word, the two burglars were gone, leaving the door of the safe swinging idly open.

HOURS later, resting for a moment from fruitlessly struggling with his bonds, Humphrey caught a creak from the door of the office and there, on the threshold, stood Black Ballard.

"Well, well," exclaimed the boss, simulating surprise and glancing from the captive to the gaping safe, then back again, "this *is* a mess, a fine howdy-do!" He removed the gag from Humphrey's mouth and proceeded to untie the bonds, talking the while. "I was going through the grounds, homeward bound after that late poker session at the Monticello," he explained, "and happened to notice that the rear door here was open. Naturally I came in and was led hither by the light from your office showing under the door. What's happened?"

"We've been held up and robbed," answered Humphrey simply, his eyes on Ballard's hands, still busy with the ropes. "I'm afraid Connerton's been slugged or murdered. Let's hurry and find him."

There was no sign of the night watchman in the corridor.

"The basement," suggested Humphrey. "Perhaps he went down there for fuel for the stove and was caught as in a trap."

At the foot of the basement steps they found Connerton, gagged and bound, but returned to consciousness. In a twinkling they freed him. But he knew less than Humphrey about who had slugged him; he had not even glimpsed his assailants.

"Next—the sheriff's office," said Lafe, and hurried up the staircase, two steps at a time, the boss immediately behind him and Connerton stumbling in the rear.

"Just a moment, Humph," interposed Ballard, as he and Humphrey were the first to enter the office. "When did this —this burglary take place?"

"About midnight."

The boss looked significantly up at the clock on the wall.

"It's four now, Lafe," he pointed out. "With that start your chances of catching the thieves are pretty slim. Let's see what's been taken."

"No need to look," snapped Humphrey, in real chagrin. "They got ten bags of gold. I know; I counted 'em. Ten thousand dollars!"

The chief whistled.

"Ten thou," he repeated, then oddly: "Quite a coincidence."

"Coincidence?"

"Just that," the boss nodded. Precisely the amount stolen when you were treasurer of Hornsilver County!"

Humphrey bit his rather full lower lip. He said nothing, however.

"Give the alarm now," continued the boss, "with the burglars four hours to the good and well on their way and with remembrance of your own bad luck in Hornsilver, and what will the people think, say? Aw, don't get wild, Lafe! Keep your shirt on! I know you're honest as they make 'em and all that, Humph! But lookit, we're both men of the world; we know human nature, how cranky and suspicious it is; and we know, further, what was said about that Hornsilver robbery. You're damned, Lafe Humphrey, for good and all, unless that money is back before daylight. And

it can be replaced. I'm telling you, man. You have only to say the word."

"What word?"

"Send Connerton to get Assemblyman Grannan right down, and pledge him to vote for Jewett."

But Humphrey was adamant.

"I won't do that, Ballard," he returned decisively. "Tom Grannan is my friend, and I think too much of him and his friendship to put him in wrong with his people. They have no use for Jewett; he's poison!"

"Tut, tut, man! Then have Grannan stay away until the first ballot is over. He can't get in bad for that."

Humphrey considered gloomily; he had much at stake, practically everything.

"Do it, Lafe," urged Connerton.

"All right," capitulated Humphrey. "I'll ask Tom to stay away, but I won't guarantee, Ballard, that he'll promise to do so."

The Boss couldn't restrain a look of pleasure.

"Enough," he said. "That's all I wanted to hear you say. And to show you what I think of your word, Humphrey, and what you can do with Tom Grannan, I am going now to get the money. I'll put it in a buggy, wait in the street opposite the rear entrance and, as soon as Grannan leaves your office, I'll bring the loot in. O. K.?"

Lafe Humphrey nodded, and the Boss left the office. Within an hour the deal was consummated, the money back in the safe and Tom Grannan was committed to staying away from the assembly during the balloting of the first vote for United States Senator. Boss Ballard had, to all appearances, won.

EYES red, face wan and showing lines that had not been there the previous evening, Lafe Humphrey entered the dining room of the Monticello House. It lacked a few minutes of seven o'clock, and no one was there but a waitress.

"Just a cup of black coffee, Nan," he ordered, and sat, head in his hands, wearily reviewing the hectic events of the night. His meditations were blasted by a drink-thickened voice, wailing:

"Drunk last night and drunk the night before;
I can always find the keyhole, but never find the door.
So I'm cuttin' out the red-eye and I'll never drink no more,
Exceptin' when I feel a little thir-stee!"

The bibulous songster, weaving his way unsteadily from the bar, seated himself with a thump opposite Humphrey. He was Assemblyman Harkness of Buckbrush County.

"Goo' mornin'," he effused. "Been up all ni', too?"

"I worked late," returned Humphrey tersely.

Harkness perceived something comical in his statement, for he laughed heartily.

"Work? Tha's funny. 'Magine an officeholder workin'!"

Intent upon tucking his napkin inside his collar, he relapsed into gravity, but laughed again as he picked up a spoon.

"I was workin' myse'f las' ni'." He conveyed a spoonful of breakfast food unsteadily to his mouth. "Out at Warm Springs, takin' on a cargo. Whoosh! What a load!"

Humphrey, his appetite for coffee gone, pushed back his chair preparatory to rising.

"Me, I don't have to work. See?" Harkness produced a leather folder and from within it a thin sheaf of bills. Humphrey glanced at the topmost note and settled back suddenly in his chair.

"A thousand-dollar bill!" he exclaimed. "That's the first I've seen in a coon's age."

"Don't you have 'em in the treasury?"

"No." Humphrey shook his head thoughtfully. "Nothing but gold and silver."

"Thass so? Well, this is outside

money. I guess you fathom where it comes from, eh?"

Unrestrained laughter grated once more on Humphrey's ear.

"Ballard, of course," chanced Lafe, with the air of one inviting confidences.

Harkness remained noncommittal.

"A very clever, suave gentleman, Mr. Ballard," persisted the State treasurer.

"Suave, yuh say? Clever?" The assemblyman's bleary eyes lighted up with appreciation. "Smooth? Slick? Say, you're tootin', 'bo! That slicker could steal the hair offa your head and make you think you looked better without it!"

Humphrey maintained silence, thereby inciting Harkness to further eulogy.

"Smooth, you say? He's more'n that! He's a great man, sir, great man. Oughta be in metropoluses, 'stead of this dinky one-hoss burg."

"You don't seem to fancy Ciudad."

"Me? I should say not! Look at the skee they dish out. Terrible stuff! If a Buckbrush barkeep gave a miner one of them peppersass and prussic-acid cocktails, the man 'u'd knock him dead and no jury 'u'd convict him of manslaughter even!"

Humphrey sat up with a sudden idea. "How would you like some thirty-year-old stuff?" he asked.

"Thirty-year whisky? Like some?" The assemblyman's eyes managed to achieve eloquence.

"Come on, then, down to Creighton's and I'll hire a rig," encouraged Lafe. "A few miles drive in the crisp morning air will do us both good," he went on, as if he himself had been guilty of alcoholic excess.

"Where to?" probed Harkness, eagerly though stumblingly following him out of the hotel.

"To the pen. Warden Jim Lantry has some bourbon that was left him by his grandfather. There was a forty-gallon barrel of it, but I guess there isn't much left, not by a good deal. Of course, Jim only doles it out on grand and festive occasions, but I'm pretty sanguine that any friend of mine, like you, Harkness, will be welcome to a taste of it."

Ere he stepped into the buggy, the assemblyman gave a sudden glance at his watch.

"Eight fifteen," he remarked. "That gives me time and to spare to git back here by ten." It was obvious he was sobering fast in the fresh, chill air.

"But why, by ten?"

"'Cause the assembly meets at that hour, you nitwit. Gotta be there on the dot to vote for Jewett. Old Blackie Ballard 'u'd skin me alive if I failed to show up on time."

BY then they were turning out of the main street into the prison road.

"Say, this is great stuff!" commented Harkness, with a degree of enthusiasm. "You know, I like jails and prisons and sechlike things."

"How come?"

"Why, I had a jail of my own once," he replied, with pride. "I used to be sheriff of Buckbrush County."

As Humphrey drew rein in front of the prison, a trusty, eager for a tip, came racing to hold their team. Alighting on the stepping-stone, Humphrey, happening to glance down at the convict's brogans, nodded with swift recollection. At the office inside, a man seated at a desk greeted him by name.

"I want to see the warden personally," announced Lafe.

"Can't be done, sir, I'm sorry. Mr. Lantry isn't up yet. He got to bed late and left strict orders not to be disturbed."

Humphrey's eyes narrowed. "That's odd. I saw him leaving town at nine last night. I suppose, though," he added, as if by afterthought, "emergencies do have a way of cropping up to rob him of his beauty sleep. Call him up," he continued sharply, "and mention my name. I miss my guess if he doesn't

want to see me a lot more than I do him."

Obediently, the man took up the desk phone.

"That you, warden? Yes, I know, sir, but it's Lafe Humphrey who is here. . . . Yes, the State treasurer. He says you have important business with him. . . . Show him up? Surely, sir, right away."

The warden's ordinarily bright, round eyes were dull and sleepy as he greeted his visitors. They widened as Humphrey explained why they had come.

"Some of the stuff Moses Grinnell gave my granddad, the old senator? Sure, Lafe!" he assented, with labored good-fellowship and poorly hidden relief. "There are only a few quarts left, but you are welcome to it. Excuse me a moment; I must fetch it myself. Wouldn't trust a trusty in the same room with it."

He seemed glad to depart. Returning promptly, he handed the decanter to Lafe and gave no sign that he considered his hospitality imposed upon when Harkness filled his glass so full some of the precious liquor overflowed. Harkness drained the glass and, without further bid, refilled and emptied it again. But when he reached for the decanter a third time, it wasn't there. Lantry had it and was looking at one of his visitors as he might have gazed at a strange animal in a menagerie.

It was with an effort that Lafe Humphrey managed to repress a smile.

"Harkness," he said then, "I'll bet they haven't anything better than this in all of Buckbrush. By the way, warden," turning to Lantry, "Mr. Harkness used to be sheriff of that county, and I'd consider it a favor to myself if you'd show him around your new cell house."

"Certainly, Mr. Humphrey," said Lantry, glad to oblige in these minor matters. "Only too happy to do anything for you or any friend of yours. I'll be with you in a jiffy." He nodded significantly at the decanter still in his hand.

"Why in heck didn't you tell him I was in the legislature?" queried Harkness, once the warden was gone. "Senator Brann tells me all these appointees will jump sidewise for a legislator."

"Don't you believe anything of the sort," rejoined Lafe, with a wry smile. "I didn't want to make him uneasy; that's all. He's got a lot of silverware, jewelry and other valuables scattered around this apartment."

PUZZLED by this too-cryptic remark, Harkness was still frowning ludicrously when Lantry returned.

"You see, gentlemen," explained the warden, as they entered the cell house, "the new cells have been in use only about six weeks. Under the old system, we had to lock each cubby separately. Now we can lock them all at once by the single action of a lever. Of course, we can lock one cell at a time, as for instance, when we have to put a prisoner in confinement during the day for punishment."

Approaching a cell, he threw open its door.

"Another advantage," he continued, "is that iron cells are sanitary. The old ones were of sandstone and, although regularly whitewashed, vermin would get in. The prisoners used to hunt them at night by the light of candles. Now the old wooden, vermin-infested bunks are replaced by beds of sheet iron, swung, as you may observe, by chains from the walls."

"Looks kinda hard," remarked Harkness judicially.

"Not with these mattresses," said Lantry.

"Why not try them?" suggested Humphrey pointedly.

"Believe I will," responded Harkness, stretching himself luxuriously upon the lower of two bunks. "Gosh, but this

feels good! Say, I could stay here a year." He closed his eyes, the lids already weighted down under the effects of the last potent liquor he had imbibed. "I'm suffering with comfort," he added.

With a tilt of the head and a significant nod, Humphrey led the way out, closed the door, turned the key which had been left in the lock and withdrew it, much to the wonderment of the warden. Jamming the key between the lock bar and the door of an adjoining cell, Lafe gave it a twist and snapped off the bit.

Lantry's round eyes fairly bulged. "Now what in tarnashun—— Why did you do that? We have no duplicates!"

"So much the better," commented Lafe dryly. "How long will it take to get a new one fashioned for us, have one made?"

The warden considered. "I suppose we can get a locksmith from town and have it done in a couple of hours. But what's the idea?"

Humphrey ignored the query. "Well, there's no hurry," he drawled. "Don't send for the locksmith until ten o'clock at the earliest."

"What! With that going on!"

Harkness had come to life. He was rattling the door, banging the sheet-iron bed, yelling like a madman.

"That shouldn't worry you," Humphrey spoke loudly, to make himself heard.

"No?" ejaculated the warden. "Why, this noise alone is a scandalous breach of prison discipline. Beyond that, I must remind you, Humphrey, there is such a thing as being sued for false imprisonment."

"Here's your alibi, then." Lafe held up the broken key. "Besides, the man was guilty of contributory negligence in entering that cell and, of his own volition, lying down."

"It's no laughing matter, Mr. Humphrey," declared the warden stiffly. "This institution is no joke, nor is it a fitting place for practical jokes."

Humphrey looked full at him. "Now I wouldn't be too sure of that, Jim Lantry," he drawled. "A pen from which inmates are released at night to commit burglary is something we don't usually look for, except of course in burlesques or comic operas."

"And just what do you mean by that?" Lantry managed to say.

Humphrey, eying him narrowly, noticed he had turned ashen.

"Do you really wish me to tell you?" retorted Lafe, with a mocking smile. "No, I rather think not. See here, Jim Lantry"—and he was suddenly serious—"I can stand a lot, but by gravy, there's a limit! I'm for peace by choice, yet get me going and I'll fight till hell freezes over and then I'll fight on the ice. Up to this minute, the choice is yours. What'll it be—peace or war?"

The warden laid a conciliatory hand on Lafe's shoulder. "Come upstairs, Humph, and have another nip of that jubilee liquor," he offered. "I'm not afraid to trust you with the decanter," he smiled wanly. "Yet I must admit I had more than half a notion to offer a bar of soap and a towel to that howling friend of yours and ask him was he taking a bath."

"Don't call him a friend of mine," growled Lafe, following him. "Harkness is not my friend!"

"What's that devilish racket, warden?" asked the turnkey, as Lantry and the treasurer emerged from the cell room into the guardroom.

"Visitor locked in by mistake. Broken key."

"I'll phone for the locksmith, sir?"

"No, Smithy, leave that to me. But go in and tell that maniac that the locksmith will be here soon. I don't want the place demolished." Lantry forced a smile at Humphrey.

Reassured by Lantry's tacit promise, Lafe would have liked to go; but he

had determined, long since, to take no chances with the working out of his plot. He meant to stay with the warden until the moment of Harkness' release.

ABOUT the time that Lantry sent for the locksmith—ten o'clock—the speaker of the assembly was calling it to order. A few minutes later began the vote for United States senator. The clerk read off the names in alphabetical order and each member, as his name was called, declared his preference.

As the first member arose, Black Ballard, wearing the contented smile of a victorious general, settled into a chair at the desk of Culver, the assemblyman from his own home county. The roll call proceeded without incident to the name of Assemblyman Tom Grannan.

"Mr. Grannan," droned the clerk perfunctorily.

There was no answer.

"Mr. Grannan!" he repeated, a little sharply, looking up.

There was silence. Then an excited buzzing began on the floor and in the gallery.

"Mr. Grannan!" called the clerk again, at last showing positive interest.

"That settles it," whispered Culver agitatedly. "Jewett is elected, fifteen—fourteen."

The boss nodded, imperturbable as ever. He was an old stager, not easily excited. Then, the third call for Grannan having elicited no response, the clerk, in accordance with precedent, passed on to the next name:

"Mr. Harkness."

Here was a surprise—there was no answer! Black Ballard glanced quickly over to the seat in a rear corner usually occupied by the member from Buckbrush County. It was vacant.

"Mr. Harkness!"

No reply, save that excited buzzing again on the floor and in the gallery. Veteran of a hundred political contests, the boss controlled his facial muscles, so that not the faintest twitching of emotion showed on his features.

"Mr. Harkness!" It was the third time and still no answer.

"Culver," whispered the boss, "you have already voted. You're not needed here. Go into the lobby and scout up Harkness."

"Maybe he's thrown us down."

"No," asserted Ballard, with supreme confidence. "He belongs to me, body, boots and britches. He wouldn't dare throw us. If he isn't in the lobby or on his way to the building, you'll find him in his room—drunk, probably. Take a cab, Culver. It's only three blocks, but seconds are precious. Drag him here by the end of the roll call if you have to tote him in, in overcoat and pajamas. I'll get the clerk to go slow and easy on the call."

Culver left the chamber at a run. In obedience to a whisper from the boss, who was accustomed as of royal right to make free with the chamber, its members and officers, the clerk prolonged the calling of the roll as much as he dared. Before the name of Zimmerman, the last on the list, was reached, Culver returned empty-handed and entirely dejected.

"What!" ejaculated Ballard. "Not in his room? Well, where in blue blazes is the damn sot?"

"The vote stands," announced the clerk, "Jewett, fourteen; Cadwalder, nine; Hester, two; Craven, one; Merkel, one; and Walling, one."

"As no candidate has received a majority of all the votes cast," declared the speaker, "the assembly will reconvene in joint session with the State senate and proceed to a joint ballot."

A few minutes later the members of the senate filed in and seated themselves alongside the assemblymen from their respective counties. The president of the senate took his place by the speaker of the assembly; the secretary of the senate stood up at the desk of the clerk

of the assembly; then began the roll call for the first joint ballot.

Tom Grannan furnished one sensation when he arose in answer to his name on this call, and another when he announced: "I cast my vote for the Honorable Lafe Humphrey."

There was a cheer from the gallery, the first that had greeted the name of any nominee. The speaker, a Jewett partisan, threatened angrily to clear the place of spectators if the demonstration was repeated. The huzza, however, produced a visible effect on some of the lukewarm members.

At the close of the roll call, the clerk proclaimed the result: "Jewett, twenty; Cadwalder, eleven; Hester, seven; Craven, two; Merkel, two; Walling, two; Humphrey, one." The joint body thereupon proceeded to a second ballot, giving Jewett, twenty; Cadwalder, fifteen and Humphrey, ten.

Obeying a whisper from Ballard, Assemblyman Culver moved an adjournment to the following day. The motion was defeated immediately, and the combined legislature went to the third balloting.

AT half past one in the afternoon, Lafe Humphrey drove up to the entrance of the capitol, hastened into the building and, eager to learn if Jewett had been defeated, passed by his own office and ascended toward the assembly chamber. As he attained the landing, he met Black Ballard emerging. The Boss looked a little fagged, but no sign of discomfiture appeared on his bland face as he extended his right hand.

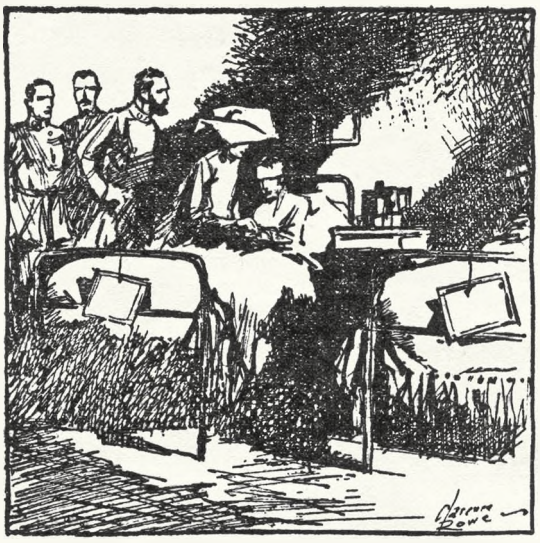
Humphrey looked nonplused at this sudden show of cordiality.

"Take it, Lafe. The victor can afford to be generous," said the Boss. "I'm congratulating you, Senator Humphrey!"

THE SAGE OF VIENNA

THERE are not many people left in this now completely discovered world who have not formed some sort of notion about Professor Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychoanalysis. Copious references to the Herr Doctor have been made in newspapers, in the records of courts of civil and common law, in the literature of advertising, in popular songs from Broadway and Vienna jazzeries and in the eleven large volumes of the scientist's works which have been translated into the English, Dutch, Russian, Swedish, Magyar, French and Italian languages. And this spring the psychoanalyst celebrated his seventieth birthday at his quiet home in the Bergasse, Vienna

And although Professor Freud is a very wise man, he can never lay claim to the gaberdine of the prophet, for in his youth he inscribed these unprophetic words upon the white sheets of his diary: "I should be able to support myself, but science will take no notice of me in my lifetime."



The Abominable Test

By Fred MacIsaac

Author of "Tin Hats," "Breakfast at the Plaza," Etc.

There are outgrowths of war that are more appalling even than the Gargantuan conflicts in which whole cities of men try to fill each other with pellets of lead and blades of steel. The army hospital is one of them. Here, where lost souls wing upwards and outwards with every tick of the second hand, the characters of our story concern themselves with science and the error which is ever in wait for science.

WHILE President Wilson was running for reëlection in the fall of 1916 on a policy of neutrality, I was pulling wires in Paris for an appointment as a staff surgeon in a French military hospital. I landed at a post at a big temporary hospital at Maunay, a few miles north of the capital.

Of course, I was wildly pro-Ally and eager to aid them, but I was also a young surgeon with little experience and I wanted practice—that's the truth. In an army hospital in war time, a physician could learn more about his business in a month than in five years of ordinary service. So I packed my bag and got a train for Maunay as soon as I received my orders.

When I set eyes on the hospital, I realized how different its management must be from the superb, quiet, well-ordered institution in New York where I had served a year as an interne. It was a huge shed of wood and galvanized iron, about six hundred feet long by sixty or seventy feet wide. The entire lower floor was a great open ward with beds jammed in until there was hardly room between them for a doctor or nurse to squeeze in. Part of the second floor was also used for patients; part was partitioned off as sleeping quarters for the staff.

The structure was ingeniously but hideously camouflaged so that hostile airplanes, soaring above, might not distinguish it. Early in the war they had

placed huge red crosses on the roofs of hospitals, trusting to the humanity of the foe; and the trust had often been betrayed. Now they camouflaged and took their chances.

The head surgeon, Colonel Dufrère, welcomed me heartily, assigned me to a poke of a room and drafted me for duty immediately.

It was a terribly busy time at Maunay, for a big battle was raging forty miles north. Machine guns, artillery and rifles were mowing down French poilus like grain; and the terrible results of the lead storm were coming to us by train, by wagon, even on foot, if the wounds were less important.

Of course, we were short-handed—there never were enough doctors and fewer nurses. Most of the nurses' work was done by stupid and ignorant orderlies who violated all instructions as to sterility, even ordinary cleanliness, with the result that the death rate from infections was appalling.

There was no hesitation in thrusting the knife into my hands and telling me to operate. Slight as had been my surgical experience, there were others there less competent. Many of my patients died because of my ineptness, but some survived and none would have lived had I stayed my hand.

Death was nothing in that place. We experimented upon the doomed, tried out every theory that would be confined to animals in times of peace. Why not? The men were going to die, and once in a while we achieved a miracle, made a discovery of incalculable benefit to future generations. The destruction of the human tenement became a trifle to us. While an American hospital staff would have been shocked at our callousness and carelessness, we sometimes effected cures beyond their ken.

It seemed to us surgeons that death was just a phase of existence. I know I got a notion that the youngsters who perished under my knife went right on living somewhere, somehow. While one would suppose that our butchery would have made crass materialists of us, I think nearly all believed in a life after death of one sort or another.

Nearly all—not Colonel Paul Dufrère. To him bodies were carcasses and souls nonexistent. A wonderful surgeon, untiring, unselfish and kind, he laughed at our comfortable theories and clung stoutly to his unlovely one.

"DEATH is the end," declared the head surgeon one night, quite late. We were all worn out and should have been sleeping; instead, we were lounging in Doctor Gaston Gervaise's room, sipping brandy and indulging in speculations.

"Man," he continued, "lives his allotted period and dies like the dog and the horse. 'Ashes to ashes and dust to dust,' and no phœnix rising from them. The dreadfulness of this war is that shells and bullets are cutting off the pitifully short span of life. Children of eighteen or twenty are dying before they have lived. I believe that battles should be fought by old men, and that armies should be restricted to persons over sixty who have lived their lives and left children behind them. Instead, useless fossils crouch far in the rear and drive the flower of the nations to destruction. We bury our children and that ends them and the future of our race."

"I don't believe that is the end," asserted Gervaise, his fine face lighted, his brown eyes shining. He was a slender, artistic-looking man who had been a nerve specialist before he grasped the scalpel. I had heard that he used hypnotism in his nervous cases.

"The body finishes, of course," our host went on, "but the spirit—you know nothing about that. Explain it—the spark of reason defies analysis. Though it inhabits a fleshy body constructed

like those of the animals, you can't prove that it is extinguished by death. If that was so, we would find it in the dissecting room."

"Just a lot of brain cells," growled Dufrère.

"My friend, you might just as well attempt to construct a person by looking into a chamber which he has vacated," countered the other.

"I could pretty nearly do that," smiled Dufrère. "I could tell from this room without ever having set eyes upon you that you are scrupulously neat and fastidious."

IT happened that I understood French well, although I did not speak it perfectly, and I was not equipped to argue eloquently upon such subjects. But now I asked Gervaise a question.

"You agree with the church that a man's spirit exists after his death?"

"I'm not orthodox," he smiled. "I can believe in an immortal soul without accepting the Catholic or Protestant definition of it or of its destiny. I feel very sure that there is some continued existence on some other plane and that the spirit which once inhabited a man remembers its former home and its friends and acquaintances."

"That's spiritualism," commented Dufrère. "What a mark you would be for a table tipper or a ouija-board operator! I can see you asking a medium to bring out of the cupboard the spirit of your uncle, Pierre."

"I abhor commercial spiritualism as much as you do," retorted Gervaise. "I am not a fool. But if a spirit came back to earth for the purpose of being recognized, it would probably take on the semblance of its former self."

"Do you think that could happen?" I asked, rather nervously. It was a strange place for such a discussion, that horrible hospital where a dozen men were dying at that very moment. The room, the grave Frenchmen, the flickering candle, our only light, the distant rumble of big guns—the whole thing was eerie.

"I have never seen it," Gervaise admitted. "But who knows? Perhaps, not a spirit long departed, but one which had not got very far away, one approached in reverent fashion—if a man about to die could be induced to try to come back."

"Old stuff!" declared the colonel. "Many persons have promised to return to tell what is beyond, but none ever did and I know why! There is nothing over there."

"Yes, that's true enough," our host agreed. "I don't mean that sort of appeal. But suppose the subconscious mind were addressed. I am not sure that what we call the subconscious is not the soul itself. We can reach it by hypnotism."

"Sacre nom de chien," exclaimed Dufrère. "How do you tie up spirits and mesmerism?"

"For a long time," replied Gervaise slowly, and thoughtfully, "I have had a theory—wild perhaps. Some day I may get a chance to test it, if I don't falter. It would solve the problem for me."

"And what is this fine theory?"

"Listen! Suppose a man at the point of death were hypnotized and while under the influence his soul was commanded to return at a certain time, would not his soul try to obey orders, particularly if that soul belonged to a soldier?"

The idea terrified me, frankly. Even Dufrère looked a trifle shocked, and Gervaise seemed sorry he had spoken.

"It's an idea," said Dufrère, considering it. "It is the best idea along those lines that I have ever heard. Of course, the soul died with the body and couldn't obey, but it's an experiment I should like to see. Try it, Gervaise!"

"I might some time," he answered, with an ashamed laugh.

"Try it now!" was the colonel's sur-

prising rejoinder. "When or where could you find such an opportunity? You need a dying man; just go downstairs; many are dying; all are soldiers. I am in command here and I permit the experiment."

"You don't really mean it?" Gervaise demanded. There was a strange look in his eyes.

"You can't permit such a thing. It's dreadful!" I protested.

"Nonsense. It won't hurt the soldier; it will have no result except to convince Gervaise that he is a fool."

"All right," said Gervaise, springing to his feet. "Very well! I'll take you at your word."

"Good! I'll go down through the hospital and find a subject. Do you require an intelligent man or one who is ignorant?"

"Why, perhaps a man who could understand would be best."

"Remain here. I'll return in a few minutes."

WHEN the colonel had gone, I turned to Gervaise.

"You won't go through with this," I pleaded. "It's loathsome. Somehow I feel that it will turn out badly."

"My friend, it's an opportunity I have long sought. I must do it. And Dufrère has gone so far I can't back out. After all, the experiment will probably fail. Perhaps I really do not anticipate results. If you disapprove, leave us."

"Oh, I'll stick," I declared.

"Thanks, old man, Dufrère is utterly cynical. I need the assistance of some one who is not so completely antagonistic."

A moment later Dufrère entered, a scoffing smile on his lips.

"I've been trying to persuade him to withdraw," I said.

"Oh, let him make his test. It may amuse the patient, give him his last laugh."

"He won't laugh," said Gervaise. "Does the man know he is going to die?"

"I wrote his will two hours ago. It's a young lieutenant, recommended for the croix de guerre—lot of good it will do him! He won't last an hour. You must work at once."

"Accompany me, Gardiner," said Gervaise. "I've had a lot of success with hypnotism, and the worst it will do will be to make the last moments less painful to the poor fellow."

I trailed behind Gervaise and Dufrère along the corridor, down the flight of wooden stairs at the end, and into the long ward. Dufrère conducted us a short distance and stopped at a cot on the right-hand side. There was a number above each bed, and the number was pinned upon the nightshirt of each patient. He stopped before cot No. 12. I observed that the hour was eleven fifteen. Screens had been placed about two beds, Nos. 12 and 13. The nurse in charge, a worn, wan, frail little Frenchwoman of forty-five or fifty, met us.

"Both these young men are about to die," she explained. "Lieutenant Prévost may go any minute. Lieutenant Bruchard may last until morning."

Gervaise squeezed between the two beds and looked down on the man in No. 12. He was little more than a boy, had been wounded in the chest.

"Please leave us, nurse," said Dufrère, in a low tone. "Prévost is the patient we wish to see."

The boy was very weak, but conscious. He opened his eyes inquiringly and pathetically as we stood over him. The other soldier made no movement.

"Unconscious or asleep," said Dufrère, glancing at him. Then he addressed himself to Prévost. "Lieutenant, Major Gervaise has an idea that hypnotism may help you. Let him put you under his influence without struggling against him."

A weak smile was our only answer. Gervaise began the customary motions of a hypnotist, commanding Prévost to look him in the eye. He continued for a minute or two, when the patient seemed to succumb.

"Prévost, do you hear me?" he demanded.

"Yes," replied the lieutenant, in a surprisingly strong voice.

"You are about to die, do you understand?"

"Yes."

"When you leave this body, where will you go?"

"I don't know."

"You will go somewhere?"

"Yes."

"I command you to return from wherever you are at the stroke of twelve to-night and enter my room here in the hospital—No. 15. You will do that?"

"Yes."

"Remember! I command you. From wherever you are, if it be the steps to the gates of heaven, you must come back. Come back! Do you understand?"

"From the steps to the gates of heaven, I shall come back."

The weirdness of the dialogue was beyond description. Chills were running up and down my spine.

"Now sleep!" commanded Doctor Gervaise. "Sleep, and do not wake."

"What's this? Are you going to leave him under the influence?" asked Dufrère.

"What difference does it make? He won't last a half hour."

"True," agreed the colonel.

"What pagan nonsense is this in such a place at such a time?" said a sharp voice. "Are you men or fiends?"

We turned and saw, confronting us with flashing eyes, Père Jacot, the chaplain. We felt like schoolboys caught in mischief, and even Dufrère, the commandant, looked ashamed of himself.

Evidently the chaplain had arrived in time to hear most of our talk with the dying lieutenant, and he was raging as he might have been expected to be. He pushed Gervaise out of the way and reached the head of the bed to lay his hand upon the forehead of the patient. He started, stooped over, stripped off the sheet, revealing the figure of the man in the white-and-gray nightshirt of the hospital—a shirt long enough to be a shroud. He laid his ear against the heart, then straightened up and looked at us angrily.

"The man is dead!" he declared. "Dead without the final rites I came to give him, departed in the diabolical condition in which you placed him, Major Gervaise."

"So much the better for our experiment," muttered the cold-blooded Dufrère.

Gervaise and myself, however, were greatly moved. It seemed probable that our experiment had hastened the demise.

I GAZED on the young lieutenant, handsome despite a growth of beard on his pale face, dead in his gray-and-white shroud, with his number fastened to his breast. I thought of his mother and his sweetheart. But after all death meant nothing in that hospital; it was only the experiment which made this of moment.

Dufrère and Gervaise took the arms of the priest and were departing, while they tried to palliate the enormity, in his eyes, of their crime.

"It is not the poor young soldier who will suffer for this, but you," said Père Jacot. "Your devilish hypnotism will damn your own souls, not his. You claim to be men of science! Do you really expect that the divinity will permit his soul to come back from the beyond?"

"If there is anything in a hereafter," declared Gervaise, "he will be back at midnight to tell us about it."

"If he comes," answered the priest hotly, "it will be to drag you down to hell as the statue did *Don Juan,* in Mozart's opera."

"I suggest," said Dufrère. "that we all go to Gervaise's room and wait until twelve o'clock. Unless our friend wishes to receive his visitor alone?"

"No, no! I require witnesses," cried Gervaise hastily.

"Will you come, father?" I asked.

"Yes," he said. "If there ever was need for a priest, there will be need for one if that poor soul returns."

So we climbed the long flight of stairs together. The uncarpeted steps creaked beneath our feet; the boards of the corridor groaned with our footfalls. Gervaise pushed open the door of his small, mean room and invited us to enter.

It was a chamber about twelve by fourteen, furnished only with a cot bed, a washstand with water pitcher and bowl, and two chairs of the kitchen variety. He offered the chairs to the priest and the colonel, while he seated himself beside me upon the bed on the side nearest the door.

THOUGH Père Jacot was not much over thirty, his hair was silver. His eyes gleamed with the light of a zealot and an ascetic. Between physicians and priests there is ordinarily a comradely toleration, but the average doctor is not a Christian in his heart and the clergyman senses it.

The present generation of educated Frenchmen, particularly those who have studied medicine, have strayed far from mother church, have become cynics and scoffers, encouraged by the attitude toward religious training of the French government. Yet these men admired and loved Père Jacot and, as soldiers, had come to respect the French soldier-priests who were doing so much for La Patrie.

In her need for man power, the government had not respected the priesthood—the young clergymen had to shoulder rifles and march to the front just as other young men. I believe some twenty thousand ordained Catholic priests served as privates and officers during the war.

They did their duty manfully and did not forget their priestly office. Many were killed because they crept into No Man's Land to administer the last rites to wounded soldiers, under a hail of shrapnel and machine-gun bullets. They fired their rifles at oncoming foes, though their training had taught them that they were damning their souls by killing their brother men. The ordinary soldier lost his life; the soldier-priest gave up his hope of everlasting life for La Patrie.

Père Jacot had entered the war as a private and had been promoted on the field to lieutenant. He owned the croix de guerre with palms, for cold courage, but he did not wear his badge of bravery; instead, he inflicted dreadful penances upon himself for the lives he had taken.

In England and America we respected the conscientious objector; France was desperate; she could make no exceptions or exemptions. So Père Jacot and many like him did their bit; in his case disabling wounds had sent him to the hospital, where he was left as chaplain, and so we respected him and winced at his disapprobation.

"Does the church consider it impossible for the dead to return?" asked Dufrère, less because he wished to know than to break the awful silence which had settled upon us.

"There are authenticated instances where the dead have returned for some good purpose," replied the priest. "If God, in His wisdom, sends a soul to earth to appear to a saint or punish a sinner, that is His right; for mortals to attempt to materialize spirits is abominable."

"This isn't a materialization," pro-

tested Gervaise. "It is an attempt to draw back a soul to a body, not yet cold, for a scientific purpose."

"It is a deadly sin," retorted Père Jacot. "Once a soul has left a body, it is winging its way to heaven, purgatory or hell; it is impossible to recall it."

"As a matter of fact, father," Dufrère declared, "dead men have been restored to life upon occasions."

"By the Son of God—none other!"

"By skillful physicians. I have seen men, killed by electric shock or by drowning, brought back to life."

"They were not actually dead."

"The heart had ceased to beat."

"The heart is a corporeal organ. The soul had not taken flight in such instances."

"What is the soul? Who has ever seen it? What proof have you it exists?" the colonel asked scornfully.

"The soul is the divine spark in the body; it is invisible—and I need no proofs because I have faith."

"It's an awful lot to accept on faith," I observed timidly.

"You take many things entirely on faith," the priest retorted, with the fire of controversy in his eye. "You have faith in the solar system; it is entirely theory; you have taken other men's word for it; it is a far more incredible proposition than is embodied in our religious belief. So far as your personal knowledge is concerned, the sun is an electric light and the stars are candles.

"They tell you the distance from the earth to the moon or the sun; they cannot prove it; they have not actually made measurements; no court of law would accept their hypothesis. So many of the statements of scientists in the past, which were believed in their day, have been proved to be errors that I don't see why you should marvel that I accept the soul on faith."

"You have us there," admitted Gervaise. "We accept a lot of medical dogmas as fact; yet each generation of medical men scrap the alleged truths of the past generation."

I glanced at my watch nervously. It was ten minutes of twelve. The others, including the priest, followed my example.

"I believe in the immortality of the soul," said Gervaise. "I simply cannot accept the Christian explanation; it doesn't fit what we know to be facts. How you can believe that a good God would permit the slaughter of millions in this horrible war is beyond me!"

"God is eternal; so is the soul," replied Père Jacot. "The time and manner of death is unimportant, compared to the state of the soul. We cannot fathom the motives of the infinite, yet from this war you may be sure some greater benefit will eventually come to mankind."

"Faith is wonderful!" exclaimed Dufrère mockingly. "What do you think will happen at midnight, father?"

"Nothing, I trust. But if the body of that poor young man comes to this door, I know that his soul will not be in it; it will be tenanted by some evil spirit drawn by this wicked man's incantation." He crossed himself as he finished.

"Oh, come, Père Jacot!" protested Gervaise. "Don't call me wicked because I make a scientific experiment. There are no evil spirits."

"'Satan and the other evil spirits who wander through the world, seeking the ruin of souls!'" he quoted. He took his rosary in his fingers and his lips moved in prayer.

"Well," declared Dufrère. "I expect nothing. I am so sure of it that I bet you, Gervaise, a thousand francs to a hundred that your dead doesn't walk."

"How dare you suggest a wager on such a subject!" exclaimed the indignant priest, who stood up and towered over the colonel. "Down on your knees and ask forgiveness."

Dufrère looked abashed. "I meant no offense, father. But I cannot pray."

"Your dead mother is praying for you at this moment, I am sure."

Gervaise glanced at his watch. I looked over his shoulder. It was three minutes of twelve.

"I suggest we all have a glass of brandy," said Gervaise.

"Far better for all of you to commend your souls to God," was the priest's sharp comment. "You invited this calamity Gervaise; now sit where you are and wait. No drinking! It is two minutes to the hour."

There have been agonized periods of waiting in my life. Not even the moment before the zero hour when the barrage is bursting ahead—the enemy's defensive barrage is raking the trench and the ground over which we are to move, while we wait with our right foot upon the firing step, rifles ready, bayonets fixed, and the commander watches the second hand of his watch with a flash light until the exact minute—never did two minutes drag like those two minutes.

AFTER what seemed a century, the bell in the distant church tower clanged the first stroke of midnight. I tittered from nervousness, was silenced by a glare from the priest. The second stroke—*cla-ang!* And then——

In the big, silent wooden building, where all except ourselves and the orderlies on the floor below had retired, we heard a stair creak. I cannot describe the eeriness of that creaking board far down the hall. It was followed by another, and then a distinct thump, as though some heavy object were dragging itself upward.

Père Jacot dropped upon his knees and lifted the crucifix of his rosary. I looked at Dufrère—the man's face was livid! Gervaise grasped my arm in a grip of steel, and the goose flesh made itself felt all over my body.

Three scientists—doctors, surgeons. to whom death was as common as breathing, who had seen many die from the fruitless incisions of our knives—and we were terrified by creaking stairs; we believed in ghosts!

I was trembling like a leaf. I could hear the chattering of the teeth of Gervaise.

Père Jacot, who expected most, seemed least afraid. He thumbed his beads and held up his crucifix, while his face, though pale, was composed. *"Ora pro nobis, ora pro nobis,"* he murmured.

Dufrère the atheist watched the door with bulging eyes. If all he had ever believed was to be overthrown by an apparition—what would he do?"

And then the thing, whatever it was, seemed to approach. We could hear it coming slowly down the hall—*thump—thump—thump!*—and then a heavy thud as though a body had fallen.

" 'Our Father, Who art in Heaven ——' " I began, and to my dismay I had forgotten the Lord's prayer. What an evil thing I was!

And then the object in the hall seemed to have righted itself, for the clump of its approach continued. It was outside the door! How I hoped that it would pass. No. It had stopped! It was there! It wanted to enter! Horror unbelievable! Gervaise, this is your doing!

A second of palsied silence, then a rap on the door. It was knocking for admittance. We dared not stir. The priest pointed a bony finger sternly at Gervaise.

"Let him enter," he commanded.

"I can't move," babbled Gervaise.

The rap was repeated. Something stronger than myself moved me. I rose, took three steps to the door, took hold of the latch, swung it open. It opened inward and I stepped back. Merciful Powers, it was there!

Standing in the doorway was the dead man, in his long, gray nightshirt—his

face ghastly, his eyes staring in a death stare, straight ahead. Mechanically his left foot lifted; the leg was bare, but the feet were thrust into wooden sabots. It crossed the threshold, dragged the other foot after it, and the apparition stood inside the room. The right arm moved slowly, swung upward in the salute of a soldier. A voice, deep, hollow, as from the tomb, intoned:

"You sent for me, sir."

"Avaunt, Satan!" exclaimed Père Jacot, retreating a step and lifting his little gold cross as high as possible.

There was a loud crash. It was Dufrère. The atheist had leaped through the second-story window carrying the frail sash, covered with waxed paper, with him. And suddenly, Gervaise uttered an exclamation and drew his pistol. I was so stricken with horror that I could not move—but he did not point it at the apparition; he placed the muzzle against his forehead and pulled the trigger. The report of the weapon, followed by the fall of the suicide, had no effect upon the priest and myself. Our eyes were glued to the soldier.

Suddenly he began to crumple at the knees, then went to the floor with a heavy thud, falling on his face. The soul had fled again.

ALONE with the dead, I got the use of my legs and rushed to Gervaise. He was quite dead; the bullet had entered his brain. I then walked to the corpse in the gray nightshirt and attempted to lift it.

"Touch it not until I sprinkle it with holy water," commanded Père Jacot.

I disobeyed and raised the body, then mutely pointed out to the good father the tag on the man's breast. It was No. 13.

"It is the vengeance of God on Gervaise," muttered the priest approaching. "He hypnotized the man in the other bed."

So that was why Gervaise had blown out his brains—the intrepid investigator affrighted by the success of his experiment. He also had seen No. 13; he had realized that his hocus-pocus had affected two men in their weakened condition: One had died; the second, his life hanging by a thread, had killed himself to obey a military command; Gervaise had murdered No. 13 and, in a spasm of remorse at the crime he had unwittingly committed, had blown out his own brains.

Or, hadn't he observed the number? Had he supposed it was the soul of No. 12 confronting him and feared to question it? Had his early religious training reasserted itself and had he shrunk from his experiment, slain himself while mad with religious frenzy? Had he accepted the priest's belief that it was the devil in person, peering out of those glazed eyes?

We would never learn the cause of his terrible act, but he had deprived poor France of one of her best surgeons at the time when she needed him most.

And Dufrère? We picked him up groaning on the hard ground below the window; his left leg was broken, but his humiliation was more dreadful than his pain.

Père Jacot did dire penance for weeks, for his reluctant share in the tragic experiment, while I—— Well, I had to work so hard as a result of the loss of the services of both Gervaise and Dufrère that I may be said to have done penance also. And science benefited not at all from the abominable experiment.

Other stories by Mr. Maclsaac will be published in forthcoming issues of THE POPULAR.

By

Burton E. Stevenson

Author of
"The Storm Center,"
"The Fate of Mona Lisa," Etc.

In Four Parts—Part I.

The Coast of

CHAPTER I.

WORDS OF WARNING.

IT was not until toward the end of the first act that Tarrant's eyes chanced to fall upon the hand resting lightly on the arm of the seat next to his. They stayed there fascinated, for he had never before seen such a hand. In the semidarkness of the theater it seemed almost fairylike, so small, so exquisite, so admirably modeled; delicate, yet with a certain air of competence; adorably plump, with slightly tapering fingers, and a deep dimple at the base of the smallest one; innocent of rings and wisely so, for a ring, however beautiful, would have disfigured it.

He managed to wrench his eyes away, after a moment, and permitted them to run discreetly along an arm entirely worthy of the hand, to a shoulder lovely beyond compare, and then to the face of the owner of all this beauty. He could catch only a glimpse of her profile, for she was turned partly away from him, her eyes riveted upon the stage, entirely absorbed in the opera—drinking it in, indeed, with lips a little parted.

They mount their operas well at Monte Carlo, and the setting for the first act of "Madame Butterfly" was exceptionally beautiful and elaborate. Perhaps too elaborate, for the *metteur-en-scène* is rather too fond of tricks. As the act proceeds, the stage gradually darkens, the lights of a village flash out high against a mountainside in the background, a row of beacons gleam along the water front, lanterns are lighted, and then, as the music lifts to the impassioned finale, the moon rises, shimmering across the water and flooding the stage with light, while a swarm of fireflies flicker among the trees.

Yes, it is a little too much; but Della Rizza was the *Butterfly* that evening, and Smirnoff the philandering *American,* and the younger Sabata was leading the orchestra; all three were surpassing themselves, and their combined efforts prevented the scenery from running away with the act.

There was a burst of applause as it

The gentle tapping hand of adventure came, unknown and mysterious, to Tarrant in the rococo splendors of the Monte Carlo opera house. The first cards of destiny that he was to see were the dazzling beauty of a strange lady and the lithe gracefulness of a polite and handsome Arab. But the night held still other cards.

Enchantment

ended, and then a series of curtain calls during which, Tarrant noticed, his neighbor sat like a person in a dream. But at last she stirred, brushed her hand across her eyes, and then sat quickly erect. For the last time the curtain rose and fell; there was a sudden clatter of talk, and the audience relaxed, stretched itself, and surged to its feet.

Tarrant's neighbor glanced around and at last rose slowly. As she did so, she turned upon him a look so searching that he thought she was going to speak to him. The next instant she had turned away and joined the crowd pushing its way toward the atrium.

For a moment Tarrant sat staring after her. Then he rose and followed. That strange glance had dazzled and upset him. There had been in it no slightest trace of coquetry; it had been challenging, questioning, impersonal. Perhaps she had been still absorbed in the opera, in the Japanese maiden's dream of love, and had looked at him without seeing him. Well, his eyes at least had been open, and he knew of no reason why he should deny himself the pleasure of gazing again upon those lovely hands and arms.

She was alone, he discovered, considerably to his surprise, and as she passed slowly along the aisle, he saw that he was by no means the only one to appreciate her beauty. It was an audience of connoisseurs—connoisseurs of women. Men stared frankly. Women, themselves for the most part too old or too fat, lifted their lorgnettes for a long, envious look. And they realized something which the men perhaps did not—that the girl was intelligent as well as lovely, for the gown she wore had been fashioned most artfully to emphasize the beautiful lines of her shoulders.

Not only was she alone, but she apparently knew no one there, for she continued on her way, glancing neither to the right nor left, and as though unconscious of the attention she attracted. Tarrant noted that her hair was a deep gold, and that a great mass of it, almost too much, was gathered in a knot low at the back of her head.

A moment later she passed from his sight through the doorway leading to the atrium.

The atrium is a long and lofty hall, surrounded by columns of imitation marble, and forms the vestibule not only to the theater but to the gaming rooms. Here on opera nights it is the custom for the whole audience to walk up and down between the acts and look at itself and discuss, with abundant charity, the latest scandals in which its members have been involved. There are a number of leather-covered seats against the wall and between the columns, and these are always occupied by dowdy, cynical, old Monagasques, too poor to go to the opera, but getting a free show. as it were, out of the parade—critical of the gowns, and skeptical of the jewels.

To-night the place was even more crowded than usual, for the performance was a gala one, and the throng was the most motley imaginable—women of every variety of social position and reputation, and in every stage of décolleté; men from every walk of life, the lower ones sometimes looking rather clever, as men do who live by their wits, but the upper ones with faces so stupid it seemed impossible they could ever have done anything to deserve the decorations which gleamed on their coats.

There was a royal duke, still slender and erect despite his seventy-five years, with an air of good humor and intelligence, being polite to a circle of bores. There was the ancient former favorite of the man who for long years had been master of Monte Carlo; she was fat and raddled now, with her gray hair done in ridiculous curls, but with a face good-natured and rather clever, in spite of its bloated features.

There was a continental king, not quite so plump as of old, with a quick eye for the women, and his slim little wife who trotted complacently beside him with an eye for no one else. There was a famous actor-and-author, dark and obese and a little oily; and a stage star, blond and slim and entirely delectable in a gown which dragged the floor on either side after the latest mode. There was a famous general, short and squat, his broad chest covered with medals, his scant height eked out by a colossal cap, and attended by a retinue of slim young officers endeavoring to look at all the women at once.

FOR a few moments, in the midst of this crush, Tarrant could not discover the object of his search, then he saw her strolling toward the entrance as though in search of a breath of fresh air. She stood for a moment at the top of the steps outside, fanning herself with her handkerchief and gazing absently at the lights of the Café de Paris across the way. There was another figure standing there, a tall and graceful Arab, with a bundle of rugs and shawls thrown carelessly across one shoulder, and Tarrant, who had stopped ostensibly to light a cigarette, was amused to see him approach the girl, unfold a shawl before her, and start to descant persuasively upon its beauties. She listened smilingly, and even, at the man's insistence, tested the shawl's texture with her fingers, then she shook her head and turned back into the atrium.

As she came toward him in the full light, Tarrant, for the first time, saw her face clearly. His first impression was one of disappointment; then, in the next instant. the feeling passed. It was not beautiful, but it was something better—it was striking and unusual. It reminded him somehow of the face of Jeanne d'Arc in Bastien-Lepage's painting. It was a face full of dreams, and its striking quality was emphasized by the peculiar way in which she wore her hair, wrapped smoothly about her head like a bandeau. As she passed, she deliberately raised her eyes to his,

and he saw what he had been too startled to see the first time she looked at him—that they were a deep blue. More than that, they suited the face. They were eyes to see visions.

There could be no doubt that she had seen him this time, had even wished to see him, and Tarrant passed on to the bar at the end of the atrium, inexplicably shaken, and ordered a cup of coffee. As he drank it, he told himself that he was behaving like a fool. There was absolutely no reason why he should be interested in this woman; still less—with a glance at himself in the mirror beside the bar—why she should be interested in him. He was at least twice her age, and he glanced again at the pepper of gray in his hair, at the wrinkle in his cheek. Yet here he was, his pulse jumping absurdly just because she had happened to look at him.

Had life, then, taught him nothing? Was he seeking still another scar?

He set the empty cup down with a little bang, paid the waiter and turned away. His face was not pleasant to see, and he looked with sudden disgust at the cheap glitter of the scene before him.

THE clanging of a gong indicated the end of the entr'acte, and the crowd slowly made its way back into the theater. When Tarrant reached his seat, he found that his neighbor was already in hers, and he made his way past her with a murmured apology. Again he caught a glimpse of the blue eyes.

He sat down and pretended to consult his program; then, as the curtain rose, resolutely gave his attention to the stage.

But he was not thinking of what went on there—he was thinking of himself. For a long time he had been conscious of a growing sense of futility, loneliness and frustration. He had striven vainly to shake it off. The surroundings among which he had spent the greater part of his life had grown more and more distasteful. He gradually discovered that he no longer had anything in common with his old acquaintances. For him, life had taken on a meaning which entirely escaped them. They seemed to him to be twisting it into something mean and narrow. He found them without ideas or ideals. At least, they were not his ideas, certainly not his ideals, and he had finally fled from them in a sort of desperation.

He was not in the least inclined to idealize himself. On the contrary, he knew quite well that if life had somehow passed him by, it was because of his own ineptitude. He knew, too, that flight was an act of cowardice—and it had profited him nothing; for the last three years, which he had spent wandering about the world, had been lonely and futile, too. He realized that the trouble was not in his surroundings or in other people, but in himself. He had grown hollow inside. His life had become purposeless—or not that so much, as that the old purposes no longer seemed worth while. Indeed, he was no longer sure what was worth while—romance, perhaps, or beauty, but where were they to be found?

The lovely music of the second act had woven itself into his reverie, and as it deepened and grew more tender, he became conscious of what was passing on the stage. Something in his mood gave to the tragedy enacting there a poignancy almost unbearable. The knowledge that this girl, so trusting, so loyal, so full of faith, had been carelessly betrayed, and was soon to learn of her betrayal, brought a mist before his eyes.

No doubt there were many in that audience—betrayed or betrayers!—who recognized in the irony and bitterness of this situation something of their own experience of life, for when the curtain fell at last on that still figure gazing out into the night for a lover who

would never come, there was no instant burst of applause. but a moment's silence, a convulsive hush; then the audience pulled itself together, masks were hastily slipped on again, and the applause came.

This time Tarrant did not join the exodus. He was too upset; he wanted to be alone. He noted out of the corner of his eye that his neighbor also seemed undecided, but at last she rose and made her way out along the aisle. It was with a certain relief that Tarrant saw her go. He drew a deep breath, settled back in his seat, and allowed his body to relax.

He felt himself to be in a nervous and emotional state so delicately balanced that the slightest touch might destroy its equilibrium. He was ready, receptive, the powder magazine waiting for the spark. A flash, and nothing would remain but the ruins. Well, why not? There wasn't much left but ruins, anyway, and perhaps the flash would be worth while!

He was suddenly conscious of a voice behind him, a man's voice, speaking in English with a careful precision.

"I beg that you will pay attention," it was saying.

No, that would not do. He must get some sort of grip on life again before this went too far.

"I beg that you will pay attention," said the voice a second time, and Tarrant fancied he felt a light touch on his shoulder. "Do not turn, I beg of you," went on the voice. "Are you listening?"

"Are you speaking to me?" asked Tarrant of the empty seats in front of him. It seemed too ridiculous.

"Yes, to you," said the voice. "You do very wrong to come here. It is dangerous, not only for you but for others. If you are wise, you will go away at once. Otherwise, something will happen to you—something most unpleasant."

Tarrant listened, staring in astonishment at nothing.

"I haven't the least idea what you are talking about," he said.

There was no reply, and turning sharply, Tarrant saw that the seats behind him were empty. At the end of the row, a man in evening clothes was making his way toward the exit, but beyond the fact that he was tall and slender and had gray hair, Tarrant could see nothing of him. He had an impulse to follow—but what for? It was a mistake of some sort—one of those absurd mysteries which the police at Monte Carlo, afraid of their own shadows, were always cooking up.

HE sank back into his seat and fell again into deep thought. Silly of that fellow to come up behind him like that and tell him he was in danger. Danger of what? Of course it was a mistake—the fellow had picked the wrong man.

The audience streamed in again, he felt his neighbor settle into her seat, the curtain went up, and the last act began. It seemed to Tarrant more than a little banal. The blow had fallen; the suspense was over; the burlesque, badly dressed, American wife made her absurd appearance; the Stars and Stripes were violently waved. And suddenly he perceived the grotesque sentimentality of the whole plot. How preposterous to attempt to graft American psychology into a Japanese mind! His mood had changed—this was not tragedy; it was just theater. His attention wandered; he wished that it was possible to get away.

His neighbor, also, evidently felt the sense of anticlimax, for she stirred nervously in her seat, gave her hair a touch, and looked about her. Tarrant knew that she glanced at him, but he kept his eyes on the stage, and when the curtain came down at last and the audience started to crush its way out,

he took himself resolutely in hand, turned his back upon her, and made for a distant exit. There was a queer mixture of emotions in his breast—pride in his self-control, and a burning sense of stupidity and cowardice. For perhaps it was romance he was fleeing—romance, which he needed so badly, which he should fly to welcome! He almost turned back!

There was an elbowing crowd about the coat room, but he finally succeeded in getting his hat and coat. As he slipped into the coat, he looked about him. But romance had vanished. Romance! For him! His lip curled a little at the irony of the thought, and turning toward the door, he walked quickly across the vestibule and into the outer air.

The Arab vender of shawls was still standing at the top of the steps, offering his wares to the people coming out. He was a handsome fellow, clad in a richly embroidered costume of dark-blue silk. Tarrant recognized him now—he was the same fellow who had tried to sell him a rug that very afternoon as he sat on the terrace of the Café de Paris; he had admired him then, and had talked with him a little about Algeria.

But how absurd for him to stand here at midnight, trying to sell his shawls to an opera audience, not one of whom so much as glanced at them. What a waste of time! And why should a man like that, with a face so proud and so intelligent, demean himself with that servile smile, that ingratiating air? Perhaps Arab psychology was different—and musing on this, Tarrant passed on down the steps.

As he did so, the man with the shawls turned sharply and nodded to some one below.

A handsome limousine, which had been standing at the curb a few feet away, its engine running, rolled quickly forward and stopped in front of Tarrant. At the same instant, its door opened and a woman looked out. It was his neighbor at the opera.

"I have been waiting for you," she said, in a voice low and yet clear, and speaking with the faintest accent. "Get in."

"B-but, madame," stammered Tarrant, scarcely able to believe either his eyes or his ears, "I do not—I am afraid that——"

"No. It is not a mistake," she broke in. "You are Mr. Tarrant, are you not?"

"Yes, madame."

"Then please get in. We are blocking the way," and she made a little peremptory gesture.

Without clearly realizing what he was doing, Tarrant stepped into the car.

An instant later, the door was slammed behind him, and the car whirled away past the Café de Paris and on toward the Boulevard du Nord.

CHAPTER II.

A STRANGE OFFER.

TARRANT, rubbing his head dazedly, glanced about at the elegantly appointed car. Then he looked again at his companion.

She smiled as she met his glance.

"No, it is not a dream," she said. and he saw how the smile lighted up her face, giving it an air almost impish.

"Then what is it?" he asked.

"An adventure out of one of your own romances, perhaps!"

"It might be," he agreed.

"And you met it just as you would have had your hero do," she added.

"I am too old for a hero," he protested, "and much too cautious."

"Yet you got in. Why was that?"

"Ah," he said, "that is a long story. Perhaps it was the psychological moment. Nevertheless, I should like to understand——"

"You shall, very soon," she promised, looking at him curiously, struck perhaps by the tone in which he spoke.

"I warn you that if you are kidnaping me, you are wasting your time. No one will think me worth ransoming."

"You are not being kidnaped. You may get out if you wish. Shall I stop the car?" She picked up the speaking tube.

He looked at her once more—at the lovely hand holding the tube, at the blue eyes whose depth he was just beginning to perceive, at the lips parted with that impish smile. In repose, her face was a little too serious, but seen thus it was delightful.

"No," he said, "do not stop it. Since I am here, I will stay." He leaned back against the cushions.

"I was sure you would say that!" she murmured, and replaced the tube in its rack.

There was a moment's silence. Tarrant, looking out, saw that they were crossing the Sainte Dévote Bridge. Far below them glittered the lights of the harbor, with the green-and-red beacons at its entrance; beyond, a diminuendo of white points marked the inclined way leading up to the Rock of Monaco. A moment later, all this was blotted from sight by a high stone balustrade, and the car whirled around the circuit of the Rue de l'Observatoire.

"You sat beside me at the opera to-night," he said, turning back to her.

"Yes."

"I could see how moved you were."

"Music is one of my passions. To-night, for some reason, I was unusually in the mood."

"The first I saw of you," he continued, "was your hand lying on the arm of the seat. I thought it lovely."

"Indeed!" she commented, and a chill little wind seemed to blow through the car. "One might almost think you a Frenchman."

"Why?"

"Most Frenchmen think it a duty to pay a woman silly compliments as soon as they meet her."

"It was not a silly compliment," protested Tarrant hotly. "I did think it lovely."

"So have many other people," she said negligently.

"Oh, no doubt," Tarrant agreed. "Even to-night——"

"Now you are being American," she broke in. "It is even worse!"

He felt an unaccountable inclination to shake her—but it was really himself he wanted to shake. What was the matter with him?

"I beg your pardon," he said.

She nodded slightly to indicate that the pardon was granted. But she did not speak. Nor did she smile, though there seemed to be a sort of suppressed amusement in her eyes. He felt absurdly like a child who was being scrutinized with disconcerting clearness by some older and wiser person. It was a friendly scrutiny, but it was very intent.

"May I ask how you knew my name?" he inquired, a little stiffly.

"You were pointed out to me."

"I am more famous than I supposed!"

"Oh, at Monte Carlo the celebrities are always known. It is part of the publicity. But why are you displeased?"

"Displeased?" He tried to put surprise into his manner and failed miserably.

"Why did your voice change like that? Because I said other people had admired my hands?"

Tarrant was conscious that that really was the reason. That remark, strangely enough, had pricked a bubble inside him—a bubble of happiness which had begun to expand.

"So that was it!" she said, looking at his face. "But how absurd!"

"I know it," Tarrant agreed, casting his pride to the winds. "Please pay no

attention to me. I am like that sometimes—supremely ridiculous. I apologize—abjectly."

"But you need not," she protested quickly. "I understand. You are an artist."

"Oh, no!" Tarrant said, in genuine distress. "I am just an artisan."

"You are an artist!" she repeated, and her face was the face of Jeanne d'Arc again. "I am not paying you a compliment."

"When you get to know me better you——"

"Am I going to know you better?"

"I hope so," he answered simply.

She looked at him for a moment without speaking, disarmed by the genuineness of his tone. Her eyes were very serious.

"I hope so, too," she said, at last. "But I do not know—I am not sure what——"

The car turned sharply through a tall iron gateway and came to a stop. The chauffeur sprang from his seat and opened the door.

"You get down here," said Tarrant's companion.

"And you?"

"I—go on."

"When shall I see you again?"

"Soon, perhaps." She was smiling her impish smile again.

"But that isn't good enough!" Tarrant protested. The smile gave him courage.

"It will depend upon you," she assured him.

"Ah, in that case——"

"You will get down, go to the door yonder, and ring the bell. You will find that you are expected. Au revoir!"

She held out her hand to him—that beautiful hand—and as he raised it to his lips, he felt her fingers give his a little pressure. Unsteadily he stepped out of the car. The chauffeur slammed the door and sprang back to his seat. The next instant the car had whirled away. As it passed from sight, Tarrant fancied that she waved to him.

HE turned and looked about him. He was standing in the entrance of a villa separated from the Rue de l'Observatoire by a little garden. It was not large, but it was beautifully proportioned, with an unmistakable air of elegance. For a moment he hesitated. Should he go on or turn back? Half a dozen steps and he would be in the street outside. The adventure would be ended. He could call a carriage, drive back to his hotel. and go quietly to bed. Good-by, romance!

With sudden decision, he stepped up to the door and rang the bell. The door swung open instantly, disclosing a tall, thin, white-clad servant.

"Enter, sir," he said in French, and drew aside to let Tarrant pass.

He must have been standing just inside the door, Tarrant thought, waiting for that ring. Or perhaps he always stood there—that was the way of the Orient, wasn't it? And this fellow, from his dark skin, his thin, ascetic face, was decidedly of the Orient.

"Enter, sir," he said again. and as Tarrant crossed the threshold, closed the door quickly. "This way, if you please, sir," he added, and set off along a wide corridor flagged with blocks of black-and-white marble.

He stepped before a door at the farther end and tapped gently.

"Entrez!" called a voice from the other side.

The man opened the door.

"This way, if you please, sir," he said again, with exactly the same intonation, almost like an automaton.

As Tarrant stepped through into the room beyond, he heard the door close with a snap behind him. The snap sounded uncommonly like a bolt springing into place, but Tarrant paid no heed to it, for it seemed to him that he had

stepped straight through into the "Arabian Nights."

Certainly nothing could have been more Oriental than the room in which he found himself, and if the white-bearded patriarch, sitting on a pile of cushions at the farther end, puffing placidly away at a nargile, was not Harun-al-Rashid's grand vizier, he was his perfect counterpart. His cheeks were sunken and lined with age; a labyrinth of wrinkles crossed and recrossed his forehead; his skin was the color of old parchment; but his eyes were preternaturally bright, and they were fixed upon Tarrant with just such a look of mingled irony and amusement as the caliph himself might have worn.

As the old man caught Tarrant's glance, he touched one hand to forehead, lips and heart, with the graceful Arab gesture of welcome, and made a little motion to the pile of cushions beside him.

"Will you do me the honor to sit here, sir?" he asked in French, and with a voice strangely robust to come from so frail a body.

Tarrant bowed, sat down, and crossed his legs as gracefully as possible. He found them considerably in the way.

"My son has been detained most unexpectedly," went on the old man, his eyes still on the visitor, "but he will certainly be here within a few minutes. He will be desolated to have kept you waiting."

"It is of no consequence." Tarrant assured him politely.

"You will find cigarettes on that taboret at your elbow."

"Thank you," said Tarrant, took one and lighted it.

It was a superexcellent cigarette, and he started to say so, but when he turned back to his host, he found that he had fallen into a sort of reverie, with eyes that stared straight in front of him at nothing. Evidently he considered further conversation unnecessary.

Tarrant rearranged his legs, made himself as comfortable as he could, and looked about him. The walls of the room, which was long and rather narrow for its length, were draped with hangings of black velvet, heavy with silver embroidery, and the floor was covered with inch-thick rugs. All across one end was a pile of multicolored cushions; before them were two tabarets.

Against one wall was a broad, low couch, heaped with cushions, while facing it, against the opposite wall, was a sort of chair of state, raised on a dais and shadowed by an elaborate canopy. Whose chair was it? Tarrant wondered. Was this the abode of one of those kings in exile, of whom, since the war, there had been so many? One, perhaps, from Asia or from Africa—some potentate deposed and banished—Harun-al-Rashid himself——

And then the door opened and a man entered.

IT was the handsome Arab who, twenty minutes ago, had been selling shawls at the top of the casino steps.

He came quickly forward, bowed low to the old man and turned to Tarrant.

"I am most sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Tarrant," he said in careful English. "A stupid accident detained me. No, do not rise." He seated himself on the pile of cushions and looked at Tarrant with a smile. "I am most pleased," he added, "most pleased indeed to find you here."

He was very handsome; somewhere in the late forties, Tarrant decided; perhaps even older; but bearing his years like a youth, with all youth's freshness and virility. His face had an expression of candor and good humor extraordinarily attractive; but beyond and above all that, there was something about him, something in his carriage, in his glance, in the set of his head on his shoulders, which bespoke race—and pride of race.

Yet this man trudged about the streets selling rugs, soliciting custom with that regal head ingratiatingly bent, haggling for a few francs.

Perhaps he understood what was passing in Tarrant's mind, for his smile broadened.

"You must be curious to know why you were brought here," he said.

"Naturally." Tarrant assented.

"Before I explain, permit that I introduce myself. My name is Cherif ben Hassan. This is my father."

Tarrant acknowledged the introduction with a bow. The name meant nothing to him.

"My father does not understand English," Cherif went on. "Therefore I hope that you will not object if I use French."

"Not at all," said Tarrant.

"You may perhaps remember," began Cherif, "that I spoke to you this afternoon as you were having an apéritif on the terrace of the Café de Paris?"

"Yes—you tried to sell me a rug. And I saw you again to-night at the casino. I do not understand it."

"What is it you do not understand?"

"Why a man like you should waste his time in that way," Tarrant answered bluntly.

"It is not altogether a waste of time," said Cherif quietly, "though it is true that I do not make many sales. Perhaps some time I shall explain. I had observed you a number of times before—you have been here about a week, I believe; but it was while I was talking to you this afternoon that I made up my mind to get you here, if I could, to appeal to your love of adventure, which I can see is very strong, and to ask you to do me a favor."

"My love of adventure may not be as strong as you suppose," Tarrant warned him. "What is the favor?"

"For you a little thing." said Cherif; "for me a great one. I wish you to go to the Sporting Club presently and to spend half an hour there in the company of a charming young woman."

Tarrant's pulse gave a sudden leap.

"Yes—and afterward?" he asked.

Cherif shrugged his shoulders to indicate that what might happen afterward was on the knees of the gods.

"You mean that that is all you wish me to do?" demanded Tarrant. "Just go to the Sporting Club and spend half an hour there?"

"It may be a little more than half an hour," Cherif explained; "but yes, that is all. It is taken for granted," he added, with a smile, "that you will be pleasant to the young woman—but I do not think you will find that difficult."

He helped himself to a cigarette from the box on the taboret, and passed the box to Tarrant.

No, Tarrant reflected, he would not find that difficult! Yet something at the back of his brain was saying over and over again: "Take care! Take care!" The still, small voice so famous in literature, he decided, smiling grimly to himself.

"Why is it you wish me to go to the Sporting Club?" he asked.

"That I cannot tell you," Cherif replied; "at least, not at this moment. But I assure you, on my word of honor, that there is in it nothing unworthy, nothing which need make you hesitate. I know that it must seem to you very strange; what I am hoping to appeal to is that love of romance so strikingly exemplified in your charming books."

Tarrant looked at him quizzically.

"I am astonished that they are so well known," he said "Have you ever read any of them?"

"Yes—'The Tornado,' for example. I was especially struck with it because its scene is laid in a country with which I am very familiar, and which you, too, seem to know well, but especially because there is at the bottom of it a vein of truth which perhaps not even you suspect."

Tarrant looked again at the handsome brown face, so alert, so imperturbable. Yes, there was a vein of truth at the bottom of that book, though he had never dared to say so to any one but himself. It had entirely escaped the critics; it was astonishing that this man should have perceived it.

"I seem to have become a center of intrigue to-night," he remarked. "I was warned at the opera to leave Monte Carlo at once."

"Warned by whom?" asked Cherif quickly.

"I do not know—by a voice which spoke over my shoulder."

"What did it say?"

Tarrant repeated the words of the unknown.

"And you saw no one?"

"Only the back of a tall, gray-haired man who was hastening toward the door."

"No explanation occurred to you?"

"I decided that he had mistaken me for some one else."

"Yes," Cherif nodded. "That was undoubtedly the case." He puffed meditatively at his cigarette.

Tarrant, too, was silent. Should he accept or refuse? But why refuse? Why throw away the opportunity so strangely offered to meet again the woman whom he had already found so fascinating?

Cherif's eyes were on his face.

"There is another thing I found in your books," he said—"a thing which pleased me very much. I perceived that you had learned what few Americans learn—that happiness is not a thing to shrink from or avoid, but a thing to be seized and held without fear and without hesitation."

"Yes," agreed Tarrant, nodding, "it is a philosophy which I have been preaching for some time."

"It is the best philosophy of all," declared Cherif. "There is only one thing a wise man ever regrets—that he has fled from joy, that he has permitted even one little moment of happiness to escape." Again his eyes were searching Tarrant's. "I see that you are going to accept."

"Yes," said Tarrant. "Why not?"

"You are right—why not? A little voyage along the coast of enchantment!" He sat for a moment longer, smiling at Tarrant's face. Then he rose abruptly to his feet. "Will you come this way?"

Tarrant bowed to the old man, who had sat calmly smoking through all this talk, and followed Cherif across the room. There was a strange, delightful riot in his breast. To seize happiness and to hold it! Yes, that was wise—that was right! A little voyage along the coast of enchantment! Who could tell where it might lead!

And he closed his mind to that little voice which still, at the back of his head, was whispering: "Take care! Take care! Take care!"

CHAPTER III.

PLAYING THE GAME.

CHERIF led the way across the hall and into a small room on the other side of it.

"Will you be seated?" he asked, and indicated a chair which stood in front of a beautiful dressing table.

Cherif struck his hands together and a slim Arab boy entered. Like the hall servant, he was clad in immaculate white, and there was a delicacy almost feminine in his face and slender body. His master spoke to him for a moment in rapid Arabic, and the boy, nodding his understanding, picked up a comb and brush from the table.

Cherif turned back to Tarrant.

"I am going to ask you," he said, "to permit Souffi to arrange your hair in a slightly different fashion."

"Is it to be a masquerade?" Tarrant asked. "You did not tell me that."

"Masquerade is too serious a word," protested Cherif. "All I wish to do is to make you look—shall we say?—a little less American."

"Very well—go ahead," Tarrant consented, and settled back in the chair.

He had no especial wish to look American. On the contrary! Besides, since he had started on this adventure, he would see it through—at least he would not withdraw until there was some really serious reason to do so. He could always withdraw, he said to the still small voice; he need not go one step farther than he wished to go.

"Thank you," said Cherif, and under his direction, Souffi brushed a trace of powder into Tarrant's hair, and then, with the aid of a little pomatum, coaxed it into a rather taking wave.

Tarrant wondered if Cherif was surprised that he should be so complaisant. Ordinarily he would not have been, but there was an urge behind him, pushing him on, of which Cherif knew nothing Or perhaps Cherif did know. Very little would escape those alert and intelligent eyes, and after all it was Cherif who had woven the web, who had, as it were, set the trap and baited it.

"Look at it now," said Cherif, and passed the American a mirror. "You will agree with me, I think, that Souffi is an artist."

Tarrant contemplated his image with a smile. Certainly there was now nothing American about it. It had undergone a subtle change. His whole expression was altered. It was, for one thing, more sophisticated.

"Souffi is a magician," he commented "I hardly recognize myself."

"You should always wear your hair like that," said Cherif. "It gives you an air entirely distinguished. One should make the most of oneself."

And Tarrant mentally agreed. After all, to allure romance one must be romantic! And there was something undeniably romantic in that wave. In spite of the powder, he looked at least five years younger.

"One more touch," said Cherif, and passed about Tarrant's neck the black ribbon of a monocle. "Place the glass in your waistcoat pocket," he directed.

"I warn you that I shall never be able to use it."

"You need not," Cherif assured him.

"Then why wear it?"

"It goes with the hair," Cherif explained, with a quizzical smile "The black ribbon across the waistcoat is also supposed to be distinguished—and extremely un-American! It is little touches like this which make the man."

"I see," said Tarrant, and tucked the glass away.

"I think that is all," added Cherif, and looked him over with an approving nod. "It could not be better. The car is waiting."

Tarrant silently resumed his coat and hat and followed Cherif through the hall to the entrance. The man who had admitted him threw open the door and bowed low as they passed. The car was indeed there—the same luxurious limousine—its motor purring softly. Tarrant saw that it was empty.

"And the lady?" he asked.

"She will join you on the way down," Cherif explained. "The chauffeur knows."

Tarrant nodded and stepped into the car.

"I wish to thank you for doing this for me," Cherif continued, standing with his hand on the door, "and to assure you once more that you will not regret it."

"I hope not," answered Tarrant, a little shortly.

Cherif closed the door, spoke a few words to the chauffeur, and in another moment the car was rolling down the Rue de l'Observatoire toward the town.

As a matter of fact, at the bottom of his heart, Tarrant had already begun to regret it. He was embarking blind-

folded upon an adventure which might lead anywhere. And he suddenly realized that if he were to escape at all, now was the time. A few moments and it would be too late; once the lady had joined him, he would have to see it through.

Yet less than ever did he wish to escape. His heart had lifted strangely when he had realized that she did not live at Cherif's villa. Even yet, of course, there were many things to be explained, but at least no situation so equivocal as that. "Take care!" said the voice. "Take care!" What was there to be afraid of? What possible objection could there be to spending half an hour at the Sporting Club, being pleasant to a charming woman? To see her again—to talk to her—to be near her—to seize happiness and hold it——

THE car whirled through a gateway, and up a road which curved between an avenue of palms, and came to a stop in front of a short flight of steps leading up to an ornate entrance. As he looked at it, Tarrant's heart fell. Only a princess could live in a palace like this—and a princess was beyond his reach. He did not want a princess. What he wanted was—not precisely a beggar maid, to be sure—but at least some one to whom he would mean something. His neighbor at the opera had, somehow, not given him the impression of being rich or of le grand monde. For one thing, she had been alone, and he had seen no one speak to her except the Arab rug vender. For another, her enjoyment of the music bespoke an unjaded ear.

The chauffeur had mounted the steps and touched the bell. As Tarrant climbed hastily from the car, the door of the house opened and a woman came out. She ran lightly down the steps, and Tarrant could see that she was muffled in a dark wrap. It made her look taller than she had looked in evening dress. He held out his hand and assisted her into the car.

"So we meet again!" he said, taking the place beside her, while the chauffeur snapped the door shut and sprang back to his seat. "I am very happy!"

"Are you?" she asked, a little mockingly, and he was conscious of an unfamiliar, exotic perfume.

Then, as the car ran through the circle of light from the lamps at the gate, he saw her face.

It was a beautiful face, an arresting face, but it was not at all the face he had hoped to see.

She was looking at him with an eagerness equal to his own, and in her eyes there was a sort of astonished delight, as though he were, in some mysterious way, better than she had hoped for.

Then she saw his disappointment.

"Can it be possible that you were expecting some one else?" she demanded. "But Cherif assured me that you knew nothing."

"Nor do I," said Tarrant, with some bitterness. The whole affair had suddenly turned stupid and distasteful. "I have been treated like a fool. I am certainly behaving like one."

"I do not think so," she countered quickly. "An adventure offers—you take it. Why not?"

"Why not, indeed?" he agreed, with a shrug. "Perhaps you are right."

"Of course I am right!" She laughed a little as the car ran through another circle of light and she saw his face clearly a second time. "So do not look so upset. It is scarcely polite! Who was it you were expecting?" she asked curiously. "Some one you are very fond of—that is evident!"

"What does it matter," he retorted impatiently, "since I am here—at your orders?"

She looked at him a moment longer, and there was a vague something in her expression which reminded him of

the girl he had met at the opera. Why should these women look at him in that quizzical way, as at a naughty child—as though they saw through into his mind and understood what was going on there?

"I understand that you are Godfrey Tarrant, the writer," she said at last, as though that explained everything.

Tarrant nodded.

"There is no one here to present me, so I shall present myself," she went on. "I am the Countess Bertrand." She was smiling again, perhaps at Tarrant's noncommittal expression. "When you converse with me, you must call me 'countess'—perhaps even 'dear countess.' That is permitted—for this evening."

"You are very kind," Tarrant murmured.

"You see, we are supposed to be—good friends. But to play the part, you will have to get rid of that downcast look."

"I dare say it will pass in time."

He saw nothing especially funny in this remark, but it seemed to amuse her, and he felt her move closer to him.

"I must coach you in your part," she said. "But first I have a flower for you." She leaned forward and placed a small crimson blossom in the buttonhole of his coat. Again he caught that faint, provocative perfume. "Now please listen attentively. I am going to the Sporting Club to gamble. Here are a hundred thousand francs," and she thrust a packet of bank notes into his hand. "Keep them for me. I shall ask for them if I need them."

"Oh, no!" Tarrant protested quickly, "I cannot possibly——"

"I am simply asking you to keep this money for me until I ask for it," she said, with some impatience. "I might drop it somewhere."

"Very well," said Tarrant, and took the bills and thrust them into his pocket. "Anything else?"

"That is all for the moment," answered the countess, still smiling. "I trust, before the evening is over, you will cheer up a little. Otherwise, people will think we have quarreled."

The car was traversing the open square in front of the casino, and Tarrant saw that the big clock above the entrance pointed to half past twelve. It was only an hour since he had emerged from the opera!

A moment more and the car stopped before the flight of steps leading up to the entrance of the Sporting Club. A flunky in blue livery assisted them to alight; another spun the revolving door opening into the vestibule; still another took their wraps; the contrôleur bowed low; and Tarrant found himself following the countess up the stairs to the gaming rooms.

NOT until that moment did he really look at her; now his eye was caught by her grace of movement, by the beauty of a figure whose lines were fully revealed by a gown so simple that only a master could have designed it. He could see how delicately the head was set upon the slender shoulders, and how it was crowned by a glorious mass of dark lustrous hair. And suddenly his spirit lifted. Here, too, was a woman beautiful and arresting, with whom he was privileged to spend a romantic hour. Well, he would take what the gods offered!

"You are enchanting to-night, dear countess," he murmured, as they reached the head of the stairs.

She gave him a quick glance.

"That is better! You have recovered from your disappointment, then?"

"Entirely!" he assured her.

"I was sure there was another woman!" she said. "I was beginning to be jealous!" And she flashed him a smile warm and intimate—the smile which a woman gives only to the man she loves.

Yes, she was enchanting with her black eyes and hair, her red lips, her ivory skin—a woman of fire; and though Tarrant knew quite well that the smile was not meant for him, that she was playing a part for the benefit of he knew not whom, nevertheless his pulse quickened in response to it.

She passed on without waiting for him to reply, into the room devoted to baccarat.

"Let us walk about for a moment," she said, "and see who is here."

THERE were perhaps a dozen tables in the room, each with seats for ten players, and all of them were filled. One had a high brass railing around it to keep spectators at a respectful distance, and here the play ran into the thousands of francs. At the far end of the room was a large table with seats for twenty players, and here a dark, heavy-set man, intrenched behind bales of thousand-franc notes, was taking on all comers. He had bought the bank for a million francs, and seemed in process of adding another million to his original capital.

The countess led the way from table to table, lingering only a moment at each—just long enough to run her eyes over the faces of the players, almost as though she were searching for some one. She was easily the most beautiful and distinguished-looking woman in the room, and drew many admiring glances.

Tarrant was amused to note how these glances, after dwelling upon her, invariably passed to him to see what sort of man possessed this goddess. He felt that he was shining with reflected glory—which, of course, is better than not shining at all!—but at the bottom of his heart was the pride which every man feels to know that the woman he is with is admired and envied and desired. Two or three men bowed to her, but she gave them no encouragement to approach.

Not until they came to the large table at the end of the room did Tarrant realize that he was attracting some attention on his own account. The swarthy individual who was holding the bank was sitting with folded arms, nonchalantly smoking a cigar, waiting until the croupier had gathered in the results of the last coup, which had been a win.

"He is going to lose this time," said the countess, and opened her bag and drew out five one-thousand-franc notes. She leaned over and placed them on the table.

The banker glanced up carelessly to see who was placing the bet, and started violently as his eyes reached the countess' face. She was smiling over her shoulder at Tarrant, that warm, intimate smile, while with one hand she drew him closer to her.

"You will see that I am right, mon amour!" she said.

"I hope so, dear countess," Tarrant agreed, and glanced toward the banker to see if he had heard.

Their eyes met, and Tarrant was astonished at the look of consternation which swept over the other's face. In another instant, the man had dropped his eyes to the table and seemed to be watching impassively the placing of the other bets, but he could not control the trembling of the hand which held his cigar.

"Who is that fellow?" Tarrant asked, his lips close to the countess' ear.

She shook her head with a shrug.

"Some nouveau riche—a profiteer, no doubt. He has a stupid appearance, do you not think so?" she said, in a voice quite audible to their neighbors—perhaps also to the banker.

It was true that he did have a stupid appearance, and yet he had a look of power, too—the look of a man used to being obeyed.

"Messieurs, faites vos jeux!" called the croupier, and looked about the board. *"Les jeux sont faites."*

He placed the narrow box containing the cards in front of the banker.

Tarrant watched the fat hand as it slid the cards from the box. It was a stodgy and brutal hand, and about the thumb was a ring of heavy gold set with a large, dark stone—a peculiar-looking stone, bulging upward to a point in the middle; and as Tarrant looked at it, a star suddenly flashed out from its depths and as suddenly disappeared.

The banker dealt six cards—one to the right, one to the left, and one to himself, and then a second all around. Then he waited, without looking at the two under his hand.

The croupier caught up the two cards at the right on the end of his long, wooden spatula, and passed them across to the countess. The two cards to the left he passed to some one at the other end of the table.

As the countess looked at her cards, Tarrant saw that they were a king and a deuce.

"Une carte," said the countess.

The player at the other end of the table also asked for a card.

With a face entirely expressionless, the banker turned his two cards face upwards. They were a ten and a seven. Then he slid a card from the box and tossed it to the countess; another, and flicked it to the other end of the board; and indicated by a gesture that he would not draw.

The card he had tossed to the countess was a six, and she placed her other cards beside it. She had eight to his seven. She had won.

Not only she had won, but, of course, all the other players at her end of the table had won. The croupier placed five bills beside the five that she had wagered, and paid the other players with amazing rapidity and dexterity. And again:

"Messieurs, faites vos jeux!"

The countess permitted the ten thousand francs to remain on the table.

"Les jeux sont faites!"

Again the six cards were dealt, and again the countess won. This time ten bills were placed beside hers.

"Three times!" she said, laughing over her shoulder at Tarrant.

Tarrant caught a gloomy flash from the eyes of the banker which seemed to envelope them both. Could it be, he wondered, that the man was an old lover upon whom the countess was revenging herself? There could be no doubt that they knew each other well; and yet, strangely enough, the man seemed to know Tarrant, too. There had certainly been a sort of recognition in that first glance.

"Ah," said the countess, "you see!"

A moment later the croupier counted out twenty-one thousand-franc notes and pushed them across to her. Without so much as a glance at the banker, she gathered up the forty thousand francs and stuffed them into her bag.

"That will do for the present," she said. "Let us get something to drink. It is stifling in here," and she led the way toward the bar.

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS MESSAGE.

THE bar at the International Sporting Club is a small square room, with the bar itself—quite American in appearance—across one end, and a shallow alcove at one side. It is crowded with little round tables, and is entirely inadequate to hold the mob that seeks to slake its thirst there. So the tables overflow into the corridor at one side, and every one who comes into the club by way of the long, tortuous, and celebrated underground passage from the Hotel de Paris is compelled to pick a circuitous course among them to get to the gaming rooms. And as every one is either talking at the top of his voice or shouting orders to the harassed waiters, the din is something awful.

By rare good fortune, a couple who had occupied a table in one corner of the alcove were rising as Tarrant and the countess entered, and Tarrant, noting their first movement, dashed forward and secured it.

"This is the very safest place in the world in which to talk," said the countess, taking the chair he offered and looking around. "Nobody listens to anybody!"

"Are we going to talk?" asked Tarrant.

"Yes—a little." The countess smiled at his tone. "Would you wish it?"

"Indeed, yes," said Tarrant, noting, as he had done once or twice before, the slight stiffness which showed that English was not her native tongue. "There are many questions I should like to ask."

"Well, ask them," said the countess. "Perhaps some of them I shall answer."

Sitting thus opposite him in the full light, he could see her face as he had not been able to do before, and he permitted himself a long scrutiny. It was at the same time lovely and clever; a combination more rare than one might think; lovely in its contours, in its skin like melted pearl. He noted the thoroughbred arch of the nostrils, the fine curve of the lips, the delicate molding of the chin.

But what appealed to him most was the intelligence, the savoir-faire, which somehow permeated and enhanced every feature. It was this air of experience which made him guess that, in spite of the fact she did not look a day over twenty-five, she must be at least ten years older than that. Only in the eyes was there any sign of age. They seemed a little tired, as though they had seen too much.

She endured his scrutiny without flinching, and with entire good humor.

"Well," she asked at last, "do I please you?"

"Immensely!" said Tarrant. "What will you have to drink?"

"A whisky and soda, please."

Tarrant ordered two.

"I also find you interesting," the countess continued. "I am sure we shall get on together. You have a look in your face which not many Americans have. You look as though you knew something—as though you had some experience of life. Very few Americans have that—very few American men, at least. It is not that they look stupid—not at all; they look clever. But it is the cleverness of a child. It is a cleverness without depth. It is the cleverness which knows how to make money, but not how to make love. You have been in Europe long?"

"Almost three years."

"That explains it. You have absorbed something of Europe."

"May I ask your nationality, countess?"

"I often ask myself. I do not know if I have a nationality. I am a hybrid—but I carry an Hungarian passport."

"Ah—Hungarian," said Tarrant, and looked at her again. "You speak English marvelously well."

"We of Hungary are like the Russians—we must be linguists to be understood outside our own country."

"French, of course," Tarrant agreed; "but English—and almost like a native."

The countess took a sip of her whisky and soda, her eyes considering him above the glass.

"Yes, I think I can tell you," she said, as she put it down. "After all, you deserve some confidences. I speak English well because I lived in England for five years. I was so ill-advised as to marry an Englishman. It is not an episode which I recall with pleasure."

"What happened to him?" Tarrant asked.

"He was killed in the war—right at the end, in the last offensive—when I had almost ceased to hope! I left Eng-

land as soon as I could arrange my affairs, and I shall never go back—never! I leave that cold, inhospitable island to the English. If they would only stay there!"

She cast a fiery glance about the bar. Fully three fourths of the people there were English—very evidently English. Tarrant followed her gaze, smiling at her intensity. He himself had long since outgrown the irritation which the English excite in some Americans. Irritation, indeed, had given way to amusement; he enjoyed them; a few of them he even liked.

"Were they as bad as that?" he asked.

"Let us not speak of it," said the countess, with a shiver. "It is too horrible to recall. Enough of my past—it was not of that I wished to talk," and she glanced at the watch at her wrist and then at the neighboring tables to be sure that no one was listening.

"Suppose we talk about your present," Tarrant suggested. "I should like to know something about that."

HE reflected that Bertrand was not an English name. It was very likely French. Perhaps she had married again. And, yes, she must be at least thirty-five, if she had married five years before the end of the war. Perhaps she was even older than that. If so, her make-up was nothing less than consummate.

"No," she said, with a smile, as though she had read his thought. "Enough of me for the present. Later, perhaps, when we know each other better, and have more time. Now we must be serious," and she leaned a little closer across the table. "You noticed the man who was holding the bank in there?"

"You do know him, then?"

"Too well. That money which was piled in front of him he has stolen from the people of my country. I came here to-night to take it away from him."

"Rather risky, isn't it?" Tarrant asked. "He is much more likely to take yours away from you."

"Not at all," said the countess. "What is to happen is predestined."

"Perhaps," Tarrant agreed, "but who knows what *is* to happen?"

"I do," asserted the countess firmly. "I have the feeling that I shall win—and I have already impressed him with the feeling that he will lose. That is a very great advantage. Did you not see how his hand trembled?"

"Yes," Tarrant admitted. "What made it tremble?"

"He knows me—he knows what to expect. But he cannot stop. The rules of this place compel him to play on until the hour of closing or until he has lost his million. Have you ever played baccarat?"

"No," said Tarrant. "It seems to me stupid."

"Splendid!" she cried, her face lighting up. "That is better than I dared to hope! But you know the game?"

"I know that you draw two cards, that you add them together, and that the one who holds nearest nine wins."

"That is all you need to know—except this: never draw if you have five."

"All I need to know?"

"You are going to play for me."

"Oh, no!" protested Tarrant, starting violently back. "It would be bad enough to play with my own money—but to play with yours——"

"It is not mine—it is part of a fund."

"That makes no difference."

"Yes, it does. And when he sees you playing—when he sees me with you—when he sees me sitting there beside you, rejoicing in your success——"

"Or weeping at my misfortune——"

"No, you will win! When he sees that, he will lose his head. It will be too much for him. Come, you will do it."

"No, I will not do it," said Tarrant, quite positively.

A wave of red crept slowly into her cheeks and then receded, leaving them paler than before. She looked at him for a moment, her lips compressed. Then she placed one hand on his.

"Will you do one thing?" she asked. "You have a hundred thousand-franc notes of mine in your pocket. Will you go out there with me and wager fifty of them when I tell you to?"

Tarrant hesitated.

"Yes, I will do that," he said at last," if it really means something to you."

"It means life or death to me!" she said, her hand pressing his, her eyes shining. "Some day you will understand—some day I shall thank you properly. Now please pay attention, so that you will understand exactly what it is I wish you to do. You will find that the packet of bills which you have is divided into two parts by a band of paper. There are fifty thousand francs in each part. When I say to you, 'Now, it is your turn,' you will place that amount on the table. If you lose, you will at once wager the other half. If you win, you will leave the money there until I tell you to take it off. By no means are you to touch it until I tell you to do so. You understand?"

"Yes," said Tarrant doubtfully, "but see——"

"It is I who take the entire responsibility," broke in the countess quickly. "You must not——"

"What is it?" asked Tarrant sharply, for a waiter had approached and was standing at his elbow.

"A message for monsieur," said the man, and indicated an envelope which lay on his tray.

Tarrant picked it up and looked at it. It was unaddressed.

"Are you sure it is for me?" he asked.

"Yes, monsieur. Monsieur was pointed out to me very carefully."

"Pointed out by whom?" Tarrant demanded.

"By the gentleman who gave me the note, monsieur."

"Who was this gentleman?"

"I do not know, monsieur. He was here but a moment. I do not think I ever saw him before."

"Wait a minute," said Tarrant, tore open the envelope, drew out the sheet of paper inside and unfolded and looked at it. "Yes," he added, "it seems to be for me. Thank you." He placed a tip on the waiting tray.

The man bowed and withdrew.

"What is this mystery?" demanded the countess.

With a smile, Tarrant passed the sheet of paper across to her. It was a letterhead of the Sporting Club. Evidently it had been written in the library.

"For the second time to-night," the countess read in French, "your highness is warned that your life is in danger, and not yours alone. Unless you leave the club at once and return instantly to your duty, nothing can save you. You have added dishonor to your other crimes. You have broken your solemn oath. You can expect no mercy."

"Quite melodramatic, isn't it?" asked Tarrant. "It might do for one of my novels."

But the countess did not smile.

"What does it mean by 'second time?'" she asked.

"A voice over my shoulder at the opera told me to get out," he explained, and related the incident. "Some one is making an awful blunder. He will probably get the sack when it is discovered that he has been warning the wrong man."

"He may also shoot the wrong man," commented the countess dryly.

Tarrant looked at her quickly.

"But you don't think he is in earnest?"

The countess nodded.

"He is very much in earnest," she said.

"Then let us turn the letter over to the police," he suggested. "They are said to be the best in the world."

"On the contrary, they are the most stupid," said the countess. "They do not prevent crime—they merely hush it up."

She read the letter carefully again, then handed it back to him.

"Then we will say nothing about it," said Tarrant, and slipped the letter into his pocket. "Let us forget it. I am at your service, dear countess."

She looked at him quickly.

"You mean that you are willing to go on?"

"But certainly—more than ever! This gives the affair an added flavor! Do you know, I have an idea—that letter was written by your banker friend, trying to throw a scare into us and save his million!"

She laughed.

"Yes, you are an American," she said. "That is the one trait of theirs which I admire most: they are never—what you call—bluffed!" She leaned forward and placed her hand on his. "Yes—some day I shall reward you properly! Come!" She rose and led the way back into the gaming room.

CHAPTER V.

FOR A MILLION FRANCS.

DURING the half hour which Tarrant and the countess had passed in the bar, the crowd in the gaming rooms had grown so dense that it was scarcely possible to move about, and the rooms themselves were stifling.

Women, women were everywhere—tall English ones; plump, dark Italian ones; sinuous, intriguing Russian ones; chic, vivacious French ones; even a few American ones, looking a little vapid amid these exotic surroundings—all of them beautifully gowned, covered with jewels, displaying quite frankly such charms as they possessed, and overborne, obsessed, enslaved by the passion of gambling.

Every table was surrounded by a throng three or four deep, and the single thought of every person seemed to be to make a wager upon the turn of a card or the fall of an ivory ball.

The crowd about the big table at the end of the room was as solid as a British square, but the countess managed somehow to break it and to get to the table. Tarrant, following close, took his stand just behind her so that he could look over her shoulder.

It was obvious at once what had drawn the crowd. A duel was in progress between the swarthy banker and a blond, square-headed man, with a towering bald forehead and a close-clipped yellow mustache. It was evidently nearing a conclusion, for the bank was winning steadily. Tarrant could catch the murmurs which ran through the crowd:

"He has lost at least three hundred thousand."

"They say he is a German—a big iron man."

"One of the profiteers—well, let him lose!"

The fellow certainly looked like a German, but then so many people did. There were the Swiss, and the Danes, even some north Italians—the Prussian strain, no matter how attenuated, had a way of cropping out. This was a perfect specimen.

The crowd was plainly glad that he was losing, and no doubt he felt this hostility, for he caressed his stubby mustache nervously and little beads of sweat glistened across his forehead. Then suddenly the end came. Perhaps the tension was too much for his nerves, or perhaps he was able to endure no longer the mocking glances of the crowd, for with trembling hands he swept together the bills in front of him, wagered them all at once—and lost.

The croupier reached out his long

spatula and gathered them in, while the loser looked on dazedly.

Then he pulled himself together, heaved himself heavily to his feet, and, with one defiant glance around, made his way rapidly through the crowd, which opened respectfully before him.

The banker gave a little shrug and glanced around the table, as if asking if there was any one else who wished to try conclusions. Then his face darkened, for the countess had slipped into the vacant place. And again Tarrant saw those black and curiously shiny eyes shift from the face of the countess to his own in a glance which was a strange mixture of fear and menace.

The crowd, which had begun to move away, came back again, sensing, as a crowd will, that a new duel was about to begin.

"I think we shall have better luck," said the countess, in a voice evidently intended for the ears of the banker, and she smiled up at Tarrant over her shoulder; but if the banker heard, he made no sign, nor did he look at her, only waited impassively, his eyes on the board, for the bets to be made.

"Faites vos jeux, mesdames, messieurs," called the croupier.

The countess drew from her bag the forty thousand francs she had placed there half an hour before, counted off ten of the bills and laid them on the table in front of her. There were a few other bets, but no large ones, for the players were waiting until the bank should come to the end of its winning streak. But the end was not yet, for the bank won, and won, and won again, and the countess' forty thousand francs were swept away.

AT the last win, the banker permitted himself a mocking glance at her face. But she did not see him, for she was smiling up at Tarrant.

"Now it is your turn," she said.

With fingers that trembled a little, Tarrant drew from his pocket the bundle of notes which she had given him. As he opened it, he saw that it was, as she had said, divided into two equal parts by a band of paper. He leaned over and placed one of the parts on the table.

The banker glanced at the bundle of notes and said something in the croupier's ear.

"How much is the wager, monsieur?" asked the croupier.

"Fifty thousand francs," Tarrant answered. "Is there a limit?"

The croupier glanced at the banker, who shook his head slightly.

"No, monsieur," said the croupier, "there is no limit."

The crowd buzzed with excitement and drew in more closely about the table.

"Messieurs, faites vos jeux," called the croupier. *"Les jeux sont faites. Rien ne va plus!"*

The banker slipped a card from the box and flipped it across to Tarrant; then one for himself; then another for Tarrant; and another for himself. Tarrant picked his up and looked at them —a king and a seven—good. But at the same instant, the banker, after a glance at his own cards, turned them face upward on the table. He had drawn a knave and a nine—nine, which could not be beaten.

As the croupier reached out with his spatula, and deftly added Tarrant's fifty thousand francs to the pile of notes in front of the banker, the latter raised his eyes and fixed them on Tarrant in a long, searching, vindictive glance. There was something uncanny in those eyes—something opaque and glassy, as though they concealed the soul, instead of revealing it.

"Better luck next time, mon amour," said the countess, and Tarrant tossed the bundle of notes which he still held in his hand over her shoulder onto the table.

As he did so, his eyes chanced to fall upon the banker's hand, poised ready to draw the cards from the box, full upon the curious ring. It was almost like a third eye, that dark, shining stone, and as he looked at it, he saw again that mysterious star flash out from its depths and vanish. It was a luck stone.

"Les jeux sont faites," said the croupier, and again the banker slipped four cards from the box—two for himself, two for Tarrant. This time Tarrant drew a ten and a five. Five—a long way from nine, but the countess had said: "Never draw to a five."

The banker waited, looking at him, a malicious smile on his lips. Tarrant shook his head to indicate he did not wish another card. The other turned his cards face upward. He had a knave and a five. He hesitated for an instant, and then drew a third card. It was an eight—and five and eight are thirteen—three to Tarrant's five. He had lost, and his face darkened when Tarrant showed his cards and he realized that if he had not drawn the hands would have been tied.

A murmur of gratification ran through the crowd. Evidently its sympathies were with Tarrant.

"I knew it!" said the countess, and caught his hand and snuggled her cheek against it. "The tide turns!"

The croupier picked up the bundle of notes and laid them out on the table in series of tens. There were fifty. He counted out the same number from the pile in front of the banker, folded up the two lots separately, and replaced them on the table in front of Tarrant.

Tarrant glanced at the countess, but she made no sign—only held his hand close against his cheek. She was looking at the banker, with what expression Tarrant could only guess.

There was a little murmur of excitement when the crowd realized that the next coup was to be for a hundred thousand francs.

THE banker's face was darker than ever as he drew the cards. This time Tarrant drew a five and a four and threw them down at once. The banker turned his over—a queen and a six.

The croupier counted out a hundred thousand-franc notes, and laid them beside the ones in front of Tarrant.

The countess had lighted a cigarette and was leaning forward, her elbows on the table, regarding with sardonic eyes the swarthy face opposite her. He had taken off his eyeglasses, which had become obscured with perspiration, and was wiping them nervously.

"Will you not sit down, monsieur?" asked the man sitting next to the countess.

"Thank you," Tarrant assented, and took the proffered place. "Well?" he asked, as the countess turned to him.

"Magnificent!" she cried in her clear voice, her eyes shining. "I knew it would happen—I felt it. It is Fate. It cannot be escaped!"

The banker replaced his glasses and looked across at the countess with malignant eyes.

"We shall see, madame," he said, and motioned to the croupier to continue.

Another murmur ran through the crowd, a tremor of interest and suspense, for it was evident that this was no ordinary battle. Something more was involved than the pile of bank notes on the table—something unusual, something personal.

The croupier glanced at the pile of notes and then at Tarrant.

"Monsieur leaves them?" he asked.

Tarrant nodded. The excitement of the battle was rising to his brain. He also had the feeling that Fate was on his side.

He drew an eight and a two.

"Une carte," he said.

The banker turned his over—a queen and a seven—and a grim smile flitted across his lips. Tarrant's heart sank

—most certainly he had lost—and then it rose again, for his third card was a nine. He had won.

The croupier slowly counted out two hundred thousand francs and pushed them across the table, leaving a very perceptible breach in the pile of bills remaining in the bank.

"Decidedly Fate is fighting on our side," said the countess, once again; "and for a good reason, perhaps!"

She was radiant, confident, elated. Truly it seemed that the gods must be with her. Her opponent dared not meet her eyes. He could no longer control nor conceal his emotion. His hands were trembling. His heavy face was flushed to a deep purple. There was a little convulsive tremor of his lower jaw of which he seemed to be unconscious. At a word from him, one of the attendants brought him a glass of water, and he drank it greedily.

"Perhaps I had better not tempt Fate too far," suggested Tarrant. "Three wins are pretty good."

"Bah!" said the countess. "You will have four, five, six—as many as are necessary to break the bank. For it is going to be broken—that is certain!"

"We shall see, madame," said the banker, in a thick voice. "You will play for the whole amount, monsieur?"

"Yes, monsieur," Tarrant answered.

"That is right!" commended the countess. "All or nothing!"

The banker drew the four cards from the box, while the crowd held its breath. Tarrant found he held a knave and a king.

"A card," he said.

The banker turned his cards face up—a nine and an eight—and flipped a card to Tarrant. It was a seven. He threw his three cards on the board—a tie.

Again the banker dealt—two eights to Tarrant, who refused to draw—and turned his own cards over—a queen and a five. For a moment he hesitated, his eyes on Tarrant's, seeking to read his mind, remembering his previous mistake. Then he drew—an ace. Another tie.

There was a moan of excitement from the crowd. It was almost too much for human nerves to endure.

"This time you win!" said the countess, and patted Tarrant's arm softly.

THE mechanical grin with which the banker sought to mask his emotion became a sort of grimace. He dealt a third time. Tarrant found he held a ten and a six. Again he refused to draw. The banker's cards were a two and a three. Never draw to five is an axiom—but Tarrant had refused a card—it was therefore certain that he held five or better. The banker drew. Slowly he turned the card over. An ace, and he would tie; a deuce, a trey, or a four, and he would win. The card was a seven. He held two to Tarrant's six. He had lost.

One could hear the deep breath which the spectators drew hissing into their lungs. Four hundred thousand francs! That was a win worth seeing, and they watched with shining eyes while the croupier counted them out. When he had finished there was not much left of the bank's million, while Tarrant had heaped in front of him eight hundred notes of a thousand francs each.

He looked at them stupidly. Could it really be money? Could it really be that this pile of paper represented a little fortune—that one could buy houses and land with it, feed and clothe oneself, command the labor of other people? How many men and women would be happy to toil for a month at any task to gain one of those notes! How few, even by a lifetime of toil, could amass so many! And here, in a few minutes, by a chance turn of the cards, he had won them. How ridiculous it seemed. And how tragic! Surely there was something wrong with

a world in which such things were possible.

"Once more!" said the countess. "Once more, and you will clean him out! Nothing can stop you!"

The croupier whispered a sentence into the banker's ear. The latter nodded, and the croupier rapidly counted the money remaining in the bank. There were four hundred and eighty thousand francs. From the pile in front of Tarrant, he counted out four hundred and eighty notes, and passed the remainder over to him.

"Four hundred and eighty thousand is the limit of the bank, monsieur," he said.

"Very well," said Tarrant. "Let us play for that, then."

He, too, felt sure that nothing could stop him. He had gathered momentum, as it were. He would win this coup, as he had the other four. After all, there was nothing remarkable in five straight wins. He had seen much longer series—there was a sort of magic about a winning streak which seemed to make it almost impossible to break. Experienced gamblers knew better than to try.

He glanced across at the swarthy, perspiring face on the other side of the table. How did it feel to lose a million francs? Could the fellow afford it, or was it his whole fortune? Where had he obtained it? And then he remembered what the countess had said: "He has stolen it from the people of my country." Perhaps she intended to restore it to them—in that case, Tarrant was fighting in a righteous cause!

He was gazing at that moist and heavy countenance with an intentness he did not realize until the other raised his eyes and gazed full at him. Obscured by glasses as they were, Tarrant could still see that they were ferocious and implacable eyes. For some instant they sat so, and Tarrant fancied the other opened his lips a little as though about to speak.

"Do we play again or not?" demanded the countess impatiently.

The parted lips snapped shut, and the fat hand with its enormous thumb ring drew forth the four cards. In the first instant, Tarrant knew that he had won. He had been dealt a four and a five, and he threw them face upward on the table.

CHAPTER VI.

A TRAP.

THE man who had lost a million francs looked on with entire calmness while the croupier gathered the final stake together and laid it in front of Tarrant. He must have been conscious of the circle of none-too-friendly faces watching him curiously, but his eyes were only for Tarrant and the countess.

Tarrant felt vaguely apologetic. To take a million francs from a man was—well, was going rather far, no matter what the circumstances. Mechanically he began to gather them up, wondering if he ought to remark upon the fortunes of war, or wish him better luck next time, or make some other observation equally banal. The situation was so new to him that he was entirely ignorant of its conventions, and he hesitated to address this man whom he did not know—whom he had never seen before, and would probably never see again.

The countess, evidently, had no such scruples. Her eyes were flaming with triumph as she plunged them into those of her adversary.

"So, Stéphan," she said, in a low tone, "it appears you have lost!"

"Ah, no," he rejoined, speaking between set teeth; "it is he who has lost," and he darted a fiery glance at Tarrant. "Has he gone mad?"

"Have you gone mad, mon amour?" queried the countess mockingly, and she smiled at Tarrant and placed one warm hand over his.

"He must be mad to appear here—and with you," said Stéphan. "He is ruined from this hour. You know it very well. Perhaps that is what you wish!"

"Perhaps," assented the countess negligently. "After all, we have a million francs. That is something!"

"The price of his honor!" said Stéphan bitterly, and he leaned toward her across the table and added a rapid sentence in a language which Tarrant did not understand.

The countess sat for a moment looking him full in the face. Then she shrugged her shoulders.

"Perhaps," she said again, "but this is scarcely the place to discuss it."

Stéphan threw a glance at the inquisitive faces staring down at them.

"No," he agreed, and rose heavily to his feet.

Not until then did Tarrant realize what a tremendous man he was. Seated, Stéphan had seemed too fat, but on his feet he carried his weight easily. He appeared hard, massive and extremely powerful.

He paused for an instant, looking down at the countess as though wishing to ask a question and yet not daring to, then turned abruptly and walked away with an agility surprising in so large a man.

"Well," said Tarrant, "what are you going to do with all this?" He indicated the pile of bank notes.

"Put them in your pocket," she said, and picked up two of them and tossed them over to the waiting croupier.

"My pockets were not made to hold a million francs," Tarrant pointed out. "Nobody ever supposed they would have to!"

"My bag will hold some of them," she said, and they stuffed it full.

The remainder Tarrant managed to get into his pockets.

"Let us go somewhere," he said, "where I can turn all this over to you—and where we can have an explanation."

"An explanation?"

"Don't you think I deserve one?"

"Perhaps," she agreed. "Yes, I suppose so. Come, then," and she arose and started for the door.

THEIR progress down the long, wide room reminded Tarrant of pictures he had seen of royal receptions, for they were shut in on either side by a wall of people, who, if they did not actually curtsy, certainly regarded the two winners with the liveliest interest and respect. News of the achievement had penetrated even to the vestiary, even to the doormen, even to the chausseur who whistled for their car. Tarrant endeavored to make his tips proportionate to his new prosperity.

"In fact," he added, after commenting on this extraordinary attention, "I suppose all Monte Carlo knows by this time that we have a million francs on our persons. Perhaps we would better ask for a police escort."

"A million francs is nothing in Monte Carlo," said the countess. "Besides, the police will keep an eye on us without our asking it—that is their business."

"Nevertheless I shall feel more at ease when I have given you all this money."

"Nonsense! Here is the car. Get in."

A footman, bent nearly double, held open the door for them and closed it reverently behind them.

"At least," continued Tarrant, as he sat down beside her and the car leaped forward along the curving road toward the casino, "I am going to unburden myself of the spoils at once," and he fished the rolls of bills from his pockets and heaped them in the countess' lap.

"But I tell you there is no danger!" she protested.

"I don't suppose there is," Tarrant agreed. "Just the same I feel better now. Their fate is on your head."

With a shrug, the countess gathered them up and thrust them into a deep pocket at the side of the seat.

"Their fate is already decided," she said. "They are going to alter the course of history."

Tarrant got out a cigarette and lighted it.

"Now you are going to tell me about it," he prompted. "I have been looking for a plot for a long time. Perhaps this is it. I am supposed to be rather good at international intrigue."

The countess laughed shortly.

"It would undoubtedly serve," she agreed.

"Well, then?"

"But I cannot tell you. It must be Cherif who tells you."

"Why can't you tell me?"

"Because I am only a pawn."

"Nonsense," said Tarrant. "You are the queen."

She shook her head a little sadly.

"Only a pawn," she repeated.

"At least let me make a guess," said Tarrant. "You will tell me if I am wrong."

She nodded slightly.

"It was evidently because of my resemblance to some one that Cherif wanted me to go to the Sporting Club to-night."

"Yes."

"Some one very distinguished—a highness."

"'Highness' is a little exaggerated," she said.

"Some one older than I am, since Cherif thought it necessary to put this powder in my hair.

"How old are you?"

"I am forty-seven."

"The man whom you resemble is five years younger than that, but his hair is more gray. He has not led the calm, unemotional life of an American."

Tarrant smiled a little. The calm, unemotional life of an American! Well, it was true—in the main, at least.

"Is the resemblance really so close?" he asked.

"It is very close, though of course there are differences—especially to one who knows him well. But seeing you with me, no one would suspect——"

She stopped and looked away, out into the night.

"He has often been seen with you?"

She nodded.

"But to be seen with you now," Tarrant persisted, "to be seen at the Sporting Club, gambling for high stakes, would do him an injury?"

"Perhaps," the countess assented, her face still turned away.

"In fact," Tarrant continued, "the man you called Stéphan asserted, with an altogether unholy joy, that it meant his ruin."

The countess nodded mutely.

"And he added something else—in Hungarian, perhaps."

"Yes," said the countess, in a muffled voice, "he assured me that you could not possibly escape being assassinated."

"That is interesting," Tarrant commented. He glanced through the window of the car at the quiet, well-lighted street, along which two gendarmes were slowly walking. Was it for him or for the unknown that fear muffled his companion's voice? Certainly if there was any danger it was his—yet how absurd to suppose that for him she would be so moved! "Tell me," he said, "why do you wish this man's ruin?"

The countess swung around upon him, her eyes flaming.

"Because he is a coward!" she cried. "A coward of the lowest sort, who betrays a woman for his own advantage. Now it is his turn—it is he who is betrayed! Ah, ask me no more, I pray you!"

"Not to-night, at least," Tarrant

promised; "but some day, perhaps, when you know me better——"

He paused, smiling to himself. It was the second time in one evening that he had used that formula. Really, he was running to repetitions!

The countess opened her eyes suddenly and looked at him.

"Why do you smile?" she demanded. "If you think it amusing, what I have just said——"

"No, no!" Tarrant protested. "It was myself I found amusing. What I should like to say is this: I am really quite——"

With a jolt that nearly threw them from their seats, the car jerked to a stop. The chauffeur, who had applied the brakes with his full strength, glanced around with a shrug of apology and motioned toward the road in front. The glare from their lamps disclosed a pile of stones lying across it. A section of the high wall at the side of the road had collapsed. It was just at the beginning of a sharp turn, and the car was almost upon the obstruction before the chauffeur had seen it.

The countess cast one glance at it and seized the speaking tube.

"Back, back, Nicolo!" she cried. "Quick, quick!"

The chauffeur nodded, and with an instant comprehension which proved that this was by no means the first emergency in which he had found himself, backed the car into the hillside and whirled it around on two wheels. Tarrant caught a confused glimpse of three or four figures dashing toward them; one of them sprang for the running board and missed it; there was a flash of red flame, a sharp report—and then they were off again down the road the way they had come.

"Take the lower road, Nicolo," said the countess composedly, and replaced the tube in its rack.

"But what was it?" Tarrant demanded.

"It was a trap."

"For your million francs? I told you that——"

"No, for you. Another moment and you would have been dead."

"But why?"

"Have you forgotten the two warnings?"

Tarrant looked at her in astonishment.

"You take them seriously, then?"

"Most seriously," replied the countess. "I advise you to rearrange your hair and get the powder out of it as soon as possible. And never again wear a gardenia in your buttonhole."

Tarrant laughed aloud.

"I can give up the gardenia," he said, "but as for the hair, I do not think I shall change it. It is very becoming like this! Cherif even told me that it gave me an air of distinction!"

"Laugh if you like," said the countess. "Later, perhaps——"

"You must pardon me," Tarrant apologized, "but I feel curiously exhilarated. It is the first time any one has ever tried to kill me. It gives me a new feeling of importance."

"You are not serious," said the countess. "You are nothing but a child. For your life is only a game."

"Yes," Tarrant agreed, "and a very stupid one sometimes!"

"You seem to find it amusing now."

"I do. But why should they want to kill me? That seems such a silly thing to do!"

"You must ask Cherif," said the countess. "But I warn you that these men are not children. For them life is a very serious thing; they are desperately in earnest. They will stop at nothing."

"So it seems. But why?"

"Because," answered the countess, "they have a passion which consumes them, and for which they are ready to lay down their lives—the passion for freedom."

The words struck Tarrant silent, and the car came to a stop before he could frame a reply. Looking out, he saw that they were before the entrance of the countess' villa.

The chauffeur sprang from his seat and opened the door.

"Good night, Monsieur Tarrant," said the countess, and placed her hand in his.

"When do I see you again?"

"To-morrow, if you wish. Will you come for tea—at five? But remember what I have told you about your hair," and she stepped from the car. "That was a near thing, Nicolo," she said in Italian, to the chauffeur.

"Yes, madame." Nicolo smiled and touched his cap.

"You were not injured?

"No, madame."

"Good night, monsieur!" said the countess again, and a moment later disappeared into the villa.

The chauffeur started to close the door of the car.

"Wait a minute," Tarrant interposed. "Where are you going to take me now?"

"My instructions are to take monsieur back to the Villa Cynthia."

Tarrant pondered. The Villa Cynthia—it was late, but why not make a night of it? Perhaps Cherif intended to tell him the story.

"Very well," he nodded.

The chauffeur closed the door and mounted to his seat.

Then Tarrant suddenly remembered. He plunged his hand into the pocket at the side of the seat and drew out the bundle of thousand-franc notes.

"A moment!" he called, rapping on the glass. "Madame has forgotten something."

He searched the pocket hastily to be sure he had all the notes, then opened the door and jumped out.

"I will be but a moment," he said, and stepped inside the little porch which shadowed the door of the villa.

There was no light, but after an instant's fumbling, he found the bell and pressed it. He waited, but there was no response. He pressed the bell again, and still no one answered. He placed his hand on the knob and tried the door. It was unlocked.

FOR a moment, Tarrant stood and debated with himself what he should do. To enter an unknown house in the middle of the night was certainly the height of folly; and yet he held in his hand a roll of bills amounting to he knew not what—four or five hundred thousand francs, at least. What should he do with it? Perhaps he should have left it in the pocket of the car; perhaps that was even what the countess had intended. Yet that was scarcely possible. And what had become of her? She must have heard the bell. She must even be close at hand, for she had preceded him by only a moment.

He opened the door slightly and looked inside. There was no light, and he suddenly realized that there had been no light when the countess entered. The fanlight over the door had been dark, and had remained dark. Something—some foreboding, some sense of disaster—sent a prickle of terror up his spine and across his scalp. He had an impulse to close the door and run frantically away.

Instead, he rang the bell again, rang it long and violently. Through the crack of the door he could hear it clanging away somewhere in the distance. Surely some one must hear it. There must be servants within.

Suddenly there was the sound of a door flung open, and a quick step approached along the hall. It came rapidly toward the entrance, where Tarrant stood with his finger still mechanically pressing the bell. Then it stumbled and stopped. A voice—a man's voice—gave a low exclamation of surprise; there was a moment's silence, and

then a sharp cry of horror and anguish rang through the hall.

Tarrant, his heart in his mouth, thrust the bundle of bills into his pocket, threw back the door and stepped across the sill.

For a moment, in the darkness, he could see nothing. Then, a few feet away, he descried a figure crouching on the floor. It seemed to be holding another figure in its arms.

"What's the matter here?" Tarrant demanded, stepping quickly forward.

The crouching figure raised its head and looked at him, its face illumined by the light from the doorway—a face white and staring and twisted with anguish, but astoundingly like his own.

CHAPTER VII.

WHEN ENEMIES MEET.

TARRANT'S hand, fumbling mechanically beside the door, found the light switch and threw it on. He was wholly unconscious of the action. Not until afterward, when he reviewed the events of the night and remembered how the hall was suddenly flooded with light, did he realize that it must have been his hand which did it.

For the moment his whole attention was focused on the group in front of him.

The man with the face so strangely like his own was kneeling on the floor within five or six feet of the door, bending above the still figure of a woman which he held in his arms. Tarrant knew who it was, even before he saw the face, but he took a step nearer to make sure. Yes, it was the countess. Her eyes were closed, her face livid—she looked her years now! A trickle of crimson flowed down over one temple.

The man who held her in his arms was muttering incoherently to himself, pressing his cheek to hers. Then, as he smoothed the hair back from her forehead, he saw the trickle of red. Something like a shriek burst from him. He lifted his head and stared wildly around—and his eyes met Tarrant's.

For a moment they remained frozen there, then they wandered from Tarrant's face to the broad monocle ribbon, to the red flower in his buttonhole, and back to the face again. Tarrant saw their bewildered gaze go past him to the wall, and knew that they were looking to see if there was a mirror there.

"No, I am flesh and blood," said Tarrant in French.

"Who are you?"

"No matter—that can wait. She's not dead?"

"No, no!" cried the other, his attention recalled to the woman in his arms. "She is not dead! She cannot be dead!"

Tarrant picked up one hand where it lay flaccid on the floor and felt for the pulse. For an instant he could not detect it, and his own heart seemed to stop; then his finger tips caught a faint flutter.

"No, she is not dead," he said. "We must get help."

Evidently whatever was to be done must be done by him. Nothing could be expected of that distraught man on the floor. Tarrant hastened out to the waiting car.

"Drive to the Villa Cynthia as quickly as you can," he said to the chauffeur, "and tell Cherif that madame la comtesse has been badly hurt. She must have a doctor at once. You understand?"

"Yes, monsieur," said the chauffeur.

"Make haste!"

The chauffeur nodded and whirled away.

Tarrant ran back into the house. The man was again moaning incoherently as he held the countess convulsively against his breast.

"Come, now," said Tarrant, shaking him sharply by the shoulder, "control

yourself. She is not dead. We must lift her to a bed or a sofa. Do you know anything about this house?"

"Nothing," answered the other, gulping down his agitation. "I entered it for the first time about half an hour ago."

"Where are the servants?"

"I do not know. A man let me in. I have not seen him since."

Tarrant paused to consider.

"Strange where they could have got to. What happened to the countess?"

"I do not know!" repeated the other, in a voice shrill with hysteria. "I know nothing, I tell you! I did not see her until I fell over her body here on the floor. Somebody was ringing the bell, ringing, ringing——"

"Yes—it was I," broke in Tarrant. "Very well—you stay here. I will see what I can find."

There were two doors on either side of the hall and he opened them each in turn—a salon, a dining room, a study, a bedroom.

"That farthest room is a bedroom," he said, hastening back. "You take her shoulders—I will take her feet—so."

As they raised her carefully, she gave a low moan.

"Oh!" groaned the unknown, between set teeth. "I cannot stand it!"

"You have got to stand it!" said Tarrant sternly. "In this way. Now, place her here—gently."

"But a doctor!" cried the other wildly. "She must have a doctor!"

"I have sent for one," Tarrant assured him and opened a door on the other side of the room. It led, as he had hoped, into a bathroom. He drew some cold water into a glass and hurried back to the bed. "Here," he said, "bathe her head where it is cut. I will look for the servants."

The stranger took the glass, dropped to his knees, and began to bathe the wound with his handkerchief. Tarrant stepped out again into the hall.

AT the end opposite the entrance, a stairway ran upward; but, he told himself, there must be a kitchen on the lower floor—opening out of the dining room, perhaps; and, on investigation, he found that this was the case. But the servants were not there. He noted with surprise that a door opening upon a court at the back of the house was standing wide. He glanced out, and saw that the court was empty. Perhaps something had frightened the servants and they had run away. But surely in that case they would have given the alarm.

Some instinct made Tarrant close the door and bolt it; then he returned to the hall. The front door was also standing wide open, and the hall blazing with light must be a conspicuous object from the outside. With a sense of being watched, even of being in danger, Tarrant walked to the door, closed it and threw the bolt. His heart was pounding, as though he had been advancing under fire, and he drew a deep breath of relief as the bolt slid home. They were safe from attack from the outside, at least; it remained to explore the upper story.

As he passed the door of the bedroom he paused to look inside. The unknown was still bathing the wound on the countess' head with the utmost tenderness. She had not stirred from the position in which she had been placed on the bed.

Tarrant passed on to the stairs. Mounting it, he found it opened on a hall running the length of the upper story, which seemed to be a counterpart of the one below. But the first door he came to was locked—then he saw that the key was in the lock. He turned it, threw the door open, and found himself gazing into three terror-stricken faces.

He had found the servants.

There were a man and two women—evidently the butler, the cook and the

housemaid—and they were all standing as though they had just sprung to their feet, the women with their mouths open, ready to scream.

"Oh, it is you, sir!" said the butler in French, and mopped his forehead with a shaking hand. "I feared they had killed you!"

"They? Who do you mean by 'they?'" Tarrant demanded.

"The two robbers. Monsieur did not see them?"

"I saw no one. Tell me what happened."

"It was perhaps twenty minutes after monsieur's arrival, and the three of us were in the kitchen having a bite to eat, when suddenly the door burst open and in they came."

"Would you know them again?"

"No, monsieur, they were masked. One of them was a very large man, and the other much smaller."

"Go ahead—what then?"

"They covered us with their revolvers; they threatened to kill us if we made a noise; they brought us up here and locked us in—and here we have been, listening to every sound—expecting to be murdered at any—— What is that?"

"It is the doorbell," said Tarrant. "Pull yourself together, man! There is no danger. The robbers have gone. Quick—answer the bell."

"But, monsieur, it may be them come back again!"

"Nonsense—it is the doctor. Your mistress is hurt. Quick!"

Somewhat reassured, the butler hastened down the stairs. Tarrant turned to the woman who was obviously the maid.

"Your mistress will have to be undressed and put to bed," he said. "Is that her bedroom on the lower floor?"

"But yes, monsieur."

"Very well. Now come with me."

She followed him obediently. As they reached the foot of the stairs, the butler, having secured the front door with the chain, was opening it cautiously.

"It is Doctor Manuel," said a voice outside in answer to his question.

"Open! Open!" cried another voice, and the butler, at sound of it, hastily released the chain and threw the door open.

A little dark man, carrying a professional-looking case, entered first, and after him an imposing figure shrouded in a dark burnoose. As he threw back the cape, Tarrant saw that it was Cherif.

"What has happened?" demanded the Arab.

"Two robbers assaulted the countess as she entered the house," said Tarrant. "She seems to be badly hurt. She is in here." He led the way to the door of the bedroom.

As they crossed the threshold, the man kneeling beside the bed looked up.

"Here is the doctor," Tarrant began.

But the other's eyes went past him to the doorway, suddenly ablaze with fury.

"You!" he cried. "You!" and he hurled himself at Cherif's throat.

To be continued in the next issue of THE POPULAR, *on the news stands September 7th.*

Every time the roll is called for a vote on a bill in the national House of Representatives, it requires nearly thirty minutes to call the names and list the responses of the 435 members. Roll calls in two sessions of Congress consume nearly a solid week. They take up 150 hours, or exactly six and a quarter days of twenty-four hours each.

The Ship Keeper

By J. H. Greene

Author of "The Man from Toolanga," "Echoes," Etc.

Captain John Sparks was a New Englander, a veteran of the sea and the living tradition of Yankee sailordom. Yet he had lost his ship because of an accident, and when a skipper loses his vessel he may as well lose his life. But Fate had arranged matters in such fashion that, through the loss of his ship, Captain Sparks was committed to the salvage of another's honor and soul.

THE fat old man with the gray stubble on his jowls squatted on the end of the pier and lazily threw his line into the sea. He watched the sinker plunge in the languid harbor water. When it touched the bottom, he drew the line taut around his flabby forefinger, lolled back against a pile and dozed. He did not care whether a bite came or not; if he felt a nibble, he would sometimes let it continue. Why hook the little beggars?

Then, remembering he would have to haul in and rebait, he tugged in the fish, just to do something, just to stop thinking, just to avoid that more embittered fishing—those memory searchings that would not let him rest. This pierhead, this trifling with line and hook, had become a pretext and an anchor to hold him to his sanity.

Sometimes real fishermen would ask how they were coming. The old man would point to a generally empty bag and make futile remarks about the tide or the steamers frightening away the fish. The pier was the last out from the town; away to his left was the long channel leading to the sea; steamers, coasters, crafts of all kinds were passing out or coming to the great piers and wharves of the smoky city behind him.

Suddenly this bright April morning, he felt a tug so unusually strong that he was startled from his blinking consideration of the hulks in the cove yonder. A small rowboat had come under the pier and had become entangled with his

line. Two young men were in the boat; one a long, swarthy fellow who was cursing the fisherman and a younger boy, bare-legged and freckled.

"Hello, gran'pop! Didn't know you was fishin' here," said the boy. "Yer can't get flounders till the tide turns."

"I can wait for 'em, Tommy," answered the old man, without surprise. "Where are you headin' for?"

"We're—we're after clams on the flats."

The bright-eyed youngster had deferred a little to his companion before answering, and the old man knew that his grandson had lied. But he said nothing; Tommy was Clara's boy and she had told him to mind his own business when he had suggested how boys should be brought up. What right, she insinuated, had an old man with his record to tell her anything?

He had words with Clara about Tommy only last week and Clara had not been to see him since. So he made no comment; he looked down from the pier indifferently; he settled back on his pile after he had got his line clear of the boat; he was a loafer, a derelict dreaming on a pierhead, laid up from family troubles, done with giving advice, as much a useless hulk as those in the cove.

But for all his placidity, he had taken sharp stock of the boat and the dark young fellow who gave Tommy orders. The old man would never have signed him on in the days when he used to sign on crews, when he was Captain John Sparks of the *Eva*. Tommy was getting into bad company.

John Sparks found he was irritated. That boy ought to be selling papers, doing something to help his mother, instead of loafing round the water front. Nothing so good for a lad as going to sea; nothing so bad as the water front where the dregs of land and sea meet. Clara would not hear of the boy going to sea. She blamed Sparks for making the boy restless with his old yarns. She asked what the sea had done for him? She reminded him of his disaster when he had lost his papers for drunkenness and almost lost his vessel. What right had a stranded old hulk like him to hold up the advantages of seafaring? What right had he to preach?

Sparks solemnly yielded to the drift of his thoughts that were as wavering as the slack waters below him, as circularly uncertain, as full of eddies of indecision, as heavy with the driftage of his memories. He always came back to the *Eva;* how he lost her; what the court declared; how the owner, Martin Garth, said he had to accept the verdict. If he had the *Eva* now he could take that boy to sea and in three months would make a man of him. If he had the *Eva*——

A faint little nibble titillated his fingers. He tugged fiercely, but the line came in empty. He had pulled too hard; he had torn the hook out of the jaws of the fish. But he rebaited; it was occupation away from those eternal questions; he could partially forget the loss of the *Eva* and all his troubles in handling twine and casting sinkers.

THE Cotucket excursion boat passed him, all white paint, paddles and passengers; a Halifax liner came in at half speed; the sea became a crisscross of ripples; the washes of the two steamers thrashed under the pier when behind the liner appeared a windjammer, a three-masted schooner. John Sparks sat up stiffly and suddenly as he recognized his old vessel.

He knew her quicker than he had his grandson. He arose almost alertly. He had seen her come into harbor many times like this; it was why he went fishing on this outermost pier; he was always expecting to see her big jib edge round the lighthouse on the point; she always tautened him up like this. His *Eva* that he had driven on the bar in

Vigo when he was drunk—he was not drunk; he was not—he had never touched that Mexican's liquor!

All the old asseverations he had made to the court, all that he had kept making after the inquiry to his owner, to his friends, to his family, came back with renewed conviction as he saw the long vessel, her deck piled to her beams with yellow pine, sailing in under another man's command, under a crew who had never heard of Captain John Sparks.

He remarked that she had too much way on her when the anchor was dropped, that her sails were allowed to flap over the lumber. Lubberly work; canvas tears that way. A boat came off and in it were two men; they were heading for his pier. He went along to the landing to look them over. The man in the stern alighted with two grips; the boat had other dunnage; the man, obviously the master, was dressed in old tweeds, not even wearing a cap. That was wrong. Even coasting masters should sport a cap with a bit of gold lace. Brass buttons get shipments. Smartness pays.

The master gave some orders about the dunnage and went along the pier, carrying his grips, without a glance at the old fisherman.

"Old Man quitting?" said Sparks to the man in the boat, who carried ashore a small trunk.

"We all are. Going to lay up soon as we get the cargo out of her. She don't pay."

John Sparks moved away. Of course she didn't pay with lubbers like that sailing her! He could make her pay; she never had a losing voyage when he had commanded her; there were hundreds of ports from St. John right down to the West Indies where a craft like that could collect cargo; little ports up rivers, on islands away from the packet and liner, glad to get their truck moved. All that was needed was experience, a sailorman who was also a business man, a skipper who could make his vessel pay.

All his old Yankee blood compounded of generations of sailors and peddlers, of master mariners who were also tight bargainers, boiled in his veins as he kindled with a proposition he would immediately put to his old owner. He hurried home elaborating the details, to shave and make himself presentable, to put on brass buttons, to suggest to Martin Garth a way to utilize his experience.

He gave one look backward at the poor *Eva,* so unfortunately handled, and hurried down the wharf with something of his younger gait. He quite forgot to take in his line; he left his bag and the gear he had carried for the fish he had preferred not to catch.

IN an hour he was rolling, still as determinedly, along a wharf in the town toward an office at the end, with a sign announcing "Martin Garth Navigation Company." He asked to see Mr. Garth just as he would have after one of those old profitable voyages of his. The clerk, unknown to him, asked him his name.

Martin Garth, a Yankee like himself, but the long, lean kind that grows old, pale and prosperous, listened to him with attention.

"It's an idea, John," he said familiarly, for they had been boys together. "You handling the business end—a supercargo—yes. But you wouldn't be an hour off the light when you'd be skipper. Couldn't help it."

Garth grinned at him quizzically.

"You've no cause to say that," answered Sparks. "I shipped for you once as mate when you hadn't a skipper's job. I know how to buckle under same as any man——"

"That ain't it," said Garth. "The coast trade has changed since you were at it. These little ports are linked up with big ones by railroads. Schooners

ain't fast enough. Our time is nearly over, John. What do you want to work for? You've got a house and family and money enough to keep you. Take it easy, John."

But John Sparks was not easily chilled; the spirit that had stirred him came from too deep a level, from the bed rock of his pride.

"I'm tired of doing nawthin'. The idea of me lying round all day when young lubbers get berths just because a board of inquiry——"

"Lay off that, John," said Martin Garth sharply. "I told you long ago to forget it. You can't get your old job at sea, because you lost your papers. You can't get a job anywhere else, because you're a man with a grievance. If you honestly admitted you were drunk when you rammed the *Eva* ashore, it would have been forgotten long ago."

"I was not drunk, I tell you!"

Martin Garth shrugged his shoulders.

"There you go, John. The court decided; I decided; the papers and your friends decided. What excuse was there but drunkenness? Clear weather and you jam your bowsprit into a palm tree. Tried to climb trees with her, the court said. Crew was drunk, too, and you were responsible for that."

Martin Garth blazed at his old friend impatiently and fussed with his papers to get rid of the old nuisance, but John Sparks did not stir; he had spoken truly when he said he knew how to buckle under.

"All right," he answered, after taking a long breath. "I plead guilty, but only to you, mind. I was drunk. I did run the *Eva* ashore. I'll admit that if you'll give me the job of ship keeper on her while she's laid up. I can't wreck her while she's anchored, can I? I plead guilty to you, but not a word to my family or to nobody."

The shipowner liked this recrudescence of spirit in a man who had sailed his ships so long successfully, and held out his hand to him.

ONE wild, squally evening with winter back in the air, John Sparks went forward to the bows of the *Eva* to inspect her hawser. She was now moored in the cove, neighbored by other idle ships and abandoned hulks. Away to the right were the lights of the city, a mist of street lamps and lighted windows, vague as a dawn. To his left were little lighthouses whose fixed and flashing eyes marked the channel to the ocean. He moved with certain steps over the familiar deck. The anchor light on the forestay threw a faint glimmer on his splashed planks; he steadied himself by the booms that were securely lashed, but deprived of their sails.

The vessel rolled quite a deal in the capricious swirls of the cove where the incoming tide, now nearly at the flood, was meeting the offshore wind. There was a risk of that hawser fraying beyond its holding strength. Sparks let out a foot or two so that it would take the strain at a different place; he would take it in to-morrow when the hauling was easy. This was his principal duty, but he made many others for himself, for the old tread of her planks had lifted his spirits and revived his sense of responsibility.

Daily he walked her decks, not as a ship keeper, but as her master, and tightened up loose lashings and replaced work seizings. The care of his old ship was as good for him as tending a child is for a woman; but for the vessel, some time or another he would have followed his fishing sinkers into the sea.

The hawser made fast, he again went back to his cabin. He took one more look at the weather as if its risks meant something to him. It promised to be a dirty night. Close by him was the old square-rigger, the *Trident*, waiting for some one to buy her fittings; a British tramp steamer held up by a libel; back

on the beach against the faint surf were the gaunt ribs of other hulks, burned for their iron. Sometimes when the wind was right, he could talk to these other ships; to-night their ship keepers were all below. He went below himself, to a cabin that was almost luxurious with the furniture and comforts he had brought with him from his cottage ashore.

He already had had his supper, which he cooked on the acorn stove set in the cabin, to avoid using the rusty galley. He lived well, for Martin Garth was generous with supplies. Usually Sparks read his papers, brought to him in weekly bundles, but to-night he was going to write to his daughter of what he was doing; a brief note to Clara that he was out of town had been, so far, his only explanation of his shut-up cottage. He sat down at the fine old desk of mahogany he had brought from Honduras, when he was interrupted by a strange noise.

HE frowned, because he thought he had cleaned out all the rats. He had set traps all over the ship and thought they were gone, as he had not caught one for days. Now he was certain there was something scratching, gnawing behind the bulkhead; he put his ears against the timbers and telephonically the sounds grew louder.

The rodents were evidently boring toward his cupboards; they might be near, they might be far, the dry sound timbers of the *Eva* would carry their noises a long way.

His search led him to try the bulkhead from the inside of his sleeping cabin; the scurrying, scuttling, whispering grew louder as he approached the locker above the washbasin, where he kept his shaving tackle. He opened the locker, cleaned it out quietly and rapped with his knuckles on the bottom. The board gave way; the scratching ceased; he lifted out the board, which had given way because it was rotten, not because it had been gnawed.

He put his hand into the hole below and drew it out suddenly with a start at encountering something soft. Then he recognized that his tactile sensation was not that of a cornered rat, and he plunged his hand in again and grasped at what he had felt.

Out of that hole he drew bundle after bundle of cigarettes, which he took out into the light of the other cabin to examine. They were very thin, very dry, wrapped in bundles, and some fell apart in his hands. They must have been there a long time; they were of some foreign make; the tobacco had a strange, musty, herbalist odor. Then he remembered that those were the sort of cigarettes that used to be smoked by that Mexican passenger he had taken on his last voyage of the *Eva*.

Sparks had almost forgotten; he recalled now that he had given up his berth to that Mexican, for the fellow had offered so much for his passage from Belize. Sparks recalled how he had liked that smiling little fellow, with his songs and tales of revolution, till Sparks found he was giving liquor to the men and was liable to queer fits of temper. The Mexican must have stored those cigarettes and forgotten them when he had been taken off the wreck. But this did not explain the rats.

Sparks could no longer hear them. He put the cigarettes in a bowl, for he could use that strange tobacco if he ever ran short of his twist; he then sat down to start his letter to Clara. He intended asking her to let Tommy come and stay a while with him; it would do the youngster good; he could teach him something; much better than chasing round the harbor with water-front rapscallions.

"Hoist yer mitts, old-timer!" said a quiet voice.

Sparks awoke from his epistolary argument with his daughter to gaze into

the barrel of a gun; behind the gun in the dimness of his shaded lamp was a man standing in the doorway of the cabin—a tall man with his hat drawn over his eyes. Instinctively Sparks grew calm to the crisis; he knew at once what had happened to him; he saw another figure behind the man with the gun; the *Eva* was boarded by harbor pirates.

"Why, Mike, it's gran'pop!" cried a shrill voice, and Tommy, carrying a sling shot, emerged from the darkness of the deck without.

"No matter. Put up yer hands, mister. We ain't going to hurt yer."

"No need for yer gun, young feller," said Sparks mildly. "I ain't got one aboard."

"He never would carry one, Mike. He never killed a man in his life," said the surprised Tommy, trying to hide his sling shot.

This involuntary testimony wrung from the boy in his amazement at finding he was holding up his grandfather was not immediately effective with the elder pirate. Mike did not lower his gun until he had searched the drawers of the desk and thoroughly frisked John Sparks.

"Your grandfather, eh, kid?" he then asked, with a surly recognition of the humor of the situation.

"No," said Sparks sternly, "I ain't grandfather to no crook."

Tommy winced, but Mike merely laughed and began to make an inventory of the cabin furniture, while Sparks sat, steady as a rock, with his face like the last judgment. These were the rats he had heard, tying their marauding boat alongside, sneaking along his deck.

Mike, considering the old man as a negligible quantity, started to see what further plunder he could find in the sleeping cabin.

"Holler if he makes a move, kiddo," he called to Tommy.

Sparks could hear him tearing open his clothes locker; there was money in those suit pockets there.

"You do what he says, gran'pop," began the flustered Tommy. "He's a hot bird. Nothin' he won't do when he starts out. We been figurin' on this job for a long time, but, honest, I didn't know you was ship keeper. Honest! It's my job, but I didn't know——"

The boy was desperately trying to reconcile loyalty to his leader with his family ties, but Sparks kept his face as wooden as his vessel.

"We figured," said the old man slowly. "What do you mean, saying it was your job?"

"I thought of it first. This vessel's so far out and so old-timey. 'Long, rakish craft, ain't she? Let's cut her out,' I says. Better'n settin' boats adrift and pickin' 'em up for rewards. Finding oars and hooks and rowlocks and anchors and things. That ain't being a crook, gran'pop. Mike says it's salvage and they can't touch yer. So I says, 'Let's board the three-master.' Remember the captain yer told me put tacks on his deck so the savages trod on 'em and he could shoot 'em when they was hoppin'? I told Mike to look out for tacks when we come on board. Course we had shoes; them savages hadn't. But tacks'll go through shoes. It was real smart of you to put them rat traps on deck. Lucky we had flash lights and saw them in the scuppers. We put out your light——"

Raising his voice so that his leader could hear there was no surreptitious conversation, the youngster displayed his full infatuation with this romantic situation. Sparks saw how much he himself was to blame for it; all the old yarns he had told the boy had been perverted to this end.

Mike returned to the cabin very well satisfied and began the removal of his spoil to the boat.

"Ain't you boys foolish, putting out

my light?" ventured Sparks. "The water police know every ship in harbor. They know me. My light won't be out unless something's happened to me."

Tommy looked at Mike doubtingly, but Mike arrogantly brushed aside the possibility.

"They can't see nothing. Weather is too thick," he answered.

"It's only thick close to the water. They have a high lookout. Ain't figgered on that, have yer?"

The pirates had not, any more than they had considered the meticulous reputation the *Eva* had acquired at her anchorage. The water police had never had occasion to hail the *Eva* because she was dark; the personality of her ship keeper was displayed by that clean, always-filled lamp, that was always lit on time, that burned from dusk to dawn.

"We can light it again," said Mike, a little shaken in his conceit as he recalled the efficiency of the water police. "Come on deck, Tommy. And you, mister, stay below. But I'll take yer lamp. No blinker signals from the cabin windows."

Mike grinned as he reached for the lamp; he was up to every move just as much as the water police; but the change in his plans had made him nervous. He dared not carry that lamp on deck and did not want to leave the ship keeper in the dark. The old man's placid reasonableness awoke the distrust of this incipient desperado.

"You come on deck, too," he said. "But if you pull anything——"

"What can I do? I'll give you a hand with the lamp. I don't want the police catching my girl's kid."

Tommy led the way cheerfully, for he was reinstated as a grandson. Mike's distrust vanished, for he understood now why the old man made the suggestion about the light.

The deck was now quite dark, but Sparks led the way confidently to the forepeak; he knew when to turn round a hatch; his fingers found a stay to cling to without fumbling. The others stumbled behind him, for Mike was too nervous now to use his flash light. Mike ran into a pot of mast slush near the fore pinrail and slipped as the greasy mess ran over the deck. They reached the tackle which hauled the anchor light to the forestay.

The lamp was swinging close to the deck, as they had left it after dousing it. It was much more difficult to relight in that wind. Sparks offered suggestions, but Mike bade him to stand back. Sparks found his feet kicking the hawser. While the pirates were bending low to make a shield for their matches, Sparks drew his knife and began sawing away at a strand of the cable. But he had barely succeeded in cutting one strand before the thieves had lit the lamp and hauled it up to the forestay.

Mike and Tommy hastened aft, calling on Sparks to follow. The three were clinging to the rail, with Mike in the lead, and Sparks felt his hand touch the painter of the pirates' boat, coiled round the main backstay. Hastily he tried to cast it loose, but Mike had been careful enough to tie a tight knot. Sparks again drew his knife and with one vigorous slash parted that painter.

THE robbers were back in the cabin, wiping that dangerous slush off their boots with some of Sparks' table linen, while Sparks sat down, praying that the wind and the sea would rise. Perhaps his very carefulness in insisting that Martin Garth supply him with new, sound ground tackle would defeat his very purpose.

That barometer was dropping, but not fast enough; the wind was rising, but he might need a hurricane to part that cable; he was not sure how deeply he had damaged it. Suddenly a calm seemed to come over the wind; the ship's motion changed; she was no

longer plunging; she was no longer fighting that thrashing tidal current. Tommy's sailor instinct was the first to sense something wrong.

"Say, gran'pop, I think——"

"Yes," answered Sparks, keeping the elation out of his voice, "the hawser's parted, but we'll go ashore somewhere and——"

In a second Mike, with an oath at this slip-up to his plans, had thrown open the door and rushed on deck; they could hear him stumbling and slipping over the greased planks.

"What are we going to do, gran'-pop?" asked Tommy.

"You're going to be wrecked, sonny."

"We've got the boat. We can take you. Let's go."

"I got to stay by my ship. You ought to know that. You stay and be wrecked with me. Wrecking don't hurt. Let him go."

"He'd say I was a quitter. He'd kill me first."

Sparks was watching the play of emotion in the boy's face and at the same time trying to figure the way his vessel was drifting. She was rolling easily in the tidal flow. He was divided between his vessel and his boy, and Tommy was the derelict that needed him most.

"He won't kill nawthin'. He's just a common sneak thief you fancy a Captain Kidd. You stay with me."

Mike burst in from the deck, raging and dangerous; he pointed his gun once more at Sparks' head.

"You cut that cable. I seen it. It didn't all part. And you cast our boat adrift. The painter's cut, too!"

"Yes, sir. I did. But that gun won't do you no good. You'll go ashore on the point and have to be took off. If you throw me overboard, you'll have to explain my absence. You're licked, young feller, unless you can swim better'n a porpoise again' this tide."

The gun wavered in Mike's trembling hand; Mike could not shoot; he could only hurl impotent curses; Sparks could smell liquor on that heated breath. Mike finally responded to Sparks' suggestion to run out on deck to see what were his chances of swimming ashore.

"He ain't much of a swimmer, gran'-pop," said Tommy.

"He ain't much of nawthin', sonny."

"Can't we sail her somehow, gran'-pop?"

THE drifting vessel would not let herself be forgotten by Sparks. In the open door, he could see the point light go by, a broken mist of beams in that rain and spray. They were past the point, but there were still the shoals, reefs and islands at the entrance.

"A vessel can't steer unless she's going faster than the water. Ain't I taught yer the idea of a rudder?"

"He's at the rudder!" cried Tommy, hearing the clank of the rudder chains. "He can steer."

"Can't navigate a vessel unless she has way on. Driftin' ain't wayin'. Rudder's no use without a sail."

"Then we can put on sail. You've got yer sails. Ain't been taken ashore. Where are they? Lazaret or forepeak? Mike! Mike!"

Tommy in sheer desperation was driven to action. Sparks sat down, throwing up his hands. He remembered how many lessons he had given Tommy in bending sails on the little model of the *Eva* he had built for him. In his infatuation for a mere deed, Tommy would be relieved of all his qualms, of all sense of crime; it would be quite useless trying to arouse his moral sense while there was a possibility of getting sail on the *Eva*. The police and the law would become only risks to be undertaken, perils to be circumvented; that rising wind was to be his riotous accomplice. Sparks could hear him shouting to Mike, actually giving him orders. Tommy was skipper.

"Set the staysail first. I know how," he caught.

Sparks could hear them dragging the canvas from the lazaret aft of the wheelhouse and hauling the heavy bundle forward. Tommy's elated pipings told Mike what to do, to stack the canvas properly on the forepeak so that it would not blow away from them, to fasten the sheets to port and starboard, to tie the peak to the downhaul, to take every precaution that that triangle of canvas might not become a flapping, unmanageable danger, instead of a controlled power, when it was lifted and had caught the wind. Tommy knew what loose canvas would do in a high wind, for Sparks had taught him that, as well as other things.

"Every fourth ring will be enough, Mike," he heard Tommy cry.

Tommy was hooking the sail to only a few of the sister rings on the forestay. The boy knew he had to hurry; there would not be time to hook all the rings; the sail would not be bent on shipshape, but it would serve.

Sparks heard them race back to the wheel. He saw that triangle of a staysail cut into the glare of the last light. He heard the rudder chains tug; he saw the head of the *Eva* make for the channel; she had way on her; Tommy had saved her from going ashore and she was heading for the open sea.

Sparks shut the cabin door, thinking what a letter he could now write to Clara; her boy was a born seaman; nothing but the sea would save him; he would become a total wreck if he was kept on shore.

Tommy opened the door.

"Got her going, gran'pop. Going to get her mainsail up now," he cried exultingly.

"You two kids can't hoist that square sail. Takes six men."

"Can use the windlass, can't we?"

Tommy had thought of that, too; his eyes, blind for book knowledge, had picked up much from his water-front vagabondage.

"Won't you take the wheel, gran'pop, while we try?"

"I do nawthin' to help sneak thieves and gunmen."

Tommy's face dropped to his plaintive boyishness, for Sparks masked his admiration with his best bucko sternness. The boy went out on deck.

THEY might be able to hoist the big sail; if so, they could manage the schooner. Sparks listened while the voices went to and fro in the wind. He heard Tommy tell Mike to lash the wheel and then the two dragging the canvas from the lazaret. The *Eva* headed for the open sea under her staysail and held by her lashed wheel; there were no more reefs or rocks between her and the Azores.

Sparks could only wait, knowing that the loss of the *Eva* from her moorings would be discovered and that something would be sent after her; the derelict would be reported and some ship would board her in the dawn. She would not be picked up before that, for she carried no lights. Mike had insisted on dousing the anchor light and would not have the side lights lit.

Sparks could hear them arguing about this as they tugged the heavy canvas. Sparks did not think that those two greenhorns even with the windlass could set the mainsail. He closed the door of the cabin; they could not do much harm; one of them might be blown overboard, but he was certain that one would not be Tommy.

"Gran'pop, we put up the trysail. Couldn't manage the mainsail; the gaff was too heavy, and the windlass too slow."

Tommy had burst into the cabin hilariously, proud to report the proceedings on deck. That was why the *Eva* was so steady. Under the pres-

sure of the extra sail, the headsail was no longer fighting the wheel.

"But where are you going?" asked Sparks.

"Dunno exactly. Mike says Canada or—— Say, we want coffee."

The boy was looking tired; now that the *Eva* was set on her course to somewhere, Tommy's doubts began to return. Sparks told him where the coffee was and bade him heat up some beans as well.

Silently Tommy blew up the stove and put the pots on the top with the same efficiency as he had bent on the staysail—this boy who slopped up the kitchen and broke plates at home when Clara asked him to clean the dishes.

THE boy had no father; Sparks had substituted a man's training for Clara's coddling, and this was the result. This amateur in lawlessness had not found a field for his restlessness ashore, but could submit himself to hardship and labor when he had to claw for a foothold on a reeling deck, when life offered dangerous chances, when he was headed for a vague port. Sparks no longer thought of his vessel, of his lost reputation, of his useless life; the question was what was to be done with that young life starting out without compass or captain.

"What are you fellers going to do?" he asked. "You can't get away. Some ship will board yer."

"Don't you worry, gran'pop. Mike's got it doped out. She blew away from her moorings. We won't say nothing about you cutting the cables. Mike says that puts you in our class, but I say it was self-defense. Don't matter. She went adrift, didn't she? We salvaged her, didn't we? We're in for a nice pot of money from the owners and the underwriters, Mike says——"

Tommy had his coffee brewed and his beans heated and was about to carry them out to his master at the wheel.

"Ain't yer leaving me out, Tommy?" said Sparks. "'Fore you get away with that salvage yarn, you'll have to dump me overboard."

Tommy, preoccupied with balancing himself and the handling of two hot pots, was distressed.

"Aw, don't be a crank, gran'pop. He ain't going to kill yer and you can't spill on us. Mike says you won't give me up to the police or the coast guards. We was visitin' you, the cable parted, and we saved the ship 'cause you was too old. We'll get medals and write-ups."

"Dammit, boy, can't you see what my duty is?"

"Aw, gran'pop, don't be a crab. Got any cigarettes? Mike don't like mine."

"There's heaps in that dish."

Tommy put down the coffeepot and filled his pocket with those cigarettes Sparks had found in the bulkhead; he was too perturbed by something he wanted to say to notice their peculiar make.

"Mike wants you to do a trick at the wheel."

"You tell Mike I'm a passenger and do nawthin'."

"But, gran'pop, you might give me a hand with him. He's getting lit up and when he starts going——"

"Lit up? Yes, I smelled the liquor on him and I don't care a whoop. Don't care whether you run ashore or get run into or lose your sticks and your sails and drift to blazes. I'm through! I'm going to turn in. When the officers come, I hand you both over to them. If your Mike wants to pull his yarn, he'll have to shoot me first. But tell him not to do it till I get my forty winks first. I'm all in."

Tommy went on deck. Sparks turned into his bunk, but not to sleep at once, for he lay awake a long time listening to the schooner's bows beating into the seas and the occasional voices from the deck. He knew perfectly well that he could not give that boy Tommy up to

justice, and Mike knew it, too. Sparks once more underwent mental perturbation like those he had wrestled with on the pierhead.

He saw himself forced to substantiate the young ruffian's story; his affections and his sense of right thrashed within him worse than the winds and waters outside. Of course the boy might get off with a light sentence in a reformatory or something of that kind. All the blame could easily be piled on Mike, but Sparks did not want that youngster in whom he recognized himself all over again given over to any discipline but his own. He would gladly see Tommy dodging a rope's end from one end of the *Eva* to the other; he could not bear to think of him in the most humanitarian of jails.

GRAN'POP, gran'pop, come on deck!"

Sparks was aware of Tommy calling down at him in his berth. Sparks had dozed off and the night had slipped by. In the gray light filtering through the cabin windows, the boy looked pinched and haggard.

"He wants more sail. There's a tug chasing us and he's lit up terrible."

Sparks put on his coat and went on deck. A gale was blowing from the northwest. The schooner was plunging and shipping water. The land was out of sight, but Sparks caught the smear of smoke from a funnel astern.

"Hey, you!"

The voice that came from the wheel was slow, thick and sodden. Mike, clothed in extra coats Tommy had brought from the cabin, was purple with liquor and blue with cold. That fixity of his gaze, that studied deliberateness in his speech, as if he were trying to hold hard the wheel of his wits, reminded Sparks of that Mexican who had brought all this trouble upon him. Those strained eyes wavered from the face of Sparks to the luffs of the sails; the last dregs of the man's sanity were bent on keeping those sails filled; the long night watch had taken everything else from him. He drooped on the wheel for support; his mouth held one of the Mexican cigarettes; he shifted it to a corner of his lips and held it there as he addressed Sparks.

"More sail, mister. Help the kid. The wind's dropping."

A heavy gust blew the light, empty schooner over on her side; spray blotted out the deck, but Sparks did not contradict Mike's estimate of the weather. A man in this condition cannot be moved by an appeal to his fears or his reason; he lives beyond facts.

A boy and an old man could not put any more canvas on her. Sparks hesitated, knowing it was quite useless to rush this fellow, who had a gun sticking from his upper pocket, and Tommy could not be depended on to hit him on the head with a belaying pin from behind.

"Mike, it's all right. We're salvaging her, ain't we? They can't do nothing to us. Let them catch us," pleaded Tommy, trying to sway Mike from one phase of unreason to another.

"Course they can't!" said Mike, with a look aft to that funnel, which was now nearer and rapidly gaining on the schooner. "That tug ain't moving."

Mike turned his attention to the wheel as he whipped out a packet of the Mexican cigarettes, bit on the whole bundle and lit the lot from the butt of the one he had been smoking. He inhaled and exhaled clouds of blue smoke.

Sparks could see the white foam curling under the speedy bows of the tug; she would carry enough men to handle this lunatic; Mike was quick enough to read his satisfaction.

"She ain't moving; she's stopped, ain't she?" he bellowed.

"Sure," answered Sparks.

"And the wind's dropped!"

"Sure."

"And the sea's calm and we go ashore."

The wheel spun round in Mike's hands and the schooner ran up into the wind; the sheets of the staysail danced madly on the forepeak. Sparks began to feel a very contagion of insanity as Mike kept affirming the stoppage of the wind, the nearness of the *Eva* to the shore while the decks rolled every way at once, the long mast creaked with every jolt, the booms tugged at their lashings; in this phantasmagoria of unsteadiness Mike kept shouting that they were in a dead calm and that land was under their bows.

"Get the boat out, I say! Give him a hand, old-timer!"

Mike covered Sparks with the revolver; despite his unsteady footing, he was able to hold it straight; it seemed as if desperation of purpose would be his to the end. Sparks dared not refuse; he pretended to get busy with the lashing of the little boat stowed aft.

"But we can't go ashore, Mike, in that sea. We'd sink!" ventured Tommy.

Sparks remembered a time when he had argued with a similar drunken man at the wheel, that time when he had wrecked the schooner in Vigo, when the drunkenness had been charged on himself.

"It's all right, kiddo," said Mike. "The harbor's smooth as a duck pond. Can't yer see Cleary's meadows? Women have got the laundry out. See it? We're home."

Mike was waving his hand to a great green comber rolling in on their quarter; rollers beyond were breaking into spreads of clean white foam; the madman was seeing green fields and laundry flaunting their blank whites. Sparks remembered the palms and the mangroves below the Vigo light where he had tried to make the *Eva* sail up the trees.

"Say, matey," he said to Mike, "got a drink about yer? I need a snifter to handle this."

Sparks wanted to taste the liquor Mike had been drinking. It must be the queer drink that Mexican had brought on board the schooner, a drink that made sailors think green water was green land.

"Ain't got a drop," said Mike, in a friendly tone. "Had nothing but yet coffee all night. Let's go ashore."

BEFORE Sparks had time to consider whether the man was lying or not, Mike had clutched the hands of Tommy and with a superhuman jerk jumped with him over the side onto the shore of his delusion. The two went down struggling in the green water beside the heaving hull.

Sparks threw over the slush bucket, the only loose floatable thing he could find on deck; he looked for a line to follow it, but there were none loose. He cut the peak halyard off the mainsail and hauled it down through the block.

A cry came from the water. Tommy had freed himself from Mike, who had disappeared; he was shouting for a line. The schooner was drifting away from him fast. Sparks coiled the halyard and threw it; Tommy caught at it, but it slipped through his fingers for the line was greasy with that slush which had flowed all over the deck. Vainly Tommy tried to grip the greasy strands; he lost the end while the black sides of the *Eva* drifted farther away from his fading, white face.

"Sorry, gran'pop, can't make it! Sorry! Tell mom!" he cried.

Sparks had not time to get way on the schooner; something told him Tommy could not keep long afloat; the tug was still too far off to be of any assistance. A frightened boy could not keep afloat long with remorse in his heart. Tommy's last cry was full of despair. Standing in the bows with that

greasy, futile line in his hand, out of his long-forgotten sea lore came illumination and help to John Sparks. Carrying the line, he climbed up into the foremast ratlines and waved his hand for Tommy to watch him. Tommy's face was now as small as a bubble and disappearing in the hollows.

Sparks began coiling that line in bights over his arm—not one over the other, but so involved that the bights would tie into knots as the line paid out. He then flung it with all his strength far out over the water. In the air the line made interlocking circles that fell on the water in loosely tied knots a yard apart.

Sparks' heart leaped as he saw Tommy had recognized what he was doing; Tommy was swimming vigorously till he caught at the last coil and pulled the knot tight. He was able to hold on now. The whole line drew taut over the glistening flanks of the waves. Tommy was able to haul himself knot by knot till he drew himself alongside the schooner. Sparks was dragging him inboard as the tug bumped alongside.

"Smart work, John!" shouted Martin Garth, as he climbed on board from the tug. "Ain't seen that pulled for twenty years."

"Ain't remembered it for thirty," said Sparks.

Garth had brought a doctor, who was attending to Tommy and trying to get him to come below for a rubdown and restoratives.

"I'm all right," said Tommy. "I've got the greatest gran'pop in the world. Betcha Will Rogers don't know that rope trick."

"Where did you get these cigarettes?" said the doctor, picking up a handful of butts Mike had left scattered about the wheel.

"South America," said Sparks. "A Mexican passenger I once carried brought them aboard. Why?"

"They're contraband. They're dope. They contain Cannabis indica."

More illumination was coming to John Sparks as he asked what were the effects of the dope, as he began to guess why Mike's delirium reminded him of the moods of the Mexican.

"It makes you feel good for a minute," answered the doctor, "then follow delusions and coma."

"Would it make you think the land was the sea and the sea the land, that a gale had stopped blowing?"

"Yes," said the doctor. "It's most characteristic effect is to suspend all sense of motion. It has the same effect on the optic nerve as a slow-motion camera. Everything slows up and stops. Why, what's the matter?"

It seemed to Sparks as if his heart was jumping; a load had been lifted from it, for he remembered that he had tried some of those cigarettes just before he had wrecked the *Eva;* they had driven him to sail her ashore. However, he explained his agitation to the doctor as weariness.

"I don't want the inquiry reopened," he said to Garth, on the voyage home after he had told his owner the facts. "I've had enough of the sea. Let me start a training school for water-front kids on the *Eva.* There's a whole lot more I can teach 'em besides knots, and I reckon I can make it pay."

The two men discussed the proposition in all its details as the *Eva* was tugged back to her moorings.

Other stories by Mr. Greene will be published in forthcoming issues of THE POPULAR.

Fane Arden

by

Henry Herbert Knibbs

THE blind white sands rolled on and on to meet the burning sky;
And ye would seek Rosalia where cool acequias run?
Fane Arden's horse went to his knees and laid him down to die,
Fane Arden staggered from the dead and cursed the desert sun.

With heavy gaze he turned him round, beholding in the glare,
Dolores of Rosalia—else madness held his mind—
Her smile a song of memory, a pale rose in her hair.
Fane Arden's fingers teased his lip, he cursed all womankind.

And ye would seek Rosalia where swells the almond bloom?
Rosalia where ripening grapes hang purple on the vine?
Where sunlight strikes a golden lance across the chancel gloom,
And shadowy fingers hold the cup that brims with sacred wine?

Fane Arden gripped his courage close within his either hand:
"Dolores of Rosalia, and have you come for me?
For you are here, yet you are far across this desert land,
And said you not that you would wait beneath the almond tree?"

"Dolores of Rosalia, have pity on my need!"
Fane Arden's prayer a brittle cry against the walls of space.
With gesturing hand the vision led as hand of dreams may lead,
Fane Arden followed silently, and fear was on his face.

As a great eagle breasts the wind, Time hung on outspread wing.
The weary miles drew underfoot, a gray and sluggish tide.
Fane Arden followed where a voice led onward, murmuring:
And see ye not Rosalia against the dark hillside?

The shadows of Rosalia commingled with the blue,
The deepening blue of piñon on the slope of San Gorgone;
The vision of Dolores with the faltering shadows drew
Into the dusk of evening, and Fane Arden was alone.

Then he was by a shepherd's fire, a tottering wraith, forspent;
One held the gourd of Tantalus to swollen lips and sere:
"My horse is dead. I came on foot. Ay, by the Sacrament,
Dolores of Rosalia called me home, and I am here!"

The desert shepherd made The Cross, invoked The Mystery . . .
"Too late ye come, Fane Arden. Ay, too late ye come!" he cried,
"Dolores of Rosalia is with The Blessed Three;
'I go to seek Fane Arden,' thus she spake, and thus she died."

DeZaldo

By Brooke Adams and Howard R. Marsh

He was a white man in a land of black and awesome jungles, of black and vicious men. And he knew that a cruel fate was weaving a noose of destruction about his neck, knew, too, that there was but one solution to his dilemma. In his fevered head swam visions of a serpent of gold with eyes of emerald, visions of a summer garden choked with white roses—and, strangely, they were connected in his bid for freedom

HE said his name was DeZaldo, which was as good as another, and we met one night in The Duke's Place, a water-front dive of bad repute in the town of Port-au-Prince, Republic of Haiti.

To say that a place was of "bad repute" in the Port-au-Prince of those days was to say a great deal, for at that time there was no blacker hole of iniquity in the world than Port-au-Prince. Shanghai and Singapore were prim Sunday-school misses compared with the black woman of the Caribbean.

No good business took me to the port, much less to The Duke's. DeZaldo had even less apparent reason than I for being there, for while I was an obvious "down-and-outer" and showed it, DeZaldo still had the faintly discernible earmarks of a decent citizen about him. Besides, I was quite drunk, and he was only trying to become so.

When I rolled into the place, DeZaldo was performing conjuring tricks on a small table in the middle of the room. It was a low-ceilinged den, foul with the fumes of liquor and blue with the pungent smoke of native tobacco.

DeZaldo was an island in a sea of black faces. Directly above his head hung a smoking kerosene lamp which cast a fitful, diffused light over the glittering black countenances of his audience. Excepting myself, he was the only white man in the room, although every other shade from deepest ebony to slate gray was ranged about him.

The man had truly remarkable skill at prestidigitation. His fingers worked

with a swiftness and dexterity too fast for the eye to follow. At the conclusion of each trick, a chorus of amazed cries of delight and wonder escaped from the spellbound onlookers. Once a big, coal-black fellow, overcome by rum and wonder, moaned and fell forward to the floor. He lay there twitching, unheeded by his fellows.

Half drunk as I was, the weird magic of the scene did not escape me. For a long time I stood there watching. It was bizarre, grotesque, fantastic. The white man seemed a priest performing some occult, mysterious rite, and the blacks, the whites of their eyes reflecting the dim light, seemed the worshipers at the shrine of some unspeakable pagan god.

At last, with an air of finality, the white man brushed aside the trinkets he had used in his performance, and, seeing me, shouldered his way through the throng of blacks to where I stood. Under the lamp at the little table, he had seemed gigantic, commanding, omnipotent. Now I saw only a rather big man, a bit flabby, somewhat seedy looking, but with a good-natured, handsome face, ravaged by dissipation and something worse than dissipation.

He was, I judged, about forty years of age, though he may have been older. He smiled as he approached me, an open, friendly smile, his teeth showing strong and white in contrast to his swarthy skin. At first I thought he might have a touch of the tar brush in him, but a glance at his finger nails belied my suspicions. The moons at the bases of them were white and clear; no trace of the orange tinge common to those with colored blood in their veins.

"Hello!" he called cheerfully. "How did you like the show? One can't do much without props, but the blacks like it." He smiled again, appraising me with his odd, burned-out eyes. "Come and have a drink. Anything you want, and as much as you want. That's my bargain with 'The Duke'—for myself and my friends. The old black devil gains by it, too. I bring him all his trade. My name is DeZaldo."

"Mine's Sullivane," I said. "At least, for the present."

"Yankee, eh? Thin, sinewy little Yankee, in spite of your name? You fellows keep your individuality even down here."

"Thanks!" I grinned. "And now I'll have a whisky and soda, if they have such a thing."

"They have," the man asserted. "I told The Duke I would walk out on him if he didn't get in a stock. The old thief tried to palm off some rotgut on me, at that." He motioned toward a table in the corner, and I noticed how long his hands were. "Over there," he suggested. "I hope the racket of the damn blacks doesn't bother you. I'm used to it."

WHEN we were seated, a mulatto girl brought in the drinks he had ordered. Deftly she flecked a cloth over the table top and placed the bottle and siphon in front of DeZaldo. Her jet eyes were fixed on the white man.

Once in a long while you see a really beautiful woman down there in Port-au-Prince. This girl was beautiful that way. The tar brush had just touched her, and her skin was the color of old ivory. Her features, too, seemed carved out of the same stuff, small and perfectly formed. Her simple shift of print goods revealed the youthful lines of her figure; not the flat slatternliness of the Haitian native, but the graceful, rounded curves of a white woman who has luxuriated long in the tropics.

The girl stood there a moment gazing down at DeZaldo with eyes filled with worshiping adoration, eyes as intense as those of a wild thing. The white man clucked in his throat and brushed her aside as he had done the trinkets he had used in his conjuring a

short time before—the same gesture of finality, of satiation.

Drink followed drink. We talked and talked, the inane confidences of liquor-mellowed men. He told me he was a fugitive from justice. Manslaughter, he said, and raised his drink high in the air and laughed nervously as he said it.

That confession—another point of contact—made us friends. All along we had been feeling our kinship—the kinship of two whites in a black country. It was as if each of us felt ourselves slipping into the black pool from which none arises, and each was the straw to which the other must cling. DeZaldo particularly felt the tentacles of the wild, barbaric native life closing around him. One could sense the nameless fear of it on his handsome, twitching face, discern it in the occasional flash of his burned-out eyes. He longed to escape, yet feared he never would escape. The fearful gods of the Haitian jungle had reached out and seized him —indolence, warmth, languorous passion, had smothered his will as a jungle creeper smothers a tree.

He admitted as much. "It's great to be talking to a white man again," he said. "Lord, but I'm sick of the bum French that the natives gabble!" He was silent for a moment, then plunged again. "It's a gosh-awful place." He was staring intently at the little globules of perspiration which had gathered on the back of his long hand. "Oh, man, so gosh-awful! But—er—some way it's hard to leave. Hard? It's damn near impossible!"

Suddenly DeZaldo's old eyes flashed up and startled me with their intensity. "Listen, man!" he ordered. "Let's make a killing and get out! Get out before it's too late. Too late. It's no place for a white man."

It seemed to me that he was trying to convince a second self rather than me.

"A killing?" I asked.

"Yes. Listen! I've wandered over most of this steaming island. I've seen a lot. Oh, I'm not boasting! I wish I hadn't seen all I have." The muscles above his cheeks were dancing again. "Voodoo ceremonies, for instance. I saw one a few months ago, and—— Have another whisky?" He poured himself a stiff drink and sat staring at it for a full minute. Then he tossed it off, straight, and wiped his lips on the back of his hand.

"That's what I want to tell you about," he said. "Ever see a voodoo? Well, don't! It's not good for sleep. Or nerves. The one I saw last fall was in the deserted castle of that old native emperor, Christopher. Awful place—ghostly, weird. Built on a mountain by the self-styled emperor. Towers and turrets and torture chambers and subcellars—all that sort of thing. And every damn stone in it marks a human life spent in its erection."

DeZaldo poured himself another drink before he resumed. His sentences were short, staccato, but gradually I felt the atmosphere of the emperor's ruined castle envelope me—the moss-grown rocks, the tropical creepers, the wisps of vaporish cloud blowing in fantastic, ghostlike curlicues in and out of the blind, broken windows of the old fortress. And then, in a lower voice, he told of the voodoo worship, the idolization of the green snake, symbol of evil; the throb of the slowly beaten tom-toms, the devil drums, pulsating through the darkness, reaching out unseen, clutching fingers to draw close the worshipers to the shrine of the black goat, the altar of sacrifice.

I WAS deeply moved. DeZaldo, too, was breathless, strangely shaken. But it wasn't the castle and it wasn't the voodoo which now remained so vividly in his mind. It was the idol the jungle folk worshiped—the green snake! The thing, he said, could have

been placed in a woman's hat box coiled as it was, but it was of solid gold, green with a strange phosphorescent stain, and the eyes of it were two great emeralds, each almost as large as a robin's egg.

"Interesting," I said, as he concluded the tale, "and probably true. Let's have a drink."

DeZaldo laughed rather mirthlessly. "Where's your imagination?" he demanded. "Doesn't that snake idol—a fortune—set you on fire? Or has the damp rot got you, too? Good Lord! To escape all this!" He included the reeking room and the crowd of sweating blacks in his sweeping gesture.

"You mean you intend to steal the damn thing?" I asked, to gain time.

"'Steal' is an ugly little word," he said, watching me with half-closed eyes. "I mean that we try to find it. It is hidden somewhere in the old castle and it belongs to the devil. Surely one can't 'steal' from the devil."

"Not without danger," I said. "The devil, I have heard, takes good care of his property. It sounds like a desperate thing to attempt, my friend."

"Perhaps. And perhaps we are desperate men." He leaned forward suddenly and grasped my arm. "Think! Think, man! We stay here and we are lost. The creepers of the jungle are already fastened upon us, clinging to us, pulling us down. We're in the mire. We might get out. How? The snake idol. If we win it—— Ah, I know of a little villa near Buenos Aires. It is white, with soft-red tiles, and tall Italian cypresses wave above it. In the summer dusk, white roses bloom in the garden; like breathing things they seem, and the air is heavy with fragrance of them——"

"Yes," I interrupted impatiently, "it's nice to dream about."

He accepted the rebuff calmly, suddenly clamping his jaws in silence. But the gold-green snake with its emerald eyes had fired my imagination after all. I couldn't let it rest. Some way that heathen idol had become a symbol as well as a fortune—the symbol of DeZaldo's possible escape from that hell hole of rottenness. Me—I could get out the way I got in, at least I thought I could. But DeZaldo couldn't. He'd stay there until some force stronger than the jungle tentacles wrenched him free. The snake—— If he stole that, he'd have to get away. That was what he had been trying to tell me.

I turned the thoughts over and over in my mind. Perhaps my fancy was heated by liquor, for suddenly the project seemed a possible one, a fascinating one; yes, worth while if it would free DeZaldo from slow rot. Nor was I thinking about DeZaldo alone. I could picture myself in a few years—a second DeZaldo, without DeZaldo's magic of manner and living. The green snake! Symbol of freedom, symbol of wealth!

"Just how do you plan to get hold of your pretty snake?" I asked, after a moment. "I suppose the voodoo priests are no fools; some of them know your own game—magic."

DeZaldo made again that nervous gesture so common to the man, as if brushing aside some disagreeable object.

"I have a plan," he said, "but this is a game in which plans count for little. It is the audacity of the thing which will win for us. If we do win. I know a black, a little, misshapen hunchback who fears neither God, man, nor the devil. I have talked this thing over with him, and he will guide us to the castle. He knows the country like a book. Once at the castle, it's up to us. I still remember where the shrine was; I can find it again. It's in a dungeon where the emperor sealed a woman up alive, a white woman who refused to become his wife, and it's three cellars underground. The idol is hidden somewhere in that room. We may find it. If we

do we'll make for Cape Haitien and get a sloop to take us to South America." He repeated the words "South America" and took a deep breath.

Then he sensed my hesitation and grasped my arm again. His fingers pressed painfully into the muscles above my wrist. The man's intensity was appalling. He began to speak excitedly, rapidly, the words crowding from his lips, and all the time his eyes sought mine beseechingly.

"Can't you see? Are you blind? Even if we lose, we win! Stay here much longer and we are worse than dead! It is our one way out!" Suddenly his voice dropped leadenly. "Mine, at least," he concluded.

Behind my chair I sensed a sudden motion and turned to stare straight into the face of the beautiful mulatto girl. Her expression was a strange mixture of alarm, passion, and intense hatred; her eyes were fixed intently upon DeZaldo. Suddenly she turned and fled silently from the room. "A woman scorned," I thought. "'Hell hath no fury——'

"Does she understand English?" I asked. "Do you think she understood us?"

DeZaldo turned from watching the girl's flight. "I'm afraid she understands," he said. "But it doesn't matter. You see why I must escape from all this?"

That look in the girl's eyes, the intense hatred, had welded me in some subtle way to the man, as if we must stand together before such alien fury. My mind was made up.

"Yes," I replied. "I understand. And I'm with you. I don't suppose we stand a ghost of a show of getting away with the thing. Maybe I've already been in this country too long and some of the native superstition has gotten into my blood. I wouldn't be much surprised if, when we get to your castle of horrors, the devil himself came after us on his black goat and dragged us down to hell. But we'll meet him together, eh?"

DeZaldo grasped my hand in his long fingers and squeezed it fiercely. Something like gratitude glowed in his smoldering eyes. "We'll have a drink on it," he whispered, "and then make ready to start to-morrow. The girl may cause me trouble if we hang around long. You know their jolly little habits—a knife between the shoulder blades, poison, and all that."

I nodded. I had seen the mulatto's face. "To-morrow, then," I said, raising my glass. "Here's to success—and to the villa in Buenos Aires."

"Happy days!" he said.

WE were to meet at noon near the ruins of an old church a mile or so back of the town. All morning I was determined not to keep the tryst. But that cursed green snake, the smoldering gratitude in DeZaldo's eyes, or perhaps the life-isn't-worth-living-anyway feeling, following the previous day's debauch, forced me to the rendezvous.

Our guide, the hunchback, was already perched on an upturned block. Faustin, he called himself, after the old barbarian who had so misruled the island fifty years before. He was gnarled and black as a blackthorn, with malicious impishness dancing across his wrinkled old face. As I approached, he grimaced at me impertinently, showing his yellow fangs of teeth.

"Bonjour, blanch!" he called in the native patois. "The other *blanch* has not yet arrived." He waited until I was close, then leaped at me. He laughed as I threw my arms up protectingly. "Do you think we shall get the serpent?" he asked, low-voiced, "or will it be this?" He drew a forefinger across his throat and sucked in his breath with a peculiar whistling noise. The old villain was probably an expert

at throat cutting himself. The gesture made the cold shivers run down my spine.

"Did Mr. DeZaldo send any message by you?" I asked.

The black shook his head. "I have not seen him since early this morning. He told me to get three mules, pack them with a few necessities, and meet him here. Perhaps he is having trouble with his petite mamselle."

We waited an hour, which seemed like three, the hunchback sitting silently by himself and smoking innumerable cigarettes of cheap, native tobacco. At last I saw the bulky figure of my strange friend toiling up the hill toward us.

"I'm sorry to be late," he panted. "But I had a little trouble. Look!" He bared his chest and showed a long, red knife scratch running from his throat diagonally across his breast.

The little hunchback crowed and capered with delight when he saw the wound. "What did I tell you, *blanch?*" he shrilled to me. "She is a tigress, that girl." Suddenly he whirled and stamped his foot childishly. "Come! We must start at once. We'll have a long way to go. As you see, I got the nice mules, although the owner is not yet aware of it. The sad-eyed one is for the little *blanch,* and the white-nosed one is for DeZaldo *blanch.* I ride this one—the lovely, fleabitten beast."

THAT was the start of our long journey. The trail, if it could be called a trail, followed a creek basin which was almost roofed with tropical vegetation. Snakelike creepers sought to entangle the legs of our mules; wild hogs ran squealing into the thickets; on the edges of occasional pools, giant lizards lay sleeping in the sun. It was oppressively hot, and myriads of stinging insects swarmed about our heads in humming clouds, an overtone to the sucking sough of our mules' hoofs in the mud and slime.

The trail, as darkness approached, became more and more impassable. At last we were forced to dismount and lead our weary animals.

"It is a trail for wild pigs, not men," grumbled old Faustin. "Not far from here lives a man I know. If we pay him a little, he will be glad to share his house with us. We will stop there until daylight."

DeZaldo and I consented gladly; mortally tired we were. When we came to the promised clearing, Faustin halted us.

"I will go ahead and make arrangements," he said, and disappeared into the darkness.

In a few minutes he returned and ordered us to follow him. Beyond the clearing, in a grove of mango trees, we could see the light of a fire. As we drew nearer, we discerned the outlines of two or three rude huts. Our host, a man who seemed almost as old and as bent as old Faustin himself, appeared and took our mules, leaving Faustin to show us to our sleeping quarters. The place was dirty and infested with vermin, but we were too tired to object. From the darkness outside came the multitudinous noises of the jungle night—the scampering of padded feet across the sun-baked soil of the clearing, the death squeal of some small animal in the near-by thicket, a noise like the beating of the wings of countless moths, the monotonous birdlike notes of a nose flute from one of the adjacent hovels. Then sleep came over me like a drug.

It was breaking daylight when I awoke. I had been dreaming of a huge green snake with emerald eyes which sought to wind itself around my neck, and I was struggling with all my might to prevent the tightening of those relentless coils.

"Let go of my arm," I heard DeZaldo's voice say to me, out of the limbo between sleeping and wakefulness.

I staggered to my feet, the fear of that horrible dream still strong within me, and followed my friend into the open. Our breakfast was waiting us, but no person was in sight. Yet it was uncomfortably certain that many eyes were watching us from the brush. Before the sun was well up, we were packing for the trail once more.

"Did either of you see that little black-leather case of mine?" demanded DeZaldo anxiously, pawing the saddlebags of his mule.

"Yes," I answered. "It slipped out of your bag last night when we unpacked, and I put it in mine."

He seemed greatly relieved. "It contains my props," he explained, "the tools of my profession, the trinkets with which I make my magic. Once, my friend, I was a leader in my line. I was to the music halls and variety theaters of Europe what Houdini and Thurston are to the vaudeville houses of your own country. You have seen that I have some dexterity, but you should have seen me then. In India I learned a little of optical illusion—climbing the rope suspended in the air, the mango-tree stunt, and all that. From a Russian juggler I learned the art of escaping from shackles, locked boxes, and barred cells. Yes, I do not brag when I say I knew the game."

He relapsed into silence, thinking, no doubt, of those better days. My thoughts seemed to follow his, and for a long time we plodded ahead wordlessly.

We were climbing now, but at last the trail dipped sharply and we descended into a jungle valley. Near the bottom of this, Faustin called a halt and spread out our meager lunch.

"We will arrive at dusk, *mon petites,*" said the black. "It is better so, for I have an uneasiness that we may be expected. The priests of the black goat have ears that hear a hundred miles. Some say it is the spirits of evil that bring them the news, but those spirits have two legs and black faces, heh?" His laughter crackled uneasily.

ALL afternoon we toiled upward between walls of green so thick, so impenetrable that we seldom saw the sun. It was late afternoon when we caught sight of the ruined castle for the first time, a huge pile of gray stone hanging perilously on the crest of a craggy cliff, a desolate place, sinister in its suggestion of evil. With our eyes we could follow the windings of the narrow trail which led upward and upward to the time-worn battlements, to this old castle which the fiendish black emperor had built. There he had held his revels with debauchery unspeakable, and there at his very door he had died by his own hand when his sons turned against him.

"Look!" muttered old Faustin, pointing a gnarled, black finger. "One of the black spirits, heh?" He rolled his eyes in terror, half mocking, half real.

On that zigzagging upward trail a black figure, more like a shadow than a person, flitted among the dank foliage.

"Damn!" ejaculated DeZaldo. I think he recognized that hurrying form.

Faustin slid slowly from the back of his fleabitten mule. "Come, *blanches,*" he said, "we go on foot from here. It is better."

We hid the tired animals in a clump of trees where the black cut a small clearing with the machete he wore at his waist. Then in single file we began the ascent of the precipice, Faustin hopping nimbly ahead like a grotesque sparrow. DeZaldo followed, his precious black case hugged under his arm. I trailed well in back.

When we reached the small plateau which fronted the ruin, DeZaldo and I, exhausted, threw ourselves on the ground and gasped air into our aching lungs. Faustin, who seemed to feel neither fatigue, thirst, nor hunger, grinned at us impishly and went ahead

to reconnoiter. He was back in a few minutes.

"The place is as silent as death," he said. "In fact, far too silent to suit this old bag of bent bones. I don't like it. Besides, it is earthquake weather." He sniffed the air like a hunting dog.

Yes, undoubtedly it was earthquake weather. A muggy stillness prevailed, a quietness too quiet. Nature seemed to be waiting for something, expectantly waiting, expectantly fearing. There seemed to be a painful vacuum of motion, of sound, of air. Even the parrots had ceased their evening-time chatter, and the monotonous hum of insects sounded muffled, far away.

"Let the damn earthquake come," growled DeZaldo. "Maybe it'll put fear into these blacks. I guess we better be moving. You lead, Faustin. Follow me, Sullivane, and stay close! We're going into a place worse than the catacombs of Rome. Faustin, is the torch ready? All right, forward!"

Cautiously we moved through the gathering dusk. As I approached the old ruin, I had an odd feeling that the castle was animated, that it lived, that it was leering at me with its blind eyes —eyes that had once been windows, but were now only black, cavernous holes like the sockets in a skull.

The place was the epitome of corruption and decay. The weather-worn walls gaped in wide cracks; jungle creepers had lodged in every niche, festooning the sides. Bats flew in and out of the stark windows, making curious, squeaking noises. It was a place fit only for a temple of evil. The dreadful gods, brought from the far Congo, had here a proper shrine.

Faustin dived into a tangle of vegetation in the rear of the castle. DeZaldo and I followed. Completely hidden from view by the matted tangle of tamarinds and guinea grass was a narrow, cavelike entrance. Here we paused and lighted the torch. DeZaldo clutched my arm.

"Life or death, old fellow!" he whispered, and laughed mirthlessly.

"Life or death," I replied.

Faustin grinned sardonically at us over his shoulder. "Follow!" he commanded, and plunged into the pitlike aperture.

We groped our way after him as best we could, stumbling over the roots of creepers, clutching at the walls wet with moisture. There was a strong smell of rotting vegetation in the passage. Like a long-unopened tomb it smelled; the odor of death was rife in that artificial cavern. At times there was hardly room enough to stand upright; again our torch couldn't light the corners of huge underground rooms. We stumbled over upturned paving stones and shattered timbers, ducked low under threatening arches.

"Don't go so fast," I gasped to Faustin, who carried the torch.

"Don't go so slow," he retorted.

At that moment I fell heavily over a piece of dislodged stone. By the time I had recovered my feet, the light had vanished.

FOR a few seconds I stumbled forward in that heavy darkness, until I brought up with a thud against a blind wall. After that I cast caution to the winds and groped blindly ahead, shouting at every step. I had only one thought, and that was to escape from this living tomb. The treasure was forgotten; DeZaldo's dream was forgotten; everything was forgotten in that one hope—to escape. Once I lighted a match, and in the brief yellow flare of it I saw a huge, black, shiny face peering at me around the corner of the passage.

I remember little of the next few minutes. I must have plunged along like a mad dog, until I was caught and thrown. Then I realized I was lying

prostrate on the floor of a large, brightly lighted room. Around me, sitting in a semicircle, were a dozen or more naked, fantastically painted blacks. I had the conviction that they had been sitting there for hours, waiting, knowing that sooner or later we would deliver ourselves into their hands. There was something patient, timeless, merciless in the postures of their gleaming black bodies. Subtly they resembled hounds, waiting a long-anticipated feast.

I had been bound hand and foot. Thongs cut my wrists and ankles. By twisting my head, I could discern DeZaldo and old Faustin beside me. Their helpless immobility showed that they, too, had been thoroughly trussed.

From the semicircle of blacks, one, evidently the high priest, rose and stepped forward. His naked body was of huge dimensions and crisscrossed with phosphorescent lines to imitate a human skeleton. He grinned horribly, showing an expanse of repulsive red gums.

"Ah, little ones," he gloated in the native dialect, "we were expecting you! You came at just the right time. We need you. The god of the green snake and the black goat is thirsty." He ran his tongue over his lips as if tasting the coming feast, a horrible gesture. "We will slay the little 'black goat' first," he clucked, pointing at Faustin, whose impish grin seemed frozen. "Then the two beautiful 'white goats' will grace the altar."

I made a rather painful and pitiful attempt to show sang-froid, to show how a white man could meet death. "I always wanted to see a voodoo ceremony," I announced to DeZaldo.

He did not answer, but lay there staring moodily into space, as if indifferent to whatever might happen.

The voodoo priests busied themselves preparing for the orgy which was to come. The torches which had lighted the room were extinguished and a large chalice of beaten gold was placed on a tripod in the center of the chamber. Burning coals were placed in it, and little rolls of leaves which gave off a pungent, exhilarating odor were sprinkled over the coals. The room immediately became filled with the intoxicating smoke. In the murkiness the priests seemed truly the spirits of evil.

NOW one of the priests began to beat slowly on a tom-tom, and from an adjoining chamber came a woman. I saw DeZaldo's involuntary start. The female was the mulatto girl, of course —the girl he thought he had left for good in Port-au-Prince. Yes, it was she who had flitted up the castle trail ahead of us, she who had brought the oath to DeZaldo's lips.

She wore a gleaming girdle at her waist and golden bracelets on her wrists. Her beauty was almost unearthly; her grace that of a fearless, untamed thing.

She did not look at us when she entered. But when she had reached the center of the strange chamber she whirled suddenly, leaped across and slapped DeZaldo's face.

The next second she had begun to dance. Slowly she moved at first, her slender feet pounding time to the vibrating tom-toms. Then faster she whirled, faster, bending, writhing, leaping until the eye could scarcely follow the sinuous movements of her supple, brown body. There was the rich gleam of old ivory, the flashing of wild eyes, a weaving and untangling of slender arms and legs. As she spun and writhed she intoned a wild, monotonous chant which blended curiously with the pulsating beat of the devil drums.

Hatred was in that dance, passion, a fanatical exaggeration of idol worship. One of the priests handed to her a white dove. For a moment she whirled with it in her hands, then she poised, high

on her toes. She killed it; then held the crumpled mass of feathers straight above her. She uttered a wild, throaty cry and leaped into a final, desperate dance. At last she fell to the floor in a swoon of exhaustion.

One of the priests took her place in front of the smoking chalice. Little beads of sweat stood out on his black face. In his hand he held a long, narrow-bladed knife, and his eyes rolled like those of a maniac. He approached and retreated with mincing steps, always drawing nearer the prostrate form of old Faustin. The beat of the tom-tom never ceased; like the pounding of a gigantic hollow heart it was. Close to Faustin the dancer was now. One more advance and the goal would be reached. I shuddered and closed my eyes, waiting to hear the death rattle. It did not come. Instead came a sudden cry, a second of silence, then a great gasp of fear.

IT all happened in a very few seconds. When I opened my eyes, I did not see the priest with the knife. A red, lurid flame burned in the chalice, and silhouetted by it stood DeZaldo, looking bigger, more powerful than ever. There he stood, the red light painting his face, his lips parted in a wicked smile, his shock of black hair seemingly on fire. The knife, which had gleamed but a minute before in the hand of the murderous priest, was in DeZaldo's long fingers. He raised the thin blade high over his head, and then, slowly lowering it, seemed to swallow it. You could see it pass into his throat, and he smiled.

The eyes of the frightened blacks gleamed white; that muffled gasp of fear sounded again.

DeZaldo turned quickly and passed his hand over the burning chalice. He mumbled a few incoherent words, and the red blaze became blue, a ghastly blue. A shriek sounded. The big chief priest crawled groveling to the feet of the magician.

"Spare us, master!" he pleaded piteously. "Spare us, O all-powerful evil one. We are your servants. We knew not that it was you we profaned with our touch. Spare us, spare us!"

Others took up the cry. "Spare us! Spare us!" All were begging for their lives now, all except the girl, who still lay where she had fallen in a swoon at the finish of her dance.

"Sullivane!" called DeZaldo in English. "Close your eyes! And whisper to Faustin to hide his! I'm going to blind the heathens!"

Even through my tightly closed lids the sudden, white, explosive flare of the chalice fire hurt my eyes. The next moment I felt a knife cutting at the thongs which bound me. I opened my eyes. DeZaldo was freeing Faustin. The atmosphere of the underground chamber was opaque with smoke. Through its curtain, writhing, crawling black figures could be seen; the air was heavy with cries of pain, pleas for mercy.

DeZaldo laughed noiselessly, mirthlessly. "They're blinder than bats," he said. "Will be for a good half hour."

Old Faustin pushed himself to his feet. "The serpent!" he whispered. "Don't forget the golden snake! It is there, back of us on the altar!"

Yes, there it was, as DeZaldo had first described it—gold gleaming through green, great, glittering eyes. The stones imbedded in its head seemed to live, to dart furious glances at one. Little green flames they were, repellent, mesmerizing. But old Faustin didn't hesitate. He crossed to the altar and picked the thing up. He grunted; it was very heavy.

"Out!" ordered DeZaldo in English. "Sullivane, hold onto Faustin this time. You mustn't get lost now."

He turned and shouted loudly, fearsomely, at the crawling, supplicating

blacks. Then he joined us at the black maw of a door which led from that den. We ran, stumbling and staggering, down a narrow passage whose intricacies Faustin seemed to follow instinctively in the blackness.

WE were in the open now. Nothing was ever better than that first clean breath of night air. Overhead the stars were shining brightly, friendly and near. A night bird sang in a thicket, challenging the mellow, yellow moon.

One deep breath and then, "Hurry!" ordered DeZaldo. "We'll have to run for it. Those flash powders will only blind them for a little while. And when the girl comes to her senses she will explain the tricks which made the blacks think I was the devil himself. She has seen that dagger-swallowing trick more than once; the colored-fire powders are no new things to her, either! Even that blinding explosive. It's just a bismuth compound. I've used it before to blind my audience temporarily. But never a whole vial! Yes, it'll fix those rolling black eyes for a while. But we've got to hurry!"

As we rushed down that zigzagging trail from the castle, DeZaldo suddenly turned to me. His face showed in the moonlight, twitching with noiseless laughter. "Never, my friend," he boasted, "never in my career was I better than I was to-night! Houdini himself could not have escaped from those ropes more cleverly; a yogi could not have swallowed the knife better. And the setting! Ah, my friend, if only I could present my act always with such a setting!"

I panted some words of assent. Old Faustin had turned and suddenly thrust the green-gold serpent into my arms. The burden required all my strength and attention.

Of that flight through the jungle I remember little else than hour after hour of aching, plodding progress. Only the unerring instinct of old Faustin took us through in safety. Cape Haitien was gained at last, and the sloop for South America boarded. Faustin didn't even wait to wave us a farewell, but plunged immediately back into the jungle. DeZaldo stared after him; there was the old, smoldering glow in his eyes. Half inclined to follow, he was, and needed the touch of my hand to turn him toward the sloop.

A gem merchant in Buenos Aires paid us richly for the serpent of gold with eyes of emerald, paid us probably one tenth of the idol's intrinsic worth. Immediately DeZaldo departed for that hilltop of which he had so long dreamed.

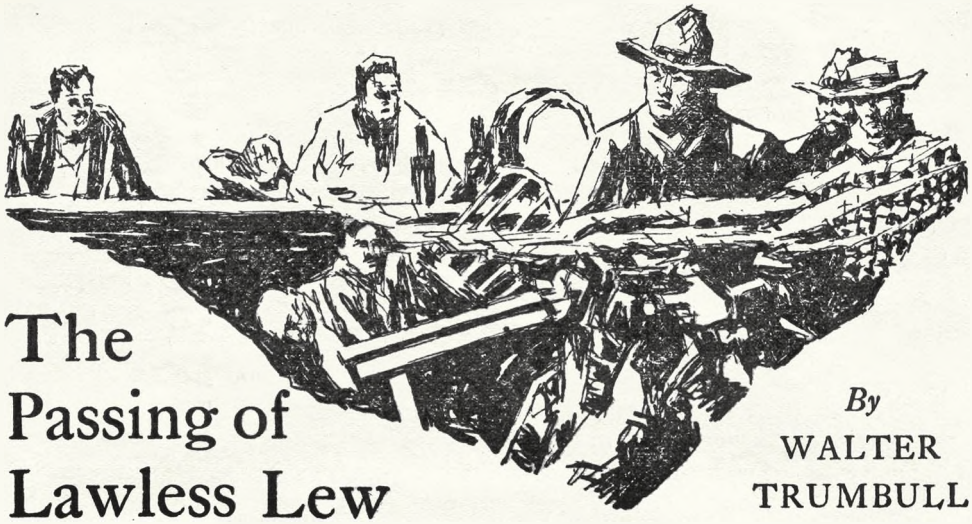
Three years ago I visited him there. It was evening, and the white roses in his garden were breathing their fragrance into the soft summer air. We talked over old times: Port-au-Prince, the mulatto girl, Faustin, conjuring tricks. DeZaldo raised his glass from the little garden table beside him. There was soda with the whisky this time.

"Here's to freedom!" he said. His burned-out eyes were fixed on a white dove which was winging its late flight to its nest. Surely he saw the beautiful mulatto girl again and the dance of the white dove. The muscles above his cheeks twitched and he made that characteristic gesture of brushing aside some annoyance.

"To freedom!" he repeated.

Five months later I learned of his death. He had been found in his bed, a long, thin-bladed knife upright in his breast.

The people who declare that prohibition is a complete farce are the people who assert that the price of bootleg liquor is a profound tragedy.



The Passing of Lawless Lew

By WALTER TRUMBULL

THIS is the story of Lawless Lew:
With a six-gun he was a cross-eyed wizard
And as fast an hombre as ever drew
To bore a foe through the heart or gizzard.

From Bloody Gulch on his horse he sprang
To ruthless raidings and forays risky;
He picked his teeth with a rattler's fang
And he drank straight lye that was slaked with whisky.

The wild cats ran when they heard him swear,
And nothing living could fright or fret him;
He traded bites with a grizzly bear
And the bear was dead when they came to get him.

Lew might have lived to a ripe old age
If he'd only stuck to his border station,
His mountains, mesa and purple sage—
But a city gal was his ruination.

He followed her to the big-league town;
He pawned his guns for a ring to give her;
But while jaywalking he got run down
And rubbed out complete by a milkman's flivver.

So this was the passing of Lawless Lew.
They'd have shipped him back to the cemetery
Where he'd buried a hundred—or maybe two—
But there wasn't enough of him left to bury.

The Gold of Feather Canyon

By Irvin Mattick

The long hard years of grubbing for a paucity of gold in a stream that was wearing away through the mountain, the lean, hungry winters of subsistence on unappetizing salt pork and beans, the gradual metamorphosis of hope into despair—these Sturtevant had left forever behind him, locked securely in a past that was now irreparably stained. At least, so he thought. There was but one false note—Sturtevant was called upon to play a rôle of great charity.

STURTEVANT was sick of the whole place. Rocks, boulders, pines, sun and sand, hot as hell all summer; crusted snow heaped to the chimney top all winter. Six months of panning the river that straggled through Feather Cañon; three months reconnoitering for better panning shallows; three months of enduring the merciless cold, when the snowdrifts made a jail out of your hut and all that a man could do was sit at a fire and cuss, try to forget he was alive. That's what you did all year.

Salt pork, bacon, beans, meal bread, and fatter salt pork when the lean was gone. That's what you fed on all year.

Sturtevant took a piece of rock out of the chimney breast and reached into the recess. He took out a little bag made of rabbit skin, and pulled it open on his knee. He poured some gold into his palm. A few nuggets were about as big as blackberries. More of them were as small as dried peas, and there was a handful of rough sand, pure dirt.

The little sackful of gold was worth about two thousand dollars. Four years Sturtevant had scraped and panned about Feather Cañon, working the river from its narrow bend up near the fork down to where it ran, a wide muddy creek, into Piney.

Two thousand dollars' worth of dirt that had made a wreck out of him. Sturtevant had a pain in his back, between the shoulders. It was like a knife sometimes, and the winters

kicked it up worse. The water of the river had seeped through his boots and had found his marrow. It had set this pain going in his back, stabbing him these cool evenings when he climbed the cañon to his shack.

It was autumn again. In about six weeks he'd be locked up in his cabin until spring. His salt pork was low, and he wanted to throw his last few cans of beans into the cañon

Sturtevant picked out three little nuggets of the gold and let the rest of the pan dirt run out of his palm back into the rabbit-skin sack He placed the bag holding all he had in the world in its cache over the fireplace and wrapped the pebbles of gold in a corner of his bandanna. They would buy more salt pork down at Carson.

Reaching up for a pipe, Sturtevant knocked the kerosene lamp from its bracket, smashing it on the cabin floor. The oil ran over the boards and was gone.

That was all he had of it. He would be without a light that night, unless he went down the cañon and borrowed some oil from Carty, across the river.

Sturtevant had about decided to get along and wait till he went to Carson in the morning for his supplies, when he saw his saddle strap on the floor. It was torn. He would have to mend that strap to-night if he wanted to start the first thing in the morning. Carson was a good ride from Feather Cañon, and Sturtevant needed stuff badly, even more than he needed the little nuggets in his bandanna. A man couldn't eat gold.

DUSK was sneaking down the cañon, a vanguard of the western night. The river down below the straight wall of stone was flecked with gray and gold and black. Gazing down on it, Sturtevant saw it stretch below him like a long, soft feather. Where it widened toward Piney, its surface quivered. At the other end of the gulch, it ran to a point like a quill.

Feather Cañon got its name from the way the river looked at dusk. In a half hour the gray would be black and the stream would lose itself, except on nights when there was a moon. Then it shone black and silver like a raven's feather. On moonless nights one could see the stars shining faintly in the river's gliding surface.

Sturtevant went down to the river and stepped across the slippery shale of the ford. In his pesky mood he kicked several rocks with his boot. He swore at the water for its meager yield of gold.

Scrambling through some low shrubbery on the other side, he came to a cleft in the high cañon wall and passed through it. Here he came out on an open plateau where some straight black pines sheltered Fred Carty's shack.

Carty opened the door for Sturtevant before he could knock and, though it was darker down there under the pine trees, Sturtevant observed a sign of surprise in Carty's manner. The men had a hasty glance at each other, and then, unlike Carty's usual quick greeting, there was a pause before he spoke.

"You lost, Sturt, down this side of the river?"

Sturtevant walked in through the door, as he always did when he came to see Carty. He strode over to a table that was spread with loose papers, covering something bulky there.

"I upset my lamp just now and smashed her. I got another in the lean-to, but I spilled the last bit of oil I had. Can I borrow a bit of yours till to-morrow? I'm going down to Carson in the morning for my stuff, but I have to mend my saddle strap to-night."

"Yes," Carty replied sullenly, and went about getting oil for Sturtevant.

Carty was pouring the oil into an empty can, when the spout of the kerosene tank swung out over the edge of

the small tin and some oil ran on the cabin floor.

Sturtevant grabbed the paper spread on Carty's table and crushed it into a wad. He knelt down to rub up the oil that had spilled. As he did, Carty set down the kerosene can with a bang and rushed over to his table.

Down on one knee, rubbing the floor with the wad of crushed paper, Sturtevant looked up and saw the scowl and fury in Carty's face. There was very little light in the cañon now, and in the dark shack Carty's eyes gleamed. His face was birdlike, sharp and livid, gaunt with avarice.

"What's a matter, Cart?" Sturtevant asked.

Following his neighbor's hands, which moved about on the table like rats, Sturtevant discerned, even in the darkness, several baggy shapes on the table. In between these he made out smaller heaps of what looked like dirt. Black dirt it was, familiar-looking stuff.

Sturtevant got up. Carty sort of raked the stuff together into one pile in the center of the table. Sturtevant heard the grit scrape the boards, and a certain smell, a smell of water and ground, a smell any gold panner would know, filled Sturtevant's nose as he drew in his breath.

"Cart, is that all gold you got there?"

Carty faced Sturtevant and tried to hide the black stuff on the table behind him.

"Yes. It's gold I got. It's mine. I panned it from a rich spot in the river. I got a right to it, ain't I? I've scratched around here twenty years, just about living like a dog. You've been here only four years now. You didn't expect me to tell you about where I got all this stuff out of the river, did you? And there's a lot more of it in the water. I scraped around till I found——"

Sturtevant cast the bunched-up paper into a corner of the shack and broke into Carty's outburst. "Sure you got a right to it, Cart! Only it surprised me, it did. I never knew you'd struck a rich bank in the river. I just came down here for a bit of oil. I'm sorry I grabbed the paper off the table. I didn't know; you saw how it all went; wasn't none of my fault. How much gold you got?"

Sturtevant tried to look behind Carty and estimate the bulk of the stuff. It was funny how a bunch of gold—the stuff you'd been looking for for years—could make you curious. But the dark had come now, and Sturtevant could only see Carty's eyes gleaming like glass. He also heard the angry man's breath coming faster.

Then Carty shouted at Sturtevant. "You knew about this; this gold I got! You've been watching me all along, Sturt; I've seen you! Just the other evening you hung around my shack. Dropped your knife a-purpose to have an excuse to be down here looking for it while my light was burning. I found the knife. You figured to peek in here and see how much gold I had. Then you've been hanging around the top of the cañon these evenings, trying to see where I pan for my gold. You want some, too, don't you? You're a liar! You didn't break no lamp. You don't need no oil!"

Sturtevant felt his arms grow tense, and his hands came up from his side. His fingers curved up into fists. He felt a hot wave rise up in him, even down the button of pain in his back. He heard that word "liar" singing about the shack, and there were red spots in the black room, spots that danced before Sturtevant's eyes.

He had his hand on his gun now, but put it away again. He was about to jump at Carty in the dark and make him swallow everything he had said, when the man standing over the gold burst out again with more accusations.

"And I tell you, Sturt, if I didn't

have a good reason with the sheriff down at Piney, where I ain't set my foot for twenty years, I'd gone down there long ago and put my gold in the bank. You've got a notion in your head—a notion to get this gold of mine. I know just what your plans are."

Sturtevant felt the anger rise to his collar now, while he listened to Carty. Then he flashed: "What'n hell's wrong with you, Cart? You got gold fear, or is your mind gone softer and blacker'n that dirt on your table?"

Sturtevant made a step nearer his neighbor, but Carty backed, pushing the table back with him across the floor.

Darkness had completely enveloped the place now, and the men faced each other like stalking beasts.

"None of your innocent questions, Sturt," Carty warned, his fury in full sway. "You better not take another step toward me. I got my gun on you. I know your game, and I've been figuring on how to queer it. You've figured it all out, you have, Sturt. I just hit on it the other night when I came across that snapshot of yours taken years back down at Carson before you grew your mustache. It's just the mustache that makes us look different. Otherwise we're about the same."

"About the same?" Sturtevant asked.

"Yes," Carty sneered back in the dark. Only his eyes could Sturt see. "You've been figuring on killing me, taking the gold I got, shaving off the brush from under your nose and riding into a soft life as though you were me. You'd ride away from here by way of Piney, because down at Carson where we both deal they'd make you out. Down at Piney they haven't seen me for twenty years. With you parading as Carty, nobody'd think I had been killed. With my gold you'd have it easy."

Sturtevant just paused there in the dark a moment, struck dumb. What gold will do to a man! When he has it, and when he wants it! Carty just stood there breathing like a horse after a hard run.

"Now you get out of my shack, Sturt, and don't come around here no more. I'm going away from here in a few days, for good. I'm getting scared of you. And if you sneak about here, asking for such lying things like oil you claim you spilled, well, maybe you won't really need it any more!"

Sturtevant's temper ebbed a bit.

Maybe Carty would tell him where the place was that gave him all that gold. If Carty was going away, why, then——

"If you leave, Carty, will you tip me off about the spot in the river?"

Sturtevant felt the pain between his shoulders return like a bullet hole. Sweat seeped out of his skin, cold as the water he had often felt down in the river when he panned for gold.

"No," Carty shouted, "and get out of here!"

"I'll go, Cart, but you're just a crazy loon. I never thought of us two looking alike till you just now said it. You see, you're the one has all the reason for suspicion, not me. I guess I can do without the oil. I wouldn't want to rob you of something. And I'll take your hint. I won't show up any more."

Sturtevant found the cabin door and two minutes later he was walking away from those high, dark pines. The wind came through them, a softly humming wind, an autumn-night wind, its chill hinting of another raw winter on its way to the plateau above the river. Salt pork, beans, snow, weeks of cussing before the fire; and all for a measly two thousand dollars he had sifted out of the river gravel.

At the river Sturtevant bent down and drank several swallows of the cold water. It went soothingly down his throat and cooled the hot sensation that still seethed within him.

So Carty accused him of hanging about his shanty at night! He *had* been down there the other evening, looking for a knife he'd lost that day. Sturtevant stopped and swore. Why, Carty must have found the knife! How could he have accused Sturtevant of dropping it on purpose unless he had found it? And he hadn't returned it either! Sturtevant had stopped at Carty's cabin window that night, had peeked in. Carty had hung a blanket before it. Sturtevant hadn't meant to be spying.

Sturtevant had also spent a few evenings on top of the cañon, right at its edge, looking over the country and the cañon while making up his mind to pull up and leave. Carty thought he was spying on him there.

So Carty had it in his head that Sturtevant was going to kill him, take his gold, have everything he wanted in the world. What gold will do to a man's senses! Carty afraid of his very life on account of that pile of stuff; Sturtevant about to pull up stakes and move away and get back to civilization.

Sturtevant slipped on a rock in the river and the water went over the top of one boot.

HE sat down on the shore and emptied the water from his boot. He threw a loose piece of shale into the river as if to punish the stream.

Carty was crazy. Why, Sturtevant had never even dreamed of that other thing! As he thought it over, though, while sitting there on the dark river bank under the precipice of Feather Cañon, Carty was right. Sturtevant's mustache was the only thing that made the two of them look very different—at least to any one who hadn't seen either of them for twenty years. They were of the same height, had the same beer-colored hair; blue eyes with rifts of gray like the skies they had sought gold under. All their features were remarkably similar, now that Sturtevant considered it. Both men were angular, bronzed, wrinkled from wind and years.

It was queer, though, how a man could get that daffy about something; especially when he got afraid about his wealth being safe.

After Sturtevant put on his wet boot, he gazed across the river toward Carty's hut. He couldn't see the shack, not in that darkness. It was sheltered under the night and under those black pines that wafted an odorous balm across the river.

Sturtevant started to climb the hill. It was pretty rotten, this. Out of oil for a light, just a pittance of gold for your own from a stingy river after four years of scratching around in it; and your only neighbor throwing you out of his shack, just for discovering a secret he'd guarded all the time.

And Carty, the man who threw him out, having all that gold for himself! There must be about—— How much was there? At least fifty times as much dirt was stacked on Carty's table, fifty times more than Sturtevant had in the rabbit-skin sack in the chimney place.

Fifty times two thousand—a hundred thousand dollars' worth! And Carty had never dropped a word about it. Well, the road was doubly hard to climb now.

And Carty had even accused Sturtevant of wanting to kill him! Said he was going to take away his gold, that hundred-thousand worth, and take his place; be Carty's living self to cover up the crime—just take the gold and live, and live. Live some place where there was no sand, no rocks, no salt pork, no stingy, icy river.

Sturtevant's grew angry again, and he stopped halfway up the plateau and gazed back down the cañon.

A yellow square of the light glowed down there mid the pines. It was Carty's light. It gleamed as yellow, as warm, as soft and far as Carty's own gold.

Carty had oil and light, a secret place in the river that yielded him plenty of gold. And he wouldn't even tell Sturtevant where it was, though he was leaving Feather Cañon.

Carty's light turned red in Sturtevant's eyes.

"And he said I looked like him, the miser!" Sturtevant uttered, as he paused on the precipice and glowered down at Carty's lighted window.

"A hundred thousand!" he grumbled, and resumed his climb.

At the top he sat down.

He saw Carty's light go out. Then —or was he beset by visions?—the yellow glare of it came and went alternately. In between the trees he thought he saw the square window of light moving, dancing about, beckoning.

Sturtevant was woozy from all Carty had said about him. Carty was asleep by now. That was just Sturtevant's mind thinking about the gold.

Sturtevant cast a stone down into the cañon. It fell out of hearing into the depths below. Then he gazed off into the night. There was no moon and, though the river was invisible, Sturtevant saw little flashes down there, little silver-and-gold flits of light that glinted at the far-away bottom of Feather Cañon.

"Damn stars in the river," Sturt growled. "They're like the gold in the water. Little pebbles that kill a man. Flowing along, a fortune within a mile of me, but when I go down there to shake it out of a man, it's gone like those stars will be gone in the morning."

Sturtevant was getting mad now.

A rage brewed up in him, a rage that thundered at the bottom of his soul. He shook his fists at the cañon, at Carty's place.

"And that miser getting fifty times as much of it as I have!"

Sturtevant grabbed his six-shooter. He petted the long, smooth muzzle and laid it along his cheek. It was cool on his hot face.

What was the use?

He bored the end of it against his temple and crooked a finger round the trigger. He'd fall down into the cañon after he'd shot—the river would get him, it had been getting him all along, it always had wanted him, gnawing at him, getting into his marrow—but now he thought Carty's yellow light. It gleamed again. No! It was gone. What was the matter with his eyes? Sturtevant rubbed them. The gun was lowered from his head now, but he was afraid to put it up there again.

Now a bitter thing grew in his heart.

A demon down in the river coaxed him. The stars winked ever so often on the gliding water.

"I only got two thousand," he whispered, then raised his voice till its dry throatiness seemed to come from the dread thing filling his chest, his head, his whole body. "He wouldn't even give me a pint of oil for a light! My pork's gone. The cold is coming on. And he said I looked like him. All but my mustache."

Sturtevant couldn't see the golden darts of the stars now. His eyes were turned toward the gloom down where the pines grew above Carty's shack.

"Damn him, and he said I'd take his place—that I'd kill him and live in his shoes, on his gold! Why, he——"

Sturtevant was going down into the cañon again. He followed the lure of that demon down in the river where the gold was hidden.

As he descended the cañon this time, despite the darkness that made him invisible, he crouched low between the big, black boulders. He guarded every sly step he took over the rocks, and he choked back the curses that boiled up to his lips every time some loose pebble made a sound.

His brain was like a top. It spun and hummed. His heart set up a tick-

ing like a clock, instead of normal beating.

"Me like him? The damn panner!"

He held his gun cocked. The trigger was warm from his finger.

And all the while he watched that black patch under the pines to make sure Carty's yellow light did not reappear.

And it didn't. Carty must have gone to sleep with his gold, not knowing that Sturtevant was coming down the cañon, coming back for the last time.

THREE days later, on a Saturday, a man wearing Fred Carty's clothes and mounted on Carty's horse rode into Piney about noon. The man had never been in Piney before. He had always got his supplies in Carson, the town at the other end of the river. He got off of his pony in front of the Piney National Bank, and with an effort he dragged a heavy sling pack off the horse's back.

The man lugged the heavy pack into the bank and dropped it on the floor before a teller's window.

"I've got some gold here for you. I'm Carty, from Feather Cañon. I want to put this in here till Monday," the man said, rubbing his upper lip that felt bare and smooth after years of protection from a heavy mustache.

The teller unlocked his wicket. The man lifted the pack from the floor and plumped it down on the counter of the teller's cage.

"How much is here, about?" the teller asked, helping to slide it through the window.

"About a hundred thousand, I figure," replied the man from Feather Cañon, looking around to see if any old-timers might be in the bank.

"And you want us to keep this?"

"Yep, I'm going to Las Vegas on Monday. I take the train from there."

"And you say there's a hundred thousand dollars' worth here?"

"Just about. All in good, rich gold washed from the river in Feather Cañon," the stranger replied, keeping his hand over his lips.

The bank teller patted the hide full of Carty's gold.

"What is your name?"

"Carty. Fred Carty. Any old-timer who's lived here twenty years or more can tell you about me. Anything else?"

"That's all. Our president, Mr. Crowley, will remember you. We'll lock up this gold in our vault." The teller called a clerk to help him lift the heavy sack down from the counter.

A half hour later the man from Feather Cañon stood in front of a hardware store. He acted as if he was interested in the stuff displayed in the show window, but in reality he was watching some gray-headed men sitting on a bench in front of a barber shop next door.

Then he set himself for the first test. An old man with a cane got up from the bench and hobbled over to Sturtevant.

"Well, in all the blue blazes of thunder and lightning, if it ain't Carty!" the old-timer blurted out.

Immediately the whole row of cronies on the bench looked up at Sturtevant, who had turned now and faced all of them.

"Carty! 'Old' Carty," the man with the cane talked on, "who told the sheriff twenty years ago if he wanted him, to follow him up into the hills and shoot it out? You're the only man in Piney that Thuner was afraid of. By Georgie, Carty, the town has missed you! We ain't had a real scrap since you left."

"Where's the sheriff now?" Sturtevant growled, looking hard at the men who had taken him to be Carty.

"Why, I guess down at his office. Carty. But he's over that affair. Don't let the chip stay on your shoulder now. Carty, you see he was plenty satisfied

and so was the town, about how you stayed away from Piney and prevented a lynching."

Well, the bare-shaved upper lip was doing its share. Sturtevant didn't have to be afraid of its slight puffiness. Six of Carty's old cronies had taken Sturtevant for their one-time associate.

Assuming the air and the walk of a man still bearing a grudge against the town, Sturtevant strolled down the street. Occasionally he looked back at the group of old men before the barber shop, all buzzing together.

The news would be all over Piney in ten minutes now. Happily Sturtevant saw only a few who might have known Carty, and who might have been living in the town when Carty had had all that trouble. There were more youngish chaps; youths, and others in their twenties and thirties, all going about on business or at leisure.

At a watering trough a seedy old man got up from the stone rim of the trough and stared at Sturtevant. When the old man walked away, Sturtevant called to him. You had to play this game the other way around, too.

"Don't you remember me?" Sturtevant drawled out, with a soury slur.

"Why, you know now if you had a lighter skin and was a bit sprier——"

"You think panning for gold all of twenty years bleaches a man, or makes his bones younger?" Sturtevant shot back. "I'm the fellow you're thinking of."

"Carty! Carty it is!" The old man came forward and stared at Sturt. "Sure, and it is! Mighty glad." He had Sturtevant's hand in both of his own, wringing it with short, pumping shakes. "You're over your row with the sheriff, I guess. He'll be mighty glad. I was talkin' to Thuner only yesterday, and he said to me: 'Hal, if it wasn't that I knew Carty was wrong when he skipped out, I'd go up there in the hills, not to bring him back, but to shake hands with him.' Yes, Thuner'll be glad to see you. I think he'll wipe the slate, Carty." The old man came a little closer and spoke softly. "Carty, Thuner always was a bit scared of you."

Well, that scheme had worked. Sturt even got that fellow's name, and he also knew the sheriff's. It was sort of nice to know that the man you wanted least to see, was, after all, afraid of you. Thuner must be a white-livered fellow. To be afraid of Carty! Why even Sturtevant had gone to Carty's shack —— *He* hadn't been afraid of Carty.

Sturtevant answered the old man. "I'll think it over, Hal. I may stay in town only a day. If I have time, I'll hunt up Thuner." Sturtevant walked on down the street.

THE day was rather warm for fall. Perhaps it was because the town lay lower in the valley than the cabin up on top of Feather Cañon, but Sturtevant got thirsty. The dust of the town streets was in his throat.

Pausing before a soft-drink parlor, he heard voices. Men, and those who would some day arrive at man's age, were arguing within.

Looking back, Sturtevant saw that all who had recognized him as Carty were staring at him down the street. For a moment he envied the real pride he could feel were he really Carty at that moment. But, then, he had a hundred thousand in gold in the bank! Heartened by his success, he strode into the bar.

Inside the drink parlor there were about a dozen men. Most of them were congregated at one end of the bar, and the barkeeper was with them. The dice were gathered up as Sturtevant came in.

At a table in one corner, looking over the newspapers, sat a gray-haired man. He had a fat chest that sloped to a bounteous belt line. His face was

pretty red. His hat was brown and wide, and he wore leather leggings above his thick-soled shoes. He chewed tobacco with regular grindings of his baggy jaws. This man did not look up when Sturtevant came in, though all the others met him squarely.

Sturtevant noticed a little curiosity float over the faces of the group, and then saw it dissemble again. As the bartender came forward, Sturtevant spoke.

"Got any real brew?"

The bartender wiped the dry counter with a wet cloth and, keeping an eye on the elderly man reading the newspapers at the table, he answered Sturt.

"Sorry, but we're minding the law."

There was suppressed sniggering among the fellows grouped at the bar. The man from Feather Cañon was about to read the big pie-and-soda list hanging above the upturned, crystal pony glasses and beer steins, when a decisive but kind voice spoke up from the table in the corner.

"Give the man something. I'm sheriff, but I'll not deny a dusty tongue a thirst quencher."

The bartender laughed; the group cheered; and Sturtevant turned to look at the man sitting at the table.

"Light or dark?" the barkeeper asked.

"Two lights for mine," Sturt said, "and ask the boys what they'll take. Thuner always drank dark, if I remember," Sturt dared, and with a trickle of anxiety running down his spine he watched the sheriff look up, startled, from his corner.

Thuner got up now.

He stood for a moment and beheld the big, brown man in Carty's clothes. Then he walked slowly over to the bar next to him.

"You scared me that minute, stranger; I thought you were a liquor agent." The sheriff smiled.

Sturtevant felt something funny run through him. Here was the real test. If Thuner, the sheriff, Carty's enemy, was taken in—well, Sturtevant didn't care what the others thought.

"You never came up to the cañon, did you?" Sturtevant drawled.

"What'll you drink, Charley?" the barkeeper interrupted, addressing the sheriff.

That was all Sturtevant needed, that first name "Charley." Charley Thuner was now a well-known man to him, not one he had just met for the first time.

"I said, Charley," Sturt repeated, using the sheriff's first name now, "you never came up to the cañon after me."

Thuner squinted. He came closer and laid a hand on Sturtevant's shoulder.

This was the moment now. If the sheriff got it, Sturtevant and Carty's gold were safe.

"Come up to the cañon?" Thuner repeated, his face puzzled.

"Stop your rearin', Charley," Sturtevant gibed, drinking his stein empty.

Thuner had his foaming mug in his hand. "Carty! Am I nutty, or in the hereafter?" the sheriff exclaimed, as he stared at the man from Feather Cañon.

"Nope, Charley, you're in a barroom, allowing the owner to serve real stuff when it's against the law. That ain't much like you used to drive the law home when you ran me out of Piney."

The second stein of light tasted better to Sturtevant, now that Thuner had recognized Carty.

Now Thuner changed to another man. He grabbed hold of Sturt's arm and literally dragged him down to the boys at the end of the bar. "Meet my old enemy, Fred Carty. We've just drunk off an old grudge—one twenty years old—and he broke his word first. He said he'd never come back down here to Piney unless I came after him. Well, I ain't ever been up the cañon for him, but he's here, you see."

Sturt had to show some teeth at this

tone of victory. "Ain't you satisfied with me here now? Are you still harping about the matter of who would give in first?" the man from Feather Cañon growled.

"I'm glad you're back, Carty. The town has changed some these twenty years. There aren't a dozen people left that knows our trouble."

"Maybe not, Charley, but those I've met and who have recognized me will scatter the news about Old Carty being in town fast enough."

"Going back, Carty? Up to Feather Cañon?"

Sturtevant threw out his chest. Now was the time to talk a little about success. "Nope, the bank has my hundred thousand in gold. I'm going to San Francisco, Monday. Then I'm bound for over the blue to them islands down near Australia, where it's sunshiny all the year. No winds, no blizzards, no snow or water to eat into your marrow. Nothing but spending the gold I got."

Thuner nodded. He stroked his heavy, square chin, and then smiled. He came right up in front of Sturt now. "Shake! You even went to the bank."

While shaking Sturtevant's hand, Thuner waved to the others. "Boys, here's a man. Fred Carty was my friend a long time ago. We had trouble and he went away. Some of you have heard the story. He's on his way to Australia and he stopped by to square himself. Step up, boys, and have a round on me for Carty."

The bunch surrounded Sturt. They asked him questions about the old town of Piney, about getting gold out of the river, about Australia.

"Another round of the light," the gang ordered.

MID the clacking of steins and greetings to the man who had come back, Thuner went to the door. "I can allow a thirsty stranger to take a drink," he said, "but I can't stand by and see a whole keg go down without disgracing my office. I'm going uptown, boys."

Then Thuner singled Sturt out of the bunch. "Carty," the sheriff said, "after you get through here, come over to the house. You can bunk with me till you leave Piney."

Sturtevant hardly knew if he should accept the invitation.

"It's the same old house on Plum Street," Thuner said, and the swinging doors closed on the sheriff.

Sturtevant gathered his wits in a minute. "Where's the hotel here in Piney?" he asked the boys.

"You'll find the Chaney House about as nice as any, Mr. Carty," the bartender suggested, after several lodging places had been recommended and again refuted by the others.

Sturtevant registered at the Chaney House as Fred Carty. After putting up Carty's horse in the stable, he sat out on the roofed pavement in front of the hotel.

Everything had gone nicely.

Every one he met had taken him for Carty. The sheriff had even asked him to bunk at his house. Sturt didn't know about that, though. If he was around old Thuner too much, something might slip. A man couldn't keep up a character like that without making some mistake. It would be better not to get on too good terms with this Thuner. They had been enemies so long, Carty and the sheriff, it would be more natural not to get too friendly.

Sturtevant reflected on the gold in the bank. He had been a fool to put it there. If he had it with him, he could start for Las Vegas in the morning. He'd escape any chance of recognition. But now he'd have to wait until Monday. The bank had closed at six, and Piney bankers observed the Sunday rule.

Well, he wouldn't have to accept Thuner's hospitality, and he'd stick in his room at the Chaney House most of

the time. Folks were too curious, anyway.

Sturtevant was leaving the hotel about Sunday noon, for a walk. As he passed the desk in the hall, the clerk stopped him.

"Mr. Carty, you made out pretty good up at the river, didn't you?"

News did spread in Piney.

"Yes, tolerably," Sturt drawled.

"Could a fellow get some gold up there yet?" the clerk asked hungrily.

Sturtevant didn't know whether to laugh or swear. "Sure you can!" he said, with a bravado flourish of his arm. "There's lots of it there, if you can find it."

Let them find out what panning for gold means, if they want it, Sturt thought. Let them eat salt pork. Let them go through half a dozen winters up on the plateau for a measly handful of gold, as Sturtevant had done. Of course Carty had found a pot. Carty had spent twenty years there until he had——

The hotel clerk got enthusiastic. "I've been thinking of trying it. What does the stuff look like that you get out of the river?"

This fellow hadn't even seen the raw stuff!

"Ain't you never seen any pan dirt?"

"No."

"And you want to try and get some?"

"Just a idea. What does it look like?"

Sturtevant drew out of his coat pocket the rabbit-skin sack full of his two-thousand-dollar treasure. This was the stuff it took him four years to get.

He poured its gritty, gravelly contents out on the hotel clerk's desk.

"There's the kind of stuff that's up in Feather Cañon. I put a hundred thousand dollars' worth of that in the Piney National yesterday afternoon. That's how gold from Feather Cañon looks."

They were examining the pan gold when the sheriff came in through the door of the Chaney House.

"Carty, I want you to have Sunday dinner with me, up at my house. We'll step by my office a few minutes, then go home," Thuner said.

Sturtevant got the gold back into the little fur bag and drew the string tight.

When they got outside, Sturtevant held the sack up. "I was just coming down to your office, Thuner," he said, handing Thuner the pouch. "I've got a little souvenir here for you."

Thuner took the soft little bit of rabbit skin.

"It's about two thousand dollars' worth of stuff from Feather Cañon, Charley, and it's yours. Maybe if you hadn't kept me up there, I'd never hit my fortune. You take it."

And into the sheriff's pocket went Sturtevant's little handful of yield, the result of four years of hard scraping and living.

THE sheriff and Sturtevant walked down the street to a little frame building. There was a sign on the door, something about a notary public, and a sheriff, and other jobs.

"We'll just drop in here at my office a moment, Carty," Thuner said, unlocking the door. "I want to get rid of something that's been on my desk a long time."

Inside the sheriff's office there was an old walnut desk, littered with papers. A few cartridge belts lay on chairs and a table was full of odd things. Pictures of outlaws and hostages were plastered everywhere over the walls.

"Sit down, Carty," Thuner said, opening the walnut desk and pushing aside a pistol as he fingered through a stack of papers.

Then Thuner drew a sheet from under a pile of others and held it up in front of Sturtevant.

"I'm not throwing this out because

you gave me that little sack of gold," said the sheriff.

Sturtevant looked at the paper. It was a notice about an escaped bank robber, and the picture on it resembled Sturtevant a lot. It was the photograph of a younger man, about twenty years younger.

Sturtevant plainly recognized Carty.

"That's what we posted up here in Piney twenty years ago, Carty," the sheriff said, "but I guess I can tear it up now."

So that's what all the trouble had been! Carty had helped to rob the bank. That's why he never came into Piney. Well, Thuner was tearing up the notice and things were about squared.

"You know, Carty, I always had a little faith in you. After so long a time went by, I lost it again. But you coming down here and giving the gold to the bank squares up everything." Thuner cast the torn pieces of paper on the floor.

"I'm glad you stayed away, especially those first few years. I'd 'a' had a lynching on my hands."

"Giving the gold back?" Sturtevant uttered, rising from his chair.

"Yes," Thuner said. "Making this restitution. 'Old' Crowley, the bank president, told me yesterday afternoon how queerly you went about leaving the gold there at his bank. Nice and quiet it was. They'll make good use of that hundred thousand. The stockholders paid it out, you know, years ago after the robbery."

Sturtevant sank back into his chair again and clutched the wooden arms.

Thuner took the little sack of gold from his pocket again. "Carty, I guess I'd better not take this. Everything has turned out so nicely all by itself, and this might smack of bribery."

The man from Feather Cañon had to struggle to keep from snatching it from Thuner.

And now a twinkle was in the sheriff's eye. "You know, Carty, when I first met you yesterday, I wasn't sure you were Carty or not. But since then, after I heard about how you put the gold in the bank for us, I didn't worry no more. I figured if you were Carty, you acted mighty white. If you weren't Carty—well, then it was only a bank robber killed for his swag."

Sturtevant felt cold around the throat.

"But the bank's satisfied, and so am I, Carty." Thuner slapped his broad thigh.

WHILE Sturtevant put the rabbit-skin sack full of his own gold into his breeches, Thuner went on.

"I'll bet," the sheriff pondered, a far-away look in the little gray eyes, "I'll bet the rest of the bunch that was with you that afternoon of the holdup wouldn't have paid back a cent."

Sturtevant managed to keep his heart down out of his mouth.

"You worked hard to make that restitution, Carty. I know what gold panning is."

Worked hard? Why, he'd even killed a man, Sturtevant had!

Sturtevant wanted to jump up and grab Thuner's throat. But he had to be Carty. Carty, who had come back and paid what he had helped to steal twenty years ago. Sturtevant had to lay low now, or he'd be taken in for something worse than bank robbery. And Thuner's pistol was on the desk, too.

"You know," Thuner mused, "being as you never got any of the original swag, this is certainly decent of you. It clears you, Carty."

"Yes," Sturtevant croaked, "I wouldn't have had to do it."

"You never heard a word from any of the other boys in the gang, did you, Carty?"

"No."

Sturtevant hardly saw the people he

and Thuner passed as they walked through the streets of Piney on their way to the sheriff's house. Sturtevant could barely swallow the excellent Sunday dinner that was served him there.

On Monday morning a man still wearing Fred Carty's clothes and mounted on Carty's horse drove away from the Piney National Bank.

The sling pack of gold with a hundred thousand dollars' worth of stuff was not behind him on the saddle.

The man on the horse assumed a calm attitude while he waved to Old Crowley, the bank president, and to Thuner, the sheriff, both standing on the pavement.

But when the horse got out of Piney and Sturtevant faced the lonely sands that lead him on to Las Vegas, he kicked the horse brutally. He yanked the pony's mane and swore.

After he had inflicted cruel punishment on the beast, heading it forward in a mad gallop, he controlled his senses enough for a moment to hear his own wild words.

"Gold, damn gold!" he let out, "I only got the two thousand dollars I scraped out! And——" He sat up in the saddle. The sands stretched far ahead of him. "Get out of my way, Carty, get out of the way!" Sturtevant yelled. "I've killed you. Don't you stop me! You can't keep me from going to San Francisco. I can spend my own gold!"

Sturtevant lashed the air and the horse with the bridle.

He shook his fist back of him at Feather Cañon, and then beat the horse again.

He rode away from the cañon as if it were a pit for his soul.

PIRATE'S PLUCK

AS capable as a Robinson Crusoe in adapting himself to circumstances was Bartholomew Portugues, one of the earliest of the sixteenth-century pirates who sucked gold from the stream of plate that monthly was shipped in great galleons from the Spanish possessions in America to the royal city of Madrid. After one of his adventures had turned out badly and he was a restless prisoner in the cabin of a galleon, Bartholomew learned that a gibbet was being prepared for him ashore. This was too much for the proud buccaneer. Not knowing how to swim a stroke he jumped overboard and ingeniously kept himself afloat with two earthern wine jars which buoyed him up like corks. He reached the beach and made his way along the coast without difficulty until he came to a river which was too deep to wade across. Bartholomew was troubled but not daunted by his lack of ability to swim. He hunted the beach and found a plank with large nails in it, a piece of driftwood which may likely have been the result of one of Bartholomew's piratical adventures. Portugues extracted the nails, whetted them until they were as sharp as Toledo steel and then proceeded to cut a number of branches and wattles with which he made a raft and floated himself across the river to the safety of a pirate camp which lay beyond.

A Tartar Drama

By Captain A. P. Corcoran

Author of "One Good Turn, Et Cetera."

With red, frantic eyes, flaring nostrils and flying hoofs, the wild stallions thundered forth from a concealed compound. And Dale Howland, American, who had been tricked into saying that he had tamed bronchos, prepared to show these men of the East the way of the West with horses.

AS the young Tartar, continually flicking his long, leathern-plaited whip, lashed their horses into a furious gallop, Dale Howland became more than ever convinced that he had accepted not an invitation, but a challenge.

They had driven quietly enough through the rutted streets of Kazan, over the graceful bridge that spans the Kama, past the almost silent factories that once furnished ammunition for the czars. Now they were in the open country.

Like a canoe towed by a motor boat in a high sea, the vehicle rocked, ducked and dived. But outwardly at least Dale Howland remained as impassive as his companion.

Alim, nephew of Nurin, said nothing, apparently saw nothing. His tilted Oriental eyes were fixed on the road before them. His head, surmounted by its colored, embroidered skullcap, never once turned in his guest's direction. He was impersonal as the East, to which he belonged. Nationally Russian, nominally Russian, he was yet at heart a Tartar, alien to the ways of the West.

"Wonder if he figures to break my neck by flinging me out of this converted toboggan?" Dale asked himself. "Not a chance, buddy. I've done some broncho-busting in my time."

But, though unafraid, he was distinctly uncomfortable.

The invitation which he was now on his way to accept had struck him as not only courteous, but complimentary. Nurin, owner of the finest stud in the

Tartar Republic, had requested the honor of the American gentleman's presence at dinner, so that he might later view a round-up of some handsome, wild horses which had been captured on the steppes.

Dale had been frankly delighted with the bid. A foreigner who has got a concession to work an old industry, once owned by natives and then confiscated by the government, is not always persona grata in the districts of Russia nowadays. During the months he had already spent in Kazan, he had done his best to conciliate local feeling. He had bought up at a ridiculously high price the rusty machinery for salvaging sunken oak from the Volga. He had employed as many of the former hands as possible, and been illegally generous in the matter of remuneration. The invitation, then, from the famous and aloof Nurin had seemed to him an acknowledgment that his tactics had been approved.

THE sight of Alim as escort to the stud had come with the unpleasant shock of an unexpected ice-cold shower. He had not known that Alim was Nurin's nephew. This gave an entirely different color to that coveted invitation.

They had met once before, on the fateful night when Alim had visited his house in an official capacity as member of the "Gaypayu" or extraordinary police. The memory of that night had left its mark on Dale Howland's young, eager face.

He had been in his bathroom, dressing for a last evening's frivolity with Anna Tatischeva, that vivid daughter of a dying noble house. The sound of the shot had found his fingers fumbling with his tie. They had continued to fumble, while his eyes searched their reflection in the mirror, trying to tell him that his instinct was not right. Then he had rushed out to find her crumpled sidewise on his living-room couch, a tiny hole in her right temple.

"Anna! Anna!"

She was beyond reach of his call.

Nicholas Nalbandoff, his manager, a Russian-American, had come running and counseled the sanest course under the circumstances.

"Call in the government officials and tell the truth. They won't want to broadcast a scandal."

Dale had done so. He remembered his own attempt to convey the facts, Western-fashion, without slurring the dead girl.

"I—— She—— You see—— Well, I can't exactly explain. She was leaving Kazan to-morrow."

Alim had understood. Why shouldn't he, when he had loved the Tatischeva himself, as Dale Howland learned later? He had given no sign at the time of his emotion at this sight of her, if one excepted the strange, cinder-like color that had overspread his sallow skin.

"She killed herself with your revolver?"

"Yes."

It was Nalbandoff who proffered her letter as proof. He had found it in its spidery, Tartarlike script on the living-room table. She had written:

> Sorry to do it this way. My only chance. No ammunition at home and no privacy. Thanks for a good time. You remember what I once said about gnats? They're happy only when humming in the sun. I'm a gnat, and there's no sun in Samara—without you. Father says I must go to-morrow to take up that position. I cannot face it. Good-by.

Alim, the up-to-date, who could read and speak English, read this without even a quiver of the eyelids, while Dale Howland, head in hands, sat sunken in his chair. His first impulse had been to run out into the sane, clean night and try to see wherein lay the meaning of this tragedy. But something in the veiled Tartar eyes had restrained him—

a subdued sneer at these Western hysterics. Orientals face their crises with philosophy.

"There is no need to make this public, Mr. Howland," Alim had said presently. "I have a plan, and I shall get in touch with her father for his approval."

Dale still marveled at the dispatch and discretion with which the Tartar had acted. It was to be announced, he explained, that Anna Tatischeva had died of heart failure in her own home, and they were to take her there, apparently still alive, by motor. Dale had never since been able to enter his own car. It was haunted by the limp form which he and Alim had walked out between them into the street.

Anna, the vivid! Anna, the gnat! Anna, who had only wanted to hum in the sun!

She had leaned—was it consciously? —on Dale, as they had half carried, half dragged her to the automobile. The slim body, soft in its evening draperies, had reminded Dale pitifully of a little dead brown rabbit he had once held in his arms as a boy.

What a nightmare that night had been, and what nightmares it had given him since!

"Wish to Heaven the fellow would give me a chance to talk about it, to explain what pals she and I had been!" Dale said now to himself.

But how hope to explain to an Oriental the relationship that can exist between a healthy-minded American boy and a young girl eager only for amusement?

This was bleak country, plentifully strewn with boulders, broken occasionally by a clump of birches beside a green-covered pool. The roads might have been those of war-scarred Flanders, and the horses those of an army wagon, maddened by shell bursts on every side. Suddenly the violent motion of the carriage eased down, and Alim pointed with his plaited whip to the right.

There Dale could see a cluster of cloth-covered huts, surrounding a log dwelling. They had reached the estate of Nurin. Involuntarily the American drew a breath of relief. Probably Nalbandoff had been wrong after all, and his own suspicions of Alim's intentions on the way out had been inspired by the other's gloomy warning.

"Look out for Alim after to-night," Nalbandoff had said, on their return from the Tatischeva's home. "He owes you a double grudge now—on his own behalf and hers, and he won't possess an easy soul until he gets even."

"But I've done nothing to him consciously."

Nalbandoff had laughed. "Won't you ever understand the East? Until you came, he had a hope of marrying the Tatischeva, even of making her love him. He is attractive, rich, and could have given her better than any one here what she desired. Before the revolution—it would have been different. Then he would never have dared aspire to a nobleman's daughter, he a mere cattleowner. Since—— Well, you look out. He'll say nothing, but he'll act swiftly."

WELL, Alim had a chance to kill him to-day, had he so desired. No one would have known that it had not been an accident. Yet here they were, and there was old Nurin bowing in the doorway of his home, uttering benedictions in the name of the Prophet, to whose religion the Tartars cling. He was a dignified figure in his long robe of silver-gray with its edging of highly colored plaid silk. His cap of intricate design shone in the sun which struck gleams from its threads of scarlet and gold. Color a plenty in the interior, too, with its elaboration of embroidered towels, many of them trophies won in Tartar sports.

They sat down to lunch, Dale Howland on Nurin's right. The women of the household waited on them, and Dale noticed that Alim himself chose his own seat across the table from his erstwhile traveling companion, just a couple of places down.

It was a Russian rather than a Tartar meal. Borsch, covered with smetana—cabbage soup and sour cream—preceded and followed by vodka served in tiny vessels of embossed gold—such was the first course.

"Your health!" Alim, suddenly cordial, called a greeting across the board.

Dale responded cheerily, and again and again he was called. He had no love for such strong spirits, but it would be an insult to refuse. Came sulta made of mutton, followed by a kind of stew, and between each course Alim's shout:

"Your health!"

And now he noticed that Alim was eying him with a kind of triumphant smile, and Dale felt a chill. What was the fellow up to? Did he hope to make him intoxicated before the ride home and then turn some trick on him?

Suddenly Alim, loudly addressing his uncle, who had been discussing the round-ups with Dale, shouted:

"The American himself, they say, is quite a horseman. Is it not so?" He swung his dark, ironical glance to the visitor.

"Well, I come from New Mexico and have done a bit of taming in my time."

"But not such horses as ours. Ours are admittedly the most difficult to conquer in the world." As he spoke, Alim turned to make some remark in Tartar to his neighbors, at which they laughed, their glances on Dale.

Nettled, the American retorted sharply: "Guess nothing could beat our bronchos for testing a rider's seat."

"No? Ah! perhaps not, but then the method would be so different here." The dark face was now openly sneering into Dale's, and the other men were eying him expectantly.

Would the American take up this obvious challenge?

"I guess a horse is a horse, wherever you find him, and a horseman a horseman."

He knew he had taken up the gauntlet by this remark. The fact was further borne in on him by old Nurin who, with veiled lids, said something sharply in Tartar to his nephew. Alim, shrugging his shoulders, deliberately replied in English:

"The American gentleman seemed anxious to give us an exhibition of his country's horsemanship."

"Delighted to, if you wish to see it," was the defiant reply.

And once more Alim raised his golden vodka cup in salutation.

THEY reached the dessert course, a confection of cheese and candied fruits. Nurin rose. They would have tea, he said, in the open. They drank glass after glass, and Dale felt his head clear, his temper cool and his judgment reassert itself. He knew he had let himself in for something dangerous, for he was unusually overfed and long out of practice. But he meant to see it through. He heard Nurin apologizing for Alim's attitude at dinner, explaining that his nephew was a great admirer of the American and his country; that it was he, in fact, who had suggested Mr. Howland's visit to the house.

"So here's where he figures to get me," thought Dale. "Nalbandoff was right."

Meantime some Tartar servants had been dispatched on horseback to turn loose the wild stallions. Alim accompanied them. Soon they came from some concealed compound, a torrent of black and cream, with red, wild eyes, flaring nostrils and flying hoofs. He heard a legend, the same that is told in an Irish saga, of how these powerful

beasts, once tamed, were inordinately faithful to their masters. The fabulous one, having lost a rider in battle, had fought the enemy, kicking fifty foemen to death and wounding others, before succumbing on his owner's body.

They were a magnificent sight certainly, as they trooped now over the plain, dashing in mad circles, with Alim and an assistant in pursuit. Presently, one was seen to slow down, to stumble, fall—and a loud cheer went up from the tea-drinking spectators. The stallion had been throttled by the arkan, or Tartar lasso.

At once Alim and his aid dismounted, slipped up to the brute, keeping the arkan taut, hobbled his fore fetlocks, and, removing the arkan, slipped on a bridle. The furious and frightened stallion struggled to his feet, tried to bolt, found he couldn't. He was led back in front of the hut.

"You call that taming them?" asked Dale incredulously.

"Ah! wait," said Nurin, the old sportsman, whose eyes were now agleam.

A saddle was brought. While a servant held the stallion's head, Alim deftly put it on. The beast neighed in indignation and struggled, but to no purpose. The rawhide bridle was sawing on its tender mouth. Alim tightened the girth slowly, and then, as the servant slit the hobble cords, Nurin's nephew shot into the saddle. Bent low with angled knees gripping the sides, he looked like an English jockey.

But what a mount!

There was silence for a second, the peace that precedes a thunderstorm. Then a wild yell rent the air, and there came the whiz of a whip. The stallion rose on its hind legs, dropped to earth, kicked madly, whirled. Balked, it fled across the plain, swift and dangerous as a cyclone. Having covered a mile, it halted abruptly. But the rider was still on its back, sitting as if clamped to the saddle, but with a rein hanging slack.

Another swish of the whip, and again the animal bounded over the earth, flying hoofs scarcely touching it. To Dale, Alim might have been a circus rider, sure of his mount and only eager to amuse his audience. Constantly the leathern thong flicked the horse's flanks, and shrill yells rent the air. Again the horse halted abruptly.

Then, tamed but with tossing mane, he allowed his rider to lead him back to the hut. As they approached, Alim could be seen taking out a long-tubed Russian cigarette, lighting it and emitting a puff of smoke. The horse's sides were dripping with perspiration, but the young Tartar was cool as a mountain breeze.

Casually he dismounted and addressed Dale.

"You find our method primitive perhaps, different from yours?"

"Quite the same, in essentials," returned the American.

"Should like to see it."

"Delighted to oblige."

Alim insisted on lassoing the stallion for the visitor. There followed the same routine of bridling and saddling it. Dale wished devoutly that the meal had been lighter, the alcohol less plentiful and the saddle more familiar. He had an incentive, however, in the veiled smile on his challenger's face. He'd show this Tartar that Americans could be horsemen, too.

He grabbed the rein and mane, put a foot in the stirrup. The stallion plunged. Before he could throw his right foot across the back, the saddle slipped sidewise.

"Deliberately left the surcingle loose," was Dale's thought, as the brute thundered across the plain. "Should have done the job myself."

His left foot was still secure in the stirrup, and he hung on with his hands, the right grasping the pommel hard and

the left holding a tuft of mane, his body thus being projected almost at right angles from the flank.

"Got to get a grip somehow," he muttered.

GRADUALLY he worked in his right foot between the loose girth and the horse's belly. By pushing it tight against the offside, he managed to brace himself. Now he was free to loose his left hand from the mane. With it, he grabbed the pommel instead. Then his right hand began to fumble at the clasp of the leather belt which encircled his waist.

At that moment the maddened stallion dashed by a heap of boulders. Dale put his hand out in time to save his face from being smashed. Open field again, and once more his fingers sought the belt. He managed to get it off.

Another rock! He nearly lost the belt in an endeavor to save himself from harm. Open field again! He thanked Heaven that the stallion kept up an even motion—one continuous mad gallop on flying hoofs.

Using teeth and his free fingers, Dale rethreaded the leather through the buckle.

"Now for it!" he said softly.

As the off foreleg doubled up under the stallion's chest, Dale swung his belt under the horse's belly, missed, tried again; as the motion recurred, he succeeded. The loop of the belt was over the off forehoof. At the next chance he slipped it farther up the cannon bone.

The perspiration was now pouring from him, dripping into his eyes, but for the first time he was conscious of pride—pride at the thought that Alim was watching him and probably wondering. Even if he failed in the final test, Dale had shown his power. But he wouldn't fail.

Taking a still firmer grip on the pommel and bracing his legs harder, he gave a violent heave on the off foreleg, as it went forward.

The stallion stumbled, fell to its knees, rolled over on the offside. Like a flash Dale loosened the surcingle, threw the saddle aside, and, as the horse, recovering from its shock, staggered to its feet, the American was on its bare back. Still holding the belt in place, Dale kicked his heels smartly on the horse's ribs and sawed on the mouth with the bit, drove the animal again into a gallop.

As it tore off, he tripped it with the belt. Once again he goaded it to a gallop, and once again threw it by a tug on the off fore cannon. Three or four times he repeated this maneuver. Finally the horse, worn by its own exertions and the constant thumping to the ground, ignored any effort to drive it to further violent motion. Tamed, it carried its rider back to the hut.

Wild Tartar yells greeted his return. Old Nurin, enthusiastic, rushed out to greet him with a kiss on each cheek. Drinks were ordered out, and there was a great fluttering among the women and high-pitched arguing among the men. Dale could not understand much of what was said, for, excited, these Tartars talked in their own language.

Only Alim remained impassive in the background, eying the foreigner and waiting for the hubbub to subside.

"Wonder what dirty crack he is going to make now?" Dale asked himself, as finally Nurin's nephew walked toward him.

ALIM bowed ceremoniously, then, deliberately holding Howland's gaze, said slowly:

"It was superb, superb! Your country then can turn out horsemen."

Dale shrugged off the compliment. It was obvious, and did not interest him. What did, though, was the expression of the other's face. For once

it had a look almost of the West—frank, questioning, almost challenging.

"He knows that I know he did it deliberately, about that surcingle," thought Dale, "and he's wondering what I'm going to do about it. Guess he thinks I'll lay for him, as he did for me. Not a chance, buddy! I'm out to do business here, not institute feuds."

But how to convey this in the Eastern fashion without any laying of cards on the table?

Alim was still eying him warily, and suddenly Dale had an inspiration of sorts.

"Shall I have the pleasure of being driven home by you to-night?" he demanded. "Or are you staying on here?"

"I shall have much pleasure in driving you home," said Alim, and again he bowed, turning away.

Amid wild Tartar yells and more cheek kissing on Nurin's side, they departed. Dale was still conscious of a question as regards Alim. Was he satisfied with the revenge he had tried to but failed to get, or was he still thirsting for more?

A moon rode the heavens amid scudding clouds. At times the pitted road lay clearly before them, and at times they forged ahead in utter blackness.

Like a canoe, the vehicle, drawn by its three galloping horses, rocked, ducked, dived. But now Dale knew that Alim was aware that he could not throw this guest into the road and so break his neck. The mad motion meant nothing.

They reached the Howland home without having said a word.

"Like to come in for a last shot in the arm—a last drink?" Dale was determined to be pleasant, if possible.

FOR a second Alim hesitated, then accepted. As they entered the living room, he looked slowly around, and something in his attitude arrested Dale, who was about to hurry away for the wine. Finally Alim spoke softly, dreamily.

"She was beautiful. Like a stallion. If she had been tamed!"

A sudden choking impeded the American's speech. The fellow had really loved Anna after his own fashion. But Anna tamed! Anna, the gnat! Anna, the vivid! Anna, who wanted only to sing in the sun!

"We don't try to tame women in our country," Dale said at last.

"Ah!" said Alim, but his eyes did not agree.

The fellow loved her, yes. But how would he have tamed her? The thought flashed through Dale Howland's mind that perhaps his friendship with the girl and the tragedy had not been without its purpose.

"Say, I'm forgetting the drinks!" he said briskly, and departed.

When he came back, Alim was still looking at the couch, from which they had lifted the limp form. Dale poured the wine.

"In our country," he said, "it is customary for friends to clink glasses before drinking."

He held his own out, and slowly Alim's arm reached forward to touch the glass with his.

"Here's how!" said Dale.

"Your good health!" said Alim.

They drank, looking one another in the eye. And in Alim's was a new expression, open, ingenuous as a child's, marveling at some discovery on this old earth.

SICKNESS costs the people of the United States $900,000,000 a year in lost wages alone, according to the National Health Council, and the total loss from preventable diseases and deaths is placed at $3,000,000,000 a year. In New York City alone 180,000 people are on the sick list each day.

BILLY THE KID

BEFORE his own death at the surprising age of twenty-one, he had killed twenty-one men, "not counting Indians." Yet with all this carnage, at his early demise many newspapers throughout the West demanded the jailing of his slayer, Sheriff Pat Garrett. And the reason for Billy's popularity with the American public was not remote. He was a quixotic adventurer, not a seeker after money as were Jesse James and his brother, but a true romantic. He began his career in murder to avenge an insult to his mother and ended it by losing his life rather than leave his sweetheart.

It was an accident that started Billy on the primrose trail but it was his skill with a gun and the realization that most men are cowards that kept the young bad man in his high seat of notoriety. In those first years the Southwest knew Billy as a gambler who got into frequent quarrels over the faro table and then shot, and shot to kill, making tracks across the Mexican border with a winded posse in full pursuit. Then Billy drifted east to the Pecos country of New Mexico, and engaged in the melodramatic exploits for which he is principally known.

In Pecos there was a war in progress between two cattle barons. Billy the Kid was befriended by one of them and hired as a gunman. With the opening of hostilities Billy's friend and employer was murdered and thereafter Billy promiscuously pumped lead into the rival cattlemen who had killed the only man, he claimed, who ever gave him a square deal. The war reached such gigantic proportions that General Lew Wallace, the author of "Ben-Hur" and then governor of the territory of New Mexico, offered a general amnesty to all participants of both sides if they should lay down their arms. All but Billy the Kid agreed. He knew that no amnesty would protect his notorious life either from government punishment or retribution at private hands. So he rode away with his gun on his hip and a sneer of defiance upon his young lips. For more than a year after that Billy enjoyed a mighty reputation as the bandit hero of the Southwest. He lived well by stealing, in the company of his small band of followers, whole herds of cattle or exacting tribute from ranchers for refraining from such action.

Then came Billy's Nemesis in the six feet four inches of Patrick F. Garrett. Garrett came all the way from Louisiana to New Mexico with the avowed purpose of getting Billy—Billy whom so far no posse had had sufficient courage to pursue in real earnest. Garrett was the kind who kills his man from cover. He hunted Billy with that plan ever in mind. Once he caught the bandit and took him back to town under guard. But Billy escaped from the hotel room which served as his prison, escaped by killing both his guards and then riding nonchalantly down the dusty street of the town. And when Garrett finally got Billy, it was from behind and due to one of those misadventures which have ended the careers of more than one man famous in the annals of history. Billy was visiting a sweetheart in Fort Sumner, New Mexico, when he should have been hotfooting it across the Rio Grande. And the irony of it was that Billy backed up into the darkened room where his host was attempting to mislead the sheriff and save his bandit friend's life. Garrett recognized Billy's voice in the gloom and his six-shooter belched red. That was the end of Billy the Kid.

A Chat With You

THE beginnings of things are always interesting and stimulating. The new and unspoiled future offers more to the imagination, if we consider it properly, than all the pageant of the past. And every moment that ticks past may be the beginning of a new era. Have things been going badly in the past? Can we look back and see that mistakes have been made? It is a bracing reflection to entertain that this very moment we may be starting all over again. Have the hands been running badly at bridge, or have we been playing abominably? Well, here is a new rubber and a fresh deal, and who knows whether or not a grand slam may be lying face down on the table before us? Has the golfer just wasted eight shots on a hole? Well, the next hole is an entirely new affair and may be a birdie. Every moment is the start of a new twenty-four hours, a new week, a new year, maybe a new turn of fortune. No need to wait till to-morrow, or next month, or New Year's Day. Now is always the time to start all over again.

* * * *

IF we could live our lives just exactly as we wished them, perhaps we would not need to read stories. But in the stories—if they are good ones—the things come out right, the fresh start is the opening of a new and auspicious drama. There is always a fascination in the unopened book or magazine, or the unsealed manuscript. Once in a while we come across in actual life the ideal start for a new tale of adventure such as has never yet been written. For instance:

We wanted to buy an army bugle to give to a boy scout and we were directed to go to a certain store on a certain street, both of which shall be nameless. The store has been there for a generation or so. We had often heard of it, but never visited it. We went as a matter of duty. We would have preferred to go for a swim. But sometimes when one tries to do a generous act, one runs into better entertainment than in the pursuit of self-indulgent fancies. This proved to be one of the times.

Here was a store with a front of at least fifty or sixty feet on one of the most expensive thoroughfares in the world. It ran back—a dim, shadowy interior, refreshingly cool—for at least a hundred feet and it occupied two or three floors of the building. The ground floor had a great, high ceiling. Of humankind it was apparently quite empty, but it was piled high, in great disorder, with some of the most curious fabrications of human hands.

Here, in fascinating confusion, were piled samples of almost every conceivable weapon of warfare. Malay creeses, Scotch claymores, the cutlasses of the old sailors, dagger pistols, Gatling guns, small cannon, hauberks, helmets, the lances of the Uhlans of past days, the sabers of Napoleon's horsemen, coats of mail from the Middle Ages, equipment salvaged from the late war, Sharpe's rifles, such as the old plainsmen used, antique dueling pistols, rifles of a late date, early types of the revolver, halberds, javelins and spears. In museums such as the Metropolitan, the armor of the various ages is ar-

ranged in orderly groups in glass cases. But here it was all tumbled together in heaps.

The store was empty. No customers. One wondered how they could pay the rent, for surely in all America there was not enough wall space in club grill rooms or bachelors' dens to accommodate a tenth of this dusty display. Presently from the back of the dim interior came a man who surely had been for some considerable period of his life a top sergeant in an old U. S. A. regiment. He had the manner, the carriage, the deep-graven lines in his face, the eyes that had gathered their wrinkles from squinting out under desert suns. He sold us the bugle—a brand-new one that appeared mysteriously. We had a twenty-dollar bill and there was some trouble getting the change.

Presently from far above appeared a rather tremulous old lady who might have been a New England spinster. She took the bill upstairs with her again and kept us waiting for the change. In the meantime the top sergeant was talking with a dignified, white-haired gentleman, a customer who had also been concealed in the rear of the store. The sergeant had opened somewhere a crate of military rifles of the latest type. We managed to get hold of one, and shoot the bolt. It was brand-new, the heavy grease in which it was packed still thick on it. This was no old curio.

WE tried to catch something of the conversation. The kindly looking old gentleman was quite evidently buying several hundred of these weapons, meant for only one purpose, expensively made for that purpose—to kill men in battle. The bargain was concluded. Then the old gentleman said:

"Have you any machine guns?"

"Yes," said the top sergeant," five or six."

At this interesting moment, the old lady returned with our change and as our company was certainly not desired, we had to withdraw slowly from this cool and romantic interior to the sunny and everyday street.

* * * *

NEW machine guns and the latest military rifles! Was the benevolent old gentleman a filibuster starting a revolution in South America? Was he buying stuff for the Riffs in Africa or for some bellicose European power? Anyhow, here is the start of a story. Here perhaps is why the store is able to maintain its expensive vocation and its big heap of antique junk without any visible customers save one. Finish the story to suit yourself. We hope that some POPULAR writer will finish it for all of us. Here is the start of a good story, set forth, free of charge, for any writer who can finish it. We hope to buy the whole story some day. It is any one's chance to sell it to us.

Slightly higher in Foreign Countries

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AT ALL DRUGGISTS