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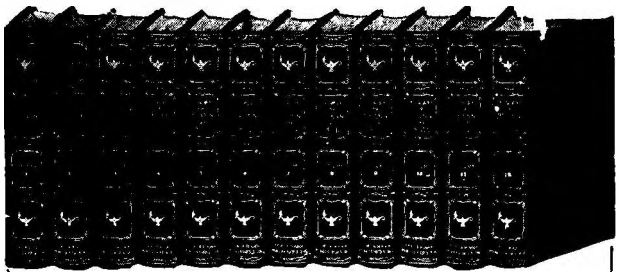

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TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

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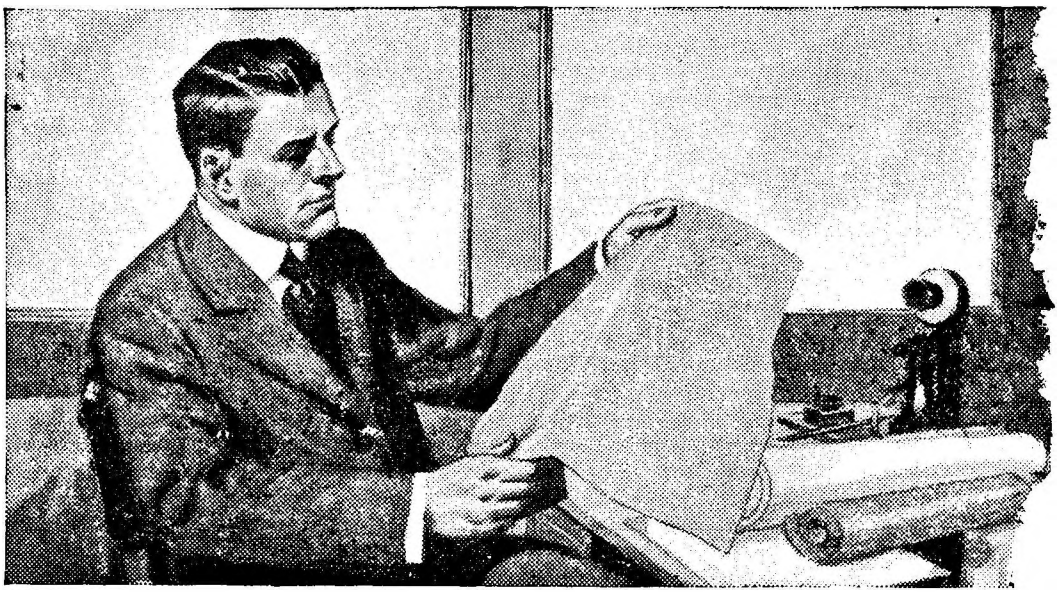

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXIII. MARCH 20, 1922. No. 5.

The Lost Mine of Morgan le Fay

By William Winter

Author of "The Count of Ten," and other stories

In spite of his name General de Launay, graduate of France's Foreign Legion, had originally been a cowboy, but for twenty years war had been his life work. By the end of Armageddon, though, war had become too systematized for this adventurous soul. "I'm through—through at forty," he said, and despite his sudden riches saw nothing left for him but a return to Twin Forks of the Far West—and dissipation. And then into that Parisian cafe came Solange d'Albret—Morgan le Fay of the wonder eyes—who had a lost mine to seek in distant, strange America—and a long-past murder to avenge. From that moment, even if he didn't know it, life began anew for De Launay.

(*A Complete Novel*)

PROLOGUE.

THE sun was westering over Ike Brandon's ranch at Twin Forks.

It was the first year of a new century when the old order was giving place to the new. Yet there was little to show the change that had already begun to take place in the old West. The desert still stretched away drearily to the south where it ended against the faint, dim line of the Esmeralda Mountains. To the north it stretched again, unpopulated and unmarked until it merged into prairie grass and again into mountains. To west and east it stretched brown and dusty. To the south was the State of Nevada and to the north the State of Idaho.

But it was all alike; bare, brown rolling plain with naught of greenness except at the ranch where the creek watered the fields and where, stretching back to the north, a thread of bushy willows and cottonwoods lined it from its source in the mountains.

Ike Brandon was himself a sign of change and of new conditions though he did not know it. A sheepman, grazing large herds of woolly pests in a country which until recently had been the habitat of cattlemen exclusively, he was a symbol of conquest. He remembered the petty warfare that had marked the coming of his kind, a warfare that he had survived and which had ended in a sort of sullen tolerance of his presence. A few years ago he had gone armed with rifle and pistol and his herders had been weaponed against attack. Now he strode his acres unafraid and unthreatened and his employees carried rifle or six-shooter only for protection against prowling coyotes or "loafer" wolves. The sheep had come to stay.

The worst that he and his had to expect was a certain coldness toward himself on the part of the cattle aristocracy and a measure of contempt and dislike toward his "Basco" herders on the part of the roughriding and gentle-speaking cow hands.

These things troubled him little. He had no near neighbors. To the north across the Idaho border there was none nearer than Sulphur Falls where the Serpentine, rushing tumultuously from the mountains, twisted in its cañon bed and squirmed away to westward and northward after making a gigantic

loop that took it almost to the line. To the south a ranch at Willow Springs where a stubborn cattleman hung on in spite of growing barrenness due to the hated sheep was forty miles away. To east and west was no one within calling distance.

At Sulphur Falls were two or three "nesters," irrigating land from the river, a store or two and a road house run by an unsavory holdover of the old days named "Snake" Murphy. For a hundred and twenty-five miles to southward was unbroken land. The cattle were mostly gone, though in days to come they were to return again in some measure. Even the Esmeralda Mountains were no longer roamed by populous herds. They were bare and forbidding except where the timber was heavy, for the sheep of Brandon and others, rushing in behind the melting snow in the spring, had cropped the tender young grass before it had a chance to grow strong.

Brandon's ranch was an idyllic spot, however. His wife and, after her, her daughter, both now dead, had given it the touch of feminine hands. Vines and creepers half hid the dingy house behind a festoon of green and blossoms. Around it the lush fields of clover were brilliant and cool in the expanse of brown sultriness. And here Ike, now growing old, lived in content with his idolized granddaughter Marion who was about six years old.

Brandon, at peace with the world, awaited the return from the summer range of "French Pete," his herder, who was to bring in one of the largest flocks for an experiment in winter feeding at and in the vicinity of the ranch. The other flocks and herders would, as usual, feed down from the mountains out into the desert where they would winter.

Little Marion hung on the swinging gate which opened onto the apology for a wagon road. She liked quaint French Pete and looked forward to his return with eagerness. Like her grandfather he always spoiled her, slavishly submitting to her every whim because she reminded him of his own *p'tite bébé,* in his far-away Pyrenean home. Marion was used to being spoiled. She was as beautiful as a flower and already a veritable tyrant over men.

But now she saw no sign of French Pete and being too young for concentration she let her glance rove to other points of the compass. So she was first to become aware that a rider came from the north, the direction of Sulphur Falls, and she called her grandfather to come and see.

The horseman loped easily into sight through the brown dust that rose about him. His horse was slim and clean-limbed and ran steadily but Brandon noted that it was showing signs of a long journey made too fast.

And then he frowned as he recognized the rider. It was a young man, or rather boy, about nineteen or twenty years old, rather dandified after the cow-puncher fashion, sporting goatskin chaps and silver-mounted bridle and spurs, silk neckerchief and flat-brimmed hat of the style now made common by the Boy Scouts. His shirt was flannel and his heavy roping saddle studded with silver *conchas.* He was belted with heavy cartridges and a holster strapped down to his leg showed the butt of a six-shooter polished by constant handling.

"It's that damned 'Louisiana!'" said Brandon with disgust.

The rider trotted through the gate which he swung open, and he dropped to the ground before the little veranda. Marion had run back behind the vines whence she peered at him half curiously and half afraid. The young fellow, teetering on his high heels, reached for her and smiling from pleasant eyes swung her into the air and lifted her high, bringing her down to his face and kissing her.

"Howdy, little Lily Bud!" he said, in a voice which was a soft blend of accents, the slurred Southern, the drawled Southwestern, and something subtly foreign.

He was a handsome, slender, dashing figure, and Marion's gleeful echo to his laughter claimed him as her own. Even Ike Brandon relaxed and grinned. If the little lady of his heart adopted the stranger Ike would put aside his prejudice. True, the man was that vanishing rarity, a reputed gunman, uncannily skilled with six-shooter and frowned on by a Western sentiment, new grown, for law and order, which had determined to have peace if it had to wage war to accomplish it.

After all, reflected Ike, the boy, though noted for skill and a certain arrogance which accompanied it, was not yet a killer. The younger element among the cowmen, reckless enough though it was, boasted no such skill as had been common with its fathers. They carried weapons but they recognized

their limitations and there were few of them who would care to test the skill that this young man was supposed to possess.

"I reckon you could eat," Ike remarked and Louisiana agreed.

"I reckon I can," he said. "And my old hoss can wrastle a bag of oats too. He's got a ride in front of him and he'd appreciate a chance to rest and limber up."

"You'll stay the night?"

"No, thanks, seh! An hour or two's all I can spare. Got business somewhere else."

Brandon did not urge nor show curiosity. That was not etiquette. But little Marion, taken with the new acquaintance, broke into a wail.

"I want you should stay while I show you my dolly that Pete made me!" she cried, imperiously. Louisiana laughed and ruffled her curls.

"You show me while I eat," he said. Then he followed Ike into the cabin, debonair and apparently unconcerned. The little girl came too, and as the Mexican servant set the table the stranger talked and laughed with her, telling her stories which he made up as he went along, fascinating her with a ready charm that won not only her but Ike himself.

He had seen that his horse was fed. After he had eaten he sat unconcerned on the veranda and played with the little girl. But at last he rose to go and she voiced her sorrow by wails and commands to stay, which he sorrowfully defied.

"I've got to ramble, little Lily Bud," he told her as he led his resaddled and refreshed horse from the stable. "But don't you fret. I'll come roamin' back hereaways some o' these days when you've done married you a prince."

"Don't want to marry a prince!" screamed Marion. "Don't want to marry no one but you-ou! You got to stay!"

"When I come back I sure will stay a whole lot, sweetheart. See here, now, you-all don't cry no more and when I come back I'll sure come a-ridin' like this Lochinvar sport and marry you-all a whole lot. That's whatever!"

"When will you come?" demanded Marion.

"Oh, right soon, honey! And you'll sure have a tame and dotin' husband, I can tell you. But now, good-by!"

"You'll come back?"

"You're shoutin', I will! With a preacher and a license and all the trimmin's. Kiss me good-by, like a nice sweetheart, and just dream once in a while of Louisiana, won't you?"

"I'll say your name in my prayers," she assured him, striving to keep back the tears.

And then he was gone, riding at a mile-eating pace toward the south and the Esmeralda Mountains.

Two hours later a tired group of men and horses loped in and wanted to know where he had gone. They were on his trail, for it seemed he had shot Snake Murphy in his own road house in a quarrel over some drab of the place who was known as Lizzie Lewis.

Ike was cautious. It was not a regularly deputized posse and the members were rather tough friends of Murphy. Between the two he preferred Louisiana. He remembered how unconcernedly that young man had waited until he and his horse were fed and rested though he must have known that Death was on his trail. And how he had laughed and petted Marion. There was good in the boy he decided, though, now he had started on his career as a killer, his end would probably be tragic. But Ike had no desire to hasten it.

Nor, as a matter of fact, had the posse. Their courage had cooled during the long ride from Sulphur Falls as the whisky had evaporated from their systems. They heard that Louisiana had passed some time ago and decided that he had too long a start. Besides, it seemed on inquiry that Snake had not been killed. He had had the gun shot out of his hand and the hand shattered. And the quarrel, it developed, had not been the boy's fault. He had repulsed the woman and she, angered, had accused him to Snake. That worthy had taken her quarrel on himself with disastrous results. Brandon, a grim old fighter himself, decided that Murphy had received no more than his just deserts.

The men rested there the night and it is to be noted that Marion evinced no affection for any of them.

Two days later the affair was driven from Brandon's mind. They brought word to him from the south that French Pete had been picked up on the road, dying from a rifle bullet shot by some unknown party and they were bringing him in in the chuck wagon that he had been driving toward the ranch.

Brandon reached the herder before he

died. French Pete, in broken English, was able to tell him that he had been shot from ambush by one whom he never saw. He also gave a message for his daughter in the south of France on the Spanish border. Lastly, he showed Brandon a sack of ore in a burlap bag which he declared he had found on a rock where he had rested while drifting with his flock. He had found a mine of fabulous wealth and he was insistent that Brandon should take it, give half to his daughter and keep the rest for himself. Then he died without being able to clearly explain where he had found the mine.

Brandon sorrowed over the faithful and gentle man and buried him in the garden at the ranch. The ore was assayed, found to be extremely rich in free gold, and a stampede was started to locate the mine. But no one ever found it, though they found Pete's flock, abandoned and deserted by all except Pete's dog who had kept them together on the desert and warded them from coyotes.

As to who killed French Pete there were many conjectures but none of them likely except one. That was that Louisiana, a born killer who had had his taste of blood, had in sheer wantonness, as killers were wont to do, shot down the harmless Frenchman for the sheer love of murder. In the absence of other explanation this view came to be widely held and found reflection in the verdict of a grand jury summoned at Maryville, the county seat south of the Esmeraldas, where in the course of time Louis Delaney, alias Louisiana, was indicted for homicide.

But the dashing Louisiana was seen no more in the land. There were rumors that he had gone north to the border where no doubt the "Mounted" would account for him in the course of time.

Then the years rolled on and Change came to the West.

CHAPTER I.

The General of Division de Launay, late of the French army operating in the Balkans and before that of considerable distinction on the western front, leaned forward in his chair as he sat in the Franco-American banking house of Doolittle, Rambaud et Cie. in Paris. His booted and spurred heels were hooked over the rung of the chair and his elbows, propped on his knees, supported his drooping back. His clean-cut, youthful features were morose and heavy with depression and listlessness and his eyes were somewhat red and glassy. Under his ruddy tan his skin was no longer fresh but dull and sallow.

Opposite him the precise and dapper Mr. Doolittle, expatriated American, waved a carefully manicured hand in acquired, Gallic gestures as he expatiated on the circumstances which had summoned the soldier to his office.

His client's steel-blue uniform which should have been immaculate and dashing, as became a famous cavalry leader, showed signs of wear without the ameliorating attention of a valet. The gold-banded kepi was tarnished and it sat on the warrior's hair at an angle more becoming to a recruit of the class of '19 than to the man who had burst his way through the Bulgarian army in that wild ride to Nish which marked the beginning of the end of Armageddon.

The banker, though he knew something of the man's history, found himself wondering at his comparative youthfulness. Most generals, even after nearly five years of warfare, were elderly men.

Yet the man had served nearly twenty years and had risen from that unbelievable depth, a private in the Foreign Legion, to the rank of general of division. That meant that he had served five years in hell and, in spite of that, had survived to be *sous-lieutenant, lieutenant, capitaine* and *commandant* during the grueling experience of nine more years of study and fighting in Africa, Madagascar and Cochin-China.

A man who has won his commission from the ranks of the Foreign Legion is a rarity almost unheard of, yet this one had done it. And he had been no garrison soldier in the years that had followed. He was, in a peculiar sense, the professional soldier par excellence, the man who lived in and for warfare.

He had had his fill of that in the last four years yet he did not seem satisfied. Of course Mr. Doolittle had heard rumors, as had many others, but they seemed hardly enough to account for De Launay's depression and general seediness. The man had been reduced in rank, following the armistice, but so had many others; and he reverted no lower than lieutenant colonel. Many a distinguished soldier had been demoted when the emergency was over.

Anyway, a lower rank, when one has been unexpectedly raised to unlimited riches as

had De Launay, would be far from insupportable—what with the social advantages attendant upon it. This was what Doolittle, with a kindly impulse of sympathy, was endeavoring tactfully to convey to the military gentleman. But he found him unresponsive.

"There's one thing you overlook, Doolittle," De Launay retorted to his well-meant suggestions. The banker, more used to French than English, felt vaguely startled to find him talking in accents as unmistakably American as had been his own many years ago, though there was something unfamiliar about it too—a drawl that was Southern and yet different. "Money's no use to me, none whatever! I might have enjoyed it—or enjoyed the getting of it—if I could have made it myself—taken it away from some one else. But to have it left to me like this after getting along without it for twenty years and more—to turn overnight from a land-poor Louisiana nester to a reeking oil millionaire—well, it leaves me plumb cold. Anyway, what'll I do with it? I can't hope to spend it all on liquor—and that's about all that's left for me to spend it on."

"But, my dear general! Even as a lieutenant colonel the social advantages open to a man of such wealth are boundless—absolutely boundless, sir! And if you are ambitious, think where a man as young as you, endowed with these millions, can rise in the army! A marshal's baton is none too much to hope for."

De Launay chuckled mirthlessly. "Tell it to the ministry of war!" he sneered. "I'll say that much for them: in France to-day money doesn't buy commands. Besides, I wouldn't give a lead two-bit piece for all the rank I could come by that way."

"There will be other opportunities for distinction," said Mr. Doolittle rather feebly.

"For diplomats. Not for soldiers. I've seen the light. War to-day isn't what it used to be. It's too big for any Napoleon. It's too big for any individual. It's too big for any ambition. It's too damn big to be worth while—for a man like me."

Mr. Doolittle was puzzled and said so.

"Well, I'll try to make it clear to you. When I started soldiering, it was with the idea that I'd make it a life work. I had my dreams. They were high dreams, too. They are right in suspecting me of that.

"For a good many years it looked as though they might be dreams that I could realize. I'm a good soldier, if I do say it myself. I was coming along nicely and I came along faster when the war gave me an opportunity to show what I could do. But it also exposed to me certain things neither I nor any other man could do.

"You can't wield armies like a personal weapon when the armies are nations and counted in millions. You can't, above all, seize the imagination of armies and nations by victories, sway the opinions of a race, rise to Napoleonic heights, unless you can get advertising—and nowadays a kid aviator who downs his fifth enemy plane gets columns of it while nobody knows who commands an army corps outside the general staff—and nobody cares!

"Where do you get off under those circumstances? You get a decoration or two, temporary rank, mention in the *Gazette*—and regretful demotion to your previous rank when the war is over.

"War, Mr. Doolittle, isn't half the hell that peace is—to a fellow like me. Peace means the chance to eat my heart out in idleness; it means I'm through—through at forty, when I ought to be rounding into the dash for the final heights of success.

"That's what's the trouble with me. That's why I look like this. That's why money means nothing to me. I don't need it. Once I was a cow-puncher and then I became a soldier and finally a general. Those are the things I know, and the things I am fit for and money is not necessary to any of them.

"So I'm through as a soldier and I have nothing to turn back to—except punching cows. It's a comedown, Mr. Doolittle, that you'd find hard to realize. But *I* realize it, you bet—and that's why I feel sort of low-down and reckless and don't-give-a-damnish—like any other cow hand that's approaching middle age with no future in front of him. That's why I'm taking to drink after twenty years of French temperance. I'm down—and I'm out! Out of humor, out of employment, out of ambition, out of everything."

"That, if you will pardon me, general, is ridiculous in your case," remonstrated the banker. "What if you have decided to leave the army—which is your intention, I take it? There is much that a man of wealth may accomplish: much that you may interest yourself in."

De Launay shook a weary head.

"You don't get me," he asserted. "I'm burned out. I've given the best of me to this business—and I've realized that I gave it for nothing. I was born fifty years too late."

Mr. Doolittle still clung to his theme. "Still you owe something to society," he said. "You might marry."

De Launay laughed loudly: *"Owe!"* he cried. "Such men as I am don't *owe* anything to any one. We're buccaneers; plunderers. We *levy* on society; we don't *owe* it anything.

"As for marrying!" he laughed again—"I'd look pretty tying myself to a petticoat! Any woman would have a fit if she could look into my nature. And I hate women, anyway. I've not looked sideways at one for twenty years. Too much water has run under the bridge for that, old-timer. If I was a youngster, back again under the Esmeraldas——"

He smiled reminiscently and his rather hard features softened.

"There was one then that I threatened to marry," he chuckled. "If they made 'em like her——"

"Why don't you go back and find her?"

De Launay stared at him. "After twenty years? Lord, man! D'you think she'd wait and remember me that long? Especially as she was about six years old when I left there!"

He chuckled again, but his mirth was curiously soft and gentle.

He rose, picked up a bundle of notes that lay on the table in front of him, stuffed them carelessly into the side pocket of his tunic and pushed the kepi still more recklessly back and sidewise.

"No, old son!" he grinned. "I'm not the house-broke kind. The only way I'd ever marry would be to win a bet or something like that. Meantime I'll stick to drink and gambling for the remaining days of my existence."

Doolittle shook his head as he rose. "At any rate," he said regretfully, "you may draw to whatever extent you wish and whenever you wish. And if America should call you again our house in New York, Doolittle, Morton & Co., will be happy to afford you every banking facility, general."

De Launay waved his hand. "I'll make a will and leave it in trust for charity," he said, "with your firm as trustee. And forget the titles. I'm nobody now—except ex-cow hand and ex-gunman, once known as Louisiana and soon to be known no more except as a drunken souse. So long!"

He strode out of the door, swaggering a little. His legs, in the cavalry boots, showed a faint bend. He unconsciously fell into a sort of indefinable, flat, stumping gait, barely noticeable to one who had never seen it before but recognizable instantly to any one who had ridden the Western range in high-heeled boots.

In some indefinable manner with the putting off of his soldierly character the man had instantly reverted twenty years to his youth in a roping saddle.

CHAPTER II.

Louis de Launay, once known as "Louisiana" and later as a general of cavalry, but now a broken man suffering from soul and mind sickness, was too far gone to give a thought to his condition. Thwarted ambition and gnawing disappointment had merely been the last straw which had broken him. His real trouble was that strange neurosis of mind and body which has attacked so many that served in the war. Jangled nerves, fiber drawn for years to too high a tension, had sagged and grown flabby under the sudden relaxation for which it was not prepared.

But where others had met the war's shocks for only four years he had striven Titanically for nearly a score, his efforts, beginning with the terrible five-year service in the *Légion des Etrangers,* culminating in ever-mounting strain to his last achievement and then—sudden, stark failure! He was, as he had said, burned out, although he was barely thirty-nine years old. He was a man still young in body but with mind and nerves like overstrained rubber from which all resilience has gone.

His uniform was gone. Careless of dress or ornamentation he had sunk into roughly fitting civilian garb of which he took no care. Of all his decorations he clung only to the little red rosette of the Legion of Honor. Half drunk he lolled at a table in a second-class *café.* He was in possession of his faculties; indeed he seldom lost them but he was dully indifferent to most of what went on around him.

When the cheerful murmur of his neighbors suddenly died away he looked around,

half resentfully, to note the entrance of a woman.

"What is it?" he asked, irritably of a French soldier near him.

The Frenchman was smiling and answered without taking his eyes from the woman who was now moving down the room toward them.

"Morgan *la fée,*" he answered briefly.

"Morgan—what the deuce are you talking about?"

"It is Morgan *la fée,*" reiterated the soldier simply, as though no other explanation were necessary.

De Launay stared at him and then shifted his uncertain gaze to the figure approaching him. He was able to focus her more clearly as she stopped to reply to the proprietor of the place who had hastened to meet her with every mark of respect. Men at the tables she passed smiled at her and murmured respectful greetings to which she replied with little nods of the head. Evidently she was a figure of some note in the life of the place although it also appeared that as much surprise at her appearance was felt as gratification.

Her costume was the familiar one of a French Red Cross nurse, with the jaunty, close-fitting cap and wimple, in white, hiding her hair except for a few strands. Her figure was slender, lithe and graceful and such of her features as were visible were delicate and shapely, her mouth, especially, being ripe and inviting.

But over her eyes and the upper part of her face stretched a strip of veiling folded to a thickness that effectually concealed them. The mask gave her an air of mystery which challenged curiosity.

De Launay vaguely recalled occasional mention of a young woman favorably known in the hospitals as Morgan *la fée.* He also was familiar with the old French legend of Morgan and the Vale of Avallon, where Ogier, the Paladin of Charlemagne, lived in perpetual felicity with the Queen of the Fairies, forgetful of earth and its problems except at such times as France in peril might need his services, when he returned to succor her. He surmised that this was the nurse of whom he had heard, setting her down as probably some attractive, sympathetic girl whom the soldiers, sentimental and wounded, endowed with imaginary virtues. He was not sentimental and, beholding her in this café, although evidently held in respect, he was inclined to be skeptical regarding her.

The young woman seemed to have an object and it was surprising to him. She exchanged a brief word with the maître, declined a proffered seat at a table and turned to come directly to that at which De Launay was seated. He had hardly time to overcome his stupid surprise and rise before she was standing before him. Awkwardly enough he bowed and waited.

Her glance took in the table, sweeping over the stacked saucers, denoting consumed drinks, but behind the veil her expression remained an enigma. She spoke in a voice that was sweet, with a clear, bell-like note.

"General de Launay, is it not? I have been seeking monsieur."

"Colonel, if mademoiselle pleases," he answered. Then suspicion crept into his dulled brain. "Mademoiselle seeks me? Pardon, but I am hardly a likely object——"

She interrupted him with an impatient wave of a well-kept hand. "Monsieur need not be afraid. It is true that I have been seeking him but my motive is harmless. If Monsieur Doolittle, the banker, has told me the truth——"

De Launay's suspicions grew rapidly. "If Doolittle has been talking I can tell you right now, mademoiselle, that it is useless. What you desire I am not disposed to grant."

Mademoiselle caught the meaning in the intonation rather than any in the words. Her inviting mouth curled scornfully.

"Sit down!" she said curtly.

De Launay, who for many years had been more used to giving orders than receiving them, at least in that manner, sat down. He could not have explained why he did. The girl sat down opposite him and De Launay looked helplessly for a waiter, feeling the need of stimulation.

"You have doubtless had enough to drink," said the girl and De Launay meekly turned back to her.

"You wonder perhaps why I am here," she went on. "I have said that Monsieur Doolittle has told me that you are an American, that you contemplate returning to your own country and——"

"Mademoiselle forgets or does not know," interrupted De Launay, "that I am not American for nearly twenty years."

"I know all that," was the impatient reply. "I know monsieur the general's history since he was a *légionnaire.* But it is of your

present plans I wish to speak, not of your past. Is it not true that you intend to return to America?"

"I'd thought of it," he admitted, "but since they have adopted prohibition——" He shrugged his shoulders.

Mademoiselle stopped him with an equally expressive gesture, implying distaste for De Launay and his habits or any discussion of them.

"But Monsieur Doolittle has also told me that monsieur is reckless, that he has the temperament of the gamester, that he is bored: in a word, that he would, as the Americans say, 'take a chance.' Is he wrong in that, also?"

"No," said De Launay, "but there is a choice among the chances which might be presented to me. I have no interest in the hazards incidental to——"

Then, for the life of him, he could not finish the sentence. He halfway believed the woman to be merely a demi-mondaine who had heard that he might be a profitable friend; but facing that blank mask above the red lips and firm chin, sensing the frozen anger that lay behind it, he felt his convictions melting in something like panic and shame.

"Monsieur was about to say?" The voice was soft, dangerously soft.

"Whatever it was, I shall not say it," he muttered. "I beg mademoiselle's pardon." He was relieved to see the lips curve in laughter and he recovered his own self-possession at once, though he had definitely dismissed his suspicion.

"I am, then, a gambler," he prompted her. "I will take risks and I am bored. Well, what is the answer?"

Mademoiselle's hands were on the table and she now was twisting the slender fingers together in apparent embarrassment.

"It is a strange thing I have to propose, perhaps. But it is a hazard, a game that monsieur may be interested in playing, an adventure that he may find relaxing. And, as monsieur is poor, the chance that it may be profitable will, no doubt, be worthy of consideration."

De Launay had to revise his ideas again. "You say that Doolittle gave you your information?"

She agreed with a nod of the head.

"Just what did he tell you?"

Mademoiselle briefly related how Doolittle, coming from his interview with De Launay to hear her own plea for help, had laughed at her crazy idea, had said that it was impossible to aid her and finally, in exasperation at both of them had told her that the only way she could accomplish her designs was by the help of another fool like herself and that De Launay was the only one he knew who could qualify for that description. He, De Launay, was reckless enough, gambler enough, ass enough, to do the thing necessary to aid her, but no one else was.

"And what," said De Launay, "is this thing that one must do to help you?" It seemed evident that Doolittle, while he had told something, had not told all.

Mademoiselle hesitated and finally blurted it out at once, while De Launay saw the flush creep down under the mask to the cheeks and chin below it. "It is to marry me," she said.

Then, observing his stupefaction and the return of doubt to his mind, she hurried on. "Not to marry me in seriousness," she said. "Merely a marriage of a temporary nature—one that the American courts will end as soon as the need is over. I must get to America, monsieur, and I cannot go alone. Nor can I get a passport and passage unaided. If one tries, one is told that the boats are jammed with returning troops and diplomats and that it is out of the question to secure passage for months even though one would pay liberally for it.

"But monsieur still has prestige—influence—in spite of that." Her nod indicated the stack of saucers. "He is still the general of France, and he is also an American. It is undoubtedly true that he will have no difficulty in securing passage nor will it be denied him to take his wife with him. Therefore it is that I suggest the marriage to monsieur. It was Monsieur Doolittle that gave me the idea."

De Launay was swept with a desire to laugh. "What on earth did he tell you?" he asked.

"That the only way I could go was to go as the wife of an American soldier," said mademoiselle. "He added that he knew of none I could marry—unless, he said, I tried Monsieur de Launay. You, he informed me, had just told him that the only marriage you would consider would be one entered into in the spirit of the gambler. Now, that is the kind of marriage I have to offer."

Mademoiselle's ascendancy was vanishing rapidly. Her naïve assumption swept away the last vestiges of his awe.

"Why do you wear that veil?" he asked abruptly.

Mademoiselle raised her hand to it doubtfully. "Why?"

"If I am to marry you, is it to be sight unseen?"

"It is merely because—it is because there is something that causes comment and makes it embarrassing to me. It is nothing—nothing repulsive, monsieur," She was pleading now. "At least, I think not. But it makes the soldiers call me——"

"Morgan *la fée?*"

"Yes. Then you must know?" There was relief in her words.

"No. I have merely wondered why they called you that."

"It is on account of my eyes. They are —queer, perhaps. And my hair, which I also hide under the cap. The poor soldiers ascribe all sorts of—of virtues to them. Magic qualities, which of course is silly. And others—are not so kind."

In De Launay's mind was running a verse from William Morris' "Earthly Paradise." He quoted it, in English:

"The fairest of all creatures did she seem;
So fresh and delicate you well might deem
That scarce for eighteen summers had she blessed
The happy, longing earth; yet, for the rest,
Within her glorious eyes such wisdom dwelt
A child before her had the wise man felt."

"Is that it?" he murmured to himself. To his surprise, for he had not thought of the possibility that she spoke English, she answered him.

"It is not. It is my eyes, yes; but they are not to be described so flatteringly." Yet she was smiling and the blush had spread again to cheeks and chin, flushing them delightfully. "It is a superstition of these ignorant poilus. And of others, also. In fact, there are some who are afraid."

"Well," said De Launay, "I have never had the reputation of being either ignorant or afraid. Also—there is Ogier?"

"What?"

"Who plays the rôle of the Danish Paladin?"

Mademoiselle blushed again. "He is not in the story this time," she said.

"I hardly qualify, you would say? Perhaps not. But there is more. Where is Avallon and what other names have you? You remember:

"Know thou, that thou art come to Avallon,
That is both thine and mine; and as for me,
Morgan le Fay men call me commonly
Within the world, but fairer names than this
I have——

What are they?"

"I am Solange d'Albret, monsieur. I am from the Basses Pyrenees. A Basque, if you please. If my name is distinguished, I am not. On the contrary I am very poor, having but enough to finance this trip to America and the search that is to follow."

"And Avallon—where is that? Where is the place that you go to in America?"

Mademoiselle opened a small hand bag and took from it a notebook which she consulted.

"America is a big country. It is not likely that you would know the place, or the man that I must look for. Here it is. The place is called 'Twin Forks' and it is near the town of Sulphur Falls in the State of Idaho. The man is a Monsieur Isaac Brandon."

In the silence she looked up, alarmed to see De Launay, who was clutching the edge of the table and staring at her as though she had struck him.

"Why, what is the matter?" she cried.

De Launay laughed out loud. "Twin Forks! Ike Brandon! Mademoiselle, what do you seek in Twin Forks and from old Ike Brandon?"

Mademoiselle, puzzled, answered slowly: "I seek a mine that my father found—a gold mine that will make us rich. And I seek also the name of the man that shot my father down like a dog. I wish to kill that man!"

CHAPTER III.

De Launay turned and called the waiter, ordering cognac for himself and light wine for mademoiselle.

"You have rendered it necessary, mademoiselle," he explained.

He saw that her sweet mouth was set in a cruel line and her cameo chin was firm as a rock. But her homicidal intentions had not affected him as sharply as the rest of it.

Mademoiselle took her wine and sipped it, but her mouth again relaxed to scornful contempt as she saw him toss off the fiery liquor. The alcohol temporarily enlivened De Launay.

"So," he said, "Avallon is at Twin Forks and I am to marry you in order that you may seek out an enemy and kill him. There was also word of a gold mine. And your father—D'Albret! I do not recall the name."

"My father," explained Solange, "went to America when I was a babe in arms. He was very poor—few of the Basques are rich—and he was in danger because of the smuggling. He worked for this Monsieur Brandon as a herder of sheep. He found a mine of gold—and he was killed when he was coming to tell about it."

"His Christian name?"

"Pedro—Pierre."

"H'mm! That must have been French Pete. I remember him. He was more than a cut above the ordinary Basco." He spoke in English, again forgetting that mademoiselle spoke the language. She reminded him of it.

"You knew my father? But that is incredible!"

"The whole affair is incredible. No wonder you have the name of being a fairy! But I knew your father—slightly. I knew Ike Brandon. I know Twin Forks. If I had made up my mind to return to America, it is to that place that I would go."

It was mademoiselle's turn to be astonished.

"To Twin Forks?"

"To Ike Brandon's ranch where your father worked. It must have been after my time that he was killed. I left there in nineteen hundred, and came to France shortly afterward. I was a cow hand—a cowboy—and we did not hold friendship with sheepmen. But I knew Ike Brandon and his granddaughter. Now tell me about this mine and your father's death."

Mademoiselle d'Albret again had recourse to her hand bag, drawing from it a small fragment of rock, a crumpled and smashed piece of metal about the size of one's thumbnail, and two pieces of paper. The latter seemed to be quite old, barely holding together along the lines where they had been creased. These she spread on the table. De Launay first picked up the rock and the bit of metal.

He was something of a geologist. France's soldiers are trained in many sciences. Turning over the tiny bit of mineral between his fingers, he readily recognized the bits of gold speckling its crumbling crystals. If there was much ore of that quality where French Pete had found his mine that mine would rank with the richest bonanzas of history.

The bit of metal also interested him. It had been washed but there were still oxidized spots which might have been made by blood. It was a soft-nosed bullet, probably of thirty caliber, which had mushroomed after striking something. His mouth was grim as he saw the jagged edges of metal. It had made a terrible wound in whatever flesh had stopped it.

He laid the two objects down and took the paper that mademoiselle handed to him. It seemed to be a piece torn from a paper sack and on it was scrawled in painful characters a few words in some unknown language. Mademoiselle translated it briefly for him, since it was in Basque:

"My love, I am assassinated! Farewell and avenge! There is much gold. The good Monsieur Brandon will——"

It trailed off into a meaningless, trembling line.

The other paper was a letter written on ruled paper. The cramped, schoolboyish characters were those of a man unused to much composition and the words were the vernacular of the ranges. It ran:

DEAR MADAM: I take my pen in hand to write you something that I sure regrets a whole lot. Which I hope you all bears up under the blow like a game woman, which your late respected husband sure was game thataway. There ain't much I can say to break the news, ma'am, and I can't do nothing being so far away to show my sympathy. Your husband has done passed over. He was killed by some ornery hound who bushwacked him somewheres in the hills and who must have been a bloody killer because Pete, your husband, sure didn't have no enemies and there wasn't no one that had any reason to kill him. He was coming home from the Esmeraldas with his sheep and some murdering gunman done up and shot him with a thirty-thirty soft nose, which makes it worse. You can see that by the bullet I'm sending.

Pete was sure a true-hearted gent, ma'am, and we was all fond of him spite of his being a Basco. If we could have found the murderer we would sure have stretched him a plenty, but there wasn't no clue.

Pete had found a gold mine, ma'am, and the specimens he had in his war bags was plenty rich as per the sample I am sending you herewith. He tried to tell me where it was, but he was too weak when we found him, more than to say it was near a rock where he stopped to eat his chuck. He said he wanted us to give your daughter half of it if we found it and we sure would do that though it don't look like we got much chance because he couldn't tell where it was. The boys have been looking but they haven't

found it yet. If they do you can gamble your last chip they will split it with you folks or else there will be some more funerals around hereaways. But it ain't likely they will found it. I got to tell you that so's you-all won't put your hopes on it and be disappointed.

I am all broke up about Pete, and if there is anything I can do to help don't you hesitate to let me know. I was fond of Pete, ma'am, and so was my granddaughter, which he made things for her and she sure doted on him. He was a good hombre.

The letter was signed "I. Brandon."

De Launay mused a moment. "Is that all?" he asked finally.

"It is all," said mademoiselle. "But there is a mine. And especially there is the man who killed him."

De Launay looked at the date on the letter. It was October, 1900.

"After nineteen years," he reminded her, "the chances of finding either the mine or the man are very remote. Perhaps the mine has been found long ago."

"Monsieur," replied the girl, and her voice was metallic and hard, "my mother received that letter. She put it away and treasured it. She hoped that I would grow up and marry a Basque who would avenge her husband. She sent me to a convent so that I might be a good mate for a man. When she died she left me money for a 'dot.' She had saved and she had inherited and all was put aside for the man who should avenge her husband.

"But the war came before I was married, and afterward there was little chance that any Basque would take the quarrel on himself. It is too easy for the men to marry, now that they are so scarce, and it is very difficult for one like me to find a husband. Besides, I have lived in the world, monsieur, and like many others I do not like to marry as though that were all that a woman might do. I do not see why I cannot go to America, find this mine and kill this man. The money that was to be my dot will serve to take me there and pay those who will assist me."

"You desire to find the mine—or to kill the man?"

"Both. I do not like to be poor. It is an evil thing, these days, to be a poor woman in France. Therefore I wish to find the mine and be rich. For if I cannot marry, wealth will at least make life pleasant for me. But I wish to find that man more than the mine."

"And if I marry you, I will be deputized to do the butchery?"

"Monsieur mistakes me," Solange replied scornfully. "I can do my own avenging, monsieur need not alarm himself."

De Launay smiled. "I don't think I'm alarmed. In fact I am not sure I wouldn't be willing to do it. Still, this vendetta seems to be rather old for any great amount of feeling on your part. How old were you when your father was killed?"

"Two years."

De Launay laughed again but choked it off when he noted the angry stiffening of mademoiselle's figure. Somehow her veiled countenance was impressive of lingering, bitter emotions. She was a Basque, and that was a primitive race. She was probably bold enough and hardy enough to fulfill her mission.

"The adventure appeals," he told her soberly enough, though the fumes of cognac were mounting again in his brain. "I am impelled to consider it, though the element of chance seems remote. It is rather a certainty that you will fail. But what is my exact part in the adventure?"

"That rests with you. For my part, all I require is that you secure for me the right to go to America. I can take care of myself after that."

"And leave me still married?"

"The marriage can be annulled as soon as you please after we arrive."

"I am afraid it will hardly be as easy as that. To be sure, in the State of Nevada where you are going, it should be easy enough; but even there it cannot be accomplished all at once. In New York it will be difficult. And how would I know that you had freed me if you left me behind?"

"If it pleases you, you may go with me." He caught the note of scorn again. She was proud, as he guessed, and the only reason she had even considered such an unusual bargain with him was her contempt for him. He was one who, when he might have remained respected and useful, had deliberately thrown away his chances, to become a sot and vagabond.

"But you will understand that this marriage is—not a real marriage. It gives you no right over me. If you so much as dare once to presume——"

She was flaming with earnest threat and he could well imagine that if he ventured a

familiarity she would knife him as quickly as look at him.

"I quite understand that, mademoiselle. And I am employed to go with you on this search? And the remuneration?"

"I will pay the expenses. I can do no more than that. And if the mine is found you shall have a full share in it. That would be a fortune."

"If I am to have a full share it would seem only fair that I contribute at least my own expenses. I should prefer to do so. While my pay has not been large, it has been more than a simple soldier needs to spend and I have saved some."

"Then," said mademoiselle in a tired voice, "you have decided that you will go?"

De Launay ordered and tossed off another drink and Solange shuddered. His voice was thickening and his eyes were red.

"Not so fast," he chuckled. "I told Doolittle that I'd never marry except on a bet. Now what will you bet against my marrying you?"

Solange shrank into herself. "I don't understand," she said hopelessly.

De Launay paid no attention to her. He was lost in his own half-drunken thoughts.

"This Morgan *la fée* business—curious thing! What's that about your eyes that's so wonderful that they give you the name?"

"People say they have the power of magic," she answered indifferently and wearily.

"Bewitch, do they? Well, I'm curious. I wonder if they are as remarkable as all that. I'll—I'll—see here, I'll bet you they don't have any such effect on me, mademoiselle. And the stake I'll put up is this marriage—and the going through with the whole crazy adventure even to killing the *picaro* for you when you find him. What do you say?"

She was not sure that she understood.

"You mean that you will agree to everything if my eyes——"

"Enchant me—bewitch me. By the Nine Gods of War, if they even startle me badly I'll go through with it! But not if they're merely crossed or green or different colors. They've got to have a real jolt in them."

Solange nodded. De Launay watched her and was disappointed to see no signs of anxiety. She seemed to be getting ready to humor some wearisome infant, to repeat some performance of whose effect she was certain and of whose repetition she was weary. She bent her head slightly, slipped the coif back from her hair with one hand and lifted the veil with the other, sweeping them both away from her head with that characteristic shake and raising of the head that women employ when removing their hats. Then she opened her eyes and looked full at him.

He stared and he remained staring. His own gaze was lost and swallowed up, his eyes apparently focusing on some far-distant object. Motionless, they sat face to face and their features were as immovable as though they were asleep or dead.

In the smoky electric light of the place her eyes seemed to be two cavernous pools of immeasurable depth. Over them her hair fluffed and waved. It was blond hair, almost colorless, almost ashen. It caught light and reflected it in the most astounding way. Where the light smote it, it gave it back like a prism, breaking it up into bands of color. On the under sides of the bands and rolls the shadows formed as deep as night, sharp and distinct, causing the hair in those spots to look as black as her eyes.

Her eyes themselves were of that sort which science tells us do not exist. So black they were that no one could have told where pupils ended and iris began. Large and wonderfully mysterious, they caught the light from the hair and held it in their tremendous depths, which seemed to glow with the banded colors. They held the entranced gaze, drawing it down, down deep and deeper, until one seemed to be sinking into infinity. It was impossible to break the spell; impossible to see anything else; features were meaningless blurs; only the glowing, mysterious wells of her eyes seemed to wrap about one and draw one as if——

Mademoiselle's lids fluttered over her eyes. She bowed her head and pulled the coif over her hair. De Launay, frozen in place, shook himself and groped for his glass of cognac, gulping it down.

"Are you satisfied, monsieur," said Solange d'Albret with something like a sneer.

"Satisfied!" repeated De Launay thickly. "Satisfied! Yes, I'm satisfied. You win!"

He sat a moment, sagging in his seat and gripping the stem of his glass. Solange was gathering her things to go.

"You win!" he chuckled. "You win! But, by glory, I got my money's worth, Morgan le Fay!"

Solange turned to walk toward the door and he rose, tossing a note to the table, to lurch after her. Her veiled head was high and the sweet mouth was set in lines of disgust and contempt.

CHAPTER IV.

Mademoiselle, as she still chose to regard herself, and her nominal husband had been domiciled in Sulphur Falls for several days, but not in company. Mademoiselle Solange, ever since the *maire* of a certain *arondissement* pronounced the words that bound her to De Launay, had spent considerable effort and emotion in making him feel that his presence in her immediate vicinity was distasteful. De Launay, sober, cared little for feminine companionship; and, drunk, he cared less. He had been fairly sober during the ceremonies culminating in the execution of the marriage contract. He had been fairly sober and efficient in the days leading up to embarkation. It had been necessary to rely on him to secure passports and passage and he had acquitted himself well. That he had bought the best accommodations on the boat at an enormous price for Solange, while he, himself, secured a stifling cubby-hole which was shared with two others was not made known to the girl.

Once on board, De Launay seemed to consider his responsibility ended—at least temporarily. Solange, finding that his first act had been to seek the smoking saloon where he had engaged in a speedy game of cards and tried to drink all the liquor on board, had, when he lurched up to her to ask thickly if he could serve her further, driven him away with a burst of fiery indignation that would have made him quiver had he not been impervious to shame and utterly lacking in pride.

During the entire voyage he drank and gambled in the saloon while Solange remained an object of remark and gossip to the few civilian passengers. In New York, however, De Launay seemed to take a sudden brace and once more appeared able to attend to affairs, at least to the extent of getting rooms at a hotel for Solange and engaging accommodations for the westward trip. On that trip her experience duplicated that of the steamer in essentials, with some modifications, however. Solange traveled in a drawing-room and, since she kept very much to herself, remaining veiled and an object of mystery, had little opportunity to suspect that some influence was at work to furnish her with luxuries which she had not sought.

As for De Launay, before being in America more than a few days he had developed a positive talent for finding illicit supplies of alcohol. Though he shepherded Solange efficiently to the point of departure, from that moment he became utterly abandoned and when he appeared at her stateroom door after the train had left was in such a condition that she was almost frightened. Rage predominated, however, and she made him feel it even through the mist of intoxication. From that time on she saw him only at stations where he generally appeared in unsteady maneuvers on the platforms.

Yet, at Chicago and again at Kansas City and once more when they finally arrived at Sulphur Falls he was able to take the burden of unaccustomed travel from her and did so without too much obtrusiveness. Each capable moment was paid for by a new outburst as soon as the emergency was over. And with each relapse Solange's contempt and disgust grew deeper although her shrewd brain had not failed to note the inconsistency of his performances.

De Launay, coming into the glittering new town, utterly unprepared for the changes that had taken place, had felt the environment strike him like a blow. He saw people wearing costumes such as he had seen on Broadway and walking paved sidewalks in front of plate glass under brilliant electric lights. He had come back to seek rest for his diseased nerves in the limitless ranges of his youth and this was what he found.

He had turned and looked back at the frowning cañon through which the train had come from the northeast. There were the mountains, forest-clad and cloud-capped as of old. There was the great, black, lava gulch of the Serpentine. It looked the same but he knew that it was changed.

Smoke hung above the cañon where tall chimneys of nitrate plants and smelters belched their foulness against the blue sky. In the forests the loggers were tearing and slashing into the remnant of the timber. Down the gloomy gulch cut out of the lava ran a broad, white ribbon of concrete road. Lastly, and primary cause of all this change, where had once been the roaring falls now there sprang a gigantic bow of masonry, two hundred feet in height, and back of it the

cañon held a vast lake of water where once had run the foaming Serpentine. From the dam enormous dynamos took their impulses and from it also huge ditches and canals led the water out and around the valley down below.

Where the lonely road house had stood at the ford across the Serpentine and the reckless range riders had stopped to drink and gamble now spread the town—paved with asphalt and brick, jammed with cottages and office buildings, theaters, factories, warehouses and mills. Plate glass gleamed in the sun or at night blazed in the effulgence of limitless electricity.

Around the town, grown in a few years to twenty thousand souls, stretched countless acres of fenced and cultivated land, yielding bountifully under the irrigating waters. From east and west long trains of nickel-plated Pullmans pulled into a granite station.

The people spoke the slang of Broadway and danced the fox trot in evening clothes.

Southward, where the limitless desert had been one now beheld, as far as eye could reach, orderly green patches of farmland, fenced and dotted with the pretty houses of the settlers.

And yet, there was something more—beyond the farms and beyond the desert. It was a blue and misty haze on the horizon, running an uneven and barely discernible line about the edges of the bright blue sky. It was faint and undefined, but De Launay knew it for the Esmeralda Range, standing out there aloof and alone and perhaps still untamed and uncivilized.

He felt resentful and at the same time helpless. To him it seemed that his last chance to win ease of mind and rest from the driving restlessness had been taken away from him. Only the mountains remained to offer him a haven and those might be changed as this spot was.

The natural thing to do was to drown his disappointment in drink, and that is what he set out to do. He left Solange safely ensconced in the shiny, new hotel whose elevators and colored waiters filled him with disgust and sought the darker haunts of the town.

With sure instinct for the old things, if they still existed, he hunted up a "livery and feed barn." He found one on a side street near a lumber yard and not far from the loading chutes which spoke of a considerable traffic in beef cattle. He noted with bitterness a cheap automobile standing in front of the place.

But there were horses in the stalls, horses that lolled on a dropped hip, with heads down and eyes closed. There were heavy roping saddles hanging on the pegs and bridles with earloops and no throat latches. Though the proprietor, one MacGregor, wore a necktie and a cloth cap, he forgave him for the sake of the open waistcoat and the lack of an outer coat.

MacGregor was an incident of little importance. One of more consequence was a good horse that roamed the open feed yard at the side of the barn. De Launay, seedy and disreputable, still had a look about him that spoke of certain long-dead days and MacGregor, when he was asked about the horse, made no mistake in concluding that he had to deal with one who knew what he was about.

The horse was MacGregor's, taken to satisfy a debt, and MacGregor would sell it. The upshot of the affair was that De Launay bought it at a fair price. This took time and when he finally came out again to the front of the barn, it was late afternoon.

Squatted against the wall, their high heels planted under them on the sloping boards of the runway, sat two men. Wide, flapping hats shaded their faces. They wore no coats although the November evenings were cool, and their waistcoats hung open. Overalls of blue denim turned up at the bottoms in wide cuffs hid all but feet and wrinkled ankles of their boots which were grooved with shiny semicircles around the heels where spurs had dented them.

One of them was as tall as De Launay, gaunt and hatchet-faced. His hair was yellowish. The other was sturdy, shorter, with curly, brown hair.

The tall one was humming a tune. De Launay recognized it with a shock of recollection. *"Roll on, my little dogy!"*

Without a word he sat down also, in a duplicate of their pose. No one spoke for several minutes. Then the shorter man said casually, addressing his remarks to nobody in particular: "They's sure a lotta fresh pilgrims done hit this here town."

The tall one echoed an equally casual chorus. "They don't teach no sort of manners to them down-East hobos, neither."

De Launay stared impassively at the road in front of them.

"You'd think some of them'd sense it that a gent has got a right to be private when he wants to be."

"It's a hell of a town, nohow."

"People even ram around smellin' of liquor—which is plumb illegal, 'Succotash.'"

"Which there are some that are that debased they even thrives on wood alcohol, Dave."

Silence settled down on them once more. It was broken this time by De Launay who spoke as impersonally as they.

"They had real cow hands hereaways, once."

A late and sluggish fly buzzed in the silence.

"I reckon the sheep eat 'em outa range and they done moved down to Arizona."

The gaunt Succotash murmured sadly: "Them pilgrims is sure hell on g'ography an' history."

"An' sheep—especially," said the one called Dave.

"Ca ne fait rien!" said De Launay, pronouncing it almost like *"sinferien"* as he had heard the linguists of the A. E. F. do. The two men slowly turned their heads and looked at him apparently aware of his existence for the first time. Like MacGregor, they evidently saw something beneath his habiliments, though the small mustache puzzled them.

"You-all been to France?" asked Dave.

De Launay did not answer directly.

"There was some reputed bronc peelers nursin' mules overseas," he mused. "Their daddies would sure have been mortified to see 'em."

"We didn't dry-nurse no mules, pilgrim," said Succotash. "When did you lick Hindenburg?"

De Launay condescended to notice them. "In the battle of *vin rouge,"* he said. "I reckon you-all musta won a round or two with the *vin* sisters, yourselves."

"You're sure a-sayin' something, old-timer," said Dave with emotion. For the first time he saw the rosette in De Launay's buttonhole. "You done a little more'n café fightin' though, to get that?"

De Launay shrugged his shoulders. "They give those for entertainin' a politician," he answered. "Any cow hands out of a job around here?"

Both of the men chuckled. "You aimin' to hire any riders?"

"I could use a couple to wrangle pilgrims in the Esmeraldas. More exactly, there's a lady aimin' to head into the mountains and she'll need a couple of packers."

"This lady don't seem to have no respect for snow and blizzards, none whatever," was the comment.

"Which she hasn't, bein' troubled with notions about gold mines and such things. She needs taking care of."

"Ridin' the Esmeraldas this time o' year and doin' chores for my old man all winter strikes me as bein' about a toss-up," said the man called Succotash. "I reckon it's a certainty that pop requires considerable labor though, and maybe this demented lady won't. If the wages is liberal——"

"We ought to see the lady, first," said Dave. "There's some lady pilgrims that couldn't hire me with di'monds."

"The pay's all right and the lady's all right. She's French."

"A mad'moiselle?" they echoed.

"It's a long story," said De Launay, smiling. "You'd better see her and talk it over. Meantime this prohibition is some burdensome."

"Which it ain't the happiest encumbrance of the world," agreed Succotash. "They do say that the right kind of a hint will work at the Empire Pool Room."

"If they have it we'll get it," asserted De Launay confidently. "You-all point the way."

The three of them rose by the simple process of straightening their legs at the knees and walked away.

CHAPTER V.

The Empire Pool Room was an innocent enough place to the uninitiated. To those who had the confidence of the proprietor it was something else. There were rooms upstairs where games were played that were somewhat different from pool and billiards. There was also a bar up there and the drinks that were served over it were not of the soft variety.

De Launay followed Succotash and Dave MacKay trustfully. The only thing he took the trouble to note was at a rack in front of the place where—strange anachronism in a town that swarmed with shiny automobiles —were tethered two slumberous, moth-eaten

burros laden with heavy packs, miner's pan, pick and bedding.

"Prospector?" he asked, indicating the dilapidated songsters of the desert.

The two cow hands looked at the beasts, identifying them with the facility of their breed.

"Old Jim Banker, I reckon. In for a wrastlin' match with the demon rum. Anything you want to know about the Esmeraldas he can tell you, if you can make him talk."

"Old Jim Banker? Old-timer, is he?"

"Been a-soakin' liquor and a-dryin' out in the desert hereaways ever since fourteen-ninety-two, I reckon. B'en here so long he resembles a horned toad more'n anything else." This from Succotash.

De Launay paused inside the door. "I wonder—are there any more old-timers left hereaways?"

"Oh, sure. There's some that dates back past the Spanish War. I reckon Snake Murphy—he tends bar for Johnny the Greek who runs this honkatonk—he's one of 'em. Banker's another. You remember when Wall Street guys hired 'Panamint Charlie' Wantage to splurge East in a private car scatterin' double eagles all the way and hoorayin' about the big mine he had in Death Valley?"

"No," said De Launay. "When was that?"

"Back in 1908."

"I was in Algeria then. I'd never heard. But I remember Panamint. He and Jim Banker were partners, weren't they?"

"They was." Succotash looked curiously at De Launay, wondering how a man who was in Algeria came to know so much about these old survivals. "Leastways, I've heard tell they was both of them prospectin' the Esmeraldas a whole lot in them days and hangin' together. But Panamint struck this soft graft and wouldn't let Jim in on it, so they broke up the household. You know—or maybe you don't—that Panamint was finally found dead in a cave in Death Valley and there was talk that Banker follered him there and beefed him, thinkin' he really had a mine. Nothin' come of it except to make folks a little dubious about Jim. He never was remarkable for popularity, nohow, so it don't amount to much."

"And Snake Murphy: he used to keep the road house at the ford over the river, didn't he?"

Once more Succotash, fairly well informed on ancient history himself, eyed De Launay askance.

"Which he might have. That's before my time, I reckon. I was just bein' weaned when Louisiana Delaney was run out of the country. My old man could tell you all about it. He's Carter Wallace, of the Lazy Y at Willow Spring."

"I knew him," said De Launay.

"You knowed my old man?"

"But maybe he'd not remember me."

Succotash sensed the fact that De Launay intended to be reticent. "Dad sure knows all the old-timers and their histories," he declared. "Him and old Ike Brandon was the last ranchers left this side the Esmeraldas and since Ike checked in a year ago he's the last survivor. There's a few has moved into town, but mostly the place is all pilgrims and nesters."

They had climbed the stairs and come into the hidden sanctum of Johnny the Greek and De Launay looked about curiously, noting the tables and the scattering of customers about the place, rough men, close-cropped, hard-faced and sullen of countenance, most of them—typical of the sort of itinerant labor that was filling the town with recruits and initiates of the I. W. W. There were one or two who were more like the two young cowmen. Behind the bar was a red-faced, shifty-eyed man wearing a mustache so black as to appear startling in contrast to his sandy hair. De Launay eyed him curiously, noting with a secret smile that his right arm appeared to be stiff at the wrist. He made no comment, however, but followed the two men to the bar where the business of the day began. It consisted of imbibing vile whisky served by the stiff-armed Snake Murphy.

But De Launay still had something on his mind. "You say Ike Brandon's dead?" he asked. "What became of his granddaughter?"

"Went to work," said Succotash. "Dave, where's Marion Pettis?"

"Beatin' a typewriter fer Cap Wilding, last I heard," said Dave.

"She was a little girl when I knew her," said De Launay, his voice softening a little with a queer change of accent into a Southern slur. Snake Murphy, who was polishing the rough bar in front of him, glanced quickly up as though hearing something vaguely familiar. But he saw nothing but

De Launay's reddened eyes and sallow face with its small, pointed mustache.

"'Scuse me, gents," he murmured. "What'll it be?"

"A very little girl," said De Launay, absently looking into and through Murphy. "A sort of little fairy."

The lanky Succotash looked at him askance, catching the note of sentiment. "Yeah?" he said a bit dryly. "Well, folks change, you know. They grow up."

"Yes," said De Launay.

"And this Marion Pettis she done growed up. I ain't sayin' nothin' against a lady, you understand, but she ain't exactly in the fairy class nowadays, I reckon."

De Launay, somewhat to his surprise, although he sensed the note of warning and dry enlightenment in Succotash's words, felt no shock. He had had a sentimental desire to see if the girl of six had fulfilled the promise of her youth after nineteen years, had even dreamed, in his soberer moments, of coming back to her to play the rôle of a prince; but nevertheless he found himself philosophically accepting the possibility hinted at by Succotash and even feeling a vague sort of relief.

"Who's Wilding?" he asked. They told him that he was a young lawyer of the town, an officer of their regiment during the war. They seemed to think highly of him.

De Launay postponed his inevitable debauch. Never quite sober, whenever there was work to do he retained command of himself sufficiently to get it attended to, and this occasion, after the information he had gathered, was one calling for the exercise of his faculties.

"If you all will hang around and herd this here desert rat Banker with you when you can find him, and then call at the hotel for Mademoiselle d'Albret, I'll look up this lawyer and his stenographer. I have to interview her."

He left them then and went out, a bit unsteady, seedy, unprepossessing, but carrying under his dilapidated exterior some remains of the man he had been.

He found Wilding's office and found the man to be a young fellow who appeared capable and alert. He also found, with a distinct shock, the girl who had occupied a niche in his memory for nineteen years. He found her with banged and bobbed hair, rouged and bepowdered, clad in georgette and glimmering artificial silk, tapping at a typewriter in Wilding's office. He had seen Broadway swarming with replicas of her.

His business with Wilding took a little time. He explained that mademoiselle might have need of his legal services and certainly would wish to see Miss Pettis. The lawyer called the girl in and to her De Launay explained that mademoiselle was the daughter of her grandfather's former employee and that she would wish to discuss with her certain matters connected with the death of French Pete. The girl swept De Launay with hard, disdainful eyes and he knew that she was forming a concept of mademoiselle by comparison with his own general disreputableness.

"Oh, sure; I jus' as soon drop in on this dame," she said. "One o' these frog refygees, I s'pose. Well, believe me, she's come a long way to get disappointed if she thinks I'm givin' any hand-outs to grandpap's pensioners. I got troubles of my own."

"We'll be at the hotel, Miss Pettis and I," said Wilding. "That will do, Miss Pettis."

The girl teetered out on her spiky heels, with a sway of hips.

De Launay turned back to the lawyer. "I've a little personal business you might attend to," he said. Wilding set himself to listen resignedly, imagining that this tramp would yield him nothing of profit.

In ten minutes he was staring at De Launay with amazement that was almost stupefaction, fingering documents as though he must awake from sleep and find he had been dreaming. The unsavory De Launay talked on, his voice slightly thick, his eyes heavy but his mind clear and capable.

Wilding went with him to a bank and after their business there was finished shook hands in parting with a mixture of astonishment, disapproval and awe.

De Launay, having finished the more pressing parts of his business, made straight for Johnny the Greek's. The two burros still stood there, eyes closed and heads hanging. He walked around them before going in. A worn, dirty leather scabbard, bursting at the seams, slanted up past the withers of one brute and out of its mouth projected the butt of a rifle. The plate was bright with wear and the walnut of the stock was battered and dull with age.

De Launay scratched the chin of the burro, was rewarded by the lazy flopping of

an ear and then went in to his delayed orgy.

CHAPTER VI.

Mademoiselle was having a series of enlivening shocks. First came Wilding with Miss Pettis. He was received by Solange in the mezzanine gallery of the hotel and she learned, for the first time, that De Launay was sending her a lawyer to transact her business for her. This made her angry, his assuming that she needed a lawyer, or, even if she did, that he could provide her with one. However, as she needed a divorce from her incubus and Wilding practiced also in the Nevada courts, she thought better of her first impulse to haughtily dismiss him. As for Wilding he began to conclude that he had gone crazy or else had encountered a set of escaped lunatics when he beheld Solange, slender and straightly tailored but with hair hidden under a close-fitting little turban and face masked by a triple or quadruple fold of netting.

Marion Pettis was another shock. The extraordinary De Launay, whom she had supposed lost in some gutter and without whose aid she had been puzzled however to proceed on her quest, was evidently very much on the job. Here was a starting point at least.

Although behind her mask her face registered disapproval of the girl, she welcomed her as cordially as possible. In her sweet, bell voice she murmured an expression of concern for her grandfather and when Marion bluntly said. "He's dead," she endeavored to convey her sorrow. To which Miss Pettis, staring at her with hard, bold eyes, as at some puzzling freak, made no reply, being engaged in uneasily wondering what "graft" the Frenchwoman was "on." Marion disliked being reminded of her grandfather's demise, having been largely responsible for it when she had run away with a plausible stranger who had assured her that she had only to present herself at Hollywood to become instantly famous as a moving-picture star, a promise that had sadly miscarried.

"But it was not so much about your grandfather as about my father that I wished to see you," mademoiselle explained, ignoring Marion's lack of response. "As for Monsieur Wilding, it is later I will require his services, though it may be that he can aid me not only in procuring a divorce from this husband but in another matter also. Miss Pettis, and perhaps Monsieur Wilding, know how my father was murdered?"

Wilding shook his head but Marion nodded at once.

"Gee, yes!" she said. "I was a kid when he was croaked but I remember it all right. There was a guy they called Louisiana, and he was one of these old-time gunmen. But at that he was some kid, believe me! He took a shot at a fellow here in Sulphur Falls —that was before there was any town here at all—and they was givin' him the gate outa the neighborhood. Going to lynch him if they caught him, I guess. I don't remember much of it except how this guy looks, but I've heard the old man tell about it.

"He come ridin' out to our place all dressed up like a movie cow-puncher and you'd never have dreamed there was a mob about three jumps behind him. He sets in with us and takes a great shine to me. I was quite a doll in those days they tell me." She tossed her head as much as to say that she was still able to qualify for the description.

"Believe me, he was a regular Adonis and you'd never in the world 'a' thought he was what he turned out to be. Delaney, his name was, or something like that. Well, he plays with me and when he goes away I cried and wanted him to stay. I remember it just as vivid! He sure made a hit with Marion! He swore he was comin' back like Young Lochinvar and marry me some day and I was all tickled to think he would do it.

"Then, would you believe it, the murdering villain rides away about half an hour before the mob comes and goes south toward the mountains. Next day or so we pick up your father, shot something terrible and this awful Louisiana Delaney had done it in cold blood and just to be killing something."

"Ah!" Mademoiselle stiffened and quivered. Her voice was like brass. "In cold blood, you say? Then he had no provocation? He was not an enemy of my father?"

"Naw! Your father didn't have no enemies. So far as I know, this Louisiana didn't even know him. He was a cattleman and they hated the sheepmen, you know, and used to fight them. Then, he was one of these gunmen, always shooting some one, and they used to be terrible. They'd kill

some one just for the fun of it—to sort of keep in practice."

Mademoiselle shuddered, envisioning some bloodthirsty, evil thing, unspeakably depraved. But it was momentary. She spoke again in her metallic voice.

"That is well to know. I will look for this Louisiana."

"You ain't likely to find him. He never was seen or heard of around here no more. I've heard granddad call him 'the last of the gunmen,' because the country was settling up and getting civilized then. One thing sure, he never made good on that Lochinvar sketch, I can promise you."

"It is no matter. He will come back—or I will follow him. It is of another matter I would talk. There was something of a mine that my father had found."

"I've heard of that," said Wilding. "It's quite a legend around here. The Lunch Rock Mine they call it, and Jim Banker, the prospector, looks for it every year."

"But he ain't found it——"

A bell boy passed, singing out: "Call for Madmyzel Dalbray! Call fer Madmyzel Dalbray!" Mademoiselle rose and beckoned to him.

"Three men in the lobby wish to see yuh, miss!" the boy told her. "Said Mr. Delonny sent 'em."

"M'sieu de Launay! What next! *Nom d'un nom. C'est homme!* Well, show them up here."

A few moments later Succotash and Dave MacKay stalked on their high heels up the stairs and into the alcove of the mezzanine balcony, holding their broad hats in their hands. Succotash gulped as mademoiselle's mysterious figure confronted him and Dave's mouth fell open.

Behind them lurched another man, slinking in the background.

"What is it, *messieurs?*" asked Solange, her voice once more clear and sweet. The cow-punchers blushed in unison.

"This here Mr. Delonny done sent us here to see you, ma'am. He allows you-all wants a couple of hands for this trip you're takin' into the Esmeraldas. He likewise instigates us to corral this here horned toad, Banker, who's a prospector, because he says you'll want to see him about some mine or other, and Banker he don't know nothing about nothing but lookin' fer mines; which he ain't never found a whole lot, I reckon; none whatever."

Solange smiled and both of these bashful range riders felt warmed to their hearts.

"I am very glad to see you," she said. "It is true that I require help and I shall be glad of yours. It is kind of you to enter my employ."

Dave uttered a protest. "Don't you mention it, mad'm'selle. Succotash and me was both in France and while we can't give that there country any rank ahead of the U. S. A. we hands it to her frank that any time we can do anything fer a mad'm'selle, we does it pronto! We're yours, ma'am, hide, hair an' hoofs!"

"Which we sure are," agreed Succotash, not to be outdone. "That's whatever!"

"And here is this minin' sharp," said Dave, turning about and reaching for the shrinking Banker. "Come here, Jim, and say howdy, if you ain't herded with burros so long you've forgotten how, that a way. Mad'm'selle wants to talk to you."

Banker emerged from behind them. He, too, held his hat in hand, an incredibly stained and battered felt atrocity. His seamed face was nut-brown under constant exposure to the sun. His garments were faded nondescripts and on his feet were thick-soled, high-lacing boots. His eyes were mean and shifty. He might have been fifty or he might have been older.

Mademoiselle hardly knew enough English to question this queer specimen. She turned to Marion Pettis.

"Miss Pettis, can you explain to him? I can hardly tell him what we wish to know. And, if the mine is found, half of it will be yours, you know."

"Mine! Lord sakes, I ain't counting on it. You gotta fat chance to find it. This bird here has been searchin' for it ever since the year one and he ain't found it.

"Say, Banker, this is Mad'm'selle Dalbray. She's the daughter of that French Pete that was killed——"

"Hey?" said Banker sharply.

"Aw, you know the yarn. You been huntin' his mine since Lord knows when. This lady is lookin' for it and she wants some dope on how to go about findin' it."

"How'n hell's she expect me to tell her?" cried Banker, in a falsetto whine.

"Well, you know the Esmeraldas, old Stingin' Lizard," growled Succotash. "You can tell her what to do about gettin' there."

"I can't tell her nothin' no more than you can," said Banker. "She's got Ike Bran-

don's letters, ain't she? He told her where it was, didn't he? What's she comin' to me fer? I don't know nothin'."

"Were you here when my father was killed?" Solange asked kindly. She felt sorry for the old fellow.

"Hey! What's that? Was I here? No'm, I wasn't here! I was—I reckon I was over south of the range, out on the desert. I don't know nothin' about the killin'."

He was looking furtively at her veil, his eyes shifting away and back to it, awed by the mystery of the hidden eyes. He was like a wild, shy animal, uneasy in this place and among these people so foreign to his natural environment.

Solange sighed. "I am sorry, m'sieur," she said. "I had hoped you could tell me more."

He broke in again with his whining voice. "It was this here Louisiana, every one says."

"Louisiana! Yes!" Solange's tones became fierce and she leaned closer to the dry desert rat who shrank from her. "And when I find him—when I find this man who shot my father like a dog"—her voice was tense and almost shrill, cutting like steel—"I shall kill him!"

The blank, masked face was close to Banker's. He raised his corded, lean hand to his corded, lean throat as though he was choking. He stared at her fixedly, his shifty eyes for once held steady. There was horror and fear in the back of them. He slowly retreated backward, with his stricken eyes still on her. Then he suddenly whirled about and scuttled down the stairs as though the devil were after him.

Solange remained standing, puzzled.

"That is queer," she said. "Why is he frightened? I suppose he is shy."

"No. Just locoed, like all them prospectors," said Succotash. "Furthermore, he's ornery, ma'am. Probably don't like this talk of killin'. They say he beefed Panamint Charlie, his partner, some years ago, and I reckon he's a mite sensitive that a way."

"He doesn't seem to know where the mine is," said mademoiselle. "Nor do you, mademoiselle?"

"Me?" said Marion airily. "If I knew where that mine was, believe me, you'd be late looking for it!"

"I wish," said mademoiselle, "that I knew what to do. Perhaps, if this unspeakable De Launay were here——"

"I can telephone the Greek's and see if he's there," suggested MacKay. Mademoiselle assented and he hurried to a telephone.

"It ain't likely he knows much that will help, mademoiselle," said Succotash, also eager to aid, "but my old man was around here when these hostilities was pulled off and it's possible he might help you. He could tell you as much as any one, I reckon."

"Your father?"

"Yes, ma'am. I recommend that you get your outfit together, except fer hosses, hire a car to take it out and start from our ranch at Willow Springs. It's right near the mountains and not far from Shoe String Cañon, which it's likely you'll have to go that way to get into the hills. And you'll be able to get all the hosses you want right there."

"That sounds as though it might be the wise thing to do," said Wilding.

Mademoiselle turned to him. "That is true. I thank M'sieu Succotash. And, M'sieu Wilding, there is one thing you can do for me, besides the arrangements for that divorce. Can you not search the records to find out what is known of my father's death and who killed him?"

"But it appears that the killer was Louisiana."

"Yes—but who is Louisiana? Where did he go? Oh! If this depraved De Launay were of any benefit, instead of being a sorrow and disgust to me——"

At this moment Dave MacKay reappeared. Mademoiselle turned to him eagerly. "Did you find him, monsieur?"

"I sure did," said Dave with disgust. "Leastways, I located him. That animated vat of inebriation has done went and landed in jail."

CHAPTER VII.

A somewhat intoxicated cow-puncher in from the mountain ranges north of the town intrigued De Launay when he returned to Johnny the Greek's. To be exact, it was not so much the cow-puncher, who was merely a gawky, loud-mouthed and uncouth importation from a Middle-Western farm, broken to ride after a fashion and to rope and brand when necessary—the sort of product, in fact, that had disillusioned De Launay; it was rather his clothes that the ex-*légionnaire* admired.

They were clothes about like those worn by Succotash and Dave MacKay. De Launay could have purchased such clothes at any one of a dozen shops but they would have been new and conspicuous. The fellow wore a wide-brimmed hat the wear of which had resulted in certain picturesque sags that De Launay considered extremely artistic. His boots were small and fairly new and not overly adorned with ornamentation. There was also a buckskin waistcoat which was aged and ripened.

De Launay imbibed enough of the terrible liquor served by Snake Murphy to completely submerge his everyday personality. He retained merely a fixed idea that he wished to return as far as possible in spirit to the days of nineteen years ago. To his befuddled mind the first step was to dress the part. He was groping after his lost youth, unable to realize that it was, indeed, lost beyond recovery; that he was, in hardly a particular, the wild lad who had once ridden the desert ranges.

The more he drank, the firmer became the notion that to him, instead of to this imitation of the real thing, rightfully belonged these insignia of a vanishing fraternity. He considered ways and means of getting them, rejecting one after another. He vaguely laid plans to wait until the fellow went to his quarters for the night and then break in and steal his clothes. A better plan suggested itself—to ply him with drink until unconscious and then drag him somewhere and strip him. This also did not seem practical. Then he thought of inducing him to gamble and winning all his possessions; but a remnant of sense deterred him. De Launay, though he gambled recklessly, never by any chance won.

Finally having gotten to a stage where the effort to think was too much for him he did the obvious thing and offered to buy the fellow's clothes. The cow-puncher was almost as drunk as De Launay and showed it much more. He was also belligerent.

"Sell you my clo'es! Say, feller, what the blazes are you givin' me?"

A bullet-headed, crop-haired and lowering laborer who was leaning against the bar uttered a snorting laugh.

"Lamp d' guy wit' de French heels an' d' one wit' d' sissy eyebrow on 'is lip, would youse? Deys a coupla heroes wat's been to France. Dey gets dem habits dere."

The sensitive cow-puncher glared about him but the leering toughs who echoed their spokesman's laughter were not safe to challenge. There were too many of them. De Launay stood alone and to the cow-puncher as to the others that little, pointed mustache was a mark of affectation and effeminacy.

"You better pull yer freight before I take a wallop at you," he remarked loudly.

"Tell 'im to go git a shave, bo," suggested the bullet-headed man.

"I'll singe the eyebrow offa him myself if he don't git outa here," growled the cow hand, turning back to his liquor.

De Launay went back to his table and sat down. He brooded on his failure and to him it seemed that he must have that hat, that waistcoat and those boots at any cost. The others in the room snickered and jeered as they eyed his sagging figure and closed eyes.

He finally got up and lurched out of the room. The door opened on a narrow stairway leading down to a sort of pantry behind the main billiard parlor on the ground floor. The stairway was steep and dark and the landing was small and only dimly lighted by a dusty, cobwebbed square of window high up in the outer wall.

De Launay sat on the top step and resumed his brooding, his head sunk on his arms which were folded on his knees. He felt a deep sense of injury and his sorrow for himself was acute. There were some things he wanted and they continually ran through his mind in jumbled sequence. There was a pair of high heels, then there was a sort of vision of limitless, abandoned plain covered with yellowing grass and black sage clumps and surmounted with a brilliant blue sky. Following this was a confused picture of a blackened, greasy waistcoat from which a fathomless pair of eyes looked out. He wondered how a waistcoat could have a pair of eyes and why the eyes should hold in them lights like those that flashed from a diamond.

Men came up the stairs and crowded roughly past him. He paid them no heed. Occasionally other men left the hidden barroom and went down. These were rougher. One of them even kicked him in passing. He merely looked up, dully took in the figure and sank his head again on his arms. Inside, newcomers advised Snake Murphy to go out and throw the bum into the street. As this might have led to inquiries Snake

decided to leave well enough alone until dark.

Finally the cow-puncher, loaded with more liquor than he could comfortably carry, decided to take an uncertain departure. He waved a debonair and inclusive farewell to all those about him, teetered a bit on his high heels, straddled an imaginary horse and with legs well apart and body balanced precariously tacked, by and full, for the door.

Reaching it he leaned against it, felt for the knob, turned it, carefully backed away from the door and opened it. Holding the edge, he eased himself around it and closed it again with elaborate care. Then he took a tentative step forward. The next moment he tripped over De Launay and fell over his head, turning a complete flip.

De Launay came out of his trance with a start to find a hundred and sixty pounds of cow-puncher sprawling in his lap and clinging about his neck. His dull eyes, gummy with sleep, showed him a hat of sorts, a grimy waistcoat——

Calmly De Launay took the cowboy by the neck and raised him. The fellow uttered a cry that was choked. De Launay pulled off his hat and substituted his own on the rumpled locks of the young man. He then swung him about as though he were a child, laid him over his knees and stripped from him his waistcoat.

His own coat was tossed aside while he wriggled into the ancient garment. He held the cowboy during this process by throwing one leg over and around his neck and clamping his legs together. The cowboy uttered muffled yells of protest.

He hauled the fellow's boots off without much trouble, but when it came to removing his own shoes there was a difficulty which he finally adjusted by rising, grasping the man by the neck again—incidentally shutting off his cries—and depositing him on the top step, after which he sat upon him.

It took only a second to rip the laces from his shoes and kick them off. Then he started to pull on the boots. But the noise had finally aroused those inside and they came charging out.

Fortunately for De Launay, Snake Murphy and his cohorts were so surprised to see the pose of the late guests that they gave him a moment of respite. He had time to get off of the cowboy and stamp the second boot onto his foot. Then, with satisfaction, he turned to face them.

They answered the cowboy's protesting shout with a charge. De Launay was peaceful but he did not intend to lose his prize without a fight. He smote the first man with a straight jab that shook all his teeth. The next one he ducked under, throwing him over his shoulder and down the stairs. Another he swept against the wall with a crash.

They were over him and around him, slugging, kicking and pushing. He fought mechanically and with incredible efficiency, striking with a snaky speed and accuracy that would have amazed any one capable of noting it. But they were too many for him. He was shoved from the step, crowded back, stumbling downward, struggling gamely but hopelessly until like Sampson he fell backward, dragging with him a confused heap of his assailants who went bumping down the stairs in a squirming, kicking mass.

They brought up at the foot of the stairs, striking in all directions, with De Launay on the bottom missing most of the destruction. The stair well was dark and obscure but at the bottom was a narrow space where the battle waged wildly. De Launay managed to get to his hands and knees but over him surged and swept a murmurous, sweating, reeking crowd who struck and battered each other in the gloom.

The door into the billiard parlor burst open and Johnny the Greek and reënforcements burst on the scene. But Johnny, not knowing what the fight was about and not being able to find out—the outraged cowboy having thrust himself before a hostile fist in the start of the encounter was now lying unconscious at the top of the stairs—proceeded to deal with what he imagined was impartiality. He simply added his weight to the combat.

The pandemonium was bound to attract attention. Still unable to comprehend the reason of the whole affair De Launay was crawling between legs and making a more or less undamaged progress to the door while his enemies battered each other. He had almost reached it and was rising to his feet when a new element was injected into the riot. A couple of uniformed policemen threw themselves into the *mêlée*.

De Launay saw only the uniforms. His wrath surged up. What were policemen doing in this West of range and sheriffs? They stood for the change he hated.

He expressed his feelings by letting the first policeman have it on the point of the jaw. The second he proceeded to walk over, to beat back and to drive through the door out into the big room and clear to the sidewalk. The man resisted, swinging his club, but he found De Launay a cold, inhumanly accurate and swift antagonist whom it was difficult to hit and impossible to dodge. Twice he was knocked down and twice he leaped up, swinging his club at a head that was never there when the club reached its objective.

The policeman whom De Launay had first knocked down had arisen and, seeing the nemesis now pursuing his comrade, ran to the rescue. De Launay could avoid a club in the hands of the man in front of him but that wielded by the man behind was another matter. It fell on his head just as he was driving the other policeman through the door into the street and De Launay went to the ground.

While they waited for the patrol wagon the two policemen tried to gather information about the cause of the fight but they found Johnny the Greek somewhat reticent. The cowboy still was upstairs, held there by Snake Murphy. The others were more or less confused in their ideas. Johnny was chiefly anxious that the police should remove the prisoner and refrain from any close inquiry into the premises, so he merely stated that the fellow had come in drunk and had made an attack on some of the men playing pool. His henchman was seeing to it that the robbed and wronged cowboy had no opportunity to tell a story that would send the police upstairs.

Half conscious and wholly drunk De Launay was carted to Sulphur Falls' imposing stone jail where he was duly slated before a police sergeant for drunkenness, assault and battery, mayhem, inciting a riot and resisting an officer in the performance of his duty. Then he was led away and deposited in a cell where he went soundly to sleep.

In the course of time he began to dream. He dreamed that he was on a raft which floated on a limitless sea of bunch grass, alkali and sagebrush where the waves ran high and regularly, rocking the raft back and forth monotonously and as monotonously throwing him from side to side and against a mast to which he clung. Right in front of the raft, floating in the air above the waves, drifted a slender, veiled figure and through the veil sparkled a pair of eyes which were bottomless and yet held the colors of the rainbow in their depths. Above this figure, which beckoned him on and after which the raft drifted faster and faster, was a halo of sparkling hair which caught and broke up the light into prismatic colors.

The raft sailed faster and faster, rotating in a circle until it was spinning about the ghostly figure. The figure grew more and more distinct as the raft gyrated more crazily. Raft, desert, waves and sky became hazy, fading out, but the figure stood there as he opened his eyes and the mast thumped him in the ribs.

His sleep and liquor-drugged mind came back to him and he found himself lying on his bunk in a cell while Solange stood before him and a turnkey poked him in the ribs and rocked him to wake him up. Sick, bruised and battered, he raised himself, swung his feet to the floor and sat up on the edge of the bed. He tried to stand, but his head swam and he became so dizzy that he feared to fall.

"Don't get up," said Solange icily.

The turnkey went to the door. "I reckon he's all right now, ma'am. You got half an hour. If he gets rough just holler and we'll settle him."

"Is the charge serious?" asked Solange.

"It ought to be. He's a sure enough hard case. But a fine and six months on the rocks is about all he'll get."

De Launay looked up sullenly. The turnkey made a derisive, threatening motion and, grinning, slammed the door behind him, locking it. De Launay licked his dry lips. There was a pitcher of water on a stand and he seized it, almost draining it as he gulped the lukewarm stuff down his sizzling throat. It strengthened and revived him. He got up from the bed and stood aside. Solange stood like a statue, but her eyes scorched him through her veil.

"So this is what a general of France has come to!" she said. Words and tone burned him like fire. He said nothing but motioned to the bed as the only seat in the cell.

He picked up the hat, the battered thing that had brought on this disaster, from the floor and as he stooped felt the sharp throb of his half-fractured skull. His weakened nerves reacted sharply and he uttered a half-suppressed cry, raising his hand to the lump on his cranium.

Solange started. "They have hurt you?" she asked sharply.

De Launay took hold of himself again. "Nothing to speak of," he answered gruffly. "Will you sit down?"

She sat down and through her veil he could not tell what her expression was, but he was uneasily conscious of the black pools that lurked there and searched his scarred soul to its depths, finding it evil. He was in no condition to meet her, half drugged with stale alcohol, shaken to his inmost being by reaction from the poisoning of weeks, broken of mind and body.

His eyes did not meet hers squarely. But she might have read in them something of despair, something of sullenness, something of shame; but mostly she should have seen a plea for mercy and perhaps she did.

If so, she did not yield to the plea—at first. In a cold voice, in incisive French, she rebaptized him a coward, a beast, a low and disgusting thing. She painted for him what a gentleman and a soldier should be and contrasted with it what he was. She sketched for him all the glory and the evil of the men who had led the soldiers of France, neither sparing nor exalting but showing them to be at least men who had courage and command of themselves or had striven for it. She contrasted them with his own weakness and degradation. Then, her voice softening subtly, she shifted the picture to what he had been, to his days of unutterable lowness in the Legion, the five years of brutal struggle, of fiercely won promotion, his gaining of a commission, the cachet of respectability, his years of Titanic struggle and study and work through the hard-won grades of the army.

She made him see himself as something glorious, rising from hell to respect and influence; made him see himself as he knew he was not: made him see his own courage, which he had; his ability, which he also had; and what he had not—great pride, noble impulses, legitimate ambition. When she painted the truth he did not respond; but when she pictured credits he did not deserve he winced and longed to earn them.

"And now," she said wearily at last, "you descend to this! Is it that you have exhausted yourself in the effort that went before?"

De Launay stared at the floor.

"What would you expect of a *légionnaire?*" he muttered.

"Nothing!" she cried angrily. "Nothing from the *légionnaire!* But, in the name of God, cannot one expect more than this from the man who wears the *Medaille Militaire*, the Grand Cross of the Legion, who won a colonelcy in Champagne, a brigade at Verdun, a division at the *Chemin des Dames*—and who, as all know, should have had an army corps after the Balkan campaign? From such a man as that, monsieur, one expects everything!"

De Launay twisted the unfortunate hat in his hands and made no reply for some minutes. Mademoiselle sat on the bed, one knee crossed over the other and her chin resting in her hand. Her head was also bent toward the floor.

"Mademoiselle," said De Launay at last. "I think you have guessed the trouble with me." His manner had reverted to that of his rank and class and she looked up in instant reaction to it.

"I am all that you say except what is good. I have been a soldier for nineteen years; have made it the work of my life, in fact. I know nothing else—except, perhaps, a little of a passing trade of this fading West. I had hoped to win—had won, I thought—place and distinction in the soldier's profession. You know what happened. Maybe I was wrong in despairing. But I had won my way by effort, mademoiselle, that exhausted me. I was too tired to take up again the task of battering my way up through the remaining ranks.

"There is nothing left for me to do. There is no one who can use me unless it be some petty state which needs mercenaries. I have served my purpose in the world. Why should I not waste the rest of my time?"

Solange nodded. "Then what you need is an object?" she asked reflectively. "Work?"

He shook his head. "I have no need of money. And why should I work otherwise? There are others who need the rewards of labor more than I."

"Philanthropy—service?"

At this he grinned. "I am not a sentimentalist but a soldier. As for service—I served France until she had no further use for me."

"Marriage—a family?"

He laughed. "I am married. As for the love that is said to mitigate that relation, am I the sort of man a woman would care for?"

Solange straightened up and rose.

"If neither love, ambition nor money will stir you," she said, "still you may find an incentive to serve. There is chivalry."

"I'm no troubadour."

"Will you serve me?" she asked abruptly.

De Launay looked at her in surprise. "Am I not serving mademoiselle?"

"You are—after your own fashion. I need your service—but not this way."

De Launay nodded slowly. "I will serve mademoiselle—in any way she wishes," he said.

Solange smiled under the mask.

"That is better, monsieur. But you cannot, it is clear, serve me effectively by being thrown into jail for months. I must find the mine and the man who killed my father before that."

"You expect to find the mine and the man, mademoiselle, after nineteen years?"

"I expect to make the attempt," she replied calmly. "Somehow I feel that I shall succeed—at least in some measure. But the same premonition points to you as one who shall make that success possible. I do not know why that is."

"Premonitions!" said De Launay doubtfully. Still—from Morgan *la fée,* even a premonition——"

The shrouding mask was turned upon him with an effect of question as he paused.

"Even a premonition, I say," concluded De Launay, "is entitled to respectful consideration in your case." He stood thoughtfully a minute, his throbbing head making mental action difficult. "I see no hope of tracing the man—but one. Have you that bullet, mademoiselle?"

She took it out of the hand bag, shivering a little as she handed it to him.

"It is common—a thirty caliber such as most hunters use. Yet it is all the clew you possess. As for the mine there seems to be only one hope, which is to retrace as closely as possible the route taken by your father before he was shot. May I keep this?"

She nodded her assent and he put the bullet in his pocket.

"And now," he added, "I must get out of here."

CHAPTER VIII.

"If you need money—to pay the fine——" began Solange doubtfully.

De Launay shook his head.

"I have a fancy to do this my own way—the old-time way," he said. "As for money, you will have need of all you possess, mademoiselle. The cowboy Succotash is a type I know. You may take a message to him for me and I think he will not refuse to help."

He gave her rapidly whispered instructions.

"And you," he finished, "when you are ready to start will gather your outfit at Wallace's ranch near Willow Springs. From there there is only one way that you can go to follow your father's trail. He must have come out of the Esmeraldas through Shoe String Cañon, so you must go into them that way. I will be there when you arrive." Solange turned to the door and De Launay bowed to her. She shook the grating and called for the turnkey. As she heard him approaching she swung round and with a smile held out her hand to the soldier. His sallow face flushed as he took it. Her hand clung to his a moment and then the door swung open and she was gone.

De Launay took the bullet from his pocket. It was just such a bullet as might have been shot from any one of a hundred rifles, a bullet of which nothing of the original shape remained except about a quarter of an inch of the butt.

He wondered if, after nineteen years, there remained any one who had even been present when French Pete was found dying. As for the mine, that was even more hopeless. No one had seriously attempted any prolonged search for the murderer, he assumed, knowing the region as it had been. Homicides were not regarded as seriously as in later days and a Basque sheepherder's demise would arouse little interest. The mine, however, was a different thing. It was certain that throughout all these years there had been many to search for it and the treasure it was supposed to hold, yet none had found it.

They themselves would not find it, of course, but there might be some way in which he could make up the disappointment to Solange. He thought he could understand the urge that had led her on the ridiculous quest. A young, pretty but portionless girl, with just enough money to support life in France for a few years, hopeless of marriage in a country where the women outnumbered the men by at least a million, would have a bleak future before her. He could guess that her high, proud spirit would rebel, on the one hand, at the prospect of

pinching poverty and ignoble work and, on the other, from the alternative existence of the *demi-mondaine*.

Here, in America, she might have a chance. He could see to it that she did have a chance. With those eyes and that hair and her voice, the stage would open its arms to her and acting was, in this country, a recognized and respectable profession. There might be other opportunities, also.

But the vendetta she would have to drop. In the Basses Pyrenees one might devote a life to hunting vengeance but it wouldn't do in the United States. If she found the man, by some freak of chance, what would she do with him? To expect to convict him after all these years was absurd. The only thing left to her would be the taking of the law into her own hands, which clearly would not do. He did not doubt her ability to kill the man, and he shuddered to think of her imprisoned in some penitentiary. If there was to be any killing, she must not be allowed to do it.

He had promised to serve her; he had no particular object in life; he was abundantly able to kill; he would do her killing for her. Having settled this to his satisfaction and feeling a certain complacent pleasure in the thought that, if the impossible happened, he could redeem himself in her eyes by an act that would condemn him in the eyes of every one else, he lay down on his bunk and went to sleep again.

In the morning he was aroused by the turnkey and brought out of his cell. Arrived at the criminal court building, he was taken into a large room just off the courtroom to await his preliminary hearing.

He had had no plan—beyond a vague one of breaking from his guardians when he was led back to the jail. But he formed a new one almost as soon as he had seated himself in the room where the prisoners were gathered.

He was placed on a long bench, the end of which was near a door leading to the corridor of the building. A door opposite led into the dock. A number of prisoners were seated there and two men in uniform formed a guard. One of them spent practically all his time glancing through the door, which he held slightly open, into the courtroom. The other was neither alert nor interested. The officer who had brought De Launay and who presumably was to make the charge against him, remained while his companion departed.

Among those gathered in the room were several relatives or friends of prisoners, lawyers and bondsmen, who went from one to another whispering their plans and proposals. One, a bulbous-nosed, greasy individual, sidled up to De Launay and suggested that he could furnish bail for a consideration.

De Launay's immediate guard at this moment said something to the uniformed policeman who sat near the center of the room. The other glanced perfunctorily in De Launay's direction and nodded, and the man stepped out into the hall.

De Launay whispered an intimation that he was interested in the bail suggestion. He arose and led the bondsman off to one side near the outer door and talked with him a few moments. He suggested that the man wait until they discovered what the bail would be and said he would be glad to accept his services. He had money which had not been taken from him when he was searched.

The bondsman nodded his satisfaction at netting another victim and strolled away to seek further prey. De Launay calmly turned around, opened the outer door and walked into the corridor.

He walked rapidly to the street entrance, out to the sidewalk and down the street. At the first corner he turned. Then he hurried along until he saw what he was looking for. This was Succotash, lounging easily against a lamp-post while De Launay's horse, saddled and equipped, stood with head hanging and reins dangling just before him at the curb.

A close observer would have noticed that a pair of spurs hung at the saddle horn and that the saddle pockets bulged. But there were no close observers around as De Launay came up to the horse. As yet, there had been not the slightest indication of any hue and cry after him. This he knew could obtain for only a short time, but it would be sufficient.

Succotash lolled negligently against the lamp-post, rolling a cigarette. He did not even look at De Launay but spoke out of a corner of his mouth.

"How'd you make it, old-timer?"

"Walked out," said De Launay dryly.

"Huh? Well, them blue bellies are right bright, now. You'll find pack hosses and an

outfit at the Springs west of the Lazy Y. Know where it is?"

De Launay nodded as he felt the cinch of the horse's saddle.

"But how the deuce will you get them there? It's nearly ninety miles," he said.

"We got a telephone at pa's ranch," said Succotash complacently. "Better hit the high spots. There's a row back there, now."

De Launay swung into the saddle. "See you at Shoe String—this side the Crater," he said, briefly. "Adios!"

De Launay spurred the horse and took the middle of the road on a run. Succotash looked after him reflectively.

"That hombre can ride a whole lot," he remarked. "He's a sure enough stingin' lizard, I'll say! Walked out! Huh!"

A few moments after De Launay had rounded a corner and disappeared with his ill-gotten habiliments; excited policemen and citizens came rushing to where Succotash with nothing on his mind but his hat strolled along the sidewalk.

"Seen an escaped prisoner? Came this way! Wasn't there a horse here a minute ago?" The questions were fired at him in rapid succession.

"They was a hoss here, yes," drawled Succotash leisurely.

"Was it yours?"

"Not that I know of. Gent came along and forked it. I allowed it was hisn."

"Which way did he go?"

"He was headin' south-southeast by no'th or thereabouts when I last seen him. And he was fannin' a hole plumb through the atmosphere."

They left the unsatisfactory witness and rushed to the corner around which De Launay had vanished. Here they found a man or two who had seen the galloping horse and its rider. But as following on foot was manifestly impossible one of them rushed to a telephone while others ran back to get a police automobile and give chase.

De Launay meanwhile was riding hard through the outlying streets of the town, heading toward the south. The paved streets gave way to gravel roads and the smoke of the factories hung in the air behind him. Past comfortable bungalows and well-kept lawns he galloped until the privet hedges gave place to barbed-wire fences and the cropped grass to fields of standing stubble.

The road ran along above and parallel to the river, following a ridge. To one side of it the farms lay, brown and gold in their autumn vesture. At regular intervals appeared a house, generally of the stereotyped bungalow form.

De Launay had passed several of these when he noticed, from one ahead of him, several men running toward the road. He watched them, saw that they gesticulated toward the cloud of dust out of which he rode and turned in his saddle to open the pockets back of the cantle. From one he drew belt and holster, sagging heavily with the pistol that filled it. From the other he pulled clips loaded with cartridges. Leaving the horse to run steadily on the road he strapped the gun on himself.

The men had reached the road and were lined up across it. One of them had a shotgun and others were armed with forks and rakes and they shouted for him to stop. He calmly drew his pistol and pulled his horse down in the midst of them.

"Well?" he asked as they surged around him. The man with the shotgun suddenly saw the pistol and started to throw the gun to his shoulder.

"We got him!" he yelled excitedly.

"Got who?" asked De Launay. "You pointing that gun at me? Better head it another way."

His automatic was swinging carelessly at the belligerent farmer. The man was not long in that country but he was long enough there to know the difference between a shotgun and an automatic .45. He lost his nerve.

"We're lookin' for an escaped convict," he muttered. "Be you the feller?"

"Keep on looking," said De Launay pleasantly. "But drop that gun and those pitchforks. What do you mean by holding up a peaceable man on the highroad?"

The rattled farmer and his cohorts were bluffed and puzzled. The automatic spoke in terms too imperative to be disregarded. Capturing escaped prisoners was all very well but when it involved risks such as this they preferred more peaceful pursuits. The men backed away and the farmer let the shotgun drop to the ground.

"Pull your freight!" said De Launay, shortly. They obeyed.

He whirled his horse and resumed his headlong flight. He had gained fifty yards when the farmer, who had run back to his gun, fired after him. The shot scattered too

much to cause him any uneasiness as he fled away.

Other places had been warned also but De Launay rushed past them without mishap. A new peril was on De Launay's trail, however. He soon heard the distant throb of a motor running with the muffler open. Looking back along the road, he could see the car as it rounded curves on top of the ridge. All too soon it was throbbing behind him and not half a mile away.

But he did not worry. Right ahead was a stone marker which he knew marked the boundary of Nevada. Long before the car could reach him he had passed it. He kept on for two or three hundred yards at the same pace while the car, forging up on him, was noisy with shouts and commands to stop. He slowed down to a trot and grinned at the men who stood in the car and pointed their revolvers at him. His pistol was dangling in his hand.

"You gents want me?" he asked pleasantly.

"You're damn shoutin' we want you," shouted his former captor. "Get off that horse and climb in here, you——"

De Launay's voice grew hard and incisive. "You got a warrant for my arrest?"

"Warrant hell! You're an escaped prisoner! Climb down before we let you have it!"

"That's interesting. Where's your extradition papers?"

The officer poured out commands and imprecations, but De Launay only grinned.

"If you want to test the law, go ahead," he said. "I'm in Nevada as you know very well. If you want to shoot, you may get me—but I can promise that *I'll* at least get the first man of you that tightens a trigger."

An officer who is on the right side of the law is thereby fortified and may proceed with confidence. But an officer who is on the wrong side of the law has no such psychological reënforcement. The policemen were courageous, but they faced a dilemma. If they shot De Launay they would have to explain. If he shot them it would be in self-defense and lawful resistance to an illegal arrest. Furthermore, there was something about the way he acted that convinced them of his intention and ability. There were only three of them and he somehow seemed fairly confident that he would even get all of them before they could kill him.

The officer who had been his guardian thought of a way out.

"There's a justice of the peace a mile ahead," he said. "We'll just linger with you until we reach him and get a warrant."

"Suit yourselves," said De Launay. "But don't crowd me too closely. Those things make my horse nervous."

They started the car but De Launay galloped easily on ahead, turning in his saddle to watch them. They proceeded slowly, allowing him to gain about forty yards. The officer thought of shooting at him when he was not looking but desisted when he discovered that De Launay seemed to be always looking.

They had proceeded only a short distance when De Launay without warning spurred his horse into a run, swinging him at the same time from side to side of the road. Turned in his saddle he raised his hand and the staccato rattle of his automatic sounded like the rattle of a drum. The startled officers fired and missed his elusive form. They had their aim disarranged by the sudden jolt and stoppage of the car. De Launay had shot the two front and one rear tire to pieces.

The discomfited policemen saw him disappearing down the road in a cloud of dust from which echoed his mocking laugh and a chanted, jubilant verse that had not been heard in that region for nineteen years:

"My Louisiana! Louisiana Lou!"

CHAPTER IX.

When Jim Banker, the prospector, hurried from the hotel he was singularly agitated for a man merely suffering from the shyness of the desert wanderer in the presence of a pretty woman. His furtive looks and the uneasy glances he cast behind him, no less than the panic character of his flight, might have aroused further question on the part of those he left had they been in a position to observe him.

He made no pause until he had gained the comparative seclusion of Johnny the Greek's place, which he found almost deserted after the riot of which De Launay had been the center. Snake Murphy was once more in his place ready to dispense hospitality. Few remained to accept it, however, the imminent memory of the police having frightened all others away. A liberal dispensation of money and the discovery

that De Launay's coat and shoes were of excellent make and more valuable than those he had lost had secured the silence of the man whom De Launay had robbed, and he had departed some time since.

Banker sidled into the upstairs room and made his way to the end of the bar where he called huskily for whisky.

"Say, Murph," he whispered hoarsely. "They's hell to pay!"

"How-come?" asked Murphy, yawning.

"You remember French Pete who was killed back in 1900?"

"The Basco? Sure I do. I got a reminder, ain't I? Louisiana done shot me up before he went out an' beefed Pete—if he did beef him."

"*If* he did? Whatever makes you say that? If he *didn't,* who did?" Jim blurted out the question in a gasp as though fairly forcing utterance of the words. Murphy flicked a sidelong look at him and then bent his absent gaze across the room.

"Oh—I dunno. Never knew Louisiana to use a rifle, though. The coyote! I can hear him now, ridin' off a-laughin' and a-singin'; chortlin':

'Back to Whisky Chitto; to *Beau Regarde* Bayou;
To my Louisiana—Louisiana Lou.'

Remember the varmint's singin', Jim?"

The few men in the place had turned startled eyes as Murphy whined the doggerel ballad nasally. It was strange to them but Banker shivered and shrank from the grinning bartender.

"Stop it, you damn fool! You gimme the creeps! What the devil's the matter with everything to-day? Everywhere I go some one starts gabblin' about mines and French Pete an' this blamed Louisiana!"

"What's that about mines—an' French Pete? You was the one that mentioned *him.*"

Banker leaned confidentially nearer. "Snake, d'you think old Ike Brandon didn't know where the mine was?"

Snake regarded him contemptuously. "You reckon Ike would have lived and died po're as a heifer after a hard winter if he'd 'a' knowed? You're plumb, starin' loco, Jim!"

"Maybe so. But did you or any one else ever know what language them Bascos talks?"

"French, I reckon," said Snake.

"French! Charlie Grandjean that used to ride fer Perkins & Co. was French and he told me once that they didn't talk no French nor nothin' like it. They talks their own lingo and there ain't nobody but a Basco that knows this Basco talk."

"Well," said Snake easily. "What's the answer? I'll bite."

"French Pete's gal has lit in here all spraddled out an' lookin' fer French Pete's mine," croaked Banker impressively. Snake was owlishly dense.

"His gal? Never knew he had a gal."

"He had one a plenty; sort of a ghastly critter like a witch, with teeth all same like a *lobo.* Kind 'at'd stick a knife in you quick as look at you."

"I reckon I won't go sparkin' her none then. Well, how's this here Basco lady with the enchantin' ways allow she's goin' to find Pete's mine?"

"That's what I'm askin' you! How's she goin' to find it? You reckon she comes pirootin' out here all the way from them Basco regions just on the hunch that she can shut her eyes an' walk to it?"

"Maybe—if she's full o' witchcraft that a way. I reckon she stands as good a chance as any one does. Drink up and ferget it, Jim."

"I been a-thinkin', Snake, Brandon didn't know where it was. But maybe Pete leaves a writin', say, which he tells Ike to send to his folks. It's in Basco, see, and Ike can't read it nor nobody else, so they sends it to this Basco place and the gal gits it. If that ain't right whyever does this Basco lady come a-runnin' out here?"

"If it is right, why does she delay all these years?" asked Snake.

"Which you ain't seen her, Snake. I makes a guess this gal ain't more'n risin' two or three years when she gets that Basco note. She has to grow up and when she gets big enough the war come along and keeps her bottled up until now."

Snake pondered this theory thoughtfully. "You may be right at that," he admitted, an expression of wonder passing over his features. "What she say about it?"

"She was askin' *me* if I knowed where it was? But that was just a blind to put me offen the track—an' she probably wanted to make sure no one else had found it. She was quizzin' that Pettis girl too, makin' sure Ike hadn't told *her* nothin'."

"Yuh reckon she'll find it?"

Jim leered evilly at him. "No, I don't

reckon she will. But she might help *me* find it."

"Howzat?" Snake was startled.

"I gotta have a grubstake, Snake. How about it."

"Jest outline this here project, Jim. Let me git the slant on it."

The two heads, one slick and sandy, though with streaks of gray, the other shaggy, colorless and unkempt, came together and a growl of hoarse and carefully guarded whispers murmured at that end of the bar. After ten minutes' talk Snake went to the safe and returned with a roll of bills and a piece of paper, pen and ink. He laboriously made out a document which Banker as laboriously signed. Then Snake surrendered the money and the two rascals shook hands.

Banker at once became all furtive activity. For a few hours he slunk from store to store, buying necessaries for his trip. By nighttime he was ready and before the moon had risen in the cold November sky he was hazing his burros southward toward the Nevada line.

Although he was mounted on a fairly good horse his progress was necessarily slow, as he had to accommodate his pace to that of the sedate burros. He was in no hurry, however. With true, desert-born patience, he plodded along, making camp that night about ten miles from Sulphur Falls. The following day he resumed his snaillike pace until the night found him in the salt pan and the alkali. He passed the Brandon ranch at Three Creek, long since sold and now occupied by a couple of Basques who had built up from sheepherding for wages until they now owned and ran a fair flock of sheep. Here he did not stop, hazing his burros past as though he had suddenly acquired a reason for haste. When Twin Forks was a couple of miles to the rear he reverted to his former sluggish pace.

The next day was a repetition. He plodded on stolidly making without hesitation for some spot which was ahead of him. Finally, that evening, he made camp about three miles north of Wallace's Lazy Y Ranch near Willow Springs and not very far from the gap in the wall of the Esmeraldas which marked the entrance to Shoe String Creek and cañon.

The next morning he did not break camp but lolled around all day until about three o'clock in the afternoon. At that time his acute ears caught the murmur of a motor long before the car came in sight in the rolling ground.

When it passed he was sitting stolidly by his camp fire, apparently oblivious to his surroundings. He did not seem to look up or notice the car but in reality not a detail of it escaped him. He saw the occupants turn and look at him and heard their comments, though the words escaped him.

He muttered an imprecation strangely full of hate and, in the manner of lonely desert rats, grumbled in conversation with himself.

"I gotta do it. She never come all this way without he told her somethin'. Fer all I know he might ha' seen more'n I thought. An' she'd do what she said quicker'n look at you. She ain't right, nohow. Why don't she show her face? An' Charlie Grandjean says them Basques is uncanny. Even if French Pete never told her, she *knows!*"

The car had passed and he now openly looked after it, mowing and muttering. He had observed the driver, a hired chauffeur from the town and he deduced that the car was going back. Indeed, there was no road by which it could have gone into the mountains at this point. He saw that young Wallace, nicknamed "Succotash" from the color of his hair, and Dave MacKay, another of the Lazy Y riders, were in the car with their saddles, and that the uncanny veiled Basque girl was seated with them, while her luggage was piled high between the seats.

"Goin' to git hosses and outfit at Wallace's and go in from there. Course, they'll have to go into Shoe String. It's the only way. They'll stop at Wallace's and it'll take a day to git the cavvy up and ready. They'll be movin' day after to-morrow 'nless they want to git caught in the snow. Proves she knows right where to go er she wouldn't head in there this time o' year."

He gloomed some more.

"That girl ain't right. She's one o' these here hypnotists er a medium er some kind o' witch. But she ain't goin' to git away with it. She ain't goin' to git the best of old Jim Banker after nineteen years. No more'n old Panamint did. I fixed *him*—an' I'll fix her too. Old Betsy's still good fer a couple o' hundred yards, I reckon. I'll let her lead me to it—er maybe I'll git a chance to ketch her alone."

This thought gave him pleasure for a

while and he mumbled over it for an hour or two. Then he ate his evening meal and went to sleep. In his sleep he moaned a good deal and tossed about, dreaming of mysterious, ghostlike, veiled figures which threatened him and mocked him.

The next day he remained where he was. About noon he was puzzled at the sight of another motor car northward bound. He recognized in the driver the lawyer who had been present when he had been interviewed by the French girl, but he did not know what brought him there. Manifestly he was on the way back to Sulphur Falls and Banker finally concluded that he had been to Maryville, the county seat south of the Esmeraldas, on some legal business. In this he was right though he could not guess what the business was nor how it favored his own designs.

On the following day he resumed his march. Now he followed the trail of the motor car which had brought Solange until he came opposite Wallace's ranch. From here he took up another trail, that of a considerable train of pack horses and three saddle animals. It led straight to the steep gully in the rim of the Esmeraldas where Shoestring Creek cut its way to the plain.

He noted but hardly considered an older trail that underlay this one. It was of a rider and two pack animals who had passed a day or two before.

CHAPTER X.

The efficient Succotash reported back to Solange the details of De Launay's escape, making them characteristically brief and colorful. Then with the effective aid of MacKay he set out to prepare for the expedition in search of the mine.

Neither he nor Dave actually had any real conviction that Solange would venture into the Esmeraldas at this time of year to look for a mine whose very existence they doubted as being legendary. Yet neither tried to dissuade her from the rash adventure—as yet. Both of them were curious and sentimental. Each secretly wondered what the slender, rather silent young woman looked like and each was beginning to imagine that the veil hid some extreme loveliness. Each felt himself handicapped in the unwonted atmosphere of the town and each imagined that once he got on his own preserves he would show to much better advantage in her eyes.

Succotash was quite confident that once they got Solange at his father's ranch they would be able to persuade her to stay there for the winter. Dave also had about the same idea. Each reasoned that, in an indeterminate stay at the ranch she would certainly in time show her countenance. Neither of them figured De Launay as anything but some assistant, more or less familiar with the West, whom she had engaged and who had been automatically eliminated by virtue of his latest escapade.

Solange, however, developed a disposition to arrange her own fate. She smiled politely when the young men gave awkward advice as to her own costuming and equipment but paid little heed to it. She allowed them to select the small portion of her camping outfit that they thought necessary at this stage and to arrange for a car to take it and them to Wallace's ranch. They sent their horses out by such chance riders as happened to be going that way.

The journey to Wallace's ranch was uneventful except for a stop at the former Brandon ranch at Twin Forks where Solange met the Basco proprietors and gave her cow-puncher henchmen further cause for wonder by conversing fluently with them in a language which bore no resemblance to any they had ever heard before. They noted an unusual deference which the shy mountaineers extended toward her.

There was a pause of some time while Solange visited the almost obliterated mound marking the grave of her father. But she did not pray over it or manifest any great emotion. She simply stood there for some time, lost in thought or else mentally renewing her vow of vengeance on his murderer. Then, after discovering that the sheepmen knew nothing of consequence concerning these long-past events, she came quietly back to the car and they resumed the journey.

Finally they passed a camp fire set back from the road at some distance and the cowpunchers pointed out the figure of Banker crouched above it, apparently oblivious of them.

"What you-all reckon that old horned toad is a-doin' here?" queried Dave.

"Dunno," replied Succotash. "Him bein' a prospector, that a way, most likely he ain't got the necessary sense to camp where a white man naturally would hog down."

"But any one would know enough to camp near water," said Solange, surprised.

"Yes'm," agreed Succotash. "Any one would. But them prospectors ain't human, that a way. They lives in the deserts so much they gets kind of wild and flighty, ma'am. Water is so scarce that they gets to regardin' it as somethin' onnatural and dangerous. More'n enough of it to give 'em a drink or two and water the jennies acts on 'em all same like it does on a hydrophoby skunk. They foams at the mouth and goes mad."

"With hydrophobia?"

"Yes'm," said Succotash. "Especially if it's deep enough to cover their feet. Yuh see, ma'am, they gets in mortal terror that some one will rack in and just forcibly afflict 'em with a bath—which 'u'd sure drive one of 'em plumb loco."

"I knowed one o' them desert rats," said Dave, "what boasts a plenty about the health he enjoys. Which he sure allows he's lived to a ripe old age—and he was ripe, all right. This here venerableness, he declares a whole lot, is solely and absolutely due to the ondisputable fact that he ain't never bathed in forty-two years. And we proves him right, at that."

"What!" cried the horrified Solange. "That his health was due to his uncleanliness?"

"Which there ain't no gettin' round the proof, ma'am. We all doubts it, just like you. So we ups and hog ties the old natural, picks him up with a pair of tongs and dips him in the crick. Which he simply lets out one bloodcurdlin' yell of despair and passes out immediate."

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Solange fervently. "What drolls!"

"Yes'm," they agreed politely.

Then Solange laughed and they broke into sympathetic grins.

Then they forgot the squatting figure by its camp fire and drove on to the ranch.

This turned out to be a straggling, adobe house shaded by cottonwoods and built around three sides of a square. It was roomy, cool and comfortable, with a picturesqueness all its own. To Solange it was inviting and homelike, much more so than the rather cold luxury of hotels and Pullman staterooms. And this feeling of homeliness was enhanced when she was smilingly and cordially welcomed by a big, gray-bearded, bronzed man and a white-haired, motherly woman, the parents of young Succotash.

The self-contained, self-reliant young woman almost broke down when Mrs. Wallace took her in charge and hurried her to her room. They seemed to know all about her and to take her arrival as an ordinary occurrence and a very welcome one. Succotash, of course, was responsible for their knowledge, having telephoned them before starting.

Before Solange reappeared, ready for supper, Succotash and Dave had explained all that they knew of the affair to Wallace. He was much interested but very dubious about it all.

"Of course, she'll not be going into the mountains at this time o' year," he declared. "It ain't more than a week before the snow's bound to fly and the Esmeraldas ain't no place fer girls in the wintertime. I reckon that feller you-all helped get out o' jail and that I planted hosses for won't more than make it across the range before the road's closed. I hope it wasn't nothin' serious he was in for, son."

"Nothin' but too much hooch an' rumplin' up a couple of cops," said his son. "Not that I wouldn't have helped so long as he was in fer anything less than murder. The mad'm'selle wanted him out, you see."

"S'pose she naturally felt responsible fer him, that a way," agreed Wallace. "Reckon she's well rid o' him, though. What was he like?"

"Tall, good-lookin', foreign-appearin' hombre. Talked pretty good range language though, and he sure could fork a hoss. Seemed to have a gnawin' ambition to coil around all the bootleg liquor there is, though."

"De Launay? French name, I reckon."

"Yeah. I reckon he'd been a soldier in the French army. Got the idea, somehow."

"Well, he's gone—and I reckon it's as well. What does the little lady wear a veil for? Been marked any?"

"Don't know, pop. Never seen her face. Ought to be a sure-enough *chiquita,* if it's up to the rest of her. D'jever hear a purtier voice?"

The old man caught the note of enthusiasm. "You better go slow, son," he said, dryly. "I reckon she's all right—but you don't really know nothin'."

"Hell!" retorted his son calmly. "I don't

have to know nothin'. She can run an iron on me any time she wants to. I'm lassoed, thrown an' tied, a'ready."

"Which you finds me hornin' in before she makes any selection, you mottled-topped son of a gun!" Dave put in warmly. "I lets that lady from France conceal her face, her past and any crimes she may have committed, is committin' or be goin' to commit, and I hereby declares myself for her, forty ways from the jack, fer anything from matrimony to murder."

"Shucks," said the old man. "You-all are mighty young!"

"Pop," declared the Wallace heir, solemnly, "you ain't never heard her laugh."

But Wallace heard her laugh at that moment. She came in arm in arm with Mrs. Wallace, whose motherly heart had taken her in at once. The ranchman's wife was somewhat bewildered and smiling uncertainly, but Solange was all gayety after her comforting moments with one of her own sex.

Wallace had stepped forward to welcome Solange but he stopped as she smilingly faced him. Behind him his son and Dave gasped in unison. The three stood and stared at the great, lovely eyes that caught and held them. Like others, they could not determine any other details of her face because they could not tear their own gaze from hers.

Mrs. Wallace glanced, frightened, from one to another. Her fluttering hands and wandering vision seemed to plead for suspended judgment as though she feared they would condemn the girl for some uncanny possession. But the three men stood stock-still until Solange, with a blush, let her lids flutter down. Then they drew long breaths.

"It is beastly!" she said with a voice that trembled slightly. "I—I cannot help it that I look this way, messieurs."

"Help it!" said Wallace blankly. "Ma'am, excuse us! I'm an old man—but I ain't never seen any one quite so plumb lovely before. Succotash! You an' Dave quit gapin' at the young lady that a way! She'll think you ain't had no raisin' at all!"

"It is nothing," Solange said apologetically. "It is because men stare so that I keep them covered. The veil is inconvenient. I know it is queer, but after a while you will grow used to it."

"I ain't never goin' to hope to grow used to it," said Succotash.

CHAPTER XI.

The fact that Solange ate heartily and naturally perhaps went far to overcome the feeling of diffidence and awe that had settled on the Wallace rancheria. Perhaps it was merely that she showed herself quite human and feminine and charmingly demure.

Mr. Wallace, himself, although retaining a slight impression that there was something uncanny about her, felt it overshadowed by a conviction that it would never do to permit her to go into the hills as she intended to do. He finally expressed himself to that effect.

"This here mine you're hunting for, mad'm'selle," he said. "I ain't goin' to hold out no hopes to you, but I'll set Dave and my son to lookin' for it and you just stay right here with ma and me and make yourself at home."

Solange smiled and shook her head.

"It is kind of you, monsieur," she said. "But I cannot stay. I am pledged to make the hunt—not only for the mine but for the man who killed my father. That is not an errand that I can delegate."

"I'm afraid there ain't no chance to find the man that did that," said Wallace kindly. "It might have been Louisiana, but if it was, he's been gone these nineteen years and you'll never find him."

Solange smiled a little sadly and grimly. "We Basques are queer people," she said. "We are very old. Perhaps that is why we feel things that others do not feel. It is not like the second sight I have heard that some possess. Yet it is in me here." She laid her hand on her breast. "I feel that I will find that man—and the mine, but not so strongly. It is what you call a—a hunch, is it not?"

Wallace shook his head dubiously but Solange had raised her eyes and as long as he could see them he felt unable to doubt anything she said.

"And it is said that a murderer always returns, sooner or later, to the scene of his crime, monsieur. I will be there when he comes back."

"But," said Mrs. Wallace gently, "it is not necessary for you to go yourself. Indeed, you can't do it, my dear!"

"Why not, madame?"

"Why—why—but, mad'm'selle, you must realize that a young girl like you can't wander these mountains alone—or with a set of

young scamps like these boys. They're good boys, but people would talk."

Solange only shrugged her shoulders. "Talk! Madame, I am not afraid of talk."

"But, my dear, you are too lovely—too—you must understand that you can't do it."

"It'd sure be dangerous," said Wallace emphatically. "We couldn't allow it nohow. Even my son here—I wouldn't let you go with him and he's a good boy as they go. And there's others you might meet in the hills."

Solange nodded. "I understand, monsieur. But I am not afraid. Besides, am I not to meet my husband on this Shoe String Cañon where we must first go?"

Simultaneously they turned on her. "Your *husband!*"

It was a cry of astonishment from the older people and one of mingled surprise and shock from the boys. Solange smiled and nodded.

"Yes," she said. "Monsieur de Launay, whom you rescued from the jail. He is my husband and it is all quite proper."

"It ain't proper nohow," muttered Succotash. "That bum is her husband, Dave!"

"I don't get this quite," said Wallace.

Then Solange explained, telling them of the strange bargain she had made with De Launay and something of his history. The effect of the story was to leave them more doubtful than ever. But when Wallace tried to point out that she would be taking a very long chance to trust herself to a man of De Launay's character and reputation she only spread her hands and laughed, declaring that she had no fear of him. He had been a soldier and a gentleman, whatever he was now.

Wallace gave it up but he had a remedy for the situation, at least in part.

"Son," he said abruptly, "you and Dave are hired. You-all are goin' to trail along with this lady and see that she comes out all right. If she's with her husband there ain't no cause for scandal. But if this De Launay feller gets anyways gay you-all just puts his light out. You hear me!"

"You're shoutin', pop. Which we already signs on with mad'm'selle. We hunts mines, murderers er horned toads fer her if she says so."

Solange laughed and there was affection in her mirth.

"That is splendid, messieurs. I cannot thank you."

"You don't need to," growled Dave. "All we asks is a chance to slay this here husband of yours. Which we-all admires to see you a widow."

After that Solange set herself to question Wallace regarding her father's death. But he could tell her little she did not know.

"We never knows who killed him," he said after telling how Pierre d'Albret had been found dying in his wagon with a sack of marvelously rich ore behind him. "There was some says it was Louisiana, and a coroner's jury over to Maryville brings in a verdict that a way. But I don't know. Louisiana was wild and reckless but he never struck me as bein' a killer. Likewise, I never knows him to carry a rifle and Brandon says he didn't have one when he went out past his ranch. Course, he might have got hold of Pete's gun and used that, but if he did how come that Pete don't know who kills him?

"The main evidence against Louisiana lays with old Jim Banker, the prospector. He comes rackin' in about a week later and says he sees Louisiana headin' in to Shoestring Cañon about the time Pete was shot. But the trailers didn't find his hoss tracks. There was tracks left by Pete's team and some burro sign, but there wasn't no recent hoss tracks outside o' that."

"You say Jim Banker says he saw him?" demanded Succotash.

"Yes."

"Huh! That's funny. Jim allows, down in Sulphur Falls, that he don't know nothin' about it. Says he was south of the range, out on the desert at the time."

"Reckon he's forgot," said Wallace. "Anyway, if it was Louisiana, he's gone and I reckon he won't come back."

"I think it could not have been any one else," said Solange thoughtfully. "What kind of man was this—this Louisiana?"

"Tall, good-lookin' young chap; slim and quick as a rattler. Came from Louisiana and gets his name from that and from a sort of coon song he was always singin'. Something about 'My Louisiana—Louisiana Lou!' Don't remember his right name except that it was something like Delaney—Lou Delaney, I think."

"He was a dangerous man, you say?"

"Well—he was sure dangerous. I've seen some could shake the loads out of a six-gun pretty fast and straight but I never saw the beat of this feller. Still, he never shoots any

one until he mixes with Snake Murphy and that was Snake's fault. He was on the run with some of Snake's friends after him when this happens. That's how come he was down here."

In the morning Solange appeared dressed for the range. Slim and delicate, she wore breeches and coat of fair, soft leather and a Stetson set over a vivid silk handkerchief arranged around her hair like a bandeau. The costume was eminently practical, but it was also picturesquely feminine and dainty. It was not new, however, and had evidently been subjected to severe service.

That day Wilding arrived, coming from Maryville. He had news to the effect that he had searched the records in the county seat and had finally found, not a record of the indictment of D'Albret's slayer but a faded, yellow handbill, offering a reward of five hundred dollars for the apprehension of Louis Delaney, alias "Louisiana" and "Louisiana Lou," wanted for the murder of "Pete Dalbert."

Somehow the ancient, fading poster carried conviction. Solange's little mouth set grimly and her eyes sparkled with baleful lights as she read it. The description was not very enlightening. Six feet, slender, weight about a hundred and sixty, walked with a free swing, small hands and feet, brown hair, gray eyes; dressed when last seen in woolen shirt, Stetson hat, leather chaps and high boots; riding a roan horse and a Visalia tree saddle with silver conchas, et cetera.

She went out to where the two young men were working with the pack outfit and horses which were being brought in.

"My friends," she said soberly. "We must hurry and be gone to-morrow. I have a feeling that we shall find him. But Monsieur de Launay will help. I do not know why but I feel that he will bring me to the man. We must go to him as soon as possible."

"All right," said Succotash shortly. Dave muttered, "Damn De Launay."

But they turned back to their work and went to it with a will.

CHAPTER XII.

The great wall of the Esmeraldas is split at one point by a ragged chasm opening out into the foothills and the grass plains to the north. This was the outlet of Shoe String Creek, a small stream of water which flowed out into the plain and was finally lost in the sands. It ran back into the range almost to the top of the main divide, forming a sort of natural pathway through the rugged mountains, a pathway much followed by the sheepherders in driving their flocks from winter to summer range.

There was no road, properly speaking. In fact when one had penetrated a few miles into the cañon, passage was rendered arduous and difficult by a series of rocky terraces down which the stream tumbled. At many points the sheep trails winding along the slopes of the cañon walls formed the only practical thoroughfare.

Farther up, the cañon became more level but no one had ever built a road through it. A good trail ran along it, generally at the level of the stream. Once past the terraced and rough part there were no difficulties worthy of mention, at least in other seasons than winter.

It was into this entrance to the Esmeraldas that Solange and her cavaliers rode, pushing on steadily so as to be able to make camp above the obstructions. Having covered the twenty miles between the ranch and the mountains, they aimed to penetrate another ten miles into the hills on this first day.

The two boys had the habit of their kind and kept silence for the most part while on the trail. As for Solange, though interested in the strange and wild country, she was engrossed in her own thoughts, wondering ceaselessly what her search would eventually develop.

There had been many times, even after starting on her pilgrimage when the whole adventure had appealed to her as one that was no better than a weird, senseless obsession, one that she would do well to turn back from and forget. Probably, at first, she had only been kept to the task by a certain spirit of adventure, a youthful and long-repressed urge for romance, fortified by inherited traditions of the sacredness of vengeance. It is even probable that had it not been for the fortuitous advent of De Launay and the wild impulse which had led her to enlist him in the affair she would have remained at home—and settled down to—what?

It was that memory of what her fate must be at home that had always furnished the final spurring to her faltering resolution.

Better to wander, lonely and helpless, fighting and struggling to achieve some measure of independence, than remain to what her existence must be in France, whether it was the drab life of a seamstress or shopgirl, the gray existence of a convent, the sluggish grind of a sordid marriage or the feverish degradation of the demi-monde.

But now, as she rode under the frowning, yellow-brown, black-patched rocks of the Esmeraldas or looked backward over the drab plain behind her, she felt an ever-increasing exaltation and tingling sense of expectation. She had no idea of what awaited her among those mountains, but she had a strong and distinct impression that fate was leading her on to a final accounting.

Why De Launay should be inextricably entangled in that settlement she could not imagine but he was always there. Her recollections of him were those of disgust and contempt. She recalled him as he had stood in the cell of the jail, unkempt, red of eye, shattered of nerve, and she shivered to think that he had been a man who was once considered great. The fact that she was bound to him, even though the affair was one purely of form, should have affected her as something degrading.

Peculiarly, however, it did not. Most of the time she never considered the marriage at all. When she did it was with a feeling of mingled security and comfort. It was convenient and somehow she felt that in De Launay she had the one husband who would not have been a nuisance or have endeavored to take advantage of the circumstances. The marriage being a matter of form, a divorce was inevitable and simple, yet when she considered that matter of divorce she felt a queer sort of reluctance and distaste as though it were best to shove consideration of that point into the future as far as possible.

The gaunt, bare cañon thrilled her as a region where danger, adventure and intrigue awaited her. The mine, indeed, remained a mere, vague possibility, hoped for but hardly expected. But her father's slayer and the vengeance that she had nursed so long became realities. The rocks that blocked the way might hide him, but somewhere in those hills rode De Launay who would lead her to that evil beast who had blighted her life.

Again, why De Launay? She did not know, except that she felt that the drunken soldier held the key to the search. Probably he was to be the instrument of vengeance, the slayer of the criminal, the settler of the blood feud. He was hers by marriage and in marrying her had wedded the vendetta. Besides, he was the type—a *légionnaire,* probably a criminal and certainly one who had killed without compunction in his time—the instrument of Providence, in fact!

Ahead of her rode Succotash, ahead of him the long string of laden pack horses and ahead of them the silent Dave. The two cow-punchers had jogged throughout the day with silent indifference to their surroundings but after they had entered the foothills and were creeping into the shadow of the cañon they evinced more animation. Every now and then Solange observed that one or the other cast a glance up into the air and ahead of them toward the interior of the range. When she rode closer to Succotash he motioned toward the distant crest of the range which showed through the gap of the cañon.

She nodded. She was mountain born and bred and recognized the signs.

"There will be a storm, monsieur."

Succotash rewarded her with an admiring glance. "Afraid we're headed into it," he said. "Better turn back?"

"It will take more than storms to turn me back," she answered.

Succotash nodded and turned again to look at the sky turning gray and gradually blackening above the dim line of the ridge. Even as they watched it the sky seemed to descend upon the crest of the range and to melt it. The outlines became vague, broke up, changed.

"Snowing up there," he said. "By'n' by it'll be snowin' down here. Snow ain't so bad—but——"

"But what?"

"She drifts into this here cañon pretty bad. There ain't no road and down hereaways, where these rocks make the goin' hard at the best of times, the drifts sure stack up bad."

"What is it that you mean, Monsieur Succotash?"

"I mean that we ain't goin' to have no trouble gettin' in, mad'm'selle, but we may have a devil of a time gettin' out. In two days the drifts will be pilin' up on the divide and the trail on the other side and in

a couple days more they'll be blockin' the cañon down this a way."

Solange shrugged her shoulders. "We have food," she answered. "At any rate, I am going on. I have promised that I would meet Monsieur de Launay in this cañon."

Succotash accepted her ultimatum without protest. But after a momentary silence he turned once more in his saddle.

"Say, mad'm'selle," he said, "this here De Launay, now; he's sure enough your husband?"

"Of course."

"But he ain't noways a regular, honest to God husband, is he?"

"We are married," said Solange. "Is that not enough?"

"I reckon so. Still, there's Dave and me —we would sure admire to know how this feller stands with you."

Solange looked at him and he found difficulty, as usual, in concentrating on what she said or on anything but the fathomless eyes. Yet he comprehended that she was speaking, that she was smiling kindly and yet that speech and smile were both destructive of his immature romance.

"He stands—not at all, monsieur, except as an aid. But—that way—he and I are bound together forever."

It was in her eyes that Succotash read meaning. Somewhere in their depths he found a knowledge denied even to her, perhaps. He heaved a profound sigh and turned to yell at Dave.

"Get a wiggle on, old-timer! You an' me are just hired hands on this *pasear.* Madame de Launay will be gettin' hungry before we make camp."

Dave swung quickly around, catching the slight emphasis on the strange name. Over the backs of the pack horses his and his companion's eyes met. Then he turned back and jogged up the pace a trifle.

By five o'clock in the evening they had passed the worst stages of the journey and were well up into the cañon. But the storm was worse than they had thought. Already occasional snowflakes were drifting down and the chill was beginning to bite even through the warm fleece that lined mademoiselle's coat. The men decided to make camp.

They pitched Solange's tent in a sheltered spot not far above the stream, themselves slept in the open under heavy "tarps." Succotash sighed again when during that evening Solange showed that she was no helpless creature of civilization but could fully perform her part of any tasks that were to be done. She cooked over a camp fire as though she had been raised to it and the food was better in consequence.

But Succotash was uneasy. He consulted Dave and that young man shared his fears.

"It ain't goin' to be bad for several days," he said. "But when she drifts in earnest we all are liable to be stuck in here until spring. I ain't aimin' to get anxious, Dave, but we ain't fixed to buck snow."

"She ain't goin' to turn back, so what can we do?" asked the other,

"This here De Launay will probably be up near the crater. Once we get her up there we ain't responsible. But there ain't no telling how soon the snow'll drift. I'm thinkin' one of us ought to mosey back to the ranch and bring in webs and dogs."

"He'd better get a-going, then," said Dave.

"You'd better stay with the lady and take her on in the mornin'. I hate to leave her alone with a feller like you but I reckon she'll meet up with her husband by night and he can settle you if necessary. I'll pull my freight out o' here and git the snowshoes and a dog sled and team. We'll maybe need a heap more grub than we've got, if we hole up here too long."

"You're shoutin'," agreed Dave.

Mademoiselle, when the plan was broached to her, made no objection. She recognized the wisdom of taking precautions against their being snowed in.

Thus the party broke up the next day. Succotash, before departing, took his rifle and a full belt of ammunition and fastened it to the girl's saddle.

"If Dave gets gay," he said, with a grin, "just bust him where he looks biggest with this here .30-30."

After assisting in packing the horses he mounted and rode down the cañon while mademoiselle and Dave resumed their journey in the opposite direction.

Succotash, as soon as he had passed out of sight, quartered up the side of the cañon where sheep trails promised somewhat easier going than the irregular floor of the gulch. Once he was well on his way he gave no heed to anything but the route ahead of him. It had been snowing some all night and it was now slithering down in great

flakes which made the air a gray mystery and the ground a vague and shadowy puzzle. Without the girl to care for Succotash was one who would take chances and he rushed his horse rapidly, slogging steadily along the trails.

There was every reason to believe that the hills were empty of all human kind except for their own party and De Launay, who was ahead and not behind them. Succotash was entirely ignorant of the fact that among the rocky terraces of the cañon Jim Banker camped, after having followed their trail as long as the light would allow him to do so.

Banker was up and on the move as soon as Succotash. He and his burros were trudging along among the rocks, the old man muttering and talking to himself and shaking his head from side to side as one whose brain has been affected by years of solitude and unending search for gold. His eyes were never still but swept the trail ahead of him or the slopes on either hand, back and forth, back and forth, restlessly and uneasily as though there were something here that he looked for and yet feared to see.

Far ahead of him and high on the slope he finally beheld Succotash riding alone and at a rapid trot along a sheep trail, his long, lean figure leaning forward raised in his stirrups and his hands on the saddle horn. He was evidently riding in haste, for that gait and attitude on the part of a cow hand means that he is in a hurry and has a long way to go.

The prospector hurriedly unslung a field glass and focused it on Succotash. When he was sure of the man and of his route he grinned evilly.

"One of 'em right into my hands!" he chuckled.

He then dismounted and ran to one of the burros. From the pack he dragged a roll of wire which he carried there for some purpose or other, probably for the construction of a short length of fence whenever he stopped long enough to make it desirable. He glanced up at the gray sky, noting the swirl of snowflakes which settled down like a cloud. A few moments ago they had almost ceased, enabling him to glimpse the rider at a distance and now they were providentially falling again. Luck was surely with him.

Above him, about fifty yards up the slope of the cañon wall, was a long bench, rather narrow and beaten flat by the passage of countless sheep. Under it the hill sloped sharply, almost precipitously. It was as though made to order for his purpose.

He mounted his horse and spurred it around and quartered up the hill even as Succotash wound in and out among the swales and depressions of the cañon wall. Banker had plenty of time.

He reached the bench and hurriedly dismounted to run to a scrubby cedar growing almost on the edge of the ledge. Round this at no more than six inches above the ground he twisted an end of the wire. Then he ran with the other end across the bench and snubbed it around a scrub oak growing on the slope. The branches of the little tree were thick and the tough, prickly leaves still hung to it in some quantity.

He dropped the wire and then went out and led his horse back among the scrub oaks. He stood up close to the tree, almost invisible against the tangled branches and dead leaves. In one hand he held the coil of wire snubbed about the roots of the oak while the other was clutching the nose of his horse.

Finally out of the smother of snow Succotash came driving, head bent and hat brim pulled down to avoid the snow. The road was easy enough and he thought of nothing but getting along with all the speed possible. He did not notice that his horse, when emerging onto the bench, broke its stride and threw up its head as though seeking something. Instead he sank his spurs and urged the beast on.

The horse broke into a lope on the level stretch in answer to the spur. They came sweeping down until opposite where the prospector crouched. Banker released his hold on his horse's nose and tightened the pull on the wire at the same time. His horse neighed.

Shrilly and loud, Succotash's mount answered. Head thrown high and turned to the side he half checked his stride at the call of his kind. Startled, Succotash also threw up his head and turned.

Then the wire clutched the forelegs of the horse and with a crash he went down. Succotash went with him and catlike strove to throw himself from the saddle. Unfortunately, he leaped on the outer side where the ledge fell away steeply. He freed himself from the plunging horse but his head struck hard against the gnarled trunk of a

juniper and half stunned he slid over the edge and dropped.

Chuckling and mowing, rubbing his hands together, Banker slunk from his ambush. He retrieved his wire and then looked at the horse kicking on the ground.

"No use lettin' him go back to the ranch," he said slyly. Then he drew his six-shooter and shot the animal.

Leading his own horse he climbed carefully down the slope and worked his way to where the body must have fallen. But it took him some time to find it as Succotash had rolled far after striking the slope.

He came upon it at last wedged against a clump of greasewood. There was blood on the head and the sightless eyes stared up to the gray sky. Snowflakes fell steadily and melted against the white cheeks. The body lay awkwardly twisted.

"Dead!" chuckled Banker. "All of 'em die! Old Jim don't die, though! Old Jim'll find it! He'll find the gold. French Pete hid it; Panamint hid it; this here Frog lady is hidin' it. But old Jim'll find it. Old Jim'll find it after all of 'em's dead. Dead! Dead! Dead!"

He burst out into shrill laughter and his horse snorted and tried to pull away. He instantly broke off laughing to curse foully, mouthing obscenities and oaths as he jerked cruelly at the spade bit. The trembling horse squatted back and then stood with wildly rolling eyes.

Muttering, Jim stamped heavily down the hill, dragging the horse with him and leaving the still form to the mercies of the snow. The falling flakes were already filling up the trail that he left. In an hour or two there would be no sign of his presence.

CHAPTER XIII.

Through most of the day Dave and Solange pushed on up the cañon while the snow deepened underfoot. After a few hours the snow grew deep enough to ball up under the feet of the horses and to cause some inconvenience from slipping. More than once Solange was in danger of being thrown by the plunge of her horse as his feet slid from under him.

They had no more than fifteen miles to go before reaching the rendezvous and this they made shortly after noon. Dave, who had become more silent than ever when he found himself alone with the girl, pitched the tent and then went to gather a supply of wood. Solange went into her tent and lay down to rest.

They had expected to find De Launay but there was no sign of him. Dave asserted his intention of scouting around to find him after he had gotten the wood.

Solange was asleep when he came back with a load snaked in with his lariat and he did not disturb her. Leaving the wood he rode on up the cañon looking for signs of De Launay. But although he spent the better part of the afternoon in the search, riding in and out of every branch gully and quartering up the slopes to where the black stands of timber began, he found no trace of the man.

Fearing that Solange would begin to be frightened at his absence he turned and started back to the camp. It was beginning to get dark, the snow was falling heavily and he found it difficult to see far in front of him.

"High time old Succotash was fannin' in fer dogs," he said to himself. "The winter's done set in for sure."

He had veered downward to the bottom of the cañon, where the snow was deeper but the going was better, and was just about to spur his horse to greater speed when through the gray mist of snow a shadowy figure loomed up before him.

"Hey, De Launay?" he called. He reined in his horse and leaned outward to look more intently. Behind the man, who was mounted, he saw the blurred outlines of pack animals. "De Launay?" he called again.

The figure seemed to grow suddenly nearer and more distinct.

"It ain't no Delonny," chuckled a shrill voice. "It's me."

"Hell!" said Dave with disgust. "Jim Banker, the damned old desert rat!"

"Reckon you ain't so glad to see me," wheezed Jim, still chuckling. "Old Jim's always around, though, when there's gold huntin' to do. Always around, old Jim is!"

"Well, mosey on and pull yer freight," snarled Dave. "We don't want you too close around."

"You don't like old Jim! Don't none of 'em like old Jim! But Jim's here, a-huntin' —and most of them's dead that don't like him. Old Jim don't die! The other fellers dies!"

"So I hears," said Dave with meaning.

He said no more for Banker, without the slightest warning, shot him through the head.

The horses plunged as the body dropped to the ground and Jim wheezed and cackled as he held his own beast down.

"Hee, hee! They all of 'em dies, but old Jim don't die!"

With a snort Dave's horse wheeled and galloped away up the cañon. The sound of his going frightened the prospector. He ceased to laugh, and cowered in his saddle, looking fearfully about him into the dim swirl of the snow.

"Who's that!" he called. The deadly silence was unbroken.

The old man shook his fist in the air and again broke into his frightful cursing.

"I ain't afraid!" he yelled. "Damn you, I ain't afraid! You're all dead. You're dead, there! French Pete's dead! Succotash Wallace is dead! Panamint's dead! But old Jim's alive! Old Jim'll find it. You bet you he will!" He bent his head and appeared to listen again. Then:

"What's that? Who's singin'?"

He fell to muttering again, quoting doggerel whined out in an approach to a tune:

"Louisiana—Louisiana Lou!

"Louisiana's dead!" he chuckled. "If he ain't he better not come back. The gal's a-waitin' fer him. Louisiana what killed her pappy! Ha, ha! Louisiana killed French Pete!"

He turned his horse and slowly, still muttering, began to haze his burros back down the cañon.

"Old Jim's smart," he declaimed. "All dead but the gal and old Jim! Old Jim don't die. The gal'll die, but not old Jim! She'll tell old Jim what she knows and then old Jim will find the gold."

Through the muffling snow he pushed on until the faint glow of a fire came to him through the mist of snowflakes. A shadow flitted in front of it and he stopped to chuckle evilly and mutter. Then he dismounted and walked up to the camp where Solange was busying herself in preparing supper.

"That you, Monsieur David?" she called cheerily as Jim's boots crunched the snow.

Jim chuckled. "It's just me—old Jim, ma'am," he said, his voice oily and ingratiating. "Old Jim, come to see the gal of his old friend, Pete."

Solange whirled. But Jim had sidled between her and the tent where, just inside the flap, rested the rifle that Succotash had left her.

"What do you wish?" she asked angrily. Her head was reared and in the dim light her eyes glowed as they caught reflections from the fire. She showed no fear.

"Just wants to talk to you about old times," whined Banker. "Old Jim wants to talk to Pete's gal, ma'am."

"I heard a shot a while ago," said Solange sharply. "Where is Monsieur Dave?"

"I don't know nothin' about Dave, ma'am. Reckon he'll be back. Boys like him don't leave purty gals alone long—less'n he's got keerless and gone an' hurt hisself. Boys is careless that a way and they don't know the mount'ins like old Jim does. They goes and dies in 'em, ma'am—but old Jim don't die. He knows the mount'ins, he does!"

Solange took a step toward him. "What do you wish?" she repeated sternly.

"Just to talk, ma'am. Just to talk about French Pete. Just to talk about gold. Old Jim's been a-huntin' gold a-many years, ma'am. And Pete he found gold and I reckon he told his gal where the gold was. He writ a paper before he died, they say and I reckon he writ on that paper where the gold was, didn't he?"

"No, he did not," said the girl shortly.

"So you'd say. So you'd say, of course." He chuckled again. "There wasn't no one could read that Basco writin'. But he done writ it. Now, you tell old Jim what that writin' says and then you and old Jim will find that gold."

Solange suddenly laughed. "Tell you. Why yes, I'll tell you. It said——"

"Yes, ma'am! It said——"

He was slaveringly eager as he stepped toward her.

"It said—to my mother—that she should seek out the man who killed him and take vengeance on him!"

Jim reeled back, cringing and mowing. "Said—said what? You're lyin'! It didn't say it!"

"I have told you what it said. Now stand aside and let me into my tent!"

With supreme contempt she walked up to him as though she would push him aside. It was a fatal mistake, though she nearly succeeded. The gibbering, cracked old fiend shrank away from her blazing eyes. For a

moment it seemed that he would yield in terror and give her passage.

But terror gave place suddenly to crazy rage. With an outburst of bloodcurdling curses he flung himself upon her. She thought to avoid him but he was as quick as a cat and as wiry and strong as a terrier. Before she could leap aside his clawlike hands were tangled in her coat and he was dragging her to him.

She kicked and twisted with all her splendid, lithe strength, but it was in vain. He clung like a leech, dragging her closer in spite of all she could do. She beat at his snarling face and the mouth out of which were whining things she fortunately did not understand.

Disgust and horror was overwhelming her. His iron arms were bending her backward. She tried again to tear free, stepped back, stumbled, went down with a crash. He seized her hair and lifted her head, to send it crashing against the ground.

The world went black as she lost consciousness.

The prospector straightened up, grumbling and cursing. He did not seem to feel the bruises left on his face by her competent hands. He stooped over her, felt her breast and found her heart beating.

"She ain't goin' to die. She ain't goin' to die yet. She'll tell old Jim what's writ on that paper. She'll tell him where the gold is."

He left her lying there while he went to get his outfit. The packs were dragged off and flung to the ground where saddle and rifle followed them. Then he went into the tent.

He pitched the rifle left by Succotash out into the snow, kicked the girl's saddle aside, dumped her bedding and her clothes on the floor, tore and fumbled among things that his foul hands should never have touched nor his evil eyes have seen. He made a fearful wreck of the place and, finally came upon her hand bag which, womanlike, she had clung to persistently, carrying it in her saddle pockets when she rode.

The small samples of ore he gloated over lovingly, mowing and gibbering. But finally he reluctantly abandoned them and dug out the two notes.

Brandon's letter he read hastily, chuckling over it as though it contained many a joke. But he was more interested in the other scrawl whose strange words completely baffled him. He tried in vain to make out its meaning, turning it about, peering at it from all angles, like an evil old buzzard. Then he gave way to a fit of rage, whining his awful curses and making to tear the thing into bits. But his sanity held sufficiently to prevent that.

Finally he folded the paper up and tucked it into a pocket. Then he gathered up the bedding, took it outside and roughly bundled the girl in it. She lay unconscious and dreadfully white, with the snow sifting steadily over her. Her condition had no effect on the old ruffian who callously let her lie, covering her only to prevent her freezing to death before he could extract the information he desired.

He finished her culinary tasks and glutted himself on the food, grunting and tearing at it like a wild animal. Then he dragged out his filthy bedding and rolled himself up in it scorning the shelter of the tent which stood wanly in the white, misty night.

It was morning when Solange recovered her senses. She awoke to a gray, chill world in which she alternately shivered and burned as fever clutched her.

Still unable to comprehend where she was or what had happened, she made a tentative attempt to move, only to wince as the pains borne of her struggle and of lying on the bare ground seized her. Stiff and sore, weakened, with head throbbing and stabbing, the whole horrible adventure came back to her. She tried to rise but she was totally helpless and her least movement gave her excruciating pain. Her head covering had been laid aside before she had begun preparation of supper the night before and her strangely brilliant hair, all tumbled and loose, lay around her head and over her shoulders in great waves and billows against the snow. Her eyes were more awe-inspiring than ever, a somber, terrible light burning in their depths.

It was this face that Jim Banker looked down upon as he came back from the creek, unkempt and dirty. It was these eyes he met as he stooped over her with his lunatic chuckle. He winced backward as though she had struck him, his face contorted with sudden panic, and cowered away from her.

"Don't you look at me like that! I never done nothing!" he whined.

"Canaille!" said Solange. Fearless, she

stared at him and he could not meet her gaze.

His gusty mood changed and he began to curse her. She heard more foulness from him in the next five minutes than all the delirium of wounded soldiers during five years of war had produced for her. She saw a soul laid bare before her in all its unutterable vileness. Yet she did not flinch nor did a single symptom of panic or fear cross her face.

Once, for a second, he ceased his mouthing abruptly. His head went up and he bent an ear to the wind as though listening to something infinitely far away.

"Singin'!" he muttered, as though in awe. "Hear that! 'Louisiana! Louisiana Lou!'" Then he cackled. "Louisiana singin'. I hear him. Louisiana—who killed French Pete. He, he!"

After a while he tired, subsiding into mutterings. He got breakfast, bringing to her some of the mess he cooked. She ate it, though it nauseated her, determining that she would endeavor to keep her strength for future struggles. While she choked down the food the prospector sat near her, but not looking at her, and conversed.

"You an' me'll talk pretty, honey. Old Jim ain't goin' to hurt you if you're reasonable. Just tell old Jim what the writin' says and old Jim'll be right nice to you. We'll go an' find the gold, you and me. You'll tell old Jim, won't you?"

His horrible pleading fell on stony ears and he changed his tune.

"You ain't a-goin' tell old Jim? Well, that's too bad. Old Jim hates to do it, pretty, but old Jim's got to know. If you won't tell him, he'll have to find out anyhow. Know how he'll do it?"

She remained silent.

"It's a trick the Injuns done taught old Jim. They uses it to make people holler when they don't want to. They takes a little sliver of pine, jest a little tiny sliver, ma'am, and they sticks it in under the toe nails where it hurts. Then they lights it. They sticks more of 'em under the finger nails and through the skin here an' there.

"Most generally it makes the fellers holler —and I reckon it'll make you tell, ma'am. Old Jim has to know. You better tell old Jim."

She remained stubbornly silent.

The prospector shook his head as though sorrowful over her obstinacy. Then he got up and got a stick of pitch pine which he began to whittle carefully into fine slivers. These he collected carefully into a bundle while the helpless girl watched him.

Finally he came to her and pulled the blankets from her. He stooped and unlaced her boots, pulling them off. One woolen stocking was jerked roughly from a foot as delicate as a babe's. She tried to kick, feebly and ineffectively. Her feet, half frozen from sleeping in the boots, were like lead.

The prospector laughed and seized her foot. But, as he held it and picked up a sliver, a thought occurred to him. He got up and went to the fire where he stooped to get a flaming brand.

At this moment, clear and joyous, although distant and faint, came a rollicking measure of song:

"My Louisiana! Louisiana Lou!"

The girl's brain failed to react to it. She gathered nothing from the sound except that there was some one coming. But Banker reared as though shot and whirled about to stare down the cañon. She could not see him and she was unable to turn.

The prospector's face had gone chalk white under its dirty stubble of beard. He looked sick and even more unwholesome than usual. From his slack jaws poured a constant whining of words, unintelligible.

Down the cañon, slouching carelessly with the motion of his horse, appeared a man, riding toward them at a jog trot. Behind him jingled two pack horses, the first of which was half buried under the high bundle on his back, the second more lightly laden.

Banker stood as though incapable of motion for a moment. Then as though galvanized into action he began to gobble his inevitable oaths while he leaped hurriedly for his rifle. He grabbed it from under the tarpaulin, jerked the lever, flung it to his shoulder and fired.

With the shot, Solange, by a terrific effort, rolled over and raised her head. She caught a glimpse of a familiar figure and shrieked out with new-found strength.

"My friend! Help!"

Then she stifled a groan, for, with the shot, the figure sagged suddenly and dropped to the side of his horse, evidently hit. She heard the insane yell of triumph from the prospector and knew that he was dancing up and down and shouting:

"They all dies but old Jim! Old Jim don't die!"

She buried her face in her hands, wondering even then why she felt such a terrible pang—not of hope destroyed, but because the man had died.

It passed like a flash, for on the instant she heard another yell from Banker and a yell, this time, of terror. At the same moment she was aware of thundering hoofs bearing down upon them and of a voice whose shouting was the sweetest music she had ever heard.

Dimly she was aware that Banker had dropped his rifle and scuttled like a scared rabbit into some place of shelter. Her whole attention was concentrated on those rattling, drumming hoofs. She looked up, tried to rise, but fell back with the pain of the effort.

A horse was sliding to a stop, forefeet planted, snow and dirt flying from his hoofs. De Launay was leaping to the ground and the pack horses were galloping clumsily up. Then his arms were around her and she was lifted from the ground.

"What's the matter, Solange? What's happened? Where's the boys? And Banker —what's he doing shooting at me?"

She clung to him and sobbed, "I thought he had killed you!"

His laugh was music. "That old natural? He couldn't kill me. Saw him aim and ducked. Shot right over me. But what's happened to you?" He ran a hand over her face and found it hot with fever.

"Why, you're sick! And your foot's bare. Here, tell me what has happened?"

She could only sob brokenly, her strength almost gone.

"That terrible old man! He did it. He's hiding—to shoot you."

De Launay's hand had run over her thick mane of hair and he felt her wince. He recognized the great bump on the skull.

"Death of a dog!" he swore in French. "*Mon amie*, is it this old devil who has injured you?"

She nodded and he began to look about him for Banker. But the prospector was not in sight although his discarded rifle was on the ground. The lever was down where the prospector had jerked it preparatory to a second shot which he had been afraid to fire. The empty ejected shell lay on the snow near by.

De Launay turned back to Solange. He bent over her and carefully restored her stocking and shoe. Then he fetched water and bathed her head, gently gathering her hair together and binding it up under the bandeau which he found among her scattered belongings. She told him something of what had happened, ascribing the prospector's actions to insanity. But when De Launay asked about Succotash and Dave she could do no more than tell him that the first had gone to the ranch to get snowshoes and dogs and that the latter had gone out yesterday and had not come back, though she had heard a single shot late in the afternoon.

De Launay listened with a frown. He was in a cold rage at Banker but there were other things to do than try to find him. He set to work to gather up the wreckage of the tent and outfit. Then he rounded up the horses, leaving the burros and Banker's horse to stay where they were. Hastily he threw on the packs, making no pretense at neat packing.

"I'll have to get you out of this," he said. "With that lunatic bushwhacking round there'll never be a moment of safety for you. You're sick and will have to have care. Can you ride?"

Solange tried to rise to her feet but was unable to stand.

"I'll have to carry you. I'll saddle your horse and lead him. The others will follow my animals. I'll get you to safety and then come back and look for Dave."

With infinite care he lifted her to his saddle, holding her there while he mounted and gathered her limp form into his left arm. His horse fortunately was gentle. He was about to reach for the reins of her horse when something made her turn and look up the slope of the hill toward an overhanging, ledgelike rock above the camp.

"*Mon ami!*" she screamed. "Look out!"

What happened she was not able exactly to understand. Only she realized that never had she understood the possibility of rapid motion before. Her own eyes had caught only a momentary glimpse of a head above the edge of the rock and the black muzzle of a six-shooter creeping into line with them.

Yet De Launay's movement was sure and accurate. His eyes seemed to sense direction, his hand made one sweep from holster to an arc across her body and the roar of the heavy weapon shattered her ears before she had fairly realized that she had cried out.

She saw a spurt of dust where the head had appeared.

Then De Launay's spurs went home and the horse leaped into a run. The pack horses, jumping at the sound of the shot, flung up their heels, lurched to one side, circled and fell into a gallop in the rear. Clattering and creaking, the whole cavalcade went thundering up the valley.

De Launay swore. "Missed, by all the devils! But I sure put dust in his eyes!"

He turned around and there, sure enough, was Banker, standing on the rock, pawing at his eyes. The shot had struck the edge of the rock just below his face and spattered fragments all over him. De Launay laughed grimly as the groping figure shook a futile fist at him. Then Banker sat down and dug at his face industriously.

They had ridden another hundred yards when a yell echoed in the cañon. He turned again and saw Banker leaping and shrieking on the rock, waving hands to the heavens and carrying on like a maniac.

"Gone plumb loco," said De Launay contemptuously.

But unknown to De Launay or mademoiselle the high gods must have laughed in irony as old Jim Banker raved and flung his hands toward their Olympian fastness. De Launay's shot, which had crushed the edge of the rock to powder, had exposed to the prospector the glittering gold of French Pete's lost bonanza!

CHAPTER XIV.

De Launay headed up into the hills making for the spot he and others familiar with the region knew as the Crater. Back about half a mile from the rim of Shoestring Cañon, which itself had originally been cut out of lava from extinct volcanoes of the range, rose a vast, basalt peak, smooth and precipitous on the side toward the cañon. Its lower slopes had once been terraced down to the flat bench land which rimmed the cañon but, unnumbered ages ago, the subterranean forces had burst their way through and formed a crater whose flanks fell steeply away to the flats on three sides. The fourth was backed by the basalt cliff.

Although long extinct, the volcano had left reminders in the shape of warm springs which had an appreciable effect on the temperature within the basin of the ancient crater. The atmosphere in the place was, even in winter, quite moderate compared with that of the rest of the range. There was, in the center of the crater, a small pond or lake, of which the somewhat lukewarm water was quite drinkable.

This spot, once a common enough rendezvous for the riders on rodeo, was his objective and toward it he climbed with mademoiselle. Behind him straggled the pack horses.

Solange lay quietly but, under his arm, he felt her shiver from time to time. His downward glance at her fell only on her hat and a casual wisp of glistening hair which escaped from it. He felt for and found one of her hands. It clutched his with a hot, dry clasp. Somewhat alarmed, he raised his hand to her face. That she had fever was no longer to be doubted.

She was talking low to herself but she spoke in Basque which he did not understand. He spoke to her in French.

"I knew you would get here; that I should find you," she answered at once. "That terrible man! He could not frighten me. It is certain that through you I would find this Louisiana!"

"Yes," he answered. "You'll find Louisiana."

He wondered what she knew of Louisiana and why she wished to find him. He concluded that she had heard of him as one who might know something of her father's death. Well, if she sought Louisiana she had not far to look—had merely to raise her head.

"I thought I heard him singing," said Solange.

"I reckon you did," he answered. "Are you riding easy?"

"Yes—but I am cold and then hot again. The man hurt me."

De Launay swore under his breath and awkwardly began to twist out of his Mackinaw which, when it was free, he wrapped around her. Then he urged his horse to greater speed.

But, once upon the bench and free to look about him toward the steep slope of the crater's outer walls, De Launay was dismayed at the unexpected change in the landscape.

On the rocky slopes there had once stood a dense thicket of lodgepole pine, slender and close, through which a trail had been cut. But years ago a fire had swept the

forest, leaving the gaunt stems and bare spikes to stand like a plantation of cane or bamboo on the crumbling lava. Then a windstorm had rushed across the mountains, leveling the dead trees to the ground, throwing them in a wild, heaping chaos of jagged spikes and tangled branches. The tough cones, opened by the fire, had germinated and seedlings had sprung up amidst the riot of down logs, growing as thick as grass. They were now about the height of a tall man's head, forming, with the tangled abatis of spiky trunks, a seemingly impenetrable jungle.

There might be a practicable way through, but search for it would take more time than the man had to spare. He must get the girl to rest and shelter before her illness gained much further headway and he knew that a search for a passage might well take days instead of the hours he had at his command. He wished that he had remained in the cañon where he might have pitched camp in spite of the danger from the prospector. But a return meant a further waste of time and he decided to risk an attempt to force his way through the tangle.

Carefully he headed into it. The going was not very hard at first as the trees lay scattered on the edge of the windfall. But as he wormed into the labyrinth the heaped-up logs gave more and more resistance to progress and it soon became apparent that he could never win through to the higher slopes which were free of the tangle.

If he had been afoot and unencumbered, the task would have been hard enough but not insuperable. Mounted, with pack horses carrying loads projecting far on the sides, to catch and entangle with spiky branches, the task became impossible. Yet he persisted, with a feeling that his best chance lay in pressing onward.

The lurching horse, scrambling over the timber, jolted and shook his burden and Solange began again to talk in Basque. Behind them the pack horses straggled, leaping and crashing clumsily in the jungle of impeding tree trunks. De Launay came to a stop and looked despairingly about him.

About thirty yards away, among the green saplings and gray down timber, stood a bluish shape, antlered, with long ears standing erect. The black-tailed deer watched him curiously, and without any apparent fear. De Launay knew at once that the animal was unaccustomed to man and had not been hunted. He stared at it, wondering that it did not run.

Now it moved, but not in the stiff leaps of its kind when in flight. He had expected this, but not what happened. There was no particular mystery in the presence of the agile animal among the down logs. But when it started off at a leisurely and smooth trot, winding in and out and upward, he leaped joyously to the only conclusion possible. The deer was following a passable trail through the jungle and a trail which led upward.

He marked the spot where he had seen it and urged his horse toward it. It was difficult going but he made it and found there, as he had hoped, a beaten game trail, narrow but fairly clear.

It took time and effort to gather the horses, caught and snared everywhere among the logs, but it was finally done. Then he pushed on. It was not easy going. The trail was narrow for packs, and snags continually caught in ropes and tarpaulins, but De Launay took an ax from his pack and cut away the worst of the obstacles. Finally they won through to the higher slopes where the trees no longer lay on the ground.

But it was growing late and the gray sky threatened more snow. He pressed on up to the rim of the crater and lost no time in the descent on the other side. The willing horses slid down behind him and, before darkness caught them, he had reached the floor of the little valley, almost free from snow, grass-grown and mildly pleasant in contrast to the biting wind of the outer world.

Jingling and jogging, the train of horses broke into a trot across the meadow and toward the grove of trees that marked the bank of the pond. Here there was an old cabin formerly used by the riders but long since abandoned. Deer trotted out of their way and stood at a distance to look curiously. A sleepy bear waddled out of the trees, eyed them superciliously and then trotted clumsily away. The place seemed to be swarming with game. Their utter unconcern showed that this haven had not been entered for years.

Snow lay on the surrounding walls in patches but there was hardly a trace of it on the valley floor. Steaming springs here and there explained the reason for the unseasonable warmth of the place. The grass grew lush and rich on the rotten lava soil.

"The Vale of Avallon, Morgan *la fée*," said De Launay with a smile. Solange murmured and twisted restlessly in his arms.

He dismounted before the cabin which seemed to be in fair condition. It was cumbered somewhat with débris left by mountain rats which haunted the place, but there were two good rooms, a fairly tight roof and a bunk built in the wall of the larger chamber. There was a rusty iron stove and the bunk room boasted a rough stone fireplace.

De Launay's first act was to carry the girl in. His second was to throw off several packs and drag them to the room. He then took the ax and made all haste to gather an armful of dry pitch pine with which he soon had a roaring fire going in the ancient fireplace. Then with a pine branch he swept out the place, cleaned the bunk thoroughly and cleared the litter from the floors. Solange reclined against a pile of bedding and canvas and fairly drank in the heat from the fire.

He found a clump of spruce and hacked branches from it, with which he filled the bunk, making a thick, springy mattress. On this he spread a tarpaulin and then heaped it with blankets. Solange, flushed and half comatose, he carried to the bed.

The damp leather of her outer garments oppressed him. It seemed a sacrilege to him to touch her, but at last he had the cumbering, slimy outer garments free and her body warmly wrapped in the coverings.

Food came next. She wanted broth and he had no fresh meat. Her rifle rendered that problem simple, however. He had hardly to step from the grove before game presented itself. He shot a young buck, feeling like a criminal in violating the animal's calm confidence. Working feverishly, he cleaned the carcass, cut off the saddle and a hind quarter, hung the rest and set to work to make broth in the Dutch oven.

The light had long since failed but the fire gave a ruddy light. Raised on his arm Solange supped the broth out of a tin cup and almost immediately fell back and went to sleep. Feeling her cheek, he found that it was damp with moisture and cool. Then he began the toil of arranging the camp.

After her things had been brought in and arranged in her room he at last came to his own packs. He ate his supper and then spread his bedding on the ground just outside the door of the cabin. As he unrolled the tarpaulin he noted a jagged rent in it which he at first thought had been caused by a snag in passing through the down timber. But when the bed had been spread out he found that the blankets were also pierced. Searching, he found a hard object which on being examined, turned out to be a bullet, smashed and mushroomed.

De Launay smiled grimly as he turned this over in his hand. He readily surmised that it was the ball that Banker had fired at him and which, missing him as he ducked, had struck the pack on the horse behind him. Something about it, however, roused a queer impression in him. It was apparently an ordinary thirty caliber bullet, yet he sensed some subtle difference in size and weight from the ordinary bullet and at the same time some vague resemblance to another bullet he had felt and weighed in his hand.

Taking his camp lantern he went into the cabin and sat down before a rude table of slabs in the room where the stove was. He took from his pocket the darkened, jagged bullet that Solange had given him and compared it with the ball he had taken from his pack. The first was split and mushroomed much more than the other, but the butts of both were intact. They seemed to be of the same size when held together.

Yet they were both of ordinary caliber. Probably nine out of ten men who carried rifles used those of this caliber. Bullets differed only in jacketing and the shape of the nose. Still, it seemed to De Launay that there was something in these two misshapen bullets that should be investigated. He took one of Solange's cartridges from his pocket and looked at it. Then with strong teeth he jerked the ball from the shell and compared the bullet with those he held in his hand. To all seeming they were much the same.

Still, a feeling of dissatisfaction persisted. In some subtle way the two mushroomed bullets were the same and yet were different from the unused one. De Launay tried to force Solange's bullet back into the shell, finding that it went in after some force was applied. Then, withdrawing it, he took the other two and tried to do the same with them.

The difference became apparent at once. The two used bullets were larger than Solanges bullet; almost imperceptibly so, but enough greater in diameter to make it clear that they did not fit the shell.

De Launay weighed the bullets in his hand and his face was grim. After a while he put the two in his pocket, threw the one he had pulled from the shell into the stove and rose to look at Solange. He held the lantern above her and stood gazing at her for a moment, then stooped and raised on his hand a lock of her hair from which the lantern light glinted back. He marveled at its fine texture and its spun-glass appearance. His hand touched her cheek, finding it damp and cool.

The iron lines of his face relaxed and softened. He leaned over and brushed her forehead with his lips. Solange murmured in her sleep and he caught his own nickname, "Louisiana."

He saw that the fire was banked and then went out and turned into his blankets, regardless of the drizzle of snow that was falling.

CHAPTER XV.

De Launay came into the cabin the next morning with an armload of wood to find Solange sitting up in bed with the blankets clutched about her, staring at the unfamiliar surroundings. He smiled at her and was delighted to be met with an answering, though somewhat puzzled smile.

"You are better?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "And you—brought me here?"

He nodded and knelt to rebuild the fire. When it was crackling again he straightened up.

"I was afraid you were going to be ill. You had a bad shock."

Solange shuddered. "It is true. That evil old man! He hurt my head. But I am all right again."

"You had better lie quiet for a day or two, just the same. You have had a bad blow. If you feel well enough, though, there is something I must do. Will you be all right if I leave you for a few hours?"

Her face darkened a little but she nodded. "If you must. You have been very kind, monsieur. You brought me here?"

Her eyes fell on her leather coat flung over the end of the bunk and she flushed, looking sidewise at the man. He seemed impassive, unconscious, and her puzzled gaze wandered over his face and form. She noted striking differences in the tanned, lean face and the lithe body. The skin was clear and the eyes no longer red and swollen. He stood upright and moved with a swift, deft certainty far from his former slouch.

"You are changed," she commented.

"Some," he answered. "Fresh air and exercise have benefited me."

"That is true. Yet there seems to be another difference. You look—purposeful, if I may say it."

"I?" he seemed to protest. "What purpose is there for me?"

"You must tell me that."

He went out into the other room and returned with broth for her. But she was hungry and the broth did not satisfy her. He brought in meat and bread and she made a fairly hearty breakfast. It pleased De Launay to see her enjoying the food frankly, bringing her nearer to the earth from which her eyes separated her.

"The only purpose I have," he said while she ate, "is that of finding what has become of your escort. There's another matter, too, on which I am curious. Do you think you can get along all right if I leave food for you here and go down to the camp? I will be back before evening."

"You will be careful of that crazy old man?"

He laughed. "If I am not mistaken he thinks I am a ghost and is frightened out of seven years' growth," he said easily. His voice changed subtly, becoming swiftly grim. "He may well be," he added half to himself.

Breakfast over and the camp cleared up, De Launay took from his packs a second automatic, hanging the holster—a left-hand one—to the bunk. He showed Solange how to operate the mechanism and found that she readily grasped the principle of it though the squat, flat weapon was incongruous in her small hand. The rifle also he left within her reach.

Shortly he was mounted on his way out of the crater and headed down into the cañon. He searched carefully for traces of Dave but found none. The snow was over a foot deep and had drifted much deeper in many spots, in some places to a depth of several feet.

Finally he came to the site of the camp where he had rescued Solange from the mad prospector. Here he was surprised to find no trace of the man although the burros were scraping forlornly in the snow on the slopes trying to uncover forage. Camp equipment was scattered around and a piece of tarpau-

lin covered a bundle of stuff. This was tucked away by a rock, but De Launay ran on it after some search.

He devoted his efforts to finding the shell from Banker's rifle which he had seen on the snow when he left the place. It was finally uncovered and he put it in his pocket. Then he left the place and headed down the cañon, searching for signs of Dave. He found none, since Dave had not been in this direction. But De Launay pushed on until almost noon. He rode high on the slopes where the snow was shallower and where he could get an unrestricted view of the cañon.

He was about to give it up, however, and turn back when his horse stopped and pricked his ears forward, raising its head. De Launay followed this indication and saw what he took to be a clump of sagebrush on the snow about half a mile away. He watched it and thought it moved. Intent observation confirmed this impression and it was made certainty when he saw the black patch waver upward, uncertainly, stagger forward and then fall again.

With an exclamation De Launay spurred his horse recklessly down the slope toward the figure on the snow. He galloped up to it and flung himself to the ground beside it. The figure raised itself on arms from which the sleeves hung in tatters and turned a pale and ghastly face toward him. It was Succotash.

Battered and bruised, with an arm almost helpless and a leg as bad, the cow-puncher was dragging himself indomitably along as long as his failing strength held out. But he was almost at the end of his resources. Hunger and weakness, wounds and bruises, had done their work and he could have gone little further.

De Launay raised his head and chafed his blue and frozen hands. The cow-puncher tried to grin.

"Glad to see you, old-timer," he croaked. "You're just about in time."

"What happened to you, man?"

"Don't know. Heard a horse nicker and then mine stumbled and pinned me. Got a bad fall and when I come to I was lyin' down the hill against some greasewood. Leg a'most busted and an arm as bad. Horse nowhere around. Got anything to drink? Snow ain't much for thirst."

De Launay had food and water and gave it to him. After eating ravenously for a moment he was stronger.

"Funny thing, that horse nickerin'. It was snowin' and I didn't see him. But after I come to I tried to climb up where I was throwed. It was some job but I made it. There was my horse, half covered with snow. Some one had shot him."

"Shot him? And then left you to lie there?"

"Just about that. There wasn't no tracks. Snow had filled 'em. But I reckon that horse wasn't just shot by accident."

"It was not. And Dave's gone."

"Dave! What's that?"

"He's gone. Left the camp day before yesterday and never came back. I wasn't there."

"And madame? She all right?"

"She is—now. I found her yesterday morning with Banker, the prospector. He was trying to torture her into telling him where that mine is located. Hurt her pretty bad."

Succotash lay silent for a moment. Then:

"Hell's delights!" he said. "That fellow has got a lot comin' to him, ain't he?"

"He has," said De Launay shortly. "More than you know."

Again the cow-puncher was silent for a space.

"Reckon he beefed Dave?" he said at last.

"Shouldn't be surprised," said De Launay. "I searched for him but couldn't find him. He wouldn't get lost. But Jim Banker's done enough, in any case."

"He sure has!" said Succotash.

De Launay helped the cow-puncher up in front of him and turned back to the crater. He rode past Banker's camp without stopping; but keeping along the slope to avoid the deeper snow he came upon a stake set in a pile of small rocks. This was evidently newly placed. He showed it to Succotash.

"The fellow's staked ground here. What could he have found?"

"Maybe the old lunatic thinks he's run onto French Pete's strike. This don't look very likely to me."

"Gone to Maryville to register it, I suppose. That accounts for his leaving the burros and part of his stuff. He'd travel light."

"He better come back heavy though. If he aims to winter in here, he'll need bookoo rations. It'd take some mine to make me do it."

Succotash was in bad shape and De Launay was not particularly interested in old

Jim's vagaries at the present time, so he made all speed back to the crater. Succotash, who knew of the windfall, would not believe that the soldier had found an entrance into the place until he had actually treaded the game trail. He looked backward from the heights above the tangle after they had come through it.

"Some stronghold," he commented. "It'd take an army to dig you outa here."

Solange was overjoyed to see Succotash and at the same time distressed to observe his condition. She heard with indignation his account of his mishap and like De Launay suspected Banker of being responsible for it. Indeed, unless they assumed that some mysterious presence was abroad at this unseasonable time in the mountains, there was no one else to suspect.

She would have risen and assumed the duties of nursing the cow-puncher but De Launay forbade it. Solange was still very weak and her head was in bad shape. The soldier therefore took upon himself the task of caring for both of them.

He made a bed for Succotash in the kitchen of the cabin and went about the work of getting them both on their feet with quiet efficiency. This bade fair to be a task of some days' duration though both were strong and healthy and yielded readily to rest and treatment.

It was night again before he had them comfortably settled and sleeping. Once more, with camp lantern lit, he sat before the slab table and examined his bullets and the shell he had picked up at Banker's camp. He found that both bullets fitted it, tightly. Then he turned the rim to the light and looked at it. Stamped in the brass were the cabalistic figures: *U. M. C. SAV. .303.*

For some time he sat there, his mouth set in straight, hard lines, his memory playing backward over nineteen years. He recalled the men he had known on the range, a scattered company, every one of whom could be numbered, every one of whom had possessions, weapons, accouterment known to nearly all the others. In that primitive community of few individuals the tools of their trades were as a part of them. Men were marked by their saddles, their chaparajos, their weapons. A pair of silver-mounted spurs owned by one was remarked by all the others.

Louisiana had known the weapons of the range riders even as they knew his. The six-shooter with which he had often performed his feats would have been as readily recognized as he himself. When a new rifle appeared in the West its advent was a matter of note.

In Maryville, then a small cow town and outfitting place for the men of the range, there had been one store in which weapons could be bought. In that store the proprietor had stocked just one rifle of the new make—the Savage. Shooting an odd caliber cartridge, the new rifle had been distrusted because of that fact, the men of the country fearing that they would have difficulty in procuring shells of such an unusual caliber. Unable to sell it the storekeeper had finally parted with it for a mere fraction of its value to one who would chance its inconvenience. The man who bought it had been known far and wide and at that time he was the sole owner of such a rifle in all that region.

Yet, with this infallible clew to the identity of French Pete's murderer at hand, it had been assumed that the bullet was an ordinary .30-30.

De Launay envisioned that worn and battered rifle butt projecting from the scabbard slung to the burro in Sulphur Falls. Nineteen years, and the man still carried and used the weapon which was to prove his guilt.

Once more he got up and went in to look at the sleeping girl. Should he tell her that the murderer of her father was discovered? What good would it do? He doubted that if confronted with the knowledge she could find the fortitude to exact the vengeance which she had vowed. And if, faced with the facts, she drew back, what reproach would she always visit upon herself for her weakness? Torn between a barbaric code and her own gentle instincts she would be unhappy whatever eventuated.

But he was free from gentleness—at least toward every one but her. He had killed. He was callous. Five years in the *Légion des Etrangères* and fourteen more of war and preparation for war had rendered him proof against squeamishness. The man was a loathly thing who had slain in cold blood, cowardly, evil and unclean. Possibly he had murdered within the past few days and at any rate he had attempted murder and torture.

Why tell her about it? He had no ties; no aims; nothing to regret leaving. He had nothing but wealth which was useless to

him, but which would lift her above all unhappiness after he was gone. And he could kill the desert rat as he would snuff out a candle.

Yet—the thought of it did give him a qualm, after all. The man was so contemptible, so unutterably low and vile and cowardly. To kill him would be like crushing vermin. He would not fight: he would cower and cringe and shriek. There would be a fight when they took Louisiana for the "murder," of course, but even his passing, desperate as he might make it, would not entirely wipe out the disgrace of such a butchery. He was a soldier, a commander with a glorious record, and it went against the grain to go out of life in an obscure brawl brought on by the slaughter of this rat.

Still, he had dedicated himself to the service of this girl; half in jest, perhaps, but it was the only service left to him to perform. He had lived his life, had enjoyed his little day of glory. It was time to go. She was his wife and to her he would make his last gesture and depart.

Then, as he looked at her, her eyes opened and flashed upon him. In their depths something gleamed, a new light more baffling than any he had seen there before. There were fire and softness, warmth and sweetness in it. He dropped on his knees beside the bunk.

"What is it, *mon ami?*" asked Solange smiling at him—a smile that drew him like a magnet.

"Nothing," he said, and rose to his feet. Her hand had strayed lightly over his hair in that instant of forgetfulness. "I looked to see that you were comfortable," he added.

"You are changed," she said uncertainly. "It is better so."

He smiled at her. "Yes. I am changed again. I am the *Légionnaire*. Nameless, hopeless, careless! You must sleep, *mon enfant!* Good night!"

He brushed the hand she held out to him with his lips and turned to the door. As he went out she heard him singing softly:

"Soldats de la Légion,
De la Légion Etrangère,
N'ayant pas de Nation,
La France est votre Mère."

He did not see that the light in her marvelous eyes had grown very tender. Nor did she dream that he had made a mat of his glory for her to walk upon.

CHAPTER XVI.

On the following morning De Launay, finding his patients doing well, once more left the camp after seeing that everything was in order and food for the invalids prepared and set to their hands. Among Solange's effects he had found a pair of prism binoculars which he slung over his shoulder. Then he made his way on foot to the lower end of the valley and up the encircling cliffs until he came out on the ridge which surrounded the crater.

Here he hunted until he came upon a narrow, outjutting ledge which overlooked the country below and the main backbone of the range to the southward and eastward. From here he could see over the bench at the base of the cliff, with its maze of tangled down timber, and on to the edge of Shoestring Cañon, though he could not see down into that gulch. Above Shoestring, however, he could see the rough trail which wound out of the cañon on the opposite side and up toward the crest of the range, where it was lost among the timber-clad gorges and peaks of the divide. Over this trail came such folk as crossed the range from the direction of Maryville. All who came from the Idaho side would head in by way of Shoestring and come up the cañon.

That day, although he swept the hills assiduously with his glasses, he saw nothing. The dark smears of timber, startlingly black against the snow, remained silent, brooding and inviolate, as though the presence of man had never stirred their depths.

Fearing that he would be needed at the cabin he returned before noon. Mademoiselle was progressing bravely though she was still weak. Succotash, however, was in worse shape and evidently would not be fit to move for several days.

The next day he did not go to his post but on the third morning, finding Succotash improving, he again took up his vigil. On that day banked clouds hovered over the high peaks and almost hid them from view. A chill and biting wind almost drove him from his post.

Seeing nothing he was about to return but, just as a heavy flurry of snow descended upon him, he turned to give one last look toward the divide and found it lost in mist which hung down into the timber. Under this fleecy blanket the cañon and the lower part of the trail stood forth clearly.

Just as De Launay was about to lower his glasses a man rode out of the timber, driving before him a half dozen pack horses. The soldier watched him as he dropped below the rim of the cañon and, although distant, thought he detected signs of haste in his going.

This man had been gone hardly more than ten minutes when a second horseman rode down the trail. There might have been doubt in the case of the first rider but it was certain that the second was in a hurry. He urged his horse recklessly, apparently in pursuit of the first man, whom he followed below the cañon's rim.

De Launay was earlier than usual at his post the next day. Yet he was not too early to meet the evidence of activity which was even more alert than his. Before he could settle himself in his post he saw the trail across the cañon alive with moving men and beasts. In ones, twos and threes they came. Some rode singly and without outfit, while others urged on pack animals. But one and all were in a hurry.

He counted more than twoscore travelers who dropped into Shoestring within an hour and a half. Then there was a pause in the rush. For an hour no more came.

After that flowed in another caravan. His glasses showed him that these were better equipped than the first comers though he was too far away to get any accurate idea of what they carried. Still, a dim suspicion was filling his mind and as each of the newcomers rushed down the trail and dove over the cañon rim his suspicion took more vivid form until it became conviction and knowledge.

"By Heaven! It's a mining rush!"

His mind worked swiftly. He jumped at the evidence he had seen where Banker had staked a claim. The prospector had found something and had ridden to Maryville to record the claims. He had been followed and in an incredibly short time here was a veritable horde rushing into Shoestring Cañon. If this was the vanguard what would be the main body? It must have been a strike of fabulous proportions that had caused this excitement. And that strike must be——

"French Pete's bonanza!" he almost yelled.

The thing was astounding and it was true. In naming a rendezvous he, himself, had directed these men to the very spot—because there was no other spot. The obvious, as usual, had been passed by for years while the seekers had sought in the out-of-the-way places. But where would Pete find a mine when he was returning to the ranch with his flock? Surely not in the out-of-the-way spots for he would not be leading his sheep by that way. He would be coming through the range by the shortest and most direct route, the very route that was the most frequented—and that was the trail over the range and down Shoestring Cañon.

De Launay wanted to shout with laughter as he thought of the search of years ending in this fashion. The discovery of the bonanza, under the very nose of the dead man's daughter by the very man who had murdered him!

But his impulse was stifled as his keen mind cast back over the past days. He recalled the rescue of Solange and the ambush from the top of the great, flat outcrop. Vague descriptions of Pete's location, heard in casual talks with mademoiselle, came to him. The old sheepherder had been able to describe his find as having been made where he had eaten his noonday meal "on a rock." That rock—the Lunch Rock, as it had been called—had even given the mine a name in future legend, just as the Peg Leg had been named.

But there had been no rock that could answer the description near the camp. At least there had been only one and that one had been the flat outcrop on which Banker had lain at length and from which he had attempted to shoot De Launay.

Then he recalled Solange's cry of warning and his own swift reaction. He had fired at the eyes and forehead appearing above the edge of the rock and he had hit the edge of the rock itself. He had laughed to see the mad prospector clawing at his eyes, filled with the powdered rock, and had laughed again to see his later antics as he stood upright while De Launay rode away, waving his arms in the air and yelling.

De Launay saw now what had caused those frantic gestures and shouts. It had been he, De Launay, who had uncovered to the prospector's gaze the gold which should have been mademoiselle's.

No wonder he had no more desire to laugh as he turned back into the valley. He was weighted down with the task that was his. He had to tell Solange that the quest on which she had come was futile—that her

mine was found but by another, and through his own act. He visualized those wonderful eyes, which had of late looked upon him with such soft fire, dulling under the chilling shock of disappointment, mutely reproaching him for her misfortune and failure.

The wild Vale of Avallon, which had seemed such a lovely haven for Morgan *la fée,* had lost its charm. He plodded downward and across the rank grass, going slowly and reluctantly to the cabin. Entering it he went first to Succotash, asking him how he felt.

The cow-puncher raised himself with rapidly returning strength, noting the serious expression on De Launay's face.

"I'm getting right hearty," he answered. "I'll drag myself out and sit up to-night, I reckon. But you don't look any too salubrious yourself, old-timer. Aimin' to answer sick call?"

"No," said De Launay. "Thinking about mademoiselle. You remember those stakes we saw?"

"Banker's claim? Sure."

"Well, he's struck something. There is a small army pouring in to Shoestring from Maryville. It's a regular, old-time gold rush."

"Hell!" said Succotash. He pondered the news a moment. "In these days," he finally said, "with gold mines bein' shut down because it don't pay to work 'em, there wouldn't be no rush unless he'd sure struck something remarkable."

"You've guessed it," said De Launay.

"It's French Pete's mine?"

"I don't see any other explanation."

Again Succotash was silent for a time. Then:

"That little girl is sure out o' luck!" he said. And the cow-puncher looked at De Launay in a manner which the soldier readily interpreted.

"No mine, no means of support, no friends within five thousand miles; nothing—but a husband she doesn't want! Is that what you're thinking?"

"Not meaning any offense, it was something like that," said Succotash.

"She'll get rid of the encumbrance, without trouble," said De Launay shortly.

"Well, she ain't quite shy of friends, neither. I ain't got no gold mines—never took no stock in them. But I've got a bunch of cows and the old man's got a right nice ranch. If it wasn't for one thing, I'd just rack in and try my luck with her."

"What's the one thing?"

"You," said Succotash.

"I've already told you that I don't count. Her marriage was merely a formality and she'll be free within a short time."

Succotash grinned. "I hate to contradict you, old-timer. In fact, I sure wish you was right. But even if she don't know it herself, I know. It sure beats the deuce how much those eyes of hers can say even when they don't know they're sayin' it."

De Launay nodded. He was thinking of the lights in them when she had turned them on him of late.

"They told *me* something, not very long ago," added Succotash, "and I'm gamblin' there won't be any divorce, pardner."

"There probably won't," De Launay replied shortly. "It won't be necessary."

He got up and went into the other room where Solange reclined on the bunk. He found her sitting up, dressed once more in leather breeches and flannel shirt waist and looking almost restored to full strength. Her cheeks were flushed again but this time with the color of health. The firelight played on her hair, glowing in it prismatically. Her eyes, as she turned them on him, caught the lights and drew them into their depths. They were once more fathomless and hypnotic.

But De Launay did not face them. He sat down on a rude stool beside the fire and looked into the flame. His face was set and indifferent.

"Monsieur," said Solange, "you are changed again, it seems. It is not pleasant to have you imitate the chameleon, in this manner. What has happened?"

"Your mine has been found," said De Launay shortly.

Solange started, half comprehending. Then, as his meaning caught hold, she half cried out, puzzled, not knowing whether his manner meant good news or bad.

"But—if it has been found, that is good news? Why do you look so grim, monsieur? Is it that you are grieved because it has been found?"

De Launay had half expected an outburst of joyous questions which would have made his task harder. In turn, he was puzzled. The girl did not seem either greatly excited or overjoyed. In fact, she appeared

to be doubtful. Probably she could not realize the truth all at once.

"It has been found," he went on harshly, "by Banker, the prospector from whom I rescued you."

Solange sat still, staring at him. His face was outlined in profile by the fire. Clean and fine-lined it was, strong with a thoroughbred strength, a face that a woman would trust and a man respect. As she looked at it, noting the somber suppression of emotion, she read the man's reluctance and disappointment for her. She guessed that he buried his feelings under that mask and she wondered, wistfully, how deep those feelings were.

"Then," she said at last, "it is not likely that this Monsieur Banker would acknowledge my claim to the mine?"

"The mine is his, under the law. I am afraid that you have no claim to it. Your father never located it nor worked it. As for Banker——"

"Well? And what of this Banker?"

"He will not hold it long. But he has heirs, no doubt, who would not acknowledge your claim. Still, I will do my best. Succotash will back us up when we jump the claim."

"Jump the claim? What is that?"

He explained briefly the etiquette of this form of sport.

"But," objected Solange, "this man will resist, most certainly. That would mean violence."

A faint smile curled the man's mouth under the mustache. "I am supposed to be a violent man," he reminded her. "I'll do the killing and you and Succotash will merely have to hold the claim. The sympathy of the miners will be with you and there should be little difficulty—unless it turns out that some one has a grubstake interest."

He had to explain again the intricacies of this phase of mining. Solange listened intently sitting now on the edge of the bunk. When he was done she slid to her feet and took position beside him, laying her hand on his shoulder. Behind her, by the side of the bunk, was a short log, set on end as a little table, on which rested the holstered automatic which De Launay had left with her.

"It appears, then," she said when he had finished, "that in any event I have no right to this mine. In order to seize it you would have to fight and perhaps kill some one. But, monsieur, I am not one who would wish you to be a common bravo—a desperado—for me. This mine—it is nothing. We shall think no more of it."

Again De Launay was mildly surprised. He had supposed that the loss of the mine would affect her poignantly and yet she was dismissing it more lightly than he could have done had she not been concerned. And in her expression of consideration for him there was a sweetness that stirred him greatly. He lifted his hand to hers where it rested on his shoulder and she did not withdraw from his touch.

"And yet," he said, "there is no reason that you should concern yourself lest I act like a desperado. There are those who would say that I merely lived up to my character. The General de Launay you have heard of, I think?"

"I have heard of him as a brave and able man," answered Solange.

"And as a driver of flesh and blood beyond endurance, a butcher of men. It was so of the colonel, the commandant, the *capitaine*. And, of the *légionnaire*, you have heard what has always been heard. We of the Legion are not lap dogs, mademoiselle."

"I do not care," said Solange.

"And before the Legion, what? There was the cow-puncher, the range bully, the gunman, the swashbuckling flourisher of six-shooters—the notorious Louisiana."

He heard her breath drawn inward in a sharp hiss. Then with startling suddenness her hand was jerked from under his but not before he had sensed an instant chilling of the warm flesh. Wondering, he turned to see her stepping backward in slow, measured steps while her eyes, fixed immovably upon him, blazed with a fell light, mingled of grief, horror and rage. Her features were frozen and pale, like a death mask. The light of the fire struck her hair and seemed to turn it into a blazing wheel of flame.

There was much of the roused fury in her and as much of a lost and despairing soul.

"Louisiana!" she gasped. "You! You are Louisiana?"

CHAPTER XVII.

Puzzled, but watchful and alert, De Launay saw her retreating, sensing the terrible change that had come over her.

"Yes, I am Louisiana," he said. "What is the matter?"

In answer she laughed, while one hand went to the breast of her shirt waist and the other reached behind her, groping for something as she paced backward. Like a cameo in chalk her features were set and the writhing flames in her hair suggested an image of Medusa. There was no change in expression but through her parted lips broke a low laugh, terrible in its utter lack of feeling.

"And I have for my husband—Louisiana! What a—farce!"

The hand at her breast was withdrawn and in it fluttered the yellow paper that Wilding had brought from Maryville to Wallace's ranch. She flung it toward him and as he stooped to pick it up her groping hand fell on the pistol resting on the upturned log at the side of the bunk. She drew it around in front of her, dropped the holster at her side and snapped the safety down. Her thumb rested on the hammer and she stood still, tensely waiting.

De Launay read the notice of reward swiftly and looked up. His face was stern, but otherwise expressionless.

"Well?" he demanded, his eyes barely resting on the pistol before they swept to meet her own blazing gaze. There was no depth to her eyes now. Instead they seemed to be fire surrounded by black rims.

"You have read—murderer!"

"I have read it." De Launay's voice was like his face and in both appeared a trace of contempt.

"What have you to say before I kill you?"

"That you would have shot before now had you been able to do it," answered De Launay. The note of contempt was deeper. He turned his back to her and leaned forward over the fire, one outstretched hand upon the stone slab that formed the rude mantel.

The girl stood motionless. The hand that held the pistol was not raised nor lowered. The thumb did not draw back the hammer. But over her face gradualiy came a change—a look of desperate sorrow, of abandonment of hope. Even the light in her hair that had made it a flaming wheel seemed in some mysterious way to die down. The terrible fire in her eyes went out as though drowned in rising tears.

A tearing sob burst from her lips as her breast heaved under her shirt waist. De Launay gazed down upon the fire and his face was bitter as though he tasted death. Solange slowly reached behind her again and dropped the heavy weapon upon the log. Then, in a choked voice she struggled to call out:

"M'sieu Wallace! Will you come?"

In the next room there was a stirring of hasty movements. Succotash raised a cheery and incongruous voice.

"Just a minute, mad'm'selle, I'm comin' a-runnin."

He stamped into his boots and flung the door open, his disheveled shirt open at the neck. Astonished, he took in the strange attitudes of the others.

"What's the answer?" he asked. "What was it you wanted, ma'am?"

Solange turned to him, her grief-ridden face stony in its hopelessness.

"M'sieu, you are my friend?"

"Fer mayhem, manslaughter or murder," he answered at once. "What's wanted?"

"Then—will you take this pistol, m'sieu, and kill that man for me?"

Succotash's eyes narrowed and his mottled hair seemed to bristle. He turned on De Launay.

"What's he done?" he asked with cold fury.

De Launay did not move. Solange answered dully:

"He is the man who—married me—when he was the man who had murdered my father!"

But Succotash made no move toward the pistol. He merely gaped at her and at De Launay. His expression had changed from anger to stupidity and dazed incomprehension.

"What's that? He murdered your father?"

"He is Louisiana!"

"The devil he is? Louisiana! I allowed he was an old-timer. Well, all I can say is—hell's delights!"

Solange put out her hand to the edge of the bunk as though she could not support herself longer unaided. Her eyes were half closed now.

"Will you kill him, m'sieu? If you do, you may have—of me—anything—that you ask!"

The words were faltered out in utter weariness. For one instant De Launay's eyes flickered toward her but Succotash had already sprung to her side and was easing her to a seat on the edge of the bunk. Her head drooped forward.

"Ma'am," said Succotash earnestly, "you got me wrong. I can't kill him—not for that."

"Not for that?" she repeated wonderingly.

"Never in the world! I thought he'd insulted you—and if he had I'd taken a fall out of him if he was twenty Louisianas. But this here notion you got that he beefed your father—that's all wrong! You can't go to downin' a man on no such notions as that!"

"Why not?" asked Solange in a stifled voice.

"Because he never done it—that's whatever. You'd never get over it, mad'm'selle, if you done that and then found you was wrong! And you *are* wrong."

Slowly Solange dragged herself upright. She was listless, the lightness had gone out of her step. Without a word she reached out and lifted her leather coat from the nail on which it hung. Then she dragged her leaden feet to the door. Succotash silently followed her.

In the other room she spoke.

"Will you saddle my horse for me, m'sieu?"

"There ain't no place for you to go, ma'am."

"Nevertheless, I shall go. If you please will——"

"Then I'll go with you."

She followed him to the door, putting on her coat. Outside she sat down on a log and remained stonily oblivious as Succotash hastily caught up several horses and dragged saddles and *alforjas* into position. The westering sun was getting low along the rim of the crater and he worked fast with the knowledge that night would soon be upon them. Inside the cabin he heard De Launay moving about. A moment later as he entered to gather Solange's equipment he saw the soldier seated at the rough table, busy with paper and fountain pen.

As Succotash went past him, carrying an armload of blankets and a tarpaulin, De Launay held out a yellow paper.

"She will want this," he said, and then bent over his writing.

Again, when Succotash came in for more stuff, De Launay stopped him. He held out the pen, indicating the sheet of paper spread upon the table.

"This needs two witnesses, I think, but one will have to serve. She is my wife, after all—but it will make it more certain. Will you sign it?"

Succotash glanced hastily at the document, reading the opening words:

> I, Louis Bienville de Launay, colonel and late general of Division of the Army of France, being of sound and disposing mind, do make, declare, and publish this my Last Will and Testament——

His eye caught only one other phrase:

> I give, bequeath, and devise to my dearly beloved wife, Solange——

With an oath Succotash savagely dashed his signature where De Launay indicated and then rushed out of the room. The soldier took another piece of paper and resumed his writing. When he had finished he folded the two sheets into an envelope and sealed it. Outside, Succotash was hauling the lashings taut on the last packs.

De Launay came to the door and stood watching the final preparations. Solange still sat desolately on the log. Finally, Succotash came to her and assisted her to rise, led her to her horse and held the stirrup for her as she swung to the saddle. He was about to mount himself when De Launay caught his eye. Instead, he stepped to the soldier's side.

"Take this," said De Launay, holding out the envelope. "Give it to her to-morrow. And—she needn't worry about the mine—or Banker."

"She's not even thinkin' about them!" growled Succotash.

He turned and strode to his horse. In another moment they were riding rapidly toward the rim of the crater.

De Launay watched them for some time and then went into the cabin. He came out a moment later carrying saddle and bridle. On his thighs were now hanging holsters, and both were strapped down at the bottoms. He caught and saddled his horse, taking his time in the operation. Then, searching the darkening surface of the crater wall, he found no trace of the two who had ridden away. But he busied himelf in getting food and eating it. It was fully an hour after they had gone before he mounted and rode after them.

By this time Solange and Succotash had reached the rim and were well on their way down through the down timber. More by luck than any knowledge of the way they managed to strike the game trail and wound through the impeding snags, the cow-puncher

taking the lead and the girl following listlessly in his wake. Before dark had come upon them they had gained the level bench and were riding toward the gulch which led into the cañon.

After a while, Succotash spoke. "Where you aimin' to camp, ma'am?"

"I am going down to these miners," she said dully.

"But, mad'm'selle, that camp ain't no place for you. There ain't no women there, most likely, and the men are sure to be a tough bunch. I wouldn't like to let you go there."

"I am going," she answered. To his further remonstrances she interposed a stony silence. He gave it up after a while. As though that were a signal, she became more loquacious. "In a mining camp, one would suppose that the men, as you have said, are violent and fierce?"

"They're sure likely to be some wolfish, ma'am," he agreed. In hope that she would be deterred by exaggeration he dwelt on the subject. "The gunmen and hoss thieves and tinhorn gamblers all come in on the rush. There's a lot of them hobos and wabblies—reds and anarchists and such—floatin' round the country and they're sure to be in on it too. I reckon any of them would cut a throat or down a man fer two bits in lead money. Then there's the kind of women that follows a rush—the kind you wouldn't want to be seen with even—and the men might allow you was the same kind if you come rackin' in among 'em."

Solange listened thoughtfully and even smiled bleakly.

"These men would kill, you say, for money?"

"For money, marbles or chalk," said Succotash.

"That is good," said Solange. "And, if not for money, for a woman—one of *that* kind of women—they would shoot a man?"

Succotash blanched. "What you drivin' at, ma'am?"

"They will kill for me, for money—or if that is not enough—for a woman; such a woman as I am. Will they not, M'sieu Succotash?"

"Kill who?"

He knew the answer, though, before she said, "Louisiana!"

Shocked, he ventured a feeble remonstrance. "He's your husband, ma'am!"

But this drove her to a wild outburst in startling contrast to her former quiescence.

"My husband! Yes, my husband who has defiled me as no other on earth could have soiled and degraded me! My husband! Oh, he shall be killed if I must sell myself body and soul to the man who shoots him down!" She whirled on him.

"M'sieu Succotash! You have said to me that you liked me. Maybe, indeed, you have loved me a little! Well, if you will kill that man for me—you may have me!"

Succotash groaned, staring at her as though fascinated. She threw back her head, turning to him, her face upraised. The sweetly curved lips were half parted, showing little white teeth. On the satin cheeks a spot of pink showed. Her eyelids were drooping over the fathomless orbs, veiling them, hiding all but a hint of the mystery and beauty behind them.

"Am I not worth a man's life?" she murmured.

"You're worth a dozen murders and any number of other crimes," said Succotash gruffly. He turned his head away. "But you got me wrong. If he was what you think, I'd smoke him up in a minute and you'd not owe me a thing. But, ma'am, I know better'n you do how you really feel. You think you want him killed—but you don't."

Solange abruptly straightened round and rode ahead without another word. Succotash morosely followed.

They came down into the cañon at last and turned downward toward the spot where camp had been pitched that day which seemed so long ago now and yet was not yet a week in the past. Snow was falling in the darkness, clouding the air with a baffling mist, and yet they could see, dotted everywhere along the sides of the cañon, the flickering fires where the miners had camped on their claims. Around them came the muffled voices of men, free with profanity. Here and there the shadow of a tent loomed up or a more solid bulk spoke of roughly built shacks of logs and canvas. Faint laughter and once or twice the sound of loud quarreling were heard. It all seemed weirdly unreal and remote as though they rode through an alien, fourth dimensional world with which they had no connection. The snow crunched softly under the feet of the horses.

But as they progressed, the houses or

shacks grew thicker until it appeared that they were traversing the rough semblance of a street. Mud sloshed under the hoofs of the horses instead of snow. A black ribbon of it stretched ahead of them. Mistily on the sides loomed dimly lighted canvas walls or dark hulks of logs. The sound of voices was more frequent and insistent down here though most of it seemed to come from some place on ahead.

In the hope that she would push on through the camp Succotash followed the girl. They came at last to a long, dim bulk, glowing with light from a height of about six feet and black below that level. From this place surged a raucous din of voices, cursing, singing. A squeaky fiddle and a mandolin uttered dimly heard notes which were tossed about in the greater turmoil. Stamping feet made a continuous sound, curiously muffled.

"What is this?" said Solange, drawing rein before the place.

"Ma'am, you better come along," replied Succotash. "I reckon the bootleggers and gamblers have run in a load of poison and started a honkatonk. If that's it, this here dive is sure no place for peaceable folks like us at this time o' night."

"But it is here that these desperate men who will kill may be found, is it not?" Solange asked.

"You can sure find 'em as bad as you want 'em in there. But you can't go in there, ma'am! My God! That place is *hell!*"

"Then it is the place for such as I," said Solange. She swung down from her horse and walked calmly to the dimly outlined canvas door, swung it back and stepped into the place.

CHAPTER XVIII.

The place, seen from the inside, was a smoky inferno, lighted precariously by oil lanterns hung from the poles that supported a canvas roof and sides. Rows of grommets and snap-hasps indicated that pack tarpaulins had been largely used in the construction. To a height of about five feet the walls were of hastily hewn slabs, logs in the rough, pieces of packing cases, joined or laid haphazard with chinks and gaps through which the wind blew, making rivulets of chill in a stifling atmosphere of smoke, reeking alcohol, sweat and oil fumes. The building was a rough rectangle about twenty feet by fifty. At one end boards laid across barrels formed a semblance of a counter behind which two burly men in red undershirts dispensed liquor.

Pieces of packing cases nailed to lengths of logs made crazy tables scattered here and there. Shorter logs upended formed the chairs. There was no floor. Sand had been thrown on the ground after the snow had been shoveled off but the scuffling feet had beaten and trampled it into the sodden surface and had hashed it into mud.

Ankle-deep in the reeking slush stood thirty or forty men, clad mostly in laced boots, corduroys or overalls, canvas or Mackinaw jackets, woolen-shirted, slouch-hatted. Rough of face and figure they stood before the bar or lounged at the few tables, talking in groups or shouting and carousing joyously. There was a faro layout on one of the tables where a man in a black felt hat, smoking a cigar, dealt from the box while a wrinkle-faced man with a mouth like a slit cut in parchment sat beside him on a high log as lookout. Half a dozen men played silently.

Perhaps half of those present milled promiscuously among the groups, hail-fellow-well-met, drunk, blasphemous and loud. These shouted, sang and cursed with vivid impartiality. The other half, keener-eyed, stern of face, capable, drew together in small groups of two or three or four, talking more quietly and ignoring all others except as they kept a general alert watch on what was going on. These were the old-timers, experienced men, who trusted no strangers and had no mind to allow indiscreet familiarities from the more reckless and ignorant.

When the door opened to admit Solange, straight and slim in her plain leather tunic and breeches stained dark with melted snow, the drunken musicians perched on upended logs were the first to see her. They stopped their playing and stared and slowly a grin came upon one of them.

"Oh, mamma! Look who's here!" he shouted.

Half a hundred pairs of eyes swung toward the door and silence fell upon the place. Stepping heedlessly into the ankle-deep muck, Solange walked forward. Her flat-brimmed hat was pulled low over her face and the silk bandanna hid her hair. Behind her Succotash walked uncertainly, glaring from side to side at the gaping men.

The groups that kept to themselves cast

appraising eyes on the cow-puncher and then turned them away. They pointedly returned to their own affairs as though to say that, however strange, the advent of this girl accompanied by the lean rider, was none of their business. Again spoke experience and the wariness born of it.

But the tenderfeet, the drunken roisterers, were of different clay. A chorus of shouts addressed to "sister" bade her step up and have a drink. A wit, in a falsetto scream, asked if he might have the next dance. Jokes, or what passed in that crew for them, flew thickly, growing more ribald and suggestive as the girl stood oblivious of them and looked about her.

Then Succotash strode between the girl and the group near the bar from which most of the noise emanated. He hitched his belt a bit and faced them truculently.

"You-all had better shut up," he announced in a flat voice. His words brought here and there a derisive echo, but for the most part the mirth died away. The loudest gibers turned ostentatiously back to the bar and called for more liquor. The few hardy ones who would have carried on their ridicule felt that sympathy had fled from them and muttered into silence. Yet half of the crew carried weapons hung in plain sight and others, no doubt, were armed, although the tools were not visible, while Succotash apparently had no weapon.

Behind the fervid comradeship and affection the men were strangers each to the other. None knew whom he could trust: none dared to strike lest the others turn upon him.

At one of the rude tables not far from the entrance sat three men. They had a bottle of pale and poisonous liquor before them from which they took frequent and deep drinks. They talked loudly, advertising their presence above the quieter groups. One or two men stood at the table examining a heap of dirty particles of crushed rock spread upon the boards. They would look at it, finger it and then pass on, generally without other comment than a muttered word or two. But the three seated men, one of whom was the gray, weasel-faced Jim Banker, boasted loudly and profanely, calling attention to the "color" and the exceeding richness of the ore. Important, swaggering and braggart, they assumed the airs of an aristocracy, as of men set apart and elevated by success.

Outside, in the lull occasioned by Solange's dramatic entrance, noises of the camp could be heard through the flimsy walls. Far down the cañon, faint shouts could be heard. Some one was calling to animals of some sort, apparently. A faint voice, muffled by snow, raised a yell.

"H'yar comes the fust dog sled in frum the no'th," he cried. "That's the sour dough for yuh! He's comin' *right!*"

They could hear the faint snarls and barks of dogs yelping far down the cañon.

Then the noise swelled up again and drowned the alien sounds.

Dimly through the murk Solange saw the evil face of the desert rat, now flushed with drink and greed. With a sudden resolution she turned and walked toward him. He saw her coming and stared, his face growing sallow and his yellow teeth showing. He gave the impression of a cornered rat at the moment.

Then his eyes fell on Succotash who followed her and he half rose from his seat, fumbling for a gun. Succotash paid no heed to him, not noticing his wild stare. His companions were busy showing the ore to curious spectators and were too drunk to heed him.

Slowly Banker subsided into his seat as he saw that neither Solange nor Succotash apparently had hostile intentions. He tried to twist his seamed features into an ingratiating grin but the effort was a failure, producing only a grimace.

"W'y, here's ole French Pete's gal!" he exclaimed cordially, though there was a quaver in his voice. "Darter of my old friend what discovered this here mine an' then lost it. Killed, he was, by a gunman, twenty years gone. Gents, say howdy to the lady!"

His two companions gaped and stared upward at the strange figure. The standing men, awkwardly and with a muttered word or two, backed away from the table, alert and watchful. Women meant danger in such a community. Under the deep shadow of her hat brim Solange's eyes smoldered, dim and mysterious.

"You are M'sieu Banker!" she asserted tonelessly. "You need not be frightened. I have not come to ask you for an accounting—yet. It is for another purpose that I am here."

"Shore! Anything I kin do fer old Pete's gal—all yuh got to do is ask me, honey!

Old Jim Banker; that's me! White an' tender an' faithful to a friend, is Jim Banker, ma'am. Set down, now, and have a nip!"

He rose and waved awkwardly to his log. One of the others with a grin that was almost a leer also rose and reached for another log at a neighboring table from which a man had risen. All about that end of the shack the seated or standing men, mostly of the silent and aloof groups, drifted casually aside, leaving the table free.

Solange sat down and Succotash put out a hand to restrain her.

"Mad'm'selle!" he remonstrated. "This ain't no place fer you! You don't want to hang around here with this old natural! He's plum poisonous, I'm tellin' you!"

Solange made an impatient gesture. "Some one quiet him!" she exclaimed. "Am I not my own mistress, then?"

"You better be keerful what you call me, young feller," said Banker belligerently. "You can't rack into this here camp and get insultin' that a way."

"Aw, shut up!" retorted Succotash, flaming. "Think you can bluff me when I'm a-facin' you? You damn, cowardly horned toad!"

He half drew back his fist to strike as Banker rose, fumbling at his gun. But one of the other men suddenly struck out with a fist like a ham, landing beneath the cowpuncher's ear. He went down without a groan, completely knocked out.

The man got up, seized him by the legs, dragged him to the door and threw him into the road outside. Then he came back, laughing loudly, and swaggering as though his feat had been one to be proud of. Solange had shuddered and shrunk for a moment, but almost at once she shook herself as though casting off her repulsion, and after that was stonily composed.

On his way to the table the man who had struck Succotash down called loudly for another bottle of liquor and one of the red-shirted men behind the bar left his place to bring it to them. The burly bruiser sat down beside Solange with every appearance of self-satisfaction. He leered at her as though expecting her to flame at his prowess. But she gave no heed to him.

"You might lift up that hat and let us git a look at you," he said, reaching out as though to tilt the brim. She jerked sharply away from him.

"In good time, m'sieu!" she said. "Have patience."

Then she turned to Banker who had been eying her with furtive, speculative eyes, cautious and suspicious.

"M'sieu Banker," she said, "it is true that you have known this man who killed my father—this Louisiana?"

"Me? Shore, I knowed him. A murderin' gunman he was, ma'am. A bad hombre!"

"And did you recognize him that time he came—when you played that little—joke—upon me?"

Banker turned sallow once more as though the recollection frightened him.

"I shore did," he assented fervently. "He plumb give me a start. Thought he was a ghost, that a way, you——"

He leaned forward, grinning, his latent lunacy showing for a moment in his red eyes. Confidentially, he unburdened himself to his companions.

"This lady—you'll see—she's a kind o' witchlike. This here feller racks in, me thinkin' him dead these many years, an' I misses him clean when I tries to down him. I shore thinks he's a ha'nt, called up by the lady. Haw, haw!"

His laughter was evil and cunning. It was followed by cackling boasts:

"But they all dies—all but old Jim. Louisiana, he dies too, even if I misses him that a way with old Betsy that ain't missed nary a one fer nigh twenty year."

Under her hat brim Solange's eyes gleamed with a fierce light as the blood-thirsty old lunatic sputtered and mowed. But the other two grinned derisively at each other and leered at the girl.

"Talks like that all the time, miss," said one. "Them old-timers likes to git off the Deadwood Dick stuff. Me, I'm nothin' but a p'fessional pug and all the gun-fightin' I ever seen was in little old Chi. But I ain't a damn' bit afraid to say I could lick a half dozen of these here hicks that used to have a reputation in these parts. Fairy tales: that's wot they are!"

He swigged his drink and sucked in his breath with vast self-satisfaction. The other man, of a leaner, quieter but just as villainous type, grinned at him.

"Oh, I don't know," he said. "I ain't never seen no one could juggle a six-gun like they say these birds could do, but I reckon there's some truth in it. Leastways there are some that can shoot pretty good."

He too leaned back with a smirk of self-satisfaction. Banker chuckled again.

"You're both good ones," he said. "This gent can shoot some, ma'am. He comes from Arkansaw. But I ain't a-worryin' none about that. Old Jim's luck's still holdin' good. I found this here mine, now, although you wouldn't tell me where it was. Didn't I?"

"I suppose so," said Solange indifferently. "I do not care about the mine, m'sieu. It is yours. But there is something that I wish and—I have money——"

The instant light of greed that answered this announcement convinced her that she had struck the right note. If the mine had been as rich as Golconda these men would have coveted additional money.

"You got money, ma'am?" Banker spoke whiningly.

"Money to pay for your service. You are brave men—men who would help a woman, I feel sure. You, M'sieu Banker, knew my father and would help his daughter—if she paid you."

The irony escaped him.

"I sure would," he answered eagerly. "What's it you want, ma'am, and what you goin' to pay fer it?"

She spoke quite calmly, almost casually.

"I want you to kill a man," she answered.

The three of them stared at her and then the big bruiser laughed.

"Who d'you want scragged?" he said derisively.

Solange looked steadily at Banker. "Louisiana!" she answered clearly. But old Jim turned pale and showed his rat's teeth.

The others merely chuckled and nudged each other.

Solange sensed that two considered her request merely a wild joke while the other was afraid. She slowly drew from her bag the yellow poster that De Launay had sent back to her by Succotash.

"You would be within the law," she pleaded, spreading it out before them. As they bent over it, reading it slowly she went on, "See! He is a fugitive with a price on his head. Any one may slay him and collect a reward. It is a good deed to shoot him down."

"Five hundred dollars looks good," said the lean man from Arkansas, "but it ain't hardly enough to set me gunnin' for a feller I don't know. Is this a bad actor?"

"Bad?" screamed Banker suddenly. "Bad! I've seen him keep a chip in the air fer two or three seconds shootin' under it with a six-shooter! I've seen him roll a bottle along the ground as if you was kickin' it, shootin' between it and the ground and never chippin' the glass. Bad! You ask Snake Murphy if he's bad. Snake was drunk an' starts a fuss with him an' his hand was still on his gun butt an' the gun in the holster when Louisiana shoots him in the wrist an' never looks at him while he's a-doin' it! Bad! I'll say he's bad!"

He was shivering and almost sick in his sudden fright at the idea of facing Louisiana. The others, however, were skeptical.

"Same old Buffalo Bill and Alkali Ike stuff!" said the pugilist sneeringly. "I ain't afraid of this guy!"

"Well—neither am I," said the man from Arkansas complacently. "He ain't the only one that can shoot, I reckon."

Banker fairly fawned upon them. "Yes," he cried. "You-all are good fellers and you ain't afraid. You'll down Louisiana if he comes. But he won't come, I reckon."

"He *is* coming," said Solange. "Not many hours ago I heard him say that he was going to 'jump your claim,' which he said did not belong to you. And he intimated that there would be a fight and that he would welcome it."

The three men were startled, looking at each other keenly. Banker licked his lips and was unmistakably frightened more than ever. But in his red eyes the flame of lunacy was slowly mounting.

"If I had old Betsy here——" he muttered.

"He ain't goin' to jump this mine," said the man from Arkansas grimly. "Me and 'Slugger' here has an interest in that mine. We works it on shares with Jim. If this shootin' sport comes round, we'll know what to do with him."

Slugger, however, was more practical. "We'll take care of him," he agreed, slapping his side where a pistol hung. "But if there's money in gettin' him I want to know how much. What'll you pay, ma'am?"

"A—a thousand dollars is all I have," said Solange. "You shall have that, messieurs."

But somehow her voice had faltered as though she now were frightened at what she had done and regretted it. Some insistent doubt, hitherto buried under her despair and rage, was struggling to the surface. As she

watched these sinister scoundrels muttering together and concerting the downfall of the man who was her husband—and perhaps something more to her—she felt a panic growing in her, an impulse to spring up and rush out back on the trail to warn De Launay. But she suppressed it, cruelly scourging herself to remembrance of her dead father and her vow of vengeance. She tried to whip her flagging sense of outrage at the trick that the brutal Louisiana had played her in allowing her to marry him.

"If he lights around here," she heard Banker cackling, "we'll down him, we will! I'll add a thousand more to what the lady gives. We'll keep a lookout, boys, an' when he shows up, he dies!"

Then his shrill, evil cry arose again and men turned from their pursuits to look at him. The foam stood on his lips that writhed into a snarl over yellow fangs, and his red eyes flamed with insanity.

"He'll die! They all dies! Only old Jim don't die. French Pete dies; Panamint dies; that there young Dave dies! But old Jim don't die!"

Solange turned pale as he half rose, leaning on the table with one hand while the other rested on the butt of his six-shooter. A great terror surged over her as she saw what she had let loose on her lover.

Her lover! For the first time she realized that he *was* her lover and that despite crime and insult and deadly injury he could be nothing else. She staggered to her feet, shoving back the brim of her hat, her wonderful eyes showing for the first time as she turned them on these wolves who faced her.

"By God!" said the bruiser in a sudden burst of awe as he was caught by the fathomless depths. The man from Arkansas could not see them so clearly but he sensed something disturbing and unusual. Banker faced her and tried to tear his own eyes from her.

Then, as they stood and sat in tableau, the flimsy door to the shack flew open and Louisiana stood on the threshold, holsters sagging on each hip and tied down around his thighs.

CHAPTER XIX.

Slowly the sense of something terrible and menacing was borne in on those who grouped themselves at the table. First there came a diminishing of the sounds that filled the place. They died away like a fading wind. Then the chill sweep of air from the door surged across the room like a great fear congealing the blood. In the sloppy mess underfoot could be heard the sucking, splashing sound of feet moving as men all about drew back instinctively and rapidly to be out of the way.

Solange felt what had happened rather than saw it. The fearful convulsion of fright followed by maniac rage that leaped to Banker's face told her as though he had shouted the news. His companions and allies were merely stupefied and startled.

With an impulse to cry out a warning or to rush to him and throw her body between De Launay and these enemies she suddenly whirled about to face him. She saw him standing in the doorway, the night black behind him except where the light fell on untrodden snow. Dim and shadowy in the open air of the roadway were groups of figures. The yelping and snarling of dogs floated into the place and she could see their wolfish figures between the legs of men and horses.

De Launay stood upright, hands outstretched at the level of his shoulders and resting against the sides of the doorway. He was open to and scornful of attack. His clean features were set sternly and his eyes looked levelly into the reeking interior, straight at Solange and the three men grouped behind her.

"M'sieu de Launay!" she cried. His eyes flickered over her and focused again on the men.

"Louisiana—at your service," he answered quietly.

In some wild desire to urge him back she choked out words: "Why—why did you come?"

He did not answer her direct but raised his voice a little, though still without emotion.

"Jim Banker," he said, "I came for you. There are others out here who have also come for you—but I am holding them back. I want you myself."

Out of Banker's foaming lips came a snarling cry.

"Wh-what fer?"

Again the answer was not direct and this time it was Solange he spoke to though he did not alter the direction of his gaze.

"Mademoiselle, you are directly in line with these—men. You had better move aside."

But Solange felt the pressure of a gun muzzle at her back and the snarl was in her ear.

"You don't move none! Stand where you be, er I'll take you fust and git him next!"

Nevertheless she would have moved, for she was fearless, had not De Launay caught the knowledge of her peril. He spoke again, still calm but with a new, steely note in his voice.

"Stand fast, mademoiselle, then, if they must have you for a shield. But don't move. Shut your eyes!"

Hardly knowing why, she obeyed, oblivious of the peril to herself but in an agony lest her presence and position increase his danger. De Launay dominated her and she stood as rigid as a statue, awaiting the cataclysm.

But he was speaking again.

"The wolves dug up the body of Dave MacKay; Banker, and the men outside found it. What you did to Wallace the other day he has recovered sufficiently to tell us. What you tried to do to this young woman I have also told them. Shall I tell her and the others who killed French Pete nineteen years ago?"

Again came the whining, shrill snarl from behind Solange.

"You did, you——"

"So you have said before, Jim. But I have the bullet that killed Pete Dalbert. I also have the bullet you shot at me when I came up to save mademoiselle from you a week ago. Those two are of the same caliber, Banker. It's a caliber that's common enough nowadays but wasn't very common in 1900. Who shot a Savage .303 nineteen years ago and who shoots that same rifle to-day?"

There was a slow mutter of astonishment rising from the men crowded about the walls and in front of the crude bar.

"I give you first shot, Jim," came the half mocking voice of De Launay—a voice beating half heard on Solange's ears while the astounding reversal of her ideas was causing her brain almost to reel. Then she heard the whistling scream of Banker, all lunatic by now, as he lost all sense of fear in his rising madness.

"By glory, but you don't git me, Louisiana! Nobody gits old Jim. They all die —all but old Jim!"

The shattering concussion of a shot fired within an inch or two of her ear almost stunned her. She felt the powder burning her cheek. Almost against her will her eyes flew open to see the figure in the door jerk and sag a little. Triumphant and horrible came Banker's scream.

"They all die—all but old Jim!"

She was conscious of hasty movements beside her. The two other men, awaking from their stupor and sensing their opportunity as De Launay was hit, were drawing their guns.

"Stand still!" thundered De Launay and she stiffened automatically. His hands had dropped from the doorway and now they seemed to snap upward with incredible speed and in them were two squat and heavy automatics, their grizzly muzzles sweeping like the snap of a whip to line directly at herself.

Two shots again rocked her with their concussion. They seemed merely echoes of the flaming roars from the big automatics as each of them spoke. A man standing against the wall some feet away from De Launay ducked sharply, with a cry. The shot fired by the Slugger had gone wide, narrowly missing him. A chip flew from the door lintel near De Launay's head. The man from Arkansas was shooting closer.

Solange was conscious that some one beside her had grunted heavily and that some one else was choking distressingly. She could not look around but she heard a heavy slump to her left. To her right something fell more suddenly and sharply, splashing soggily in the muck. Then once more the powder burned her cheek and her eardrum was numbed under an explosion.

"I got you, Louisiana!" came Banker's yell. She saw De Launay stagger again and felt that she was about to faint.

"Stand still!" he shouted again. She knew she was sheltering his murderer and that from behind her the finishing shot was already being aimed over her shoulder. Yet, although she felt that she must risk her life in order to get out of line and give him a chance, his voice still dominated her and she stiffened.

One of the big pistols swept into line and belched fire and noise at her. She heard the brittle snapping of bone at her ear and something struck her sharply on the collar bone, a snapping blow, as though some hard and heavy object had struck and glanced upward and away. Then the second pistol crashed at her.

Again she heard the sound of something smashing behind her. There was no other

sound except the noise of something slipping. That something then slid, splashing, to the floor.

De Launay's pistols were lowered and he was taking a step into the room. Solange noted that he staggered again, that the deerskin waistcoat was stained and she tried to find strength to run to him.

She saw, as she moved, the huddled figures at her side where the dead men lay, and she knew that there was another behind her. She heard the slopping of feet in the mud as men closed in from all about her. She heard awe-struck voices commenting on what had happened.

"Plumb center—and only a chunk of his haid showin' above the gal! If you ask me, that's shore some shootin'!"

"And each o' the other two with a shot—jest a left an' a right!"

"Gits the gun with one barrel an' the man with the other. Did you-all see it?"

Her feet were refusing to carry her, leaden and weighty as they seemed. Her knees were trembling and her head swimming. Yet she retained consciousness, for in front of her De Launay was crumpling forward, folding up and sinking to the muddy shambles in which he stood.

Friendly hands were holding her up and she swept the cobwebs from her brain, determined that she would conquer her weakness. Somehow she staggered to De Launay's side and, heedless of the mud, sank to her knees.

"My friend! My friend!" she mourned over him, her hands folding over his lean cheeks, still brown in spite of the pallor that was sweeping them.

A man dropped to his knees beside De Launay and opposite her. She did not heed his swift gesture in ripping back the buckskin vest. Nor did she feel the hand on her shoulder where Succotash stood behind her.

As she raised De Launay's head his eyes fluttered open and met hers—were held by them as though they were drawn down to the depths of them and lost in the fathomless pools. Over his mouth, under the small, military mustache crept a smile.

"Morgan *la fée!*" he whispered.

Solange choked back a sob. She leaned nearer and opened her eyes wider. De Launay's gaze remained lost in the depths of hers, but he saw at last to the bottom of those eyes—saw there unutterable sorrow and love.

"Don't worry, fay lady!" he gasped. "It's been something—to live for—once more! And the mine—you'll not need that—after all!"

His eyes slowly closed but he was not unconscious, for he spoke again.

"It's nothing much. That rat couldn't kill—Louisiana!"

The man who was examining De Launay made an impatient gesture and Succotash drew her gently away. She rose slowly, bending dumbly over the physician, as he seemed to be.

"Reckon he's right," said this man grimly as he bared De Launay's chest. "Huh! These holes aren't a circumstance to what this hombre's had in him before this. Reckon he's had a habit of mixing with cougars or something like that! Here's a knife wound—old."

"A bayonet did that," said Solange.

"Soldier, eh! Well, he's used to bullet holes and it's a good thing. Hand me something to bandage him with, some one. He's lost a heap of blood but there ain't anything he won't git over—that is, if you can get him out of this hole."

The man seemed competent enough, although, abandoning his practice to join the gold rush, he had brought few of the tools of his trade with him. He gathered handkerchiefs and Solange ripped open her flannel shirt waist and tore the lingerie beneath it to furnish him additional cloth. She had collected herself and although still shaky was cool and efficient, her nurse's experience rendering the doctor invaluable aid. Together they soon stanched the bleeding and directed De Launay's removal to a near-by tent.

Then the doctor turned to Solange and Succotash, who hovered around her like a satellite.

"I've done what I can," he said. "But he'll not stand much chance if he's left up here. You'd better risk it and get him down to the Falls if it can be done."

"But how can we take him?" cried Solange. "Surely it would kill him to ride a horse."

"No, he can't," agreed the doctor. "But there is the dog team that came in to-night. You ought to get him to Wallace's with that and he can probably stand it."

Solange turned at once and ran out to seek the driver of the dog team. The dogs lay about in the road but the man was not

visible. She hastily burst into the saloon again in the hope of finding him there.

The signs of conflict had been hastily removed and men were once more lined up before the rude bar, discussing the fight in low voices.

They fell silent when Solange entered and most of them took off their hats although they had all been puzzled to explain her connection with the event and her actions before it had come off. She paid no attention to them but swept the crowd, looking for the newcomer. He saved her the trouble of identifying him by coming forward.

"Ma'am," he said, with a great embarrassment, "I'm Snake Murphy and I was grubstakin' that ornery coyote that Louisiana just beefed. I come in to-night with that dog team and I reckon that accordin' to law this here claim of Jim's belongs to me now that he's dead. But I wants to say that I ain't robbin' no women after they come all the way across the ocean to find this here mine and—well—if half of it'll satisfy you, it's yours!"

Solange seized him by the arm.

"You are the man with the dogs?" she cried.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Then—you keep the mine—all of it, m'sieu! I do not want it. But you will let us have the dogs that we may take M'sieu de Launay to the hospital? We must have the dogs!"

"Hell's bells!" Snake Murphy broke into a grin. "Why, ma'am, shore you're welcome to the dogs. This here Louisiana shot me up once—but damned if I stands fer no one shootin' him from behind a woman that a away. Come on and we'll fix the sled!"

A few minutes later Solange had resumed her watch beside De Launay while, outside, Succotash and Murphy were busy unloading the sled and getting it ready for the wounded man.

De Launay slept, apparently. Solange sat patiently as the long hours passed. At intervals he muttered in his sleep and she listened. Fragments of his life formed the subject of the words, incoherent and disconnected. She caught references to the terrible years of existence as a *légionnaire* and later snatches of as terrible scenes of warfare. Once he spoke more clearly and his words referred to her.

"Morgan *la fée!* Promised to be something interesting—more than that. Life's worth living, maybe, after all."

She dropped her hand over his and he clutched it, holding fast. After that he was quiet, sleeping as easily as could be expected.

In the morning the doctor examined him again and said that the trip might be taken. De Launay awoke, somewhat dazed and uncertain but contented, evidently, at finding Solange at his side. He had fever but was doing very well.

Solange fed him broth and as he sipped it he looked now and then at her. Something seemed to be on his mind. Finally he unburdened himself.

"I was planning to save you the divorce," he said. "But I probably will get well. It is too bad!"

"Why too bad?" asked Solange, with eyes on broth and spoon.

"After this even a Nevada divorce will mean notoriety for you. And you've lost the mine."

"I have not lost it," said Solange. "M'sieu Murphy gave me half of it—but I traded it away."

"Traded it?"

"For a team of dogs to take you out. As for a divorce, M'sieu de Launay, there is a difficulty in the way."

"A difficulty! All you have to do is establish a residence. Such a marriage of form wouldn't hold a minute if you want to have it annulled."

Solange blushed a little.

"But m'sieu forgets. I cannot blame you, for I hardly recalled it myself until recently. I am a Catholic—and divorce is not allowed."

"But—even a Catholic could get an annullment—under the circumstances, if she wished it."

"But——" said Solange, and stopped.

"But what?"

"Be quiet, m'sieu! If you twist that way you will spill the broth. If I wished—yes, perhaps."

"Solange!"

"But I—do not wish!"

De Launay lay still a moment. Then:

"Solange!"

"M'sieu?"

"*Why* don't you wish it?"

She stole a glance at him and then turned away. His face was damp and the fever was

glittering in his eyes but behind the fever was a great hunger.

"Husbands," said Solange, "are not plentiful, m'sieu."

He sank back on the bed, sighing a little as though exhausted. Instantly Solange bent over him, frightened.

"Is that all?" she heard him mutter.

Slowly she stooped until her glimmering hair swept around his face and her lips met his.

"Rogue!" she breathed softly. "That is not all. There is also—this!"

Her lips clung to his.

Finally she straightened up and arranged her hair, smiling down at him, her cheeks flushed delicately and her eyes wonderfully soft.

"Morgan *la fée!*" said De Launay. "My witch—my fairy lady!"

Solange kissed him lightly on the forehead and rose.

"We must be getting ready to go," she said. "It will be a hard trip, I am afraid. But we shall get you down to the town and there is enough money left to keep you in the hospital until you are well again. And I shall go on the stage until everything is all right again."

De Launay stared at her. "Hasn't Succotash given you that note?"

"But what note?"

He laughed out loud.

"Call him in."

When the cow-puncher came in he had the envelope in his hand and held it out to Solange.

"I done forgot this till this minute, ma'am. The boss told me to give it to you to-day—but I reckon it ain't needed yet."

"Open it," said De Launay.

Solange complied and took out the two inclosures. The first she read was the will and her eyes filled at this proof of De Launay's care for her, although she had no idea that his estate was of value. Then she unfolded the second paper. This she read with growing amazement.

"But, m'sieu!" she cried, and stopped. She looked at him, troubled. "I did not know!" she said uncertainly.

His hand groped for hers and as she took it, timidly, he drew her closer.

"Why," he said, "it makes no difference, does it, dear?"

She nodded. "It makes a difference," she replied. "I am not one that——"

"You are one that traded a mine worth millions that I might have dogs to take me out," he interrupted. "Now I will buy those dogs from you and for them I will pay the value of a dozen gold mines. If you will kiss me again I will endow you with every oil well on my father's ancestral acres!"

Solange broke into a laugh and her eyes grew deep and mysterious again as she stooped to him while the embarrassed Succotash sidled out under the tent flap.

"You will make yourself poor," she said.

"I couldn't," he answered, "so long as Morgan *la fée* is with me in Avallon."

Succotash called from outside, plaintively.

"I got the dogs fed and ready, mad'm'selle—I mean, madame! Reckon we better carry the gen'ral out now!"

Solange threw back the flap to let him enter again.

"We are ready—for Avallon," she said.

"Wallace's ranch, you mean, don't you?" asked Succotash.

"Yes—and Avallon also."

Then, as the stalwart Succotash gathered the wounded man and lifted him, she took De Launay's hand and walked out beside him.

In the next issue appears "Galvo 40," a complete novel by W. R. Hoefer.

THOSE PRECIOUS DROPS

MR. GEORGE WASHINGTON JONES was crossing a street. Also he was breaking the prohibition law, for in his hip pocket he was transporting a bottle of whisky. Along came an automobile and knocked Mr. Jones down. The colored brother picked himself up. There was an anxious expression on his face as he felt a terrifying dampness in the region of his coat tails. "Good gosh," he exclaimed, "I hopes that there's blood!"

Classics in Slang

Jazzed by H. C. Witwer

Author of "Phil Grimm's Progress," "Confidence," Etc.

Afflicted with the bookstore blues McTague was sadly reflecting on the uselessness of a man's kicking unless he is a chorus girl—and then suddenly he sold a book! Considerable sale!

IX.—GULLIVER'S TRAVELS

To the Sporting's Editor of the *Daily Shriek.*

FRIEND EDITOR: Well, editor, I trust you spent a happy Arbor Day. As far as your humbly correspondent is concerned, why the day passed quietly. Not bein' a tree, or even a flower, for that matter, I get no more thrill out of Arbor Day than Sears Roebuck gets out of receivin' a letter. But as everybody which has any feelin' at all for Father Nature is suppose to go to a garden and plant somethin' on Arbor Day, why I went down to Madison Square Garden and plant my fist in the face of "Battlin' " Erstwhile and cracked him for a nutmeg in two minutes and a half, Eastern Time.

This makes two notably victories for me in a week, editor, as three days before this little incident I was gave the decisions over "Shifty" von Gazzatti in gay Philadelphia, at the end of a six-round bout which had all the earmarks of a race riot. My next imitation is to be a delightful little set-to with Tom Gibbons. This is the baby, editor, that's been makin' high divers out of all and sundry in the heavyweight line. I am suppose to mingle with him next month if the bout don't fall through, which I certainly hope it does!

How the so ever, editor, they is no use of a man kickin' unless he is a chorus girl, so let us get to the objects of this letter and be done with it. The objects is, editor, to let you know that the bookstore left unto me by my Uncle Angus McTague, when by the via of dyin' he fin'ly got his name in the paper, has turned out to be a gold mine and I am sittin' pretty once again with my pulse-quickenin' clerkine, Ethel Kingsley.

Editor, I am more infatuated with Ethel Kingsley than a bootlegger is with prohibition and if I could only lead her to the handiest altar, why I wouldst be so happy that I wouldst even be willin' to give up my chance of becomin' president, which everybody has which is born in the U. S. and A.

But they's manys the lurch twixt the girl and the church, editor, and whilst Ethel is at the helm of the cash register in my shoppe as of yore and still helpin' me get a education by readin' the classicals and then writin' my ideas of them for her, why she keeps the counter between us on the account I am a box fighter on the side. Editor, I have been *drove* to committin' aggravated assault and battery for pennies, as up until lately, customers in my bookstore has been about as plentiful as canoes is on the Gobi Desert and a man has got to get his calories at least twice the week, hey, editor?

But the eye-widenin' Ethel can't see it that way and she claims they must be whole flocks of things a great, big, comely, young husky like your correspondent can do, without continually gettin' his nose broke and the etc. She puts down her silk-clad little foot, editor, and exclaims that if I don't give up the ring, why *she* will give up the one I plied *her* with. As if that ain't enough to make me thoughtful, editor, she goes to work and throws up her portfolio as my clerkine, simply because the store is starvin' to death and I run a guy ragged which wanted to buy it, but made the fatal mistake of callin' Ethel "Cutey" in my presence.

Well, editor, about a week after Ethel flounced out of my store with the cheery remark that she trusts she never sees me again, I am sittin' in lonely state amongst my books, which tryin' to get rid of 'em is the same as tryin' to get rid of diphtheria. Since Ethel quit me cold I have sent her a covey of telegrams and wires, merciful Heavens knows how many letters, post cards and others mail in season, and I have likewise

tried my hand at gettin' her on the phone, but all I can get in touch with is the telephone twins, "Busy" and "Don't Answer."

Well, as I ejaculated before, editor, I am sittin' in my store wonderin' why it is that when some likely customers *does* grant me the boon of a visit, the only books they want to see is the telephone book and the city directory. I'm so lonesome, editor, I am even gettin' in the habit of talkin' to my Airedale cat, which as the results is beginnin' to regard me uneasily. I got the bookstore blues, what I mean!

In the order to murder some time, editor, I pick up a detective story called "Killed In Fun" or "The Oyster Opener's Revenge!" by Galahad Camembert. Editor, the hero is the same as the hero of all detective stories, whether they are wrote by Galahad Camembert or not; to wit; he is tall and thin, a bit stooped, wears glasses, is kind of goofy lookin', seems like everything in the wide, wide world but a dick, has been left four billion by his grandmother and is merely bein' a private detective to devil the dumbell coppers. Give this baby one glance at the murdered man's sleeve garters and the most bafflin' crime is a open and shut case to him!

Well, editor, I have just got to the points where the old banker is shot in the library, which is where all old bankers has got to get shot in detective stories, when lo and behold a customer walks in. Editor, I dropped "Killed In Fun" like it was a hot nickel and tripped to the front of the store, smirkin' and beamin' and rubbin' my hands together like a loan shark. "At last, a sale!" I says to myself, editor, like I am cast away on a deserted island or the etc.

"How thick a book did you wish to buy?" I says, with a bewitchin' smile.

Well, it seems, editor, that what this bozo come in for was to get a twenty-dollar bill changed and the farthest thing from his mind was buyin' books. The second farthest thing was buyin' *anything*. Then a lady of the female sex pitty-pats in for the purposes of findin' out where is Colombus Avenue if at all and she has hardly went out when two guys comes bustlin' in together. One of them wishes to buy stamps and the other one asks is they a chewin'-gum machine in the store anywheres. So after gettin' rid of the usually daily rush with a few appropriate remarks, editor, which sent these dizzy pests out in a state where they was fit to be tied, I am settlin' down to the detective story once again when a middle-aged old man walks in and he looks more like a bookworm than bookworm himself! With him is a young bozo of my own build, but lackin' my manifold attractions to the tired eye.

"Eh—where is the charming young lady who used to be here?" says the oldish guy, lookin' at me with not the little surprise.

"She has went back to her home in Montenegro," I says coldly. "Anyways, we are sellin' books here and not charmin' young ladies and one of the healthiest things you can do is not to crack no more about my formerly sales force!"

This seems to burn the young blood up, editor, but the old bird kind of laughs.

"Quite so—eh—Mister McTague, I believe?" he says.

I answered with a popular word of three letters.

"I thought so from Mister Clay's description," says the old guy. "I am Mister Marcus and"—he nods at the young bozo which is still scowlin' at me—"and this is Mister Davis."

"I have never heard of either of you two guys," I says; "but Mister Clay is the dumbell I run out of here a short time hence, for battin' out of his turn with that charmin' young lady you just asked me about. He——"

"Mister Clay desires to buy your store," butts in old Mr. Marcus. "And he has asked us to—eh—look it over and appraise it for him. You do not object?"

Well, editor, I have always made it the point to be courteously to the aged and then again I figure that as long as Ethel has went to work and left me flat, why I might as well get rid of the store for whatever I can get and make the fresh start in life. So I told the old gent to go ahead. He starts prowlin' about hithers and yon, examinin' the books like a pawnbroker examines a diamond, whilst his young confederate lures me into conversation. Away in the back of the shop, editor, is a closet fill of dusty and musty old novels and the etc. which looks so old I bet Adam used to kill manys the dull night in the Garden of Eden readin' 'em! Instead of lookin' over the shelf after shelf of nice brand *new* books with gilt edges and softly leather backs, editor, why old Mr. Marcus goes after them shopworn, torn and

cobwebby volumes like a ferret goes after a rat.

"Just how much do you want for your store?" the young guy suddenly asks me out of the clear sky.

"Well," I says without flickin' a eye, "to be frankly with you, I want to get rid of this store the same way I want to get rid of my neck; but I have took quite a fancy to you and I will let you have it for twenty-five grand—that is, twenty-five thousand bucks. There's what *I* call a bargain!"

The young man gives vent to a whinny, editor.

"Be yourself!" he sneers. "Twenty-five thousand for this ramshackle old shack is the same kind of a bargain that paying a hundred bucks for a cinnamon bun would be! We'll give you——"

Just then comes a interruption, editor, in the shape of the old gent hurryin' and scurryin' across the floor of the ramshackle old shack to where we are standin'. He's got a torn old book in his hand and he's a oil paintin' of excitement.

"How—eh—what is the price of *this* book?" he wants to know and my how his voice shakes, editor.

The young fellow looks at him with the greatest of curiosity whilst I gaze at the relic which the old man holds out. He don't seem particularly anxious for me to take it out of his hands, editor, but never's the less, that's what I done. The book is called by the title of "Gulliver's Travels" and it is dated 1726, but from the looks of it I am satisfied it come out manys the year before that! The spellin' in it is terribler than mine, if such things can be possible, editor. Well, the young guy is lookin' at the book, too, by this time and he begins lickin' his lips like a collie advancin' on a nice, meaty bone.

"How much?" says both of 'em together, reachin' for the book.

Well, editor, I figure I am lucky to get rid of this book at all—nearly 200 years old and as musty as a damp cellar!

"Oh, I don't know," I says, on the brinks of makin' 'em a present of it, "I suppose half a buck wouldst be about right, if——"

"Fifty cents!" gasps the young guy, like he's dumfounded. "I——"

"Well, call it a quarter then and it's a sale!" I butts in.

Editor, I thought the old gent wouldst die in convulsions. It's a good minute before he can talk! I likewise thought they was both sore at what they figured was profiteerin' prices. If I'd only of knowed the *real* facts, editor, why *I* wouldst of been the one to die in convulsions!

"I—I—*I'll give you fifty dollars for it!*" busts out old Mr. Marcus. "Hand it over!"

Editor, I wish you could of been there, if only to see the way his hands is tremblin'.

"Fifty dollars is ridiculous!" I says. "Another thing, I don't take kindly to bein' kidded. You guys wait and I will call up my formerly clerk. If I can get her on the phone I'll ask her to come down here and she'll give you the prices on all this junk."

"Wait—eh—I—it is not necessary to telephone *anybody*," says the old guy, grabbin' my arm, "I will give you *one hundred* dollars for this book and not another penny!"

"*Two* hundred, here!" bawls the young guy.

Editor, it commences to look to me like they is three or four hundred Negroes in the woodpile. Two hundred berries for a book 196 years of age! Can you picture that?

Well, I paid no attention to their pleadin's, but called up Ethel's number without much hope that I wouldst get her. For once in my lifetime luck is with me, editor, and in no time at all the voice with the smile comes tinklin' back over the wires. For the instant, editor, I am so cuckoo at hearin' her speak again that I forget what I called up for, but after I have whispered just enough sweet nothin's over the wire to get my two buyers all steamed up, why they remind me.

The heartbreakin' Ethel had promised me when she left, editor, that if I ever got a fair chance to sell the store, why she wouldst be willin' to come down and help the new owner with the inventory. So I remind her of her vow and I also tells her that I have a offer of two hundred kronen for a single book. I likewise says that the book in question is nearin' its 200th birthday and if I can get two hundred for one *that* old, why then each and every *new* book in my store must be worth a plumber's ransom!

Then, editor, *Ethel* is the one which gets excited. She makes me repeat all I have said and then she says to hold on to the book and not make no price on it til she gets there, which will be as soon as she can possibly make the trip. As I hung up, I heard old Mr. Marcus and young Mr. Davis groan.

"Look here, McTague," says the young guy, "suppose we draw up a bill of sale for the store and be done with it! Never mind that book, it will be—eh—included in the sale, anyhow. We were joking about its value—that's all—joking. I doubt if you could sell it for a dime. *You* know that! We'll give you ten thousand dollars cash—right now—for your store; lock, stock and barrel!"

"They is no barrels connected with this store in any manner, shape, or form!" I says. "Nothin' stirrin' til Ethel—til my ex-clerkess gets here. You can do business with her."

"So that's the way the wind blows is it?" says the young guy with a leer.

"Listen!" I says, frigid and cold. "You make one more crack about that girl and they'll be plenty of blows here—and the *wind* will have nothin' to do with it!"

The youth presents me with a skeptical grunt, editor, but says nothin', as the old man calls him aside and they chatter away at each other in tones which makes eavesdroppin' a impossible feat. Then the door is flang open and Ethel comes in.

Editor, in the order to see a duplicate of this boss looker, why you wouldst have to smoke at least $50,000 worth of opium! Ethel wouldst of made Venus take carbolic and Cleopatra wouldst never of been heard tell of, had Ethel lived in the noted snake charmer's time. She has the same effect on me that catnip has on puss and I drop the book and rush out to greet her. You ought to of saw her blush, editor, and then she smiles and shakes hands and asks me how I been and it seems I can't tell her under twenty minutes, which gets the two strangers red-headed. The young guy comes up and lays his hand on my arm.

"See here," he snarls. "Are we going to do business, or are you people rehearsing an act?"

"Take your hands off me, guy," I says growlin'ly, "before I smack you for a trip!"

His face gets as red as a cheap bottle of claret, editor.

"I didn't come here to be made a fool of!" he says, givin' me a glance, which could looks kill, editor, why I wouldst of perish at his feet.

"Why *should* you come here to be made a fool of when you had that part of it done years ago?" I says politely.

Ethel steps in between us, editor.

"Here, here!" she comments, frownin', "I thought you were through acting like—like that? You owe this gentleman an apology and I expect you to make it at once."

"O. K., Ethel," I says, full of smiles. "Your orders is my commands!" I turns around to this bird with a winnin' grin. "I beg your pardon!" I says, courteousy itself.

"You had *better* beg my pardon, you big roughneck!" he growls, with a admirin' glance at Ethel.

"Shut up, you sap!" I returns with some feelin'. "I'll knock you stiff!"

With that, editor, I am so peeved that I have turned loose a straight left before I can control myself. The young guy ducks under it and grabs me.

"Eh—I am not one to hold a grudge!" he says hurriedly. "Your apology is accepted. Let's get to business!"

In the mean's while, editor, Ethel has stepped up to old Mr. Marcus and has managed to get "Gulliver's Travels" away from him, which he picked up when I dropped it.

"I do not think we want to do business with either of you!" she is sayin' to the flustered old gent when I come up. Editor, that *"we"* gives me a thrill I have never got out of no movie. "The very idea," she goes on, "of attempting to take advantage of Mister McTague's ignor—eh—of his unfamiliarity with the value of rare editions by offering him two hundred dollars for a first edition that you know to be worth perhaps two thousand! You should both be ashamed of yourselves and I——"

"Just a moment, my dear child," says the old gent. "I—eh—we wish to buy the store itself for Mister Clay—the gentleman who was in to see you the other day, remember? We are willing to pay ten thousand dollars cash for a clear bill of sale. As for this particular book, we—well, as you probably know, Mister Clay is a collector. Old prints, old books, are his hobby and——"

"Then he will pay a great deal more than two hundred dollars for this 1726 Gulliver!" interrupts Ethel. "And the store is not for sale—at least, not until I have had time to inventory those old books. Why, I never opened that closet. I thought it was merely a door to the cellar, or——"

"Let me get this straight," butts in the young bird. "Who really owns this store—

the young lady or this big—or—eh—Mister McTague?"

"Why—eh——" begins Ethel, a bit confused, editor.

"It's a corporation!" I comes to the rescue, whilst Ethel gets redder and redder. "Miss Kingsley does all the business. I'm merely the innocent bystander. Whatever *she* says goes double for me!"

"Very well, sir," says the old gent briskly. "We'll return in an hour or so. Will a small deposit hold that book until then?"

"Yes, sir," says Ethel. "A deposit of *five hundred dollars!*"

The old guy blinks, but that's how much they left, editor.

Well, they are no more than out the door when I begin beggin' Ethel to be my clerkine again and if a reasonably salary will interest her, why I am willin' to give her ninety-nine per cent of the net loot from each day's sales. She fin'ly says she will stay long enough to inventory this gold mine of old books, editor, and the only salary she wants is her old one of twenty-five kopecks the week.

Think of that, editor! And if it hadn't of been for her, why I wouldst of prob'ly sold that "Gulliver's Travels" for two bits! Whilst we are still arguin' about Ethel's wages, editor, the old guy comes back alone.

"A-hump!" he says, "I left you five hundred dollars on deposit. Here is a certified check for fifteen hundred more. That is two thousand dollars and our top figure for that first edition of Swift. Kindly make out a bill of sale!"

Ethel looks at the check and the old guy with equal coldness.

"Will you take *me* to Mister Clay?" she says, after a minute.

The old gent seems dumfounded.

"That is useless!" he says harshly. "I am authorized to act for——"

"I will sell to your principal or not at all!" snaps Ethel and, editor, a slightly groan escapes away from me when he picks up his fifteen-hundred-buck check and likewise takes back the five hundred which Ethel counts out. But when he puts 'em in his pocket, he turns to her.

"You are a remarkable young woman!" he says. "Come along—and please handle that book carefully!"

Editor, Ethel is back in two hours with a check for $2,750!

The minute I recover my senses I forced $500 on her, locked up the store and took her home and not by the via of the subway either. Her dear old mother won't have it no other way but that I got to eat dinner with 'em and after that pleasin' and succulent event was staged, why I used some nerve I never dreamed was in me and invited the both of 'em to go to a show. They says they're triple delighted and went with me and I have had such a spell of luck, editor, that I suppose the first thing to-morrow mornin' I will pick up the paper and read that my store has burnt up and my body is now at the morgue!

Here is the book which caused all the commotion, editor.

GULLIVER'S TRAVELS.

By

Johnny Swift & One Punch McTague.

Well, it seems that in the year of 1699, which is about the last time St. Looey figured in a world's series baseball game, there lived and breathed a dashin' young daredevil story-teller named Gulliver. Besides bein' a sailor, this baby was likewise a liar which wouldst of made Ananias look like Geo. Washington. And one day, accordin' to the story he tells Johnny Swift, he gets shipwrecked in the Sunny South Seas, which has been the bon-ton place to get shipwrecked since authors first begin to take their pens in hand. Where the average guy wouldst of been content to drown and be done with it, why Gulliver comes to the surface, sees that all his shipmates has sunk and with the shrug of his shapely shoulders he starts to swim for land. After swimmin' for either five or twenty-four hours, Gulliver says he finds himself in shallow water and he wades just one mile to shore. Immediately he lays down in the grass and goes to sleep, on the account he's wore out —prob'ly from thinkin' up the above apple sauce!

A week later, Gulliver goes on, by a odd coincidence he happens to wake up. He tries out a yawn and finds he is strapped to the ground so's that he can't even wiggle his ears, his favorite way of expressin' astonishment. He then feels somethin' crawlin' up his arm and thinkin' it was merely a rattlesnake he wasn't goin' to pay it no attention, when chancin' to look down he sees what he seems to think is a remarkable sight. But manys the guy enjoyin' delirium tremens has seen more sights than Gulli-

ver ever did on this island which he calls Lilliput.

How the so ever, this particular sight which caused Gulliver to think he had went cuckoo, was a lot of little human bein's about exactly six inches high. This statement strikes even Gulliver himself as bein' so idiotical that he lets out a guffaw which blows them little boobs off his chest. In about half a hour they come back and begin shootin' arrows the size of needles into him. This was more than Gulliver could tolerate as them needles didn't care where they hit and Gulliver hollers murder til a cute little bozo steps forth from this mob of human gnats and hollers "As you were!" at 'em.

Then the newcomer puts a ladder up against Gulliver's face and crawlin' up to his ear he breaks down and confesses that he is the king of the Lilliputians and what wouldst Gulliver like? Gulliver makes known by signs that he wouldst fain eat, drink and be merry. No sooner said than a couple hundred of these clever little guys puts ladders up against Gulliver's sides and supplies him with food and liquor for one solid hour, only stoppin' to gasp in astonishment at his size and table manners.

Well, the bright little chaps has poured about thirty thousand dollars' worth of morphine into Gulliver's drinks and the first thing he knows he don't know nothin'. The minute he goes bye-bye the undersized dwarfs hitches up fifteen hundred of their midget horses to Gulliver and pulls him to the biggest jail in their country. Then, says Gulliver—and I am copyin' this right out of the book—they put ninety-nine chains around his left leg and left him there to think matters over.

Ninety-nine chains! This Gulliver told a mean story, what?

This kind of thing goes on for several months and whilst the six-inch high king pays Gulliver plenty of party calls and talks over this and that with him, why he just laughs when Gulliver asks to be gave his liberty and let go back to merry England. Fin'ly, when Gulliver is gettin' the idea that he is goin' to be a total loss the king releases him, gives him the high-soundin' title of Duke of Pneumonia and in no time at all Gulliver is sittin' so pretty he don't care if he *never* sees Lloyd George again!

For a long while Gulliver lives the life of Riley in the midget country and then one day the little king runs up his arm and stickin' his royal head about three feet into Gulliver's ear he hollers that the country is bein' raided by a rival troupe of midgets and unless Gulliver comes to the rescue they will be wiped out like ants, which is what they look like.

"King," says Gulliver, "you have been a good guy to me and they ain't nobody gonna do no pushin' around whilst I'm on the job. Give me a flock of this midget wine and I'll go out and knock your enemies for a row of Lilliputian shanties!"

The Lilliputian glass, of course, was only as big as a thimble and Gulliver tells Swift he had to drink about 1,600 of 'em before he got a kick. But when he fin'ly got right he walks coolly out into the bay where the enemies' battleships is and as a preliminary he kicks about a baker's half dozen of 'em a midget mile in the air, just to be nasty! This kind of tactics drove the enemy wild and they was so scared of this giant which can walk out into their ocean and the water only comes to his hips, that they leaped into the sea and swim back home, leavin' their warships deserted. Gulliver ties all the dreadnaughts together with his shoe lace and drags 'em in to the king of the Lilliputians as a gift.

This little incident makes Gulliver more solid than ever, but after the midget king has deliberately started a half dozen more wars and made Gulliver win 'em all single-handed, why Gulliver figures the king is only makin' a sucker out of him and drivin' a willin' horse to death, so he makes up his mind to escape. One dark and stormy night he fills his pockets with midget cows and sheep and pigs and all this sort of thing and swimmin' out to sea once again he is picked up by a handy ferry. The engineer courteously brung Gulliver back to Great Britain and Ireland which had just begin to miss him, and, as Nero remarked when Rome went up in flames, that's that!

And I sell this book for $2,750—woof!

Wishin' myself the best of luck,

Your humbly servant,

One Punch McTague, the Fightin' Bookseller.

This series began in the issue of November 20, 1921. The next of Mr. Witwer's "Classics" will appear in an early number.

Fanny Burke and the Statesman

By Frederick Stuart Greene

Author of "Texas Burke: His Father's Son," "The Living Past," Etc.

Texas Burke's wife couldn't have set herself a much harder job if she had tried. Lucky for J. Harold Gage that she went to it!

HOW can I ever get it across? He's such a good old scout, he'd go the limit for me any time. But—but he just won't get this. He'll think I've gone dippy."

Fanny Burke had neglected her sewing and, through gray eyes half closed, looked over the shimmering surface of Lake George. She was too much puzzled by a problem that had suddenly confronted her to appreciate the beauty of the picturesque lake that stretched before her. The rugged mountains so closely pressing its shores were today unnoticed. Even her special joy, the tree-covered islands scattered here and there like floating gardens upon the burnished water, failed this sunny morning to delight her.

"Texas" Burke, her problem and her husband, rested in a steamer chair near by. To be exact, not all of Mr. Burke was in the chair, for his big frame overran the foot rest by many inches, his legs finding support on a low stool with which Fanny had thoughtfully pieced out his resting place. Burke was a man's man; one thing only he knew but knew that well—horses. Two things he loved, horses and Fanny. Fanny first. He had met his wife three years before this August morning when, in whatever theater she chose to dance, the applause of all New York was being given her. In his persistent, frank way Texas had set about winning her and Fanny had never regretted his success.

While Mrs. Burke organized her plan of attack her husband, unconscious of danger, studied the form chart for the day's races at Saratoga. The air was pleasantly warm and still, the usual sputtering motor craft were not abroad and the steady buzz of a solitary bee sampling the honeysuckle about the cedar posts of their camp porch sounded like the roll of a far-away drum.

Burke looked up at last from his paper. "Why so quiet, honey? Ain't you feelin' well?" His deep voice matched the man; he spoke with a careless, pleasant drawl.

"I'm feeling fine, only I—well, I was just thinking," Fanny answered.

"What's it now—figurin' whether we'd better get a sailboat or a limousine?"

"No." Fanny put her sewing basket carefully aside. "It wasn't nothing *for* us. I was thinking something *about* us—about what we're doing."

"Then I'll say your thoughts was pleasant." A smile spread across Burke's good-natured face. "We've done better this meetin' than ever before."

"No, Tex, you don't guess right. My thoughts wasn't pleasant."

"Now that's funny. We've won over ten thousand the first week; don't you call that pleasant?"

Fanny's pretty forehead drew to a frown; she was thinking hard how best to make the approach. "But couldn't we do something else, make money some other way, do something that's really useful?" she asked wistfully.

"Why, deary, there ain't nothin' else I know—nothin' else I could do; besides, makin' book is the fastest way to get money there is!"

Both were silent for some moments after this, Fanny striving to perfect her plan.

"Come over here and sit by me," she said, breaking the silence. "Now, that's better." She caught one of his big hands and held it with both her small ones. "Deary," she said, looking straight into his honest eyes, "you're ace high with me and you know it."

"Yes, that's one thing I do know," Texas shook his head; "but I ain't never been able to figure out why I'm so lucky."

"Well, I'm not going to tell all the rea-

sons, I don't know them myself but there's one big one; I'm strong for you because you're so square. I like everything about you, Tex, except"—she tightened her hold on his hand—"except this business we're in. Now let's see if I can get this through your dear, thick head." She paused, then said firmly, "Our business isn't useful."

"Useful!" Texas looked blankly at his pretty wife. "But just see how good we're goin', what a lot we've made. Ain't money useful?"

The zero hour was at hand. Fanny determined to dash from the trenches and begin open attack; or no, it should be a sortie, for wise Mrs. Burke knew her objective could not be gained by one bold offensive, nor in any one day. Like most big men, her husband had to be given time to grasp a new idea.

"Yes, Tex, dear, money is useful," she admitted, "and a real blessing if you come by it right. Now where does all this money you talk about come from?"

"Why, Fan, you know I win it at the track. It comes all right!"

"Exactly! You win it, but somebody loses it, don't they?"

Burke stepped down from the porch. Standing on the pine needles that lay thick at the foot of the steps, his bewildered face was still above Fanny's head.

"Look here, has one of them blue-law preachers been pesterin' you?" He stooped and resting both hands on his knees studied his wife in alarm.

Fanny smiled reassuringly and drew him again beside her. "No, it wasn't a preacher started me thinking. It's this way. Four days ago I met a new bride in the grand stand; she's a pretty little thing, only eighteen years old—comes from some jay town down in the Southern Tier. As you don't know any more than I did what that means, I'll put you wise; it's the line of counties just north of Pennsylvania. She's married to a rather good-looking hick named Gage—J. Harold Gage—that she thinks outclasses William Jennings Bryan as an orator and Al Smith as a statesman. J. Harold is serving his first term in the legislature; he's only an assemblyman now, but he'll be governor before long. He's the smartest lawyer in the whole Southern Tier. Mrs. Harold says so herself. He's an Elk, chairman of the good roads committee of the Auto Club, trustee for the richest old maid in town, an' everything."

"Time!" Texas interrupted. "What's all this J. Harold stuff got to do with our business?"

"Just a minute, old dear, I'm coming to that. As you may have guessed, Mrs. J. Harold and me are pretty well acquainted by now. She's told me all about her family and the Finger Lakes and what I don't know about the greatness of her Harold wouldn't make a half portion in a Childs restaurant. Now, Tex, I'm worried over that little bride—her name's Bessie. She hasn't got all the brains Hetty Green used to have but she's a sweet little thing, only eighteen, remember, and there's trouble ahead for her, sure; because J. Harold's riding straight for a fall."

"For the love o' Mike, deary, what's all this got to do——"

"I'm getting to that. All Bessie's troubles, if my dope's right, are coming from the business we're in. The first day I met them, J. Harold won a bet or two and it went to his head. He was lucky the second day and by the third day what he didn't know about horses was nothing at all. And Bessie smiled and smiled and told me that her Harold was just bound to succeed in every endeavor of life. And J. Harold said that if I wouldn't tell a soul he'd tell me that he had a friend who used to be a jockey and was wise to all the good things that were going to be put across at Saratoga, and so forth, and so forth and then some. And again, if I wouldn't tell anybody, he'd show me this wise guy. So after a little he whispered, all excited: 'There he is now, that little fellow with the blue band on his hat.' Tex, it just made me sick. Bessie's statesman pointed out that tout, that sneaking rat with the twisted nose, Jimmy Finch!"

Texas gave a long, low whistle. "Gee, that's bad, Fan! You know Finch's game, he does his best to win for a time or two, and if he's lucky and gets his 'come-on' goin' good he steers him strong onto a dead one and takes his split from one or two men that ain't straight."

"That's just what's about to happen to Bessie's future governor," Fanny said positively. "The third day he won pretty well, but on the fourth, unless my wires are crossed, that weasel, Finch, landed him hard. Bessie told me after the last race that her husband had been suddenly called home

on very, very important business and wasn't it too dreadful, but he'd be back in time for the races to-day. Her Harold had told her he would work all night long so as not to lose an unnecessary moment from her side. But I had my searchlights on J. Harold, I know the signs; he was hit for more money than he's got and he's going back to that Southern Tier metropolis for a new bank roll. And Tex——"

"Yes, honey, go on."

"Well, I can't forget he's trustee for that rich old maid."

Burke looked at his troubled wife. "Now see here, Fan," he said kindly, "it ain't none of your funeral. I ain't took any bets from your Mr. Gage, so forget it."

"I can't forget it and I don't want you to forget it," Fanny answered seriously. "Think it over, Tex. Remember how many J. Harold Gages go to the races every year. Now promise."

"All right, honey, I'll promise. But it's ten o'clock. We've got to be on our way. Let's have lunch on the clubhouse veranda; it'll cheer you up, the music and seein' all the gay folks. Go put on your prettiest lid while I bring the car around."

Texas strode toward the garage; in spite of his great size there was alertness in his step. Fanny's gray eyes followed him until he had passed the corner of their camp.

"Not such a bad start," she thought. "It'll take time, but he's so good clear through he can't help seeing it my way in the end. He used to think he couldn't live away from these sporty hotels but since we got this camp he don't like to go near 'em."

By the time they had finished lunch Fanny's high spirits proved the truth of Burke's predictions; their drive along the picturesque road from Lake George to Saratoga, the throng of gay, overdressed people and the music had driven away her pensive mood. She was again the jolly Fanny that Texas wanted her always to be and his broad face beamed good humor.

"Do you know how you look to-day?" he asked, puffing contentedly at a huge cigar.

Fanny's hand flew to her small hat. "Why, is there anything wrong with me?"

"You couldn't be righter. You look just like you did the first night I saw you dancin' in 'Hitchy Koo' an' you smiled at me in my box."

"I hate to spoil your dreams, Tex, dear, but I didn't smile at you. The directions said to smile at the right lower box at the end of that step. Over the footlights," Fanny wrinkled her short nose at Texas, "even the handsome Mr. Burke looks like nothing but a fat, stuffed sofa pillow."

A string of horses passed beneath them and turned from the track at the paddock gate.

"That means it's time to get to work," Texas said regretfully. "Hope you find your J. Harold Gages to-day."

He walked with Fanny to the far end of the grand stand where he left her to take up his betting position on the lawn.

The stand was rapidly filling and Fanny spread out her motor coat to save places for the new acquaintances she expected. Then, as was her industrious habit, she opened a small work bag and began making delicate stitches on a bit of cambric. She did not have long to wait. Only a few minutes had passed when she saw the fluffy, blond head of Bessie moving through the crowded aisle toward her; her husband followed close behind and while they were yet at some distance Fanny could see that Gage had had a bad time of it while away. She made room for them and it pleased Fanny to see how glad the little bride was to find her waiting at their appointed rendezvous.

"Didn't I tell you?" Mrs. Gage said proudly. "I knew he wouldn't disappoint me; but, poor boy, he has had to work and travel all night." She gave her husband's arm an affectionate squeeze. "And, as if that wasn't enough, just before we left the hotel he had to go to the bank. He always has such big deals under way," she whispered.

Fanny, greeting Gage, surveyed every feature of the man; her sharp scrutiny was not reassuring. Gage's eyes showed more strain than lack of sleep could cause; his face was pale and drawn; his small chin, it seemed to Fanny, had further receded overnight.

While Bessie was scientifically picking the day's winners by closing tight her doll's eyes and striking a pin through the back of her program, Fanny seized the opportunity.

"Have a good day yesterday?" she asked Gage.

"No, I lost. Not very much—nothing to worry about," he said nervously; "besides,

to-day I'm going to make what Mr. Finch calls a killing."

"What are you betting on in the first?"

"Nothing, I'm not going to bet on the first four races, at all. Can't expect to pick all six winners, can you?" He pushed his straw hat far back; the hand raised to his forehead was noticeably shaky.

Fanny sewed steadily. Bessie, slightly off key, hummed happily with the band.

"Say," Gage said in lowered voice, "do you ever bet?"

Fanny shook her head.

"I've noticed that. Then why do you come every day?"

"My husband works at the track."

"Does he bet?" Gage asked quickly.

Fanny, frowning slightly, thought out her reply.

"He never bets on any horse to win," she answered after a pause.

Gage leaned toward her and whispered: "Then I'll tell you something. I'm going to make a big bet on Nosegay in the fifth. She can't lose; Mr. Finch says he'd stake his life on her."

"Oh, Harold!" Bessie interrupted. "There's Jim and Mary Wesley!" Her pink cheeks were aglow; she nodded her pretty blond head vigorously to the new-found friends.

"Are they from the Southern Tier too?" Fanny asked innocently.

"Oh, yes, they're from Chemung!" Had they been from paradise Bessie could not have announced the fact with more pride.

Fanny, whose knowledge of Chemung County was slightly less than her acquaintance with the Aland Isles, answered diplomatically, "Chemung! How wonderful! That's the best county in the State, next to yours. Why don't you go and speak to your friends? Yes, it's quite proper, we'll save your seat."

After Bessie had excitedly fluttered to her friends, Fanny dropped her sewing and took full command.

"Who do you bet with, Mr. Gage?"

Harold named a bookmaker and Fanny's lips pressed hard together.

"Mr. Finch introduced you?"

"Of course. He's advising me in all my —my operations," Gage answered pompously.

"Ever heard, when you're in a losing streak, that to win out you've got to change your bookie?"

The eager way Gage seized her suggestion caused Fanny to think of the oft-mentioned drowning man and his straw life preserver.

"Is that so? Does it really work out?" His small chin quivered.

"This statesman is pathetic," Fanny thought and took up her sewing. "It's an old saying about the track," she answered.

"Then I'll do it." He spoke with determination but a moment later doubt blanketed his weak face. "No, I can't," he said helplessly. "I don't know any other man that would take my bet. It's going to be a —Mr. Finch told me to make it a swell one."

"Do you see that tall man just in front, the one they're all crowding around? That's Texas Burke; he lays the biggest book in the ring. Give him this. He knows me." She wrote upon a betting slip:

Introducing J. Harold Gage.
Good for any amount. FANNY.

Gage seized the paper and rushed down the steps. Fanny saw him push through the crowd of men surrounding her husband and, watching Texas while he read, she laughed softly.

"The old dear," she thought. "He's saying to himself, 'Well, I'll be damned! If this isn't the same rube Fan wants to keep from betting!'"

Gage pulled excitedly at Burke's sleeve and pointed toward the stand. Fanny stood up and nodded a vigorous assent to Texas.

Before Gage rejoined her she wrote a second note. With one eye on Bessie, the other on the aisle by which Gage would return, she called a messenger.

"Here, Joe, take this to Texas and bring me his answer, quick!"

"Right-o, Fanny," Joe answered with race-track familiarity. "Anything you say."

He returned before Gage had reappeared. Fanny read her husband's reply and smiled a trifle sadly.

"Just what I thought," she said. "It'll be his finish."

"Whose finish, me?"

"Yes, Joe, yours if you don't get this back to Texas, toot sweet, as you S O S heroes say."

Joe took Fanny's second note, her dollar tip, and was gone.

Texas had shown surprise when Gage presented Fanny's introduction. He indicated a genuine case of mental disturbance

when he read her last message. He looked toward his wife, his eyes propped wide, his mouth gaping. Fanny rose and nodded more decisively than before. In a few moments she read Burke's scribbled answer.

You must have gone batty, but it's a go. You're on!

Fanny read and laughed softly to herself.

After the first race Bessie left her friends and, rejoining Fanny, sang the praises of Chemung and the greatness of her Harold. Fanny, who had arranged her seat between the bride and the statesman, watched Gage out of the corner of her eye. After two races had been run and won, Gage wisely assured his wife that he had mentally selected the winners of both. But he knew what he was about, their odds had been short, neither worth a bet, took too much capital to play favorites. Just wait for the fifth race and they would see how a killing was pulled off. And Fanny, sewing steadily and watching, saw Bessie's husband grow more nervous, more painfully tense as the moments passed.

"What makes you so strong for Nosegay?" she asked. "Do you think you'd better go so heavy on her?"

His shaking fingers clenched, he grew a shade more white.

"I've got to! No," he corrected hurriedly, "I didn't mean that. I mean she can't lose."

Then he told the old, old story, a fable worn threadbare by its having been administered to the broken hopes of race-track followers the world over. The story was that Finch knew the trainer of Nosegay like a brother; War Bride would be the odds-on favorite and could win easily. Here Gage shook his head wisely. But that was all attended to; it was to be what Finch called a "shoo in." The trainers and owners had fixed it all beforehand. Fanny pressed her lips hard together; Bessie, who had been listening with rapt expression, supplied the answer.

"Isn't Harold clever? Just think, Mrs. —oh, isn't that funny! You haven't ever told me your name. Now, that's awful sweet of you to let me—— Well, then, Fanny, just think, Harold's only been here five times. Isn't he wonderful to learn so much in that time?"

Gage fidgeted and grew visibly more nervous after every race that brought nearer the eventful fifth. He had left Fanny and his bride between each race, but for the first three had held to his determination to make but one wager during the day.

"If he can stay off until Nosegay there may be some strength in him," Fanny thought. But when Gage joined them before the fourth race, her faith was shaken. While the horses were at the post Gage could not hold one position for two seconds.

"Seen Mr. Finch, haven't you?" said wise Fanny.

"Yes. He says John M. P. will win this one."

"Oh, he'll surely win," cried Harold's bride; "he's the horse my hatpin said would."

"He's only four to five."

The next instant Gage sprang to his feet. The horses were off. As John M. P. swung into the stretch four lengths in the lead and galloped home an easy winner, Gage did not cease for a moment from jumping up and down and urging the horse to greater effort.

Fanny, watching quietly, said to herself: "It couldn't be done; not with that chin."

When John M. P. passed the finish line Gage wiped the perspiration from his forehead and turned to his wife with an elated smile.

"Just took a little flyer on him, only twenty-five to win twenty but watch me now."

"Harold, you're just wonderful!" Bessie called after him as he hurried down the aisle.

Fanny saw Finch take Gage's arm at the stairway and go with him to the lawn. As usual there was a crowd about Texas, but now the pushing and crowding was more than normal. One man fell near her husband, he was quickly pulled to his feet and the accustomed scramble to get the best price was immediately renewed.

Gage, when he returned to the stairway, paused to put himself in order. His coat had been pulled from one shoulder, his collar was merely a wet bit of cloth stuck to his throat, his hat was hopelessly dented. He hurried up and sank, breathing hard, into the seat beside Fanny.

"I've done it!" he panted. "He took my bet, every dollar I offered, but it was fierce."

"Was all that rush to get down on Nosegay?" Fanny's needle moved rapidly.

"No. Those fools seemed crazy to lose their money on War Bride." Gage laughed nervously. "And wasn't it funny, that man

Burke didn't have any odds on War Bride at all."

'What price did he give on Nosegay?"

"Ten to one, just think of it, and only four horses in the race. I'll be worth fifty thousand in a few minutes."

"Oh, Harold!" Bessie gasped. "Fifty thousand dollars! Won't that be lovely!"

While Bessie and her statesman were planning the castle they intended building down in the Southern Tier, Fanny stopped the messenger.

"Soft pedal now, Joe. What's War Bride's price and what's her chances?"

"Nothin' to it. One to four. She'll walk in," Joe answered and hurried away.

"By the way, I forgot to tell you." Gage leaned toward Fanny. "The man I used to bet with stands behind Burke and when I stopped to make my bet Mr. Finch tried to pull me past Burke. He was really rough about it and began to talk pretty loud when all of a sudden Burke said: 'On your way, rat,' and gave him a push. It didn't seem hard to me but it sent Finch sprawling. He was picked up and went away cursing. I don't see why he should care," Gage said innocently. "I promised him ten per cent no matter who I win it from."

Though having won the fourth race had encouraged and somewhat steadied Gage he was pitifully nervous as the horses were going to the post. When they reached the barrier he could no longer remain seated and Fanny saw when he stood that his legs were shaking. She put aside her sewing and, pointing out Nosegay's colors to Bessie, bade her watch them closely.

That race was a wretched affair to Fanny. War Bride sprang away from the barrier well in front; Nosegay, for an instant, was second and then began to lose ground steadily. As Joe had predicted it was merely a walk for the favorite. Before the race was half run even, Gage must have known that his horse, trailing a bad last, had no chance. Watching him closely, Fanny saw amazement then fright follow swiftly the hope he had had at the start. As the horses reached the finish, War Bride twenty lengths in the lead, terrified despair showed in his painfully drawn face.

"Why, Nosegay didn't win, did she, Harold?"

"No, Bessie," Fanny answered for Gage. "But it's all right, dear. Your husband will win another time."

She reached out and caught Gage's hand; it was like ice. "Steady!" she whispered. "Buck up, don't frighten Bessie!" Then to his wife: "Your Chemung friends beckoned to you before the race; go over and see what they want."

When Bessie had obediently gone Fanny turned to Gage. He had slumped down on the bench, his sagging cheeks were yellow-white, his arms hung from his shoulders like slack ropes.

"See here," she said, using her firmest tone, "this won't do! If Bessie sees you looking like that she'll faint or do something worse." She caught his limp arm and gave it a vigorous shake. "Now, brace up!"

"My God! I'm ruined!" Gage answered in a trembling whisper.

"Well, if you've got to tell the world so," Fanny again shook him, "say something new. That line's five-cent movie stuff." She saw that the people near them had noticed Gage's collapse.

"I—I want to get away—back to the hotel. I'm—I think I'm sick."

"You look the part, and the hotel's just where I'm going to take you. I'll give you two minutes to pull yourself together. Now get busy and do the comeback act."

Fanny scribbled her third note for that day to Texas. "Meet us at the Grand Union," she wrote. "You've got to pay for J. Harold's dinner." And while the faithful Joe was delivering her message she went to Bessie.

"That trip was a little too much for your husband," she told her. "He's tired out and doesn't want to stay for the last race. I'm going with you and we're all going to have dinner together."

Gage had lost his ghastly expression when they rejoined him, and Bessie, who had just learned that Fanny had once been a real actress, her friends having seen her on the stage, was too excited by this to notice anything amiss even with her Harold. Fanny took Gage's arm and after half carrying the man she sighed with relief when she had him safely in a taxi.

The ride to the hotel was a help to Gage but he was far from steady even after they had reached his rooms. While Bessie was arranging her fluffy hair Fanny had a moment alone with Gage.

"Have you anything to drink?"

Gage feebly shook his head.

"Well, for once I'm not strong for that

eighteenth amendment; but at least here's some water. I'll keep Bessie as long as I can and give you more time to come to."

She managed to hold Bessie in the inner room for half an hour, straining the while to hear above the bride's prattle any sound from Gage. The despair in the man's weak face had frightened her. When they went out to him Fanny left the door ajar.

"It's hot in there," she told him. "Don't mind me, I'll turn my back on you."

She took a chair facing a long mirror and while Bessie asked questions about the stage and told what little was left to tell about Harold and herself, Fanny sat alert, on watch. She caught glimpses of Gage in the mirror as he passed and repassed the partly open door. After some minutes she saw him place a suit case on the bed and rapidly search among the folded clothes. Fanny pressed her lips together and nodded wisely. When he joined them she proposed that they go at once to the dining room and secure a table. Her husband, she explained, always spent a half hour at the track after the last race, but would be with them shortly.

When the elevator came Bessie went at once to the mirror to give a last touch to her hair; Fanny followed but Gage stepped back.

"You two go ahead, meet you in the lobby. I—I've forgotten my handkerchief." He turned and walked down the hall, dragging his feet like a man but half alive. Fanny caught the closing door and sprang from the elevator. "Speed along," she said to the boy. "I'll take the next car."

The sliding door closed noisily behind her and the elevator moved downward. Following Gage, Fanny ran swiftly and reached his room just as the door was shut in her face.

"Open that door!" Fanny cried, pounding with both hands against the panel. "Open that door, I say!" Gage obeyed her. "Now we'll have none of that!" Standing on the threshold, her chin held high, Fanny's pretty face was sternly determined.

"What do you mean? I forgot my——"

"Rubbish! Take that thing out of your pocket and put it back in your suit case." She stamped her small foot. "And for Heaven's sake, try to be a man!"

Gage wavered. "For God's sake," he pleaded, "go away and let me alone! It's the only thing I can do, now."

"Rubbish!" Fanny repeated, more sternly. From down the hall they heard the noise of the elevator door opening. "Now see here, Gage, you put that thing back and come down to dinner. I promise that if, after dinner, you still want to be a fool I'll help you. I'll make a chance for you. Hurry and don't try any tricks on me—here comes Bessie back!"

Gage walked to the inner room; from her place at the door Fanny saw him open and close the suit case.

"Why, what's the matter?" Bessie's surprised voice called over Fanny's shoulder. "Whatever in the world are you and Harold doing?"

"Even his lame excuse will do," Fanny thought and turned to Bessie with a reassuring smile. "I forgot my handkerchief too," she said, "but your husband has found it for me. Come, let's make a second start."

After they were seated in a quiet corner of the dining room, Fanny did not long have to endure the ordeal of trying to make conversation for the desperate man and his little wife who sat smiling, happily unconscious that she was in the center of a tragic situation. During her tenth description of the Finger Lakes Fanny saw Gage start violently and fix his staring eyes upon the entrance. The big frame of Texas Burke all but filled the doorway. He caught sight of their table and came to them.

"Hello, Mr. Gage," Texas called in his careless, deep voice. "Well, Fan, what's the big idea anyway?"

"Is—is *he* your husband?" Gage stammered.

"Why, yes, didn't I tell you?" Fanny turned from the wretched man and introduced Texas to Bessie. "He's going to blow us all to a nice, big, happy dinner," she said. Then seeing Gage's suffering she had pity.

"I had intended to hold this until after dinner was over, but I'll have a heart," Fanny thought. The convenient Chemung friends were at a near-by table.

"Bessie," she said, "my husband and Mr. Gage want to talk over a business proposition. You go over and see your friends. We'll call you, dear, when dinner is served."

Obedient Bessie did as she was told.

"Tex," Fanny began briskly, "I'll take charge now and carry on. You just sit in the game and give your silent approval."

"Anything you want," Texas agreed. "Do I smile or frown?"

"You'll grin and order the dinner. Now,

Mr. Gage!" Fanny rested both elbows on the table and leaned toward her miserable guest. "How much did you lose yesterday?"

Gage was close to a second collapse. "Four—four thousand," he answered.

"With the five to-day that makes nine thousand. Pretty good for a beginner." She paused before asking abruptly: "You turned some securities into cash at the Saratoga bank this morning?"

Gage whispered a feeble, "Yes."

"Were they your securities?"

The man's eyes shifted under her steady gaze.

"I thought not," Fanny said. Then sharply: "They belonged to that rich old maid who's trusting you, didn't they?"

Gage visibly shrank inside his clothes; his lips moved but he did not speak.

"For the love o' Mike, Fan, have a heart," Texas broke in.

She waved his protest aside. "So to cover up your theft," she said mercilessly, "you were going to break that child's heart, if I hadn't stopped you."

"Oh, I say, easy there! Cut out the rough stuff!" There was real pain in Burke's deep voice.

"Don't butt in, Tex. It's for Bessie's sake and his too." She turned again to Gage, her manner still hard. "Well, what are you going to do about it now?" she demanded.

Gage swallowed some water and answered in a whisper, "I'm going to—going through with it; there's nothing else." He straightened slightly. "You promised—you promised to help me."

"And so I will, but not to be a fool." For the first time since Bessie had left them Fanny smiled. "Come, brace up! The worst is over. Texas, give me those notes I wrote you to-day."

Burke reached a big hand into his pocket and handed her some crumpled bits of paper.

"After I sent you to meet my husband I wrote him this." Fanny smoothed out one of the papers. "It reads:

"Has Nosegay got a chance?"

She found another slip of paper in her hand bag. "Here's his answer:

"Only if somebody saws the legs off the other three."

"Now, Mr. Gage, I know that Texas knows more about horses than anybody. He can't pick all the winners, but when he says a horse can't win, he can't. And I knew nobody was going to get busy with a saw. You didn't have a chance, see?"

A slight flush came to Gage's yellow cheeks. "Yes, I see, plain enough. I couldn't win but you wanted your husband to take my money from me on a certainty."

Fanny nodded her well-shaped head with satisfaction. "Glad to see you've got some spunk. But you're wrong, J. Harold, you're wrong two ways. You said, *your* money." Gage's cheeks flushed a deeper red. "And you didn't lose to my husband."

"Didn't lose? What—what do you mean?" Gage said excitedly.

Fanny killed his flickering hope. "I said you didn't lose to my husband. Oh, you lost, all right, but you lost to me." She smoothed out another paper. "This is the note," she smiled, "that came pretty near putting Tex out. It says:

"Take every dollar Gage wants to bet on Nosegay for my personal account. You're not in on this."

"Oh, you wanted to win my—the money, yourself!" Gage showed no bravado, he was too plainly amazed for further resentment.

"I wanted just that little thing," Fanny declared. "And now I'll tell you why. Tex, hand me Mr. Gage's slip."

Texas searched a second pocket, ran rapidly through a handful of betting memoranda and gave one of them to his wife.

"I don't know any more what she's goin' to spring than you do," he said to Gage.

Fanny took the slip and read aloud:

"Fifty thousand to five thousand, Nosegay to win. J. Harold Gage."

"That's your signature, isn't it?" she asked. She showed but did not hand the slip to Gage.

"What difference does that make," Gage said gloomily. "I gave the money to one of his men before the race."

Fanny glanced toward Texas, her brows arched,

"Yes, that's so," he answered. "It was too big a chance to take on a feller I didn't know nothin' about."

"Well, then, we can settle this thing quickly." In a businesslike way, Fanny placed all her slips of paper neatly together. "Have you enough money left to pay your hotel bill?"

Gage looked down at the tablecloth.

"No," he admitted. "Bessie's father gave us the money for that as a present, but I lost it yesterday."

"That's just what I thought. Tex, hand over five thousand two hundred." She reached her open hand to him.

For a moment her husband hesitated, then with a puzzled smile he produced a roll of bills as thick as a bologna sausage and counted out the money.

"Can that old maid's securities be redeemed to-morrow?" Fanny asked.

"Any one who had enough money could."

Fanny remained thoughtfully silent after this while the two men looked at her, both puzzled—one half smiling, the other leaning forward, every nerve quivering.

"There's one rule in betting," Fanny broke the silence, "among the thousand or so you don't know, J. Harold, that I'm going to tell you. It's this: where you can't win, you can't lose. It was a certainty that Nosegay couldn't win."

"Easy there, now, there ain't nothin' certain about racin'," Texas protested.

"This was certain enough to suit me," his wife answered shortly. "Now, Mr. Gage, if you'll make me two promises, we'll call this bet off!"

Relief and hope sprang to fight the misery in Gage's yellow-white face.

"I'll make you any promise you ask—do anything in the world you say." The words fairly leaped at her.

"It won't be hard. First, you must redeem those securities to-morrow morning and secondly, you must promise me, J. Harold, that the next time you go for a joy trip you'll side-step the races; instead you'll just take Bessie for a nice, safe buggy ride along one of those Finger Lakes she loves so much."

"Well, I'll be damned!" said Texas Burke.

Gage said nothing, he sat staring at Fanny, his mouth open.

"Well, show some action, J. Harold. You're only giving an imitation of a strangled fish. Will you promise?"

"Promise!" Gage cried. "Why—why, you have saved my life—my——"

Fanny, who had torn the slips of paper to small bits, threw them above her head and shivered as the flakes fell about her.

"Cut out the melodrama, J. Harold." She tossed the bills across the table to him. "Now go and get Bessie and we'll all have a nice, jolly dinner together."

While Gage walked toward Bessie, his head up, life again in his step, Fanny's gray eyes studied her husband. Texas was sitting stiffly in his chair, brows drawn to a puzzled frown, his eyes fixed upon some unseen point on the opposite wall.

"Score one!" thought Fanny. "This has got his think tank stirred." She reached out and caught his hand. "How'd you make out to-day?" she asked.

"Well, countin' out that five thousand you just throwed away, not so good. Broke a little better'n even."

Fanny smiled happily at her big, good man. Her faith in the future was large—and being a woman she had the patience to abide by it.

"Think it over, old scout," she said. "Isn't this really the best day's work we've ever done?"

Other stories by Mr. Greene will appear in early issues.

A TRAGIC OVERSIGHT

COLONEL FRANKLIN PIERCE MORGAN, the veteran Washington journalist, being a violent opponent of all "blue laws," never overlooks an opportunity to gibe the "moralists." Dropping into "Uncle Joe" Cannon's office, recently, he burst forth in mock alarm to that kindred spirit:

"These 'blue-law' people are always passing faulty legislation! They've put a law through in the Philippines obliging all the uncivilized Filipinos to wear pants, but they forgot to insert a paragraph compelling them to buy suspenders!"

Vanderdecken

By H. de Vere Stacpoole

Author of "Picaroons," "Luck," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

A big reward was offered for the capture of Vanderdecken, the modern pirate who had been looting yachts off the Californian coast. Hank Fisher, adventurer in finance and in everything else, wanted the reward and wanted excitement more; "Bud" du Cane, San Francisco millionaire, didn't want the reward at all but was caught by the lure of a deep-sea man-hunt. So they borrowed the yacht *Wear Jack* from Hank's friend Tyrebuck, tossed a coin with Barrett of "Barrett's Stores" and won the provisions, fired Jake, the shipkeeper who to keep his job had given the *Wear Jack* a bad name, shipped a Chinese crew and made ready for sea. Barrett had lost a couple of thousand dollars' worth of stores and won newspaper publicity that he had made such good use of that Hank and Bud knew that if they came back without Vanderdecken they would be laughed out of San Francisco. Aboard the *Wear Jack* came Bob Candon, a blue-eyed sailorman who offered to lead them to Vanderdecken and his loot for five thousand dollars and a landing safe from Pat McGinnis and his crew of the schooner *Heart of Ireland.* They accepted the offer and as McGinnis was hot on Candon's heels made a hurried departure in the night, heading south for the Bay of Whales, on the Mexican coast. Later Candon confessed that he was Vanderdecken. He was an idealist and his thought had been to even matters a bit by preying on the alcoholic treasures of plutocratic yachtsmen. That had led to other looting, but now he wanted the treasure itself, which he had hidden, to go back to its owners. The three men—good friends by now—landed on San Nicolas Island, and saw a white girl held captive by the crew of a Chinese junk, headed by a white man. Under the leadership of Candon they rescued her and in getting clear rammed the junk—and found that they had abducted little Tommie Coulthurst, movie queen, and broken up the making of a feature film. But when matters were explained to her Tommie laughed and offered to go with them on their treasure quest.

(*A Two-Part Story—Part II.*)

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE FREIGHTER.

THE sea grew bluer. Day by day the Kuro Shiwo increased its splendor as the *Wear Jack* at a steady ten-knot clip left the latitude of Guadalupe behind, raising Eugenio Point and the heat-hazy coast that stretches to Cape San Pablo.

The threatened difference between Hank and George had died out. The reason of this was not far to seek. Tommie at that moment of her life was as destitute of all the infernal sex wiles of womanhood as a melon. She had no idea of men as anything else than companions, that was why the pocket Artemis failed a bit in love stunts. A year ago she had signed a contract with the Wallack & Jackson Company by which she received forty thousand dollars a year for five years and Wallack had reason sometimes to grumble. Tommie had no idea of how to fling herself into the arms of movie heroes or how to do the face work in a close-up when the heroine is exhibiting to the audience the grin and glad eye or the "abandon" or the "passionate appeal" so dear to the movie fan.

"Good glory, that ain't the way to make love," would cry Scudder, her first producer. "Nuzzle him—stop. Now, then, make ready and get 'abandon' into it. He's not the plumber come to mend the bath, nor your long-lost brother you wished had remained in 'Urope. He's the guy you're in love with. Now then, put some heart punch and pep into it—now then—camera!"

No good.

"Oh Lord, oh Lord!" the perspiring Scudder would cry. "Looks as if you were nursing a teddy bear. *Strain* him to your heart. Stop flapping your hands on his back! Now look up in his face, so! Astonished yet almost fearful! Can't you understand the wonder of love just born in the 'uman heart, the soul's awakening stunt? Lord! you're not lookin' at an eclipse of the sun!

That's better, hang on so, count ten and then nuzzle him."

But despite all directions Tommie was somewhat a failure in passion.

Wallack summed the situation up when he declared that it would be worth paying ten thousand dollars a year to some chap that would do the soul's awakening business with Tommie. She could laugh, weep, fly into a temper, ride a mustang bare-backed, drive a motor car over a precipice, be as funny in her diminutive way as Charlie Chaplin, but she couldn't make love worth a cent.

That was what Hank Fisher & Co. sensed when the girl illusion vanished, disclosing a jolly companion and nothing more—sensed, without in the least sensing the fact that owing maybe to her small size, she had a power almost as strong as the power that wakens the wonder of love in the "'uman heart."

Life was different on board owing to this new importation; busier too. This was an entirely new stunt and just as she knew everything about an automobile, an aëroplane and a horse, she seemed determined to know everything about the *Wear Jack*. Her capacity for assimilating detail was phenomenal. The use of everything from the main-sheet buffer to the mast winch had to be explained; she had to learn how to steer and, having learned, she insisted on taking her trick at the wheel. When she was not sitting with her nose in a book she was helping or hindering in the running of the ship. Then there was the question of her clothes to keep them busy.

Drawing on to the tropics it was more a question of shedding clothes, especially when it came to the matter of tweed coats and skirts. Bud, in his millionaire way, had come well provided; boxes and boxes had arrived from Hewson & Loders and had been received by Hank and stowed as "more of Bud's truck." White silk shirts, suits of white drill, they all rose up like a white cloud in George's mind one blue and burning morning as he contemplated Tommie in her stuffy tweeds.

"Look here, T. C.," said George, "you can't get along in that toggery. I've half a dozen suits of white, down below, and I'll get one of the chinks to tailor a couple of them for you. Hank, roust out those boxes, will you?"

They tried a white drill coat on her.

They had never really recognized her size till they saw her in that coat, which would almost have done her for an overcoat. But now they recognized that perfect proportion had given her stature and that if the gods had made her head an inch or so more in circumference she would have been a dwarf.

Then Hank started forward to find a tailor among the chinks and returned with a slit-eyed individual who contemplated his strange customer standing like Mr. Hyde in the garment of Doctor Jekyll, took eye measurements of the length of her limbs and the circumference of her waist and retired to the fo'c's'le with two pairs of white drill trousers and two coats to work his works; also with some white silk pajamas and shirts. By the next morning he produced an outfit which fitted more or less. She solved the question of shoes and stockings by discarding them on deck.

That was on the morning when across the sea, to port, Cape San Lazaro showed itself and the heat-hazy opening to Magdalena Bay.

The steady nor'westerly breeze that had held all night began to flicker out at dawn; when they came up from breakfast the world had gone to sleep. From the hazy coast to the hazy horizon nothing moved but the vast, marching, glassy swell coming up from a thousand miles away and unruffled by the faintest breeze.

Tommie, having come on deck and taken a sniff at the glacial condition of things, curled herself in one of the deck chairs with a book. The *Wear Jack* was well provided with deck chairs and Hank, having inspected the weather, dived below and brought one up. George followed suit. Then, having placed the chairs about under the awning which had been rigged, they sat and smoked and talked, Tommie up to her eyes in her confounded book, taking no part in the conversation.

T. C. was one of those readers who become absolutely dead to surroundings. Curled there with her nose in "Traffics and Discoveries," she looked as if you might have kicked her without waking her, and this fact somehow cast a pall over the conversation of Hank and Bud who, after a few minutes, found their conversation beginning to dry up.

"Lord," said Hank, "I wonder how long this beastly calm's going to hold?"

"Don't know," said George.

Then Candon came on deck. He had no chair. He stood with his back to the port rail cutting up some tobacco and filling a pipe.

"I wonder how long this beastly calm is going to hold?" said George.

"Lord knows," said Candon.

Tommie chuckled. Something in the book had tickled her. She turned over a page rapidly and plunged deeper into oblivion, like a puffin after smelts.

"What's the current taking us?" asked George.

"Maybe three knots," said Hank. "There's no saying." He yawned. Then, as though the idea had just struck him: "Say —what's wrong with trying the engine?"

"It's too beastly hot for tinkering over engines," yawned George, "and B. C. says he can't get the thing to go."

"Go'n' have another try, B. C.," said Hank. "There's no use in us sitting here wagging our tails and waiting for the wind —Tell you what, I'll draw lots with you— give's a piece of paper, Bud."

George produced an old letter and Hank tore off three slips, one long and two short.

Candon, with little interest in the business, drew a short slip, George the long one.

"It's me," said George, rising. "Well now, I'll just tell you, if I don't get the thing to revolute I'll stick there till I do. I'm not going to be beat by a bit of machinery." He moved toward the hatch.

"I'll go with you," said Tommie, suddenly dog-earing a page and closing her book as though she had been listening to the whole conversation, which in a way she had. Hank and Candon were left alone and Candon took his seat in the chair vacated by George. Neither seemed in good humor. Perhaps it was the heat.

From down below through the open hatch leading to the little engine room, they could hear voices—George's voice and the voice of T. C.

Then, as they sat yawning, another sound came, faint and far away, rhythmical, ghostly.

Hank raised himself and looked. Away to the s'uth'ard across the glassy sea a freighter was coming up. She was a great distance off but in the absolute stillness and across that glacial calm, the thud of her propellers could be felt by the ear.

Both men left their chairs and leaned on the rail watching her.

Said Candon, after a moment's silence, "D'y' know what I've been thinking? I've been thinking we've played it pretty low-down on T. C."

"How?"

"Well, it's this way. McGinnis will be after us, sure—as soon as he can get his hoofs under him. He'll know we're making for the Bay of Whales and he'll be after us. Question is can he get the *Heart* tinkered up in time or would he take another boat. If he does and catches us, there's sure to be a fight. We should have told T. C. that. I thought of it this morning at breakfast."

"Well, why didn't you tell her?"

"Well, I didn't, somehow. There's another thing—we've never told her who I am. That's worried me."

"Well, it's easy enough to tell her."

"No, sir, it isn't—not by a long chalk. I almost came to it yesterday. It was when you two were down below and I had her here on deck showing her how to make a fisherman's bend. It came to me to tell her and I opened out about Vanderdecken, saying he wasn't maybe as bad as some folk painted him; then she closed me up and put the lid on."

"What did she say?"

"Said stealing was stealing and taking women's jewelry was a dirty trick."

"Why didn't you explain?"

"Because she was right. Right or wrong, how's a chap to explain? Well, there it is. You'd better go down to her and say, 'That chap Candon's Vanderdecken and Pat McGinnis is after him and there'll maybe be a dust-up when we get down to the Bay, and there's a freighter coming along that'll take you back north and you'd better get aboard her.' "

"Me!"

"Yes, you. It's clean beyond me."

Hank watched the freighter. She was away up now out of the water and showing the white of her bridge screen. At her present speed she would soon be level with them. "She looks to be in ballast, don't she?" said Hank,

"Yep."

"Where's she going, do you think?"

"San Francisco, sure."

"That's a long way from Los Angeles."

"Maybe, but it's nearer than the Bay o' Whales."

The freighter was making anything from twelve to fifteen knots. She would pass the *Wear Jack* and a signal would stop her as sure as a bullet through the eye will stop a man.

Then, suddenly, something that had risen to Hank's surface intelligence like a bubble burst angrily.

"You can go down and tell her yourself," said he. "It's no affair of mine. If she wasn't fooling there with Bud she'd have seen the ship. How'n the nation do you think I'm going to go down and give you away like that?"

Candon hung silent as if offended with the other. He wasn't in the least. His eyes were fixed on the water overside. Right below, in the bit of shadow cast by the ship against the morning sun, the water lay pure emerald and showing fathom-deep glimpses of life—scraps of fuci, hints of jellyfish and once, far down, like a moving jewel in a world of crystal, an albacore passing swift as a sword thrust.

Ahead of them on the lifting swell a turtle was sunning itself awash in the blue of that lazy, silent sea, one polished plate of its carapace showing like a spot of burnished steel.

Candon found himself wondering why one plate should shine like that. It looked now like a little window in a roof. Then it seemed to him that out of that window came an idea, or rather a vision. A horrible vision of the freighter going off with Tommie and vanishing beyond the northern sky line with her. Not till that moment had he recognized that T. C. was at once the linchpin of their coach and the thing that had suddenly come to lend reason to his own life.

His whole existence had led logically up to the Vanderdecken business and the Vanderdecken business had led to her capture and her capture had given him something to care for; not as a man cares for a girl but more as a lonely man cares for a child or a dog. It was her small size, maybe, that clinched the thing with him and made him feel that he'd sooner do a dive overside than lose touch with her.

Hank was feeling at that moment pretty much the same. The microscopic Tommie had captured the leathery Hank as a chum.

The freighter drew on and they could see now the touch of white where the spume rose in a feather at her forefoot. It was a huge brute of a Coleman liner up from Callao or Valparaiso, a five thousand tonner with a rust-red funnel.

If they stopped her it would be necessary to get T. C. on deck right away and the chinks ready to man the boat. There would be scarcely time to say good-by. Besides, it was ten to one T. C. wouldn't want to go—especially in those togs. The freighter was abreast of them now. They watched her without a word. Suddenly a stream of bunting fluttered up and blew out on the wind of her passage. Candon shaded his eyes and looked.

"Wishing us a pleasant voyage," said Candon.

They watched the flags flutter down and the great turtle-backed stern with the sunlight on it and the plumes of foam from the propellers. Then as the wash reached them, making the *Wear Jack* groan and clatter her blocks, there came a new sound, a *thrud-thrud-thrud* right under their feet followed by the voice of George yelling, "Hi, you chaps, get the helm on her! Engine's going."

Candon sprang to the wheel and Hank came and stood beside him. Said Hank, "That freighter must have thought us awful swine not acknowledging their signal."

"Maybe they thought right," said Candon.

At that moment George appeared triumphant from the engine room. "She's running a treat," said he, "and T. C.'s looking after her. What's made the cross swell?" Without waiting for an answer and at a call from Tommie he dived below again.

Half an hour later when he came on deck, taking a look aft, George said: "Now if we hadn't an auxiliary engine and if it wasn't running well, this calm would have lasted a fortnight. Look there!"

They looked. Away to northward a vast expanse of the glassy swell had turned to a tray of smashed sapphires.

It was the breeze.

CHAPTER XXV.

THEY TURN THE CORNER.

They had given Tommie the after cabin, but in this hot weather the three of them kept the deck at night so that she might have her door open. To-night, just before dawn, when the *Wear Jack* was right on to

Cape San Lucas, Candon and George were keeping watch, listening to Hank. Hank was lying on the deck with a pillow under his head snoring. The engine had been shut off to save gasoline and the *Wear Jack,* with a chink at the wheel and the main boom guyed out, was sailing dead before the wind under a million stars and through a silence broken only by the bow wash and Hank.

Candon, pacing the deck with George, was in a reflective mood.

"Wonder what that chink's thinking about?" said he. "Home most like. They say every Chinaman carries China about with him in his box and unpacks it when he lights his opium pipe. Well, it's a good thing to have a home. Lord! what's the good of anything else? What's the good of working for money to spend in Chicago or N' York? I reckon there's many a millionaire in the cities living all day in his office on pills an' pepsin, would swap his dollars for the old home if he could get it back—the old shanty where the cows used to graze in the meadows and the fish jump in the stream—with his old dad and his mother sitting by the fire and his sister Sue playin' on the step."

"Where was your home?" asked George.

"Never had one," said Candon, "and never will."

"Oh, yes, you will."

"Don't see it. Don't see where it's to come from even if I had the dollars. I'm a lone man. Reckon there's bucks in every herd, same as me. Look at me, getting on for forty and the nearest thing to a home is a penitentiary. That's so!"

"Now look here, B. C.," said George, then he stopped dead. A sudden great uplift had come in his mind. Perhaps it was the night of stars through which they were driving or some waft from old Harley du Cane, the railway wrecker, who none the less always had his hand in his pocket for any unfortunate; perhaps he had long and subconsciously been debating in his mind the case of Candon. Who knows?

"You were going to say——" said Candon.

'Just this," said George. "Close up on the penitentiary business. There's worse men than you in the church, B. C., or I'm a liar. You're going to have a home yet and a jolly good one. I've got it for you."

"Where?"

"In my pocket. Fruit farming—that's your line—and a partner that can put up the dollars—that's me."

Candon was silent for a moment.

"It's good of you," said he at last, "damn good of you. I reckon I could make a business pay if it came to that, but there's more than dollars, Bud. I reckon I was born a wild duck. I've no anchor on board that wouldn't pull out of the mud first bit of wind that made me want to go wandering."

"I'll fix you up with an anchor," said Bud, "somehow or 'nuther. You leave things to me and trust your Uncle Bud."

He was thinking of getting Candon married somehow to some girl. He could almost visualize her, a big, healthy, honest American girl, businesslike, with a heart the size of a cauliflower. Some anchor.

"Sun's coming," said George, turning and stirring Hank awake with the point of his toe. Hank sat up yawning.

Away on the port bow against a watery blue window of sky Cape San Lucas showed, its lighthouse winking at the dawn. Then came the clang of gulls starting for the fishing and moment by moment, as they watched, the sea beyond the Cape showed sharper, steel-blue and desolate beyond words. The North could show nothing colder, till, all at once, over the hills came color on a suddenly materialized reef of cloud.

They held their course while the day grew broader and the Cape fell astern, then shifting the helm they steered right into the eye of the sun for the coast of Mexico.

They had turned the tip of Lower California.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE BAY OF WHALES.

Magadalena Bay, that great expanse of protected water between Punta Entrado and Santa Margarita Island, was once a great haunt of the sulphur-bottom whales. Then came the shark fishers and then came the American Pacific fleet and made a gun-practice ground of it, just as they have made a speed-testing ground of the Santa Barbara Channel between the Channel Islands and the coast. Maybe that drove the sulphur bottoms to go south all in a body and the more pessimistical ones to commit suicide in a bunch and all on the same day in the bay once known as the Bay of Juarez and now as the Bay of Whales. For the bones

seem all of the same date, ghost-white, calcined by sun and worn by the moving sands that cover them and uncover them and the winds that drive the sands.

Another thing, you find them almost to the foot of the low cliffs that ring the bay. How has this happened? The wind. The wind that can lift as well as drift, the wind that is always redisposing the sands.

The bay stretches for a distance of four miles between horn and horn, the water is strewn with reefs visible at low tide. Emerald shallows and sapphire depths and foam lines and snow of gulls all show more beautiful than any picture, and beyond lie the sands and the cliffs and the country desolate as when Juarez first sighted it. Near the center of the beach at the sea edge stands a great rock shaped like a pulpit.

"That's the bay," said Candon, pointing ahead.

It was noon and the *Wear Jack* with all plain sail set was diving straight for a great blue break in the reefs, Hank at the helm and Candon giving directions. The chinks were all on deck gathered forward, their faces turned shoreward, gazing at the land almost with interest.

"Where's the whales?" asked Tommie suddenly. "You said it was all covered with the skeletons of whales."

"You'll see them quick enough," said Candon. "Port—steady so——"

The rip of the outgoing tide was making a lather round the reef spurs, and ahead the diamond-bright, dead-blue water showed up to a line where it suddenly turned to emerald.

"It's twenty fathom up to there," said Candon, "and then the sands take hold. I'm anchoring somewhere about here. It's a good bottom—make ready with the anchor there!"

He held on for another minute or so, then the wind spilled from the sails and the anchor fell in fifteen fathom water and nearly half a mile from the shore.

The boat was got over with two chinks to do the rowing and they started, Candon steering.

"Where's the whales?" asked Tommie.

They were almost on to the beach now and there lay the sands singing to the sun and wind. Miles and miles of sand, with ponds of mirage to the south, gulls strutting on the uncovered beach, a vast desolation with far overhead, just a dot in the blue, an eagle from the hills of Sinaloa. An eagle so high as to be all but invisible, whose eyes could yet number the shells on the beach and the movement of the smallest crab. But where were the whales?

T. C. had once seen a whale's skeleton in a museum, set up and articulated. Her vivid imagination had pictured a beach covered with whale skeletons just like that and instead of thanking Providence for the absence of such a boneyard, her mind grumbled. She was wearing one of Bud's superfluous Panamas and she took it off and put it on again.

As they landed close to the pulpit rock Hank said nothing. George said nothing. Candon, visibly disturbed, looked north and south. Here but a short time ago had been ribs lying about like great bent staves, skulls, vertebræ; here to-day there was nothing but sand.

He did not know that a fortnight before a south wind had "moved the beach" bringing up hundreds of thousands of tons of sand not only from the south end but from the bay beyond, or that in a month more, maybe, a north wind would move the beach sending the sand back home and that only between the winds were the bones laid fully bare. No storm was required to do the work, just a steady driving wind, sifting, sifting, sifting, for days and days.

The fact that the beach seemed higher just here suddenly brought the truth to Candon.

"Boys," said he, "it's the sand."

No one spoke for a moment under the frost that had fallen on them. Then Hank said, "Sure you've struck the right bay?"

Like Tommie, he had pictured entire skeletons, not bones and skulls lying flat and easily sanded over.

"Sure. It's the sand has lifted over them."

Scarcely had he spoken when a thunderbolt fell into the shallows a cable length away from the shore. It was the eagle. In a moment it rose, a fish in its talons and went climbing the air to seaward, and then up a vast spiral stairs in the blue; and then, like an arrow, away to the far-off hills.

It was like an underscore to the desolation of this place where man was disregarded if not unknown.

"Well," said George, coming back to things, "the bones aren't any use anyway.

Let's start for the boodle. Strike out for the cache, B. C."

They turned, following their leader, and made diagonally for the cliffs to the north. Candon walked heavily, a vague suspicion filling his mind that Hank and George held something more in reservation than mere disappointment over absent skeletons. The odious thought that they might suspect him of being a fraud came to him as he walked, but he had little time for self-communing. Something worse was in store. He saw it now and wondered at his stupidity in not having seen it before.

Among the implements of the expedition two spades had been brought. The chinks carried these spades. They brought up the rear of the procession, silent, imperturbable, apparently incurious. They would not do the digging when the moment came. Candon and Hank or George would be easily able to negotiate the few feet of hard sand that covered the treasure. The chinks just carried the spades. Candon stopped dead all of a sudden. Then he went on, quickening his pace almost to a run. The bundle had been buried at a place easily recognizable on the southern side of a little outjut of the cliff and about ten feet from an issue of water that came clear and cold and bright through a crack in the cliff face.

The issue was still there. But it was far lower than before. The sand had risen. The wind had done its work and five feet or more of new sand lay upon the cache. It ran up the cliff face like a snowdrift—five or six feet of friable sand that seemed an almost impassable barrier. The big man folded his arms and stood for a moment dumb. Then he laughed.

"Boys," said he, "I'm a fraud."

No answer came but the wash of the little waves on the beach and far gull voices from the south. He turned about fiercely.

"I've led you wrong. I've fooled you, but it's not me—it's my pardner—it's the sand—sand. That's me and all my work—all I've ever stood on. Sand—sand—six foot deep."

"For the land's sake, B. C.," cried Hank, "get a clutch on yourself. What's wrong with you anyhow?"

"He means the sand has covered the cache," said the steady little voice of Tommie.

Candon did not look at her. It seemed to him just then in that moment of disappointment that Fate was carefully explaining to him the futility of his works and his life. In an immeasurably short space of time all sorts of little details, from his Alaskan experiences to his absurd rescue of Tommie, all sorts of weaknesses from his enjoyment of robbery to his inaction in letting that freighter pass, rose before him. He struggled to find more words.

"It's just me," said he and fell dumb and brooding.

"Well," said George, "it's a long way to come—to be fooled like this—but there's an end of it. How many men would it take to move that stuff?"

"Six foot of sand and square yards of surface? It would take a steam dredger," said Hank in a hard voice.

Tommie's eyes were fixed on Candon. She knew little of the whole thing but she knew suffering when she saw it. From what he had said and from his attitude she could almost read Candon's thoughts. The movie business is a teacher of dumb expression.

"D'you mean to say you're going to turn this down?" asked Tommie.

"What's the good?" said George. He was feeling just as Hank felt. The absence of whales' bones, the flatness of landing on an ordinary beach where they had expected to see strange sights, had deflated them both. They did not doubt the good faith of B. C. but as a medicine man he was at a discount.

They saw before them hopeless digging. The thing was not hopeless, but in that moment of deflection and disappointment it seemed impossible.

"Well," said Tommie, "next time I start on a show of this kind, I'll take girls along—that's all I've got to say."

In the dead silence following this bombshell, Candon looked up and found himself looking straight into the eyes of the redoubtable T. C.

"Talk of sands," she went on, talking to him and seeming to disregard the others, "and all your life has been sands and that nonsense! Why, it's the sand in a man that makes him. Anyhow I've not come all this distance to go back without having a try. Aren't you going to dig?"

The scorn in her tone had no equivalent in her mind, no more than the spur on a rider's heel has to do with his mentality. She was out to save B. C. from himself. Also, although she did not care a button for

the hidden "boodle," her whole soul resented turning back when on the spot.

Candon, standing before her like a chidden child, seemed to flush under his tan; then his eyes turned to Hank.

"Lord! let's dig," suddenly said Hank. "Let's have a try anyhow, if it takes a month." He stopped and stared at the hopeless-looking task before him. "We'll get the whole of the chinks to help."

"Chinks!" said Candon, suddenly coming back to his old self in a snap. "This is white men's work. I brought you here and I'll do it myself if I have to dig with my hands. It's there and we've got to get it."

"I'll help," said Tommie.

"Well, I reckon we'll all help," said George unenthusiastically.

It was a strange fact that of the three men Tommie had least power over George du Cane. Less attraction for him maybe, even though the very clothes on her back were his.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CONFESSION.

The size of the task was apparent to all of them, but to none more clearly than Candon.

First of all, reckoning to deal with hard stuff he had brought spades, not shovels. The bundle had been buried hurriedly. Even under the best conditions he would have had to turn over many square feet of stuff to find it. Then this soft, fickle sand was a terrible material to work on; it was like trying to shovel away water—almost. But the most daunting thing to him was the fact that Fate had induced him to make the cache on the south side of the outjut of cliff instead of the north, for the south wind blowing up from the bay beyond had added feet to the depth to be dealt with, just as a wind drifts snow against any obstruction. The sand level on the north of the jut was much lower and it was not drifted. Then there was the question of time. Given time enough the McGinnis crowd would surely arrive, if he knew anything of them, and there would be a fight—and there was the question of Tommie.

This last consideration only came to him now on top of her words, "I'll help." He stood for a moment plunged back into thought. Then he turned to the others.

"Boys, I reckon I've been talking through my hat. White man or yellow man it's all the same. We'll all have to take our turn. Back with you, you two, to the ship and get canvas enough for tents. We'll want three, grub too; we'll want enough for a week. Leave two chinks to look after the schooner and try and get some boarding to make extra shovels, as much as you can, for we'll want some to shore up the sand. We've got to camp here right on our work."

"Sure," said Hank. "Come along, Bud, we'll fetch the truck." They turned toward the boat.

"I'll go with you," said Tommie. "I want to fetch my book."

"I'd rather you didn't," said Candon, "I want you to help me here."

"Me!" said Tommie surprised.

'Yes—if you don't mind."

"All right," said she. Then to Hank, "You'll find the book in my bunk; and fetch me my toothbrush, will you—and that hairbrush and my pajamas, if we've got to camp."

"Right," said Hank. "You trust me."

They shoved off, and to George, as he looked back, the huge figure of Candon and the little figure of his companion seemed strange standing side by side on that desolate beach. Stranger even than the whales' skeletons that had vanished.

The wind had veered to the west and freshened, blowing in cool from the sea.

"Well," said Tommie after they had watched the boat halfway to the schooner, "what are you going to do now? What did you want me for?"

"I want to have a word with you," said Candon. "S'pose we sit down. It's fresh and breezy here and I can think better sitting down than standing up. I'm bothered at your being dragged into this business and that's the truth. And I've things to tell you." They sat down and the big man took his pipe from his pocket and filled it in a leisurely and far-away manner, absolutely automatically.

Tommie watched him, vastly interested all of a sudden.

"It's this way," said he. "I got rid of the other chaps so's I could get you alone, and I'm not going one peg further in this business till you know all about me and the chances you're running. Y' remember one day on deck I was talking to you about that chap Vanderdecken?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'm Vanderdecken."

"You're which?"

"I'm Vanderdecken—the swab that pirated those yachts."

"You!" said Tommie.

"Yes. I'm the swab."

A long pause followed this definite statement, the gulls cried and the waves broke. Tommie, leaning on her elbow and watching the breaking waves, seemed trying to adjust her mind to this idea and failing utterly. She was not considering the question of how Vanderdecken, who was being chased by Hank and George, had managed to be partners with them. She was up against the great fact that Candon was a robber. It seemed impossible to her, yet he said so.

"But what made you *do* it?" she cried, suddenly sitting up and looking straight at him.

"I didn't start to do it," said he, throwing the unlit pipe beside him on the sand. "All the same I did it and I'll tell you how it was." He sat up and holding his knees started to talk, telling her the whole business.

It sounded worse than when he told Hank and George, for he gave nothing in extenuation, just the hard bricks. But hard bricks were good enough for Tommie; she could build better with them and quicker than if he had handed her out ornamental tiles to be inserted at given positions.

When he had done talking and when she had done building her edifice from his words she shook her head over it. It wasn't straight. In some ways it pleased her, as, for instance, the liquor business; she had sympathy with that. But the larceny business appealed to her not as an act of piracy but theft. T. C. would have been smothered in a judge's wig, but she would have made an excellent judge for all that. Candon was now clearly before her, the man and his actions. He had been frank as day with her, he was a repentant sinner and to cap all he had saved her, at all events in intention, from Chinese slavers. His size and his sailor simplicity appealed to her—and his eyes.

All the same her sense of right refused to be stirred by the blue eyes of Candon, by his size, his simplicity, his patent daring, by the something or another that made her like him even better than Hank or George, or by the fact that he had carried her off on his shoulder against her will and in the face of destruction—and absurdity.

"You shouldn't have done it," said Tommie. "I don't want to rub it in, but you shouldn't. You shouldn't have got mixed up with that McGinnis crowd. What made you?"

"You've put your finger on it," said Candon. "I don't know what made me. Want of steering."

"Well," said Tommie, "you wish you hadn't, don't you?"

"You bet."

"Well then, you're half out of the hole. D'you ever say your prayers?"

"Me! No." Candon laughed. "Lord, no—I've never been given that way."

"Maybe if you had you wouldn't have got into this hole—or maybe you would. No telling," said Tommie. "I'm no praying beetle myself, but I regular ask the Lord for protection. You want it in the movie business; dope and a broken neck is what I put in for. I don't mind being killed, but I don't want to be killed sudden or fall to cocaine or whisky like some do. Well, I guess work is sometimes praying and I reckon you'll have some praying to do with your fists getting the sand off that stuff. And when you've sent it back to its owners, you'll have prayed yourself clear—that's my 'pinion."

"I've got something else to tell you," said Candon. "I reckon you don't know me yet. Anyhow you've got to have the lot now I've begun."

"Spit it out," said the confessor, a bit uneasy in her mind at this new development and the serious tone of the other.

"I told the boys there was a black streak in me—and there is. I let you down."

"Let me down?"

"Yep. D'you remember when you were tinkering at the engine that day the calm took us?"

"Yes."

"Well, a big freighter passed within hail and I let her go."

"Well, what about it?"

"I should have stopped her so that you might have got back to San Francisco."

"But I didn't want to go there."

"Why, you said the day we first had you on board that you could get back on some ship."

"Oh, did I? I'd forgot. Well, I wouldn't have gone in the freighter, to San Francisco of all places."

"I didn't know that. From what you said I should have stopped her."

"Why didn't you?"

"Well," said he, "I didn't want to lose you. Hank and me didn't want you to go off and leave us. You'd been such a good chum."

"Well, forget it. I didn't want to leave you either. Not me! Why this trip is the best holiday I've had for years. If that's all you have to bother about, forget it."

"There's something else," said he. "The McGinnis crowd is pretty sure to blow along down after us and there'll be a fight, sure. You see we're held here by that sand; that will give them time to get on our tracks."

"Well, if they come we'll have to fight them," said Tommie; "but if you ask me I don't think there's much fight in that lot, by what you say of them."

"They're toughs all the same. I'm telling you and I want you to choose right now. We can stay here and risk it, or push out and away back and put you down at Santa Barbara. Give us the word."

Tommie considered deeply for a moment. Then she said: "I'm not afraid. I reckon we can match them if it comes to scratching. No, we'll stick. You see there's two things: you can't put me back in Santa Barbara without the whole of this business coming out and Hank Fisher and Bud du Cane being guyed to death. You see your ship is known. Althusen and that lot will give evidence. You can't put me back out of the *Wear Jack* anyhow."

"Then how are you to get back?" asked Candon.

"I've been trying to think that long enough," said Tommie. "You remember the rat in the flowerpot—something or another will turn up or I'll have to do some more thinking."

"Do you know what I'm thinking?" asked Candon. "I'm thinking there's not many would stick this out just to save chaps being guyed."

"Maybe. I don't know. Anyhow the other thing is I want to see the end of this business and that stuff got out of the sand and handed back to its owners. Lord, can't you see, if we turned back now we'd be quitters, and I don't know what you'd do with yourself but I tell you what I'd do with myself. I'd take to making lace for a living—or go as mother's help!"

"Lord!" said Candon. "Give me your fist."

Tommie held out her fist and they shook.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

HANK.

Hank, as before mentioned, was a man of resource; there was nothing much he could not do with his hands backed by his head. In two hours on board the *Wear Jack* he had found the materials for and constructed three tent poles; in the sail room, by sacrificing the awning, he had obtained the necessary canvas; ropes and pegs evolved themselves from nowhere as if by magic. Then, in some way, from the interior of the *Wear Jack* he managed to get planking —not much but enough for his purpose.

While he worked on these matters, George superintended the removal of stores; bully beef, canned tomatoes, canned kippered herrings, biscuits, butter, tea, condensed milk, rice. He sent two chinks ashore with a boatload, then, when they came back, the rest of the stuff was loaded into the boat together with the tent poles and canvas and blankets; last came a small bundle containing Tommie's night things and toothbrush, then they pushed off.

Candon helped in the unloading of the boat and then they set to raising the tents.

In this section of the bay there were two breaks in the line of cliffs, a north and a south break. Hank drew the line of the tents between the breaks and at right angles to the cliffs so as to escape as much as possible the hot land wind when it blew; also he put a long distance between each tent. Tommie's was nearest the cliffs, the chinks' nearest the sea; by sunset the canvas was up, a fire lit, a breaker filled with fresh water from the issue in the cliff and the stores piled to leeward of the middle tent. Hank had even brought mosquito netting and a plan for using it in the tents. He seemed to have forgotten nothing till Tommie opened her bundle.

"Where's my book?" asked Tommie.

"Blest if I haven't forgot it!" cried Hank. "Chucklehead! Say! I'll put off right now and fetch it."

"Oh, it'll wait," said the other. "I guess I'll be busy enough for a while not to want books. You can fetch it to-morrow."

If Hank had known the consequences of delay he would have fetched it there and

then, but he didn't. He went to attend to the fire. The fire was built of dry seaweed, bits of a broken-up packing case and fragments of wreck wood and when the kettle was boiled over it and tea made the sun had set and the stars were looking down on the beach.

After supper Tommie went off to her tent leaving the men to smoke. The two chinks, who had built a microscopic fire of their own, were seated close to it talking, maybe, of China and home. The wind had died out and through the warm night the sound of the waves all down the beach came like a lullaby.

Hank was giving his ideas of how they should start in the morning attacking the sand, when Candon, who had been smoking silently, suddenly cut in.

"I've told her," said Candon.

"What you say?" asked Hank.

"I've told her all about myself and who I am—and the chances; told her when you chaps went off for the stores. Told her it's possible McGinnis may light down on us before we've done, seeing the work before us on that sand, and that there'll maybe be fighting she oughtn't to be mixed up in."

"B' gosh!" said Hank. "I never thought of that. What did she say?"

"Oh, she said, 'Let him come.' Wouldn't listen to anything about turning back. Said we'd be quitters if we dropped it now."

"Lord, she's a peach!"

"She's more than that," said Candon. "Well, I'm going for a breather before turning in." He tapped his pipe out and walked off down along the sea edge.

George laughed. He was laughing at the size of Candon compared to the size of Tommie and at the quaint idea that had suddenly come to him—the idea that Candon had suddenly become gone on her. George could view the matter in a detached way, for though T. C. appealed to him as an individual he scarcely considered her as a girl.

A lot of little signs and symptoms collected themselves together in his head capped by the tone of those words, "She's more than that." Yes, it was highly probable that the heart punch had come to B. C. Why not? Tommie as an anchor wasn't much as far as size went, yet as far as character and heart—who could tell? All the indications were in her favor.

"She's a peach," murmured Hank, half aloud, half to himself.

"Hullo," thought George, "has old Hank gone bughouse on her too?" Then aloud: "Y' mean Tommie?"

"Yep."

"Oh, she's not so bad."

"And I went and forgot her book. Bud, d'you remember to-day when we were all standing like a lot of lost hoodlums going to turn our backs on this proposition and the way she yanked us round? It came on me then."

"What?"

"I dunno. Bud, say——"

"Yes?"

"She's great—it came on me to-day like a belt on the head with a sandbag. It came to me before. Remember the day she was first aboard and wouldn't put back, wanting to save our faces? Well, that hit me, but the jaw punch got me to-day; and just now when she trundled off to her tent, lugging that blanket behind her, I seemed to get one in the solar plexus that near sent me through the ropes. Bud, I'm on my back being counted out."

"Oh, talk sense," said Bud. "We've too much work on hand to be carrying on with girls. Can it, Hank, till we're clear of this place, anyhow; b'sides it's ten to one there's some other chap after her."

A form loomed up coming toward them. It was Candon.

CHAPTER XXIX.

STRANGERS ON THE BEACH.

At seven next morning the digging began. At six, when Hank turned out of the tent, the aspect of the beach had changed. A north wind rising before midnight had blown steadily and strongly unheard and unheeded by the snoring sleepers in the tents. It died out after dawn.

Hank called George to look. Here and there away across the sands white spots were visible, some like the tops of gigantic mushrooms. One quite close to them showed as the top of a whale's skull. Farther on a huge rib hinted of itself. There were little sand drifts on the windward side of the tents.

"Wind's been shifting the sand," said George. "It's all over me." His hair was full of it, and his pockets. Hank was in the same condition. Tommie came out of her tent blinking at the sun.

"Say, I'm all sand," cried Tommie.

"Wind's been blowing," said Hank. "Look at the bones."

The sand seemed lower over the cache. Candon gave it as his opinion that it was at least a foot lower. Then without more ado they began to dig, using the two spades and one of the shovels improvised by Hank.

Candon, Hank and one of the chinks were the diggers; they had divided themselves into two gangs, George, Tommie, and the other chink formed the second gang; and having seen the work started they went off to prepare breakfast.

After breakfast they started again working in two shifts of half an hour each and keeping it up till eleven. Then they knocked off, fagged out but somehow happy. The middle of the day was too hot for work and after dinner they slept till three, knocking off finally somewhere about six. A hole ten feet broad from north to south, eight feet from east to west, and nearly three feet deep was the result of their work—the excavated stuff being banked north and south, so that if the wind blew up from either quarter there would be less drift of sand into the hole. Hank watered these banks as far as he could with water from the spring in the cliff to make the sand "stay put," then they went off to supper.

T. C. had worked in her way as hard as any of them, taking as a sort of personal insult any suggestion that she was overdoing herself. Dog-tired now, she was seated on the sand by the middle tent reading an old Chicago *Tribune* that George had brought ashore, while the others prepared supper.

"Lord," said Hank as he knelt building up the fire. "If I haven't forgot to send for your book." He looked toward the boat on the beach and half rose to his feet.

"I'm not wanting it," said Tommie. "This is good enough for me. I'm too tired for books—tea's what I want."

She dived into the paper again, emerging, when supper was announced, with the gist of an article on the League of Nations between her teeth. T. C. had strong political opinions and her own ideas about the League of Nations. She did not favor the League and said so.

Hank, opening a can of salmon and hit in his ideals, forgot it, waved it in the air and started to do battle with Tommie. That was Hank all over. Heart-punched, lying on his back with Cupid counting him out, he saw for a moment only the banner of universal peace and brotherhood waving above him.

"But it ain't so," cried Hank. "There's no Monroe doctrines in morality, 'Murrica can't sit scratching herself when others are up and doing. Why the nations have got war down, right now, kicking under the blanket, and it only wants 'Murrica to sit on her head to keep her down."

" 'Merrica's got to be strong before she does anything," fired Tommie. "How's she to be strong if a lot of foreigners sitting in Geneva can tell her to do this or that? Why they'd cut her fists off."

"Strong!" cried Hank. "Why armies and navies ain't strength. Love of man for man and——"

"Mean to tell me you could love Turks?"

"Ain't talking of Turks."

"Greeks then—Portugueses. Say, tell me straight—do you love Mexicans?"

The sight of Tommie "het up" and with sparkling eyes gave the struggling hero such another heart punch that he collapsed, lost sight of the banner of brotherhood and went on opening the can of salmon.

"Maybe I'm wrong and maybe you're right," said he, "it's a big question. Pass me that plate, will you, Bud?"

Candon had said nothing. He had deserted his coidealist like a skunk and seemed engaged in rereviewing the League of Nations by the light of Tommie.

Half an hour after supper the whole lot of them were snoring in their tents, poleaxed by sleep.

At ten o'clock next morning as the Tommie-chink-Bud shift were taking on digging, Hank, shaking sand from his clothes called out to the others to look.

Down from the southern defile in the cliffs a small procession was coming on to the beach. First came a man in a broad-brimmed hat, then another leading a mule, and another following after.

"Mexicans," said George.

"Sure," said Hank. "Look! they've seen us. They've stopped—now they're going on, right down to the sea edge. Wonder what they're after?"

The Mexicans, having reached the sea edge, began to wander along it coming in the direction of the tents. Every now and then they stopped to gather something.

"Seaweed," said Hank. "Look, they are shoving it into a sack on the mule."

"Well, come on," said Tommie. She jumped into the sand pit and began to dig, Bud and the chink following her. Hank, rolling a cigarette, sat down and watched the seaweed gatherers.

The tide was half out and they were following it, walking along the extreme edge of the water. Then he saw them stop and take something from the mule's back.

"Shovels," said Hank to himself. As chief engineer of the business, Hank, from the first, had been impressed by the fact that the deeper they went the harder the work would be, simply because the sand had to be flung out of the pit. The first few feet in depth was easy enough, but the depth already gained was beginning to tell, and the banks of excavated stuff to north and south made matters worse by increasing the height over which the sand had to be flung.

"B. C.!" suddenly cried Hank, springing to his feet. "Shovels!"

Candon, who was lying on his back with his hat over his face, resting for a moment, sat up.

Hank was gone, running full speed and whooping as he ran.

He reached the sea edge and caught up with the beach combers who were digging for huge clams just where a bank of sand and mud touched the true sand. They showed up now as three tanned, lean, hard-bitten individuals, carrying big, satisfactory, heart-shaped Mexican shovels and looking all nerves and sinews, with faces expressionless as the face of the mule that stood by with its two sacks bulging, one evidently with provender, the other with gathered seaweed.

"Hi, you jossers!" cried Hank. "Want a job, hey? Mucho plenty dollars, dig for Americanos." He made movements as if digging and pointed toward the sand hole.

"No intende," replied the tallest of the three.

"Kim on," said Hank, taking the long man by the arm and leading the way. He had remembered that Candon said he could talk the Mexican lingo. The others were all out of the sand hole watching, and halfway up Candon and George joined Hank.

"Here's your dredging machine," cried Hank. "Look at the shovels—ain't they lovely! Get at them, B. C., and ask their terms."

Candon spoke with the long man, seeming to explain matters.

"Five dollars a day each," said Candon. "They say they'll work all day for that."

"Fifteen dollars," said Hank. "Take 'em on, it's cheap. We can get rid of them before we strike the stuff. Take 'em on for one day, anyhow."

Candon concluded the bargain. Then he led the beach combers to the hole and explained matters. They understood. Having consulted together like experts they took the matter into their own hands, asking only that the others should set to work and remove the banks of refuse to north and south of the hole.

"Well," said Hank as they sat at dinner that day, "give me Mexicans for work. A raft of blacks couldn't have moved the dirt quicker'n those chaps. Why, we'll be down to bed rock by to-night."

"I gingered them up," said Candon; "told them if they got down to what I wanted to find by to-night, I'd give them ten dollars extra apiece—but they won't do it."

By six o'clock that evening, however, the job was nearly done. Candon reckoned that only a few hours more work would find the stuff, unless a heavy wind blew up in the night and spoiled things.

He paid the hired men off with dollars supplied by George and then they sat down to supper, the beach combers camping near by and having the time of their lives with canned salmon, ship's bread and peaches supplied for nothing.

Tommie had fallen in love with the mule. It had eaten half a Chicago *Tribune* blowing about on the sands and she was feeding it now with nice Nabisco wafers which the brute took in a gingerly and delicate manner as though chicken and asparagus had been its upbringing instead of old gasoline cans and esparto grass.

"She's made friends with that mule," said George.

"She'd make friends with Satan," said Hank. "Look at her talking to those dagos as if she knew their lingo."

"She's making them laugh," said Candon.

An hour after supper the beach was at peace. Even the mule had fallen into the frame of the picture. It was lying down by its sleeping masters. Away out across the water the amber light of the *Wear Jack* showed beneath the stars.

Another hour passed. Then things changed. The mule was lying dreaming,

maybe, of more wafers and in the starlight, like shadows, the forms of the three dagos, each with a shovel over its shoulder, were passing toward the sand hole.

CHAPTER XXX.

"TOMMIE'S GONE!"

"Rouse up, Hank!"

Hank, snoring on his back, flung out his arms, opened his eyes, yawned and stared at the beautiful, blazing morning visible through the tent opening.

"Lord! it's good to be alive!" said Hank. He dressed and came out.

Candon was tinkering at the fire. The mule, on its feet now, was standing while Tommie was feeding it with dried grass taken from the provender bag. The dagos, sitting like tired men, were smoking cigarettes, while the four-mile beach sang to the crystal waves and the white gulls laughed. It was a pretty picture.

Tommie came running to the heap of stores by the middle tent, chose a couple of tins, wrapped up some biscuits in a bit of newspaper and presented the lot to the dagos.

"They look so tired," said she as they sat down to breakfast.

"Well, they ought to be," said Hank, "seeing the way they've been digging; boys, I reckon they ought to have a bonus."

"They've had fifteen dollars," said the practical George, "and their grub."

"Maybe," said Hank, "but they've done fifty dollars' worth of work, seeing how we're placed. I vote we give them five dollars extra."

"I'm with you," said Candon.

"Ten," said Tommie.

"I've only a ten-dollar bill left on me," said George. "Don't matter. Give it to them."

Tommie took the note and, leaving her breakfast, tripped over to the Mexicans. Then she came back.

Half an hour later, armed only with the spades and Hank's improvised shovel, Hank and the others set to work.

"Let's borrow those chaps' shovels," said George.

"I'd rather not," said Candon. "They'll be going off the beach soon and I'd rather they weren't here when we strike the stuff. We'll be soon on it now."

"What's the matter with the sand," asked Hank as he contemplated the floor of the hole. "Looks as if it had been beaten down with a shovel."

"Shovel—nothing!" said George. "It's their flat feet. Come on!"

By half past eleven o'clock Candon reckoned that the depth required had been reached if not passed.

"We'll get it this evening," said he, "as sure's my name's Bob Candon."

"Hope so," said George.

As they turned to the tents for dinner and siesta they found that the Mexicans were still on the beach a bit to the southward strolling along by the sea edge. Then they came back northward.

"I wish those chaps would go," said George.

When they turned in for the midday siesta, the beach combers seemed to have made a little camp for the purpose of rest and cigarette smoking halfway between the sea edge and the southern defile in the cliffs.

George slept at first the sleep of the just. Then began the sleep of canned kippered herrings and eighty degrees in the shade.

Tyrebuck was buried alive somewhere on the beach and they were trying to locate him without treading on him. Having seemingly given up this quest, they were then seated playing cards with Hank's late partner, the lady who could put a whole potato in her mouth. They were playing a new sort of game which the ingenious Hank had invented and which he called Back to Front. That is to say they were holding their cards so that each player could only see the backs of his own hand and the fronts of his partner's hand. It was whist, moreover, and they were playing for potato points. How long this extremely intellectual game lasted, it is impossible to say. It was suddenly interrupted.

Hank outside the tent had seized George's foot and seemed trying to pull his leg off.

"Kim out!" cried Hank. "She's gone!"

"Gone! Who's gone?"

"Tommie. They've stolen her."

Candon, already awakened and out, was running round looking at the sand as if hunting for footsteps.

The raving Hank explained that unable to sleep he had come out and found the Mexicans gone. Some premonition of evil had made him glance at Tommie's tent opening; not being able to see her, he looked closer. She was gone.

"After them!" cried George.

Aroused from a fantastic dream George found himself faced with something almost equally fantastic. The size of Tommie made a lot of things possible, visions of her captured and strangled and stuffed into one of the bags on the mule's back rose before him, though why or for what purpose the dagos should commit such an act was not clear.

The going was hard over the sand till they reached the defile in the cliffs toward which the mule tracks seemed to lead. Here the way led gently uphill over broken rocky ground till they reached a low plateau where under the unchanging sunlight the landscape lay spread in humps and hollows to the hills away to the east. Rock, sagebrush and sand, cactus, sand, sagebrush, it lay before them. But of Tommie, the mule or her captors, there was no trace or sign. The sand here was no use for tracking purposes; it was beach sand blown up by west winds and lay only in places. Rock was the true floor, rock rising sometimes six feet in camel humps obstructing the view. Candon climbed one of these kopjes, shaded his eyes and looked. Then he gave a shout.

"Got 'em!" cried Candon. "Right ahead! After me, boys!"

He came tumbling down and started at full speed, taking a track that led due east between the hillocks till, rounding a bowlder, away ahead of them they saw the mule and its companions slowly winding their way in a southeasterly direction—but not a trace of Tommie.

They closed up rapidly. The dagos turned at the shout of Hank. Then as if a bombshell had burst among them they scattered, leaving the mule to its fate and running south, sou'east and east.

"Mule first," cried Hank.

Through the canvas of the great bulging sack of seaweed on the mule's back, he could see the small corpse of Tommie—strangled maybe—doubled up, done for.

The mule left to itself had begun to feed on a patch of grass tough looking as bowstring hemp. It cocked an eye at the oncomers and continued feeding till they got close up to it.

"Look out!" yelled Hank.

The heels of the brute had missed him by inches.

They scattered, picking up rocks by instinct and instinctively planning and carrying out their attack without word of common counsel. It was the primitive man in them, no doubt, aroused by rage. At all events the mule, mechanically grazing, got a whack with a rock on its rump that made it squeal and wheel only to get another on its flank. It flung its heels up as if trying to kick heaven.

"Stand clear," cried Hank. The sack, provender and shovels had fallen to the ground and the mule seeing an open course and impelled by another rock, was off.

Hank flung himself on the sack. There was no Tommie in it, only seaweed. Candon, recognizing this, made off running, after the dagos. But something was protruding from the provender bag that was not provender. Hank pulled it out. It was a parcel done up in oilcloth and tied clumsily with tarred string.

"Lord!" cried George. "The boodle!"

The shock of the discovery almost made them forget Tommie for a moment.

"Hounds!" said Hank. "They must have been digging last night after we turned in."

"And they've opened it," said George. "Look at the way it's tied up again—and that knot's a granny. Oh, damn! What's the use of bothering, we haven't got her. Hank, clutch a hold of the darned thing and hide it somewhere and come on—scatter and hunt."

Candon had made off due east. They heard his voice shouting, "Hi, there, hi there! Tommie! Ahoy there!" Then Hank, throwing the parcel at the foot of a prominent upstanding rock, made off south and Bud north.

The eagle of the Sinaloa hills having fed its young that morning had returned to its watchtower and from there she saw the hunt. She saw Hank overtaking and kicking a Mexican, Bud chasing another Mexican, Candon pursuing a third. Philosophizing, perhaps, on the craziness of human beings, she saw the chase of the Mexicans relinquished and the pursuers each now seemingly in pursuit of something else.

An hour later Hank returning to the rock where he had flung the bundle, found Bud.

"She's not here," said Hank, "but she can't be anywhere else. I'm done—there's nothing for it but to hike back and get all the chinks and comb this place. It's not the Mexicans. She's maybe wandered out here alone and fallen off a rock or into a hole or got sunstroke. Come on and fetch the chinks."

"Where's B. C.?"

"I dunno. Chasing away there somewhere. Come on."

He caught up the bundle and they started, the most dejected pair of human beings in Mexico at that moment. They couldn't speak. They came through the defile in the cliffs and there on the sands lay the new beached boat, and on the sands the tents, and half in and out of her tent, sitting with her head in the shade and her feet in the sun, Tommie reading a book.

Hank dropped the bundle and ran toward her, shouting as he ran and waving his arms.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE RETURN OF CANDON.

Bud saw her spring up evidently fancying some danger was upon them, then he saw Hank seizing her and jumping her round in a sort of dance. When he reached them, Hank had flung himself down on the sand and was laughing.

"He's gone crazy," said Tommie, laughing despite herself. "Where on earth you been?"

"Been!" cried George. "Hunting Mexico for you, thinking you were lost! Where have *you* been?"

"Me—only to get my book. I took the boat when you two were asleep and I got back here a few minutes ago and found you all gone."

"Well," said Bud, sitting down on the sand. "I was asleep when Hank pulled me out by the leg, saying you were gone and the Mexicans had stolen you. Then we all started off to chase them and hunt for you."

"But didn't you see the boat was gone?" asked she.

"I only saw you were gone," said Hank, "and the Mexican guys."

"Hank told us they'd stolen you and made off with you," put in George. "I took it for gospel and started right off."

Hank snorted. "What else was a body to think. It gets me! Say, people, what's wrong with this cruise anyhow—look at it."

The idea that his own frightful imagination had not only launched the whole expedition but had also dragged Tommie in, broken up a picture show and wrecked a junk, to say nothing of the later business, never dawned on him or his companions—nor the premonition that his imagination had not done with them yet.

"Where's B. C.?" asked Tommie suddenly.

"Hunting away still," replied George.

"What's in that bundle?"

"Oh, the bundle! Why, it's the boodle. The dagos must have dug it up for we found it in the sack on the mule."

"The jewels!"

"Yep."

"*My!*" said Tommie, her eyes wide and the color coming to her cheeks. "*Why* didn't you tell me?" She seized on the bundle.

"I'll help," said Hank, "you'll dirty your fingers with the string."

"Bother my fingers."

She had the string off and then unwrapping the oilskin cover, came on sackcloth. Opening this unskillfully, the whole contents shot out on her knees and the sand. Diamond rings, ten silver spoons, a diamond necklace, blazing huge and vulgar, a diamond hair ornament like a tiara, a ring set with rubies, another with emeralds, a woman's wrist watch set with diamonds, and a silver pepper pot. Twenty or thirty thousand dollars' worth of plunder, at least, and shouting with individuality. One could almost see the fat woman who once wore the necklace and tiara. No wonder that the pirates had determined to give them a year to cool amid the sands of the Bay of Whales.

"My!" said Tommie again, her eyes glittering as she gathered the things together carefully, spread the sackcloth and put them out. She brooded on them without another word, picking them up one by one, trying the rings on, holding up the necklace for all to admire—even the chinks, who had drawn close and who seemed to understand that these were the things for which they had been digging.

Then she put the lot on for fun, the tiara that nearly came over her ears, the necklace that nearly came down to her waist, the rings that hung loose on her fingers. Then making a fan out of an old piece of paper she got up and promenaded the sands, gathering up imaginary skirts and looking disdain upon her recent friends, till even the chinks laughed. Then, all at once, she quit fooling, became preternaturally grave and, sitting down again, did the things up in the sackcloth and oilskin. George thought that she heaved a sigh as she tied the string. Hank noticed that she made a reef knot with her capable fingers and the fact gave him another little heart punch.

"They're worth a lot," said George.

"Thousands and thousands of dollars,"

said Tommie. "Here, take them and hide them somewhere safe."

Hank took the bundle. "I'm going to take them right aboard," declared he, "and shove them in the locker with the ship's money. I won't trust them another minute on this beach."

"Why, don't be a fool," said George. "We'll all be going aboard when Candon comes. We've done our work here."

"It's just on sundown," said Hank, "and if he's not here in another half hour we'll have to stick the night. Can't get all these tents moved in the dark and I'm not going to leave 'em. It's ten to one we'll stick till morning and I'm not going to have those jewels stay the night with us. Something would happen sure—maybe those dagos would come back with more chaps to help them."

"Not they! They won't stop running till next week."

"All the same these things have played us a good many tricks and I want to stop their game."

"Are you superstitious?" asked Tommie.

"Not a bit, only I've got a hunch that they're better on board."

"Oh, then take them, take them," said George, "if you must. And see here, you'd better bring off those two automatics and some cartridges in case we don't get off tonight and those scamps make trouble."

"Sure," said Hank. Off he started calling the chinks to man the boat, while George and Tommie set to and began to build the fire.

Tommie every now and then took a glance toward the cliffs as though the absence of Candon were worrying her. When Hank came back he found them seated by the fire with the supper things spread, but no Candon.

"Hasn't B. C. come back?" asked Hank, sitting down.

"No," replied George.

The thought that he was still hunting for Tommie and that they had returned and were seated comfortably beginning their supper came not only to the pair of them, but evidently, by her manner, to Miss Coulthurst. They tried to explain that they had come back not to give up the hunt but to get the chinks to help to comb the place, but the explanation seemed to fall rather flat.

"I hope to goodness nothing has happened to him," said George weakly.

"Maybe you'd better go and see," suggested Tommie.

Hank jumped to his feet.

"Come on," he cried. George was scrambling up also when a hail came from toward the cliffs and they saw the figure of B. C. in the first of the starlight, coming toward them across the sands. He spotted the figure of Tommie long before he reached them, and concluded that the others had found her and brought her back. Walking like a man dead beat he came up to them and cast himself down to rest on the sand.

"Thank God," said he.

"Where you been?" asked George.

"Been! Half over Mexico—kicking dagos—hunting. Give's a drink. Say"—to Tommie—"where did they find you?"

Tommie's only answer was a little peal of laughter.

"She'd never gone," said Hank. Then he told the whole story.

Candon said nothing. Not one of them guessed the revolution that had suddenly taken place in his dead-tired mind. Beyond the bald fact that he had made a fool of himself hunting for hours for something that was not there stood the truth that Fate had worked things so that whenever he moved toward a decent act he got a snub on the nose from somewhere. His attempt to return those jewels to their proper owners had brought the whole McGinnis crowd on top of him and had made him start on this mad expedition; his attempts to rescue Tommie from the white slavers had made him ridiculous—anyhow to himself; this wild search of the last few hours had made him ridiculous in the eyes of his companions.

One thing called up another till the hell broth in his mind, the feeling of "damn everything," was almost complete. What completed it was Tommie's spurt of laughter. That was fatal.

He said nothing but began eating his supper with the rest. Then Hank, suddenly remembering the jewels, broke out, "Say! I forgot, we've got a surprise for you. I'll give you a hundred guesses and I'll bet you won't tell what it is."

"It's the boodle," cut in George.

Then they told. Candon showed neither pleasure nor surprise. He went on eating.

"Well, where is it?" said he at last.

"On the yacht," said Hank. "I rowed

over and stowed it away, just before you came."

"You rowed over and stowed it away? What did you do that for?"

"Safety."

"Safety! Did you expect I was going to steal it?"

"Lord! B. C.," said Hank, "what's getting at you?"

"Nothing," said Candon, suddenly blazing out. "Well, as you have taken the stuff on board, you can take it back to San Francisco without me. The expedition's ended. You start off back to-morrow. I stay here. I've fulfilled my part of the contract. I've brought Vanderdecken on board your ship and I've brought you to the stuff and you've got it. In the contract I was to receive so much money down. I don't want it. I can hoof it down to Mazatlan and get work among the Mexicans. You can leave me one of the automatics and some cartridges. That's all I want."

George sat aghast; so did Hank. It was as if B. C. had turned inside out before their eyes.

"Look here," said George at last, "that's nonsense. We are all good friends. Vanderdecken has nothing to do with us or that boodle. Good Lord! What's come to you?"

"It's come to me that I'm sick of the show," said B. C. "I've done my part, the expedition is over as far as I'm concerned, and I stay here. You'll be leaving early in the morning?"

"Sunup," said Hank.

"Well, you can leave a couple of days' grub for me; but I'll see you in the morning before you start."

They saw he was in earnest and in no temper for discussion. Neither of them spoke. Then Candon, having finished, got up and walked down to the beach. Tommie had not said a word.

George was the first to speak.

"What ails him? What in the nation's got into his head?"

"Search me," said Hank in a dreary voice, "unless it's this expedition. I was saying before he came back there was something wrong with it, has been from the start. I dunno. Well, here we are, and how are we to leave him without money or anything? Why I've got as fond of that chap as if he was my own brother and he turns like that on us!"

"Maybe he's tired," said Tommie, "and if you talk to him in the morning you'll find him different."

"I don't believe it," said George. "He means what he says. Question is, what's turned him on us?"

"Turned him on us? Why, my taking those rotten diamonds off to the ship—what else? I didn't know he'd take it like that, how could I?"

"Then go and explain," said George, "go and tell him you're sorry."

"Me! What's there to be sorry for?"

"Well, it was a fool's game, anyhow."

"Which?"

"Carting that stuff off on board."

"We ain't all as clever as you, I know," said Hank. "S'pose those Mexicans come down to-night on us, you'll see if it was a fool's game getting the valuables off first. I tell you we ought to have cleared off this evening. It's plain not safe sticking here the night. We *would* have cleared only for B. C. fooling about."

"He was looking for me," quietly put in Tommie.

Hank, squashed for the moment, was silent; then he said, "Well, maybe. But here we are, in about as dangerous a fix as people could be, and you talk of fools' games."

"By the way," said George, "have you brought off those automatics?"

"Those which—automatics? Lord, no—I forgot, clean! How's a chap to be remembering things running backward and forward from that damned ship?"

"Well, it's not the first thing you've forgotten, and if you're so anxious about the Mexicans you'd better go and fetch them."

"Me! I ain't going to fetch and carry any more. Go yourself!"

"Pistols aren't any use," said Tommie suddenly, as if awaking from a reverie; "if those people come there'll be so many of them it won't be any use firing at them; and if any of them were shot we might get into trouble."

"Seems to me we're mighty near it."

"Mighty near which?" asked a voice.

Candon had returned and was standing just outside the fire zone. He seemed in a slightly better temper.

"Why, Hank here has forgot to bring off the automatics," said George, "and he's afraid of those Mexicans coming down on us in the night."

"Lord, I hadn't thought of that," said

B. C. almost in his old voice. "Well, I'll go off and fetch them. I've got to fetch a couple of things I've left in my locker anyway." He turned.

"Fetch the ammunition if you're going," said George.

"Sure."

They heard him calling the chinks, then the boat put off.

"Seems he's still bent on quitting," said Hank.

George yawned.

If the air of the Bay of Whales could be condensed and bottled, morphia would be a drug in the drug market. It had the two men now firmly in its grip and they determined to turn in without waiting for B. C. Tommie, retiring to her tent, seemed as heavy with sleep as the others. She was not. She did not undress but just lay down on a blanket, her chin in the palms of her hands and gazing out on the starlit beach as though hypnotized.

She was gazing at Candon.

He was the only man she had ever thought twice about; he was different from the others though she could not tell how. The fact that he was Vanderdecken did not make this difference, nor the fact that he had picked her up and literally run away with her, nor the fact he had beautiful blue eyes. He was just different and she felt that she would never meet any one like him again.

Yet he was going to leave them. Instinctively she knew why. That outburst when they found the cache sanded over gave her some knowledge of his temperament and the fact that he had almost killed himself hunting for her gave her some hint of his care for her—and she had laughed at him. She remembered how he had said: "Thank God!" on finding her safe.

She rose and came out of the tent onto the sands. She had come to the determination that if he stayed behind here on the morrow it would not be her fault; and coming down to the sea edge she sat down on the beach to wait for the returning boat.

The sound of the waves on the long beach came mixed with the breath of the sea. The reefs spoke sometimes and the wind blowing from the northwest stirred the sand with a silken whispering sound that would die off to nothing and then return.

Sometimes she fancied that she could hear the creak of oars and, rising, strained her eyes to catch a glimpse of the coming boat. Nothing. She could not see the anchor light of the *Wear Jack* owing to the faint sea haze. Taking her seat again on the sands she resumed her watch while the time passed and the stars moved and the tide went farther out.

Then she rose. Candon was evidently remaining for the night on the *Wear Jack;* there was no use in waiting longer. Still, she waited, standing and looking out to sea. Then at last she turned and came back to the tents.

She would see him in the morning, but the others would be there—it would be quite different then. The moment had passed and gone and would not return.

Arrived at her tent she undressed and got into her pajamas and crawled under a blanket which she pulled over her head. Then, safely hidden and with her face in the crook of her arm, she sniveled and sobbed, remembered she had not said her prayers and said them, sniffed some more and fell asleep. Poor Tommie! She did not know what she wanted but she knew she wanted it. She felt she had lost something but she did not know it was her heart.

CHAPTER XXXII.

GONE!

The sun got up and struck the hills of Sinaloa, the plains of sagebrush, rock and sand, and the sea. The Bay of Whales lit from end to end and shouting with gulls faced an ocean destitute of sign of ship or sail.

George awoke in the tent and gazed for a moment lazily at the honey-colored patch in the sailcloth above his head, where the sun was laying a finger. He heard the waves on the beach and the crying of the gulls. The wind through the tent opening came fresh and pure and he knew it was good to be alive—alive in a clean world where the wind was a person and the sun the chief character, after God's earth and sea. Then Candon came blowing into his mind and he remembered the incidents of the night before and how B. C. had gone off the handle over something, he could not guess what, and how he had fixed to leave them that day—all this in the first few seconds of waking. Then he recognized that Candon was not in the tent and that his blankets were carefully rolled up and stowed for the day. He must have got up early and gone out; prob-

ably he was building the fire. He gave the sleeping Hank a dig and woke him up.

"Hank!" he said.

"Yep?"

"I've been thinking of B. C."

"What's the matter with B. C.?"

"Wake up, you old mud turtle. He's leaving us to-day and we've just got not to let him go."

"Oh, aye," said Hank, remembering things. Then he yawned frightfully, blinked and looked around. "Where's he gone?"

"He's got up early—outside somewhere. Say, we've got to keep him—have a straight talk with him. He's one of the best, for all his queer ways."

"Sure," said Hank.

Fully awake now he rose and slipped into his clothes, George following suit. Hank was the first out. He stepped onto the sand, looked round for Candon and then looked out to sea.

"*Jumping* Moses!"

"What's wrong?" cried George, coming out. "What are you—— Good *gosh!*" He had followed the pointing of Hank's finger. The *Wear Jack* was gone.

Almost at the same moment came Tommie's voice from her tent door: "Why, where's the ship?"

"Gone," said Hank. "Drifted—sunk—but what in the nation could have sunk her? How could she have drifted? Oh, blazes! It can't be that B. C. has bolted with her. Say—Bud——"

"It is," said George; "bolted with her and the boodle. We've been stung—that's all."

"I don't believe it," said Tommie. Her little face looked like a piece of chalk and she was holding on to the tent flap.

"There you are," said Hank. "Nor I. B. C. couldn't do it, that's all. He couldn't do it."

"He's done it," said George. "He was sore about your taking the stuff off to the ship because he intended bunking with it himself—can't you see?"

"Maybe those chinks have taken the ship," said Hank.

George shook his head. "We'd have heard him shout with the wind blowing that way. Besides they couldn't. Not one of them has any notion of navigating her. Can't you see he's got the boodle? He's meant to do this all along when the stuff turned up and he's done it."

"I tell you that chap's a white man," began Hank furiously.

"In spots," said George, "or in streaks—as he said himself. He runs straight for a while, *wants* to run straight and then goes off the other way about. He's a socialist—grand ideas and a slung shot in his pocket."

"Socialist! So'm I."

"No you're not—you're Hank Fisher."

Hank went off a few yards and sat down on the sand and folded his arms and brooded. His good soul had been hit and hit hard. Even while defending Candon he recognized the logic of the situation pointing to the almost unbelievable fact that Candon, yielding to his worse nature, had bolted. Bolted, leaving them stranded on that beach.

He could not but recognize that for a man in Candon's position, leaving morality aside, the move was a good one. His return to San Francisco was impossible; McGinnis would surely turn evidence against him. Leaving the Vanderdecken business aside there was the wrecking of the junk. The *Wear Jack* herself was attainted. All sorts of new ideas began to turn somersaults in Hank's mind as this fact burst fully for the first time on his intelligence.

"Bud," he shouted, "kim here and sit. Where's T. C.? Call her. Sit down."

They came and sat down.

"Folks," said Hank, "here's a new tangle. Hasn't it ever struck into you that the old *Jack's* n' more use to us than an opera hat to a bull? Those movie men don't know her name but they know her make and that she went south, see? And every yacht coming up from the south anything like her will be overhauled by the coast guard, see? Well, suppose we'd put back in her, getting along for the islands, the coast guard would have been sure to board us. They'd have found T. C. aboard and we'd have been dished, straight."

"I hadn't thought it out like that before," said George. "I thought we could have slipped up to San Francisco and then told some yarn."

Tommie said nothing. The color had almost returned to her face but she seemed like a person slightly dazed. No wonder. Despite, or maybe partly because of his confession to her, partly because of his evident care for her and partly because of her newborn care for him, she would have trusted B. C. with anything, her life, her

money, everything—this man who had betrayed her, betrayed Bud and Hank, taken their ship and left them stranded on a hostile beach.

"Well, we couldn't," said Hank. "The fact is the *Wear Jack* was no use to us and maybe it was Providence that made B. C. let us down."

"Maybe," said Tommie, catching at straws, "she drifted away."

"That's what I thought first," said George, "but she couldn't. She was anchored fast. If she had, why she could have put back. What's the good of supposing when the thing's clear as paint. He was boss of the ship, the chinks always looked to him for orders. They'd do whatever he told them and when he went aboard last night and told them to knock off the shackle and drop the anchor chain they wouldn't grumble. If they thought anything they'd think it was part of some move in the game and we were in it. We've made several big mistakes but the biggest was letting that guy be boss."

"Well he was boss, anyhow," said the ingenuous Hank. "He was the best man of us three in the practical business and I'm not saying he wasn't the best in brains. He couldn't run straight, that's all. If he could he might have been president by this."

They all sat silent for a minute, then George sprang to his feet.

"Breakfast," said he.

Not another word was spoken of Candon. It was as though he had been expelled from their minds as from their society.

But they could not expel the situation he had created. Though the *Wear Jack* was no use for taking them back to San Francisco, it could have taken them somewhere —anywhere from that beach where the fume of the sea and the sun and the silence and desolation and the blinding sands and mournful cliffs had already begun to tell upon them now that the place was a prison.

Then there were the Mexicans to be thought of. If those men whom they had kicked and manhandled and robbed of their booty were to return with a dozen others, what would happen? How could two men and a girl put up any sort of fight? And the dreadful thing was Tommie. Tommie who had stuck to them because she was a brick and who, to save them from a ridicule almost as bad as disgrace, had insisted on going on. If she had turned back she might have been safe at Los Angeles now instead of here. This thought hit Bud almost as badly as Hank.

It did not seem to hit Tommie at all. There were moments during the preparation of breakfast when the throat muscles of the redoubtable T. C. made movements as though she were swallowing down the recollection of Candon. But the meal once begun she seemed herself again.

As they ate they discussed the situation in all its bearings. They had provisions enough for three weeks according to Hank's calculations. He suggested that they should hang on just there for a day or two and then, if nothing turned up in the way of a ship, that they should hike down the coast toward the town "that blighter" had spoken of.

"What was the name of it?" asked George.

"Search me," replied Hank, "but it don't matter, the name. It's a town, anyhow."

"And suppose while we're hanging on here those Mexicans come at us?" asked George.

Hank had forgotten the Mexicans.

"If they do," said he, "we'll have to fight them, that's all. We've got the spades and two 'Murricans are a match for a dozen dagos, and there's not likely to be that number."

George got up and walked off down to the sea edge. He seemed to be thinking things over.

Hank found himself alone with Tommie.

"You meant three 'Merricans," said she.

"Sure," said Hank, "you'd put up as good a fight as any of us, I believe."

Hank had never dealt much with womankind, except maybe in that horrible business liaison of his with Mrs. Driscoll, and though he had read the "Poems of Passion," by Ella Wheeler Wilcox he had no language at all to garb his sentiments with, if you can dignify with the title of sentiment a desire to eat Tommie.

He heaved a deep sigh and began tracing patterns on the sand with his finger. The rat-trap inventor was at fault, his ingenuity could not assist him. The civilized man who believed in the sanctity of womanhood and the primitive man who wanted to make a meal of T. C. were at war, but the primitive man was the stronger and was preparing to speak and make a fool of himself when a yell came from George.

"Ship!"

They sprang to their feet and came running to the water's edge. They could see

nothing. Then, following his pointing, away on the sea line they saw what looked like the wing of a fly.

"It's the *Wear Jack,*" said Hank. "No, it ain't! Her canvas wouldn't show as dark as that."

"How's she bearing?" asked George.

"Coming right in, I believe. She's got the wind with her; that's her fore canvas. There'd be more spread if she was sideways to us or tacking against the wind. Yes, she's coming right for us."

"Good," said George.

There was silence for a moment, a silence more indicative than any words could be of the relief that had come to their minds. It was suddenly shattered by Hank.

"She's the *Heart of Ireland!*"

"What you say?" cried George.

"She's the *Heart of Ireland.*"

"How do you know?"

"Lord! how do I know? I know! I feel it. What else can she be? Why, she's *due.* She's just had time to mend herself and put out. What other boat would be putting into this God-forsaken place? And she seems about the size of the *Heart.* We'll soon see. I've got the specification down in my head—that blighter gave it to me—two topmast, fifty-ton schooner, broad beam and dirty as—Hades. Those are her beauty marks—we'll soon see."

"But she'd have passed the *Wear Jack,*" said George.

"Not if the *Jack* went south. And anyhow they'd have passed in the night—wouldn't have seen each other."

"What are we to do?" asked Tommie.

"I'm thinking," said Hank. He looked round, brooded for a moment and then stood looking out to sea. His ingenuity was at work. Then he spoke.

"There are no caves in these cliffs or we might hide there. No use scattering inland. First of all, if these chaps find nothing but the tents they'll think us gone and they'll go off with the tents and grub and everything. Then where would we be? We've got to hide and watch for chances."

"Where?" asked George.

Hank pointed to the big rock before mentioned, shaped like a pulpit that stood close to them by the sea edge.

"There, standing close up to it. We can dodge them when they're coming ashore. Then when they land we can shift round to the north side of it, see?"

"I see," said George, "but where's the use? Suppose we manage to hide entirely from them, where's the use? They'll take the tents and stores as you said—and where will we be?"

"Now see here," said the rat-trap man, "it's ten to one the whole crowd will come ashore leaving only a couple of guys to look after the ship. They'll beach the boat leaving a man to look after her and scatter up to the tents, see?"

"Yes."

"Well, there's a chance that we may be able to make a dash for the boat, knock the chap on the head, push her off and get to the schooner."

"Good!" cried Tommie.

"And suppose there's a lot of fellows on the schooner?" asked George.

"Oh, suppose anything! What do you think this show is? If I know anything of that crowd, it's our lives we are playing for and the chances are a hundred to one against us. It all depends where they beach the boat. Come along, it's time to get to eastward of that rock."

Hank picked up a water breaker and a cup and they moved off to the rock and put it between them and the sea. Before taking shelter Hank shaded his eyes and looked out to sea.

"It'll take them near an hour to get in," said he.

Half an hour passed and then the thirst began. Used as they were to the sun they had never before experienced the ordeal of sitting still with the sun's rays beating on them. Fortunately they wore Panamas and the wind from the sea licked round the rock every little while, bringing a trace of coolness. Hank poured out the water and they drank in turn every now and then. He insisted on wetting Tommie's head occasionally. They talked in whispers and scarcely at all, listening—listening—listening. Time passed bringing gulls' voices, the beat of the little waves on the beach, the silky whisper of the sand. Then suddenly, far away:

Rumble-tumble-tum-tum-tum.

The sound of an anchor chain running through a hawse pipe.

They looked at one another.

"That's the killick," murmured Hank. "It's them right enough. They've come right in, knowing the ground. They wouldn't have been in so quick if they hadn't been used to the place. Listen!"

Time passed and the beach talked, but no sound came from the sea but the sound of the small waves. Tommie suddenly nudged Hank. She nodded toward the cliffs. On the sky edge of the cliffs something black showed; then it withdrew.

"Men," whispered Tommie.

"Mexicans," murmured Hank. The eerie feeling came to him that behind those cliffs, in the gullies, men were swarming—that Sinaloa had beaten up its bandits and desperadoes just as he had expected it would and that the call of the diamonds like the call of a corpse in the desert was bringing the vultures. The Mexicans would connect the approaching McGinnis crowd with the treasure business. If they showed themselves too soon then McGinnis and his men would be frightened off. McGinnis was bad, but the Mexicans were worse. Hank did not often say his prayers but he prayed just then that cunning might be granted to the dagos not to shout before their game was corralled.

He needn't.

There came far-away voices from the sea and the creak of oars—nearer.

"Get your hind legs ready," whispered Hank.

Crash! the oars were in. Then came a burst of yells as though a pack of demons had suddenly been unleashed and unmuzzled. Hank sprang to his feet. Leading the others he dodged round the north side to the seaward side of the rock. On the beach to the south a big boat had been beached. It lay unattended. Like a pack of hounds on a hot scent the McGinnis crowd were racing up toward the tents; you could have covered them with a blanket. Blind to everything but loot and vengeance a trumpet would not have turned them.

Hank seized Tommie by the hand and started.

It was a hundred and fifty yards from the rock to the boat, the going good over a strip of hard sand uncovered by the ebbing tide.

From the boat to the nearest tent was about a hundred yards, the going bad over soft, friable sand.

They had made fifty yards unnoticed when Tommie tripped and fell. Hank, picking her up, flung her on his shoulder.

The ruffians racing from tent to tent, hunting, cursing, rooting about, saw nothing till Pat McGinnis himself, turning from Tommie's tent, empty like the rest, saw the whole of Hank's cards on the table—so to speak.

All but the ace of trumps.

He whipped it from his belt, aimed, took a long shot on chance and leading the others raced back for the sea edge.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

JAKE.

Hank had dropped Tommie into the boat and was striving with George to push off when the crack of the revolver came, followed by the bizz of the bullet, yards out.

"Shove her—shove her!" cried Hank. The huge brute of a scow had settled herself comfortably in the sand as if she meant to take up her residence there. Tommie, tumbling out of the boat nearly as quickly as she had been thrown in, put her shoulder to the stem; Hank and George at either gunnel clutched hard. Hank gave the word and they all heaved together. Next moment they were on board her and she was waterborne.

Hank seized one of the ash sweeps and using it as a pole drove her half a dozen yards, she slued round sidewise, but George in the bow had a sweep out now and with a stroke pulled her nose round while Hank took his seat.

As they got away on her, McGinnis, leading the hunt, was only twenty yards from the sea. He was holding his fire as were the others till they reached the water's edge, when the bang of an old musket that might have landed with Padre Junipero made the echoes jump alive.

The attackers wheeled.

Down through the two defiles and fanning out on the sands, pouring like ants, came the countryside for all it was worth—half a hundred beggars and landed proprietors, *zambos* and *terzerons,* yellow men and men who were almost black, armed with anything and everything and led by the "Dredging Machine." A fellow who had tumbled in his hurry was picking himself up. It was his musket that had gone off by accident.

"Pull!" shouted Hank.

They were saved. The McGinnis crowd like a pack of wild dogs chased by wolves were racing along the water edge toward the south horn of the bay. The Mexicans, faced by the facts of the sand and a proposition in Euclid, had paused for half a moment.

The direct line toward the south horn of the bay was hard going over the soft sand, but it was shorter than making direct for the hard beach. Two sides of a triangle being longer than the third, they took the shorter way.

The rowers, as they rowed, watched the race and saw plainly that McGinnis and his merry men were making good. Then they turned their attention to the ship ahead. She was swinging to the current broadside on to them, a frowzy-looking, two-topmast schooner—the *Heart of Ireland* sure enough.

"Wonder how many chaps are on board," said George.

"We'll soon see," replied Hank.

As they drew closer they saw a man leaning on the rail and watching them through a pair of binoculars. He seemed the only person on the ship.

Closer now, the old schooner began to speak of her disreputability. The paint, in Hank's words, was less paint than blisters; the canvas hurriedly stowed was discolored and patched—old stuff redone by the hand of McGay, that stand-by of small ship owners in these days when a new mainsail for a small boat costs anything from two hundred dollars. Built in 1882 as a trading schooner she had been built a bit too small, but she had looked honest when the fitters and riggers had done with her; honest, clean and homely, in those first days, one might have compared her to a country girl starting for market with a basket a bit too small.

In two years this simple trader had changed her vocation. In thirty-five years she had done pretty much everything that a ship ought not to do—had run guns, run gin and opium, fished in prohibited waters, and in some extraordinary way she bore the stamp of it all. If some ship lover had seen the *Mary Burton*—that was her first name—and the *Heart of Ireland*—which was her last—he might have been excused, if a moral man, for weeping.

"Ahoy!" cried Hank as the boat came alongside grinding the blisters off her. "Fling's a rope there—— Why, good Lord! it's Jake!"

It was. Jake looking just the same as when Hank had fired him off the *Wear Jack*, only now instead of an old cap, he was wearing a dingy white Stetson with the brim turned down. He had come along with the McGinnis crowd partly because he wanted a job and partly because he wanted to see the downfall of Hank. As a matter of fact he had seen the triumph of Hank, if you can call it a triumph, for he had been watching the whole of the proceedings from start to finish. Recognizing the inevitable he made no bones but flung the rope.

"Well, you scoundrel," said Hank as he came on deck, "what you doing here?"

"What you doin' yourself?" said Jake.

"I'll jolly soon show you," said Hank, who had no time to waste in verbal explanation. He seized the scamp by the shoulders, turning him round in some extraordinary way and giving him a shove that sent him running forward two yards. "Get the gaskets off the jib and look slippy about it—quick now or I'll be after you. Bud, I'm going to leave the boat, there's a dinghy aboard and that scow would clutter up the decks too much. Cut her adrift and come on. Clap on to the throat an' peak halyards! Now then, altogether, yeo ho!"

Mainsail and foresail took the wind at last. And what a mainsail it was after the canvas of the *Wear Jack!* Dirty as a dishcloth and patched where a pilot mark had once been. And what sticks after the spars of the *Jack!* From the main boom that had seen better days to the gaff with its wooden jaws bound to creak like a four-post bedstead.

"Now the winch!" cried Hank. "Clap on to the winch and roust her out."

He took the wheel while Jake, Tommie and Bud clapped on to the winch, and as he stood listening to the music of the chain coming in he cast his eyes away toward the south horn of the bay where the McGinnis crew could be seen moving slowly now toward the bay beyond, followed by the Mexicans evidently half beaten, but still doggedly in pursuit.

"She's out of the mud!" cried George.

Hank turned the spokes of the wheel and the *Heart* with all her canvas thrashing took the wind, got steerage way on her and as the anchor came home lay over on the starboard tack. She had been anchored to north of the break in the reefs and this course would take her diagonally through the break.

Hank, who had bitten off a piece of plug tobacco, stood working his lantern jaws as he steered. Gulls raced them as they went and the breeze strengthened up while block, spar, and cordage creaked to the boost of the waves and the slap of the bow wash. They

passed the horn of the northern reef by a short ten yards, the outgoing tide and the south-running current foaming round the rocks like destruction gnashing at them. Then lifting her bowsprit the *Heart* took the great sea, dipping and rising again to the steadily marching swell.

Hank held on; the wind was breezing up strong from the south of west and he was keeping her close hauled. Then, a few miles out with Mexico a cloud on the sea line and the reefs a memory, he spun the wheel and laid her on a due westerly course. He called Jake.

"You can steer?"

"Sure," said Jake.

"Then catch hold and keep her as she is." He stood watching while Jake steered.

That individual, despite the shove he had received, seemed to bear no malice. Absolutely unperturbed he stood with his hands on the spokes, chewing, his eye wandering from the binnacle to the luff of the mainsail.

"Whar's the *Jack?*" he suddenly asked, turning to spit into the starboard scupper.

"What were you doing with those chaps?" countered Hank.

"Me? Them chaps? Why you saw what I was doin', keepin' ship whiles they went ashore. What were *you* doin' with them?"

"Mean to tell me you don't know why they went ashore?"

"Me? Nuthin'. I'm only a foremast hand signed on 'cause I was out of a job. I saw you all scutterin' about on shore, then you comes off and takes the ship—that's all I know."

"Look here," said Hank, "d'you mean to tell me you didn't put the McGinnis crowd on to us before we left San Francisco? D'you mean to say you weren't on the wharf that night when Black Mullins dropped aboard and peeked through the skylight and saw Mr. Candon?"

"Me? Which? Me! N' more than Adam. You're talkin' French."

"Don't bother with him," said George. "Come on down below and let's see what it's like."

They left the deck to Jake, still chewing, and came down the companionway to the cabin where McGinnis and his afterguard had dwelt.

Bunks with tossed blankets showed on either side; aft lay the captain's cabin, door open and an oilskin swinging like a corpse from a nail; above and through the atmosphere of must and bad tobacco, came the smell of the *Heart*, a perfume of shark oil, ineradicable, faint, but unforgetable once smelled. George opened the porthole and Tommie took her seat on a bunk edge, looking round her but saying nothing.

A cheap brass lamp swung from the beam above the table; the table was covered with white marbled oilcloth stained and stamped with the innumerable ring marks from the bottoms of coffee cups; about the whole place was that atmosphere of sordidness and misery that man alone can create.

Tommie sat absorbing it while Hank and George explored lockers and investigated McGinnis' cabin. Then she rose and took off her coat. Then she tore the oilcloth from the table, said, "Faugh!" rolled it up and flung it on the floor.

"Say!" cried she, "isn't there any soap in this hooker?"

"Soap!" cried Hank, appearing from McGinnis' cabin carrying the log book and a tin box. "I dunno. Jake will know."

"Go up and send him down. You can take the wheel for a minute while I get this place clean. Goodness!"

"You wait," said Hank.

He went on deck followed by George and next minute Jake appeared. Despite Tommie's get-up he had spotted her for a girl when she came on board. Not being a haunter of the pictures he had not recognized her. What she was or where she had come from he could not imagine—or what she wanted of him. He was soon to learn.

"Take off your hat," said Tommie. "Now then get me some soap and a scrubbing brush if there is one on this dirty ship."

"Soap!" said Jake.

"Yes, soap."

He turned and went on deck and came back in a minute or so with a tin of soft-soap and a mop.

"I said scrubbing brush."

"Ain't none."

"Well, we'll have to make the mop do. Now go and fetch a bucket of water."

"Ain't enough on board for swillin'."

"There's enough in the sea. We must make it do. Go on and don't stand there scratching your head."

Hank, leaving George at the wheel and coming down half an hour later to see what was going on, returned jubilant.

"She's working that gink like a housemaid. He's washed the table an's scrubbing the floor and she's stripping the blankets off the bunks. She's going to make him wash them. She's a peach."

The tin box with the ship's money—some thousand dollars, and the log lay on the deck. He placed them on one side and then stood erect and walked to the rail. He gazed aft at the far-away shore as if visualizing something there.

"Bud."

"Yep?"

"Nothing's ever got me like she has, right by the neck. I reckon it's a punishment on me for having invented rat traps."

"Oh, don't be an ass."

"Easy to say that."

"Have you told her?"

"Lord, no!"

"Well, go down and tell her and get it over, same as seasickness."

"Bud, I could no more tell her than I could walk into a blazing fiery furnace like those chaps in the Scriptures."

"Why?"

"Because, Bud—— Well, there's two reasons; first of all she'd laugh at me, maybe."

"She would, sure."

"And then—there's a girl——"

"Yes."

"A girl—another girl."

"Mrs. Driscoll?"

"Oh, Lord, no! She ain't a girl. This one I'm telling you of is running a little store of her own in Cable Street, kind of fancy-work business—I've known her a year—Ostrander is her name. Zillah Ostrander. She's running a fancy-work——"

"I know, you've told me; are you engaged to her?"

"Well, we've been keeping company," said Hank, "and it amounts to that."

"You mean you are—then you've no right to bother about Tommie."

"It's she that's bothering me."

"Well, you may make your mind easy. 'S far as I can see she's harpooned—that blighter harpooned her."

"B. C.?"

"Yep—remember her face when he bunked? And ever since she hasn't been the same."

Hank was silent for a moment.

"But, Bud, she couldn't care for that chap after the way he's landed us."

"No, but she cared for him before. And maybe she cares for him still. Lord only knows—women are funny things. Anyhow, you've no right to think of her with that other girl in tow. Why, Hank, you've always been going on about women being saints and all that and now, you old double-dealing——"

"It ain't me," said Hank. "I reckon it's human nature. But I'll bite on the bullet. After all it's not so much as a girl I care for her, but just for herself."

"Well bite on what's her name as well—Beliah——"

"Zillah."

"All the same. Keep thinking of her—and catch hold of the wheel. I want a quiet smoke."

Half an hour later Jake wandered on deck with the mop and the bucket. He looked subdued; and a few minutes later Tommie's head and shoulders appeared.

"The place is pretty clean now," said T. C. "Maybe some of you will get at where the food's stowed and find out what we can have to eat. I'm going 'long to the galley to get the fire on."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

SANTANDER ROCK.

The wind held steady all that day and half the following night, then it died to a tepid breeze just sufficient to keep steerage way on the schooner.

Hank was the first up in the morning, relieving George at the wheel.

After supper on the night before they had made a plan based on the fact that there were enough provisions on board for a three months' cruise for four people. This plan was simple enough. They would put out far to avoid the islands and any bother of complications. Hank's idea was to strike a course nor'west to a point midway between Honolulu and San Francisco, and then make directly for the city of the Golden Gate. They would tell Tyrebuck the truth, but it would be no sin to delude the gaping public with a Hank-constructed yarn, sure that McGinnis or his relations would never dispute it. The only bother was that Tyrebuck would want his ten thousand dollars. If the *Wear Jack* had been wrecked, all would have been well, for the insurance people would have paid. But they had just lost her, as a person might lose a horse or a motor car.

"Of course," said Hank, "there was no

agreement with him. Who'd have ever imagined such a thing as our losing her like that? All the same, I've got to pay old man Tyrebuck; it's a debt of honor. I'll have to mortgage the trap, that's all."

"I'll go half," said George.

"No, you won't. I was the borrower, this expedition was mine, if I'd got the twenty-five thousand reward, I'd have stuck to it."

"Say," said George.

"Yep."

"You told me you'd written a story once."

"What about it?"

"Well, write the whole of this expedition up and sell it to THE POPULAR, if you want money."

"B' gosh!" said Hank, "that's not a bad idea—only it would give the show away."

"Not a bit. Pretend it's fiction."

"It sounds like fiction," said Tommie. "I don't mind. You can stick me in as much as you like."

"I'll do it, maybe," said Hank.

But there was another point. Wallacks and their wrecked junk and Tommie and her story. The public would want to know the particulars of her abduction and Wallack would want compensation. Althusen and Moscovitch and Mrs. Raphael would not be behindhand in their wants, either.

"Leave it to me," said Miss Coulthurst. "When we get to San Francisco just let me slip on shore, and I'll take the first train to Los Angeles and I'll fix it. I'll tell old Wallack the whole truth. He won't want compensation. I reckon the advertisement he's had will be enough for him. And the film wasn't damaged—the reel was safe in one of those tents."

They left it at that, ignorant of the new development impending.

Hank took the wheel and George snuffed out the binnacle lights. It was day though the sun had not yet broken the morning bank on the eastern horizon.

"There's a big rock on the port bow," said George, "away over there. It's the Santander I believe—remember? It's on the chart. Where's Jake?"

"Right," said Hank. "Where's Jake? I let him turn in ten minutes ago. He's in the fo'c's'le."

"Well, I'll go and make some coffee," said George. "Keep her as she goes."

He disappeared and Hank, left alone, stood at the wheel, the warm wind gently lifting his hair and his hawk eyes wandering from the binnacle to the far-off rock and from the rock to the sea line. Ten minutes passed and then George appeared, a cup of coffee in his hand.

"Shove her on the deck for a minute," said Hank, "and have a look with those binoculars. Something funny about that rock, seems to me."

George placed the cup on the deck, fetched the old binoculars Jake had been using the day before, and leveled them at the rock.

"Ship piled on the north side," said George. "I can see the masts; some sort of small hooker or another. It's the Santander rock, can't be anything else—there's nothing else of any size marked down just here except the Tres Marias Islands and they are to the south."

"Well, we'll have a look at her," said Hank. "There's maybe some poor devils on board. She's flying no signals, is she?"

"No, she's signal enough in herself."

Just then Tommie came on deck.

She had a look through the binoculars and then went off to the galley with George to see about breakfast. McGinnis and his crew had evidently plenty of cash or credit, to judge by the condition of the lazaret and storeroom. When Tommie and George had satisfied their wants, Hank, giving them the deck, came down.

When he returned on deck the schooner was closing up with the rock and the wreck was plainly visible to the naked eye, with the gulls shouting around her.

The Santander rock, shaped and spired like a cathedral, runs north and south, three hundred yards long, two hundred feet high, caved here and there by the sea and worn by wind and rain into ledges and depressions where the gulls roost—where they have roosted for ten thousand years.

It is the top of a big submarine mountain that rises gradually from the depth of a mile. Quite inshore, on the northern side, the lead gives a depth of only twenty fathoms, gradually deepening as you put away by five fathoms to the hundred yards till suddenly the lead finds nothing. There must be a sheer, unimaginable cliff just there some three quarters of a mile high!

It was on the north side of this great rock which is at once a monstrous and a tragic figure that the wreck was skewered, listing to starboard, her sticks still standing but

her canvas unstowed. The crew had evidently piled her there. Perhaps in the dark.

Drawing close to her, the stern of her somehow seemed familiar and the fact that she was a yacht became apparent. It was Hank who voiced the growing conviction in their minds.

"Boys!" cried Hank, "she's the *Wear Jack!*"

George and Tommie were the only boys on that deck beside himself, but Tommie did not laugh. She heaved a deep breath and stood with her hands on the rail and her eyes fixed on the wreck.

"She is!" said George. "Look at her paint. Lord, this is lovely! That blighter has piled her."

"And got off in the boat," said Hank. "The boat's gone—they'd have easy lowered her over the starboard side."

"What you going to do?" asked the other. "Shall we board her?"

"Sure," said Hank. "Roust out Jake and get ready to drop the hook if we can find anchorage. Get the lead ready."

George ran to the fo'c's'le and rousted out Jake who came on deck rubbing his eyes.

"Why there's the blasted old *Jack!*" cried he. "Piled!" He clapped his hand on his thigh, then fetched the lead at the order of Hank and hove it. Forty fathoms rocky bottom, was the result. Then, as they came slowly up, the depth shoaled.

"Get ready with the anchor," cried Hank. He brought the *Heart* along till they were almost abreast of the wreck and at a safe distance; then in thirty fathoms the anchor was dropped and the *Heart* slowly swung to her moorings.

The dinghy was lowered and Hank and George got in.

Yes, it was the *Wear Jack* right enough, lying there like a stricken thing, the gentle list bringing her starboard rail to within a few feet of the blue lapping swell. Gaffs brought down on the booms, booms unsupported by the topping lifts, boat gone, she made a picture of desolation and abandonment unforgetable, seen there against the grim, gray background of the rock.

"Well, he's made a masterpiece of it," said Hank as they tied on and scrambled on board. "He sure has."

They were turning aft along the slanting deck when up through the cabin hatch came the head and shoulders of a man, a man rubbing sleep from his eyes. It was Candon.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"CANDON."

Candon deserted by the chinks just as he had deserted his companions on the beach.

"It's the blighter!" cried Hank.

Candon, as startled as themselves, wild-eyed and just roused from profound sleep, standing now on deck staring at Hank, took the insult right in his teeth. He drew back a bit, glanced over, saw the *Heart* and turned to George.

"What's this?" said Candon. "Where the hell have you come from?"

"Where you left us stranded on that beach," replied George. "Where you left us when you bunked with the ship and the boodle."

Candon's face blazed up for a second. Then he got a clutch on himself and seemed to bottle his pride and his anger. He folded his arms and stared at the deck planking without speaking. He rocked slightly as he stood, as though unsure of his balance. He seemed to have no sense of shame. Caught and confronted with his deed he did not seem even to be searching for excuses. There was a frown on his brow and his lips were compressed.

Suddenly he spoke.

"Well," said Candon, "you've given me a name. What more have you to say?"

"Nothing," said George.

Candon turned, spat viciously over the rail and laughed, an odious sneering laugh that raised the bristles on Hank.

"It's easy to laugh," said Hank, "but it's no laughing matter to us. We've lost the *Wear Jack*, we've lost the boodle, we've lost our time and we've been played a damn dirty trick, about as dirty as the trick the chinks seem to have played on you."

Candon was not laughing now. He had turned to the starboard rail and was standing looking at the *Heart*. Tommie on the deck was clearly visible. She was looking at the *Wear Jack*, then she turned away and went below as though to escape from the sight of him.

Candon gripped the rail tighter and heaved a deep breath. He turned to the others.

"So I've played you a dirty trick," said Candon. "Well, if I hadn't you'd have sus-

pected me all the same. You'd never have said to yourselves, 'Maybe he didn't; let's ask him.' "

"Ask him!" said Hank. "What's the use? But I ask you now—did you take that boat and go off to the *Wear Jack* for those automatics leaving us there on that beach without pistols or means of fighting if the Mexicans came?"

"I did," said Candon, a curious light in his blue eyes.

"Did you sail off and leave us there?"

"I did."

"Well then, there's no use talking."

"Not a bit," said George.

"You finished?" asked Candon.

"Yep."

"Well, then, that's Pat McGinnis' boat. He's been down to the bay—must have been or you wouldn't have collared it. What you done with him?"

"That's nothing to you," said Hank.

"A minute," said George. "We've left him and his men there and we collared his boat, but we played the game he forced on us and we played it straight."

"So you say," said Candon. "How'm I to know?"

"You suspect us!" fired Hank.

"And why not? You suspected me. The whole three of you jumped on me like this directly you came on board, never asked a question. Not you! Because you weren't true friends, hadn't the makin's of friendship in you! Never asked for reasons."

Hank flushed. "Good Lord!" said he, "you mean to say you had a reason for leaving us like that?"

"No, I hadn't," replied the other, "but that's nothing. It's nothing if I'm the biggest blackguard on earth, as I intend to be. For what's the good of being honest when you're wrote down a rogue out of hand the first traverse that seems suspicious—even if you are a rogue. Why, God bless my soul! Them diamonds! You wouldn't trust them on the beach with me! You must take and shove them aboard the *Jack*."

"I never thought of you," said Hank. "I was thinking of the Mexicans coming down on us."

"Maybe," said Candon. "So you say, but how'm I to know?" He spoke with extraordinary bitterness.

To George the whole thing was beyond words, the evidence of a mentality bordering on the insane. Here was a man guilty of the betrayal of his companions, guilty of leaving them marooned on a hostile beach; yet he was not only unashamed but highly indignant that they should have suspected him and declared him guilty offhand. It was true there was something in what he said; they had taken his action as the action of a rogue almost from the first go off; but they could not have done otherwise. George was determined to put this point right.

"Look here," he said, "we might have thought you put off for some reason other than making away with that boodle, if you hadn't said you were going to leave us."

"I said I was going to stick in Mexico," replied Candon. "But there's no use in talking any more. Question is what to do now. I can't stick here and I don't want to go on the *Heart*, unless I berth forward and help to work the ship. You can put me ashore somewhere."

"You'll have to berth with Jake," said Hank. "He's the chap that was on the quay that night we put off and gave the show away to McGinnis."

"He'll do," said Candon, "I reckon he's good enough for me."

"Well, you'd better get your things then," said George.

They went down into the cabin one after the other, Candon leading.

The first things that struck Hank's eye, were the automatic pistols lying on the tray shelf where he had seen them last. Hank went to his bunk where he had hid the diamonds. The parcel was gone.

"I suppose the chinks took the boodle as well as the boat," said he.

"That's so," replied Candon.

"Seems to me you didn't make much of a fight seeing you had those pistols."

"I didn't make any fight at all."

Hank sniffed. George said nothing. They were busy now collecting their property. The chinks had touched nothing but the diamonds. Hadn't time, most likely, to think of anything but escape from the wreck and the chance of being found by some ship on the vessel they had helped Candon to run away with.

"What made you show them the diamonds?" asked Hank as he stuffed Tommie's possessions into a bag.

"I didn't," said Candon.

"Then who told them?"

"The chap who brought them on board."

"That was me. I said nothing."

He remembered how Tommie had put the things on and how the two chinks had seen her. They had rowed him off with the package and might have given the news to the others. However, it didn't matter much and he was inclined for no more talk with B. C. Felt he had lowered himself already by speaking on the matter at all to the blighter.

Then they put the dunnage on deck and transshipped it in two journeys to the *Heart*. Tommie was on deck again when Candon came on board. She just nodded to him and then turned to help getting the things down to the cabin. Candon's lot went into the fo'c's'le. Then he, Jake and George set to on the windlass getting the anchor chain in.

It was the queerest and weirdest business, for B. C. showed neither shame nor irritation nor anger. A tremendous placidity seemed to have fallen upon him, almost a mild cheerfulness. He worked away and spoke to no one. He might have been an absolute stranger, a new hand just signed on.

When the *Heart* was under way Hank and George picked watches. Hank had first call and picked Jake. George said nothing. Candon had fallen to him automatically.

Then Candon went down into the fo'c's'le to arrange his things and see after his bunk. With Hank at the wheel, the schooner lay again on her old course, the far-off crying of the gulls round Santander rock following them like the voice of mockery.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

JAKE IS FIRED AGAIN.

They had left Cancer far behind. They had rejected Hank's first idea of steering out toward Honolulu and then making for San Francisco. They were taking the shortest way possible home, shaving the Channel Islands and almost careless about being stopped. They wanted to finish the voyage as quickly as possible.

Candon there in the fo'c's'le made his presence felt right through the ship; it was as though he had died and his ghost were haunting them. He never spoke unless in reply to orders. He seemed living in a world of his own, a silent, secretive world where emotions were not. They began to appreciate the fact that they had shipped in San Francisco, not an ordinary sailorman with blue eyes, but a personality absolutely outside the ambit of ordinary experience.

"It's getting on my spine," said Hank one day as he sat in the fusty cabin smoking with George. "The chap seems gone dead. No shame nor nothing. Just as if he'd never seen us before—unless he gets an order, and then he jumps to it."

"It's got on T. C.'s spine, too," said George. "Damn him, she's not the same. I see her staring in front of her sometimes as if she was looking at ghosts. She never laughs and she's off her feed."

"He's worse than a cargo of skeletons," said Hank, "and I've noticed T. C. I'm not thinking any more of her, Bud, in that way, but it gets me to see her crumpled. What are women made of anyhow? Seems to me if they once get gone on a chap they go clean mushy for good. And such a chap! Why, I heard Jake joshing him in the fo'c's'le only yesterday—Jake!—and he took it like a lamb. Gets me."

He got up and took some little photographs from a locker. They had salved George's kodak and developer from the *Wear Jack* and Hank, just before starting, had taken half a dozen snaps of the *Jack* lying piled on the rocks. He had done this for no sentimental reasons but as evidence whereby Tyrebuck could collect his insurance money. He looked at them now with glowing satisfaction, they were the only bright spots in this new business.

"Well," said he, "there's one thing. I won't have to pay Tyrebuck his ten thousand. Luck's been playing pretty dirty tricks on us, but she's let up for once—unless she piles us same as she did the *Jack*."

Keeping as they were, well to outward of the longitude of Guadalupe, there was little fear of them hitting anything except a derelict. They passed and were passed by vessels—tanks and great four-masters battered by Cape Horn or making south to meet him. The traffic has increased somewhat nowadays in the waters between Panama and San Francisco, it has decreased between Panama and the Horn, and is still decreasing. The Horn, that frightful criminal standing there facing the ceaseless march of the mountainous waves, has come to recognize the hatred of man. Day by day the ships that pass him grow fewer, till a day may come when they cease, leaving him in loneliness forever.

On the day that they passed the latitude

of Santa Catalina Island, out of sight far to starboard, an incident occurred.

Hank had already noticed the attitude of Jake toward Candon. Jake had evidently been putting two and two together and arriving at conclusions not far wrong. The attitude of the afterguard toward B. C. completed the matter.

On this day Hank coming up to relieve George at the wheel found Tommie talking to George. At the same moment Jake rose from the fo'c's'le hatch to relieve Candon. Candon's back was turned to Jake who wished to pass him.

"Now then, you big stiff," cried Jake, "shift yourself, will you?"

Then the explosion came.

Candon wheeled, and next moment Jake, caught by the waistband, went flying over the port rail, tossed away like a rag doll; the next, Candon was after him; the next, the *Heart of Ireland,* answering to the helm, was turning and coming up into the wind with all her canvas thrashing.

"Over with the dinghy," cried George, giving the wheel to Tommie and letting go the halyards. Tommie, without a word, watched as the two men got the dinghy afloat. Then she was alone.

She ran to the rail for a moment and saw, away on the lifting swell, the heads of Candon and Jake close together, Candon evidently supporting the other and the boat making straight for them.

Ten minutes later the boat was back and Jake, half drowned, was being hauled on board, Candon helping. Then Candon took him down to the fo'c's'le to revive him. The *Heart* was put on her course again and the incident was closed.

Next day, Jake, subdued, went on with his work and Candon with his, absolutely as though nothing had happened.

The day after that, with the American coast showing to starboard and San Francisco not far ahead, Candon spoke to Hank.

"May I ask for the loan of your stylographic pen?" said Candon.

"Sure," said Hank. "Do you want some paper?"

"I was going to ask for some," said the other.

Hank went below and fetched up some note paper, some envelopes and the pen.

"Thanks," said Candon and went off to the fo'c's'le. It was his watch below.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE ANCHOR TAKES THE MUD.

Some days later, toward noon, the *Heart of Ireland,* with the northwest wind and a flooding tide, was making to enter the Golden Gate.

It was a perfect day. Tamalpais on the port bow showed clear against a diamond-bright blue sky. Astern lay the sea of adventure and romance, blue as when first sighted by Cortez.

Hank was at the wheel and feeling pretty nervous of the bar, when Candon, who had just come on deck, came aft.

"I'll take you in," said Candon. He took the spokes and Hank, walking to the starboard rail, stood close to George watching the land. Then they moved a bit more forward to talk.

"What's T. C. doing?" asked Hank.

"Down below," said George, "getting things together. She's not likely to come up till he's off."

"You've fixed things with him?"

"Yep. We'll drop anchor off Tiburon, I'll row him ashore in the dinghy. Wouldn't take money—says he's got twenty dollars and it's all he wants. Lord, Hank! I'd give twenty hundred dollars if this hadn't happened. Twenty thousand, for I liked him. I did. What is it makes chaps run crooked that were built to run straight?"

"Search me," said Hank.

The *Heart* began to take the tumble of the bar; they thrashed through and then came the old familiar places, Lime Point, the Presidio, the Bay—breezed up and showing the same old ships and traffic, the ferryboats running like pond insects, the junks, the steamers with rust-red funnels, the pleasure yachts, the oyster boats.

As they drew on to Tiburon a white steam yacht passing in the distance sent the music of a band along the breeze. It was playing "Suwanee." Hank went below. For all his leathery old face he was far more emotional than George, and his mind, for all his will power, would keep jumping over the barrier of B. C.'s atrocious act to the old days when he had loved B. C. as a man and brother.

Tommie was in the after cabin and invisible, and Hank, alone, sat down at the table and leaned his arms on it, staring at the grain in the wood and listening. Leaning like this, suddenly a tear that seemed in

an awful hurry raced down his right cheek. He did not know it. He was talking to himself, repeating the same words over and over again:

"Damn scoundrel—damn scoundrel—damn scoundrel!"

Then suddenly, way off, a voice on deck gave an order and the sound of the anchor chain rasped through the ship. The anchor was down. Other sounds came that told him what was going on. Then silence.

He came up. There was no one on deck but Jake chewing and spitting overside. Away on the water, making for the wharf, was the dinghy with George rowing and Candon in the stern. Hank stood watching for a moment, calling up in his mind the day when, talking to George in the cabin of the *Wear Jack,* Candon first came on board. He could see him plainly as he stood in the doorway, huge, friendly looking, with those eyes—the clear, blue, truthful eyes of a child. He called up all those discussions of an evening when George was ashore and Candon hiding from McGinnis and his men, those long talks covering the world and men and women—including Ella Wheeler Wilcox. The thing made him feel frightened, as though the solid deck beneath his feet were threatening to dissolve.

B. C. had been in earnest during those conversations, dead earnest. Yet look what he had done. If that were so, how was he—Hank—to make sure he wasn't as bad as B. C.? Good one moment, bad the next! He tried to recall all the mean things he had ever done, going right back to his childhood. He couldn't remember anything in particular except nicking some apples off a stall. Then he gave up thinking and came below where he found Tommie who had finished putting things straight.

She looked pale and pretty miserable and Hank's heart went out to her so that he might have revealed what was in it only for his recollection of Zillah, backed by Candon. Providence also helped, for at that moment through the open ports he heard a quick-running launch checking her speed and coming washing alongside. A voice hailed Jake.

"It's the port man," said Hand. He darted up the companionway, looked over and saw the port authority man. It was old Captain Scudder, a friend.

"Hullo, Hank!" cried Scudder. "Lord bless my soul, where have you sprung from? Where's the old *Wear Jack?"*

"Come on board," said Hank, helping him up. "Come along down—this is better'n beans! Thought it might be some chap I didn't know."

"Got the Dutchman?" asked Scudder as he came down the companionway.

"Well you might almost say I have," replied Hank. "But I'll tell you the yarn."

Tommie had retired into the after cabin and they sat down while Hank, knowing the man he was speaking to, gave his story with big cuts, but all essentials.

"So you see," finished Hank, "McGinnis is down and out, can't come back to San Francisco with the fear of us on top of him. He was Vanderdecken, practically speaking. But I've got some of his money and this old schooner to hand over to his wife if he's got one."

"Well, if you ask me, he's got a widow—if I know anything of those Mexicans," replied Scudder. "Yes, he had a wife; she lives in Lincoln Street and we'll fix it with her. Listen, there's a boat come alongside."

It was George returned. He came down and took a hand while they debated matters with Scudder.

"Take my advice," said the captain, "and keep your heads shut. You piled and lost the *Wear Jack* and came home in a schooner that happened along. Tell that to your friends. I'll smother the yarn as far as my side lies and I'll look after Jake. There's no use in stirring up trouble. Why, it might mean a dust up with Mexico. Don't bother about being joshed at not bringing Vanderdecken home. He's half forgot. There's an election on. You know San Francisco. As for that cinema company and the show of theirs you bust up—Wallack and Jackson it was—there was a big story about it in the papers. But Wallack and Jackson is bust themselves—a week ago they went, with half a dozen others. Why, half Los Angeles has gone ruined, overcapitalized or something, payin' them movie stars as much in a week as another man could make in a year."

"Well, that's a comfort," said Hank, forgetting Tommie and her means of livelihood.

Then Scudder heaved himself up and took his leave and Tommie came out of the after cabin.

"Say," said Hank, suddenly remembering

the importance of Scudder's news and recognizing the gravity of it to her, "Old Scudder, the port man, has been, and we've fixed everything up all right. But he's brought bad news. Your show has bust."

"Which?" asked Tommie.

"Jackson and what's-his-name."

"How?"

"Oh, half Los Angeles has gone bust and they went with it."

"I don't wonder," said Tommie. "It has been going a long time. Well, it doesn't matter to me. I've been careful and put by. I've thirty thousand dollars laid by with Aunt Coulthurst. She lives in Montgomery Street and I'm tired of the movies anyway. I want real life and I'm going to get it."

"How?" asked Hank.

"Ranch."

"Where?"

"Where I was born. Texas. There's air there, and life."

"Sure," said Hank.

"I'll buy a ranch and run it. It's a better life than being thrown out of windows for fools to look at or dropping from aëroplanes."

"Sure," said Hank.

"Well," said Tommie, taking her seat for a moment on a bunk side and speaking as if in a reverie, "I suppose this is the end of our trip. It's been queer and we've had tight shaves, but I wouldn't have missed it for earths. It's taught me more than I ever knew and it's made me have no fear in striking out for myself in life. I was never afraid of things, but I used to be frightened of life and what was to come the day after next, and I reckon that's clean gone."

"What are you going to do now, when you get ashore?" asked George.

"I'm going to Aunt Coulthurst—No. 16 Montgomery Street is her address, and don't you forget it. Come and see us."

"Sure," said Hank.

"Come Sunday. You'll love her and—and"—finished Miss Coulthurst, with a catch in her voice—"I want her to thank you, for you've both been vury—vury—good to me."

Hank seemed swallowing something.

"We'll come with pleasure," said George.

There was a pause during which George took a letter from his pocket and gave it to Hank. It was a letter Candon had given him at parting. It had been written on the voyage with the stylographic pen he had borrowed and it was addressed to Hank Fisher.

" 'Scuse me," said Hank, and as Tommie rose to get her hat before going he opened the letter and began to read.

He hadn't been reading long when his jaw began to drop. He stopped dead and stared before him, took up the letter again, then handed it to George.

"That does me," said Hank. "Read it—read it out—read it!"

Tommie stood by while George read out the letter. This is a verbatim copy:

"You called me a blighter. I am, maybe, but not that sort. Right away from the first you said to yourselves, the whole three of you, that this chap Candon had let you down, gone off with the ship and boodle. You asked me had I gone aboard for those pistols, and I said I had. You asked me had I sailed off and left you, and I said I had. You asked me had I any reason for going, meaning, in your left-handed way, was I a blackguard or not, and I said I hadn't. I hadn't. I was took.

"I'll tell you. When I left the beach that night and got the chinks to row me aboard for those automatics I found the cabin on board lit, the bunk bedding all pulled about and everything upside down and Charlie down there putting things to rights. I said to myself: 'That's Hank's work. The chinks have nosed the diamonds and been on the search and got them, to judge by the mess they've made. I saw it was serious but said nothing, went to the locker for the guns and while my back was turned, Charlie slipped on deck.

"The guns were there, the chinks had been too busy to hunt for them. I took one of the automatics and saw it was loaded. As I was handling it I heard the door of the cabin hatch shut and knew at once I was bottled and cursed myself for being such a fool for not getting on deck quicker. I remembered the galley hatch and made for it nearly killing myself against the fo'c's'le bulkhead. The galley hatch was shut. I made back for the cabin and tried to burst the door. It was held like a rock by the bolts and something shoved against it. I thought of firing an automatic out of one of the ports for help, till I remembered you had no boat. If I'd once dreamed that you'd have suspected me, I'd have fired the shot. But I could not think that and it never entered my mind."

George paused for a moment.

"That shows you what jumping at conclusions too quick comes to. Here's the best chap on earth, seems to me and we—at least I did—yes, I did—I wrote him off as a scoundrel right from the beginning—almost."

"We didn't," cried Tommie. "I didn't. I know I felt there must be something that took him away. I never gave up hope till

I saw you all standing on the deck of the *Wear Jack* and saw that you were scarcely speaking to him and that he didn't seem to be explaining things. I don't know if I even quite gave up then. Oh, dear!"

Her agitation made Hank blaze up.

"Why in the nation," he cried, "couldn't the chap have explained?"

"You called him a blighter," said George. "He saw we'd marked him down without trial, and he was that sort."

"Which sort?"

"The sort that will kill you if you hit its pride, even if it has to kill itself. I expect that time in the fo'c's'le with Jake was pure hell's delight to him, feeling he was making us miserable and being miserable himself. I expect he's gloating at this present minute over us reading this letter and being unable to get at him to make things up. Gloating with pleasure; yet in hell all the time."

"Why, Bud," said Hank, "you're talking as if you knew the chap's mind inside out."

"Maybe I do," said Bud. "Maybe I'm not such a fool as I look. I take him as a discontented man who's made a mess of his life, and nicking on him and calling him names like that, just at that moment, finished the business."

Tommie nodded. All the same she guessed the case to be a bit more complicated than that.

"Go on reading," she said.

George went on:

"I sat down on one of the couches thinking what to do and I heard the chinks powwowing away on deck. Talking maybe of how to get rid of me. Time went on and the clock went round to twelve, that's two hours after I boarded her, then Charlie came to the skylight and hailed me. He said they'd taken the ship and had got the stuff we were digging for. He asked me would I navigate her if they let me out. I told him to go to hell. He went off and time went on and then I heard them handling the halyards and getting in the hook. They didn't shout at their work, went silent as cats. Then I felt the ship under way.

"Morning came. I daren't sleep or they'd have been down on me, but I had food from the lazaret and there was water in the swinging bottle.

"Charlie came again that day to know if I would help work the ship. He said they meant to beach her on the Panama coast at a place they knew and offered me a share in the boodle. I told him I'd fire the ship first and he went away.

"That night about three hours after dark as far as I could guess, for the clock had run down and I hadn't bothered to wind it, and they'd taken the chronometer with the charts on deck, a smash came and I knew the fools had piled her. I heard them shouting and powwowing. The sea was smooth and I knew they could easy get away if they didn't foul the boat in lowering her. They got her over all right and I heard them putting their dunnage in, grub and water, too, if they weren't crazy. Then I heard nothing more. They'd gone.

"The lamp was still alight. I'd put it out in the daytime and lit it up before dark; all the same, there wasn't much oil in her. So I set to on the cabin hatch working with my knife. I left off to get one of the automatics to see if I couldn't smash up the wood by firing. Just as I took it I felt a draft of air blowing toward the skylight. I'd thought of getting out by the skylight, but the chinks had thought of it too, and they'd overlaid it with ropes. But that draft blowing toward it gave me a jog and I made down along to the galley. The galley hatch was open.

"Those chaps must have opened it before doing their bunk, reckoning that if anything turned up and they were caught, it would be lighter for them if they hadn't killed me.

"I got out on deck; couldn't see the boat. Then I opened the cabin-hatch and let the air in.

"Then I had some grub and laid down and went asleep. I dreamed I heard a boat coming alongside. I tumbled out and came on deck and found my pals.

"You know the rest. BOB CANDON."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

VANDERDECKEN.

Candon with his bundle under his arm walked from the stage, where George had landed him, to the ferry wharf. He did not intend staying at Tiburon; he wanted to lose himself, put himself beyond possible reach of Hank and George. He was waiting for the San Francisco ferry.

He felt uplifted, light-headed, full and satisfied with the knowledge that George du Cane and the others would be reading his letter by now. He had revenged himself, on society, and on his companions. Right from his first joining in with Hank and George, under everything, had lain the fact that he was an outlaw, coupled with the fact that he had joined the *Wear Jack* through subterfuge. His confession at San Nicolas had seemingly cleared the slate, yet the fact remained, you cannot confess a fact away. He had been forgiven by Hank and Bud, and Tommie had declared her opinion that he would be all right with the Almighty when he'd prayed himself out of the hole he was in by hard work and the restoration of the jewels. Just so. Yet the fact remained that he had run crooked.

It had been like a grit in the eye. Sometimes he did not feel it, other times he did. But it had been there all the time.

It was this sense of inferiority always fretting his pride and his pride always fretful that had, perhaps, brought about the end of everything.

A lesser man or a greater man might have defended himself—explained or tried to explain.

He took his place in the ferryboat crammed with the usual crowd. As it drew off from the wharf he saw the *Heart of Ireland* as she lay at anchor. There was a figure on deck; it was Jake; the others were evidently down below. What were they saying, what were they doing? He watched the old schooner as she dimmed away into the distance across the breezy water, then he turned and looked at San Francisco standing before him in a blaze of light—the Palace Hotel, the hills veined with streets, the docks and shipping, all so vast, so indifferent, brilliant, self-possessed and cruel.

Nature in her worst moods has made nothing more daunting than a city. Candon had never felt this as he felt it now. The *Wear Jack* had been a home and he and his companions almost a family. In all the city he had not a friend. That is the worst of a sailor's life, unless he rises to the command of a ship and keeps it. The end of each voyage often means a break-up and separation from the men he sails with and the best friends part never to meet again. The sailor has no time ashore to make friends and the friends he makes at sea he loses.

Candon landed at the wharf and made for Essex Street where he had put up before. Number twelve was the house, a humble enough place but clean and respectable, kept by a widow woman whose husband had been captain of one of the Oakland ferryboats.

He obtained a room, left his bundle and started out making uptown. He had no object in view. In the old days he would most likely have drifted into a tavern, met companions and maybe made friends under the freemasonry of drink; but those days are done with. Drink he could have got—poison, swallowed in a corner at five or ten times the price of the old stuff; but, though several touts spoke to him, recognizing a man in from the sea, he turned them down. Passing from street to street without caring where he went, the fact of his own isolation was borne in on him by every sight and sound. All these people had businesses, friends, acquaintances; he had none. If he were to drop dead not a soul would care.

He found himself among the sharp-faced, hustling crowd of Market Street and drifted with it, scarcely seeing it, looking in at shop windows but scarcely noticing the goods. He was not walking alone now. The wraiths of Hank and George and Tommie were with him, walking on either side of him; and now in some extraordinary way his anger and enmity against them, against himself and against circumstances, had faded. It was as though they were dead.

The loneliness of the great city, the very atmosphere of it had seized upon him, cut him off from those past few brilliant weeks of adventure and stress. He could no longer feel as he felt then. Remembering how they had prejudged him he tried to work up his feelings of only a few hours ago, but the old anger would not come. He had left it behind him on the *Heart of Ireland,* or maybe, on the ferryboat. Anger would not come because the way was barred by a newfound sense of reason that kept saying to him, "Well, suppose they did? Look at the facts. They made a mistake—you were furious because you were innocent—but were you made of glass so that they could see your innocence? Not you! Why, you were Vanderdecken. You had already done a shady trick by getting on board the *Wear Jack* under that contract; you were no white lamb. Facts were against you and you were too proud to explain. That's the truth. And you had a grudge against everything. Well, there it is and no more to be said."

He went into a picture house and sat for ten minutes and came out again and had some food.

It was evening now and the lamps were springing alight. He wandered down toward the docks, Hank, Bud and Tommie still clinging to him—and reason, refreshed with a porterhouse steak, clearing her throat to say something. Then in Tallis Street where the crimps abide, she said it.

"Swab!" Then she began to rub it in. "You wrote that letter. Every line you wrote, down there in the fo'c's'le of the *Heart,* was pure joy. You said to yourself, 'When they read this they will suffer.' That's what you said and what you felt. You didn't write to explain, you wrote to hit."

That was the truth.

They were the best people he had ever met and he had wounded them all he could. Done all he could to make them feel mean and small.

If they had not been the best people, the letter would have had no effect. If he had not loved them, the odious pleasure of writing it would not have been there. If he had not loved them, he would not have struck them, struck them with the feverish anger of the child that breaks and destroys the thing it cares for.

He walked on, making toward the waterside, reviewing himself and his futilities.

Impulse and a volcanic nature had been his ruin right along from the first—and pride. And the devil of it was his impulse had always been—or nearly always—toward the good. Why, look away back to the time when he commanded a ship and had been fired for a volcanic letter to the owners for supplying his crew with "grub that a dog wouldn't eat." Look at the McGinnis business! Look at everything!

A man rarely sees himself in the glass of his mind. When he does the image is rarely quite true. Candon saw a reflection uglier than the reality. At all events it was a good thing that he saw it. Then he went home and tried to sleep and could not.

At ten o'clock next evening he found himself in Pacific Avenue, asking his way. At five minutes past ten he was coming up the steps of a residence with Purbeckian marble pillars to the doorway.

He rang and Farintosh opened. Farintosh did not know if Mr. du Cane were in; he would see. He returned in a minute and ushered Candon into a library where Bud, in his shirt sleeves, was rearranging some books. Bud had a pipe in his mouth.

Farintosh shut the door and the two men were left alone.

"Sit down," said Bud. There was no warmth in his tone. He seemed a different man from the Bud of the *Wear Jack*, older, more serious.

Old Harley du Cane with his rose in his coat and his air of a *flaneur*, could sometimes crystallize into awful and icy seriousness, the man of pleasure suddenly becoming the man of affairs, cold, logical, with something of the touch of the judge.

"I've come to say I haven't treated you people well," said Candon. "I'll never see you again, so I wanted just to say that. I couldn't sit down under it any longer—couldn't sleep to-night without saying what I wanted to say. I shouldn't have given up that letter."

"You shouldn't," said Bud. He was standing with his back to the fireplace now, with his pipe in his mouth. "I'm not wanting to rub it in, but you've crumpled Tommie up. Steady on, and let me talk. I'm the man you ought to have a grouch against, for when the *Wear Jack* went off, I was the first to say you'd taken your hook. I had to kick Hank to make him believe. Hank's a good sort, much better than me, much better than you, much better than any of us. He believed in you. So did Tommie.

"Well, now, see here, B. C., I'm not going to apologize to you for being mistaken and for writing you down worse than you were, for the facts were all dead against you. And it was no pleasure to me to think you'd hooked it. It cut me bad. Let's forget it and come to the point. I guess the Almighty sent you here to-night for me to deal with and I'm going to deal with you straight. One moment."

He left the room, and Candon heard him calling for Farintosh and giving some directions; then he returned, took his place on the hearthrug and went on.

"What are your plans?" he asked.

"Fo'c's'le," replied Candon.

"Yes, the fo'c's'le of some windjammer. Fine time and fine prospects! Well, I've made different plans for you—made them long ago. Dropped them when that beastly business happened, but I've picked them up again right now."

"I reckon a dive into the harbor would be the best plan for me," said Candon. He was seated with his arms folded, wilted, miserable. He was thinking of Tommie and what Bud had said about her.

"It would," said Bud, "if you are an ass and don't fall in with what I want to do."

"Yes?"

"You've got to take my money, work and pay me back. Fruit farm or ranch. Quit the sea. The sea's no use to you, B. C., and I tell you that straight."

"It's good of you," said the other, shaking his head. "It's darn good of you, Bud du Cane. But—— Oh, it's not my pride—I reckon I've no pride left. But where's the good? I reckon I'm too far gone for any man to help me. I've lost clutch of myself in the last two days. I tell you it's as

if I'd been boiled and my backbone taken out of me. I'm changed, that's a fact. All my life I've never lost confidence in myself till now. You remember how I took the *Wear Jack* out of harbor that night? I could no more do that now than I could fly —I've lost confidence in myself."

"And maybe a good thing too," said George.

"I don't know," said Candon; "maybe it's good or bad; but there's the fact. A while ago I was a man who could lead things; now I feel all I want is to take orders."

"Good," said George, "and now you're talking like a man. What do you think a man is, anyway? Why, till he learns to take orders, he hasn't got the makings of a man in him. And now I'm going to give you your orders, B. C. You've got to make a home for a girl that cares for you. She's got money enough of her own, but you can't take a woman's money. You can take mine, though, as a loan; and if you don't make good, why you aren't the man I think you are."

"Cares for me?" said Candon as though he were a bit deaf and not sure that he had caught the other's words.

"Yes, unless I have no sense or judgment left. But she'll tell you herself in a minute. I've sent for her."

He left the room.

Candon got up and walked to and fro for a long time, his hands behind his back. Then he lifted his chin and gazed before him with those clear eyes trained to look over vast distances. The manhood had come back to him with the call to a greater adventure than any he had ever undertaken.

He heard an automobile drawing up in the street; then voices. Then the door opened and Tommie stood before him. It closed, leaving them alone.

That is the story of Vanderdecken as told to me by Hank Fisher. The story of a man of temperament saved from himself by a woman. I met George du Cane at Pasadena a little while ago and he corroborated the tale, giving me a few extra details left out by Hank. George said Tyrebuck collected his insurance all right on the *Wear Jack,* also that McGinnis and his crowd managed to escape from the Mexicans and, making down the coast, were rescued by a tanker which had put into Santa Clara Bay owing to a defect in her machinery. They returned to San Francisco, but made no trouble—or rather made trouble only with Mrs. McGinnis who had sold the *Heart of Ireland* and invested the money in a laundry, thinking McGinnis dead.

Hank married his girl quite recently and Candon and Tommie are happy, but the thing uppermost in George's mind in connection with the entire business was the treasure.

He took an old press cutting from his pocketbook and showed it to me. It gave news of a boatful of dead Chinamen found and sunk by the British cruiser *Hesperia,* down by the Galapagos Islands.

"They'd have sunk it maybe with a shell," said George. "It would have given them fine target practice for one of their small guns and they'd never have overhauled it for jewelry.

"It's a hundred to one it was the boat of the *Wear Jack;* the *Wear Jack's* whaler had no name on it and it's just the position they'd have been in by drifting. You see the Kuro Shiwo would have brought them down past the line and then they'd have met Humboldt's current that would push them back. And there they'd have been drifting and messing about when the *Hesperia* came along. Anyhow," finished George, "whatever's become of those jewels, they've never been seen since; and it's my opinion they'll never be seen again."

THE END.

In the next issue appears a short story, "The Deaf Mute," by Mr. Stacpoole.

NOTHING GIVEN FREE

CONTACTS and associations," said Litt Mallory, the Virginia philosopher, "don't benefit you at all unless you go to work to get the benefit out of them. A young whippersnapper told me the other day that he was wise because he had made it a rule always to associate with wise people. You might as well tell me that, because you've been running around with millionaires, you're rich."

Easiest Money

By Calvin Johnston

Author of "Mrs. Kadiak's Fortune," "Whistle: The Flagman's Dog," Etc.

Rook wanted to prevent crime, but the bankers didn't encourage him enough

IN lodgings not too conspicuous or too retired, on one of those streets which mark the social gradations of a Mid Western city, the occupant of the second-floor corner, front, was a man most calculated to excite the envy of others. His body was symmetrical with an even distribution of muscular effort when moved; his regular features unanimous in expressing a thought, whereas in most faces the thought registers by the eye or mouth or brows alone—a habit not always pleasing and sometimes actually sinister. His manner in public and when alone was so identical that the shades of his windows remained only half pulled until bedtime, with an indifference to spying neighbors who might enviously have tried to trap him in the extravagances by which most of us relieve ourselves, in private, of humors good or bad.

He left the house regularly at eight in the morning and returned at eight at night, thus evenly dividing the day between home and business; at the table in his brightly lighted room he read his paper until nine; wrote up his day's business until ten. At that time he rose and taking the heavy revolver from his suit case examined its mechanism and loads and slipped it under his pillow. This in itself was an act characteristic of the check and balance system which operated him—for the street on which he had chosen his lodging was the dead line of two dissimilar neighborhoods, and the revolver shining so brightly and tested so carefully might well arbitrate the honest differences of the respectables and the police on one side and criminals on the other.

This lodger was named Rook and being a stranger in the city had selected quarters so appropriate to him as if by instinct. That is he had arrived a stranger and of his own accord had made no friends since his coming, though he spoke to fellow lodgers courteously when passing in the hall, and to the druggist on the corner when buying a cigar.

But now, having been here a week and exchanged no confidences, he was nevertheless conscious that he was no longer a stranger to one person in the house. He made no advances to this possible friend or enemy, nor received any. He heard a military tread pass up and down the hall; he heard it in the room overhead. He spoke courteously in passing this person, as he did to everybody, and though curtly answered, was conscious of a glance over the shoulder. He was indeed under surveillance, not only from the upstairs window of this house as he went and came but from some spy's nest on the opposite or disreputable side of the street as he wrote up his business and examined the loads and mechanism of his gun under the light before going to bed.

A man of such poise could not secretly seek to acquaint himself with the stranger who had thus secretly made himself acquainted. But it was not inconsistent at this stage for Rook to leave his door slightly ajar in the evening. Any fellow lodger, be he an honest man, a dangerous criminal or an agent of police, would only have to invite himself halfway to meet Rook's halfway invitation and he would find himself a guest in the room. And if it should crop up between them that they were not to be friends there would be no feeling of intrusion on either side and they could part without embarrassment and leave each other strictly alone thereafter.

One morning when passing the stranger in the hall, the latter nodded indifferently as if his former sharp scrutinies and his investigations had informed him on all he need know: so that evening Rook left his door ajar.

The room overhead had been silent all evening except for a slight creaking of the floor occasioned by the pacing of a man

much lighter or more stealthy than the regular occupant of the military tread. But punctually at ten o'clock Rook heard the concussion as of chair legs coming down when a man rises who has been sitting tilted against the wall. Then the military tread —passing into the upper hall and down the stairs. His door was pushed open, not stealthily nor yet abruptly but with a slow, steady swing as if his visitor, while determined to enter, did not intend to do so in an unfriendly manner. Having entered he closed the door and glanced toward the raised window shades. Rook made a careless negative gesture. The visitor pulled up a chair.

"How's the dope treating you?" he asked, glancing at the sporting sheet on the table from which Rook had been copying entries and by an intricate system of his own calculating their possibilities as winners on the morrow.

"Not badly, I may say," smiled the latter.

"You're not here for a killing?" Rook shook his head. The visitor said: "My name is Ferguson."

"Mine is Rook."

"Name's Rook! Just like that!" said Ferguson. He was a tall, strong young fellow, with a big, lean face, close, red-shot, glittering eyes and a well-groomed appearance in a rough way. He had humor which he used reluctantly, harshly, as if considering it a poor sort of trait in a man of action.

"You've been picking up change on ball games and the horses? Just a little vacation money?"

"You might call it that."

"Then you're open for an offer. What about twenty thousand?"

"Sure thing, eh?"

"There ain't any sure thing. Talk sense."

Rook flushed faintly under the rebuke and a slow stiffening of his manner as of cooling metal became perceptible. But the other repeated: "Talk sense!" his jaw thrusting out challengingly.

The proposed partnership was apparently an incongruous one. Mr. Rook, the genteel, polished, balanced man, and Ferguson whose native ferocity was thinly disguised by a disciplined military manner. Rook thought so at the moment but would not accept his snap judgment as final.

"What do I put up?"

"A car that can do better than eighty miles."

"On concrete?"

"You're from the East! On a State highway one hundred miles dirt, seventy hard surface; here is the map." He spread it out over the dope sheet and traced his highway from the city to a certain small town in the rich wheat country to the west. "About two thousand people," he said, "in a country lousy with money. No railroad; telephone of course to be cut—here, in the edge of a wood. Now I'll show you my own dope sheet." It was in the form of a bank statement clipped from a county paper. "About ten thousand cash on hand——"

Rook pushed it away. "Not interested."

"And in the vault not less than sixty thousand Liberty Bonds." Ferguson also produced his dope for that statement—two clipped newspaper articles on small-town bank robberies where the booty had consisted principally of Liberty Bonds.

Rook reflected, "Why don't you introduce your friend—the creaker upstairs?"

"He's not in on this. Still, we'll need a man in the car—and he's a cool head." He went out returning a moment later with the more soft-footed occupant of the room upstairs. Meantime Rook had cleared the table and placed a pack of cards; the three, with window shades up, sat down to play under the glaring light.

The newcomer, a Mr. Jackson, was a limp little rag of a man with a dank, whitish face and eyelids that fluttered in the strong light. If it had not been for fingers and palm stained to ocher by cigarettes Rook would have thought that he had recently been in prison. A cigarette clung to his lower lip as he talked with an affected languor, though evidently much flattered by being taken into a big job by such men as these.

"Now this is a serious business, Mr. Jackson," said Rook after Ferguson had told his friend as much as he chose. "Do you know what may be required of you—and the consequences?"

"Killing a cashier maybe," replied Jackson languidly, reading his hand. "As for consequences—that's my business."

The three went further into details but Rook did not give his decision.

"Mr. Rook doesn't know either of us," said Jackson finally. "And we don't know him. But I'm willing to take the first chance." He took his credential from his

pocket, which when unfolded proved to be the discharge of a soldier who had served and been wounded in the Argonne campaign.

"But this is the discharge of one O. A. Henderson," said Rook as if puzzled. Ferguson shrugged but Jackson was at once drawn out.

"That's Henderson's discharge and here's his bonus check."

"I see; you took it from his pocket."

"It has never been in any pocket but mine; I took it en route in the mails. Tomorrow Ferguson will cash it—that makes fourteen—or is it fifteen, Ferguson?" The latter shuffled and dealt silently.

"Ah—a post-office proposition."

"Railway mail," interjected Jackson; "I have a run out of here."

"But the identification of Mr. Ferguson as the particular soldier named on the bonus check?"

"Every soldier is required to forward his discharge to Washington to establish record and identity. And under the war department cover the check is returned along with the discharge. Every mail clerk knows 'em. And if he is game enough he can take the check and cash it anywhere with the discharge as an identification."

"If he looks like a soldier," corrected Rook.

"Sure; that's why I let Ferguson in on it. He and I roomed next to each other when I was off the run. Now I room across the street."

"Where you can spy into my window," reflected Rook, then resumed aloud: "Sometimes, gentlemen, it makes me sad to think of the fate of our country—run by men who mail checks in the same envelope with the means of identifying as the payee any man who may have an interest in cashing them." Stirred to reminiscences he told of a man who by means of a simple little organization made a killing on the treasury department. He had interested a mail clerk in reading postal cards sent to banks by that department, notifying of shipments of new currency in lieu of that which had been mutilated. As these cards named the train mail by which the new currency was to move he had been able to interest several parties in intercepting it.

"You're a bird at your business, ain't you, to overlook a bet like that," said Ferguson to the mail clerk who was greatly crestfallen.

"About those Liberty Bonds," mused Rook, reverting to the main subject; "you have left me to guess that there is a way of disposing of them without risk."

"Same as currency," assured Ferguson impatiently.

The mail clerk, it seemed, had been obliged during the war to buy no less than four bonds which he had immediately discounted to a local bank shark, no questions asked. The loquacious Jackson went into particulars. "Bardolph was the shark's name, 771 Juniper Street."

It was only Ferguson's natural taciturnity and not a suspicion that this information given Rook could or would be used to his disadvantage which caused him to say: "You talk too damn much."

Rook nodded assent to this but he did not forget the name and address—Bardolph, 771 Juniper. "Now, gentlemen, he said, "I'll think over the proposition and give you my answer to-morrow night."

Careful surveillance of Rook and a wolfish instinct for a pack brother had made Ferguson certain of this man. So without even warning Rook of the vengeance which would follow an attempt at double crossing he nodded, thinking rather more of him for his deliberatensss.

His visitors departed, Rook repeated the name and address of the bond shark several times but was too discreet a man to make a written memorandum.

In the planning of all crimes, except those of revenge, the dominant consideration should always be given the pursuit which begins after the get-away is made and the fugitive in hiding. Is it a bank burglary? Steel is not impregnable! A daylight raid? Guards and tellers and cashiers bow or drop to automatics! The trail, though one of blood, ends at the door where a swift motor is in wait. A bold man can perpetrate incredible crimes and make his get-away. These two elements are subject to nearly exact calculation. By the pursuit therefore is meant not the hue and cry which follows the escape from the scene of crime, but the stealthy invisible processes automatically set in motion in the social body to localize and seal up a disease germ.

Rook reflected; would it blow over with a scurry of municipal police who, holding office only as long as the public reads of their efficiency in the daily papers, are more intent on maintaining a current calendar for

the prosecutor than in ferretings unknown to police-news reporters? The public must have local detective stories which end in arrest and conviction; and long secret chases cannot interest a temporary political police organization which must make a quick turnover of crime in the courts to hold on to office. Rook pondered these facts next day. He could easily keep up the hide-and-seek game till the city police were off the job. So safely and sanely he ignored them.

Again, would the robbery enlist in the pursuit those surety concerns of unparalleled vindictiveness who, it is legended among employees, will dog a suspect to his grave so that he never dare spend a dollar of unearned money even though starving? Rook thought they might put this across on employees—men of settled habits and fixed social relationship. But surety companies, though persistent and possessing the facilities of the police, are baffled by the professional criminal of flitting residence and unanchored family. The surety concerns cast a far net over the business world but catch few fish in the underworld. Rook eliminated them from the pursuit also.

There is, to be sure, a third organization, the most formidable of all, which keeps data on both the underworld and business world. It has the rough authoritative strength of the local police and the patient revengefulness of the surety companies.

"It is just as well," Rook told himself, smiling thoughtfully, "that the United States secret service claims no particular jurisdiction in burglaries."

On an October morning after a week of bright, dry, "road-mending" weather, the motor of Rook & Co. was brought out for a road trip by one of the partners. Rook and his other partner were still at their lodgings taking a last thought and look around.

"One dozen ham, one dozen chicken," checked Rook, and dropped the sandwiches into a traveling bag. "Pies, et cetera. Where's the mustard?"

"You believe in preparedness, don't you, bo? What's that stuff for—a wake or a picnic?"

Rook contended seriously that after a stick-up there was nothing to quiet a man's nerves like a piece of pie. The other concluded a nervous inspection of his revolver with a gesture of loathing. "Nix on the eats now." They still had thirty minutes to meet their partner and Rook with an eye to steadying his companion, said: "Get the drop on me, Ferguson. I'm going to throw a scare into you."

Ferguson, startled, shook his lowered head so like a bull that Rook laughed.

"Well, here goes—I'm not a robber—never beat any man out of a cent; never went armed except in militia camp——"

Ferguson actually drew his revolver with a hoarse rattle of oaths and accusations.

"Ferguson, I knew I'd scare you—but didn't expect to so badly. Why your nervousness makes me believe that you're not cut out at all for bank robbery!"

Ferguson was staggered. "Bank robbery! And just preachin' about honesty. What are you doing—kidding me, you——"

"That's about all from you," said the man of balance in the tone of a jockey to a nervous racer. "I tell you that I never did a dishonest trick or a desperate act. I was till lately a bond and stock broker, went bankrupt and came out here to start all over again. Took a cheap room and played the races to get a little stake—then you came along. I ran an honest business—lost—paid my debts. Now I see respected citizens getting theirs—one way or another—and naturally believe that just one crime won't demoralize me." He picked up the grip: "Have you steadied down? I thought better of a professional."

Ferguson, though surly, was a fairly good loser. "You win," he said. And, after brief reflection, "I'll never believe another damn word against a business man." Ten minutes later they joined Jackson in the car.

That night the three divided over five thousand cash and ninety thousand in Liberty Bonds in Ferguson's room. The robbery had been carried out with no mishap except the shooting of a teller by Jackson from the car as the others ran from the bank. He was inordinately proud of his marksmanship and indeed deserved credit for phenomenal nerve and bloodthirstiness. Ferguson had cursed the murder as unnecessary. Rook, with his usual equanimity, recalled that the teller had fallen revolver in hand. "It is better to receive than to give death," he said, "but it is not human nature."

They arranged that the next morning Jackson should negotiate his bonds with Bardolph and report. Ferguson had protested. "We can't flash these bonds before

that teller's body is cold. It's too raw even for a bond shark; he'll squeal."

"What!" remonstrated Rook. "Wait till some possible means of identifying them is spread around so that no bond dealer can handle them without directly incriminating himself with the United States treasury secret service? No, no, Ferguson."

His companions broke into a torrent of whispered questions: How was the United States secret service concerned in this; how could the bonds be identified, et cetera.

"What's this—a panic?" said the old stock gambler impassively. "No wonder you fellows get caught." His companions subsided, glaring at him. "In the first place," resumed Rook, "we robbed a Federal Reserve Bank—which makes a case to be handled from Washington. In the second place, these bonds are each numbered and are possible of identification, if the bank has a list of the numbers. Even the government can't be so stupid as to leave its own stockholders, the holders of Liberty Bonds, entirely unprotected. There may be some system by which stolen bonds can be identified. And the only sure way we have of selling these is at once—so the shark can turn them over before the banks are——"

"Why didn't you say something about this before?" Ferguson was livid.

"Be calm—be calm," the little mail clerk's cigarette clung to his lip, twisted in a contemptuous smile; he had rallied quickly, remembering that he had a killing to his credit. He was now the superior of the confederate who had bullied him from the day of their acquaintance. The stalwart ruffian was appalled by the leer and the eyes fixed on him, filmy as a snake's.

"Rook's right," he said; "I'll take mine to Bardolph to-morrow morning and give you two a lead. Of course I'm going to resign my mail run and move on as soon as I cash in," he told Rook; "though I'm not much afraid of secret service after putting this bonus-check deal across for three months."

After that Rook advised cards, and they adjourned to his room of the raised shades and glaring light, where several neighbors saw them at play.

The following morning proved Rook a prophet. Himself and Ferguson were awaiting in Jackson's room across the street the latter's return from Bardolph's.

His arrival was like a thunder shock—the thieving mail clerk, who had hardened to inveterate criminality in a day, hardly entering the door before giving way to a paroxysm of sheer ferocity. His rag of a body went tense and limp and tense again as he slavered and gritted out his news. Bardolph had offered seventy-five per cent of par for the bonds with the privilege of turning in the numbers to the local reserve bank for checking up, before payment. Without that privilege he offered twenty per cent.

"Maybe you had it pat," he told Rook, "but somehow I believe Bardolph's putting over a foul. He explained a new system of checking for stolen bonds and said he wouldn't risk a chance on mine for his regular profit. Twenty per cent! I want you to hear him tell about that system—you've got more sense than me." He gripped Rook and dragged him with the raging strength in his spidery body. The hoarse growls of Ferguson rising like a bear from the bed mingled with the shrillings of Jackson. "I'll bump him, so help me God," said the latter, "if he's lied to me!"

Rook released himself and stood meditating; the others subsided in consideration of this man, now their acknowledged leader.

"We'll put Bardolph's statement to the proof," said Rook. He picked up the morning paper he had been reading and with his knife slitted out two advertisements of Liberty Bond brokers. Then he seated himself, looking from one to the other wearily.

"I'll be all right in a minute, cap," said Jackson shamefacedly. Holding out his hand, wavering, then steadying to immovability, he swaggered at Ferguson. He was like a wicked little ape who, sewed up in the skin of a man, had suddenly ripped it off. Ferguson, a lowering desperate fellow, shuddered at his uncouth dramatics.

"I don't like the looks of things," he admitted: "I'd never have gone into this business if it hadn't seemed so easy."

"Neither would we," answered Jackson; "but now that we're in I'm man enough to close it out."

"It is easy," said Rook, "easy enough. I don't give a continental cuss for the whole treasury police as long as they don't suspect us personally. If they ever do, it's all over —we could hide in the Kongo jungle or behind the Great Wall of China and they'd get us. But you two have found in your bonus-check business that the government itself

identifies you as the payee; well, merely to hold Liberty Bonds is identification enough. The bloodhounds are without a scent—let 'em sniff and yelp. Even if Bardolph tells the truth—that the banks have put a joker in bond circulating, why Bardolph takes the risk. It will cost us money, but he takes the risk; he has no clew to our identity."

"Do you believe him?" asked Jackson.

"No. We'll put his statement to the test, of course."

The others followed him out unquestioningly, and into the downtown business district. Once Rook admonished: "Keep step, Ferguson; don't hang back and look around every corner for a cop." The mail clerk spoke disgustedly: "You're a swell robber," he said.

The trio turned into a big, popular-priced hotel and through the thronged lobby to the telephone booths where Rook called up one of the bond brokers whose ad he had clipped. He kept his companions at his elbow.

"What are you quoting on second Liberty loans?" he asked the broker. And receiving his quotation, he added, "I have three thousand par to be closed out this morning to meet a note."

For the first time since their acquaintance began Rook's anxious companions observed a slight fluctuation in his manner. He clenched his hand, hesitated and then requested, "Please repeat that—I didn't quite get you," and placed the receiver at Ferguson's ear.

The latter heard the bond broker plainly enough: "I said nothing doing till those bonds are checked at the reserve bank."

Rook hung up.

Jackson had been looking up the number of the second broker. "Call him," said Rook; "better explain your hurry to cash in as I did—that you have a note to meet." Jackson did so. The second bond broker answered as the other had done.

"It may mean an organized holdup among these sharks," Rook told his dejected friends. "We'll make Bardolph explain the new system anyway, before we take twenty per cent."

In spite of the profit to be made of such custom, Bardolph did not receive the three resolutes tramping unceremoniously into his private office with any sign of pleasure.

Rook reviewed briefly what Jackson had reported, "Now please explain this new system of checking for stolen bonds," he said.

Bardolph complied, unquestionably eager to get them off his premises.

"It's this, as near as I can come at it. They're trying out a system for blocking the market. Every bond dealer is required to report all bond transactions week by week to a sort of central bureau set up by the banks—here's the notification." He showed a letter from the president of the district reserve bank, dated six days back. "Now every bank in the district has been notified to make record of their Liberty Bonds and in case of theft to notify this central bureau. The bureau then by means of a new perforating machine transfers this list to cards and these cards are sent to all other district banks. When lists of bonds furnished by me or any broker are run through this machine, any stolen bond would automatically register. If I buy these bonds of you, my only chance to turn them over is in small amounts among the class of people who have little dealing with banks and don't keep track of their rulings."

"Bosh—you can sell them anywhere to anybody!" Rook studied the shark intently. "How many men, even here in a reserve center have heard of this 'system?'"

"They'll not be long in hearing of it—a secret-service man here yesterday told me that the banks were only giving the system a few days' work-out to prove its efficiency—that is land a bandit or two—before petitioning the treasury that it be incorporated into Federal legislation."

"Twenty-five per cent—and let's go," demanded Ferguson hoarsely, his bonds already on the desk. The mention of the secret-service man who had been here in this very office only yesterday had finished him.

"What d'ya mean, twenty-five——"

It was several seconds before the ferocious Jackson could pick himself up from the corner where he had landed under Ferguson's sudden back-hand swipe. The latter was already receiving his money. Rook's was counted out next. Only the discomfited mail clerk and a guard who had mysteriously appeared in the office, remained with Bardolph. "Throw him out," said the latter.

"Wait a minute—give a man a show, can't you?" Jackson tore with trembling rage at the lining of his coat. Another minute he was out of the building. His confederates had disappeared. Jackson strolled leisurely away with eight thousand dollars stowed in various pockets. As far as two of the three

robbers were concerned the transaction was closed.

It had however opened a new lead to Rook, who within the hour was back in Mr. Bardolph's office. "What d'ya mean by coming here again?" demanded that gentleman—who had kept the guard in the room in sour expectation of Rook's reappearance.

Rook smiled, and drawing up a sheet of paper made some penciled calculation. "You owe me twenty-five thousand dollars," he said, pushing the memorandum across the desk. Mr. Bardolph signaled the guard. The latter came up threateningly, but Rook shook his head.

"You know better than to try that, Bardolph," he said. "Let's don't have any disgraceful scene of thieves falling out. You daren't murder me here in your office; and if you cheat you'll have to murder me to keep me still."

Rook in fact still retained an interest in the bonds, which after a sharp argument was closed out in Bardolph's office an hour later. This interest amounted to twenty-five thousand dollars in bonds at the market.

It seems that Rook on the day after the robbery was proposed to him, had gone to the two advertising bond brokers, representing himself as a United States treasury agent. He had without explanation advised them to answer the phone question regarding the sale of three thousand second Liberty as they had subsequently done.

On that same day he had gone to Bardolph and explained the system which he had worked out for the tracing of stolen bonds and detection of robbers. Between them they had found no difficulty in double crossing Ferguson and Jackson. After pocketing his twenty-five thousand equity, in the shape of Liberty Bonds to that value, Rook congratulated the bond broker on the letter which the latter had written to himself on the reserve bank letterhead. "It was a stroke of genius," he said.

"I'd have liked to double cross you, too!" Bardolph sighed for his twenty-five thousand bonds. "But the fact is, I was afraid to. For pure nerve and sense you have it on anybody I've done business with in such matters."

Rook nodded. "It is easily explained," he said. "My courage and sense. I am an honest man."

Bardolph's explosion of savage laughter was stifled in his throat by Rook's clear, unwavering gaze.

"I did indeed engage in one crime," he resumed, "but it was one already planned and about to be executed anyway, and I will devote the proceeds to rehabilitating myself as an honest man, whereas a criminal would have spent it demoralizingly to himself and the community. Moreover, I will repay the community a thousandfold for any injury I may have done them, by making the bank and the private holder of Liberty Bonds secure from depredation and murder."

Stunned by this argument Bardolph watched the departure of his visitor from the desk, and then from the door, and then from the window until he disappeared among the street crowd, all in silence and without the wink of an eyelid.

And as a man with a mission, composed and bold and not a little exalted, Rook betook himself to the Federal Reserve Bank of the district, not three squares away.

A man of his speech and presence had no difficulty in obtaining audience with the cashier and then with the governor and two directors who happened in. They heard his system explained, could find no flaw in it and congratulated him upon its applicability.

"Then you will put it into practice," he said, much relieved. For, as he had stated to all the scoundrels he had been in partnership with, he was an honest man. And he felt the justification of committing a single crime, if he could, through the experience gained, prevent the committing of many more.

But the governor and cashier pointed out that his proposition was one to be acted upon by bankers' conferences and by the treasury and committees of both houses of Congress with a view to incorporation in some protective act.

"But that may not be until the bonds are due and paid," urged Rook; "and in the meantime how many criminals will profit and honest men be led astray by the impossibility of detection?"

They listened patiently but his vehemence was in vain and he cursed them silently for sending him away with the burden of guilt on his conscience.

At last he told them plainly: "If you in authority must reject a simple system, both preventive and remedial of these crimes, I for one refuse to burden myself further with

the possession of bonds which I dare not trust to my own bankers." He produced the bonds lately received from Bardolph and in a few moments had disposed of them at the day's figure in New York.

When he was outside and around the corner, a certificate of deposit in his pocket, he leaned against the wall with his cigar at an angle and reasoned passionately.

"If they want honest men in this country why do they make the going so hard for them and yet smooth the path of the criminal? Undoubtedly I have had a revelation. They do not want honest men!"

Presently with mind set at ease by his experience he might have been found at his former lodgings in conference with Jackson. "Now that we have capital," he told the latter, "we can afford to take our time and seek out a stronger market for our bonds than this cursed Bardolph. Somehow, I believe the so-called system is only a conspiracy to defraud among these local sharks."

The little Jackson cursed them heartily, without however any of the dramatics which had before proven so distasteful to this partner of superior tastes. "We don't want Ferguson in on any more operations," he said tentatively. "Somehow I never trusted that fellow. A welsher and double crosser if there ever was one."

"He is not to be trusted," agreed Rook, and as his perfect balance could now be maintained only by the honorable practices proverbial among thieves, he told of his double-crossing arrangement with Bardolph, wrote Jackson a check for half the profits and immediately felt himself a member of the confederation in good standing.

"My intentions were indeed otherwise," he observed with a shade of regret which was quickly dissipated by his partner's reply:

"Sure. So were mine." Jackson stretched luxuriously in a dilapidated morris chair. "This is the life! And I never even thought of it till twenty-eight years old. But what do they expect of a guy?—offering him thirty, forty, ninety thousand on a little gun play, with no pursuit! We'd be the boneheads to work—and tainted money so easy."

And, notwithstanding the coarseness of the expression, the man of superior refinement nodded sadly over the weapon whose loads and mechanism he was examining preparatory to retiring.

Look for other stories by Mr. Johnston soon.

THEY DON'T LET GO

ONE of the cherished delusions among America's young men is that it is a fine thing to go to Washington, get a government job, study a profession in one of the capital's universities while using Uncle Sam's pay roll as a meal ticket and then, ten minutes after graduation day, make all speed for home and a new, richly furnished office. The system works like a charm up to nine minutes after graduation day. The young man does everything in the picture except the making speed for home.

By the time he gets his diploma he has been in Washington four years. He has had to work only from nine in the morning until half past four in the afternoon. Rain or shine, his pay envelope has been handed to him on the first and fifteenth of every month. He has learned that he can support himself and have a little pocket money by doing a minimum amount of work. Ahead of him, if he cuts loose from Uncle Sam's munificence, looms a chance: he may make good and he may not. Besides, there will be at least a year when his earnings would hardly incommode the eye of a gnat. Besides again, he will have to work like a slave. And after all he may be a failure.

He reflects, hesitates, puts off. Ten years later he is a typical government clerk, getting round in the shoulders, flat in the chest and touchy in the temper. There is no future in the "service" and he knows it. Unless he quits Washington he has no chance of a career. But he has less courage now than he had ten years ago. He is done.

Young man, if you have an opportunity to educate yourself in Washington at government expense, don't do it. Unless you have the heart of a lion and the courage of a hero that sort of an education will ruin you.

Bright Roads of Adventure

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "First Down, Kentucky!" "Eyes in the Boat, Number Six!" Etc.

Like the patter of rain on an attic roof came the ringing of those steel-nosed bullets on Mr. Paine's sugar-boiler shelter—and somehow he fairly loved that Cuban boiler!

IX.—THE MARINES HELD THE HILL

LOOKING backward from the tranquil environment of a New Hampshire farm and the perspective of a middle age not without its dignity I am honestly surprised at the singular capacity displayed by this Ralph Paine, in his youth, for surging into matters which were wholly foreign to the pursuit of journalism. It would be charitable to call it a surplus of energy which flew off at blazing tangents. The fact may be apparent, by this time, that he was unhappy unless life consisted of one damn thing after another.

In the course of this patchwork of memories he has now come to an episode for which he has the grace actually to blush. In so far as he is able to discover there were no extenuating circumstances. This was the verdict of numerous beholders.

Soon after the American fleet established its grim and unwearied blockade of Santiago Admiral Sampson became aware that he required a harbor, not too far away, in which his ships could be coaled and minor repairs effected and where refuge might be sought in violent weather or after a punishing sea battle. An ideal base was found in Guantánamo Bay, thirty-eight miles to the eastward. It was wide and deep, with an outer roadstead in which the largest fleet could anchor without jostling. There was no finer harbor in the West Indies but Spanish commerce had made little use of it. Near the entrance was a cable station and a small fishing village. Otherwise the shores and the richly verdant hills were untenanted.

The light cruiser *Marblehead* reconnoitered the bay on June 7th in company with the armed liner *Yankee* and drove the Spanish gunboat *Sandoval* into the shoal water of the inner harbor. They also shelled the cable station, destroying it and putting to flight the guard of Spanish troops. Three days later the transport *Panther* arrived from Key West with six hundred and fifty marines on board in command of Lieutenant Colonel Robert W. Huntington. Their job was to occupy and hold a shore base and make the enemy hard to find. It goes without saying that the United States Marine Corps viewed this errand with enthusiasm.

For more than a hundred years this illustrious force of sea soldiers had slung its hammocks between the decks of the ships of our navy. Its traditions of valor and service were a priceless inheritance. These "leathernecks," as the bluejackets called them, had been deadly with musket and boarding pike when, from the shattered poop of the *Bon Homme Richard,* Captain John Paul Jones was trumpeting that he had not begun to fight. They had manned the tops when ruddy Isaac Hull was sinking the *Guerriere* with immortal broadsides which thundered from the wooden walls of the *Constitution* frigate. They had lined the bulwarks of the *Hartford* when the great-hearted Farragut damned the torpedoes and they had swung the breech blocks and slammed home the brass shell cases with Dewey at Manila.

Soldier and sailor, too. From seaports exotic and remote had come the frequent and familiar message:

> The marines have landed and have the situation well in hand.

This fight at Guantánamo Bay was an incident in the ordinary and accustomed routine but it possessed a larger significance because it welded a little more enduringly the spirit and the tradition of the corps. It played its part in passing along to the next generation that temper and habit which is, after all, a spiritual equation and which causes men of all sorts and conditions to believe that honor is to be preferred to life. This is what the regiments of American ma-

rines were to show to all the world in Belleau Wood and at Château-Thierry, with the slogan of, "Come on, you ——, do you want to live forever?"

These six hundred and fifty marines aboard the *Panther* desired to be put ashore, the sooner the quicker. Impatience was a mild word for it. For days and days they had been cooped in a ship which, as a floating barracks, was wretchedly equipped. Nobody had seemed to know what to do with them. Shafter's army was supposed to be ready to sail from Tampa for the decisive invasion of Cuba but never was an army more unready. It could not be said that the high command changed its mind, for the reason that it had no mind to change. Confusion was its middle name. Fortunately this was an army of brave soldiers who were determinted to win in spite of the war department.

By way of contrast it was worth noting that this battalion of marines was intelligently equipped for a campaign in the tropics. They were in uniforms of khaki. Thousands of suffering American infantrymen later strewed the Santiago trails with those red-lined, blue woolen overcoats with heavy capes familiar in pictures of the Civil War. They had been thoughtfully prepared for marching into the Hudson Bay country. Through some official oversight the snowshoes and fur caps had been omitted from the kit.

The dispatch boat *Three Friends* followed the *Panther* into the bay and the correspondents looked on while the *Marblehead* and the *Dolphin* raked the wooded hills and valleys with shrapnel to drive back any lurking Spanish forces. Swiftly the marines filled the whaleboats and cutters from the naval vessels and were towed to the beach by steam launches. Within an hour the battalion was disembarked with its tents and supplies.

The marines climbed the hill selected for a camp, rifles on their shoulders, belts stuffed with cartridge clips, canteens filled, a ration in their haversacks. They discarded their coats and rolled up their sleeves, sinewy, active men hardened by incessant drill. To their eager questions the obliging bluejackets made answer:

"Will you big stiffs get action? Listen! These woods are full of Spanish guerrillas, the *Escaudra de Guantánamo*, the finest sharpshootin' outfit in Cuba, three thousand of 'em—and they let out a hearty laugh when they saw you shove off. What they figure on handin' you will be a plenty. Don't you worry! You'll be combin' Mauser bullets out of your hair."

The hill rose rather sharply from the beach. On top was an area more or less level and perhaps two acres in extent. It was a rolling country and where the hills dipped the intervales were dense with trees and creepers and tall grass. The camp site was well chosen at an elevation which overlooked the other hills near by and with a line of communication and retreat open to the bay and the guns of the warships. Through the afternoon the marines pitched camp and the tents blossomed in rows. Possibly there was too much confidence in the ability of the battalion to chase the enemy to a safe distance. At any rate, little was done in the way of digging trenches.

When nightfall came the marines were still in the open. They had not dug themselves in with their shovels and broad bayonets. The camp was on the alert, of course, outposts vigilant and the officers a competent lot. It was near midnight when the Spanish guerrillas began to creep nearer under cover of darkness. You could not call it an attack. It was desultory sniping at the embers of the camp fires, at the vague outline of the assemblage of tents, a procedure cunningly calculated to rasp the nerves of those detestable *Marinos Americanos* and rob them of sleep.

There was no hitting back excepting as the exasperated "leathernecks" fired at the flash of the rifles in the undergrowth. The sibilant little voices of the bullets as they drove across the hill persuaded the battalion to make the dirt fly with whatever tools were handiest. They were in a mood to give the humble mole credit for a superior intelligence.

Daybreak disclosed the thin lines of marines lying flat behind small, brown ridges of earth, shooting intermittently, very sore at an enemy which squibbed at them from the thickets. There had been no sleep in camp and this was only the overture. The navy signaled to know whether reënforcements were needed but the marines growled "No thank you" and guessed they could hold the hill and maybe make things interesting for the Spaniards.

Meanwhile the *Three Friends* had left in a hurry for Port Antonio, Jamaica, to cable

the news of the landing and the opening skirmish. This was the first attempt of an American armed force to seize and hold enemy territory in Cuba, a curtain raiser in advance of the grand entrance of the army. Stephen Crane stayed ashore with the marines because he foresaw much personal enjoyment. A hawser could not have dragged him away from the show. The haste to file cable dispatches never troubled him. It was his business, as he viewed it, to gather impressions and write them as the spirit moved. He was not a reporter but an artist.

The *Three Friends* wasted no time during that run of a hundred and ten miles to Jamaica. It was the intention to return to Guantánamo Bay as soon as the Lord would let her. The weather was unusually favorable but after reaching Port Antonio she was delayed several hours by engine-room repairs. As a result, it was in the middle of the night when the *Three Friends* approached the Cuban coast and then went more cautiously lest she become entangled with the blockading fleet or with scouting cruisers. Also she had been told by crisp and emphatic naval commanders not to go blundering into Guantánamo Bay until after sunrise.

In the early morning, therefore, she passed in from the sea and dropped anchor not far from the *Marblehead* and within a short distance of the marines upon the hill. They were still there and Old Glory stirred in the faint breeze which breathed with the dawn. The petulant pop of rifles indicated that the fight was unfinished. For more than thirty hours there had been no cessation. The marines had taken their punishment. Between the tents they had laid their dead in a row on the grass and decently covered them with rubber blankets. There had been no leisure for digging graves.

Stephen Crane came down to the beach and waved his hat in token of his desire to be taken aboard the *Three Friends*. He was dirty and heavy-eyed and enormously hungry and thirsty. It was all he could do to drag himself into the ship's galley where he gulped down food and black coffee. Then he sprawled on deck, rolling cigarettes and talking in a slow, unemotional manner as was his wont, but the thin, pallid face kindled and the somber, weary young eyes brightened as he told us how it had fared with the battalion of marines. He was in a mood to talk as he wrote, vividly, as though words were colors to be laid on a canvas with a bold and vigorous brush.

"With a thousand rifles rattling," said he, "with the field guns booming in your ears, with the Colt automatics crackling, with the roar of the *Marblehead* coming from the bay and with Mauser bullets sneering always in the air a few inches over one's head, and with this enduring from dusk to dawn, it was extremely doubtful if any one who was there would be able to forget it easily. The noise, the darkness, the knowledge, from the sound of the bullets, that the enemy was on three sides of the camp, the infrequent bloody stumbling and death of some man with whom perhaps you had messed two hours previously——"

What had particularly impressed Crane was the behavior of the four signalmen who through the night had kept the *Marblehead* informed of events upon the hill. These marines had a cracker box placed on top of a trench. When not signaling they hid the lanterns in this box, but as soon as an order to send a message was received it became necessary for one of the men to stand up and expose the lights.

'And then—oh, my eye!" drawled Crane. "How the guerrillas hidden in the gulf of night would turn loose at those yellow gleams! How in the name of wonder those four men were not riddled from head to foot and sent home more as repositories of Spanish ammunition than as marines, is beyond my comprehension. To make a confession, when one of these men stood up to wave his lantern, I, lying in the trench, invariably rolled a little to the right or left in order that, when he was shot, he would not fall on me. Whenever the adjutant, Lieutenant Draper, came plunging through the darkness with an order, such as, 'Please ask the *Marblehead* to shell the woods to the left,' my heart would come into my mouth, for I knew that one of my pals was going to stand up behind the lanterns and have all Spain shoot at him.

"The answer was always upon the instant, *'Yes, sir.'* Then the bullets began to snap, snap, snap, at his head while all the woods began to crackle like burning straw. I could lie near and watch the face of the signalman, illumined as it was by the yellow shine of lantern light. And the absence of excitement, fright, or any emotion at all, on his countenance was something to astonish

all theories out of one's mind. The face was in every instance merely that of a man intent upon his own business, the business of wigwagging into the gulf of night where a light on the *Marblehead* was seen to move slowly."

While Stephen Crane went on to portray the daylight sortie of a hundred and sixty marines under Captain Elliott, who had burned the headquarters of the guerrilla forces at Cusco, it was noticed that the scattering rifle fire in the camp and from the chaparral had ceased. It was a morning lull. The Spanish sharpshooters had knocked off for breakfast, or such was the deduction, and the marines were in a mood to second the motion.

Ralph Paine was so absorbed in Crane's recital of events that he had forgotten his haste to get ashore and investigate this situation at firsthand. His attention diverted by the interval of strange silence on land, he thought it an excellent time to visit the battalion upon the hill. He had taken no thought of breakfast while Crane was talking and now breakfast seemed inconsequential, not worth the delay. This was a serious error, as it turned out. By way of speedy nourishment he poured out one drink of Scotch whisky—one drink, mind you—and it was *not* a large one. This is important to remember.

A noble idea occurred to him. He drove the cork in the bottle and carried it along with him. It seemed a sin to leave it in the locker when those heroic marines were so sorely in need of comfort and sympathy. This was nothing at all like that moonlit picnic on the white beach of Haiti when the rum had gurgled so hospitably. The motive was entirely different. The most censorious critic could have found no fault with it. The bottle of Scotch was to be a friend in need and a tribute to valor.

It happened that another Colt machine gun had just then been landed from a ship. It was a heavy affair mounted on a pair of wheels and, for some reason, more men were needed to drag it up the steep slope of the hill. Being a young man of some beef and brawn I put my shoulder to the wheel and shoved. The foothold was crumbling and insecure, as the men on the drag rope also discovered. The gun slued and slid back. I went with it, but even more rapidly, rolling into a tall clump of cactus after bumping over a rock or two. The first impulse, and a praiseworthy one, was to save the bottle of Scotch. It had lodged unbroken. In the light of this good fortune, the altercation with the cactus clump amounted to nothing at all.

Two correspondents who had come ashore from another dispatch boat had also volunteered to help the marines haul the gun up the hill. One of these was H. J. Whigham, an Englishman who won the amateur golf championship in the early days of the game in America and who later became the publisher of *The Metropolitan Magazine*. Poor Whigham, too, fell downhill, but was unlucky enough to finish the descent on his face, which was scratched and cut and bruised in such wholesale fashion that after a naval surgeon had crisscrossed it with strips of plaster there was no recognizing Whigham at all.

Another struggle with the Colt gun and it was pulled over the brow of the hill. The marines were found in their shallow trenches, haggard men fighting off sleep but uttering no complaints. There was never a notion among them of withdrawing to the ships. To the nearest squads of them appeared a correspondent with a bottle of Scotch in his fist. They eyed him with a wistful fondness. He was more popular than a paymaster.

It was touching to see how sparingly each man drank a swallow and then passed the bottle to the comrade at his elbow. A few of them were asleep during this lull, cheek against the rifle stock, fingers ready to jerk the bolt and slide in another clip. A boyish second lieutenant refused to drink and handed the bottle to a hard-featured sergeant with a bloody bandage around his head. It was done with the grace of Sir Philip Sidney.

"After you, sir," said the sergeant.

"Take a slug, you old fool!" snapped the lieutenant. "You men need it worse than I do."

The correspondent sauntered along the line until a marine tossed aside the empty bottle. One of these men had lost his cap during the night and his head was bare as he lay stretched in his furrow of earth. Already the sun had begun to beat down upon this open hill and the little breeze had died. It was going to be a wickedly hot day, with a sky unclouded and the prostrate marines red and sweating like ship's stokers. I gave this bareheaded marine my gray, soft hat,

for which he seemed profoundly grateful. It would be easy enough to rummage the *Three Friends* for other headgear.

However, it was unnecessary to go aboard the ship on this errand. In another part of the camp a big straw hat with a flapping brim was discovered. It had been picked up by a marine during the return march from Cusco. The guerrilla who had worn the hat had no further use for it. Clapping this discarded souvenir on my own head I was protected against the blazing sun. A detail so trifling as this big straw hat is mentioned because it was soon to become an affair of sinister significance to an impulsive correspondent named Ralph Paine.

The lull in the fighting was abruptly broken by the hammering staccato of a machine gun. The drowsy marines in the trenches rolled over to their rifles as a man is startled in his bed when an alarm clock rings. An officer with field glasses at his eyes had discovered a movement against the grassy hillside across a valley. Where the trees and bushes were less profuse, in an opening of the jungle, a considerable number of Spanish guerrillas were in the act of crossing to another ridge of ground. All that made them visible were the big straw hats. The machine gun sprayed that hillside with bullets. It flushed the enemy like shooting into a covey of quail. You could see the straw hats bob up and disappear in all directions. Having made themselves scarce, with amazing rapidity, the straw hats returned the compliment by resuming the action with rifle fire. Once more the bullets buzzed across the camp and the marines set their sights and pulled trigger at whatever they fancied to be a living target.

The young man named Paine decided to betake himself elsewhere. There seemed to be no trench to hold him comfortably. He was fastidious about a proper fit. He would return to the bottom of the hill, beside the bay, and see what was going on there. Having reached this destination, he poked along the beach and found a detachment of a hundred marines. They were posted to keep the line of communication open and also to guard a large heap of ammunition boxes from which the camp occasionally replenished its stock.

These marines were so placed that they commanded a little valley between the hills, a valley which ran down to the bay. On one side of it was the camp, on the other the ambushed enemy. The camp could not be rushed from this direction so long as the hundred marines were there to thwart it. When the machine gun set the battle going again these men had swarmed into line behind fortifications hastily improvised from boxes of ammunition and provisions. Out of the water scampered naked men who had been bathing. As they ran they arrayed themselves with cartridge belts and rifles.

Ralph Paine tarried to get acquainted with them and found the conversation entertaining. They were very fine men. He was glad to sit down upon a box of shells. The heat of the sun, that falling down the hill with the Colt automatic gun and the omission of breakfast had combined to make him feel a trifle queer. I am ready to swear that the one drink of Scotch—*not* a large one, mind you—had nothing whatever to do with it. If he had tackled breakfast with his customary zeal, nothing extraordinary would have occurred.

A habit of these Spanish guerrillas was to wrap themselves in palm leaves and climb a tree where they baffled detection and could practice fancy sharpshooting in a leisurely manner. It is the plain truth that Ralph Paine felt sure he saw one of these crafty marksmen in a distant tree. At once he wished greatly to shoot this Spanish assassin, which was an impulse perfectly proper. The marines had done more than their share. To lend them a hand was no more than courtesy. In fact, the young man's admiration of the battalion was so great that he was ready to charge the entire force of guerrillas, by way of showing his appreciation. And this he proceeded to do.

Some time after this, Stephen Crane wrote for *McClure's Magazine* a story cast in the fictional form which he labeled, "The Lone Charge of William B. Perkins. A True Story." I read it with embarrassment. As a disciple of realism, Crane had been conscientious. In order that you may visualize the incident as he saw it, and to save the chief actor from talking about himself for a few minutes, I quote, in part:

> And now it befell Perkins to discover a Spaniard in the bush. In a loud voice he announced his perception. He also declared hoarsely that if he only had a rifle he would go and possess himself of this particular enemy. Immediately an amiable young corporal who had been shot in the arm said: "Well, take mine." Perkins thus acquired a rifle and a clip of five cartridges.

"Come on!" he shouted. This part of the battalion was lying very tight, not yet being engaged, but not knowing when the business would swirl around to them.

To Perkins they replied with a roar. "Come back here, you —— fool. Do you want to get shot by your own crowd? Come back, come back, you —— ——."

As a detail it might be mentioned that the fire from a part of the camp swept the journey upon which Perkins had started.

Now behold the solitary Perkins adrift in the storm of fighting, even as a champagne jacket of straw is lost in a great surf. He found it out quickly. Four seconds elapsed before he discovered that he was an almshouse idiot plunging through hot, crackling thickets on a June morning in Cuba. *Sss-s-s-swing-sing-ing-pop* went the lightning-swift metal grasshoppers over him and beside him. *Sshsh-swing-pop!* Perkins decided that if he cared to extract himself from a tangle of imbecility he must shoot. The entire situation was that he must shoot. It was necessary that he should shoot. Nothing would save him but shooting. It is a law that men thus decide when the waters of battle close over their minds. So with a prayer that the Americans would not hit him in the back nor the left side, and that the Spaniards would not hit him in the front, he knelt like a supplicant alone in the desert of chaparral, and emptied his magazine at his Spaniard before he discovered that his Spaniard was a bit of dried palm branch.

Then Perkins flurried like a fish. His reason for being was a Spaniard in the bush. When the Spaniard turned into a dried palm branch, he could no longer furnish himself with one adequate reason. Then did he dream frantically of some anthracite hiding place, some profound dungeon of peace where blind mules live placidly chewing the far-gathered hay.

Sss-swing-win-pop! Prut-prut-prrut! Then a field gun spoke. *Boom-ra-swow-ow-ow-ow-pum!* Then a Colt automatic began to bark. *Crack-crk-crk-crk-crk-crk*, endlessly. Raked, enfiladed, flanked, surrounded, and overwhelmed, what hope was there for William B. Perkins?

But war is a spirit. War provides for those that it loves. It provides sometimes death and sometimes a singular and incredible safety. There were few ways by which it was possible to preserve Perkins. One way was by means of a steam boiler.

Perkins espied near him an old, rusty steam boiler lying in the bushes. War only knows how it was there, but there it was, a temple shining with safety. With a moan of haste, Perkins flung himself through that hole which expressed the absence of a steam pipe.

Then ensconced in his boiler, Perkins comfortably listened to the ring of a fight which seemed to be in the air above him. Sometimes bullets struck their strong, swift blows against the boiler's sides, but none entered to interfere with Perkins' rest.

Time passed. The fight dwindled to *prut-prut-prut-prut*. And when silence came, Perkins might have been seen cautiously protruding from the boiler. Presently he strolled back toward the marine lines with his hat not able to fit his head for the new bumps of wisdom that were on it.

The marines, with an annoyed air, were settling down again, when an apparitional figure came from the bushes. There was great excitement.

"It's the crazy man!" they shouted and as he drew near they gathered tumultuously about him and demanded to know how he had accomplished it.

Perkins made a gesture, the gesture of a man escaping from an unintentional mud bath, the gesture of a man coming out of battle, and then he told them.

The incredulity was immediate and general. "Yes, you did! What? In an old boiler? An old boiler? Out in that brush? Well, we guess not!" They did not believe him until two days later when a patrol happened to find the rusty boiler, relic of some curious transaction in the ruin of the sugar industry. The marines of the patrol marveled at the truthfulness of war correspondents until they were almost blind.

Soon after his adventure, Perkins boarded the tug, wearing a countenance of poignant thoughtfulness.

This is how the author of "The Red Badge of Courage" interpreted it. To the reader it will be obvious that he pinned a leather medal, as a booby prize, on William B. Perkins. The verdict will not be disputed. And yet it seemed a perfectly logical impulse at the time, to shoot up the Spanish army as a token of hearty coöperation with the battling marines. Had it occurred twenty years later, the students of psychoanalysis would be demanding to know what was the matter with the young man's complex and how about his reactions. But he would have had Freud & Co. guessing, because the explanation was so simple. This was merely another attack of *damfoolitis*.

Touching on the historian of this episode as well as on my own activity in it, part of a letter—recently received from McCready, now a highly reputable newspaper publisher in St. John, New Brunswick, seems apropos. It runs:

In your yarning don't neglect the story of landing the marines, leaving Crane with them and coming back to find that the war had been started and that Stephen proposed to remain with his dead until the fray was over—that he refused to write anything at once or go to a cable station and write en route, being blind to all duties and heedless of all seductions. For why? Because he was looking for color and impressions and all that, and having found them there he was and there he would remain. When he finally was lured by promises of beer and cigarettes—when he agreed, under these softening influences to dictate the epic to me and caught me in the act of omitting an adjective or two—then there occurred a clinch between the novelist-artist and the plain reporter thinking in terms of cable tolls.

No, I am not forgetting that it was on that

same day you were standing off hordes of Spanish skirmishers from your post in the sounding recesses of the deserted boiler. I was nearly shot—military term—that day, but as I recall the crowded hours now, I think the impression of horror that clings to me most springs not from my peril from enemy fire so much as from the horrid crash and din which I could not at the time identify but which I learned subsequently, as we rolled seaward again, was caused by the impact of Spanish shells and rifle bullets upon the rounded steel walls of your boiler.

It was not an incident for Ralph Paine, alias William B. Perkins, to write about in news dispatches. The incident might have been called extraneous to the war. When he returned home and the thing followed him, he laughed it aside as utter nonsense. But the first informant, who was the hostess at a dinner party, made this retort:

"My brother-in-law is a major in the Marine Corps and he was with the battalion at Guantánamo. He saw you do it."

To set the matter right in this chronicle of fact, there were essential details which Stephen Crane overlooked. The most important of these concerned that big, flapping straw hat for which a guerrilla had no more use because of his sudden death. I had worn it gratefully, even during that unsupported advance with the rifle of the wounded corporal. When these friendly marines were yelling at me to come back, one of them said something about throwing away that hat, for God's sake, but this made no impression at the moment.

The fact that the marines on the hill shot at these big straw hats on sight as almost the only targets visible was well worth noting, but there was room for no more than one idea under this particular straw hat. It went bobbing along the valley and the marines in camp attempted to drill holes through it. They failed to do so because the wearer of the hat was moving too fast to be hit by any one but an expert wing shot. At Yale this man Paine had been called a clumsy oarsman and a sluggish football player. At Guantánamo the coaches would have offered him apologies. He would have been invited to join the track team and show the other hundred-yard sprinters how slow they were. His heels flew up behind and swished the brim of the straw hat. This is how he ran.

As Stephen Crane has testified, he did not burn the wind in this manner until after he had shot the borrowed rifle empty. At first, the purpose of potting that Spanish sharpshooter in the tree had fascinated him and he had been more or less oblivious to the efforts of those who were trying to pot *him*. But with no more cartridges there was indeed a lack of occupation—that frame of mind in which one is apt to be bored. To retreat may have been the part of wisdom but it didn't look so. It was my belief that besides the marines the *Escaudra de Guantánamo,* three thousand strong, was shooting at the rapidly moving figure in the valley which was I, the latter having rightly assumed that no Spanish soldier would be in that particular position.

The sugar boiler stood among the trees, the ruins of a brick chimney close by. If the chimney had been intact, it is not boastful to affirm that I could have reached the top in one bound and dived down inside. In the end of the boiler was an opening. It was not where the steam pipe had been. No two-hundred-pound man could have inserted himself through such a small aperture as that, although I might have tried. The furnace door was my appointed haven. I took it head foremost, as clean as a whistle, without rubbing the rust from the door frame.

Nor could the art of Stephen Crane depict the sense of ineffable contentment with which I nestled in that providential old boiler. A brave man would not have sacrificed his precious dignity in this manner. You could imagine such a one strolling calmly back to the hundred marines behind their breastwork of cartridges and hard-tack and easily exclaiming, while he flicked the dust from his riding boots with a silk handkerchief:

"Rather warm work out there, boys. Devilish poor shooting, though. The marines disappointed me. I shall have to speak to the colonel about it. They ought to have bagged me."

Did you ever sleep in an attic room and listen to the patter of an autumn rain on the shingles? Snug and comfortable to be all tucked in, wasn't it? To sit hunched in that blessed old boiler was like that—only more so. The steel-nosed bullets rang against the iron plates with a musical tintinnabulation. There was a slight uneasiness, of course, lest a spot eaten thin by rust might let a bullet in. But it was a bully old boiler and I loved it.

It was an excellent place in which to sit and think hard. A man with no breakfast under his belt could not lodge in this boiler

all day. It was a splendid tenement for a transient visitor caught in a storm but this is all you could say for it. There was nothing to indicate that the marines were eager to send a relief expedition. They had shown their friendship by giving the missing correspondent a rifle. And he had absconded with government property.

There now percolated the conjecture that the big straw hat might have had something to do with all that shooting at Ralph Paine. He took it from his head and used it as a fan. You could have raised steam in that boiler without building a fire under it. As a summer resort it was out of the question.

"That hat made trouble for me," was the lucid conclusion. "The marines and the Spaniards were shooting at each other across the valley, of course, but at least a million bullets flew entirely too low. Both parties disliked this hat, it looks to me. I won't wear it when I go back. I'd rather get sunstruck."

Go back? This was something that had to be done, but shiveringly, like jumping into a bath of ice water. However, this getting to the beach had one advantage over the *Gussie* expedition. I did not have to tow a horse. The fighting had died down. Bullets no longer rang bull's-eyes on the boiler plates. It was a propitious time for emerging like a hermit crab forsaking its shell. The straw hat was *not* carried along as a souvenir. There was an acute feeling of homesickness in leaving this dear old rusty boiler.

This return journey down the valley was made with long strides but, by contrast, it was as peaceful as going to church. The hundred marines offered a vociferous welcome, as Stephen Crane has informed you, and the wounded corporal seemed glad to get his rifle back. There was considerable discussion, a sort of informal court of inquiry, concerning the adventure. It was agreed that the correspondent was cold sober. And not all the marines were ready to say that he was crazy. A grizzled gunnery sergeant declared, after gravely pondering it:

"These newspaper boys have a hard time of it, what with bucketin' around in nasty weather with the blockadin' fleet where nothing seldom happens. Why shouldn't this lad enjoy himself when he gets a chance? It was like takin' a day off. Why didn't we give him a belt full of cartridges and he could have set all tight in the boiler and made a real holiday of it."

"It was that straw hat that gummed the deal for him," said a tall private. "If he'd had sense enough to lose that lid, pronto, he wouldn't have got pestered with so many bullets. For a man as big as he is, I sure did admire the way he slung his feet. He must have looked funny from up in the camp. I'll bet them guys was sayin', 'There goes one swift Spaniard that don't waste no time on siestas.' "

The correspondent expressed his gratitude for these kindly opinions and as he walked away the marines began to whistle the air of "Johnny Get Your Gun."

This was the last day of the fighting at Guantánamo Bay. Convinced that they could not dislodge the battalion, and severely mauled, the guerrilla forces retired inland and the harbor was safe for Admiral Sampson's ships. The *Three Friends* made another trip to Jamaica and then returned to her station off Santiago.

I went aboard the flagship *New York* for a chat with my friends in the wardroom and steerage mess. Among the officers pleasantly encountered were Colonel Robert L. Meade, commanding the marines of the fleet, and Major Mancil C. Goodrell of the flagship's marine detachment. We three finally drifted into the colonel's stateroom to talk over the good fight of Huntington's battalion at Guantánamo. The suggestion was made that I should try to get a commission as second lieutenant in the Marine Corps. I listened with enthusiasm. It was most desirable. Just then no other career seemed so congenial.

The colonel and the major would be pleased to write letters of indorsement and recommendation, said they, and this they proceeded to do at the desk in the stateroom. These letters they would forward to Washington at once, along with my application. At that time the editor in chief of the Philadelphia *Press,* Charles Emory Smith, was a member of President McKinley's cabinet, as the postmaster general. Naturally enough, I wrote a letter to Mr. Smith, acquainting him with my ambition and requesting him to use his influence in my behalf.

It meant losing a promising young journalist but in time of war I thought that Mr. Charles Emory Smith might be willing to make the sacrifice. He was a kindly man

with a sense of humor and I hoped he had forgotten or overlooked my last interview with him in the *Press* office. He had run up from Washington to keep in touch with his newspaper and while strolling through the city room he was good enough to stop and say:

"How are you, Mr. Paine? What are you doing now? Anything interesting?"

"Not very, thank you, Mr. Smith. I shall have to be in Easton to-morrow to cover the laying of a corner stone or the dedication of a new building or something at Lafayette College. You know what those things are—some tiresome orator delivers an address, all wind and platitudes, and you have to sit and listen to it. Misfortunes like that blight a reporter's life."

"Ah, yes," said Charles Emory Smith with a smile that was not wholly spontaneous. "I believe I am to be the principal speaker at Lafayette College to-morrow."

Need I add that the eloquent address of the postmaster general and editor was reported by Ralph D. Paine with the utmost fidelity and an accuracy that amounted to one hundred per cent? And he felt uneasy until he saw the closing paragraph ticked off by the Easton telegraph operator.

To return to that afternoon aboard the flagship *New York,* the documents were made ready for mailing, and the colonel, the major and I felt sanguine that the United States Marine Corps would shortly acquire a new second lieutenant. We went up to the quarter-deck where the air was much cooler. Admiral Sampson paced to and fro, hands clasped behind him, with that detached, introspective demeanor. He paused to remark very graciously:

"Good afternoon, Mr. Paine. How has your conduct been since the night war was declared when you came aboard—er—call it unceremoniously?"

"My conduct, sir?" was the hasty reply. This was too soon after Guantánamo for questions like that. "My record is active but excellent. Why, you can ask Colonel Meade and Major Goodrell. They have just given me written testimonials. Would you like to see them?"

"Never mind," said Admiral Sampson with a rare twinkle. "You had better hang onto those testimonials. They may keep you out of jail."

The sequel of this epistolary industry came several months later. The campaign of Santiago and its aftermath had given this aspiring correspondent other things to think about than his candidacy for the Marine Corps. It had been an impulse born of the time and the place. The momentum of journalism whirled him into other orbits and that afternoon with the colonel and the major had become a dimming memory. It was recalled when he chanced to meet Mr. Charle Emory Smith in Washington.

"Why didn't you accept that commission in the Marine Corps?" inquired the postmaster general. "I spoke to the president about it and he was most agreeable. He made a note of the matter and said that he would look after it personally."

"I never heard a word from Washington, Mr. Smith. I was hoping to be ordered North for the examinations but there was nothing doing."

"Well, let's look into this!" he exclaimed. "I am rather curious to know."

Mr. Smith promptly investigated and discovered that another young man named Paine, from Connecticut, had made application for a commission in the Marine Corps but without results until the postmaster general interviewed the president. Then the amiable and patient William McKinley, amid the tremendous pressure of affairs, had said a word in favor of bestowing this second lieutenant's commission, but the Marine Corps, with the best of intentions, gave it to the other Paine. He made far better use of it, I have no doubt, and Ralph Paine was left to continue his career as a reporter of events.

That lone charge of William B. Perkins at Guantánamo did, indeed, cause its hero to wear an expression of poignant thoughtfulness at times, as Stephen Crane has related. More than once he found himself meditating with respect to an episode of the Santiago blockade which, when witnessed, he had regarded as pure comedy. Now he viewed it in a different light and his sympathy was with the enemy.

What had happened was this.

The *Dolphin* had been cruising to the eastward of the Morro when Commander Henry Lyon descried a train of open flat cars loaded with Spanish troops coming from the direction of Juricao and bound to Santiago. At this point the railroad skirted the beach, running through a succession of short tunnels and deep cuts with open spaces between.

The train was moving from one tunnel toward the next when the *Dolphin* dashed shoreward and shelled the train with a four-inch battery at a range of only six hundred yards. The engineer yanked the throttle open and rattled the train along to gain the tunnel ahead of him, like a rabbit racing for a hole. The refuge proved to be a lamentable misfit, for it was a bit too short to shelter the locomotive and its string of flat cars.

The train pulled ahead a little and the *Dolphin* banged away at the locomotive. It backed violently and two cars were exposed at the hinder end of the tunnel. Chased by flying fragments of shell the troops upon these cars departed for the bushes without orders. Then the *Dolphin* bombarded the side of the tunnel and filled the air with earth and masonry. The Spanish engine driver thereupon fixed his gaze on the next refuge and the train went scuttling to reach it. The American bluejackets were hilarious. Never before in their experience had they beheld a hysterical locomotive. It had almost gained a refuge in a long cut when a shell exploded squarely in the boiler and the game of hide and seek ended right then and there.

The Spanish soldiers instantaneously vanished from those flat cars and proceeded to Santiago on foot. One was puzzled to know whether to call this a naval engagement or a train wreck. At least a hundred conscript youths of Spain, in uniforms of blue bedticking, could find no mirth in this excursion, for they were killed or wounded by the target practice of the *Dolphin*.

As I say, it no longer seemed so uproariously comical to me. The experience of those poor devils was too much like the adventure of a young man who had dived into a rusty sugar boiler. And if his girth had been a trifle larger or the furnace door a few inches smaller his plight would have very much resembled that of the panicky locomotive so frantically trying to find a tunnel long enough.

These reminiscences of Mr. Paine began in the issue of November 20, 1921. In the next number he will tell how he was "Jailed With Every Courtesy" in Havana.

PRONG-HORN ANTELOPE NEED PROTECTION

READERS who enjoyed Edison Marshall's novel, "Folk of the Gray Sage," that was published in THE POPULAR of March 20, 1921, will be interested to know that Mr. Marshall's plea for the proper protection of the fast-vanishing prong-horn antelope, once as numerous as the buffalo, is echoed by so noted a naturalist as Mr. George Bird Grinnell.

As those who read Mr. Marshall's story will remember, the prong-horn antelope is one of the few North American animals that is without close relations anywhere else in the world—a one-hundred-per-cent American of the animal world. Now this unique and interesting animal seems on the verge of extinction, for sheepmen are driving their herds into its last refuge, the country along the border of eastern Oregon and northern Nevada. Some effort has been made to have this territory—valueless for agricultural purposes—set aside for the protection of the prong-horn and of the sage hen, our largest grouse, which seems to be going the way of the wild pigeon. Although the prong-horn is protected by law, it is claimed that some of the sheepmen, fearing the loss of their grazing lands, have declared their intention of killing off the antelope so that the government will not establish a game refuge in the district.

Mr. Grinnell has been informed that an official of the Biological Survey recently saw the carcasses of fourteen antelope that had been shot wantonly and left where they fell. This official was informed that stockmen had seen twenty-seven antelope that had been killed in the same fashion. Mr. Grinnell says that active measures for the protection of these animals should at once be taken by State and Federal authorities, and we suggest to those of our readers who live in Oregon or Nevada that they help in the good work by bringing the matter to the attention of their representatives at their State capital.

Spunyarn

By George Hugh Banning

(A Four-Part Story—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XX.

DESERTION ON THE HIGH SEAS.

A SHIP without discipline, Mr. Farrier, is like a bottle of beer without a cap. It loses its personality!" explained the skipper shortly after having "knocked seven bells out of" Black-fin. "When your arm is well, learn to use it! *Understand?"*

The old man was seated in the owner's cabin of the *Evening Star* scrutinizing the young officer and drumming the table with his fingers.

"Leave it to me next time, sir," said Farrier.

"Too much is being left to you," growled the old man. "You're doing well, but don't take yourself so seriously."

Farrier frowned. When Black-fin, the wheelman, had "luffed up" despite Farrier's orders to "hold 'er off" it was Farrier's place, not the skipper's, to administer the "seven-bells cure," if such were necessary.

Like all who class themselves as yachtsmen, Farrier could handle a small vessel just a little better than the next man. In fact, as third officer he made a better skipper; but again as third officer he stowed this knowledge under his "foretop" and the skipper was never enlightened.

To Farrier, leaving the *Aggie* for the *Evening Star,* was like leaving mules for race horses. This change, however, worked opposites for all remaining hands. Mule drivers have difficulties with horses—especially race horses—and the *Evening Star* was a regular Kentucky Picket when it came to "tin-canning it."

"You've handled small craft before, I take it," nodded the old man.

"Yes sir—lots of them."

"You love the sport, do you? Where did you do all this—ah—sporting?"

"Monte Carlo, Nice, Florida, California and——"

"What was the occasion for all this yachting?" interrupted the skipper.

"Oh, I liked it. I could get a job nearly any place."

"A job, was it? What do you mean? *Ship,* did you, as one of the crew?"

"Yes sir—during racing season especially. Then, too, I was two years aboard the schooner yacht *La Paloma* before I came to St. Helens."

"*La Paloma,* hey? I knew 'er. Fastest on the coast for heavy weather. Who owned 'er while you were aboard?"

"A man named Whittly. Tom, I used to call him."

The old man's eyes brightened.

"You don't mean Tom Whittly! Long white whiskers and an English accent?"

"You're thinking of the father, sir. He died three years ago."

"Yes, of course. He was a heavy drinker. Old Tom Whittly—great old sketch. There was a real man! He picked me up as a boy when I was down and out. He made third mate of me—saw to it that I got my first papers, and finally he gave me my first ship, the *Halieva,* full-rigged, and the tautest little ship of his fleet. I made good, but I'd 'a' been in the foks'l to-day if it hadn't been for Whittly. He owned a sugar plantation on Oahu. And so you shipped under his son, and on a *yacht,* did you?" The word "yacht" came with a touch of scorn.

Farrier nodded.

"Old Tom Whittly," the skipper mused; "I remember now—he had a son. They tell me he was a regular scapegrace—a good for nothing."

Farrier grinned and turned away. "Poor Tom," he said reminiscently. "Perhaps he was a scapegrace—a good for nothing. Lots of men are that in the eyes of the world. The world, sir, judges men by snapshot. And the world judges so many it has no time for justice."

"You're all wrong!" said the skipper,

humping forward. "The world's judgment is the *only* judgment. There's only one way to test a man; drag him over the snags; see how he pulls through. Throw him against the world and, as the world finds him, so he is. If he fails to buck what the world hurls at him, he's a failure. What his wife, or his sweetheart believes of him is not to be considered. What his mother thinks he is, what his father looks forward to seeing him, how his sister remembers him, or what his best pal believes he must be, has little to do with what he really is. If he can't succeed as a man in his dealings with other men, then, by the Lord Harry!" and the old man slammed the table with his fist, "he's a church mouse—a hawse rat. He's no good! That's what!"

A silence followed.

"Understand, Dick," continued the skipper; "this is not to be taken personally. It's not directed against your friend Whittly—if young Whittly *is* your friend. But if you want to judge him properly, think of him in a life-and-death pinch, apply his fighting qualities—if he has any—and speculate on his possibilities of coming out on top. Take him, for instance, and put him in your shirt. Put him against conditions you've beat your way through during this little voyage. Ask the question: could he have pulled through? Would we, the ship's company, have judged him a man?"

Farrier smiled in silence, for a moment. Then:

"Tom," he replied, "Tom Whittly—here, on this ship—or aboard the *Aggie*—would have been a failure because the best in him he kept to himself. To have displayed his better qualities, from his standpoint, would have been egotism. In other words, sir, he lived in himself—not in the world. Only an egotist can succeed among men."

"Well," said the skipper thoughtfully; "if he lived only in himself, as you put it, wasn't he an egotist?"

"No sir, he was an ego*ist*—not an ego*tist*. An egoist regards himself as the only real thing in life and lets the rest of the world roll by. An ego*tist* is a hero worshiper who puts himself on the same pedestal with his hero and bids the world look on. An ego*tist* is lost without the world. An ego*ist* is lost *with* the world, for the world is in him, and he is lost in himself."

"You're a queer chap, Dick. How about you? Do you consider yourself an egoist, or an egotist?"

"Experience has taught me egotism. What I have to be ashamed of I try to keep to myself, the rest I like to display. Therefore I have no retreat—nothing left to be proud of. Consequently I am not proud—though, perhaps, vain. Tom *was* proud. He saw the world as a prince disguised as a pauper. He laughed at the world as the world laughed at him. He carried his medals in his pocket."

The old man leaned back and cocked an eye. "I don't see *you* displaying your medals, exactly."

"If I had any, I'd wear them. But Tom—Tom was different. That's why I like him. We were good friends. We went to school together and all that."

"Where?"

"Well, Tom went to school in England, first—Eton. I went too, just to be with Tom. But——"

"Who financed all this?" broke in the skipper.

"Tom did. He thought the world of me. But he was discharged after a year for painting black stripes on the white horse belonging to the head master. So when he left, I left too. I didn't like to leave him. I used to try to make him stick by 'the strait and narrow' because that was his only chance. I came with him to California—his father was living there then—and we went to school in the northern part of the State. But Tom was fired for getting too much beer under his belt and beating up a Jap waiter before the head master's eyes. So we made a contract with another school and were both railroaded into college in short order.

"About that time Tom's father died, leaving him enough in interest to put him through college and keep him in shoe leather for the rest of his life. Tom went through college like water through a leaky pipe. He dribbled out. He never graduated. His ambitions were to write. He started a novel in college and as a result there was no time to study. He made me the hero of the yarn, and named it 'Dick Farrier, or the Testament of the Sea.'"

"A religious yarn, was it?"

"No. Tom was far from anything like that. The 'testament' part refers to a legal testament—a will."

"How's that?" said the old man, bristling back.

"A *will*," repeated Farrier. "That's what his plot was based on. But you're not interested in that."

"A true story, was it?"

"Oh yes, in a way. That is, he tried to take it from life, but of course he juggled it around for the sake of the story. He all but finished it aboard *La Paloma* while we were cruising among the Channel Islands off California. We had great times in those days, but Tom was drinking himself to death and I could see him going from bad to worse. All he could do was drink and write, and writing finally fell by the boards.

"One day I said to him, 'Tom, if you don't pick up and quit your fooling, I'm through with you forever.' He swore off for a while, but it wasn't long before he was at it again. So I left him."

"Where is he now?"

"He's dead. Poor Tom's dead," said Farrier, making an attempt at sadness.

"How'd it happen?" asked the other disinterestedly.

"Don't know, exactly, except I left him."

"What! Died because you left him?"

"Yes, sir. I could see he was squandering all the good in him. To have seen that spent would have killed me. So I went away—and he died. It's better he's dead—poor Tom!"

The old man combed his hair with his fingers and stared with a wooden face.

"Never heard the likes of such a yarn," he grumbled.

"If you had known Tom, sir, you'd understand."

"But I don't care about Tom. I'm interested in you just now, Dick. You were born in England, weren't you?"

"Yes, sir. So was Tom. His father and mother were traveling when it happened, and the father himself was an Englishman."

"I'm not asking you about that. I'm asking you about yourself."

"I'm not interested in myself, sir. There's nothing to be interested in. But with Tom, it was different. You see, *Tom* was——"

"Bother Tom!"

'Don't bother him, sir. He's dead."

This conversation, though designed by the skipper for results more enlightening, ended when Farrier forced a sudden retreat on the plea that Ross had sentenced the sun to be shot at noon for latitude.

Tuesday, September 17th, had been recorded in the log book. During her five days' run the *Evening Star* had traced a white wake through eight hundred and forty knots. Her position was now about one hundred and sixty-one and a half degrees east longitude; latitude seven south, thanks to a two-knot west set, not uncommon in this region, which had afforded the disabled *Aggie* about five hundred and seventy-five knots westing during the twelve days' calm.

The total distance to have been traversed by the yawl was charted at one thousand miles, the destination having been Tulagi Harbor, Florida Island, the government seat of the British Solomon Island protectorate. Here the skipper hoped to negotiate means of rescue for the *Aggie*—and incidentally to find the rightful owner of the *Evening Star* and collect salvage, or else sell her at auction. Stevens' claims to the yacht had been laid waste during the peace conference.

Few traces of identification remained aboard the *Evening Star*. The original log book had been lost, stolen or destroyed. Suspicion pointed to Donivan Stevens, but he denied ever having seen such a record. That the vessel had been built in Melbourne and that she might be known among the Solomons was induced by her name plate inscriptions. That she had formerly been in irresponsible hands was the belief of many, though it was quite possible that the ex-mutineers were partially responsible for her topsy-turvy condition. All of which was as might be, however.

Since Roberta's conversation with Farrier aboard the *Aggie* she had consistently avoided him. On the *Evening Star*, small as it was, scarcely ever had she been seen in his company. Her actions were beyond the understanding of Aggie and Ross. Even the old man grumbled of it, wondering if his daughter were not ill.

Her quarters had been in a stateroom with her mother. Here, to-day, as through the porthole she watched the sun go sliding into the sea, she was asking herself if, after all, she had not been overconscientious or just plain foolish. Whatever she had once been guilty of with respect to Dick Farrier, she loved him now and, in this light, who could accuse her of being false? So with the rising of the half moon she went to him on deck.

The *Evening Star* was bending with the warm night wind, splashing down the moon path aglow and dancing with the silver light. Farrier, who lay forward on a coil of rope,

watching the water curl at the stem, was aroused from his musing by the shadow of Roberta projected from a moonbeam. Rising, he came to her as she fixed herself comfortably at the break of the trunk, her back to the mast. So peaceful was the song of the whitecaps that the two sat listening as if caught in dreams and held by the enchantment of music.

"If I were a poet," said Roberta at last, "I know I could write something to-night."

"If I had a pencil and paper," replied Farrier, with reticence; "I could do the same. I have it all in my mind. Have you ever tried to write verse?"

"No—Dick! Have you? Do you write?"

"I've told editors that I could, but so far they seem skeptical."

"But you are trying? Are you really trying?"

"Oh yes. I've been *trying* for a long time."

"Always verse?"

"Not always. Very seldom, in fact. For the past year it has been prose narrative altogether."

"And you have never told me about it, Dick!"

"I didn't know you'd be interested. Every would-be writer is a bore."

"You couldn't bore me, Dick. Tell me more about your work."

"I'm not trying much of anything now, I'm waiting for another plot. But I worked over a year on a long yarn before I came to sea."

"A novel?"

"Perhaps not exactly that in the strict sense of the word. But at least—a very long story. It was a mystery story; the mystery being, where's the story?"

Roberta smiled. "And where *is* the story? Did you bring it with you?"

"Yes, I have a copy—what's left of it. I launched the original before I left St. Helens. The copy received a ducking when the *Aggie* did the submarine act, so you can imagine its condition. I'll give it to you, if you like."

"I'd love to have a copy, Dick. But tell me about it now—just the plot."

"Well, first of all, it's based on a will left by a worthy sire to an unworthy son."

Roberta's eyes opened with amazement. "Oh! It's about you, then?"

"Thanks. I'm flattered. However, I *did* write it about myself, to a certain extent. That is I wove a plot about a 'me' as I would have had myself."

"That's what I meant," faltered the girl.

"And in this particular instance I made myself unworthy."

"Of course."

"'Of course' nothing! I tell you it was a difficult thing to make myself unworthy. But for the sake of the story, so I was, and there's a will with five hundred thousand pounds, left in trust for me, heir to the manor, by my worthy sire—an earl. Lord Gilbert Farrier—we'll call him that—does not care to trust this wealth to his wild son, Dick, so leaves it in trust, with stipulations that before the boy can inherit it he must make a man of himself—prove to the executors that he is fit to assume the responsibility. As a means of proof it is specified that he must put to sea on a sailing vessel and learn to do real work. He must then become a ship's officer, and finally he must marry some 'eminently respectable woman of good repute' to——"

Roberta interrupted with a vain attempt to speak, but ended by vigorously clearing her throat.

"You see," explained Farrier, "I had to have a motive for sending him to sea. It's a sea story, you understand. So off he goes. Every one aboard has heard of him. The papers have been full of it. So you can fancy the merry time he has with all the hard-boiled shellbacks."

But Roberta at that moment could fancy nothing. Her mind worked so fast she could not follow it and her ears throbbed double time with the beating of her heart.

"Now on this particular vessel," continued Farrier, "there's a skipper's daughter. You'd know her type: the kind who would marry a man for his money or prestige—the kind who would think only of what a man has, not what he is. She's worthless, selfish—she's no good."

Farrier paused a moment—a moment that seemed an age to Roberta. Slowly she raised her hand and gripped a halyard. Her voice was nearly a whisper.

"Is she that way—worthless, selfish, no good—all through the book? Doesn't she mend—reform—or something."

"Reform!" echoed Farrier. "How can a woman like that reform? She marries him, yes. But it's all a cooked-up affair. He's forced to by the skipper."

"Oh," was the reply. "I—I don't like

that. I should have had her repent through love and then—well, make it end happily."

"It does end happily but not through any reform of the skipper's daughter. You see, Roberta, a marriage at sea, officiated by a sea captain, is not legal. That's how *Dick* finally squirms out of it, and he later marries the 'girl he left behind him'—one he loves; one who has stood by him through thick and thin despite all gossip peddled by her associates. In this way he carries out the last stipulation of the will, and he does it only one hour before his given time is up."

"What is her name—the girl's—the one he loves?"

"Oh, I named her Lois Barthway. I liked the sound. But in my new book I want to name the heroine—would you mind if I named her Roberta? And I want to make her just like you. I think I know you better than any one else in the world."

Roberta did not answer.

"Would you mind?" repeated Farrier.

Roberta did not answer. She was crying.

"Roberta! What's the matter?"

"Dick," she began, mustering all the strength that was in her, "do you really know me so well?"

"Better than I know myself. And I can't write my book without a Roberta like you."

"Another—'skipper's daughter?'"

Farrier studied her curiously.

"Another *kind* of a skipper's daughter, yes. A *real* girl! Not a schemer. She'd be the kind to care for man for man's sake—money go hang! She'd be a Roberta, like you."

Roberta felt herself trapped in quicksand where each struggle only drew her deeper. A cold force encircled her limbs, bore down upon her breast, rose to the height of her chin until with the terror of suffocation her mind was whirled in panic.

Turning sharply, she sprang to her feet. Her face was deathlike under the blue-silver sheen of the moon. Her words trembled.

"Is it for my benefit you are saying this? Is it sarcasm? Are you trying to torture me. You say you love me—and yet——"

Roberta crumpled in her shadow across the trunk cabin, her body throbbing convulsively with her sobs. Farrier took one step forward, then stood staring in bewilderment.

"Roberta!" he whispered at last. "Roberta, what's the matter. I—I don't understand."

An awkward silence followed. Roberta finally rose, her handkerchief to her eyes. When Farrier took her hand she shuddered and drew it away.

"I can't stand it another minute!" she sobbed. "Go away."

"But I didn't mean to offend you. I was only telling stories—spinning yarns—it's all fiction. What has it to do with you, or me?"

"Everything! Everything in the world. I should have known. I *did* know! I told you once before—as much as I dared. There's nothing left. Oh, please go away! You must leave me for good."

Farrier turned away wondering.

"You must, Dick," she continued more soberly. "It's not your fault, I know. Oh, you don't know—how *miserable* I've been!"

"But—but——" stammered Farrier, impatiently.

"I know what you'll say; you don't understand. But, *I* understand. That's all I can tell you. To me, everything is clear. You must leave me. You will, won't you? In Tulagi—to-morrow?"

Farrier turned almost contemptuously. "To-night, if you wish."

"To-night! You *can't!*"

"Show me that I can't. The whaleboat's a drag. Mallu harbor is only thirty miles away."

"Mallu harbor? Malaita Island! Dick! *Please!* You can't!"

"Why not? If I wait for to-morrow I surely can't. Tulagi is the capital of the government—what government there is. There are laws there against immigration, you know."

"But on Malaita——"

"Men make their own laws. I'm going there and make mine." And he walked away.

Roberta saw him drop through the companionway aft and return shortly with his arms full. He sent the wheelman below, took the wheel and lashed it. He stood by for several minutes while the *Evening Star* trimmed and held her course, then hauling up the tow on a short hawser he tossed his dunnage aboard, stood for a moment thinking and returned again to the cabin.

Roberta made her way aft.

"Don't, Dick. Please don't," she pleaded.

"What's the matter? You wanted me to go."

"Yes, but wait."

"I'll wait three seconds, for three words. Otherwise——"

Three seconds passed and with each second Roberta's heart beat out the three words a thousand times. She could have spoken the words before God, and spoken truly; but she remembered Farrier's story—the "yarn" about a certain skipper's daughter, and her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth.

"She'll tend to luff up," he said, pointing to the trembling tack. "The watch is yours, Roberta. Hold 'er full and by."

He swung from the jigger boom to the tow, stepped the mast, cut free, and fell behind. A small white sail appeared on the moon path and vanished again. "Tarry Dick" was gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

TYPHOON.

Just before dawn, Captain Newmiller, seven seas under, awoke and turned out all hands. It was not on Farrier's account, for the skipper had not yet learned of the escape. But the fact was, the old man's sniffer had sniffed, and had sensed no gentle zephyr. Not only that, but the barometer seemed caught with severe sinking spells.

The moon, like a smoked red lantern, hung over a waving calm. The *Evening Star* wallowed in the trough and threatened to roll her very sticks out, while everything from the frying pan in the galley to the boom and gaff on the mainmast rattled and banged a nerve-racking accompaniment. Added to the din came the loud commands of the skipper, the stamping of sea boots on the trunk cabin and the rattle and screech of the running gear as the men worked. They took in the flying and outer jibs. They reefed the staysail and jigger, shortened the mainsail down to storm canvas, spread lifelines, battened down fore and aft and waited for the wind.

They did not wait long. Heavy black clouds came tumbling up from the northwest. A light air fanned the sails as the *Evening Star* fell from tack to tack with a haphazard flapping of canvas.

"Twenty-nine sixty, and fallin', sir," announced Ben-Tenny, stumbling up the companionway. "She'll be fair 'ell!"

The old man brailed back his sou'wester to pocket his hands. The normal register in this region was between 29.90 and 30. But 29.60, this time of year, was one of those numerous things of which the skipper had "never heard the likes." However, he had sniffed at least 29.70 before having referred to the instrument and 29.60 was nothing compared with his most sober forecast. Through the first gray light of dawn the black cloud banks loomed like a yawning recess torn from the sky—torn as an entrance to the world by the thundering furies beyond. A flaw of wind struck the old man's face and whisked past. It was followed by a series of vagrant cat's-paws that came dodging over the waves as if frightened by unseen forces behind. A fine spray swept the deck. Suddenly the old man veered about, cursing from the depths of his sea boots.

"When did it happen?" he snapped.

"W'en did w'at 'appen? The fallin' o' the barometer?"

"Fallin' o' my eye! Where's the whaleboat?"

The little Britisher looked aft, eyed the severed hawser and dropped his lower jaw. "Well, blarst me 'e'd! Devils tyke me, sir, she's gone!"

"Gone! What did you think she was—invisible? Where's Farrier?"

Ben-Tenny's answer was blown back down his throat by a sudden gust. There came a sound like the rattle of distant musketry and the door of the companionway slammed to. The *Evening Star* filled off on her port tack. Ben-Tenny dropped back into the cabin.

"Ross!" sang out the skipper.

Ross, who had been supervising the work forward, came aft.

"Where's your sister?"

"Below in her cabin, sir."

"You're sure?"

"Yes sir. She's not well. Seeing Dick shove off in the whaleboat rather upset her."

"She saw him, did she! H'm-mm!"

The old man swore again and this time his boots were not deep enough. "I fancy she just sat there and watched him, eh?"

"Looks that way. When it came third watch the wheelman was sent below. Bobby stayed on deck with Dick. They were alone when it happened. She won't talk. She's all to pieces over it."

"And Farrier'll be to pieces over it a damn sight more when this hits him."

"Twenty-nine fifty-four!" cried Ben-Tenny, appearing a second time at the companionway. " 'Ere she comes! I sye, cap'n, oo 'ucked the wylebaut?"

A sea broke sluggishly over the weather bow. The *Evening Star* slid back, water bubbling at her after scuppers. There came a low sound like tumbling water and a sudden rush of air.

The skipper looked at his watch. It was nearly five o'clock. The sun had just cleared the horizon. He sent all hands below for a bite to eat, ordering Ross to stand by "for the first of it."

And the first came with a bone in its fangs and the day of judgment in tow. Before it swept a fine spray flying like a veil of steam and covering the entire ocean. It seemed as if the very surface of the sea had been ripped up like a carpet, shredded into lint, and sent flying in a waving, white mass over the edge of the world. The *Evening Star* heeled on her beam ends and sped forward. The old man, nearly carried off his feet, sought shelter in the cockpit abaft the cabin. Ross, who had taken the wheel, instinctively luffed up and lowered his head against a driving downpour of rain.

Then came a blast of wind. It struck with the sharp impact of an explosion—an explosion of half the elements. It was a pressure irresistible—a fury—a force absolute. It screamed. It wailed. It lifted coils from their pins, tangled them in the rigging, tore the whipping from their ends. It snatched the inner jib and whisked it away. There was no sea, there was no sky, no air between. All was a mad white panic of vapor—a riot of intangible forces, preventing, at first, even the sea from rising against them.

But this was only the first of it. The sea had not yet marshaled its powers. It had been caught unprepared by the wind. But now it too began to rise. Great towering monsters, with curling and frothing maws, rolled down upon the yawl, tossed her with sickening speed over their crests and dropped her in chaos down the other side.

"Twenty-nine thirty-six!" cried Ben-Tenny, at the top of his voice. "There's the devil t' pye. 'Adn't ye better 'eave 'er to?"

"And drift on a lee shore? Not yet! We'll buck it, that's what! Bend another sheet on that staysail! Stand by to take in the main! And *sharp!*"

"And lower the jigger peak, sir?"

"Do what I tell you! *Fly,* now!"

Thus the *Evening Star* drove into the jaws of a hurricane.

Roberta alone thought of Farrier now. She prayed for his safety, oblivious of her own plight. Screams of the wind, the rush and thunder of waves and the frenzied contortions of the little yawl were all in harmony with the torment of her mind.

Aggie, in the bunk below, was nearly distracted. The world had dropped from under, leaving her suspended alone in a thundercloud. Now she bemoaned the loss of the *Aggie;* now the loss of Dick Farrier. Now she rebuked Charles, now Roberta. Nothing would stay her frank expressions of contempt but the sudden soaring of the yacht in the grip of a comber or the deafening crash of thunder. Then she gasped, or cried out her terror, until choked by strokes of hysteria. Roberta could soothe her mother no more than she could find solace for herself.

There were times when the *Evening Star* seemed so far beneath the surface that she could never rise. There were times when she seemed flying through the air, tumbling like a leaf in a whirlwind. There came sounds into the stuffy cabin of men bellowing above the mad screaming of the wind.

Roberta hid her face in the pillow, overwhelmed by a storm of conjectures. She wondered if Farrier had reached the harbor before the gale had overtaken him. She shuddered to think that he might at that very moment be foundering on a reef where he would be dashed to pieces. Dick Farrier! Her heart throbbed through the syllables of the name faster and faster until it seemed that if he did not, through some means of magic, appear before her, she would go to meet him in death; and death, at that moment, was the force behind each wave.

Suddenly there came a banging at the door and the ruddy, water-streaked face of Ben-Tenny appeared through the opening.

"Pardon, missus," he said, "but it's cap'n's orders. 'E wants ye fer t' put into yer life preservers just in case, ye knaw—in case it gets rough. We're ridin' at a sea anchor now —driftin' perty. An' by the wye, Miss Roberta, I found this 'ere on me bunk. It's addressed t' you. Fawncy Tarry left it."

He handed Roberta a large bulky envelope on which had been scribbled her name.

"Fawncy it's just a keepsake, miss." The little Britisher paused. "Don't worry, lydies. We're 'angin' on all 'unky—'cept there's rocks, ye knaw."

He forced an anæmic smile, lost his balance with a sudden lurch of the vessel and fell back, slamming the door shut. Roberta opened the package with trembling hands and withdrew a bundle of papers, withered and warped—bound loosely with spunyarn.

On the cover was written in hasty scrawls:

I promised you this. If you don't want it, give it to Davy Jones. Sincerely——

And when Roberta read the signature, "Thomas Whittly, Jr.," her thoughts melted into jumbled impressions that whirled like crystals in a kaleidoscope. But on turning to the next page where the title had been worded: "Dick Farrier or the Testament of the Sea, by Thomas Whittly, Jr.," the miscellaneous colors began to harmonize and take form.

She recalled the story as formerly outlined. She remembered the detestable "skipper's daughter" and the strange will involved. Her mind raced on as her fingers turned the pages until suddenly, standing out in bold type, was the will, written word for word as Ross had described it in St. Helens. It was contained on a single sheet, differing from the other pages in that the lines were single spaced and of another type. But the accurate precision of each word, the lawyer phrasing, and the form—even to the blank lines reserved for the signatures of witnesses—made it a perfectly reproduced copy of a true will.

Everything cleared in a flash. The prospective fortune of Dick Farrier was contained only in the pages of a book—a book written by a Thomas Whittly, Jr. Thomas Whittly! The name somehow linked itself with her father. She had heard him speak of a Whittly. With quick determination, she detached the testament from the rest of the manuscript and sprang from her bunk.

"Whatever is happening?" exclaimed Aggie, lifting her tear-streaked face from the pillow.

"Nothing, mother," replied Roberta, nearly breathless. "I—I was just wondering if I hadn't better help you into a life preserver."

She removed two life preservers from beneath the berths and placed them on a chair beside her mother.

"I'll be back in a moment," she said and quickly left the cabin.

Roberta made her way through the narrow passage to the engine room and galley, leaning at an angle of forty-five degrees against the paneled bulkheads. She passed through the main saloon, having to resort, at times, to hands as well as feet while the little vessel went through all the antics of a broncho with a bur beneath its saddle. She reached the companionway, and climbed to the cockpit.

What she now beheld surpassed her wildest imaginings. The *Evening Star* was in the direct path of a hurricane. Her decks, flush to the rails from the last sea she had shipped, were rushing torrents of foam as the stern sank and the bow tossed skyward to meet the breaking crest. The waves were ranges of great, crumbling, roaring, white avalanches, bowling down to destroy with the force of a volcanic explosion behind them.

Ross was alone in the flooded cockpit. He was standing in the lee of the cabin squinting forward at the drag. The wheel had been lashed. All canvas had been taken in and made fast. When Roberta called her brother's name he did not hear. Nothing could be heard but the roar of the sea and the screaming of the gale. Clinging to a life line she drew herself closer. He turned, glaring. Then with sudden impatience and anger he literally dragged her back into the shelter of the companionway.

"Wait!" she cried. "I have to see you!"

"Well, stay below. Good Lord! Do you want to be blown overboard?"

"I came here for another purpose," retorted the girl, displaying the warped piece of manuscript. "Is this the 'will' you saw in St. Helens?"

Ross looked puzzled; then suddenly his eyes gleamed. He snatched the paper and studied it.

"Where did you get this?" he demanded. "Did—did he *leave* it?"

Roberta smiled. "Yes. He gave it to me—with the rest of his manuscript."

Ross replied only with a blank stare.

"Don't you see, Ross," explained Roberta, "it's not a real copy of a will. It's just fiction. So was Dick Farrier—fiction."

She went on to explain the facts as she knew them. Ross seemed to forget the storm as he listened, but when the story

was told his face twisted to cynicism. He laughed.

"Poof! No wonder you let him go!"

"Let him go!" cried the girl, recoiling. "Let him go! I *made* him go because I thought he *was* Dick Farrier. I didn't know then. I made him go because I loved him."

Love was a note on the scale of life Ross had never sounded. To him it was only a word. The realization of this, after a moment, brought a whimsical smile to Roberta's lips, but pressing her brother's hand, she nodded sadly and turned toward her father's cabin.

The skipper was busy with his charts. When Roberta drew near he waved her away with the terse command to go to her cabin and care for her mother. She obeyed after protest, but later, when he seemed more composed, she went to him again. This time he listened, though Roberta heard him grumble about Cape Something-or-other being a lee shore and about the time being limited. So she hastened with her story, explaining in broken phrases why Farrier had left the ship and about the fictional "will." The old man grunted impatiently. But when Roberta announced the fact that Dick Farrier was only a character of fiction and that his real name was Thomas Whittly, Jr., she turned the key that brought the skipper halfway to his feet.

"Thomas Whittly!" he cried. "Dick? the son of—of Whittly—the old man, Tom Whittly?"

Roberta nodded. "Didn't you know a Whittly once?"

"Didn't I know him?" murmured the old man reminiscently. "Didn't I know Tom—poor old——" The skipper's eyes flashed. He sat erect and clenched both fists on the chart before him. "Didn't I know the man who put my wheels on the track and sent me going in the right direction? Got me my first ship! Girl, Tom Whittly saved me from hell, that's what! H'm-mm!"

He sat humming till the hum became a growl. He uttered an oath and lifted his gaze to Roberta.

"You say Dick left—when?"

"Just before midnight."

"Did he tell you where he was bound?"

"Mallu harbor, he said."

"Mallu harbor! The young fool! He'll be *killed*—if he's not drowned first! Mallu bushmen—the lowest cannibals on Malaita! Some of them don't know what a white man looks like. Those who *do*, know the taste better. So Dick was Tom Whittly, was he? Ego*tist!* H'm-mm! He's a man—every bit of him! He's a chip of the block. He's like his father—the old reprobate Tom Whittly! Dick can't go to hell on my account—nor on the devil's account! No! By the Lord Harry! We'll make a run for Mallu!"

But instead, the *Evening Star* attempted a run for the bottom of the sea. There came a roaring of a breaker as the skylight was stove in, a clatter of glass, a blast of air and a crashing deluge of water. The old man jumped to his feet, but was borne down by the weight of it. The compartment was flooded.

The old man rose, spluttering and cursing. The vessel pitched over on her stem, diving for the trough. The water beat upon the forward bulkhead and recoiled.

"Go to your cabin and take care of your mother!" the skipper ordered Roberta and staggered for the door. "Fly now!"

Roberta followed her father to the corridor, and saw him disappear aft through the engine room. She heard a second downpour of water thundering into the cabin, she heard Aggie scream. The door flew open from Aggie's cabin and she appeared harnessed—not in one life preserver but in two.

"Mother!" cried Roberta, rushing to her and grasping her hand. "Everything is all right! Don't be frightened! We're going to find him! We're going to Mallu!"

CHAPTER XXII.

SHIPWRECK.

Captain Newmiller knew that the *Evening Star* could afford to ride at her drag little longer without the reefs off Cape Astrolabe to pay. That she must trust to her sticks and canvas was evident; and in this there were two alternatives. Under one jib and a storm trysail bent to the jigger mast, she might attempt it full and by with the hope of reaching the storm center. Or she might attempt to fall off and run before. The first was risk enough, but to fall off in this sea was, from a sane standpoint, an easy way to founder and sink.

But the old man was on deck this time with blood in his eyes. He was prepared to accomplish what only a fool would dare, though, unlike a fool, he knew the dangers. He knew the dangers of falling off at this

time and he knew the dangers of attempting an entry through the reefs off Mallu.

Mallu harbor is immediately to the eastward of Cape Astrolabe. It is formed by a hooked prong of reef, parallel to the cape and extending from its northeast corner. The channel is nearly a mile in length and scarcely two hundred yards wide. Space at the entrance is very confined and inaccurately charted.

All this the old man knew, but his purpose was as fixed as his fate. At his order all hands came tumbling up from the booby hatch and companionway, like rats from a sinking ship, as the *Evening Star,* like a porpoise, plunged under and came up for air.

"Stevens!" sang out the skipper.

Stevens did not crawl aft; he was washed there and only a jigger shroud held him from going overboard.

"Stand to wheel!" came the order.

After that, and despite everything, operations began to go like clockwork. A line was bent to the drag hawse, and led outboard to the after bitt. It was hauled in till the strain was relieved on the bitt forward. The vessel sheered slightly to port. Men stood by to set the staysail, and simultaneously as it caught the wind and snapped out to leeward against its sheet the hawse was let go from the bitt forward, the helm was ordered up and the *Evening Star* fell off from the teeth of the wind and into the jaws of the sea.

The attack of the seas was more appalling than that of armed battalions. It was an uprising of invisible fiends—ubiquitous furies—monstrosities. When the hawse forward was let go, the small vessel was at the combing crest of a wave, and when the next one broke the *Evening Star* lay broadside in its very jaws. Beside her trembled a mountain of dappled green—a tremendous wall of water. It rose higher—it stole the wind from the sail and the sight of clouds from the heavens.

The skipper's orders were drowned in the roar of a Titanic breaker and before he could have uttered another syllable the miserable crew groveled in chaos. It was a turmoil of silence and a jumble of darkness.

But it ended. The death cry of the hurricane returned as a welcome. The *Evening Star,* by some trick of Providence, had been whirled about in time to catch the bulk of it abaft the starboard beam; and now, with cockpit flooded and decks that were boiling torrents, she was flying before the crest like a surf board, her rudder out of water and with a listing yaw that worked the wheelman to madness.

Before she could be fetched up with a jerk by the drag aft, the old man had severed the hawse; and now the jigger sail was set while the *Evening Star* slid trembling down the rear of the comber.

"Trim sails! Sharp!" roared the skipper.

The skipper stood by until sheets and halyards were overhauled and made fast to the proper pins. Then ordering all hands but Ross and Stevens below he disappeared through the companionway for his cabin to determine further the nature of the Mallu entrance.

Due to the driving rain and spray it was some time before any sign of Malaita Island appeared. But suddenly, dim and gray as a shadow, there loomed dead ahead the rugged outline of high ridges sloping down from Mount Alit, some two thousand feet above the sea. The *Evening Star* seemed only about five miles from the harbor. She should be there, at her present rate, in less than half an hour.

The old man was notified. He appeared in the cockpit with a binocular and attempted to identify a landmark but announced the results by a volley of well-chosen synonyms for "damn."

Another half hour proved their dead reckoning wrong. The *Evening Star* was flying along the crests of breakers, and no sign of reefs or anything resembling a harbor appeared.

Suddenly, the islet of Bassakanna was sighted two points to starboard and the shadowy outline of Cape Astrolabe loomed behind it through the haze. Again all hands were turned to, and again the skipper was prepared to take a chance.

But chance, if such a thing exists, was equally prepared to take the skipper. It lurked behind its submerged fortress—the barrier reef. It employed strategy, setting off the opening from what appeared to be a logical entrance. It resorted to camouflage, stirring no less surge at the opening than along the impregnable coral ridges. It created a barrage of driving rain and spindrift and it disguised eternal silence with a tempest's din. It was not chance, the skipper saw. It was doom.

But to Roberta now, it was romance—it was adventure. It was life and the joy of

fighting for it. Whether it was for the sake of Tom Whittly, Dick Farrier or John Doe, it made no difference. The name was nothing—her love had laid claim to the man. And somehow she felt he was safe. Despite the worst that the wind and waves could do as the *Evening Star* flew before them, Roberta was happy. Clad in her tattered garment—the same she had worn and saved from the burning *Aggie*—she sat impatiently fluttering the pages of the ominous manuscript and waiting for something to happen.

It happened—not something, but everything. Roberta knew of it a moment before it came and was conscious of it for a moment after—but only for a moment.

A stunning blow, a crash, a deluge—that was all. There was no time for fright nor to seek means of escape. It happened. It was over.

The *Evening Star* had not struck a reef. She had been dropped upon one. With the collapse of a great breaker she had slammed down on it. It was like an unsuspecting diver dropping headforemost from a platform into a swimming pool from which the water had been drained. His momentary embarrassment or kind of dull amazement and disgust upon striking the cement bottom, together with the oblivion which might logically most speedily follow, were much in the same category as Roberta's impressions of the wreck of the *Evening Star*.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MAN-EATERS.

Not so many hours before, nor so many miles away, a whaleboat had piled up on the rocks, and the body of a man had been hurled out. Whether this were Astrolabe, Mallu, or the pebbly beach of Paradise, the unfortunate victim did not know. He had been half drowned, exhausted, and what life remained was dashed to the rocks and left a prey to the combined forces of the elements.

A concave wall of green water drew up to a crest and balanced. There came a bursting crash like the splitting of a volcanic mountain. Stones, sticks, gravel, sand and pieces of wrecked whaleboat beat down with tons of water in a boiling furor.

The ocean receded. There was no whaleboat. There was no man. The rock was clean.

Another sea broke and on a neighboring sand bar a torn sail was deposited. It became wedged between two bowlders. It moved. A tattered and bleeding creature crawled out from under. He dragged himself up the slope through the mangroves to a small opening beneath a breadfruit tree, where he fell, face downward, with scarcely the strength for breath. But with breath came sleep. It bore him through the remaining hours of the day, the night, and into the early morning.

When he wakened the terrible past was like a dream left behind in the night to him, and the silver morning filled the glade like a tranquil vision. Only a mild warm breeze swayed the foliage overhead where like sunlight in and out the leaves the green doves went. Through the balmy air a diaphanous scarf of steam rose from the tall grasses and tiger lilies. Over the tops of the mangroves bordering the sea the waves sparkled with a billion spangles as they rolled in with intermittent surging upon the rocks and reefs below. It was all a mystery, soft, soothing and gentle as the sight of some deep lavender grotto beneath the sea.

Alias Dick Farrier propped himself upon an elbow in an attempt to rise. His musing took a sudden and abrupt twist. He became aware that his bones ached. His skin burned. His throat was dry and sticky. It smarted for water. He was like some desert wanderer groveling on the sand with the sparkling waters of a mirage stretched out before him.

But such waters are silent; and from the ravine came the cool, babbling music of a mountain brook. It lured him to his feet and he steadied himself against a palm. He looked about. He was on the outskirts of a dense jungle, abounding in coconut, mango, banana, breadfruit and other trees of such variety that he could not have named them.

As Farrier ventured forth, even the anticipation of water was refreshing. His pulse leaped anew. His mind sprang gladly to meet new issues and fresh tides of thought.

But it all ended at the ravine. He stopped short and drew back breathless. He threw himself into the mangroves and crept forward to another opening. Thirst, hunger, sunburn and aching bones—all were forgotten—trammeled in a stampede of mental confusion.

The stream was there as he had expected, sparkling cool and silver beneath the dipping leaves. From an opening on the far side the ravine sloped abruptly and on this slope,

descending, each with a spear or war club, jogged four woolly headed and bearded savages, naked save for ludicrous ornaments and narrow loin cloths.

But these creatures, grotesque and terrible as they appeared, were not the cause of Farrier's apprehension. Down in the clearing, lashed to a tree, was Donivan Stevens, and before him stood two more Solomon bushmen.

One of them, who by his actions seemed to be the chief, wore an oval mirror strapped to his forehead, and two wooden disks at least three inches in diameter set snugly in the lobes of his ears. He was medium in stature, straight-nosed, square-jawed and with heavy, sullen lips. He jabbered ceaselessly, though always in an undertone or whisper, and motioned impatiently to the other four.

His companion was no less than a monstrosity. Decorated as he was with a toothbrush through the cartilage of his nose and with two huge abalone shells wedged in his ear lobes, he appeared ludicrous enough. He was worse. He was ghastly. His four limbs were inflated like purple bladders. They bulged to twice—three times—their normal size. He was plagued with elephantiasis, if not leprosy. He was a living sacrilege; a slander to his maker—the devil.

Upon the arrival of the other four blacks he waddled off and vanished behind a thicket where, judging from glances, was another source of interest besides Donivan Stevens. But Stevens was no small attraction in himself. They giggled like small children over his possessions, all of which were deposited with the chief who strapped a belt and sheath knife about his hips and fastened a rather shabby pair of green garters below his knees. Then rising to the height of his majesty he beckoned two of his staff, jabbering at them and motioning to either embankment. As he did so, a ray of sun was caught by the mirror on his forehead, and projected in Farrier's eyes.

Blinded by the sudden flash, the latter withdrew. When he looked again one of the bushmen was climbing the trail—the one leading not two feet from the bush concealing Farrier.

There was no time to lose. He pulled himself deeper into the mangroves, his heart drumming the retreat. As stealthily as possible he forged on till the foliage shut him in near darkness.

There he waited. Listened. A snapping and crackling of branches from the opposite direction doubled his alarm. The noise was loud—unmistakable. He strained his eyes, scanning the maze of brambles, but could see nothing. He burrowed forward. Stopped. He listened again. Silence was added to darkness. He breathed more easily and continued to burrow, seeking another opening overlooking the ravine. There was no time for conjecture. His mind was a hive of buzzing and stinging questions.

Stevens being here upon the island of Malaita, there must be others as well. And if there were others—— But the thought was impossible. And yet at that very moment, and before he could reach his objective the question was answered.

It was answered by the shrill cry of a woman—a scream of terror.

Farrier sprang up, distracted. A blind rage—a numbness—swept over him. Branches pierced and tore his flesh as he leaped forward. Roots caught his feet. He fell. The cry was repeated. He knew it as he knew Roberta. Torn to madness he rose. He struck out with his naked fists as if already in the clutches of wild men. He tore at the foliage, kicked through the undergrowth and elbowed his way with the authority of an enraged officer through a riot.

He arrived at the edge of the ravine. No farther. He was stopped by a grip of a heavy hand upon his shoulder. It dragged him crashing, sprawling, back into the bush. A white-hot frenzy burned him like a fire. He cursed, twisted, squirmed and struck blindly. Another hand clapped itself over his mouth and two eyes, dancing with savage fire, stared down.

"Don't be a fool! For God's sake!" came the frightened whisper. "Lay low!"

Farrier, half dazed, looked twice before he recognized the scratched and unshaven face of Roy Harlow. But with recognition came a degree of mastery and realization that Harlow's advice was the fulcrum upon which balanced not only life and death but the well-being of a woman—one he loved.

Mustering what courage he could through the grip of a friendly hand he nodded his understanding and motioned Harlow forward. There they drew back, frozen with horror. Harlow's face, beaded with perspiration, was ash-gray. His lips trembled and receded from his tight-set teeth. Far-

rier closed his eyes from the scene as a dizzy sickness overpowered him like a fever.

There, upon the trail, winding up the opposite slope, moved the ghastly company. In the lead, struggling between the chief and the plague-stricken monster, was Roberta. Following were two more blacks and upon the shoulder of each rested a long pole from which dangled the headless body of Donivan Stevens.

Farrier, breathless with inutterable horror, gripped Harlow by the arm. Then with sudden impulse he rose, crouching. He made his way, half running, half crawling, toward the trail leading down the embankment. Whether or not Harlow were following he did not know. Nor did he care. His eyes saw blood and it was more blood they sought, his only passion being to kill.

Had he possessed the mind of a military officer whose objective had been designated his emotions might have been made subordinate. He might have drawn a mental estimate of the situation and from this evolved a plan of action. He might have remembered the bushmen assigned by the chief as outposts—the one he had seen ascending the trail. He might have seen the folly of creeping through the jungles with purpose to ambush and destroy an enemy five times his strength, while all the time a skulking black, whose intention would be expressed only by a quick blow of a war club, was watching from behind. It was like the futility of a pursuit pilot whose purpose is to destroy five enemy planes but who falls from his machine during the first maneuver because he has forgotten to buckle his life belt.

So it was with Farrier in his having forgotten the most obvious menace of all—the man behind—the cowardly bushman of Malaita who as Farrier approached the trail was crouching hard by, with ready club, waiting his chance.

But that chance, like many chances, did not come. As the four bushmen on the opposite slope disappeared into the jungle Farrier, instead of continuing along the shadow of the bush, struck out boldly for the tall grasses and down toward the stream. He had not gone far before he stopped. There was a scuffling behind and, turning, he saw two men tearing savagely at each other as they rolled together down the slope. One was Roy Harlow, the other a naked, black savage. Halfway down they stopped and gained footing in a clinch. A war club swung free and went crashing down to the stream bed and before Farrier could come to the aid of his shipmate the bushman came rolling after, his face covered with blood. His skull had been cracked by the butt of a pistol. He was dead.

The two white men, now as wild as the wildest men of Malaita and harboring as few scruples with respect to life and death, threw the battered corpse into the thicket, robbed it of its war club, forded the brook and together rushed up the trail and into the jungle.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE ESCAPE.

The trail wound in like a corridor. There was not a chance to go wrong. Or perhaps there was not a chance to keep from going wrong for, despite the bushman whose absence was already accounted for, the odds remained heavy against them. Luckily Harlow's automatic contained five good cartridges—that is, he hoped they were good, for they had not been put to the test since the wreck of the *Evening Star*.

Not only did the heavy footprints of the corpse bearers and the tiny tracks of Roberta's shoes verify the course but ominous drops of blood, not yet soaked into the ground, bore out the fact that the enemy was not far in advance.

Farrier panted in anticipation of the pending crisis. Every movement was the result of a keen impulse—an obsession which, when it burned low, instead of trying to quench, he kindled with the awful thought of the headless white man and fanned with the mental picture of the toadlike cannibal who had dared lay hands on Roberta.

On they ran, pausing at each turn only for a glance. Gradually the slope grew steeper, becoming more encumbered with undergrowth until the only remaining trace of bushmen was a leaf here, or a fern there, tinted with a splotch of red.

The sky in many places was obliterated, the trees presenting a height of from seventy-five to a hundred feet, all matted and interwoven with tangled vines and parasite growth. Nowhere at this time did a sunbeam sift through to the ground, but the heat and humidity were stifling.

Harlow came to an abrupt halt just ahead, where the trail swung around to the left. He lifted a nervous arm, motioning Farrier

back and at the same time tiptoeing to peep through an opening in the shrub. But Farrier, with little intention of heeding the warning, continued forward only to receive a sharp and unexpected blow in the abdomen from Harlow's elbow as the latter drew his pistol and blocked the trail. Farrier submitted, not caring to destroy the other's aim; but suddenly Harlow relaxed and returned the weapon to its holster, grinning nervously.

"What's the matter now?" Farrier remonstrated, whispering.

"I thought I saw something—moving!" The last words came with emphasis and again Harlow drew his pistol. *"Look! There!"* he whispered, raising and lowering his weapon with indecision.

Farrier, edging impatiently to the front, looked and saw nothing but the thick, wild hedge at the next turn.

"Come on! There's nothing there," he said and started out almost at a run.

He believed heartily now that Harlow *had* seen something, but whatever it was, the sooner the tangle, the better. And besides, pistol or no pistol, he did not care to have Harlow conduct the campaign single-handed. Without looking back, and feeling himself very much alone, he realized his folly and the realization was driven home by a long, black arm that shot from the bush directly ahead, and the man himself—black and hideous—sprang out, raised a spear above his head, drew it back and with a guttural snarl let it fly.

Farrier felt it graze his neck, heard the hum, and sprang forward in a rage. A sharp report of a pistol resounded behind him. The native dived headlong into the bush, vanishing as quickly as he had come.

Abandoning the chase for better prey Farrier turned and dashed on up the trail, Harlow following at a run. Another spear came crashing through the branches close by, but lodged itself in a rotted stump. Farrier did not stop. He heard a second report from the pistol, a rustle of leaves, a smashing of branches and a cry of pain. Glancing back he perceived Harlow resuming his gait, his head thrown back, his face dripping with perspiration, his pistol in hand.

"Don't stop!" he cried, with a wave of his free hand; and then almost in the same breath: "Wait! Stop!"

Farrier obeyed, following Harlow's gaze to the high branches of a breadfruit tree. There a dark object swung from limb to limb like some great species of monkey. It ascended with incredible speed, higher and higher, as if it knew the position of each branch.

At first Farrier took it for a gorilla, but as it reached the sunlight among the higher limbs there came a flash from its forehead and a long shaft of light appeared and vanished through the shadows beyond. Harlow grinned, but to Farrier it was a new token of danger.

"There's your chance. Get him!" he whispered.

"Why waste ammunition? I've bumped two already," panted Harlow. "He can't do any harm."

"He can't, can't he! Look! What did I tell you?"

As a matter of fact Farrier had not told Harlow anything, but now it was obviously unnecessary that he should. Doubtless the tree climber was the chief, but the mirror was now proving to be more than a mere ornament. He had stopped among the uppermost branches and, taking the glass, was diverting a sun shaft over the tops of trees. Harlow muttered something through his teeth, lifted the pistol, took careful aim——

Farrier waited. He held his breath. He kept on waiting. He wondered if Harlow was going to stand there aiming all day. He would probably wait till all the natives on the island had received the signal, and then——

But Harlow had fired, and the shot went true. Headforemost the dusky warrior tumbled from the branches.

Passion, like a high-pitched note, is divine only when controlled by a master. But Farrier was no master. A cold and discordant thrill, harsh as a scream, passed over him. It was an intermingling of terror and delight—a painful and chaotic ecstasy.

The falling chief did not issue a sound; but one by one, as he struck the branches, they crashed and echoed through the jungle, as if the fall were that of an empire. He came, like an avalanche. As he fell the crackling of branches grew to smashing and the smashing seemingly to resounding thunder. Then silence.

For a second, as the last echoes died away, the two white men stood staring at each other, speechless. In Farrier there vibrated the helpless sensation of a child who through

excessive meddling has succeeded in capsizing the china cabinet. Revenge had been sweet enough—almost insipid. The after taste was sickening. The act of shooting a defenseless human being was murder.

But the spell could not last longer. A sudden thought of Roberta sent all qualms glimmering. If this were murder, or cowardice, there would be more of it. The game had just begun.

"Good shot!" cried Farrier with genuine admiration.

Harlow's eyes snapped with pride. His ruddy cheeks became nearly livid as he playfully assumed a boyish nonchalance which asserted itself in a series of pompous steps and a broad smile. Evidently he was no less surprised at his marksmanship than was Farrier. Farrier laughed despite the underlying gravity of his purpose, and with sudden impatience turned and started off to bring the game to a finish.

At the next bend of the trail they stumbled upon a discarded spear and shortly after upon the remains of Donivan Stevens, sprawled and distorted, lying across the path as if they had been dropped there suddenly when the captors had fled. Nothing could be done for Stevens now, so, after dragging the body into the bush and covering it hurriedly with branches, the two ran on until the hill grew so steep they were forced to slacken their pace through temporary exhaustion.

"We *scattered* their little party, at any rate," said Harlow, panting, and looking behind.

"That's the trouble, now," grumbled Farrier. "Maybe we've come too far. I wonder——"

Harlow was wondering too. He became suddenly alert and again uncovered his weapon.

From the bush near by there came a muffled choking, a scuffling and a faint cough. It was followed by an instant of silence. Then, simultaneously, Farrier and Harlow sprang into the thicket following the direction of sound. There they caught sight of the bloated devil escaping to the trail. Harlow took after him. Farrier continued in a frenzied search for Roberta whom he at last found, unconscious but breathing or rather gasping for air. She had been strangled and the mark of the monster's hands, like a curse, remained upon her throat.

Farrier knelt falteringly before her. The heavy vapor and dust, rising slowly through the ferns by the ringlets and waves of her disheveled hair threw out a halo round her head. Her breast rose and fell with interrupted regularity as if, while her body slept, her spirit cried out for protection and in despair shook the walls of its sacred prison. And yet, as Farrier bent over, drawing together the torn portions of her upper garment, he thought he saw a fleeting ghost of a smile on her lips—a smile so faint that it might have been illusion or a vague reflection of his own buoyant hopes. A warm breeze—a gentle fluttering of leaves through dancing lights and shadows, lent an air of enchantment. It was as if a magic circle had set off the place from the grim past and future and from all the world; as if here were the oasis on a boundless desert of time and space precluding all worldly beings save these two—Roberta and Farrier.

But the momentary serenity ended with a rustling of leaves and a sharp whisper, loud and more alarming than a cry. It was Harlow.

"Yes, Roy. What is it?" answered Farrier in a low voice.

"Is she—have you found her? Is she all right?"

Farrier replied in the affirmative, and was about to inquire the results of the chase when he was interrupted by:

"Well, come on then! Get out of there! What's the matter?"

Without further ado Farrier lifted Roberta from the ground and carried her as carefully as possible out of the entanglement to the opening. Harlow had already started down the slope but upon looking back he made a frantic gesture and then relaxed, as if resigning himself to utter discouragement.

"What's the matter?" he cried. "What's the matter anyhow? I thought you said—— Oh, my Lord!"

And with this he retraced his steps, adding: "I thought you said she was all right! We've got to get away from here—in a hurry too! There's no time! Not a minute!"

Out of the short silence that followed as Farrier stood holding Roberta there came a distant, but penetrant booming like the sound of a hundred kettledrums. It was a deep, muffled sound, seeming to come from all points of the compass at once and, with-

out growing louder, each successive throb was clearer and deeper, until the very earth seemed to vibrate, like the shell of a Titanic cello.

By this time Roberta had opened her eyes—eyes that were filled with terror but which suddenly softened to tears of radiant joy. The beating of the drums was lost in the ecstasy of the moment as Farrier lowered the girl gently to her feet and unconsciously pressed her in his arms. To him there was nothing new or extraordinary in his actions nor in those of Roberta who rested her head upon his shoulder, speaking his name over and over again as if in it were the explanation of life.

To Roy Harlow all this meant nothing but that which he feared would be the inevitable. He stood by, nearly distracted, sometimes starting off down the trail alone but always returning like a faithful St. Bernard trying by strange jumps and growls to lead his master from danger. Finally, unable to contain himself longer, he seized Roberta's hand, muttered incoherently and dragged her off at a brisk gait down the trail.

"Come on, Dick! Come on!" she cried, waving and holding back in protest to Harlow's rough determination. But despite the gravity of the situation, which at least she must have been aware of, she was laughing as if it were no more than a game of hare and hounds.

"Come on, Dick!" she cried again.

And Dick came running like a gay harlequin. What was an island of cannibals now? What were two islands of them? Bring on your cannibals! Roberta was found! He had held her in his arms! He could see her —Roberta! Running before him. He had only to reach out his hand to touch her! She was his! He could have turned a handspring and gone feet first over the horizon!

On he ran, or flew, or glided in mid-air, directly on the heels of Harlow and his captive, until the latter, exhausted, dragged back, saying she could go no farther.

"Then," said Harlow, "you'll have to climb."

"Climb! Climb where? Why?" exclaimed the girl.

"You'll have to climb a tree. What do you suppose? See here, Dick, do you know what's happened? No. You don't," he added, with scrutiny. "But I'm not going to stand here till all our throats are cut, and I'm not going to do this thing alone. I need your help and I need it now. When we began shooting we started something we may not be able to finish. When I went out after that black bullfrog I lost him in the bush. So I climbed a tree to locate the beggar and I located more than I was looking for: *three villages!* Understand? There were three; and they were all up and dancing. You can *hear* them.

"Either they got a signal from the chief or they heard my shots or else they got it straight from the devils that made their get-away. Anyhow they're coming, and it won't be any proper sort of a tea party when they land. We've got to get out of here, and there's no time to stop for wild flowers. Unless we can steal a canoe, a tree is the only place. At least, we can hide there. If they find us, we still have a chance. Do you think you can manage, Miss Newmiller?"

Roberta nodded indefinitely, but Harlow was already clearing the way through the brush, his gaze fixed upon a breadfruit tree some distance back.

Taking Roberta by the hand, Farrier followed just as a loud cry rang out in the distance and the weird booming of drums ceased. Harlow had already ascended the columnar tree trunk when they arrived at its foot. He had torn his shirt from his back, and was knotting it together to form a line. To this he added his belt and lowered it within six feet of the ground, directing Farrier to try his weight upon it.

Farrier did so. It parted in the middle. The cries grew louder and then, as if by signal, ceased altogether. Farrier tore off his only upper garment and belt, which he knotted together and tossed to Harlow. The test was repeated, this time proving successful. Farrier with the help of the improvised hawse dragged himself up the trunk, instructed Roberta to "hang on," and together the two men pulled her to the first fork. After this, climbing was easier. Farrier replaced his belt, leaving the knotted cord fast behind as a means of assistance to the girl. It was a long hard climb to the top branches, but necessity lent strength, and finally Roberta was allowed to rest where she could sit leaning back against a limb and survey the country for miles around.

By glances at Roberta, Farrier surmised there was much to see, but his time was occupied now with Harlow, dragging in branches and long vine tendrils with which

to hide the girl's light dress. The two men selected inconspicuous stations in the foliage.

"Suppose some of them carry guns?" remarked Farrier. "They seem to have other modern conveniences—mirrors, for instance, and toothbrushes!"

Harlow shook his head thoughtfully. "I don't think so," he said; "else we'd have heard from them before."

Farrier climbed on up the tree to satisfy his curiosity as to the three villages and the general lay of the land. He stopped short. A sound of rifle fire had reached his ears. It came from a direction opposite from that of the expected attack but the bullets flew low, peppering the ground in the vicinity of the breadfruit tree.

Harlow, completely astounded, peered anxiously through the cluttered forest and shook his head. Not a soul was visible. Farrier lost no time concealing himself, though the firing gave him a strange sense of security rather than fright. There was less mystery in gun warfare. It was a mark of civilization—a white man's method. Perhaps the riflemen *were* whites—a platoon of bluejackets from a British gunboat engaged in a counterattack. He glanced up at Roberta to transmit his thought through the media of signs and expressions.

She met his gaze as if she knew his mind, but instead of reflecting it she became ghastly pale, recoiling and pointing to something in the vicinity of the trail—something Farrier was unable to see.

A heavy stillness followed. It was absolute, seeming to bear in from all sides. It was as if all remaining life were concentrated in a noiseless swarm of insects, apparently part of the atmosphere—the living part—while all the rest was dead and decaying.

Farrier glanced down again at Harlow who at that moment was slowly drawing his pistol. He was staring fixedly at a near-by clump, the foliage of which was moving—as if it had suddenly gained life. Roberta did not notice it. Her eyes remained fixed, as before, on something farther to the right.

Putting two and two together Farrier concluded that these were the natives from the villages, creeping down in thin lines—combing the jungle. They had discovered the hiding place, perhaps, and now were watching—waiting for the signal to spring.

But another signal from another source at that moment prompted something very different. There came a banging of rifles from behind. Farrier turned, and the frightful realization of facts gripped him. His heart sank. A thought of Roberta flashed through his mind, trailing in its wake a feeling of utter helplessness. The riflemen were blacks. There were at least a dozen of them, naked, hideously painted and with eyes like cold, shining beads. Their yells rang out. They dashed past the breadfruit tree, shooting. A hundred spearmen leaped from bushes, trees, clumps, underbrush—everywhere, as if they had lain there for days waiting for the occasion. They hurled their weapons, and vanished, the gunmen springing on in pursuit. More firing was heard in the distance, until the entire forest echoed with the din of a veritable battle.

But in the vicinity neither spear nor bullet had taken effect; and now not a single black remained in sight. The cracking of guns grew fainter and farther away until it was only a tapping like water drops upon a canopy.

CHAPTER XXV.

REVELATION AND RESCUE.

Farrier had entered upon a new chapter of his life and followed it to its conclusion without knowing the content of the episode preceding, and without having time to turn back for reference. The character, Roberta, in the autobiography of Dick Farrier, had been left to her chosen fate aboard the *Evening Star* to exist only as a memory. He had severed the link in the old chain of events and, in a new world, shackled himself to a separate destiny.

But destiny, if it is real, is jester as well as king and, in either capacity, it is no less a dictator. But as monarch or clown—god or demon—it is not influence, but finality.

To account for himself Farrier recognized a god. If there was a god, this god must be omnipotent. If omnipotent, it was the maker of all things and, as such, the creator of evil as well as good. Therefore god—Farrier's god of reason—was the almighty cause of everything. Fate.

So now, to Farrier, Fate was playing the clown. All he had purposely left behind in the old world had been returned to him in the new. It was as if he had been blindfolded and led away to a strange place,

there to be confronted, as in a dream, with memories made real.

Here was Dick Farrier and near him was Roberta Newmiller—Roberta whom he had shut out of his life. She was bending over a cool stream, one hand resting upon a rock, the other submerged, a straying lock of her hair dancing upon eddies while the impassioned reflection of her own beauty rose to the surface and was gratified by a kiss.

The three companions had come down from their hiding and made their way back to the stream. It was decided that the armed force of blacks had landed in canoes somewhere along the beach, the battle being merely a matter of tribal warfare. At least the theory was worthy of investigation. A canoe might prove a valuable asset in the present plight.

So after drinking from the stream and damping their hunger with tropical fruits the three started eastward along the coast just above the mangroves toward what Farrier recalled, from his former study of the chart, as Ongora Point and Sio harbor. They walked sometimes with great difficulty, having learned through experience to keep from the beaten track.

Not since Farrier had seen Donivan Stevens lashed to a tree had there been time to ask, or even to wonder, why the crew of the *Evening Star* had come to Malaita. So now, as they walked, Roberta told the story, Harlow supplying incidents otherwise unknown to the girl. She refrained, however, from giving the purpose of the call, taking Harlow's explanation, "any old port in a storm" as sufficient for the time being.

With the collapse of a great breaker, it was pointed out, the *Evening Star* crashed down upon a reef, staved in her side, fell on over into calmer water, righted herself and slowly, by the head, she went down. By this time they had launched the dinghy, but due to overload the little craft swamped and all hands were obliged to resort to life preservers or their abilities as swimmers.

The old man had stood by to the last. He saw Aggie over the side with Ross to guard her with his life. He saw Roberta in the strong arms of Donivan Stevens who, with great flourish of bravado, had assigned himself as her rescuer. The skipper protested but with more on his hands now than he could manage he gave orders to Harlow, as his last command, to follow—to stand by Roberta and not to lose sight of her.

So Harlow followed. He noticed that Stevens as he swam, despite the extra burden was helping and guiding Roberta away from the rest of the crew which, by now, was safely in toward shore.

Finally, when Stevens carried Roberta up the beach, Harlow, like a shadow, strode beside him. Roberta, partly from shock and partly from exhaustion, was in a daze. They laid her down upon the beach in the warm sun and later when she had regained strength they broke through the mangroves to a stream and there stretched out to rest.

The day was drawing to a close and Roberta, completely exhausted, could go no farther. She must remain until daybreak before seeking the rest of the ship's company.

During this time Stevens' attitude toward Harlow was as might be expected. He regarded his conscientious follower as an intruder and upon more than one occasion had advised him to "go away and mind his own business." At this Harlow had forcibly driven home the fact that his own business was wherever he chose it to be and that in this particular instance it was with Roberta. Shortly before dark, Stevens, in Roberta's absence, clinched the controversy with:

"Damn your childish nonsense. It's a match between us."

But Harlow could see it in no such light. He was there first and last to "stand by." So he stood—with a thirty-caliber automatic leveled from his hip. Whether or not this was childish nonsense, Stevens, who was unarmed save for a knife, sheathed his fangs and turned away, growling. Harlow stood watch all night, never once taking his eyes from the other male escort.

Early the next morning, when Roberta awoke, knowing nothing of the actual circumstances, she thanked Mr. Stevens for his heroism, explaining that it was to his bravery and skill as a swimmer that she owed her life. Here Harlow left them for a moment with the intention of picking some mangoes and coconuts for breakfast. But upon his return——

Harlow, who was telling the last of it, looked at Farrier and shrugged his shoulders. "You know the rest," he said; "Steve was fast to a tree, and——"

"*Please,* that's enough!" protested the girl, with a shudder. "There is no use going further with it."

They were climbing a low ridge. The three stopped and eyed one another questioningly. Over the tops of the mangroves, about two miles away, a low ridge jetted out into the sea where blue waves pushed their shadows into a long white fringe of reef. Farrier trudged on ahead, afraid to speak his dreams. His gaze was fixed upon a thin column of blue smoke, rising straight up to a filmy wisp where it flickered and disappeared. So eagerly he watched it, he did not know that Roberta and Harlow had suddenly stopped again. Nor did he hear them catch their breath in alarm. It was as if the woolly headed man-eater, standing at the top of the hill, staring down, meant nothing to Farrier. But in another instant, from the corners of his eyes, he caught a glimpse of the red loin cloth and coarse black hide of a woolly headed man-eater standing at the top of the hill, staring down. He wore a belt between which and his skin was thrust a naked knife.

He stopped. So unexpectedly had the creature appeared that it was as if Aladdin's genie had sprung from the magic smoke. Like other Solomon Islanders, his ears were pierced and distended to accommodate all manner of barbaric ornaments. His face and body were tattooed, and scarred in hideous designs. His arms were folded upon his apelike chest as he stood, like a wild moose, staring.

Farrier thought of Harlow's pistol. It was well fixed in his mind that there remained three more shots. And yet, the creature had made no hostile move, save against a swarm of flies that rose and settled upon his body.

"What name you fella white Mary walk about Moutei?" he blurted at Roberta in *beche-de-mer* English.

Roberta remained silent. Farrier and Harlow exchanged glances.

"What? How's that again?" asked Farrier in a tone pitched so as not to hurt the creature's feelings.

'Me good fella Tanoa-Mike, house boy, work along Moutei plantation."

"Plantation!" cried Farrier. "What plantation?"

"Plantation belong along white fella marster. Me sabee you two fella white man walk about Mallu." His glance fell again upon Roberta. "Me sabee you white Mary walk along two fella white man belong along big fella chief. Fella marster talk along me: 'You good fella Tanoa-Mike catch'm one fella white Mary; catch'm two fella white man walk about Mallu, I pay you plenta fella tobacco, plenta fella calico.' All right, now you fella white Mary, two fella white man walk along me Moutei. My word, plenty strong fella trouble too much you no walk along."

Farrier could not help smiling, but he was convinced at least of the existence of a white man's plantation, and the word "tobacco," had a magical effect, renewing a craving almost forgotten.

"How many white men—plantation?" he asked.

"One fella white marster," came the sullen reply.

"One? Only one?"

The answer was a frown and a vacant stare.

"Yesterday," added Harlow, "how many?"

This time the native's eyes grew bright. He seemed to be exerting great mental effort, then shook his head with a kind of a giggle.

"Yesterday plenta fella white man she come, one fella white chief, one fella Mary belong along him, swim Sio harbor strong fella too much. Plenta fella wind, my word! Bym-by big fella white chief talk along marster make'm strong fella trouble too much. Bym-by fella marster sing out call'm all hands. 'You fella salt-water men,' him talk along we. 'You plenta good fella too much. You catch'm plenta fella gun. You finish along fella bushmen strong fella plenta. I pay plenta tobacco. I pay plenta calico. You catch'm one fella white Mary, two fella white man walk about Mallu. I pay plenta fella more tobacco, plenta fella more calico.' Bym-by all hands catch'm plenta fella gun, finish along fella bushmen strong fella too much. All right, me catch'm white fella Mary, two fella white man. Now you come along me. Sabee?"

Although it was difficult, Farrier understood most of it and Roberta the rest. She recalled Donivan Stevens' yarn about methods of plantation owners who recruited salt-water men to establish a plantation in bushmen territory, or vice versa, there being natural enmity between the two Solomon factors. Farrier concluded that the "white fella chief" must be none other than the skipper who had made arrangements with the plantation owner to send a rescue party

for Roberta. Aggie had managed to arrive safely ashore also, he believed, since the house boy, who termed himself Tanoa-Mike, had mentioned "white Mary," an appellation he had also applied to Roberta.

Tanoa-Mike squatted on his haunches, keeping eyes trained upon the trio which was now holding conference, fitting together the strange phrases in jig-saw fashion until the information conveyed through Tanoa-Mike was all but complete.

"You belong white man plantation?" asked Farrier for reassurance.

Tanoa-Mike grunted his affirmation.

"All right. We follow."

Immediately the black man rose and started up the slope accompanied by Harlow. Roberta and Farrier followed. Upon reaching the ridge their hopes were realized in full. Before them sagged a shallow cañon the mouth of which held a sleeping stretch of bay fringed near the shore with jetting coral. In the foreground, close to the beach, a tall schooner hung lazily back upon her kedge where, clear blue and breathing, the waters frothed along the broken reefs and lapped gently at the shore. Here, a short distance inland, a small wicker gate opened into a compound, inclosing a grass-thatched cottage built on piles and surrounded by a broad veranda partially hidden in long sweeping fronds of banana trees. Suddenly, stern first from the beach, splashed a small skiff, loaded to the gunwales not only with men, but with dunnage of all descriptions. One of the crew in the after thwart was clad in white—white apron and white, pie-shaped cap. "Barnacle Joe!" exclaimed Farrier.

Roberta stopped short, pointing to a spot on the beach from which the skiff had been launched.

"And all the rest of them!" she added.

Harlow cried out, waving his hands. He started off at a run followed by the astonished Tanoa-Mike. The group on the beach moved about excitedly. They waved back and echoed the salutation. At that moment three figures appeared on the veranda. One was a woman—Aggie. And one of the men was the skipper. Roberta cried out her joy, waving her torn handkerchief, her eyes sparkling with tears of glad emotion. The old man waved back while Aggie clung to his shoulder, apparently sobbing in her sudden relief and happiness.

By this time, Roy and Tanoa-Mike were halfway down the hill. Roberta in her elation took after them. But Farrier drew her back with an expression that told the reason.

"Tell me, Roberta," he hesitated; "before we join them. Tell me why you came here."

Roberta considered for a moment, her eyes cast downward, and a smile traced its shadow on her lips. Then, slowly lifting her head she asked:

"Don't you know, Dick?"

Farrier shook his head. He dared not guess.

"We came here to find Tom Whittly," smiled Roberta; "at least father did. But I——" She hesitated and looked away.

"You?" urged Farrier. "Why did you come here?"

"I had to come with everybody else. Naturally! You see father——" And Roberta explained the old man's sentiments regarding the son of old Tom Whittly and how it was that the former shipowner was so cherished in her father's memory. "You see, Dick," she continued, "no one aboard suspected you of being other than Dick Farrier till I learned who you were through the manuscript and note you left behind. That made it different."

"Different with you?" asked Farrier.

Roberta nodded, her gaze fastened beyond the horizon.

"Why, what difference did it make to you who I was? What's a name?"

Roberta's answer was contained in a weathered sheet of paper which she drew from her pocket and handed to Farrier. The lines were typed, but the letters were blurred together to the point of illegibility and it was with some effort that he recognized the first three words: "I, Gilbert Farrier——"

He read them aloud but suddenly stopped and glanced up. "What of it?" he asked. "That's part of my yarn."

"And it is also a part of *my* yarn. It's a part of a true story. Ross happened to see that in your room at St. Helens. He thought it was a copy of a real will. He thought that you, being Dick Farrier, were naturally the beneficiary it mentions. That's why you were shanghaied. That's why Ross did all he could to make you a ship's officer and that's why I—I was none other than your incorrigible 'skipper's daughter.' "

The facts struck and burned like light-

ning. But in a flash it was over. Farrier took Roberta gently by the hand while their gazes met and welded into a single truth.

"'Skipper's daughter,'" murmured Farrier. "You"—he faltered—"and all the time Roberta, you——"

"Yes," she answered softly. "I had to prove it to myself. I had to prove you wrong. That's why I told you to leave me." She looked away. The soft glow of the setting sun shone upon the track of a reticent tear which sparkled as it moved down her cheek. "*Your* skipper's daughter could not have done that, Dick," she concluded, with a happy smile.

"*My* skipper's daughter," cried Farrier. "*This* skipper's daughter," he corrected, taking her in his arms; "this one did."

The sun rolled slowly off the tip of Cape Astrolabe and sank behind the sea. Men, like silhouettes, moved here and there on the deck of the little schooner from which came the clicking notes of the revolving capstan. They were hauling in the slack of the anchor chain, making ready, perhaps, to sail with the first breeze.

The first breeze came shortly before noon on the following day. The plantation vessel, chartered by Captain Newmiller, headed for Tulagi where Farrier and Roberta were to bid the old crew farewell and take the first steamer for Sydney, and where the skipper planned to charter a tug with which to search along latitude five, south, for his deserted schooner.

But she was never found. Buka men at Cape North, whose villages are now built of mining timbers, tell the story of a vast quantity of timber cast up by the sea upon their reefs. But the *Aggie* herself they never saw and to the old crew she remained forever a memory—a tale of adventure returned to the bookshelves—a piece of spunyarn.

THE END.

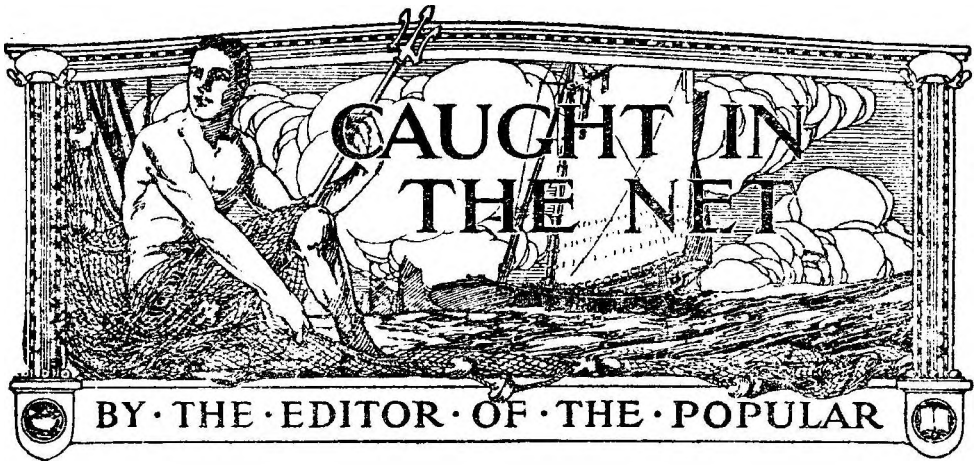
Look for more of Mr. Banning's work in the near future

THE CAPITAL'S MAN HUNT

WHEN the secretaries and assistants, the big men's advance guard, began to pour into Washington last October in preparation for the Arms Conference the tuft hunters marshaled their forces. The eye of the snob took on a greasy and expectant glitter. Men and women accustomed to swell and burgeon at the opportunity to bend the knee to the reputed great put extra muffs on their elbows preparatory to horning in. The local supply of bootlickers was reënforced by companies and regiments from the hinterland. Here was a chance to "get in," to force recognition in the "society columns."

Obviously, there would be a vast amount of legitimate entertaining of ministers, ambassadors and delegates, both by the government officials and by the established leaders of society. Why not, reasoned the tuft hunters, get in their invitations early? The foreigners would think anybody with a handsome house and two or three cars worthy of grateful acceptance. Strugglers for prominence in other cities rushed to Washington and rented houses "for the conference." The siege was terrific. Long before the big men arrived their embassies had been snowed under with "invitations" to teas, balls, breakfasts, luncheons and dinners. Some of the more adventurous snobs had invited the diplomats to come to other cities. Not a trick was overlooked, not a card unplayed.

They had, however, missed one fact: the diplomats had dealt with these nuisances in other countries and learned how to protect themselves. In Washington their embassies had "society experts" to put into one list the people who "counted" and in the other those who could be dismissed with form letters of refusal.



PROHIBITION AND THE DRUG HABIT

WHEN prohibition became a law in this country, a number of people who took an interest in the question predicted that the number of drug addicts would largely increase. Many of those who had habitually been excessive drinkers, it was held, would use narcotics instead.

This theory does not appear to be sustained by facts and figures. In a statement made in Washington, recently, by Colonel O. G. Ferrer, administrative assistant in the narcotic division of the treasury department, Colonel Ferrer denies the assumption that any increase in the use of drugs is due to prohibition.

"The truth is," he continued, "that the victims of the drug habit, practically in all instances, are young men and women, often in their teens. Rarely are they alcoholics. The alcoholic, after a 'spree,' usually is sorry and experiences a period of reform. The drug addict has no such experience. Once a victim, there is rarely any cessation. The disease is rarely curable and even when the body is cured the mental craving continues."

He has compiled statistics for five consecutive months for his department showing the arrests in some of the largest cities during that time. The total number is 1,918 and 852 convictions followed. The largest number of arrests, 364, were made in Little Rock, and the lowest, 49, in Hawaii. In New York there were 106 and in Philadelphia 118 arrests. The entire list of arrests is not looked on as abnormally large.

Experts hold that the tendency toward drinking alcoholic liquor to excess, which is generally fostered by acquaintanceship among people, is totally different in its causes from the tendency toward using narcotics. The latter is generally a solitary habit. In the days before prohibition there was one small class of solitary drunkards who made few acquaintances. A drunkard of this class had intermittent spells of indulgence in liquor. He would keep sober for months and would then stay in a saloon barroom day after day for weeks at a time, keeping in an intoxicated condition, and frequently his drinking spell would wind up by his removal to a hospital. A period of complete abstinence from intoxicating liquor, sometimes lasting for many months, would follow his recovery, before he would have the next drinking spell. Indulgence in alcoholic liquor in his case apparently had the same effect, to a certain extent, as the taking of a drug. As far as is known, however, there are no intermittent spells of drug addiction, or, if there are, such cases are so rare as not to be noticeable. The drug evil is either continuous, or, if there is a cure, the cure is permanent.

PUTTING BY FOR A RAINY DAY

TO prescribe a curbing of prosperity as a safeguard against recurrent periods of business depression and unemployment sounds queer. And yet, though it involves the apparent heresy of a certain restriction of production, the idea as presented recently to the Society of Industrial Engineers by Edward E. Hunt, secretary of the president's conference on unemployment, seems to bear consideration. Making a general

distinction in our productive processes between additions to national plant and equipment—such as houses, railroads, telephones, et cetera, on the one hand, and "consumable" goods, on the other, he contends that if the former sort of "construction" work "could systematically put aside financial reserves in times of prosperity for the deliberate purpose of improvement and expansion in times of depression," the regularly recurring periods of business "slump" might be greatly decreased and consequent unemployment might be much less widespread. "A rough calculation," he adds, "indicates that if we maintained a reserve of only ten per cent of our average annual construction for this purpose, we could almost iron out the fluctuations in unemployment."

That such a sum if set aside could be a significant factor in the matter can be easily grasped from a glance at figures bearing on only one branch of construction work in only some fifty principal cities. As given by the *World Almanac*, the cost of new buildings in these cities for 1919 was $1,060,228,000. Plainly, in the case of a business of gross receipts of this magnitude, a ten-per-cent reserve fund set aside annually could amount to a very appreciable power for good in time of need. Imagination need not be ridden very hard to bring one to realization of what a ten-per-cent reserve made in prosperity by all branches of construction work could mean toward mitigating unemployment in depressed periods. The question occurs, in passing, whether such a reserve could be beneficially exempted from taxation?

Another consideration in regard to the laying by of a reserve fund for use in periods of depression is that of resultant possible economy in construction work done at such times. During the more inactive periods, with contractors competing less heavily with producers of "consumable" goods for both material and labor, and prices consequently kept at less unhealthy heights, general construction cost could not but be lower. Viewed from this angle Mr. Hunt's ten per cent curbing of prosperity would seem to be only another way of recognizing that it is the waste grown rampant through too feverish competition for materials and labor in boom times that make inevitable the recurring painful processes of liquidation and consequent stagnation. He by no means counsels underproduction, but merely cautions against overproducing, and appears to have considerable logic on his side. There obviously must be a point at which competitive enterprise becomes destructive.

ARMS AND THE BAND

IN these days of disarmament tendencies the outlook, from the soldier's point of view, would not seem to be particularly rosy, but there is at least one army which is bound to be as cheerful about it all as the gods will permit—if music can help. The first move to this effect—the army in question being our own—has already been made by General Pershing himself who, having ordered the army music school at Fort Jay, New York, to be transferred to Washington, has directed that it be organized as a "superband comparable only to the splendid band which was organized in France." Not that military bands or music, particularly for the enhancing of the weary infantryman's hiking powers, is in itself anything new under the sun, and many and curious are the instruments of "stirring power" which all races have been prone to use, such as the Indian's tom-tom, the "Jingling Johnny" formerly universal in the Russian army—a frame of small bells that was sharply shaken in the accented parts of music, and the well-known Scottish "pipes" whose inspiriting strains came so welcomely to the ears of the beleaguered in Lucknow. But the present project in our military circles is very much something else again—is, in fact, distinctly ambitious, musically speaking.

The object of the school, as outlined in army orders, "is to give courses in instruction in music, both practical and theoretical, elementary and advanced, to student bandsmen and to advanced instrumentalists—soloists—and to student band leaders; to standardize and perfect band music and to supply trained personnel to meet as fully as possible the needs of the service." In a word there is a thorough determination to elevate music in the army.

No further proof of the seriousness of this effort is needed than the fact that no less a person than Walter Damrosch, conductor of the New York Symphony Orchestra, has pledged General Pershing his assistance in the work.

So does the seed sown by our own unique John Philip Sousa now bid fair to blossom

into luxuriant fullness. Few of the present middle-aged generation but remember his blood-enlivening "Washington Post" and "Hands Across the Sea," to say nothing of his other most cheering marches. To attempt progress past these is indeed to attempt considerable. But the attempt is well under way, nor can there be any reasonable doubt of success. Army music will soon compare with that of our best orchestras. Reflecting, however, on this announced intent to supplement army "popular" music with the classical masterpieces, we almost wonder if the Disarmament Conference itself is not back of it all. Recalling a well-known quotation to the effect of music's power to soothe the savage breast one cannot help wondering whether there may not be more than a desire merely to please back of this introduction of some of the "higher" music among our army men. Is it still another step toward the inducing of a "peace and good-will" state of mind in circles where it will do the most good?

THE DOUBLE LIFE

"Down to Gehenna or up to the throne,
He travels the fastest who travels alone."

SO sang the pithy Kipling some years ago—who married at the age of twenty-seven. As to the accuracy of the observation we have nothing to say except that the word fastest might well bear more than one interpretation. Any one placing implicit faith in the poet's dictum, however, would at least have to admit that the majority of the country's inhabitants are not afflicted with the speed mania to the extent of making it their chief consideration in life. In other words, over half of our citizenry who have attained to fifteen years of age or more have entered into that well-known condition which is the direct opposite of single cussedness. Over 70 per cent of the ladies of the land, on January 1, 1920, were or had been wedded, and about 65 per cent of the men. What is more, a very tremendously small proportion of our fellow citizens, at the census date in question, were classifiable under the heading of "divorced." In fact, only eight tenths of one per cent of the ladies and only six tenths of one per cent of the men. In short, if that famous captain of fun, *Punch,* were by any strange chance to run for national office here on the platform of his classic advice of "Don't" to those about to be wed, his chance of election would seem to be remote.

In the report on the subject, made by the census bureau, one notes that the proportion of women who are widowed is over twice as great as the proportion of men. Lest the thoughtless or ungallant should notice and draw false inferences from this, one should hasten to reflect that this by no means indicates that the marital state is harder on the less deadly of the species than on their mates. A moment's consideration brings to mind the fact that marrying at an earlier age than men, as a rule, women could not very well help outliving their spouses, generally speaking. And anyway, the census bureau finds, the span of a woman's life is generally greater than that of a man. As far as the effect of matrimony upon the latter goes, in the hygienic sense, so to speak, he seems to thrive under it quite as well as do the ladies. Lord bless 'em! why shouldn't he?

So much for current conditions. As for the outlook for the future, if the tendency of the last ten years is any criterion, the habit of wedlock would appear to be strengthening its hold on the body politic. In every State since 1910 the proportion of single men decreased and that of married men increased and in all but five States the same is true of the ladies. Wherefore, before indulging in any vain boastings of immunity, let all single souls proud in their invulnerability take thought unto themselves. Almost any day, haply, may it be theirs to say with that greatest of their tribe, Benedick, "When I said I would die a bachelor, I did not think I would live till I were married." Which of course is quite as it should be!

EYESTRAIN

FOR many years a large number of young people with eye defects have been able to secure some kinds of work at factories and workshops in cities, which would have been otherwise impossible for them, through remedying their visual defects by the use of suitable eyeglasses. Some optometrists now assert they have found a great proportion of these cases of supposed defective eyesight to be the result of eyestrain and say that often in such cases the use of eyeglasses is a positive injury to the eyesight.

The volunteer head of the Hoover plan municipal employment bureau in one of our largest cities, who in his regular business work outside of the bureau has hired and managed tens of thousands of men in various industries, said recently in discussing defective eyesight among workers and the chances of employment of those with defective vision:

"An eyestrain is as great a handicap to the man without a job as to the man in a job. Its effect is appalling. It has become a national menace. Americans are progressively growing blind. And the most alarming feature of the situation is that the younger generation is growing up in worse condition than its elders."

According to a late report of the Hoover Committee for the Elimination of Waste in Industry, he said, about 25 per cent of the school children of this country are suffering from defective eyesight and added that the imagination could therefore readily picture the handicaps of the adult generation.

"But fortunately," he continued, "there is a remedy and people are beginning to find it out. It has been abundantly proved that many common defects of vision are not caused by disease, but simply by eyestrain and that by teaching such people not to strain their eyes you can often restore them to normal vision."

Resting the eyes, he asserted, often restored to normality eyesight apparently defective. He was studying plans, he stated, for introducing the methods of the new school of optometry into the workshops of American industry and raising the national standard of efficiency by abolishing eyestrain. He experienced a period of eyestrain himself and found that the use of eyeglasses only made his eyes worse, but he conquered the difficulty by the new methods.

The use of test cards to discover eyestrain among the pupils in schools is commended to school superintendents by some optometrists. M. J. Husted, school superintendent, of North Bergen, New Jersey, is quoted as saying that the testing of the eyes in this way, by using cards placed at different distances without straining the eyes to see them, had restored to normality the eyesight of many whose sight seemed to be congenitally defective at first. Reports were made, he said, showing that in less than a year, by this means, over 1,000 of 3,000 children with imperfect eyesight had obtained normal vision.

POPULAR TOPICS

ALL marching records of the United States army were broken by the Third Infantry when that organization completed a march from Camp Sherman, Ohio, to Fort Snelling, Minnesota, a distance of 950 miles, in 61 days—an average of 15.5 miles a day. The longest day's hike was 22.6 miles, and the last day's march of 19.6 miles was made in a driving snowstorm. The Third claims the distinction of being the oldest regiment in the army and its colors carry decorations won in sixteen campaigns.

A QUARTER of the nation's wage earners are women. According to statistics of the women's department of labor twelve million American women are engaged in gainful occupations. The woman worker, it is said, receives seventy-five cents for performing the same labor for which a man receives a dollar.

OUR living costs are high enough, but we are better off than most other countries. The cost of living in Great Britain at the end of last October was 103 per cent above the cost in July, 1914, but was lower than at any time since July, 1918. Fifteen out of every hundred members of British trades unions were out of work on November 1st. Let's cheer up!

MOTOR trucks and automobiles may be taking the horse's place for commercial and general utilitarian purposes, but the thoroughbred is doing a little more than holding his own. Last year more than two thousand thoroughbred foals were registered with the Jockey Club.

A NATURAL gas field that the bureau of mines says has "tremendous production potentialities" has been uncovered near the city of Munroe, Louisiana. The field is 135,000 acres in extent.

THERE is a great difference of opinion as to whether or not prohibition is a good thing for the United States, but the statement from Canada that American tourists are spending a million dollars a week in the Dominion makes it quite certain that prohibition in the United States is a good thing for Canada. Of course it would be unfair to even suggest that any considerable number of these American visitors go across the border in search of what is forbidden them at home, but it must be admitted that to a thirsty man planning a vacation even the strictly limited alcoholic indulgence that is legal in Canada might be an "object."

AMERICAN ex-soldiers who were wounded in the war and now are living in foreign countries receive over a half million dollars a month from the veterans' bureau. Checks go to eighty-six different countries. Italy heads the list and Ireland is second. Over three thousand dollars a month is paid to ex-doughboys who are living in Germany.

THAT "Safety First" on our railroads is no idle phrase is shown by the Interstate Commerce Commission's report on railroad fatalities for 1920. During that year there were 6,958—only a few more than in 1898, the low record year—despite the fact that in the intervening period freight and passenger traffic, and the number of railroad employees increased tremendously. During 1920 only 76 passengers were killed in train accidents, and 293 roads which operated almost half our rail mileage got through the year without having a single passenger killed.

ATTRACTIVE markers have been placed at historic spots along that part of the Lincoln Highway that once was the old "Pioneer Trail" followed by the gold seekers who went to California in '49. The trail led from Fallon, Nevada, via Carson City and the south shore of Lake Tahoe, to Placerville, California—where gold was first discovered in 1848—and on down to Sacramento. Tourists now drive their automobiles along the route followed by Pony Express riders, the Overland Stagecoach and the Wells-Fargo freighters who carried supplies to the gold camps and took their yield back to the Pacific coast.

CANADA is not going to allow her birdmen to lose their skill for lack of opportunity to fly. "Refresher" courses give ex-service aviators the chance to spend a month, during the summer, flying at the government's expense, and last summer ten thousand men who had won their wings in the war availed themselves of this opportunity to fly again. Isn't there a hint in this for our air service?

A motor truck recently completed a trip from Los Angeles to New York in 6 days, 15 hours, 23 minutes actual running time. The total time taken for the trip was twelve and one half days. The truck traveled 3,507 miles, and averaged 21.9 miles an hour while running. It was of the five-and-one-half-ton type and its total weight, including load, was 21,800 pounds.

ITALIAN air service officials say that a new Caproni triplane, which can carry thirty passengers and make a nonstop trip from New York to San Francisco in twenty-four hours, shortly will be shipped to America. The big plane has a speed of 180 miles an hour, a wing spread of 186 feet, and is driven by five 300-horse-power motors.

The Last Stand

By T. von Ziekursch

A little epic of the last of our buffalo—and of a man who was in at the finish

LONG years ago the last of the great buffalo herds went northward from the Yellowstone, the Missouri and the Saskatchewan, just as they had gone each spring for centuries with copper-hued riders harrying them as they traveled, and white men, too, adding to the toll. It had been bad enough when there were merely the arrows and lances, but this was the finish. The high-powered rifle and the railroad furnished the climax.

North to the rolling grasslands above the lakes and then to the timber country the survivors went, driven and hunted until they attained those vast reaches of the north where the hunters cannot ride pell-mell and one or two shots is the limit before the quarry finds refuge in the protecting thickets of the wilderness.

What happened then no white man knows, although the Indians still believe they will come back one day, seeping down through the passes and sent by the Manitou who rules the destinies of the wild.

Up near the edge of the barrens, skulking and timid, altered by nature in a few generations to fit the new surroundings are the descendants of those few survivors—the wood buffalo. Long-limbed, rangy, shaggier than their forbears, they are the rarest of wild game with the possible exception of the sea otter.

North and east of Lake la Marte and in the vicinity of the Coppermine headwaters is their summer range, while the metallic blasts of arctic winter send them to the heavy forests on the southern side of the mountain slopes.

There it was that the summer found a bull calf hovering near the side of an ugly cow who turned and fled, with the calf keeping pace with her as an old she grizzly reared up among the rock piles, advancing in a rage at this horned creature that had dared snort at her cub.

To her a buffalo meant only meat; she had no fear of the short-horned cow, nor even of the massive-headed bull she had seen occasionally. In fact the grizzly had no fear of anything. She had never met man and even the males of her own kind bowed readily enough to her mandates.

A little later the buffalo cow and her calf sought safety in flight again when the grizzly stalked them down through the foothills in that vast stretch of the primeval wilderness along the upper reaches of the Nahanni. There the crash of the gun is never heard and even the white man with his law and modern rifles dares not invade. There the red man in his last retreat still presents a hostile front. Deep in those spruce forests where the muskeg bars the pack train and the lashing whirl of mile after mile of white water acts as a barrier to the canoe the buffalo cow and her calf found a few others of their kind—a bull and four cows, three of them with their calves—a big herd of their species.

That summer they roamed the thickets of alder and spruce, timid in spite of their safety, a far different type from those of the great herds that used to range the southern prairies—fleeter, taller, keener of eye and ear, with none of the stolidness that once was the characteristic of their kind.

In peace they dwelt with the other inhabitants of that solitude, the great moose and wandering bands of caribou. Their sharp senses enabled them to evade the occasional foraging attempts of the old she grizzly and the cub who was beginning to attain some of his mother's stature now and would soon be driven forth to find new range for himself. No others of her kind invaded her domain, for the grizzly usually rules his own territory alone, especially if he happens to be of the gentler sex and with an immature progeny in tow.

In July the herd crossed to the north and east, headed toward the fringes of the great barrens where the hundreds of miles of unbroken, flowered stretches with their coarse grass served as the lure to call up instincts

of preceding generations. But a Dog Rib hunter turned them back with a long shot that wounded one of the cows. Then they circled to the seclusion of the Nahanni country and thrived on the plenty that the northland produces during its short, intense summer.

The rapid change that marks the advent of winter north of sixty found the bull calf almost as tall as the cows, but his barrel and shoulders had the slim and graceful lines of the youngling. And that first winter, as always, was his hardest.

Driven lower and lower the herd finally drifted into the bottoms and huddled closer in a compact circle with lowered heads when the wolf pack ran. But the gray messengers of death avoided them. These great, shaggy brutes could not be brought down by a frontal attack and their circle with horns outward precluded any chance of hamstringing by nipping a rear leg. Better far to risk the brow tines and crushing hoofs of the biggest moose, for the moose always faced the last struggle alone and part of the pack could close from the rear.

Pawing aside the snow the herd found scant remnants of the previous season's luxuriant growths, tufts that projected from the frozen muskeg, withered cranberries, bits of bark, odds and ends from Nature's dormant supply.

Great, somber-looking, gaunt creatures spring found them; yet somehow the bull calf had grown on that ill fare and now had a mane almost to his knees. Lack of condition made them surly and they shouldered each other about, butting and threatening constantly, losing some of their watchfulness and timidity in a willingness to meet trouble more than halfway.

But the plenitude of summer wore that away and by autumn the bull calf was more than a match in height for the herd bull. But the lines of his shoulders and legs were thinner and more shapely, denoting extreme speed and power when they should fill out. The wandering impulse that occasionally drew him far from the cows gave way to a yearning for their companionship and he sought it, but a surprise awaited him. The herd bull faced him constantly with lowered head, pawing and snorting in a rumbling growl.

For days he avoided the leader, but finally halted and snorted back, facing the other with head swinging slowly from side to side. Then he got another surprise, for the herd bull's attack was so sudden and sharp that it sent him to his haunches and the follow-up barely left him time enough to escape. But he was permitted to winter with them and the passing of the season found him and the herd bull seeking each other's company and leaving the cows more and more to themselves.

The herd had been increased by four more calves and now numbered fourteen. They ranged through the moose yards in the bottoms and his three-year-old growth found the bull calf a monster of his kind, clean limbed, enormous through the shoulders and high at the haunches, with a pair of curving horns as thick as a man's wrist at the base.

Still, he was not the herd bull and followed the other's leadership with the rest until the season approached again. Then that yearning for the companionship of the cows came stronger than before. He sought out one that had come into the world the same spring as himself, a sleek, lively thing that brooked his advances with apparent welcome. But a low, growling roar, like distant thunder, came from the herd bull. The first thin layer of snow was cast up by the pawing forefeet of both and each bellowed as they advanced toward the other with enormous heads swinging low.

Came a sudden rush, two straining grunts and the forest echoed the awful crash as their thick skulls met with terrific impact. The old herd bull hurtled backward a full ten feet, scrambling for renewed footing and shaking his great head as though dazed. Once again he met that colossus of youth and this time went down with never a chance to give real battle. Then the young bull returned to his herd while the deposed leader hung about the edges with two yearlings of his own sex.

The seasons passed and the bull calf was a shaggy monster now, absolute monarch of the Nahanni reaches. Before his ponderous advance at the head of the herd the biggest moose drew aside while the old she grizzly hesitated with mouth watering as she peered from the brush at the calves in one of those open spaces where the herd grazed, and then went off in search of other food.

Each spring the old call for the flat country found answer and he led the band over to the edges of the barrens where they fat-

tened and lolled about while the hot spell lasted, losing their heavy fur and taking on a straggling, unkempt appearance.

But the first breath of the polar winds sent them back on the long journey through the region of lakes and rivers to the vast timbered stretches that formed their impenetrable refuge.

At last calamity overtook them on one of these return journeys. A shallow, fast-running stream lent its touch of feathery white to the dark background of the forest and they crossed at the lower end of the rapids where the rush of water had been broken by the many rocks above. There a game trail emerged on the opposite shore and the bull attained it and was clambering up when a faint swishing sound passed his ear and something sharp drove into one of his great shoulders. He snorted and surged forward as that swishing sound was repeated time after time. Another sharp pang smote him in the side and something that almost knocked him down glanced off his thick ribs. He bellowed and looked hastily to all sides as a calf bleated piteously and a cow directly in back went down. Still that menacing swishing sound came to his ears and two more of the cows fell with feathered shafts protruding from their bodies.

Then the bull saw the nemesis that struck so mysteriously. The tribesmen were out for meat and hunted in deadly silence with their great juniper bows, capable of firing a half dozen arrows without alarming the game and finally only confusing it as to the direction of the attackers, where the first detonation of a rifle would have sent the whole herd scurrying to cover, fully aware of where the hunter was hidden.

A bellow of terror and rage escaped the bull as he tore up the steep trail. Behind him a cow and her calf turned aside into the brush and fled madly, goaded by fear, while a yearling bull with an arrow deep in his lungs, raced after the great leader only to stumble and fall. At the bottom of the game trail in the shallow water and at the edge the rest of the stricken herd lay, with four-foot feathered shafts protruding grotesquely from their vitals. Halfway toward the opposite shore a lone cow, last in the procession, fled in great jumps through the waters, back toward the safety of the tree-fringed bank they had so recently left. There an Indian stepped out and drove an arrow between her shoulders.

The big bull mounted upward and soon the trail was lost in a maze of scrub. But he plunged straight ahead, snapping off the shaft of the arrow embedded in his shoulder muscles, leaving the head of copper to be worked and torn out by much writhing against tree trunks.

At last he stopped and called a deep-throated appeal to his herd. But they were gone and he was alone, a monarch without subjects in the vast domain of the North. His head lowered and he strode on, skulking and silent, jumpy, all nerves on edge, facing the wild reaches beyond which lay the headwaters of the Nahanni where even these bronze-skinned hunters did not come and where there was peace.

Day after day he breasted the thickets, his instinct unerring in his lonely migration to the south and west just as his ancestors had migrated on the great plains two thousand miles to the south.

At last his goal was attained. He emerged through a cleft in the hills. Here were the vast, untrodden reaches of forest and tiny streams unfitted for the invasion of the canoe. Here the dense trees acted almost as a roof in winter and kept the snow from piling solid and deep. At the edge of the drifts there would be food enough to sustain life even in the worst winter, and the bull was content. A day or two he roamed alone, and then came the longing for his herd renewed and stronger than ever in this solitude.

Restlessly he grazed back toward the cleft in the hills, and now he called occasionally, stopping to paw the earth and straighten his head toward the north and east where the debacle had occurred.

Then, one night the wind that sighed through the forest from the great barrens brought a sound. Was that the bleat of a calf? Eagerly he trotted toward it. There, it came again and he found them, traveling slow, a cow and calf, all that had come through.

Together they stood, heads hanging close, with the calf at its mother's side, while the early darkness that betokened the impending winter settled over the thickets.

Through the snows they ranged together and the old call for the treeless flat land came again with the first hint of spring. The bull was restless, working eastward and north, through the opening in the hills where the snow waters gathered to flow outward

toward the arctic with the final break-up of the ice in late June.

But the slaughter of the previous autumn had not been forgotten and they turned farther north. At last came a rocky side slope where the red bowlders were strewn afar by some cataclysm of the ice age and only stunted spruce grew at intervals.

There the old she grizzly waited, crazed by the hunger of the long winter, desperate, fierce, murderous to the extreme.

Head swinging low the bull came down the slope with the cow and calf following. The grizzly's tongue rolled forth, wet and eager, while those huge paws with the five-inch claws twitched. A crashing blow from those enormous muscles and even this monster bull's neck would be shattered; but those horns were long and the neck mighty. The grizzly hesitated and the colossus in front of the little procession passed the clump of small spruce where she lay hidden. Then came the cow and calf. There was a roar, a crashing rush through the spruce and the calf bleated as one great forepaw battered against its withers, a glancing blow, for the cow had wheeled like a flash and drove in, almost flattening the bear.

At that first roar of the grizzly the big bull jumped forward in a convulsive leap, every impulse calling for flight, but half turned at the calf's bleat and the cow's bellow of mother rage aroused. There he saw the injured calf, barely able to stand, endeavoring to struggle off up the slope just as the cow crashed into the bear again with lowered head, endeavoring to keep at close quarters and prevent the full, bone-crushing sweep of those battering-ram paws. But the bear's paws raked the hump of the cow and sought to drag her down so the ferocious jaws could reach the neck.

Then the bull charged. A sudden red appeared in his little eyes half hidden by the shaggy hair. The sound that came from his throat was a rumbling growl ending in a roar of fury. His great haunches gathered and he launched forward like an avalanche coming down a steep slope, irresistible, mighty, a relic of an earlier age when sheer might ruled.

Even the cow was thrown sidewards by the crushing impact with which the great bull's head crashed against the bear's ribs. The grizzly grunted and then the squeal of her rage and hurt sounded down the slopes to where the imperial inspector, traveling northward to the Bear Lake country, listened. The man halted in his wavering stride.

Four days without food other than bits of bark and lichens had weakened even his sinewy body, almost inured to the hardships of the trail. It was a madness of the body more than of the brain that welled over him now, an insane longing for fresh meat, growing constantly since his flour had been lost, the last of his bacon consumed, four days previous. The roar of the bull was a mysterious sound—a big bull moose perhaps. The white man hurried through the thickets to the base of the open slope and rubbed his eyes as though in disbelief as he saw the panorama of this primordial strife.

The bull, with short tail stiffened and held erect, was driving in one short, smashing thrust after another, like a pile driver impelled by the speed and science of muscles and thews trained in the art of battle. So furious was the attack that even the active, powerful grizzly had no time to rear or even to get squarely on all fours. Her sharp claws ripped and tore through the bull's mane and the blood spurted down his legs from the wounds in his shoulders; but he was maddened, a berserk of cloven hoofs. Up the slope the cow slowly shouldered the injured calf toward the protecting fringe of the forest and the man raised his rifle for tender meat. But the import of the whole scene was plain. Here was this mighty monarch fighting his most feared enemy that the cow and her progeny might escape, and the man thrilled. The rifle came down and he stood amazed at the ferocity of the fight.

Now the bull was half thrown, going to his knees as one of the bear's paws sought for a hold that would stop those murderous rushes. She too was bleeding profusely, for the curved horns had gored her cruelly. But he was up and in again, bowling her backward and surging on over her a dozen yards before the force of his rush expended. That gave the bear her chance and she arose to an erect posture, her head battered and crimson streams running down her flanks. Great paws held wide for the killing blow that would break the spine of anything save one of those gigantic pachyderms of the tropics she advanced at a rolling gait with the semblance of some crude dancer.

The bull had wheeled. His breath was coming short. There was a first intimation of weakness in a slight quiver of the muscles

as he gathered. Then he shot forward, in full gallop with the second jump. Past those paws, smashing through them his monstrous head battered against the breast of the grizzly and hurled her fifteen feet and more. He, too, went down, scrambling and sliding, exhausted and done, his last ounce of energy sapped by that shock.

Slowly, unsteadily he came up still facing the bear where she lay, writhing convulsively. Then his head turned and he peered up the slope toward the forest where the cow and calf had disappeared among the spruce. His long, deep bellow of victory rolled out.

Again the man raised the rifle as the great bull started slowly up the slope, halting at short intervals to swing his head from side to side. But no spurt of flame came from the gun.

At the very edge of the forest the bull halted. It was spring and the flat plains of the north lured even as the flat plains of the south had lured his ancestors generations ago. But it was a siren call. In answer to it he had lost his herd before. Now he had fought his greatest fight to save the last of them while on their way to answer that instinct that called them away from the forest.

It was powerful. Over there toward the north and east were the flat, grass-covered, flowered stretches where for two months of the year the grip of the north is loosened and the barrens become a paradise. But in the forest aisles of the Nahanni country where the streams run fast and shallow, where the white man has not yet cut his way and even the red men number few, was peace. The cow and the calf had gone that way. Once more the great bull, old now and battered, but still fitted to be a mighty ruler, looked toward the north and east, out over the slope where the grizzly lay still. His huge head was thrust forward and he bellowed once. Perhaps it was the call of victory or a challenge to the bear, perhaps a final defiance of the lure of the open, treeless stretches. Then he turned and disappeared into the forest, headed toward the final barrier of the wilderness—the last of the herd.

The half smile of admiration on the imperial inspector's face gave way to a grimace as he thought of the strong grizzly meat. Then his shoulders shrugged and he staggered up the slope toward the bear while his stomach called ravenously but in vain for the juicy steaks of the buffalo.

CHEMISTS DO SOME PREDICTING

AT a meeting held in New York City recently by the American Chemical Society various gentlemen eminent in their profession made statements and prophecies that a few centuries ago would surely have caused them to end their careers unpleasantly by being burned at the stake. One professor said that the Bible must be revised in view of the achievements of modern science—that many of the miracles of the New Testament are everyday acts of master surgeons of to-day. Another predicted that the rays of the sun, now wasted, would some day be transformed into usable power. The Sahara Desert alone, he said, receives daily solar energy equivalent to the power produced by the burning of six billion tons of coal. Some genius of the future will find the way to turn this energy into power.

Still another predicted an enormous decrease in the amount of power necessary for the supplying of the world with artificial light, by the production of "cold light"—the sort of illumination produced by the firefly. Another speaker predicted that a way would be found to cause rain clouds to precipitate, while others forecast the increased development of tidal power—already undertaken by the French government at the mouth of the River Rance and by the British at the mouth of the Severn River. Also was predicted wider employment of the energy of the earth's rotation, now used only in the Sperry gyroscope. Production of power from the atomic energy of ordinary matter was another forecast made at the meeting.

The Spark in the Tinder

By Holman Day

Author of "The Psychomancers," "On the Long Leash," Etc.

(A Six-Part Story—Part V.)

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE MAGIC OF A VOICE.

THE Black Dragons had said to the charging, red-plumed ranks, "You shall not pass!" That name, the Black Dragons, was long ago given by the woodsmen to the serrated, battlemented heights of the border watershed. The ranks of the racing fires faltered on the rocky slopes to the south and died against the flinty breasts of the Black Dragons.

On the second night after the torches had made that horrid circle about Ashael's camp—after the seeds from those torches had been sown on the winds and had raised with magical suddenness a crop of blazing chaos that was tipped with flowers of the flames—one saw only scattered lights in the smoky gloom, stubs of trees that were upright, glowing embers. When the eyes gazed forth on the vast tracts where destruction had raged, the panorama seemed, in the obscurity, like cities dimly lighted.

The Big Smoke, however, had rolled over the cliffs of the watershed, though the fires had been kept back.

On the day that followed the second night of the conflagration, the skies were hung with a somber pall of saffron hue and the sun overhead was like a dull-red lozenge laid on a yellow screen.

On the L'Islet waters the men who were working down the pulp-timber drive on its way to the Canadian mills breathed acrid air and looked over their shoulders toward the south and wondered how much damage had been done.

They hardly expected that any messenger would come out of that hell to report the damage. However, near the time when twilight was merging with the dun light of the day a man came to them, and his appearance showed that he had been through that vast hell to the south. He came down the river, paddling with a broken oar, a voyager in a leaky bateau that was evidently some ancient, condemned craft that had been left to rot on the shore.

The man was blackened and blistered; his eyes were closed; the fires had seared them. He paddled only feebly—the current of the river was the chief motive power in bringing the bateau along. The man was crying aloud. But when the rivermen hurried out to him, their sweeps forcing along a frothing bateau, they learned that he was not making appeals in his own behalf; he was incoherently calling for help for somebody who was back there in the woods from which he had come. When the rivermen hailed and after they caught hold of the craft, their brown hands clinging to the thwarts, he addressed men whom he could not see but whose voices gave him a new impulse to summon aid for the one who was lost.

The rivermen could not understand very well because he kept contradicting himself in his delirium. He said that a good old man had run away into the fires so that he would not be a burden to the younger who might be able to escape. He said that the good old man was alive. He declared that God would not allow a man like that to die in fires that had been set by lunatics and renegades. But then he went on to say that the old man had been burned in the flames because he would not be the cause of sacrificing another man. He said that he had carried the old man on his shoulders; then he said that the old man would not allow himself to be carried.

The boss of the rivermen tapped his forehead and shook his head when he swapped glances with his crew.

"Whoever is up yon in the smoke, he is still there, what's left of him. This man must be taken to the village of Boisvert."

They lied to the stranger when they said

that they would send for the old man. But they did not lie to themselves when they averred in low tones that there was no need of searching for anybody who had been left yonder.

The stranger threw away the broken oar when they promised to send aid. After they had lifted him into their bateau he lay limply on the wool jackets which they spread for him; he was motionless and silent. While the bateau swept on down the river, with the stranger on board, and on through the smoky twilight and into the night which followed the twilight, the rivermen knew that he was alive only from the boss' assurances. Every little while the boss knelt and put his ear to the stranger's breast and listened for heartbeats.

These rivermen made up a part of the crew that was handling the rear of the pulpwood drive—and they had been located far up the L'Islet waters. It was morning before they came to the settlement of Boisvert.

The boss had dipped water in his palms as the bateau drove on and had bathed the face of the unconscious man and had cleared away the soot and grime as best he could. But the cruelly seared eyes he did not dare to touch.

"It's for Doctor Lebel—that job," he told his men. "One of you must go on to St. Beauce and bring Doctor Lebel."

The rivermen were not wondering because the boss had taken all this trouble for a stricken stranger and was willing to go to more pains. On the L'Islet waters they all called him "Generous Jock." And the house of Jock Duncan at Boisvert, an open house for all who came and went along the watery thoroughfare, had a weather-stained board above its door with letters carved deeply. It was a tribute to Jock Duncan though Duncan shook his head and grinned disparagingly when old "Dominie" MacMath nailed up the board which he had patiently carved in the period of his recovery from a broken leg; Duncan had taken in the aged lay preacher who had suffered injury on a tour among the camps. This was the verse on the board:

> But deep this truth impressed my mind:
> Thro' all His works abroad,
> The heart benevolent and kind
> The most resembles God.

"I'm leaving it where the dominie nailed it," Duncan was wont to explain, "for it's a bit verse frae Bobby Bur-rns and I'd no lay my rough paw on any of Bobby's jingle."

Duncan led the way when the men bore the stranger from the bateau to the door where the verse proclaimed the character of the house's hospitality. "It comes at a good time," he said. "Mavis has no call to be busy with the village bairns, for the school is closed. And she aye must needs tend and do for somebody."

He called to his daughter Mavis before he reached the door. "I'm bringing one of our own kind, lass. For he wouldna let the clutch of his sufferings close his throat or make him lose the hold on his oar till he had told what he had come to tell—of the other man he tried hard to save and couldn't. So, be good to him. He has earned it!"

Therefore, John Lang, who had been lodged in the house of Jock Duncan of Boisvert, another with the nickname of "Generous," proceeded to collect what Duncan considered had been earned. But Lang did not know that he was collecting. He did not seem to know his own identity for many days. He knew not night from day, for he was in a darkened room, his eyes bandaged by the skillful ministrations of Doctor Lebel from far St. Beauce. Just how a man whose lungs had been shriveled by the fires and choked by the smoke, whose eyes were blinded and whose throat was scorched within and without, had been able to keep on till he had made known to men the peril of another man, was a source of marvel to the doctor, and he made that astonishment known to Duncan. And the more the doctor wondered, the more was Duncan convinced that his first judgment in regard to the stranger was justified. "He must be one o' my own sort—and it's good to gi'e hand o' help to such," commented Duncan. "I'd like to know his name—but there's no hurry. Dumb and blind ye say he'll be for many a day? Oh, well! I'll shift the name o' Generous Jock to him. I'm tired of carrying it and he's welcome to its use."

After a long time, after days of which he did not know the lapse, John Lang became conscious of a voice. It was faint and far away, it seemed, at first; his ears had suffered from the flames and his dulled hearing came back to him slowly. It was a girl's voice. After he began to hear it more plainly he was aware, for his own comfort, that he was back in a safe world.

He had been battling with the phantasmagoria of flames—flames that were leaping and limitless. He had fought through them—he had fled from before them. He was everlastingly struggling with a burden which resisted his efforts and he tried to drag along an old man who had urged him to go on and make the most of the years that were still ahead of a young man. At first, in the vagaries of his delirium, the girl's distant voice seemed to be calling to him to come away from the torturing fires. It was the call of youth summoning the spirit of youth. So, he turned his back on the flames and answered the call of the voice. It was the beginning of his convalescence.

Day by day he depended on the voice to guide him, because his way was still beset with visionary obstacles, as if with the smoldering stumps that had flanked him on that day when he staggered up the mountainside and groped his way to the L'Islet waters. He seemed to come into clearer air where he could see the cool, purple rim of the hills—the boundary that had always stimulated his yearning to go on and seek. He trusted in the voice. He waited for it—he loved it when he heard it.

So gradually did the twilight of bewilderment develop into the dawn of reality that he scarcely knew when it was that he came to realize that the voice of the girl who had tenderly nursed him was not merely a sound that was a part of his troubled visions.

Even when he had begun to stammer words for the first time, asking anxious questions, he made no attempt to learn her identity. The voice sufficed for his comfort.

Other women had approached him by way of his eyes; he remembered Reba Donworth swinging along the boulevard—he recollected how Anita Trask had looked when her old husband disclosed the tableau by pulling aside the portière.

His eyes were bandaged, his ears gave him uncertain evidence still. But that voice went straight to his heart. Sometimes, when he was restless, the voice read the verses of Bobby Burns, sympathetically and with all the delightful characterization of the dialect. Sometimes the voice crooned the Scottish songs.

The voice comforted him, from time to time, reassured him, encouraged him. It said that he would see again when Doctor Lebel felt that the hour had come to take the bandages away.

Then there came a day when the strong arms of men helped him out of the room where he had been lodged so long, the voice directing the helpers and urging them to be tender and careful. He was in the open. He heard the mellow murmur of a river's current and sniffed the odor of summer's flowers. They seated him in a big chair and he listened to the rustle of leaves above his head. In the dark room he had felt a listless indifference about the lapse of time. Now he asked questions and the girl with that blessed voice of comfort told him that it was the last week of June. She indulged his awakened curiosity and explained how he had been brought to the home of Jock Duncan at Boisvert.

"I am Mavis Duncan. Right beside you is my young sister, Jessie."

A little hand was laid upon his where it rested on the arm of the chair. He heard another voice. "I have sat almost every day beside your bed, sir, when Sister Mavis could not be there all the time. I have reached to you water and your medicine."

"It makes me very sad to know that you stayed in that dark room for my sake," said Lang.

"But it has made me happy, sir, because there are so few things that I can do to help anybody. I have to sit in my wheel chair all the time, just as you do now. I am twelve years old. I have sat five years in my chair. It is not so bad when one can see. The doctor will take the cloth off your eyes some day. Then I will bring my games and you and I can play them and we shall not mind much because we have to sit in our chairs."

Under the bandage he felt the healing tears moisten the eyes that the flames had seared. "I don't know much about what I have said or done since I have been in the dark room. And before I was brought here," he said, "I did not know there was so much unselfish generosity in the world. My name is John Lang. I hope you'll let just the name suffice you for now. When I can stand up like a man in front of you both and look into your eyes I will tell you the rest."

"You must not trouble your thoughts till that time comes," said the voice of Mavis. "Think only this—that it is June, and that you can come out here every day when it's fair and can listen to the river and catch the scents of the flowers, They are all about

you because I tend them and love them. And it won't be long before you can see them and look at the fields in the sunshine. Now, I must go into the house and attend to the baking. Jessie will be with you."

The child chattered joyfully, grateful for the commission that had been intrusted to her. She was eyes for the man who sat beside her. She described all that could be seen from where they sat—the river, the logs rolling along its flood, the broad tillage fields and the little white houses.

"It's too bad your sister must work indoors on such a beautiful day," he ventured. He was hoping that the child would assure him that the stay would not be for long. "And it's too bad that she has to work at baking when it's warm."

"Oh, Mavis only keeps an eye on old Joan and the other girl—and Mavis only makes the pies because it's fun for her. Mamma used to make the pies before she went away to heaven, and Mavis is mamma of our house now. And she teaches our school."

Lang rested his head on the back of his chair. The little girl patted his hand.

"Maybe you'd like to go to sleep. I'll hush my tongue, sir."

"No, no!" he protested. "Your dear tongue is helping me so much that I'm not missing my eyes just now. Tell me some more, please!"

"I think I have told you all about everything that's in sight. Oh, here comes Blind Lebaude—he's tapping past with his stick. He's a jolly man. Hey, Jules Lebaude!" she called. "You must tell this gentleman who is just now the same as you are and who can't see that it's not so very bad to be without eyes. He'd like to be made jolly as you are all the day long!"

The sightless man who sat in the big chair heard a very jovial chuckle. *"Mais, non!* She was not so very funny dat day when de grin'stone she bus' on me at de meell. I grin' de ax on de power stone, m'sieu. Some time, dem stone she bus'. *Oui!* So I'm blind. But I don' stay sad. I can make fon for maself. I have one leetle farm. I have de wire stretch to hen pen, pig house —to my barn—and I go along so sweef' about ma work by put ma hand on de wire. And dey come pas' and la'f and call me de 'lectric car on de trolley, eh! So, I la'f and I don't care."

Then the cane tapped on its way.

"So, you see, even if you have to sit in the chair all the time, or if you can't look at the sun and the flowers, there's always something left for fun if you'll make up your mind to be happy," said the little girl. "Now, let's see what else there is in sight to tell about! Oh, yes! There's Jessie Duncan, right here! Well, you'll know the color of her hair when I sing you the bit song that Papa Jock jokes me with:

"Lassie wi' the lint-white locks,
Bonny lassie, artless lassie,
Wilt thou wi' me tent the flocks
Wilt thau be my deary, O?"

While she was laughing merrily after her little song, he reached in her direction and patted her locks.

"But I don't think I'm really very good looking," she went on. "Papa Jock says he likes my mouth because it's big like his. He says it's a good sign of generosity. That's his nickname all along the river—'Generous Jock.' There's a little joke—I can tell it now, since we're getting to be friends, sir. Because you were so anxious to have the men not bother about you but wanted them to go back after that friend you had to leave in the woods, papa said that you were the right kind and that he'd lend you his name for a time—till we found out yours. So you have been called 'Generous Jock.' But you don't want us to call you that any more, do you?"

"No! No!" cried Lang with deep feeling.

"I'm sorry," said the little girl, taken aback by his fervor. "But it was only a joke—and the name helped us in our talk about you."

"I'm not blaming you, dear, or any of your folks. But I don't deserve the name. I know it belongs by rights to your father."

"Oh, yes!" she agreed serenely. "It fits him. But now I must tell you how Sister Mavis looks. She is——"

"Hush!" he warned. "I think I hear her coming."

"No! She isn't anywhere in sight."

"Please! Please, dear child!" he urged. "Don't tell me how she looks—not now. It's a whim. Sick men have queer whims, don't they? I'm—I'm guessing how she looks. You enjoy working out riddles, don't you? Well, I'm childish right now—and it's like a sort of a riddle—guessing how

she looks. It takes up my mind. I don't want the answer right now."

"Then you must be thinking about Sister Mavis a whole lot," she said, surprise in her tone.

"Yes!" said John Lang meekly. He had enshrined a voice—he had pictured an image and for the time being he was keeping the shrine sacred from invasion by a human visage.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

WITH THE EYES OF A MAN.

John Lang broke a resolve. He talked about himself to Mavis Duncan before the bandages were off his eyes.

In his thoughts, while he talked, he accused himself of weakness and folly. He knew that he ought to wait till he was hale and strong, finding his poise with the aid of honest eyesight. But he succumbed to the usual temptation which assails a sick man in the presence of a nurse who is tender and patient. He reached out for understanding sympathy. He told Mavis about Reba Donworth.

Somehow, he wanted this girl of the North to feel that he was loyal and dependable in his affections. He acknowledged to himself that his impulses were of a mixed quality, but he desired to have Mavis know about the faults which had turned Reba from him. It was in his thoughts that Mavis was the one of all others who could assure him that those faults had been corrected.

"My vanity, my pride, my selfishness, my lack of tenderness!" That was his theme. Daily he brought the matter up and dwelt upon the theme; he was finding inexpressible comfort in Mavis' reiterated belief that he had been cleansed of those errors.

Then he was troubled because he could not prove his new spirit by acts, not merely by his protestation.

He fell to wondering what he could do in the way of that proof. His doubts in regard to them, his anxiety to perform, were the natural developments of a sick man's vague protests against hampering conditions and of his restlessness as convalescence progressed. He was eager to make the proof plain in order that Reba might know!

"It will be easy for you to show it by some act, now that you have the will," Mavis had assured him, over and over. "I'm sure that the way will present itself. God always puts the means within the reach of those who simply and honestly want to show goodness."

"And humility!" he urged.

"Yes! Otherwise, the show is all for parade. Some way will be provided and then she will know!"

Through long days, under the rustling leaves, he talked with Jessie; the child's cheerful patience touched his heart. The doctors had told her father that nothing could be done to cure her of the paralysis that fettered her feet. She and Lang had discussed often the strange old man who had died in the flaming woods.

"I wish I might have seen him," the child confessed. "I have heard about the other Charmer Men of the woods—the rivermen have told me. I am good, I hope. I trust in God's goodness. Do you believe the old man could have made me well, so I could walk? If I could only stand and walk a little, I would be happier. I'd never care, even if I couldn't run about like the other children. Anyway, I'm getting too old to run about like a child. Is there such a thing as being healed without doctors—just because God wants you to be well?"

"I'm afraid I don't know very much about it or how to talk to you, Jessie. I wish I had studied that thing instead of wasting so much study on other matters. But I do believe that God wants everybody to be well. Strange things are done in the way of healing—I do know that!"

"A riverman told me that once he was at the great church of Beaupré, on the Feast Day of Sainte Anne—that's in July, the twenty-sixth day. He said that while the procession was moving and the chimes were ringing and the people were singing the chant to good Sainte Anne he heard a child scream very loud and say, 'I can walk!' And a little girl got out of her wheel chair there in the yard in front of the church, where all the people were, and she walked off. The riverman said he got down on his knees with the rest of the people and cried—and he said he had never been on his knees before like that, because he was wicked. I'm afraid he was—I have heard him swear."

"Yes, there are strange things in the world," murmured Lang.

He pondered for some time.

"I used to be very curt and cross, my child, when folks told me that there were such things. But I don't have so much

faith in my own notions these days as I used to have. I want to listen with respect to what other folks say and to believe in all good things that happen to other folks. The shrine you speak of is not so very far from here, is it?"

Jessie's tone had revealed to him how carefully she had gleaned information and how, in her hopes, she had treasured all that she had learned. "After one gets to the valley of the Chaudiere it's not so very far, sir," said Jessie with wistful eagerness. "And the road is broad and smooth—they call it the King's Highway. And one goes to a place called Levis and there's a ferry across to the city of Quebec and then it's twenty-one miles down to the church of Sainte Anne. Oh, I have asked so many questions, sir! It seems as if I can shut my eyes and see the broad road and all the white houses and then I come to the place where the church rises so grand! And there's the statue of the good saint in the courtyard! She holds her little grandson, Jesus, in her arms. And in the church there's another great statue of her and they say she looks down very sweet and tender on the sick folks and the cripples who come and kneel and ask for help. And there's a bit of bone from her wrist—and it cures folks!"

She paused, and he could determine from her voice, though it was brave, that she was very near to tears.

"Have you asked your father to take you there, child?"

"No! no!" He heard the indrawn breath of apprehensiveness.

"But why not?"

"He's a Presbyterian, sir! He's Scotch!" There was no reproach in the child's tone. She gave her statement as if it were a cogent, final, absolute and unanswerable explanation.

Lang's thoughts went back to what Ashael had said in the courtroom on that day when he had been called to the stand as a witness. Men did insist on putting tags upon God's mysterious bounty! Men in the quarrels of human belief insisted on choosing the channels of their own blessings and, if those channels were dry, scornfully refused to partake of the overflow of another channel to which other men had given a specific name.

He wanted to burst out into protests against making the infinite God a creature of creeds, even though he had only a child for an auditor; but he respected that child's simple faith in a goodness that for her was still undefined; and he was unwilling to disturb her deference to a father's settled opinions.

But an idea was born in John Lang. He set his thought to the elaboration of that idea as day succeeded day. Sometimes he was afraid that he was putting his own affairs ahead of the child's in the matter; for his own case became involved with the child's as he proceeded with his plans.

One day Mavis gave him a bit of news; she had served as his information monger in regard to the little happenings of the settlement of Boisvert. She said that some of the folks were going to make the pilgrimage to Sainte Anne de Beaupré for the great feast day. They were going in their carts and their buckboards to the Chaudiere valley and down the broad highway. There were the men, wives and children of the families of Etienne Laurendeau, of Philippe Montreuil, of Maxime Filteau and of Ubalde Duplisse.

"Are all of them sick?"

"Oh, no! They are going for the trip, to see the sights, to ask the blessing and to bring back the holy water from the fountain after the father has blessed the bottles they fill."

"Do you believe that persons have been healed at that shrine?"

"I only know what I have been told. There are many thousands who go there as pilgrims, each year, and I have talked with folks who have seen sick people made whole."

"They call themselves pilgrims—and they ride in trains and carriages and motor cars," he said with some bitterness. "Away back in the old days of the world there were real pilgrims—and they walked and they received their blessings. In these times, it's all show and mock with most folks. They haven't the humility to be real pilgrims. If they knew how to ask for blessings, they'd get them."

Later, in other talks, he referred to the matter. He indicated that it occupied his thoughts a great deal.

Then there came the day that brought Doctor Lebel for the final and the crucial visit. The doctor on his other calls had tested Lang's eyes, in the darkened room, to an extent that assured them both that the recovery was sure, though it had been slow.

When the bandages were taken off for the last time, John Lang saw!

It was in the twilight. He was seated in the big chair under the rustling leaves, his head on the back of the chair and he looked up into the foliage that was stirred by the evening breeze.

Jock Duncan was at home those days. The rear of the drive was down.

'Your hand, man!" he cried, reaching for Lang's. "Gi'e us your honest grip! I'm greeting ye as ye come frae the mouth o' the covered bridge! A sunlit way for ye frae noo on!"

Lang looked slowly around—and saw Mavis. He was not hearing the voice that he longed to hear. He saw nothing but her eyes at first, so it seemed to him. His gaze did not stray from them. They belonged with the voice. They were big and honest and gray. Happy tears filled them but did not dim them.

Lang rose slowly. He had regained his strength of body for he had been walking for many days, guided by Mavis' hand.

"Mr. Lang would never let me tell him about your looks, Sister Mavis," cried Jessie, laughing and sobbing with a touch of a child's nervous hysteria in a moment of crisis. "I wanted to break the news of how homely you are."

At that prod John Lang forgot reserve, tactfulness, the delicacy of conventionality. He declared with a childishness that quite matched Jessie's emotion of the moment, "Hush, child! Your sister is the handsomest girl I have ever seen!"

Jock Duncan's shouts of laughter broke the tension of the little party and helped Mavis to control her swift confusion.

"It's what I'd always say to your mither, lass, my first day out frae the choppings in the spring! But she was ne'er unco set up by any such silliness—so she aye ca'ed it!"

Lang walked to Mavis, his hands outstretched, and she took them in her warm clasp.

"Judging from my words, my tongue is fully as uncertain a member as my eyes are undependable, right now," he apologized—then blushed, and was really embarrassed by that remark which discounted his former and fervent declaration.

"Man, don't spoil a compliment, even if it did somewhat o'erpraise my lassie," rebuked Duncan, laughing.

"Oh, I stick to what I said! I—I——" He released Mavis' hands and joined with her in the laughter which echoed Duncan's robust efforts in that line. "I think I won't try to juggle any more words just now—not even the words with which to thank you for what you have done through all the long days. I don't know just what to do with words, it seems!"

"Nor would I know, either, if you should give them to me." She released his hands.

He wished he had the courage to invite her to walk with him along the river bank.

The feeling that he lacked the courage to do the especial something that he wanted to go about with all his heart, suggested that he would do well to tone up that courage by a little exercise of it in another quarter.

He turned to Duncan. "Will you take a short walk with me along the river, sir? I want to have a talk with you."

They were a long time away from the house. Mavis and Jessie sat without speaking and watched the moon come up. It was broad and white in a tranquil sky.

Silhouetted against the quivering pathway which the moon laid across the water, Duncan and Lang walked up the slope returning from the river.

"Lassies, we've had a long, long talk, John Lang and I," said the father mildly. "I might say that it has been about beliefs, pro and con, but the argument is ended without either of us being the wiser—only agreeing, the two of us, with the spirit o' gude friends, that there are many things beyond the ken o' mortal man. So, we'll say nowt about the arguments.

"We agreed on anither matter—and it's for me, as master o' my house, to speak of it." He drew a long breath—a breath of resignation. "John Lang tells me that he has pleaded mony a case in court, but he has given no compliment to himsel'. He needs not to do so. I compliment him; as a Scotch Pr-resbyterian who has been won over to stray temporar-rily outside the pathway of a pairfect cr-reed, I compliment him." He bowed to Lang who stood at a respectful distance from the family group, listening.

"In due season, so that we may be there on the day o' the Great Festival, we start for Sainte Anne de Beaupré. And if God or any of His saints bend down closer that day, so that they may hear the prayer of my puir bairnie here, I care nowt whether it's in the yard o' papistry or in the yard

o' the kirk. I shall bless the Father o' the wor-rld for the mercies He may see fit to grant."

There was a long silence there under the moon.

Then the child began to sob softly.

Her father went quickly to her, knelt beside her wheel chair and took the head with the lint-white locks upon his shoulder. He talked to her comfortingly in low tones.

When Mavis moved toward John Lang he hurried to meet her.

"It has been one of my dreams," she whispered. "I had heard of the others—I had hoped—but I wasn't sure——"

"None of us are sure," he returned when she hesitated. "We can only hope."

"It's a long road—it's rough for a part of the way." Her motherly solicitude for the child was stirring. "But we must arrange, somehow, to make the wagon comfortable for Jessie."

"We need not hurry," Lang assured her. "But as for the wagon! I have been giving this matter long thought. It was not sudden impulse when I asked your father to go with me for a talk. I had made some plans for myself. I know that there are bicycles in the village. I shall buy some wheels. The child is used to her chair. She can be very comfortable in it if it is pushed with care over the rough places."

"You surely don't mean that you——"

"I have begged that privilege of your father. It is more than a privilege. It is for the peace of my own soul. Understand me, Mavis!" In the eagerness of his appeal he blurted her name. "This is not to parade my humility or to crucify my vanity. When I can say that and can be absolutely honest in saying it, I feel that I am well along in my cure of self. But it seems to me that when I have gone on foot, in the dust of the highway, being of real service to a child in making the way smooth for her, I can look up to God and plead her cause and mine with a better understanding of the Law—the Great Law that I'm only beginning to grasp. I hope you don't think it's a whim!"

"No!" she assured him. "It's what you have been wanting to show by act instead of word—it's your proof!"

That night, in her chamber, the daughter of Generous Jock Duncan made a test of her own generosity; the spirit of sacrifice was dominating that household in those days! Even a Scotch Presbyterian had put aside the tenets of his creed.

The moonlight flooded a table that was close beside her window—it was light enough to serve Mavis. She wrote a letter to Reba Donworth of the office of the clerk of the court in the distant city. Lang, in making his confidences, had disclosed the occupation of the one he had loved, as well as telling her name.

The girl of Boisvert told the girl of the city that the man who would be at Sainte Anne de Beaupré on the twenty-sixth day of July would be worthy of all her love, after having been through the fires of penitence and sacrifice. She urged Reba to go to Sainte Anne. She declared that John Lang deserved that reward—a blessing in answer to the appeal from his contrite spirit.

Mavis waited for a little while before she sealed the envelope. Then she drew her finger across her tear-wet cheek and moistened the edge of the flap and held her hand closely pressed there for many minutes.

Some letters are sealed with a kiss; that letter was sealed with tears.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MAN ON THE BROAD HIGHWAY.

Member Mathison banged into the somnolent noon hush of the Talisman Club on a July day. Of the few members who were still sticking in town and were lounging in the club, Mr. Mathison's advent produced an effect not wholly unlike that which would have been provoked by the irruption of a noisy dog with a tin can tied to his tail.

Mr. Mathison brought a couple of sensation tin cans—one that was visible in his hand and one that was in the shape of a piece of news hidden in his noddle. What he had in his hand was an interestingly sagging leather bag. The convivial manner displayed by Mr. Mathison suggested the nature of the contents of the bag—but Member Mathison proceeded to leave nothing to the imagination.

"Come along, boys! All up for the buffet! I've got a whale of an excuse for buying the drinks—I'll tell you in a minute what the excuse is. Come along—right from good old Quebec and fresh across the border!" He shook the bag at them. "Whisky is food—why pay grocery bills?"

It was evident that Member Mathison was just in from a motor trip; he wore dust coat,

cap and goggles. He was followed to the buffet by a fairly representative delegation of the club members. On the way, Mr. Mathison chatted. "If Benedict Arnold was on earth again and was trying to get an army to walk all the way to Quebec he'd mighty soon make up his mind that we're a country of patriots. We'd walk if we had to! Ought to see the roads between here and there! However, it's hard to see 'em on account of the dust and the strings of autos! But I did see one thing! Just a minute till I get this bottle open!"

When the bottle had been opened and the glasses filled, Member Mathison had more to say.

"Toast! To all who have said that John Lang has run away, is dead or married! They're damn liars! Drink hearty! Go ahead, Devon! Hope it doesn't choke you!"

"I don't know why you should especially pick me out of the crowd here," protested the lawyer sourly.

"Oh, yes, you do!" insisted Member Mathison cheerfully. "I'm not saying that John didn't give you plenty of reason for making a lot of talk against him. We all know that you've made it. But there's been a different feeling growing among the boys since John was driven away by lies and slander. I helped to start the new feeling and I'm mighty glad to see it going so well. John wouldn't be a man unless he had made his mistakes, just the same as the rest of us. I don't know how it would seem to associate with angels—never did. I like men who ain't so blame perfect that they make you ashamed of yourself. Fill up again! Toast! Here's to giving John Lang the glad hand when he comes back home!"

"Say! Look here, Mathison!" suggested one of the group. "Suppose you let us in on this. Have you seen Lang? Do you mean to tell us that?"

"You can see most anything on the road —coming *from* Quebec," growled Devon.

"You bet I have seen John Lang! Talked with him. Met him face to face and I stopped my car so sudden that it turned somersaults and fetched up, headed the other way, toward Quebec. Instinct and homesickness! That's the kind of a trained auto I own."

Then Mathison, feeling that he had teased curiosity to the proper pitch, dropped banter.

"Yes, I did see John, boys! When I tell you where I saw him, and what he was doing, you're going to look big-eyed at me. But don't any one of you tell me that I'm lying—not even you, Larry Devon, no matter how hard work you have to swallow back words.

"I was coming up the big road of the Chaudiere—headed home. I know John Lang as well as I know my own brother—but I looked into his face and I went on a half mile before I could make myself believe I had really seen him. Then I turned around and drove back.

"John was wearing a suit of clothes that he had bought off the pile in some Canuck village somewhere. He was footing it along the road—pushing a wheel chair that had a little girl in it—a cripple. Now don't you say it, Devon!" he warned, brandishing a monitory forefinger. "I'm convincing the boys, here, that I'm telling the truth. I talked with John. He introduced me to a party that was going along with him; they were in a big wagon. I don't remember their names. All I do know about that party is that there was a girl in it who could make me let a wop push me along, wheelbarrow fashion, if she wished it, much less make me trundle along her sister who was bound for the shrine at Sainte Anne. That's where Lang and his party were headed for!

"And he stood up straight and looked me in the eye and he says, 'Jake, I suppose you'll be making the Talisman Club along around to-morrow noon, if you keep going at the clip you were hitting when you went past me just now?' When I said that clip was about according to the schedule planned, he says, 'If you happen to run up against the boys, tell 'em where you saw me, what I was doing and that I am having the best time of my life and will be back on the job, sooner or later, a new man!' And believe me, he put a devil of a lot of emphasis on the word new. Fill up again! Can't use good stuff in a better cause! Here's to John's coming back! And here's to the girl with the big gray eyes, whoever she may be!"

Then Member Mathison squinted at the depleted bottle, decided that it was not worth carrying away and departed breezily.

Devon did not take part in the discussion of the strange news. He went into the grill alone and ordered his lunch. While it was being prepared he left the table and went

to the telephone. He called the Trask mansion and gave his name and was able to get in touch with Mrs. Trask herself. For some weeks since the return to town of the mistress of the Double T from the North country the law firm of Blake, Devon & Walsh had been attending to certain legal matters connected with the settlement of the estate.

Over the telephone he informed Mrs. Trask that he wished to see her on a matter of business and she granted him permission to call on her within the hour.

He hurried his lunch with the air of a man who was too deeply absorbed in thought to take any interest in food.

Devon had been guessing, and he had spent some money in securing information. His agent had trailed certain squatters of the North country after they had scattered to the four winds, following the affair of the conflagration that had swept over the Double T acres. He was not sure that he had been able to winnow the truth from the lies. But he knew that the squatters asserted that they had been ordered to drive away a meddlesome leader of malcontents. They said that Anita Trask had given those commands. Devon knew that other land owners whose timber had been destroyed were threatening to bring suit, under the law which permits damage abutters to collect from an owner who has allowed fires to be set.

But what was more vital information for the needs of Larry Devon was the description of the stranger who had held off the mob that attacked the man known as The Charmer of Angel Knob. The squatters had been explicit on that point.

The lawyer was assured that Anita Trask understood well enough who that stranger was—the man who had joined Ashael in flight and had been swallowed by the flaming forests.

Devon had been studying Anita Trask, and estimating her situation since she had arrived in town from the North country. Her coming away had been flight, he was told. Not all the statements of the squatters found credence up there but enough was believed to make the threats against her open and vicious.

In the city she was a recluse, except for the interviews she had granted her attorneys.

Devon not only had guessed—he began to hope.

He was a bachelor, he was covetous.

He was giving her time to recover from the shock of Lang's disappearance—a matter about which all sorts of stories were afloat.

He resolved to be the first to give her the news which Mathison had brought. As long as Devon had believed that Lang was dead he perceived opportunity which he might eventually be able to grasp. Lang alive was manifestly allowing Anita to suffer on in her uncertainty; he was in the North country in the company of a handsome girl. Devon had been hoping for much after sorrow should be dead; now he was hoping for more after he had been able to fan jealousy into life—making it so keen that her resentment would turn her from Lang to himself.

Therefore, Devon rushed to her after his lunch.

When she came into the room where he waited for her he reflected that though her black garb might be the conventional mourning for Serenus Trask, an unloved husband, her white face was a tribute to her fears or her despair in regard to John Lang.

Devon had been wondering how long her nature would remain true to a man who had gone or was dead. He knew that some women were persistent fools on that point. But he was quite sure that all women were alike after they had been flouted and scorned.

So he told the news which Mathison had related at the club.

She had seated herself, showing the lassitude of hopeless woe, when he began to talk. But the instant she understood what his message was she leaped up and beat her hands together, crying out to him that it was a lie.

"But it's the solemn truth. He's on the Chaudiere road, wheeling that chair, making slow work of it, so Mathison says—and Mathison can be depended on. Lang is making the job a long one because he has a very handsome girl with him. It's plain enough what has happened."

He was glad when he noted the flush that began to color her cheeks; he welcomed the brilliancy that sparkled in her eyes. He talked more about the girl and of Lang's enjoyment of the trip, elaborating what Mathison had reported on the thing.

Anita, not speaking, was transfigured; from the pallor of listlessness she flamed

into the hues of fervid emotion. Devon told himself that he had seen jealousy afire before in his life, but nothing so lurid as that! He was tempted to take advantage of the situation and to put himself forward as a man who could give her the real devotion that she deserved. She was saying nothing —she walked up and down the room and he waited for the outburst that would confirm his conviction that he had done a good job.

When she turned and addressed Devon her tones were low and thrilling. "The man you speak of—when did he see John Lang?"

"Yesterday, around about this time, I should say. It's a straight road—he came right along."

"It's wonderful news you have brought to me, Mr. Devon, this news that John Lang is safe and well. I thank you."

She paid no more attention to him. She rang and a servant promptly came.

"Have my car brought to the door. Tell the driver we are going to Quebec. Send my maid." With the air of one to whom moments were precious she left Devon standing there.

He waited in the room, thinking she would return. But when she came downstairs she hurried to the car without a glance in Devon's direction.

Through the glare and the dust of the July afternoon, through cities and villages, over rivers and hills, her car flashed on its way. All night, by the main highway that winds through the wooded mountains which divide the Atlantic slope from the Laurentian valley, the tireless motor purred. In the dawn they crossed the line between the countries.

They halted only for the observance of the regulations of the customs posts.

Anita had kept vigil through the night, making sure that the driver did not doze, though he assured her that he was not weary.

When at last they came to the rolling farms and the villages of the broad Chaudiere valley and swept along the smooth turnpike her eyes were wide, her lips apart and her pose was of strained intensity.

She was on the watch for a man who was trundling a wheel chair in which a crippled child was riding. She was frenziedly seeking to solve a mystery which had been torturing her by visions at night and making hideous her waking fears by day.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE PILGRIMS IN THE DUST.

The unalloyed joy of the child who rode in the wheel chair was the keynote for the harmony that attended on the pilgrims from Boisvert.

In her circle that had been so pathetically narrowed by her misfortune she had seen only the little white houses, the river and the domed hills which penned in the limits of her village. "And I have always wondered what was behind the hills," she confided to Lang.

"So have I, every time that I have looked up at them, no matter what hills they were." He repeated to Jessie his well-conned lines from Tennyson, his eyes studying Mavis' face as they walked along. He dwelt with special tenderness on the words, "Through all the world she followed him."

For most of the way Mavis walked with Lang.

It was a leisurely pilgrimage for which they had allowed plenty of time. Duncan wrapped the reins about the whipstock and lounged on the wagon seat and hummed songs. Old Joan rode in the wagon. She had brought hampers of food. They ate their lunches by the wayside under the trees. Nights they lodged at little inns or at farmhouses where they were welcomed. During the heat of the day they rested; they traveled in the early, fresh mornings or in the cool dusk. They held humbly to the edge of the broad highway, leaving plenty of room for the tourists in the rushing motor cars.

There were many others who went slowly —farmers and Canadian carters and vegetable venders bound for the open-air markets of Quebec. The pilgrims made friends among those who plodded, and the plight of the child in the wheel chair attracted much sympathetic interest.

Beside the highway, here and there, were outdoor shrines, and the new "friends of the road" often went and knelt before the figures in the niches and offered honest prayers for the sake of the child.

Jock Duncan ventured no comment on what he had been wont to term papist idolatry; he looked on and listened tolerantly. All this quest and journey of his little flock seemed to be for the child's sake and he was in the mood to welcome aid of any sort. He constantly quizzed the Canadians—having a smattering of their patois at his com-

mand—about the wonders that had been wrought at the shrine of Sainte Anne.

Every turn of the road, every house, every village developed new features of delight for Jessie; the lint-white locks fluttered, so quickly did she constantly turn her head, eagerly observing all objects in order that she might not miss anything.

At one place there was a railroad crossing and they waited long until a train clattered along the *"chemin de fer."* She had never seen such a spectacle, and she marveled.

"We'll come back on the train of cars as far as the iron road will bring us," Lang promised her. "But we must get all the good we can out of the pilgrimage, going down to the shrine."

He was lingering with fond delay over the hours of their journey, passing them through his thoughts with the same reverent deliberateness that was displayed by those who knelt at the wayside shrines and told the beads of their rosaries.

Often he found Mavis regarding him with an expression whose meaning he could not fathom. He was not flattered; the expression certainly did not convey any sentiments of fondness. On the contrary, there seemed to be some sort of fear in her. One day when they were nearing the river, he succumbed to the impulse to question her. She made no reply even when he pressed her earnestly.

"I have been grateful for the sunshine all the way," he told her. "I have been more grateful for the happiness. But that happiness is clouded when you look at me as you do."

"I have only good thoughts for you—please understand that! But I'm growing to be afraid that my friendship has led me to do something which will seem like going too far—and then you will not understand how I meant it."

"There is nothing that your friendship could do for me—absolutely nothing—that I wouldn't heartily approve, Mavis." After the first day of the pilgrimage he used her name frankly, without embarrassment. "And I've had every proof from you that you're my kind, true friend. Tell me your trouble and see how quickly I'll laugh it away."

"I'll tell you at Sainte Anne. I'll dare to tell you then because I'll be obliged to tell you."

"If you'll be obliged to tell me, that will not be so very daring! I'd rather you'd do things, where I'm concerned, that haven't any flavor of obligation about them."

"Not till Sainte Anne!" she insisted firmly.

"It seems that a great many wonderful events are looked for at Sainte Anne! But I'll wait just as patiently as Jessie is waiting."

She turned and left him with a swift excuse and went to the wagon, before he had time to note her pallor.

"Child, have you any idea what it is your sister means to tell me?" he asked Jessie.

"No, sir! And how about the promise you just made to her? If I didn't love you so much I'd be telling her that you don't mean to keep your promises when you make 'em to her."

"I am well scolded," he laughed. "And I impose sentence on myself, here and now. Yonder is a sign which tells me that a certain Madame Belliveau sells ice cream. Procession, halt!"

He brought the ice cream out to them, along with some of Madame Belliveau's little cakes, and they ate under a wayside tree.

It was there that Anita Trask came upon Lang in her rush down the broad highway. He paid no attention to the limousine when it swung to the side of the road and stopped; he was teasing the child by pretending to rob her of her little cakes. He did not heed Anita even when she leaned from the window of the car and called to him.

But he did take note when Mavis spoke to him; he glanced up quickly at her, alarmed by her choking tone and when he saw her white face and the expression in her eyes he was thoroughly frightened. He started to go to her but she directed his attention with a gesture and he turned and saw Anita. But he promptly whirled about and faced Mavis again, filled with solicitude in her behalf. He did not understand; he wondered what the girl of Boisvert could have heard about his association with Anita; he had never mentioned the widow of Serenus Trask.

"What is the trouble? What has happened, Mavis?"

"I wanted to do something to help you—to help more. And now I'm afraid! I had no right to meddle."

She hurried away and he stood in his tracks, staring at her.

Then he was aware that Anita was calling his name over and over. She was some distance away and was obliged to call loudly.

He went to the side of her car and greeted her with cold politeness; his puzzled fears were so persistently engaged in Mavis' strange demeanor that he was having hard work to take interest even in a visitation so astonishing as the arrival of Anita Trask.

"You're alive! I heard of it. I hurried here!"

"Yes!" he returned, his tone noncommittal.

"I know why you look at me that way. You believe the lies those wretches told about me that night on Angel Knob. I know what they said. I hunted some of them down and I lashed them with my whip for their lies."

"The matter is of no importance to me, Mrs. Trask, one way or the other."

"But you were put in danger of your life and you have been thinking that I was the cause."

"Will you pardon me when I say that I have not been devoting any thought to you?"

"But your manner shows that you are hating me for what you may have believed I did! I can read your mind!"

"If you really could read my mind," he returned mildly, "you would know that I no longer have any hatred for any person in this world. I speak the truth!"

"Why have you been hiding from me? What has happened to you?"

"So much has happened that I have no time to tell it now, and if I ever did tell it to you I'm afraid you would not understand."

"But you must tell me—something—John Lang. I demand it! I have the right to know! You promised to come to me. It was a pledge. It has been said of you that you never broke your pledge."

"I intended to keep my word to you, Mrs. Trask. I had started to come to you. I stopped for the night with Ashael—and at dawn I was to begin my journey to Hagas." He was looking hard into her wavering eyes. "But in the night a raging conflagration drove me north—away from you."

"I know what you mean," she insisted; but the spirit was gone out of her. Her lips were trembling. "But you told me that you intended to stay on Borestone."

"And on Borestone, you'll remember, I told you that I intended to be honest with you! I'll be honest, now that we meet again. I left Borestone suddenly because I was lonely there—because you had touched my heart—because I wanted to talk with you once more. But now—keeping straight on the track of honesty—I tell you that I hope I may never see you again in this life. That's brutal—but it may put you into a proper state of mind toward me. It will not be good for us to see each other again."

"Oh, God! My punishment!" she wailed.

He was gentle with her. "I have been punished, too, by my own acts. It has been bitter business. But after the punishment, when one knows it has been deserved, the way back to peace is open. Understand that I'm talking about myself, please. I have no intention of preaching to anybody else. I'm not fit to be a preacher."

She saw that he was about to leave her; she reached swiftly and held him by the sleeve, the rough cloth of the toiler of the North country. "John Lang, there has never been any other man in this world who could talk good advice to me. I'd never let a man advise me. My whole soul told me I needed you. I'll not allow you to leave me like this! I swear you shall not! Come with me. Talk to me!"

"I cannot go with you. I have undertaken a task I must go on with."

"What is it you're doing? Think of it—an important man like you are in the world—going on foot in the dust and wheeling a little girl!"

"I am a very small—a very humble man these days, Mrs. Trask. I have no time for mere talk. I must go on."

"Where are you going?"

"To the shrine of Sainte Anne de Beaupré."

"For what?"

"I am taking that crippled child there hoping for a blessing. I'll admit that I'm hoping for a blessing for myself."

"But it's only for Catholics."

He smiled—there were patience and wistfulness in the smile. "As a lawyer I know that our human judges have no prejudices in regard to creeds when petitioners come before them. I certainly do not believe that the Eternal Judge of the Universe is less broad in His consideration of cases."

He bowed, took her hand and released it from his sleeve, then clasped it cordially. "I must say good-by!"

He walked away.

"No, it is not good-by, John Lang," she called after him defiantly. "If there's a place where there are blessings for everybody, I'm glad to know of it! I'll go there, myself. I'll be waiting for you at Sainte Anne."

She did not order her car to proceed; she sat and observed him with curiosity.

He went straight to Mavis and gazed long into her troubled countenance. "You must not misunderstand for a moment. Do you know who that is yonder?"

"It is—it is——" she was unable to go on.

"It is the widow of Serenus Trask, the rich man who owned the timber company known as the Double T. I was his attorney."

Her frank astonishment informed him that this information was real news. More than ever was he puzzled as he reflected on her demeanor when Anita arrived and on the words Mavis had uttered. He ventured to ask some questions. But she would not answer them. Her expression of fear returned. "I'll explain at Sainte Anne!" she insisted.

"Very well!" he agreed. "It seems that everything is to be made clear for us at Sainte Anne."

Again he started on with the wheel chair and the slow wagon rumbled behind.

After they had proceeded for a little distance Anita's car overtook them. It rolled slowly past and the mistress of the Double T, framed in the window, frankly stared at the girl who was walking at Lang's side. Mavis returned the gaze and it was plain that she perceived something outside the bounds of the conventional relations between client and counsel. After the car had gone on, the girl cast side glances at Lang as if she were hoping that he would comment on the affair. His manner indicated that he was thinking deeply.

"She is very beautiful," suggested the girl.

"Very, indeed!"

"And she is very rich, is she?" There had been a long silence before she had ventured with that question.

"Yes!" Then there was a longer silence.

"I should think there would be many beaus."

"I know of none."

"I should like to hear a great deal about her. Won't you tell me?"

"It may be," he drawled, with a perverse and rather childish suggestion in his tone that he had been irritated by her tenacity in holding to her own secret, "that the matter will come up when hearts are generally opened at Sainte Anne. We need to wait only until day after to-morrow."

That was the afternoon of the twenty-fourth day of July, and they were near the end of the journey.

In the dusk they crossed on the big ferry from Levis and, while the boat drove on, Jessie, raptly silent, wore the expression of a child who had arrived in wonderland. It was a calm night; the linked lights which were strung from The Lower Town to The Heights flashed against the soft gloom like jewels on black velvet and the reflections trembled in the swirling current of the great river. Faint and far, a band pulsed music for the pleasure of the promenaders on the terrace, and the majestic Château, with its lights, was like a fairy palace, so the marveling child found it.

They lodged for the night in humble quarters in The Lower Town and were on their way next morning at sunrise. Lang proposed to make two stages of the journey to Sainte Anne, down the river; he could not hurry because he was reserving one especial spectacle for Jessie's eyes, keeping his plans from her.

When they came to the edge of a great gorge and heard the thunder of falling waters, he lifted Jessie in his arms and carried her to the cable car and they descended to the foot of the magnificent cataract of Montmorency.

The pilgrims from Boisvert sat for a long hour and gazed up at the white flood that veiled the cliffs, and listened to the mighty monotone of tumbling waters. They spoke no words to each other. The child braided her trembling fingers with Lang's and he wondered at the thoughts which were behind those enthralled and earnest eyes. It might well be, he pondered, that she was thinking, hopefully, that Nature's God who had fashioned that tremendous work at which she stared could easily give strength to the stricken limbs of a poor little girl—and only a puny miracle that would be beside the miracle of Montmorency!

One more night—the hither side of Sainte Anne—they lodged in a farmhouse whose whitewashed walls invited them to the cleanliness they found within doors. Again in the early morning they went on their way, ahead of the flood of pilgrims who would later crowd that narrow road between the rows of little houses.

And after a time, softened by distance, they heard the chimes of Sainte Anne, signaling her Feast Day, promising the beneficence of her especial bounty to those who should come and kneel.

Lang kept his eyes from the child's face then. He could not endure an expression that had become a veritable agony of hope. He walked on without speaking; a great sob that was crowding in his throat dammed back words; his eyes were not so well guarded; every time he looked at Mavis and caught her responsive gaze his tears welled and dripped frankly upon his cheeks.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

REFINEMENT AND ENVIRONMENT

MANY well-to-do, educated ladies with benevolent impulses, who take up welfare work among toilers living in the slums of our large cities, have noticed lately, at times, in a family, some young woman with a subtle, intangible refinement which defies her environment. She looks as much out of place as a flower in a waste of weeds, which would blossom out more brightly in a more suitable soil. Even individuals among men workers in poverty-stricken sections, where ignorance prevails, have been found to show remarkable and unexpected good manners.

To strangers, at first, these traits appear to be inherited from long-forgotten ancestors, but closer acquaintance shows that they are in most cases instinctive. Self-effacement and an impulse to condone the shortcomings of others are usually the starting cause for their refinement and good manners. That good manners are not necessarily a heritage, is often shown by descendants of cultured families which have become poor through successive preceding generations until the present descendants live among sordid surroundings and uncultured people and sink to the level of their environments. On the other hand, it has often been shown that people born where little courtesy or good manners are to be found have been led by change of environment to acquire good manners. Some of them, too, with an innate consideration for others, have improved in manners more quickly than the rest.

One of the best instances of this in public life is Abraham Lincoln who was born and brought up in a backwoods cabin with little opportunity of acquiring polished manners. Yet Lincoln's good manners and good breeding were almost without a flaw when he reached maturity. He was by nature possessed of a courtesy and considerateness for others that few possessed and which in his new environments developed into the most perfect good manners.

There are instances of leaders of labor unions who have been ungrammatical in their speeches at labor meetings and who happened to be elected later to the legislature of the State in which they lived and who, after a legislative term, overcame their bad grammar by hearing others speak. Some, who before they were elected were not only ungrammatical but vulgar at times in their utterances and who had been reëlected for a second term surprised their audiences in addressing meetings when they returned to the home town. They seemed like new men. Their grammar not only was good, but their manners without fault and their courtesy unimpeachable.

Instances of this kind have been increasing of late in every part of the United States. The changes of personal traits due to new environments are still going on—more rapidly than ever some people now think as facilities for acquiring education spread.

A Rift in the Clouds

By Arthur Tuckerman

Author of "Jeering Birds," "The Starfish Tattoo," Etc.

Nemesis trod on Vengeance's heels on that Swiss mountain peak

WHEN Johan Merkel first came to Blaumatt it did not occur to him that he had arrived at the end of one of Nature's blind alleys. He was seeking rest; a hurried and discreet departure was the farthest thing from his mind. All that came later, for when Merkel arrived at Blaumatt the great plan had not yet taken form within his brain.

Blaumatt was, during those years, one of the comparatively unknown resorts of the Bernese Oberland. It was situated at the upper end of a narrow, green, gently sloping valley, nestling placidly at the very foot of rugged snow-capped mountains. The village consisted of perhaps fifty native chalets of mellow, darkened wood with geranium-boxed windows, and heavily sloping roofs bowider-strewn as a protection against winter snows. There was also a post office, a diminutive railway station, and a straggling boarding house that called itself the Hotel Royal. The railway station marked the terminus of a narrow-gauge electric line, recently opened, that came winding up from some obscure town near the shores of Lake Thun. One train a day came as far up the line as Blaumatt, arriving at six p. m. One train a day left on the downward trip, at six in the morning.

Merkel from the very first liked the look of the place. But Blaumatt apparently did not return the compliment. He was not exactly prepossessing in appearance; lean, angular, loose-jointed—almost shabbily dressed because he looked on clothes merely as covering for the human body and not as adornments. His high, narrow face was cadaverous, a colorless gray, his beard yellowish and untidy; the tip of his nose inclined to be unduly red. His eyes, which were the first of his features you noticed, burned with a peculiar and unholy brightness that would have made any wide-awake doctor look twice at him.

Of course not one of the guests at the Royal had an inkling of Merkel's tragic past, nor did he seem inclined to enlighten them. Merkel had come to Blaumatt to forget—if such were possible.

The Royal was an old-fashioned establishment with wooden walls, creaking floors and sparsely furnished bedrooms. At dinner the first night, served at a single immensely long table, Merkel found some twenty-five people—a motley gathering of English clergy, Bostonian spinsters and several French provincial families, stout, complacent, utterly absorbed in the meal before them. One by one they eyed Merkel furtively; but no one ventured to address him. This was precisely one of the things that embittered him. His was a nature that craved friendship, popularity, admiration—all of which he was denied because of an unattractive personality.

After dinner he lighted a long Havana and strolled out onto the terrace overlooking the hotel garden. It was a formal, old-fashioned garden of gravel paths and primly neat flower beds; there was a fountain playing softly in the moonlight and near by it a rustic summerhouse and an ancient telescope, such as is found in nearly all Swiss gardens for the purpose of surveying the Alpine panorama. It was a hot, sultry night, and the terrace was crowded, but Merkel presently succeeded in finding a vacant chair in a quiet corner near the garden steps. The chair next to him was occupied by a young man sipping his after-dinner cup of coffee. There was an arc light not far away, and in the white rays of it Merkel surveyed the young man's face, jumped a little in his chair and looked again. It was perhaps lucky that Merkel himself was sitting in deep shadow, for the expression that came upon his face was not at all pleasant nor the distortion of his lips a pleasing thing to contemplate. It was a concentration of years

of venom and hatred, of frustrated hopes and shattered aspirations.

The young man, to whom Merkel was obviously a complete stranger, suddenly turned to address him in English, making some wholly formal remark concerning the warmth of the evening. Merkel replied evenly, suavely, revealing nothing of the turbid wave of emotion that had swept through him.

"I've been here three weeks now," the young man volunteered, "and the weather's been like this every day—far too hot. Are you up here for your health, sir?"

The question, Merkel thought, was tactless. The young man had no finesse. He hated him cordially at that moment, but merely shook his head. Of course the young man had come to Blaumatt for his health; that was obvious. His body was frail; he had a mean, ratlike little face, a muddy complexion. Just like his vile father, Merkel concluded. Merkel's hands were trembling.

After a while they exchanged names politely—discovered that they came from the same northern nation and switched over from English to their native tongue. Merkel gave his name as Hansen and as he did so he thanked God he had registered as Hansen because he was seeking rest and had not wished to be pursued by shadows of the past. The young man's name was, of course, Erik Boik. Merkel had been sure of this all along, on account of his striking resemblance to his father.

Conversation drifted on in a leisurely fashion; it never touched the personal; Merkel saw to that. Soon they were talking of the mountains, of climbing. Perhaps Merkel broached the subject, perhaps Boik. They discussed the various mountain peaks in the vicinity; methods of ascent; a recent accident on the Schreckhorn. At eleven o'clock Merkel said good night politely and retired. He climbed the stairs to his room, grim, sardonic—the picture of a lonely, friendless man. His eyes, though, were bright with some desperate thing.

The facts were simple enough. When Merkel had gone bankrupt after twenty years of hard work building up a small business in his native town of Köpping it was because young Boik's father had double crossed him in what had purported to be a friendly deal; had destroyed the work of those years in one crooked blow. When Merkel's aged mother had died in wretched poverty and sickness the following winter it was because Boik's father had foreclosed upon her in the midst of an icebound January, despite Merkel's plea for respite. Of course Merkel could fasten nothing definitely illegal on Boik, senior. The Boiks of this world are always far too clever—and the boy, curse him, was sleek and suave, a perfect counterpart of his father.

The outstanding fact in Merkel's mind that night as he climbed the stairs was: "Young Boik does not know me or recognize me." And definite and clean-cut as a fine steel blade came the conviction:

"The house of Merkel has suffered long. It is high time that the house of Boik suffered."

Merkel, it must be told, had visited a famous Zurich doctor just before coming up to Blaumatt. The brain specialist had made sundry curious discoveries but had diplomatically merely told Merkel to take a long, long rest. Doctors cannot always tell their patients everything. He made, nevertheless, a note upon his pad:

> Merkel, Johan. To be kept quiet, free from shocks.
> Above all, not to come in contact with anything likely to arouse his anger.

"Go to Blaumatt," the doctor had said; "it's quiet and not very well known. The railway's only just been opened. I can see that you're a man who needs to forget something in the past."

So Merkel had gone to Blaumatt. And the first person he met there was the son of Boik. A case where Fate entered into a crueler conspiracy than any human being ever undertook.

Young Boik, Merkel discovered, was even more despicable in the white glare of noontide. His mean little face with its shifting, watery blue eyes played upon Merkel's mind to such a degree—so like his father!—that it was only with the greatest difficulty he preserved an outward calm and courtesy. To his credit it must be said that he tried desperately to avoid Boik, but the young man was parasitical—probably on the grounds that they both came from the same northern country and spoke the same language. Merkel was careful, however, to deny that he had ever been to Köpping, pretending that he was a lumber merchant from the southern forests.

The other guests at the Royal did not

take kindly to either Hansen—alias Merkel—or Boik, so that the two of them were left much alone together. Gradually Merkel pumped the lad and breathed a great sigh of relief when he learned that the latter had been away from Köpping nearly all his life, at school, in the army—and knew, consequently, little of local gossip. Whether young Boik had ever heard of the long series of disasters which had fallen upon Merkel at Boik, senior's, instigation, Merkel dared not ask. As a matter of fact, it was a one-sided affair, for the simple reason that Boik, senior, had, with one of those judicious distributions of gold which he managed so well, secured from the local authorities at Köpping a promise to have Merkel arrested on a trumped-up charge the instant he showed his head in the town. In this way Boik, senior, had procured temporary immunity from revenge. That was why Merkel laughed and laughed, almost hysterically, when he thought of Boik's little rat-faced son falling so beautifully into his power. Even then Merkel might not have acted, might have been guided by what was left of his finer sensibilities, had not the last proverbial straw wielded its force on the afternoon of his fifth day at Blaumatt.

Blaumatt shimmering greenly under an afternoon sun was undeniably attractive. Even Merkel—miserable, cynical, broken-hearted Merkel—found some essence of joy in the emerald fields streaked with great purple patches of bluebells, the softly brown chalets ornate with their biblical inscriptions and geranium-boxed windows, the herds of creamy cattle, placid and somnolent in the fields, heavy bells jangling at their studded collars. The sky overhead was a gorgeous blue, the rugged fringe of the Bernese Alps a sheer, impressive wall rising from the valley's green carpet to giddy heights, pinnacled with black spires like some tremendous cathedral which God, not man, had designed.

Merkel and Boik were walking through the fields along a winding path that led to the foot of the mountains. Merkel nodded toward the distant pinnacles.

"When I was your age," he remarked, "I'd climbed every peak in the Frutigen valley. And you"—he could not repress a slight sneer—"I suppose you, in your generation, spend your time playing croquet with those little hussies in the hotel?"

Erik Boik laughed shortly.

"Not at all. I think mountain climbing is one of the best things life has to offer. I like to get away up above the clouds, all alone—even without a guide. I like solitude. I hate humanity in general, anyway, Mr. Hansen."

Merkel looked at him curiously.

"Why so? For a young man like you the thought isn't natural."

Boik lighted a cigarette. They were approaching a tiny chalet where afternoon tea was being served at red-clothed tables.

"Because people in general don't like me, sir." And he added in a seeming burst of confidence: "They all hate my father. God knows why. And so I suppose they hate me."

Merkel, too, lighted a cigarette. He longed to shout:

"They hate you because you're just a little edition of your father and people like your father should be exterminated, wiped off the earth—like vipers in a garden!"

Yet he was able to remark, with perfect outward calmness:

"Let us go into the chalet, Mr. Boik, and have some afternoon tea. That is a delightful English custom of which I thoroughly approve."

"I hate the English," Boik retorted.

"Why?"

The young man was suddenly nervous, tried to squirm out of an answer, but failed under the steely glance of Merkel's eyes.

"Oh, well—father had a small fleet of merchant ships during the war. The English took three of them away for carrying contraband to Germany."

A slow, reminiscent smile crept to Merkel's face as they took seats at a table.

"Perfectly fair, though. They did the same to the Americans before they came in."

"I hate the Americans," said Boik. "I hate all nations except the Teutons."

Merkel thought of Boik, senior's, clandestine deals with German submarines at a lonely isle near Köpping and again felt anger surge up within him. Merkel had lost two brothers in the French Foreign Legion.

People like the Boiks ought to be exterminated. If young Boik were to die there would be no more Boiks—and a happier world!

He fought his rising anger down to a reasoning calm and ordered tea of the waitress in dulcet tones.

Two young Englishmen joined them at their table a few minutes later, tired and dusty after a long tramp. There was an hour or so to pass before it was time to return to the hotel. One of the Englishmen suggested a mild game of poker to which the others agreed. They played for a two-franc ante and a ten-franc limit.

At the end of the first half hour Merkel had lost two hundred francs, the two Englishmen about a hundred each, and Boik's chips were like miniature towers upon the table. It was Boik's deal.

Something impelled Merkel to watch the deal carefully; he saw Boik deal himself six cards and conceal the sixth behind the rest with incredible swiftness. Young Boik had proved himself a worthy successor to his ancestors. Merkel said nothing; but his mind was made up, then and there.

On their way home Merkel pointed to the glittering, snow-covered Teufelhorn, all rosy in the Alpine glow of a gorgeous sunset.

"A glorious mountain," he remarked.

Boik nodded.

"Only six men have ever climbed it—and two of them were killed on the way down," he said; and added, "I suppose that with all your climbing in your youth, Mr. Hansen, you never risked a thing like that."

Merkel laughed outright.

"I climbed the Teufelhorn in 1898—and I'm going up again one of these days."

Boik, for the first time since Merkel had met him, showed some signs of enthusiasm.

"Take me with you," he pleaded. "I'm capable. I've climbed the Schreckhorn, the Blumlisalp and parts of the Lötschberg range. How I'd like to show all these damn, boasting Alpine experts that I'm just as good a climber as any of them!"

Merkel's brain hammered within his head. How well the thing was working—already!

"We'd have to take a guide with us," he countered, knowing full well that no guide in Blaumatt would undertake the ascent of the Teufelhorn or would dare to grapple with these sheer, stark walls that rose straight as a knife's blade into the summer skies.

"Also," added Merkel as an afterthought, "you'd have to train for at least two weeks on the lesser mountains. No—on second thought you had better forget the Teufelhorn."

They climbed the wholly innocuous Frieshorn on the following day and three other mountains during the week. Merkel was slow, sure-footed, experienced; Boik proved to be agile, swift, yet nervous. Boik learned many things about Alpinism from Merkel; how to reduce equipment to a safe minimum; how to conserve energy when tired; how to wait for the coolness of the night to cross the more treacherous patches of snow and ice, lest the sun melt them in the heat of noon; how to cut secure footholds in the blue-white sheen of a glacier.

All Blaumatt marveled at the consistent energy of these two yet made no attempt at friendship. They were seen almost every evening at sundown, returning from the day's climb, Merkel grave and silent, Boik swaggering and smirking, ostentatious in the striped red and yellow football sweater which he always wore and which made him the most conspicuous figure in the neighborhood.

On the fourth of August Boik told Merkel:

"I'm leaving here on the seventh. Going down to Zurich to meet my father."

Splendid, thought Merkel, rubbing his lean hands. Just the right climax! Boik, senior, waiting down at Zurich—waiting for his ratlike son—who'd never come.

Merkel, it must be remembered, was not wholly sane; had never been since that poker game.

Boik continued.

"So if we're going up the Teufelhorn we'll have to do it to-morrow or the day after."

It was exactly what Merkel hoped and expected he would say. With an air of well-assumed casualness he replied:

"I'd never take you up the Teufelhorn, Boik. You're too nervous and not sure-footed enough."

Boik flushed an angry, ugly red.

"I'm sorry that I don't attain your standards, Mr. Hansen. It seems to me, though, that I remember your slipping yourself once or twice on the Frieshorn."

He strolled away in high dudgeon. Merkel chuckled to himself. The little rat!

The house of Boik must not be allowed to continue!

He proceeded to enlarge upon his plan carefully, with a cynical, detached calmness.

They said good-by to each other on the evening of the sixth. There was some coldness, of course, for Boik's excessive pride

had been grievously hurt. He was due to leave on the six-o'clock the following morning; his baggage was sent down to the station that night.

Long before dawn Merkel rose, glanced out of his window and predicted a perfect day in the valley. He proceeded methodically to dress in Alpine costume; put on his heaviest-studded boots; took with him a coil of rope, pickax and other equipment. Downstairs in the hall he met, quite unexpectedly, the proprietor of the hotel, Signor Pumpelli.

"I'm going up the Baarhorn to-day," Merkel volunteered hurriedly as he opened the front door and the chill morning air swept in.

"Good!" said the proprietor. "It is a beautiful climb and an easy one."

Merkel breathed a sigh of relief when he had emerged from the hotel. So far, so good.

He took the path leading to the wooded base of the Baarhorn, but after he had walked about a mile struck off through a field and came presently to the railway line. Here he waited silently, in the semitwilight before dawn, for perhaps twenty minutes. Daylight came, heralded by saffron streaks across a pearly sky. Merkel prayed fervently that it would not be long before the train came.

At last he heard it trundling gently through the fields from the direction of Blaumatt; saw the three well-lighted electric cars approaching; saw the bow collector on the forward car emitting vivid flashes of blue light against the gray dawn as it picked the current from the overhead wire. As he had expected, the train was not traveling at more than fifteen miles an hour. As it glided by him he jumped without hesitation onto the rear platform of the last car.

He knew that he was safe there; he had been to Blaumatt station and made a careful study of the train's make-up. There was no connecting door between the platform and the interior of the last vehicle, which was a milk car; he knew that he could remain there unseen until the train reached Winkelried—where it waited for some twenty minutes while the passengers had breakfast. Swiss railways are considerate and the Blaumatt line was no exception to the rule. It was a leisurely organization and no one ever hurried who was connected with it. Indeed, the motormen suffered terrific fines if by some miracle of chance they reached a station ahead of time.

At Winkelried it was broad daylight. Merkel slipped down from the platform of the car on the side away from the station and ran down the length of the train, scanning carefully each window. Here he knew that there was a weak spot in his plan. If Boik was sitting on the other side of the train there would be complications. He wanted especially to avoid being seen by the Winkelried station master. He passed two cars; his hopes fell. Then, at last, at the forward window next to the motorman's cabin of the front car he saw Boik, complacently smoking a cigarette and reading a paper-covered novel. The window was lowered, half open. Boik was clad in mountaineering clothes. Just like him, Merkel thought, to wish to advertise his prowess to fellow passengers.

"Hullo!" said Merkel casually.

Boik started, looked out of the window. In his surprise he seemed momentarily to forget his offended dignity.

"Hullo, Hansen. What on earth are you doing here at this hour?"

Merkel, flicking the ashes from a cigarette, said:

"Starting up the Teufelhorn in twenty minutes."

Boik flushed, thinking of his dignity; but could not, nevertheless, restrain his curiosity.

"Where's your guide?"

Merkel laughed.

"I haven't any. They wouldn't take the risk."

He was playing the game well; making a subtle appeal to Boik's vanity.

"I hate to go alone," he added, "but I made up my mind I'd climb that mountain once again before I left this country."

Boik leaned out of the window.

"For Heaven's sake, Hansen, be reasonable. Let me come with you. There's nothing I'd like better."

Merkel kept his wits about him.

"You put me in an awkward position. Besides, I thought you had to get through to Zurich to-day?"

"Oh, that's all right," Boik said. "I was going to stop over at Interlaken a couple of days anyway. I'll go with you now, if you just say the word. Then we'll come down to Blaumatt to-night and show those

blasted fools who talk of Alpine climbing just what real climbing is."

"Come along, then," said Merkel. "And you'd better get off the train on this side. We'll save at least twenty minutes cutting across the fields instead of going through the station and taking the road."

Boik came.

Noontime. They had climbed three thousand six hundred feet; had toiled across a great glacier and had at last reached the base of the rocky wall that ascended sheerly to the summit, four hundred feet above them. The sky had become overcast. They were standing on a narrow ledge of rock, a glacier below them, like some vast, frozen sea; a sheer wall of rock was at their backs. Boik glanced upward and shivered.

"My God," he said. "It's worse than I had imagined."

Merkel smiled grimly.

"I'll go first, because I know the footholds. We'll use the rope for you. I'll shout down to you just what to do."

The rope was tied round Boik's waist and Merkel started up, like a fly on the sheer surface of the wall. Boik followed with infinite caution. Halfway up Boik started to look down, but Merkel shouted hurriedly:

"Don't. It'll make you giddy!"

Only two hundred feet more and they would be at the summit. Below they could see nothing but a sea of vapor. Merkel dug the toe of his boot into a three-inch ledge, and moved up several more feet. His mind was a whirling chaos. Damn! Now was the time to act! And—somehow—he couldn't! Something was keeping him back, tying his hands. Conscience? How could he have conscience—after what the Boiks had done to him? A wave of nausea swept over him. He wiped sweat from his brow—although the temperature was below twenty degrees.

A wraith of clouds drifted over the pinnacle, enveloping him in its moist, filmy softness; tiny silver globules clustered upon his woolen sweater. He heard Boik's voice, drifting up to him:

"Fine to be away up here, above the rest of humanity. I like the feeling that I'm above the rest of the world, that I'm lording it over them—the crawling, earthly swine! We Boiks have always been like that."

Something snapped within Merkel's brain.

"Yes!" he cried. "You Boiks have always been like that! But you're not going to enjoy it any longer!"

Quite quietly and easily he cut the taut rope.

There was, at that instant, a little rift in the clouds through which permeated an oblique, golden ray of morning sunshine.

He had to wait nearly an hour for the clouds to clear; then cautiously he began his descent. It was two o'clock when he reached the foot of the wall, stood at the glacier's edge and made a furtive, half-terrified examination of the place. But Nature had done a kindness by placing a deep, glacial crevasse, with a mouth some twenty feet wide, at the very foot of the wall of rock. Evidently Boik had fallen straight and swift.

And yet, as Merkel turned to cross the glacier, he closed his eyes for a fraction of a second, catching sight of a dark-red smear on the edge of the crevasse, in dreadful contrast to the marble-white purity of the ice. He was momentarily sick—giddy——

He picked his way across the glacier and breathed a tremendous sigh of relief when at four o'clock he attained the comparatively easy, rock-strewn path across the lower range and entered the wooded fragrance of the pine region. The journey seemed long and painful; he was hungry, weak—yet elated. He had no regrets. The last of the Boiks was gone! He even found himself wondering whether he dared send a telegram—anonymous of course—announcing the fact to Boik, senior. He wanted to shout the news to the whole world. But that would be foolish, when he had accomplished the thing so carefully and had so beautifully covered his tracks. Now that he had drunk in his revenge he would find some happiness in life!

His mind, as has been stated before, was not whole.

With intense cunning he did not descend all the way to Winkelried but crossed over a rocky spur to the Baarhorn where he was supposed to have spent the day, and so came down to Blaumatt in the rosy twilight of late evening.

How wonderful the world was! He felt as if some great, unendurable weight had been suddenly lifted from him. He strolled slowly through the streets, humming a little song that he had not thought of since school

days. He turned a corner of the street and ran straight into a crowd gathered at the very gates of the Royal Hotel. The proprietor, Signor Pumpelli, was there and approached him.

"Good evening, Mr. Hansen!"

Why did his voice sound so peculiar—so different?

"Good evening!" said Merkel—and for some unaccountable reason felt a wave of fear sweep through him. Then he saw a Swiss gendarme eying him in a curious, intensive yet detached manner. People about him began to murmur in the guttural Swiss German which he had never been able to understand. He was suddenly aware that there were two gendarmes, standing on either side of him—like grim, black posts.

Merciful God, what was happening? The sweat leaped up upon his brow.

He had not long to wait.

"You are arrested," said one of the gendarmes, frigidly polite, "for the murder of one Erik Boik upon the summit of the Teufelhorn. The murder was witnessed by two persons."

Merkel turned gray, made strange, clicking noises in his dry throat. Through a bedlam of voices he heard Pumpelli, saw him waving his fat little arms:

"Telescope in the hotel garden—were searching for the summit of the Teufelhorn —a rift in the clouds—Boik's red and yellow sweater tumbling into space—Hansen's green costume, which you could tell anywhere——"

"But listen to me!" Merkel shouted. "Listen to me! I saved you all; saved the whole world from the Boiks! Listen——"

Why couldn't the fools understand what he had done for them all? Oh, why couldn't they understand?

SUPERFLUOUS PREVISION

FOREIGN delegates to the Washington conference brought their wines and liquors with them. Having heard gruesome stories of American prohibition they were appalled at the prospect of settling the affairs of a groaning world without the help of the soothing liquors and wines to which they had been accustomed. Consequently their preparations against the drought were imposing and complete. "International courtesy" made the "dry" laws of no effect. The delegations had special agents to see that their consignments of drink were safely debarked at New York. The stuff was hauled through the streets of Washington in huge truck loads. One delegation sent its shipment from New York to the capital in a special car under armed guards.

Then came the awakening. Invited out to dinners the diplomats saw no lack of cocktails and wines. Prohibition evidently had been overestimated on the other side! Everywhere they turned there was "something to drink." They got an eyeopener, too, as to Americans' mellow ways when warmed to hospitality. One journalist gave a big party for the visiting newspaper men. It cost $20,000, according to the gossips, and before it was over a Washington correspondent was leading the orchestra. Other items of the entertainment were a "wild-West show" and a negro jazz band. At still another "function" for the journalists a well-known Southern correspondent evinced the democracy of his soul by putting an arm around Admiral Kato, addressing him as "Ad."

A Chat With You

PERHAPS you have not heard the fable of the author who turned cynical. He could not get by with his stuff. Every morning he sent out a manuscript, every afternoon he got one back. Naturally he began to sour on the world. He told a friend that the publications of to-day were full of hokum and that there was no chance for the real stuff.

"Rudyard Kipling," he told a friend, "if he were unknown, could not sell his stories now."

The friend scoffed and put up fifty dollars to back his opinion. So the writer pulled down a well-worn volume from the shelf, banged away at his new typewriter all day, signed his name to the result and sent it to a near-by magazine. He would have the laugh on the scoffer. To his surprise he received a courteous note, telling him the story was a good one and asking him to call.

The room he entered had a heavy rug on the floor and a couch. The young man who received him asked him if he were the person whose name was signed to the manuscript. The author admitted it and was just about to flash a sarcastic smile when the young man hit him. When he woke up he was lying on the couch.

"I always wanted to take a punch at a plagiarist," the young man remarked, blowing on his knuckles. "They are the lowest of mankind. It was a pleasure to see you fall. Now I'm going to have you arrested for stealing another man's work."

The author was a good explainer and with the help of witnesses he finally made his story stick. But it was hard work and embarrassing.

One moral to this is that they know the good stuff when they see it. The other is that we should avoid even the appearance of evil.

* *

SUCH incidents are rare to a degree approaching nullity. Editors love and respect authors. Authors are too polite to say anything. They are both more interested in the readers—those people who, as we explained a while back, are so hard to visualize. Generally when we think of a POPULAR reader he presents himself to our vision as a man.

"In your 'Chat' in the January POPULAR," writes Mrs. Rogers, of Washington, Pennsylvania, "you did not wait quite long enough. You just missed another change in the pictures of those who enjoy your stories. Had you waited you would have seen one whose complexion is neither fair nor soft, whose arms are no longer softly rounded, whose figure is approaching the stodginess of the middle forties, and yet you would have seen in her eyes just the same enjoyment when reading your stories as you might have seen eighteen years ago. You can call me a charter member."

Lucy Bates, of Elmira, New York; Charlotte Webster, of Boston, and Mrs. C. L. Gibbs, of New York, write in to the same effect.

We wonder what the proportion of women readers is. One in ten, one in four—it's anybody's guess.

THERE is one difficulty about the charter members. As time goes on their judgment grows keener. It must. They have read more and have more standards of comparison.

So far we seem to be able to make the grade on high.

"It is better than ever," writes A. G. Benjes, Jr., of Memphis, Tennessee. "I think I am in a position to know as I have read every single issue for years. I have read very few series to equal Witwer's new creation. 'Chanting Wheels,' 'The Man of the North,' and 'Musket House' were simply fine. Where could you get a novel more spellbinding than 'The Gray Lagoon?'"

Also here is a line from W. F. R., of Stuart, Florida.

"During the years that I have been engaged in the practice of the law I have been using magazine reading as a stimulant and rest; have used nearly all the fiction magazines and believe I have read every issue of THE POPULAR. I am therefore writing to congratulate you on its constant improvement. I believe the recent numbers are the best you have ever published."

Also H. Higgins, of Fayetteville, Tennessee, is kind enough to say that the magazine is better than ever and that this department is the one he turns to first.

WE are not in the best position to judge but it is our honest opinion that this and almost all the other successful magazines are better than they used to be. The pace is faster, competition is keener, the readers are more interested and more discriminating. We have manuscripts lying in the safe, bought and paid for, that we will never publish. They seemed good enough at the time to pay money for but they are not good enough now.

As for the unknown writer who wants a hearing, never was the chance so good. If Kipling were writing to-day he would make an even greater success. Kipling has stopped writing for the most part and when he does write a story it lacks the swing of the old stuff. But let a new Kipling wander in here. He will find the path made easy for him.

Perhaps he is already here. Perhaps you are going to hear from him soon. You never can tell.

"There's one thing you can say about THE POPULAR and ought to say in every number," writes W. R. R., of White Plains, New York. "More authors who have become famous started in THE POPULAR than in any magazine in America."

Stage Beauty Loses a Pound a Day Through Amazing New Method

Without exercise, starving, baths, massages, or any bitter self-denials or discomforts Ziegfeld Follies beauty and Artist's Model reduces to normal weight in record time

Free proof that anyone can lose seven to ten pounds a week. Results in 48 hours

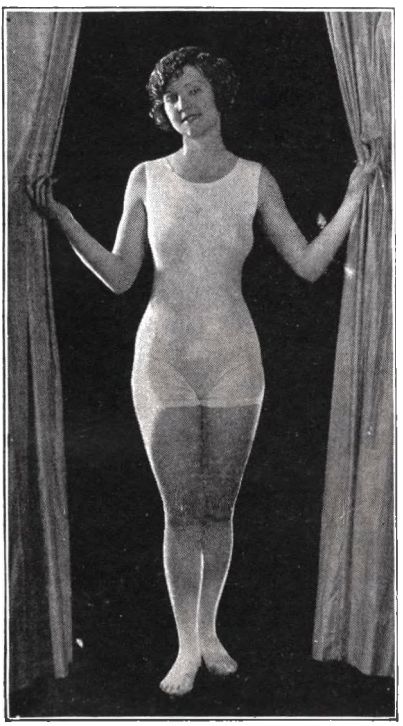
"IN just three weeks I reduced 20 pounds—just what I wanted to—through your wonderful way to reduce. And without one bit of discomfort. I think it is perfectly remarkable."

Thus writes Miss Kathleen Mullane, famous Artist's Model and Ziegfeld Follies Beauty. It is only a short time since excessive weight threatened to blight her career. For some reason, she began to take on flesh steadily. In a very short time she was 20 pounds overweight—and still increasing.

Dieting, exercise, appliances, massage and rubber clothing were all tried, but without success.

Learns of New, Easy Method

Then came the surprise. Miss Mullane learned of the new, simple, natural law that has been discovered, whereby she could quickly reduce to normal weight without any dangerous starving, patent foods, exercise or special clothing—without any painful self-denials whatsoever. Her own letter tells what wonderful and speedy results she secured. In three weeks she had reduced twenty pounds. And she has no fear of ever again becoming stout, for the control of her weight is in her own hands.



Actual photograph of Miss Kathleen Mullane, famous Follies Beauty and Artist Model

You, Too, Can Quickly Reduce to Normal

You can begin right now to lose as many pounds as you wish. Many people have noted definite reductions within 48 hours. And you can control the rate of reduction. Some people arrange to reduce a pound a day or more. Others regulate the rate of reduction more slowly to prevent the necessity of great alterations in their clothes. With a decrease in weight there comes a clearer skin, a brighter eye, a firmer step—a general improvement in your health.

READ THESE RESULTS!

Loses 13 Pounds in 8 Days

"Hurrah! I've lost 13 pounds since last Monday. I feel better than I have for months." Mrs. George Guiterman, 420 E. 66th St., New York

Lose 22 Pounds in 14 Days

"I reduced from 175 pounds to 153 pounds in two weeks. Before I started I was flabby and sick. I feel wonderful now." Ben Naddle, 102 Fulton St., New York

Reduces 30 Pounds

"I reduced 30 pounds by your method without being forced to undergo the painful dieting prescribed by other methods. I enjoyed the pleasure of eating the foods my appetite called for combined according to the instructions you give." Elizabeth L. Johnson, 141 Toronto St., Indianapolis, Ind.

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

The Secret Explained

Eugene Christian, the world famous food specialist, discovered the one sure certain and easily followed method of regaining normal weight. He discovered that certain foods when eaten together take off weight instead of adding to it. Certain combinations cause fat, others consume fat. It is simply a matter of learning how to COMBINE your food properly.

These CORRECT combinations which reduce weight, are regarded by users as so much more appetizing than the WRONG combinations that it seems strange to them that their palates could have been so easily satisfied in the past. They approach their meals with more zest than ever, enjoy them more thoroughly. They are even able to eat delicious dishes which they have been forced to deny themselves in the past.

Free Trial—Send No Money

Eugene Christian incorporated this method in the form of simple, easy-to-follow little lessons under the title of "Weight Control and Basis of Health." This is offered on free trial. Send no money; just mail the coupon, or a letter if you prefer.

See your own unnecessary flesh vanish; see how your complexion improves, your eyes brighten, your step becomes more springy. Weigh yourself. Decide how much weight you wish to lose the first week, and each week thereafter. Then try the first lesson. Weigh yourself in 48 hours and note the remarkable result. Still you've undergone no hardships or self-denials. You'll be as happily surprised as the thousands of others who have quickly regained a beautiful normal figure in this new, delightful way.

Although people would be willing to pay many dollars for such a safe, certain method of reducing weight, we have made our price as low as we safely can because we want as many people as possible to benefit. Mail coupon or letter now. The course will be mailed in PLAIN WRAPPER, and only the $1.97 (plus postage) deposited with the postman makes it yours. Then if you are not satisfied in every particular, return it within five days after its receipt and we'll gladly refund your money immediately, so you take no risk. Act today before you overlook it. Corrective Eating Society, Inc., Dept. W-372, 43 West 16th St., New York City.

Corrective Eating Society, Inc.
Dept. W-372, 43 W. 16th St., New York City

You may send me in PLAIN WRAPPER, Eugene Christian's Course, "Weight Control—the Basis of Health," in 12 lessons. I will pay the postman only $1.97 (plus postage) in full payment on arrival. If I am not satisfied with it, I have the privilege of returning it to you within five days after its receipt. It is, of course understood that you are to return my money if I return the course.

Name .....
(Please write plainly)

Address .....

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

Price outside U. S., $2.15 cash with order.

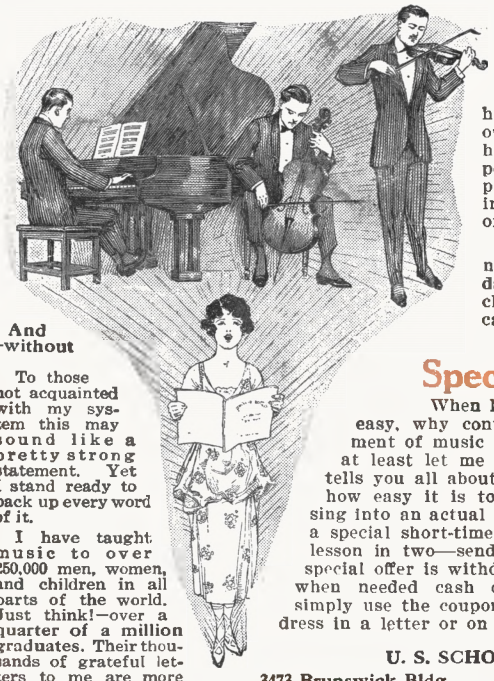
Amaze Your Friends—
Learn Music Quickly at Home

Through This Wonderful New Method You Can Now Learn to Play Your Favorite Instrument in a Few Short Months. Entire Cost Averages a Few Cents a Lesson

HOW did you ever do it? Where in the wide world did you ever learn to play so quickly?"

This is the question that thousands of my students have been asked and are being asked daily. With my wonderful easy print and picture lessons for beginners, their progress has been nothing short of astonishing. Not only their friends, but they themselves, were amazed at their sudden ability to play or sing. With this accomplishment they have been able to achieve greater popularity than they ever thought possible. And you can do the same

Even if you don't know the first thing about music, don't know one note from another—with this new method you can easily and quickly learn to sing or to play your favorite musical instrument. **And all in your spare time at home—without a teacher!**



To those not acquainted with my system this may sound like a pretty strong statement. Yet I stand ready to back up every word of it.

I have taught music to over 250,000 men, women, and children in all parts of the world. Just think!—over a quarter of a million graduates. Their thousands of grateful letters to me are more convincing than anything I could say of the true merit of my system.

My method removes all the discouraging drawbacks and entangling hindrances of the old way of learning music. There is no need of joining a class, pinning yourself down to certain hours of practice, paying a dollar or more per lesson to a private teacher.

All these obstacles have been eliminated entirely. In their place are delightfully clear, easy and interesting lessons, which make every step as simple as A, B, C. You take lessons in the privacy of your own home with no strangers around to embarrass you. Practice whenever it is most convenient for you.

So easy is my method that children only 10 to 12 years old have quickly become accomplished singers or players as well as men and women 50 to 60 years old—including many who have never before taken a lesson.

And my lessons are just as thorough as they are easy—no "trick" music, no "numbers" no make-shifts of any kind. I teach you the only right way—teach you to play or sing by note.

Think of the pleasure and happiness you can add to your own daily life once you know how to play! Think of the popularity you can gain—for players and singers are always in demand at social gatherings of every kind.

Thousands of our students now play in orchestras, at dances, etc. Many have orchestras of their own. Why can't you do the same?

LEARN TO PLAY

Piano	'Cello
Organ	Guitar
Violin	Ukulele
Drums and Traps	Hawaiian Steel Guitar
Banjo	
Tenor Banjo	Harp
Mandolin	Cornet
Clarinet	Piccolo
Flute	Trombone
Saxophone	

Voice and Speech Culture

Automatic Finger Control

THE VERDICT

Since I've been taking your lessons I've made over $200 with my violin. Your lessons surely are fine.—Melvin Freeland, Macopin, N. J.

I am more than satisfied with the lessons. They are much better than a private teacher. I certainly admire the way you take pains to explain everything in their I wouldn't go to any private teacher if I were paid money.—Julian L. Piccat, Conn.

Special Offer

When learning to play or sing is so easy, why continue to confine your enjoyment of music to mere listening? Why not at least let me send you my free book that tells you all about my method? It shows you how easy it is to turn your wish to play or sing into an actual fact. Just now I am making a special short-time offer that cuts the cost per lesson in two—send your name now before this special offer is withdrawn. Instruments supplied when needed cash or credit. No obligation.—simply use the coupon or send your name and address in a letter or on a post-card.

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Please send me your free book, "Music Lessons in Your Own Home," and particulars of your special offer. I am interested in the following course

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