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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

Volume LXIV Number 3

BEST FICTION MAGAZINE IN AMERICA

TWICE - A - MONTH 20 CENTS

The Popular Magazine

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MAY 20TH 1922

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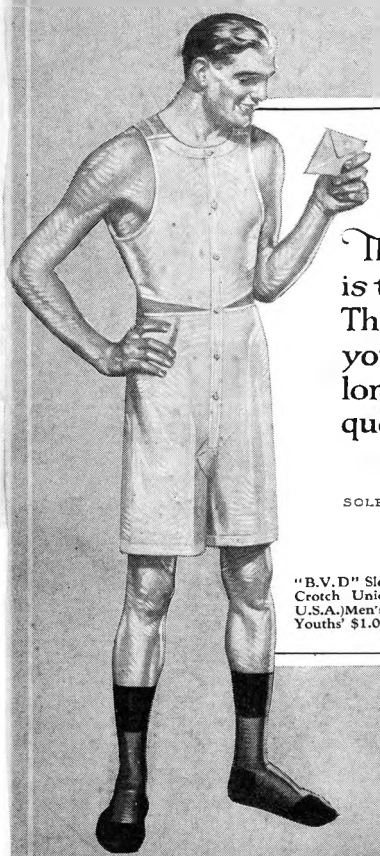

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ROY NORTON will have a complete novel, "The Innocent Thief," in the next issue. There also will be work from the pens of Knibbs, Sinclair, McMorrow, Coolidge, Paine and others.

TWICE-A-MONTH

The Popular Magazine

Vol. LXIV. No. 3 — May 20, 1922

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THE POPULAR MAGAZINE

VOL. LXIV. MAY 20, 1922. No. 3

A Transplanted Tenderfoot

By Francis Lynde

Author of "A Sidetracked Christmas," "B. Typhosus Takes a Hand," Etc.

Cherubic Wilgus of the United Motors Company didn't look it, but he cherished a firm faith that the West had not lost all its wool or wildness. So he took a job with that Colorado engineering outfit that seemed scheduled for trouble. Then he met Miss Peggy Fingal—and we imagine you will conclude that between them the West was made to live up to its best traditions.

(A Complete Novel)

CHAPTER I.

FROM THE CERULEAN.

BERTIE WILGUS, dumpling-fisted, round-faced, cherubic and with a handsomely dimpled chin to offset the slightly owlish aspect imparted by a pair of the largest-sized, horn-rimmed glasses, read his telegram a bit breathlessly, holding it in a hand that trembled a little in spite of his efforts to keep it still. For one thing, as a mere cog in the complicated accounting machinery of United Motors, the bare fact of being handed a personal wire in business hours was an event; and for another, the wire in question was wildly, madly subversive of all the well-rutted routine which went with a link in a chain of desks in the orderly office of a great corporation.

This is what was set forth in the blurred typewriting of the receiving operator:

MESA CABALLADO, COLO., April 10.

To H. B. WILGUS,
Care United Motors, Indianapolis.

Job paymaster on Rio Blanco project, twenty-five hundred per, probably two years, yours if you want it. Bring blankets and pair regulation forty-fives. Answer. ADAMS.

"What is it, Bertie? Long-lost uncle died and left you a fortune?" Thus Golabird, who held down the other half of the big, double flat-top and checked cost sheets against Wilgus' production figures.

"N-n-no," Wilgus stammered. "It's—it's from a chap I used to room with in college."

"Oh! Old pal, eh? What's he doing—trying to touch you for a hundred or so of your hard-earned savings?"

"Oh, no—nothing at all like that," and to prove it Wilgus passed the message across the desk.

Golabird read it at a glance and was immediately crippled and rendered speechless by an attack of unseemly mirth.

"Well," said Wilgus, taking in the contortions with a smile that would have been sour on any face but his own, "supposing you split it with me. Where is the joke?"

"Oh, my suffering aunt!" chuckled Golabird. "Why, you're the joke, Bertie! You say you used to room with this fellow Adams?"

"I said it; yes."

"And he knows you well?"

"Of course he does."

"What business is he in, right now?"

"He is field engineer for a big irrigation company that is building a dam at Rio Blanco."

"All right. I don't know where this Rio Blanco place is but it appears to be some wild and woolly joint where you have to carry your own bed around with you and lug a couple of gats. I think I see you

playing the part of the Bad Man from Bitter Creek—*not,* Bertie. Why, if you couldn't have your shoes shined every morning and put on the necktie appropriate to the day, you'd faint!"

Now, though Golabird the josher was far from knowing it, he had touched Wilgus in his tenderest part. Every man worthy of the name has within him a potential pirate, buccaneer, swashbuckler; and Wilgus was no exception to the rule. Also, every man has deeply buried somewhere in his cosmos an imperishable vein of romanticism; and again Wilgus was no exception. A humdrum boyhood in which nothing in particular had ever happened, a college interval in which he had taken the "Liberal Arts" course chiefly because his family wanted him to—in which interval no amount of gymnasium work had enabled him to take off fat enough to make him eligible for any of the athletic teams—and finally, after graduation, an office job in which he became an unrecognizable unit in the white-collar mob—not any or all of these had sufficed to bury the vein of romanticism so deeply as entirely to submerge it.

"Rub it in, Goly; I'm used to it," was all the reply he made to Golabird as he folded the incendiary telegram and put it away carefully in an inside pocket. But for the remainder of the day he was more or less of a mental wreck; prudence, ingrained habit, the bonds of routine all pulling one way, while the inextinguishable small voice at the bottom of his soul was continually crying out, "Now, now, *now* is your chance! If you don't listen to me now, you'll be an office drudge, drudge, drudge all your life—and you'll deserve to be!"

It was half past ten in the forenoon when the telegram had been brought in by one of the office boys; and it will be remarked that while Wilgus was thinking about it and the revolutionary offer it contained—so hard that he made half a dozen mistakes in the production figures before quitting time, he nevertheless was not answering it. The major reason for the delay lived in a modest apartment far out in North Illinois Street and thither Wilgus betook himself after a rather hurried and exceedingly absent-minded dinner in a downtown restaurant.

It was Peggy herself who admitted him when he pressed the third bell push on the right and his heart failed him when he entered the familiar living room, with its conventional rug, conventional bookcases, conventional pictures on the walls, and was met by a conventional young woman who gave him both hands in welcome and held up a chaste cheek to receive the conventional kiss of greeting.

"You are early this evening, Bertie, dear," she said and the cool and dispassionate quality of her voice—though it was no cooler or more dispassionate than it had always been—made his heart failure still more pronounced.

"Y-yes," he admitted, taking his usual chair beside the usual table. And then, plunging because he felt that it would be impossible to wade in gradually: "I've got something to tell you, Peggy—something to show you," and he gave her the inflammable telegram to read.

"Well?" she said, after she had read it.

"What do you think of it, Peggy, dear?" he asked mildly.

"What do I think of it? What should I think of it? Who is this man who signs himself 'Adams?'"

Wilgus explained briefly, as he had to Golabird.

"The idea!" exclaimed the conventional young woman, and her pretty lip curled. "You say you roomed with him in college, but he certainly doesn't know you, Bertie. Why—why, it's almost impudent, his making you such an offer as this!"

Wilgus tried to keep his smile from falling into the ordinary cherubic lines but he didn't succeed very well.

"It doesn't appear to me that there is anything very impudent about twenty-five hundred a year, which is a thousand more than I'm getting for making figures in United Motors," he ventured.

"But the absurdity of asking you to go to a place where you have to provide your own bed and—and—what is it he says? a 'pair regulation forty-fives,' whatever they are. You know how I hate slang but there is nothing else that fits: it's a perfect scream, Bertie!"

"You mean that I wouldn't fit?"

"I mean that it is too ridiculous to talk about. I hope you haven't let it upset you."

Wilgus was afraid to tell her how much it had upset him. They had been engaged for six months and had agreed to wait another six until the September promotions in United Motors should raise the fifteen-hundred-dollar salary to seventeen hundred.

From September on, their plans had been considerately and carefully laid. Peggy would give up her kindergarten work in the public schools, there would be a conventional wedding in St. Mark's, a conventional wedding trip to Pleasant Lake, a conventional return to a conventional apartment in the northern suburb; after which they would live happily, in a perfectly conventional fashion, forever and a day.

"I know it is—it is rather upsetting—just to think of it, Peggy, dear," Wilgus stammered. "But it seems such a splendid opportunity for me to—to——"

"Nonsense!" said the cool voice on the other side of the table. Then: "It's just another attack of your incurable romanticism, Bertie. You've always had intervals of wanting to be something you are not and never could be. Why, you dear boy, you are no more fit to go roughing it on the frontier among swearing men and wild beasts and Indians than I would be!"

"That's it—that's just it," Wilgus pleaded. "Of course, I shouldn't want to do it for a settled thing, but I—I'd like to be fit. I guess it couldn't any more than kill me trying to get fit."

"Then there is the practical side of it," the cool voice went on, entirely ignoring the possible price paying that Wilgus had mentioned. "Two years, this Mr. Adams says; what about our plans for next September?"

"Th-that's just what I wanted to talk about, Peggy, dear," said Wilgus quickly, twisting in his chair and trying to reach the hand that was playing with a paper knife on the other side of the table—trying and missing it by a good six inches. "Why should we drag along and wait until next September? Why can't we be married now—to-morrow—and go out there together?"

The reading lamp stood between so that he could not see her face, but he knew exactly how it looked when she said: "Positively, Bertie, you grow more ridiculously absurd every minute! You know perfectly well that such a thing is utterly, unthinkably impossible! Why, before I'd consent to go and bury myself in a—a wretched construction camp, or whatever it is, where there probably isn't another woman within a hundred miles, I'd—I'd——"

Wilgus stopped reaching for the elusive hand and his gaze was fixed absently upon a very poor oil painting of Peggy's maternal grandmother on the opposite wall when he broke in.

"I was just wondering about that, Peggy," he said in his gentlest tone; "wondering what you'd say if this job were the only thing I had in the world. Would it still be impossible?"

"Of course it would; you know it would; ridiculously impossible!"

For once in a way, Wilgus was unable to summon the cherubic smile. And he was still staring blankly at the terrible picture on the opposite wall when he took the long, long jump into the bottomless void.

"I'm sorry to hear you say that, Peggy, because, after half past eight to-morrow morning I shan't have anything else in the world."

"*Bertie!* You don't mean to say that you are going to throw away your prospects with United Motors and go off on this perfectly insane chase after something that you're no more fitted for than a babe in arms?"

He nodded slowly. "You've said it, Peggy; or something nearly like it. I've always liked to fancy that to every man, at least once in his lifetime, comes a call—the call he has always been listening for, sort of longing for. I guess this telegram from Bob Adams is my call. I've been rolling along in a decent, smooth, conventional little rut ever since I can remember, and I—well, even if I don't look it, Peggy, dear, I'm just like other men, under the surface. I've got to—got to have my——"

"To have your fling, I suppose you would say," she cut in, finishing the sentence for him.

"Not in the way you mean," he answered soberly. "If it were that way, I shouldn't have asked you to marry me and go along. But I do want to get out and mix with a bunch of fellows who are doing some real thing; something more important to humanity than the mere making of swollen fortunes in building motor cars for a vehicle-mad world."

It was just here that Miss Margaret Bradbury said something that made the imminent parting easier for Wilgus than he thought it could be made.

"If you weren't so totally blind to your own limitations!" she protested. "You are twenty-seven years old and you haven't yet learned that Providence, or good luck, or whatever you choose to call it, has gently shouldered you into the place you are best

fitted for and given you tastes and habits to correspond. The one thing it has apparently failed to do for you is to eradicate this silly notion that you want to be something that you can't ever be."

Wilgus stiffened a bit in his chair at this. Like Golabird, she had touched him in his tenderest part. Now that he came to think of it, he was beginning to wonder if the shouldering process to which she referred hadn't gently pushed him into his engagement as well as into other things. And here was another of those hidden springs that had bubbled up more than once out of the substratum of romance. His ideal courtship had always been something virile, spiffy, whirlwindy, so to speak. But what the gods had handed him was merely conventionality in its most innocuous and uninspiring form.

"I've asked you to go with me and you've said no, Peggy," he remarked quietly. "Do you say it again?"

"I do, most assuredly. One of two things would happen: either we would drag out a miserable two years' existence in an uncivilized wilderness, lacking everything that makes life worth living; or—what is very much more likely—we'd be back in Indianapolis in a few weeks, with you looking for another office place. No, thank you!"

"Very well," he went on and he tried to keep his voice steady. "There is one alternative. Will you wait for me, Peggy?"

"What do you mean? Wait for two years? Or wait until you have had your fling and are back looking for another place in United Motors?"

"If I go, I shall stay until the job is finished."

Her answer was wordless. She merely took the ring from her finger and pushed it across the table to where Wilgus could reach it. He saw it and staggered to his feet.

"Do you mean that, Peggy?" he gasped.

"I certainly do. If you have lost your mind completely, I can assure you that I haven't lost mine."

He stared at her helplessly through the owllike glasses.

"Not even a tear, Peggy?" he faltered.

"Not even a tear, Bertie. When your little fit of insanity is over and you have come to your right mind——"

It was a very much bedazed cherub who stumbled out upon the sidewalk a few minutes later and groped its way to the nearest crossing to wait for a downtown car. But that it was a determined cherub was amply proved some fifteen minutes later when it swung off the car and marched resolutely into a telegraph office. And there was no trembling of the pudgy hand when it reached for a blank at the public desk and wrote the epoch-making answer to Adams' telegram:

INDIANAPOLIS, IND., May 10.

To ROBERT ADAMS,
Field Engineer Rio Blanco Co., Mesa Caballado, Colo.

Accept with thanks. Will leave for West to-morrow noon, Big Four, C. & N. W., Union Pacific to Denver. Will bring blankets and pair regulation forty-fives. WILGUS.

Though it rushed him frantically, the determined cherub hurried his affairs into shape and made the noon train for Chicago the next day, according to promise. But just as he was passing through the station gates to get aboard, another message from Adams was thrust into his hand. It bore the Mesa Caballado date line, and read:

Good man! Clerk from our attorneys will meet you at C. & N. W. train to-night with valuable papers. Careful don't lose them. Give your name to the gateman so clerk can find you. Bon voyage. ADAMS.

Being well used to carrying out orders faithfully and literally, Wilgus wasted no more than an hour or two in the Chicago shopping district after his arrival. Finding that he could get into his Denver sleeper any time after nine-thirty, he took his time over a late dinner in the C. & N. W. station, left his name with the gateman and got aboard. Half an hour later the promised clerk came through the car and paged him. When he answered to his name the messenger gave him a sealed packet.

"Deeds," said the clerk, "and the boss says they're pretty valuable. Mind signing a receipt for the package?"

"Not at all," said Wilgus, and after he had signed he buttoned the packet into the inside pocket of his waistcoat, and the thing was done.

In a vague sort of way he rather wished that the messenger had spoken a little more quietly. The gentleman in the berth diagonally opposite his own—a man of noticing beady, black eyes, had obviously overheard the message and on general principles there was no use in telling all the world about one's affairs. Not that it really mattered, however.

CHAPTER II.

THE BROAD JUMP.

If your born New Yorker cherishes a secret conviction that the truly civilized United States pauses at the summits of the Alleghenies, for the native Middle Westerner the boundary removes itself only to the Mississippi River or possibly to the Missouri. Wilgus had traveled little in his short and uneventful life and after his train left Omaha and was speeding out upon the great Nebraskan plain he was confident that only the gathering darkness kept him from looking out upon wide landscapes dotted with vast herds of cattle shepherded by picturesque cowboys in silver-bullioned sombreros and goatskin "chaps."

He blushed a little when he thought of the sombreros, blushed and glanced at the circular, paper-wrapped parcel reposing on the opposite half of his Pullman seat. Indianapolis had refused to offer appropriate headgear and so he had improved the time between trains in Chicago. Golabird had referred to him as a meticulous dresser, but he was this only in the sense that he had a modest horror of making himself conspicuous by being out of the mode. Having been a faithful patron of the movies he knew precisely what would be expected of him in the way of habiliments on the Rio Blanco frontier. Hence the paper-wrapped parcel on the opposite seat of his section.

It was after he had been to dinner in the dining car—a dinner which in its highly civilized appointments seemed strangely out of keeping with what was, or ought to be, the primitive wilderness rushing backward past the darkened windows of the train—that he met, socially, as one might say, the man who had taken Lower 11 at Omaha. Having selected the mildest of the mild panetelas from the case in his Boston bag he sought the smoking compartment of the Pullman, to find it already tenanted by the long-legged, leather-faced person from Section 11; he was a picture of a smoker at ease, with his feet on the porter's camp stool and was burning a cigar the reek of which almost gave Wilgus a qualm.

"Come in—come right in," said the easy smoker, grinning amiably. "You ain't crowdin' the mourners none. Have a light?" and he held out the black cigar reversed, with its fire end glowing like a baleful eye.

"Thanks, awfully," said Wilgus, "I've got a match," and he made haste to light the one he had taken from his pocket box; hastening because he didn't wish to poison the panetela by holding it in contact with the offered horror.

"Travelin'? Or just goin' somewhere?" inquired the leather-faced one after Wilgus had taken his seat.

"Why—both, I guess," Wilgus admitted, rewarding the mild joke with his choir-boy smile.

"Right you are. So'm I. Been down to Omaha with a couple carloads o' prime beef. Sure got enough o' that burg to last me for the next six months. I ain't stuck much on the bright lights, nohow."

Wilgus looked his seatmate over appraisingly. Beyond doubt this was one of the real cowboys, but his failure to measure up sartorially with his comrades on the silver screen was almost painful. The flannel shirt was there, to be sure, but it was overlaid by a very ordinary suit of store clothes, with the trousers much bagged at the knees. And there was no sombrero. The hat which the returning caretaker of cattle in transit had tossed aside was a flat-brimmed, dust-colored felt, well worn and with nothing but the leather head string to show that it belonged to a horseback person.

While Wilgus was puzzling over these curious discrepancies the cowman introduced himself.

"My name's Budaker—Shorty's what they call me mostly, bein' as I ain't more'n two inches over six foot long. What might I call you?"

"Wilgus," said the cherub; and then he spelled it out, W-i-l-g-u-s, as he had to for most people.

"Headin' for Denver, I reckon?" was the next question.

Wilgus said "yes," which was true merely because his ticket ran out at the Colorado capital. The Indianapolis ticket agent had been unable to find Mesa Caballado in his roster of railroad stations, so he had advised Wilgus to buy to Denver and try again there.

"Huh! They'll tell you Denver is a man's town all right, but I reckon it ain't nothin' to what it used to be if you can believe half what the old-timers tell you. Ever been there?"

"Never," Wilgus confessed, struggling to set his mind in order. If he could only discover a way to lead up to them, there were

a thousand questions that he wanted to ask this young fellow with the weather-beaten face who was doubtless fresh from the very wilderness into which Adams' telegram had summoned him.

"Denver's all O. K., only they won't let you pack a gun there no more," the cattleman went on. "Got to get over the range now before you can wear your artillery."

"I suppose you go on beyond Denver, don't you?" said Wilgus, making a violent effort to push the talk over into the region about which he was anxious to gather first-hand information.

"Yep, a right smart ways beyond. Red Butte, on what used to be the old Red Butte Western, and then some. The Rio Blanco's my stampin' ground."

At this Wilgus came alive in every ounce of his chubby being.

"Is that how you get to the Rio Blanco —by way of Red Butte?" he asked.

"Yep. Nearest railroad town. Stage runs to Mesa Caballado and beyond that you pound pig leather. Great country, Rio Blanco, only the durn land sharks are aimin' to spoil it."

"How is that?" Wilgus queried.

"One o' them get-rich-quick irrigation comp'nies. Aimin' to build a dam and open up the valley for ranches and plum' ruin the prettiest cattle range there is left east o' the Wasatch. But they ain't done it yet."

"You mean that the ranches would run the cattlemen out?"

The chaperon of prime beef looked his seatmate over in good-natured contempt.

"Say; you are a tenderfoot, right, ain't you? Never heard tell how we been pushed and shoved and crowded back, year after year, by these irrigation hogs? You sure got a heap to learn. But this cussed Rio Blanco outfit ain't got us yet; and I reckon old Maj' Fingal ain't aimin' to let 'em get us—not while he's on top o' ground."

By a perfectly Herculean effort Wilgus restrained himself from blurting out that he was on his way to the Rio Blanco to be the paymaster of the "cussed" outfit in question.

"Of course there would be opposition," he ventured cautiously. "This Mr. Fingal is your—er—employer?"

"He's the boss, yep. And I want to tell you he's a he-man, at that. Fifty year old, if he's a day, but there ain't a dog-gone man in the outfit that's quicker on the draw nor surer to hit what he's aimin' at. Some o' these fine days he's goin' to have a fallin' out with Bob Adams or some o' his bunch, and then, lemme tell you, there'll sure be blood on the moon and don't you forget it."

"But—but don't these irrigation companies acquire a legal right to build their dams?" Wilgus stammered.

"Legal hell! We saw the Rio Blanco first, I reckon. There ain't no law courts west o' the Timanyonis, nohow. You have what you get and you hang onto it if you can."

Wilgus did not seek to prolong the conversation much beyond the middle of his slowly smoked panetela. For one thing, he thought he had enough to keep him awake for a good part of the night in the startling information he had acquired; and for another, the fumes of Budaker's cigar were climbing to his brain and making him slightly dizzy and confused.

Much to his relief, however, neither the warlike news he had heard nor the tobacco vertigo served to keep him awake very long after he had rolled himself in the berth blankets. And when he ran the window shade up the next morning the train was covering the final lap in its five-hundred-and-fifty-nine-mile race and the big mountains were in sight.

Leaving the through train at the Union Station in Denver, Wilgus found that he had little time to spare; not more than sufficed for a hurried breakfast, the buying of a ticket to Red Butte and the rechecking of his trunk. In the change of trains he saw nothing of his companion of the smoking compartment, neither then nor later.

The long daylight run which followed would have been wearisomely monotonous for a seasoned traveler. But to the emancipated office man everything was new and strange; the breath-taking storming of the cañons, the gaspy plunge over Plug Pass, the gliding race down the valley of the Pannikin, the seemingly endless trek across the Red Desert and, finally, after more cañons and mountains, the halt, just at nightfall, at the high-lying mining camp and smelter town of Red Butte—all these experiences were so titivating to the tenderfoot that he had had no occasion to be either wearied or bored.

At Red Butte, where he fully expected to have to sleep over a dance hall or at least in the same block with one, and to be awakened any number of times in the night by

the crackle of gunfire in the streets, he was surprised to see three or four quite modern-looking taxis in waiting at the railroad station and, upon taking one of them, to find himself set down at a hotel which was more modern than the taxis.

Inquiry at the desk developed the information that the stage for Mesa Caballado left at seven o'clock in the morning. So, with a deep sigh of satisfaction at the unexpectedly urban and comfortable surroundings, he took a room for the night, enjoyed the luxury of what he told himself would probably be his last civilized bath and went down to dinner.

CHAPTER III.

SANS-GENE.

Entering the ornate and bepillared dining room of the Red Butte hotel Wilgus found that he was late. The tables were all pretty well filled and when the head waiter placed him it was at a small table with one of the two places already occupied by a young woman. In Indianapolis Wilgus would have apologized before taking his seat. While he was wondering if he ought to do it in Red Butte the chance went by; the waiter had shoved his chair under him and had handed him the bill of fare.

After he had given his order, however, the small social lapse returned to worry him. Shy glances across the table assured him that the girl opposite was astonishingly pretty; that while she wore her hair short, she was not painted; that she was wearing a coat suit instead of a dinner gown; that the gaze of the brown eyes which he encountered now and then in his appraising glances was not only frank and fearless but also had in it a glint of quizzical amusement. When the worry over the skipped apology finally drove him to it, he spoke to her.

"I—really, you know, I ought to—er—ah—excuse myself for—er——"

"For butting in?" she suggested before he could finish. "Please don't. Life is too short. Besides, I can use only half of the table." Then, as one speaking in confidence, and with a smile that on any face less enchantingly charming would have been impish: "I wouldn't take the bouillon, if I were you. It's perfectly vicious to-night."

Wilgus gasped inwardly. His experience with young women had been strictly limited and the standard he knew best was that uplifted by the straitly conventional Peggy Bradburys. Yet it was somehow rather intoxicating to have this bewildering beauty smile across the table at him and talk to him quite as if there were no such things as the social conventions.

"Th-thanks, awfully," he said; "I'll dodge the bouillon. It's——" he was going to say that the soup was of no consequence, but she finished the sentence for him another way.

"It's beef extract. And that always tastes tinny to me." Then, out of a perfectly cloudless sky, "Have you bought your mine yet?"

Wilgus gasped again, this time quite visibly.

"Gracious, no! What made you think I was going to buy a mine?"

"Aren't you? I thought that was the only reason why Eastern people ever came to Red Butte. You *are* from the East, aren't you?"

"Why—er—yes," said Wilgus, swept hopelessly from his feet. "Do I advertise myself so plainly as all that?"

"Of course," was the prompt reply. "Anybody could tell."

"How, please?"

"Oh, in lots of little ways;" the brown eyes were mockingly roguish now; "the dinner coat, for one."

Wilgus gave a hurried glance at the other diners; business clothes everywhere, he noticed.

"It does seem to be a little uncalled for," he admitted. "But I thought it would probably be my last chance to wear it, so I dug it out and put it on."

"What a dear, innocent boy you are," remarked this most astounding of all young women; and Wilgus, who was just beginning on the meat course, nearly choked. "What made you think this was going to be your last chance with the coat?"

"Because I'm on my way to a place where I suppose a dinner coat was never heard of."

"Oh—won't you please tell me where it is? I thought I knew our part of the West better than that."

"Do you know Mesa Caballado?"

"Quite well. I was there no later than this morning."

"You were? Then perhaps you know Mr. Robert Adams, field engineer for the Rio Blanco Company?"

"Everybody knows Bob Adams," she replied. "*He* wouldn't wear a dinner coat

unless somebody pointed a gun at him and made him."

Wilgus nodded gratefully. "I see you do know him. Bob and I went to the university together; roomed together. I'm going out to be the paymaster for his company."

At this the young woman extended a shapely hand across the table. "Shake," she invited. "You are Bertie Wilgus. Bob has already introduced us, you see—he told me, day before yesterday, that you were on the way. I'm Peggy Fingal and the Rio Blanco is my daddy's cattle range."

Wilgus had taken the firmly gripping hand in his own but he nearly dropped it when she named herself.

"*Peggy!*" he gurgled, "I—ah—er——"

"Well, Madge, Marge or Margaret, if you like any of those better; only I'm Peggy to most people. When are you planning to go out to the Rio Blanco?"

"Why, I—they told me at the desk that the stage goes in the morning."

"So it does. But it is a horrible old rattletrap of a car. Besides, you have to take a horse from Mesa Caballado to the camp—twenty miles. Do you ride?"

"I suppose I can, if I have to," said Wilgus.

"If you put it that way, you can't," she laughed. "At least, you can't ride any of the horses you'll find at Mesa Caballado. They'd shake you off and step on you."

"B-bronchos, you mean?"

"The very worst kind," agreed the young woman imperturbably. Then, "You seem to be in for it. Bob isn't expecting you until Friday—he told me so; which means that he won't be at Mesa Caballado to meet you with his little tin motor. I'm afraid you'll have to choose between a seat in my car and spending the night at the Mesa. And whichever you do, you'll probably wish you'd done the other."

"You—you are driving back?" said Wilgus.

"Yes; to-morrow morning. I came to town to do a little banking business for daddy. You'll make it quicker with me, but perhaps——"

Wilgus set his teeth upon a firm resolve. Translated to ancient Rome he would have worn a toga in spite of anything his inner sense of fitness might have to say about the substitution of robes for trousers. This wild West—which seemed to be wild only in its absolute disregard of the social fetishes of the rest of the world—should be taken at its face value, come what might to the fetishes.

"If you are really going to be so good-natured as to offer to take me with you in your car, I shall be delighted and grateful, I assure you," he said.

"The pleasure will be all mine," she returned, giving him another of those heart-kindling smiles which seemed too good to be true. "We'll start at eight, if that won't be too early for you. Do you drive a car? But of course you do; everybody does, nowadays."

Wilgus would have liked to be able to say that he could drive anything that had wheels under it; but he couldn't say that, truthfully. "I've driven a little, but mostly in the city and on paved roads," was the way he had to compromise with the wild desire to pose as a Jehu of motor cars.

Following this, there was, as one might say, a little two-bar rest intervening while the young woman was telling the waiter how she wished her dessert served. In the pause Wilgus had time to think back a space—to the previous evening when he had sat in the Pullman smoker with one "Shorty" Budaker and had been given a broad hint of the strained relations existing between the Rio Blanco Company and a cattle king by the name of Fingal.

The remembrance put a new face upon the proposed motor drive for two. What if this fierce old viking of the mountains—Wilgus wasn't quite sure whether "viking" was the proper term to apply to a cattle baron or not, but he let it go—what if this fierce old viking should resent the courtesy extended by his daughter to a member of the hated tribe of intruders and proceed to take it out upon this charming young person who was telling the waiter that she didn't want the Nesselrode pudding unless it was made à la Napoleon?

Being of those to whom a suggestion swiftly becomes a nagging urgency, Wilgus was obliged to speak of this as soon as the waiter went away.

"Pardon me, Miss Fingal," he began, "but—er—under the existing conditions, with your father being, as it were, at—er—at war with the Rio Blanco Company, do you think it will be quite fair for me to take advantage of your—er—kindness?"

She laughed so heartily at this that Wil-

gus wondered if he had perpetrated a joke without realizing it.

"You do put it so deliciously!" she gurgled. And then: "At war? Who has been so cruel as to malign daddy that way? Not Bob Adams, I'm sure."

"No, Bob didn't say anything about it in his telegram; he wouldn't, naturally. But last evening, somewhere this side of Omaha, I met a young man in the Pullman smoking room who led me to believe that he was in your father's employ and that——"

"Oh—Shorty Budaker," she interrupted. "You mustn't mind anything that Shorty says. He thinks he has a sense of humor and he just loves to hear himself talk. If he can get hold of a real tender tenderfoot——"

"I see," said Wilgus with a little sigh. "I guess he got hold of one last night. One of his remarks was that I had a heap to learn. But—is he a real cowboy, Miss Peg—er—Miss Margaret?"

"Why, yes. Why not?"

"Somehow, he didn't seem to look the part. I thought they all wore goatskin riding breeches, you know, and boots with high heels and spurs, and—oh, well, you know what I mean," he finished weakly.

Again the charmer across the table enjoyed a little fit of the speech-extinguishing laughter, winding up with, "Oh, my sainted aunt! I wonder if you realize what a perfect darling you are? How could you ever trust yourself so far away from—Indianapolis, was it? Why in the world hasn't she put you next to some of the real things in life? Or doesn't she know them herself?"

"'She?'" Wilgus queried, staring wide-eyed through the horn-rimmed glasses.

"You know who I mean; the girl you've left behind you. Tell me about her. Is she pretty?"

Wilgus wanted to pinch himself to make sure that he was awake. He had hungered for romance, adventure, the virile life, and this Red Butte seemed to be a place where all three could be had in prodigious slices. He had longed to break with the traditions, but he had never dreamed that they could be so torn apart and scattered to the four winds in the space of one short half hour—and by a young woman of whose very existence he had been ignorant previous to the beginning of the half hour.

"Has Bob Adams been telling you a lot of things about me?" he asked.

"He told me that you were not very tall and that your eyes were blue and that you had a face like one of Michelangelo's dear, fat, little-boy angels and that you wore glasses merely because other people did and do, and that you had such a sweet disposition that you didn't have to put sugar in your coffee and——" she stopped, but apparently only because she had run out of breath.

"Is that all?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"Then you were merely assuming the—er—the girl?"

"No chance of going wrong—not the slightest in the world. You couldn't possibly have escaped. With that face and those eyes, not to speak of the darling disposition——"

"Please!" Wilgus begged, trying his hardest to meet this altogether bedazing young woman upon her own ground. "It isn't quite fair, you know, to—er—walk all over a man after he's down!"

"All right," she smiled; "if you are willing to cry 'enough.' But you haven't told me about the girl."

"There—there was a girl," he admitted.

"Past tense?" she queried mockingly.

"Quite so—yes. She took my ring off when I told her good-by."

"Why?"

"She didn't approve of my coming out here."

"Why not?"

Wilgus considered his reply well before he made it. And when he had it properly shaped up and worded he took off the horn-rimmed glasses, put them away carefully in their case and looked his pretty tablemate squarely in the eyes with nothing to come between.

"It was because—most unhappily—she is not any of the things that you are," he said, with all the challenge there was in him.

The girl opposite clapped her hands softly. "Splendid!" she praised. "I didn't think you could do it! Now you shall have your reward." She bent lower over the table and spoke in subdued tones. "You let Shorty Budaker make you believe that daddy was fighting the irrigation company. Daddy doesn't exactly love the project, naturally, since it aims to make farms out of his cattle range, but he has sense enough to know that it is no use fighting the inevitable."

"Well?" Wilgus encouraged, thrilled in

his most remote nerve centers by her confidential attitude.

"Daddy isn't the one your company has to fear."

"But there are others?"

"I think so. At the second table on your left—don't look now—wait until you can do it naturally."

Wilgus waited and then looked. At the table in question there were six men. Since two of them had their backs turned his way, Wilgus could not see their faces, but sizing up the four whose faces were visible he catalogued the group as a party of business men; they might have figured as an executive committee of some sort, with the heavy-faced man with iron-gray hair at the head of the table posturing as the chairman.

"Who are they?" he asked, copying her low tones.

"I don't know any of them excepting the big man with the graying hair. He is Mr. Johnson Pitcairn, a mining promoter pretty well known all over this part of the West —and not too favorably known."

"And you think Bob's company has something to fear from him? How?"

"That I can't tell you—not in detail." Then, "How much do you know about the Rio Blanco irrigation project?"

"Nothing; rather less than nothing."

"Well, it's this way. The company is building a dam at the mouth of Rio Blanco Cañon. It will turn the cañon above it into a lake and out of the lake the water will be taken on high levels to irrigate the lands in the valley below. Can you grasp that much of it?"

"After a fashion, yes."

"And you can see that the dam will drown everything in the cañon above it?"

"I should suppose it would."

"Very well. If you were going to build such a dam, what would be your first undertaking?"

Wilgus thought about it for a moment.

"Why, I should think it would be to get a clear title to all the land that was going to be submerged."

"So should I," she answered quietly, adding, "and it is to be hoped that your company has done this."

"Good Lord!" Wilgus ejaculated. "Is there any chance that it hasn't?"

She shook her head. "There are just a lot of rumors; that's all. Three miles above the place where the dam is building there is an abandoned mine—the Estancia. There has been no work done in it for many years. It was in litigation and nobody seems to know whether it was the tangled lawsuit that stopped it or whether the lode ran out and became profitless. Anyway, it's been idle and deserted for a long time."

"And our company hasn't acquired the title to that mine?"

"Everybody supposed it had. The owner of the mine died some years ago and the property went to a lot of distant relatives who immediately went to law about it, fighting among themselves to see who should get the mine. We all understood that the Rio Blanco Company had bought up the rights from these heirs; but Bob Adams says that two other distant relatives have turned up now, with this large-featured gentleman at the other table backing them. You see how it is. The mine may be worth just nothing at all—as a mine. But it may be worth a lot to anybody owning it, if a rich irrigation company proposes to drown it."

"You interest me immensely," said Wilgus with the adventure fire burning brightly within him. "Will there be a fight?"

The young woman had finished her dinner and was getting up to go.

"You will have to ask Bob about that," she said. "All I've been doing is to pass a bit of gossip along. It may be nothing more than gossip; you know how people will talk. I shouldn't have thought of it if I hadn't seen the large-featured person in the bank today and heard him asking if he could hire an auto to take him over the range in the morning. And that reminds me: will you wait for me in the lobby at about eight o'clock—if that won't be too early for you?"

It was then that Bertie Wilgus rose to the high privilege of those who have struck hands with romance and have deliberately smashed all the well-worn traditions.

"No," he said firmly, "I shall breakfast with you here at this table to-morrow morning at half past seven."

After she had gone Wilgus sipped his black coffee slowly and tried once more to assure himself that he was awake and not dreaming. Was it possible that in two short days he had stepped out of the humdrum and into a world in which, as it appeared, anything, no matter how startling, might happen without creating so much as a ripple on the surface of this new world's commonplace?

And Peggy—this second Peggy—what an intoxicating wonder she was with her vivid beauty, her unfettered camaraderie, her quick wit, her pulse-hastening smile. True, the smiles had been mostly good-naturedly derisive of his newness to the broken traditions, but that didn't matter. He wouldn't always be so new and so strikingly reminded of the Michelangelo fat-boy angels.

Meanwhile, another lobe of his brain, the business lobe, was concerning itself with the six men at the second table on the left. What a dazzling prospect Miss Fingal's few words of explanation had opened up for a person in search of adventure! If the rumor about the old mine should turn out to be true there would be—there must be—a fight; on one side for its possession; on the other for a stopping of the work on the dam which would submerge it. Wilgus stole another glance at the sextet of suspicion. The man Pitcairn certainly looked as if he could fight; the bushy eyebrows, beaklike nose and heavy jowl all bespoke the business gladiator. As he studied the big man's face Wilgus found himself hoping desperately that the heavy jowls and protruding lower jaws were not all on the enemy's side of the line.

Upon leaving the dining room he lighted one of the mild panetelas and did it wondering if perhaps he couldn't learn to smoke a little stronger brand; or, possibly, even a pipe. Following that idea up, he threw the panetela away and bought a pipe at the lobby news stand; a natty little brier of the bulldog type.

But, unhappily, a single charging of the new pipe made his head swim and he went up to his room to go to bed and dream of driving, or being driven in, a whirlwind car which transformed itself in mid-flight into an army tank and plowed murderously into a throng of workmen who were standing in line in front of a shack office to get their pay checks.

CHAPTER IV.

EL SOMBRERO.

Though the cold light of the next morning is always rather apt to take the edge off the ardent flights of the night before, Wilgus was up betimes, determined to make good his threat, or challenge, or whatever it was, to breakfast with his dinner-table companion of the previous evening; and he was on the spot and waiting for her at the specified table for two when she came in.

"Nice man!" she said approvingly. "I rather thought I might have to send a boy up after you. This isn't particularly early for Red Butte; but for Indianapolis——"

"I have left Indianapolis sixteen hundred and three and four tenths miles behind me," Wilgus declared, as per the mileage in the railroad time-tables.

"Indianapolis and all it stands for?" she asked, beginning briskly on her grapefruit.

"I hope so; anyway, I'm trying to tell myself I have."

She looked up with the pulse-quickening smile once more in action.

"How did you ever muster up the courage to break away?" she asked.

"Courage?"

"Why, yes. I should imagine it took a lot of it. Of course, you know what a wild, savage, lawless country this is that you've come to. Or perhaps you don't realize yet how barbarous and cold-blooded it is?"

Wilgus looked around at the carefully civilized appointments of the big dining room.

"Perhaps I don't. I haven't seen anything to indicate the barbarisms yet. I wonder if you'll understand if I say that I'm a little—er—disappointed?"

"Oh, yes," she laughed, "I can understand. It's the undying *petit sauvage* in the human atom. I have a brother who used to say when he was a kiddie that he was going to be a pirate when he grew up. I suppose the peace people would call him next thing to a pirate now. He was first officer on a destroyer during the war. Did you get into the war?"

"Just about as far as you'd expect," said Wilgus ruefully. "I hadn't more than got my billet in the first officers' training camp before they found out that my specialty was production figuring. That settled it. I held down one side of a desk in a Washington office from that time on."

"Oh, well," she broke in cheerfully, "maybe the Rio Blanco will make up for some of the lost opportunities. What do you think of Mr. Johnson Pitcairn as a substitute for the boches? I left you studying his classic features last evening, didn't I?"

"I wish you'd tell me more about the prospective fight you spoke of. I'm immensely interested in that."

"I told you all I knew, last night. And it was only rumor, as I said."

"But there might be something in it, mightn't there?"

"Anything a good, vivid imagination might want to put into it. Such an imagination could easily construct the plot. A soulless corporation is about to build a dam which will drown a valuable mine. The mine owners protest but the dam builders persist. The law is invoked but the courts are far away and slow to act. Reprisals begin. Driven to desperation, the mine owners try to dynamite the rising dam. In retaliation the dam builders fire the mine shaft house. The merry war goes on until nothing is left in the grim, gray cañon but blackened ruins and a huddle of stark corpses. Did you ever try your hand at writing movie scenarios?"

As he shook his head and returned her smile Wilgus hardly knew whether to listen to the romantic part of him which was telling him that all these things might happen or to the common-sense part which was assuring him that they couldn't possibly happen in the twentieth century—not even in the wild and woolly West. But the romantic part was firmly seated in the saddle when he said: "But if it all should turn out that way, I shall be delighted to have my share in it."

The pretty girl opposite had siruped her cakes and was regarding him quizzically.

"Are you really so warlike as all that?" she asked.

"Don't I look it?" he demanded.

"Oh, no, no—you *don't* look it in the least!" she replied. "You look much more like a dear, pink-cheeked man angel. And that is what I believe you really are. But hurry up and finish your cakes. We have something like a hundred miles to go before we shall see another decent meal."

Wilgus hurried accordingly and a few minutes later excused himself to go and get his dunnage and pay his hotel bill. These parting preparations made, he brushed aside the offered ministrations of a bell hop and descended to the street. A handsomely appointed, powerful roadster, painted an electric blue, stood ready at the curb and his road hostess, becapped, begoggled and swathed to shapelessness in what appeared to be a man's Mackintosh, was already behind the big steering wheel.

"How about your trunk?" she asked as he was stuffing his two hand bags into the roadster's deck locker.

"I'll let Bob send after that later," he returned. "I've most of the things I'll need in the suit case. If I could only find a place for this?"—"this" being the circular, paper-wrapped parcel he had acquired in passing through Chicago.

"What is it?" she wanted to know, leaning out to look back at him.

"It's my hat."

"Your hat?" she gurgled. "Are you sure you didn't get a lady's picture hat by mistake? If it's a hat, why don't you put it on and wear it?"

Wilgus looked furtively about him. Early as it was, there were a number of men in the street, but he didn't see any headgear remotely resembling the beautiful, grayish-white thing concealed in the brown-paper parcel.

"I think—I guess the cap will be better for the drive," he stammered, swinging in beside her and slamming the door. "I'll just carry this in my lap."

At the snap of the door latch the young woman stepped on the starting button and the motor roared into action with the deep-toned hum of many cylinders. Next came a momentary click of the gears in low, a quick *snick—snack—snuck* as the gear lever was snatched through to high and the next instant, as it seemed to Wilgus, Red Butte with its smelter stacks and railroad yard, its one pretentious business street and its scattered array of shacks and laborers' cabins, had whisked out of sight to the rear and the car was storming up a cañon over a climbing road so narrow, between gray cliffs on one hand and a foaming mountain torrent on the other, that there was room only for the one set of wheels.

For a time which seemed little short of an age Wilgus sat braced in his half of the seat, holding his breath. That is, he would hold it as long as he could, gasp, get another and hold that. Talking was entirely out of the question. What with the thunder of the motor—muffler cut out, of course—and the deeper thunder of the roadside torrent, nothing short of a shout could have been heard. Wilgus had prided himself upon his ability to ride elsewhere than behind the steering wheel without trying to push the footboard of the car out in an uncontrollable impulse to apply the brakes. But this mad race broke all the precedents.

It was a little less hair-raising after the narrow, crooked road in the cañon gave place to long, zigzag inclines running up toward a gap in the range which Wilgus supposed was a "pass." Here at least, one would see whether or not the way ahead was unobstructed. Also, with the wider horizons and with the pounding of the noisy torrent left behind, there was only the roar of the motor to be fought with when one wished to speak.

"You—you certainly have the courage of your convictions as a driver," Wilgus ventured, as the blue roadster spun seemingly on two wheels around the first of the hairpin curves connecting the straightaways. "These mum-mountain roads are something fierce, aren't they?"

"We call this a pretty good road; wait until you see the one down the Horsehead," was the comforting reply. "Shall I slow down?"

"N-not for me," Wilgus forced himself to say. "I like it. It's just a—a bit different, that's all."

It was on the second of the straightaways that they overtook the Mesa Caballado stage, a way-worn touring car laboring up the grade with a tonneauful of freight, but only one passenger. As the roadster stormed up behind it, volleying raucous horn demands for the right of way, Wilgus clutched for handholds. There didn't seem to be the slightest chance for a passing on the narrow road and a thousand-foot descent yawned on the left as a hazard for failure. Wilgus swallowed a noiseless yell as the stage drew aside a scant three or four feet and the roadster shot past with nothing to spare between mudguard and mudguard.

"That is Shorty Budaker riding beside the stage driver—the man you were talking to in the Omaha train," said his seatmate when they had given their dust to the lumbering stage.

Wilgus groped for his lost voice, found it and said: "I'm taking your word for it. You couldn't prove it by me; you couldn't prove anything by me just now. How much room did you have on your side when you went past that touring car?"

"Oh, I don't know; it was enough, wasn't it? We didn't go over the edge. What more could you ask?"

"N-nothing at present. I'm living as rapidly as I can, thank you."

"Do you want me to drop you and let the stage pick you up as it comes along?"

"I should never forgive you if you did!"

"Fine!" she sparkled—and stepped on the accelerator again.

The zigzags were surmounted in time—in record time, Wilgus thought—and at the summit of the pass the car was halted. The prospect ahead was for more mountains but there were broad valleys intermingled. The young woman pointed to a silver thread winding through one of the valleys far away to the right and miles below.

"The Rio Blanco," she told him. "You can't quite see the cañon from here; it is farther around to the east."

"It isn't so far away as I supposed it would be," he said, meaning the region to which he was destined.

"Tenderfoot eyes," she laughed. "You're not used to the clear air of the altitudes. How far would you make it from here?"

He looked again. "Is it twenty-five miles?"

"It is much nearer seventy-five."

"I'm believing anything you tell me," Wilgus answered meekly. Then he looked back over the road they had just traversed. At the moment, the Mesa Caballado stage, two zigzags below, was pulling aside in one of the shallow passing spaces to let a big touring car get ahead of it. "Something else coming our way," he pointed out.

His pretty seatmate leaned across him to look out on his side of the car and the warmth of her body set his nerves atingle like the glow from an open fire.

"That will be Mr. Johnson Pitcairn and his tableful, with Jud Hoskins driving them: it's Jud's car, anyway," she said. Then, "What are you shivering about?"

"Nothing," he denied; but when she took the wheel and let the clutch in he wished she would lean on him again. Peggy Bradbury had never done anything so innocently confiding as that in all the six months of their engagement.

On the farther side of the pass there were more zigzags and steeper ones, but now the reckless driver seemed to have grown suddenly careful. She was letting the blue car slowly down the grades with the engine in gear and the switch turned off. Wilgus was far from suspecting the reason for the leisurely pace; was still unsuspecting when he glanced up and saw the big, heavily loaded touring car coming down the

incline out of which they had just turned in negotiating one of the hairpin curves.

Nothing happened until the driver of the big car honked for passing room. "They can't possibly pass us here!" Wilgus protested; but as he spoke, his companion said, "Now we'll show them!" and snapped the ignition switch and stepped on the gas. The next instant Wilgus fancied he knew how he should feel if he were a passenger in an aëroplane which had gone into a tail spin from which it couldn't be righted.

"Jud Hoskins thinks he's some driver!" The words blew across to him and he caught them as they flew. "We'll see if he wants room to pass us anywhere else on the way down."

Wilgus shut his eyes and resigned himself to his fate. That it would come leaping at him out of one or another of the yawning voids below he made no question. He knew now why his madcap driver had been slowing on the way down from the summit of the pass; it was merely to let the big car get near enough to make it a real race. A hundred times in imagination he felt the blue car skidding and toppling to the final crash, but as often it righted itself and dashed on. When the end came he emerged from the trance of resignation to find the young woman's gauntleted hand on his arm as if she had been trying to shake him awake.

"It's all over, you sweet, patient angel," she laughed. "It wasn't very chummy in me to hurl you down the mountain that way, but I simply couldn't let Jud Hoskins put it all over me, could I?"

"Of course you couldn't!" Wilgus returned loyally. "I—I'm awfully glad you take me for granted, you know."

"Did it scare you silly?"

He lied handsomely. "It was delicious. I think I nearly fell asleep along toward the last. Whereabouts are we now?"

"This is the Tombstone Desert—or a little piece of it. We skirt it for a few miles before we come to the Horsehead."

For the next twenty miles or more the going was over the level desert floor and the blue car fled like a bird. Then came more hills, a series of climbing loops and later a sliding descent, with the brakes shrilling, into a basinlike valley through which the road, now little more than a bowlder-strewn trail, led to a cañon with a tumbling stream threading it.

"This is the Horsehead—a tributary of the Rio Blanco," the young woman said as she juggled the wheel to make the car miss the biggest of the bowlders. "Mesa Caballado is just below us."

As Wilgus looked out upon the pristine scenery of the cañon, Indianapolis and all things pertaining thereto withdrew to the vanishing point and his life there seemed already to belong to a remote past. Was it possible that he had ever sat at a flat-topped desk and made foolish figures for United Motors? Perhaps; but only in some far distant and half-forgotten avatar; certainly not within three short days.

And his companion? From time to time he stole glances aside at her, trying to fit her into some scheme of things at least partly familiar. Being herself and no other she refused to be fitted. Modern girls, courageous of speech and of clothes, he had known and had consistently shied from, finding it difficult to place any woman upon the footing of give and take which the modern attitude seemed to demand. That there could be any middle ground between the Peggy Bradbury type and the rolled-stockings extreme was a prefiguring which had never presented itself.

Next came a natural wonder as to the light in which this altogether charming—and competent—young woman beside him was regarding him. Did she really mean it when she said that he looked like a "dear, pink-cheeked man angel?" Or was that only a free and flowing manner of speech adapted to the frontier? And her offer to set him down and let him wait for the slower—and safer—stage: did she really imagine that he was such a mollycoddle as that would imply or that he wouldn't willingly die a thousand deaths in a smash-up rather than admit it to her if he were?

In the romantic part of him he saw himself doing some incredibly heroic thing at which the entire frontier would stand aghast; and then, in an upflash of the good common sense that never quite deserted him, he saw her laughing at him, joshing him, turning the pathos of the heroic into the bathos of the ridiculous. Also in the same upflash he had a disquieting premonition that in the new environment toward which the blue roadster was at that moment jouncing him he was destined to provide endless amusement for the little world of the Rio Blanco and that the quick-witted and altogether charming

young woman at his side was more than likely to be his chief exploiter in the field of mockery.

If he had only known it the young woman's sense of humor—a perverted sense of humor, some of her victims called it—was at that very instant planning a merry jest for the inhabitants of Mesa Caballado in which he was cast to play the title rôle. There was a rude log bridge just ahead over which the primitive cañon road dodged to the right-hand side of the stream and Wilgus failed to mark the dancing imps in the brown eyes of his seatmate when she told him to look out on his side of the car and see if he thought the bridge, with its loose corduroy flooring, seemed safe for their crossing.

"I thought it looked a bit shaky when I came over it yesterday," she explained; and Wilgus leaned far out and peered down at the logs bouncing and rattling as the weight of the car came upon them.

"It looks pretty bad," he warned and he was concentrating so breathlessly upon the narrow margin of safety between the unguarded ends of the logs and the jostling wheels of the car that he was entirely oblivious to the flick of a gauntleted hand from the steering wheel; a light touch that merely brushed the modish golf cap he was wearing like the wing of a bird in passing. A light touch, but, like Mercutio's wound, it served. Wilgus grabbed frantically with his one free hand, missed and sank back in his seat, bareheaded.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he exclaimed. "My cap fell off and tumbled into the creek!"

A disinterested observer might have remarked that Miss Fingal refused to take her eyes from the road ahead and that she seemed to be struggling with some inward emotion. After the car was safely off the bridge she said, rather hysterically, Wilgus fancied: "Why—isn't that too bad! If it fell into the Horsehead you'll never get it again! But then"—more calmly—"didn't you say you had a hat in that parcel?"

Slowly and with reluctant fingers Wilgus untied the string of the brown-paper parcel he had been nursing all the way over from Red Butte. When the wrappings were removed the wonder was revealed. His seatmate had not exaggerated when she said he must have taken a woman's picture hat by mistake. In a broad nest of inner tissue lay the most magnificent of Mexican sombreros, bell-crowned, silver-bullion corded, filigree-bound on the edges of its target-sized brim.

"Oh, how perfectly, *perfectly* gorgeous!" cried the young woman in an ecstasy of admiration real or most accurately simulated; and now the dancing imps were plainly to be seen if Wilgus had had wit enough to look for them. "Oh, put it on—please put it on! How could you ever make yourself carry it wrapped up in paper all the way from—from wherever it was that you got it?"

Wilgus did put it on, because it was now the only head covering he had—and it filled the hood of the roadster. How it looked in conjunction with the modest business suit and overcoat he was wearing he hardly dared to imagine. All the world knows that it is the headgear that marks the man. The shoes may be broken, the coat shapeless and the trousers bagged at the knees; these will pass if the hat be decently apologetic. Wilgus had prefigured himself as a sombreroed unit in a crowd of sombreros. Was there ever a Westerner shown on the silver screen without one? But as yet he hadn't seen one in the real life of the West and his faith in the movies was beginning to waver.

"Do I look like a complete tomfool?" he asked, gritting the words; and the young woman, shaking now with the laughter that refused longer to be denied, protested eagerly.

"Don't imagine such a thing!" she begged. "You look just too cunning for any use. That dear, angel-boy face of yours needed something to set it off—I didn't know just what it was, but now I do know—no, please don't take it off—you'll take cold if you do. You simply *can't* ride bareheaded this early in the year at this altitude."

Sitting uncomfortably straight, because the wide-spreading monstrosity on his head wouldn't let him lean back, Wilgus clutched once more for handholds when the car began to slide down a steep hill to the little mining camp of Mesa Caballado. Somewhere along the road his companion had told him that they would stop for dinner at the Mesa and he was wondering bitterly what sort of a reception he would have if his chanced to be the only sombrero in the place.

While he was picturing the possible approaching agonies—agonies known only to those who have sought to live the inconspicuous life—the blue car rolled down the single street of the camp and came to a stand before a log-built house with a broad,

slab-floored porch abutting upon what should have been the sidewalk. Before he could make a move to get out, a handsome, sunburned young giant in the corduroys of the engineer swung himself over the porch rail and hurried out to the machine.

"Bertie, old scout!" he shouted; and then, with another shout: "Where in Heaven's name did you get that hat?"

"Permit me," cut in the girl with the laughing eyes, in mock formality. "Let me introduce my friend, El Sombrero. Don't you think he ought to have gotten the rest of the costume while he was about it?"

Adams' laugh shook the surrounding scenery.

"That's one for you, Bertie. All you lack are the embroidered jacket, the slashed, silver-buttoned trousers *and* a fringed sash: then you'd be a Mexicano right. But get out and come in, both of you. Brockett's Chinaman will have dinner ready in a little while."

Miss Fingal glanced at her wrist watch.

"The 'little while' will be a good half hour," she said. Then, "I have a horrible suspicion that I broke a spring coming down the cañon. Will you look and see?"

Adams made a quick inspection while Wilgus was getting out.

"You did," he announced; "right-hand front—two leaves cracked."

"Then I think I'll drive around to Kimball's and see if he can't patch me up so that I can get home. I'll be back in time to eat dinner with you, if you insist on it."

"Of course we insist," said the young engineer with a laugh. "Besides, you've got to get Bertie out to the camp. I'm not going that way. I wasn't looking for you until to-morrow. I'm on my way to the lower canal camps and I was planning to come back this way to-morrow and pick you up. But if Miss Peggy will stretch her hospitality a little further——"

"I am more than delighted," Wilgus' charioteer returned; and then spoiled it all by adding: "I wouldn't miss the chance of introducing that wonderful sombrero to your headquarters camp for worlds!"

Wilgus let her drive on to the repairman's with no more than a decent word of acknowledgment and followed Adams up the tavern steps. There were a number of dinner-waiting loungers on the porch and though he kept his eyes fixed firmly upon Adams' back he could feel the broad grins evoked by his headgear. Wherefore, the first thing he said after they were inside, and he had jammed the huge hat upon a convenient wall peg, framed itself as an angry beseeching, as thus:

"If you love me, Bob, you'll show me where I can get a civilized hat before I leave this town. I'd rather be drawn and quartered than wear that cursed thing another mile!"

Adams laughed again and led the way to the dining-room wing of the log-built hostelry.

CHAPTER V.

TAME TIGERS.

In what seemed to be a refinement of luxury for a mining-camp tavern, the Hotel Caballado had two dining rooms; a large one with long tables and a smaller one which was a sort of alcove, built on, apparently, as an afterthought. It was to a table in the smaller room that Adams pointed the way.

"We can sit here until dinner is served," he said. "It's the quietest place in the shop. Now tell us about it, Bertie. How are you and what kind of a trip have you had? By George, you know, you haven't changed an atom; same little old angel face that you used to carry around in the college days. Not married yet, are you?"

"Not so that you could discover it," Wilgus returned; adding: "though I was going to be, next September, if you hadn't wired."

Adams was all sympathy, as became a good friend and comrade.

"Great heavens! You don't mean to say that my wire broke it off?" he exclaimed in real concern.

Wilgus explained briefly how the wire had developed the little rift within the betrothal lute and Adams shook his head.

"That was too bad!" he protested. "I had no idea I was messing with such intimate things as that. But maybe, after a time things——"

"No," said Wilgus calmly. "I think it is final. There wasn't any too much sentiment about it, anyway. I'll admit that it jarred me a good bit, at the moment; but afterward, when I came to think it over, I couldn't quite visualize Margaret roughing it out here with me as I asked her to. She isn't at all that sort, you know."

"Roughing it?" said Adams with the lift of an eyebrow. "She missed it a mile, if that was her reason for giving you the sack.

We have a fairly comfortable sort of shanty camp over at the dam and she wouldn't have had to rough it to any extent. Am I to understand that it is permanently a back number for you?"

"I think so," Wilgus returned. "Let's drop it."

"It's dropped," Adams declared with friendly readiness. "Yesterday was yesterday and to-day is to-day. Which reminds me; I wasn't looking for you until to-morrow; must have tangled myself in figuring the railroad time-tables. How did you work it to capture Peggy Fingal and her speed car?"

"I didn't," Wilgus denied. "She captured me. I just happened to sit at table with her last evening in Red Butte and by the time the salad course was served she was offering me a seat in her car."

"Shock you?" said Adams, grinning.

"Took me off my feet a bit, yes. I never met any one just like her before."

"And you never will again," Adams prophesied. "She isn't a type; the mold was smashed after she was made. Didn't she guy you unmercifully about that hat?"

Wilgus told rather reluctantly the tale of the sombrero; how he had bought it in Chicago, meaning only to conform to what he supposed was the custom of the new world to which he was migrating; how he had carried it in the original package to within a short distance of Mesa Caballado; and how it was only the loss of his cap that had made him resort to it at the last.

"Um-m," said Adams reflectively. "Cap fell off in the creek, did it? Are you right sure Peggy Fingal didn't knock it off? Don't think, for a single minute, that she isn't equal to it," he went on with a grin fully as broad as any that the porch loungers had accorded the handsome sombrero. "To get a rise out of a man she'd do anything that happened to occur to her. She's built just that way."

Wilgus shook his head. "I couldn't seem to place her at all. Why, five minutes after I had tried to apologize for taking a seat at her table last night, she was treating me just as if she had known me for years."

"Sure she would!" Adams laughed. "That is one of her many charms. She can be hail-fellow-well-met with anything that walks on two legs; and she is—up to a certain point. But I'll give you your tip right now, Bertie. Don't ever let anything tempt you to pass that point. She knows men like a book."

"Educated?" Wilgus queried; adding, "But of course she is."

Adams nodded. "The biggest and best of the Eastern women's colleges. But it hasn't spoiled her an atom. She is the apple of her father's eye and what she says goes as it lies—with the major and with every man of his outfit."

"Fingal," said Wilgus; "Scandinavian?"

"Not at all. Old Kentucky stock with a pedigree as long as your good right arm."

"Racing stock, at that," Wilgus qualified; and from that he went on to tell of the breakneck drive down the mountain undertaken to show one Jud Hoskins what it meant to try to pass the blue roadster.

Adams caught immediately at the name of the man who had to be shown.

"Hoskins—the Red Butte garage man? Who is he bringing in?"

"A Mr. Johnson Pitcairn and five men he had with him at the hotel in Red Butte last night. Miss Fingal pointed them out to me."

"Um-m! Pitcairn, eh? Did Peggy tell you anything about him?"

Wilgus repeated the rumor that had been passed on to him about the possible flaw in the irrigation company's title to an abandoned mine, winding up with the query:

"Is there anything in it?"

"Not now, thank Heaven, though there might have been," Adams said. "We all believe that Pitcairn was trying to frame a cold-blooded holdup. The Estancia is—or was—an abandoned mine. Ten years ago it was a gold producer in ore rich enough to pay for the long truck haul out to the Red Butte smelter. Then for some reason or other it was shut down; and shortly after that the owner died. Immediately the property went into litigation. The owner had left no will and the heirs began a fight among themselves which has dragged along up to the present time. Am I making it clear?"

"Clear enough," said Wilgus.

"When our people kicked in and began to buy up submergence rights they ran up against this mine—which looked as if it might be a blockade. If the Estancia were really a valuable gold producer, you can see what it might cost us to buy the privilege of drowning it—practically any sum the owners might ask for it. If, on the other

hand, it was only a worked-out pocket—as most people believe it was—the price would be, or ought to be, merely nominal."

"I see," said Wilgus. "What did you do?"

"The real value of the mine was the first thing to be ascertained and that was the first bone we struck. The buildings and workings were boarded up and locked up and there was a family of armed watchmen—a man and his three sons. I don't know how our experts got past the garrison but they did it, some way, and made a thorough examination.

"They reported that the original vein had run out against a 'lime horse,' a dike of barren rock; that attempts had been made to find it again by tunneling the dike; and that these attempts had failed. With that information to work on, our attorneys made offers to the fighting heirs and bought them off, one at a time; got a quitclaim from each of them. Still understandable?"

"Perfectly," Wilgus nodded.

"That was the situation up to a few weeks ago. Then Pitcairn butted in. He is a sort of fly-by-night mining promoter who has been mixed up in a raft of shady deals but has always contrived to keep on the weather side of the law. First he tried to cook up some kind of a plot with Major Fingal. When the valley is opened up for farms, the cattle ranching will have to go, so you can imagine the major doesn't love our project any too warmly. I don't know how far Pitcairn succeeded in interesting him; naturally, I'd be about the last person to know."

"Could the major do anything to stop you?"

"That's an open question. There is a rich grass valley up the cañon above the dam site that the major has been using for summer pasturage—and still uses it. I have heard that he, or some of his men, have taken up homesteads in that valley. That may, or may not, be true. The major is a pretty shrewd old gentleman and if he has anything up his sleeve, he is keeping it strictly to himself.

"However, the next move came from Pitcairn and it turned upon the Estancia—not upon the major's holdings. Pitcairn notified us that two more heirs—besides those we had already settled with—had been discovered; that he was their legal representative and that if we wanted to buy up their share in the title it would cost us an even million dollars."

Wilgus smiled. "Nothing small about Mr. Pitcairn, is there?"

"No, indeed. He was out for a killing. You can see where that landed us. Having every reason to believe that we were safe, we had gone on with the dam building. I don't know just what happened but I suspect our legal department did some mighty tall hustling. The upshot was that I had a wire from Chicago, three days ago, telling me that the two additional quitclaim deeds had been signed; by which I suppose that our lawyers were able to cut the ground from under Pitcairn in some way. And right there is where you came in."

"I?" Wilgus inquired in some amazement.

"Yes, you. President Acton wired that he would be sending the two lately signed deeds to me by special messenger so that I might have them recorded at the county seat, which is just over the range to the north of the dam. I wired him at once that you were coming out to take Nelson's place as paymaster and that you could bring the deeds. You've got them, haven't you?"

"I have something that was given me by a fellow who paged me in the C. & N. W. sleeper at Chicago," said Wilgus and he took the sealed envelope from his pocket and tried to give it to Adams.

"I don't want it," said the engineer. "Keep it until you get to camp and lock it up in your safe. When I come back from this inspection trip we'll do the needful in the way of having the documents recorded."

Wilgus fingered the sealed packet half apprehensively.

"In your wire to me you said 'valuable papers;' you didn't stretch it any," he remarked. "If I had known that I was carrying something that might be worth a million dollars to the company—they are worth that, aren't they?"

"They might easily be, yes. We have the word of our experts that the Estancia isn't worth anything, and that is doubtless the fact. But suppose Pitcairn has been salting it in the meantime and could prove, or seem to prove, that it is a valuable property? In that case those deeds are worth exactly a million dollars to us; and they'll continue to be worth that much until they are recorded."

"How so? Do they have to be recorded

before the title will pass to our company?" Wilgus demanded.

"Oh, no. So long as we hold the deeds we can prove title, of course. But if they should disappear before they are recorded —well, you can see what might happen then. Pitcairn might get next to these two late signers and persuade them not to sign duplicates. Then we would be strictly up against it."

Wilgus put the envelope back into his pocket.

"As I say, if I'd known what you've just told me I shouldn't have been able to sleep a wink all the way out here," he asserted. And then, as the full magnitude of it laid hold upon him: "Why, great man! I didn't even take the precaution of putting the thing under my pillow in the Pullman!"

Adams grinned again. "What you didn't know never hurt you a particle. But you know now. First thing when you get to camp, you lock those deeds up in the safe. They'll be all right then. Oldham, our draftsman, sleeps in the office. Not that there's any danger. The chances are that Pitcairn hasn't found out yet that he has been undermined."

"I suppose not," said Wilgus and then he looked distinctly disappointed. "That's another little bubble of mine pricked. When Miss Fingal told me about Pitcairn and the Estancia rumor, I had hopes."

"Hopes of what?"

"Hopes that there was going to be a regular old knock-down-and-drag-out scrap, and that I could get in on it."

"Yes, you did!" Adams chuckled with blunt sarcasm. "As if I didn't know your leanings better than that! No, no; nothing like that for you, old man. You're going to have a nice, quiet office job, just like you had at home. You can even wear a white collar, if you feel you need one."

It was at this conjuncture that Wilgus grew red in the face and all the romance that was bottled up in him boiled over and blew the cork.

"D-d-damn it, Bob, that's just what I don't want!" he stuttered. "I want to be a man—not a dash-bingled adding machine! I can pay off your men and keep your dodgasted cash books for you with one hand tied behind my back, but you're not going to cut me out of the real stuff!"

"My heavens!" said the young chief engineer in mock concern. "And I roomed with you four long years and never found it out! What did they give you to drink last night over in Red Butte, Bertie? Let's talk of something cheerful. Peggy Fingal, for example. You say your affair with the other Peggy lacked sentiment—was too conventional. Didn't Peggy Fingal's smashing of the conventions sort of warm the cockles of your recently frozen heart?"

"She made game of me," said Wilgus, trying to look soured and making a conspicuous failure of it.

"About the hat? Forget it! Peggy doesn't tease people that she doesn't like. If she teases *you,* she likes you. If you are a good sport and can prove it, she'll love you."

While Adams was rattling on about Miss Fingal, Wilgus was half absently taking in the appointments of the two interiors visible from where he sat. There were few signs of the frontier he had traveled so far to find, either in the small alcove or the main dining room. There were curtains at the windows and pictures on the walls. The table napery was not fine linen, to be sure, but it was quite as good as that in the respectable boarding house—for gentlemen only—which he had inhabited in Indianapolis. Also, there were electric lights and a telephone service.

"I thought—I hoped—I was getting my final touch of civilization when I breakfasted in Red Butte this morning," he said. "But you seem to have it here, too."

Adams' laugh was a bray. "What on top of earth did you expect, you hopeless anachronism? Did you think that, just because the Rio Blanco happens to be halfway across the continent from Indianapolis we have to live like blanket Indians? Because we don't, you know. Not even on the job. As I said a few minutes ago, you'll find our camp as comfortable as an army post. You'll have a room to yourself and a civilized bed; and you can even have your morning bath with hot water, the same as you would at home. The day has gone by when people thought they had to live rough and tough just because they didn't happen to live within shouting distance of a big city. A piece back, you spoke of scrappings and adventures; you'd get more of them in a minute in some back street in a city than you would out here in a lifetime."

Wilgus was silent for a time. Then he said: "Didn't you tell me in your wire to bring blankets and a couple of revolvers?"

Adams laughed again. "Did you do it?" he asked.

"The blankets are in a roll with my trunk in Red Butte and I have the guns in my suit case."

Adams sobered down at once.

"I didn't suppose you'd take that seriously, Bertie. The blanket-and-pistol part of the wire was only a joke. You won't have any use for either in the Rio Blanco."

"What made you say it, then?"

"You won't get a grouch if I tell you?"

"No."

"Well, Peggy Fingal was with me the day I came here to phone the telegram and she egged me on to put in that line about the pistols and blankets."

"Which means that you'd been telling her what an easy mark I was—and am? You needn't deny it. I know you did, because she told me you did. And that isn't the worst of it. I——"

He was about to go on and tell Adams how the fine, romantic air castles had all been ruthlessly tumbled down—air castles built upon a West that had once been the home of all things romantic—red-shirted miners and shaggy-chapped cowboys, lone-hand road agents and two-gun bad men who took snapshots at the boot heels of the tenderfoot to make him dance. But an interruption broke in. A big, dust-whitened auto came to a stand in the street with brakes complaining and, looking out of the alcove window, Wilgus recognized it and the men who were descending from it.

"Here comes Pitcairn with his bunch now," he said. "They're stopping here for dinner, I suppose."

CHAPTER VI.

IN SPLIT CANON.

When Wilgus called attention to the stopped auto and the men who were climbing out of it Adams frowned.

"I wonder what that big bluffer thinks he's going to do now?" he grumbled.

"Maybe he's bringing in a sheriff's posse to tell you to quit work on your dam," Wilgus suggested in mild banter.

"He'd have to show us, first," Adams retorted; and further comment was forestalled by the appearance of Miss Peggy Fingal, breezy, brown eyes dancing, ripe lips parted in what Wilgus would have described as a heart-wrecking smile.

"How dear of you two to wait for me!" she exclaimed, taking one of the two vacant chairs at the alcove table. Then, singing softly, and parodying the familiar war march of the Campbells:

"The Pitcairns are coming, O ho! O ho!
The Pitcairns are coming, O ho! O ho!

"Aren't you shaking in your shoes, Mr. Bob Adams?"

"Not at the present moment," Adams laughed. And since he was neither a diplomat nor a secret-service man but only an ingenuous young chief of construction under the spell of a beautiful woman's eyes, he added, "A few days ago I might have been having a cold chill or so, but not to-day. Bertie, here, has the antidote safely in his coat pocket."

"What?" she breathed. "Are you trying to tell me that the new heirs' claims are settled?"

"Signed, sealed and delivered; and Bertie has the documents, which are on their way to be recorded. This is one time when our able legal department has put one over on the enemy."

"Ah, me!" sighed the daughter of the pedigrees in mock despair. "There goes our last little hope. Now you will go on and build your stubborn old dam and drown our summer grazing meadow in the cañon. Such is life in the Far West. But tell me, Bobby, dear: are the county commissioners going to repair the valley road so you can get your cement from Dorno, instead of having to haul it over the range?"

The men of the lately arrived auto party were entering the larger dining room and taking their seats at a table which had evidently been reserved for them. As Adams and the young woman went on talking about roads and cement hauls and things industrial, Wilgus dropped out, content to eat his dinner and listen. Now and then he let his gaze drift out to the larger room and to the sextet at the reserved table. The previous evening he had likened the heavy-faced promoter to the president of a company and his following to the possible directors. Seen in daylight the group looked less like investors and rather more like the sheriff's posse that he had jocularly suggested to Adams.

The table at which the six silent men were sitting stood endwise to the alcove and Wilgus' view was of the broad back of the promoter, with the profiles of the four at his

right and left. The odd man sat at the other end of the table, facing Pitcairn. Wilgus leaned back in his chair to get a fair sight of the fifth man, and when he got it, it gave him a start.

For a moment he thought he must surely be mistaken. Having an excellent memory for faces Wilgus could have sworn that the man with a sallow face, a clipped black mustache and restless, beady, black eyes was the person who had occupied the berth diagonally opposite his own in the Chicago-Omaha-Denver sleeper.

The discovery, or potential discovery, was provocative of a little thrill; not of apprehension, but rather of belated excitement. Was it possible that he had ridden a third of the way across the continent cheek by jowl, so to speak, with one of Pitcairn's confederates or accomplices or whatever he might be? Wilgus stole another look and suspicion became certainty. As he was about to speak to Adams, the young woman turned to him.

"Have you forgiven me for making you wear the beautiful hat?" she asked. "I hope you have. I'm awfully cut up and discouraged when I'm not forgiven."

Wilgus gave her his best angelic smile.

"A person would have to be a lot more vindictive than I am not to forgive you for anything you might see fit to do. Is that what you wanted me to say?"

"It is what I know you would say. And now you'll have to forgive me for something else. Alec Kimball is nothing but a mine blacksmith and I'm afraid it is going to take him quite some time to repair that broken spring under my car. You won't mind waiting in this our charming little city of Mesa Caballado?"

Once more Wilgus took his newly found courage with women in both hands.

"Mind waiting—and with you? The afternoon will be all too short."

"Listen!" she laughed, turning to Adams. "Isn't that perfectly delicious?"

Adams grinned appreciatively.

"You will have to make allowances for Bertie; he is just out of swaddling clothes, as you might say, and you mustn't let him down too hard." Then to Wilgus, "As long as you're here and have time I'll take you to the bank and introduce you so you can get the Saturday pay-roll money. I was intending to come through and get it to-morrow but if you will take it, it will save me about ten miles of rough riding in the flivver. You are under salary, you know, and you may as well begin to earn your money on the spot. If you're both through, let's adjourn. It's high time I was on my way to the down-valley canal diggings."

In the hotel hallway the young woman excused herself, saying that she would return to the blacksmith's shop and try to hurry the repairs on her car. Wilgus emptied the contents of his Boston bag into the suit case in order to have the smaller bag for a cash carrier and told Adams he was ready to go to the bank. On the porch steps, in full view of all who cared to witness, he sailed the gorgeous sombrero across the street, where it fell in the vacant, tin-can-littered lot opposite the hotel.

"That's that," he said firmly; and then to Adams: "Now lead me to a hat shop and I'm with you."

"Good Lord—how reckless!" Adams chuckled; but a general store was promptly found and over its counter Wilgus purchased a cap similar to the one lost in the Horsehead. A visit to the bank followed, the pay-roll money was obtained and Wilgus walked with Adams to the place where the engineer's dust-covered little car was parked.

"Here is where I leave you to your own devices—and Peggy's," Adams said at parting. "Make yourself at home when you get to camp. Oldham will give you the combination to the safe and if there is anything about the books that you don't understand, make a note of it and I'll enlighten you after I get back. That's all, I guess; only don't let Peggy tease the life out of you going in."

Wilgus returned to the hotel when Adams drove away and, having the newly acquired money responsibility on his mind, he sat out on the porch with the hand bag between his feet and tried to kill time by taking another whirl at the new pipe acquired the previous evening in Red Butte. He was hoping that having given the repairing blacksmith his jogging Miss Fingal would come back to help him wait.

A few minutes after he had taken his place on the porch, Pitcairn and his five fellow travelers came out and went at once to their car. At the mounting moment Wilgus had another fair look at the man with the sallow complexion and the closely clipped mustache. The look was completely confirming; he was unmistakably the man who

had occupied Section Nine in the through sleeper from Chicago to Denver.

After the big auto rolled away Wilgus had the porch and his thoughts to himself for the better part of the afternoon. Miss Fingal did not come back and with commendable self-control he denied himself the pleasure of going to look for her. It was the money-bag responsibility that held him fast. It didn't seem quite judicious to go strolling about the streets of a strange town with a hand bag half full of currency.

For this reason he was still possessing his soul in what patience he could command when, quite in the shank of the afternoon, the blue roadster came down the street and was halted to let him get in. It was altogether a new young woman—a penitent young woman, this time—who greeted him from behind the wheel.

"I deserve anything you can possibly say to me," she protested. "It was an outrage to make you wait this way but I simply *couldn't* hurry that thumby-fingered Alec to save my life! Now we shall be out after dark and in the cañon, at that."

Wilgus said all the "never minds" that a guest ought to say, put his money bag into the car and went to fetch his suit case which he once more stowed under the roadster's rumble hatch. Two minutes later Mesa Caballado had faded into a recollection and the blue car was speeding over a level upland which Wilgus supposed—and rightly—was the mesa.

"A better road than we had coming in," he said after two or three of the level miles had been flung to the rear.

She nodded. "We could make it before dark if it were all like this. Unfortunately, about half of it is more like that bit coming down the Horsehead."

"More cañon?" he asked.

"Yes; the Little Rio," and she went on to explain that there were two roads to the valley from Mesa Caballado; one down the Horsehead—which was navigable only for those who, like Bob Adams, drove cars that could be cheaply replaced when they were worn out; and another—the one they were on—which came into the great cañon at a point some three miles above the dam by way of the Little Rio. "We call this the back-door route," she added, "and it is a little longer than the other way. But the road is much easier on a car."

"You say it leads into the main cañon: do we go anywhere near the mine you were telling me about?" Wilgus asked.

"We go right past it, or rather we enter the big cañon just below it. But you won't see much of it. It will be dark before we get that far."

The good mesa road held for possibly ten miles. Then came a tortuous descent into the head of a gulch. A little farther along, the gulch deepened into a true cañon and the setting sun went out of sight from the road, though the upper air was still shot through with the sunset glow. It was on a perilously narrow bit of the descending road, with the perpendicular cañon cliff on the left and a steepish bank of a small, gulch-threading stream on the right, that the small accident occurred. In one of the short turns the blue car lost its footing and before it could be righted began to slide sidewise down the bank toward the stream.

For a heart-swallowing instant Wilgus made sure they were going to turn turtle into the creek but after that first instant he had other things to think of. The sudden pitch-over and twist had jerked the young woman's hands from the wheel and flung her into his arms, so, for a moment, there was a breathless wrestling match; Wilgus fighting manfully to keep himself and his armful from being thrown out and the young woman struggling to get back to the wheel.

It was all over in the turning of a leaf, so to speak. The plucky girl driver contrived to get a hand on the wheel and a toe on the accelerator and with a plunging rush the car righted itself and climbed back into the road. When the young woman settled herself in her proper place behind the steering wheel, she was laughing—giggling, Wilgus was tempted to say.

"You've probably heard of how some women fairly throw themselves at a man's head," she bubbled. "Hereafter it will be something stronger than hearsay with you, won't it?"

Wilgus was still breathing hard.

"I thought we were gone, that time," he asseverated. "This road is frightfully narrow. If we should meet anything along here——"

"Let's hope we won't meet anything this side of the big river," she said. "Split Cañon—the place where the two cañons come together—is only about two miles ahead and below that the road is wider."

So ran the comforting assurance, but the

two miles were destined to be long ones. A short distance beyond the scene of the near disaster the blue car's motor began to miss. A halt was made and the young woman got out and lifted the hood.

"Wiring," she announced cheerfully. "That twist down the bank did something to it."

Wilgus climbed out and stood beside her, feeling as helpless as the nonmechanical passenger always does.

"I wish I could fix it but I don't know a thing about motors," he confessed.

"Luckily, I do," was the prompt reply. "If you'll look under the seat cushion and get the flash light and hold it for me——"

Wilgus did the one thing he could do and did it faithfully and well, but the small repair job ate time greedily. Long before it was completed the last lingering remains of the sunset glow had faded out of the strip of sky overhead and it was quite dark before the motor consented to cluck evenly on all of its six cylinders.

"It's fortunate I'm not the one to drive," Wilgus said when the long-delayed start was finally made. "If I were, we'd camp down right here until daylight. I'd never dare to try to run a car on this road in the dark."

"You wouldn't dare?" came out of the gloom beside him. "Don't you know that that is an exceedingly damaging admission for a man to make—to a woman?"

The little taunt made Wilgus wish very heartily that he had bitten his tongue before it could make the damaging admission. Daring was the one thing he had promised himself that he was going to indulge in to the limit in the new, wild life of the frontier—the life he had been picturing and which seemed so determined not to materialize for him. As the powerful head lamps of the car brought the swiftly recurring road hazards ahead into view he was hoping, almost praying, that something would turn up to enable him to prove to her that he could dare—and dare twice, if need be.

It was while he was still prickling under the imputation of timidity which he had heedlessly put upon himself that the head lamps swept their dodging double beam around a curve in the road and poured it upon a complete change of scene. A hundred yards ahead the narrow cañon ended abruptly in a much wider and grander gorge through which a swift mountain river was tumbling and thundering over the bowlders in its bed. On the right, a rocky height, as sharp as a ship's prow, marked the junction of the two gorges, and at the mouth of the small stream they had been following down from the mesa level there was a rude log bridge across the tributary stream.

All this, one would say, was sufficiently interesting, though merely from the scenic point of view. But the human interest was only waiting. As the blue car turned into the main cañon road and was slowing for the bridge crossing, three men, masked to the eyes with black handkerchiefs drawn across their faces, rose up out of the side shadows and flung themselves upon the roadster.

One of the three sprang upon the left-hand running board and with what seemed to be a single motion turned the switch which killed the motor and thrust a pistol into the young woman's face. At the same instant, the two on the right-hand side grappled Wilgus and before he knew what was happening he was jerked violently out of the car to the ground and one of the two was holding him while the other tried to draw a blindfolding sack over his head.

With some dim and confused idea that the chance he had been praying for had been miraculously showered down upon him out of the heaven of the wish-fulfilling angels, Wilgus hurled himself joyously into the fray. Here, at last, was the real thing—the West he had dreamed of—a holdup in the grim mountain fastnesses, a terrified young woman to be defended, the company's money to be saved.

Lacking everything in the way of athletic training Wilgus still possessed those twin capital assets of the fighting man—a sound body builded upon a clean life and the good nerve of the hitherto unwhipped. In some skill-less fashion he contrived to plant a lifting blow under the chin of the man who was holding him, a blow which disposed of this one assailant—temporarily, at least—by knocking him down the bank and into the river. That done, he spun around, all claws to clutch and teeth to bite and tackled the tall man who was trying to muzzle him with a bag.

It was a whirlwind affair, while it lasted. Wilgus knew no rules, Marquis of Queensberry or other—knew nothing about the persuasive effect of the short-arm jab, the kidney drub, the cross counter or the hook

to the jaw—in spite of the fact that he had just used the last-named so efficiently upon the man who was temporarily out of it. But to compensate for the lack of skill he had as many hands and feet and knees and elbows as anybody—these backed by a wild madness rooted in the sheer joy of conflict.

Twice he fought out of the entwining grasp of the tall man and in the third clinch set his teeth in a convenient shoulder. The bite brought a yell of pain and broke the clinch. At this, Wilgus became himself the clincher; rushed in like a cherubic cyclone, dodged a pistol-butt blow aimed at his head and, grabbing the knee raised to stop him, butted the tall man off his feet.

With a shrill yell of triumph, he was about to jump upon his fallen adversary when the faint glow of the little dash light showed him the first man—the one he had knocked into the river—reaching into the car for the money bag. This was the signal for another berserk charge, inspired by the clerkly sense of responsibility for a trust fund, and in a fierce grapple with the money thief he got possession of the Boston bag.

It was at that instant that he saw his opportunity. If he could make off with the money bag, the robbers would pursue him and thus the young woman in the car would have a chance to escape. With another yell and a swing of the silver-laden bag that smote the recovering tall man to his knees, the fighting cherub darted around the rear of the roadster and fled up the river bank.

CHAPTER VII.

THUMBSCREWS AND RACK.

Dashing thus out of a round of pretty fast fighting and being, in addition, not precisely fat, perhaps, but at least comfortably well-fleshed, Wilgus knew he couldn't run very far and all he at first hoped to do was to make a diversion which would draw the robbers away from the car and thus give the young woman her chance to start the motor and escape.

It was for this reason that he ran to the rear; but it was a sudden recrudescence of the clerkly sense of responsibility for the company's money that led him to take the left-hand road at the fork, instead of the one down which the car had come from the mesa, hoping that by so doing he might mislead his pursuers, for the moment, at least. Straining his ears as he sped he could hear the quick *pad-pad* of footsteps behind him but he did not hear the hoped-for skirl of the starting motor. Spurred to greater exertions he held his breath and raced on until a short turn in the up-cañon road around a projecting cliff shoulder blotted out all rearward sounds.

Here he stopped and listened, but apart from the river noises he could hear nothing save the pounding of his own heart. The halt meant a loss of time at a crisis when the very seconds were precious but his lungs were bursting, and a dizzying vertigo warned him that he must drop in his tracks if he persisted in pushing the untrained body beyond its limit.

When the momentary dizziness passed and his breath began to come back in labored gaspings he went on, running where he dared and slowing down to a fast walk only where the loose stones in the road, unseen in the darkness until he was fairly upon them, made better speed impossible. Given thus a little time in which to collect his thoughts he began to hope that his small ruse in the choice of roads had succeeded; that the robbers had taken the wrong turn at the junction of the small cañon with the great one. Still, he knew that he was gaining nothing thereby but a short respite. They would soon discover their mistake and come back.

Having, as he devoutly trusted, made it possible for the young woman to save herself, the next thing to be considered was the safety of the pay-roll money. Now that he had been made to feel his own physical limitations—and to heap maledictions upon the sedentary office life that had set them—he knew he couldn't hope to outrun the hold-ups if they once got on the right road. And with a quick-water river on one hand and an apparently unscalable mountain on the other there was no chance to dodge aside or hide.

But if he couldn't hide in his own proper person, it was presently borne in upon him that he might hide the Boston bag with the booty the robbers were after. Stumbling along in the dim starlight he began to look for a safe hiding place—some little rift in the cliffy mountainside, a crack, a crevice, a flat stone that could be lifted. Surely there must be a niche, somewhere, big enough to hold the small bag.

It was necessity at last that forced him to stop and make the search definite and painstaking. Above the rumbling thunder of the

river, or rather mingled with it, came another sound—the sputtering roar of an approaching automobile. While he was still groping in a mad frenzy of impatience for the fortunate crack or crevice or loose stone, the pursuing car came in sight, or at least its head lamps did. He saw a broad beam of light play for a moment upon the turbulent torrent of the river and then swing jerkily toward him as the car came around the curve in the road. And at the same instant he found what he was groping for—a crevice in the road-bordering cliff measurably well hidden by a bush rooted below it.

Oddly enough, as he remembered afterward, it was only the loss of the pay-roll money that he was thinking of; and it was not until he was about to thrust the money bag into its hiding place that he thought of the sealed packet which had been given him at the Chicago terminal just before his train left. Hurriedly, for the pursuing car was now no more than a few hundred yards distant, he felt in his pockets for the sealed envelope.

At first he couldn't find it and even the blinding glare of the car's head lamps, now pouring straight in his direction, did not suffice to keep things from going black for him. In frantic haste he slapped his pockets and went through them, half paralyzed by a great and growing fear that the precious packet had fallen out in the struggle at the bridge; but finally finding it, or something that felt like it, he crammed it in with the money and dropped the black bag into the bush-hidden crevice.

Pausing only long enough to take an instantaneous snapshot of the surroundings on his memory film, he ran on, pluckily resolved to place the point of recapture as far as possible beyond the hiding place of the money bag. In this he was succeeding fairly well—the roughness of the road over which he was floundering being still more of a handicap for the pursuing car—when the crash came. In a bit of the roadway that seemed quite clear of obstructions he speeded up, caught a toe under a projecting tree root, and took a headlong dive that climaxed in extinction.

When the wheels of consciousness began to turn again Wilgus found himself lying on the floor of what seemed to be a candle-lighted barn; it was a high-studded room with beams overhead and rough plank walls in which the window openings were securely shuttered or boarded up; a room bare of furnishings save for a workbench littered with the appliances of an assayer's laboratory, a couple of three-legged stools and an iron cot bed with a mattress and a blanket.

For a minute or so after he had struggled to his feet he couldn't seem to pull himself together sufficiently to remember what had happened. Then it all came back with a rush; the holdup of the blue roadster, the whirlwind fight with the two footpads, the wild flight in the starlight, the hiding of the money bag, the renewal of the flight with the pursuing automobile at his heels, the tripping stumble and the headlong dive to oblivion.

And the upshot? Hand to head he found a blood-matted stone bruise which accounted for the oblivion and for the bedazing headache that made him stagger when he tried to walk. And the heavily planked barn or chemist's laboratory, or whatever it was, with all of the outlets closed, hinted strongly at the complete triumph of his pursuers. They had captured him and their next move would doubtless be to try to make him tell what he had done with the money.

Turning toward the cot at one end of the room, he staggered over to it and sat down to hold his head in his hands. Not being a fool he realized that he was in the hands of desperate men, and that his situation was serious enough to warrant any sort of forebodings that an alarmed imagination might conjure up. But in spite of all that had taken place—or might later take place—his soul was jubilant. This was something more like the West as he had pictured it. Here were thrills enough to satisfy even the greediest seeker after excitement. Civilized hotels with white tablecloths and napkins to the contrary notwithstanding, there seemed to be still a few good, old-fashioned jolts left in what he had been tempted to call the sadly emasculated West.

He was just arriving at this compensating conclusion when a door opened at the other end of the room and the tall robber who had been smitten aside with the clubbed money bag strode in, still wearing the handkerchief mask over the lower part of his face.

"All right, Algy," he said, grimly jovial. "Found yourself again, have you? Now suppose you loosen up and tell us what you did with that money bag that you knocked me down with."

Wilgus swallowed the headache qualms and grinned at his interlocutor.

"Don't you wish you knew?" he flung back. "That money is where you'll never find it, if you hunt from now to the middle of next week."

"Oh, yes, we shall," was the confident retort. "Because you are going to tell us where to find it. You're too young to die."

"I'm not dead yet," Wilgus asserted stoutly.

"But if you don't tell us what we want to know, there is an even chance that you are going to be like the fellow who was so seasick that one minute he was afraid he was going to die and the next was afraid he wouldn't die. Do you get the full force of that?"

"I hear what you say; but the answer is still the same. And it's going to keep on being the same."

By the wrinkles at the corners of the sharp eyes Wilgus judged that the tall man's mood was still sardonically jovial.

"I like your pluck, Algy—your name *is* Algernon, isn't it?—but it isn't going to get you anywhere in this pinch. We are going to find out what you did with that bag before you ever see daylight again. It has to be and you may as well make up your mind to it, first as last."

Wilgus wagged his aching head.

"As long as I'm alive, I won't tell you; and after I'm dead I can't tell you. So there you are."

"That is your last word, is it?"

"You may take it that way, if you like. I could add a good many more but they would all be to the same effect."

The tall man turned to go but at the door he paused to say, "Tell me, Algy—where did you get all this cold nerve? You are an office man, aren't you?"

"What if I am? What has that got to do with my nerve?"

"Oh, nothing, I suppose; only you seem a little out of character in any Horatio-at-the-bridge stunt—that's all. Won't reconsider and let us Etruscans come in and loot the city?"

"No."

The door slammed behind the tall man and Wilgus heard the lock click and a heavy bar drop into place. Left once more to himself he began to wonder at this latest manifestation of the topsy-turvy West; a West so signally unlike that fed to their patrons by the moving-picture producers; a West in which the very footpads threatened in grammatical English and were not even beyond using an illustration drawn from the Latin classics. It was very puzzling but in some undefinable way it seemed to give an added fillip to the thrills. With such curtain-raisers as the holdup of the blue roadster, the fight and the kidnaping, one might safely anticipate a luxurious surfeit of action in the play itself.

While Wilgus was speculating as to what form the action would take and assuring himself that come what might he would defend the company's money to the last, there were slight noises overhead as of some one walking cautiously across the floor of an upper room. Followed another sound like the lifting of a loose plank and he fixed his gaze upon the high ceiling, the beaming of which was almost lost in the upper gloom which was only slightly diluted by the light of the single candle. Out of the overhead darkness came a voice, easily distinguishable as that of his late visitor.

"Once more, Algernon—will you tell?"

"Shoot," said Wilgus. "I've talked all I'm going to."

From somewhere up above a missile dropped into the laboratory. Wilgus had only a glimpse of it as it fell, but an immediate crash of breaking glass told him it must have been a bottle. He laughed.

"Go to it," he called out. "Break up the entire drug store, if you want to. I don't have to pay the bills."

"Wait," said the voice; and then the loose board clattered back into place.

The captive without bonds found that he did not have to wait very long. Inside of a few seconds he began to detect a curious odor, sickly sweet, which was slowly permeating the dead air of the laboratory. At first it was not disagreeable; it was rather pleasant, with a faint reminiscence of Easter lilies or perhaps of tuberoses. Once, on a college-class excursion, Wilgus had visited a factory where synthetic flavoring extracts were made. As the heavy odor grew stronger he recalled, with an inward shudder, the sniffs he had taken in that factory at the uncorked mouths of huge carboys; perfumes that outperfumed all the fruits or flowers that had ever ripened or bloomed.

Next came a remembrance of the funerals he had attended; of one, in particular, in which the small parlor where the coffin

stood was banked and heaped with hothouse flowers. It needed no stretch of imagination to fancy himself back in that crowded room, soaked and saturated with the stifling perfume of those mortuary crosses and wreaths and sprays.

"Heavens!" he muttered, gasping for breath. "What sort of stuff could there have been in that bottle?" Mechanically he started to his feet and beat at the thickening air with his hands. Next he caught up the blanket from the bed and waved it wildly above his head to drive the asphyxiating sweetness back. A little later he was running from place to place around the walls, searching vainly for some crack or cranny through which he might draw a breath of pure, clean air. It was quite futile. The terrible fragrance seemed to follow him like his shadow. It was in his clothes; in his hair. He could taste it on his lips. It was making him so faint that he stumbled as he ran.

Now stubbornness, or its virtuous twin, fortitude, had never been one of the Wilgus characteristics in the peaceful life he had left behind in Indianapolis; but the plow of adversity is likely to turn up many unsuspected rootlings in the human subsoil. Staggering about in his barnlike prison cell, half stifled in the overpowering sweetness, sickened and nauseated, he was still unbeaten. And when the sardonic voice out of the upper void called down to him—a voice that now seemed to come from an abysmal distance—asking again if he would tell, new strength was given him to gasp out a militant "No!" emphasized by a mumbling string of curses lapsing into silence as he fell across the cot bed and lost consicousness.

How long the fit of sleeping sickness lasted he had no means of determining. When he awoke from it a cool wind was blowing across the bed from an open window, and the laboratory room was in darkness. Sitting up, he gulped down deep breaths of the life-giving blast. Some traces of the cloying sweetness still lingered and the bare suggestion of it made him shudder.

For quite some time he sat still, hugging his knees, drinking in long drafts of the refreshing outdoor air. Then, all at once, it occurred to him that the open window offered a way of escape and he was halfway across the room to it when the wooden shutter crashed into place and was bolted or barred on the outside. At this proof that his jailers were still on the alert he went back and sat down on the bed in darkness that had now become total, wondering where and how the disappointed highwaymen would hit him next.

Mixed in with the wonder there presently came to be a growing feeling of surprise that the three men would go to such extremes to make a success of a rather ordinary bit of banditry—ordinary as modern crimes go. He argued that they must know, approximately, at any rate, the size of the stake they were playing for—the amount of the pay-roll installment in the black bag was just under five thousand dollars—and this seemed entirely inadequate to account for the trouble they were taking and the risk of consequences they were running in kidnaping and torturing him.

If Margaret Fingal had escaped—he hoped she had, but the fact that he had been pursued and overtaken by a car looked a bit ominous—she had doubtless long since given the alarm at the irrigation company's camp at the dam. True, Adams was not there, but there must be some one in authority to raise the hue and cry and head a rescue party. Following that line of thought he was able to make a few plausible deductions. From what Miss Fingal had told him of the topography he was assured that the big river must be the Rio Blanco and, in that case, the scene of the holdup must have been within a comparatively short distance of the camp at the dam site.

This conclusion quickly led to another. In the talk at the Red Butte dinner table the young woman had said that the Estancia Mine was only three miles above the dam. Also, on the drive over from Mesa Caballado, she had said that they would pass within a short distance of the abandoned mine upon entering the great cañon. Hence it was more than probable that this barnlike prison cell in which he was immured was one of the buildings of the mine; most likely the one which had formerly been the assayer's testing laboratory.

Having progressed thus far along the road of the deductions he felt for his watch, meaning to open the crystal and try if he could determine the time by the sense of touch. But now he discovered that he had been systematically robbed. Failing to secure the principal booty, his captors had searched his clothes. The watch wasn't the

only thing that had been taken; every pocket was empty. Even a little stamp book with a few postage stamps in it was gone.

"Thrills!" he muttered, grinning. "I seem to be getting them all right, in spite of what Bob Adams had to say about the utter peacefulness of my new job! I wish he could see me now."

As if the mere mention of the verb of visibility had evoked it, a flash of blinding white light filled the place with a glare that was as painful as that of sheet lightning. Wilgus clapped his hands to his eyes and when he ventured to look again a moment later the Stygian darkness had returned. But now the gloom became vocal and the sardonic voice that Wilgus was learning to hate, said:

"Had your nap out, Algernon? How do you like the smell of the beautiful flowers? Too much of a good thing is more than enough, isn't it? How about telling us that little thing that we've got to know?"

The mocking voice seemed to touch some hidden fury spring inside of his brain and at its release red rage leaped up.

"You—go—to—hell!" he yelled, hurling the four words violently into the darkness.

The answer was a grating laugh.

"Your nap doesn't seem to have quieted those frazzled nerves of yours, Algy," said the voice out of the blackness. And then, "Listen! You don't want to be a blind beggar for the rest of your days, do you?"

Wilgus made no answer to this.

"Because there is a chance—an even chance, I should say—that you will be just that, you know, if you don't loosen up," the voice went on. "I'll give you just ten seconds in which to think about it."

For the granted interval Wilgus maintained a stubborn silence and then, again as suddenly as an electric flash, the searing, blinding light blazed out again. As before, it lasted but little longer than an instant, but before he could close his eyes or cover them it had done its work, stabbing his eyeballs like red-hot needles and leaving a dull agony behind it that not even the succeeding darkness was able to allay. With the darkness the menacing voice came again.

"Just to show you what you are in for, Algy. We've got to have that money bag of yours. The quicker you tell us what you did with it the better chance you'll have to keep from going blind."

"No—damn you!" shouted Wilgus, pressing his hands to his eyes.

Instantly the flash came again and he threw himself on the bed and covered his head with the blanket. There and then began a period of ingenious torment that would have done credit to the malevolent cleverness of a Torquemada; torture based upon the outraging of the sense of sight. There was no regular timing of the glare that came and went, but as often as he uncovered his head to get a breath of air the harrowing brilliancy would flame out, driving him to cover again with aching eyeballs.

What the source of the recurring glare was he did not guess until the acrid fumes of burning chemicals began to poison the air. Then he knew that his tormentors were using a photographer's flash light, or something like it, though through what opening they were directing it he could not tell. For a time he was able to play hide and seek with the demoniacal thing, after some fashion, keeping his head under the blanket until an interval of darkness permitted him to come up to take breath. But in one of the black intervals an invisible hand or hook snatched the blanket away and he was wellnigh blinded before he could strip off his coat and substitute it for the stolen head muffling.

Being stubbornly determined to hold out, or, in any event, to stifle rather than to be stricken blind, he made no outcry, though there were times when the stabbing flare caught him unawares in which he had to set his teeth to keep from screaming aloud. And in the end stubbornness won out. Before the air of the confined space became altogether insupportable with the thickening chemical fumes the vicious flashes ceased and the grateful darkness was once more unbroken.

Hardly daring to hope that he had escaped without permanent injury to his throbbing eyeballs, Wilgus sat up and listened. The silence was as profound as the darkness but just as he was beginning to fear that both silence and darkness were only the prelude to other and more devilish tortures, the hated voice came again.

"How about it now, Algy? Haven't you got enough yet?"

Wilgus was too full for utterance—much too full. So he held his peace.

"Sulky, are you?" said the harrying voice. "Won't give us that bit of information that

we've got to have? All right; we'll try you on another set of nerves."

Wilgus told himself that he was not weakening, yet he shuddered in spite of his resolution. The fairly satanic ingenuity of his torturers seemed to be inexhaustible and the cleverness with which they contrived to make him suffer without actually crippling him physically was terrifying to a degree.

For an interval of possibly five minutes nothing happened. Then the stillness was broken by a low humming sound; a soothing murmur, distance muffled. Wilgus got up and made a groping circuit of his prison room, listening on all sides and trying unsuccessfully to define the new threat. As nearly as he could make out, the murmuring noise was the hum of machinery and mixed in with it he thought he could distinguish a throbbing like the rapid strokes of an air pump.

After this had gone on for some minutes a whistle began to blow. It was not a loud whistle; the note was low and rather pleasing than disturbing. Wilgus supposed it was a signal of some sort and that it would shortly stop. But it did not stop. Endlessly the single note droned upon the shut-in air of the laboratory. With anything to do, with a distraction of any sort, he would have been able to ignore it. But as it was, shut in in the darkness and with nothing to appeal to the other senses, he found that he could not ignore it. Inside of five minutes the droning, unvarying sound, with its unchanging wave length, had become an irritating annoyance; in ten minutes it had become an exquisite torture.

Struggling manfully Wilgus brought all his will power to bear and tried by every means he could devise to keep the tormented auditory nerves from daggering him to death. It was absurd, ridiculous, he told himself, that a mere noise could so blot out all other thoughts and impressions and make of itself an instrument of torture unbearable. Yet the agonizing fact remained. In fifteen minutes the low, monotonous droning seemed to be piercing his very soul. It was harrowing; maddening beyond all description.

As a last resort he groped his way back to the bed and flung himself upon it, once more muffling his head in the coat and trying to stop his ears. Even this brought only a slight measure of relief. Try as he might, he could not shut out the maddening sound; the mere suggestion of it which came through the mufflings tightly clamped upon his ears was enough to play fiendishly upon the jangled nerves. Wilgus was presently made to realize that it was only a matter of minutes until he should lose his reason and become a raving maniac.

Why his persecutors should desist, when a few more minutes would have made him a babbling madman, Wilgus did not know. But as suddenly as it had begun, the droning whistle stopped and a silence like that of the deaf supervened. Wilgus raised his head and listened and in the very act the overstrained nerves took their revenge. Like the dropping of a thick curtain his senses let go and in the twinkling of an eye he had fallen over upon the mattress and was asleep.

How long he slept he had no means of determining but when he awoke he was not conscious of any lapse of time; it seemed to him that he had barely closed his eyes and opened them again. Sitting up he struggled into his coat and listened. At the first eye opening he had thought he heard a broken murmur of voices; and now it came again.

Waiting only long enough to determine the direction of the murmuring he slipped his shoes off and felt his way along the wall until he came to the barred door. The door apparently opened into a room beyond the laboratory; a line of light showed under it and he could smell a faint odor of tobacco smoke. There were two men talking, and by laying an ear to the threshold crack Wilgus found that he could hear very well what they were saying.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUT OF THE FRYING PAN.

The first connected sentence that Wilgus caught was angrily condemnatory of somebody present and under castigation.

"You've balled this thing damnably, amongst you, Turby!" the accusing voice was saying. "Three of you, with a perfectly simple job and a dead-sure thing, and you've let it get into hell's own snarl. Begin at the front end of it and tell me exactly what you've done."

"I've told you how that spiteful little wild cat of a paymaster blew up when we pulled him out of the car. You gave us the wrong slant on him altogether, chief. He may look like somebody's innocent little choir

boy, but the looks are all there is to it. If you had told us we'd have to handle something like a bag of tomcats tied together by their tails——"

"You didn't need to let it come to a showdown—with two of you to frisk him while Gaston held a gun on the girl. She didn't give you any trouble, I know. She's native to this neck of woods and she knows enough to sit tight with a gun in her face."

"No, she didn't make any trouble. But there wasn't any 'letting' about it in the case of the tenderfoot. At the first crack out of the box he got Bassett under the chin and nearly made him bite his tongue off. Bassett went down as if he'd been shot and came mighty near rolling into the river. Then that fat little bobcat turned on me; scratched, hammered, clawed, kicked and finally bit me, by gad!"

A sudden accession of victor pride made Wilgus' blood sing in his veins. Praise from the enemy was praise indeed.

"I tried to tap him on the head with the gun," the voice which he knew and had now fully learned to hate went on. "But somehow he contrived to kick me in the stomach and for a minute I was out of it; didn't know as I'd ever get my breath back again. By that time Bassett had got into action and was fishing the bag out of the car. The little cuss saw him and pulled off another wild-cat exhibition, this time with Jim for a subject. I don't know how he did it and Jim doesn't, but he finally got the bag and made a run with it. Jim and I both lit out after him but it was so dark that we couldn't see whether he ran back up the Little Rio or out this way."

"And of course you guessed wrong," was the disgusted assumption.

"We did. Size it up yourself. He had just come down over the Little Rio road and from what we'd been told we didn't suppose that he knew that there was any other road."

"Um-m." Then, with grating sarcasm: "You couldn't turn back and chase him afoot, of course. That never occurred to you. You had to put the cap sheaf on the stack of blunders and take the car—and the girl with it."

Wilgus' gasp at this piece of information made him take in a lungful of the floor dust and for a second or so he endured the tortures of a lost soul trying to keep from coughing and betraying his presence. But he strove and conquered.

"That was Gaston," the explanatory voice went on. "He turned the car at the forks and headed it up cañon. What else could he do? With our man running away with the loot he couldn't turn the girl loose to go on and carry the news down to Adams' camp. A bunch of those dam builders would have been up here in less time than it takes to tell it."

"It's a damned botch—the whole of it; but it's done now and can't be helped. Go on with your obituary."

"Jim and I caught the car as it was passing us and climbed on. Gaston had the wheel, and he was steering with one hand and holding a gun on the girl with the other. So far, she hadn't said a word; didn't say anything even after we found the paymaster lying in the road, knocked out with a broken head. Gaston stopped the car and Jim and I got down and went through his pockets and hunted for the bag. We thought at first that he had probably dropped it when he stumbled and fell. But he hadn't. He'd hidden it somewhere."

"And you say you can't make him tell where? It's got to be done, Turby, and done mighty quickly. The paymaster may not be missed until Adams gets back from his trip to the lower valley. But the girl will be missed. And that means that the whole Fingal outfit of cow-punchers will be turned loose to hunt for her. If you let it come to that, this mountain country won't be big enough to hide you. And when the reckoning comes those gentle cowmen won't know any better than to drag you three blunderers at the end of a horse rope."

"Wait half a second," said the other voice, and now, for the first time, it was not apologetic, "Bassett and Gaston and I are not alone in this deal. You mustn't forget that."

"You are as much alone in this end of it as if you were marooned on an uninhabited island in the South Seas," was the prompt rejoinder. "I've got my alibi. But go on; what have you been doing since you picked the paymaster up in the road?"

"First, we searched every inch of the road for the bag and didn't find it. He's hidden it too well. By the time we got back he'd come to his senses and I put the screws on to make him tell; choked him with that anæsthetic we brought along, blinded him with

the magnesium flash and run him crazy with the air whistle that the miners used to signal with."

"And you can't make him tell?"

"We haven't been able to yet. He's as stubborn as a balky mule."

There was a movement in the other room as if one or both of the speakers had risen. Then the one who had confessed failure got his ultimatum.

"Well, Turby, it's strictly up to you. That hand bag has got to be produced and you know the perfectly good and sufficient reasons why it's got to be produced quickly. You'd better be frying what few wits you have and get action. I can't stay here to furnish brains for you. As it is, I've taken a long risk in coming up here from Adams' camp. If anybody down there happens to find out that I'm not in bed and asleep there will——"

"I understand," said the other voice. And then, "Without admitting that we've been quite the blundering fools that you seem to think we have, I'll grant you the thing has got into pretty bad shape. This young fellow we've got hold of is no fool. When he gets a chance to think it over he's going to see that this holdup isn't like any other one that he ever heard of. That being the case——"

There was a pause and it was the hoarser voice that broke the silence.

"That's up to you, too. If you're afraid to turn him loose after you've got the information out of him, that's your affair. But if I were in your place—as I am not—I believe I'd see to it that he didn't have a chance to squeal on me. What have you done with the girl? And how much does she know about the mix-up?"

"She doesn't know anything more than what she saw at the bridge and on the way up here. She's locked up in the old cabin that used to be the mine superintendent's office."

"Well, I've got to get back. Go to it and make this paymaster come across—if you have to hang him up by the thumbs or light a fire under him."

There was another little silence and then the hateful voice began again.

"I don't mind hanging him or burning him, but from what I've seen, I'm afraid he's just fool enough to go out without telling us what we want to know. I'll put the branding iron to him if I have to, but I believe I have a scheme that will be more likely to produce results. The girl—is there anything soft between them? They were eating and riding together like a pair of lovers. How about it?"

"I don't know. They may have met before. The girl spent four or five years in some Eastern college. But say they are lovers? What then?"

"I was just thinking. In that case he might tell her what he did with the money bag, if we should give him a chance."

"It's another risk—mixing the girl up in it. But I don't care. Try it, if you like. You can't get the thing in much worse shape than it's in now. Where did you say you have this young fellow?"

"Right here in the old assay shop. He's asleep; knocked out with the third degree I've been giving him."

"Asleep? Hell's bells! How do you know he isn't on the other side of that door listening to us?"

"No danger. I'll show you."

Wilgus heard the thrust of a key into a lock—and waited to hear no more. Leaping up, he fled in his stocking feet and was lucky enough to take the right direction in the Cimmerian darkness. When the iron cot tripped him, he whirled, managed to pull his shoes on unlaced, and flung himself full length upon the mattress with his coat turned up over his head.

He had scarcely composed himself when the door hinges creaked and the light from the outer room cut a broad swath across the farther end of the laboratory. There were footsteps in the room and a guarded voice said: "You can see for yourself. He's still asleep. If he wasn't, he'd be up and trying to bite us."

Wilgus heard the sound of the closing door but he waited until the bolt of the lock was shot before he sat up and began to lace his shoes. The talk he had overheard was enlightening in a way, but it also introduced an element of mystery. Who was this man whom the other man called "chief," and who, according to his own admission, was supposed to be in bed and asleep in the irrigation company's camp at the dam? And why was he, Herbert Wilgus, "if he got a chance to think it over," going to discover that the holdup wasn't like any other one that he had ever heard of?

Finding no ready answer to these mystery queries he passed to the rather dismaying

facts which the overheard talk had set forth. The first of these gave him a decided shock. The robbers were not only determined to make him talk and tell where he had hidden the bag; beyond that there was a pretty plain intimation that the sentence of "dead men tell no tales" was to be pronounced upon him. The romantic second self had demanded thrills and here was one large enough to satisfy the most greedy appetite for them. For the moment he was almost ready to admit that in sitting down at the table of the thrills it was possible to find it too bountifully laden.

Then there was this other disturbing ramification of the tangle—Margaret Fingal's involvement in a matter in which she was particularly and pointedly only the most innocent of bystanders. Considering this, all the militant chivalry which goes hand in hand with romance rose up to fire his imagination. She was the captive princess and it would go hard with him if he couldn't contrive to Sir Galahad her out of the clutches of these bandits. If the tall villain would only carry out his suggestion about casting the young woman in the rôle of an innocent Delilah and so bring them together——

He had just reached the point of vowing a vow of knightly resolution to do and dare all in behalf of the captive princess when he again heard the key rattling in the lock of his prison door and at the signal he flung himself down upon the mattress as before. Peeping between his fingers he saw the door open to admit the captive and captivating partner of his misfortunes. She was carrying a candle in an old-fashioned, tin candlestick and shading the flame with a cupped hand; and when the door was shut and locked behind her she stood still and held the candle high in an effort to make its inconsequent light penetrate the gloom. Wilgus spoke softly.

"Don't be alarmed," he said in a hoarse whisper. "I'm the only dangerous thing there is in here just now."

"You!" she exclaimed. "They didn't tell me you were here." She put the candle on the workbench and came toward him; whereupon he sat up and begged in dumb show for silence by laying a finger on his lips. Indicating the cot upon which he was sitting, he made signs for her to come and sit beside him, and when she obeyed he whispered again.

"It's a trap. They are listening to hear what we shall say to each other."

It thrilled him deliciously to see how quickly she understood and grasped the situation.

"We must talk—without saying anything," she whispered back. Then, aloud: "I didn't know what they'd done with you or how badly you were hurt. When they picked you up in the road you were unconscious and I was afraid something terrible had happened to you."

Wilgus took his cue promptly.

"It wasn't terrible; it was merely awkward—my awkwardness. I fell down and hit my head against something hard—a rock, I guess it was. There were plenty of them lying around, goodness knows. It knocked me out for the time being but I'm as good as new now. Did they hurt you?"

"No; just made me too furious for words—that beast holding a gun in my face! If only I hadn't slowed for the bridge crossing!"

"That was all right; you had to slow up; the car would have gone into the river if you had tried to run fast."

"Just the same, I blame myself. I had a gun in the seat pocket of the car and—well, I've grown up in a two-gun country, and it makes me ashamed to think that I had to let these—these amateur bad men hold us up."

"They are not so terribly amateurish, if you'll let me say so," Wilgus ventured. "But when you talk about the culpabilities, I'm the one who is to blame—wholly. I shouldn't have let you bring me and the payroll money. And Bob Adams ought to have known better, too. Do you know whereabouts we are?"

"Surely. This is the Estancia Mine power house—you remember? The old deserted mine I told you about."

"Then we are only three miles from the camp at the dam?"

"That is all. But it might as well be three hundred. We shall be missed, of course, but nobody will know where to look for us." This seemed to be a good place for a break in the talk for effect and into the gap she thrust an eager whisper. "Do you know positively that they are listening? If you do, don't speak—just clasp your hands over your knee."

He made the affirmative answer as indicated, and without looking around at him

she whispered again: "Did you learn Morse while you were in the army?"

He unclasped his hands and clasped them again.

"All right," she nodded. "Tell me—with your fingers."

Haltingly, for he had learned the telegraphic code only because he was required to, he spelled out the situation with a tapping forefinger.

"I hid the bag before they caught up with me—they have been giving me the third degree to make me tell where—they have brought you here in the hope that I would tell you—I listened at the door and heard them."

With her hands lying loosely in her lap she signaled the answer.

"I'm going to talk and lead up—play your part and tell me what you did with the bag—only don't tell me right." Then aloud, for the benefit of the eavesdroppers, wherever they might be: "If daddy only knew of this—but he won't know. Nobody will ever think of looking for us this near home. It's a hideous outrage!"

"I shall never forgive myself for getting you into this trouble when you were only trying to be neighborly and give me a lift," Wilgus protested, following her lead and speaking distinctly. "If it hadn't been for that miserable money bag——"

"Of course it was the money," she agreed. "I saw you take the Boston bag away from the wretches and run with it. Did you hide it somewhere?"

"I sure did!" said Wilgus with the best imitation of a chuckle he could manufacture on the spur of the moment. "They've been trying to make me tell where, but I wouldn't."

"Fine!" she exclaimed.

"All a person has to do is to reason a bit," Wilgus went on. "When I snatched the bag and ran the natural inference would be that I would hang to it as long as I could, wouldn't it?"

"How clever!" she praised. "And you didn't?"

"Listen," he said. "You remember that little clump of young trees that we passed just before we were stopped? I pitched the bag just as far as I could into that and then trotted along, meaning to get as far away from those trees as I could before they caught me. They'll never find it unless they hunt for it with a searchlight."

"Splendid!" said the young woman and she laughed as lightly as if it were a joke of jokes. "They won't find it and they'll have to let us go, some time. They can't keep us here forever." Then, "What is that noise?"

The noise sounded suspiciously like the tread of cautious footsteps overhead but Wilgus was prompt to attribute it to another cause.

"Rats, I guess," he offered. "I've been hearing them off and on ever since they locked me in here."

The casual explanation gave room for another pause and again they listened. Presently there was a stir in the outer room and a confused murmur of voices; and then the quick slam of a door. Next they heard the pur of an automobile motor.

"They are taking my car to save time," the young woman whispered. "They had it parked in one of the old ore sheds. Will they all go, do you think?"

"Here is hoping," said Wilgus fervently. "Their listener was up overhead; that is the noise we heard. If they'll leave us alone in this old shack for a few minutes, we'll have a little private jail delivery—or know the reason why."

She looked at him with what he hoped was undisguised admiration.

"You—you don't seem at all like the person who wore the beautiful hat," she commented. "Did you really mean it when you said you hoped there would be a fight and that you could get into it?"

Wilgus waved a reckless hand.

"You saw me—back there at the bridge."

"But Bob Adams told me——"

"Bob is an ass—at times; a wild ass of the plains. Just because he has never happened to see me go on a rampage and shoot up the town——"

"It was a lovely fight," she murmured. And then, "Hark! the car is going!"

It was and the drumming of its motor shortly withdrew into the distance and was lost.

"Now we'll investigate a bit," Wilgus announced; and slipping his shoes off again he crept to the door. The key was in the lock, but happily it was turned so that it did not completely fill the keyhole. Wilgus put an eye to the aperture and saw all he needed to see.

"They have left at least one man behind," he reported after he had made the

reconnoissance. "I couldn't see his face but he is sitting in a chair with a gun in his lap."

"Then we can't get out?" she asked.

"We couldn't get out by the door, anyway; it is locked and barred. Do you happen to know anything about these mine buildings—how they are situated, I mean?"

"Not very much. The mine itself is tunneled back into the mountain—and the buildings—or this main one, at least, is built at the mouth of the tunnel."

Wilgus nodded. "This assay shop, or whatever it is, seems to be boarded up tight all around; but there is one way out—upstairs. There are loose boards in the ceiling. They took one up and talked down to me through the hole."

"But, goodness me! we can never climb up there!" she protested.

" 'Never' is a long time," he came back cheerfully. "You don't appear to realize that I am right in my native element now. Something like this is what I've always wanted to have happen to me. If you'll kindly stand up a minute——"

With due care not to make a noise he slid the mattress from the iron cot and upended the bedstead against the wall. With one of the three-legged stools for a climbing step he mounted nimbly to the top of the tottering stage.

"Mercy! You'll fall!" she breathed; but Wilgus was not thinking of falling; he was trying one plank after another between the ceiling beams—kept on trying until he found one that could be lifted.

"So far, so good," he murmured down to her. "Now for our world-famous pyramiding act. Climb up on the stool and give me your hand."

When she did it, as promptly and fearlessly as a girl athlete, Wilgus was silently contrasting her with the women he had known back in the conventional world which, up to within the past few hours, he had found it so difficult to shake off and leave behind; he thought of the other Peggy, for example. She would have shrieked and hung back and covered her face with her hands. He knew she would.

Perched together riskily upon the iron bedstead's foot rail, they found the opening in the ceiling barely within hand reach. Wilgus asked a single question: "How much do you weigh?" And the answer came apologetically: "I'm awfully heavy—one hundred and twenty-eight."

"Pshaw! I'm good for that much," he boasted and, balancing himself like a trained tight-rope performer, he secured a good, low hold and lifted her cleanly through the loose board trap. "Are you all right?" he whispered as he pushed the second neatly shod foot up out of reach; and when the reassuring answer came: "Wait just a minute and I'll go get the candle," and well inside of the minute he had secured the flickering light source, candlestick and all, and was passing it up to her.

That done, he drew himself up and together they looked about them. What the dim light of the candle revealed proved to be nothing more than a gabled loft under the rafters, a space which had apparently been used as a catch-all for unconsidered odds and ends of machinery and mine tackle. Off at the farther side a dull light glow seemed to indicate the placing of an egress of some sort to the ground floor. Once more slipping his shoes off, Wilgus made another reconnoissance.

"Nothing feasible in that direction," he whispered when he came back. "There is a scuttle hole and a ladder going down from it, but the fellow with the gun is sitting right at the foot of the ladder. Let's see what this other gable has to offer."

With cautious care not to rattle the loose flooring boards, they explored the triangular roof cavern in the opposite direction. At the farther end of it Wilgus ventured to lift one of the planks and lower the candle at arm's length through the opening thus made.

"The boiler and engine room," he reported. "It may be all nailed up like the laboratory but perhaps we can break out if we get down there. Did you ever climb a rope?"

She shook her head. "Not since I was a little girl. But we haven't any rope."

"There are oodles of rope back in that lumber attic," he returned. "Just hold the candle a second and I'll go get a piece."

With the coil of rope secured he began to cast about for something to serve for rounds in a rope ladder; but when he explained what he meant to do, his pretty jailmate protested at once.

"Mercy me! We haven't any time for that! Have you forgotten that those men who have gone to look for the bag may be back here any minute?"

"No, I haven't forgotten; but I'm not going to have you break your neck," he objected loyally.

"My neck isn't any more valuable than yours. I can get down on the rope without your stopping to make a ladder for me."

"I'll go first," he said and, with a short length of the rope lowered and made fast, he was ready to descend. But now the indispensable candle had to be considered. Having had his pockets rifled, Wilgus had no matches. If the candle should be extinguished there would be no way of relighting it and they would be helpless in the dark.

At first Wilgus thought he might lower it, lighted, at the end of the rope, but he couldn't devise any kind of a sling that would keep the candle upright and burning. Losing patience finally, he took a leaf out of the picture-actors' book by taking the edge of the candlestick between his teeth and, taking also the imminent risk of making a living torch of himself by setting his hair afire, he swung down through the opening and landed in the midst of dead engines and dynamos, hoist crabs, steam pipes, and boilers.

The descent accomplished, he was looking for a safe place to put the candle when he heard the susurrant pur of a motor car's engine drumming into the sepulchral silence.

"Quick!" he called up; "they're coming back! Slide and I'll catch you!"

With commendable promptness the young woman grasped the rope and dropped through the opening in the ceiling and with equal promptness the catch was made. Since this was the third time within a few hours that Wilgus had held this new and altogether enrapturing Peggy in his arms he found it growing much less embarrassing; not only that but he was discovering that each succeeding embrace brought a delightful and, as one might say, a cumulative recurrence of those thrills he had experienced on the high mountain pass when she had leaned across him in the blue roadster to get a fair sight of the Pitcairn car climbing the loopings of the grade.

But with the insistent rapid fire of this same blue car's motor growing louder every instant there was scant time for a proper appreciation of emotional thrills. Breaking the chivalrous clinch rather reluctantly, he caught up the candle and together they made a swift and eager circuit of the cluttered machinery room. There proved to be but one exit that wasn't securely boarded up and fastened on the outside and that was into the gaping tunnel of the mine.

"We've got to burrow for it—there's no other way!" Wilgus declared, and arm in arm they dashed into the gloomy depths, with the young woman whispering excitedly, "Careful, careful, *careful* with the candle—d-d-don't let it blow out, whatever you do!"

Wilgus contrived to shield the precious candle flame as they ran stumbling over the crossties of the narrow tram track leading back into the heart of the mountain; and after they had covered what seemed like at least half a mile—and was really quite some little distance—he called for a slowing of the breakneck pace.

"Ruh-running won't save us, in this black hole!" he panted. "It's got to be brains from this time on and I can't think good when I'm out of breath."

"Will they find out where we have gone?" she asked as they pressed on at a fast walk.

"Surest thing that ever blossomed," he chanted. "We've left a beautifully plain trail; the bedstead standing on its head in that laboratory place and the rope hanging from the ceiling in the engine room. My heavens—if I only had a gun or a tomahawk—or even an Indian war club!"

"You brought two guns with you from Indianapolis, didn't you?" said the young woman; and the query eased the strains a little for Wilgus. Things were not so bad if she could begin to gibe at him again.

"You know blessed well I did—since you were the one who made Bob Adams tell me to," he retorted. "And a lot of good they're doing me right now! They're locked up in the suit case in the blue car—if the holdups haven't broken that open, too, and looted it."

"Do you suppose you could hit anything with them if you had them? The boys on the ranch tell me it takes lots and lots of practice."

"Huh! A man can do anything he's obliged to do, I guess. I've been finding that out, a little at a time, ever since these brigands stopped the car down there at the bridge and hauled me out of it."

"If you only had those nice, new guns and that beautiful hat that you threw away, they might take you for a really desperate

man, don't you think?" she remarked with covert mockery in her tone.

He was amazed to find that she could so easily rebound from the very real and material perils of the moment, but he was determined not to let her outrun him in the field of light-hearted bravado.

"I *am* a desperate man!" he declared. "I've whipped twice my weight in wild cats once to-night, and I can do it again, if I have to. I've found myself, Miss—er—Fingal. For the first time in all my twenty-seven years I've known the exquisite joy of drawing blood—for I *did* bloody that tall fellow's shoulder, I'll bet, when I bit him."

"Whe-when you bit him?" she gurgled. "Did—did you really and truly bite him?"

"I did, indeed; and I have excellent teeth, as you may have noticed."

"How splendid and—and perfectly original!" she exclaimed. And then, musingly: "You never can tell, can you? I'm afraid I have been doing you a great injustice, Mr. Wilgus."

"Please cut out the 'Mister,' " he begged. "I'm 'Bertie' to—to people who like me."

"Well, you called me 'Miss Fingal' just now. I'm 'Peggy' to people who like me."

He shook his head masterfully.

"You'll never be 'Peggy' to me; never in this world."

"Why not?" she began; and then: "Oh, I see. *Her* name is Peggy, is it?"

"How did you know?" he demanded.

Her laugh did a lot more toward easing the strains.

"The workings of your mind are like your face, you angel boy; as transparent as a pane of glass. Never mind; you may call me Marge, if you want to. That is what daddy calls me."

By this time they had penetrated quite deeply into the labyrinth of the mine workings, pushing on with no other aim than to lose themselves as effectually as possible and so to gain something upon the pursuit which they made no doubt would be immediately set afoot. Thus far there had been no obstacles to the flight. The Estancia, as nearly as they could determine by the flickering light of their single candle, was or had been a mine in which there were numerous ramifications of the metal-bearing vein; "pocketings," in mining phrase.

From time to time there were great cavernous openings on either hand where the ore had been excavated; branchings of the main tunnel, these were, some of them deep enough to afford excellent hiding places, yet they did not turn aside. Distance seemed to be the greatest desideratum and they kept on increasing it mechanically.

"I don't know where we're going or what we are going to do when we get there," Wilgus offered. "I've been keeping an eye out all along for some place where we could hide and have some chance of hiding the candlelight as well—not but what I suppose they'll search the whole mine before they give us up."

"*I've* been hoping we'd find a way out," was the quick reply.

"Is there any other way—besides the way we came in?"

"I've been trying to remember. It seems just like a dream that I once heard daddy say, a long time ago, that one of the side veins came out into the cañon and made another opening—or came into a crevice that made an opening or something like that. But I can't be certain."

"Well, here's hoping that we find it," said Wilgus, adding, "I guess we could find it, if they'd give us time. But they won't do that."

It was possibly a hundred yards beyond this pessimistic remark that they came to the apparent end of things. The main tunnel ran out into an irregular-shaped cavern with its farther wall pierced with a number of small tunnel borings. Wilgus immediately recalled what Adams had told him about the "lime horse" or dike against which the gold-bearing vein had stopped and been lost.

This extended cavern appeared to be the stopping place. It was littered with piles of broken stone—the débris from the small tunnel borings—and though Wilgus knew next to nothing about "formations" and geological "periods," he could see at a glance that the stone was different from that through which the older workings had been driven.

"I'm afraid this is the end of it for us," he said; and his companion nodded.

"This must be the place where they lost the vein; and these holes are where they dug to try to find it again."

"Yes," he agreed, "and they are probably not very deep. If we duck into one of them we'll be trapped beautifully. I'm afraid we'll have to go back and try one of those side caves we've been passing."

They turned, accordingly, to begin the un-

hopeful search; but now, as it appeared, it was too late. Back in the farther reaches of the long tunnel through which they had come, a tiny star of light showed itself, alternately shining and vanishing like a winking flash lamp.

"That settles it!" Wilgus groaned. "They're on our trail, and all they've got to do now is to keep on coming. My Lord! —if I only had something to fight with!"

"They'd make you tell what you did with that Boston bag or kill you," said the girl calmly.

Wilgus scarcely heard what she said. He had put the candle down behind one of the rock piles and was running to first one and then another of the small openings in the limestone dike like a hunted animal searching distractedly for the ultimate dodge hole. What he found at last was only a poor makeshift, at best. In one of the trial tunnels the miners who had driven it had not taken the trouble, at the end of the experiment, to remove all of the blasted-out rock. There was a great pile of it in the mouth of the tunnel, with only a shallow opening between the top of the "muck" pile and the roof, through which the diggers had made their final exit.

"Here is our chance—the only one!" Wilgus gasped out. "Can you crawl in over those rocks?"

The retreat was made in fairly good order, the young woman creeping in first and taking the candle from Wilgus as he passed it to her and made his own dive into the covert. Once inside, he began heaping up the broken stone partly to close the aperture—enough to make it seem unlikely as a passageway for anything as big as a human body. That done, he found a niche for the candlestick, building a little stone wall around it so that the light would not shine out and betray them.

These hurried preparations were barely completed when the beam of the searchers' electric torch began to flicker beyond the hastily heightened barrier and the enemy was at the gates.

CHAPTER IX.

A BAG OF GOLD.

It was a rather breath-choking interval of suspense that followed the entrance of the disappointed booty hunters into the widened working in which the main mine tunnel ended. As Wilgus and his companion soon determined by the voices, there were only two men in the searching party and the inference was that the third man had been left to guard the attic scuttle outlet. The masked candle gave a little dim light in their covert and by its help Wilgus selected a few stones of handy throwing size and in a fresh access of the berserk exaltation, prepared to sell his life dearly.

But the fully expected occasion was slow to materialize. They could hear the two men stumbling about over the piles of loose stone and once the beam of the electric torch was turned into their hiding place, but only to shine harmlessly over their heads as they crouched low behind the friendly rock barricade. A moment later a voice, which Wilgus instantly recognized as that of the tall man who seemed to be the leader of the three, said: "It's just as I told you; we've passed them; they're hiding somewhere in the main workings."

"That hole," said the other voice and Wilgus knew intuitively that the speaker was pointing at their refuge; "have you looked in there?"

"Just this minute," was the answer. "A cat couldn't crawl in over that pile of rock. Let's get back. We've missed them somewhere on the way through."

For some little time after the footsteps of the pair had died away in the underground distances Wilgus did not venture to speak. Finally, however, he drew a deep breath and said, "Well, I suppose we are to have a respite, long or short, as it may chance. They will hardly come back here until after they have searched every other place in the mine." And he began to take down the little loose-stone wall he had built to mask the light of the candle.

"We might call it an entr'acte," said the one who was still refusing to be terrified. "Can you guess what will be the next act in the—what shall we call it? It's hardly a tragedy yet, is it?"

"If you had gone through what I have in the past few hours, you'd say it doesn't lack so awfully much of being a tragedy," Wilgus returned; and then he told her of the ingenious tortures of the perfume, the light blinding and the maddening whistle.

"Why, you poor, dear martyr!" she exclaimed. "If I had even suspected that they were treating you that way—— But listen; do you still believe they are taking all this trouble for a paltry five thousand dollars?"

"Must be. That's all the money there is in the bag. In fact, there isn't quite that much. There are only four thousand nine hundred and twenty-four dollars. That is all the pay roll called for."

"All the money, yes. But listen again: didn't you recognize that man's voice? The one who told the other one that he had held the light in here?"

"I certainly did. It belongs to the tall fellow that I bit. He is the one who has been doing all the talking to me, thus far."

"Didn't you ever hear his voice before he began talking to you in the mine power house?"

"Not that I can remember."

"Well, I have."

"Where?"

"In the dining room at Mesa Caballado. He is the man with the horrid eyes and the clipped black mustache who sat at Mr. Johnson Pitcairn's right while they were at dinner."

Wilgus leaned against the wall of the narrow tunnel and gurgled in his throat. When he could find speech, he said: "Doesn't that thrill you clear down to your toes? Why, good goodness! it's even better than I thought it was! I've been thinking all along, you know, that it was merely a common, everyday, highway robbery. But it's a lot bigger than that. They don't want the money; what they are after are those title deeds! That man with the black mustache knew that I had them. He came all the way from Chicago with me in the same sleeping car and he saw the lawyer's clerk give me the deeds!"

"Precisely," was the cool rejoinder. "But why do you say that it is better than you thought it was?"

"Why, don't you see? It's a big thing—the biggest kind of a thing! These fellows are trying to rob our company not of a pitiful five thousand dollars, but of a *million!* If they can get hold of those deeds and destroy them before they are put on record—but you can see what would happen. Pitcairn has probably got it all fixed up with those deed signers so they wouldn't sign duplicates for anything short of a million."

"Oh, yes," the young woman returned calmly, "I can see the bigness of it; I've been seeing it all along. For that matter, I saw it before any of these hairbreadth things began happening to us. What I can't quite see is why you are rejoicing over it."

Wilgus shook his head and sighed.

"Of course, I couldn't make you understand; perhaps I couldn't make anybody understand. But all my life I've been—well, sort of hungering and thirsting for something of this kind. Maybe the hunger was only psychological; a curiosity to find out how I would react if I should be jerked out of the humdrum office life and be dropped down into a sure-enough, man-size, rough-and-tumble fight for something that was really worth while."

She gave him the smile that he had found so entrancingly intoxicating across the dinner table in Red Butte.

"I'll say you are 'reacting' splendidly! Did your imagined try-out involve the safety and well-being of a poor, helpless girl?"

Wilgus blushed. "I never had the nerve to let it go quite that far," he confessed. "But, since it has come about that way—— Say! I believe I could whip all three of these scoundrels barehanded, if they'd only agree not to shoot me before I could get within reach of them."

"I don't doubt it in the smallest least," was the praiseful rejoinder. "Haven't I seen you—er—in action? But, joking aside, I do think you are really the cleverest, bravest thing I ever saw. And I—I'm sorry for the hat and all the rest of it. I hope you are not vindictive."

"Vindictive?—at you? If I wasn't so darned bashful and—er—afraid you mummightn't understand, I'd—I'd show you how vuv-vindictive I am!"

"But about the deeds," she broke in hastily as one grabs at the steering wheel to keep a rash driver from committing quick suicide. "Are you sure you put them in the bag?"

"Why, y-yes. Of course, I couldn't see anything in the dark but I could feel the envelope."

"You are quite certain you didn't have two envelopes of the same kind in your pocket?"

Wilgus shook his head in the negative. Then he caught himself up quickly and a choking sensation, as if his heart were trying to climb up into his mouth, seized and nearly paralyzed him.

"My good heavens!" he groaned, "I did! I had my life insurance policy and it was in an envelope very much like the one that was given me in Chicago!"

"And you found only the one envelope

when you were searching for the deeds to put them in the Boston bag?"

"Only one. And I was so badly rattled that I didn't remember that there ought to be two! I must have lost one of them in that scrap at the bridge. And it would be the deeds, at that. I had them in my coat pocket, as I remember now, and the policy was in the inside pocket of my vest. Isn't that enough to make an angel weep?"

The young woman had a hand inside of her dress and when it came out it was holding a fat, official-sized envelope, somewhat rumpled.

"You may wipe the tears from the angel's eyes," she said, making a queer little grimace at him. "Here are your precious deeds."

For a moment he was threatened with a return of the paralysis, though this time it was the apoplexy of relief.

"For the love of M-Mike! How did you get them?" he stammered, turning the sealed envelope over and over as if he expected to find the answer written upon it somewhere.

"I picked your pocket," she returned serenely. "Don't you remember the time when the car started to go down the bank and turn over and you caught me in your arms and helped me get back to the wheel? That was when I did it."

For half a minute or so Wilgus was silent. Then he asked: "Did you tip the car on purpose?"

"Of course I did. I hope you don't think I'm such a poor driver as not to be able to keep a car in the road when I want to."

"But why—*why?*" he pleaded.

"Ah—now you are trying to find out something that nobody has ever been able to card-index satisfactorily—a woman's impulses. I shan't attempt to answer your 'why;' I'll merely offer a suggestion. Suppose I had been thinking about what Bob Adams said at the dinner table and about what Mr. Johnson Pitcairn had been trying to do to your company? Then supposing something urged me to try and see how easily you could be robbed?"

Wilgus drew a long breath.

"It's a blessed good thing that you did rob me. I might have got hold of the wrong one of the two envelopes in my hurry to hide the bag before the car came up or I might easily have lost this one out of my coat pocket in the mix-up at the bridge. The next question is, what shall we do with it now? It's a—it's a decided handicap, don't you think? As long as I supposed it was safely hidden in the bag——"

The interruption was a most shocking one. A hairy arm was thrust in over the broken stone barricade and the rasping voice of the man who had been the tall man's partner in the search a few minutes earlier, said: "I'll take care o' that handicap for ye! Pass it over or I'll blow the top o' yer head off!"

As everybody knows, there are times and crises when a suggestion, taking the form of a sudden and masterful command is more potent than the strongest will; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the suggestion gets an underhold upon the will and throws it before it can have time to assert itself.

Quite involuntarily Wilgus handed the sealed envelope over and then a number of things happened all at once. In the very act of letting go his hold on the precious packet of deeds he had a confused impression that his companion caught at it. But this was only an indistinct and fleeting bit of mental byplay. For the instant the envelope was out of his hands the stunned will power came to its own again and he laid hold of the hairy arm with a grip that was no more to be shaken off than the clamping of a bulldog's jaws.

For a straining moment or so the struggle thus precipitated resolved itself into a furious tug of war, each combatant trying to drag the other bodily over the obstructing barrier of broken rock. In this effort the man on the outside, having the better anchorage, perhaps, was presently successful. Wilgus felt himself plowing a furrow, headfirst, through the loosely piled crest of the barrier, but he had no notion of letting go. With eyes, nose and mouth full of the gritty stone dust he hung on to the hairy arm and was dragged out of his burrow.

But at that the owner of the hairy arm found that he had a frenzied maniac to deal with; a fighting, clawing, clutching thing which seemed to be all arms and legs, battering fists, kicking feet and gnashing teeth. Up and down over the piles of débris in the larger cavern, in the total darkness, beleaguered and beleaguer staggered and fell and rose to clutch and pommel and stumble and fall again. Sometimes Wilgus was underneath and sometimes he was on top, but never for an instant did he relax the bulldog grip he had first secured and never for half

an instant did he give his burly antagonist a chance to gather himself or take breath.

Victory, in such a struggle, is neither to the practiced nor to the strong; it perches upon the banner of him who has the indomitable will to conquer. Three fractions of a second before he was at his last gasp Wilgus contrived to trip the hairy-armed one and to fall with him over one of the débris heaps. Jerking a hand free, he groped for and found a fist-sized stone and with it beat upon the head that dodged and twisted in a vain effort to avoid the blows.

When the writhing body to which he had clamped himself shuddered and relaxed, Wilgus got up, reeling and drunken with exhaustion, but jubilant with a triumphant feeling of exaltation which was mightier than the fatigue and enabled him to keep his feet. Once more the call of the romantic and the primitive had been heard and answered. If he had known a saga he would have tried to sing it. He was no longer a figure-making automaton sitting at a desk. He was a man.

Searching the fallen foe for weapons he was surprised when he found none. He would have sworn that at the beginning of the struggle the hairy-armed man had had a gun in his right hand and had tried to use it as a club. The inference being that the gun had been dropped underfoot he was groping for it when the candle appeared in the small tunnel mouth and behind it a pair of wide-staring brown eyes set in a rather pallid face.

Wilgus paused in the blind search. "Don't be scared," he said. "The show is over and we're still alive and kicking."

"Wh-where is he?" faltered the young woman, creeping out of the refuge, candle in hand.

"Over there by that pile of stone," said the victor, pointing. "You needn't be afraid of him; I've mashed his head with a rock."

"Why, you——" she stopped as if searching in vain for the proper epithet to an enraged and victorious cherub. "You—you perfectly wonderful thing! Did—didn't he have a gun?"

"I thought he had one; thought he tried to club me with it. But I can't find it anywhere."

"And the deeds?" she queried.

"Heavens and earth—those blessed deeds!" he exclaimed. "I'll be utterly hornswoggled if I hadn't forgotten them again! Will you hold the candle while I look him over?"

If he had been less excited or less triumphantly primitive he wouldn't have asked her to do that; but when he saw her shudder at the sight of the bloody-headed loser in the fight, he came to himself and hastily took the candle from her.

A thorough search in the stunned man's pockets failed to reveal the documentary envelope; revealed nothing but a pocketknife, a card of matches, a soiled black handkerchief and a few loose pistol cartridges. But it also revealed the fact that the robber was about to regain consciousness, and Wilgus took measures promptly. With the pocketknife he cut broad strips from the man's coat and therewith bound him hand and foot; after which he tied a small stone in a knot in the middle of the black handkerchief and prepared to make it serve for a gag.

It was while he was adjusting the gag that the robber came strugglingly alive and Wilgus put an admonitory knee in his stomach.

"One yip out of you and I beat your head with a stone again," he told the struggler and the needful acquiescence was secured.

The binding and gagging accomplished, Wilgus dragged the captive into one of the test tunnels and there left him. Resuming the candle, he made a careful search for the fat envelope which had so mysteriously disappeared. But neither the envelope, nor the weapon with which the robber had threatened to commit a murder, were to be found. The only thing that turned up was an electric torch which had been trampled upon and broken in the fierce mêlée.

"Are you quite sure you gave him the envelope?" the young woman asked when the search proved unavailing.

"He had it in his hand when I grappled him; or at least I thought he had."

"Maybe he dropped it inside, where we were hiding," she suggested.

Thereupon, Wilgus gave her the candle to hold and, after he had crept in over the barricade and had taken the light from her, she followed him. Here, again, the search failed. There was no trace of the lost envelope and Wilgus was in despair; self-condemnatory despair it was, too, aimed at his weakness in surrendering the treasure at the totally unlooked-for word of command.

"We'll find it somewhere; I feel perfectly sure we shall find it," his companion en-

couraged. And then: "Will it be entirely safe to find it, do you think?"

"Safe? How do you mean?"

"Why, if we should find it, wouldn't there then be the chance that they might take it away from us? You must remember that while we've seen only three of them, there were five men in that auto with Johnson Pitcairn."

"There are five minus one, now," Wilgus boasted.

"I know. But——"

"You think I won't get a chance at 'em, one at a time? I'd risk that, if I only had those deeds to fight for. I'll risk it anyway—for your sake."

"A few hours ago I would have said, 'Nice boy!' to that. It is nice, you know. Where did you learn to fight?"

"I haven't learned; I didn't have to learn. I was born that way—only Providence put a face on me that I've been trying to live down to ever since I can remember."

Serious as their involvement had become she was still able to laugh.

"The idea of living down to one's face!" she said.

"Well, that is what I have been doing; living down to my face and my fat. But if this sort of thing keeps up much longer I'll be able to work some of the fat off—that's one comfort."

While he talked he was also searching, pawing the lately disturbed stones over and holding the candle down to let its feeble light shine into all the crannies where the deed envelope might be hiding. It was the young woman who suggested that the quest be carried farther back into the tunnel and when that was done the restless envelope was found lying beside a small, half-filled canvas bag.

Wilgus pounced upon the envelope with a gasp of relief.

"How in the world do you suppose it got away back here?" he queried.

The young woman who had given him leave to call her by her father's house name laughed again.

"It didn't go as far as I hoped it might when I threw it. Didn't you see me snatch it when you tried to hand it to the robber?"

Wilgus held the candle up so that he could see her face and look into her eyes. "That's twice you've saved my life. Do you think you can go on doing that indefinitely and not——"

"Let's not be too romantic," she interposed quickly with the half-mocking smile in place again. "We are not out of the woods yet. Now that the deeds are found again what shall we do with them? Don't you think you'd better let me have them?"

"And shift the responsibility to your shoulders? Not in a million years!" and he thrust the envelope into the inside pocket of his vest, buttoned the vest, buttoned what remained of his battle-torn coat over the vest. "That's that! And the next thing is something else. They'll be missing that rascal I've tied up, pretty soon and be coming to look for him. Which means that we can't stay here. My heavens! if I could only find the gun that that fellow threw away and lost so completely——"

The young woman was absently prodding the half-filled little canvas bag with the toe of her boot.

"What do you suppose is in this bag?" she said. "And why does it look so new?"

Wilgus stooped and felt the bag. Its contents felt something like fine shot and when he tried to lift it it proved to be unexpectedly heavy. "We'll have a look," he said and with the captured pocketknife he cut the string and opened the bag. Then: "Huh! It's only coarse sand, after all"—letting a handful of the contents dribble through his fingers. "And still it doesn't feel like sand, either."

She knelt beside him and held the candle closer.

"It isn't sand!" she declared; "it's—why, it's shot gold! And there must be hundreds of dollars' worth of it!" Then, with the queer little grimace that he was coming to look for and to love: "Do you believe in special Providences, Bertie?"

"I didn't until I met you; but I do now."

"Not me, but this!" she exclaimed in a fine and excited disregard for the grammar of the expensive Eastern college. "Don't you see what this bag of shot gold hidden away in here means? They are going to 'salt' the mine and so make it appear to be worth the million dollars they are going to make your company pay for it after they have destroyed those deeds you have in your pocket!"

This was Greek to Wilgus, or partly Greek, at least; the desk in United Motors having afforded him no opportunity of learning anything about mines and their "salt-

ing." But his companion was well able to enlighten him.

"It is as plain as day," she went on hurriedly. "You can see that this tunnel has been dug all the way through the 'lime horse' and the heading is in vein rock of some sort—a much softer stone. I don't know just how they are meaning to do it, of course, but one way is to load grain gold into a shotgun and shoot it into the rock. It has been done that way lots of times, so daddy says."

"But, see here," Wilgus put in; "any expert could tell——"

"They'll take precious good care not to let any expert employed by your company get a chance to examine and test the 'salted' ore. You may depend upon that."

Wilgus patted his chest over the pocket that contained the priceless deeds; the deeds that were doubly priceless now, in view of this latest discovery.

"It gets better and better as we go along!" he maintained. "Now there is no shadow of a question at all about our having to cripple and hog tie every single one of these bandits. Let's get about it. If you'll hold the candle for me, I'll do the crippling—or know the reason why."

As once before in this eventful night she looked at him in what seemed to be undisguised and wondering admiration; and, as at that other time, she murmured: "Dear me! —you never *can* tell! If anybody had asked me—— But I'm for you, you dear angel boy. Lead on, and I'll be your candle holder."

"Talk of courage, and women not having any!" he said glowingly; "why, you're made of it! You'd put fighting blood into a wooden man, Margie, dear, and I'm not quite that, I hope. Come on; let's get out of this rat hole while we can."

CHAPTER X.

THE MISSING THRILL.

Escaping into the wider freedom of the chambered cavern which had been hollowed out in the search for the lost ore body, Wilgus' first care was to look to the security of his prisoner.

"I guess that one will stay put until he is sent for," he commented after he had thrust the candle into the cell-like burrow into which the vanquished bandit had been dragged and had found the status quo undisturbed.

"Which one of the three is he?" the young woman asked.

"It's the Bassett person; one of the two who snatched me out of the car at the bridge."

"How did you learn his name?"

"In the talk I overheard just before they chucked you into the laboratory. Turby—he's the one whose voice you recognized—was telling the other man what had happened up to date."

"And the other man was——"

"I couldn't guess at the time, but I think I know now. It was Pitcairn, himself."

She nodded.

"It was carefully plotted. Most likely Johnson Pitcairn has known every move your company was making in this matter of securing a clear title to the Estancia. Six men left Mesa Caballado in Hoskins' big car after dinner; I saw them as they passed Alec Kimball's shop. One of the six was driving. They had left Hoskins behind because they didn't want a witness to what they were planning to do."

"I see," said Wilgus. "Three of them dropped off at Split Cañon to waylay us and the other three drove on to the camp at the dam to be able to establish a safe alibi."

"And that isn't all," the girl put in quickly. "They meant to make it look like an ordinary holdup, with the pay-roll money for its object. If it had worked out as they thought it would, and intended it should, the deeds wouldn't have figured in it at all, don't you see? Besides taking the money bag, any ordinary gang of footpads would have gone through your pockets as a matter of course, and in that way the deeds would have been lost, since the common auto robber, not knowing their value, would have promptly thrown them away. Of course, it was no part of their original plan to make prisoners of us. The simple thing to do—and it was no doubt what they meant to do—was to rob you and then let us drive on to the camp with our story of the holdup."

"But who were the two men who went on in the big auto with Pitcairn?"

"I don't know; supernumeraries in the play, most likely, taken along to avert suspicion. It is even possible that they are not in the plot at all. They wouldn't need to be."

"You have one fine little brain!" Wilgus

declared enthusiastically. "As you have it figured out, all I have to do is to cripple these two remaining brigands, who are doubtless hunting for us right now—and possibly Mr. Johnson Pitcairn, if he should get restless and ramble up here again to see how Turby is making out with his third-degreeing of me—and we'll have the whole push."

"All you have to do?" she gurgled. "Is that the way you are looking at it? Is there no limit at all to your appetite for—er—carnage?"

"'Carnage' is good but slightly inappropriate," he laughed. "I can't make it look much like carnage with nothing but my teeth and my bare hands. But I'll do my little level best, you may depend upon that. And, as I've said before, I wouldn't miss the chance for the best farm that ever lay out of doors."

She lifted the candle so that the light shone into his eyes.

"You lovely, lovely boy!" she murmured; adding with a deep sigh: "I never was so completely mistaken in all my born days."

"You thought I wouldn't fight?"

"When Bob Adams told me to-day at Mesa Caballado that you were carrying those deeds, I was silly enough to think that perhaps I might have to fight for you!"

"You suspected Pitcairn even then?"

"Perhaps it hadn't yet grown to a real suspicion. But I knew something of Johnson Pitcairn and his methods. He hasn't a very good reputation, you know. And his happening to be in Red Butte just at the time when you got there—and his coming right along with us over here——"

"Exactly," said Wilgus. "Another outreaching of that sharp little brain of yours. But we are losing time. Turby and Gaston are liable to come chasing back here any minute to see what has become of Bassett. If I were alone I'd wait for 'em and see if I couldn't knock one or both of 'em silly before they could get me. As it is——"

"As it is, you'll do precisely the same as you would if you didn't have me tagging along," she cut in firmly. "Didn't I promise to be your candle holder?"

This reference to the candle made Wilgus regard it appraisingly.

"That piece of candle isn't going to last forever," he remarked. "It's more than half gone already. No, I guess we'll have to cut out the additional carnage and make a quick hunt for that side-door outlet you spoke of a while back. I'm all kinds of sorry not to be able to make a finished job of it while I'm at it, but your safety comes first."

"But if I refuse to be——" the sentence was left incomplete. Away back in the distant reaches of the main tunnel a flickering light made its appearance. "They're coming!" she breathed and quickly put the candle out of sight behind one of the rock piles.

Once more Wilgus was moved to lament his lack of a weapon.

"If I only had a club, a tomahawk, anything—even old Father Samson's jawbone of an ass!" he groaned. Then, as if the groan had given birth to a sudden inspiration: "By Jove!—I've got it!" and he sat down and began to pull the laces out of his shoes in feverish haste.

"What is it?" she demanded breathlessly.

"A sling—little old David's Goliath sling. Time was, not so many years ago, when I could knock the rooster off of the neighbor's barn four times out of every five. It was my one kiddish accomplishment. If I only haven't lost the knack of it!"

"That pocketknife—give it to me!" she ordered and sat down in her turn to make a similar feverish attack upon her own shoe laces.

The primitive weapon was fashioned in record time, Wilgus' laces, which were of soft leather, new and strong, furnishing the thongs, and a piece cut out of one of the young woman's shoe tops answering for the stone pocket. Hastily collecting a few bits of broken stone, grapeshot size, Wilgus tried the sling out in the roomy mine-end cavern. To his joy he found that he hadn't lost the knack; the missiles flew true to their aim, or measurably so, and they went with velocity enough to smash themselves against the end walls of the cavern when they struck.

"Now then," he said, "you get down behind that biggest rock pile out of harm's way and pray for me. Most likely I'll need it. And keep the candle out of sight, whatever you do."

Estimating the distance of the oncoming torch, he saw that he still had time for careful preparation. Selecting his pebbles as painstakingly as any Goliath killer of old, he filled his pockets with them and fitted one to the sling. Next came a judicious measuring of the range. By now the light of the torch—the flambeau seemed to be a

blazing pine knot—showed him that two men were coming on abreast, the taller carrying the torch, which was waved now and then to throw its light into one or another of the side caverns.

Wilgus waited until he could make out the two figures quite distinctly. Then the thonged stone spun in accelerating circles around his head and was released to go whistling down the tunnel. The first shot was a clean miss, but it had its effect, none the less. The two men stopped abruptly, and Wilgus heard one of them swear and say, "What the hell was that?" Quickly he fitted another stone and let it fly. It proved to be a miss, also, but it went close enough to make the short man crouch and dodge.

"Duck for it! He's got one o' them guns with a silencer!"

Wilgus heard the shouted warning in the hated Turby tones as he was whirling a third stone in the momentum-breeding circles. Almost coincident with the shout came the flip of the released thong and the whir of the small projectile. Quite as plainly came the *smack* of the missile as it struck and the noise was so loud that Wilgus thought he had shot wild again and hit the side of the tunnel.

But the result proved that he hadn't. There was a hoarse scream of pain, followed instantly by the rapid-fire roar of an automatic, and to Wilgus who, luckily, had stepped aside as he loosed the stone, the air seemed full of a bee-buzzing swarm of bullets. When he ventured to look again, the torch, waving about as if it were carried by some one in frantic flight, was dodging down the underground avenue, in the farther windings of which it presently disappeared.

While he was waiting for further developments, with another stone fitted, his fellow prisoner crept out of her refuge and called to him. "I—I couldn't stand it any longer," she stammered. "You haven't made a sound since those pistol shots were fired and I was afraid they had killed you. What was that awful cry that came just before the shots?"

"I don't know," returned the amateur David, "but I guess I must have hit one of them. I heard the stone strike but it made so much racket that I thought I'd missed them and hit the rocks."

"What has become of them?"

"I think they have gone away from here. I dodged and when I looked again, the torch, at least, was on the run."

"Listen!" she said; "isn't that somebody groaning? Oughtn't we to go and see?"

At first, Wilgus thought not and said so. "It might be only a trap," he objected. "We'd have to take the candle and that would make us a fair mark to shoot at, just as the torch did for them. And even if they shouldn't do anything worse than to make us blow the candle out, we'd be perfectly helpless in the dark."

"We could blow the candle out before we start and light it again when we need it," she said. "Didn't you say you found some matches in the pocket of the man who tried to snatch the deeds?"

"Of course I did! I'd clean forgotten. I guess things are happening a bit too fast for me. Are you willing to try walking down the tunnel in the dark?"

"I'll try anything—once," she agreed; and Wilgus went after the candle, which he extinguished and then felt his way back to her. "You take the candlestick and I'll take you," he said, and in such close order, as one might say, they groped their way slowly in darkness that was almost like a thickened cloud of soot.

After they had gone a little distance along the main tunnel the groaning noise became distinctly audible; and when it seemed that it must be coming from some source almost underfoot, Wilgus got down on his hands and knees and began to feel around on the tunnel floor. After a bit his hand came in contact with a man's foot and from the manner in which the foot was jerked away and drawn up he knew that the man to whom it belonged must be lying on his back.

"Take about three steps forward and give me the candle," he whispered out into the darkness; a moment later the candlestick was put into his hands. "We'll have to take a chance on the light," he went on, striking one of the stolen matches and holding it to the candle wick. "I suspect I've been a better shot than I thought I was."

What the lighted candle showed them was a rather unnerving sight. The man who lay shuddering and groaning at their feet was the one who had played the part of the gunman in the holdup at the bridge. The sling-hurled stone had struck him fairly in the right eye, and an explosive bullet could scarcely have done greater damage. The eye, as it appeared, was completely de-

stroyed, and the bones of the face and forehead were crushed. Wilgus felt his gorge rising at the gruesome sight but he resolutely put the qualms aside as something belonging to a life upon which he had definitely and finally turned his back.

"Take the candle," he ordered, thrusting it at his companion; and when she obeyed, trembling a little and turning her face aside, he got a grip under the stricken man's arms and dragged him into one of the crosscut workings where the light of the candle would be hidden and where they would be out of range if there should be any more firing. In the temporary security thus obtained he knelt to search the wounded man's pockets and, at a protesting struggle and groan he said, "Lie still, you beggar, or I'll gouge your other eye out!"

A serviceable revolver of large caliber and another of the black handkerchiefs rewarded the search, and Wilgus straightened up.

"Not such a bad haul, this time," he commented exultantly, twirling the cylinder of the big revolver to see that all the chambers were loaded. "If I can't make at least a drawn game of it with Mr. Turby with this thing, I'll deserve whatever he hands out to me, don't you think? Let's be going."

"But, mercy!" gasped the young woman, clinging to him; "we can't go and leave this poor wretch suffering like this!"

Wilgus handled the revolver affectionately.

"It would make too much noise to shoot him," he offered.

"Horrors! You know I didn't mean that!"—indignantly. "Isn't there something we can do for him? He is suffering terribly!"

Thus entreated, Wilgus took the black handkerchief and sopped it in a pool of the mine drippings beside the recumbent figure.

"Hold that to your face," he said gruffly, thrusting the wet compress into the man's hand. "By and by, after I've killed off your remaining partner, I'll send somebody in to take you to jail."

"Oh, for pity's sake, don't leave me here like this!" groaned the unlucky victim of the hurled stone.

"I'll leave you dead, if you don't want to be left alive," Wilgus returned grittingly; and with that he took the young woman by the arm and led her away.

For a little space they stumbled along in silence, Margaret Fingal carrying the candle and shading its light with her hand so that it would not serve as too fair a mark to be shot at, and Wilgus, alert and militant, holding the captured revolver in readiness to fire upon anything that stirred. After they had gone a short distance the young woman said in a hushed whisper: "Are you —are you getting your full measure of thrills, thus far?"

"I'm doing very nicely, thank you."

Another silence, and then, "I'm afraid Bob Adams—and you, too—have been making game of me rather shamefully."

"In what way?"

"Making me believe that you—that you have——"

"That I'd been cosseted and fed with a bottle and brought up by hand? No; it's all true enough. I'm as tenderfootish as they make 'em; or I was, up to a few hours ago."

"But the terrible way you maimed that poor wretch we've just left——"

"That's just the fortunes of war. Besides, the hit was the merest fluke on my part—a mighty lucky fluke, but still in the accident class. You don't think I tried to hit him in the eye, do you?"

"I didn't know."

"Well, I do. I was just firing away on general principles and hoping I might land on at least one of them before they got to us. Not that I'm weeping any over that smashed face, you understand."

"But Bob said——"

"I know about what he said; and he was perfectly justified. He didn't suspect that I've been feeding a wild and ruthless desperado down inside of me all my life."

By this time they were come to one of the side caverns which, unlike the others they had examined, had no visible end. Wilgus took the candle and held it up for a better view. The irregular-shaped crevice appeared to go on into the mountain indefinitely, or at least until its windings were lost to sight from the entrance.

"I wonder if, by any chance, this might be that side vein you spoke of; the one with an outlet to the cañon?" Wilgus queried; then, with swift decision, "We'll try it, at any rate."

For some distance this side passage offered no obstacles. But farther along it became, in a manner, a path perilous. A hundred feet from the main tunnel the crevice began to take all sorts of tortuous shapes, and to narrow until there were places where they could barely squeeze through. Wilgus

led the way, expecting every minute to find the dead-wall end of the crooked crack confronting him; but the end, when he finally reached it, brought a little shock of surprise. Rounding the last of the elbow turns, he came into a hollow niche in which the mountain-heart silence was broken by the low-toned thunder of quick water. Through a slit that was less than a foot wide he found himself looking up at the stars.

Reaching back, he drew the young woman up to his side.

"My hunch was right," he said. "There are the good old stars."

"Yes, but—goodness me! we can never get out through that narrow crack! It isn't half wide enough."

"It is wider a little higher up. If I boost you, you can make it. See; I can stand right here, and——"

He stopped because just then he found himself stepping upon something that felt, under his foot, like a sleeping animal of some sort. When he reached down, the broken sentence turned itself into an ejaculation of astoundment.

"My Boston bag!" he exclaimed. "Doesn't that beat the Dutch! This is the crack I dropped it into when they were chasing me. See; there's the little tree outside that partly hides it. If I could have crawled in, myself, they would never have found me."

"But they had already found me, you must remember," said a small and reproachful voice at his elbow. "And, besides, think what you would have missed in the way of thrills; none of those brave struggles in the torture chamber, no hairbreadth escapes, no poor captive maiden to fight for. Surely you don't regret——"

It was then and there that Herbert Brevoort Wilgus broke the final bond attaching him to a world of the codified conventions. Laying the loaded revolver carefully aside, he wheeled and took her in his arms.

"You unmitigated darling—you bet I don't regret!" he exclaimed, half smothering her with a quick kiss. Then, "Now I've done it, I suppose; but I'll pay. You may slap my face and swear that you'll never speak to me again and I shan't blame you. More than that, I'll help you to get quit of me, once for all. Stand up here on this ledge and let me boost you out through that crack. Then you can slip around to the mine and get your car and go on home."

She was wiping her lips with the back of her hand and even the poor light of the flickering candle showed the fire in the brown eyes. But when Wilgus looked again, he was not sure whether or not the fire was intended to burn him.

"I sup-pup-pose that was meant to be the one missing thrill," she said; and he couldn't tell whether it was mockery or reproach that was uppermost in her tone. Then, "You may help me out, if you want to."

She stepped up on the little ledge; and if she had been a queen he couldn't have been more gentle and respectful in his handling of her in helping her out through the narrow slit. When she was standing safely in the road outside, he stuck his face through the slit and, pushing the obstructing tree foliage aside, spoke again.

"When you come back in the car, if there is no pursuit, would you mind taking this money bag down to our camp? I'll place it where you can reach it easily and if you drive close you won't have to get out of the car."

"But I don't understand," she protested. "Aren't you coming, too?"

"Not much! I'm going back to have it out with that devil who tortured me—that, and to keep him busy while you're getting your car."

"Nonsense!" she snapped. "You've done enough for one night. I shan't move a step until you come out."

"I can't," he returned.

"Why can't you?"

"W-well, if you *must* know; the crack isn't big enough for me to get through. I'm too fat."

Before he had even begun to realize what she was doing she had scrambled up the cliff face with the help of the little tree, had wedged herself through the narrow slit and was again standing beside him in the nichelike cavern.

"If you are determined to get yourself killed, I'm going with you! I'm just as good a sport as you are, Bertie Wilgus!"

"Well, I'll be——"

"Say it, if you want to; I don't care. If you are trying to make me believe that you are a throwback to the stone age, I'll tag along too, and do my best to keep you in sight."

Wilgus held the guttering candle up and peered at her as if he were trying to deter-

mine the exact shade of the luminous brown eyes that met his without flinching.

"Do you mean that you've had these wild and woolly promptings sometimes, too?" he inquired.

"Who hasn't?" she retorted. "But that doesn't matter. If you have to go out the way we came in, why, that's the way I'm going. And we'd better be at it before that candle burns out. It won't last much longer."

Wilgus shook his head and tried to grin, but his face was so poorly adapted to grinning that all he accomplished was a cherubic smile.

"Cave-man stuff," he chuckled. "All right; if you must, you must. But there'll be bullets flying, this time, and you've got to keep out of the way of them. Let's go."

It was at the precise instant when they were turning to retrace their steps through the crooked crevice that the unmistakable pulse beat of an automobile came drifting through the narrow opening. Wilgus cupped a hand to an ear and listened.

"Turby has lost his nerve and is running away with your car," he said, hastily putting the candle beyond the jutting elbow turn where its light couldn't be seen from the road.

"It's not my car," was the quick denial; "that's an eight or a twin; and mine's only a six. Besides, it's coming from the other way."

Crouching together with their faces at the outgiving crack, they saw the car as it approached. As Margaret Fingal had said, it was coming from the down-cañon direction. At the passing moment the tiny dash light showed them that it had only one occupant, the big-bodied man who was driving.

"Jud Hoskins' car and Johnson Pitcairn driving it!" she said, under her breath. "What does that mean?"

"It means that I'm going to get the boss plotter along with the hired man," said Wilgus grimly. "It's just as I said a while back; Pitcairn has got impatient to know what's doing and he couldn't stay away. There is too much at stake."

"But you can't fight two of them at once!"

" 'Can't,' this time, is 'can' and 'will,' " he returned.

"But, listen: Johnson Pitcairn has the reputation of being a bad man and absolutely cold-blooded when he's cornered. He'd kill you without a moment's hesitation."

"Same here," said Wilgus cheerfully. "And that reminds me: I don't know much about guns and maybe you can tell me about this one." He took up the captured revolver. "I've been wondering if I'd have to cock it each time to fire it."

She glanced at the big weapon and shook her head.

"No; it is what they call 'double action.' All you have to do is to keep on pulling the trigger." Then, with a little cry of impatience: "The idea of your trying to use it, with your life at stake, when you don't know even that much about it!"

"That will be all right," he assured her. "I have the complete courage of my ignorance and, if you'll stop to think of it, that is worth a lot."

CHAPTER XI.

THE ACID TEST.

Taking the lead in the retreat and carrying the fast-diminishing candle Wilgus piloted the way back through the winding crevice out of which the ore had been dug. The main tunnel was silent and untenanted when they reached it and Wilgus quickened the pace.

"If we can get into that machinery place before the show begins you'll have something to hide behind," he explained; and as they hurried on, "you must promise me that you'll keep out of the way and under cover, you know. I'm the captain of this expedition and you've got to obey orders."

"Some time I may have to promise somebody to 'love, honor and obey,' but I haven't done it yet," she retorted.

"This is a good time to begin learning how," he flung back. "The women always have to do it in the stone-age stuff."

Running and walking fast by turns over the little tramway track, they came shortly to the tunnel's mouth and into the stone-floored boiler and engine room. Apparently, nothing had been disturbed here. The rope by means of which they had descended from the attic was still hanging as they had left it. But there was one change noticeable. At the far end of the place a door, which had been locked and barred when they had been trying to make their escape from the building, was now standing open. Wilgus stopped and pointed with the revolver.

"That door must open into the labora-

tory," he whispered. "If you'll stay in here out of harm's way——"

"And let you go on and get killed all by yourself? I won't! I told you I hadn't yet promised to 'love, honor and obey.' Give me that candle!"

"All right," he yielded. "I shall probably need both hands. Listen: that's the two of them we can hear talking. They are in the room beyond the laboratory. If you'd only consent to stay here and play safe——"

"I won't!" she reiterated. Then suddenly a round arm went about his neck: "Please, *please*, angel boy, let's hide—in the boilers, or somewhere! I—I don't want to see you get killed!"

"Don't you worry," he said soothingly. "When we get into that laboratory shop, you shy away off to one side. If you don't —if you get in the way of the scrap—it'll simply paralyze me."

"I s-said I'd be your candle holder, and I w-will!" she quavered. Then with almost tearful impatience: "I don't know what is the matter with me! I'm not gun shy—or I never have been before. But to see my t-teeth chatter, you'd think I was scared stiff; and I'm *not!*"

"Of course you're not," he returned. "I'm the scared one. My legs are fairly begging me to let them run away with me. That's how I know I'm going to win out —because I can make those legs go the way I want 'em to."

In any battle he is the good general who picks his battleground and forces the enemy to meet him where the advantage will be all one way. The boiler and engine room with its many bullet-proof breastworks would have been an ideal place in which to make a forlorn-hope stand. But Wilgus could not content himself to take shelter and wait.

Gripping the big revolver he ran for the open door. He was scarcely upon the threshold when the opposing door leading to the outer office room was flung wide and two men, Turby and the big-bodied promoter, entered the laboratory. At the same moment the young woman darted in under Wilgus' arm and ran aside, holding the flaring candle high over her head. The promoter snapped the switch of the electric torch he was carrying and turned the concentrated beam of light full upon Wilgus. "Get him!" was the savage order and Wilgus was conscious of three things happening all at once; a flash of red light, a deafening crash and a sensation as if a red-hot poker had been drawn across his arm.

It was a cry from Margaret Fingal that shocked Wilgus into action. *"Don't stand there and let them kill you!"* she shrieked; and then Wilgus raised the big revolver deliberately and emptied it, point-blank, as he thought, at the two figures less than twenty feet away.

He could scarcely believe his own eyes when, at the crash of the final shot of the six, he saw the two men, apparently unhurt, rushing upon him through the smoke of the discharges. It seemed grossly incredible that all six of his shots could have missed the double target at such a short distance.

But the stimulus of failure was exactly what he needed. With a wild-Indian yell, he hurled the empty pistol at the oncoming enemy, followed it with a volley of clay crucibles, retorts, glass jars, iron bracket stands and what not snatched from the laboratory bench, ending by charging, head down, and fists and feet flying like the beaters in a hammer mill into the thick of the fray.

It was perhaps fortunate for him that the barrage of missiles caught up from the bench —or some one of the hurled utensils, at least—had found a mark in the person of the burly promoter. Pitcairn, down, but not entirely out, caught a leg in Wilgus' mad rush, but the leg promptly kicked itself free and in the momentary struggle the well-shod foot at the end of the leg came down with a quieting stamp upon the promoter's face. That left the tall torturer to take the brunt of the fierce charge alone and in the unskilled wrestling match that ensued he was thrown so hard that he was partly stunned.

Hog wild, now, as his pioneer forbears would have phrased it, Wilgus sprang to the bench and caught up a great bottle half filled with yellowish liquor to hurl it at the fallen foe. But at the poising instant the half-stunned man came to sufficiently to realize what was going to happen to him and gave a bloodcurdling yell.

"Oh—oh! for God's sake don't!" he screamed in chattering terror. "That's acid!"

Wilgus removed the glass stopper, sniffed cautiously at the strangling fumes that rose to his nostrils and nodded.

"You are entirely right," he panted; "chemically pure sulphuric, if my college-laboratory memory for smells serves me.

Good! Lie still, now—both of you—or I'll give you a bath that will make you wish you could die quick and have it over with!"

With the unstoppered bottle in his hand he walked around the pair on the floor to where Turby's pistol had been dropped in the furious wrestling match. Kicking the weapon out into the other room, he knelt and made a one-handed search of both of his victims for other weapons, holding the acid bottle ready for action during the process.

"Only the one pistol?" he grinned when the search proved futile. "If you had known what you were up against, you'd have brought a machine gun, I guess." Then to the candle-holding maiden, who was still standing statuelike on the spot to which she had fled in the darting rush:

"It's all over but the shouting. You still have that looted pocketknife, I believe? If you will kindly take this cast-off electric spotlight and go into the boiler room and cut me a length of that rope ladder of ours we can——"

Without a word she put the candlestick on the bench and went to do his bidding. While she was gone Wilgus stood over the promoter and his accomplice with the acid bottle within easy reach. He was getting his breath back now and a tidal wave of triumph was threatening to submerge him. At the long last the hungry appetite of a lifetime had been satisfied—not to say gorged. With everything pointing to failure at first, the West, the glorious West of his imaginings, had kept its promise. Single-handed and alone—no, not quite alone, because he had had the witnessing and inspiration of a pair of matchless brown eyes to make him invincible—he had fought and conquered—and the precious deeds were still buttoned safely in his inside pocket! If Peggy Bradbury could only see him now!

It was the return of the other Peggy with a goodly length of the frayed rope that broke the train of intoxicating exultation and brought him back to the stern requirements of the moment.

"Untwist it, please, and let me have the strands," he directed and when the thing was done he gave a sharp order to the pair held motionless on the floor under the acid threat: "Turn over on your faces and hold your hands behind you, both of you!"

There was a bit of hesitation at first, but a menacing gesture with the acid bottle was all that was needed to enforce obedience. It was an absurd situation; two men, neither of them permanently disabled, held helpless by a bottle of harmless-looking, yellowish liquid in the grasp of a handsome, if somewhat disheveled cherub. But terror, like truth, is mighty and will prevail. Turby rolled over in silence and crossed his hands above the small of his back. The promoter did likewise, but not in silence. Hell held no fires too hot to be stoked for the future roasting of a victorious cherub, so he said; but when the frothing maledictions grew vulgarly profane, Wilgus paused in his knotting of the rope strands about the crossed wrists long enough to say:

"That will do for you, Mr. Pitcairn. You seem to be forgetting that there is a lady present and that the acid bottle is still handy."

The "hog tying," as Wilgus called it, was soon accomplished and when he had the pair trussed up and bound beyond any possible chance of escape, he said his modest valedictory.

"You've sliced the ball pretty awkwardly, this time, Mr. Pitcairn. Your man Bassett is back in the mine, hog tied as you are, though not quite so neatly, perhaps; and the other man, Gaston, is also back there, on the blink with a lost eye and a broken face. The deeds you wanted to destroy are safely in my pocket and the pay-roll money is where I can pick it up on the way to our camp. As soon as we reach camp I'll send a bunch of our men up here after you and your strikers and they will probably let you ride to jail in your own hired car. That's all, I believe, except that when the posse comes for you it will also get the bag of shot gold with which you were going to salt the mine to make it look like a million dollars."

To be in perfect harmony with the impressions of such scenes gathered from the dramatic stage, Wilgus thought that this parting speech should have elicited an explosion of curses and other bad language from the foiled plotters. But the two trussed-up captives lying on the bare floor of the laboratory made no reply whatever, so it was with a slight tinge of disappointment that Wilgus held the door open for the young woman to escape to the office room and afterward shut and barred it upon the two bound robbers, romance and blood-tingling adventure.

The dawn of a new day was just beginning to pale the light of the stars when they went together in search of the blue roadster and found it under one of the tumble-down ore sheds.

"Ho hum!" said the cherub wearily, stretching his arms over his head. "Back in the commonplace world again, with nowhere to go but home. But say, Margie, we've sure had one night that will stay with us as long as we live; though I must confess it is already beginning to seem like a fantastic dream to me. Isn't it to you?"

Instead of replying she pointed to his left hand. "What is that on your hand?" she asked.

"That?" he said, looking at it rather proudly. "That is gore—ruddy gore; otherwise a leak from the place where Turby pinked me at that first shot. It's only a scratch, I guess. But tell me; why couldn't I hit one of those scoundrels with six good shots in that overgrown pistol I had?"

"It was because it was overgrown," she said. "Those big pistols always jump and shoot high if you don't hold them down. But let me see that scratch. Maybe it isn't so little as you think it is."

Wilgus pulled his coat off and bared the arm. There was a red welt on it about four inches long, from which the blood was oozing slowly. "Oh, yes; a mere scratch!" she said; and then she went around to the other side of the car and Wilgus heard a sound like the ripping of cloth. When she came back she had a bandage for the hurt and she made him hold still while she put it on.

"That will do until we get to camp and can find some iodine," she said; and then she answered that question of his that had been kept waiting: "No; it doesn't seem in the least like a dream to me. Look at my clothes—and yours, too, for that matter."

"Clothes!" he chuckled, climbing into the car beside her. "It is only in the world of the conventions that such trivial things as clothes cut any figure. And haven't we agreed that the conventions have been left so far behind that they can never catch up with us two again?"

She was starting the car, and she didn't say whether they had or not; and his question was still hanging in the air after she had carefully tooled the blue roadster around the first jutting cliff shoulder in the down-cañon road and brought it to a stand opposite the crevice where the Boston bag had been left to be called for.

Wilgus descended and got the bag and another start was made. Then, as if no lapse of time had come between what he had said as they were backing out of the ore shed and what he was now saying: "Because, you know, if we haven't left the conventions hopelessly behind, society, the social order, or whatever you like to call it, has something coming to it, don't you think?"

"I can't think, not while I have to keep dodging the stones in this horrible road," she said.

"All right," he returned affably. "We'll wait for a better road."

That came after they had passed the bridge of the holdup and the blue car was rolling smoothly down the great cañon, with the April dawn blushing pink on the distant snow caps of the Sierra Blanco. It was then that Margaret Fingal took her foot from the accelerator pedal and let the machine take its time.

"You were saying, a few minutes ago?" she said.

"I was saying that Mother Grundy—if we admit her existence—has something coming to her. We've been out all night together, without a chaperon, and——"

"Are you really so other-century as to think that you are obliged to offer to marry me?" she asked; and again he couldn't be sure whether it was a gibe or a sober question. But his reply was sober enough.

"I'm like you were a few minutes back: I can't do any great amount of thinking. But one thing I know without having to think about it—in something less than twenty-four hours I've learned to love you as I've always thought a man ought to love the woman he wanted to marry."

"Isn't that the way you loved the other Peggy just a few days ago?" she asked mildly.

"It—is—not! Not by ten thousand miles! I didn't know the meaning of the word until I saw you."

"Yet you were going to marry her."

He thought about it for a second or so; and then, quite deliberately, "No, *I* wasn't; it was the other Bertie Wilgus who was going to marry her; and quite possibly he would have been measurably happy in his humdrum way. But this Bertie Wilgus that

you've spent the night with couldn't any more do it than he could fly. But that's a bygone. We—you and I—have had twenty-four hours together under conditions that count for more than as many years of the way people ordinarily live. Isn't that so?"

"Maybe."

"There isn't any 'maybe' about it; it is gospel truth. Time is only one of the conventions, too. Why should two people have to know each other for weeks or months before they can find out if they love each other? Why shouldn't there be short cuts in love as well as in other things?"

"I wasn't thinking of that," she said as her foot sought the accelerator pedal. "But I can't marry you, Bertie."

Very gently he interposed his own foot so that she couldn't speed up the car in that way. In a flash her hand went to the throttle lever on the wheel, but she did not move it.

"I don't need any more time; but if you do——" he was beginning, but she broke in quickly.

"Wait. After I've told you what I've been trying all night long to muster up the courage to tell you, you won't want to marry me, Bertie, dear. You—you'll hate me! When I stole those deeds from your pocket I—I meant to keep them; to—to destroy them. When your dam is built, daddy will lose his cattle range, just as Shorty Budaker told you. But if your company should get into a long legal fight over the title to the Estancia—well, in that case, we'd have that much longer to stay in the old-home ranch, where I was born and where—where my mother died. Daddy has been reasonable about it, but I haven't. I've been bitter. I—I vamped you, Bertie."

It was then that Herbert Brevoort Wilgus, third of the name, climbed to the topmost dizzying battlements of the high tower of romance. Unbuttoning his vest, he took the crumpled envelope from its hiding place and held it out to her, saying: "That's how much I love you, Margie, dear. Up to this minute I've been an honest man; but if you want me to be a villain——"

"Why, you *dear!*—the very idea!" she said, brushing the envelope aside as if it were some sort of a biting insect.

Tradition doesn't say whether the blue car stopped of its own accord or whether Wilgus pulled it out of gear; but anyway it stopped. There was an arm between the two seats, but even that was not too much of an obstacle. Also, there was no hard-faced motion-picture censor standing by to insist that the clinch was prolonged beyond the legal limit. And there was only the morning sun, peeping over the intervening mountains, to look on when the young woman finally released herself with a happy little sigh and said, as her foot sought the clutch pedal:

"Dear me! For an angel boy you do kiss awfully hard, Bertie. But then—you never *can* tell."

The complete novel in the next issue is "The Innocent Thief," by Roy Norton.

MAKING EVERYTHING PLAIN

CHARLES A. WEBB, the newspaper publisher of Asheville, North Carolina, is a politician from sheer love of the game. He revels in it. Consequently, he knows what to do to win votes—and when, where and how the doing of it should be done. During the last campaign he escorted an imported spellbinder to a speaking place in one of the mountain coves far back in western North Carolina, warning the new man that in addressing the mountaineers it was necessary to use the simplest language so as to make everything plain to them. The visiting orator said he understood the situation and would govern himself and his tongue accordingly.

"My countrymen," he began, after having been suitably introduced by the hopeful Mr. Webb, "I shall begin with an epitome of the Democratic platform." Remembering Webb's warning, he added: "'Epitome,' my fellow citizens, has a signification synonymous with synopsis."

"The Writer-Upward"

By Albert Payson Terhune

Author of "Sant-El-Klaus Najib," "The Whiffet," Etc.

Najib is never very strong on ethics but he *is* sometimes most efficient

FURTHERMORE, Howaji," said Najib, appearing at the door of the tent and rousing Kirby from the perusal of a sheaf of month-old American newspapers, "furthermore, Howaji, it is a pleasureful thing to be thus bewritten upward. But——"

"What?" queried Logan Kirby, glancing at him, in perplexity.

"To be bewritten upward, of an assuredly," repeated Najib, adding, as Kirby's brain still failed to grasp his meaning, "by this Melvin person, Howaji. You told me, yourself, he came himself hitherward from over than six thousand miles to bewrite us upward. He——"

"I told you Mr. Herbert Melvin came here to write us up," corrected Kirby. "Or rather to write up the Cabell Smelting Company's antimony mine here. That meant he wanted to look over the mine and ask us questions about its operation and output and all that sort of thing; and look over our books. Then he will write an article about it for the *Mine Journal* that sent him to Europe and the Near East to get a series of expert articles on a dozen or more mines, from the Hartz Mountains to Arawak—mines owned by American concerns and operating on this side of the Atlantic. That's what I meant, when I said he had come here to 'write us up.' Mr. Melvin is——"

"Just as I speeched it, Howaji," said Najib. "I said it was a pleasureful thing to be bewritten upward. But this writer-upward person—this Melvin person——"

"When you speak of an American," chided Kirby with some sharpness, knowing the stark need of impressing upon Oriental employees a reverence for the dominant race, "give him his title. "Say 'Mister Melvin' or 'Melvin Howaji.' Not——"

"Excusingly, Howaji," protested Najib stubbornly. "He does not merit it that I should be-mister him. He is not a Howaji. He is not a mister. He is a person. A hell-person, Howaji."

Angrily Kirby got to his feet. But Najib did not flinch. The fat little Syrian stood his ground stolidly.

"It is as I tell you," he insisted. "He is a hell-person. If he were not a guest and sacred by the guest law, it might be a mirthsome and wise deed to kill him."

Kirby checked his first impulse to break his riding switch over the shoulders of the presumptuous native for daring to speak thus of an American and a guest. Something in Najib's unwontedly tense earnestness made him pause.

Logan Kirby had lived long enough in the East to learn more about Oriental nature than it is granted to ninety-nine Occidentals in a hundred. Here, apparently, was something out of the common—something which might make inquiry wiser than chastisement.

Kirby had been born in Syria. And he had spent his boyhood in his father's big mission house at Nabous. Going to New York, he had taken the "mines course" at Columbia and had found a job with the Cabell Smelting Company on Broad Street.

A few years later the Cabells had sent him out as manager to their lucrative little antimony mine in the heart of the pink-brown mountains of Moab, three days' journey east of the Jordan. There his knowledge of Arabic and of Oriental human nature had made him invaluable to his employers in a thousand ways.

His mine superintendent and factotum and adoring satellite was Najib, a squat Damascene who once had misspent two blissful years with an all-nations show at Coney Island and who had acquired there a smattering of a language he mistook for English, of which he was so vastly proud

that he would speak to Kirby in no other tongue, unless stress of overstrong emotion made him lapse into his native Arabic.

Kirby now stared in bewilderment at his superintendent. Najib, at news of Melvin's impending arrival at the Cabell mine, had been as happily excited as a child. For the two days of the guest's sojourn he had overwhelmed him with attentions. Hence Kirby's amazement at the sudden change of front.

Kirby himself had been as delighted as Najib when Melvin had written him from Brindisi of a projected stop at the Cabell mine during a tour of American-owned properties. A laudatory article in so powerful an organ as the *Mine Journal,* would do much for Logan's prestige and for that of the little mine in whose interests he was toiling so hard. At the very least such an article ought to mean a raise of salary to him; and it might even lead to his transfer to some less God-forsaken region.

Thus, he had granted to Melvin every facility for seeing the mine at its best; and he had offered the journalist the cream of such rough-and-ready hospitality as the mine afforded.

Now, during the guest's brief absence on a morning's ride among the nearer hills, Najib had come to him with this hint of unpleasantness.

"Speak up!" commanded Kirby. "Say whatever you've got to say. Forget, for once, that you're an Oriental, and come to the point. What are you driving at, when you speak that way of Mr. Melvin?"

"I bewent me to his tent, yonder, but just now, Howaji," serenely answered Najib. "He had left in his *un*riding trousers his bunch of keys. One of them befitted itself right sweetsomely into the key mouth of his trunk. I——"

"You mangy little pest!" raged Kirby. "Do you mean to say you went through a guest's luggage and——"

"Only to put it into an orderliness, Howaji, if need was. But need was not. It was neatful. And in it was his portfolio; full of words on many pages, in groups, and all printed forth in fair clearitude with a type machine. And the first one entitled itself, 'The Grunauer Mine: a Model Plant.' And the article bepraised that Grunauer Mine and its manager as if they were Es Semme and the Prophet—on whom be the peace of Allah and the ages of the ages! I do not know what the Grunauer Mine may be, Howaji. But of an assuredly it is a mine of much splendor and wealth, if all be true that this Melvin hell-person has bewritten himself upward about it. He——"

"Najib!" groaned Kirby.

Then he gave up the struggle to teach this Syrian a glimmering of a notion as to his own depravity in meddling with the locked papers of others. Najib, missing the look of utter disgust wherewith his chief favored him, prattled on.

"There were other articles, too, Howaji; all begrouped by theirselfs with a metal clasp. And some praised high the mines they spoke of and some praised low. But one was not praiseful at all. It was hellful. This one was not all finished. But it becalled itself, 'Cabell Antimony Mine—a Worthless Property; Wretchedly Managed.' It——"

"What!" gasped Kirby, amazement making him forget his contempt for the prying of his henchman.

"If I lie, may the Seventh Circle of Gehenna burn me to eternity!" said Najib.

He was groping with dirty hands into the folds of a dirtier *abieh* as he spoke. He fished out a sheaf of typed manuscript pages.

"Here it is, Howaji," said he, proffering the unfinished article to Kirby. "Beread yourself of it. It makes smaller of yourself and of the mine's management and of the output and of all, than the smallness of a flea. And it bespeaks itself merrily of *me* —of ME, Howaji—as a 'lazy monkey; fit companion for his boss.' Offspring of six thousand carrion crows and a trillion sick she camels that he is, this Melvin person! May his remains find refuge in the stomachs of hogs and vultures! May his grave be dug up by pariah dogs! May his father's bones——"

Najib had dropped into fluent Arabic, so fiercely excited was he. Now, breaking off in his invective, he thrust the manuscript again toward Kirby.

"But read it for yourself, Howaji!" he begged.

"Take that thing back to Mr. Melvin's tent," ordered Kirby, without touching or so much as looking at the proffered papers, "and put it back where you found it."

"But, Howaji!" stammered the dumfounded Najib.

"Tamâm!" rasped Kirby, jerking his thumb toward the guest's tent.

With a resigned sigh Najib pattered off to obey the mystifying command.

Left alone, Logan Kirby sat long and motionless, his unseeing eyes upon the pinkish peaks of the barren mountains that stretched away to the horizon beyond his tent door. His brain was in a jumble.

This man, Melvin, had come with proper credentials. He was a financial writer of some slight note. Kirby had often seen his name as author of articles and treatises in trade papers devoted to mining. The *Mine Journal* was not only the most powerful, but the most honorable periodical of its kind in America. Having been sent out to write this series of expert articles on the various American-owned mines across the Atlantic, why should Melvin have written such cruel and damaging lies about the Cabell mine and about the managership of the man who was his host and fellow countryman?

It did not make sense to Kirby from any angle. He was making the very best of the little mine, in every way. Such an article, appearing in a paper of the *Mine Journal's* prestige, would do much harm to the mine and would brand Kirby, throughout the profession, as an incompetent. It meant the end of his career. True, he and the Cabells might bring suit for libel. But libel, at a distance of more than six thousand miles, is a slow and costly and difficult thing to establish.

What could be the motive for so blackguardly and lying an attack?

As Kirby sat there, the jingle of bells and the droning song of an Arab sounded along the steep trail which wound upward toward the mine from westward. Up the trail rode a native muleteer—the man who brought the twice-a-week mail to Kirby from Jerusalem. Across his pillowlike saddle sprawled the mail sack. The muleteer was singing, in Beirut dialect, through his nose and in one minor tone:

"Seek to the depths of my heart, O beloved! And there thou shalt find naught but love for thee. Thine eyes are like to sunshine. Thine arms are——"

The inspired singer paused in this catalog of his mythical sweetheart's physical geography long enough to shrill at his mule:

"Iellá, abras! Move, one-eyed child of Shaitán and a dead pig! Move, ere I rip the rotting flesh from thy useless bones! *Iellá!"*

This zeal for speed was due to his glimpse of Logan Kirby in the tent door. Kirby took from him the mail sack, unlocked it and shook out on the tent's deal table the pitiful handful of letters and papers and magazines. Pushing the papers to one side he seized avidly on the half dozen letters—his sole personal link with the home land from which he was an exile.

The top letter bore the imprint of the Cabell Company's main office on Broad Street, New York City. This Kirby tore open first. And then for a space he forgot the others. For glancing down the typed page dictated by the company's vice president, he read:

Herbert Melvin, the free-lance writer, is making a tour of Europe and the Near East, preparing a series of articles for the *Mine Journal*. But I do not think you will be troubled by him. He is likely to give Cabell Mine a wide berth. He is clever; and, though nothing can be actually proven against him, the people who know him best say he is twice as crooked as he is clever.

For example, he sent an emissary to several American owners of European and Occidental mines, telling them of his proposed trip and intimating—in a way that could not be brought home to him—that any private contributions toward his foreign traveling expenses, et cetera, would be repaid by a flattering write-up of the donor's mining interests, out there; the larger the contribution, the more flattering the write-up.

I refused to see his emissary, who called here, twice. Then Melvin himself took a chance and called. I saw him. He approached the topic of a bribe with infinite tact and said not one word I could hold him on. But he made his meaning so plain that I proceeded to tell him, very exhaustively, what I thought of him. Then I risked a suit for assault and battery by ejecting the miserable crook bodily from my office.

So I don't think you'll be troubled by a visit from him. He is likely to give the Cabell Mine the silence cure. Naturally, the *Mine Journal* will act in entire good faith in publishing his articles. Bates, the editor, is Melvin's cousin and is almost the only man alive who clings to a fond belief in Melvin's squareness. I hear, in a roundabout way, that Fosdick, of the Grunauer Mining Corporation, slipped the grafter a thousand dollars for the promise of a write-up that will send the mine's stock soaring. I don't know how true that is.

Kirby's reading was interrupted at this interesting point by the clatter of cantering hoofs on the trail. Herbert Melvin, spruce and smiling in natty riding clothes, swung down from his pony at the tent door, toss-

ing the reins to Najib, who chanced to be inching toward the tent, and came swaggering blithely up to where Kirby sat.

"Great ride!" he exulted. "It's given me a wolf's appetite for lunch. Can we eat a bit early, old man? I've the rest of my packing to do. I start for Jerusalem at three, you know."

"I know," said Kirby heavily, adding, "Do you send any of your articles from Jerusalem; or do you wait till you get back to New York and turn them all in at once?"

"I'm finishing up the last one," answered Melvin, eager as ever to talk of his own exploits. "I've a half hour's work to do on it, before I leave. Then I'm going to mail the whole lot from Jerusalem. The series begins in about three months. Yours was the last mine on the list. I'm going to loaf around Paris for a couple of months before I go home. So I'm glad to get the whole dozen articles off my hands and on their way before then. I—hello!" he broke off, at sight of the papers and letters on the table. "Mail's in, eh? Nothing for me, I suppose?"

"Nothing for you," returned Kirby in that same heavy voice. "But one that is all about you. Here it is."

He handed Melvin the Cabell Company letter he had been reading. Melvin's alert eyes skimmed the pages. His expression did not change. When he had finished the perusal he calmly thrust the letter into his coat pocket.

"Unless I am much mistaken," he said quietly, "that will form all the evidence I need for a five-figure libel suit against your company and its president. A writer, like myself, has no other asset as valuable as his literary honor. This letter assails my literary honor. And I——"

"And you hold that honor at five figures?" interposed Kirby. "Mr. Melvin, you are my guest—though an uninvited and undesired and dishonest guest. But here hospitality means more than at home. I don't wish to shame my hospitality by taking that letter from you by force. Kindly give it back to me."

He took a step forward as he spoke. Melvin's right hand went melodramatically to the butt of a pearl-handled revolver which hung ostentatiously at the belt of his motion-picture riding suit.

Through the open door, on noiseless bare feet, slipped a squat little figure. It paused for an instant behind the unsuspecting Melvin. Then it slipped out again, unobserved by the guest. In the doorway of the tent, on his way out, Najib paused only for the fraction of a second. He paused to wink at Kirby, over Melvin's shoulder, and to hold up for momentary view the Cabell letter he had so deftly lifted from the loose-hanging outside pocket of the riding coat.

Then he was gone.

Kirby halted in his own advance toward the melodramatic visitor. Turning aside he moved back to the table.

"H'm!" remarked Melvin, shoving back the weapon into its holster. "A gun is an excellent deterrent to forcible robbery."

"Robbery of what?" asked Kirby sulkily.

"Of the letter you wished to take from me," retorted Melvin. "I hardly think you planned to take my watch, as well. The letter——"

"What letter?" asked Kirby, still sulkily; though he was at trouble to keep his mouth straight.

"The letter that is going to lose you your job and win me something more than fifteen thousand dollars in the courts," said Melvin, dropping his hand into his pocket to emphasize his words.

Then he went silent and began to grope fidgetingly through the voluminous pocket —jettisoning from its depths a gold cigarette case and a silk handkerchief and other articles of vertu; but no letter. After which he dug into the other side pocket. Then angrily he ransacked his clothes, pocket after pocket, and glanced about the floor at his feet, on the chance that it might have fallen out.

"Maybe you left it in another coat," suggested Kirby, unkindly. "Oh perhaps—more likely—you dreamed the whole thing. Yes, that must be it. You dreamed it. Now if only I could succeed in dreaming that you had been out here, disgracing America and the hospitality of a fellow American, we'd both be content. Lunch will be ready in ten minutes. You won't mind eating alone? I expect to be too busy down at the mine to eat this noon. I'm afraid I'll even be too busy to come out of the shaft long enough to say good-by when you go."

He walked out of the tent and set off for the mine shaft, leaving Herbert Melvin gaping after him in furious bewilderment. On the way, Kirby met Najib. In silence,

the little Syrian handed him the purloined letter.

"Thanks," said Kirby.

"You are full of welcome, Howaji," replied Najib. "It was a pleasure. And, besides, I beliked its reading. I——"

"I'm going down the shaft," interrupted Kirby. "Let me know when Melvin Howaji and his groom have gone. I don't want to be disturbed till then."

But Najib did not let him know. Three o'clock arrived. Then four, and then five. Kirby sent one of the fellaheen to make inquiries and to bid Najib come to him.

The fellaheen returned with tidings that Melvin Howaji had departed shortly before three o'clock with his groom and baggage mule and said that Najib had received a message by the hand of some village boy, an hour later, and had also left camp.

Puzzled and vexed, Logan Kirby plodded up the hill to his own tent. There, pinned to the deal table, alongside his unread mail he found a soiled slip of paper—the wrapper of one of his magazines—on which was scrawled, in Arabic:

Kirby Howaji—on whom the blessings of the All-Compassionate:

Word has come to me of the death of my father's son and my half brother, Imbarak-Abou-Nasif, at Damascus. He has left me much wealth. Therefore, I go in all haste to set his house in order and to claim that which is my own before the effendina of the Serail can seal his effects. It may be that I shall be gone for a month. It may be that I shall be gone for a year. But I shall return. That I swear on the beard of my father. May he lie where rose leaves shall fall upon his tomb! I grieve to leave you without farewell. But there was need of haste and you bade me not to disturb you. When I am gone, think not harshly of me that I have left you nor doubt that I shall return. The way is long and there is ever peril from wandering Badawi in the mountain passes. And I am no warrior. So I am taking with me two of the fellaheen whom I can trust—for I have promised them much baksheesh. We shall all return to serve you. That I swear.

Logan Kirby swore loudly and fluently. It was bad enough to have his job and his future wrecked by Melvin without losing the services of his superintendent and two of the fellaheen for an indefinite time.

Luckily it was a slack season at the mine. But, carrying the small force he did he could ill spare a single worker. Moreover, Najib was his one human companion in the loneliness of the long evenings when the jackals and wolves fought over carrion in the valleys below and the eerie "laugh" of the hyena woke the hilltop echoes. Kirby was fond of the queer little native; he foresaw he should miss him acutely.

Shrugging his shoulders and calling to his aid such fatalistic Oriental philosophy as Syria had taught him, Kirby made ready to face the stretch of lonely shorthandedness. In the East one must either become philosophical or else one must be ready to face a nervous breakdown.

Yet the time dragged for the unhappy Kirby even more annoyingly than he had expected. He dreaded the inevitable day when word must come to him of the publishing of the article which would wreck his future and bring such cruel injury to the mine he loved. Eagerly he tore open every copy of the *Mine Journal* which the post brought. Eagerly he scanned every letter from the home office. He lost weight and he slept badly. This for three interminable months.

Then on a bright morning, at the end of the rainy season, three bedraggled men plodded up the trail toward his tent. They were dirty and ragged and thoroughly disreputable. Also, they were on foot, in this region where the taking of a long journey on foot betokens poverty. It required a second glance for Kirby to recognize the trio as Najib and the two missing fellaheen.

The fellaheen slunk off toward the mine huts down near the mouth of the shaft. Najib kept on toward the wondering Kirby. The little Syrian's dirty face was one vast smile. Before he was within ten feet of Logan he began to shout glad greetings.

"You miserable little renegade!" stormed Kirby, trying to be indignant. "I ought to discharge you! I ought to thrash you and then throw you out of camp. There's one comfort, though," with an appraising glance at Najib's rags, "you don't seem to have profited much by the 'much wealth' your half brother left you. He——"

"No, Howaji," meekly assented Najib, adding, "though for the sake of my family's honor it is but of a rightness that I should say if I had ever had a half brother, he would of an assuredly have been a most wealthful man. And I believe he would undoubtlessly have bewilled it all to me. He——"

"It was a lie, then, about your half brother dying? You worthless——"

"All men must die, Howaji," said Najib piously. "Even half brethren. Indeed, per-

chancely, half brethren may die as easily as whole brethren, if it be the will of Allah. In His sight, all are of an equalness. If——"

"What crazy idiocy are you blithering?" snorted Kirby. "Where have you been? And——"

"This morning, Howaji," returned Najib, diving into his *abieh* in search of something, "this morning I have been past the Mejdel khan, where slept the post muleteer last night. He still beslept himself as we passed; he being a slumbersome person. So I beopened me the mail bag and brought the post. I—I counted the time and it beseemed me it would be now. And I was aright. See?"

He handed Kirby two or three letters and then held up for his inspection an open copy of the *Mine Journal.*

Across the top of the page at which he had opened the magazine were blazoned the words:

AMERICAN-OWNED MINES IN EUROPE AND THE EAST.

A Series

By Herbert D. Melvin.

No. 1.—THE CABELL MINE: A Model Plant.

Brief Review of the Best-Managed and Best-Paying Concern, for Its Size, East of New York.

His eyes bulging, his brain aghast, Logan Kirby ran his eyes over the two thousand words of glowing praise that followed. The mine was described as a miracle of efficiency and of high-grade production. Kirby's exploits as manager were all but fulsome in their laudatory word-painting. He was held up as perhaps the only man in America who could have lifted so hopeless a venture from foredoomed failure to affluence.

Even Najib came in for a word of praise as a rarely competent superintendent and a born leader of men. The mine's output was exalted to the skies for both quality and quantity. Words were not spared to depict an institution for whose excellence the highest compliments were too feeble.

At the end of the article was the promise:

Next Month: The Grunauer Mine.

Dazed, Kirby raised his eyes from their incredulous scanning of the magazine. Najib, grinning blissfully, fidgeted in front of him. Kirby tried to speak. But he could only gulp. Najib, thrilling with the true Oriental love for story-telling and for dramatic effects, struck an attitude and began to declaim.

"Furthermore, Howaji," he said, "I enseech you to begladden yourself. We are not downward and outward, as we feared us we would be. We have much kudos and much raisements of salary in store for us. Wherefore, let us be rejoiceful and make merry. *Alla-hu-akbar! Mahmoud saidnah rasoul Allah! Ei——"*

"Najib!" gurgled Kirby, pointing shakily to the magazine in his hand. "What——"

"Be of a calmness, Howaji," begged Najib, dropping back into English. "Do not let my rejoicesomeness beget your goat. I will tell you. Hark yourself to my words of blessedness."

Then, patteringly at times and at times with dramatic halts and always with wealth of gestures, Najib launched forth upon his story.

"I befeared me that Melvin person might lose his way on the journey to Jerusalem," he began. "Wherefore I followed after. And with me I betook two ignoranceful fellaheen who are as my worshiping sons—because that I know of a murder which would emplace them in the prison for their life. Also because I bepledged that you would pay them a hundred mejidie each."

"I——"

"Of a patientness, Howaji, I plea you! We came upon Melvin Howaji and his groom at the guest hut at the foot of Nebo. It was late in the night. They beslept themselfs with sweet snore soundings. The groom we wokened. And when we had talked softsomely to him for a space and when he saw our knifes and when we beswore ourselfs solemn what we would do if he tarried, he journeyed himself away from thither with much speed and no noisiness. Perchancely he is journeying yet. For he went with much earnestness of feet.

"Then, while the Melvin person still made sweet snore sounds we tied that poor Melvin person with ropes. And when he awokened we were carrying him from the trail. To the shrine of the holy Fathma we carried him. He was of a willingness to be carried. Or, if not, he did not say he was not of a willingness. Though of a perhaps that may have been by reason that we had gagged him."

"Najib!"

"It was of a needfulness, Howaji. For my heart is of much softness and it sorrows me to hark the cries of distressedness. So I begagged the poor person. The Howaji remembers the shrine of the holy Fathma? Silly fellaheen think it is now the haunt of *afrits*. So they besteer them clear of it. And it is far off the path of others. It is a safesome place; and it is comfortful, too, except for the wet and the fat spiders and the fleas and such like and the darkness of the inside of it. And there that sad Melvin person has been beliving himself for four pleasant months. Until this morning. He——"

"No!" cried Kirby, in sharp repulsion.

"But yes, Howaji. He abided there for four months—that *we* might not abide jobless, perhapsly for life. A noble person, Howaji; and a fine sacrificer. For a day he did scant else but enhowl himself to a pitisome hoarseness. Then he grew hungered and most thirsting. And he listened with a little kindness when I bespoke him."

"When you?"

"When I enseeched him to take his little typing machine and becopy two of his articles, Howaji, with some small changes to them. I made him becopy that article about the Grunauer Mine and alterate its name to Cabell Mine and its output from aluminum to antimony and its place to the mountains of Moab and its manager and his superintendent to you and my lowly self. It was easy. For he had the Grunauer article to becopy by."

"Do you actually mean you——"

"It was of a difficultness, Howaji. For three days we had to plea at him and keep him with no feeding and with but such water as he could belick from the wet walls of the shrine of the holy Fathma. And the spiders and the fleas were of an evilness that wrathed him. Oh, Howaji, I was so sorrowed for that poor unhappy person in his hungriness and his thirstings and his fleas that I wept tears. I wept tears whenever I looked upon his miserableness. So I forbeared to look.

"But on the fourth day he sent one of the fellaheen for me. And he surrenderized himself at me and did even as I had bidded him. Only, he sought to betrick me and do it wrong. So I unfed him for another hot day. And then he did it right. I read the first article writing and the second, side by their sides, and he had done it aright. Even as you behold it now. Then I encoaxened him to make the Grunauer article as he had at first made the Cabell one. And this he did with less crossfulness."

"But why on earth——"

"If all the articles were of a like sweetness," explained Najib, "ours would not beshine itself so gloryingly in the printed word as if the next one spoke evil of the other mine. So, when the two were done, I built me a fire and I burned the two articles and all his other ten articles in that fire, with much incantfulness. This I told him I did to belift a curse from our mine. But I did not burn them. I burned blank article-pages. Yet he enthought himself they were the ones he had becopied so fairly.

"In his portfolio were letters. One was to the sheik of the *Mine Journal*. It had been written the day he departured from here. And it was in a fine thick wrapping, with all the articles. It told the *Journal* sheik that here were all the articles and that he was bepostaging them from Jerusalem. In that packet I put the two alterated articles and I benumbered them 'one' and 'two' and I emplaced them to the top of the others. Then, while the two fellaheen guarded him, I journeyed me to Jerusalem and to the post-serail there and I beposted the packet to the place addressed on its wrap. I had often beposted our mine mail for you; and I had wisdom of how it was done."

"You blackguard!" groaned Kirby. "I don't——"

"He had told that the articles would commence to bepublish theirselfs in three months," resumed Najib, unheeding. "I had not a pure trust in that Melvin person. Even though he had thought he beholded me burn them, he is a suspicionful person. I befeared me he would send a telegraph to the *Mine Journal* to watch for a trick. So I kept him as my honorful guest until the first article and the second article could beprint theirselfs. Last night I set him at freeness. And he——"

"You idiot!" roared Kirby. "It was rotten enough for you to do such a vile thing as to kidnap him and hold him prisoner in that hole of a shrine and tamper with his mail! But don't you know what will happen now? The minute he gets to Jerusalem, he'll go to our consul and make formal com-

plaint! Soldiers will be sent up here to arrest you—and perhaps take me along as an accomplice. The mine is likely to lose its concession and——"

"Tame yourself, Howaji!" cooed Najib. "Tame yourself and become ungoated. He will do none of those wicked and ungratesome and treacherous deeds."

"But——"

"There were other letters in his locked portfolio, Howaji. And when the time hung with a heaviness I beread me of them. One was to his brother and it enbragged itself of the money he had begotten for each of the praisings he gave to mines; and how he was going to unbusiness our mine because Cabell Effendi—may he be the sire of a hundred warrior sons!—had insulted him in New York in the serail of the company on the Street That Is Called Broad. And there was another letter to a woman who was not one of his wifes. And in that lovesome letter he told how his wife would 'raise hell' if it were known about the woman he loved. Forthermore, Howaji, there was a letter to a man who had been darkposting him—no, 'blackmail' was the pretty word, whatever it may mean—and promising more money when he should be in Paris. And there were other letters. I——"

"Good Lord!"

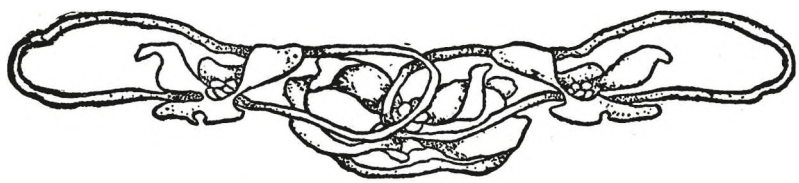
"I have them here," finished Najib. "I told him we should betreasure them in the case that he might do us ill. He will not."

"Najib!" stammered Kirby dizzily, after a long pause wherein the little Syrian wriggled bashfully and looked expectant. "You mangy crook! If you had one atom of understanding as to the damnableness of the thing you've done——"

"And how it has besaved us our darling job, Howaji," supplemented Najib, "and won us kudos and baksheesh from the company's sheik——"

"Oh, what's the use!" sighed Kirby, giving up the fight and ashamed of himself for his own sensation of joyous relief. "What's the use!"

"Of an assuredly, Howaji!" assented Najib. "What is the use? The use is larger than one man can say it. And it is a gladsome use that will mean wealth for us. As your wise feringhi proverb enspeeches itself: 'When thieves fall out, honest men—honest men gather no moss.' Or is it that they 'make strange bedfellows?' *Bismillah!*"



THE MAN WHO HAD

THEY were in one of the "places" which still manage to exist in the city of New York, charging high prices and dispensing beverages of potent and weird effect. The conversation was dominated by a garrulous gentleman who held the attention of all except a watery-eyed, tremulous and rather sodden-looking little man. The talker was telling his travels. He had been everywhere and he had seen everything. He had killed lions in Africa and tigers in India, fished for trout in the streams of the Blue Ridge and for pearl oysters off the shores of Ceylon, shot quail in Minnesota and cannibals in the South Seas. He had forgathered with kings and gamblers, freaks and dramatic stars. The museums of two continents, the zoos of every land and the art galleries of civilization had known his exploration. His hair-raising, terrifying, hair-trigger experiences, escapes and escapades defied the imagination, broke the bounds of knowledge and triumphed over the probable and the possible.

"Excuse me, sir," broke in the watery-eyed little man, who had been gazing into space with every appearance of boredom; "but have you ever had delirium tremens?"

"No, sir!" thundered the talker, resenting the little man's evident belittlement of his narratives.

"Well, then," said his interrupter, "you ain't seen nothin' and you ain't been nowhere."

Out on Bail

By Thomas McMorrow

Author of "Kidnaped," "The Circus of Senhor Ribeiro," Etc.

Doing honest work for Millionaire Morgenstern seemed so similar to "crooking" that "Stretch" Lantry decided he might as well stick to him and go straight

"STRETCH" LANTRY pushed open the great door and looked down at Lafayette Street as framed between the somber sphinxes which flank the steps of the Criminal Courts. He had just been admitted to bail after pleading "Not guilty" to a charge of burglary; he had been so herded and guarded during the last week that he was unready to believe that the clutch of the law had been released from his collar.

But the May sunshine in Lafayette Street showed no waiting turnkey; no detective lurked in the shadow of the sphinxes. The few pedestrians passing along the sidewalk gave not so much as a casual glance upward; they were going about their own affairs and the Criminal Courts was none of their concern.

Stretch Lantry shook himself reassuringly and swaggered down the stone steps, drawing a single deep breath. His light-blue eyes were narrowed reflectively in his sallow face. The natural expression of his features was one of boyish good humor tinged with recklessness. He frowned when he thought, because he did not like to think.

"I got to get some dough to pay that lawyer," he muttered. "And I suppose I will have to do another job to get it and maybe be catched again! S'help me! If I can beat this case I will lay off crooking and go to work!"

He had made such resolutions before and under similar circumstances; he had offered up his resolutions to appease the wrath of the spiritual Power against which he had offended; there was such a Power. But this time he felt even more sincere than usual, for this time he was not guilty. His friends had not waited for him but had pulled the job off before he arrived; and when he had run up to the sacked jewelry store the police were already there. It was tough and enough to make any guy turn over a new leaf.

"I never have any luck," he murmured pityingly as his long shadow fell on the pavement of Lafayette Street.

Before him on the sidewalk lay a neatly creased five-dollar bill, with the numeral looking up at him. He sprang for it and snatched it up and thrust it into his pocket.

He looked around him, and returned a happy smile for the envious glance of a fruit peddler who had halted his pushcart at the curb.

"Thees man drop da mon'," said the peddler, pointing at one of several retreating pedestrians. "You split feefty-feefty, fellow?"

"Garn!" snarled Stretch Lantry, like a dog with a bone. "I'll split you in the nose!"

He stalked down Lafayette Street in the direction opposite to that pursued by the alleged owner of the bank note. He had thrust his hands into his jacket pockets and toed in as he walked, giving an exaggerated and daunting swing to his wide, thin shoulders. His good resolution still went as made, but it would be an absurd refinement on it to apply it to a windfall such as this. The aforesaid Power would be a good fellow and see the sense of that.

He paused beside the high wall which encircles the Tombs and drew the bill from his pocket and feasted his eyes on it in the hollow of his hand. This small trove gave him much pleasure.

"Move on, now," said a passing policeman, looking at the loitering gangster with disfavor.

"Garn!" growled Stretch. "Ain't a citizen got no right to stand on his own street—you flat-footed—aw right, officer! I'm going—don't get excited!"

There was a white slip inside the folded

note; he drew it out. It was a pasteboard baggage check from the Pennsylvania Station parcel room.

"I will go and see what this calls for," said Stretch, bargaining again with the sinister Power. "If it is not any good I will not crook it, as I am off that kind of work for good!"

He hurried down into the subway, and rode up to the Pennsylvania Station. He thought that the owner of the goods on deposit might discover the loss of his check; in which event he would make haste to forestall Stretch Lantry and thus deprive him of the chance to refuse to steal.

He entered the station and went to the parcel room and handed his ticket to an attendant. The attendant was one of a half dozen men who were pressed to keep up with the demand for baggage or storage and he did not glance at his latest customer.

Up the moving belt came a new dress-suit case; the attendant pulled the tag from it and deposited it before Stretch Lantry.

"T'anks," mumbled Stretch, grasping the handle and starting away.

"Hey, there!" shouted the attendant. "Just a minute!"

"Whassa matter?" frowned Stretch.

"Take your menagerie," grinned the attendant. He handed to Stretch a small wicker cage in which was a live pigeon.

"I almost forgot him, didn't I?" said Stretch. "T'anks!"

"I wonder what kind of a nut I'm supposed to be," he muttered, blushing under the interested gaze of the people about him. He walked through the throng to the Eighth Avenue entrance, carrying the suit case in one hand and the bird cage in the other. When he got to the street he dropped the cage into a waste-paper receptacle.

"Hey!" shouted the station policeman who stood beside the entrance. "Come back here, and take that bird out of there!"

"Go soak yer head," grumbled Stretch, walking away.

"Is that so?" cried the officer, hurrying after him and catching his arm. "I've a good mind to pinch you for cruelty. You take that bird out of there and take him home and be good to him—you hear?"

"Garn—you Keystone Comedy cop!" retorted Stretch. "You couldn't pinch nobody. Where do you get that stuff—trying to talk like a regular policeman!"

But he picked the cage from the receptacle again and went off with it. He rode uptown on the Ninth Avenue elevated to his room in a Harlem tenement.

He was in haste to get out onto Eighth Avenue and show himself to his friends, so as to restore his prestige, which had been tarnished by his arrest. He threw the suit case onto the bed and opened it, hoping to find therein some snappy garments which would increase the dramatic effect of his reappearance in his wonted haunts.

In the case was a gray uniform, set with shining brass buttons and trimmed with black braid. There was also a loaded revolver, a policeman's billy and a polished silver badge. He fingered these things and picked up from the floor a sheet of paper which had fluttered thither.

It was half of a sheet of ordinary typewriting paper; there was a typewritten letter on it. He sat down on the bed to read it.

My Dear Mr. Lantry:——

"Hello!" exclaimed Stretch, looking up from the sheet. "This bird is a friend of mine!"

My Dear Mr. Lantry: You will find herein the uniform of John Casey who is the interior night-watchman in J. Dupont Morgenstern's jewel vault. If you do not know of Mr. Morgenstern you may understand that he is one of the richest men in this country and has a collection of precious stones of the value of several millions of dollars.

Put on this uniform and go to the Seventieth Street entrance to the vault; it is on the north side of the street, between Fifth and Madison Avenues. The captain of the guard will be expecting you at nine o'clock to-night. Tell him that you are John Casey's brother and that John sent you, as he is ill and cannot come. Take this letter with you in one of your shoes. You will be admitted to the vault.

Put the pigeon in the lunch-box and bring it along. When you are alone in the vault go to the third case from the left as you stand at the side farthest from the steel door. Read the direction on the left-hand corner of the case.

"Well, what do you know about that!" exclaimed Stretch, dropping the sheet and starting away from the bed. "I got a mighty good mind to fool this bird and stay home. He is certainly one grand little fixer, I'll say!

"Morgenstern," he muttered. "Why, that is that big millionaire. It would not do the honestest guy in the world any harm to be loose for a little while in that vault, and then he could make up his mind. I do not think I will go. At the same time, it is

not like as if this bird was asking me to do anything crooked."

He studied the matter, surveying it on all sides with equal suspicion and longing and striving to pierce to the secret design, as a wild animal circles a baited trap.

His foreboding of disaster lessened as he considered the smoothness with which he had been tolled along to this point. It was inevitable that he should have picked up the five-dollar bill and that he should have sought to secure the baggage for which the ticket called and that he should have gone to a secret place to examine his booty. And he was known to the person who had prepared these things; if he refused to continue in the path in which his feet were set he would make a secret enemy. And his unseen ally would not desert him, but would speak to him again in the vault.

"No—I won't go!" he cried aloud.

But when the captain of the night guard looked impatiently through the barred window at nine o'clock he saw Stretch Lantry approaching in the familiar gray uniform.

"You're Casey's brother, are you?" repeated the captain, at Stretch's introduction of himself. "Come in this way."

Stretch pushed open a wrought-iron door set in a granite archway and stepped into an open court paved with red tiles. The court was seventy-five feet wide on Seventieth Street and fifty feet in depth. On its northerly side was the jewel vault, a one-story structure faced with Indiana limestone. It abutted the Morgenstern mansion on the west. The court and the wall of the vault were brightly but softly illuminated by invisible electric bulbs set under the return of the vault's cornice. Stretch Lantry shivered slightly and dropped his gaze to the red tiles.

"What's the matter with John?"

"He has a touch of gezippus."

"What's that?"

"Search me," said Stretch blandly. "But he has it so bad that he can't come."

"I understand that you're attached to the Criminal Courts."

"In a way," said Stretch, looking at his companion. "Who told you that?"

"The wire I got an hour ago from John. He said you were on duty down there. Have you been a detective long?"

"Quite a while."

"You look like John; I knew you right away. Come in this way."

The captain led him up two stone steps and unlocked a door in the wall of the Morgenstern mansion. Stretch followed along a short interior passage and then up three steps again. "Take off your hat," said the captain in a subdued tone.

They stepped into a large and elegant foyer. The captain crossed the dully shining floor of inlaid parquet like a heavy man crossing thin ice, and breathed easier when he reached the deep-piled rug whereon his footfalls were inaudible. The walls were paneled and stippled in three shades of tan; light fell on them from a single standing lamp with a hammered-bronze stem. The captain pressed on one of the panels and it swung inward noiselessly.

"Nifty!" commented Stretch.

On either side of the secret door were seated life-size figures on high-backed antique chairs. They seemed to be combined of bronze and tinted ivory or alabaster, in the beautiful old Byzantine fashion. While waiting for the captain to proceed, Stretch crossed his shins and leaned his elbow on the head of one of these statues in an attitude of elegant ease.

"Excuse me," said the statue dryly. "But would you mind taking your bloody elbow to the devil?"

"Excuse *me!*" cried Stretch in confusion. "I thought you was an image, you got such a serious mug on you. Why don't they light this blamed point up so a guy can see! That other little joker sitting over there is another of you, hey? Well, well, I'll say your act is a riot!"

"Shut up!" hissed the captain. "Come in here!"

The captain dismissed the guardsman in gray who rose from his seat at the opposite side of the vault as the two men entered.

"See those two clocks on the walls?" he said to Stretch. "You're to punch those every fifteen minutes through the night until six o'clock to-morrow morning. That's all you have to do except to see that no one enters here. If I myself enter here during the night you're to arrest me; that's the only door and it shuts with a time lock and no one can release it except Mr. Morgenstern himself; that telephone is connected with his bedroom. Let me see your gun."

The captain inspected Stretch in military fashion.

"What have you got to eat?" he asked, glancing at the lunch box.

"Little hot bird," said Stretch impudently.

"Well, so long!" The captain retreated through the doorway. The door was of great weight for all its apparent ease of movement; as it returned into its jamb the pinched air squeaked under its blow.

The dozen frosted bulbs which were burning in the vault were ample to suffuse it with a soft radiance; their light was reflected from walls of Carrara marble chaste as snow. The whiteness of the Carrara was enlivened by a black-and-gold marble used decoratively. There were no windows; overhead was a dome twenty feet in diameter and set with frosted plate glass. The cases and cabinets were of steel, white enameled; except for the gold veins in the black marble there was no color in the room which could lend by reflection the faintest tint to the whiteness of daylight.

Stretch Lantry was imprisoned more securely than he had ever been in his life.

"And make believe I wouldn't like to get out of here on bail!" he muttered, with a burning glance at the lustrous contents of the adjacent cabinet.

The cabinets were like flower beds; Morgenstern has an income of two millions yearly and is in a position to gratify a fancy. You will remember having read of his purchase of the McCormick Buddha, one of the world's rarest stones: it is a statuette carved from a single sapphire, the head being white, the torso blue and the base yellow. He has that white diamond that is known as the Singhalese Fakir; it was stolen by a slave, who slit his calf and thrust the stone into it; he got to the seashore and gave it to an English sea captain for passage to Europe; the Englishman threw him overboard when one day out and was himself murdered in Limehouse for the gem.

Most great stones have a history of crime and murder and sudden death; could some of the pretty bits of mineral in Morgenstern's cabinets have unfolded their tales they would have caused the marceled hair of the pretty ladies who bent over them with tender exclamations to stand on end like quills upon the fretful porcupine.

Stretch went to the seat from which had arisen the watchman whom he had replaced. He sat down and looked all about him with care to be quite sure that he was in solitary confinement.

"The third case from the left," he muttered.

The indicated case was of the same structure and appearance as its many mates, being a shallow box of plate glass bound with enameled steel. From the unrelieved black of the velvet which lined it winked and flickered gems of such decided colors that Stretch did not recognize any of them for what they were, diamonds. There were yellow diamonds and green, and stones of a deep and blazing blue from Golconda. And one was red.

There were scratches on the enamel of the corner, such as could readily have been made by a person leaning over the case with his or her hand resting on the rim. Stretch studied these marks, in default of anything seemingly more purposeful.

"'The Notched Bullet,'" he spelled out from the scratches. "Now what in blue blazes is that supposed to mean?"

He went over the enamel inch by inch but failed to find any other message.

"Now that he's got me hooked," he muttered disgruntledly, "he's going to put riddles and conundrums to me. He must think I sit around Sunday afternoon solving puzzles in the family sheet. This bird has got me dead wrong!"

And then he pulled his revolver from his pocket and twirled the cylinder. And he saw that a cross had been cut in the lead nose of one of the bullets.

He threw the shell out into the palm of his hand and examined it. He was not lacking in perception when an explanation was thrust under his nose and he discovered shortly that the missile had been removed from its brass jacket and restored. He pulled it out again. In the emptied powder chamber of the cartridge was a crumpled piece of onion-skin paper.

This was the message on the onion-skin paper:

Open dome with hook in wash room. Take red gem in center of same case and put in sling on pigeon's leg. Release pigeon through dome. After releasing pigeon, put both papers into packet of gray powder which is in lunch box, place on floor and pour liquid over packet. Liquid is in bottle in breast-pocket. Let remain in powder twenty minutes. Remove and wash in clear water, when instructions for finding secret exit will appear. Take what jewels you please, but follow directions exactly, at your peril.

Stretch carried the paper into the small

tiled wash room off the vault. He stopped three times to glance at the paper, to be quite sure that he was filling the prescription exactly. In the washroom he found a long wooden rod with a hooked end, as his unseen mentor had promised.

From the dome twelve feet overhead, two short chains hung down which ended in rings. He angled with them until he had discovered the simple mechanism and then pulled down on one chain, whereupon the topmost section of the dome pivoted on its center, disclosing an opening six feet square. Through the opening showed the slate-hued night sky; it was faintly crisscrossed by stout bars.

"He seems to know his way about," murmured Stretch, looking up at the dome.

He went to the case, slid back the lid and picked the red jewel from its velvet bed. He held it under the light and turned it slowly about.

It was the larger of the famous Cobra pair, weighing seven and one eighth carats, as against its twin's even seven. It was a diamond, but its hue was only less ruddy than that of a pigeon blood from Burma. While Stretch held it still between his fingers its glow was soft and equable and not unlike the shine of the precious bits of red corundum which come from sleepy Burma; but when he agitated it and woke its royal temper, hot flames shot from it. It flashed like light whisked from drawn steel, which a ruby never does. It was of even tinting and flawless, without silk and without feathers even under a lens; if you are a diamond expert you know that a stone perfect in all ways does not exist; Hirschman—of Hirschman, Bodenkamp & Son—has certified that there is a knot in the larger Cobra, meaning a waved grain; other experts have failed to discover this technical defect.

In the very act of placing the gem in the sling on the pigeon's leg Stretch paused to scratch his head in puzzlement.

"This bird has got me guessing, I'll say! Now, what in blue blazes is he asking me to do this for?"

He placed the stone in the sling.

He shrugged his shoulders as a disclaimer of any blame in the premises, and carried the bird to a point beneath the open skylight. He mounted upon a chair, threw the pigeon upward and into the gap in the dome and saw it slip through the bars and disappear in the outer darkness.

"That's that!" he grunted, getting down and replacing the chair. He pulled the skylight to and set about the next item on his schedule.

He found the envelope in the lunch box containing the gray powder referred to in the message and his breast pocket yielded him the vial of colorless liquid. He thrust the two missives into the powder, placed the envelope on a marble slab of the floor and poured the liquid over the envelope.

He turned away to select the gems which should accompany him on his journey; he proposed to fill the lunch box but did not want to take any but the best. He thought that he would save time by doing his picking early, while the secret instructions were being printed on the papers. He had heard of invisible ink and it seemed to him an ingenious idea to compel the paper to carry double. He suspected no evil at this stage; it is commonly observed by those who come into contact in a confidential way with criminals that often their minds are characterized by an abiding and engaging simplicity.

His mouth opened slowly as he bent over a superb display of beryl emeralds; his nose wrinkled.

He sneezed. He sneezed so hard that the convulsion doubled him up and then he continued sneezing. His eyes watered so that he did not perceive the blue haze which was rising from the packet on the marble floor.

But he recognized that something was radically wrong with the atmosphere of the vault and he was seized with panic terror. His fright caused his heart to thump and he ascribed this disturbing phenomenon to the acrid air; he thought that perhaps he was going to smother in the vault.

He stumbled to the steel door and beat and kicked at it and shouted. He turned again, remembering the telephone.

"Hello, hello!" he gasped into the mouthpiece. "In the vault—come quick—I'm being killed!"

He was still rattling the receiver and crying for help when the steel door swung back. He was no coward; an imminent prospect of smothering is calculated to throw any man from his balance.

Half a dozen gray guardsmen appeared in the doorway with drawn revolvers. In dressing gown behind them was J. Dupont Morgenstern.

Ten minutes later Stretch was standing under guard in the smoking room while Morgenstern plied him leisurely with questions. With the help of the captain of the guard he discovered easily enough that Stretch was not remotely acquainted with his alleged brother, John Casey.

"But what was your idea in getting into the vault?" asked Morgenstern smilingly. "You could not have gotten out again. And you must have known, if you used any sense at all, that you would have been elaborately searched in the morning. It would have been absolutely impossible for you to have stolen anything, my man."

"Don't I know it, boss?" said Stretch, rubbing his hand across his wide mouth. "I'm telling you I was hired for the job to be Casey's brother, just for to-night."

Morgenstern was lying back in the chair, with his head tipped forward on his breast and his heavy gray brows lifted to let his black eyes bore straight at his subject. He was smiling but he knew that there was a mystery here.

He was a large and stooping man of about sixty, very gentle of voice and glance and gesture. His address suggested the wary and respectful approach of a wrestler who does not underrate his adversary. Behind those large and unwinking eyes he was turning Stretch over and over and studying his every angle, as a jeweler turns a brilliant about in his forceps and peers in turn into each of its fifty-eight facets to surprise its secrets. He preserved his even manner at all times, though as an enemy he was quite remorseless.

There was a sound of voices in the foyer among the guards and the captain stepped out to quiet it; he returned with a tall young man in civilian clothing.

"Here's Casey now!" he announced to Morgenstern.

"Well?" said Morgenstern, nodding at the watchman.

"I was walking home this morning," said Casey shamefacedly, "and on the corner of Madison Avenue I see a fellow tinkering with an automobile. And he looks and sees me and asks me will I give him a hand to put on a shoe. And I did!"

"And then?" said Morgenstern.

"And then he says he will take me home. And we get in and I tell him where I live and he gives me a cigar. Well, we drive along and he asks me will I have a drink and I am feeling kind of plugged out from being awake all night and I say I don't mind. He hands me a bottle and I have a drink and he says it is all right and plenty more where that comes from and I take one more. Well, half an hour ago I wake up in my room and I do not find my clothes —and that is all I know."

"You don't know how you got there?"

"Well, I ask the landlady and she says a fellow brings me home and helps me upstairs and she shouldn't wonder but I am under the influence. And that is all she knows about it."

"What did this man look like? Did you get the number of his car or can you describe it?"

"Well, I am not noticing much, on account I am quite tired and he keeps me busy on his shoe and on talking. He has on a linen duster and gloves and a soft hat pulled down and a handkerchief around his neck, as he does not want to get dirty. And I do not know so much about automobiles."

"Do you know this man here?"

"No, sir. I never see him before in my life."

"That's all. Wait downstairs."

Mr. Morgenstern's secretary entered; he whispered to his master.

"The Cobra?" repeated Morgenstern, turning his head sharply to frown at Stretch Lantry. "Thank you; we will find it easily enough; he had no chance to make away with it."

He spoke to Stretch. "I would advise you, young man, to save us the small trouble of finding this stone for ourselves. I am going to hand you over to the police in any event but you have probably enough experience to recognize that matters will take on a much more serious complexion if I charge you with removing that jewel from the cabinet. That act was grand larceny."

"Boss," said Stretch earnestly, "I'm out on bail now, on a charge of burglary, and if you turn me in on this charge it will finish me. I'm willing to do what I can to help you to get back your sparkler, as the guy I was working with done me dirt, but I'm not going to help you to get it back if you're going to turn me in! I tell you what you do: look around for it and when you give it up you can call in the cops if you like after you hear what I got to say!"

"I do not care to bargain with you," said Morgenstern.

"Suit yourself, boss," said Stretch, with a shrug of the shoulders. "Call in the bulls; but if you do you can kiss that stone good-by!"

"Take this fellow down into the servants' hall and search him thoroughly," said Morgenstern. "Have the gallery searched at the same time. Has that infernal stuff blown out yet? When you have found the stone notify the police and call me. It is already eleven o'clock and I wish to go to bed by half past, so please be quick."

He rose, thrust his hands into the pockets of his gown and walked slowly toward the foyer.

"But," interposed the captain hesitatingly. "If we do not find the stone?"

"We will not prepare against an impossibility," said the master promptly. "You will find it. It is the greater Cobra; there is only one gem like it in the world—and perhaps not even one."

He walked away; they saw his stooping figure mounting the staircase which rose from the foyer.

But when he descended later at an apologetic summons it was to cope with his alleged impossibility; naturally, they had not found the gem. He listened in silence to the story of the quest.

He nodded at the end. "Then it is gone," he said. "And what are your terms, young man?"

"I want enough to pay a cracking good lawyer!"

"Very well," he assented calmly. "If you recover that jewel for me I will have my own attorneys defend you at your trial."

"*Your* attorneys!" repeated Stretch. "What was you pinched for, boss? Well, that is your own business. Listen, then, and I will tell you all about it and how I come to be in your vault!"

And he repeated the tale of his adventures, from his leaving the Criminal Courts Building that afternoon until he poured the liquid onto the packet of gray powder.

"Did you find anything on the floor?" asked Morgenstern of the captain of the guards.

"Nothing but a handful of charred ashes. We sifted them, looking for the diamond."

"It is a curious story," said Morgenstern to Stretch. "But I fail to see that it affords us any clew to the present whereabouts of the stone. Supposing that it is not a fabrication from whole cloth it appears that you carefully destroyed what little evidence there was as to the identity of the thief. I am sorry, but I think we had better call in the police."

"All right, boss," said Stretch after a moment's rueful silence. "As my old man often says to me: them that lives by the hammer dies by it! I used to laugh at him but he will certainly have the laugh on son Stretch now. But let me ask you one thing, boss, so as I won't be thinking about it the next ten years in case they give me the limit: what do you figure that bird had on his mind when he gets me to tie the stone to the pigeon?"

"Why, that was undoubtedly a homing pigeon. When you released the pigeon it flew back to the cote it came from. Is it possible you did not understand that?"

"Yeah?" breathed Stretch. "So that was his little racket! The pigeon would fly back to where it come from, hey? Well, ain't that the cutest little thing!"

He burst into unaffected laughter, so that Morgenstern found himself smiling sympathetically despite his chagrin at his loss.

"No other pigeon would do him as well, would it?" inquired Stretch.

"Of course not! No pigeon except one from that cote!"

"Well, then, that wise gazabo is out of luck," cried Stretch, beginning to laugh again. "Because—the bird I let go through your skylight was *not his pigeon!*"

"What's that?" exclaimed Morgenstern puzzledly.

"The way I am about pigeons," said Stretch, sobering, "they all look alike to me and one pigeon is just the same as another. But there is a guy lives on my block who is all smoked up about pigeons. He is a nut and he stands on his roof every morning and waves a pole and his gang of pigeons fly around in the air like he tells them to."

"Come to the point!" ordered Morgenstern eagerly.

"Well, there is one thing I did this afternoon that I did not tell you, because I did not see it made any difference. As I was coming up my block this afternoon with my new dress-suit case and my pigeon, this bird, who is called Joe Frankenheimer, hails me and nothing will do him but he must give my pigeon the once-over. And he says to me that he will give me half a buck for my pigeon. Well, I says to him like this:

'Joe, I cannot give you that pigeon on account I need a pigeon very bad just now.' Well, he looks at my pigeon again and he says he will give me half a buck and another pigeon. Well, thinks I, a pigeon is a pigeon and a half a buck is half a buck and this is just like finding money. So I give him my pigeon and he gives me his and a half a buck; and I changes the sling to his leg, and that is the pigeon I let go through your skylight!"

"I see," nodded Morgenstern. "Then, unless it has gone hopelessly astray, the gem is now in the pigeon cote of your friend Joe Frankenheimer!"

"That's the idea," said Stretch. "Of course, I am not acquainted with this pigeon that Joe gives me and maybe he does not know his way around the city, but——"

"Take a car and go with this young man to his home," said Morgenstern to the captain. "He will show you where this Joe Frankenheimer lives. If the gem is there, take possession of it—this young man will make any necessary explanation to the pigeon fancier. And bring here also the original pigeon now in the custody of this Frankenheimer. This person will return here with you."

"And if the stone should not be there, sir?"

"Turn this young man at once over to the police!"

When they had gone Morgenstern rang for black coffee and chose himself a heavy black cigar. Almost without effort he thrust aside the thought of sleep; he was a man of regular habits but his body was trained to obey the imperious mind.

It was a queer business. The person who had prepared this thing and who had so nearly succeeded in robbing him was familiar with the interior of the vault. And he was not a common thief, for jewels were there of even greater value than the red Cobra. That jewel, indeed, was a worthy prize; Morgenstern had paid eleven thousand dollars for it. The plotter, then, had wanted the gem for itself and not for its market value. And after it had been secured, as he thought, he had taken measures to give the alarm, so that the robber should be seized at once.

"A collector!" exclaimed Morgenstern, his eyes brightening as he perceived a semblance of design in the web of circumstance.

A collector—an amateur of jewels! But why particularly the Cobra? The sapphire Buddha had excited even more remark. And, historically, the Cobra was not in itself a complete entity. There had been two such stones; they had been the glaring eyeballs of an Indian idol in that land where the dread serpent after which they were named was sacred and royal. The other Cobra had disappeared from public knowledge at the time of the Sepoy Rebellion of 1859; during many years those learned in the lore of jewels had watched for its reappearance as astronomers study the heavens for the return after generations of some baleful comet.

Morgenstern spoke again in a whisper which trembled with excitement. "The person who plotted to steal that stone is a collector—and he has the other Cobra!"

His hand shook so that the coffee spilled about as he poured it from the squat silver pot into the fragile cup. Collecting is a strange psychosis; its emotions are understandable only by the elect; if by others, by alienists, perhaps. It is the acquisitive instinct gone mad—as though a squirrel, relishing pig nuts, should heap them up until they topped the Woolworth. And now Morgenstern, who had more rare jewels than any man in the broad United States, trembled with desire at the thought of possessing the twin Cobras.

He crossed his legs and bent over, hugging himself together to concentrate on this problem.

Who was this bold collector? They were not many who could be suspected under all the circumstances; and yet they were several.

The captain of the guards appeared in the doorway; he entered in response to a gesture and placed the red diamond at his master's elbow. Morgenstern looked at it almost without satisfaction.

"It was in the pigeon house on the roof," the captain announced pleasedly. "I brought that young rascal back with me, and the bird."

"Well done," said his master. "Send the young man in to me and return to your duties."

"Young man," said Morgenstern to Stretch, "can you, by any force of will, control your kleptomaniac propensities for a few days if I give you your freedom?"

"Come again, boss?"

"The matter of the theft is still to be unraveled and I ask you to stay out of jail

for a very few days so that you may help me. I realize that I am asking a great deal and I am willing to pay you for lost time. Does fifty dollars per week appeal to you as a living wage?"

"It ain't bad," said Stretch cautiously. "What have I got to do, boss? I got a weak back, from lifting."

"I will not ask you to lift anything—at least not immediately," said Morgenstern with a shadow of a smile. "Your duties will consist in reporting here every morning to my secretary and in keeping out of mischief."

He handed Stretch fifty dollars.

"Your first week's wages," he said. "Go to Collamore, Stark & Ellenbogen, of 60 Wall Street, and ask for Mr. Ellenbogen and tell him your story. I would suggest that you tell him the truth; he may wish to use it, or some of it, in presenting your defense at the trial. He is my personal counsel and is one of the most honorable and able of the city bar. I bid you good night."

The butler coughed and beckoned in the hall; Stretch went to him and was honorably and watchfully escorted to the street.

After he had departed Morgenstern went to a desk and sat down to pencil and paper. He wrote several names upon the paper, meditating well over each. When he had done they were seven in all. These were the names of all the individuals who could by any force of imagination have been the prime mover in bringing about Stretch's misadventure.

Morgenstern went to the telephone.

"Let me have Professor Berkeley. Eh? Then awake him. This is Morgenstern—J. Dupont Morgenstern.

"Professor Berkeley? Morgenstern. I wish to obtain some chemical or corrosive acid, Berkeley, which will inflame or scarify the hands of any one who touches it. I would prefer something which will not result in permanent injury, but it must have a very definite and perceptible action. I have been thinking of hydrofluoric acid—that stuff the jewelers use in testing stones. But perhaps you had better come here to my house at once and let me explain to you just what I want. I am sorry but the matter must be attended to to-night. You will come? Very good."

He stepped into the foyer, looked about under the silent gaze of the guards at the steel door and perceived the pigeon in its wicker cage on the table. He picked up the cage and returned with it to the smoking room. The great red gem still lay where the captain had put it. While he waited for the coming of the chemist he busied himself in fashioning a sling of chamois and silk thread to receive the diamond, for he purposed to send the stone to the unseen conspirator. There was sporting blood in Morgenstern and when once aroused he was quite implacable.

Every morning thereafter, for five days, Stretch presented himself at the iron grille under the brownstone stoop of the old-fashioned Morgenstern mansion; and every morning he was curtly dismissed by that pale and impeccable man who was Mr. Morgenstern's secretary. Except for his visit to the attorney's offices Stretch spent these five days in standing on an Eighth Avenue corner trimming his finger nails—an employment which was to him a synonym for elegant leisure. His finger nails stood it, growing ever fresh, but he wore out an excellent penknife.

But on the sixth day his inquiry at the service entrance was answered differently.

"Return here at ten o'clock to-night," said the secretary, still curt.

At the appointed hour Stretch presented himself for duty.

The captain of the guard was waiting outside the granite archway; at the curb stood a closed limousine with a liveried chauffeur sitting erect behind the wheel.

"Get in," said the captain. Stretch entered the car; the captain followed him, slammed the door and they were off, rolling smoothly toward the park.

"Where are we going?" inquired Stretch.

"Thanks for reminding me," said the captain. "I had almost forgotten." And he drew a colored handkerchief from his pocket, folded it and proceeded to tie it about Stretch's temples, blinding him.

Stretch asked no more questions. The car rolled along rapidly at an increased speed. He felt that it turned several times, and so lost all sense of direction. They held on their way for twenty minutes and then the car came softly to a full stop.

"Get out," said the captain in a whisper. "Hold my hand and follow me very quietly. Here is a flight of steps—going down—three steps!"

When they reached the bottom of the

stairs Stretch felt the grip on his hand shift. He followed the pull on his fingers for a few seconds, turning once, and then the handkerchief was whisked from his forehead.

He was standing in a large square room beside a billiard table; the room was lit by the shaded light over the green cloth. Beside him stood a portly and bald-headed man in a dinner coat.

"Where am I?" asked Stretch.

"None of your bloody business," said the bald-headed man. "So you're a burglar, are you?"

"You're a liar," said Stretch.

"None of your lip, young fellow," said the bald-headed man, "or I'm liable to knock some civility into you so quick it'll make your head sing. You're a burglar and you've come here to crack a safe, you hear? Don't give me any argument. Come along and I'll show you the box!"

The bald-headed man took him by the arm and led him to the end of the room and switched on a light overhead. He pushed a hanging aside and showed Stretch a large door of nickeled steel.

"Open it," he directed.

"Open what?" said Stretch. "Why, mister, I couldn't open that in a week if I had the house to myself! That's a regular bank-vault door; look here at the name on it, who made it: Dowdney & Heil! You could blow the house from around that door, but itself——"

"Shut up," said the bald-headed man. "What do you think you're doing—giving a blooming lecture? I told you to open it, didn't I?"

Stretch put forth his hand demonstratively and pulled on the knob of the door.

The door swung toward him.

"Some burglar!" sneered the bald-headed man. And he switched on another light, illuminating the interior of the vault. "Go in now and burgle. Or do you want me to carry the stuff out to you and put it in your bloody pockets?"

Stretch stepped into the vault bewilderedly. He spun about on his heel, but too late to stop the closing of the door behind him. Through the thicknesses of steel he heard a gong sounding an alarm, and the muffled shouts of the bald-headed man.

"I give it up," said Stretch in an easy, conversational tone. "I guess I've gone nutty and they are sending for the wagon!"

The door reopened, slowly and cautiously at first.

"And when I saw him go in," he heard the bald-headed man saying, "I ran up behind him and slammed the door!"

"He's a liar!" shouted Stretch.

"Come out, young fellow," said the bald-headed man. "And don't try any tricks on us or you'll get your blooming head blown off!"

A police sergeant and three patrolmen were waiting in the billiard room with drawn revolvers. There were also several nondescript persons whom Stretch did not recognize as domestic servants; these latter persons were armed with a poker, a snow shovel, a mop and a bronze bust of Buddha. Mr. J. Dupont Morgenstern was standing in the background smoking a cigar with evident enjoyment. Beside him and behind an overstuffed chair was a middle-aged little gentleman with a large nose and close-set black eyes. Morgenstern and his companion were in evening clothes.

The little gentleman behind the portly chair had his hands bandaged.

Stretch came out.

"Has he stolen anything?" called the little gentleman. "Look and see, like a good fellow, Saunders!"

"Yes, sir," said the bald-headed man, taking hold of Stretch.

He searched his captive adroitly. From Stretch's trousers pocket he drew a small leather case; this naturally occasioned Stretch great surprise, as he had not put the case where it had been found.

"That is all, sir," he said, placing the case on the billiard table under the electric lights.

Morgenstern stepped forward and picked up the case. He opened it; it contained two almost perfectly matched crimson jewels. His face lighted with pleasure, for here were the matchless Cobras reunited after many years.

He exhibited them silently to Stretch for a moment, before he spoke.

"You took these from the vault there, did you not?"

"No!" cried Stretch. "That is—yes! Whatever you say, boss."

"Here is a strange thing," said Morgenstern, turning inquiringly to the little gentleman with the bandaged hands. "I have seen these stones before—one of them, at any rate. May I ask you to whom they

belong? Look at them, my dear fellow, and tell me to whom they belong."

The little man came forward slowly, with his eyes reading Morgenstern's face. He took the case, looked at the gems during an interval of many seconds and then looked up again at Morgenstern.

"Why," he said with a bland smile, "don't you remember them, Mr. Morgenstern? They are yours! You will recall that I borrowed them from you some time ago."

"I believe you are right," said Morgenstern, after thought. "But they were not both mine. This one, it seems to me, belonged to you and I do not remember having paid you for it. At what figure would you, as the first lapidary in this country, value that stone?"

"It is easily worth eight thousand dollars as a single stone," said the little man. "But please do not mention payment, Mr. Morgenstern! It was my idea to present you with it."

"I must insist," said the other gravely. "I cannot take it as a gift; you may give the money to charity, if you will. And now will you be good enough to look again at this person who has just stepped from your vault; tell the officers here whether he is an employee of yours going about his lawful occasions, or whether he is a burglar?"

"I have already recognized him," said the little man, averting his eyes from the bewildered Stretch.

"Then we may dispense with the presence of the police," said Morgenstern, bowing and smiling. "It was provident of you to call them in and I myself thought that they would go out with a prisoner."

The little gentleman ushered the policemen from the room, commending them to the hospitality of the bald-headed Saunders. The servants vanished at a gesture. The little gentleman returned to Morgenstern, and pleaded in a husky whisper.

"Won't you please let it remain a secret, sir? Upon my word of honor, I did not intend to resell them. You will perceive that it would have been out of the question! I wanted them for myself. You know that I sometimes permit myself the luxury of keeping an exceptionally beautiful stone. That is why I did not offer the lesser Cobra to you when I found it in a shop in Amsterdam last summer. I went several times to your gallery to admire your stone—and the idea of having it grew on me until it was an obsession and I could think of nothing else. I had to have it! Ah, sir, you of all men can understand that!"

"I will say nothing of the matter," said Morgenstern grimly.

"But this fellow here?"

"He does not know who you are, nor even where he is standing at this moment. I will see that he never knows.

"My chemist tells me that the irritating stuff you have gotten on your hands is a weak infusion of dichlorethylsulphide; it was on the chamois bag in which the jewel came to you. If you find the sores painful or inconvenient you may thank Heaven that your hands were spared to you at all; in my first moment of anger I seriously considered letting you have the gem at the price of both hands; it was only a matter of increasing the virulence of the solution. Your physician will know how to treat you when you give him the name of the acid; to assist him you may inform him that it is the liquid which was popular in the late war under the name of mustard gas—my chemist was a chief in the department of chemical warfare. I trust you will make a speedy recovery. Good evening!

"Come with me, young man," he said to Stretch Lantry.

"Oh!" He turned again to the householder. "You will have to look around for another butler. Your irreproachable Saunders will probably give you notice at once; he is an operative of the Duggan Detective Agency and it was he who opened your vault. It would be wise of you to pretend to be still unaware of his identity."

The captain of the guards was waiting in the vestibule. He replaced the bandage about Stretch's eyes and led him to the waiting limousine. Morgenstern seated himself in the car, which returned by a devious route to Seventieth Street.

"Good-by, young man," said Morgenstern to Stretch on the sidewalk.

"I say, boss," said Stretch, plucking at his sleeve, "what is the chance of a good guy getting a steady job with you? I am tired of crooking, because it always gets you in wrong. Now, you are a guy who has had dealings with lawyers yourself and you know it is no good and they get away from you all you can make—and once in a while they do not beat the case at that—although I am

willing to admit that a man with your dough can get the noisiest of them and you probably got a mouthpiece can talk a tin ear onto any judge in this country. But still and all, it is no use."

"What in the world are you talking about?" asked Morgenstern.

"I'm asking you for a job," said Stretch. "The way it is with me I do not know a trade and I thought I could not make a decent living unless I crooked; but since I am working for you I see that an honest life is just like crooking, except you don't get a collar. So what do you say, boss? Give me a chance and if I go back to the old game that is my funeral. Of course, I know it would not be all waffles and sirup at first, and it might come a little hard, but I certainly would like to have a little home of my own, like yours, and I think I would take the gaff and stick if I had a chance and nobody giving me the razz. What is the word, boss?"

"I think you will be back at your old tricks in a very short time," said Morgenstern amusedly. "But at least you shall have the chance, since you ask it. Report to-morrow morning as usual to my secretary and tell him he is to find you some hard and reasonably well-paid work where you may prove your good will without too much risk to my property."

"T'anks, boss!" cried Stretch happily as Morgenstern mounted the stoop.

He went off down the block, muttering to himself and closing and unclosing his fists. He meant every word that he had said. He had meant as much on other occasions and had fallen again from grace; but a guy can't do more than resolve to do his best.

In the next number, "The Devil and Anthony Kerrigan," by Mr. McMorrow.

THE TIME NOT TO QUIT

YOU'RE thirty-odd years old. You have a good job but it keeps you tied pretty closely to your desk all day nearly every day. Probably you have learned that there are such things as family responsibilities. Advancing yourself in business seems a mighty important thing—as it is. Yet you notice the lack of a certain zest for life that you had plenty of ten years back. Some mornings you feel tired when you get up. After dinner an easy-chair, a pipe and the paper look better to you than going to a dance or attending the theater. You admit that you've lost some of your "pep."

About this time you begin to tell yourself and the world that you are working too hard. Probably that's not it at all. You worked just as hard ten years ago and didn't get paid nearly so much for it. The trouble probably is not too much hard work but not enough hard play.

Can you walk ten miles without limping for a week afterward? Can you swim a couple of hundred yards without remembering the cigar you smoked after breakfast? Can you play tennis all afternoon without spending the next day wishing that you were all the way dead? If you can't do these things without an unpleasant degree of tiredness you're out of condition. Get back!

Most men get plenty of exercise up to the time they begin to crowd thirty. Then they stop. It begins to be hard to "find time." Doctors say that the early thirties are the dangerous age—the time when a man begins to go back physically if he doesn't take care of himself. Mr. Camp's "Daily Dozen" every morning, supplemented by a few hours a week spent playing some game in the open air will keep you fit. The hours you spend getting this exercise wouldn't look like much if toted up and compared to the hours you would lose by a serious illness. You pay your life insurance premium regularly. Be just as particular about keeping your health insurance in force. If you can't find time *make* time to play. You can do it.

The Scalp Lock

By Dane Coolidge

Author of "From Bitter Creek," "Lost Wagons," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

"This little white heifer is mine!" cried Steve Lovelady, wagon boss of the Lazy B, as he cast the loop of his rope over the shoulders of Charlotte Pennyman that night in Powder Springs. "Penny" wasn't angry—she had induced her fiancé, Clayton Hawks, to bring her and her mother to Wyoming and was "just crazy" about cowboys—but Hawks was furious and when the drunken Lovelady recognized him as the son of old Sam Hawks, owner of the Lazy B, his apologies were profuse and—thought Penny—charming. Hawks had been sent by his father to investigate the disappearance of eight hundred steers from the Lazy B herd and when next morning he interviewed William Bones, money lender and owner of the Forty-four Ranch, who had been managing the Lazy B since Hawks had moved to Boston, he demanded the discharge of Lovelady and his gang of Texan riders. Bones, who blamed the cattle stealing on Telford Payne, a Southerner who had settled in Coon Hole, across the line in Colorado, induced Hawks to keep the Texans. Penny coaxed him to take her and self-satisfied Mrs. Pennyman to the ranch and Hawks did so, after ordering Lovelady and his riders out on the range. Penny, however, managed to meet Lovelady and Hawks realized that both she and her mother had fallen under the spell of the dissipated but courtly Texan; but he had his work to do and after a few days rode to Coon Hole to look for his missing stock. There he saw many steers with a heart brand that he didn't know; talked with Payne and his wife, and was given a flower by Mary Blossom, the younger of the Paynes' two daughters, from her old-fashioned garden. Later, while riding along the trail in Vermilion Cañon, he met a friend of his boyhood, "Rooster" Raslem, who had been accused of robbing a train and was hiding out with a price on his head.

(A Four-Part Story—Part II.)

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SCALP LOCK.

A SUDDEN animation had come over Rooster; he seemed to caper as he bounded up to his cave. Sticking his head out, he laughed long and loud as Clay stumbled after him with the bag.

"How's this for a holdout?" he shouted boastfully. "Ever look for a man up here? I been here three months, holed up like a rabbit. Any detectives come by your place? Well, they did, all right, only you didn't recognize 'em; they're hunting for me everywhere. Must be some around here, because the man that brings me grub ain't showed up for more than a month. Come in! What do you think of my cave?"

He stepped back from the narrow cleft that served him for an entrance and jerked his head sidewise, like a rooster. It was a nervous trick he had—mentioned in detail in the sheriff's circular, along with the fact that he was a great talker—and Clay smiled at the memories it brought up. In the old days when he had been a cowboy, learning his job with the rest, Rooster had been his *fidus Achates*, his partner in many a wild prank—and here was the old Rooster, still. He was short and bow-legged, with a disproportionately long body; looking in fact like a very tall cowboy who had been driven into the ground about a foot. And his beady eyes were dancing with mischief as he exhibited his secret hiding place.

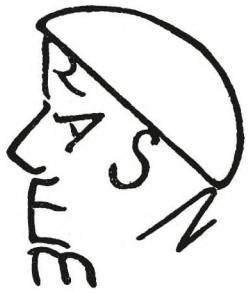
It was no more than a long cleft behind a great shoulder of rock which had parted from the cliff above; and by walling up one end and making a stairway up to the other he had converted it into a living place, a narrow cell about twenty feet long. The overhang of the stratum above made a roof in all weathers, there was a crack that led off most of his smoke and close by the fireplace he had constructed a crude bed out of cedar poles strung with rawhide. A quarter of beef hung back in a cranny, two pistols in a cartridge belt adorned the wall and in the soot above the fireplace there were curious faces and figures, scratched one on top of the other.

"Pretty good!" praised Clay, taking in every detail and coming back to the faces

on the wall. "What's this here, some cliff-dwelling stuff?"

"That's my blackboard!" laughed Rooster; "got to pass the time somehow, so I make all these pictures on the wall. How's this, now? Don't that show some class?"

He pointed to a portrait, limned with charcoal on the gray wall—a portrait composed entirely of letters.



"Make it out?" he challenged. "Come on now, you're so smart—what word do them letters make?"

Clay looked at it closer, admiring its ingenuity but not discovering the particular word at first glance. An E formed the mouth, an L the nose, an A the eye, an S the ear; and for the forehead an R, for the chin an M, with a half moon for the head and hair.

"Read 'em off!" prompted Raslem. "Here, begin at the top, then skip to the eye and ear. R-A-S-L-E-M! Gee whillikens, boy, what did they learn you in school?"

"It's your signature, eh?" said Clay. "A kind of monogram."

"Sure! It's my moniker—my high sign! When the wild bunch sees that, they'll understand!"

"Pretty smooth," conceded Clay, "but at the same time, Rooster, I don't like to see you in with that bunch. This train-robbing business doesn't pay."

"The hell it don't!" came back Rooster. "I'd just like to show you my roll—it comes close to ten thousand dollars. What do you want me to do, punch cows all my life for a stinking little dollar a day? 'Another day, another dollar! A million days, a million dollars!' Will a man ever get rich at that?"

"No," replied Hawks, "but he'll keep out of the penitentiary—and you don't have to punch cows all your life. If you'd kept out of this racket you'd be my wagon boss, right now——"

"Too late, now, to talk about that."

Rooster turned to the fireplace and threw on some kindling, but as he nursed the sulky fire he was thinking.

"This country has gone to hell!" he burst out angrily. "They don't give a poor man a chance. You don't realize, Clay, what a change has come over things since you and the Old Man went East. He kind of held the bunch down and put the fear of God in their hearts, but now—cripes, what's the use? There's old Bones over on Snake River, feeding his punchers on sowbelly and working 'em from daylight to dark; and then this cheap sport Lovelady, that he put in at the Lazy B—didn't he fire every one of the old gang? And look at the bunch of Texans he's working up there now—they'd cut a man's throat for a nickel!"

"I believe it," answered Clay, "but what's that got to do with running wild and holding up trains? No, I tell you, Rooster——"

"It's got a lot to do!" broke in Rooster vehemently. "You don't know what I've been up against, Clay. You hadn't been gone a month when this man Lovelady began to pick on me and to work the boss to hire more Texans; and inside of six months all the old boys had quit and the Tehannos were running the outfit. Then they began to ride old Butterfield until he gave up and quit, and Bones made Lovelady wagon boss. No chance for me then with the Lazy B's, so I went over and took on with Bones—down on the river with the Forty-fours. Working from daylight to dark and stand guard two hours every night—and nothing but sowbelly and beans! And only paid me thirty a month. Your old man paid me forty and I earned every nickel of it, but Bones beat me down to thirty."

Rooster piled on more wood and opened two cans of corn, raking some coals out to fry his strips of bacon.

"No corrals," he went on querulously, "and no pastures to hold our horses; and if we'd ask him for a nighthawk to take care of the cavvy he'd swear we were sending him bankrupt. But it was the grub, more than anything—nothing but sowbelly, sowbelly—and beef all around us—too damned stingy to let us kill a yearling stray. Well, we were down on Snake River and he'd gone back for some stamp irons when I jumped

a big deer, right down there by the crossing, and roped him before he could get into the brush. We drug him to the wagon and I killed him with my six-shooter and old Charley, the cook, had both frying pans working when Bones rode up, biling mad.

" 'Who killed that beef?' he hollered. 'Dog-gone you cussed cowboys, you break their legs on purpose! Who killed that beef, I say?'

"He see the meat hanging up and naturally thought it was a yearling, and we was all too bowed up to tell him. So we let him yammer a while and then I got up—I was hot.

" 'Mr. Bones,' I says, 'that ain't no beef!'

" 'Whoa! Whoa!' he says as his horse shied at the carcass and danged nigh throwed him off. 'Stand still, you bucking fool!'

"Well, his horse wasn't bucking, nor anything like it, but he's a mean old jasper, and he was ringy by that time, so he made a swipe at its head with a stamp iron. The old son of a goat! I jerked out my six-shooter and pointed it right into his belly.

" 'You drop that iron!' I said. 'You hit that horse again and I'll have you rolling snowballs in hell.'

"He knowed I meant it, too, because I won't see no horse abused, and this was nothing but a half-broke colt; but it stuck in his craw to see us eating that meat and he still thought we'd killed another beef. We used to cripple 'em on purpose, sometimes.

" 'Who killed that beef?' he says, gitting down off of his horse, and by that time I could fight a buzz saw.

" 'Now here, gentlemen,' says old Charley —you know how polite he always was, 'what's the use of all this fussing over nothing? This ain't no steer, Mr. Bones, this is nothing but a deer that Rooster roped and killed with his six-shooter.'

"Well, old Bones had to take water and acknowledge he was wrong but he gave me my time the next day. Said a man of my temper was liable to make trouble and he didn't care to have me around. So there I was, fired, and winter coming on—nothing to do but get out and ride the chuck line. So I says, 'To hell with being respectable!' and came over and joined the Dobe Town gang!"

"Been doing fine ever since, eh?" suggested Clay.

"Fine as frog's hair," asserted Rooster; "never regretted it for a minute. But old Bones is the man that drove me to it—I'll get his scalp before I reform."

"Oh, reform, eh?" laughed Clay. "So *you're* going to reform, too? But I suppose, like all the rest, you're going to pull off one more job——"

"Two more," said Rooster briskly, "and I quit!"

Clay looked at him a minute and changed the subject abruptly—he knew that Rooster meant every word of it and he was a man who could be pressed only so far. And besides, the die was cast; the Pinkertons were on his trail and there was five thousand dollars' reward on his head. He was a hunted man, a fugitive from justice—and he had taken the belt and six-shooters from the wall. They lay on the bed, close at hand while he was cooking, and Hawks understood what that meant. Like his enemy, Bones, Rooster had adopted the motto: "Don't tempt any man too far and don't trust any man too far"—and three months of solitude had made him jumpy. Yet he was glad, ever so glad, to have company.

"Out hunting cows?" he asked with a mischievous twinkle; "thought I saw you looking down at them tracks!"

"Yes, and I'll find where they went to," Hawks answered, "before I'm many days older. Old Bones tried to tell me that it was the Payne outfit down here that was running off all our steers——"

"Old Bones!" stated Rooster with much profane emphasis, "is nothing but a cow thief himself."

"Very likely," acknowledged Clay, "but at the same time I'd like to know who's running this heart brand in Coon Hole. Mrs. Payne tried to tell me she'd never even heard of it and the old man called me a liar twice——"

"Now here!" broke in Rooster, "don't you jump at conclusions. Old Man Payne is a mighty nice man. He may be kind of short with you, if he thinks you're some detective; but he's all right, and his folks are all right. I've stayed down there, and I ought to know."

"Maybe so; I don't dispute it; but he's got a very unfortunate way with him when it comes to receiving strangers. And who owns that heart brand, if he doesn't?"

"Hey! Now listen!" cried Raslem aggressively, "you want to know who runs that brand? Well, you go right back to

William Bones and ask *him* who owns it! The Paynes have got nothing to do with it!"

"All right!" shrugged Clay. "You ought to know what you're talking about. Come on, let's have something to eat."

They ate, Rooster prodigiously, Clay sparingly and mostly beef, not to cut down poor Rooster's dwindling hoard; but all the time in the back of his mind Hawks was thinking about the heart brand. Rooster knew who owned it, knew who was running off his cows, had seen them pass in the cañon below him; but Rooster was an outlaw now and dependent on other outlaws for favors. Their friendship meant more to him than Clay's. Yet here for the second time that same hint had cropped up, a hint that Bones was playing him false. But Bones was at war with Payne and all the Coon Hole cedar snappers, and the heart cattle were running on Payne's range.

"Well, I'll be going," said Clay as soon as he had finished, "and any time you run out of meat, Rooster, you're welcome to a Lazy B."

"No! Sit down!" insisted Raslem. "What's your sweat, all at once? I ain't talked to a man for a month. And speaking of Lazy B beef I reckon you think you've been eating some, but that's another time when you guessed wrong. I'll travel ten miles any time to get one of Bones' Forty-fours when there's Lazy B's right up the cañon. No sir, Clay, I never steal from my friends."

"Well, you're welcome," repeated Clay. "It isn't stealing from me, because I've told you to take what you need. And when a man loses eight hundred three-and-four-year-old steers he don't mind a calf, now and then."

He rose up to go, but Rooster cast himself upon him and forced him back to his seat.

"Sit down," he cursed, "and let me give you a tip—don't you leave the ranch again without your six-shooter! You don't know what chances you're taking."

"What, with the Payne outfit?"

"Aw, no! What's a-biting you, anyway? Did Bones fill you up with that bunk? Well, you stay with me a while and I'll tell you more about your own business than you're liable to find out in a month. What's the use of hurrying off?"

"It's this way," stated Clay, "I know how you're probably fixed and I don't want to pry into your business. You're dependent upon Payne and that bunch of rustlers he's got down there and I don't expect you to say a word against them; but if I sit around and chat and go to asking leading questions you're liable to get the idea I'm snooping."

"Nothing of the kind!" declared Rooster, pressing him back onto the bed and hanging the belt of six-shooters on the wall. "I know I can trust you, Clay. Otherwise I'd either shoot you, right here and now, or pull my freight the minute you're gone. But I'm trusting you, Clay—a man has got to trust somebody—and I've got to talk to somebody or go crazy. You're the first human being that I've spoken a word to since me and Sundance Thorp held up the train. Old Man Payne, nor nobody, don't know where I'm hiding—they all think I'm in some cave, up in Dobe Town. But, now you know where I am, I'm going to ask you as a favor to bring me down a little tobacco. That ain't asking too much, is it—and in return for this favor I'm going to tell you something important."

He jerked his head sidewise and gazed at Clay impressively.

"Look out for that man Lovelady!" he said.

"All right," agreed Clay, "and then what?"

"Well, do *that!*" burst out Raslem impatiently. "For cripes' sake, coming off without your six-shooter!"

"Do you mean he might shoot me?" inquired Clay.

"W'y, that son of a——" began Rooster. And then he choked with rage. "Look out for him!" he cried, "he's a bad one!"

"I know that. I'm going to fire him when I get back."

"Don't you do it!" warned Rooster. "He'll kill you, sure as hell. Aw, here, you don't know what's going on!"

He grabbed a brand out of the fire and drew a Lazy B on the wall.

"Now, here," he said, "that's your cow brand, ain't it? Well, he's burning that into a heart!"

"Who—Lovelady?"

"Surest thing! And he's got two line riders, up here on the Vermilion, pushing the burned stuff down this cañon into Coon Hole!"

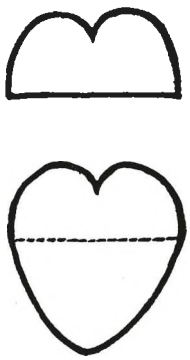
"Why, the thieving cuss!" cursed Hawks. "He's got those men on the pay roll!"

"Sure, and *he's* on your pay roll!" exulted

Rooster. "Old Bones is on your pay roll, too!"

"No, but here!" contended Clay, his eye back on the brand. "How can you burn a Lazy B into a heart? There's that bar—what becomes of the bar?"

Raslem seized another firebrand and extended the wings of the B until they joined in the tip of the heart—except for the bar it was perfect. Then he wiped out the bar and left a heart.



"That bar is only a hair brand," he smirked. "As soon as they shed their hair, the bar is gone—then they drive 'em off and alter 'em to the heart."

"Yes, but who makes the hair brand?" persisted Clay. "And these cattle that we lost were big steers!"

"That's just what I'm getting to," returned Rooster. "I want to show you what a bunch of crooks they are. When old Bones bought those steers for your father he sent Lovelady and them Texans to receive them—it was somewhere over in Utah—and when they branded that stuff they ran a hair brand on the bar and altered them to a heart when they got home. On your own range, mind ye, and working on your own time—*now* tell me that Bones ain't a crook!"

"Well, if he isn't," pronounced Clay, "he's a damned poor cowman. Didn't anybody ever catch on?"

"*I* did!" asserted Raslem, "so they must have been others. But you understand now why Lovelady fired all us old-timers—he was afraid some honest guy would belch. Wouldn't allow us around there; and if any reps came in to the round-up he put 'em to holding the herd. He and his Texans branded every calf; and then when they shed they rebranded 'em. Now you know who owns this heart brand—it's your own wagon boss—Lovelady!"

Hawks nodded his head and sat silent, but Raslem had only begun.

"What d'ye think of Telford Payne, now? Willing to admit you might've been wrong? Why, that old man is a Southern gentleman; he wouldn't dirty his hands by stealing. I'm from Missouri myself, so we're pretty good neighbors; but he's having a hard time, Clay. Just came in and got nicely settled when they punched that Robbers' Trail through—runs from Canada to the Mexican line—and now in spite of hell he's running a regular holdout for all the tough characters in the country. They come there, you understand, and he has to take 'em in—if he didn't they'd move in anyway—and then, when they go, they slap his iron on a few horses or leave a bunch of steers in his pasture. He owes money at the bank, so he can't move out, and old Bones is making him trouble all the time; and on top of that, Clay, it's a bad place for his womenfolks—a damned hard place to keep straight."

'You mean—his wife?" ventured Clay, remembering a certain look in her eyes.

"Yes, and—well, if Payne knowed what I know there's one man would sure get his, right square where his suspenders cross. They say now he's making up to Pearl."

"No!" exclaimed Clay, "why, she's only a child!"

"*He* don't care—he's sure hell for women. They all know his reputation, but that don't make no difference; he goes in to win, and he wins. But here's the damnedest thing—you'd hardly believe it—he carries around a scalp lock of their hair."

Clay's eyes opened wider, but he put the thought away from him.

"I don't believe it," he said. "He'd get killed."

"It's a fact!" stated Rooster, jerking his head impressively. "I've seen it—a big, long braid. He shows it around when he's drunk. And he carries some little scissors—I've seen them, too—that he uses to cut off their hair. Carries them around in his vest pocket, and when he's stole the lock of hair he plaits it into his braid. Ever hear of anything ranker than that?"

"Don't talk about it," shuddered Clay; "it makes me sick."

"He ought to be shot!" declared Raslem. "And you ought to see the cosmetics he

keeps. He's got more kinds of lotions and hair oils and perfumery—and he wears gloves, all the time, to keep his hands white."

"Gloves!" cried Clay, suddenly leaping to his feet. "Why, you don't mean——"

"Sure!" nodded Rooster. "You know who I mean. Your own wagon boss—Lovelady."

CHAPTER IX.

BEFORE BREAKFAST.

The first gleam of day found Hawks in the Bad Lands, spurring north with Raslem's pistol in his chaps. For Rooster had had his way. Clay had avoided the beaten paths, circling wide to throw his enemies off his trail. It was a different world now from the one of two days before when he had started for Coon Hole without his six-shooter; Raslem had peopled it with rustlers, looking down from wooded peaks, watching passes, riding hard to cut him off. And to prove that he meant it Rooster had given him one of his pistols from the belt that hung on the wall. After that there was no room for doubt.

"Ride east," Rooster had said, "and make your own trail—and keep your eye on the rim."

Twenty miles lay behind him and now he was headed north across the powdery flats of the Bad Lands. Chalky buttes rose all about him, table-topped and bare of shrubs; the rim ran like a line on either side; as he went down into the sink the line of cliffs seemed to rise until he found himself in Dobe Town. Mighty domes and cathedral spires loomed up against the sky line as if built brick by brick by aspiring man, but since God had done the work the men who came there to hide had mocked it by calling it Dobe Town. Grotesque forms like silurian monsters raised their heads from eroded points, there were amphitheaters and fluted columns and Corinthian capitals; and deep under the façades of what might pass for Grecian temples ran the caverns which had made Dobe Town a city of refuge.

But it was as a holdout for outlaws rather than a refuge for fugitives that Dobe Town had latterly been known; and as Clay made his way through it he kept his eyes on the rim as Rooster Raslem had enjoined him. The solemn silence of this sunken valley, unbroken except for the crunch as his horses' hoofs broke through the crust of the alkali, had a sinister significance now; but it came mostly from his own thoughts, which were of Lovelady and Penny, for he rode out of the Bad Lands in safety. Up the old Rustlers' Trail, which he had known since boyhood, he mounted to the edge of Hawks' Mesa; and when he crept up and looked over the rim he saw the Lazy B wagon below him.

Uncle Jimmy, the cook, was chopping at a log and as his ax came back the sound of the blow reached Clay. He ceased, and two more blows came up from the stillness, like echoes out of the past. Here and there across the basin Clay could see the cattle in motion, disturbed by Lovelady's cowboys who were range branding; except for Rooster's warning he would have ridden down among them; he was tempted to do so still. But far into the night the garrulous Rooster had inveighed against them, describing their giant scheme to defraud him.

The winter before, when Green River had become frozen, they had crossed two hundred steers on the ice; and now, back in the cedar brakes, they were holding still others until the river should freeze again. Over in Utah they had confederates who had sold their first cattle—this was the source of the money they were squandering—and the rustlers who made Coon Hole their headquarters looked to Lovelady for leadership in everything. Did Clay think they would let one man stand in their way? had asked Rooster.

A restless impatience urged him to ride down the slope and dash across the mesa to the ranch—there was no water in Dobe Town and his horses were fretting. But those long hours in the cave, with Rooster Raslem straddling in front of him pouring out curses against Lovelady and Bones, had put a new fear into his heart. He lay behind the rim rock and watched. The sun was sinking low when the cowboys rode back to the wagon, coming in by ones and twos, but Lovelady was not among them. Clay's heart began to thump, the self-accusations of the morning came back with redoubled force. Was all well with Penny? Had he done right to leave her, even with her mother to preach much-needed restraint? Was it possible that a perfumed dandy, in two weeks' time, could woo Charlotte Pennyman and win her? He shuddered as he had shuddered before—she had talked so much of being free!

As the dusk settled in the huge bowl, ob-

scuring the wagon from sight, he mounted and rode down to the water; and then, spurring angrily, he took the trail for the ranch house, regardless of Raslem's solemn warnings. Now that he found himself in action all his pent-up feelings were released and he cursed the self-sufficiency of the Pennymans. At the bottom of it all lay the complacency of Mrs. Pennyman, her placid taking it for granted that all was well. She did not approve of his objections to Mr. Lovelady's presence; as far as she was concerned he was welcome at any time; and yet here was a man who kept a scalp lock to record his conquests, who hunted women as an Indian hunts deer.

It was dark when he arrived within sight of the ranch house and he circled it before he rode in. There in the stable was Lovelady's horse, eating hay as if he lived there, with his saddle flung over the rack. Clay unsaddled in the horse lot and turned his animals out into the pasture, then crept up to his own house like a thief. There was a light in the kitchen and as he looked in through the window he saw Penny talking quietly with Lovelady. Mrs. Pennyman sat apart, nursing her rheumatism by the warm stove but looking on with a placid smile, and anger swept Clay like a storm blast.

Here he was, hungry and tired, the night air was chill, all the food and warmth was inside; and yet he must wait till this visit was over or break in and create a scene. With Rooster's pistol beneath his waistband and hunger gnawing at his belly he dared not trust himself too far, for at a word from Lovelady his hand would leap to his gun and he would kill him—knowing his heart as he did. He retreated into the darkness and waited. Hour after hour he paced to and fro, sighing wearily as he listened to their laughter, and when at last Lovelady arose to go the Great Dipper was down below the horizon. It was midnight and bitter cold, Clay's anger had died within him, all he wished for was to end his long misery. The door opened and Lovelady stepped forth, followed quickly by the form of Penny; and then as the door closed Clay saw her leap into his arms and cling there, locked in a kiss.

At daylight he opened the door and started a fire in the stove, with trembling hands; and as nobody stirred he cooked a hasty breakfast, still pondering on what he should say. After the revelation of that kiss there was nothing to do but see Penny and demand back his ring; but, though she was in the wrong, he still dreaded that something in her which made her as unconquerable as Fate. She would have her own way, in spite of him. Yet come what would he dared not think of yielding—she must leave the ranch forever. It was necessary to save her from this madness. He was roused from his meditations by a patter of feet from within and Penny slipped through the door.

"Oh! It's *you!*" she cried and the smile on her lips suddenly froze to something less radiant. "When did you get home?" she asked demurely.

"Last night," he stated, "about nine o'clock. Who did you think it was?" he inquired grimly.

She looked at him again, took in his gray, unshaven face and his eyes which began to glow, and drew her kimono closer.

"I must go back to mother," she decided.

"Just a moment," he spoke up sharply, placing his foot against the door. "I'd like my ring back," he said.

He held out his hand and she glanced at him hatefully.

"You get out of my way," she quavered. Then as he did not move she stepped to the outer door and as she peered out the rising sun smote her hair. It had been coiled up hastily, and the sun turned it to gold; but all he saw was a lock of hair—gone.

"My God, Penny," he gasped, starting forward and lurching back again. "What have you done?" he cried out hoarsely.

She stood in the doorway surveying him curiously, and at the look in his eyes she flushed. Then, regardless of her will, one hand stole up her neck and covered the damning spot in her hair. She plucked it away hurriedly and turned her face away, stealing a glance at him through her tumbled tresses.

"What's the matter?" she asked faintly. "Are you sick?"

"Yes, Penny, I'm sick. I—I hardly know what I'm saying. Only—I didn't think you'd do it."

"Do what?" she demanded, flaring up at the implication. "You're always accusing me of something!"

He rose up quietly and reached out his hand.

"Give me my ring—you know what you've done."

She twisted the ring on her finger but left it in its place.

"*What* have I done?" she asked defiantly.

"I see," he answered slowly, "that you have lost a lock of hair. Did you give it to Lovelady, Penny?"

She reeled and placed one hand on the table for support.

"He took it," she murmured. "Why?"

"Give me the ring!" he burst out angrily. "My God, why discuss it? Do you pretend to love me, now?"

"No!" she replied, turning deathly pale. "But—how did you know it, Clay?"

"I knew it when I saw that lock of hair gone. You aren't the first girl——"

"Oh!" she shrieked, and bit her lips fiercely to check the sound. "Don't wake mother!" she implored him. "Now tell me!"

"Dear Penny," he said contritely, "I'm sorry this had to happen—I should never have gone off and left you. But now that it's done be assured I will never tell it—only, Penny, you must give me the ring."

"Here it is," she said, placing it coldly in his hand. "I intended to give it back. But, Clay, what did you mean when you said that—about my hair? You said: 'You're not the first girl——'"

"He has done it with others, so they say."

"Oh! They say, do they?" she repeated, her color coming back. "You ought to be ashamed of such gossip. Mr. Loveleddy is a gentleman and——"

"He's not a gentleman!" Clay broke in ruthlessly. "Now listen to me a minute—this thing has gone far enough. Not only is he no gentleman but he keeps these locks of hair and shows them in the saloons when he's drunk. He braids them into a scalp lock and boasts over his conquests! Is that what you call a gentleman?"

"Oh!" she screamed, clapping her hands over her ears and retreating against the wall. "Oh, how can you be so cruel? I don't believe a word of it—you're just saying it to wound me, to poison my thoughts of—him."

"I *know* it," he answered inexorably.

"*How* do you know it? Did you see it yourself? Or did you take the word of some lying enemy? There, I can tell by your eye you've just been repeating some falsehood. I'll never forgive you, Clay."

"Forgive *me!*" he cried. "Can you look me in the eyes and explain how he got that lock of hair? If I were half a man I'd——"

"He promised to marry me," she said.

"Sure—and he promised all the rest of them! What's the word of a dog like that? My God, Penny, I can hardly believe it."

"You don't need to be so superior!" she spat back vindictively. "And I'm not ashamed, the least bit. What is love for anyway, if not to be given? You thought you could buy it with money. But I never did love you and I never intended to marry you; I just used you, to get out here where I'm free."

"Oh, I see," he nodded and stood silent. "Well, you're free," he went on evenly. "What now?"

"I'm going to marry Mr. Loveleddy," she answered resolutely. "Oh, you don't need to smile—I know what you're thinking—but he *is* going to marry me! I know it!"

"Well, you want to hurry up," he answered grimly, "before I——"

"Before you what?" she demanded, panting.

"Before I put him in the pen," he said.

CHAPTER X.

BURNED OUT.

"What do you mean?" Penny pleaded, reading the purpose in Hawks' hard eyes. "Oh, Clay, don't you *ever* think of my happiness?"

A measured step was approaching the door and Penny signaled him frantically not to tell.

"What are you children quarreling about?" inquired Mrs. Pennyman from the doorway. "Why, Clay, I didn't know that you were back."

"I got back last night, but Lovelady was before me. We've broken our engagement," he added.

"Oh—again?" she cried with mock dismay. "Well, most quarrels occur before breakfast."

"I'd had my breakfast," he stated.

"You look tired, Clay," she soothed; "did you have a hard ride? Oh, dear, the fire is out."

"I'll light it," he said, "as soon as I chop a little wood. You stayed up late last night."

"Why, yes, we did. Were you here?"

"Outside. I saw Mr. Lovelady."

"Why, Clay! It never occurred to me that you objected to him so seriously!"

"He was your guest," he said politely. But it was the formal politeness that cloaks anger and resentment and she gave over puttering with the stove.

"And was this quarrel——" she began. "Did you break your engagement merely because Mr. Lovelady was our guest? Then, Penny, you must pack your trunk at once, while I am cooking breakfast. We will start for Powder Springs immediately."

"I'll be harnessing up the horses," he said, still politely, and went off without chopping the wood.

"Oh, I think——" burst out Penny as he stepped out the door; but he did not linger to hear. He had been taught by his father an austere politeness toward all women, but the strain was beginning to tell; and, having committed them to the departure, he kept resolutely away from them until further overtures would have been abject. When he drove up to the doorway his two saddle horses were behind the wagon and his rifle was between his knees and there was a look in his eye so grim and overbearing that Penny brushed away a burst of tears. Her last hope had fled and, still weeping bitter tears, she kissed her pony good-by and stepped in.

The presence of two pistols, in addition to Clay's rifle, filled Mrs. Pennyman with a vague alarm; but, remembering his father's precepts, he was the acme of politeness until he drew up before the hotel. Then, begging them to excuse him, he took his horses and the guns and rode down for an interview with Bones. Mr. Bones was out, so he put his horses in the corral and came back to find him waiting.

"Well, Clay," he smiled, "they told me you were looking for me—must've had a medium hard trip."

Clay closed the door behind him; remembering a quotation from Shakespeare that a man can smile and smile and be a villain still.

"Yes," he said, "and if you'd do a little more riding you'd come nearer my idea of a manager. Every time I come to town I find you in this office. No wonder they're stealing us blind."

Clay strode over past him and closed the other door, the one that connected with the bank.

"What do you know about this heart brand?" he asked.

"Heart brand—heart brand?" repeated Bones irritably. "I don't know a thing about it!"

"Well, you're one hell of a manager, that's all I'll say. You've got a nerve to take the money."

Bones sat up stiffly, glaring at Clay through his eyebrows. He saw now that he was speaking in earnest.

"Any time," he announced, "that you don't like my way of managing things, you can have the job back—*I* don't want it!"

"Well, you're fired, then," rapped out Clay. "And Lovelady is fired. I'm going to wire to Rawlins for a bunch of gunmen and take over the outfit myself."

"Gunmen!" echoed Bones, and then he laughed harshly. "Been having some trouble with Lovelady? Must've cut you out with your girl!"

"You keep on getting funny," glowered Clay, "and you'll find out you've picked the wrong man to monkey with. Kindly leave the lady's name strictly out of it."

"Oh, certainly, certainly!" returned Bones with exaggerated politeness. "Anything else I can do to accommodate you?"

"Yes, I want a complete statement of our business, up to date; and you can turn over the cash right now."

"Do you mean it?" demanded Bones, taken aback by his manner. "Well, see here, now; who am I working for—you or your father?"

"You're working for my father, but as soon as I touch the wire you'll find out you're working for me. The Old Man gave me the ranch if I'd come out here and take charge of it, and that's just what I'm going to do. Your duties as manager have ceased."

"What's your objections to the way I've been running things?" asked Bones. "Don't you think I've been faithful in my duties?"

"Did you ever hear of the heart brand?" inquired Clay.

"What's biting you?" countered Bones after glaring at him a minute. "You seem to have something on your mind."

"I have," stated Clay; "something important. Mr. Bones, under your management we lost eight hundred head of steers, worth at the least twenty dollars apiece—that comes to sixteen thousand, right there. And besides that I find calves, sucking Lazy B cows, with a big heart burned on their hip.

You never heard of the heart brand, you say?"

"Well, I've heard of it," acknowledged Bones; "seen a few on the range; but I never did know who owned it."

"And you think your wagon boss, Lovelady, is capable and honest, if he does come to town and get drunk?"

"I'll swear to it!" Bones asserted stoutly.

"I'll report that to the Old Man," nodded Clay.

"Now, here!" challenged Bones, bringing his chair down with a thump. "You tell me what you know, straight out. I don't allow no man to make insinuations against my character—I'm honest, if I do make mistakes. What's all this talk leading up to?"

For an answer Clay leaned over and, taking a slip of paper drew a Lazy B brand, while Bones stared. Then with a couple of flips he extended the wings, forming a heart below the bar.

"Our brand is being burned," he said.

"Yes, but gosh A'mighty, man, look at that bar going across there!"

"That's been hair branded, right under your nose."

"W'y, the son of a goat!" marveled Bones.

"By your own wagon boss—Lovelady—and his gang."

"I don't believe it!" Bones shouted defiantly.

"You don't have to," returned Clay. "I've got the evidence to prove it. Is the sheriff in this county any good?"

"Now, here," argued Bones, twisting his head to one side and showing his teeth belligerently, "what's the use of showing me up? I've been negligent, and I admit it, but the best of us make mistakes. I don't want this taken out of my hands!"

"You've been worse than negligent," answered Clay indignantly. "You've opposed me from the start and stood in with Lovelady. You've stood by him, right or wrong, and the best I could get out of you was some low, coarse crack about the lady. You've done me an injury that you can never repay."

He looked at him so sternly that Bones squirmed in his seat for he felt the unspoken tragedy behind his words.

"I'm sorry," he apologized lamely; "never thought it wasn't all right. Anything I can do, Clay, don't fail to let me know."

"The first thing you can do," spoke up Clay, "is to send out a caretaker to look after that ranch house before those Texans burn it down. Let me tell you what kind of an outfit we're up against."

He ran over circumstantially all that Rooster had told him, carefully concealing the source of his knowledge, and when he had ended Bones leaned back in his chair and called down heartfelt curses on Lovelady. Then he sat a long time silent, matching the tips of his fingers together while his ferret eyes were glazed in thought. He did not look honest, even then, but Clay was satisfied his intentions were good. Either that or he was a play actor, instead of a money lender who imagined himself a cowman. That was the trouble with Bones; he was still a thrifty farmer, pinching pennies where he should be riding horses down. He had trusted his wagon boss too far.

"Clay," he said at last, "I got you into this jack pot and I'm going to get you out. Them steers ain't all gone, only that two hundred head that they crossed on the ice last winter; the rest are hid out in the cedars. Now you turn this over to me and I'll guarantee to get them back—that's better than shooting it out with Lovelady. Yes, I know how you feel, but I'm responsible to your father—I lost them steers and I'll return 'em—what's left. But if you ride in on that gang with a bunch of gunmen from Rawlins they'll start something and you'll lose the whole herd. Them cattle are in Colorado and Wyoming warrants are no use anyway—what we want is to get the steers—and the only way to do it is to keep dark, understand, until we can find out where they are. Now here's my proposition and you can take it or leave it; I'll submit it for what it's worth.

"We go down to my ranch, which is in Bear County, Colorado, and get all my cowpunchers deputized; then we ride back to the Lazy B and tell Lovelady I've bought the outfit and we're going to have a range count, right now. If there's anything crooked that's the sure way to find it out, but what them fellows will do is to high-tail it for the Vermilion and start to drive off their steers. Then all we've got to do is to follow after 'em with our deputies and they can't possibly get away. And while we're about it we'll clean up on Old Man Payne."

There was the devil's hoof again—Bones never forgot his grudge against Payne—but

his plan seemed a good one and, less than a week later, Clay rode up to Lovelady's wagon with the posse. Bones was there beside him, a cumbersome rifle on his saddle and his old forty-five in his belt; and behind them rode eleven men with pistol and saddle gun more in evidence than running iron and rope. It was along toward noon but all the Texans were at the wagon. Each man wore two six-shooters, and from the glint in Lovelady's eyes it was evident that he was forewarned.

"Mr. Lovelady," began Bones with a wolfish grin, "we've come over here to have a round-up and range count. This here ranch is losing money and, as Hawks is dissatisfied, I've taken the Lazy B off his hands."

"Very well, seh," bowed Lovelady, favoring Clay with a mocking smile, "I have no objections, I'm sure."

"We'll count the mesa here, first," went on Bones importantly, "and then the lower range; and, if any of you boys would like to keep on, you can help till the round-up is done."

There was a long minute of silence as the Texans exchanged glances, and the posse opened out expectantly.

"How about me?" whined Uncle Jimmy, crippling up to the front with a six-shooter low at his hip, "do I hold my job, or go?"

"You go," announced Bones; "your cooking is too wasteful. From now on things are going to be different."

"Yes—sowbelly and beans!" spoke up a big Texan disdainfully. "You can give me my time, right now."

"I'll take mine, too," jeered another and as Bones whipped out his check book they all called for their time, except Lovelady. He lounged easily by the wagon wheel where their saddle guns were stacked, looking on with an impish grin.

"I done blowed my time," he laughed, "for six months in advance, so there's no use mentioning payment. Come on, boys, I'm burned out on the Lazy B."

He stepped up on his private mount, which was saddled and waiting, and picked up the rope of his pack horse.

"Good day, gentlemen," he bowed, "I hope you find all satisfactory. We shore worked hard, didn't we, boys?"

There was a rumble of sarcastic laughter from the band of Texans and then they rode off, heading south.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST OF EIGHT HUNDRED.

The first skirmish had been a draw, except that in the excitement several Texans had ridden off on Lazy B horses. It was a bold thing to do, but if anybody took notice it was allowed to pass at the time. They were a hard-looking outfit, evidently fully prepared for trouble and any controversy might have brought on a shooting; so, with his eye on the main chance, Bones pocketed the insult and spread a new net for their feet. But first he packed off Uncle Jimmy, who was waspish as a rattlesnake, lest his plans should be revealed a second time.

His first carefully laid plot had been betrayed to the enemy and, without naming any names, he gave Clay to understand that he suspected a certain young lady. She had been seen in Lovelady's company the day after Clay left town, and God only knew what had come off since—she was certainly crazy over cowboys. And, Bones added naïvely, if he'd known then what he knew later, he'd have been a little more careful what he said to her. Clay let the subject drop, for in an ill-advised moment he had spoken a word too much to Penny himself. He had told her if she was going to marry Lovelady she would have to hurry up, before he put him in the pen.

At sight of the wagon boss lolling so nonchalantly among his henchmen, Clay had felt a surging impulse to shoot him. Not only had Lovelady robbed him of a small fortune in cattle but he had besmirched the good name of his fiancée. Yes, he had stolen a love lock from Penny's foolish head while Clay's ring still gleamed on her finger; and something told Hawks now that, over and beyond Lovelady's love of conquest, was the desire to strike a blow at his enemy. He had devised the most hellish insult that human mind could contemplate—he had stepped between Clay and his promised bride. And now as Lovelady glanced up at him he read his secret laughter, the leering insolence of a man steeped in evil. But Clay had turned this raid over to that arch-blunderer, Bones, and given his word not to shoot.

Yet Bones' plan was a good one and, to lull the suspicion of the Texans, they began the first circle of their round-up. That gather was enough to prove beyond a doubt that the Lazy B calves were being hair

branded. Working on Hawks' own time and within sight of his ranch house they had been preparing to steal still more calves. Only the mother cows carried a straight Lazy B brand. It was a humiliating day for Bones, in the presence of his own cowboys, to have his gullibility thus shown up, and as soon as it was dark he sent two of his best riders to spy on Lovelady's gang. If his crafty scheme succeeded and they won back the stolen steers these mistakes would be like pawns to capture kings.

The wagon was started south the next day, to be that much nearer the battleground; but hardly were they moving when one of their scouts topped the rim and beckoned them frantically with his hat. He rode his horse in short circles, the Indian sign for game and haste, and the posse broke into a lope. Leading the chase to the rim Clay saw at a glance that the rustlers had stolen a march. The dust of their moving herds showed far down Vermilion Wash and as they spurred down to intercept them the plume of their dust cloud disappeared down the vent of Vermilion Cañon. The rustlers had won again, carrying on their round-up by moonlight and making their escape into Coon Hole. Clay was for following pell-mell after them but, fearing an ambush, Bones led the posse east through the cedars. When they gazed down into the Hole the cattle were nearly across it and the sun was setting red through their dust.

That night they brought up the horse herd. With fresh mounts and packs of provisions they pressed on across the basin at dawn. But the hardihood of the rustlers had put them far in the lead—their tracks led to the hidden Robbers' Trail. Where a ledge of lime made a clear space among the cedars the posse came to a high level bench and, following up an open draw, Clay caught sight of a few stragglers.

On both sides, like a ribbed wall, the rim rose before them, its summit crowned with pines and firs; and the gateway through which the herd had passed was no wider than the cast of a rope. Three panels of fence and an unbarred gate showed that cattle had been held there before; but not a man in the posse had ever penetrated into the no man's land that lay beyond the rim. All they knew was that the trail led into a huge pocket of a basin, cut off on the west by the abysmal cañon of Green River and on the south by the cañon of the Bear.

"We've got 'em!" announced Bones after they had talked the matter over, and he led off at the head of the posse. There were others more competent both to lead and to track, but a devilish impatience seemed to have laid hold upon Bones and he spurred his horse up to the front. He rode like an Indian, kicking his heels at every step, muttering threats at the rustlers they had trapped; but as he rounded a point a bullet struck in front of him and in the scramble he was nearly unhorsed. As that bullet whined over his head there was a smash against a pine tree and another against a rock; and after they had all taken cover they saw the smoke of black-powder rifles, jetting out from the portals of the pass. The rustlers had made a stand.

"By cracky, boys, this is dangerous!" exclaimed Bones to his cowboys. "We can never get through that pass—one man could hold back a thousand. What say we go back to Coon Hole?"

"Coon Hole!" echoed Clay. "What do you want to go there for? The steers are over this rim."

Clay looked around at the grim faces of the cowboys and caught the eye of the under sheriff—the one who had come along to do the deputizing.

"Who'll go with me up that rim, on foot?" he asked, and they all spoke up at once.

"I got no business in Coon Hole," added the under sheriff significantly and Bones found himself on the defensive.

"Well, now here, boys," he hedged, "mebbe I was a little too precipitate—I never thought of climbing up them ledges—but here's the way it looks to me. Tel Payne and his gang and all them Coon Hole cedar snappers are bottled up as tight as a drumhead—they've come over here to help drive these cattle. Now! Ain't this the chance of a lifetime to cut old Tel's herd, leaving him nothing except what carries his straight brand? He's been stealing off of all of us and he's got burned stuff from everywhere, but nothing with a barred brand goes. Make him show a bill of sale or seize every vented cow he's got—we can come back and get these steers later."

"Yes, but maybe they won't be here!" Clay objected angrily; "maybe they'll drive 'em across the river into Utah. We've been fiddling and fooling around until I've got a bellyful, myself. Come on, Jim, you're the boss; let's go after 'em."

"Suits me," returned the under sheriff with a baleful glare at Bones. "It's been said," he went on, "that the sheriff and his deputies are afraid to do their duty in Bear County. I want to make it plain, right now, that here's one deputy sheriff that ain't afraid to go anywhere!"

"Well, all right, boys," capitulated Bones, "this is an awful risky business——"

"Risky, hell!" snorted the deputy, "this is my regular line of duty. Come on, boys —take your spurs off—let's start!"

It was a long and dangerous climb up the shelving heights of the rim rock but they gained the summit about noon, only to find the portals below them deserted. The rustlers had sensed an attack from above and retreated up the cañon after the herd. From the pine-clad heights the six men who had made the ascent could look down into the no man's land beyond and, far out across the waste of sagebrush and cedared hills, they could see the dust of their herd. It was still moving south and, darting about in the rear, they could make out the harrying horsemen; but what they saw was only the tail of the long, snakelike trail herd, disappearing through a gap in the hills.

Where the high ridge to the east pushed out across the basin a jagged peak thrust up among low hills; and west of that ran the wooded lip of the great cañon, making the gorge of Green River far below. All beyond seemed still more forbidding, if not impassable; and whichever way it went the trail would end at the brink of a chasm, for Bear River was only a short distance south. There seemed no escape, yet the outlaws were still fleeing and Jim signaled for the horses to be brought up.

Minutes dragged by like hours and one hour dragged into two before Bones and the rear posse came up, and as they dashed across the mesa on the trail of the rustlers even Bones forgot his fears. At last they were in the open and, on the wings of the wind they could hear the distant bellowing of the herd.

"What's that?" exclaimed the deputy as they halted on a rise to look out the country ahead. "It's shooting—can't you hear that big gun?" They strained their ears to listen and, above the distant lowing, they could hear a faint popping, like the sputtering of wet coals in a fire.

"There!" cried the deputy, "didn't you hear that forty-five-ninety? There's been shooting down there for an hour!"

"Must be fighting among themselves," suggested an excited cowboy. "Either that or another posse is after 'em!"

"Something funny going on," observed the under sheriff to Clay; "sounds like down by the river to me."

"They're crossing 'em into Utah, I'll bet you," returned Clay. "Come on, or we'll lose the whole herd!"

He started forward at a lope and once more they rounded a point and ran into a spatter of bullets. But no horses went down and, racing down into the next swale, they called a hasty council of war. The firing this time was from the slopes of a wooded hill, behind which the herd had vanished; while Bones, as before, stayed behind with the pack animals Clay and the deputy's picked cowboys rode west. The country drained off here toward the invisible side cañon down which the steers had been driven and by circling the hill they hoped to cut the trailing herd and engage the rustlers in battle. Following the cut bank of their wash they presently entered a deeper one which led south around the hill into a third; but their movements had been noted and as they approached the main cañon they were met by the rapid fire of Winchesters.

"Cut around 'em, boys," yelled Jim, "we'll ride clean to the river—they can't head us off from that!"

They turned back and tried again but the rim of the Grand Cañon seemed swarming with hostile riflemen. The distant firing had almost ceased, the bellowing of cattle was only an echo of what had been long in their ears; and now the bullets came so fast that, though no one was hit, they decided to return to their packs. If it ever came to war they were clearly outnumbered, though the rustlers did not shoot to kill. They seemed fully satisfied to stand the posse off while the herd was being crossed below. But was it being crossed? Clay for one could not believe it for he had seen the sweep of Green River above. Where it flowed into its cañon neither man nor horse could swim it; and here its rush would be tremendous. Yet Lovelady had accomplished the impossible so often that Hawks feared he might yet lose his herd.

"Hey! Don't shoot, boys!" hailed Bones

as they rode up the wash. "There's a party going to get them to surrender!"

"What party?" yelled Clay, enraged at the delay. "What do you expect us to do—sit down and wait?"

"That was the agreement!" smirked Bones. "There was a lady came by here, claiming to be Lovelady's wife—she had rode down with Uncle Jimmy, the cook—and she said if we'd stop shooting and let her see her husband she knew she could get him to surrender!"

"Yes, but what about those steers?" shouted Clay without listening to him. "Maybe they're running them off into the brush. I didn't make any such agreement and I'm not going to be bound by it. Come on, Jim, let's try to circle east."

"I'll go you," answered Jim. "If they shoot, by grab, we'll shoot back!"

They rode off through the sagebrush, still followed by the four cowboys; and, since nobody fired at them as they came into the main trail, the deputy spurred down it at a gallop. Clay and the cowboys rode after him, openly defying the hidden outlaws, who allowed them to pass unscathed. Rounding the wooded hill they swung west down the dusty path where the great herd had trailed off down the cañon. Over rocks and through quaking asps they pounded on down the steep slope until they pulled up on the brink of a precipice; and there, far below them, they saw the silver of the river and a surging mass of cattle on a sand bar. Behind them in a phalanx stretched a solid line of cowboys and as they listened they heard muffled reports.

"They're shooting them!" yelped the deputy. "They're trying to destroy the evidence. Come on, boys! All we need is just one!"

Once more they fought their way down the trail the cattle had traveled, a trail that seemed impassable; but when they got to the bottom and rode out on the sand bar the last of Clay's steers was gone. Twenty men came trotting toward them, with Lovelady at their head; and by his side rode Penny.

CHAPTER XII.

THE RUSTLER QUEEN.

Surprise and anger held Clay speechless as he confronted his archenemy and beheld Charlotte Pennyman beside him, but Jim, the under sheriff, found his tongue.

"Stop right there!" he ordered, holding one hand against them while the other reached for his gun. "You're under arrest, the whole outfit!"

"For what?" inquired Lovelady, reining his wet horse in defiantly, and the rustlers wheeled in behind him.

"For stealing cattle," returned the deputy grimly.

"Ain't stole no cattle," challenged Lovelady. "Show me any cow that I stole!"

The deputy frowned and glanced dubiously at Clay.

"Will you swear out a warrant?" he asked.

"Just a moment, seh!" protested Lovelady, pointing a gloved finger at the deputy. "I happen to know the law."

"You don't observe it!" flared back the deputy. "I saw you myself, driving those cattle into the river and drowning them."

"Where's your evidence to prove it?" sneered Lovelady. "A man is presumed to be innocent till he's proven guilty."

"I saw a stray, back there," spoke up a cowboy deputy and the under sheriff drew his gun.

"Go back and find it," he ordered, without turning his head, "and don't let no man take it away from you. I'll ask all you gentlemen to remain here."

He balanced his six-shooter beside his ear, ready at the first move to throw down and shoot; but it was six against twenty and the rustlers were not the men to meekly submit to arrest. There were too many with rewards on their heads. They began to mill among themselves, grumbling and protesting louder and louder; and as the spirit of revolt emboldened the more daring they began to scatter out and drift off.

"Come back here!" barked the under sheriff as Curly Bill, Lovelady's negro, started his horse off up the ravine.

"What for, suh?" he complained. "Ah ain't stole no cattle."

"You stole that horse!" charged Clay, reining out to turn him back. "It's got my brand on its hip. Go back there, damn your heart, or I'll kill you."

"Now heah!" spoke up Lovelady and as Clay whirled on him, eyes aflame, Penny rode in between them and faced him.

"We're married, now," she said. "Please don't quarrel with him, Clay. And they surrender—don't you, boys? You know you promised!"

"I'll surrender," assented Lovelady, turn-

ing to address the under sheriff, "but not to him—understand?"

He jerked a scornful thumb in the direction of Hawks and the under sheriff nodded briefly.

"You're my prisoner," he said, "and I want that colored fellow, too. The rest of you gentlemen are excused. But stay behind!" he ordered as they started to romp ahead. "And leave that stray strictly alone!"

They fell in behind, some grumbling, some openly voicing disrespect for the law; but the under sheriff allowed their remarks to pass unnoticed for he found himself in a tight hole. Instead of Lovelady and his six cowboys he found himself confronted by over twenty desperate outlaws, some of whom he knew by their photographs; and besides that he suddenly realized that he was in the heart of the rustler country where no officer's life was safe. Hence his magnanimous action in dismissing all the cattle thieves with the exception of Lovelady and his man Friday. He would be lucky to get away with those two—but for Penny he would have let them all go.

"Must have had a hard ride, ma'am," he said as he led off up the cañon with Penny close behind him. "Much obliged for helping me out with these men."

"Oh, don't mention it," she smiled. "I'm Mrs. Loveleddy, you know—we've only been married a week."

"You don't say!" exclaimed the deputy, turning to eye her curiously, but he left his thoughts unsaid.

"Yes, and when I received word that this trouble had come up I rode clear from Powder Springs with the cook."

The under sheriff's eye shifted to the sinister visage of Uncle Jimmy and once more what he thought remained unsaid.

"I knew my husband wasn't guilty," she went on impulsively, "so I rode down to get him to surrender. He's from Texas, you know, and——"

"Yes, I savvy," nodded the deputy. "Here comes the rest of them."

They had ascended to the first bench where, in a thicket of quaking aspens, Bones and his posse were trying to flog out the sullen stray.

"Well, well!" exclaimed Bones as Penny gave him a tired smile. "Wasn't looking to see you, down here. So you're Mrs. Lovelady, now?"

"Yes!" she beamed. "Sorry you couldn't be present. We were married the day after you left."

"Too late to kiss the bride," he observed, with a smirk at Clay. "Have you congratulated 'em yet, Mr. Hawks?"

"No," Clay answered absently, still keeping his eye on the stray which was being dragged out on a rope. "Is that one of those Utah steers?"

"W'y—yes!" assented Bones, after a look at the brand. "Where's all the rest of them, Clay?"

"In the river," he replied. "On their way down the Grand Cañon. This is all we've got left, Mr. Bones."

Bones screwed up his mouth and gazed about at the bedraggled rustlers who were looking him over sourly.

"What about them?" he asked, turning to the deputy. "Have you placed them under arrest?"

"Only Lovelady and the negro," answered the deputy curtly. "We can't prove the ownership of those steers."

"Well, what about this one?" demanded Bones. "Is that your steer, Mr. Lovelady?"

"No, seh," smiled Lovelady, "it is not."

"Ain't that your brand?" broke in the under sheriff, pointing accusingly at the heart which was burned on the stray steer's hip.

"My brand, seh, yes; but not my steer. Some enemy of mine has put it on this critter in order to get me involved with the law."

"You damned cow thief," burst out Clay Hawks vehemently, "you know very well you're lying. You've been stealing my steers by the thousand."

"Now here!" interrupted the deputy, laying a restraining hand on Clay, "don't pick no fight with my prisoner. He's surrendered to the law and he's under my protection until I deliver him into the custody of the sheriff."

"Well, keep him away from me, then," returned Clay, his eyes blazing, "or I won't be responsible for what happens. I'll stay behind and look after this steer."

"Good enough!" agreed the deputy. "I'll leave six men to help you." And he departed with his prisoners up the cañon.

It was a long trip to Cody, a half-dead mining town over on Bear River, and a longer wait for the trial; and the moment that Penny took her place on the witness stand Clay knew he had lost his case. She

testified, among other things, to having been engaged to Mr. Hawks, in whose employ Mr. Lovelady had been; and that when she had informed Hawks that she was going to marry Lovelady he had made a definite threat against her husband. He had told her she had better hurry up before he put Lovelady in the pen. Yes, she understood the word "pen" to mean the penitentiary; Mr. Hawks had appeared jealous of his wagon boss.

It was a bitter pill to swallow; and when Lovelady was acquitted Clay told them to turn Curly Bill loose before she appeared for *him*. Then he washed his hands of her and of the whole proceedings and, incidentally, of Bear County law. His range was in Wyoming, most of the jury had been rustler sympathizers and Bones had done his share to wreck their case. He was not very popular in Bear County, especially with the officers of the law; and a high-priced Denver lawyer, engaged by Penny to defend her husband, had tied him up in a knot. The whole trial had been a farce, the six hundred steers were a total loss, and the best thing for Clay to do was to go back to his ranch and try to protect what was left.

The new punchers that he engaged were not exactly gunmen, but at the same time they were hired for their nerve; and to obviate the possibility of having any more Loveladys in his employ he took the job of wagon boss himself. Then, having raked the lower range and rebranded his hair-brand calves, he bethought himself of the residue in Coon Hole. At the trial, Lovelady had admitted that he owned the heart brand, but he claimed that Clay's calves had been burned without his knowledge by enemies who sought to incriminate him. All that had the straight heart brand he acknowledged as his property; those which had been burned he disclaimed any responsibility for. Therefore, according to his own statement, the mavericked calves in Coon Hole still belonged to the Lazy B.

Perhaps it was a rankling sense of the injuries he had suffered that made Clay's thoughts turn toward Coon Hole, or perhaps rather a willingness to pick a fight with his archenemy. For, promptly after his wife had secured his release on bail, Lovelady had returned to Coon Hole. At the lower end of the valley—where Green River, flowing into its cañon, gave a wonderful view from their front door—he and Penny had built a home out of logs, fitting it up with every luxury to be imagined. The story had traveled far of the Brussels carpet on their floor, the model kitchen and the grand piano; and one room was nearly filled with the wedding gifts Penny had received, cut glass, and solid silver with her monogram. All this in a log house that soon became the rendezvous of all the rustlers associated with Lovelady and his gang—the same ruthless men who, unable to cross them into Utah, had destroyed six hundred head of Clay's steers.

The thought of those big steers, fat and ready for market, floating off down Green River in windrows always left Clay Hawks seeing red; and when he rode back into Coon Hole with his cowboys behind him there was still a baleful glint in his eye. He was not hunting for trouble but, law or no law, he was out to get his full legal rights. They rode up to the Payne ranch half an hour after sunrise, having entered the Hole at night, and when Telford Payne came out and saw the men behind him he was almost civil in his greeting to Clay.

"Good morning, Mr. Payne," returned Clay politely, "just down looking for some Lazy B strays. Any objection to my cutting that herd?"

He jerked his head toward the cattle grazing below them and Payne glanced up at the ridge.

"None whatever," he said at last.

"I might explain," went on Clay, "that the cattle I'm looking for are some that Lovelady stole. He altered my brand to a heart, but at the trial he stated specifically that he laid no claim to burned stuff. Anything, he said, that was not in his straight brand had been burned over by his enemies. Do you claim any interest in these heart calves?"

"None whatever," stated Payne decidedly.

"Good enough," pronounced Clay. "I hope it won't cause any inconvenience if my cowboys ride through your pasture?"

"No sir," replied Payne. "It will not."

"Very kind of you," murmured Clay and was reining away when Mrs. Payne stepped out the door. Even at this early hour her hair was smoothly brushed, her house dress immaculately clean; and as she hurried down the walk, passing her husband as he went in, Clay could not but notice the difference in their step. His was that of an

old man, firm and resolute but slow; and she came down as lightly as a deer.

"Good morning!" she called and as Clay returned the greeting his cowboys all took off their hats. "Good morning, boys," she said, meeting their admiring glances frankly; "have you had your breakfast yet?"

"Yes, ma'am," they responded and after looking at each one of them she turned her eyes upon Clay.

He was starting off again, having no stomach for woman's gossip, when she beckoned him back significantly.

"You'd better look out," she warned; "they're watching you from the ridge."

"All right," he said. "Much obliged."

"And if you'll take my advice," she added, "you'll whip out of Coon Hole, right now."

"We just got in," he answered with a grin and rode off to look through the herd.

There was nothing in Payne's pasture that he could lay any claim to; so, remembering her warning, he spread his men across the flat and rode rapidly back toward the east. For some reason or other the heart cattle he had seen before had disappeared from the meadows along the Vermilion, but as they worked back toward Irish Cañon they began to pick up strays that had been altered from Lazy B to heart. Their ears were still unhealed where the swallow fork in the left had been cut down to a grub; and it came over Clay that he was still losing calves, that even yet they were working his range. In spite of his line riders they were picking up hair-burned calves and pushing them over the divide into Coon Hole.

But gathering these strays had taken time; and as he pressed on up the trail Clay was brought to a realization of what Rooster Raslem had told him. From the mouth of Irish Cañon two horsemen rode out and ducked back into their ambush; a peak out on the flat gave up its man; and as they moved on toward Vermilion Cañon a flying streak of dust told of riders in hot purslit. They were caught in the open and, seeing the leaders riding around him, Clay bunched up his cattle and waited. One man on the ground is the equal of two or three mounted, but the rustlers were not seeking a fight. Having brought them to a stand the outlaws rode in slowly, their right hands held up for peace, and Clay beckoned the foremost to approach. They all moved in at that, and, as he scanned their hard faces, Hawks recognized several of the old gang that had driven his steers into Green River—and Lovelady was there with the rest. He advanced a trifle dubiously, with Curly Bill and his Texans around him, and when Clay held up his hand they stopped.

"What's all this?" inquired Lovelady after a minute's silent scrutiny. "Driving off a bunch of my calves?"

"They're my calves," stated Clay, "burned over the Lazy B. You must think you can pick me like a Christmas tree."

"Oh, no, Mr. Hawks," exclaimed the Texan good-naturedly; "but there seems to be a slight difference of opinion. I claim everything in Colorado in the heart brand."

"When you were tried," accused Clay, "you testified under oath that you claimed nothing but the straight heart brand."

"What I said in court is one thing; outside is another. I came to get those calves, Mr. Hawks."

"Well, come and get 'em," invited Clay. "You can't run it over me. But you'd better come a-shooting."

"I'll get 'em," promised Lovelady, "but there won't be no shooting—that is, not started by me."

"I'll start it," promised Clay, "if you crowd in any closer. I've taken enough from you, Lovelady."

"Well, I see the little leddy is coming up over yondeh—we'll leave it to her to decide."

Clay settled back grimly, his mind firmly made up that Penny would settle nothing for him. It was humiliating enough to remember he once had loved her and that she had inveigled him into taking her West, without having it forced upon him that she had married this cow thief and set up to be queen of the rustlers. The cattle were his and he would keep them.

She came up at a gallop, with a few belated stragglers, and rode fearlessly into the midst of them; then, seeing her husband, she trotted over to join him while the rustlers gathered about them. Clay shifted his gun and looked on expectantly and presently she came riding toward him. Her eyes were bright with excitement, the wind had had its way with her hair and she smiled as she used to beguile him. But Clay was done playing Samson to her Delilah.

"No," he said shortly, "you'll arbitrate nothing. And if you value that horse thief that you've got for a husband you'll advise him that these calves are mine."

"But *are* they yours?" she questioned and, meeting her innocent eyes, his lip curled up in a smile.

"Did your husband," he asked, "ever buy a single cow? Has he bought one since he came to this country? These calves are mine and I'll keep them."

She glanced back at Lovelady and the rough men gathered about him and the glad light went out of her eyes.

"Won't you show me the brands?" she asked, "so I can go back and report what they are. And please don't be hateful, Clay."

"Go and look at 'em," he said, "I don't give a damn whether they think they own 'em or not."

Penny rode over to the band of seared and earmarked yearlings, scanning their brands with vacant eyes; then without another word she turned back to the waiting rustlers, shaking her head as they all questioned her at once.

"My mistake," called Lovelady, waving a carefully gloved hand at Hawks, and rode off with all his men.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN HUNT.

Hawks and his cowboys smiled grimly among themselves at this phrase which Lovelady had employed. "My mistake" was good enough as a euphemistic expression, conveying the idea that he yielded the point; but the king of the rustlers had been bluffed out of his boots and compelled to beat a retreat. In the presence of Penny and all his thieving followers he had backed down and let Clay keep his calves—he had allowed nine men to ride into Coon Hole and defy him to cut their herd. Hawks drove them safely home, but when he started his fall round-up he found that the rustlers had taken their revenge. In spite of his line riders the lower range had been combed clean and several hundred more calves had disappeared.

Here in a way was Lovelady's answer to the defiance which had been hurled into his teeth; but in another way it was only the working out of a law as old as nature itself. When a pair of wolves invade the range they kill for themselves alone; but when their cubs are grown up they run in packs and kill for the pleasure of the chase. The cedar snappers of Coon Hole, like a neglected den of wolves, had increased until they ran in packs; and now, riding at night, they stole Lazy B calves and would continue until they were driven off or killed. But the times had changed since Sam Hawks had ridden the range, a law unto himself. The day was past when a man could arm his cowboys and ride in and hang presumptuous rustlers; and yet the day had not come when the officers of the law could give protection to honest cattlemen.

Clay thought it all over as the round-up went on, revealing more losses each day; and then, bending to the storm, he ordered the whole lower range cleared—for it was either that or fight. All the bad men in the West were filtering into Coon Hole and every man was a wolf. There were two packs, now—the Dobe Town gang of train robbers and the rustlers that made their headquarters with Lovelady. But all of them were eating his beef. They had to eat—he knew it—but he did not have to feed them; and he retreated to Hawks' Mesa with his herds. There with line camps along the rim he stood guard over his cows and the wolf pack took warning and passed him by.

All winter there were rumors of strange cowboys riding the range and of stray steers drifting in bands before the storms; but when the spring round-ups came all the strays had disappeared and tremendous losses of steers were reported. Utah brands were found in Wyoming and Wyoming brands in Utah; the Snake River winter ranges had been stripped and as the cattlemen compared notes it soon became evident that organized rustlers were at work. Northern cattle had been driven south and crossed into Utah, and southern cattle driven north into Wyoming; and at a call from William Bones the principal stock raisers of the district met at his office for a private conference.

If Bones had questioned Clay's judgment when he had abandoned his lower range and wintered his cows on the bleak mesa, the spring round-up brought its own answer. Where others had lost their hundreds Bones, by actual count, was short nearly a thousand head. Most of his steers had been driven off during a heavy storm; even his cows and calves had been preyed upon; and every trail that left his range had ended, sooner or later, in Coon Hole. And the new sheriff of Bear County, after sundry excuses,

had finally admitted he had not lost any rustlers.

It had got beyond the law. Or so Bones said; and while others were less outspoken it was agreed that something should be done. Hawks refused to commit himself, for he saw in Bones' eye a desire to push him into the forefront of the battle. Bones was for cleaning out Coon Hole, but not with his own hands. He thought Clay would make a better leader. He was perfectly willing to do the organizing and collecting but the leadership should go to a Hawks. Just the name would make men think of old Sam Hawks—and when Sam put on his war paint there had been a scattering. He would have cleaned out Coon Hole in one day.

Clay listened and smiled indulgently, for some of these lost steers that Bones was raving about had been put in on his own lower range. With apologies, to be sure, and veiled references to his father and what he would think to see his winter range abandoned; but Bones had put in a bunch of steers and his own cowboys had joined the rustlers, driving the whole herd off into Coon Hole. That was the way Bones preferred to tell it; but it was rumored around the saloons that the process had been reversed. Bones had hired some rustlers, thinking he was getting honest punchers, and they had never stopped till they struck the Hole.

Clay had not quarreled with Bones, but when he put the steers in on his range he recalled what Mrs. Payne had said. According to her, Bones' sole reason for making war on them was to get possession of Coon Hole for a winter range. Had he planned to get Clay's range, instead? That was a question, of course, which was now purely academic since the cedar snappers had stolen all the steers; but after all he had suffered from Bones' bungling and mismanagement Clay did not feel called upon to be his cat's-paw in Coon Hole. If he wanted it for his winter range let him go down and take it, the way Sam Hawks would have done. And besides, Clay was not losing stock now. He had hired trustworthy men to ride the rim of his high stronghold and he did a little riding himself.

There were conferences and heated arguments, but Bones' plans were coming to nothing when a spark set the meeting off. A train came backing in, the whistle hooting raucously, and as they crowded about the station the word was passed along.

"Another holdup! Train robbed, up at Clifton!"

It was Sundance Thorp again—Sundance and the Dobe Town gang—and they had headed in the direction of Coon Hole. Just the name was enough; when the railroad detectives arrived they found a posse of twenty cattlemen waiting. Bones was there and Hawks and all the Snake River cowmen; and along with the local officers and a carload of detectives they swept out of town at a gallop. But it was a race for the reward more than a pursuit of vicious criminals and as they cut a fresh trail leading down Irish Cañon the detectives jumped into the lead. They had brought their own horses in the special stock car which the railroad had fitted up for that purpose and the thought of twenty thousand dollars on Sundance alone made them forget the desperate chances they took.

But Sundance and his gang had not stopped to lie in ambush; they were heading for the cedar brakes of Coon Hole and when the rest of the posse came stringing out of Irish Cañon the chase was far to the west. The Payne house was deserted when they finally rode up to it and the detectives were still spurring west; but since Sundance and his three partners had changed horses at the ranch any further pursuit seemed useless. After riding half the night and a good part of the day the posse was ready to quit and when Mrs. Payne appeared and offered to make them some coffee they let the reward hunters go.

But hardly had they unsaddled their trembling mounts when there was a rattle of shots from below. Back went the sweaty saddles and once more the race was on, down the trail toward Green River Cañon. It was a long and weary chase for horses half dead with fatigue, but as they rode up over the point and looked off down the river they could see dismounted men climbing up over the huge terraces of broken sandstone.

Puffs of smoke from among the cedars showed where a running fight was in progress along the very brink of the chasm; but for the most part all was still and only skulking forms showed where the man hunters closed in on their prey. Sundance Thorp and his men had taken shelter among the cedars, leaving their horses on the bench below; and while some cattlemen pressed on ahead to join in the battle Clay took shelter

behind a bowlder and waited. His motive in coming south had been that of most of the cattlemen, a desire to clean up Coon Hole; but as for killing Sundance Thorp he would leave that to the detectives who had blazed the way for their posse.

The firing had ceased now, only a loud shout now and then marked the progress the man hunters had made; but from the sound of their voices it was evident that the chase had led high up against the base of a precipice. Here, with the river on one side and the rock wall behind them, the train robbers had made a last stand; and as evening was coming on the detectives were closing in rather than risk an escape after dark.

There was much shouting and challenging, even banter from those below; but Sundance and his men lay hid. They were waiting with their backs to the wall. A tense silence ensued and to the cowmen down below it seemed as if the outlaws had vanished; then, echoing from the cliff, there came the crack of a rifle and a man slipped and fell from a ledge. Not until he began to fall was his presence suspected by those below; but he lay where he had fallen, dead. An aching silence followed, and then from either side stealthy forms crept up to the body; not another shot was fired and only when night had fallen did the sullen detectives return.

They brought the dead man with them, shot squarely between the eyes as he had thrust his head up over the last ledge; and, seeing the result of his foolhardiness, the rest of the man hunters had kept under cover until dark. The posse returned to the log house of the Loveladys where they made themselves strictly at home; but rather than become involved in any controversy about the cattle Clay camped up on the bench, away from the mosquitoes.

In the morning he rode down and looked across at the long ranch house set under the brow of the hill; already the cattlemen were assembling. The pursuit of the train robbers had proved a failure for the detectives; but now that the rustlers were scattered the cowmen intended to sweep Coon Hole clean.

Bones was the man in the saddle, giving the orders and doing the talking, and when Hawks rode up he immediately deputized him to cut Lovelady's herd for strays. But Bones was not the only one who had been watching for Clay's coming and Penny came flying out to meet him.

"Oh, Clay!" she cried. "Why haven't you been here? They're going to take all our cattle!"

"Sure," he said. "Why not?"

"Why not!" she echoed, her eyes big with anger. "It's plain stealing, that's all it is! And besides, we've sold half of them to Lord Abernethy and it wouldn't be fair to him!"

She waved a dainty hand in the direction of an Englishman who was lingering near, smoking a pipe, but Clay only gave him a glance. He was thinking of what he had suffered at Penny's hands.

"You worried yourself sick, didn't you?" he went on sarcastically, "when your husband was stealing my steers. It wasn't right to steal then, was it? Well, this is part of the game when you run off and marry a cow thief; you needn't look to me for any sympathy."

"No, but listen, my good man," broke in the Englishman excitedly, "you don't realize the importance of this case. I bought these cattle in good faith, paying two thousand pounds for them, and if you take them I shall appeal to his majesty."

"You'll have to appeal then, because these cattle have been stolen and these gentlemen can claim everything in their brands."

"No, but they're going to take them *all*, Clay!" cried Penny tearfully, "whether they have our brand or not! And David is a lord in——"

"That makes no difference out here!" broke in Clay impatiently, "we don't give a whoop if he's a king. If he's bought stolen stock he's lost his money, that's all. What title can you show for these cattle?"

"Why—I don't know what you mean!" answered Penny resentfully. "But if you mean you're going to take them——"

"We're not going to take a hoof that you can prove title to. Have you got any bills of sale?"

"Why, no. You see, Clay, Mr. Loveleddy ran away and took all his papers with him; and if it hadn't been for Lord Abernethy"—she turned and smiled at him sweetly—"I don't know what I'd have done."

"Oh, it was nothing—nothing," Abernethy spoke up briskly, but Clay saw the blush that mounted his blond cheeks and almost took pity on his innocence.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Abernethy, or whatever your name is——"

"David Williams! And what is yours, pray?"

"Clayton Hawks," answered Clay.

"Glad to meet you, Mr. Hawks; very glad, I'm sure. Now, what was it about the cattle?"

"If they've got your straight brand on them you can claim them as your property. But if they've got some other man's brand, or if he can show where his brand has been changed, we'll have to give them to him."

"Fair enough!" declared the Englishman. "Quite right, I'm sure. Would you mind if I go along?"

"Not at all," returned Clay, but as Williams started into the house Penny whispered a moment in his ear.

"I'm very sorry," he said, turning gravely to Clay, "but perhaps I would better remain here. Disturbed conditions, you understand, and the little lady is such a brick that——"

"All right," nodded Clay and rode off grimly. He understood better than the Englishman knew.

While the detectives were conducting a wary search of the high cliffs in an endeavor to locate Sundance and his gang the posse of cattlemen threw a quick circle up the valley and gathered in Lovelady's herd. What few carried his straight brand were thrown back toward the ranch house where the queen of the rustlers kept her lord; but every stray of any brand was ruthlessly cut and driven on over the hill to Payne's. Here most of the cattle ranged, attracted by the green grass and the springs that came out along the hillside; and without asking permission Clay and his posse rounded them up and once more began to cut their strays.

But things had not gone well during their absence from the Payne ranch; some of the gang had returned during the night; and, ghastly reminder of the power of the hidden outlaws, a man's body hung dangling from the corral gate frame. Clay rode over to the house as soon as the round-up was well started and helped cut the body down. Whoever the man was he had been suspected of intended treachery; and there he hung, a warning to all informers. But the significance of this hanging and the menace which lay behind it were lost on some of the posse; and as Clay rode past the gate he heard an altercation in the house where Mrs. Payne was laying down the law. Four horses stood outside and, knowing who rode them, Clay dropped off and hurried up the path. Some of the posse had been loading up on whisky and now they were making themselves objectionable.

At the clank of his spurs Mrs. Payne looked out the door and beckoned him in with a sigh.

"I'd just like to know," she demanded, "whether these men here can insult me just because my husband is away. When Mr. Payne hears of this and of his daughters being insulted——"

Clay looked at the four men, who were leering defiantly, and turned to the angry woman.

"No, Mrs. Payne," he said, "you won't be insulted. Can you get me a little breakfast?"

"Well, I can," she flared back, "if you'll keep these four brutes from calling through that door to my daughters; but you or no one else can come into my house——"

"All right," he cut in, "they won't do it."

"Well, make them get out of here—they've been sitting there for an hour and I won't have my daughters insulted."

"Did you gentlemen insult her daughters?" demanded Clay after a silence, and the drunkest of the four spoke up.

"Insult hell," he jeered. "Her daughters are just like she is—ain't she common to all these rustlers?"

The blush of shame that mantled Mrs. Payne's cheeks went unnoticed in the fracas that followed. With a plunge Clay caught the man by a leg and arm and hurled him out through the screen door; and then, rushing after him, he jerked him to his feet and kicked him down the path to the gate.

"Now you get on that horse," he said, "and beat it for Powder Springs. Never mind about your gun—I'll keep it."

He was a Hawks, like his father, and when his righteous anger leaped up weaker men felt it smite them like a blast. And no man, drunk or sober, could say a word against Mary Blossom without answering for the insult to him. The drunken man rode away, his companions slunk after him and Clay swung up on his own horse and spurred off. Rooster Raslem was right—Coon Hole was no place for a woman.

TO BE CONTINUED.

The Nook that Beckoned

By Theodore Seixas Solomons

Author of "Vassals of the Ice," "The Fang Mark," Etc.

Civilization or freedom? Which did Prattlow choose?

ON the night the telegram went winging on its long flight both Frank Prattlow and his one-time friend and partner, Robert Ellery, tossed sleeplessly on their beds. But how different were the beds; how different their surroundings and how far apart!

Ellery lay between linen, under silk and eider down. A telephone stood on his bed stand, though it was long since he had used it. The beautiful appointments of the bedroom were revealed by the soft glow of indirect lighting. There was stillness in the house and out of it, except for the occasional slither and pur of a motor on the dry, smooth asphalt of the Chicago street.

Prattlow's bed was a bunk filled with marsh hay. He lay in a fur sleeping bag. His light, when he made it to glance at the scratched face of his heavy silver watch, was of the direct sort emitted by a miner's granite candle number two. Its feeble glare disclosed the walls and ceiling of a small cabin built of spruce logs chinked with moss and mud. In it were a sheet-iron stove, a stool and a table of poles hewn flat and nailed against the window. The window was a row of bottles, the apertures between the necks stuffed with moss.

Usually Frank Prattlow slept like a tired child. His restlessness that night was explained by noises sounding upon the door and wall of his cabin—grinding and knocking, as the close-pressed horns of caribou passed from log to jamb, to door, to jamb and to log again. They had kept him prisoner since early the previous afternoon—some hundreds of thousands of these migrants and he was short of wood and out of temper.

It was evident that the forks of Jack-Wade Creek, where late last summer he had built this cabin, were on the route of the caribou to their distant winter feeding grounds in the upper Yukon Valley and the cabin meant as little to them as though it had been a huge bowlder. While they had passed in mere thousands Prattlow had been pleased. Four carcasses were on the roof of the cabin, frozen. But the next day, in tens of thousands, they interfered with his work; and now they had immured him quite. A transverse section of the valley, with the cabin in its center, was packed with their moving bodies.

The evening before, Mrs. Ellery, a handsome woman of forty-five, after dismissing the day nurse, had made her usual hourly visit to her husband's bedside. As usual, he was restless. As usual he did what she told him, looking at her with unseeing eyes. But this time he spoke—muttered. That was unusual. It had occurred only twice before.

"Frank Prattlow," her husband's voice said. "Where's Frank Prattlow?"

"Do you want him?" she asked. But there was no answer.

She turned his pillow, touched his forehead and went back to the living room downstairs.

Her daughter Marion, glancing at her mother's face, said: "Something new!" Her words were more an assertion than a question.

"He is calling for Frank Prattlow again." She still stood. "I wonder if it would be possible to find him."

"Why surely, mother. There must be telegraph lines up there—or at least to the principal places."

"If I only knew where he was! Why, deary, I don't know if he is up there at all or even if he is still alive. Your father came home one night, years ago, and said, 'I met a fellow to-day that knew a man from Alaska who worked with Frank Prattlow last winter in a place called Candle.' That's a rather slim chance, deary. You know those placer-mining places don't last

long and the men shift about. Years ago it was."

"Try it, mother," urged Marion. "Ring up Mr. Overfield."

"That's just what I'll do." And she did at once.

Overfield was the attorney for the Ellery Pipe Company and also for Robert Ellery personally. The result of the conversation was the telegram that started from Chicago on its zigzag quest an hour later and reached Frank Prattlow in three weeks, four days and fourteen hours.

At Seattle it performed a feat of self-multiplication, becoming four identical cablegrams to as many ports of Alaska. And the larger part of the message was not addressed to Frank Prattlow but to the managers of the stations, directing them to use every effort to locate addressee, any and all costs guaranteed, the other three stations to be at once notified if and when delivery was made.

Candle, reached from the Nome station by a long-distance wire insulated from the ground mainly by dry snow, replied that Frank Prattlow had left that arctic camp three years before bound for the Kuskokwim country. That put it up to either Fairbanks or the Innoko branch, the operators of which immediately got busy. The Innoko man—or rather woman—perceiving sentiment in the message and suspecting a life-and-death issue—employed a dog-team driver. When that musher reported what he had learned in the Kuskokwim to the woman operator and she to her chief at Fairbanks the latter switched the inquiry to Eagle.

The Eagle man in his aerie had heard, by pure accident, something about a man named Harlow, who was thought to be up on Jack-Wade Creek, either across the Canadian line or on the Alaska side of it. He wired Seattle for authority to send a dog team to deliver to Harlow. Word came back: "Prattlow was right no authority disburse funds to locate Harlow." But the Eagle telegrapher, though not a woman, had a hunch that rode him like an Old Man of the Sea and whispered in his ear that the person wanted was the fellow at Jack-Wade; and he took a chance—a two-hundred-and-thirty-dollar risk of personal loss it proved to have been when Dan McKinstry, the messenger, brought in his bill.

When the wire reached him Frank Prattlow had eaten only a scant half of one fat caribou, for he was an abstemious man who realized, after twenty years in the Far North, that it is always a long time until spring and scurvy ever peering at you through your cabin window.

He was setting his fire in the first deep hole on Jack-Wade Creek when the shaft darkened. Looking up he saw a red face framed in a flaring parkey hood looking the thirty-eight feet down on him. He touched a match to his shavings, climbed nimbly up the ladder, in spite of his touch of rheumatism, and said: "Well, hullo, human bein'!" And smiled. That was a typical Frank Prattlow greeting. Ask any old-timer.

"Say!" said McKinstry. "The census on this creek is big. I met just one man all the way up. And he said there was just one more. I reckon you're him."

"Yes, I'm the other one. Come into the cabin, my boy. It's cold."

"Are you Frank Harlow?" asked the parkeyed stranger, for the moment ignoring the invitation.

"I am not. I'm Frank Prattlow, at your service, pardner."

"Better yet. Then you're the real guy and I'll sure get my money." Which exhalation of relief he explained later—after he had handed a buff envelope to its addressee.

Prattlow read it and whistled, threw it on his bed and heated some caribou and beans for McKinstry, who ate them hurriedly and mushed down the creek again, leaving Prattlow to take his telegram to the light of the chinked bottles and meditate upon it. This was the message he now carefully reread:

CHICAGO, Nov. 7, 19....

MR. FRANK PRATTLOW, Candle, or elsewhere in Alaska:

Your old friend Robert Ellery ill for weeks and knowing nobody is calling for you. Lives two O three one Monroe avenue.

MARGARET ELLERY.

It was a little early for dinner—hardly eleven, according to the watch of a thousand scratches. But there was nothing to do until the "thawin'" was ready to be taken out and, as that would not be for hours, he propped the telegram against the bottle of real Worcestershire sauce—as English as he had been thirty-five years before—spooned himself a generous helping of beans and a little caribou, ate and cogitated.

He prided himself on being a deliberate

man. It was true enough; and the quality had saved him, as it had saved thousands, in a land where feeling and impulse are dangerous counselors. He said to himself aloud —as is sometimes the wont of the sanest who cabin alone: "I'd certainly not go till I've seen this Jack-Wade bed rock!"

Whether he would go at all he rather doubted. A little beans, a little rumination; a bit of caribou, a bit of the past. "I wonder," was one of his thoughts, "how poor old Bob, or Bob's woman, ever saved up enough to get this telegram to me. That feller that brought it isn't traveling clear through from Eagle for nothing! I'll bet they have a bunch of kids. Twenty-thirty-one Monroe Avenue, hey? Don't remember it. One of them tenement avenues, of course. 'Margaret Ellery!' As sure as the world that'll be Margy Winters that was. So she *did* marry him! And callin' for me —after all these years. Wonder what's on his mind?"

He screwed up one eye. "Perhaps I can come pretty near guessin'!" He was thinking of their separation.

Shopmates they had been in the big English manufacturing town of their birth, together learning to cut a thread on a pipe as big as themselves; and a little later steerage mates, too, sharers of the weal and woe of young paupers in a new country. Off and on for many a year they continued to be companions; and finally they became partners in a venture in the trade to which they had both been bred. But briefly! Prattlow had "pulled out" and gone farther west. A few constrained letters followed; and then silence. And after that, the North opened its cold and cavernous jaws to Prattlow and Bob Ellery had become only a memory.

Yet a memory pregnant! For up through the welter of the years between there rose now like a mirage, swimming in a sweetness of light, a vivid pageant of their youth together, its sharings, its loyalties, its shy fondnesses. Only their painful parting of the ways remained, by his will, mercifully shrouded and obscure. Thus, unmarred, the beauty of that one long oasis his parched life had traversed was reborn to him, revivified by the subtle force of the current which had brought him that pitiful picture of his old friend—ill for weeks, knowing nobody, calling for him!

"I got to know about this Jack-Wade bed rock," he said again, but less decisively. He believed that the fire now burning would be the last one needed in that shaft. Heavy sedimentary gravel, with some coarse colors, had marked the previous thawing, and to-day or to-morrow would tell a story he had been curious to learn for years—since his old Klondike days, in fact.

But a thought occurred to him: Dave Bayne might——

Dave Bayne was the other man on the creek, another old Klondiker come back to Jack-Wade to test the benches. Prattlow found himself packing his old dunnage bag and getting down grub from his cache. He thought to himself that Bayne wouldn't be fool enough to come way up there and bother with another man's prospect. Nothin' in it for him. Still, in case he *should* be willing——

The mirage of youth still holding his eyes, mechanically, almost, he made ready —much to the satisfaction of his three dogs, who watched him look to the lashings of his old, worn basket sled with low yelpings of delight.

"Hullo, Pratt," said Bayne, a somewhat younger man, about two hours later. "Fixed for a trip somewheres?"

"Nothin' doin'," answered Prattlow positively. He smiled his infectious, deprecating smile. "Never till I see bed rock up there on that Jack-Wade claim of mine."

He was conscious of an old-young man with eyes open but unseeing, lying on a bed of pain. "Leastways," he added cautiously, "not unless somebody sees it for me." And he told Dave Bayne of his telegram and of the ridiculousness of it. Imagine *him* taking a journey like that half round a world he had forgotten for a man he had almost forgotten! An expensive journey, too, and in the dead of winter!

Bayne had a spasm of laughing. He went over and unlashed the end of the tarpaulin cleanly covering the load on Frank Prattlow's sled. He appraised its contents with an experienced eye.

"No, I guess you ain't *dreamin'* of goin'!" he returned mockingly, and another spasm shook him. "Well, I'll take out that thawin' and put in any more needed to git to bed rock. I kind o' like the idee of the exercise. Gimme that address and then clear out and—good luck!"

Prattlow had known savage cold in the Yukon and deadly blizzards on the north-

west coast. But that December and January seemed to him to have reached and held to a new mark in silent cruelty of arctic weather. He might at times have mitigated its rigors by sleeping in roadhouses; but what little money he had he knew he must save for dog feed and steamer fare, so he wolfed it in the snow with only the tarpaulin erected as a windbreak behind his lonely camp fire. All day and every day he trudged the trails where trails existed on that incredibly rough ice highway of the Yukon, or, on snowshoes, ahead of his panting dogs, tramped out a trail for himself.

At times of slight relaxing of that death grip of cold he thought perhaps it was only that he was getting old. Though turned of fifty he did not feel his years, except for the occasional touch of rheumatism. But at Whitehorse, over two thirds of the way to the coast, he learned that it had been the coldest midwinter ever recorded in the Yukon basin. He wolfed it onward again over the wind-swept lakes of Skagway, the end of his moccasin journey of some thousand miles.

He had barely time to register his precious huskies at a dog hotel, kept for the convenience of northern travelers who, for a time, abandon sleds for steamships, when a whistle blew from the dock and he and his dunnage bag were hauled aboard the *Boreal Queen* with her gangplank and after twenty years he sniffed again the salt water of Lynn Canal, most northerly arm of that deep and narrow waterway, the Inland Passage. An hour later he acknowledged to an old-time friend that he was "kinder glad to get outside again." He was "tired of Alaska."

In Prattlow's poke was but little more dust than the purser presently demanded of him. But he remembered that in a savings bank in Seattle was a nest egg—a small sum he had left there twenty years before against the day when, despite his golden dreams, he might be returning to the States, "broke."

He inquired about that nest egg of two hundred and fifty dollars when he landed and had eaten a late breakfast. And much to his surprise he found that an indefatigable old hen known as Compound Interest, had laid a few more eggs beside it. However, when he had secured his transportation to Chicago the sum total was considerably reduced and it would have shrunk still further had Prattlow yielded to a very natural impulse to buy some clothes. He was a squarish, well-set-up man whom women had found not unpleasing to look upon in days gone by. And he wondered if, with a shave and hair cut, a good suit, a city shirt and a collar and tie he might not again become the Frank Prattlow of former years—merely grown older.

But the thought of Bob Ellery in some tenement of Monroe Avenue forbade the experiment. He had never relinquished the notion that the money for that exceedingly expensive telegram had come from some sympathetic friend—perhaps from a relative of Margy Winters, whose people, he remembered, were fairly well to do. And it would hardly be the right thing for him to walk in upon the Ellerys "looking like prosperity."

What trinkets and personal articles he possessed he had transferred to a suit case; with this in hand he emerged from the railway station in Chicago and stood uncertainly on the sidewalk semicircled by importunate taxi drivers.

"Gentlemen," he shouted, "I'm flattered to have you make all this fuss over me. How can I get to twenty-thirty-one Monroe Avenue?"

In chorus they invited him to "step this way;" and he was about to make his choice and follow the chosen when again he thought of the unseemliness of driving up to the home of his unfortunate friend in an automobile. The humblest of those taxicabs would contradict the impression he wished his clothes to convey. So he turned away apologetically and inquired of a policeman the route to his destination. Very soon he was on a trolley car, speeding toward it.

Chicago had changed. Or else he had forgotten about its avenues. Or—something! For Monroe Avenue was a "swell" street—a place of *nobs* he would have called it, long ago, before America and the American language corrupted the purity of his near-cockney English. He consulted the nearest lamp-post and spelled the letters carefully. It *was* Monroe Avenue, just as the conductor had insisted. And this *was* the twenty-hundred block. Could it be that Bob had been taken to the house of some rich relation? Not that it was a house apart—a palace. But it was at least as handsome as its neighbors. As he crossed the stone mosaic of the vestibule and pressed

the button at the margin of the high, carved doorway, Frank Prattlow looked at his worn duck coat and blue flannel shirt and smiled his droll, sheepish smile.

The servant who answered his summons stared at the rough-looking person who inquired if Mrs. Ellery lived there. He admitted that she did but before he would state whether or not she was at home he asked the name of the caller and murmuring that he would "see," departed. He never returned, but, instead, a woman who seemed both old and young, both a plain woman and a goddess, noiselessly descended the broad staircase and swept silently toward the man dressed like a laborer. She looked at him intently, expectantly, yet almost unbelievingly.

"You—you are Frank Prattlow?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"Why, it *is* you—Mr. Prattlow! Of course it's you." Her face flushed slightly. "Don't you remember me?"

"Margaret——" He cleared his throat. "You were Margy Winters. Of course I remember you."

They burst out laughing as they grasped each other's hand. But directly he became self-conscious in the presence of this affluence, his eyes half drooping to his clothes. Quick to note it, the woman drew him in, talking smoothly, ringing for the return of the servant to take the suit case.

"You didn't wire. We heard the telegram was delivered, but we thought it might be to the wrong man. We——"

"'We?'" he repeated when she paused. "That's yourself and Bob? He's better, then?"

A shade passed over her face. "N-o, not any. Twice since that night I sent out that message to you he has spoken your name. But no other words have passed his lips, no recognition has been in his eyes. Yet he holds on, month after month. Our doctors say it is very strange."

"What seems to be the matter?" asked the old friend.

"Oh, a number of things. But the mental condition—that is the worst, of course. We hoped—we thought that perhaps if you came——"

"I hoped it might help."

"It was so kind, so good of you to come so very, very far."

"Oh, *that's* all right," Prattlow assured her offhandedly, much as though he had been summoned from a house around the corner. "But you said '*We* thought——'"

Something like happiness came to her eyes for the first time since she had greeted him. "My daughter Marion and I."

"I *see!*" said Prattlow, smiling as happily.

"I'll telephone Doctor Hillton. He's the mental specialist. Come, come and meet Marion and be at home, Mr. Prattlow—Frank. You must let me call you Frank, as I used to years ago."

"Why, I'd feel pretty queer if you didn't, Mrs. Ellery."

She looked at him with a kind of wan archness. "To be fair, it must be 'Margy'—as *you* used to, years ago."

Frank Prattlow blushed and looked again at his clothes. She had given no sign of having noticed them. But later, after he had met Marion—a charming little high-school girl who was so perfect a replica of the youthful Margy Winters that the curtain of the years rolled away from Prattlow—he became conscious, as he talked with them, of a searching on the part of Margaret Ellery for a chance to put him at his ease in the presence of their manifest wealth and make him forget his poverty. He sensed the broaching of compensation and feared tactful insistence that he accept at least reimbursement for the expense of his journey. This he forestalled quite artfully.

"Well, do you know," he said genially, "I'm glad to find you all so comfortable—aside from Bob's hard luck at present. Let's hope he'll come round, though. It's queer, but I've been seeing him just as we used to be—still poor and struggling. Perhaps it's because I always think of sickness and poverty together. We were used to that in our boyhood back in the old country. Whatever it was made me think it, anyhow I was dead sure you'd be hard up against it and I side-stepped every clothing shop in Seattle when I landed. Yes, and—think of it! I was afraid even to come out in one of those machine cabs they have at the depots. I didn't want to put on any airs—if you get me, ladies?"

Mrs. Ellery's eyes never left him. Had he read her mind and saved her embarrassment? Was this indeed the old Frank Prattlow, the heedless, devil-may-care youth she had known?

"We mustn't see Bob, you say, till the doctor comes after supper. Well, then,

ladies, if you'll excuse me, I'll go downtown and buy something to wear. I suppose they can fit an old miner, if his joints *are* a bit hard!"

When he returned, still in his old clothes, a flat box suspended by its brown twine from his great hard fingers, she wondered why he had hesitated to wear the new clothes.

"It's just that I thought, perhaps, if it's a question of reco'nizin' me"—there was a twinkle in his eye—"I might stand a better chance lookin' like he and I always *used* to look."

She nodded slowly. "You are very keen-witted and thoughtful. Alaska must *teach!*"

"Much, ma'am, even to a dunce," he replied soberly.

When the mental specialist arrived, Mrs. Ellery asked him tremulously whether she and Marion might also come into the room, so that if the darkened mind were lit by the visage of the man for whom it had been calling they too might stand revealed.

All four stepped through the doorway of the bedchamber. The nurse ministering to the man who was lost in his own house tiptoed away and Frank Prattlow advanced to the bedside and looked into the open eyes of his boyhood friend.

No recognition came to those eyes. Yet they must have conveyed recognition to the brain behind them, to an expectant mind, a longing heart.

"Frank Prattlow! Five thousand miles. Too bad!" The words came a little huskily. A thin hand went out and feebly clasped the tendoned hand of the Alaska miner. "Yet —I'm glad you came!"

A pause, and Prattlow spoke to him, but there was no response, no further words. And several times before the man died, three days later, Prattlow came to him. There may have been consciousness, there may have been profound satisfaction, infinite solace! But there was no look of the eye, no movement of the lips, no sign of the hand.

Prattlow helped to carry the visible remains of Robert Ellery to their last resting place. He helped in many things. The widow acknowledged it some days later when, after a visit from Mr. Overfield, the lawyer, she said to the old friend in the presence of Marion:

"Frank, I wondered why Robert thought of you and called for you after all those years. I was glad that he suddenly found speech. It showed his mind was not gone. But I was a little—jealous, I must confess. Mr. Overfield has just brought me Robert's will to read, and another paper, a little note to me which was sealed up with the will. They explain, and yet they do not explain. Your father, Marion, has left to Mr. Prattlow an interest in the business, provided he cares to engage in it. And in the note to me he explains that he thinks that Mr. Prattlow is entitled to this recognition on account, perhaps, of some things that happened long ago. He hopes he may be alive still and that he may be found. What were those things that happened, Frank? Speak out before Marion. I called her on purpose."

She was a very brave woman, thought Prattlow. But whether Marion were present or absent he did not intend to tell her that he had thought Ellery played him a sharp trick in the business they started together and that that thought—of which through many years he had tried to rid himself—seemed now borne out by the conscience of the old partner. But he knew he must not pause long. Ingenuity came to him and he said in his sheepish, waggish way, smilingly—though a tear had formed in each deep, gray eye:

"Stuff and nonsense! You know how the younger man usually is. I was for complainin' every once in a while. I imagined I wasn't getting a square deal. But I've thought since maybe I got more'n I deserved. We parted the best of friends—honest we did. It was just that *he* thought *I* thought he wasn't fair—and that the feelin' held on to him all these many years. Just because we were pals so long I expect he couldn't bear the idea that I might still be thinkin' he'd given me a bit the worst of it. But he hadn't!"

It happened that Margaret Ellery knew the man who had just died through and through—a good man, as men go, but with some very grave faults of egotism and avarice. And she felt sure that Frank Prattlow lied and she knew that he lied for her sake—and even more for Marion's. But she accepted his explanation and thanked him for it with a fervor that almost made the wary Prattlow suspect.

"Frank, he wanted you to take some of this business. You've confessed you're tired of Alaska. Then stay and settle down. We shall need some one we can trust. Are you

still the pipe wizard Robert used to say you were?"

"That's what they call me in Alaska," admitted Prattlow with some pride. "From prospectin' and minin' I've often turned for a grubstake to a hard pipe job."

"You won't have to actually *handle* pipe, you know."

"Not likely," he admitted again, his eyes atwinkle. For he had seen the plant of the Ellery Pipe Works. "But there's that Jack-Wade bed rock I've got to know about first. Y' see I was there in the old Klondike days when frozen placer ground was a new thing and men didn't know how to work the deep channels of the benches. We just grabbed off the cream in the creek channel and stampeded to some new place.

"Yet every once in a while I'd wonder about the *real* channel on Jack-Wade; and I somehow managed to get the assessment work done on that claim of mine, number eighteen above Discovery. But I never got back to that upper country during all the years I was down around Nome and the arctic diggin's, a thousand miles away, until, when I left the Kuskokwim about a year ago I says to myself: 'Now I'm kind of foot-loose for a while, and hang me if I don't beat it back to old Jack-Wade and try the benches!' I found another old-timer up there with the same happy thought. He said he'd finish thawin' my shaft to bed rock while I——"

"Grappled with the dreadful arctic cold through days and weeks and months at the call of a friend long dead to you."

"Oh, now, Margy," remonstrated Prattlow, "I want to tell you I was just achin' to get Alaska out of my bones. Honest, now!"

"You're getting along in years, Frank. Why not *keep* it out of your bones? Why not forget that Jack-Wade bed rock? You —you don't need the money, surely."

Prattlow looked at her a little narrowly as he thought with dismay of the diminished balance in that Seattle bank. But he had made the journey for self-satisfaction, not at the behest of the rich, and he answered her from the niche in which she had placed him.

"I've quite enough." He chuckled lightly.

"Still, we know you'll be more comfortable in civilization—and happier—especially with a pipe job—a big one."

"I suppose so—— If it wasn't for that Jack-Wade bed rock."

Spring flooded the city and its environs. Green sprang everywhere. It was unbelievable to Prattlow, and unbelievably rejuvenating. The frozen heart in him thawed to a score of old curiosities and new impulses. He looked up some friends of his young manhood. One only he found—who barely remembered him! But the young-old miner refused to let that disappointment affect him and resolved to be very happy in his interlude of civilization.

Why should he not be happy? He was perfectly comfortable with the Ellerys. Robert Ellery's will made it easy, indeed almost obligatory, for him to stay on with them for a while. He was more than comfortable. He was softened, affected. The girl and he had taken a great liking to each other. She called him "Uncle Frank" to match her mother's cordially simple "Frank," and had acquired the habit, evenings, of sitting very close to him and holding his hand while he told her tales and tales of the early life of her father. He ransacked his memory for creditable deeds—in fact strained it, at times, to the verge of the apocryphal.

Margaret Ellery's admiration was great for the man who had done what this man had done—and waved it aside as nothing, and was what this man was—and seemed unconscious of it! But after all it was only a fulfillment, she felt, of that which she had sensed in him as a youth. Whether or not she would admit it to herself, it remained that once she had admired Frank Prattlow more than Robert Ellery; and, much though she had loved her husband, the years between had but developed the instincts upon which the preference had been founded.

As for Frank Prattlow, though he deliberately chuckled in the excess of his comfort and insisted to himself that he really was happy, the truth was that Chicago irked and annoyed him deeply—too profoundly, indeed, for ready realization. It was not because it was Chicago but because it was an unaccustomed world, complex, artificial, a vortex of *semblances*. It was not Alaska! Ere long, bubbles of discontent rose to the surface of his perceptions; and late in the summer he told Margaret Ellery that he would like to let her little proposition stand until he made just one more trip to Alaska. He had not heard from Dave Bayne and he wondered why.

"We'll be waiting for you, Frank," she said to him warmly when they parted.

Fall found him in Seattle, with a ticket to Skagway and the last of his savings in his pocket. But before the boat sailed he somehow managed to convert most of the small sum that remained to him into grub. Even though he was to return soon, he did not want to go down the Yukon lacking an outfit. An outfit had been the one thing that during all his long fighting years in the North had meant self-respect and the ability to feel your words when you told a man to go plumb to hell.

At Skagway, snow upon its streets, he bolted for the dog hotel and his "little fellers," his three huskies. Four days later, as he rounded up upon the Summit, he bumped into a two-dog team and—Dave Bayne!

"You damned old fraud, you!" exclaimed Prattlow as he wrung his hand. "I thought you was goin' to finish that hole for me. How about it?"

Bayne beamed at "the other man on Jack-Wade Creek." Then he looked guilty.

"I went down to bed rock all right. It only took one more fire. But I couldn't write you about it——"

"Why not?" asked Prattlow. His heart sank as it had sunk many times before—on bed rock! "Nothing there, hey?"

"That wasn't it," Bayne answered matter-of-factly. "It was because I lost that slip of paper you gimme with the address on it. Was it St. Louis or New York you was a-goin' to?"

"Chicago, you mutt!" corrected Prattlow. "So *that* was your reason. It wasn't because you found nothing to report about?"

"No, it was because I *couldn't* report. If I hadn't of lost that scrap of paper I'd of written you long ago that there wasn't hardly a color *on* or *in* that bed rock. To hell with the creek! I'm goin' outside. Come on!"

He started down the hill, looking back expectantly.

Prattlow walked to the head of his team and took in the view, his mind in Chicago, the pipe works and the Ellerys—whom he thought of as two bosoms that were warm for him.

He had done his duty by Jack-Wade—by the whole of Alaska for that matter. He had earned rest and ease and warmth and the love that Margaret Ellery, some day not greatly afar, would give him. He was fifty-one and sound as a nut, it was true. But he tired easily nowadays, the cushions of his joints were wearing thin and there was that touch of rheumatism.

The view obtruded upon his thoughts. Below him, stretching away to a very distant, very blue and cold but inexpressibly beautiful horizon, were spread the tumultuous ranges of the Yukon, the dark green of spruce forests lit with the sparkle of fresh snow. Almost beneath him, cuddled in its gorge, lay Bennett, first of the lakes of the mighty river, long and slender and white, its mantled ice ripe and ready for the silent glide of runners.

He had only twenty-five dollars in his pocket; and of other worldly wealth—the little sled held it all. Jack-Wade was gone, and there was no other creek he particularly cared to prospect. So he guessed he'd better follow Dave Bayne and return to the big pipe works, and the comfort of the warm house and warmer hearts of the Ellerys.

Yet he frowned. It was, after all, another man's world, another man's accumulations. Not carved by him was the nook that beckoned.

He looked again into the hard and somber face of the Northern wilderness. In his nostrils the cool, clean air was sweet. His dogs sniffed it, raised their muzzles and howled. His leader licked his hand.

Frank Prattlow moved, like a man in a dream, to the rear of his sled and grasped the handlebars. He lifted his grizzled chin and fixed his eyes on the northward horizon.

"Mush on, little fellers!" he said.

More of Mr. Solomons' work will appear soon.

A PRINTING BILL

General Dawes might reduce the expense of printing the *Congressional Record* by making the congressmen pay for all the space they use in it for advertising purposes.

Sandy

By Henry Herbert Knibbs

Author of "The Return of the Spider," "Rags," Etc.

A man who can be as amusing as "Sandy" Brett while trying to beat a most irate sheriff's posse into Mexico is worth knowing. Meet him!

HE reined up as he topped the low hill, turned in his saddle and surveyed the open country toward the north. The St. Augustine plains seemed like a great brown sea that moved gently in the white light of noon. He had come in haste. His horse showed it. Thus far he was familiar with the country. Beyond and south was new to him.

He curved his hands like binoculars, gazing long toward the north. His boyish mouth shaped in a grin. "They're riding fresh horses—or I'd 'a' lost 'em yesterday. Come on, you posse! You'll catch me yet!"

Three black dots blinked into view on the far northern rim of the plains: three men of Magdalena, on fresh mounts requisitioned at the Gary ranch, as the fugitive had suspected.

"One more flutter," said the man on the hill, patting the neck of his horse. "Then you get a rest. Me, I'm ridin' the stars down.

"You're too good a horse to kill," said the fugitive as they drifted down the hillside and out onto the flat. "One more flutter and they can catch you and read your brand. I ain't branded yet."

South, on the immediate horizon rose a thin thread of smoke. A blur of distant buildings that might develop into ranch house, windmill, corrals, lay at the base of the uprising smoke. Sandy, so called because he had grit and not because of Scotch ancestry, surveyed the country ahead with an experienced eye. The scattered black specks between him and the ranch house were not clumps of brush, but grazing cattle. An hour and he was among them. His tired horse pricked its ears. Sandy grinned. "If them fellas back there had as much sense as you got, they'd stay right here and take a rest, like you're going to do."

His gray eyes singled out a lean, active steer. He took down his rope. "One more flutter, old-timer!" And he swung his horse after the steer. The big cow pony heaved into a run. Sandy's rope whistled. The steer ran like a scared cat but the cow horse knew his work. The rope flickered out, the horse jumped at right angles to his course and braced against the shock. Sandy slipped from the saddle and ran toward the steer. To a casual observer this would have seemed a peculiar pastime for a young man hotly pursued by a posse.

It takes a real hand to hog tie, saddle and mount a steer. But he did it—because he had to.

About the time Sandy got into action a cowboy appeared, riding leisurely. The steer had quit bucking and was running straight west, making a little better time than a down-grade freight. The cowboy stared, noticed that the steer was saddled and also noticed Sandy's horse which had turned to graze. "Hey! Where you goin'!" yelled the puncher.

"Darned if I know!" shouted Sandy as he humped past.

The puncher caught sight of the three distant riders. His mouth shaped the word "posse." He had never liked the word nor what it implied. He gazed after the running steer, grinned hugely and turned to inspect Sandy's horse. The brand was strange to him. He shook his head. Then, because he had known in his youth what it means to be pacemaker to a posse, he obliterated the story of the steer roping by riding in Sandy's tracks and across the spot where the steer had been grounded. Back and forth he rode, enacting something like an equestrian minuet without music. He had never known Sandy; did not even know where he hailed from, but he did know that that wild rider, whoever he was, was one of his kind, all leather, hand stitched

and guaranteed to wear. "The young son of a gun," he murmured soulfully.

His weathered eyes were not so soulful, however, when the posse finally met him, a mile or so north of Sandy's fresh start in life. In the first place the posse, as an aggregation, was not polite. Nor did they appeal to him individually. They had the lust of killing in their eyes. They were dead sure they were after the right man. The cow-puncher thought so, too, but that did not affect his attitude toward the recently departed. "Seen him?" he said in answer to their hot questioning. "No. I ain't seen nobody ridin' a Bar-2 bay hoss with a blaze face. But I seen the hoss."

"Where?"

"Back yonder a couple of miles, grazin' pretty."

"You better come along with us," suggested one of the posse.

"I'm just dyin' to do that thing. All I was waitin' for was the invite."

"His hoss was played out," stated one of the posse as they jogged along in the hot sun, following the tracks of the bay.

"Seemed like he was," concurred the cow-puncher.

Arrived at the spot where Sandy had left his horse, the posse rode circles trying to pick up the fugitive's trail. But trail there was none, save that of the cow-puncher coming from the distant ranch. The posse rode more circles, swore, interrogated the puncher, dismounted and tried to pick up the trail on foot and finally drew in to where the other sat serenely smoking a cigarette and gazing into space.

"Looks like you might 'a' met up with him, about here," said the leader of the posse.

"Sure does," assented the puncher.

"Was he a friend of yours?" queried another member.

"He might of been. I didn't ask him."

"There's somethin' mighty queer about this," asserted the leader. "We trail him for two days. He's ridin' the same hoss. We come within two hours of landin' him. Here's his hoss, and a mess of tracks which ain't his, and he's gone."

"Mebby he has," sighed the puncher. "I almost think so. Me, I made them tracks, lookin' for him. What's his name, anyhow?"

"Sandy Brett."

"What started him tryin' to beat you folks into Mexico?"

"Killed a man in Magdalena."

"Is that all! He didn't steal a hoss, did he?"

"That's his hoss," declared one of the posse. "First off we heard he stole one of Jim Benson's thoroughbreds."

"So all he done was kill a man, eh?" queried the puncher.

"You talk like that was nothin'," said the leader.

"Depends on what kind of a man he killed. Some folks in this country needs killin'."

"And he's one of 'em," declared the leader. "How far is it to the house?"

" 'Bout two miles."

There was little satisfaction in palavering with the puncher, so the disgruntled posse rode on, arriving at the ranch house, where they learned that no one had passed that way answering the description of the stranger. After eating they mounted and continued their search south, surmising that Sandy Brett was headed in the same general direction. Just how he had evaded them was a puzzle which they did not try to solve through discussion. They were too disgusted to talk.

With destination unknown and no stop-off privileges, Sandy hung and rattled as the steer cut a lively course toward the southwest. Sandy was glad that the steer had not decided to head north, for instance, because the matter of direction and control was out of his hands. Sandy simply stuck to him. He did ride. He had to ride. He could ride. Occasionally the steer showed signs of slowing up. Sandy never for an instant forgot what his spurs were for. It was a grand career, wild, free and fast.

Sandy still retained his rope. He had reasoned that he might need it, even if the posse did not. The rope was still around the steer's horns, the slack coiled in his rider's hand and enough loose end out to whang the steer down his flanks and shoulders as a matter of encouragement. In the steer's "first fine frenzy" Sandy had let the rope drag. Later he had gathered and coiled it neatly.

Sandy's alert mind was not occupied with any special thought of the posse. He had other and more immediate problems. The first of these was to stick to his mount. The

second might be summarized by, how, when and where? He did not want to lose a good saddle and rope. He had tied his bridle back of the cantle. There were other mounts in the country and other days to ride. There was much unfenced country round about and, being of an ambitious turn of mind, Sandy wanted to see it first. The posse could look it over later.

The problem of how, when and where was solved a bit sooner than Sandy had anticipated. The flying steer bore down upon a mud-banked alkali-ringed water hole. Cattle straggled near by, some lying down on the long, gently sloping banks, some standing belly deep in the mud and water, gazing stupidly at the approaching rider. The steer headed straight for the water hole at high speed.

Sandy whanged him across the head with his rope, trying to turn him, as he did not care to be set afoot or afloat just then. He was thinking that when the steer struck the mud—— Sandy had experienced that sensation more than twice—the sudden cessation of movement under him, the parabolic dive into space, the dead shock as the earth reared up and butted him—— "But this here is wet," said Sandy as the steer tore across the alkali rim toward the water.

Sandy could ride. He scorned to pull leather. But this time there was no human audience. He dropped his coiled rope, grabbed the horn and shot his stirrups forward. For a second he thought he was gone. In another second he knew he wasn't. In still another he realized that his boots were slowly filling with water, that he was in the saddle and that the steer had, for the time being, quit. Most of the cattle had left. Two or three stood, hesitating, then finally drifted away.

The steer's flanks heaved hard and fast. Sandy drew a deep breath. "Well, we're here," he observed, glancing round. The smile faded from his face. A horse poked over a low rise directly in front of him. Sandy's hand dropped to his holster. Then it crept up to his shirt pocket. He rolled a cigarette and lighted it. Then he reached down and began to coil the wet rope. "Darned if it ain't a woman," he muttered and his young face flushed.

The horse picked its way daintily toward the water hole. The rider, a golden-haired girl whose blue eyes were filled with both wonder and amusement leaned forward in the saddle as her horse drank. Sandy coughed. He almost wished that it had been the posse. He raised his hat with some dignity. The girl laughed outright. "*How* did you do it?" she asked.

"I dunno. First time I ever tried it, serious."

"You *do* look serious," said the girl.

Sandy grinned. "I was admiring you—you—your horse," he stammered.

"You have an unusual mount, yourself," she declared.

"Some. He's a Lazy-J, on the hide, but he ain't. He's sure lively."

"Did you ride him from the Lazy-J, clear over here?"

"If you would call it riding. We come."

"But what are you doing in the water hole?"

"Ask him," said Sandy, indicating the steer.

"How are you going to get out?"

"Ask him," reiterated Sandy.

"He seems rather satisfied where he is," said the girl, laughing.

"I ain't suffering any, myself," asserted Sandy, gazing at the girl in open admiration. "It's a mighty fine day."

"Can't you spur him up out of there?" she queried.

"Mebby. He might take to pitching and he might make it out and start to running again. Then mebby you couldn't catch him."

"But why should I want to catch him?"

"That's right! Only, if he was to leave me, sudden, I'd stand to lose a good saddle. And I'm losing time, right now."

The steer began to show signs of restlessness. Sandy reached down and felt of the cinch. It was slack—too slack for safety. He tugged the cinch hook loose, straightened up and shook the rope from the steer's horns and then roweled him briskly. The steer bellowed, humped himself and started for dry land. The turmoil in the middle of the water hole subsided as Sandy came up, dragging his saddle after him. His wet shirt clung to his muscular shoulders and lean waist. He squelched through the mud to solid footing. He raised his dripping sombrero. "Me, I'm Sandy Brett of Magdalena. I'm on my way south."

"And I'm Kate Rose, of—of just here." And the laughing girl extended her hand. Sandy squeezed the slender, gloved hand

vigorously. "Thanks!" he said as vigorously.

"For what?"

Sandy flushed. "Why, for—for—because you're Kate Rose." And he sat down and began to scrape the mud from his boots.

"It was interesting to see how you solved your problem," declared the girl.

Sandy glanced up. "It ain't all solved yet, ma'am."

"You mean, you lost your horse?"

"Well, I turned him loose, over on the Lazy-J. He was played out."

The girl studied Sandy's boyish face. "You're in trouble?" she said presently.

"Shucks!"

"You are afoot. I saw you reach for your gun when I rode up."

"I'm asking you to forget that, ma'am. I wasn't expecting company just then."

"But you do expect company?"

"Not awful sudden—unless that rawhide over on the Lazy-J tells 'em which way I headed."

"Did any one see you rope that steer and ride him?" she questioned.

"Only one, ma'am. He come drifting up easy, about the time we got to going good. 'Where you goin'?' he hollers. But he didn't act mad."

"What did he look like?"

"Well, I didn't see him a whole lot. I was busy. But he rode a paint horse and had a mustache long enough to get a good holt on. He was kind of thin, too."

"Why, that was Mr. Larkins of the Lazy-J."

"Foreman?"

"Yes."

"Well, he sure must of liked my looks, riding one of his steers out of the country. He could of took after me——"

"What did you say when he called to you?"

Sandy glanced down and scraped tentatively at his muddy boots. Then he glanced up again. "I'm afoot," he said slowly. Then, "I hollered that I didn't know where I was going."

Sandy rose and shouldered his saddle. The girl hesitated, rather expecting this ambitious young puncher to at least ask his way or appeal indirectly for assistance. But he did neither. She was pleased that he hesitated to take advantage of her apparent friendliness. Had he been of a certain kind he could have forced her to give up her horse. He did not know that the ranch house was just beyond the next rise. Sandy raised his hat and turned toward the south.

"The house is just beyond that hill," she said, gesturing toward the west. "There is no one there but the cook and the barn man. We are short of hands. But you didn't meet me on your way over."

"No, ma'am, I didn't," said Sandy.

Meanwhile the posse rode south, on general principles. It was surmised that the fugitive would head for Mexico. They rather suspected that he had stolen a fresh horse from the Lazy-J outfit. There could be no other explanation of his sudden disappearance. That night they put up in Bordwell, some twenty miles below the Lazy-J. They wired to the border towns, giving a description of the young puncher and instructions to detain him.

Sandy approached the Rose homestead whistling. He dumped his saddle on the long veranda, clumped to the door and knocked. Without the slightest warning of his approach a felt-shod Chinaman appeared at the door. "Hello, John!" said Sandy. "Where's the boss?"

"Mlissy she lide to Lazy-Jlay. Boss he hop along line shack. You walkee, walkee, no ketchee horse?"

"You said it, old-timer." Sandy fished a dollar from his wet jeans. The dollar disappeared in the Chinaman's voluminous garments. "I ketchee glub," grinned the other.

Sandy followed him round to the kitchen.

Most barn men are taciturn. The barn man of the Rose ranch was no exception. The fact that the young stranger was afoot was suspicious. This did not add to the flow of conversation and Sandy's modest questions met with evasive, single-barreled answers. Activity was Sandy's element. Stagnation fretted him. After his hearty dinner was pretty well digested he picked up his rope and saddle and strolled to the corral. "Got any bronks that need working over?" he asked.

"Not by strangers," replied the barn man.

"Shucks! The horses will find me real friendly."

"Don't you go to rope none of them bronks!" warned the other as Sandy chucked his saddle over the corral bars and climbed after it.

Sandy hesitated, his leg over the top rail. "Tell you what you do. If you're scared I'm going to fan it with any of these crow-

baits, go get your gun and sit on the fence and watch me. If you see me trying to make a get-away, just plug me."

"I'll do that little thing," said the barn man as he climbed the corral bars and sat on the topmost bar, his feet hooked under the bar below and his six-gun, which he produced from somewhere about his lean person, in his blue-knuckled hand.

"Hold mine, too," said Sandy, unbuckling his belt and passing it up to the barn man. The barn man hung the belt across his knee. He noticed that Sandy singled out the toughest horse in the cavy, so far as disposition went, a Roman-nosed gray, with a wicked eye and magnificent withers and hind quarters. Sandy fought him down, snubbed him to the post and saddled him.

Sandy grabbed the horn. The gray started for the sky, then seemed to change his mind, came down with his head where his hind quarters had been, squealed, plunged, fought with the fury of a roped wild cat, while the rest of the horses milled and kicked and Sandy hung and rattled like a dry pea in a cup—but he stayed.

The taciturn barn man awakened to the fact that this puncher could ride. Some half-forgotten memory of his own youth stirred his dry pulse. He was about to utter a shout of approval when Sandy, lurching past, flicked a noose that dropped over the barn man's shoulders, drew taut—and with a wild dive accompanied by as wild a shot the ancient stock tender bit the dust and bit it hard. The next thing he knew he was snubbed to the post, with several turns of the rope about his body and legs.

The Roman-nosed gray showed signs of wear and tear. He was almost willing to quit; but Sandy again mounted him and spurred him into action again until there was no question about it. Then he dismounted, picked up his belt and gun and strolled over to the snubbing post. "Do I win first money?" he queried, grinning. The barn man didn't hesitate to say what he thought. When he had finished, Sandy asked him where the outfit was. The other refused to answer. Sandy walked over and pulled the corral bars. "I'll be back in time for grub," he asserted as he returned and mounted the gray.

"I hope he kills you!" spluttered the barn man.

"Him?" said Sandy, indicating the horse. "Now I thought mebby you meant somebody else."

Sandy again had a good horse between his knees. There was much open country to ride and no one to bid him stay. He was tempted; without doubt he was tempted. The Rose ranch lay a few miles west of the north-and-south road which the posse had taken when leaving the Lazy-J. He had briefly surveyed the stretch between the two ranches from the back of a running steer. He could only guess at the distance, but he knew the country was not as smooth as the proverbial pool table. He did not know that the posse had left the Lazy-J, continuing their search toward the south, nor just how much the foreman might have told them.

There was one way to find out. Kate Rose would know when she returned. He realized that it would hardly do for him to stay in the vicinity of the ranch house. Some of the Rose riders might return unexpectedly. He circled the ranch buildings and rode toward the water hole. He picked up the trail the girl had taken and followed it as far as the stream bed, where he turned and rode up its rock-strewn course to a bend behind which he dismounted, neck-roped and tied his horse; taking up a position where he could observe the ford below, he waited.

Sandy was quite aware that the Rose outfit might return at any time. Their barn man would have something to tell them. They would have little difficulty in trailing the Roman-nosed gray. Consequently, he maintained a vigilant watch.

The slow afternoon shadows reached across the narrow arroyo. The tedium of inaction irritated Sandy. He had about made up his mind to take the trail south and forget whose horse he was riding, when he heard the clatter of hoofs. Kate Rose crossed the ford leading a spare horse. Sandy mounted and rode down the stream bed. On the level above he overtook the girl, who turned and stared at him. "Did you see father?" she asked.

"No, ma'am."

"What are you doing on Pancho?"

"Riding him—if this is Pancho."

"Mr. Larkins had your horse in the corral when I arrived. He suggested that I lead him over—that you might need him."

"That's mighty kind of you, Miss Rose. I——"

"No, it isn't. I didn't think that you'd steal a horse, though."

"Great snakes, ma'am! I ain't stole no horse! I told your barn boss that I'd be back for supper. I just choused out here to have a talk with you."

"I don't think I want to listen."

"You got to," asserted Sandy. "Speaking of horses, I meet up with you leading my horse and you meet up with me riding one of yours. You up and call me a horse thief. But I thank you for having my horse on your lead rope. Do you reckon I'd be here, right now, if I wanted to make my getaway? I been waiting here most all afternoon."

The girl's face flushed. "After what I heard at the Lazy-J, I wouldn't have been at all surprised to learn that you had taken one of our horses——"

"Just a minute, lady. A fellow gets in wrong, and then he's anything that folks want to call him. That posse was sore because I fooled 'em. They told the Lazy-J outfit that I killed a man in Magdalena, which is correct. I did. He tried to kill me. He was drunk and I was sober. He shot twice before I even threw down on him. I didn't want to kill him, even if I did catch him pulling aces from the bottom of the deck. I just called him—and he come at me, blowing smoke. Now what would you have done?"

"Mr. Larkins said he had heard of the man you—you shot. He said he didn't blame you. Those men from Magdalena tried to get Mr. Larkins to tell which way you had gone. He wouldn't. He said—to me, of course—that any puncher enterprising enough to rope and ride a steer out of the country ought to get away. He asked me if I would mind leading your horse over. I think he had an idea that you might trade him for a fresh horse."

"Yes, ma'am. I might do that. But not knowing which way the posse headed——"

"Mr. Larkins said that they went south, probably to Bordwell. That is twenty miles below here."

"Thanks, ma'am. Now I know which way not to head. Course they'll whipsaw this country from Bordwell clean to Magdalena when they find I didn't get across the border. It's a new sheriff, lady, and he's trying to make a rep, and I'm it."

The girl's forehead drew into a puzzled frown. "Couldn't you go back and give yourself up and be tried—if you killed that man in self-defense?"

"I sure could—if that blamed posse would let me. But they keep chasing me south. What they want is the glory of fetching me in with my hands tied behind me. If they were any good, I'd let 'em do it. But they ain't. You see, lady, I backed the sheriff down when he tried to get me, made a run for my horse and with the bullets cutting dust all around me I lit out. Here I am. Why, that outfit can't even shoot straight!"

"You seem to make a joke of a rather serious matter," declared the girl.

"Well, that posse is a joke."

"How is it that Collins let you take Pancho?" queried the girl.

"If Collins is your barn man, he didn't. He got some excited about my crawling this bronk. Reckon he was scared I might get hurt."

"Didn't Pancho buck?"

"I reckon he done his best. I know I did."

"What are you going to do?" asked Kate Rose.

"Just what I was wondering. Now I can't strike your dad for a job, like I figured I would, because of what them folks at the Lazy-J told you. You would have to let on you didn't know, or give me away, so I ain't going to leave it up to you. And I don't aim to kill a good horse, posse or no posse. The best bet I got is to bush out somewhere till the smoke blows away. There must be a line shack around here somewhere."

"Here's your horse," said the girl, giving Sandy the lead rope.

"It was mighty fine of you——" began Sandy.

"Oh, I only did it to oblige Mr. Larkins," said the girl.

Sandy's smile was engaging. "Course! That was what I meant. And I only climbed this here Roman-nosed skyrocket just to oblige your barn boss. Ask him. I'm saying adios."

"There's no one at our north-line shack," stated Kate Rose. "The man who was out there is going to leave. He was to come in with father this evening."

"North is up that way about eight or ten miles, ain't it?" queried Sandy.

"Six miles."

"I'm turning the gray loose," said Sandy.

Jogging easily across the mesa Sandy had

plenty of time to recall all that Kate Rose had said to him. He wished ardently that he had met her under more auspicious circumstances. He had never paid much attention to girls. But then, he had never seen a girl that compared with her. Of course she would have nothing to do with him now. He was an outlaw—a hunted man, suspected by every one. Yet she had as much as told him where he could hide, for a while at least. Sandy reasoned shrewdly that she was not altogether unsympathetic. "She's our kind of folks," he said, patting the neck of his horse. She had said they were short of hands at the ranch. Sandy argued that if the punchers he had known were but once to catch sight of her, the Rose ranch would soon have riders enough to furnish each cow with a personal escort.

But there were other things to consider. Was there any food at the line shack? And how long before some one would be posted there? As to its location, Sandy had but to ride to the north line and follow it until he found the shack. Two hours after leaving the girl, Sandy came abruptly upon the fence and, turning, rode west into the starlit night.

He was within a hundred yards of the shack when his horse stopped suddenly and pricked its ears. Sandy slipped out of the saddle and held the horse's nose so that it could not nicker. While riding he had seen nothing to cause suspicion. But now in the absolute silence he thought he heard the faint creak of a saddle. Then came the unmistakable sound of voices, pitched low. He could just make out the dim bulk of the distant shack. Cautiously he led his horse toward the fence.

He heard the *zing* of a clipped wire and finally made out two figures moving in the starlight. Those men were not Rose hands. They wouldn't be cutting their own fence. Who were they and what were they doing?

Picking his way as carefully as though he anticipated the buzz of a rattler at each step, he turned and led his horse back toward a clump of juniper he had recently passed. Mounting, he rode a wide circle, swinging toward the shack from the opposite direction. He suspected that some one had planned to run off with a bunch of the Rose cattle. This was evident as a quick patter of hoofs warned him that riders were bunching the cattle toward the break in the fence.

"They work like they knew this district pretty well," thought Sandy. "They're drifting 'em along easy, making no fuss." A blurred mass of cattle passed him.

A rider pounded up. "Where's Bill?" he asked.

"Hazing 'em through the down fence," was Sandy's prompt reply.

"Well, this is the drag," said the rider. "We better push 'em along."

Sandy swung his horse alongside the other. As he did so he jogged his own astonished mount with the off spur. "You will, will you!" said Sandy, reaching down and unbuckling the rope strap. He built a small loop and swung it as though intending to discipline his horse; but instead of whipping the horse the loop spread and flipped out to the left—a neat, overhand throw that dropped over the shoulders of the rustler. Sandy jerked his horse round and started south—again. About three hundred yards of that was enough. He did not want to kill the man. He tied and, slipping from the saddle, ran back. The rustler was limp, unconscious. His gun had jarred from the holster.

The distant, faint trampling of cattle, the sound of a quirt slapping a boot, then silence and the blinking stars.

No one returned to look for the missing rustler. Naturally his friends had immediate business elsewhere. Sandy bent over the unconscious figure. "Don't know how bad he's busted—and he sure don't. Wish it was daylight." He took the rope from his horse and allowed him to graze. Then, to cheat his hunger, he rolled a cigarette. It was little short of an hour before the man on the ground groaned and tried to sit up. "Can you make it to the shack?" queried Sandy.

"Who in hell are you?"

"Oh, just a Rose hand. New man. How do you feel?"

The other cursed Sandy generously, admitting that he "was all stove in."

"Nice little trick you pulled on old man Rose," said Sandy. "He'll be right glad to have a talk with you."

"Slack this rope and give me a chanst to get up," said the other.

"Nope! If you can walk, we make the shack. If you can't, we stick right here till morning. Suit yourself."

Finally the rustler decided that he could walk. He walked, with Sandy following close. Sandy pushed the shack door open and shoving the other in, followed and struck a match. The flame of the lamp flared in a smoky chimney. The rustler made for the bunk and lay down, groaning. His right arm was broken above the elbow and his collar bone was fractured.

Sandy immediately inspected the grub supply and contented himself with a can of cold beans and another cigarette. The rustler, heavy set, dark, with matted black hair and a coarse-featured face, offered no especially interesting picture, so Sandy gave his attention to the details of the shack, the fly-specked and cracked mirror, the small, rusted stove, the magazine pictures tacked on the walls, the notched bench, the few cooking utensils.

Dawn found the open doorway. Sandy rose and stretched. The rustler blinked up at him. "I'll leave the names of the rest of the bunch wrote on a paper, if you'll turn me loose," he declared.

"Man, you're talking to the cat—and she ain't here."

"Now if I was talkin' to young Brett, that plugged a man over in Magdalena——" The rustler hesitated. "You worked for the Gary outfit wunst. I remember you."

Sandy, making a fire in the stove, turned his head. "You got a touch of fever. It's getting the best of you."

"That's all right. You turn me over to Rose—and I tell him who you are."

"That's kind of tough on everybody, ain't it?" And Sandy grinned. "I don't remember you. But say, Steve, what do you say to some coffee and bacon and flapjacks? I lost out, night-herding you."

"You sure did," stated the rustler significantly.

After a sort of catch-as-catch-can breakfast, Sandy caught up his horse, which had grazed some distance from the shack. He was riding back slowly when he heard the thud of hoofs and turned to behold three men riding swiftly toward him. For a second he thought it was the posse. Then he knew it was not. Two of the riders wore chaps. Moreover, one of them had a peculiar stoop to his shoulders—the barn man. Sandy reined round and faced them as they pounded up.

"That's him," said the barn man.

The eldest of the three, a tall, heavy man of perhaps fifty, gazed at Sandy with an appraising eye. "Making yourself right to home," he said, as he noticed a thread of smoke drifting from the shack stove pipe. The third rider eased his mount round so that Sandy was virtually pocketed. The situation did not escape him, yet he nodded and smiled. "You're Mr. Rose?" Sandy addressed the big man, who nodded.

"He's the one," reiterated the barn man, indicating Sandy.

Rose gestured to the other to be silent. "Word came up from Bordwell last night that there's a man wanted, bad. Left Magdalena two jumps ahead of a posse. Now that horse you're riding——"

"Didn't I wait, all quiet and peaceful, for you fellows to come up?" queried Sandy.

"Good thing you did. Your horse is rode down."

"But I got a gun that's working," asserted Sandy.

Rose smiled. "Got some sense, too, eh?"

"Ask Collins," said Sandy, indicating the barn man.

"Hoss thief!" said Collins.

"Going to come along peaceful, or will we have to tie you?" queried Rose.

"Peaceful—this journey. But before you ride back with me you better take a look in the shack yonder—and then at your north fence. You might find out something."

"He's tricky," asserted the barn man.

Rose had been studying Sandy's face. He saw unspoiled youth, ambition, daring and a sense of humor. "Ride ahead, slow," said Rose, gesturing toward the shack.

Within a few yards of the shack door Sandy reined up. "I only got one of 'em," he declared deprecatingly. "If I'd had help I might have got more. But I did the best I could for you, Mr. Rose."

"One what?"

"One cow thief. Take a look at your fence yonder."

The barn man swung away from the group and loped over toward the down fence. Rose, frowning, dismounted and stepped to the doorway. "I don't know his name," said Sandy, "but that's him. Ask him."

The rustler refused to talk. It was evident that he needed a doctor. Rose stepped outside. "How about it?" he queried.

Sandy threw his leg over the horn, rolled a smoke and gave Rose a brief account of the recent happenings. "He offered to name

the rest of the outfit, if I'd turn him loose," concluded Sandy. Just then Collins rode up. "I'll chouse back and get a posse to trail these cow thieves," he volunteered. The barn man seemed in a special hurry to do his duty. Rose regarded him gravely. Collins seemed just a shade too eager. "I'll need your horse," said Rose. "You can stay at the shack. Step down and help Jim get that sick man on your horse."

Collins hesitated. "And this guy fans it, about then, eh?"

"Not on your life!" declared Sandy. "Mr. Rose is going to need my testimony."

"The testimony of a hoss thief and a killer!" sneered Collins.

"That will keep," said Sandy quietly. "But if you weren't just about falling to pieces now, I'd bust you wide open."

Muttering, the barn man dismounted and stepped into the shack with the cowboy. The injured man was heaved up and helped to Collins' horse. Once in the saddle he straightened up and faced the barn man. "So you're hot to chouse back and get a posse," he said thickly. "You double crossed us—and now you're tryin' to double cross Rose. Ask him who sent word to us that they wouldn't be anybody at the line shack last night," said the rustler, turning to Rose.

"How about it, Collins?" queried Rose.

"He's a liar! You ketched him stealin' cattle—and you take his word——"

"That'll do," said Rose. "You get busy and mend that fence. There's grub in the shack. I'll send some one out to-morrow."

Rose turned to Sandy. "Will you give me your word you'll come along back without any fuss?"

"Course you want to send Jim here over to the Lazy-J to corral some riders," said Sandy. "That leaves you and me to haze this hombre to the ranch. Well, it could be done."

"For instance?"

"If there are no Magdalena boys bushing out around your wickiup waiting for me to ride in."

"I sent word I'd hold you, if I ran onto you," stated Rose. "Then Collins said you'd lit out with one of my horses."

"I turned the gray loose when I—when I got hold of my own horse."

"I take your word for that. We've got to get moving."

"Then you got to turn me loose, right now—or"—Sandy whipped out his gun—"I'll shoot it out with you."

Rose and his rider, Jim, froze stiff in their saddles. "Shall I plug him?" cried Collins from the doorway of the shack.

"No. He'd get me, first. Brett, you're no killer. You got in wrong in Magdalena. That's your business. Mine is to round up these cow thieves. Will you lend a hand?"

"Nope."

"Will you give your testimony before a committee of cattlemen, if I will guarantee your safety?"

"When?"

"Don't know. It'll be a week, mebby two."

"I'll go you—if that posse don't beat me to it."

Sandy holstered his gun. As though nothing had happened, Rose reined round and, followed by the other three, rode across the morning mesa. When they were out of sight of the shack Rose turned to Sandy. "Jim, here, can haze this man to the house. I want you to ride over to the Lazy-J with me. Larkins will like to hear what you got to say."

"Suits me. But you turned some good evidence loose when you left Collins at the shack. He'll leave the country."

"Afoot? Perhaps he will. That will be mighty good evidence."

Four hours later, Rose, Sandy Brett, Larkins and Matthews, owner of the Lazy J, were holding a quiet but intense conference in the ranch office. About that time a doctor was on his way from Bordwell to the Rose ranch.

The conference was brief. Sandy told his story, omitting, however, some of the earlier details of his arrival and the occasion for it. Over in the bunk house six picked men were waiting the outcome of the conference. In concluding his talk Rose volunteered to take charge of the posse. Fifteen minutes later they were under way, headed toward the border. While not aware of the individual identity of the rustlers they had a pretty fair idea as to who they were and the course they would pursue.

Arriving in Bordwell, Rose was accosted by a member of the posse hunting Sandy Brett. Rose disclaimed any knowledge of Sandy's whereabouts but stated positively that he knew the Magdalena puncher had been mixed up in the cattle stealing. He suggested that the Magdalena outfit join

him in hunting the rustlers. "If your man is with them, we'll get him," said Rose, and let it go at that. After a brief conference the three Magdalena riders voted to go with the Lazy-J outfit. Rose had arranged for Sandy's immediate safety more easily than he had anticipated.

Following an undertaking with Rose, Larkins placed Sandy at a Lazy-J line shack, so far removed from the usual run of travel that it was considered eminently safe from approach save by some one exceedingly familiar with the country. However, Sandy did not relax his vigilance, but rather gave special attention to the possibilities of the surrounding country. Larkins had loaned him a pair of high-power glasses. With these Sandy spent much time spotting landmarks and vainly endeavoring to get a clear view of the Rose ranch buildings. He could see the water hole, but the house and outbuildings were screened from view by the rise west of it.

The third day of his isolation, Sandy, riding to the crest of a ridge back of the shack, was leisurely surveying the country to the north—a stretch of brush-dotted, rolling country—when he made out the figure of a man on foot, carrying something on his back. The man seemed to be making his way toward the Lazy-J north fence.

Sandy dropped down to the opposite side of the ridge and, dismounting, crawled to the top. The distant figure drew nearer. Sandy whistled softly. He had recognized Collins, packing a half-filled gunny sack. Finally the barn man crawled through the fence, hesitated, and hallooing to no avail, stepped over to the shack and entered. Sandy stepped quietly down the ridge and round to the doorway. "Good morning!" he called. Collins whirled round. The end of his long nose twitched. His little eyes looked wicked. But Sandy's hand was filled. Collins declined to draw.

"Shall I plug him?" queried Sandy, mimicking the other's voice. Then, as Collins made no suggestion, "You won't find a horse under that bunk, if that's what you're looking for; or a saddle under that lard pail. You're in the wrong corral, old-timer."

"I been bushin' out two nights," whined Collins. "I'm an old man. I was lookin' for tobacco. I'm dead for a smoke."

"Quit the Rose outfit, eh?"

Collins tried to conjure up a plausible lie, but Sandy's expression rather precluded that. "Well, you got me," said Collins finally. "What you goin' to do?"

"Why, nothing! The main idea is, what you going to do?"

Collins mumbled something which Sandy did not catch. Sandy studied that battered and treacherous old face for a full minute. "I reckon you've had your day," said Sandy. "The best thing you can do is to fade out of the scenery, right now. Only don't come cat-footing around here trying to lift my horse, some night. I sleep light and I ain't particular what I shoot at. Here's a sack of tobacco and some papers. I see you got grub in that war bag."

Collins picked up the gunny sack and came to the doorway. Sandy backed round and followed him out to the ridge. "There's a live posse lined out for the border," said Sandy as Collins drifted down the ridge, past Sandy's horse and on toward the east line.

Sandy felt that he had used the barn man fairly enough in allowing him to go, instead of hazing him to the Lazy-J headquarters. Sandy knew what it was to be a hunted man—and Collins was, or would be. Strangely enough, Sandy had not reckoned with the possibility of Collins repaying square dealing with treachery. It had not occurred to him that the other might inform some one of his whereabouts. So, with little to worry him, the young Magdalena puncher stepped down the ridge and got his horse. Nominally he was a Lazy-J hand. Actually he was his own man, free to go or come until the capture of the rustlers, when his presence would be required by a committee of cattlemen, but—Rose had told him—not in any court that boasted a roof.

"Somebody'll be short a rope when they get through with those cow lifters," soliloquized Sandy. "During said excitement I aim to change my boarding house."

The change was made, however, much sooner than Sandy had anticipated. Shortly after noon a Lazy-J hand, riding easily, drifted up to the shack with word that Larkins wanted to interview Sandy at headquarters. Suddenly Sandy thought of Collins and an equally sudden suspicion popped into his head. "All right," he said. "You going to stay at the shack?"

"Me? No. I'm going to ride back with you as far as The Sinks."

"Mr. Larkins himself said he wanted to see me, eh?"

"Yep. This here bunch of rustlers sure stirred up somethin'. First time I ever heard of a deputy U. S. marshal takin' a hand in roundin' up cow thieves."

"Mebby he's after one of 'em for something else," ventured Sandy as he closed the shack door and stepped over to his horse.

"I dunno. The chief and Bud Shoop had a long palaver before they chased me out here after you."

"Bud is riding a long ways from home," said Sandy. "He beds down at Magdalena, mostly."

The cowboy, who was not aware of Sandy's actual identity, nodded. "They'll be smoke on the ridges before this hand is played."

"I figure it that way," concurred Sandy.

They rode at a swinging trot, their hats pulled down against the glare of the high sun, their chins in, straight-legged, leaning slightly forward in the saddle. Arrived at The Sinks, the Lazy-J puncher swung to the right with a wave of his hand and an impersonal, "So long."

Sandy nodded, and immediately stepped off his horse and picked up one of its front feet. He appeared to be busy until the other had vanished beyond a ridge. Then he mounted and rode briskly in the opposite direction. "Things were coming too easy," he told himself. And, "They sure sent a real one after me, this journey. I don't want to tangle with Old Bud."

East and east to the line and then south along the foothills of a country all but barren of habitation, rugged, desolate and submerged in heat, Sandy rode with a careful eye to his going and to the possibilities of chance grazing and water, with the probability of finding neither unless he swung higher into the hills. As he journeyed he began to doubt the loyalty of Larkins and Rose, imagining that they were covertly playing into the hands of the law. They had heard his evidence, and were through with him. Yet he disliked to believe that as fearless and frank a man as Rose would break his word.

The fact remained that Bud Shoop, deputy marshal, was at the Lazy-J ranch making inquiries. Why hadn't Shoop ridden out to the shack himself? He might have known that Sandy wouldn't pull a gun on him, for, up to the time of the recent shooting scrape in Magdalena, Sandy had called Shoop his friend. "Something funny about it!" thought Sandy. And there was, although he didn't guess within a mile of it in his vague and hasty surmisings.

Toward evening, as he crossed a dry wash, he happened to glance up toward the timbered hills of the main range. He thought he could discern the flicker of smoke near the lower edge of the timber. He was hungry and his horse needed feed and water. The smoke might come from a temporary camp or a lone habitation. He swung his horse up the wash and as it narrowed he stumbled onto a dim trail.

He did not intend to blunder onto a posse camped in the hills. He was rather certain that rustlers would not build a fire in such an exposed spot. On and up he plodded until the night had shut him in. His horse occasionally sniffed the trail. Sandy whistled a bar or two of a range tune as he recognized a square, yellow patch of light as a cabin window. Nearer, he hallooed and was answered by a husky voice. A bulky figure blocked the doorway of the cabin.

"I'm riding light," declared Sandy, taking a chance. "Can I get some grub and a feed for my horse?"

"You sure kin, stranger. From Bordwell, did you say?"

"Down around that way."

The man chuckled as though at some obvious joke. He was a tremendous bulk of fat, shapeless, flabby, a queer type to be living in the hills. He fetched a battered lantern and led the way to a small pole corral back of the cabin. He filled Sandy's empty morral with grain—much to Sandy's surprise. There were no other horses in sight. Sandy watered the horse and turned it into the corral. The fat man led the way back to the cabin.

The room was neater than would have been expected. There was a semblance of order about everything, including the rack of rifles on the wall—Sandy counted six—and three filled cartridge belts and six-guns. A huge skillet of frying potatoes was on the stove and back of it a simmering coffeepot.

"I'm Sowdy," said the fat man, "Dave Sowdy. Everybody knows me. It's different with you, eh?"

"Some," said Sandy, grinning. "I was trying to remember what I was called last."

The fat man chuckled. His chuckle

ended in a fit of coughing. Tears rolled down the creased rolls of fat on his face. He emanated villainy in every movement, every expression of his pouched and watery eyes. Sandy noticed that his hands were not the hands of a man who did hard work—yet he had grain to spare for horse feed and rifles to spare—for horse thieves, thought Sandy. He had heard vague rumors of "Fat" Sowdy of the southern hills.

"I lost track of my friends, down around the Rose ranch," declared Sandy.

Sowdy chuckled and coughed, nodding his head. "Mebby I could tell you where they are," he said. "And mebby I couldn't."

"Oh, I'll find 'em," declared Sandy easily. "I'm not asking any questions."

"Meat," said Sowdy and left the cabin. Sandy glanced round, not altogether satisfied with the prospect of spending the night there. A peculiar thrill of apprehension tingled in his fingers—the same thrill he had experienced just before the shooting in Magdalena.

Sowdy puffed up the trail back of his cabin, crossed the stream from the spring and stood wheezing and peering into the shadows. "That you, Dave?" came from the darkness.

"Me. Say, there's a young waddie in the camp that mebby you want to see and mebby you don't. He ain't sayin' much. Says he got left at the Rose ranch. I figure he ain't one of the bunch. But he's trailin' you pretty clost."

"What does he look like?"

"Young, kinda gray eyes, sandy hair, moves quick."

"Bill was dark complected and heavy set. It ain't him."

"All right. I'll string him along till I get him to say he is one of the bunch. Then—if you was on the downhill side, where you could see in good, and I was to make a clatter with the skillet, on the stove—— We'll be eatin' right soon. You can see in from the side window."

"Is he afoot?"

"No; ridin' a right good hoss."

"I'll take a look. But I don't figure to do your killin' for you. If it's somebody you aim to get——"

"Never saw him before."

"All right. If you rattle the pan, I get him."

Sowdy turned and plodded down to a low building that spanned the creek. It was his storeroom and meat house. From there he found his heavy way back to the cabin. "Meat!" he said as he laid a half shoulder of prime beef on the table.

"A lot of meat, for two men," laughed Sandy.

Sowdy chuckled and coughed. "We'll eat first," he asserted, as he cut a thick steak. "Them potatoes is done."

He flopped the steak in the big skillet. Sandy sniffed and swallowed hard. He was desperately hungry. The steak sizzled and spluttered. Sandy watched his huge host manipulate the meat. Sowdy's back was toward him. A breath of wind puffed in. The lamp flared and smoked the chimney. Sowdy turned swiftly, chuckled, and resumed his cooking. Occasionally Sowdy's raised elbow came between Sandy and the window near the stove. Yet—Sandy was not sure—something had moved across the glazed sheen of the window—and Sowdy had not raised his elbow to manipulate the steak.

Slowly a pair of boots took outline, the tabs, spurs, the run-over heels. Sandy did not shift his gaze. Some one was standing back from the window, just barely within the dim light from the lamp that filtered out and was lost on the uneven ground. "Smells darned good!" said Sandy enthusiastically. The vaguely outlined boots had disappeared.

"Set right where you are," said Sowdy, fetching the steak from the stove. "Guess you can git around that. I'll bring you the potatoes. Help yourself to bread. Pitch right in. I'm comin' soon's I pour the coffee."

Sandy set to, but he did not take his eyes off the open doorway. "Speakin' of meat," began Sowdy, turning to watch Sandy's face, "I hear the bunch had a clost call pushin' the stuff past Bordwell."

Sandy nodded.

"Seems like Bill—nothin' personal—got throwed or somethin'. He never did show up," observed Sowdy.

"Meaning me?"

"Was you in it, honest?"

"Right up to the eyes," replied Sandy.

Sowdy raised the empty skillet and banged it on the stove just as Sandy reached forward to carve another piece of meat. Something whisked past Sandy's cheek and thudded against the logs back of him. The snarling *whang* of a rifle rippled through the silence. Sandy jumped to his feet and

jerked out his gun in one swift movement. Fat Sowdy whirled from the stove, his hand diving into his shirt.

Sandy's first shot blew the lamp to atoms. He jumped to one side and dropped to his knee. A sliver of flame, breast high, spurted from the direction of the stove. Sandy fired twice, a foot below the spurt of Sowdy's gun. Then he jumped to his feet and stepped softly sidewise. A dull, slithering fall—and he could hear Sowdy gasping and choking.

Backing to the far corner of the cabin Sandy kicked the three empty shells from his gun and reloaded. He had not had time to realize what had happened, what it all meant. He only knew that some one had tried to get him and that Sowdy had banged the skillet on the stove just before the shot. He felt that he was trapped. He moved along the wall, back to it, and fumbled for the window catch. The cabin might be surrounded, but he would make a break for it—for elbow room and a chance to ride. His saddle and bridle were in the shed by the corral. If he could get to his horse——

He climbed through the window and stood listening. Then step by step he picked his way to the shed, took down his saddle and crawled through the corral bars. Mounted, he felt that he had a chance. The first shot had come from outside the cabin—a rifle shot following instantly upon Sowdy's signal. A deliberate attempt to murder. The man who had fired that shot was out there in the brush somewhere.

The cabin was in darkness. Sandy reasoned that the man in the brush would be curious to know what had actually happened. He must have known that he had missed and that there had been a gun fight in the cabin. Sandy sat his horse, listening, waiting for the first hint of a surprise. He would have to pass the cabin to reach the trail. Presently he heard a slight sound as though some one were dragging something across the cabin floor. The sound ceased, began again. Sandy visioned Sowdy dragging himself toward the doorway. The horse pricked its ears as a step sounded on the grit of the yard—a cautious, hesitant step—then Sowdy's voice, thick and choking: "He got me."

Sandy touched his horse with the spurs and leaned close to him. He saw the dark blur of a figure almost in front of him. The horse reared as a gun flashed and swung away on the run. Sandy let him have his head as they lunged down the trail. The high brush whipped his face and tore at his sleeves. As they crossed the dry wash at the foot of the trail, the horse stopped suddenly. Before he knew what had happened Sandy was surrounded by mounted men. Some one struck his hand from his half-drawn gun. Some one else thrust the muzzle of a rifle into his stomach. And still another had his horse by the head. Instantly he surmised that the rustlers, on their way to Sowdy's cabin, had blundered into him —or he into them. A match flared. Sandy blinked. He recognized the impassive face and the stalwart figure of Rose. "So it's you," said the ranchman. The match flickered and went out.

"Sandy Brett," said another. "We'll take care of him." Sandy recognized the voice of one of the members of the Magdalena posse.

"I didn't think you'd double cross me, Brett." Rose was speaking.

Sandy flushed stubbornly. "How about you," he queried.

"I left you at the Lazy-J," said Rose.

"I didn't agree to stay there. I said I'd be on the job when you wanted me."

"Well, we want you, right now," said another member of the group. "Where did you leave your gang?"

Sandy refused to reply.

"What you doing down this way?"

Still Sandy refused to answer. The fact that the Magdalena men were with the cattlemen seemed evidence that Rose had gone back on his word. It was a situation difficult for Rose to explain, with the three Magdalena men present. And the Magdalena men, in turn, had lost all interest in rounding up rustlers, now that they had their hands on Sandy Brett. They immediately proposed to take him back with them. But Rose interfered.

"I'll talk with him," he said. "We're losing time." The group drew off to one side. "I invited the Magdalena boys to join us," asserted Rose. "If you had stayed at the ranch——"

Suddenly it dawned upon Sandy that he had misjudged the big cattleman. "I figured to stay—but along comes Bud Shoop and sends word to me to come along in. Seeing he's a U. S. marshal, I didn't come. I lit out."

"I don't know what Shoop might want you for," said Rose. "But you're riding

pretty close to Sowdy's hang-out. Looks bad."

"It'll look worse, when you see his cabin," declared Sandy. "I just lit out of there. I left Sowdy on the floor with a couple of slugs in him." Swiftly Sandy recounted what had happened.

Rose whistled softly. "You say you plugged Fat Sowdy?"

"I didn't say that. But I'm willing to say he's plugged, good and proper."

"That means the bunch will scatter."

"Including me," said Sandy, and before Rose could protest or raise a hand Sandy had whirled his horse and was flying across the open country beyond the wash; but this time he headed north. A rider broke from the group to follow and blundered into Rose. "So that's your game!" cried the disgruntled Magdalena man as their horses pranced and milled.

"Not any," said Rose. "I'm after those cow thieves." Then he called his posse together and gave them a few brief directions. Seven of the silent cavalcade passed on up the trail toward Sowdy's place. Three of them turned and drifted in the general direction of Bordwell. "I'll land him yet," declared one of them. The others said nothing.

"One more flutter," Sandy was saying as he leaned over his horse and patted his neck. "Some day you're going to get that rest I promised you."

Bud Shoop, seemingly in no hurry to get anywhere in particular, jogged across from the Lazy-J to the Rose ranch, paid his respects to Kate Rose and was promptly invited to stay for dinner. Bud liked a good dinner and most purveyors of good dinners in the cattle country liked to have Bud dine with them. Bud was stout, a trifle bald and gifted with a fine sense of humor. Moreover, he was one of the quickest and best shots in Arizona. In his youth he had had his red fling at chance. Latterly he had decided that peace and prosperity were a very desirable team to drive. He longed for a rooftree of his own, yet his official duties as a peacemaker had kept him so busy that he had not had time to settle down. He had many friends and not a few enemies.

His present mission was entirely of his own finding, unofficial, in fact, and contemplating peace; yet it had to do with a shooting scrape in Magdalena and one Sandy Brett, location unknown. When Sandy did not show up in answer to Bud's message through Larkins, Bud turned a serene though sweating face toward Bordwell, stopping at the Rose ranch on the way, casually. Larkins had told him something of Sandy's recent steer riding, bronk twisting, and other activities.

Bud realized that Sandy knew that the Magdalena posse was somewhere south, having overshot their mark. Bud hadn't the slightest idea that Sandy could be found anywhere in the vicinity of the Rose ranch. All Bud wanted was an opportunity to chat with Kate Rose. This was afforded after dinner, under the wide roof of the long veranda. "Funny," said Bud, "how that young high-loper keeps popping up and popping out of sight again. Posse chasin' him, and me chasin' the posse—and like as not if he hears I want to see him he'll take to chasin' me. Now if we was all ridin' in a circle, we might get together and find out who was chasin' which. I'm scared that boy'll get hurt."

"But isn't it true that he killed a man in Magdalena?"

"Katy, just between you and me, it's too bad he didn't. That scandalous ole Whittaker that tangled with him is just as alive as me and a darn sight thinner. No, lady. In the first glad rush to catch somebody, it was thought Sandy had bumped Whittaker clean off the big map. But no. That old sidewinder comes out of it about the time the posse is too far south to get word to. Now if Sandy and that posse should meet up, somethin' is like to happen. Personally, I'm hopin' it don't happen to the boy. I like that boy. He's got sand. Why, lady, I don't even want to edge up too clost to him myself. You see how it is."

"He didn't look so terribly wicked when I saw him," said Kate. "I should say he looked a little embarrassed."

"Out in the middle of that water hole, settin' that steer?" And Shoop chuckled.

"He actually blushed."

"Mighty good sign, Katy. A real bad one don't do that. He carries a poker face. Well, this ain't gettin' me anywhere," and Bud heaved himself up and glanced, rather wistfully, at his horse over in the corral.

Kate Rose laughed. "Our spare room is cooler than the hotel at Bordwell. Those

rooms are awfully stuffy at night. Can't you ride over in the morning?"

Bud's serene face lighted with a smile. "And you've got a mighty good cook."

"Then I'll get the card table and we'll finish that series we began—let's see—last spring, wasn't it?"

"May twenty-second. I was in Bordwell the twenty-third. You had three games out of five—and now it's summer again."

About three that afternoon they were startled from their placid game of double solitaire by a wild rush of hoofs across the yard, a sliding stop, a lithe figure darting out of sight in the barn across from the house. The hot sun played down upon a lathered cow pony, whose heaving flanks told of a hard run. "That," said Bud coolly, "is Sandy's hoss."

"Somebody ran into the barn!" exclaimed Kate.

"Almost. Here comes the reason—three of 'em." Bud rose and pointed to three separate puffs of dust that rose and fell away like tiny explosions, far down the road.

"The posse?" And Kate turned to her companion.

"*A* posse, I reckon. Expect I'd better talk to 'em." The posse was still a good half mile away.

Bud stepped out into the glare of the yard and raised his hand toward the barn, palm forward.

"Sandy," he said, "if you're up there, listen a minute. My gun is in the house. I'm comin' across to put your hoss out of sight, so I can gain time with that posse. I come friendly. If you want to shoot, blaze away. I'm comin'." And Shoop strode rapidly across the yard, caught up the reins and led the horse round to the corrals.

Presently Shoop returned, mopping his face. "Darn little fool!" he muttered. "On a hot day, like this!" He turned to Kate who was watching the approaching riders. "It's your play," he said, smiling. Kate came to the table and pulled up her chair. They were deep in the intricacies of double solitaire when the posse clattered up. Shoop's face expressed a mild surprise. "Hello, Sam!" And he nodded to the sheriff. "Have you met Miss Katy Rose?"

The sheriff raised his hat, then ungallantly switched the subject. "We're after young Brett."

"So I been hearin'," declared Bud.

"He rode in here," said the sheriff.

"That's a fact," said Shoop.

"Well, where is he? Which way did he head?"

"I'd give somethin' to know that myself, Sam. That kid can change direction so quick that he don't make any shadow."

The sheriff looked mad. "I'm askin' you, Miss Rose."

"You can talk to me," said Shoop, pleasantly but significantly.

"You tryin' to block my game, Bud?"

"Shucks, no! I'm just tryin' to keep somebody from gettin' hurt."

One of the posse had dismounted and was trailing about the yard looking for tracks. Suddenly he halted and backed slowly away from the barn door, keeping close to the building. "He lit off his horse at the door, there," called the deputy.

"That's right!" said Shoop, nodding extravagant approval. The other two members of the posse turned and glanced toward the barn. Shoop was not sure but that there would be some shooting, immediately. "Just what do you want young Brett for?" he queried slowly.

"You ought to know. You were in Magdalena when it happened. He killed Jake Whittaker."

"That's queer! Jake never told me anything about it."

The third member of the posse dismounted and stepped up to his chief. "Now I figure——"

"Don't move!" The cool, keen voice came from behind them, in fact from the front doorway of the house. "Reach for the clothespins!"

The sheriff and his companion reached for the invisible clothespins. The other deputy, he who had exclaimed about tracks, saw, and disappeared round the corner of the barn. But Bud Shoop's fingers kept on tapping the edge of the card table. "Nope!" he declared ludicrously. "It's too hot."

Sandy stepped across the veranda and relieved the law of its sting. Kate Rose watched him, her eyes big, her heart beating hard.

Sandy backed away, keeping his men covered. "Sorry, Miss Rose," he said, forcing a thin smile, "but I had to do it. They won't quit bothering me. I was headed for Magdalena when they took after me this last trip."

"And you can ride back with me," declared Shoop. "Whittaker ain't dead.

That's what I been chasin' you all over hell's front yard to tell you." And despite Sandy's threatening attitude the genial Bud pulled a creased and folded newspaper from his hip pocket. "Read it to him," he said, handing the paper to Kate. "He won't listen to me. Just read that little article about Jake Whittaker."

Kate found and read the article aloud slowly and then handed the paper to the Magdalena sheriff. She glanced at Sandy and nodded, but already Sandy knew that Bud Shoop had spoken the truth. Sandy strode over and handed the two guns to the sheriff, meanwhile keeping his right hand filled, possibly through force of habit. Kate graciously invited the posse to put up their horses and make themselves at home, but the posse declined the invitation, chiefly because they did not want Sandy Brett to arrive in Magdalena ahead of them—a situation which would be exceedingly ludicrous under the circumstances. After they had departed, Bud turned to Sandy. "I want to ask you just one question, son. How did you get from that barn into this house?"

"Through the corrals and round back of the bunk house," replied Sandy modestly. "You went around the other side when you put up my horse."

"I see!" And Bud glanced at Kate Rose, who flushed slightly but said nothing.

"How come you picked on this ranch to make your stand against that posse?" queried Bud, his eyes twinkling.

"I didn't figure to. I was going to stop by and tell Miss Rose that I had a talk with her father, yesterday evening, when that outfit come boiling over the hill—"

"Did you meet father?"

"Yes, ma'am. Down south a piece." And Sandy recounted his experience at the Sowdy cabin up to the time he had been shot at, not mentioning, however, what had immediately followed the shot. Kate Rose, anxious as to her father's welfare, did not appreciate the full significance of Sandy's story. But Shoop rather guessed it.

About an hour later, after Sandy had left, Jim Baker, Rose's foreman, and Larkins of the Lazy-J, both up from Bordwell, turned in at the Rose ranch gate. The minute Kate Rose saw their faces she felt a queer thrill of apprehension. Baker immediately assured her that her father was all right, adding that he and the posse of cowboys had been heard from. There had been an early-morning gun battle at Sowdy's meadows. Two of the Lazy-J men had been wounded, but not dangerously. The cowboys had taken the rustlers by surprise and had literally wiped them out. There would be no prisoners; consequently no lynching, the thought of which had filled Kate with dread. Larkins mentioned the fact that Sandy Brett's evidence would not now be needed.

"Now mebby you'll get a chanst to tell him that," said Bud Shoop. "He left here about a half hour ago, sayin' that he was goin' over to the Lazy-J and strike you for a regular job. Seems he changed his mind about goin' back to Magdalena, right away."

Sometimes a man makes a reputation for himself without being aware of it. Sandy had put in two years of hard work on the Lazy-J, when, during a brief sojourn in the town of Bordwell, he was approached by a committee of citizens and asked to run for sheriff. He was told that there would be no opposition to speak of. Sandy was surprised. He laughed, and told the committee that his experience was decidedly limited in regard to the duties of a sheriff. He had ridden behind a posse and ahead of a posse but never with one.

The committee asked him to think it over and let them know soon.

It was a great temptation to Sandy, who, when all was said and done, was simply a cow-puncher on a scanty wage. The position of sheriff would lend him prestige, allow him a living salary and excite the envy of his old Magdalena friends. Yet something still more pertinent hinged on his acceptance of the offer.

Riding up from Bordwell he gave his horse the rein as he neared the Rose ranch, smiling as the animal turned deliberately off the road and headed for the distant, high gateway. Sandy had some mail for the Rose ranch. More important still, he had a question to ask Kate Rose. No, he wasn't going to ask her to marry him, although they were now so well acquainted that this would not have occasioned a great deal of surprise. He was her recognized suitor and was always welcome at the ranch. He was head over heels in love with Kate, yet he never dreamed of asking her to marry him in his present position.

Closing the big gate after him, Sandy jogged on up the road, not paying much at-

tention to anything save his immediate problem. The horse, having its head, swung over toward the water hole south of the ranch road. Sandy noticed and smiled. He recalled another ride he had made in that vicinity on a much wilder mount.

The horse squelched through the mud and lowered his head to drink. Sandy sat gazing at the ridge beyond that masked the ranch buildings. Not a flicker of surprise crossed his face as the head of a horse poked over the ridge and Kate Rose, riding her favorite pony, drew rein and waved a greeting.

Sandy allowed his horse to drink and then, reining him out of the mud, swung round the margin and up to the ridge. He dismounted and fetched the mail from his saddle pockets. Hat in hand he stood looking up at Kate, who smiled down upon him. "How is everything, Sandy?" she asked affectionately.

"Just all right—except the Bordwell folks asked me to run for sheriff this election."

Kate studied his clear, gray eyes some time before speaking. Then: "Of course you will run?"

Sandy hesitated. He had come to ask her point-blank whether or not he should accept the nomination. Now he knew that he would have to decide the matter himself. He had read that much in her question.

"I don't think I will," he stated after deliberating a moment.

"It's a compliment to you, Sandy—the offer."

"Maybe it is. And the salary would mean a whole lot to me."

She knew what he meant, yet she did not seem especially affected by his grave expression. To the contrary she seemed amused at something. "Sandy, I'll tell you a secret. Jimmy Blake notified father that he was going to leave the first of the month."

"Well, Jimmy's been a first-class foreman. He's got a good rep. I guess it's up to him."

"It wasn't—altogether," said Kate, blushing in spite of her effort to seem casual. "Jimmy asked me to marry him. I like Jimmy—but, of course——"

"That settles it!" declared Sandy. "I'm not going to take one more little chance. I'm going up to the house and ask your father if he will give me the job."

"Is that all you are going to ask him?" Kate glanced away. She was smiling.

Sandy reached up his hand. Kate dismounted. The letters lay scattered at her feet. She did not realize that they were there—nor did Sandy. Kate's horse walked over and stood beside Sandy's horse. The afternoon sunlight flickered across the water hole. There wasn't a cloud in sight.

Look for more of Mr. Knibbs' work.

THE ARMY OFFERS YOU A VACATION

IF you are wondering how to spend your vacation this summer the United States army extends an invitation to you to spend a month at one of the citizens' military training camps. Of course you must be in good health and sufficiently patriotic to want to fit yourself for service should another national emergency arise. The camps are no places for loafers or boys or men who go for "a good time," but while they are under proper discipline and demand several hours of drill and study each day, they also provide opportunities for plenty of healthful exercise and amusement. We can think of no more valuable experience for a young man, and of no vacation from which you will bring back more in the way of improved physical condition—or more pleasant memories.

The camps offer three courses—"Red," "White" and "Blue" for men of varying military experience. The "Red" course, for beginners, is open to men between the ages of seventeen and twenty-five. Uniforms, food and lodging are provided, but there is no pay. Full information can be obtained by writing to the war department or to the Military Training Camps Association, 19 West Forty-fourth Street, New York City.

Bright Roads of Adventure

By Ralph D. Paine

Author of "First Down, Kentucky!" "Eyes in the Boat, Number Six!" Etc.

That goodly trio—You Han, "Shanghai" and Ralph Paine—wander eighty miles west of Peking in troubled times, just to show it can be done

XIII.—"THROW ALL REGRETS AWAY!"

DURING the winter of the occupation by the foreign armies, after the tumult and fighting had died down, it was a strange place to live, in the heart of the Chinese city beyond the Tatar walls of Peking. The native people who had fled terrified out into the country were swarming back into the district ruled by an American provost marshal, hundreds of thousands of them, and the streets and alleys were again clamorous and thronged as though nothing unusual had occurred. There were no more frenzied explosions of hatred against the foreign devil. It had been an attack of *chi,* of madness.

A few yards from the gateway of the house where Herbert Jordan and Ralph Paine lived was a Boxer temple, gaudy with inscriptions in crimson, in which the bands of fanatical murderers had rehearsed their incantations and brandished their weapons. Now the Chinese shopkeepers grinned when they peered into this abandoned temple and the boys and girls tore down the banners and regalia in sport.

It was interesting to live in the midst of this peaceful and industrious multitude, away from the legations and the diplomats and the soldiers. No other foreigners were to be seen in this quarter excepting an occasional American cavalryman riding past on police patrol, muffled against the cold in a long coat, fur gloves and coonskin cap. The friends and neighbors were all Chinese, a kindly, cheerful folk who toiled with incredible diligence from dawn until late at night to keep body and soul together.

It was possible to exist with some degree of comfort, for this part of Peking had not been looted and burned in wholesale fashion because it had no riches to attract the wolfish Boxers or the greedy Christian troops. And servants were easy to find, now that they no longer feared for their lives. The number of servants we had suggests a most luxurious establishment—a cook and his helper, a house boy, a handy man and a stable groom—five Chinese hired to look after a correspondent and the stenographer of the American legation—but the work had to be subdivided in this manner; and the total pay roll amounted to twenty-five dollars a month in American money.

To the hasty glance of the foreign tourist all Chinese may look alike, but to live with this crew of pig-tailed servitors was to discover that they differed in dispositions even more than in appearance. Two of them stood out from the rest as individual and attractive, each in his own peculiar way. You Han was the house boy, a youth of nineteen or so who was a waif of war—his village burned by the allied forces on the road from Tientsin, his family wiped out or scattered he knew not whither. Bright and quick and eager to please, he learned foreign customs with astonishing rapidity.

He attacked the English language with the zeal of a terrier after a rat. He made headway with it while his masters floundered in the bog of a few necessary Chinese words. For instance, whenever the stupid Ralph Paine desired to have a pony saddled, he shouted for the *ma-fu* or stable boy. This was always the signal for giggles of mirth from the other Chinese youths of the household. They never grew tired of the joke. *Ma-fu* can be spoken or sung in several different tones and meanings. And try as hard as he might, the correspondent usually shouted a demand for a city with a brick wall around it.

And while he blundered day after day with this one little word, *ma-fu,* the dapper young house boy You Han, who had never laid eyes on a foreigner until the besom of

war had swept him out of his hamlet, was piecing together a working English vocabulary by main strength. He would ask to be told the name of some object and then he trotted about his tasks, making beds or sweeping floors, and chanting in a singsong monotone:

"Table—ho, la—table—yo, mi—table—table—table."

A youth of very different inclination was the burly chore boy who fetched water with two wooden buckets hung from a shoulder yoke or ran about Peking doing errands. His Chinese name was not easy to remember so he was known as Shanghai. A born bully and rough-and-tumble scrapper was the scowling Shanghai, with a perpetual chip on his shoulder. He was faithful and honest but very expensive, for nothing gave him more sincere joy than to whip a couple of Chinese policemen of the night watch, ridiculous, petticoated persons who poked about with lanterns and beat gongs to let the burglars know they were coming.

It cost a certain number of Mexican silver dollars every now and then to save the two-fisted Shanghai from being locked up and having the soles of his feet flayed with a bamboo rod or his foolish head cut off. He had earned a reputation in the neighborhood; this was partly the trouble; and every hoodlum who aspired to lead a gang of Chinese roughs thought it obligatory to gain glory by mixing it up with the unterrified Shanghai. Much of the time he walked with a limp or displayed a scratched face or a black eye.

The two Americans who lived in this solitary fashion, apart from their own kind, had a daily round of duties; the correspondent had to keep in touch with the various sources of news and send brief cable dispatches, the stenographer had to report the confidential business of the American minister and the progress of the diplomatic procedure whose chief business was to fix the punishments of high Chinese officials, princes, and the like, who were guilty of responsibility for the destruction of foreign lives and property in the Boxer Rebellion. The United States alone, of the allied nations, was not bloodthirsty and avaricious in its demands.

To those who had to look on, it was a dreary, unhappy business long drawn out. A copy of one of the edicts which the Chinese government was compelled to decree happens to be among my memoranda and it affords a vivid glimpse of the penalties visited by command of the allied diplomats backed by an army of occupation.

In a late Decree, dealing with those chiefly responsible for the recent misfortunes, We meted out to them varying degrees of severe punishment. Prince Ching and Li Hung Chang now report to us by telegraph that the note presented by the Foreign Plenipotentiaries calls for yet heavier penalties and they pray that We take the matter into further consideration.

Leaving out of account Prince Chuang who has already been granted the privilege of committing suicide, and Yu Hsien, orders for whose immediate decapitation have been issued—officers in each case being deputed personally to supervise the carrying out of the sentence—We hereby decree as follows:

Prince Tuan and Tsai-lan are to be imprisoned pending decapitation. Bearing in mind, however, that they are Our near relatives and having regard to the ties of kinship, We, as a special act of grace, commute this sentence to one of perpetual incarceration on the most remote frontier of the New Dominion. Officers will forthwith be appointed to take them into custody and set out with them on the journey to their place of exile.

Kang-yi's guilt is characterized by features of exceptional gravity. His sentence ought to be that of immediate decapitation, but as he has already died a natural death no further action need be taken.

Our previous Decree sentenced Ying Nien and Chao Shu-chaio to imprisonment pending decapitation. They are now granted the privilege of committing suicide. T'sen Chun-hsuan, Governor of Shensi, will himself supervise the execution of this sentence.

Chisui and Hsu Cheng-yu were recently deprived of their rank. The Foreign Powers having pointed out that they materially aided the Boxer rebels and were noted for their antiforeign attitude, they are to be taken into custody and immediately decapitated. The Board of Punishments will see that these sentences are carried into execution.

Hsutung, by lightly placing confidence in the Boxer rebels, seriously compromised the situation. Li Ping-heng by his magniloquent language and bigoted obstinance was instrumental in bringing about trouble. Both ought to have been sentenced to prison pending decapitation, but as on the eve of adversity they committed suicide and have already been deprived of their rank and posthumous distinctions, no further action need be taken.

The crimes of which the chief delinquents were guilty have been clearly set forth in detail in Our former Decree. Respect this.

It was in the work of the correspondent to go to see the executions of several of these Chinese dignitaries and, to make a confession, so much of the bloody business rather got on his nerves. The culprits deserved the punishment, no doubt, having in-

stigated or abetted the antiforeign uprising which had resulted in the barbarous massacre of hundreds of missionaries of inland stations as well as the attack on the legations in Peking. The doctrine of reprisal was an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth and so these influential Chinese officials were condemned to perish by the sword.

Of those named in the foregoing decree, I particularly remember the execution of Chihsui and Hsu C'heng-yu. The scene was typical of many others. These were two elderly men of the highest rank and importance. It was like cutting off the heads of American or British cabinet ministers. Chihsui, a Manchu, had been successively the controller of the imperial household, president of the board of ceremonies, a member of the grand council of state and of the ministry of foreign affairs. Among the imposing list of offices which had been held by Hsu C'heng-yu were director of the court of sacrificial worship, vice director of the imperial clan court, vice president of the censorate, and vice president of the board of punishments.

They had conspired to drive the foreigners out of China. The methods employed had been barbarous and merciless, a war of extermination in which Christian women and children had been tortured and slain. Such was the custom of a country in which an ancient and highly refined civilization was stained by the most callous indifference to human life and suffering. Poison gas had not been invented nor the practice of drowning women and children in unarmed, sinking ships. The Chinese had much to learn from Western civilization.

It was a lost cause, this antiforeign rebellion, and Chihsui and Hsu C'heng-yu were to pay the price with their heads. Successful, they would have been patriots. Defeated, they were criminals. It is the way of the world. Their ignoble death was made a public spectacle for the curious to enjoy and the vengeful to gloat over. The scene was the old execution ground in the Chinese city, a small space surrounded by shops and dwellings. The time was fixed for noon but by ten o'clock the crowd was dense in the streets and upon the roofs.

The Chinese people, silent and unemotional, were shoved aside by the hundreds of foreign spectators, squads of troops on duty, smart German, British, French, Japanese and American officers and a strange mixture of civilians, correspondents, photographers, missionaries, bargain hunters in loot and employees of the various legations. The German officers made themselves the most conspicuous in this motley throng, stern-visaged figures in helmets and gray field cloaks, who consciously embodied the doctrine of the mailed fist in China. There were ladies present, also—of several nationalities. It was worth remarking.

The troops on guard were Japanese and American because the execution ground happened to be in their military district. During the waiting hour the crowd amused itself by pressing around the professional executioner and his assistant, two burly, swarthy Manchus who wore long tunics like butchers' smocks. These garments were stained and filthy with blood. The heavy sword was clotted with dried patches of blood and bits of hair. These two workmen had come from the German quarter where the heads of three bandits had been cut off earlier in the day. Near where they stood and chatted affably, two unpainted wooden coffins had been set on the ground. The photographers snapped the big, ruffianly executioner with his bloody apron and drawn sword and many amateurs found room to click their little cameras.

At length, two hooded Peking carts creaked toward the inclosure. In front of them walked several Chinese officials in silken robes and furs with the buttons of various degrees of rank on their hats. A guard of Japanese infantry escorted the black-curtained carts. By this time the executioner had spread two small straw mattresses in the mud. Upon one he placed a patch of red cloth, upon the other a bit of board wrapped in black cloth. Common prisoners were compelled to kneel in the mud but those whose relatives took care to approach the executioner beforehand with suitable offerings could have these small straw mattresses provided. Until the carts approached, the executioner smoked his pipe and laughed thunderously at the unprintable jests of his admiring acquaintances.

The crowd rushed forward to stare at the cart, officers, missionaries, secretaries, the Chinese populace, all herded together, until the cordon of soldiers thrust them back. It had the semblance of a holiday diversion. Death deserved a more dignified reception than this.

Through a tiny window in the sable cur-

tain of the foremost cart peered the calm and intelligent face of Chihsui, member of the grand council of state and the ministry of foreign affairs of the Chinese empire. There was no sign of fear or trepidation. His composure was outwardly serene.

A Chinese spectator thrust a letter into the little window, perhaps a farewell from some one who loved him. Chihsui read it carefully through his horn-rimmed spectacles and he was still scanning it when the curtains were lifted. Then he thoughtfully removed the spectacles. He would not need them again.

Hirelings of the executioner assisted him to dismount from the high-wheeled cart. They supported him on either side as he walked twenty yards to the open space. He did not need assistance. In his blue robes he moved with an air of profound resignation and the dignity of his years and exalted station. Two of the butcher's helpers leaped upon his back as he was about to kneel, of his own volition, upon a straw mattress in the mud. They flew at him like tigers. It seemed unnecessary. He was roughly forced to his knees and held there while the clothing was torn from his neck and shoulders.

A piece of thin cord was twisted tightly around his head, one end hanging free. It was noted that his queue was slender, with many gray hairs in it. The queue might not be strong enough to hold fast in the grip of the executioner's assistant. Hence the piece of thin cord. The two muscular helpers forced Chihsui down until his face was almost ground into the straw of the mattress. There they held him, clutching his shoulders. The executioner stepped forward in a leisurely manner, taking the sword from the hands of the assistant, and wiping it on his bloody tunic.

As a golfer addresses the ball with preliminary swings, this Herculean Manchu expert aimed two trial blows, the blade checked before it touched the neck of Chihsui. It was a short, chopping blow and not a full-arm swing. The assistant sat down and tugged at the thin cord. It pulled the victim's neck out as a turtle's head protrudes from its shell. The red-rusted sword was lifted again. It came down with the grunt of the powerful man who wielded it.

The head of Chihsui bounced from his shoulders as an apple is knocked from a branch. The assistant fell back with the head in his lap, tethered by the piece of cord. The trunk of Chihsui lay prone with a crimson stream spouting from between the shoulders. The head was tossed beside it.

Presently, from the second hooded cart, Hsu C'heng-yu was lifted to the ground. His eyes were closed. He seemed almost inanimate. It was necessary to carry him bodily to the other straw mattress. Friends had seen to it that he was heavily dosed with opium. His decapitation followed quickly. As before, the crowd stirred and made a long, sighing ejaculation when the sword fell. Otherwise there was silence. The two bodies were thrown into the unpainted coffins and coolies carried them away. Five minutes later the crowd was jostling over the blood-soaked ground although many of the Chinese avoided the spot until a shopkeeper came out and sprinkled dust on it. The tea houses, the greengrocers, the sellers of sweetmeats and the beauty parlor resumed trade. There was nothing to indicate that anything unusual had occurred.

There were other executions, more informal, which a correspondent felt it his duty to witness. These took place in the German military district. Many foreigners dropped in to see them, as though going to a matinée. German military columns, called punitive expeditions, were marching far out into the country, the high command asserting that stern measures were requisite to punish and pacify. They usually returned with prisoners whose heads were chopped off in public by the Manchu expert with the heavy sword. As an added punishment they were first compelled to listen to the reading of a long death warrant in the German language.

Major General Adna R. Chaffee refused to take part in or to approve of such military movements as these offensive expeditions. As commander of the American forces he reported to his government:

> I have not heard of any hostile Chinese movement or force of consequence for a month. All such reports have been found on examination to amount to nothing. Occasional shots are fired, if not at, to frighten foraging parties of two or three men by the villagers. I do not hear of soldiers being killed or wounded by these real or supposed Boxers. Order has gradually improved along our line of communications since indiscriminate firing by troops was stopped. In Peking the Chinese are very orderly, returning to business where protected, notably in the Japanese and American sections.
>
> The city of Peking has been sacked, looted

from corner to corner in the most disgraceful manner imaginable. Such is my opinion. I had no idea that civilized beings would resort to such proceedings. It is a race for spoil. I have kept my own command fairly clean, thank God, but with all my efforts it is not spotless.

It is a bright page in the history of the foreign relations of the United States that as secretary of state, John Hay should have written to the blunt, square-jawed cavalryman such a letter as this:

My Dear General Chaffee: The Chinese minister called here the other day and expressed with great earnestness and deep feeling the gratitude of the Chinese government and the people of Peking for the humane, enlightened and generous treatment they received at your hands and those of your officers and soldiers under your command. It was a personal and not an official dispatch. You know how we feel about the matter here in Washington, that your whole administration of affairs in China was a source of the greatest credit to yourself and of honor to your country, and I am glad to be able to assure you that the same sentiment animates the people of China with whom you were associated.

Now all this may seem to be a roundabout way to reach Ralph Paine's road of adventure but the influence was direct and it shot him off at a new tangent. He had been ill in one American army hospital after another, from Peking to Tientsin and back again. And although he was able to get about and, after a fashion, do a certain amount of work, he was not in normal condition. Given common sense, he would have packed up and gone home. His friend Herbert Jordan, with whom he lived, was also in ragged health, a young man never robust, who had not flourished in this filthy, war-wrecked Peking. And so there were a pair of low-spirited exiles who were more or less homesick and in the dumps and not much consolation for each other.

The sense of failure clouded them nor did they realize how depressing and conducive to melancholy was the atmosphere in which they dwelt. At the dinner table, for instance, Jordan was apt to indulge in some such cheery chit-chat as this:

"You missed that execution to-day—another Chinese official. There must have been bribery all along the line, for he was treated quite respectfully. The wind was freezing cold and while the poor old Johnny was kneeling to wait for the sword, one of the understrappers threw a coat over his shoulders. There was some delay about reading the death warrant. And what sort of broke me up was to see this patient old boy pull the coat around his throat. He was coughing badly and I suppose he didn't want to catch any more cold. It was a little thing, but to see him pull that coat around his throat—a precious lot it mattered whether he felt chilly or not."

One day there came booming into this Chinese house a street cry which crashed through the high-pitched clatter of the multitude like surf on a granite shore. It stirred like a battle chant, sounding again and again. It was only some peddler shouting his wares, you understand, but it was indescribably big, buoyant, as though exhorting all who heard it to take heart and cease repining.

The words were Chinese, of course, but the odd thing about it was that they came to the ears of the two forlorn Americans precisely as though this great, deep voice was booming in English:

"Throw all regrets away-y-y."

The peddler proved to be a giant of a fellow in tattered blue blouse and breeches, a yoke across his broad shoulders from which dangled many flat baskets. When he opened his mouth and swelled his chest the air trembled with that tremendous call of his. He earned ten or fifteen cents a day, he said, and supported a family of nine people by selling roasted watermelon seeds. He sang loud because he had a big voice and because his heart was honest and he owed no man anything. And whatever the Chinese street cry for roasted watermelon seeds may be, certain it was that he proclaimed to foreign ears:

"Throw all regrets away-y-y."

The influence of it on Ralph Paine's downhearted mood was timely and bracing. He announced his intention to Jordan.

"Here is where I seek a change of air for a few days. Too many executions and worrying about my symptoms has been demoralizing. And Peking is a rotten hole, anyhow. An excursion into the country is what I need."

"You're crazy," said Jordan. "I get a chance to see the reports at the legation. The German troops have been running into trouble in all directions, heavy forces of them. You can't go wandering off on your own."

"You watch me. I prefer to take old man Chaffee's word for it. He says the country is pretty well quieted down."

"Even then the scattered Boxers are in hiding in the villages. What's the idea?"

"To look it over for myself. What else is a correspondent for? I may be a little bit cracked, after watching the gilded dragons wiggle on the rafters in that field hospital, but this stunt seems perfectly reasonable to me. I have pulled off just as flighty ones in my time."

Jordan argued it earnestly. Attached to the American legation in a confidential capacity, he insisted that he knew what he was talking about. Disturbed and dangerous conditions in the region beyond the outer walls of Peking had been reported by Field Marshal Count von Waldersee. Look at the frequent executions of bandits and Boxers captured by these German troops!

Ralph Paine changed the subject. After all, a man has to go his own gait. Privately he decided to oufit his personally conducted expedition and start out the next day while Jordan was in his office at the legation.

It was an impulse born of conditions, of wearisome discontent with Peking and of ordeals in army hospitals. Yes, it might have been called a little flighty. It was time to do something, to brace up and throw all regrets away. Therefore a covered Peking cart with its two huge wheels and a dun mule in the shafts was brought into the courtyard. The boy, You Han, was sent to the army commissary for a side of bacon, tins of butter, bread, canned beans and so on. The heavy gray army blankets were stowed in the cart, with an extra fur coat. In the dead of winter the temperature often hovered around zero. Two rifles were included in the equipment.

You Han was told to drive the cart while that troublesome youth, Shanghai, saddled a pony for his own use and another for his master. It made an impression that these two Chinese lads obeyed without hesitation, without asking a question. They were made to understand that a journey was intended out into the region to the westward of Peking, toward the interior. They had heard many rumors, fearsomely magnified among their own people, of hostility to foreigners and all who associated with them. It must have been disturbing for them to contemplate this excursion into regions unknown and sinister; and yet they were loyal and cheerful. The sensitive You Han looked a trifle wistful, perhaps because he had dared to think of matrimony with his munificent wages of five dollars a month. But the scowling young Shanghai assumed a swagger more truculent than ever. He fairly yearned for trouble.

Beyond a general direction the route selected was aimless, in a way, leading from one village to another in an area which had not been traversed by foreign troops. This was the intention, to see what the heart of the country was like, away from the paths of the punitive columns and the plundering and killing. It was not so reckless as it appeared because of the belief that most of the commotion had been stirred up by the European soldiers themselves. Living in the Chinese city of Peking had shown that the masses were anxious to be let alone to return to peace and industry.

The cart and the two riders moved out through a towered gateway of the city wall soon after noon. You Han dangled his feet from the shaft and whistled at the mule, according to custom. Ralph Paine rode on ahead with Shanghai, the ponies plodding to the fetlocks in the sand of the deeply worn highroad. They did not know where they were going nor for how long; and this was an agreeable sensation, to be tramping it free and unfettered under the open sky. Every day's march would be unfamiliar, with the elements of novelty and surprise.

The massive walls of Peking slowly sank into the brown plain as though looked back at from a ship at sea. Toward sunset the expedition came to a village unscathed by war. Elderly men gossiped in the doorways of the narrow, squalid street. Pigs and children were underfoot in the dust. Women stared curiously, hands tucked in their flowing blue sleeves, black hair sleekly parted and stuck through with bright ornaments. The girls smiled and coquetted when the bold Shanghai let fall flowery compliments in passing. He inquired the way to the inn and the cart jolted into a large courtyard already filled with other vehicles and with groups of dusty muleteers, some of them cooking supper in the open.

A room was found, with latticed paper walls and a brick *k'ang* or sleeping platform heated by means of flues. You Han trotted out and returned with a chicken which he deftly fried. The only drawbacks were the vigorous smells of this ancient village inn and the fleas which were even more vigorous. After supper Shanghai swaggered out

for a stroll but went no farther than the noisy yard. Unexpectedly he found what he was usually looking for. Among the loiterers was a young man of bad repute, the *kuang-kun* or village bully himself, a character peculiar to China.

This professional rowdy proclaimed himself as such by the cap cocked to one side on his shaven pate, his loosely braided queue coiled about his neck, his leggings untied, his loud, menacing language. The make-up was studiously *tough*. Translated into foreign terms, he would have been called the leader of a hard gang, a terror and a nuisance to the village. It was to be inferred that he cursed Shanghai as a stranger beneath contempt. This was the opening gun. By way of retort, Shanghai called him a cowardly *ih-hwo-ch'uan*, a Boxer afraid to show his true colors.

It was a gorgeous battle, surrounded by excited villagers and itinerant guests of the inn. Horn lanterns were hastily fetched to illuminate it. There were no rules against kicking, biting, scratching or trying to choke the other man in a twist of his own pigtail. The ring was like a cyclone. The crowd shrieked in favor of the stranger. The village bully was a most unpopular person. This might be a Heaven-sent deliverance from the local bad man. The big foreign devil, Ralph Paine, now felt certain that his pilgrimage would be entertaining. This was an auspicious curtain-raiser.

The gentle-mannered You Han, however, felt very anxious while he danced up and down and prayed to strange gods. It was difficult to tell how things were going with his comrade, Shanghai, in this swirling, dust-enveloped combat whose technique was that of a pair of wild cats. Presently the tumult of the crowd was shriller and louder, with a note of rejoicing. In the shadowy light it was discerned that the village bully lay sprawled underneath the sinewy Shanghai who was earnestly endeavoring to gouge out an eye with his thumbs. The vanquished bully was yelling with pain and begging for mercy. The applause was terrific.

When they were pried apart it was necessary for the friends of the village terror to carry him away in a wheelbarrow. He had literally "lost face," or most of the skin thereof, and there was a broken ankle which had been deftly wrenched by Shanghai who was an adept at the "fist-and-foot" school of fighting. He himself was damaged but not disabled, wearing a few more honorable scars.

There was a pleasing sequel next morning when the two village elders or head men, the venerable *hsiang chang*, came toddling to the inn to offer the conquering stranger their profound respects and gratitude. Their errand was also to beg the admirable young man to tarry and make his home in the unworthy Wang-Family-Great-Melon village. They brought gifts, a basket of eggs, a packet of tea and a jar of preserves. It was in token of their high esteem. Shanghai was embarrassed. Hitherto his prowess had been rewarded with a threat of jail or worse. In singsong accents, bobbing his head, he thanked the village worthies, explaining that he must go on with his master who had some big business in his mind.

Again the covered cart rattled on its random way, bound to the westward. Shanghai drove the dun mule, squatting on a roll of blankets. He was too stiff and sore to endure bumping in a saddle, so You Han bestrode the pony. The road led through one small, huddled village after another with the monotony of flat, brown fields between. A halt was made at a schoolhouse in one of these hamlets. From the squat, dilapidated building came an incessant sound like the hum of a gigantic top. The children were reciting the daily task from the Confucian Analects at the limit of their lung power when the foreigner was spied by a truant who ran screaming indoors, and the teacher could not hold the riotous flock in leash.

By scores they came tumbling out to take to their heels in terror until You Han shouted a message of good will. Back they trooped and the correspondent slid from his pony to play jackstones with them and to try to make the bit of sharpened stick fly into the miniature mud-pie city. Then the teacher gathered these urchins in with labor like that of collecting spilled quicksilver.

Late in the afternoon a village of considerable size lifted its walls against the sky line and seemed to offer a resting place for the night. You Han flogged his pony and rode on ahead at a gallop. Whatever the notion was, he failed to disclose it, saying merely:

"You wait. I go look-see."

Later events and his own report, as imagination pieced it out, sufficed to indicate that the ingenious young You Han had learned

from a wayfarer that in yonder town dwelt the magistrate or ruler of the district. A brilliant inspiration laid hold of him. In he rode and sought out the residence of this dignitary who graciously consented to give audience to the importunate pilgrim. His heart fluttering, no doubt, You Han kotowed before the presence; and his oration, delivered in a high, wailing stammer, must have sounded something like this:

"An illustrious and most honorable general of the foreign soldiers comes to visit the city of the wise and benevolent magistrate. I am his insignificant and thrice-despised servant. This sublime and valiant hero, my master, is of the Americans who protect and do not plunder and destroy. He comes to extend peace and protecting power to your heavenly presence and to learn whether you have been molested by other foreign-devil armies, whom he will swiftly punish if it be your august pleasure to request it. This insufferably noble master leaves his soldiers, cannon, horses behind lest he terrify the country which is already in fear of the devastating foreign fighting men. He sends the greetings of one wise ruler to another."

Half an hour later the correspondent saw approaching a procession led by You Han and a squad of *yamen* runners identified by the red tassels on their flat hats. These rode shaggy rats of ponies and behind them tailed off a rabble of villagers on foot and many squealing children.

The merchants left their wares and the drowsy old men laid down their pipes when this parade presently proceeded to the magistrate's *yamen*. In the compound, servants waited to escort "the benevolent foreign general" to rooms made ready for him. In comfort he brushed his dusty riding clothes of woolen khaki and scrubbed and shaved with plenty of hot water.

A little later he was greeted as a guest of rare distinction by the sagacious, wrinkled gentleman in red silk robes who ruled and "squeezed" the district. They dined together, seated cross-legged at a low table and the menu was mysterious and elaborate. You Han, beaming, obsequious, acted the double rôle of personal attendant and interpreter. It was astonishing how few words were needed to carry on an animated conversation, to convey a mutual attitude of respect, cordiality and protection. Smoking cigarettes and sipping tiny goblets of potent *samshui,* the American visitor and the Chinese magistrate arrived at a sympathetic understanding and agreement. They were friends.

This was an unusual evening but no more so, perhaps, than certain others; such a one, for instance, as the sublime butler of New Rochelle had made so enjoyable in a moonlit port of Haiti. This Chinese tour was improving all the time. It had covered more than forty miles since leaving Peking and had encountered neither peril nor hardship. The turmoil of fire and sword and slaughter had left this region undisturbed. It was the ancient China, prodigiously industrious and tenaciously absorbed in its own immediate affairs. Peking was so far distant that few villagers had ever dreamed of attempting the journey.

Soon after dawn the correspondent was awakened by the pop, pop of the oiled paper of the latticed wall and brown fingers came poking through to make peepholes. Curious men and women were anxious to find out what the foreigner looked like. Coyly he draped a blanket against the wall and dressed with haste. After an early breakfast came the parting with the hospitable magistrate. It was ceremonious, each man bowing low and shaking his own hands.

Until afternoon the little caravan jogged along and then it came to the edge of a strip of desert, a waste of dazzling sand in which no one lived, in which nothing grew. It was said to be no more than ten miles wide, rolling like a lake from the last village wall to a misty horizon. To cross it before nightfall seemed to offer no great difficulty. Presently the small hoofs of the mule sank in the white sand and the cart wheels left a winding trail. It was a slower, heavier task than had been expected. At the end of an hour the village in the rear was a brown smudge no more than two miles distant.

In the third hour the cart and the two riders were halfway across this deceptive strip of desert and the short winter afternoon was reddening. The level desolation had begun to tumble up into crowding little hills and sand barriers among which the trail now and then entangled itself. But the air was still and very clear and, scrambling to the top of one of the white hills, the correspondent could see the faint tracery of a towered temple on the farther side of the desert as a guiding landmark.

It had become a forced march and a halt was made only for a snatch of cold supper and a swig from the water bottles. The moon rose in the sleeping dusk but, before it was clear of the scalloping ridges of sand, the sky was spattered with rags of flying cloud. Soon the wind behind the angry scud began to pick up gusts of sand and flirt them from one crest to another. The travelers rubbed their eyes as they plowed steadily westward, steering a course by the track which other carts had made. It seemed absurd to be afraid of getting lost in this two-by-four Chinese desert.

Then the gray sky closed down in blackness everywhere and billows of sand were leaping up to meet it. The rush of the terrific wind wiped out the trail as if it had been no more than a finger mark. There were no more hills nor winding passages among them, only a fog of whirling sand. The wind had an icy edge as it brought the killing cold of Mongolian steppes a thousand miles away.

The three travelers covered their faces with their hands and their coats; and almost instantly they were adrift, cowering, lost, helpless. So dense was the driving smother of sand that they could scarcely see the dun mule which You Han was leading by the halter rope. The hillocks were shifting with a complaining roar and the shriek of the wind in mid-air was pierced with a shrill rasp like the commotion of innumerable iron filings.

The correspondent and Shanghai groped toward the side of a hillock, seeking a lee; but the flooding sand tumbled down its side knee-deep and the wind sucked round and searched them out, as if in chase. The cart afforded no shelter, for a whooping blast of wind had whisked away the rotten canvas curtains in bits of rag. The flinty particles of sand pelted in sheets and bit like incessant volleys of fine shot. There was no more time to think of what should be done than when a swimmer is plunged over a dam.

The hapless wanderers were not only stifled but soon benumbed. Never had they felt anything to compare with the searching cold of this desert sand storm. They stumbled from one hill to another, sometimes keeping their feet, falling oftener. The ponies were led by the bridles. Vainly they tried to turn tail to the storm. In terror lest they lose sight of each other, Shanghai clutched You Han by the queue. This was one of the occasions when Ralph Paine had cause bitterly to regret that he had not listened to advice. Peking was infinitely preferable. Death was near at hand in this furiously hostile desert.

Suddenly the dun mule pushed forward impetuously, ears forward, muzzle outstretched, trumpeting joyously.

"He b'lieve can find. He sabee plenty," feebly sputtered You Han.

The frantic mule dragged the boy by the halter rope and the others scrambled after, falling, sliding, staggering. They were enveloped in a somber and swaying curtain of sand. Not more than a hundred feet away a camel train lay encamped against the storm. The Mongolian drivers had pitched their black tents behind a shaggy barrier of crouching camels. To them appeared a mule cart and three exhausted castaways of the desert.

The swarthy men of the north wrapped these guests in furs and filled them with boiling tea and were wonderfully kind. During the night the sudden fury of the storm blew itself out. Sunrise revealed the desert as a shimmering, tranquil expanse of little white hills and crests like a bit of frozen ocean. The episode of the stifling billows of wind-driven sand was like a very evil dream. The Mongolian camel men broke camp and helped their half-buried beasts to extricate themselves from the sand. In a long line, to the tinkle of bells, this picturesque caravan, laden with coal in baskets, went plodding in the direction of Peking.

Ralph Paine's personally conducted tour resumed the march to the westward, to the other side of the desert which had seemed so small and harmless. There was no lack of grit in the party. It was in the food, in the blankets, in the human system. A Chinese sand storm is warranted to make the victim grind his teeth for some time thereafter. It was grateful to leave the desert behind and halt in a friendly village to rest and recuperate.

A day of this leisure and the mule cart moved slowly onward. It seemed to have passed almost beyond all rumor and echo of wars. But this sense of peace and security was rudely shocked toward night. Approaching the mud-walled town which was to be the halting place, a confused, ferocious yelling was heard and the flames of a

burning building licked skyward. It was advisable to investigate with caution. Listening nervously, young You Han bravely suggested:

"I go look-see. Can do. Plenty fight have got. Bad mens kill."

Shanghai grinned and nodded and they trudged on together, leaving the big foreign devil to await the result of their reconnoitering. It was an infernal din, with occasional shots, most of them dull reports heavier than the sound of rifles. After some delay the two scouts came scurrying back, waving their arms in reassuring gestures. Out of breath and jabbering both at once, it was not easy to make head or tail of the report beyond the fact that the village was safe for the foreigner to enter.

What the three travelers presently witnessed was the finish of an episode characteristic of the bloody upheaval in North China. A small party of native Christian converts, refugees from some mission settlement farther inland, had found safety in this town which had been out of the path of the Boxer scourge. Now, however, a few of the savage fanatics of the crimson girdles and apron, fleeing from the foreign soldiery, had appeared in the village. Immediately they resolved to exterminate the native Christians.

It was a grievous blunder. Led by a stalwart Chinese deacon, these militant disciples of the Cross drove the Boxers into a blacksmith shop and set the timber-roofed hovel on fire. Frenzied sorties were hurled back in combats with sword and knife, while the leaden slugs were shot from the *jingals,* or "two-man guns" with barrels ten feet long. The villagers looked on and took no part. It was a strictly private quarrel.

The end was not long delayed. The blazing roof crashed in and the last Boxer died as he tried to crawl out of the embers. And then the Chinese deacon, a splendid man he was, talked to the correspondent in broken English and told such tales of heroism and martyrdom among the humble converts of remote and isolated stations as St. Paul himself might have gloried in. By hundreds they had died for the faith, refusing to recant and join the secret fraternity of the Boxers. When opportunity offered they had fought valiantly for their lives as was right and proper. In this particular village they could now tarry unmolested and worship God in their own manner. The ruins of the blacksmith shop emphatically testified to this.

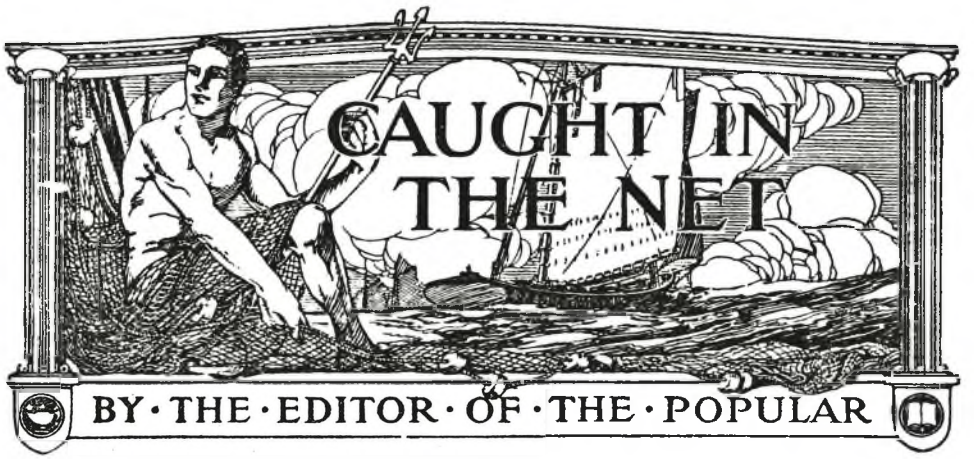
Into what was called, by courtesy, the intelligence of one Ralph Paine, there now sifted a lucid conclusion. It would have been unpleasant for him had these few deceased Boxers reached the village ahead of the competent native Christians. He had wandered eighty miles west of Peking, far enough to prove his contention that the thing could be done without hazard. There might be such a contingency as crowding his luck. Having mulled it over, he decided to turn around. You Han and Shanghai were agreeable to this, although if urged they would have continued clear across China with an air of nonchalance.

When the mule cart trundled into the courtyard of the home in the Chinese city of Peking, Herbert Jordan, stenographer to the American minister, was drinking tea in a looted mandarin's robe of gorgeous hue. His greeting was effusive and he appeared astonished.

"Well, I will be damned! A couple of cables came for you, Paine, and I came near sending back word that you had vanished without a trace. Where do you think you've been?"

"Visiting friends, Jordan. And they gave me a grand time. I'll show you on the map. It did me a lot of good. I have thrown all regrets away and I feel as strong as a horse. For the tired city man there is nothing like a week or so in the country, among peaceful rural scenes and people."

This series of Mr. Paine's reminiscences began in the issue of November 20, 1921. In the next number he will tell of how "A Mariner Visits the White House."



A NONPARTISAN POLITICAL BODY

IN this country of partisan politics it is difficult to imagine a real, permanent nonpartisan political organization, municipal, State or Federal. Attempts to form such organizations, composed of people of different political views, have been disappointing. When organized they have been short-lived and it has long been generally believed that a permanent body of that kind would be an impossibility.

Yet it was recently announced that in Mount Vernon, New York, political candidates have organized a genuine nonpartisan body under the name of the Political Candidates' Mutual Benefit Association, the main object of which is to stop political candidates from buying tickets for anything, from a concert to a ball, to secure votes. The leaders of the movement intend to make the body a national one with branches in all the States, the Mount Vernon chapter being the first. During campaigns candidates for all kinds of offices in different States have spent large sums, win or lose, in buying tickets from people of all political beliefs, in order to influence votes.

The leaders of the new nonpartisan organization are sanguine as to its success. In their latest announcement they estimated that before the close of the campaigns of 1923 there will be 4,392,320 branches in the United States. How they figured this out is not stated. One Mount Vernon candidate said:

"The last election shows us clearly that politicians have to stand together or else get sandbagged. If I bought one ticket to one jamboree I bought $596 worth to as many varieties. You can't refuse or you lose a vote; but if you lose the election, what have you got to show for your money?"

It is true that Mount Vernon is not one of the large-sized cities but those in favor of the organization point out that big events in political history have started in unexpected places.

What seem to be political miracles have at times taken place. A number of years ago Lloyd George was one of the most unpopular men in Great Britain and the most unpopular man in the British Parliament; on account of his radical ideas. He was then regarded as the last man in the British kingdom to form the coalition government, which was so effective during the war, and was made up of such conflicting elements as Liberals, Radicals, Unionists and different kinds of Conservatives. Yet he performed this apparent miracle and appears to have been the only man who could have accomplished it.

Who can tell now what the new nonpartisan movement started in Mount Vernon may amount to? It may fizzle out or be an unexpected success. At all events its leaders are very hopeful about its success, though it would be a small thing to accomplish compared to the bringing about of the coalition government in the British Parliament.

LET US STUDY THE CONSTITUTION

WHEN compared with our forefathers, it is often said that we are vastly ignorant of the workings of government. To-day so many interests consume our lives that we have little time for political philosophy. But events of recent years force us to realize that we must give serious attention to the laws and statutes under which we have our being if we want to preserve our most precious heritage of liberty and equality. The recent movement of "Back-to-the-Constitution" reflects this feeling.

The National Security League advocates that laws be passed in every State which will require the study of the Constitution of the United States in schools and colleges and make it also compulsory in the educational departments of other public institutions. At the beginning of the year the college of William and Mary led off with the Marshall-Wythe School of Government and Citizenship, where lectures on constitutional government opened the campaign. As John W. Davis, former ambassador to Great Britain, said on that occasion:

"If our government ideals and the structure of our government are to survive, it can only be by persistent, constant education of the people in their essentials."

The man in the street knows hardly anything about the Constitution of the United States. Except that, once in a while, there is an amendment made to it, he would likely enough forget that such an instrument of government existed. Any mention of political science usually fills the ordinary person with an uneasy feeling that the subject is heavy and abstruse. It is only for college professors. That attitude is indeed unfortunate, because there is nothing more vital to our welfare than a thorough understanding of our political institutions. And they are far from being dull or deep if properly approached by way of historic happening. The writer remembers that more than once a teacher of his made him stay in after school and as a punishment copy the Constitution of the United States. Of course, such a method only tends to make the student abhor that wonderful instrument of government.

The Constitution should be taught or studied in connection with the historic events which produced it. Unlike many other written constitutions of the world it was the result of hard, practical experience rather than abstract theory.

Offhand, one would never suppose that the value of two houses of Congress could have been doubted, yet an anecdote is related of Washington and Jefferson which shows it as a fact. The two patriots were at tea. Jefferson had advanced most eloquent objections to a bicameral legislature. Watching him, Washington said: "Why, you yourself have proved the excellence of two houses this very moment." Jefferson was astonished. "I? How is that, general?" he asked. "You have turned your hot tea from the cup into the saucer to get cool," explained Washington. "It is the same thing we desire of the two houses."

Who could forget the primary functions of the House of Representatives and the Senate with this apt story in mind? And, really, the Constitution is alive with human interest if you peep behind the curtain of its cold and exact phraseology.

THE MOSQUITO'S WATERLOO

FOR some time back residents of scattered districts in this country have been planning ways and means of meeting the mosquito pest in the summer and early fall. In the suburban portions of large cities ponds of stagnant water, or spaces of marsh land in open lots have been the most fertile breeding places for the mosquitoes which infested these cities and it was found that the evil was greatly lessened after the ponds or marshes were drained when the lots were used for building purposes. In one or two large Eastern cities where such ponds or marshes existed in open lots in the suburban districts, the mosquitoes, which were in countless swarms, disappeared or their numbers became negligible when the ponds and marshes were replaced by buildings.

The mosquito indigenous to the State of New Jersey had the reputation for many years of being the most vicious of the mosquito family. No other mosquito was believed

to have so many varieties; and "like the bite of a Jersey mosquito," was a common expression when one described a severe itching pain. The Jersey mosquito, when it crossed the Hudson River to New York, was recognized, it was said, by its peculiar viciousness and the taste of new blood appeared to make it multiply by the million.

The New Jersey Mosquito Extermination Association, which has been for a long time fighting the mosquito, has planned a big campaign against it this year. At a recent convention of the association, held in Atlantic City, New Jersey, it was stated that the mosquito was meeting its defeat in that State. In Jersey coast cities and other communities within the former mosquito zone, it was asserted, property values in the State had increased $70,000,000 in ten years. It was also asserted that property values in the State will be enhanced $500,000,000 more when the mosquito pest has been banished.

Lewis E. Jackson, treasurer of the association, said that the mosquito could be banished from the State in five years, if the legislature appropriated $750,000 for the purpose. At present, he said, practically all of the funds for extermination are furnished by the counties. Nevertheless, territories which were marsh land were being reclaimed through drainage, he said, and there were factories and mills in portions of the State, which a few years ago were considered useless for any purpose.

The varieties of mosquitoes in the State, it was stated, were reduced from forty to ten and the disease-carrying type was practically extinct. Mr. Jackson asserted that New York City raised more mosquitoes in a year than the whole of North Jersey and the campaign against the mosquito family, it was said, was to be kept up until the mosquito is banished.

STRAWBERRIES

"FRESH stra-a-awberries!" Few to whom the lilting cadence of this pleasant old street call is not almost as much a part of the first glory of summer as is the blushing berry's distant linguistic relative the straw hat itself. And now the brief hour of triumph of this little aristocrat of the fruits of the earth is at hand again. For let us say in passing that we never could take quite seriously the midwinter pretensions of those precocious pretenders of the species which more or less savorlessly appear on our menus of a snowy February. Your early-summer berry is your true princeling. And perhaps you don't fully realize what deference is really paid to this superior representative of berrydom nowadays. It is the object of very specialized attention from no less imposing an organization than the department of agriculture of these United States.

It was as early as 1915, as a matter of fact, that the department's first "field station" devoted to the service of the strawberry was opened at Hammond, Louisiana. Here modern methods of packing, shipping and distribution were perfected; and the further importance of this station is apparent in the daily service of current information which it supplies throughout the shipping season regarding the prices and conditions obtaining in the leading consuming markets as well a concerning strawberry movements from practically all of the country's shipping centers. Even information as to weather conditions in different parts of the land is furnished so that proper refrigeration for shipments can be provided.

It may be a surprise to many to learn that in value of annual yield, in spite of the northern temperate climes having always been considered the strawberry's natural habitat, this southern Louisiana of ours has become the premier "strawberry State" of the country. And the Hammond station of the department of agriculture forms a large part of the reason for this. Making full use of the value of its service Louisiana, last year, marketed 14,000 carloads in 74 different cities and, due to their quality, her berries brought a higher price than any others practically throughout the season. Shipments were made to points spreading from the Atlantic coast to the Rockies and as far north as Canada, two or three express fruit trains carrying out the precious fruit daily. The principal markets, in order of importance were Chicago, Detroit, Boston, Pittsburgh and New York.

For a part of the year at least King Cotton seems to have found a serious rival in

the sunny South, in this refreshing delicacy. So be it. Wherever the succulent berry hails from it is most welcome. As the soul of a genuine, old-fashioned shortcake on a sultry summer's day—— But there! We don't dare dwell on it until some of those Louisiana beauties arrive.

WHAT MACAULAY FORESAW FOR US

HOW long does a civilization last? In his archæological explorations Flinders Petrie is reported to have counted nine separate attempts at civilization. All of them failed at some point of their development. Now, we are proud of our civilization, or we used to be until the World War upset our calculations somewhat. Even so, we probably consider ourselves pretty good political and social architects. But will future generations think so?

As the very heart of present civilization, democracy and its development have become our chief concern. Enemies of democracy declare that it cannot endure under the strain of modern thinking and the tension of economic struggles. Friends of democracy, while admitting their anxiety for its complete vindication, deny that it can possibly fail.

Whether we agree with him or not, it is interesting to read what Lord Macaulay wrote some sixty years ago on the question to H. S. Randall, of Virginia, who was related to Thomas Jefferson. Macaulay said:

I have long been convinced that institutions purely democratic must, sooner or later, destroy liberty or civilization, or both. You may think that your country enjoys an exemption from these evils. I will frankly own to you that I am of a very different opinion. Your fate I believe to be certain, though it is deferred by a physical cause. As long as you have a boundless extent of fertile and unoccupied land your laboring population will be far more at ease than the laboring population of the Old World; and, while that is the case the Jefferson politics may continue to exist without causing any fatal calamity. But the time will come when New England will be as thickly populated as old England. Wages will be as low and will fluctuate with you as with us. You will have your Manchesters and Birminghams; and in those Manchesters and Birminghams hundreds of thousands of artisans will assuredly sometimes be out of work. Then your institutions will be fairly brought to the test.

It is quite plain that your government will never be able to restrain a distressed and discontented majority; for with you the majority is the government and has the rich, who are always a minority, absolutely at its mercy. The day will come when in the State of New York, a multitude of people, none of whom has more than half a breakfast or expects to have more than half a dinner, will choose a legislature. On one side is a statesman preaching patience, respect for vested right, strict observance of public faith. On the other is a demagogue, ranting about the tyranny of capitalists and usurers and asking why anybody should be permitted to drink champagne and to ride in a carriage while thousands of honest folks are in want of necessaries. Which of the two candidates is likely to be preferred by a workingman who hears his children cry for more bread?

I seriously apprehend that you will, in some such season of adversity as I have described, do things which will prevent prosperity from returning; that you will act like people who should in a year of scarcity devour all the seed corn and thus make the next year one not of scarcity but of absolute famine. There will be, I fear, spoliation. The spoliation will increase the distress; the distress will produce spoliation. There is nothing to stop you. Your constitution is all sail and no anchor.

As I said before, when a society has entered on this downward progress, either civilization or liberty must perish. Either some Cæsar or Napoleon will seize the reins of government with a strong hand or your republic will be as fearfully plundered and laid waste by barbarians in the twentieth century as the Roman Empire was in the fifth, with this difference—that the Huns and Vandals who ravished the Roman Empire came from without, while your Huns and Vandals will have been engendered within your own country by your own institutions."

Altogether, this prophecy rather links up with that other famous one of Macaulay's about the New Zealander on London Bridge surveying the ruins of the British capital.

POPULAR TOPICS

THAT 1923 may see the worst European crop failure since the terrible dearth of 1315 is the warning of Sir William Henry Beveridge, a distinguished British scientist. Sir William has made a study of wheat prices from 1500 to 1869, from data collected at fifty places in Great Britain and on the Continent and bases his opinion on the fact that

peak prices have prevailed on an average of once every 15.3 years for the last 350 years. The worst crop failures seem to have occurred 123 years apart, and as 1800 was a year of extremely small harvests indications seem to point toward a small wheat crop in 1923 and high prices in 1924.

IF a job isn't worth praying for, it isn't worth having," is the slogan of the Drexel Biddle Bible Class in Philadelphia, which conduct an employment bureau for its members and at last reports had the highly creditable record of having found jobs for 271 of 299 applicants.

SAILOR lore says that rats always will leave a ship that is routed for Davy Jones' locker. So it looks as if the Russian ship of state is doomed, for all the rats are leaving it. Famine is driving the rodents out of Russia and most of them seem to be heading for Budapest, for that city is overrun with them.

THAT shows how one thing leads to another. During the war, when food was hard to obtain in Budapest, many a family tabby made the supreme sacrifice and ended its career in a stew. After the armistice cat fur became popular as a substitute for more expensive furs and most of the surviving cats lost all of their nine lives. Now that cats are scarce and rats too plentiful Budapest shopkeepers are willing to pay three or four thousand krone for a mere inexperienced kitten.

MEET a new champion—Mr. Mike Algero, of New Orleans, premier oyster shucker of the South, who won his title by opening 4,944 oysters in five minutes less than six hours. Now a match for the championship of the United States between Algero and one of Baltimore's lightning oyster openers is being agitated.

ELDERLY people often say that the old district school turned out better spellers than do present-day educational institutions. Mrs. E. B. Finley of Bucyrus, Ohio, held that opinion, and recently, at the age of eighty-seven, she proved her point by defeating twenty-five high-school and college graduates in a spelling bee. The field was reduced to twenty by "renaissance." Seven more joined the also rans at "virtiginous." Ten others came croppers at "rendezvous." The three survivors battled desperately for almost an hour, and then "fortissimo" left Mrs. Finley an undisputed winner.

LAST year over a million people visited the parks and monuments under the supervision of our national park service. In 1916 only 256,000 visitors went to the playgrounds provided by Uncle Sam for his big family.

THE American steamship *Pine Tree State* recently made a new American record for the transpacific voyage by making the run from Yokohama to Williamhead, near Victoria, British Columbia, in eight days, nineteen hours, thirty minutes. This is within an hour of the international record made in 1914 by the Canadian steamer *Empress of Russia.*

DISGUSTING, wriggling jazz," the director of dance reform of the American National Association of Masters of Dancing rises to state, "is slowly but surely going into the discard." The association began a campaign for less hectic dancing two years ago and now crusades against the terpsichorean creeps are under way in all parts of the country.

Oil of Mustard

By Richard Barry

Author of "Fruit of the Desert," "The Bauble," Etc.

Donnell knew just where to stop answering—and Cliff knew just where to stop asking

THE "mob" leaned over the haul eagerly while the chief separated it into four equal shares. The job had been done expertly and nothing difficult to handle, like drafts, bonds or checks, had been carried away. There was a pile of paper currency in various denominations; two sacks of gold coins, one of eagles and one of double eagles; and an old-fashioned diamond brooch.

The chief made four equal piles of the paper and the gold. Then he stepped back and indicated them impartially. "Help yourselves, boys," said he. "Three of those piles has eight thousand four hundred and thirty-two dollars, each; the fourth has eight thousand four hundred and thirty-one dollars."

He held the brooch to one side. "Later, we'll settle this," he said.

"Slate Sim," the gunman who always protected the get-away, took one of the piles and slipped it sourly inside his shirt. "Nervous Pete," the lookout, took the second pile. "The Mole," the "soup" expert who handled the nitroglycerin, softly secured the third pile.

The leader pocketed the fourth with a smile. "Nothing modest about this mob and that's why I like it," he commented. "I see you left me the odd dollar, but that's all right. I never did like even money."

He tossed the brooch into the center of the table. "This trinket's left," said he, "and it'll take time and trouble to break it up. Besides, the stones may be marked and hard to fence. I'd just as soon keep it for myself. So, if you boys aren't unreasonable I'll buy you out."

The leader turned to the gunman. "Sim, what'll you take for your share?"

The hard-faced yegg picked up the brooch and glumly appraised it while his two companions bent over his shoulder. They saw a tarnished and battered old piece of elaborate, dull gold filigree in which were enmeshed a dozen or more stones. These stones might have been alum incased in dust, for they lacked luster and modish shape. But if they were not diamonds why had they been locked so carefully in the bank's innermost vault?

"Gimme a baby an' I'll call it square," said Sim.

The leader dutifully counted out from his pile five double eagles, a "baby," in the argot, being a hundred dollars.

"And you, Pete?"

"The same."

The lookout got his hundred.

The Mole craftily faced the leader, shaking his head. "Not for me," he muttered, "this ice has class. I want five babies for my cut."

Without the slightest demurrer the leader counted out twenty-five large gold pieces, at the same time pocketing the brooch.

Donnell then produced from an inner pocket an eight-ounce bottle filled with fluid the color of sluggish ocher. From another he took twine and an old handkerchief which he tore into eight equal parts.

Then, "take off your shoes, boys," he commanded. Dutifully they passed over to him three pairs of footgear. They crowded about him as he uncorked the bottle and poured a few drops of the liquid inside each shoe, including his own, just over the instep; after which he soaked a rag and smeared each shoe well, all over its bottom.

"What's that, Joe?" demanded The Mole.

"Oil of mustard."

"What for?"

"You'll see."

Donnell now saturated each piece of linen with the drug and then securely tied these pieces to the outside bottoms of the shoes, leaving them snugly against the heel tap.

"Whew!" muttered Pete, holding his nose, "that stuff goes to my stummick!"

"Sure!" said Donnell, "and it'll do the same thing to a bloodhound. Now carry your shoes carefully in your hands and follow me!"

All of this had been accomplished in a stable opposite the rear entrance to the bank just looted. In one corner lay the bound and gagged figure of the watchman.

It was now a few minutes after three o'clock in the morning. They had begun at exactly two a. m., the ideal hour for work of this character in a small town like Cliffden. So far the job was flawless, for it had been timed to occupy about an hour. The preparation had been accurate, the execution as prearranged. But so were all jobs of this mob, when led by Joe Donnell, one of the most accomplished safe blowers in America.

It was a saying of Donnell's that the only yegg ever caught was the one who left something to chance. "Spend your time in preparation before, not in alibis afterward," he often put his instructions to his "boys."

He led the way through the alley into the near-by main street, down this street to another traversing the residence section, up a broad, shaded avenue to a conspicuous, old, white-columned mansion set far back in a spacious lawn.

At length, followed by Pete and Sim and The Mole, as by shadows, he stood on the front veranda of this, the most conspicuous dwelling in the town.

Swiftly Donnell replaced his shoes and securely tied them. The three did likewise. After which they faded away in the night and, presently, as the dawn came in, stood near the railway station.

"Here's where we break," said Donnell as they came to a halt. "Now it's each man for himself. I'll take this local for Raleigh at four-ten. I expect to be in Toledo at the old place, within a week. Good luck!"

Donnell arrived in Raleigh, the first junction on the line, in time for breakfast. He found that the first through train, bound for the north, would not be due until late afternoon. He put in his day profitably in getting the lay of the local banks and in making a preliminary survey of the prospects, as was his custom.

As he stood on the platform, about five o'clock that afternoon, waiting for the through train, a local, the second of the day, pulled in from the direction of Cliffden and there alighted from it, among others, a tall, soft-hatted, extremely conspicuous Southerner whom every one seemed to know.

A number of persons instantly crowded around this man. Donnell easily overheard the drift of the remarks, for the newcomer spoke in a high, pleasant, drawling, clear voice. This person was being addressed as "Colonel," and as "Governor Cliff."

"Yaas, boys," he replied to the crowd at large in response to the many individual inquiries, "your news is right enough, I reckon. They did get into us for a big sum. Yaas, a good many thousands. But we're after 'em and we'll ketch 'em."

"Are your hound dawgs sicked onto 'em yet?" asked one.

The colonel seemed embarrassed but, after a slight hesitation, he said yes.

Donnell asked a bystander the identity of the prominent passenger who did not leave the platform and who apparently was waiting like himself for the through train.

"That's Colonel Cliff, president of the Cliffden bank. Robbers got into it last night and cracked the safe for all the spare cash. But they'll never get away with it. Colonel Cliff is the owner of the celebrated pack of bloodhounds—the best bloodhounds in the country."

"Ah!" said Donnell. "How interesting!"

The through train pulled in just then and the passengers for Richmond and points north boarded it, among them Colonel Cliff and Donnell, whose easy bearing, smart clothes and well set-up appearance caused him to be taken for a commercial traveler or possibly a business man of importance. There was a quickness and directness about his manner which caused the Southerners to instantly assume that he was from the North.

It happened that Cliff came legitimately by both his titles. He had been a commissioned colonel in the Confederate army and at one time had been the elected governor of his State. Apparently every one on the line knew him, honored him and loved him. Trainmen and passengers alike crowded past his seat to shake hands and chat. While many subjects were broached all gave way to the prime importance of the robbery, the details of which he repeated over and over again.

"Yaas," he admitted, "it was a slick job, all right. I reckon a right smart gang of cracksmen did it. We found the watchman bound, gagged and blindfolded in a stable.

They hadn't hurt him and they didn't make a needless scratch in the bank—just opened up that safe as if it had been a boiled egg for breakfast."

"How many of 'em, colonel?" asked the conductor.

"The watchman, a poor negro scared white, said he counted a regiment, said he fought and knocked down a dozen, personally, by himself." The colonel grinned broadly.

"How many do *you* think there was?"

"Four, mebby. These gangs, or 'mobs,' as they call themselves, usually go in fours."

Donnell had been edging his way through the group around the colonel's seat. He had observed that every one spoke to the distinguished traveler without introduction and that even those hitherto strangers took it for granted that this was a sort of public reception.

"Governor," said Donnell, "I hear you own some fine bloodhounds."

"Yaas," drawled the pleasant voice while its owner only casually surveyed the questioner.

"And did you happen to have them in Cliffden last night?"

"Ya-as." This came with a peculiar hesitancy.

"Well, then, I should think you could be sure to get that 'mob,' as you call it."

The colonel looked at Donnell more carefully. "Yew-all from the No'th, stranger?" he asked melodiously.

"Yes, governor."

"Set down." Cliff motioned toward the vacant seat which faced him and which none of those who crowded about him had had the temerity to preëmpt.

Donnell nonchalantly seated himself facing the man whose cash and diamonds he held in a chamois belt about his waist, next his skin.

The colonel's brow corrugated. The smile faded from his face and the drawl from his voice.

"I'll tell you somethin'," he said, after a moment of quiet, while a number of passengers hung breathless over his seat. "I've got six of the best bloodhoun's ever bred. They're a hobby of mine, those dawgs. I love every one of them and every hair on every one of them. There's not a crime, that is not a negro crime, been done in any county of this State for over four years that they haven't run it down; and the white men that got away from 'em I could count on the fingers of one hand—and *they* had a long start."

The colonel paused, looked out of the window and then back from one face to another of his audience, finally resting his gaze on the piercing black eyes of Donnell.

"I was at breakfast this morning," he went on, "when they phoned me the bank had been robbed in the night. I went right to the kennels, unleashed the dawgs, muzzled them and took them myself down to the bank. Nobody had been allowed near the safe. I put the dawgs in there and rubbed their noses in it, speaking metaphorically. The chief of police, and myself and the watchman followed them. And what do you suppose those dawgs did?"

The president of the Cliffden bank, one-time governor of his commonwealth, looked all about his audience, pausing for a reply. Donnell voiced the general curiosity.

"I can't imagine, governor. Tell us," he said with polite but vigorous sincerity.

"Went up Main Street, turned down Pinckney Avenue, passed in the gate to my residence, up the front lawn, up the steps to the door and then sat right down there on their tails, put their noses in the air and bayed!"

The colonel brought his narrative to a close as if it were a political oration while his voice conveyed the indignation and the bewilderment that he clearly felt.

There was a chorus of protests and ejaculations. "That's queer," said Donnell. "Of course later you got them out on the right trail."

"No!" exclaimed the colonel. "I spent the whole morning with those dawgs. Couldn't budge 'em. They just traced the crime to my doorstep and quit."

"Well—well!" protested Donnell. "I sympathize with you, governor. Have you any theory?"

"Don't know as I have," Cliffden answered, "but I'm on my way to Richmond to see a friend of mine. He may help me. Meanwhile I'm having the country scoured; I mean the cross country. One thing I've learned is that cracksmen smart enough to do a job like that don't try to get away on the railroad. Every one usually looks for them on the railroad, so they strike cross country, through the fields, away from people."

"That sounds plausible, sir," said Donnell respectfully.

For the several hours of the journey they faced each other there on the double seat of the day coach, the president of the bank and the leader of the "mob" which had just robbed it. They exchanged cigars, stories and a number of confidences.

At Richmond they parted pleasantly.

When the excitement had blown over, Donnell took his "mob" back to Raleigh and blew open the safe of the Second National Bank there. The personnel was the same with the exception of Nervous Pete, overly addicted to dope, whom Donnell had not considered steady enough for this sort of a job in a big town where the get-away was more complicated than it had been in Cliffden.

In place of Nervous Pete he had accepted "Reggie the Toff," though Reggie had been going steadily with the same girl for more than a year. Donnell made it a rule never to work with any man who was married or who stuck to the same girl for any length of time. He considered such men unreliable. But Reggie begged for the chance. He was going to be married and he wanted one last stake with which to retire and settle down.

Against his own better judgment Donnell placed Reggie as lookout; but, in some way that never was explained, Reggie bungled and, in the get-away, was shot and killed.

This upset Donnell extremely, although he got away neatly and with a much larger haul than at Cliffden. "It's unlucky to work with a man who's got a woman in his head," he protested to Sim and The Mole; but at the same time he insisted on a quarterly division and sent the fourth stake to Reggie's "widow."

The leader now announced to his two "boys" that he was through. He had always been superstitious and had often declared that if death occurred to one of his partners he would quit the evil game. Despite their repeated protests he told them he was going straight and advised them to seek some other "mob."

Then, instead of going to Toledo, where customarily he would have lived high until his money was gone, he went to Detroit, sought a job in a motor factory and started in at five dollars a day to become a skilled mechanic.

However, Donnell did not live like other common workmen. Instead, he occupied a five-room apartment and was attended by a Japanese butler. He announced to his employers that an inheritance had made him independent but that he wanted to learn the business from the bottom up. Which he did, effectively. In six months he was subforeman; in nine months he was foreman of one shop. A year later he was assistant superintendent, with authority over two shops.

Then, one night, his butler brought him a card. He read:

Mr. A. H. CLIFF
President
Cliffden National Bank

He asked Merito to show the caller in. As they shook hands neither man gave any indication that he remembered a previous meeting.

"Mr. Donnell," said Governor Cliff as soon as they were alone and he was satisfied that the Japanese was out of hearing, "I have called on you at the suggestion of my friend, Mr. Nearing, of the government postal-inspection service. I require assistance in a very delicate situation. Perhaps you can render it; and, if so, I assure you that I am ready to offer a very liberal reward."

Donnell refrained from smiling. Nearing, the craftiest detective in the government's employ, was the one man in all the police forces of the country whom he really feared. It was largely through respect for Nearing's uncanny intuitions that he had made up his mind to devote his unusual talents to a safer occupation than safe cracking.

He used but one word in reply: "Well?"

"The situation is this," went on the president of the Cliffden bank. "Nearly two years ago my bank was robbed. No one has ever been apprehended for it and we have long ago written off the money loss and given up hope of recovery.

"However, among the loot taken from the vault that night was a diamond brooch, the property of my wife. It was an heirloom, had been in her family for six generations and had originally been presented to one of her ancestors by Napoleon.

"The loss of that brooch has been a genuine calamity in our family. And I have come to you with this proposition. If you can locate that brooch and return it to me in its

original condition I stand ready to pay you in cash twenty thousand dollars, which, I have ascertained, is about twice the price that could be obtained for it in a forced sale."

Donnell was silent.

"And," added the Southerner, with direct frankness, "I give you my word of honor as a gentleman that no questions will be asked and that no one will be prosecuted."

Donnell was thinking of Nearing, the soft spoken, the mysterious, the unseen. He shook his head gravely.

"I know nothing about it, Mr. Cliff," he replied.

"I have not assumed that you do. In fact, I am not interested to know who took the brooch. I only want it back and I am willing to pay twenty thousand dollars and to grant immunity to get it back."

"Does Mr. Nearing know who got into your vault?"

"He does not *know.*"

"But he suspects. Is that it?"

President Cliff smiled. "If he does suspect, he has no legal proof, absolutely none, and that is the only thing that the——" He was about to say "thief," but tactfully added—"the person who took it, has to fear. I can assure you of that, positively, Mr. Donnell. Come now. Won't you help me?"

The former leader of the safe-cracking "mob" shook his head. "Sorry I can do nothing for you, Mr. Cliff," he replied. "I would like to oblige—either you or Mr. Nearing—but, I know absolutely nothing about it."

The Southerner rose. "Very well," he said, "but think it over and, if you will so honor me, I would enjoy your company at dinner to-morrow evening, at my hotel."

"Thank you." Donnell inclined his head slightly, nonplused at a situation new to his experience.

The next evening at the hotel the charming and hospitable Southerner introduced him to a man widely known at that moment as the newest meteor in the Detroit automobile world, Mr. Castle. The astounding success of the great Castle car was on all tongues.

Donnell refused the champagne that was offered at dinner as he sat alone with these two, for he felt this was the most distinguished moment of his life. The ex-cracksman dining alone with two of the most distinguished capitalists in the country! Secretly he thanked his stars that his record was good, at least for the past year. Yet he could not avoid an undercurrent of concern whenever he thought of Nearing.

Castle encouraged him to talk about himself. Instead he talked about motor cars and factories. The war was on. Prices were soaring and the labor problem was difficult. Fortunately Donnell was exempt from the draft, being over forty-six.

When he learned this, together with his record in a rival shop, the eminent Mr. Castle offered Donnell a job with him as superintendent of his factory at twice the salary he was receiving. His head swimming, Donnell modestly accepted the offer.

He left the two men in a daze, walked about the streets for an hour to think it out and finally, overcome with the impulse of generosity, returned to the hotel and asked for his late host. The latter received him in pajamas.

"Colonel Cliff!" Donnell exclaimed, "I try to take men as I find them. I can't help believing you are the real thing and, will you pardon me if I ask you one question?"

"Shoot!"

"Why have you done this thing for me—gotten me in with Castle?"

The Southerner placed a friendly hand on the other's shoulder. "Because I believe in you."

"And you want your brooch back?"

"Well—yes, frankly, I do. It is a very important thing to my wife."

Donnell seized both of the governor's hands in his. "Colonel," he asserted warmly, "you shall have that brooch and it won't cost you a cent; but you'll have to give me time."

"Of course. Take your own time."

"It may be three months."

"Very well. No hurry."

Thus again they parted pleasantly.

Donnell had broken up the brooch, extracting from it the diamonds. Fortunately he had retained the setting, for the gold was not heavy and would have brought little if melted. Moreover, he had appreciated its antique beauty. Now he appreciated it more than ever, knowing its history.

About half of the stones he had had reset into shirt studs and cuff links for himself. These were easily replaced. Four more he had given to men friends. It took him ten days to get these back.

There remained six stones to account for. These, a year before, he had had set into a pair of garter buckles which had become a present to a dancer, a quondam acquaintance, now only a memory. From a theatrical weekly he discovered that she was playing the European circuit and was at The Hague, billed to follow at Brussels, then Ostend, then Paris.

He wrote asking for a return of the stones. No reply. To Brussels he wrote pleading that his own safety depended on her return of the stones. Still no reply. To Ostend he sent a more urgent appeal, declaring that only the six diamonds could save him from a prison sentence. Although he had registered the letters the dancer made no reply.

Then, happily, he heard that The Mole was in Paris. He wrote a letter to his old "soup fixer," directing that he wait for the dancer's appearance in the French capital, whereupon he was to call on her and demand the garter buckles under a threat that if not delivered she would be arrested and deported, charged with their theft.

Promptly, by registered post, he received the missing diamonds. The brooch was now complete. But over three months had elapsed. He was prompted to wire Colonel Cliff of his success, but stilled this impulse. No need of advertising or of taking any unnecessary chances. Nor would he summon the president of the Cliffden bank to Detroit.

Instead, without a word of warning, he took the first train south and the second morning walked into the Cliffden bank. He asked for the president, but was told that official had not arrived as yet. He left his name with word that he could be reached at the hotel, whither he repaired and prepared himself for a cautious lookout, not yet able to shake off his old-time preparations against surprise.

Shortly the phone rang and the voice of Colonel Cliff boomed a hearty greeting, asking him if he would not come to the residence for lunch. He had accepted before he realized that this might be a trap.

Finally, however, he determined to go through with it and rely to the end on the word he had already accepted. At five minutes before one he rang the front bell of the residence at the identical spot where he had stood, in his stocking feet, that early morning now going on to two years ago.

Presently Colonel Cliff arrived, greeting him like a long-lost brother. A moment later he was introduced to Mrs. Cliff; and to a daughter; then to a son.

Puzzled, overwhelmed with the hospitality, radiant with his sense of equality with these charming and respectable people, he boldly produced the brooch. It was greeted with such an excess of emotion, such a wave of sentimentality that he was more elated than ever.

Ensued an afternoon of happiness at the end of which he found his grip had been moved from the hotel and that he was installed as a guest in the front suite of the Cliff mansion. Late in the day he managed to get the colonel aside.

"Look here," he demanded, "what have you told your family about me? How have you explained my getting that brooch?"

The former governor was courtesy itself. "Why, my dear sir," he replied, "I have merely told them that you are the superintendent of my friend Castle's factory in Detroit. Is that not true?"

"Quite true."

"That's all I know myself—except the important fact that you have produced this priceless heirloom. By the way, seems to me I owe you something like twenty thousand and, of course, any expenses you may have incurred."

"You don't owe me a cent," Donnell cried. He had just consumed several mint juleps and he seized his host by the arm as he protested, "Guvner, a guy that'd rob you oughta be fried in oil."

The various members of the Cliff family apparently had no duties for the following days except to make the time pleasant for Mr. Donnell of Detroit. He was taken shooting into North Carolina, fishing down the Chattahoochee, motor boating on Lake Toms and driving into the Blue Ridge.

At the end of a week he parted for the third time with Colonel Cliff—very pleasantly.

The great Castle car did better in war than in peace. For a year after the armistice it went on climbing the heights. Then it hit the toboggan. A year later it was in the ditch. And Donnell, who had climbed with it to a twenty-five-thousand-dollar salary, suddenly found himself without a job and without a prospect.

He was getting on toward fifty now; his hair was iron-gray; he appeared to be a

man of affairs, assured of himself and in an intrenched position.

However, his sole fortune consisted of fifteen thousand dollars in Liberty Bonds which his wife had insisted that he save. He had been married for three years and was very happy. She was about half his age, had been chief of the record room in the Castle factory and knew nothing of his past.

They decided to come to New York to become adjusted to the new conditions and so that he could find a place for his services. But times grew worse. There was nothing to be had. When jobs were available he would not take what was offered and when he was ready to take almost anything nothing was available.

Thus, one afternoon about five o'clock, accidentally he met The Mole.

"Just the guy we need to fill in the mob," said the old "soup slinger."

"No," said Donnell, "I'm off all that stuff for life. Thank you, just the same."

"Oh! On Easy Street, eh?"

"No. I'm not on Easy Street, but I'll never crack another safe."

"Who said anything about crackin' safes?"

"Or any kind of a blow."

"This is a swell trick."

"No," Donnell persisted, "even when I was going the gait I never touched paper, you know that."

"No paper about this, less'n you call playin' cards paper."

"Whatever it is count me out."

Donnell started to move away. The Mole held him by his coat lapel. "Wait and look over the lay. Won't cost you nothin'. They's two besides me in it already, but we need a tony guy with a front—like you. An' "—The Mole spoke very softly—"they's five thousand apiece in it fer about two hours' work."

"Two hours' work? Not a paper trick? Not a bank job?"

The Mole shook his head impressively.

"When?"

"To-night."

Donnell was thinking of the low state of his finances. On the morrow it would be necessary to sell some of his Liberty Bonds and that would be a severe blow to his wife. Of course it would be a severer blow if she ever found out that he had committed a crime. He had gone straight for five years; he had thought never to travel the crooked path again; but——

"Tell me about it," he said.

At nine o'clock that evening Donnell, in evening clothes, ascended the stairs in a private house in the Forties, rapped thrice gently and twice loudly, was inspected through a porthole and admitted to what appeared to be a gambling room. In one corner was a roulette wheel, in another a faro layout. A sofa lay between.

Behind the faro table, apparently the dealer, sat The Mole, deftly fingering the cards. Out of the corner of his mouth the old "soup slinger" whispered:

"The sucker is due. Paddy'll introduce you. He's a faro fiend. You two go against the bank, me dealing. In five minutes Paddy goes blooey; it's 'hands up!' and he frisks the three of us. See. The sucker's supposed to have twenty thousand on him in Liberties. That's our lay! See?"

Donnell nodded silently.

"It's after the holdup that you come in," went on The Mole, "to cover the get-away. Soon's Paddy beats it with the cush you call to the sucker to follow you for the cops. You say you know the quick way out. You duck down those rear stairs and pull him with you. It's a blind alley. Be sure to give Paddy an' me five minutes. That's enough—five. Then we all meet for the divvy at one, in Paddy's room. Get me?"

Again Donnell nodded.

"Sssh! He's on the stairs. It's the sucker!"

In a moment the door opened and, as Donnell turned to face it, he recognized Colonel Cliff of Cliffden. They had agreed that he should be known as "Mr. Morley," but, before a word could be spoken, he advanced energetically, calling:

"Why, governor, what a delightful surprise!"

"Donnell!" exclaimed the colonel, embracing the restorer of the lost diamonds and greeting him like an old family friend, "so this is your little recreation, is it?" He indicated the faro table.

"Yes, I like to call the turn—when I can."

"And that's pretty often, I take it."

Donnell strove to convey a message to The Mole by a look, but that worthy saw nothing but his cards. Donnell felt the

eyes of an observer, doubtless Paddy, the stick-up, through a slit high in the door.

"You remember I told you about my friend, Nearing?" Colonel Cliff was speaking.

"Yes." Donnell paid quick attention.

"Well, he warned me about this place and I came armed."

The colonel took from his hip pocket a long revolver which he handed over to Donnell. "But with you I feel safe. Take it and keep me out of danger."

The colonel rummaged in an inner pocket and, at length, produced a sheaf of bonds. "And here's this stuff, Donnell," he added, as if the papers were of no value. "I've had it on me all day and haven't felt safe a minute. You keep it. Then I'll know its in good hands. If my old friend, Jack Donnell, has it, it's safe. Now, let's have a drink before we play."

A waiter appeared with a bottle and glasses in answer to The Mole's ring. Donnell recognized the fourth member of the "mob," a man whom he had met that afternoon when they had planned the lay together. He managed to get aside enough to whisper:

"Tell Paddy not to load his gun. I'll have to put up a fight, but I'll shoot wild."

The waiter blinked his comprehension.

The game began, The Mole tending bank, Cliff and Donnell playing opposite.

Ten minutes later a masked man stood in the door, quietly commanding, "Put up your hands."

Cliff obeyed with alacrity but Donnell dropped instantly to the floor, pulling two guns and opening fire. Cliff did not observe that his bullets went wild. All he knew was that the masked man promptly uttered a groan and disappeared.

"Quick! This way, governor!" Donnell pointed the way to the blind alley.

Then, as soon as the Southerner was well down the stairs, at the bottom of which he was bound to discover he was unable to get out, Donnell rapidly discharged all the remaining cartridges, and cried, as if in agony, "they've got me!"

With that he ran for the street.

At one o'clock Paddy, The Mole and the one who had acted as the waiter waited in Paddy's room. It had been more than five minutes before Colonel Cliff could find his way out and give the alarm to the police. By that time all the "mob" was safely gone.

Promptly on the hour Donnell appeared.

"Slick work!" Paddy admiringly commented.

"I told you he was a prince," The Mole asserted.

"Good enough," the waiter glumly admitted. And he added pertinently, "Well —you got the Liberties. Come across and we'll divvy."

In reply Donnell laid the colonel's revolver on the table and, beside it, another of his own. Then he faced the three crooks squarely.

"Boys," he said, "I've nothing to divide."

"What!" they growled in unison.

Donnell respectfully touched the weapons. "Hold on," he continued quietly, "let me explain."

"You can't explain to me," Paddy muttered.

"Then I'll tell The Mole. Meanwhile, you listen."

With the two able-bodied revolvers facing them the three kept silence.

"This sucker of yours," went on Donnell, "is the best friend I ever had in the world. You didn't tell me his name or I'd never have strung along with you."

"I don't swallow that," the waiter mumbled. "You've cached the swag."

"Shut your mouth." The Mole kicked the waiter under the table. "Donnell ain't that kind."

"No," Donnell calmly persisted, "I sought Colonel Cliff just now and returned his bonds. I can't stick up a friend; not one on the level, any more than one of you boys."

Paddy and the waiter both sneered. The Mole nodded approvingly.

"Well, ain't you stuck us up?" Paddy snarled. "Ain't you cut in on our game and beat us out of it? What's the difference if he is a pal, of yours, as you say—and I ain't seen no proof of it yet—where do *we* get off?"

"That's the size of it!" the waiter pursued. "Do you think you can stick us up and get away with it?"

"Is that a threat?" Donnell asked.

"Take it any way you like," the waiter mumbled.

The Mole interfered. "He don't mean

nothing, guv," the "soup slinger" pleaded. "He don't know you like I do. He don't know you ain't got it in you to go back on a pal."

This shot, apparently without aim, seemed to hit Donnell seriously. He took a very deep breath.

"Look here, boys," there was a warmer note in his voice, "I never went back on a pal yet, whether he was straight or crooked."

"Huh!" growled Paddy.

"Tell it to the marines," the waiter sotto voced.

"It's the God's truth," cried The Mole.

"Sssh, easy," Donnell admonished his old partner. And then he went on to them all, impartially, "You figure this haul to-night is worth twenty thousand. Is that right?"

Paddy and the waiter nodded assent.

"Very well. Be at my room in the hotel to-morrow morning at ten o'clock and I'll hand you each five thousand. That leaves me five. Is that fair?"

Instantly the three brightened. With a babel of gratitude they assured Donnell they knew he was joking all along.

At nine the next morning he withdrew his Liberty Bonds from the safety-deposit vault. An hour later he was penniless.

At noon Colonel Cliff appeared. He knew of the condition of the Castle works.

"Donnell," he said, "if you will consider a job I can offer I have one you could fill. Since I saw you last I have been elected president of the Southern Bankers' Association. I find that one man we stand in strong need of is a protective manager."

"A protective manager? What's that?" Donnell asked.

"A fellow who can lock the barn door before the horse is stolen; not a detective to find thieves after they have committed crimes, but a man who knows enough about the seamy side of human nature to keep us on our toes all the time. The job is yours for the asking. What do you say?"

Donnell's defenses crumbled. "How much do you know about me?" he asked.

"Enough to know you're the man we want."

"Very well. Thank you, I'll take the job."

As they traveled south the next day the colonel said, "Donnell, now that you're working for me, will you tell me this; how can a man cover his tracks so bloodhounds can't follow him?"

Donnell laughed. "That's easy," he said, "but I'll answer it with another question. When the scientists were looking for a name for the most deadly gas used in the war what did they pick?"

"You tell me."

"Mustard. As you perhaps know, there is no mustard in mustard gas, though the gas itself has some of the effects of mustard in an intensified and deadly way. For instance, mustard is extremely pungent; it penetrates anything, clothing, shoes, even the skin with rapidity, and, as it goes, it destroys all other odors. Which also describes the effect of the war gas, only that had, in addition, lethal elements."

"How does this all apply to bloodhounds?"

"I'm getting to that. Oil of mustard not only destroys all other odors quickly, but it also nauseates. Now if you want to kill your trail so a bloodhound can't get it just saturate the bottoms of your shoes with oil of mustard, especially the instep, for, as you must know, it is from the instep that most of the smell comes. Then, to make it sure, tie a rag soaked with oil of mustard on the outside of the instep—and you're safe."

"Ah—huh!" The colonel pondered deeply. He was silent a long while.

Finally Donnell asked, "Is that why you hired me, governor?"

The banker's answer was not direct. "I do love those dawgs," he said. "Reckon I'll try mustard on 'em first thing in the morning."

Donnell repeated his question.

Colonel Cliff smiled broadly. "No, Joe," he said, amiably, "I hired you because you've got a sense of humor."

"Don't you mean sense of honor?" countered Donnell.

"I reckon it was a combination of the two."

Again silence. At length the new protective manager of the Southern Bankers' Association put a hypothetical question to his chief. "If you happened to find out," he inquired, "that a certain man had robbed your bank wouldn't it make you an accomplice after the fact if you failed to arrest him and, instead, went on doing business with him?"

"Yes," responded Colonel Cliff, "if that were strictly true it would, but you must

remember that both in law and in fact suspicion is not proof. We feel positive of many things we can't prove, and it would be folly to make a charge of guilt without legal proof.

"I'll illustrate what I mean. Once my bank was robbed. There were no clews to the robbers; I failed utterly to trace them. The next day I traveled north and met on the train a man I couldn't forget. A certain force of intelligence and what I thought was integrity in his countenance impressed me. Later my friend, Mr. Nearing of the government service, described to me a crook he had been striving for years to catch, a crook grown up in the business of crime, a professional who looked on robbing banks as a legitimate game in which he excelled —the penalty for failure in which meant imprisonment. I thought I recognized in that description the friend I had met casually on the train. Do you follow me?"

"I sure do," uncomfortably responded Donnell.

"Later, in a Western city, I happened to meet this man. The circumstances of that meeting and of what followed were such that I became satisfied he was the fellow who had cracked my safe—and yet legal proof was lacking. Now get this straight—I still am without proof and the only proof I can conceive getting would be his confession. Do you understand?"

"Trust me, governor."

"One thing more. I firmly believe that habitual criminals, if they persist in their trade beyond a certain age, usually around forty, are subnormal. It's a lack of brain development. If they are normal they usually quit around forty, barring accidents. Do you remember that when you went to work for Castle, in Detroit, he asked you to submit to a brain and nerve test?"

"Sure, and they told me I came out A 1."

"If you hadn't I wouldn't be talking to you now."

Donnell, for the first time, showed excitement. "Look here, governor, if you've been on my trail all this time, that faro layout must have been a plant. Was it?"

"No," laughed the Southerner, "that was my lucky draw—same as the diamond brooch was yours."

Again silence for a long time. Finally Donnell remarked as if after profound thought, "Well, governor, I intend to devote my life to proving your theory sound; but if, at any time, I come up against a tough temptation, I'm simply going to remember that you can't play cards against a man who has both luck and science. So I'll never sit into any game less'n I'm your partner!"

A FOOTBALL ROMANCE

ON the campus of the University of Georgia at Athens, Georgia, stands the only memorial ever put up by one university in honor of a player on another university's football team. This monument, which was unveiled last November, was given to Georgia by the University of Virginia's athletic association in honor of Von Gammon, the famous Georgia full back who was killed in the 1907 game between the Georgia and Virginia teams on the Georgia field.

Because of Gammon's death, a country-wide campaign was made against college football. It was carried into Congress, the Chicago city council and State legislatures. Medical journals and some of the biggest newspapers in the country took it up. The person who prevented the Georgia legislature from passing a law prohibiting the game in that State forever was Von Gammon's mother, of Rome, Georgia. In spite of her grief at the loss of her son, she appealed to the governor and to the legislature not to abolish football, saying that she would permit her other sons to play the game and that she considered it a fine and manly sport. Mrs. Gammon's generosity and self-sacrifice took all the snap out of the fight against the game and soon no more was heard of it.

The Love Call

By Austin Hall

Author of "From a Line of Kings," and other stories

A tale of a *Jekyll* and *Hyde* of the animal kingdom

THE coyote watched. For days now he had waited in the shade of the pinnacle where he could burrow with the cool sand sifting through his coat and sniff the soft breeze that carried the sheep scent. He knew the seasons of the year and he could tell, almost to the day, the time of the sheep's arrival. It was not the first time that he had waited; the sheep had not come yet, so he slept; the breeze said nothing.

It was a fine place to sleep; and when he was not sleeping it was just as comfortable to crouch with his head between his paws and watch the valley below him—his own valley, the place of all places where he would have chosen to live had he been a man thing. He had been born somewhere near the pinnacle.

Sometimes he thought back; and when he did, he brought out of the dim recesses of memory a vague picture of his puppyhood—a black hole full of snapping, romping brothers and sisters—and a chaotic recollection of alternate feasting and starvation, all of which he had endured better than his fellow puppies. From the start he had been different. It had often puzzled him why his coat was of a ruddy glow of gold, whereas that of his brother coyotes was but a somber gray. Even as a puppy he had been marked from his fellows; he was stronger, quicker, and more beautiful. From the day of his birth—when he had fought for and had won the best place next to his mother's flank—he had had the best of the good things in the world of the coyotes. His intelligence and his cunning were above those of his kind; and he had reason to know that the degree of his craftiness had passed to the notice of the dreaded man things.

His fame had passed into a name. Men called him Shag, because of the glossy coat that distinguished him from the other coyotes. He was a rascal, if there ever was one; and he was just as beautiful as he was bad. Whenever men sat in the twilight and told tales of coyote cunning the name of Shag was sure to come up; and when his name was mentioned the other coyotes would be forgotten. Because he was of the wild and was a personification they could not but admire him; they were men and, being men, they could forget their hate when they thought of him as the king of coyotes.

But there was another reason for his fame. In the years past, a famous shepherd dog had slipped out into the wilds during breeding season; Shag had found her and for a month had roamed with her over the hills, romping under the moon in a canine honeymoon much to his liking. And when the puppies had come, the sheepman, knowing the sire and wondering whether the craftiness of the wild might not be utilized in the sheepfold, had given them individual attention. Some called it folly; but the result proved that, for once at least, a cross had been made that brought out the best, instead of the worst, of the parents.

The puppies had grown into splendid, intelligent creatures; and they and their descendants had become the greatest strain of sheep dogs on the western ranges. To-day, while Shag waited under the pinnacle, a Shag puppy was worth five hundred dollars. And the name of the strain had redounded to the fame of the sire.

The sheep were coming southward. And Shag knew it. What he did not know was that they were being driven by Shag shepherds, that his own descendants were guarding and protecting the herds of the sheepmen. The sheepmen were proud of their dogs; and were it not for his relentless cunning and his terrible habits they would have been proud of Shag himself.

Nevertheless, for all of his habits, Shag loved sheep. Being mostly coyote and one fourth shepherd, there were many things

that he could not understand. He had two natures. One was wild, cruel and relentless; while the other was full of tenderness. Often he would sit and watch the flocks of woolly fleece browsing in the valley, with the dogs watching—always watching. Had he not been born a coyote he would have been a shepherd—to be with the sheep always, to walk in their spoor and to follow in their scent was about the greatest happiness that he could conceive of. When his stomach was full the good part of his nature came up and he was full of tenderness.

But when he was hungry he was another being entirely. It was then that he was puzzled. Then it was that his instincts turned to killing. When he was hungry he could not understand the dogs nor their motive: the dogs ate the scraps of the man thing and were his slaves; but he had never seen them eat sheep. And what must life be without fresh mutton!

In this spirit he would sneak down and make his kill, practicing a cunning that was the despair of the sheepmen. Once he had stolen a dozen sheep and had driven them into the mountains. It had been a dastardly feat in the eyes of the man things, but a great one to the shepherd-coyote. The capture of the twelve sheep had set him out on his greatest ambition—to become a dog and a shepherd. He would be a master!

A shepherd and a master! A thousand sheep that he could call his own! A flock of blatting, baaing beauties that he could watch and tend under the night and the stars! Whether hungry or replenished, coyote or shepherd, it was always the same dream. As a coyote his dream was cruel, and full of blood and fresh mutton; as a shepherd it was full of love, tenderness and solicitude. But the dream was ever the same—sheep, sheep, nothing but sheep! Shag loved sheep!

But how to go about it? The dogs were watching, always watching—and there were the man things and the bang sticks. It was death to go near the flocks. How was he to steal a whole band from under the eyes of man things? That was something that he could not tell; but he was of the wild and he had the patience of the hunted.

And he had need for all his patience; because, just when he had nursed his ambition up to its highest pitch, the sheep suddenly disappeared.

Shag knew nothing of the man things beyond the fact that they were terrible creatures and the constituted lords of creation. He did not know that the valley that he called home was the property of a great government and that the sheepmen and their flocks held no title other than a grazing one. Neither did he know that there were cattlemen who considered the sheep and the sheepmen as the vermin of the ranges. He had never heard of politics nor the tricks that men will employ when a valley of rich pasture is the stake to be played for. Much less did he dream of a war between the man things.

All he knew was that one fall, when the sheep should have returned, their place had been taken by cattle; instead of the walking sheep-herders there had come man things on horses, fierce men, who rode fast and shot true and who made his life a precarious one. For two years Shag had lived without a taste of mutton. Each year, when the rains had come and the grass in the valley was fresh and tender, he had waited under the pinnacle with his nose pointed to the north, sniffing for the sheep scent. But each time cattle had come in at the southern end of the valley. And there had been no sheep.

Nevertheless Shag had never given up hope. On the third year he had climbed the pinnacle and waited. Something told him that this year it would be sheep, not cattle. He waited long and patiently, as is the way of the wild, when on the sixth day he held up his head and sniffed of the north wind. A pleasant sensation tickled his nostrils—the sheep were coming!

Shag wagged his tail. There was no doubt of it. The north wind had traveled far; but it was bearing the message of the approaching flocks. For some moments he stood poised, alert, eager, drinking the wind. And then—his heart burst forth in gladness and he howled his welcome. After that he slept.

When he awoke there was something in the air that he could not understand. The wind had veered to the south. Where there had been the scent of sheep there was now a different odor. The air had changed. He smelled cattle. Cattle coming from the south!

For hours he sat under the pinnacle and brooded over the problem.

And then again the wind veered, the scent changed and once again it was sheep. This

time they were closer; so close that he could almost hear the bells, jingling, tinkling, musical, cadent with silver sound. It was coming out of the mountains to the northward. He could hear sheep, a perfect babel of blatting—the plaintive baaing of the flocks. And then they came all at once. A great white wave burst out at the foot of the mountains, burst and spread fanwise into the valley. The air rang with the tinkling bells, the barking of the dogs and the call of the Basque sheep-herders; even the donkeys were there with their canvas-covered packs that held the camp that would be spread at nightfall. Wagons brought up the rear. He watched the flocks break into units and spread out—each flock drifting to its own particular feeding ground.

It was a beautiful sight to Shag; he lay still, silent, watching, eager, never moving, with his ears pricked up to catch the slightest sound of the welcome babel; he loved sheep; whether as a coyote or a shepherd they were always the center and motif of his dreams. Just now he was lean and hungry and a wolf; and as he was hungry his dream was of warm and blood-dripping mutton. The lust of killing gripped his vitals and submerged the one fourth shepherd that he had inherited from his domesticated grandparent. Hunger knows no compromise; and when his hunger was uppermost Shag was ever the wolf.

But while he watched the wind veered suddenly, and shifted to the south and, as before, Shag scented cattle. There was no doubt of it now—the scent was heavy. He stood up and watched; and as he watched he beheld the head of a black wedge coming through the pass. Then he beheld the man things riding on horses, many of them —and they were coming in advance of the cattle. They were the most dreaded of man things, who rode fast and shot true; they were far more dangerous than the humble sheepmen. Shag could not understand.

He did not know that there was a dispute over the valley range and that down in their hearts many of the men were not much better than the animals that they herded. Shag had never seen a sheep and cattle war. He did not know that the man things riding on horses would kill a sheepman, when it came to a matter of range, just as quickly as they would a coyote.

When the sun had set, the coyote, keeping one eye on the riders, descended from the pinnacle and stole up to the nearest flock. The man things riding on horses were still coming from the south; there were many of them and they were headed straight for the flocks. Shag was afraid of these particular man things; but his fear was not as great as his hunger. He was determined to dine, that night, on mutton; but he knew that he could do it only through the exercise of supercunning. Accordingly, when he was close enough, he hid himself under a sagebrush to await the outcome of affairs among the man things.

Now Shag was only a coyote and he could only reason from a lupine standpoint. He had never known such a thing as a fight among the man things and he did not believe it possible. Yet that is just what he saw in the next few minutes. The man things on horses were riding swiftly—they dashed past him in a galloping blur, rode straight up to the flock and without a word began charging through the sheep, shooting, shouting and maiming.

The great flock buckled, milled about, stampeded and milled again. Shag heard the baas of the wounded and the barking of the dogs—and he saw the sheepman running up in defense of his flock. There were calls and shouts from the man things. The dogs dashed at the man things riding on horses and were killed, one by one, by the terrible bang sticks. He watched the dogs rolling over and over. Many times had he seen coyotes picked out of a run by the dreaded bang sticks; but never before had he seen them turned on the dogs. One of the man things leaped from his horse and attacked the sheepman; another joined him and they rolled over and over, fighting like coyotes. Presently the two men got up; but the sheepman lay still. There were now no dogs and no sheepman. Then the men remounted their horses and rode away.

It was the first time that Shag knew that the man things on horses were the enemies of the man things who drove the sheep. All his life he had regarded the man things and feared them—they were crafty and full of guile, above fighting; but now—they were even as he—they were coyotes!

Shag waited. It was dark and there was no sound; the sheep were huddled together. The stars came out, one by one; and the air was soft with the desert night. The sight had been so unusual that he re-

doubled his caution; to the north he heard the yipping of coyotes; he smelled blood.

It reminded him of his hunger. He had come for mutton. He sneaked forward. Suddenly he stopped and sniffed, his hair standing on end. But the thing that had startled him lay still; there was no answer, no defiance. Shag stepped up. It was the body of a dog: a few minutes before he had seen that dog running and full of life. And now—— It was a mystery that he could not understand—the work of the bang stick. All the dogs were dead! When he had made sure of that he sought out a wounded sheep, a fat wether, and dragged him down. Then he ate.

It was the first full meal of mutton that he had had for two whole years; for an hour he gorged himself with blood and tender morsels. Then he stretched himself out to consider. It had come so swiftly that he did not understand; coyotewise as he was he could not comprehend the man things. Why had they fought? And where was the sheepman?

He stood up and sniffed; there was no difficulty in finding where the man lay—the full moon was tipping the mountains in the east. The man was prone upon his back with his arms thrown outward; his face was ghastly in the light of the rising moon. Shag crept up to the body and sniffed again; he drew back, snarling. The man was not dead; and he was afraid of him—afraid of the man thing! He had learned from experience that any man, not dead, is dangerous.

He returned to the sheep. The full moon had lifted itself over the mountains and the air was full of soft light. Once he heard shots in the distance, followed by shouts. Then silence.

He listened. But there was no more sound, no more shooting. He stepped up to the flock, and surveyed it. It was the first time that he had ever been so close to the sheep when he was not hungry. He loved sheep, both to eat and to care for. All his life he had yearned for this moment; he had had many yearning moments; but always, hitherto, he had yearned from a distance. Now he was with the sheep—*his sheep!*

Shag wagged his tail. The shepherd in his soul had come up and conquered. Now that he was full-bellied he was a coyote no longer; he was a dog, a shepherd—a master! He trotted up close. The sheep were frightened; they blatted and milled in terror; but what of it? He whined softly and ran his muzzle into the oily fleece; he could teach them and he could love them! They were his own—Shag's sheep! Then in a very exultation of love and happiness he ran three times about the great flock, capering and gamboling in the light of the moon and giving thanks to the god of good things!

For Shag had answered the love call. The coyote ethics of his nature had been submerged and washed by a divine effusion that came out of his inner self—he was a guardian and a protector. That which he had formerly yearned and longed for was at last a reality. It was love! Sheep! Sheep! A thousand bleating, baaing beauties! All his! Shag's sheep!

His heart beat fast with pride and exultation; his head went up and he stood back where he could get a full view of his charges. The full moon lit up the fleece; it was animated, undulated like a moving sea. The sheep milled restlessly—they were afraid. Shag whined softly and lay down to consider.

For he was crafty. It was the proudest moment of his life; but he knew that it would not last unless he could outwit the man things. He had been hunted all his life and he knew that the cunning of the man things never ceased. If the sheepman should awaken it would be the end of Shag.

He stood up and listened. Again in the north, coming nearer, he heard the yipping of coyotes. It was a cold-blooded call; it sent a chill to his very marrow. He growled wickedly, his hair standing on end and his lips curling back from his fangs. Coyotes!

Never had he hated before. He had thought that he had hated the man things; but it had never been such a feeling as this. His heart went black. He knew coyotes and the ways of the wild—they were after blood—they had scented it even as he. They were after his sheep! Had he been a mother he would have known the feeling that stirred within him—it was the yearning to shield the weaklings—the yearning that had called the first wolf down to the sheepfold. It was the love call!

Shag had crossed a bridge of centuries. He was a coyote no longer; he was a shepherd; he hated the wild; henceforth, the wild and all it contained was his enemy. His hair bristled. The blood call drew nearer. He snarled viciously and held up

his head to catch the wolf scent. How well he knew that yelp, what it meant and where it led to! How often had he, himself, caught the unwary sheep and dragged them down! Then would come the drinking of blood and the eating in at the rump and the glorious gorge in the moonlight! He had been a king of coyotes. He was still a king!

When the call had come just so close, Shag circled the sheep. They milled like a troubled sea; their dogs were gone; they seemed to know that they were defenseless. They were afraid of Shag. A thousand flat-slitted eyes glared out at him. But Shag kept on. Once on the other side he trotted out into the desert and stopped beside a sagebrush.

He was coyotewise and a terrible foe; he knew the ways of the coyotes. He could call them; and he could answer their call. He stood stiff-legged, ears pricked up, eyes peering. When they were just so close he shook his head, coyote style, and let out an answering bedlam of yips. It was instantaneous, startling and enough to wake the dead—and it was a death call! The coyotes answered and trotted up close. There were three. Shag was a king! He was larger than they and stronger. And he had always ruled among the coyotes. He gave no warning.

The first one he struck flankwise, rolled him over and had his throat slit in one rush. It was a death stroke that he had often dealt; it was sure, quick, fatal—almost a single movement. He knew the ways of coyotes—the second would rush him; but the third would flee. He wanted all three. Just as the second leaped, Shag caught his rush. He was borne back on his hind legs but his superior strength told—the coyote went down a snapping, coughing mass with his throat slit. The third turned and darted into the sagebrush.

But Shag was a coyote as well as a dog—he could outrun even a coyote and he could outwit him in cunning. Therefore, when he gave chase and had come just so close, he beat the coyote at his own game. He had been a coyote too long himself not to know just what the other would do; he knew the time and he knew the moment; so that when the coyote shifted, he anticipated him by the split of a second and met him with open jaws. It was over in a twinkling.

The next instant Shag was walking back in the moonlight. His head was up and his tail was jaunty. It was his first battle in behalf of his sheep. It was a proud moment. He was a lord and a protector. Henceforth he must fight the coyotes as well as the man things! It was all a dream coming true; it was hazy, and indistinct, but it was wonderful! He returned to the flock, trotted about it and smelled it. He rubbed his flanks along the oily fleece, whining softly; by degrees he insinuated himself into their favor. He walked like a dog and acted as he had seen the dogs act. After a bit the sheep ceased milling. He was cunning enough to know that he must instill them with confidence; if they would accept him as a dog he could drive them wherever he willed. When he had them quieted he sought out the man thing.

The sheepman was where he had fallen; he was very close to death, with a ghastly mark where the butt of a revolver had crashed against the skull. Shag approached cautiously, stalking close to the body, sniffing. His wild instinct knew enough of the ways of the dying—he had seen a great deal of it—but something told him that this man would live. Had Shag been an ordinary coyote—and a hungry one—he might have finished him; but he was one fourth shepherd and the shepherd part of his nature drew him up to the man thing.

Shag had always hated a man; he had waged fierce warfare against his flocks and had pitted his wild cunning against the ingenuity and resourcefulness of his enemy. But never before had he been up close. And there was one thing that he did not know. The sheepman, John Thorpe, was a splendid man and a lover of animals; there was no man in the country with a greater heart nor a kinder nature. He even liked old Shag; and had it not been as a measure of defense he would never have sought his life. The price upon Shag's head was of Shag's own setting; there was no doubt of his crimes. John Thorpe was a sheepman; Shag was a killer; Shag had to go.

A dog has an instinct that approaches divination. Trust a dog to tell a good man from a bad one. Shag had never been so close to a man thing. The man lay prone, helpless. Shag grew bolder. Cautiously, he advanced, step by step, until the tip of his cold nose touched the cheek of the man

thing. And at that moment a change came over old Shag.

Perhaps it was the strain of dog that he had inherited from his grandmother; or again, it may have been that strange affinity that had brought the first wolf down to the fold of the man thing. From the beginning there has been a tie between the canine and the human. Shag felt that tie. Here was love—love where he did not expect it. He did not know that the man was a lover of the wild, of pets, animals, what not. The man was a shepherd, even as he. Both loved the lowly, the weak, the helpless. It was the scent of love—the tie that is stronger than all things else.

For a moment Shag lay down and watched the man thing. It was wonderful to be so close. The scent was good and it seemed to fill him. His tongue lopped out and he looked up at the moon. He snuggled up close to the prostrate form and sniffed again. Could it be that this was the pay of the dog? He had often watched the dogs and the man things; and he had always thought that the dogs were unrewarded. Now he knew better. It was love that held them—the love of the man thing! That was why a dog served his master. The spirit of the thing, and the understanding, filled Shag's soul. Willingly would he have been a dog.

But he was old and, as he was old, he was also crafty. He was of the hunted—and there can be no compromise between the wild and the man things. Strongly as he was drawn by this strange bond, he knew that it was not for him. Therefore he withdrew and returned to his sheep.

The moon was now high in the night. The sheep had settled and were resting quietly, their white mass spread like a great fleecy blanket upon the desert floor. Shag ran up to them and smelled them once more and rubbed his flanks against the fleece. He was eager now, joyous, deliberate. He had nothing to fear. They were his sheep and they would go where he would drive them. He panted with happiness, his tongue lolling out while he circled the flock on his last detour. Then he stood to one side.

He was a dog now. Like a dog he barked—sharp, suddenly, imperatively. The sheep stood up. They were wonderful; it seemed too good to be true! The flock undulated and vibrated like a living thing—awaiting the commands of its master. For a moment Shag stood stiff-legged—gloriously proud, his tail up, his eyes shining. The next minute he was driving his sheep, first running the sides to give them direction, then bringing up in the rear. The flock began moving, the dust lifted and the air was full of bells.

He drove them to the northwest, toward the head of the valley, deliberately heading for the mountains. There was no trouble with the sheep and no confusion; he knew the pace at which they could travel best and he knew the way that was shortest. Whenever there was any varying from the course he was there to correct it, running along the flanks and then bringing up in the rear. Always he barked—joyously—singing a pæan of victory!

At the head of the valley they entered a creek bed that led into the mountains and for hours followed its course under the mellow light of the moon. Twice that night he battled with coyotes. When the moon had set he drove his flock into a cove where there was feed and water. Then he lay down to sleep with one eye and to watch with the other.

But now a new problem came up to Shag. The long night and the excitement had made him hungry. He had thought that he was a shepherd; but when he lay down and had time to consider he remembered, suddenly, that he was a coyote. For months he had lived on a lean, sparse diet. He was lean and bony. Wherefore, the food that he had absorbed the night before had been quickly assimilated. A sudden pang of hunger shot up from his vitals; and in a twinkling the shepherd had become the coyote.

He could not understand. He had been happy, before, and would not have harmed one of his fleecy beauties for all the world; and now—he still loved sheep but it was in a different manner. He was too canine to attempt reasoning; he only knew that it was so. He loved sheep for blood and mutton; hunger made him the wolf.

But Fate was kind to Shag; had he been ravenous he might have plunged among the sheep and terrified them beyond handling; as it was, he was just hungry enough to render him a mild coyote—a killer, to be sure, but possessed, for all that, with some of the tender instinct of the shepherd. Wherefore he was both cunning and kind in his killing. He sought out a fat wether, cut him out of the flock and drove him beyond the

rocks of a near-by gully, where, once he had him alone, he dragged him down and killed him. After that he breakfasted. When he returned to the sheep his head was up and his tail jaunty.

All through the day the sheep browsed in the cove, spread out contentedly, eating and napping alternately. Shag trotted in and out among them, rubbing against their flanks —always making friends. He had the sagacity of the wild and the kindness of the shepherd; he knew sheep, and—now that his belly was full—he understood the quality and the greatness of love. Love was his master; he loved sheep and he wanted their love in return.

When he was not treading among them, making friends, he was sleeping. He had his old dreams, wonderful dreams of sheep, phantasms of splendid pastures and fleecy folds. And when he awoke, the reality of his happiness transcended his fondest illusions. Life was good to Shag. It was good to live, to repose thus, basking in the sun, sleeping, watching and scenting the wind as it drifted down the cañons. If the sheep strayed, he got up quietly, crossed to them and edged them back to the fold. His instinct and sagacity were contagious; the bond of his love was rewarded by the trust of his charges.

He was of the wild no longer. From the first hour he had to fight back the carnivorous host that headed in to share the feast of the slaughtered wether. Throughout the day his rest was broken. He had been of the wild himself and he knew that it was not to be trusted. A dead wolf is a good wolf; and Shag knew it. He killed always and in each killing he received a twofold pleasure. He had the lust of battle, the hate that is born of love—the hate that burns in the shepherd's heart. Never had he known such hate nor such pleasure in killing. The world had changed; his love had given his life a new perspective; he hated all things but his sheep.

When the sun was setting and the ridges to the west took on the color of umber and gold he drove the sheep out of the cove and into the creek bed. Once more he headed into the mountains, keeping straight on until the walls of the cañon were crowding close and the great flock had thinned to a long line that threaded and climbed through the narrow defile. By midnight they had reached the region of torrent waters and cataclysmic grandeur—huge walls of granite, fallen pine trees, tossed-up bowlders—everything twisted and torn, majestic —a chaos of confusion. Still Shag kept on, with the full moon overhead to light him through the craggy wilderness.

He knew sheep out of his instinct and he loved to drive them; whenever the leaders hesitated, and the narrow way was blocked, he leaped upon their packed backs and ran over the carpet of fleece to the bell sheep in front. Always he drove them into the mountains, up, up, toward the snow line, until the way was blocked by huge walls of lava rock that rose sheer and stupendous into the moonlit night; then he skirted the cliffs until the wall was broken by a fissure, from which a cascade of snow water rushed out over the rocks and leaped to the depths below.

Deftly, he turned the sheep into the gorge and, when the last one had entered, brought up the rear. The floor of the pass was smooth and washed by water and the walls cut off the moonlight. The bells tinkled echoed music and the patter of thousands of feet rang in the passage. Then, suddenly, the walls fell away and once more the air was sweet with the scent of the open, rich with the odor of luscious pastures. They had come out upon the floor of an old crater. The moon had gone down; the sky to the east was paling to pink and azure. They had finished their journey; Shag had stolen the great flock.

They were Shag's sheep!

Thereafter followed many happy days. With nothing to do but watch the sheep and protect them Shag had about gained the canine elysium. He knew that he was safe, that the crater was unknown and beyond the ken of the man things; all he had to do was to watch his charges and protect them. It was good to sleep with one eye open, to watch always and to fight and kill the creatures that came down to devour his loved ones. He was a shepherd and with his love to inspire him he was a terrible fighter. Just how great his ability was as a fighter may be instanced by his battle with a panther, which by many is considered the king beast of the mountains.

When the panther came down, one night, Shag killed him; not in a straight-out fight, to be sure, but by matching his love-born cunning against the killing instinct of his

feline foe. He had been a coyote too long to fight at a disadvantage; so, when the cat crept up, he slunk off like a cur and placed himself in a place where the wind was against him. It was a hard moment; but he knew that it would be his last, if he made a mistake. He loved his sheep and it was the supreme test of his love when he let the panther attack them.

He waited until the panther had a ewe down and had its claws tangled in the wool; then he leaped upon him. He lost all reason and caution; but in that moment he reaped the reward of his previous cunning. He caught the panther unawares and from behind—and for once in his life he fought like a cat. Instead of striving for the jugular he clenched his powerful jaws at the base of the skull, crushing the bones and breaking the spinal marrow. He felt the lust of death and of victory and he hung on until the spasmodic convulsions of his enemy threw him out of his hold. But he had won. By dint of cunning he had outwitted the most terrible fighter of the mountains!

Nevertheless it taught him a lesson. He had been a coyote and most of his life he had run with a mate. It was hard to be awake always and to be forever watching. He still had a lingering distrust of the man things. And he knew that there was not a living thing in the world, outside of the sheep, that was not his enemy. His instinct as well as his cunning told him that he must have a mate if he were to hold the flock in safety. And besides, he knew that only in that way could he achieve the full happiness that he had dreamed of.

It was then that he remembered the shepherd dog with whom he had run in the moonlight. He was a dog, now, even as she—and as a dog he would share with her in his flock's affection. Together they could gambol in the moonlight, watch the sheep, guard them and fight back the creatures that stole through from the mountains. Once more Shag's heart was great with ambition; and once again he went down to pit his cunning against the man things.

So he returned to the lowlands. One night, just as the dusk was falling, he trotted down from the hills and hid himself in a patch of alfalfa. A half mile away lay a little house under some cottonwoods. Cows were passing through the yards and a dog was barking. When Shag heard that bark a feeling of hunger and longing shot up from his heart. She had been his mate in those nights gone by—she had loved him—and together they had run under the light of the stars! But that was a long time ago when he was still a coyote. He was a dog now, even as she! She must be his mate—he could have no other—he must have a mate who would love his sheep!

He waited.

The stars came out and the beams of the rising moon tinged the mountains to the eastward. When the lights of the man things had gone out he stole toward the farmhouse and gave his call. The dog barked in answer, startled at first, then coming closer. Again he barked; and again he caught her answer.

When he was certain of her approach he trotted away and lay down beside a sage bush. The dog came close, sniffing—hair bristling. Shag waited, his tail up at its proudest angle, his eyes glowing. When she saw who he was she, ladylike, became interested in something else; she ran to another bush and lay down. Shag wagged his tail. He whimpered and ran over to her, whining softly.

But she did not understand.

He touched noses with her and repeated his crooning. Then he stood up and, in the most approved manner, ran about in the moonlight. He gamboled and circled and capered, running rings about her, dragging his tail—darting in and out. She lay still, her eyes following—always watching. He pounced in, put his head between his paws and yelped out barks of invitation. And at last, in very exuberance, he rushed in, seized her neck in a friendly bite and rolled her over. Then she too sprang into action. She leaped up, snapping, and joined in his play. They ran in circles, leaped together and tumbled over and over.

But Shag was crafty; while he was playing, he was at the same time using his cunning. He took good care that each circle and play took them farther from the farmhouse. At length he broke into a long run with the shepherd loping at his side—it was his way of telling her of his wonderful secret, of the life that would be theirs in the old crater. For a while she ran with him, contented, her tongue lolling out, racing. Then, suddenly, she stopped.

Again Shag went through his canine persuasion, displaying his proudest antics. He

capered and circled and crouched and leaped and made the air ring with his barking. But the dog held still; after a bit, she whimpered and turned and started back to the farmhouse.

He endeavored to head her off. At first he ran beside her, crowding her and turning her back to the foothills. But always she drew back, dodged and resumed her direction. When he saw that he could not guide her he lost his temper and made a show of force, baring his teeth in a pretense of warning. Which was a mistake, because she was a female and he could not bite her. All he got was a vicious snap on the ear. She bit quickly and ran all the faster. They brought up where they had started.

But now that they were back, she was ready to play again. Shag had the patience of cunning. He repeated the maneuvers and the antics by which he hoped to win her. Always he tried to tell her of the wonderful life up in the mountains, of the sheep and of the liberty that would be theirs forever. But he failed. Each time he brought her to the foothills; and each time she stopped and dashed back to the farmhouse. Shag had patience but the morning came without his winning.

So he returned to the crater and to his sheep.

Though he was disappointed, he did not despair. He knew that the time would come when he could go down and by dint of his antics coax her into the mountains. Then his dream would come true—all of it—and even more than he had dreamed. He would wait.

As it happened, he did not have to wait long. The time came, not long after, that brought an end to his dream. For he had forgotten the man things!

One day he had driven his flock close to the cleft that led from the crater. It was a warm, fine day. The sun said noon. The sheep were scattered here and there, as is the manner of sheep, and Shag was watching.

He had waited many days in just this manner, scenting the air and reading the breeze as it drifted in from the mountains. He was alert, ready; he could detect the slightest sound or the faintest odor. Just now he was standing straight—listening.

Something had entered the cleft. He could hear the touch and the patter of feet upon the washed floor of the chasm. He knew the sound and he caught the odor. For a moment he stood still, stiff-legged, proudly waiting. It was too good to be true. The shepherd dog was coming—the dog of his love and the pet of his dreams! He was too canine to reason into the why of her coming—he did not know that she was scenting him out for the man things.

The next instant her brown body flashed into the sunlight. Shag ran forward. At the sight of his bouncing body she stopped still and stood poised, waiting. He ran up close, eyes shining. At that moment it seemed that all the world had come to Shag. In the climax of his happiness he lost all his cunning—his scent went dead. He did not hear the other sounds coming up the cleft, the patter of many feet and the heavy treading coming after. And he had forgotten about the man things!

The shepherd dog stood still, whining. Shag stepped up close and touched her nose; he whimpered. He did not see the dogs, many of them, coming out of the cleft. They were dogs, ruddy and beautiful, even as he—Shag shepherds! His eagerness and ecstasy had robbed him of caution. They were upon him before he knew.

It was almost tragic. In that last battle he gave a good account of himself; but he never had a chance. They outnumbered him and, once they had him down, they had no mercy. Being his own descendants, grandsons and great-grandsons, they were killers, even as he. They had been trained to kill the wild things—and Shag was a coyote.

But John Thorpe was a lover of animals; when he came upon the scene he drove off the dogs and picked up the bleeding Shag. He knew Shag as a coyote and as the sire of his shepherds. The fact that the sheep were intact meant a great deal to the sheepman.

"Boys," he said to his companions, "I am going to keep him. He's not dead yet. He is the sire of the greatest strain of sheep dogs that ever lived. He saved my sheep. He's a foxy old coyote; but he's a lot 'dog.' He has taught us that love can tame even the wolf. Let us thank old Shag!"

In the next number an unusual story of the ring by Mr. Hall, "The Old Master."

The Red Redmaynes

By Eden Phillpotts

Author of "The Gray Room," "Children of the Mist," Etc.

WHAT HAPPENED IN PREVIOUS CHAPTERS.

Mark Brendon of Scotland Yard, on vacation on Dartmoor, was appealed to by Jenny Pendean, whom he had seen and admired, to solve the mystery of the disappearance of her husband, Michael. Her uncle, Robert Redmayne, whom Brendon had met casually, was suspected of murdering him in a half-built bungalow in a lonely district near Princetown. From Jenny, Mark learned that Robert and his two brothers, Albert, a bookworm who lived in Italy, and Bendigo, a retired sea captain, had objected to her marrying Pendean because he had not wanted to fight in the war, and also learned that she would inherit the fortunes of her three uncles. Shortly before her husband's disappearance she had met her uncle Robert, who had suffered shell shock in the war, and as Michael had done good civilian service Robert had seemed to forget his bitterness and had invited them both to meet his fiancée, Flora Reed, who was staying at a near-by resort. Upon investigating Michael's disappearance Brendon found a pool of blood in the bungalow, and the police reported that a man answering to the description of Robert Redmayne had been seen riding a motor cycle with a large sack strapped behind the saddle. Brendon did his best but failed—Pendean's body could not be found and Redmayne, mad or sane, had eluded the police and probably escaped from England. Some months later Brendon visited Jenny at her uncle Bendigo's house, Crow's Nest, near Dartmouth, and the old sailor showed him a letter from Robert confessing that the latter had "done in" Pendean. More than the mystery was bothering Brendon when he left Crow's Nest—he loved Jenny and she seemed to be interested in Doria, a handsome Italian boatman employed by her uncle. Then, as he passed through the woods near the house, Brendon saw Robert Redmayne leaning on a gate. A meeting of the brothers in Robert's hiding place, a cave by the sea, was arranged by Jenny—a meeting from which Bendigo never returned. Doria had taken him to the cave in a launch and left the brothers together. Later he told Brendon that when he had returned for Bendigo he had found the cave empty. Brendon and the police investigated; in the cave they found a blot of blood and marks of a struggle, and in a rough passageway traces of a heavy body having been dragged to the cliffs above. But neither Robert Redmayne nor the body of his brother could be found. Albert Redmayne arrived from Italy but could throw no light on the mystery—he could only regret that his friend Peter Ganns, an American detective, was not on the scene. Later Brendon learned that Jenny and Doria had been married. Some months after that Jenny wrote to Brendon at her uncle's suggestion that she had seen Robert Redmayne near Albert Redmayne's house in Italy, asked his help and suggested that he bring Peter Ganns, then in London, with him. Ganns and Brendon went to Italy at once and were welcomed by Albert Redmayne and his friend Virgilio Poggi, who lived near him. Jenny told Brendon that she was not happy with her husband. Ganns was of the opinion that Brendon had been misled all through the case, and as he suspected both Doria and Jenny and feared for Albert's life, took the latter to England, leaving Brendon on watch.

(A Five-Part Story—Part IV.)

CHAPTER XIV.

REVOLVER AND PICKAX.

WHILE Brendon entertained no sort of regard for Giuseppe Doria, his balanced mind allowed him to view the man with impartial justice. He discounted the fact of the Italian's victory in love, and because he knew himself to be an unsuccessful rival was the more jealous that disappointment should not create any bias. But Doria had failed to make Jenny a happy wife; he now knew that well enough, and he could not forget that some future advantage to himself might accrue from this circumstance. The girl's attitude had changed; he was not blind and could not fail to note it. For the present, however, he smothered his own interests and strove with all his strength to advance solution of the problems before him. He was specially desirous to furnish important information for Peter Ganns on his return.

He did what his judgment indicated but failed to find any sufficient reasons for linking Doria with the mystery or associating him with Robert Redmayne. For despite Peter's luminous analysis Mark still regarded the unknown as Albert Redmayne's brother; and he could find no reasonable present ar-

gument for associating Giuseppe with this person, either at present or in the past. Everything rather pointed in a contrary direction. Brendon traversed the incidents connected with Bendigo Redmayne's disappearance, yet he could recall nothing suspicious about Giuseppe's conduct at Crow's Nest; and if it seemed unreasonable to suppose he had taken a hand in the second tragedy, it appeared still less likely that he could be associated with the first.

It was true that Doria had wedded Pendean's widow; but that he should have slain her husband in order to do so appeared a grotesque assumption. Moreover, as a student of character, Mark could not honestly find in Jenny's husband any characteristics that argued a sinister attitude to life. He was a pleasure-loving spirit and his outlook and ambitions, while frivolous, were certainly not criminal. He talked of the smugglers a good deal and declared himself in sympathy with them; but it was gasconade; he evinced no particular physical bravery; he was fond of his comforts and seemed little likely to risk his own liberty by association with breakers of law and order.

A startling proof that Mark had not erred in this estimate was afforded by a conversation which he enjoyed with Doria on a day soon after the departure of Albert Redmayne and his friend. Giuseppe and his wife had planned to visit an acquaintance at Colico, to the northward of the lake; and before the steamer started, after noon, the two men took a stroll in the hills a mile above Menaggio. Brendon had asked for some private conversation and the other gladly agreed.

"As you know, I'm going to spend the day in the red man's haunt," explained Mark, "and I'll call at supper time since you wish it; but before you go, I'll ask you to stroll along for an hour. I want to talk to you."

"That will suit me very well," said the other and in half an hour he returned to Brendon, found him chatting with Jenny in the dark portal of the silkworm house and drew him away.

"You shall have speech with her to-night after supper," promised Giuseppe. "Now it is my turn. We will ascend to the little shrine on the track above the orchards."

They climbed aloft presently, Doria in a holiday suit of golden-brown cloth with a ruby tie, and Brendon attired in tweeds, with his luncheon in his pocket. Then the Italian's manner changed and he dropped his banter. Indeed for a time he grew silent.

Brendon opened the conversation and of course treated the other as though no question existed concerning his honesty.

"What do you think of this business?" he asked. "You have been pretty close to it for a long time now. You have seen the man. You must have some theory."

"I have no theory at all," replied Doria. "My own affairs are enough for me and this cursed mystery seems to be thrusting a finger into my life and darkening it. I grow a very anxious and miserable man and I will tell you why, because you are so understanding. You must not be angry if I now mention my wife in this affair. A mill and a woman are always in want of something, as our proverb says; but though we may know what a mill requires, who can guess a woman's whims? I am dark and dazed with guessing wrong. I don't intend to be hard or cruel. It is not in me to be cruel to any woman. But how if your own woman is cruel to you?"

They had reached the shrine—a little alcove in a rotting mass of brick and plaster. Beneath it extended a stone seat whereon the wayfarer might kneel or sit; above in the niche, protected by a wire grating, stood a doll painted with a blue cloak and a golden crown. Offerings of wayside flowers decorated the ledge before the little image.

They sat down and Doria began to smoke his usual Tuscan cigar. His depression increased and with it Brendon's astonishment. The man appeared to be taking exactly that attitude to his wife, she had already implied was hers toward him.

"*Il volto sciolto ed i pensieri stretti,*" declared Giuseppe with gloom. "That is to say 'her countenance may be clear, but her thoughts are dark'—too dark to tell me—her husband."

"Perhaps she fears you a little. A woman is always helpless before a man who keeps his own secrets hidden."

"Helpless? Far from it. She is a self-controlled, efficient, hard-headed woman. Her loveliness is a curtain. You have not yet got behind that. You loved her, but she did not love you. She loved me and married me. And it is I who know her character, not you. She is very clever and pretends a great deal more than she feels. If

she makes you think she is unhappy and helpless, she does it on purpose. She may be unhappy, because to keep secrets is often to court unhappiness; but she is not helpless at all. Her eyes look helpless; her mouth never. There is power and will between her teeth."

"Why do you speak of secrets?"

"Because you did. I have no secrets. It is Jenny, my wife, who has secrets. I tell you this. *She knows all about the red man!* She is as deep as hell."

"You mean that she understands what is happening and will not tell her uncle or you?"

"That is precisely what I mean. She does not care a curse for Alberto—or anybody. What is born of hen will scrape—remember that. Her father had a temper like a fiend and the cousin of her mother was hanged for murder. These are facts she will not deny. I had them from her uncle. I am frightened of her and I have disappointed her, because I am not what she thought and have ceased to covet my ancestral estates and title."

Such a monstrous picture of Jenny at first bewildered Brendon and then incensed him. Was it within the bounds of possibility that after six months of wedded life with this woman any man living would utter such an indictment and believe it?

"She is great in her way—much too great for me," said Giuseppe frankly. "She should have been a Medici or a Borgia; she should have lived many centuries sooner, before policemen and detective officers were invented. You stare and think I lie. But I do not lie. I see very clearly indeed. I look back at the past and the veil is lifted. I understand much that I did not understand when I was growing blind with love for her. As for this Robert Redmayne—'Robert the Devil,' I call him—once I thought that he was a ghost; but he is not a ghost: he is a live man.

"And, presently what will happen if he is not caught and hanged? He will kill Uncle Alberto and perhaps kill me, too. Then he will run away with Jenny. And I tell you this, Brendon: the sooner he does so, if only he leaves me alone, the better pleased I shall be. A hideous speech? Yes, very hideous indeed; but perfectly true, like many hideous things."

"Do you honestly expect that I, who know your wife, am going to believe this grotesque story?"

"I do not mind whether you believe it or no. Feel as savage as you please. For that matter I feel rather savage myself. There is a new ferocity creeping into me. Why? If you keep company with a wolf, you will soon learn to howl—that's why I howl a good deal in secret I can tell you. Soon I shall howl so that everybody will hear. So now you know how it is with me. I am outside her secrets and feel no wish whatever to learn them, save as they affect me. If she will give me a few thousand pounds and let me vanish out of her life, I shall be delighted to do so. I did not marry her for her money; but since love is dead, I should like a little of it now to start me at Turin. Then she is free as air. It will pay you quite well to try and arrange the bargain."

Brendon could hardly believe his ears, but the Italian appeared very much in earnest. He chattered on for some time. Then he looked at his watch and declared that he must descend.

"The steamer is coming soon," he said. "Now I leave you and I hope that I have done good. Think how to help me and yourself. What she now feels to you I cannot tell. Your turn may come. I trust so. I am not at all jealous. But be warned. This red man—he is no friend to you or me. You seek him again to-day. So be it. And if you find him, be careful of your skin. Not that a man can protect his skin against fate. We meet at supper."

He swung away singing a canzonet and quickly vanished, while Brendon, overwhelmed by this extraordinary conversation, sat for an hour motionless and deep in thought. He could hardly plow his path through what appeared a jungle of flagrant falsehood. But where another man had striven to find underlying purpose in this diatribe and consider Doria's object in choosing him for a confessor, Brendon, while swift enough to regard the attack on Jenny as foul and false, yet did not hesitate to believe that which his own desire drove him to believe. He sifted the grain from the chaff, doubtfully guided by his own passion, and saw the Italian's wife free. But he could not see her false. He scorned the baleful picture that Giuseppe had painted and guessed that his purpose was to cut the ground from under Jenny's feet and accuse her of those identical crimes that he himself

had committed. His attitude to Doria was affirmed and from that hour he believed with Peter Ganns that the Italian knew the plans of the unknown and was assisting him to achieve them. But again his spirit picked and chose. He did not remember how Ganns also, though in more temperate words than Doria's, had warned him for the present to put no trust in Jenny. He trusted her as he trusted himself; and that also meant distrusting her husband.

He considered now his own course of action and presently proceeded to the region in which Robert Redmayne had been most frequently reported. Certain appearances were chronicled and, before Ganns returned to England, the theory had been accepted that the fugitive hid and dwelt aloft in some fastness with the charcoal burners; now Brendon felt the need to probe this opinion and determined if possible to find the lair of the red man.

Not single-handed did he expect to do so. His purpose henceforth was to watch Doria unseen and so discover the man he served. Thus he would kill two birds with one stone and simplify action for Peter Ganns when he returned.

Brendon climbed steadily upward and presently sat down to rest upon a little lofty plateau where, in the mountain scrub, grew lilies of the valley and white sun roses. Idly he sat and smoked, marked the steamers creep like waterman beetles upon the shiny surface of the lake stretched far below, watched a brown fox sunning itself on a stone and then plucked a bunch of the fragrant valley lilies to take to Jenny that night when he came to sup at the Villa Pianezzo. But the blossoms never reached the hand of Mrs. Doria.

Suddenly, as he rose from this innocent pastime, Mark became aware that he was watched and found himself face to face with the object of his search. Robert Redmayne stood separated from him by a distance of thirty yards and by the boughs of a breast-high shrub. He stood bareheaded, peering over the thicket, and the sun shone upon his fiery red scalp and tawny mustache. There could be no mistaking the man and Brendon, rejoicing that daylight would now enable him to come to grips at last, flung down his bouquet and leaped straight for the other.

But it appeared that the watcher desired no closer contact. He turned and ran, heading upward for a wild tract of stone and scrub that spread beneath the last precipices of the mountain. Straight at this cliff, as though familiar with some secret channel of escape, the red man ran and made surprising speed. But Mark found himself gaining. He strove to run the other down as speedily as possible, that he might close, with strength sufficient to win the inevitable battle that must follow, and effect a capture.

He was disappointed, however, for while still twenty yards behind and forced to make only a moderate progress over the rocky way he saw Robert Redmayne suddenly stop, turn and lift a revolver. The flash of the sun on the barrel and the explosion of the discharge were simultaneous. As the red man fired, the other flung up his arms, plunged forward on his face, gave one convulsive tremor through all his limbs and moved no more. The discovery, the chase and its termination had occupied but five minutes; and while one big man, panting from his exertions stayed only to see that his fallen victim showed no sign of life, the other, with his face amid the alpine flowers, remained where he had dropped, his arms outstretched, his hands clenched, his body still.

The conqueror took careful note of the spot in which he stood. Then he disappeared and peace reigned above the fallen. So still he lay that another fox, scared from his siesta, poked a black muzzle round a rock and sniffed the air; but it trusted not appearances and having contemplated the recumbent object lifted its head, uttered a dubious bark and trotted away. From on high an eagle also saw the fallen man, but soared upward to the crown of the mountain and was no more seen. The spot was lonely enough, yet a track ran within one hundred yards and it often happened that charcoal burners and their mules passed that way to the valleys.

None, however, came now and no human eye saw what happened as the sun turned westward and the cool shadow of the precipice began to creep over the little wilderness at its feet. Many hours passed and then, after night had flooded the hollow with its purple wine, there came from close at hand strange sounds and the intermittent thud of some metal weapon striking the earth. The noise ascended from a rock which lifted its gray head above a thicket of juniper; and here, while the flat summit

of the bowlder began to shine whitely under the rising moon, a lantern flickered and showed two shadows busy about the excavation of an oblong hole. They mumbled together and dug in turn. Then one dark figure came out into the open, took his bearings and advanced to a brown hump easily apparent under the light of the sky.

Infinite silence reigned over that uplifted region. Above, near the summit of the mountain, flashed the red eye of a charcoal burner's fire; beneath only the plateau sloped to a ragged edge easterly, for the lake was hidden under the shoulder of the hills. No firefly danced upon this height; but music there was, for a nightingale bubbled his liquid notes in a great myrtle not ten yards from where the still shape lay.

The dark, approaching figure saw the object of his search and came forward. His purpose was to bury the victim, whom he had lured hither before destroying, and then remove any trace that might linger upon the spot where the body lay. He bent down, put his hands to the jacket of the motionless man and then, as he exerted his strength, a strange, hideous thing happened. The body under his touch dropped to pieces. Its head rolled away; its trunk became dismembered and he fell backward heaving an amorphous torso into the air. For, exerting the needful pressure to move a dead weight, he tumbled to the ground, holding up a coat stuffed with grass.

The man was on his feet in an instant, fearing an ambush; but astonishment opened his mouth.

"Corpo di Bacco!" he cried and the exclamation rang in a note of something like terror against the cliffs and upon the ear of his companion. Yet no swift retribution stayed his steps; no shot rang out to arrest his progress. He leaped away, dodging and bounding like a deer to escape the expected bullet and then disappeared behind the bowlder. But neither he nor his companion delayed a moment. Their mingled steps instantly rang out; then the clatter faded swiftly upon the night and silence returned.

For ten minutes nothing happened. Next, out of a lair not fifteen yards from the distorted dummy, rose a figure that shone white as snow under the moon. Mark Brendon approached the snare that he himself had set, shook the grass out of his coat, lifted his hat from the ball of leaves it covered and presently drew on his knickerbockers having emptied them of their stuffing. He was cold and calm. He had learned more than he expected to learn; for that startled exclamation left no doubt at all concerning one of the grave diggers. It was Giuseppe Doria who had come to move the body.

"'Corpo di Bacco,' perhaps, but not *corpo di Brendon,* my friend," murmured Mark to himself. Then he turned northward, traversed some harsh thickets that barred the plateau and reached a mule track, a mile beneath, which he had discovered before daylight waned. It led to Menaggio through chestnut woods.

The operations of the detective from the moment that he fell headlong, apparently to rise no more, may be briefly chronicled.

When his enemy drew up and fired point-blank upon him, the bullet passed within an inch of Brendon's ear and the memory of a similar experience flashed into his mind and led to his subsequent action.

On a previous occasion, having been missed at close quarters, he pretended to be hit and fell apparently lifeless within fifteen yards of a famous malefactor. The ruse succeeded; the man crept back to triumph over an inveterate foe and Brendon shot him dead as he bent to examine a fancied corpse. With a loaded revolver still in his opponent's hand he could take no risk on this second occasion and fell accordingly. His purpose was to tempt the red man back and if possible secure his weapon before he had time to fire again.

But he was disappointed, for the unknown, seeing his pursuer crash headfirst to the ground, evidently felt assured of his aim and did not return. Brendon had simulated death for a while but when satisfied of his assailant's departure, presently rose, with no worse hurt than a bruised face and a wounded shin.

The situation thus created he weighed in all its bearings and guessed that those who now believed themselves responsible for his death would take occasion to remove the evidence of their crime without much delay. Nobody had ever seen one of Robert Redmayne's victims and the last was little likely to be an exception. Mark guessed that until darkness returned he might expect to be undisturbed. He walked back, therefore, to his starting place and found the packet of food, which he had brought with him and a flask of red wine left beside it.

After a meal and a pipe he made his plan

and presently stood again on the rough ground beneath the cliffs where he had pretended so realistically to perish. He intended no attempt to arrest; but, having created the effigy of himself and stuffed his knickerbockers and coat to resemble nature and deceive anybody who might return in darkness to his corpse, Brendon found a hiding place near enough to study what would happen. He expected Redmayne to return and guessed that another would return with him. His hope was to recognize the accomplice and prove at least whether Jenny was right in hinting her husband's secret wickedness or whether Doria had justly accused her of collusion with the unknown. It was impossible that both were speaking the truth. But it was not impossible that both might be lying—to deceive him.

It was with infinite satisfaction that he heard Giuseppe's voice. Even an element of grim amusement attended the spectacle of the Italian's shock and his subsequent snipelike antics as he leaped to safety before an anticipated revolver barrage.

The adventure told Brendon much and his first inclination was to arrest Doria on the following morning; but that desire swiftly passed. A surer strategy presented itself; from the first ambition—to get Jenny's husband under lock and key—his mind leaped to a more workmanlike proposition. He suspected, however, that Giuseppe might take the initiative and deny him any further opportunity of bettering their acquaintance; and that night, as he fell asleep with an aching shin and cheek, Mark endeavored to consider the situation as it must appear from Doria's angle of vision. Much temporal comfort resulted for him from this examination.

It seemed clear that Doria and Redmayne were working to destroy Albert Redmayne for their common advantage. Let the old book lover disappear and Robert and his niece would be the last of the Redmaynes to share the fortune of the vanished brothers. Robert, indeed, could have no open part in these advantages, for he was outlawed; but it would be possible for him, in process of time, when Jenny inherited all three estates and Robert, Bendigo and Albert were alike held to be deceased in the eyes of the law, to share the fortune in secret with his niece and her husband. This view explained the prescience of Peter Ganns and his expressed surprise that Albert Redmayne should still be in the land of the living. Ganns, however, was proved mistaken in one vital particular, for there could no longer be any reasonable doubt that Robert Redmayne still lived.

Utterly mistaken as Brendon's theories ultimately proved, they bore to his weary brain the stamp of value and he next proceeded to consider Doria's present attitude before the problem now awaiting him and his companion in crime. Doria could not be sure that he had been seen to approach the supposed corpse of Redmayne's victim and, in any case, under the darkness, no man might certainly swear that it was Doria who came to dig the grave and dispose of the body. Brendon confessed to himself that only Giuseppe's startled oath had proved his presence and Jenny's husband might well be expected to offer a sound alibi if arrested. He judged, therefore, that Doria would deny any knowledge of the incidents; and time proved that Mark was right enough in that prediction.

CHAPTER XV.

A GHOST.

The next morning while he rubbed his bruises in a hot bath Brendon determined upon a course of action. Mark proposed to tell Jenny and her husband exactly what had happened to him, merely concealing the end of the story.

He breakfasted, lighted his pipe and limped over to Villa Pianezzo. He was not in reality very lame, but accentuated the stiffness. Only Assunta appeared, though Brendon's eyes had marked Doria and Jenny together in the neighborhood of the silkworm house as he entered the garden. He asked for Giuseppe and, having left Brendon in the sitting room of the villa, Assunta departed. Almost immediately afterward Jenny greeted him with evident pleasure but reproved him.

"We waited an hour for supper," she said, "then Giuseppe would wait no longer. I was beginning to get frightened and I have been frightened all night. I am thankful to see you, for I feared something serious might have happened."

"Something serious did happen. I've got a strange story to tell. Is your husband within reach? He must hear it too I think. He may be in some danger as well as others."

She expressed impatience and shook her head.

"Can't you believe me? But of course you can't—why should you? Doria in danger! However, if you want him, you don't want me, Mark."

It was the first time that she had thus addressed him and his heart throbbed; but the temptation to confide in her lasted not a moment.

"On the contrary I want you both," he answered. "I attach very great weight to the hints you have given me—not only for my sake but for your own. The end is not yet as far as you're concerned, Jenny, for your welfare is more to me than anything else in the world—you know it. Trust me to prove that presently. But other things come first. I must do what I am here to do, before I am free to do what I long to do."

"I trust you—and only you," she said. "In all this bewilderment and misery, you are now the only steadfast rock to which I can cling. Don't desert me, that's all I ask."

"Never! All that's best in me shall be devoted to you, thankfully and proudly—now that you have wished it. Trust me, I say again. Call your husband. I want to tell you both what happened to me yesterday."

Again she hesitated and gazed intently upon him.

"Are you sure that you are wise? Would Mr. Ganns like you to tell Doria anything?"

"You will judge better when you have heard me."

Again he longed to confide in her and show her that he understood the truth; but two considerations shut his mouth: the thought of Peter Ganns and the reflections that the more Jenny knew, the greater might be her own peril. This last conviction made him conclude their conference.

"Call him. We must not let him think that we have anything of a private nature to say to each other. It is vital that he should not imagine such a thing."

"You have secrets from me—though I have let you know my own secret," she murmured, preparing to obey him.

"If I keep anything from you, it is for your own good—for your own security," he replied.

She left him then and in a few moments returned with her husband. He was full of curiosity and under his usual assumption of cheerfulness Brendon perceived considerable anxiety.

"An adventure, Signor Marco? I know that without you telling me. Your face is solemn as a raven and you walked stiffly as you came to the door. I saw you from the silkworms. What has happened?"

"I've had the squeak of my life," replied Mark, "and I've made a stupid mistake. You must pay all attention to what I'm going to tell you, Doria, for we can't say who is in danger now and who is not. The shot that very nearly ended my career yesterday might just as easily have been aimed at you, had you been in my place."

"A shot? Not the red man? A smuggler perhaps? You may have stumbled upon some of them, and knowing no Italian——"

"It was Robert Redmayne who fired upon me and missed by a miracle."

Jenny uttered an exclamation of fear. "Thank God!" she said under her breath.

Then Brendon told the story in every detail and explained his own ruse. He related nothing but the truth—up to a certain point; but beyond that he described events that had not taken place.

"Having made the faked figure, I hid just before dusk fairly close to it intending, of course, to keep watch, for I was positive that the murderer, as he would suppose himself to be, must come back after dark to hide his work. But now ensued an awkward contretemps for which I had not provided. I found myself faint—so faint that I began to be alarmed. I had not eaten since the morning and the food and flask which I had brought with me were half a mile and more away. They doubtless remained where I had left them when I started to chase Redmayne. It was a choice between attempting to reach the food while I could do so or stop and grow chilled and every moment weaker.

"I am not made of iron and the day had been rather strenuous for me. I was bruised and lame and utterly played out. I decided that I should have time to reach my food and return to my hiding place before the moon rose. But it was not such an easy or speedy business as I had expected. It took me a long time to get back to the starting place and when I did, a search was needed before I found my sandwiches and flask of Chianti. Never has a meal been more welcome. I soon felt my strength returning

and set off in half an hour on the journey back to the plateau.

"Then my troubles began. You'll think the wine got into my head and it may have done so; but at any rate I lost the path most effectually and presently lost myself. The moon had risen but, instead of assisting me, its illumination seemed to play a magic sleight upon the hills and woods. I began to despair and had very nearly given up any further attempt to return when, out of the trees, blinked the white face of the precipice under Griante's crown and I recognized the situation. Then I went slowly and silently forward and kept a sharp lookout.

"But I returned too late. Once back again, a glance at the dummy showed me that I had lost my chance. It had been handled. The trunk was in one place, the grass head, with my cap upon it, lay in another. One knew that no fox or other wild creature would have disturbed it thus.

"Dead silence reigned over the spot; and now, half fearing an ambush in my turn, I waited an hour before emerging. Not a soul was there. Redmayne had clearly come, discovered my escape and then departed again. Even in that moment I considered what I should have done had he confiscated my clothes! It would then have been necessary to tramp to my hotel in the white shirt and scanty underclothing which was all that remained to me. But now I donned my jacket and knickerbockers, cap and stockings and then prepared to depart.

"There was a smell of earth in the air—a reek of upturned mold; but what that may have been I cannot say. I soon started downhill and, presently striking a path to the north, entered the chestnut woods and was at my hotel soon after midnight. That is my story and I propose to-day to revisit the spot. I shall engage the local police who have orders to assist us—that is unless you, Giuseppe, can spare time to accompany me yourself. I would rather not ask them; but I do not go there again alone."

Jenny looked at her husband and waited to speak until he had done so. But Doria appeared more interested in what had already happened to Brendon than in what was next to happen. He asked many questions, to which Mark was able to return true replies. Then he declared that he would certainly accompany the detective to the scene of his adventure.

"We will go armed this time," he said.

But Jenny protested.

"Mr. Brendon is not nearly well enough to climb there again to-day," she said. "He is lame and must be feeling the effects of yesterday. I beg him not to attempt to go again so soon."

Doria said nothing but looked at Mark.

"I shall best lose my stiffness by another climb," he declared.

"That is very true. We will be in no hurry."

"If you go, I come too," declared the woman quietly; and both men protested. But she would take no denial.

"I will carry your meal for you," she said and, though they opposed her again, went off to prepare it. Giuseppe also disappeared that he might leave an order for the day with Ernesto Marzelli; Jenny had joined Brendon again before he returned. He begged her once more not to accompany them; but she was impatient.

"How dull you are for all your fame, Mark!" she replied. "Can you not think and put two and two together where I am concerned, as you do in everything else? I am safe enough with my husband. It will not pay him to destroy me—yet. But you. Even now I implore you not to go up again alone. He is as wily as a cat. He will make some excuse, disappear and meet the other villain. They won't fail twice—and what can a woman do to help you against two of them?"

"I want no help. I shall be armed."

They started, however, and Jenny's fears were not realized. Doria showed no levity and did nothing suspicious. He kept close to Brendon, offered him an arm at steep places and advanced a dozen theories of the incidents reported. He was deeply interested and reiterated his surprise that the unknown's shot should have missed Brendon.

"It is better to be lucky than wise," he declared. "And yet who shall not call you very wise indeed? That was a great ruse—to fall as though dead when the bullet had missed its billet."

Brendon did not reply and little was said as they proceeded to the scene of adventure; but presently Doria spoke again.

"One eye of the master sees more than six of his servants. We shall hear how Pietro Ganns understands all this. But I am thinking of the red man. What is in his mind this morning? He is very savage with

himself and perhaps frightened. Because he knows that we know. He is a murderer still. He does not repent."

They scoured the scene of Brendon's exploit presently and it was Jenny who found the shallow grave. She was very pale and shivering when they responded to her call.

"That is where you would be now!" she said to Mark.

But he was occupied with the mold piled beside the pit. Here and there were prints of heavy feet and Doria declared that the impression of the nails pointed to such boots as the mountain men habitually wore. Nothing else rewarded the search; but Giuseppe was full of theories and Brendon, occupied with his own thoughts, allowed him to chatter without interruption. For his part he felt doubtful whether any further apparition of Robert Redmayne might be expected. This failure would probably put a period to his activity for a time. Mark guessed that he might lie low—at any rate until the return of Albert Redmayne; while as for Giuseppe, finding that he was not suspected, the detective doubted not that he, too, would take no further aggressive steps for a season.

Brendon determined to take no action until Mr. Ganns came back to Menaggio. Meantime he proposed to occupy himself with the Dorias and, so far as possible, preserve an attitude of friendship to them both. That relations were secretly strained between them appeared clear enough; and the results of casual but frequent visits to the Villa Pianezzo were summed in Mark's mind before Mr. Redmayne and Peter returned. He believed most firmly that Doria was in collusion with the secret antagonist, and intended ultimate mischief to his wife's uncle for his own ends; and he was equally convinced that Jenny, while conscious enough that her husband could not be trusted and meant evil, as yet hardly guessed the full extent of his lawless purpose.

Had she known that Giuseppe and Robert Redmayne were actually working together to destroy Albert Redmayne, Brendon believed that she would tell him. But he guessed that she knew nothing definite, while suspecting much. She had shown the most acute concern at his own danger and more than once implored Mark to do no more than look after his own safety until Peter Ganns was back again. Meantime the rift between her spouse and herself appeared to grow. She was tearful and anxious, yet still chose to be vague, though she did admit that she thought she had glimpsed Robert Redmayne again, one evening, and he purposely pressed her no more to confide in him. Doria showed no sort of jealousy. He often left them together for hours and exhibited to the detective a very amiable attitude. He, too, on more than one occasion confessed that matrimony was a state overvaunted.

"Praise married life by all means, Signor Marco," he said, "but—keep single. Peace, my friend, is the highest happiness and the rarest."

The days passed and presently, without any warning, Albert Redmayne and the American suddenly reappeared. They arrived at Menaggio about midday.

Mr. Redmayne was in the highest spirits and delighted to be home again. He knew nothing about Peter's operations and cared less. His visit to England was spent at London, where he had renewed acquaintance with certain book lovers, seen and handled many precious things and surprised and gratified himself to observe his own physical energies and enterprise.

"I am still wonderfully strong, Jenny," he told his niece. "I have been most active in mind and body and am by no means so far down the hill of old age that ends by the River of Lethe as I imagined."

He made a good meal and then, despite the long night in the train, insisted on sending for a boat and crossing the water to Belaggio.

"I have a present for my Poggi," he said, "and I cannot sleep until I hear his voice and hold his hand."

Ernesto went for a waterman and soon a boat waited at the steps which descended from Mr. Redmayne's private apartments to the lake. He rowed away and Brendon, who had come to see Doria and found to his surprise that Redmayne and Peter were back again, anticipated some private hours with Mr. Ganns. But the traveler was weary and, after one of Assunta's famous omelets and three glasses of white wine, he declared that he must retire and sleep as long as nature ordained slumber.

He spoke before the listening Giuseppe but addressed his remarks to Brendon.

"I'm exceedingly short of rest," he said. "Whether I have done the least good by my inquiries remains to be seen. To be

frank, I doubt it. We'll have a talk to-morrow, Mark; and maybe Doria will remember a thing or two that happened at Crow's Nest and so help me. But until I have slept I am useless."

He withdrew presently, carrying his notebook in his hand, while Brendon, promising to return after breakfast on the following morning, strolled to the silkworm house where the last of the caterpillars had spun its golden shroud. He was not depressed by the weary tones of Peter's voice nor the discouraging nature of his brief statement, for, while speaking, Mr. Ganns had discounted his pessimism by a pregnant wink unseen by Doria. It was clear to Brendon that he had no intention of acquainting Giuseppe with any new facts—if such there might be; and this interested Mark the more because, as yet, Peter was quite ignorant of his own adventure on Griante. He had kept it out of the post, not desiring to obtrude anything between Mr. Ganns and his personal activities.

On the following day it was Mr. Redmayne who found himself weary. Reaction came and he slept ill that night and determined to keep his bed for twenty-four hours. It seemed, however, that he was going to find occupation for everybody. He directed Doria to visit Milan on an elaborate mission to a secondhand bookseller and Jenny was sent to Varenna with a letter and a gift for an acquaintance.

Brendon perceived that it was designed to keep both husband and wife out of the way for a few hours; but whether Doria suspected the intention he could not judge. Certainly Jenny did not. She welcomed the excursion to Varenna, for her uncle's correspondent was a widow lady and Jenny already knew her and valued her friendship.

Brendon arrived at Villa Pianezzo just as the twain were starting on their missions and he and Peter walked to the landing stage with them and saw them depart in different steamers.

Even this arrangement, however, failed to satisfy Ganns. He was mysterious.

"If his packet stopped nowhere between here and Como we wouldn't need to trouble," he said; "but as it does and Doria might hop off anywhere and come back in an hour, we'll just drift back to Albert."

"He will be asleep and we can have our yarn out without fear of interruption," answered Mark.

They soon sat together on a shady seat of the villa garden from which the entrance was visible and Peter, bringing out his notebook, took a great pinch of snuff, set his gold box on a little table before him and turned to Brendon.

"You shoot first," he said; "there are three things I need to know. Have you seen the red man and what is your present opinion concerning Doria and his wife? Needn't ask if you found Bendigo's diary, because I am dead sure you did not."

"I didn't. I directed Jenny to have a hunt and she invited me to help her. For the rest I have seen Robert Redmayne, for we may safely speak of the unknown by that name, and I have come to a very definite conclusion concerning Giuseppe Doria and the unfortunate woman who is at present his wife."

A shadow of a smile passed over the great features of Peter.

He nodded and Mark proceeded to tell his story, beginning with the adventure on the mountain. He omitted no detail and described his talk with Doria, the latter's departure to join Jenny on their expedition to Colico and his own subsequent surprise and escape from death. He told how he had been fired at and fallen, hoping to tempt the other to him; how his assailant had disappeared and how, at a late hour, he had planned the dummy and seen Giuseppe Doria arrive to bury him.

He narrated how Giuseppe and Robert Redmayne had departed after their disappointment, how he had decided to give Giuseppe an account of the adventure in order that he might not guess his share in it was known; and he told how, on the morrow, the Dorias and himself had returned to the spot and found the empty grave with footmarks of native boots about the margin. He added that Jenny, four days later, had reported a glimpse of a man whom she believed to be her uncle; but it was dark at the time and she could not be positive, though she felt morally sure of him. He was standing two hundred yards from the Villa Pianezzo in a lane from the hills and had turned and hastened away as she approached.

To this statement Peter listened with the deepest attention and he did not disguise his satisfaction when Mark made an end.

"I'm mighty glad for two things," he said. "First that you're in the land of the living, my son, and that a certain bullet passed your

ear instead of stopping in that fine forehead of yours; and I'm glad to know what you've told me, because it fits in tolerably well and strengthens an argument you'll hear later. Your little trap was quite smart, though I should have worked it a bit different myself. However, you did a very clever thing and to take Doria into your confidence afterward was up to our best traditions. Your opinion of him needn't detain us now. There only remains to hear what you may have to say on the subject of his pretty dame."

It seemed to Brendon that "pretty" was almost a term of scorn in such a connection. The word was contemptuous applied to the girl he loved with increasing devotion and increasing hope.

"My opinion of a very wonderful and brave woman remains unchanged," he answered. "She is the victim of a hateful union and for her the situation must get worse, I fear, before it can get better. She is as straight as a line, Ganns; but of course she knows well enough that her husband's a rascal.

"Needless to say I haven't dropped her a hint of the truth; but while she is loyal in a sense and very careful, on her side, to leave her sufferings or suspicions vague, she doesn't pretend she's happy and she doesn't pretend that Doria is a good husband or a good man. She knows that I know better. She has been longing for your return and it is a question with me now whether we shall not do wisely to take her into our confidence. If she knew even what we know, she would no doubt see much light herself and afford much light for us. As to her good faith and honor, there can be no question whatever."

"Well—so be it. I've heard you. Now you've got to hear me. We are up against a very marvelous performance, Mark. This case has some of the finest features—some unique even in my experience. Though, as history repeats itself, I dare say there have been bigger blackguards than the great unknown—though surely not many."

"Robert Redmayne?"

Peter broke off for a brief exposition. He took snuff, shut his eyes and began.

"Why do you harp on 'Robert Redmayne,' like a parrot, my son? Just consider all I've said on that matter and the general subject of forgeries for a minute. You can forge anything that man ever made and a good few things that God has. You can forge a picture, a postage stamp, a signature, a finger print; and our human minds, accustomed to pictures, postage stamps, finger prints, are easily deceived by appearance and seldom possess the necessary expert knowledge to recognize a forgery when we see it. And now we're dealing with people who have forged a human being, for that is what the red man amounts to.

"Didn't you do the same thing last week? Didn't you forge yourself and leave yourself dead on the ground? Whether the real Robert Redmayne is actually a stiff, we can't yet swear, though for my part I am pretty well prepared to prove it; but this I do know, that the man who shot at you and missed you and ran away was not Robert Redmayne."

Brendon demurred. "Remember, I'm not a stranger to him, Ganns. I saw and spoke with him by the pool in Foggintor Quarry before the murder."

"What of it? You've never spoken with him since; and, what's more, you've never seen him since, either. You've seen a forgery. It was a forgery that looked at you on your way back to Dartmouth in the moonlight. It was a forgery that robbed the farm for food and lived in the cave and cut Bendigo Redmayne's throat. It was a forgery that tried to shoot you and missed. But honest guys may commit forgeries for honest ends—as you did. Now you can listen to my adventures."

Mr. Ganns took snuff again and continued.

But, as the course of his inquiries belong properly to the terrible culmination of the mystery and cannot here be told with their just significance, it will suffice to record that Brendon presently found his brain reeling before a theory so extravagant that he would instantly have discredited it from any lesser lips than those of the famous man who propounded it.

"Mind," concluded Peter, who had spoken without ceasing for nearly two hours, "I'm not saying that I am right. I'm only saying that, wild though it sounds, it fits and makes a logical story even though that story beats all experience. It might have happened; and if it didn't happen, then I'm damned if I know what did or what is happening at this moment. It is a horrible thing, if true; but it's a beautiful thing from the professional point of view—a cancer or a battle or an earthquake can be beauti-

ful, put in a professional category clean outside morals."

Brendon delayed his answer and his face was racked with many poignant emotions.

"I can't believe it," he replied at length in a voice which indicated the extent of his mental amazement and perturbation; "but I shall nevertheless do exactly as you direct. That is well within my power and obviously my duty."

"Good boy. And now we'll have something to eat. You've got it clear? The time is all important."

Mark scanned his notebook in which he had been making voluminous entries. Then he nodded and shut it.

Suddenly Mr. Ganns laughed. The other's book had reminded him of an incident.

"A funny little thing happened yesterday afternoon that I forgot," he said. "I'd turned in, leaving my notebook by my head, when there came a visitor to my room. I was asleep all right, but my heaviest sleep won't hold through the noise of a fly on a windowpane; and lying with my face to the door I heard a tiny sound and lifted one eyelid. The door opened and Signor Doria put his nose in. I'd pulled the blind, but there was plenty of light and he spotted my vademecum lying on the bed table a couple of feet from my head. Over he came, as quiet as a spider, and I let him get within a yard. Then I yawned and shifted. He was gone like a streak; half an hour later I heard him again. But I was moving and he didn't do more than listen outside. He wanted that book bad—you can guess how bad."

For two days Mr. Ganns declared that he must rest; and then there came an evening when he privately invited Doria to take a walk.

"There's a few things I'd like to put to you," he said. "You needn't let on to anybody else about it and we won't start together. You know my favorite stroll up the hill. Meet me at the corner—say seven o'clock."

Giuseppe gladly agreed.

"We will go up to the shrine of Madonna del Ferniente," he declared; and when the time came, Peter found him at the spot. They ascended the hill side by side and the elder invited Doria's aid.

"Between ourselves," he said, "I am not too well pleased with the way this inquiry is panning out. Brendon's all right and means as well as any bull that ever I worked with. He does a clever thing here and there—as when he shammed death on the mountain; but there's nothing to him, Doria. What was the sense of setting that trap and then missing his man? I shouldn't have done that. You wouldn't have done it. In plain words there's something coming between Mark and his work and I should like to hear what you think of him, as an independent witness and a pretty shrewd cuss. You've had a chance to study his make-up, so tell me what you think. I'm tired of fooling round this job—and being fooled myself."

"Marco is in love with my wife," answered Giuseppe calmly. "That is what's the matter with him. And, as I don't trust my wife in this affair and still believe that she knows more about the red man than anybody else, I think, as long as she hoodwinks Brendon, he will be no manner of use to you."

Peter pretended to be much astonished.

"My stars! You take it pretty cool!"

"For the good reason that I am no longer in love with my wife myself. I am not a dog in the manger. I want peace and quietness. I have no use for intrigues and plots. I am a plain man, Signor Pietro. Mystery bores me. Moreover I live in fear of getting into a mess myself. I do not see where I come in at all. My wife and this unseen, unknown rascal are after something; and if you want to get to the bottom of this, watch her—not me. The blow you fear may fall at any moment."

"You'd say trail Jenny?"

"That is what I would say. Sooner or later she'll make an excuse to be off to the mountains alone. Let her start and then follow her up with Brendon. The problem is surely simple enough: to catch this red Redmayne. It you cannot do it, tell the police and the doganieri. There is a force of smuggler hunters always on the spot and ready to your hand. Describe this savage, human fox and offer a big reward for his brush. He will be caught quickly enough then."

Mr. Ganns nodded and stood still.

"I shouldn't wonder if that may not have to be done; but I'd a deal sooner take him ourselves if we could. Anyway I must get a move on this fortnight, for to stop longer in Italy is impossible. Yet how am I going to beat it and leave my old friend at the mercy of this threat? While I'm along-

side him, he's safe I guess; but what may happen as soon as I turn my back?"

"Can I not help you?"

But Mr. Ganns shook his head.

"Can't work in cahoots with you, son, because I begin to fear you are right when you say your wife's against us; and a man isn't to be trusted to pull down his own wife."

"If that's all——"

They proceeded slowly and Peter kept the ball of conversation rolling while he pretended to be very busy with his plans and projects. He promised also that when Jenny went to the hills alone, he and Brendon would secretly follow her.

Then a very strange thing happened. As the first firefly streaked the dusk and the ruined shrine appeared beside the way it seemed that a tall man suddenly appeared beside it. He had not been there a moment before, yet now he bulked large in the purple evening light and it was not yet so dark but his remarkable features challenged the beholders. For there stood Robert Redmayne, his great, red head and huge mustache thrusting out of the gloom. He stared quite motionless. His hands were by his sides; the stripes of his tweed jacket could be seen and the gilt buttons on the familiar red waistcoat.

Doria stood quite still and stiffened. For a moment he failed to conceal his surprise and cast one look of evident horror and amazement at the apparition. He clearly knew the tall figure, but there was no friendship or understanding in the bewildered stare he now turned upon the shadow that filled the path. For a moment he brushed his hand over his eyes, as though to remove the object upon which he glared; then he looked again—to find the lane empty and Peter Ganns staring at him.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"Did you see him—right in the path—Robert Redmayne?"

But Peter only stared at Giuseppe and peered forward.

"I saw nothing," he said. Then, like lightning, the Italian's manner changed. His concern vanished and he laughed aloud.

"What a fool—what a fool am I! It was the shadow behind the shrine!"

"You've got the red man on your nerves, I guess. I don't blame you. What did you think you saw?"

"No—no, signor; I have no nerves. It was a shadow."

Ganns instantly dismissed the subject and appeared to attach no importance whatever to it; but Doria's mood was altered. He became less expansive and more alert.

"We'll turn now," announced Peter half an hour afterward. "You're a smart lad and you've given me a bright thought or two. We must lecture Mark. It may be better for you, as her husband, to pretend a bit, even though you don't feel it. Let me know when the lady is for the hills."

He stopped, kept his eye on Giuseppe and took a pinch of snuff.

"Maybe we'll get a move on to-morrow," he said.

Doria, now self-possessed but fallen taciturn, smiled at him and his white teeth shone through the gloom.

"Of to-morrow nobody is sure," he answered. "The man who knows what is to happen to-morrow would rule the world."

"I'm hopeful of to-morrow all the same."

"A detective must be hopeful," answered Giuseppe. "So often hope is all that he has got."

Chaffing each other amiably they returned together.

CHAPTER XVI.

LAST OF THE REDMAYNES.

For the night immediately following Doria's experience at the old shrine, Albert Redmayne and his friend, Virgilio Poggi, had accepted Mark Brendon's invitation to dine at the Hotel Victoria, where he still stayed. Ganns was responsible for the suggestion; and while he knew that, after his evening vision, Giuseppe might view the little festivity with suspicion, that could not be avoided.

His purpose in arranging to get Albert Redmayne away from home on this particular night was twofold. It was necessary that Peter himself should see Mark Brendon without interruption; and it was vital that henceforth his friend, the old book lover, should never for an instant lie within the power of any enemy to do him ill. So, at least, thought Ganns. In order, therefore, that he might enjoy private conversation with Brendon and, at the same time, keep a close watch upon Albert, Ganns had proposed the dinner party at the hotel and directed Brendon to issue the invitation as soon as Redmayne returned home.

Wholly unsuspicious, Signor Poggi and Albert appeared in the glory of soft white shirt fronts and rather rusty evening black.

A special meal was prepared for their pleasure and the four partook of it in a reserved chamber at the hotel. Then they adjourned to the smoking room and anon, when Poggi and his companion were deep in their all-sufficing subject, Peter, a few yards distant with Mark beside him, related the incident of Giuseppe's ghost.

"You did the trick to a miracle," he said. "You're a born actor, my son, and you came and went and got away with it just as well as mortal man could wish and far better than I hoped. Well, Doria was fine. We stung him all right and when he saw and thought he recognized the real Robert Redmayne, it got him fairly in the solar plexus—I'm dog-gone sure of it. For just a moment he slipped, but how could he help it?

"You see the beauty of his dilemma. If he'd been straight, he'd have gone for you baldheaded; but he wasn't straight. He knew well enough that *his* Robert Redmayne —the forgery—wasn't on the warpath last night; and when I said I saw nothing he pulled himself together and swore he hadn't either. And the next second he saw what he had done! But too late. I had my hand on my shooting iron in my pocket after that, I can tell you. He was spoiling to sting back —he is now—he's not wasting to-night. But all that matters for the moment is that we've put a crimp on him and he knows it."

"He may be off before you get back."

"Not he. He's going to see this thing through and finish his job, if we don't prevent it. And he won't waste any more time either. He's been playing a game and amusing himself—with us and Albert yonder—as a cat with a mouse. But he won't play any more. From to-night he's going for all three of us baldheaded. He's mad with himself that he was foolish enough to delay. He's a wonder for his age, Mark; but a man, after all—not a superman."

"What happened exactly and how does he stand to what he saw?"

"Can't swear, but I figure it like this. I watched very close with what I call my third eye—a sort of receiver in my brain that soaks up what a man's thinking and draws it out of him. For the first moment he was nonplused, lost his nerve and possibly believed he saw a spirit. He cried out, 'It's Robert Redmayne!' and instantly asked me if I'd seen him too. I stared and said I'd seen nothing at all and then his manner changed and he laughed it off and said it was only a shadow cast by the shrine. But on second thoughts he knew mighty well it was no shadow and presently he fell a bit silent, thinking hard, while I just chatted about nothing, as I'd done from the start of our walk, and shammed I'd forgot his surprise. I'd pretended to take him into confidence, you see, and I heard from him just exactly what I thought he was going to tell me—that you were in love with his wife; that he had no more use for her; that she knew all about the red man, and so on.

"Now what passed in his mind? He must have come to one of two possible conclusions. Either he suspected that he had been subject to hallucination and seen a freak of his own imagination, and believed me when I stared at him and said I had seen nothing; or else he did not. If he had taken it that way, there was nothing more to be said and nothing to worry about as far as I was concerned. But he didn't take it that way and, on second thoughts, he didn't believe me. He knew very well indeed he was not the sort of person who sees ghosts; he remembered that you'd been away at Milan for a couple of days and he tumbled to it, the moment his wits cleared, that this was a frame-up between me and you to surprise something out of him. And he knew that I got exactly what I wanted, when he swore he'd seen nothing after all.

"And that's where he stands now. And he's going to be busy in consequence; but we've got to be busier. What he and his accomplice propose to do is to destroy Albert Redmayne—in such a way that they are not associated with his death; and what they will do, if we let them, is to act as they have already acted in the case of Albert's brothers. Albert would disappear—and we might or might not be invited to look upon his blood; but we shouldn't see him any more. Como is the grave they probably mean for him."

"You'll go for him straight then?"

"Yes. He's making his plans at this moment, just as we are, and it's up to us to work our wonders so they'll tumble in ahead of his. You see that? There's two of us and two of them and the next move must be ours, or they'll checkmate our king all right. We've got this great advantage; that Albert is at our beck and call, not theirs; and while he remains safe, our stock's good. Master Giuseppe knows that; but he also suspects that he's no longer safe himself; and he's

probably going to take some chances in the next twenty-four hours."

"Everything centers on the present safety of Mr. Redmayne?"

"It does; and we must watch him like a pair of hawks. To me the most interesting aspect of this case is the personal factor that has spoiled it for the master criminal. And that factor is vanity—an overmastering, gigantic, yet boyish vanity that tempted him to delay his purpose for the simple pleasure of playing, first with you and then with me. It's himself that has given him away; there's mighty little credit to us, Mark. His own pride of intellect has thrown him. If he can win out now I'll forgive the scamp."

"To you all credit—if you are right in what you believe; to me certainly none from first to last," answered Brendon gloomily. "And yet," he added, "you may be mistaken. A man's convictions are not easily uprooted; and still I feel that, even if I have lost my reputation, I may win something better—after the tale is told."

Ganns patted his arm kindly.

"Hope no such thing, I beg you," he said. "Fight your hope, for it will soon prove to be based on a chimera—on something that doesn't and never did exist. But your reputation is another matter and I pray you won't feel so ready to let a fine record go down the wind this time to-morrow."

"To-morrow?"

"Yes; to-morrow night the bracelets go on him."

Peter then indicated his purpose.

"He'll not guess we're moving quite so quickly and, by so doing, we anticipate his stroke. That, at least, is what I mean to attempt with your help if possible. To-night and to-morrow morning I keep beside Albert; to-morrow you must do so; because, after lunch, I have a meeting with the local police down the lake at Como. The warrant will be waiting for me and I shall return after dark in one of the little black boats of the doganieri. We shall come up with lights out and land at the villa.

"Your part will be to keep Albert in sight and watch the others. Doria will probably believe my excuse for going down to Como isn't true, and he is therefore likely to jump at the opportunity to get on with it. There's just a chance of poison. I don't like to get Albert across to Poggi, because there he would be much easier to tackle than here."

"He's awake to the critical situation?"

"Yes, I've made it clear. He's promised not to eat or drink anything, except what I bring home with me to-night from here. Our game is that he'll be indisposed to-morrow and keep to his private rooms. He'll pretend that he's done himself too well with you to-night. I shall be with him—I don't sleep to-night, but play watchdog. To-morrow his breakfast will go away untouched—and mine also. We shall then partake of the secret food.

"After noon it's up to you. I can't say what Doria will do; but when he knows me to be away, he may possibly do something. If he wants to see Albert, use your authority and tell him he cannot until I return. Put the blame on me; and if he's wicked, use your iron."

"He may, of course, bolt when he knows the game is up," said Mark. "He may be off already."

"Not he," answered Peter. "It's contrary to reason to suppose he'll guess that I can possibly know what I know. He underrates me far too much to give me credit for that. He won't beat it; he'll bluff it—till too late. I don't fear to lose him; I only fear to lose Albert."

"Trust me that far."

"I'm going to. And I want to plan a little surprise of some sort so that Albert unconsciously helps us. We can't ask him to do anything cute himself; he's not built that way; but he's the king to be guarded and if the king makes an unexpected move, much may be gained. We've got to be alive to a dozen possibilities. If, for instance, poison is attempted and found to fail——"

"How if we gave it out it had succeeded and that Mr. Redmayne pretended he was mighty ill an hour after breakfast?"

"I'd thought of that. But the difficulty would be that we shan't be in a position to say if poison is really used. No time for chemistry."

"Try it on the cat."

Peter considered.

"A double cross is often a very pretty thing," he admitted, "but I've seen too many examples among the police of digging a pit and falling in themselves. One difficulty is that we don't want to alarm Albert more than necessary. At present he only knows that I think him in danger; but he has not the most shadowy idea that members of his own household are implicated. He won't

know it till I forbid him to touch his breakfast. Yes; we can certainly try a double cross. He shall order bread and milk—we know who will bring it to him. Then his cat, 'Grillo,' shall breakfast upon it." Peter turned to Mark. "That will convince you, my friend."

But the other shook his head.

"It depends upon circumstances. Granted poison, many an honest man and woman has been the innocent tool of a murderer's will."

"True enough; but we are wasting time upon an improbability. I do not myself think it will be attempted. It is the line of least resistance and the line of least resistance generally means the line of highest danger afterward. No—he'll do something smarter than that if he gets half a chance. The grand danger would be that Doria should find himself alone with Albert, even for a moment. That is the situation to circumvent and avoid at any cost. Let nothing induce you to lose sight of one or the other; and even should Doria obviously make a run for it before I return, don't be deceived by that or go after him. He may adopt any ruse to get you guessing when I have gone —that is if he suspects me of some immediate step. But if I go without leading him to feel any very grave suspicion as to my object in going, we may surprise him before his own stroke is struck. That, in a word, is our objective."

An hour later the detectives saw Signor Poggi to his boat and then walked home with Mr. Redmayne. Peter had provender concealed about his person and presently he explained to his friend that things were now come to a climax.

"In twenty-four hours I hope we're through with our mysteries and plots, Albert," he said; "but during that time you've got to obey me in every particular and so help me to set you free from this abomination hanging over you. I can trust you; and you must trust me and Mark here till to-morrow night. You'll soon be at peace again with your troubles ended."

Albert thanked Ganns and expressed his satisfaction that a conclusion was in sight.

"I have seen through the glass darkly," he told them. "Indeed I cannot say that I have seen through the glass at all. I am entirely mystified and shall be glad indeed to know this horror with which I am threatened may be removed. Only my absolute trust in you, dear Peter, has prevented me from becoming distracted."

At the villa Brendon left them and Jenny welcomed her uncle. The girl begged Mark to come in for a while before returning; but it was late and Mr. Ganns declared that everybody must retire.

"Look us up to-morrow, Mark," he directed. "I hear there are some pictures at Como that have got a lot of kick in them. Maybe we'll all go down the lake for a pleasure party to-morrow, if Albert thinks it's good."

For a moment Brendon and Jenny stood alone before he departed; and she whispered to him.

"Something has happened to Doria to-night. He is strange and struck dumb. Since his walk with Mr. Ganns."

"Is he at home?"

"Yes; he went to bed many hours ago."

"Avoid him," answered Mark. "Avoid him as far as possible, without rousing his suspicion. Your torments may be at an end sooner than you think for."

He departed without more words. But he presented himself early on the following day. And it was Jenny who first saw him. Then Peter Ganns joined them.

"How is uncle?" asked Mr. Redmayne's niece, and Albert's friend declared the old book lover found himself a little indisposed.

"He kept it up a bit too late last night at the hotel and drank a little too much white wine," said Peter. "He's all right but feeling a trifle like next morning. He'll stop where he is for a spell and you can take him up a biscuit and a hair of the dog that bit him presently."

Ganns then announced his intention of going later to the town of Como and he invited Doria and Brendon to accompany him; but Mark, already familiar with the part he had to play, declined, while Giuseppe also declared himself unable to take the trip.

"I must make ready to return to Turin," he said. "The world does not stand still while Signor Pietro is catching his red man. I have business, and there is nothing to keep me here any longer."

He appeared indifferent to the rest of the company and his usual good humor lacked; but the reason Brendon did not learn until a later hour.

After an early luncheon Mr. Ganns set off —in a white waistcoat and other adornments; Giuseppe also left the villa, promis-

ing to return in a few hours; and Brendon joined Albert in his sleeping apartment. For a time they were alone together and then came Jenny with some soup. She stopped to chat for a little while and, finding her uncle apparently somnolent and disinclined to talk, turned to Mark and spoke under her breath. She was still agitated and much preoccupied.

"Later, when we may, I should like to speak to you—indeed I must do so. I am in great danger myself and can only look to you," she whispered. Combined fear and entreaty filled her amazing eyes and she put her hand upon his sleeve. His own caught it and pressed it. He forgot everything before her words. She had come to him at last of her own free will.

"Trust me," he answered, so that only she could hear. "Your welfare and happiness are more to me than anything else on earth."

"Doria will be out again later. Once he has gone—after dusk—we can safely speak," she answered. Then she hastened away.

Albert Redmayne stirred himself as soon as Jenny withdrew. He was dressed and lying on a couch beside the window.

"This subterfuge and simulation of ill health are most painful to me," he declared. "I am exceedingly well to-day and all the better for our delightful dinner of last night. For nobody less than dear Peter would I ever sink to pretend anything: it is contrary to my nature and disposition so to do. But since I have his word that to-day light is going to be thrown upon all this doubt and darkness I must possess my soul in patience, Mark. There are dreadful fears in Peter's mind. I have never known him to be suspicious of good people before. He will not let me eat and drink in my own house to-day! That is as much as to say that I have enemies within my gates. What could be more distressing?"

"A precaution."

"Suspicion is inconceivably painful to me. I will not harbor suspicion. When suspicion dawns in my mind I instantly throw over the cause of the suspicion. If it is a book, however precious it may be, I drop it once for all. I will not be tormented by doubts or suspicions. In this house are Assunta and Ernesto Marzelli, my niece Jenny Doria, and her husband. To suspect any of those excellent and honorable people is abominable and I am quite incapable of doing so."

"Only a few hours. Then, I think, all but one will be exonerated. Indeed I'm sure of it."

"Giuseppe appears to be the storm center in Peter's mind. It is all beyond my understanding. He has always treated me with courtesy and consideration. He has a sense of humor and perceives that human nature lacks much that we could wish it possessed. He feels rightly toward literature, too, and reads desirable authors. He is a good European and is the only man I know, save Poggi, who understands Nietzsche. All this is in his favor; and yet even Jenny appears to regard Giuseppe as wholly ineffectual. She openly hints that she is disappointed in him. I know what may go to make a man; but am, I confess, quite ignorant of what goes to make a husband. No doubt a good man may be a bad husband, because the female has her own marital standards and what she wants, or does not want, I cannot tell."

"You like Doria?"

"I have had no reason to do otherwise. I trust that this unhappy brother of mine—if, indeed, he is what you all think and not an air-drawn vision projected by your subconscious minds—may soon be laid by the heels—for his own sake as much as ours. I will now read in 'The Consolations of Boethius'—last of the Latin authors properly so called—and smoke a cigar. I shall not see Giuseppe. I have promised. It is understood that I am an invalid; but he will certainly be hurt that I deny myself to him. The man has a heart as well as a head."

He rose and went to a little bookshelf of his favorite authors. Then he buried himself in Boethius and Mark, looking out of the window, saw the life of the lake and the glory of the summer sky reflected. Opposite Belaggio's towers and cypresses were massed under a little mountain. From time to time there sounded the beat of paddle wheels, as the white steamers came and went.

Doria returned for a while during the afternoon and Jenny told him that her uncle was better but still thought it wise to keep his room. Her husband appeared to have recovered his good temper. He drank wine, ate fruit and addressed most of his conversation to Brendon, who spoke with him in the dining room for a while.

"When you and Mr. Ganns are weary of hunting this red shadow I hope you will come and see me at Turin," he said. "And perhaps you will also be able to convince Jenny that my suggestions are reasonable. What is money for? She has twenty thousand pounds upon her hands and I, her husband, offer such an investment as falls to the chance of few capitalists. You shall come and see what my friends and I are doing at Turin. Then you will make her think better of my sense!"

"A new motor car you told me?" asked Mark.

"Yes—a car that will be to all other cars as an ocean liner to Noah's ark. Millions are staring us in the face. Yet we languish for the modest thousands to launch us. The little dogs find the hare; the big dogs hold him."

Jenny said nothing. Then Doria turned to her and bade her pack his clothes.

"I cannot stop here," he said when she had gone. "This is no life for a man. Jenny will probably remain with her uncle. She is fed up, as you say, with me. I am very unfortunate, Marco, for I have not in the least deserved to lose her affection. However, if a new inamorato fills her thoughts, it is idle for me to yelp. Jealousy is a fool's failing. But I must work or I shall be wicked!"

He departed and Brendon joined Albert Redmayne, to find the old man had grown uneasy and fearful.

"I am not happy, Brendon," he said. "There is coming into my mind a cloud—a premonition that very dreadful disasters are going to happen to those I love. When does Ganns return?"

"Soon after dark, Mr. Redmayne. Perhaps about eight o'clock, or sooner, we may expect him. Be patient a little longer."

"It has not happened to me to feel as I do to-day," answered the book lover. "A sense of ill clouds my mind—a suspicion of finality, and Jenny shares it. Something is amiss. She has a presentiment that it is so. It may be that my second self is not happy either. Virgilio and I are as twins. We have become strangely and psychologically linked together. I am sure that he is uneasy on my account at this moment. I'm almost inclined to send Ernesto to see if all is well with him and report that all is well with me."

He rambled on and presently went out upon his balcony and looked across to Belaggio. Then he appeared to forget Signor Poggi for a time and presently ate a little of the store of food brought back in secret by Mr. Ganns on the previous night.

"It is a grief to me," he said again, "that Peter fears treachery under this roof. Surely God is all powerful and would not suffer my interesting and harmless life to be snatched away from me by poison? I shall be very thankful when Peter leaves his horrid profession and retires and devotes his noble intellect to purer thoughts."

"What became of the soup, Mr. Redmayne?"

"'Grillo' drank every drop and having done so, my beautiful cat purred a grace after meat, according to his custom, then sank into peaceful slumber."

Mark looked at the great blue Persian, who was evidently sleeping in perfect comfort. It woke to his touch, yawned, spread its paws, purred gently and then tucked itself up again.

"He's right enough."

"Of course. Jenny tells me that her husband returns to Turin to-morrow. She, however, will stop here with me for the present. It may be well if they separate for a while."

They talked and smoked, while Mr. Redmayne became reminiscent and amused himself with memories of the past. He forgot his present disquiet amid these recollections and chattered amiably of his earliest days in Australia and his subsequent, successful career as a bookseller and dealer.

Jenny presently joined them and all entered the dining room together, where tea was served.

"He will be going out soon now," whispered Albert's niece to Brendon; and he knew that she referred to her husband. Mr. Redmayne still declined to eat or drink.

"I did both to excess yesterday," he said, "and must rest my ill-used stomach until to-morrow."

He was chiefly concerned with Doria and had prepared for him various messages to bookmen in Turin. They sat long and the shadows were lengthening before the old man returned to his apartments. Then Giuseppe made a final and humorous appeal to Mark to influence Jenny in favor of the motor cars and presently lit one of his Tuscan cigars, took his hat and left the house.

"At last!" whispered Jenny, her face light-

ing in relief. "He will be gone for a good two hours now and we can talk."

"Not here, then," Mark answered. "Let us go into the garden. Then I can see when the man comes back."

They proceeded into the gathering dusk and presently sat together on a marble seat under an ilex, so near the entrance that none might arrive without their knowledge.

Presently Ernesto came and turned on an electric bulb that hung over the scrolled ironwork of the outer gate. Then they were alone again.

Jenny now threw off all shadow of reserve and restraint.

"Thank God you can listen at last," she said and poured out a flood of entreaties. He was swept from every mental hold, drowned in the torrent of her petitions, baffled and bewildered at one moment, filled with joy in the next.

"Save me," she implored, "for only you can do so or would care to do so. I am not worthy of your love and you may well have ceased to care for me or even respect me; but I can still respect myself, because I know well enough now that I was the innocent victim of this accursed man. It was not natural love that made me follow him and wed him; it was a power that he possesses—a magnetic thing—what they call the 'evil eye' in Italy. I have been cruelly and wickedly wronged and I do not deserve all that I have suffered, for it was the magic of hypnotism or some kindred deviltry that made me see him falsely and deceived me.

"From the time my uncle died at Crow's Nest Doria has controlled me. I did not know it then or I would have killed myself rather than sink to be the creature of any man. I thought it was love and so I married him; then the trick became apparent and he cared not how soon my eyes were opened. But I must leave him if I am to remain a sane woman."

For an hour she spoke and detailed all she had been called upon to endure, while he listened with absorbed interest. She often touched Brendon's shoulder, often clasped his hand. Once she kissed it in gratitude, as he promised to dedicate every thought and energy to her salvation. Her breath brushed his cheek, his arm was round her as she sobbed.

"Save me and I will come to you," she promised. "I am hoodwinked and deceived no longer. He even owns the trap and laughs horribly at me by night. He only wants my money, but thankfully would I give him every penny, if by so doing I could be free of him."

And Brendon listened with a rapture that was almost incredulous; for she loved him at last and desired nothing better than to come to him and forget the double tragedy that had clouded her young life.

She was in his arms now and he sought to soothe her, sustain her and bring her thoughts to regard a future wherein peace, happiness and content might still be her portion. Another hour passed, the fireflies danced over their heads; sweet scents stole through the garden; lights twinkled from the house; on the lake in the silence that now fell between them they heard the gentle thud of a steamer's propeller. Still Doria did not return and as a church clock struck the hour Jenny rose. Already she had knelt at his feet and called him her savior. Now, still dreaming of the immense change in his fortunes, already occupied with the means that must be taken to free his future wife, Mark was brought back to the present.

Jenny left him to seek Assunta; and he, hearing the steamer and guessing what she meant, hastened to the house. All was silent and, as he lifted his voice and called to Albert Redmayne, the noise on the water ceased. No answer reached Mark and from the library he proceeded to the adjoining bedroom. It was empty and he hastened out upon the veranda above the lake. But still the book lover did not appear. A long, black vessel with all lights out had anchored a hundred yards from the Villa Pianezzo, and now a boat put off from the craft of the lake police and paddled to the steps below Brendon.

At the same moment Jenny joined him.

"Where is Uncle Albert?" she asked.

"I do not know. I have called him and got no answer."

"Mark!" she cried with a voice of fear. "Is it possible——" She moved into the house and lifted her voice. Then Brendon heard Assunta answer her and in a moment there followed a horrified exclamation from Jenny Doria.

But Brendon had descended the steps to meet the approaching boat. His mind was still in a whirl of mingled emotions. Above him, as he steadied the boat, stood Jenny and she spoke swiftly.

"He is not in the house! Oh, come quickly, if that is Mr. Ganns. My uncle has gone across the water and my husband has not returned."

Peter, with four other men, quickly landed and Brendon spoke. He could give no details, however, and Jenny furnished them. While she and Mark had sat in the garden, guarding the front door and front gate, behind them to the house there came a message for Mr. Redmayne from Belaggio. Perhaps there was but one appeal powerful enough to make Albert forget his promises or the danger he had been assured now threatened him; but it was precisely that demand which had made the old man hasten away.

Assunta told them how an unknown Italian had reached the steps in a skiff from Belaggio; how he had called her and broken the evil news that Signor Poggi was fallen dangerously ill; and how he sent entreaties to his friend to see him without delay.

"Virgilio Poggi has had a fatal fall and is dying," said the messenger. "He prays Signor Redmayne to fly to him before it is too late."

Assunta dared not delay the message. Indeed, knowing all that it must mean to her master, she delivered it instantly, and five minutes after hearing the dreadful news Albert Redmayne, in great agony of mind, had himself embarked, to be rowed toward the promontory where his friend dwelt.

Assunta declared that her master had been gone for an hour and a half, if not longer.

"It may be true," said Jenny, but Brendon knew too well what had happened.

The group formed under Peter's command and he issued his directions swiftly. He cast one look at Mark which the detective never forgot; but none saw it save the victim. Then he spoke.

"Row this boat back to the steamer, Brendon," he said, "and tell them to take you across to Poggi as quick as may be. If Mr. Redmayne is there, leave him there and return. But he's not there: he's at the bottom of the lake. Go!"

Mark hastened to the boat and one of the officers who had come with Ganns wrote a dozen words on a sheet from a notebook. With this Brendon reached the black steamer and in another moment the vessel disappeared at full speed under the darkness in the direction of Belaggio.

Then Peter turned to the rest and bade them all, with Jenny, accompany him to the dwelling room. Supper had been laid here but the apartment was empty.

"What has happened," exclaimed Peter, "is this: Doria has used the only certain means of getting Albert Redmayne out of this house and his wife has doubtless aided him to the best of her power by arresting the attention of my colleague whom I left in charge. How she did it I can easily guess."

Jenny's horrified eyes flamed at him and her face grew rosy.

"How little you know!" she cried. "This is cruel, infamous! Have I not suffered enough?"

"If I am wrong, I'll be the first to own it, ma'am," he answered. "But I am not wrong. What has happened means that your husband will be back to supper. That's but ten minutes to wait. Assunta, return to the kitchen. Ernesto, hide in the garden and lock the iron gate as soon as Doria has passed through it."

Three big men in plain clothes had these remarks translated to them by the fourth, who was a chief of police. Then Ernesto went into the garden; the officers took their stations and Mr. Ganns, indicating a chair to Jenny, himself occupied another within reach of her. Once she tried to leave the room, but Peter forbade it.

"Fear nothing if you're honest," he said, but she ignored him and kept her thoughts to herself. She had grown very pale and her eyes roamed over the strange faces around her. Silence fell and upon it came the chink of the iron gate and the footfall of a man without. Doria was singing his canzonet. He came straight into the room, stared about him at the assembled men, then fixed his eyes upon his wife.

"What's this? What has happened?" he asked.

"Game's up and you've lost," answered Ganns. "A great crook! And your own vanity is all that's beat you!" He turned quickly to the chief of police, who showed a warrant and spoke English.

"Michael Pendean," he said, "you are arrested for the murder of Robert Redmayne and Bendigo Redmayne."

"And add 'Albert Redmayne,'" growled Ganns. He leaped aside with amazing agility as he spoke, for the culprit had seized the weapon nearest his hand and hurled a heavy saltcellar from the table at Peter's

head. The mass of glass crashed into an old Italian mirror behind Ganns and at the moment when all eyes instinctively followed the sound Jenny's husband dashed for the door. Like lightning he turned and was over the threshold before a hand could be lifted to stop him; but one in the room had watched and now he raised his revolver. This young officer—destined for future fame—had never taken his eyes off Doria and now he fired. He was quick, but another had been quicker, had seen his purpose and anticipated his action. The bullet meant for Michael Pendean struck down his wife, for Jenny had leaped into the doorway and stopped it.

She screamed once and fell, whereupon the fugitive turned instantly, abandoned his flight, ran to her, knelt and lifted her to his breast.

He was harmless now, but he embraced a dead woman and the blood from her mouth, as he kissed her, covered his lips. He made no further fight and, knowing that she was dead, carried her to a couch, laid her gently down, then turned and stretched his arms for the handcuffs.

A moment later Mark Brendon entered from the house.

"Poggi sent no message and Albert Redmayne has not been seen at Belaggio," he said.

TO BE CONCLUDED.

CLIPPING HAIR AND CLIPPING COUPONS

AN odd story is attached to the origination of the common hair clipper the barber uses on your head.

Twenty-five, or more, years ago there was an old negro barber down near the docks in Providence, Rhode Island. His customers were for the most part sailors off the seagoing ships. These sailors were in the habit of letting their locks grow while on the deep with the result that when ashore there were easier things for a barber to do than to cut the stubborn growth.

The colored barber worked out a scheme for putting two pieces of sharpened steel together and working them against each other. This was only partially successful and resulted in numerous cuts and an equal number of good, swift and well-aimed kicks from wounded patrons.

Finally the barber took his invention to Henry Leland, now president of the Lincoln Motor Car Company, in Detroit. Mr. Leland was then associated with Browne & Sharpe, tool makers. He saw possibilities in the crude contraption and put a one-way spring in it.

The colored barber returned to his shop, but the clipper did not work properly.

Returning to the factory he sought out Mr. Leland, but his benefactor was busy and the idea was turned over to Frank Beall, who recently resigned as vice president in charge of production of the Packard Motor Car Company. Mr. Beall added another spring, so the clipper would release itself and cut continuously, and turned the article over to the company for patent purposes.

The colored barber went back to his shop, first being given a paper to sign which called for certain royalties to be turned over to him. After a year or so he sold out his barber shop and returned South to a life of ease and contentment.

The Sheeted Terror

By J. Frank Davis

Author of "Providence Takes Charge," "Statutes Made and Provided," Etc.

"Tangle with *me*," said Mr. Bumblebee Druly, "an' fus' thing you know ole undertaker'll be pattin' you on the breas' with a spade!" And then the parade began

ALMANZAR EVARTS, colored, swept the front gallery with such economy of speed as would assuredly make the job last until it was time to begin to get dinner, because if he hurried to complete it Mrs. Farnsworth might think of something else for him to do. Mrs. Farnsworth, generally speaking, was as fine a Caucasian lady as there was in the world, but white folks were that way, always thinking up something else to do.

Going through the outward motions of industry he allowed his gaze to wander down the street which stretched unbusy in the warm brightness of late afternoon and he presently slowed the automatic movements of his broom to an irreducible minimum as around the corner came an automobile, a low, rakish, single-seated car of a most attractive shade of red. Then the broom became altogether static, for the car stopped in front of the Farnsworth house and its lone occupant, who was about nineteen years old and six feet two inches in height, with disproportionately long legs, literally unfolded himself, slid out of the seat and ambled briskly up the walk. Almanzar smiled an amiable welcome.

"Hello, Almanzar," the youth said. "Mrs. Farnsworth at home?"

"Evenin', Mistuh Edson. Yassuh, she's home. I'll go tell her. 'At new car is sho'ly pretty, Mistuh Edson. I bet you go some in her. You an' you' folks all well, Mistuh Edson?"

"Fine. You don't need to ask Mrs. Farnsworth to come to the door, if she is busy. Just tell her I came after the coffee cups she is going to loan mother."

Mrs. Farnsworth appeared in the door before Almanzar had more than begun to consider starting on the errand.

"Hello, Pierce," she said. "Your mother told me over the phone she was going to make a beast of burden of you. They are all ready. Almanzar, go in and get that package we wrapped. Too bad you had to take all this trouble, Pierce. I told her I could bring them when we came but she wouldn't listen to it."

Pierce Edson's hat was off. He was a frank-faced, good-looking boy, but slightly stooped and awkward because of his unusual build. He smiled down at Mrs. Farnsworth.

"That would be nice, wouldn't it," he said, "for you not only to be good enough to lend us after-dinner coffees to make enough for the party, but to bring them over yourself when running errands is one of the very best things I do! It isn't two blocks out of my way home from downtown to stop here——"

He broke off as Almanzar came out with a gingerly borne package. He eyed it with apprehension, put his hat on and took it with both hands from the negro with obvious anxiety.

"They're pretty well packed; don't worry," Mrs. Farnsworth laughed.

The young man grinned. "I won't if you won't," he said. "You and Mr. Farnsworth are coming early, aren't you? Mother said you were going to help her with some last-minute odds and ends."

"We'll be over right after dinner."

Pierce Edson kept one eye on the package of china and one on the walk before his feet as he went to the car. When he had carefully deposited the bundle on the seat and carefully edged himself in beside it Mrs. Farnsworth could imagine, even at that distance, that she heard his sigh of relief. She waved her hand, he lifted his hat and the car rolled away.

"Mistuh Edson," Almanzar remarked, "is the mos' jackknify young gen'leman I eveh *did* see. See him walk along the street, looks like he tek steps about six feet long. Laigs swingin' free, haid sort o' pulled in that a way like a turkle——"

"You can't be a minute late with dinner

to-night, with us going out right afterward to a party," Mrs. Farnsworth interrupted.

"No ma'am," replied Almanzar. "I'm goin' staht get dinner right this minute, Miz Fahnswo'th."

This he did, singing softly as he worked, a hymn with which he hoped to achieve more than usual prominence when he should voice it as a solo on the following Sunday in the choir of the African M. E. Zion Church. His mind was only partially on the dinner he was preparing. His thoughts flitted aimlessly and pleasurably—on the effect he believed should follow his arrival at a certain high note in the hymn; on how tall and lanky young Mr. Edson was and how altogether satisfying it must be for a young white man to own a red roadster; on a new girl from Gonzales with wide-apart eyes and a pleasing brown complexion whom he had seen from the choir the preceding Sunday and hoped would be again present on the coming Sabbath; on what he would do that evening after the Farnsworths had departed for the Edsons' party.

The question as to his evening program was determined for him by the arrival in the yard, just as he had put the dessert in the oven, of an exceedingly skinny negro child of nine or ten years who drifted in through the gate and stood outside the kitchen door aimlessly digging bare toes into the grass. Almanzar immediately joined him.

" 'Lo, 'Ratio," he said.

"Evenin', Mistuh Evarts. Mamma an' Myrtle send me oveh foh to see you an' tell you—Myrtle say, she say she goin' have comp'ny to-night at ouah house an' she wish you come."

"Comp'ny?" Almanzar was not especially interested in Myrtle Scott who was one of his fiancées ten or a dozen removed and who now, as all the A. M. E. Zion younger set knew, was not only engaged to "Buster" Smales but gave every indication of intending to marry him. Nor did Almanzar pine for an evening of Myrtle's mother's society. But the company might prove interesting. "I done got a engagement," he hedged, pending further information. "I don' know whether it could get broke or not. What comp'ny you-all goin' have?"

Horatio was not entirely clear as to this, seemingly.

"Ladies an' gen'lemen," he said vaguely, "*I* don' know 'em. Six, eight ladies an' gen'lemen, I reckon. Myrtle say, she say she hope you kin come. Mamma say maybe you might sing foh to help entertain."

This was as it should be at any party Almanzar deigned to attend; he always expected to be asked to sing, and to comply. But social gatherings which he honored with his presence were also supposed to entertain him and he did not foresee any extreme quality of entertainment in spending an evening with Myrtle Scott, Buster Smales and that crowd; he would have a better time at the movies. He hesitated and while he hesitated —happily before he declined with regrets, as he was on the point of doing—Myrtle's little brother had a flicker of memory.

"One 'em ladies what's goin' be theah, Myrtle say—one 'em ladies is stranger. Name is Miss Tarbox. Come f'om somewheah down in the sticks. Gonzales, seems to me Myrtle say."

The wide-eyed, pretty brown stranger! He had heard her name after church, Sunday, although she had departed before he could break away from the congratulations that accrued from his singing and since then had neither seen nor heard of her. Miss Delso Tarbox of Gonzales. He decided without hesitation.

"You tell you' mamma an' Myrtle," he said, "that it sho'ly give me much pleasure to come. What time 'at party?"

"Early," Horatio informed him. "Mamma say it oughta begin early because it oughta brek up early; she nev' in all her life had a bigger washin' to do than she got foh Miz Judge Chatterton to-morro'; an' Myrtle she goin' to help. Mamma an' Myrtle say they appreciate if you come by eight o'clock."

An odor from the oven demanded Almanzar's instant presence.

"You tell 'em I'll be right promp'," he told Horatio. The child departed.

Mr. and Mrs. Farnsworth, both dressed for their evening at the Edsons', were in the living room when Almanzar was ready to announce dinner. As he completed a final survey of the table and moved soft-footedly toward the chimes that hung in the dining room beside the door to the butler's pantry, a word from Mr. Farnsworth came through from the front and froze him into immobility.

The word was "klan."

Perhaps no other syllable in all the English language could compel more instant attention from Texas colored people at the

moment. Tradition from an older generation made its very sound horrible to them. Rumor, all the more highly shaded because only whispered, attributed to the unidentifiable night riders, in their ghostly habiliments, qualities mysterious, malignant and altogether terrifying. Almanzar's eyes rolled. He stood motionless, his ears strained.

Mr. Farnsworth was reading the afternoon newspaper. He looked up from it and said, "The Klan was riding in North Texas again last night."

"They're riding somewhere every week," replied Mrs. Farnsworth. "I hope it doesn't happen here in San Antonio. Do you think it will, Fred?"

"I hope not. They haven't ridden here yet. But you can't tell. They don't give much if any warning, you know, and I haven't any doubt there is a branch here. They might appear any night. Hello, here's an item that will interest you! Billy French —that's old Mrs. Potter's nephew, you know —has been awarded the contract for that big bridge at——"

Almanzar rang the chimes.

When the dessert was served Mr. Farnsworth addressed him.

"Have you got in any wood yet, Almanzar?"

"Nossuh. I was fixin' to get some in right afteh dinner to-night, Mistuh Fahnswo'th."

"And last night and night before that."

Almanzar smiled deprecatingly. "I done forgot it," he said.

"Well, don't forget it to-night. This is the last day of October; it can't be many days before we get a norther. We'll wake up some morning with the thermometer down about a foot and have to wait for you to chop wood before we can have any fires."

"Yassuh," Almanzar promised. "Right afteh dinner I'll get 'at wood in. I don' know how come I forgot it las' night. Yassuh. I was figurin' I'd get in *lots* of wood; enough foh two, three days."

"Good idea," his employer said. "If you don't get in enough for *one* day, Mrs. Farnsworth won't advance you a cent this week."

"I won't anyway," she said pleasantly for Almanzar's benefit on general principles. "He has already had more than half his week's wages."

"Yassum," grinned Almanzar on his way to the kitchen. "You certain'y is good to me, Miz Fahnswo'th. But I don't have to be wantin' a li'l' change advanced to be fixin' to get in 'at wood. No, ma'am. I'll get it right afteh I get my dinneh dishes washed." He paused in the doorway. "Seein' as I got to get in 'at wood, will it be all right, Miz Fahnswo'th, if I leave my dishes excep' the silver ontwel mawnin'? I'll come in right early an' have 'em done befo' breakfas'."

"All right," she agreed.

So Almanzar left his dishes and hastened, as soon as Mr. and Mrs. Farnsworth had departed, to his house in the yard where he arrayed himself in his very best clothes, with especial attention to the knotting of a magnificent new purple tie for which, on the preceding Saturday, he had spent a third of his week's wages. Immediately, then, he locked up the family dog and set out for Miss Myrtle Scott's.

He did not carry in any wood. He had fully intended to when he promised, but the necktie had delayed him and now he observed he did not have time.

Myrtle Scott and her mother and small brother did not live in a colored quarter but in one of the best white neighborhoods in the city in a two-room house fronting on an alley in the rear of a residence whose occupants, three elderly sisters, did most of their own work and kept no regular servants. For devoting a day a week to the elderly sisters' laundry work Myrtle's mother and Myrtle had the rental of the house on the alley, where they made an excellent living by taking in washing. The unusual roominess of the house, for servants' quarters, made it possible for them to entertain with greater pomp than was possible for most colored people who inhabited white folks' yards.

When barely three minutes from the end of Myrtle's alley Almanzar passed across a street whose curbs for nearly the length of a block were lined with empty automobiles, while others were arriving from both directions and discharging cargoes of festively dressed young men and women who moved, laughing and greeting one another merrily, toward a brightly illuminated residence in the middle of the block.

Almanzar paused a moment to watch, beaming with vicarious pride. That was the Edsons' house that was lighted and these young men and women, many of whom he recognized as the city's élite, were on their way to Mabel Edson's party; and Mr. and Mrs. Farnsworth were there. Mr. and

Mrs. Farnsworth were not as wealthy as the Edsons and did not live in as large a house but the fact that the families were close friends was a tribute to the social standing of both. It was ever a pride and boast of Almanzar's that his white folks were quality.

Near where he stopped a negro of about twenty-four, his own age, was supporting an electric-light pole and idly observing the excitement.

"Hello, 'Manzar," he called. "Some goin's on! Swell pahty as eveh I see in long time. Weddin' or sump'm, maybe."

"No, jes' a pahty," Almanzar informed him. "My white folks is at it. Friends of ouahs, Mistuh an' Miz Edson is."

The other boy watched the arrival and decanting of another motor load of guests and asked, "What do they do at big white folks' pahties like 'at, 'Manzar?"

Almanzar was pleased at this recognition of his greater familiarity with the customs of the socially elect.

"Dance," he said. "An' sit eroun' an' talk. An' maybe play games."

"Games?" The idle watcher was an elevator attendant in a downtown office building, who had never lived with white people and by his question frankly admitted that he knew nothing about their ways. "Not games like we would play? Not craps?"

"What you mean 'we?'" Almanzar demanded. "Cullud pahties in the society *I* goes in doesn't shoot craps"—he frowned judicially and amended this—"much."

"What kine o' games?"

"Why—er—cahds, an'—they sometimes play cahds an' diffe'ent other games," Almanzar explained, having very little idea what parties of young people did, the Farnsworth family having no younger generation. He recalled a word regarding this particular Edson party that had been dropped during dinner a few days since. "An' do stunts," he said. "They is plannin' to do stunts tonight."

"What kine o' stunts?"

"Sev'ral kines," replied Almanzar, who hadn't heard the details. "I got to be goin' now. I is overdue already at a pahty of my own self."

"Wheah?"

"Miss Myrtle Scott." He remembered how he had heard Mrs. Farnsworth describe a small reception while he was serving tea one afternoon. "They is havin' jes' a few frien's in."

"I reckon 'at's wheah 'at 'Bumblebee' Druly was goin'. Went by heah, li'l' while ago, all dress' up fit to kill."

If true, this information gave Almanzar no special pleasure, as he did not like Bumblebee Druly—who, since his return from the war, had demonstrated distaste of the nickname of his childhood and on a number of occasions had intimated that he much preferred to be known as Corporal Druly. The war was long over but he was still talking about it whenever opportunity allowed. Of it and of his share in it. A general impression might have been gained from his remarks on the subject that if Bumblebee had never got to France General Pershing would have been in a bad way indeed.

Almanzar knew some colored boys who, as replacements, had fought with that New York negro regiment which had more than a hundred days at the front and was many times cited, and these boys seldom boasted. He was quite firmly convinced that Bumblebee Druly had done most of his fighting with a pick and shovel, back in the service of supply.

"He might 'a' been goin' theah," Almanzar agreed. " 'At Bumblebee is all the time tryin' to bus' into society."

"Did you see 'at new girl f'om Gonzales, 'Manzar?" the other asked, seeming to change the subject. "Pretties' girl I eveh throwed my lookin' eyes on. Name is Miss Tarbox."

"She was at chuhch Sunday."

"Yassuh. 'At's her. I see her an' 'at Bumblebee at a pitcher show, las' night. 'At Bumblebee sho' was buzzin' in her ear."

"You say he *was!*" cried Almanzar and left him so suddenly that the gossiper almost straightened up from the electric-light pole in astonishment.

There were no less than eleven people present in the Scott residence when Almanzar came through the alley, counting Mrs. Scott, Myrtle and the skinny Horatio. The door and all the windows were open and he could see them crowded in the house from which came the scratchy strains of Myrtle's installment phonograph. Among them, as he entered, he first observed the exceedingly good-looking stranger from Gonzales. She was quite centrally ensconced in a rocking-chair, and over her, in an attitude implying devotion, leaned Bumblebee.

Almanzar straightened his necktie and saluted Myrtle and Myrtle's mother in Mr.

Farnsworth's best manner. The phonograph stopped just at that moment, and Myrtle at once called the company's attention to his arrival.

"I reckon you know mos' eve'ybody, 'Manzar," she said, "excep' my frien', Miss Tarbox. Miss Tarbox, allow me to interjuce my frien' Mistuh Evahts. Miss Tarbox is f'om Gonzales. She is aimin' to remain permanent in ouah midst. Her papa is come to wuk at the St. Francis." As the tall, wide-shouldered boy who was ardently whispering to Miss Tarbox gave no sign of any intention to move out of the way, but scowled at Almanzar, Myrtle added, "Does you know Mistuh Druly, or doesn't you? Mistuh Corp'rul Druly."

"I does," Almanzar said briefly. "Hello, Bumblebee."

Almanzar bowed with all the grace he could muster above Miss Tarbox's hand.

"I is mos' delighted to meet you," he said warmly. "I saw you Sunday. Jes' natchully done tried my bes' to get oveh to wheah you was in a crowd befo' you got away, but couldn't do it. 'At's the trouble singin' in the choir; you kain't always get out as quick as other folkses."

"I sho'ly enjoyed hearin' you," Miss Tarbox said. "You certain'y sing mighty pretty."

At this moment the skinny Horatio, who was sitting beside Miss Tarbox, rose reluctantly at a command from his mother and Almanzar would have dropped into the vacated chair, but Bumblebee beat him to it.

"An' so, as I was er-sayin', Delso," he remarked, quite as though Almanzar was not there, as though he had never been there, in fact, "they laid down the barrage an' ouah majuh blowed the whistle that it was time foh us to go oveh the top."

"Yes," she exclaimed. "Isn't you thrillin'!" Miss Tarbox hung on his words rapturously as he continued the recital.

And he had called her Delso. Almanzar, in his affairs of the heart, often made as much progress as that in a day or two after meeting a new girl, but he thought it outrageous that Bumblebee should. His attention from the thought of how to take her away from Bumblebee, which he was resolved to do, was distracted at the moment, however, by a hail from Buster Smales, Myrtle's fiancé.

"Didn't I see you' white folks, 'Manzar, standin' out on the gallery at Mistuh Edson's house, where the big pahty is at, when I come by?"

"They is theah," Almanzar replied. "They is chapperones." He wasn't sure this was right and to cover the ground fully amended: "Or patronusses."

"Oh, Mistuh Evarts! *Do* tell me about what they do at pahties where they have chapperones an' patronusses an' all 'at. Us girls of the Daughters of the Five Wise Bridesmaids is goin' to have a sociable with ouah mammas and a'nties an' all to help, an' we has already decided to call 'em patronusses. But what they wants to know, if they is such, is what do they *do?*"

The girl who gushingly made this demand was Lily Mix, black, stout, with skimpy, kinky hair and close to thirty years old. A boy named Bliggens, whom she had been monopolizing for fifteen minutes, hastened to rise from the chair beside her. "Sit right down, 'Manzar," he invited with cordial enthusiasm. "I wants to look over the names on them phonygraf records to see ef they's a jazz tune seems lak I natchully kain't remember the name of. Gives you jes' the seat you is lookin' foh."

It didn't, but Almanzar took the chair. If he couldn't talk to a girl he wanted to talk to, at least it might be some pleasure to assume the pose of social authority that sometimes he was encouraged in taking because of his position as a servant in a quality family where they unquestionably knew how to do things right. For twenty minutes or more he discussed matters of etiquette with Miss Mix, without once, however, completely withdrawing his attention from the beautiful Miss Tarbox.

If, during these twenty minutes Miss Tarbox was again conscious of his presence, she gave no sign of it. Obviously she was enamored of Corporal Druly and Corporal Druly's war record. The corporal did most of the talking, interrupted only by admiring ejaculations, and never once let the conversation wander from the subject of the bravest colored boy in France.

From time to time the phonograph ground out fresh airs but this had no effect on the conversation other than to make it louder and more confusing, it obviously being the theory of Myrtle and Myrtle's mother—an idea by no means confined to Afro-Americans—that the way to enjoy a phonograph recital is to start the machine and then outtalk it. During the music, Corporal Druly

found it necessary to get his mouth very near indeed to Miss Tarbox's chocolate ear and Almanzar had difficulty concealing his resentment at the evidence of his eyes that she liked such proximity.

He was ordinarily an amiable youth and a polite one but he began to accumulate a great disgust with the party, an inexpressible boredom over the gushings of Miss Mix and a smoldering anger at Bumblebee.

Once, indeed, while Miss Mix was describing at fulsome length a unique reception the Daughters of the Five Wise Bridesmaids had once tendered a visiting reverend from Dallas, he lost all track of the recital and muttered:

"Old Bumblebee always buzzin' eroun' honey! I kin buzz a li'l' my ownse'f. Sting, too!"

"What's 'at you say, Mistuh Evarts?"

Almanzar came back with an effort. "I say what you tells is sho'ly interestin'," he dissembled.

At nine o'clock it became public knowledge that there were to be refreshments by reason of the wholly unrepressed sternness with which Mrs. Scott commanded the skinny Horatio to go to a drug store two or three blocks away for a supply of ice cream and to return without once licking the inside of the box covers or even looking into them.

Ten minutes later, her eyes chancing to fall upon Almanzar, she remembered something of the language in which she had helped Myrtle to send him his invitation.

"Oh, 'Manzar!" she said and was deceived into believing the alacrity with which he replied was due to respect for her instead of weariness of Lily Mix and the Daughters of the Five Wise Bridesmaids. "Won't you be kine enough to sing to us?"

Almanzar's complacent smile, although he protested, as usual, that he didn't know anything new, implied perfect willingness to oblige. He was beaming upon the company, waiting for Myrtle's mother or Myrtle to hush the murmur and more formally call their attention to the treat in store for them, when Corporal Druly, whose face had been shadowed by a frown at Mrs. Scott's suggestion, exclaimed, affecting not to have heard her:

"Let's have 'at 'Ole Virginia Blues' record again. *Nice* music, 'at 'Old Virginia Blues' is."

He rose, stepped to the phonograph, started it and turned to rejoin Miss Tarbox. But the insult had been more than Almanzar could bear and the corporal found his way blocked by a glaring youth of approximately his own weight, which was not far from a hundred and eighty pounds, who addressed him fiercely but so softly that the remainder of the company could not hear his words above the racket of the music machine and remained unconscious that a ruckus was on the point of starting.

Almanzar possessed a certain directness in such matters.

"You rub me the wrong way jes' a li'l' bit mo', Bumblebee," he growled, "an' you an' me is goin' to tangle!"

Corporal Druly did not display fear; he was himself by way of being not without reputation in rough-and-tumble debate.

"Tangle with *me*, niggeh," he said, "an' fus' thing you know ole undertaker'll be pattin' you on the breas' with a spade."

"Does you want to come out in the alley an' settle it now?"

"Go 'way," contemptuously ejaculated Bumblebee. "Go 'way f'om me. I'll 'ten' to you firs' time we comes together when I ain't got no social engagements."

"You'll 'ten' to me *now!*" Almanzar declared. "What you heah with you' ears, boy, is me layin' down a garage. The whistle is whistlin' foh you to go oveh the top *now*. Onless," he sneered, "you is anxious not to let 'at lady see how messy you is goin' to get marked up. Onless you is afraid!"

The taunt settled it.

"I isn't afraid of nothin'," Bumblebee cried. "Nothin' in the wide worl'."

"Oh!" breathed Delso Tarbox at their elbows, admiringly, and the young men realized that she had overheard at least a part of their dialogue. Also, as she did not call for the others to interfere between them, that she had no objection to letting the disputation proceed to its logical conclusion. And Almanzar, by the look that she cast in Corporal Druly's direction, saw that her sympathies were with him who knew no fear.

"Out in the alley!" commanded Almanzar under his breath. "An' ef you lets anybody see what's goin' to happen, you is scared. Me, I don't talk so much about it, but I ain't afraid of nothin' myself. Out in the alley, niggeh!"

But as Bumblebee, now entirely willing,

moved to turn toward the exit, there came a sensational diversion.

"Land o' Canaan!" somebody cried. "What's the matter with 'at Horatio?"

Through the open door they all saw the skinny child approaching, or rather halted in his approach by some visitation that appeared to be paralysis. He stood in the yard, six feet from the door, a liberal-sized box of ice cream pendent from each hand, his eyes fixed on some point up the alley with such staring terror that in the light from the doorway they seemed to be composed wholly of whites. As the company looked and before his mother could more than gasp, 'What's matteh, chile?' he dropped both boxes of ice cream to the ground and then fell prostrate himself and began to wriggle toward a corner of the house.

Mrs. Scott, stuttering astonishment and protest, was divided for a moment between the conflicting impulses of going to him or salvaging the ice cream, and while she hesitated her eyes also moved in the direction in which his had been set.

"Oh, Lawsy!" she groaned and sank in a faint across the threshold.

They all saw it, now.

There was an arc light where the alley crossed the next street, and under this light, moving past the alley in awful procession, marched a file of human figures. Human and yet inhuman, for each figure was robed to the ground in a ghostly sheet, and over the head of each was a ghostly pillow case.

"K-K-Klu Kluxes!" stammered Buster Smales, and the entire company became a bedlam of chattering hysteria.

Forgotten by Almanzar was the song in which he was to have lifted up his voice and attracted grace and beauty; forgotten was Bumblebee Druly and the passage at arms with him that had impended; forgotten even was the lovely lady from Gonzales. Almanzar desired but one thing in all the world —to go away from there and to go in the direction opposite to that in which, seemingly in never-ending numbers, the white-garbed agents of terror were still passing, single-filed, silent, sinister.

Going away, however, presented almost insurmountable difficulties. The desire to depart being unanimous the doorway was jammed.

Almanzar, babbling incoherences, thrust a resisting form out of his way without being conscious that it was the stout vice president of the Daughters of the Five Wise Bridesmaids or indeed that he had thrust anybody aside at all. Then, still ahead of him, he sensed the congestion at the door. Dimly he heard Miss Tarbox cry aloud to Corporal Druly:

"Get me outa this! My Lawsy! Get me out!"

And, also dimly, he witnessed that Bumblebee most ungallantly shook off the restraining clasp of Miss Tarbox and said, not at all in reply to her but unconsciously, aloud to himself:

"When the K. K.'s is out, ain't but one place foh cullud boy—an' 'at place is *home!*"

He saw Bumblebee lay violent hands on those before him, men and women alike, in the desire to get there.

The door seemed hopeless. Almanzar rushed to a window. It was screened on the outside. He tore at it.

Across the end of the alley still the sheeted procession passed. A figure of exceptional height brought up the rear. It was waving its arms grotesquely, seeming to herd before it the other marchers. There was something most uncommon in its gait.

Almanzar's eyes remained a moment on the shepherding rear guard; then his frenzied fingers ceased working on the screen. Another moment he stood regaining his breath. Then he turned to see that the jam in the doorway gave signs of being broken and seized the still frantic Delso Tarbox protectingly by the elbow.

"*I* will save you, Miss Tarbox!" he said firmly.

"Oh, kin you? Oh, Mistuh Evarts! 'Em riders——"

"Give you'self no concern," Almanzar said. It was a good phrase which he once had heard Mr. Farnsworth use and he liked the sound of it so well now that he repeated it, quite loudly. "Give you'self no concern. *I* will esco't you to you' home."

Gibbering, Bumblebee Druly won his way across the prostrate form of Mrs. Scott. Others followed him. Without haste or hysteria Almanzar strode behind them—and turned *up,* toward the very corner which the ghostly marchers had passed, holding Miss Tarbox closely to him, speaking words of encouragement into her ear.

"Oh, not *this a way!*" she cried. "You wouldn't dare go this a way, would you?"

"Why not? With you, I dares go anywheah, Miss Tarbox."

The look she gave him was recognition of his bravery and more, but she held back.

"I—I reckons I'd ruther go the otheh way," she gulped. "We'd betteh hurry."

He yielded to her gracefully as to direction but not as to haste.

"Ve'y well," he said, with a calmness that was heroic. "Ve'y well, Delso. You doesn't mine ef I calls you Delso, does you?"

"Not any," she said. "Not any a-tall. Le's be movin' along, 'Manzar."

They moved, through an alley now quite empty of Mrs. Scott's fleeing guests. At the corner she looked back over her shoulder apprehensively. " 'Manzar!" she said. "Isn't you afraid of 'em——" she could not say "Ku Klux;" even the word possessed too much terror. "Isn't you afraid of 'em night riders?"

"Yes, I is," he admitted, because he knew she could not possibly believe him if he declared otherwise. "I is, a li'l'. But I knows they wouldn't hurt *me,* nor nobody what was with me. Nossuh."

"How come?" she admiringly asked. They were rapidly leaving the danger zone now and she was snuggling close to his arm most satisfyingly.

"Well," he said, judicially. "Mistuh Fahnswo'th—he's my white folks—he always gets me out o' trouble. When I gets arrested, I doesn't have to get scared, like mos' colored boys. I jes' says to the police, 'I wuks foh Mistuh Frederick Fahnswo'th; will you kinely sen' foh him, please suh?' an' they does, an' he comes, an' I gets tuhned loose immediate. I doesn't eveh need to get scared a-tall when I gets arrested, and so I doesn't."

This information would have greatly delighted Mr. Farnsworth, who on two occasions had found Almanzar practically speechless when he went to get him out of the police station after minor breaches of the law. One time, after a policeman had jumped at him in the dark, Mr. Farnsworth had known him to be tinted a beautiful pea green from fear. But Miss Tarbox received his claim with full credulity. Had she not just witnessed an example of his unprecedented courage?

He went on without too much boastfulness in his voice:

"Ef we should have walked up 'at otheh way, an' those"—he also decided not to speak the name of the society—"an' those K. K.'s was to come up to us, I'd 'a' said, 'My name is Almanzar Evarts, gen'lemen, an' I wuks foh Mistuh Frederick Fahnswo'th, an' he is at this endurin' minute back here a street or two at the house of Mistuh Edson an' if you will please tek me to him, gen'lemen, he'll tell you I is all right."

He carried this idea to a pleasing conclusion.

"An' I'd say, 'This is Miss Tarbox of Gonzales, gen'lemen, an' Mistuh Fahnswo'th will speak foh her, too!"

"Would he?" she asked, her eyes conveying oceans of admiration for one who wielded such influence.

"Yassum," Almanzar said. "Mistuh Fahnswo'th does mos' anything foh me I asks him to. Mistuh Fahnswo'th, Delso, is about the nices' white folks in Texas. Is you got any engagement foh to-morrow night, Delso? We could go to a vawdaville. Awful good vawdaville at the Majesty Theayter this week, I heahs."

Just after they had returned from the Edson party the Farnsworths heard their gate slam and the sound of a tune loudly whistled, the agreed procedure of Almanzar when he arrived home late, in order that he might never be shot as a burglar.

Mr. Farnsworth stepped to the back door.

"Where's that wood, Almanzar?" he demanded.

"Yassuh. 'At wood," the boy replied cheerfully. "I was jes' goin' bring 'at wood in, Mistuh Fahnswo'th. Yassuh. 'At's how come I came home early, so's to bring it in."

"Early? It's midnight!"

"Yassuh. I'll bring it right in."

"No, you won't. You'll bring it in first thing in the morning and have your dishes washed and not be a minute late with breakfast! It's up to you to get up early enough."

"Yassuh. I'll do it, sho'ly. Did you-all have a nice time at the pahty, Mistuh Fahnswo'th? I bet they wasn't a lady dressed as pretty or looked as pretty as Miz Fahnswo'th, ole lady *or* young lady."

"Kind thoughts as a substitute for wood," Mrs. Farnsworth murmured from an invisible part of the room behind her hsuband in a voice too low to reach Almanzar's ear.

"It was a good party," Mr. Farnsworth said shortly.

"I was up by that a way," Almanzar told him. "Young folks done amuse 'emselves

right smaht, didn't they? Wheah was they goin', all dressed up funny?"

"Just around calling on people in the neighborhood. Just a stunt to fit the night."

"Yassuh. They sho' look comical. Specially 'at Mistuh Pierce Edson. 'At Mistuh Pierce Edson, tall like he is an' with 'at funny walk, laigs swingin' an' haid kind o' drawed in like a turkle—couldn't nobody get fooled as to who he was. Reckernize who *he* was minute I set my eyes on him."

Mr. Farnsworth remembered a hilarious report that had come back with the parade.

"I heard some colored folks got scared and ran," he said.

"Yassuh, I done see 'em," Almanzar told him. "Lawsy, 'at was funny! Boy name' Bumblebee Druly, especially. Pretty talky boy, he is. 'Lows he ain't ever 'fraid of nothin'. When I saw him goin' it I laffed ontwel I thought I'd sho'ly die off. Run? I wouldn't be s'prised, Mistuh Fahnswo'th, if 'at Bumblebee was runnin' yet."

Mr. Farnsworth made ready to close the door.

"Didn't scare you, eh?" he said.

"Me!" cried Almanzar, in hurt amazement. "Me scared of nice young ladies an' gen'lemen like Mistuh Pierce Edson cuttin' up at a Hallowe'en pahty? No *suh!"*

Meet Almanzar again in the next issue in "Falsus in Omnibus."

REGULATING CLOTHES

ALCOHOLIC beverages are prohibited in the United States, as all of us know, and we hear that tobacco is to be banned before long. Dress is also exciting the wrath of the professional reformer, who points with particular indignation at the clothes worn by the female of the species. The lack of modesty and taste among women, especially young women, is appalling. Church, society, parental authority have no influence upon unregenerate youth. Therefore the law must be invoked. Our professional reformer is determined to regulate costumes as well as customs.

Dig down far enough in history and your most modern notion becomes a twice-told tale. In the reign of Edward III. in England there was a great hubbub at one period over the quality of the clothes worn by persons of no quality. The Commons put up a complaint in Parliament against the indiscriminate use of rich apparel by those unsuited either by degree or wealth to wear the same. As a result the following regulations were instituted:

1. Furs, of ermine and lettice, and embellishments of pearls, excepting for a headdress, were strictly forbidden to any but the royal family and nobles possessing upward of £1,000 per annum. 2. Cloths of gold or silver and habits embroidered with jewelry, lined with pure miniver and other expensive furs were permitted only to knights and ladies whose incomes exceeded 400 marks yearly.

We are told that these rules were more honored in the breach than in the observance. However, a century later, in the reign of Edward IV. there was another agitation about clothing in Great Britain. Laws were made which proclaimed it a misdemeanor for any one under the estate of a lord to wear indecently short jackets or gowns or to have pikes on his shoes and boots exceeding two inches in length. Furthermore, tailors or shoemakers making such clothes or shoes for unprivileged persons were to be fined twenty shillings and cursed by the clergy.

Lack of obedience to these laws caused them to be revoked. While this was going on in England, there were derogatory remarks made in France on the clothing worn by women. The clergy were greatly exercised over the lengths to which the ladies were going in their headdresses. They wore two horns which stuck out from their heads for two feet and more, with veils or curtains depending from them. One famous preacher employed boys to chase the women in the streets, tearing off their horns and braying like an ass. The chronicler who records these facts fails to mention that the hoodlum campaign was successful.

Winter Ball

By William Almon Wolff

Author of "Cacos in the Cane," "Efficiency Plus," Etc.

The manager of the Lions tries a little of the hair of the dog that bit him—on the dog

IF all you knew about baseball was what you could see from a seat in the stands or maybe from getting the box score in the five-star absolutely final till the next one edition, you might have thought Bill Ransom was one happy manager the day the Lions beat the Pelicans twice while Chicago was losing—which made their lead six games, with about a month of the season to go. Especially when you remembered that Bill was on his way to winning his first pennant and that the Lions, which always had been the most expensive team in baseball, never had finished better than second. You might have thought so, I say—and you'd have been wrong.

That was the day Bill made his crack about retiring. He was still playing in the field, those days, and he came in as limp as a rag.

"I'm through!" he said. "You hear me! So help me, after we've copped I'm going to retire. Like Bill Carrigan did, too—not like Chance. I've got a lot of bees on my place and I can get stung a plenty and still have something to show for it when I'm through!"

Well, no one paid much attention to him. We all knew Bill wasn't having any easy time. It wasn't that sort of a club. Not with Johnny Bateman on it. And he wasn't the only one; but the others wouldn't have been so bad except for him. When you're carrying a bird who's worth about half a million a year in extra attendance you can't discipline him the way you can a busher. And Johnny, of course, was there as a ball player. There never was a better one. And still—well, it was a toss-up whether he did the club more good or harm, as a playing proposition. As a turnstile asset, of course, there was only one side to it. And it is rumored that the owners of big-league ball clubs do, from time to time, ask about the gate receipts.

Johnny Bateman wasn't a bad actor of the old, conventional sort. He didn't drink. I don't believe he ever took a drink in his life. He didn't need to, though; when it came to trouble he was a self-starter, and there wasn't any need of enriching his mixture with alcohol to get a spark. And he wasn't wild other ways, either; not any ordinary ways, that is. About three quarters of the time he was just a nice, quiet, modest kid who played short so that you thought of a Praxiteles statue; and he ran neck and neck with "Babe" Ruth for the home-run record, right along, after he crashed in from San Francisco. The other quarter of the time he was like a cross between the star pony in a really good rodeo and the Twentieth Century Limited thirty seconds after it's left the track when the engineer was trying to make up time between Buffalo and Cleveland.

The word that was left out of the bright lexicon of Johnny's youth wasn't fail—although he didn't fail much, at that. It was responsibility. He was as irresponsible as a three-months-old Airedale pup or an automobile with a broken steering column.

My soul! Do you know what I saw him do once—in the ninth inning of a game with two out and the tying run on third and the winning run on second? Catch a pop fly with his hands behind his back! And that's not the worst thing he ever did—it's just the sample I happen to think of this minute. He caught that one and his bull luck saved him a lot of times when he was being just about as foolish. But it didn't always hold, of course. Why, Bill got so he'd beg them to keep Nick Altrock off the coaching lines when Washington was in town, so that Johnny wouldn't get any new ideas for clowning on the field!

Well, that sort of thing was what was turning Bill Ransom's hair gray. The fans ate it up, of course. All they cared about was that Johnny was a great ball player.

And that he surely was. He made more impossible plays than any man I ever saw—and they never looked hard. He didn't have that sin—making the easy ones look hard. And to see him come up in a pinch and lace that old pill out—— Boy, how he could hit!

Now, the Lions were a queer club; always had been. Back in the old days when they started in every one said the league had wished a pennant on them. But it didn't work out that way. They started with a made-to-order all-star team—and finished about fourth, because, of course, a team of stars isn't a star team necessarily. And the Lions came to be a regular graveyard for managers. Half a dozen had the club, under two ownerships, before Tom McNamara and Joe Beach bought it and handed Bill Ransom a manager's contract and their check books and told him to go get a pennant.

Bill told them from the start he wasn't going to deliver a pennant right away. They'd bought a lot of junk and Bill had to clean house and build a team from the bottom up. When he took hold he had Sam Thurston in left, himself to play right, "Doc" Hasbrook behind the bat and two good pitchers—Jimmy Devoe and Harry Pierson. And the rest of the league was willing to help him out. Oh, sure! He could have had any star he liked—if he'd been willing to give up Sam and Doc and either Jimmy or Harry, and twenty or so thousand cash to boot. What he had to do was to wait and do what trading and what buying he could, when things eased up, and comb the minor leagues for good prospects.

At that, though, he came out pretty well, and he had a good, fighting, young club his first season, that finished fourth.

Then, that winter, he took a chance and plunged on Johnny Bateman. Johnny had a great big rep out on the coast and when he started with the Lions he just made that reputation bigger than ever. There hasn't been such a rookie since Hal Chase came up.

But even from the start he was crazy and neither Bill nor any one else could do a thing with him. If he'd been bad it would have been easier. Trouble with Johnny was that baseball kept on being a game to him after he started making a living out of it. It was what helped to make him the great player he was, of course, and it had a lot to do with the way the fans went wild over him. But it was hard on Bill.

Johnny wanted to win, right enough, but he wanted something else a lot more—and that was to have a good time twenty-four hours a day, including the hour and a half or so between the time when the umps said "Play ball!" and the last out in the ninth. He had it, too.

Well, I could fill a book telling the crazy things that fool kid pulled. He came up to the grounds one day in time for the fourth inning and explained he'd had a bet with a chap he'd met some place where he was eating lunch about which of two sugar bowls would attract a hundred flies first; and they'd lost count and had to start over again so often that he didn't keep track of the time! And another time he wanted to see what would happen if he didn't get out of his berth at Washington in the morning when the porter called him; and he went to sleep again and got forgotten, somehow, and woke up on the way to Richmond, because there'd been a hurry call for sleepers down there.

And there was the time he saw a bird being chased in Boston and took off down a side street, with the crowd after him, and got caught and was in the lockup till after game time before he could get himself identified. And the time in Chi—but what's the use going on? You can see what sort of a nut he was and what it meant to a manager to have to keep cases on him!

And it wasn't only Johnny, of course. That sort of thing's rotten for discipline. With Johnny you knew it was animal spirits and a kid's foolishness; and, besides, he was Johnny Bateman. He didn't have a swelled head, really, but he knew how good he was and what he meant to the club. Bill would talk to him and he'd promise to be good—and mean it, too. And the next day he'd just naturally pull something worse than ever.

Bill could fine him and did, once in a while. Johnny didn't care. He had a whale of a salary; and what he made on the side, writing and selling his name for things, was sinful. They put him in a movie, too, and he fooled them all by making good, so that if there'd been any one who'd never heard of Johnny Bateman, he'd still have liked the film. He had personality, as well as the greatest pair of hands and the best batting eye in baseball. That was the answer. Yes. Bill could fine him, but when it came to

suspending him it was just like cutting off your nose to spite your face.

Well, in Johnny's first season things broke pretty well, but the club finished just a good second. That was before Bill got his pitching staff going right, and no one had any kick. But that winter he got Vic Brewster from the Pelicans; and with young Truman seasoned it looked like nothing but the Lions from the start the next spring.

Bill got some pretty bad breaks early in the year. He had a Charley horse himself; and in May Sam Thurston got spiked and there were some other little things wrong—Pierson had a bad arm till it got hot, for one thing. Along in June, though, when the hot weather really began, the club straightened out and by Labor Day everything looked sweet and pretty. And when that double header made the lead six full games I'd have said it was all over and the Lions were in.

Which shows just about how safe it is to say anything about baseball louder than a whisper. Because that was the day Bill's young sister, Peggy, chose to come up and see the Lions play.

She'd seen them before, I suppose, but not that season. Bill had had her in schools here and there and everywhere; and that spring she'd gone abroad and she was just back. Bill, you know, was a college man himself and his people were the sort who think professional baseball's not quite nice—except for Peggy. There wasn't anything foolish about that child; and she knew where her silk stockings and her finishing school and her trip to Europe had come from, all right—and what she'd probably get out of Bill's cut of the world's series money. I don't mean she was mercenary; she wasn't. She was crazy about Bill and she was dead right. He was a darned good brother. But she appreciated how it was he'd been able to do so much for her and she thought baseball was a pretty good old game.

Now, that double header was pretty much Johnny Bateman's show. As for the first game—score ten to nine—Johnny's hitting saved it twice and won it three times before it stuck. The second was different. Each team got a run in the first inning; and then Dorsey, pitching against us, settled down and didn't let a man get to first for thirteen innings. Brewster was pitching for us and he wasn't so good.

The Pelicans didn't score, either, after that first inning, but they had men on about every time. And if you asked me to think of the best piece of shortstopping I've ever seen I'd pick that game. Johnny picked them off behind third base; he went out to center field for pop flies; he did everything. He made one play on a grounder that went caroming off Ted Conroy's glove that was simply impossible—speared it on the grass behind second and got his man at first while the Pelican bat boy was rolling them up. And in the fourteenth he put one in the grand stand and settled things. I thought the crowd would tear off his uniform for souvenirs.

And still Bill made that crack about retiring—that very day. Why? Because, in the first half of the fourteenth, with men on second and third, the batter lifted a Texas Leaguer. Johnny went back for it and the runners took long leads. He got under it, running, with his back to the plate—his back! And then—he trapped it! Trapped it on the dead run. Well, he got his man at the plate, but it was crazy baseball even if he did bring it off, and it was enough to give any manager heart failure. But the point is, if you look at it one way, that if any other man had been playing short that pop fly would have been good for a hit and two runs.

So Bill told the world he was through; and then, at dinner that night in his hotel, when he had Peggy with him, of course, Johnny Bateman blew in and Bill had to introduce him.

I didn't see that, but those who did tell me Johnny took the count right on the spot. He never had looked at a girl, so far as we knew. But people did look at Peggy—she was made that way. And it seemed that she wasn't exactly unconscious of him, either. Then, just by chance, Joe Beach came along and wanted to see Bill about something; and Johnny stuck around and it was all off.

Now, the details of what you might call Johnny's courtship aren't very clear. I guess Johnny and Peggy herself are the only ones who knew them; and they wouldn't talk, even if they could remember; and they say people don't, always. They were engaged within a week, I know, and just at first a lot of us, and I think Bill, too, thought being in love with Peggy and having her in love with him might make Johnny behave

himself. He was all right that week, anyway.

But, Lord—he was just as irresponsible about being engaged and planning to be married after the season as he was about everything else. Bill told me some things about him I hadn't known before—that his people had had a lot of money and lost it, and that Johnny, as a kid, hadn't had to give a care about anything. I suppose that had lasted with him. Anyway, after that first week, Johnny began breaking dates with Peggy—and the first thing he knew he had his ring back and it was all off!

So was Bill's first pennant. Johnny blew entirely for three days—no one ever did find out what he did or where he was. And when he came back he was about as dependable, even when he was playing, as one of the early vintage aëroplanes used to be. He was good in spots—but, boy, he was just as bad in others!

That six-game lead just went glimmering. By the first week in October the Lions were hanging on by their eyelashes and the pennant went to glory and Chicago the last day of the season when poor old Sam Thurston chased a fly a mile and then lost it—and got blamed for something that was all Johnny Bateman's fault, or Peggy's, the way you happened to look at it.

Now Bill knew that Johnny Bateman and his foolishness had blown that pennant; and I knew it; and so did the team and every other newspaper man who, like me, had traveled with the club. But did the fans know it? They did not. Just at first they blamed poor Sam for dropping that fly; and then, of course, they turned on Bill. Well, that's one thing a manager's for; and in a way it's fair enough. It's his job to win; and if doing that involves handling a freak—well, he's supposed to do it. Look at McGraw and some of the birds he's taken on and turned into winners! Still, this was rough on Bill. And he'd wanted to retire!

He could have done it easily enough, too. There was an awful howl going up and maybe I oughtn't to say it, but some papers joined in it, being those that had baseball reporters who thought of making a hit with their readers by following the crowd—or who maybe had it in for Bill for something. Anyway, what with one thing or another, there were a lot of lads after Bill's scalp; and if he'd offered to quit I guess Mac and Joe Beach would have taken him up. But they were good sports and offered him another contract.

Did he sign up again? Listen, how could he do anything else? He'd have had to quit under fire and with every one remembering him as the manager who'd booted a pennant he'd had in his pocket. Of course he signed—and began studying what to do.

"If I haven't got Johnny hog tied by April I'll murder him by June!" he said.

Peggy, all this time, was staying off Johnny. She didn't look any too happy. I had what seemed good authority for it that she'd fallen for him pretty hard. But though she wasn't very old she had a lot of sense and I guess she figured that there wasn't enough percentage in marrying any one as crazy as Johnny, no matter how attractive he was.

She stayed around town with Bill. Bill had a lot of odds and ends to attend to; the scheme was for them to go on to his place down in Maryland afterward. And meanwhile she stayed, and made some visits to girl friends and killed time generally; and if she was packing a broken heart or anything like that she didn't show it. And she was one of the people, by the way, who knew just how Chi had won that flag. She knew more about baseball than any woman I ever saw.

Johnny was funny. He came back, or tried to get taken back, about six times. He'd turn up and make an awful drive and then he'd go off again. She saw him; didn't ever refuse to do that. And she was perfectly friendly, too; she didn't freeze him. She told him that she liked him but that he needn't figure on that, because she had some sense if he didn't. Whether she had any ulterior intentions, as it were, I don't know. But I do know that it was she who suggested the thing that broke up the winter, because I was in Bill's suite at his hotel at the time.

I'd gone around to see Bill, and he wasn't in and I sat around waiting for him and talked to Peggy. And when he came up he had his mail in his hands and he was spilling language that made me blush and Peggy laugh.

"Willie!" she said. "Wil-lee! What's the matter, boy?"

The general idea was that it was triply qualified gall. That he'd see them—he didn't say who—in the deepest part of Tophet first. That—well, we let him run

down and finally it came out. Some lads were getting up a sort of short-time winter league to catch the cream of the tourist business out on the Coast, with stars to manage the teams. Well, I knew about that and that Johnny Bateman had been signed to "manage" one of the teams. And the promoters wanted Bill to play on it!

I laughed. But Peggy didn't. Her eyes got deep and she pursed up her mouth and made her cheeks small, in a funny way she had.

"Well," she said, "what are you going to tell them?"

I wouldn't repeat his answer, but you could boil it down to one word—no.

"You're not going to do anything of the sort," said Peggy. "Bill—you used to be bright, once! This"—her lips gave a queer little jump—"this Johnny Bateman person made a lot of trouble for you last year, didn't he? And you want to win next year, just to show them? Well—think of the example you could set him! Think of how much he could learn, being a manager himself, from seeing how well a ball player can behave! Think——"

Bill was thinking, all right. So was I. Peggy never cracked a smile even when Bill and I began to laugh.

"You win!" he said. "God knows what they'll say about me, but I guess it's up to me. Want to see the Coast, Peg?"

"If you think I'd stay home!" she said, scornfully.

So that was that. I was mourning, because it looked to me as if I was going to miss some fun; but they wanted a publicity man out there and Bill pulled some wires and got me the job and I got a leave of absence from the paper and went.

That was some league. There were only four clubs and they were chock-full of stars from both leagues. It was a glorified junket really, at the start; but you can't keep ball players down; and after the first two or three games I could see they were going to fight like a lot of college teams.

I think Johnny got a jolt when he found Bill was coming; and I know he got a bigger one on the Overland when he walked into the diner and saw Peggy. But he brazened it out; grinned and shook hands with her and acted as if he didn't care any more. He looked sort of sober all the way out, though, and I noticed he was turning in early. Bill wasn't. He started a poker game right away and kept it in session continuously, except for meals, all the way to Los Angeles. It was one red-eyed crowd that got off that train.

Well, we started in right away, not needing any training trip or anything like that, of course, and for the first week everything was serene. Johnny as a manager was a knock-out. He was just as good as ever at short and he took being manager as seriously as a chorus girl does the first line she ever has all for her own. As for Bill he just played left field and behaved like Georgie Burns—shifting from right because right was the sun garden on those grounds.

Then, one day, Bill came up in the ninth with the bases full and one out and one run needed to tie. Now the last rookie up wouldn't need to look to the bench for orders with a layout like that. He'd know there was only one thing to do—hit it out. Any sort of long fly would go for a sacrifice, even if it didn't go safe. So Bill went up, choked his bat on the first pitch and bunted straight at the pitcher! Kerr was so surprised he could scarcely field the ball; but he did and the catcher shot it to first for a double play.

Johnny headed for Bill screaming—fairly screaming.

"What'd you do that for?" he yelled. "You——"

"Tie that bull outside!" said Bill. "D'you ever hear of crossing them?"

And he laughed and kept on for the showers.

Well, that was pretty raw, and the rest of the way Bill went in for being what you might call subtle—only taking care not to be so subtle that Johnny'd miss anything. So far as I could make out he must have made a list from memory of every outrage Johnny had ever pulled off and then studied out a way of going him one better. And he didn't miss once.

He was the talk of the league. Old Bill had always had a reputation, even before he got to be a manager, for being a quiet, well-behaved ball player. He kept it about a week that winter. And what could a manager do?

There weren't any rules worth speaking of in a league like that. In effect, those were off-season exhibition games. As a matter of fact there was a tremendous lot of

interest, because, for the first time, so far as I know—and probably the last—a bunch of promoters had actually happened to get together four teams of great ball players who really liked playing ball and were out to win just for the fun of the game.

But there was nothing doing when it came to fines or suspensions or anything like that. Johnny just had to take his own medicine. And he didn't like it. Who does?

Personally the thing made me nervous. They were calling Bill "Maverick" Ransom and there was getting to be a lot of talk about him. I knew what he was trying, of course, but others didn't, and they just thought he'd started in on prohibition hooch or something like that. And what worried me was that the talk was bound to drift back East and get to Mac and Joe; and that sort of thing makes trouble. I'd been strong for Peggy's hunch at the start; but after I saw it working I wasn't so sure.

One thing was sure, though. Whether it was just being a manager or seeing some one else stealing his stuff, Johnny was like a new man. He never cut loose once in six weeks. He didn't see much of Peggy, from what I heard; I wasn't with his club all the time, of course, but went wandering about.

Pretty soon I got so I wasn't sure I knew what was happening myself. If Bill was just acting he was being pretty darned realistic. He got in with some of the wild crowd around the hotels and he was in on *some* parties. And the thing worried me.

You know, a quiet, steady chap like Bill Ransom will go plumb off with all the suddenness of a summer squall sometimes if he gets the right start. And that last season had been a heartbreaker for Bill. It's an awful strain managing a big-league ball club any time; and when it's one of the leaders it's that much worse. And Bill had had Johnny Bateman and that ghastly finish piled up on top of all the rest. No. I didn't like it and I wasn't a bit sure that what had started as a joke hadn't slipped into something a long way from being funny.

When I rejoined the club just before the last week of the season the four teams were still neck and neck. Johnny's outfit was second, about one game behind a gang of fence breakers Tommy Rohan was managing; and the two others were right up behind, so that any one of the four could still win. There was one thing that comforted me a little. Except for that first break Bill hadn't actually tossed off any games; and his parties and his wild doings generally hadn't kept him from batting .368 and cutting down his full share of base runners with throws from the outfield.

But when I saw Peggy I got scared all over again. She looked as if she'd been crying and she looked as if she were worrying a lot, too. She wouldn't talk to me; but then, after all, I didn't know her so awfully well. But if she wouldn't talk, Johnny's tongue was hung in the middle and wagged at both ends.

"You needn't say it!" he said when I shut him up, or tried to, by telling him he was just getting back what he'd handed poor Bill all through the regular season back East. "I know it! But I'm grown up now. Now that I've had to stand for it myself I can see what a goat I was! But we've got to get old Bill straightened out. How're we ever going to cop next year without him in shape to run the club?"

"That's easy," I said. "They'll make you manager."

But he wouldn't rise to that and I saw he was really feeling bad. So I went out looking for Bill. He just laughed when I talked to him and he had me guessing. I told him he needn't rub it in; Johnny was ready to sit up and beg and why wasn't it a good time to kiss and make up and call all bets off?

"Yes?" said Bill. "Remember that jingle about the devil? How when he was sick the devil a monk would be and when he was well, the devil a monk was he? Think it over. Fit it to Johnny—and then fit it to me."

And he gave me a nasty sort of laugh that left me worse puzzled than I'd been before. In a way, of course, I could see that even if the original joke was still on it mightn't be safe to call it off yet, because there wasn't any guarantee that Johnny would stay reformed—though reformed he certainly was then. Responsibility that's thrust on a man is often a cure for irresponsibility—just as being thrown into deep water's a great way for being taught to swim. And still—well, things might break one way or they might break another.

After I got back East and told the whole thing, just the way I saw it happen, to some one whose opinion about things in which a

girl is concerned I respect a lot, I just got laughed at.

'Stupid!" she said—the one whose opinion I respect so much. "That's what she was planning all the time! But then, if men could see through things like that, I suppose——"

But you use your own judgment. Because this is what happened.

The night before the last series of Johnny's club with Tommy Rohan's began it was a cinch that whichever of those clubs got two of the three games would win, because then, even if one of the other clubs won three straight, it would still be half a game behind Johnny's team or Tommy's, as the case might be. And I want to tell you that there was as much excitement about that series, proportionately, and as much betting, as I've ever seen in the East.

They split the first two games. Each club had a pitcher who figured to be pretty nearly unbeatable—Brewster for Johnny and Carter for Rohan; and I figured Johnny had got the edge by having Brewster ready for the first game—which gave him a chance to go in again for the third game with one day's rest, if needed. Carter breezed in with the second game to even things up. And that evening, with everything hanging on the next day's game, Bill Ransom pulled the one he'd been saving up all season.

He came into the hotel lobby where I was talking to Johnny and walked right up to us. He slapped Johnny on the back.

"Johnny, old boy," he said, "you can't be beaten, but I swore I'd tie you or die trying. I've signed up with the Van Kyle outfit to drop from a plane with a parachute tomorrow and land in left field, ready to play the first inning!"

Right there was where I handed it to Johnny. He didn't blow up. Not a bit. He just blinked once—and stuck out his hand.

"Good work!" he said. "You'll get quite a hand for that, Bill." Then he looked at his watch. "Got to blow," he said. "Got a date. See you later."

And he went off. I just stared at Bill. He was looking after Johnny and he was pretty thoughtful.

"Now, I wonder——" he said.

I sailed in and did the best I could, but what I had to say just rebounded. He didn't pay any attention to me at all, except that after a few minutes he said:

"Let's eat."

I had some idea of watching him, so I went into the dining room with him. And later we went out into the lobby again and we were sitting, not saying a word, off in a corner when Johnny came in. He wasn't alone; Peggy was with him and she was smiling. They walked right up to us.

"Now, you big stiff!" said Johnny. "You'll listen to me. You're going to bed and you're going to have breakfast in your room—and lunch; and you're going to stay there till you get in a taxi with Peggy and me and go out to the grounds."

"Where do you get that stuff?" said Bill. And he laughed—a nasty sort of laugh. "Just because you're a manager doesn't get you anywhere. You helped to show me that last season."

"That's all right, too. But just because I was a fool doesn't give you a license to keep on being one. And being in the family now I've got something to say——"

"In the family——"

I stared, too. And Peggy laughed, and got sort of red.

"He's your brother-in-law, Bill," she said. "We decided he might have some influence on you if he and I were married——"

"Married!" said Bill. "You want to remember he won't be a manager after tomorrow."

"No, but he'll keep on being married," said Peggy with a flash in her eye. "And I guess I'll be as much responsibility as an old baseball team!"

That was when I went off to have my laugh to myself.

"She couldn't have married him right away and had anything on him!" That's what my authority about Peggy's reasoning says. "And if she'd married him to keep *him* straight—why, that never worked! It's no use marrying a man to reform him. But marrying him so that he can reform some one else—that's different!"

Oh, yes—the Lions were in the next year a week after Labor Day; and the only game they dropped in the world's series was the fourth—on errors.

A Chat With You

WHEN authors ask us what sort of stories we are looking for we always make the same reply. We say: "Oh, any kind of a *good* story."

That is a safe sort of answer. We want to look at everything that comes along and decide for ourselves whether we want it or not. We don't want the author to do the rejecting. If we told him we did not like this sort of story or that, he might not let us see something that we were really pining for. We have yet to meet an author who does not think the story he has just finished *some* kind of a good story.

EVERY one that we have ever known or heard of thinks that he knows a good story when he sees it. A man has to pass some sort of apprenticeship before he feels himself qualified to pass on most things; but when it comes to stories, the fewer stories people have read the more dogmatic and confident are they in their opinions. They know what they like. That's enough. If they like the story it is good, if they don't it is not.

WHATEVER value our opinion may have derives from the fact that we reject a great many stories, buy a few and altogether read many thousands in the course of a year. We would not be human if we had not acquired some prejudices and rather definite opinions on the subject. We have a very definite prejudice against what are known as sex stories. This prejudice is founded, we are ashamed to say, neither in morality nor in cold reason, but in the simple fact that we don't like such stories. They make us ill. From our point of view, this is a perfectly good reason.

WE also have a prejudice against the story that is ethically false. The triumph of a crook offends us, not because we pretend to any superior virtue, but because we don't believe in it. We dislike the story on the same principle as we would dislike a yarn built upon the thesis that two and two made five or that water would not seek its own level.

NOR do we like stories about trivial things. We have just been reading a well-written story in another magazine. The speaker at a public dinner intends to play a joke on another man by handing him, as a mock testimonial, a tin watch. At the last minute he changes his mind and spares the

intended victim. Our objection to this sort of story is that it is not a story at all; it doesn't matter enough, it isn't important enough. We like stories we can get excited over. Stories, to suit us, ought to be written about stirring and beautiful things. Danger, love, laughter, ambition, and conflict—we like them all in fiction and we like them full strength.

WE like stories that are well written. The author who avoids stock, set phrases, who tries to tell things honestly as he sees them in his own words, who feels the throb and color of the life he describes and tries to get that feeling across to the reader, is the man we admire. Stories are important with us, they are significant—they mean something. A good story is not only life but the essence of life. It is life under the microscope, life on the modeling block, life being taken apart and put together again so that we may know it better, understand its workings, realize its meaning and use it toward its nobler and kinder ends.

"Literature," some one has said, "is life made transparent by the light of great spirits and the medium of great language. It will be accepted by wise men as of a truthfulness exceeding the truth of things seen only with the material eye."

AS you know, we are partial to the story of action. We like tales in which things happen and we like to read about people who do things. We want character as well, we want insight and humor and pathos, we want high literary values without preciosity, we want nothing that has not some worthwhile significance. We want sanity, distinction and atmosphere. We want stories to make us think and stories to make us feel. We want the freshest, the clearest, the brightest reflection of the swiftly changing life about us, whether in New York or on the Painted Desert or in the Maine woods or on a South Sea island. We don't want stories that are echoes of other tales; we want things fresh from life itself. This is a large order. We are aiming frankly at a star, we are trying to do what no one ever has succeeded in doing; we are hoping for a magazine better than the brightest dreams of any reader.

THIS," said the author, laying the manuscript on our desk, "is the best story I have ever written."

Whether he was right or not was to be shown in the reading, but we got something of the tingle of his enthusiasm. It wasn't salesmanship that made him say that. It was an exaltation of spirit, the triumph of accomplishment. Whether the author was right or wrong, he had the right feeling; and that is perhaps the most important thing of all.

So, when the editor says, as sometimes he does: "This next number is the best magazine I have ever put together," have faith in him, for he means it.

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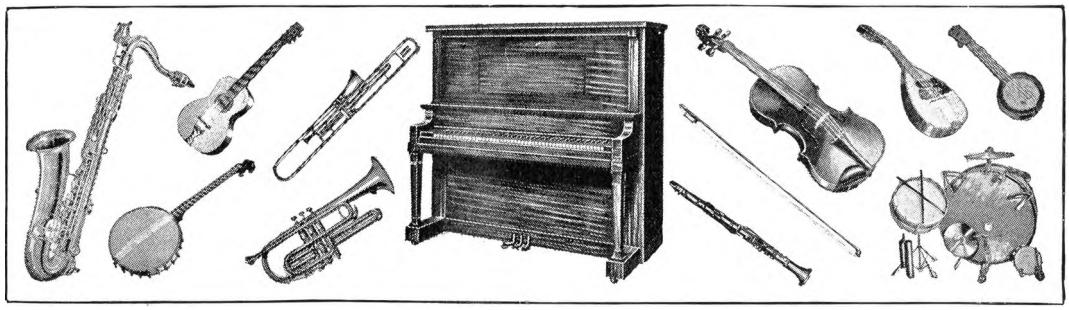

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